JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES – vol. 23 (2025): xx-xx. http://doi.org/10.18172/jes.6656

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES: THE COSMOPOLITAN ARAB WOMAN IN FADIA FAQIR'S *WILLOW TREES DON'T WEEP*

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ABSTRACT. This study investigates Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, with a particular focus on the processes influencing the formation of the cultural identity of the female Arab protagonist in relation to her condition as a displaced immigrant. Drawing upon cosmopolitanism as a concept relevant to marginalised groups in the diaspora, the analysis of Faqir's text shows that the novel's protagonist, Najwa, is exposed to various forms of gendered, cultural, social, ideological, religious, and political stereotyping-constructed prejudices across different locations. These prejudices push her into a rootless existence, leading to a state of alienation and unbelonging. The textual analysis also indicates that Najwa, in response, develops a fluid identity and a cosmopolitan subjectivity as a unique means of acquiring agency amidst several disempowering counter-cosmopolitan forces.

Keywords: displacement, diaspora, prejudice, identity, cosmopolitan, agency.

DESAFIANDO ESTEREOTIPOS: LA MUJER ÁRABE COSMOPOLITA EN *LOS SAUCES NO LLORAN* DE FADIA FAQIR

RESUMEN. Este estudio examina la novela de Fadia Faqir *Los sauces no lloran* poniendo el foco en los procesos que influyen en la formación de la identidad cultural de su protagonista árabe en relación con su condición de inmigrante desplazada. Utilizando el concepto del cosmopolitismo como relevante en la formación de diásporas marginadas, el análisis del texto de Faqir muestra a la protagonista, Najwa, expuesta a varios tipos de prejuicios originados en diferentes países con respecto a la construcción de estereotipos de género, culturales, sociales, religiosos, ideológicos y políticos. Estos prejuicios la empujan a llevar una existencia sin raíces que le conducen a un estado de alienación y a un sentido de no pertenencia. El análisis textual también indica que Najwa, en respuesta, desarrolla una identidad fluida y una subjetividad cosmopolita como la única forma de empoderarse ante tantas fuerzas contrarias a la idea cosmopolita que la intentan desempoderar.

Palabras clave: personas desplazadas, diáspora, prejuicio, identidad, cosmopolitismo, empoderamiento.

Received 25/03/2025

Revised version accepted 02/07/2025

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, English-language literary works by women writers of Arab descent have gained increasing prominence, accompanied by a growing body of academic scholarship. However, limited critical attention has been paid to how these works portray cosmopolitan subjectivity as a form of female agency and critique anti-cosmopolitan forces in relation to diasporic individuals, particularly in Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). Positioned within the broader context of cross-cultural and diasporic literature, these narratives frequently address the tensions and intersections between home and host cultures by tracing the lived experiences of diasporic female protagonists undergoing geographical and cultural relocation. Layla Al Maleh identifies a distinctive set of characteristics in contemporary Anglophone Arab women's fiction, describing it as feminist in scope, diasporic in sensibility, and political in its modes of representation (13). Such works usually depict Arab women confronting marginalisation, either within their native societies or as migrants facing exclusion in foreign contexts. In keeping with this trend, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* centres on an Arab female protagonist who, through multiple experiences of displacement, develops a diasporic consciousness and a cosmopolitan subjectivity as strategies of resistance against multiple forms of social, cultural, and political discrimination.

Existing scholarship on Faqir's novel tends to foreground significant aspects of identity transformation, including Najwa's response to displacement through the formation of new identities and spaces (Aladylah 229), her negotiation between

religious and secular worldviews (Sarnou 160), her conceptualisation of "home" as a site of identification (Sarnou and Ouahmiche 144), and the role of dress in identity formation (Abu Joudeh and Awad 14). Nevertheless, to date, no study has offered an examination of the novel's portrayal of cosmopolitan identity construction. Relevant to this discourse is Saleh Chaoui's analysis of cosmopolitan subjectivity in Camilla Gibb's *Sweetness in the Belly* (2005). In his article, Chaoui interprets "the intersections between religion, cosmopolitanism, and displacement", arguing that "religion *can* be a constitutive component in the formation of female cosmopolitan subjectivity" (173). Building on, yet diverging from his argument, the present study takes a different trajectory. Whereas Chaoui traces the protagonist Lilly's spiritual journey and her embrace of Islamic Sufism as a pivotal element in cosmopolitan belonging, this analysis deals with Najwa's more ambivalent and negotiated form of cosmopolitanism. Unlike Lilly, Najwa does not fully reject either secular or religious frameworks. Instead, she reinvents a hybrid and pragmatic identity that accommodates multiple, even opposing worldviews, allowing her to challenge anti-cosmopolitan forces in both gendered and cultural terms.

Given this distinctive approach to cosmopolitan identity formation, the present study investigates how *Willow Trees Don't Weep* represents the sociocultural constraints placed on its female protagonist, Najwa, who is subjected to reductive stereotypes that intensify her estrangement and dislocation. This study argues that Najwa's evolving sense of self reflects a dynamic engagement with cosmopolitanism that challenges both patriarchal norms and exclusionary cultural ideologies. Central to this analysis is the recognition that her marginalisation arises not only from external perception but also from the systemic reproduction of stereotypes that seek to fix her identity within narrow boundaries. Through a close reading of the text, this study explores how the novel constructs cosmopolitan subjectivity as both a strategy of resistance and a site of empowerment, offering new insights into the ways contemporary Arab women writers reimagine female agency within diasporic contexts.

To understand how this resistance operates, it is essential to examine the mechanisms through which Najwa is marginalised. In *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Faqir's protagonist encounters the destructive effects of stereotyping across multiple cultural contexts, revealing how stereotyping can be seen as forming fixed, oversimplified ideas or expectations about a group of people without really understanding them. The novel demonstrates how such stereotyping involves making unfair judgments about their traits, abilities, or behavioural patterns based on limited or inaccurate information. These stereotypes are not only based on mere preconceived assumptions but can further function as a source for the construction of prejudice and discrimination. This process of categorisation, while seemingly natural, carries profound implications for individual identity. As Rebecca Cook and Simone Cusack argue:

> [s]tereotyping is part of human nature. It is the way we categorise individuals, often unconsciously, into particular groups or types, in part to

> simplify the world around us. It is the process of ascribing to an individual general attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of his or her apparent membership in a particular group (1).

In Najwa's case, her experiences across different geographical and cultural spaces exemplify how the components of identity, on the basis of which individuals are categorised into stereotypically monolithic groups, can include–but are not limited to–gender, class, sex, race, religion, and nationality. The implications of this categorisation process extend beyond the individual level and have significant social consequences. In a social context, the adherence to stereotypes plays an integral role in making a group of people with shared characteristics (such as their language, religion, customs, traditions, and values) appear homogeneous and their identities coherent and rooted. However, through Najwa's narrative, Faqir exposes how such stereotypical homogenisation undermines the coexistence of differences and, as a consequence, cultural–let alone individual–diversity, thereby preventing or resisting openness towards cultural otherness.

Cultural stereotyping and the lack of openness to cultural diversity are particularly problematic in the contemporary globalised world, where unprecedented movements of people challenge established boundaries. People carry identity structures that existing frameworks cannot adequately accommodate. Not surprisingly, cosmopolitan enterprise focuses on negotiating existing fixed cultural identities and reconsidering their conjunctural validity. Cosmopolitanism creates a medium for viewing and re-negotiating the uniformity and rootedness of cultural identities to produce dynamic alternatives that work with cultural difference. Cosmopolitanism calls for a framework of consciousness, where people of various gendered, ethnic, political, religious, and cultural backgrounds accept each other under the ethical responsibilities of mutual concern, tolerance, and respect while sustaining a stance of openness to cultural heterogeneity, rather than the inclination of preserving homogenisation and sameness. Although these principles may seem idealistic and difficult to fully implement, they play a vital role in dismantling discriminatory discourses and prejudices, thereby fostering a more inclusive and ethically responsible global community.

These principal notions are reciprocally central to two strands of cosmopolitanism: Enlightenment cosmopolitanism and contemporary cosmopolitanism. In reading the foundational creeds of cosmopolitanism within the context of European Enlightenment, Walter Mignolo points out how Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitan ideas invite us to the readiness of hospitality and the endurance of peace and social equality at a wide universal scale (733). In line with this, Kwame Anthony Appiah, a prominent advocate of the cosmopolitan enterprise, reminds us that we are "citizens of the world" and that we ought to keep up "obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by ties of kith or kind or even the moral formal ties of a shared citizenship" (XV). However, such idealistic conceptualisations, especially those featuring universal Enlightenment like that of Kant, aside from their tendency to prioritise elitism as well as their "racial underpinnings and Eurocentric bias" (Mignolo

732-33), lack specification in the sense that they do not identify what precisely constitutes the cosmopolitan community and who the cosmopolitan subjects really are.

These issues have drawn the attention of several contemporary cosmopolitan intellectuals, prompting a rethinking of the aspects that the enlightened and universalist contributions have often overlooked. In inclusive terms, Daniel Hiebert posits that cosmopolitanism is concerned with describing individuals "who are well travelled and have learned to be comfortable in many cultural settings" (212). Grounding their argument in the idea that "rootlessness, movement, homelessness, and nomadism have become the motifs of the analyst of cosmopolitanism" (Kendall 16) suggest three types of cosmopolitanism in the contemporary world: global business elites, refugees, and expatriates (13). Focusing exclusively on the non-elites, Sheldon Pollock et al., take the view that "refugees, people of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitan community" (582). This argument, foregrounding the non-elite subjects, is also confirmed by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, who argue that cosmopolitanism can "exist among a wide variety of non-elites, especially migrants and refugees" (8). By the same token, Ulf Hannerz argues that migrants may be most readily associated with cosmopolitanism, since they possess the free will to make their ways into other cultures through their movements across nations (243). According to these perspectives, cosmopolitanism is thus bound to diasporic and migratory experiences, and it is ultimately the travel and mobility of people across a variety of locations of the globe that gives rise to the contemporary cosmopolitan subject. This framework proves particularly relevant to understanding Najwa's transformation throughout her geographic and cultural relocations in the novel.

The marginalised and disenfranchised immigrants, however, occupy a pivotal space in the cosmopolitan sphere simply because they, quite like other groups of cosmopolitanism, have more or less the willingness to take risks by dint of encountering cultural otherness, and also because they are subject to a substantial transformation of their selves and identities that occurs as an outcome of their inevitable interactions with different cultures. In this regard, Pnina Werbner, in reviewing multiple types of the cosmopolitan community, refers to Homi Bhabha's notion of vernacular cosmopolitanism which, as she confirms, involves non-elite, particularly non-western forms of travel in a postcolonial world, where the openness to ethnic, religious, cultural, and national otherness becomes indispensable (14). Vernacular cosmopolitanism, as defined by Bhabha, pertains to those who "occupy marginal or minority positions within cultures and societies" (139). Najwa's position as a disenfranchised Arab woman clearly aligns with this vernacular cosmopolitan identity, occupying marginal positions across the various societies she encounters.

Drawing upon Bhabha's notions of third space and cultural hybridity, Vinay Dharwadker associates the vernacular cosmopolitans with the marginalised migrants' state of ambivalent in-betweenness, arguing that it is the condition of liminality that ultimately situates these migrants in a third space of hybridity in which they appropriate for themselves ways of life formulated out of the two spaces, and hence,

their own hybrid identities (127). Within an emerging zone, they create micro-worlds of their own that combine aspects of their home culture with those of their newly adopted one. Nevertheless, not all hybrid subjects may possess a cosmopolitan outlook, thereby emerging as truly cosmopolitan individuals; the ability to navigate this hybridity is conditional on these individuals' capacity for devising agency, their strategic ability to cope with influential socio-cultural factors, and also their potential for maintaining dynamic identities. Vertovec and Cohen support this point, demonstrating that cosmopolitanism "assumes complex, overlapping, changing, and often highly individualistic choices of identity and belonging" (18). Remarkably, this assertion suggests that cosmopolitanism ought not to be viewed as a rigid or universally accessible condition; rather, it is shaped by personal agency and the specific circumstances in which individuals find themselves. Drawing upon this complexity, Chan Kwok-Bun offers an insight into the nexus between hybridity and cosmopolitanism, highlighting both "the dark side of cosmopolitan encounters" (206), where individuals are subject to alienation due to their liminality, and the "many fascinating, exciting possibilities" (194), where hybridity opens up new opportunities for hybrid subjects. Kwok-Bun argues that whereas strangeness can drive to exclusion, it can, in turn, arouse curiosity, adventure, and transformation (207). Cosmopolitanism, hence, does not disregard one's local affinity; it is ingrained in one's cultural background and works out as a basis for negotiating identity in a transnational context.

It comes as no surprise that the representation of the marginalised, unprivileged, and diasporic migrants as cosmopolitan subjects permeates contemporary literary texts, particularly some of those committed to addressing matters of border-crossing, cultural identity, displacement, (un)belonging, adaptation, and hybridity. Faqir's novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep* uniquely examines the transformation of the personal identity that a disenfranchised Arab woman undergoes due to her experiences of multiple relocations. The novel's protagonist Najwa embarks on an intricate journey from her birthplace Jordan to Pakistan, then Afghanistan and all the way to England to follow her missing father's footsteps. Through this journey, Najwa constructs a fluid cosmopolitan subjectivity that serves as a unique strategy to redefine her consciousness/personhood and provides her with agency against the multiple partial stereotypes inherent in the conventional norms of the different patriarchal societies in which she moves. Before going to England, where she faces multiple forms of discrimination based on her racial and religious identity as the feminine cultural other in such a Western patriarchal context, Najwa is exposed to gender-oriented degradation that arises as a result of the patriarchal order of the Jordanian traditional society. Nevertheless, Najwa manages to forge a dynamic identity in reaction to these discourses and excels at reinventing herself so as to overcome prospective discriminatory treatment either within her original culture or within the newly adopted one.

In light of the above, the present study explores the processes that have an impact on Najwa's formation of identity with regard to her multiple displacements as delineated in Faqir's novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep*. It aims at revealing how

prejudices rooted in stereotypes against the novel's female protagonist push her to a rootless existence with a persistent sense of unbelonging. It also aims to accentuate in what ways she, in response, constructs a fluid cosmopolitan identity among several counter-cosmopolitan forces as a unique method of acquiring self-empowerment. Drawing upon various conceptual theorisations of cosmopolitanism as a notion that pertains to specific marginal groups in diaspora, I claim that the investigation of the above-outlined subjects breaks novel ground and contributes to the understanding of Faqir's novel as a cross-cultural literary text that not only challenges the ways and reasons behind the subordination of the disenfranchised Arab migrant woman in the contemporary times, but also as regards the construction of a cosmopolitan female subjectivity as a method of personal empowerment.

2. ROOTED STEREOTYPES AND ROOTLESS IDENTITY

The female protagonist, Najwa, a young Jordanian woman in Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, sets out on a challenging and mysterious mission involving travel across various locations, as she crosses the borders of her Arab country to look for her father, Omar Rahman. She seeks to understand why he suddenly left and what happened to him during his long years of absence. At the age of three, Najwa's father abandons his family and travels with his close friend Hani to Afghanistan to join a global movement of Islamic Jihad. As a result, Najwa's mother, Raneen, adopts a reluctant stance towards Islam, showing repulsion and a strong rejection of anything related to the religion that she associates with her husband's betrayal. In response, she takes several steps towards secularism such as removing her Islamic veil and burning all the religious books in the house.

Omar's sudden desertion marks the beginning of the family's suffering. His prioritisation of religious ideology over familial responsibilities creates a void and triggers consequential reactions from his wife, Raneen. This act reveals the powerful pull of religious fundamentalism and its role in disrupting the family structure. It also raises questions about the consequences faced by Arab women, particularly when they lack a male guardian within a traditional patriarchal system. Conversely, Raneen's resentment of Islamic ideology goes beyond personal reaction; it becomes a definitive stance against the consequences of religious fundamentalism that have caused deep distress to her and her daughter. Therefore, she does not only distance herself from her husband's religion, but she also imposes secularism on Najwa, forcing her to unveil her head and forbidding her from participating in religious events at school.

This is exemplified when Raneen flies into a rage upon observing that her daughter wears a piece of jewellery, given to her by a schoolmate, which contains an Islamic symbol, declaring "no religious words, deeds, texts, symbols, jewellery or dress in this house" (9). Raneen's extreme reaction to religious markers illuminates the intensity of her trauma and her profound fear that any Islamic symbol might reintroduce the oppressive forces she seeks to undermine. The symbol becomes threatening not for its inherent meaning, but for what it signifies from her

perspective: a potential gateway back to the fundamentalist influence that once constrained her life. Her blanket prohibition of all religious expression reveals how her rejection of religious oppression has transformed into an equally totalising secular ideology that denies Najwa the right to explore her own spiritual identity. Consequently, the process of secularising Najwa by her mother extends to impact Najwa's future, as well. As soon as the young Najwa prepares to attend college, Raneen insists that her daughter studies French language because France "is the most secular country on earth" (9). However, as this subject is not on offer, she decides that Najwa must "train as a tourist guide and work in one of the hotels by the Dead Sea, the most cosmopolitan and secular of environments" (10), which can be understood as deliberate and practical measures to integrate Najwa into a secular environment, far removed from religious fundamentalist influences.

Set against the backdrop of Najwa's transition from childhood to adolescence, the narrative highlights the tension between religious extremism and liberal secularism, a conflict that influences Najwa's beliefs, choices, and identity. This tension is embodied in the contrasting ideologies and behaviours of her family members and can be interpreted through Hisham Sharabi's concept of neopatriarchy. Sharabi identifies neopatriarchal society as emerging from the intersection of European colonial modernity and traditional Arab patriarchy: "the marriage of imperialism and patriarchy" (22). Sharabi observes that this interaction produces a clash between religious fundamentalism and liberal secularism, creating a defining characteristic of the contemporary Arab socio-cultural sphere. He argues that modernised Arab society, in its core concerns, represents a cultural and social encounter between "the two fundamental standpoints of secularism and Islam". The former comes from the West with its cultural standards as "its implicit or explicit model", while the latter arises from the established religion as "its source of legitimacy and inspiration" (10). Sharabi further contends that neither standpoint succeeds in "developing a genuinely independent critical and analytical discourse" in which "the problems of identity, history and the West" do not "find effective resolution" (10). Hence, Najwa's narrative, confused amidst the opposition between her parents' ideologies, exemplifies the societal discrepancy Sharabi describes. The intersection in Najwa's personal life reflects the larger cultural and social forces at play, marked by the cultural tension between notions of Western modernity and entrenched norms of Arab traditional and conservative culture in contemporary Arab neopatriarchal society.

As the events of the narrative unfold, it becomes evident that Najwa's upbringing as a secular girl under the guidance of her mother, in the absence of her father, is fraught with difficulties. In a sense, it establishes her as a castaway stranger with a sense of difference and unbelonging among her neighbours, as she lives in a religious and conservative milieu, where she does not adhere to its customs, standards, and values. Besides transgressing the sanctioned dress code designated to women in such a traditional culture by appearing in public unveiled and dressed in a liberal style, she does not practise Islamic rituals either, which renders her a cultural and religious other in the perception of the surrounding people. This

paradoxical positioning underscores the intricate relationship between physical belonging and socio-cultural acceptance. In their analysis of Najwa's conditions within the local sphere, Ghania Ouahmiche and Sarnou make the remark that "[b]eing different from other conservative girls of Amman excludes Najwa from a space she inhabits physically but cannot adhere to its rulings emotionally" (148). This observation captures the essence of Najwa's unsettled existence: she is geographically settled but culturally uprooted, present in body but absent in spirit from the community that surrounds her. This spatial paradox becomes a defining feature of her identity construction and foreshadows her later experiences of displacement in diverse cultural landscapes. Such consciousness of divergence is reflected in Najwa's narration: "I knew I was different. I was not allowed to cover my head, wear a long school uniform or trousers, recite the Qur'an, participate in the Ramadan procession, or wear prayer clothes and go to the mosque in the evening with the other children, who carried lanterns" (9). This passage highlights her non-conformity and the isolation it creates. Her exclusion from communal religious activities further alienates her from her peers, causing both physical and emotional estrangement. This positioning as an outsider exposes how rigid social, cultural, and religious values can marginalise individuals who do not fully conform to them.

The narrative also exemplifies that Najwa is viewed and even treated as a person with less dignity and honour, for she is brought up in a family house that is only inhabited by three women: Najwa, her mother, and her grandmother. This is evidenced when Najwa says, "[n]o male guardian, no honour, no status in this neighbourhood" (5). This realisation of societal judgments reveals how prejudicial mechanisms function in practice, categorising Najwa and her family based on their household structure with rigid assumptions about their moral character imposed upon them regardless of their individual circumstances. Though these realities are not Najwa's own faults, and definitely not the outcome of her deliberate personal choices, she is subject to prejudiced misrepresentation and mistreatment that notably emerge from dual sources of bias: a religious framework that perceives women who lack religiosity as deviant, coupled with a gender-based framework that identifies women who live without male guardians as shameless. These overlapping stereotypes function as sources for exclusion, creating a double bind that frames Najwa's view of herself as perpetually other. As a consequence, the community's assumptions become internalised constraints that impact her identity formation. This forces her to navigate between fulfilling social expectations and reclaiming her individual agency–a tension that drives her towards developing alternative forms of belonging and subjectivity.

Furthermore, Faqir's novel makes it explicit that Najwa has fewer–if any–social interactions, since no guests habitually visit her house and she has no relatives or friends with whom she can socialise, which intensifies her feeling of isolation and, by extension, her dilemma of not having affinity either for her society or for its people, who at times look down upon her. For instance, the next-door neighbours prohibit their son to propose to Najwa because she grows up in a family without

men, and therefore, she does not, as they believe, know how to show obedience and respect to their son, which reveals how it is taken for granted by society that female roles are secondary and restricted to obeying males' wills in the private sphere. What is more, this attitude assumes that as long as a woman grows up in a house without men, she is not accustomed to the standardised occupations expected of women and shall be, by default, unable to perform her alleged domestic duties, pivoted on an unconditional conformity towards her prospective husband, who, in turn, acts as her legitimate guardian substituting her previous one; that is, her father.

In response to her marginalisation and isolation within the local patriarchal sphere, Najwa takes on unique methods of self-empowerment. Her capacity for devising agency is evident in her neutral position in the opening scene of the story. She mentions that her mother requests before she dies "[n]o Islamic funeral" (3), something that Najwa's grandmother Zainab does not adhere to. At the funeral, the grandmother follows religious rituals such as washing Raneen's body, performing Islamic ablutions, reciting Quranic verses, wrapping the corpse in loofah, and performing the funeral prayer in the mosque. Within the contrast between the mother's dismissal of religious beliefs and the grandmother's adherence to religious values, Najwa's position is balanced, as she does not disregard either of them. She remains an observant, who actively engages with the complexity of the situation without necessarily intervening or taking a side. Though this situation reflects her internal struggle as to which path to choose, her middle ground allows her to become connected to both despite their inherent opposition. According to Sarnou, Najwa navigates the ideological tensions in her life by appropriating an in-between position and "a way that perceives the truth from a neutral and ideology-free position" (160). More precisely, Najwa maintains traits of the secular character desired by her mother, but she does not fully reject the Islamic rituals that her grandmother believes in; that is why she accompanies her grandmother to the cemetery on the day of her mother's funeral, even though women are not allowed to go there, since this is, from the perspective of her conservative community, considered a man's space.

Similarly, in assisting her grandmother on her visit to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage, one of the five pillars of Islam, Najwa acknowledges the significance of religious spirituality, while, at the same time, she behaves and appears as a secular person, who seems to have less sense of religiousness, which shows how much openness and flexibility pave the way for her to develop a fluid identity and a neutral positionality. Her wish before her grandmother takes the bus to Mecca, "May Allah accept your pilgrimage and grant you a place in his paradise" (61), also shows Najwa's acceptance of religious teachings, even if she does not herself embrace them. This suggests that Najwa does not confine herself to a rigid identity. Her flexibility enables her to develop a more comprehensive and adaptable approach between the contrasting aspects of her life, without being either strictly secular or fully religious.

Therefore, Najwa is emancipated from inside and she is not completely fettered by the confines of these ideologies, as she can resist and evade these confines

through the dynamic characteristics of her identity. From a cosmopolitan viewpoint, this open attitude of neutrality can be interpreted in correspondence with Hannerz' ideas on the cosmopolites' competence, surrender, and mastery. This scholar asserts that the cosmopolitans are those who have a sense of mastery in espousing the different culture but do not necessarily become fully committed to it. When necessary, they always know how and where to find the secure exit, which means that they have the eagerness to override the state of being fully restricted to their standards (240). This is exactly how Najwa manages her complex cultural balance: even if at this point she cannot be claimed as the fully cosmopolitan subject, this trait exhibits the foundational skills that will facilitate her later development of cosmopolitan subjectivity when she encounters diverse cultural contexts through displacement. She has a sense of mastery in taking on what satisfies her demands from the diverse cultures, admitting certain aspects to herself and leaving behind the others, without regarding the validity or invalidity of the relinquished ones.

In spite of these micro-successes of hers in terms of adaptability, Najwa still struggles, and her experiences within the local sphere uncover crucial aspects contributing to her marginalisation. Due to her mother's secularism and her lack of male custodianship, she is forced into a state of exclusion and a feeling of estrangement because of her non-conforming identities. These experiences expose the biased societal judgments and stereotypical gender-based discrimination that foster Najwa's sense of rootlessness and lack of belonging within a patriarchal environment; they also reveal that the established norms of her society operate as driving forces for women's degradation and inferiority. However, Najwa's resistance to this marginalisation, though constrained within the local context, manifests through her ability to craft flexible and neutral identities. This ability to adapt to the rigid expectations of her environment showcases the foundational traits of a cosmopolitan individual. These traits lay the ground for her later journeys, through which her engagement with diverse cultures will not only refine but also consolidate her cosmopolitan subjectivity.

3. BEYOND BORDERS: THE FORMATION OF COSMOPOLITAN SUBJECTIVITY

Faqir's novel presents distinctive possibilities for the development of a dynamic identity in a diasporic context by employing the trope of the journey as a narrative strategy to foreground the processes involved in the reinvention of Najwa's cultural identity. As depicted in the story, Najwa's identity changes and is constantly reshaped, as she encounters different social situations in which she engages with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, who challenge or affirm her sense of self. Therefore, the formation of her identity is the product of her scattered experiences in a variety of locations and an outcome of her condition both as a marginalised individual within her indigenous culture and as a displaced nomadic migrant. In this respect, her journey can be interpreted as a process of self-exploration and self-identification.

It is also a course of socialisation in which her experiences with distinct cultures bring about an alternate experience that redefines her identity and reformulates her life in a different mode. In an online interview with Fadi Zaghmout, Faqir reveals that she wants Najwa "to go on a journey that is so difficult and is going to change her into someone who is possibly aware of what is happening in the world" (01:28–01:40). Najwa is forced to confront this difficulty, since she has enough motives to push her ahead on an endeavour of discovery through undertaking an unavoidable action of border-crossing. In this vein, Ouahmiche and Sarnou state that Najwa "started a long journey of crossing borders to discover her father's past which would make her reach the coherent sense of the self" (146). She has to face a predicament made up of an internal confusion and a personal crisis that stem from her lack of knowledge about her father's true identity and whereabouts, the absence of concrete information about his past actions and motivations, her urgent need to come to terms with her real existence in life, and her quest to reestablish her sense of belonging and conformity, which would remain unresolved and unidentified unless she reaches a genuine sense of self-awareness.

Through her migratory activity, Najwa creates a private space of consciousness that provides her with latent agency which enables her to transcend all the obstacles pervading her life and to carry on her challenging mission not only of pursuing her father, who seems in some way a mere reminiscence of childhood for her, but also of searching for her disoriented self and unsettled roots. In many instances in the novel, Najwa shows an extraordinary ability in crafting a non-static but changeable identity as a personal strategy and a self-cautionary tool that empowers her to avoid falling into foreseeable tribulations. For instance, because she is aware that, in a time of witnessing huge movements of Arab Muslim jihadists towards Pakistan and Afghanistan, having a visa to these countries is difficult especially for young Muslim people, Najwa puts tourism as the main reason behind her visit to Pakistan in an attempt not to raise suspicion about her identity. At the embassy interview, she insists that she studies tourism and is eager to discover the fascinating peaks of a Pakistani mountain. Ironically, the man at the embassy asks her not to "tell [him] [she is] going to climb it!". Najwa, in turn, answers: "I have to climb it" (53), mirroring her own mission which is as arduously adventurous as climbing such high mountains.

Going through the airport check, Najwa downplays the situation when the police officer asks about the purpose of her visit to Pakistan. She claims she is on a tourism trip and expresses an interest in traditional music, believing that "someone who loved to sing, dance … was no threat to anyone" (68). Similarly, when questioned again by a police officer upon arriving in the country, she retains her claim, demonstrating her obsession with "ethnic Pakistani music" (74). These interactions reveal how Najwa strategically uses cultural stereotypes to her benefit. By crafting an identity as a harmless tourist and pretending to be familiar with local customs, she manipulates herself within a framework of dissimulation in which she manages to deflect attention from her true plans. This tactic allows her to distance herself from potential doubts, ensuring she is not scrutinised or detained. Najwa's approach

highlights her awareness of the role cultural knowledge can effectively play in tailoring a credible persona that can mitigate authorities' suspicions. This corresponds with Hannerz's view of cosmopolitanism as "a perspective, a state of mind, or–to take a more processual view–a mode of managing meaning". Hannerz further explains that cosmopolitanism entails "relationships to a plurality of cultures" and requires "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other". He also describes this cosmopolitan competence as "a built-up skill in manoeuvring more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms" (238-39). By managing the meaning of the inspection system at the airport with her cultural realisation and flexibility, Najwa embodies these cosmopolitan traits, successfully relying on them to influence perceptions and accomplish her goals not only of protecting herself, but also of continuing her mission without disruption.

During her visit to "al-Zahrani mosque" (77) in Pakistan, where Najwa seeks clues about her father's whereabouts, she performs ablution and reads verses from the holy Quran about how ease and relief often follow every difficulty through divine mercy. Initially, she engages in these religious practices for pragmatic purposes with the desire to get along with the unfamiliar atmosphere of the mosque and establish a connection with its people. However, as she ponders on these verses, their profound implications start to take hold of her. This moment becomes particularly significant when Najwa remembers her sick mother, thinking that if she "had read this verse from the Qur'an, she would have realised that each trial carried the seeds of healing within it" (79). This incident captures a moment of transformation in Najwa's internal journey in which her engagement with religious beliefs leads to a meaningful spiritual and philosophical introspection. Resonating with her experiences, the content of the verses, reflecting divine mercy and eventual relief, allows Najwa to reassess her understanding of the struggles in her own life. This shift shows Najwa's growing awareness, underscoring her continuing pursuit of meaning and solace. It turns out to operate as a catalyst for Najwa to identify the dichotomy of suffering and healing within every move, aligning with her efforts to reconcile her past and present realities with a sense of purpose and realisation.

On her first meeting with the religious man Abu Baker in the mosque, he suspects her identity as a spy. Najwa, however, manages to convince him of her true identity and her expedition of finding her father by providing specific, minimal details about him, "he has a crescent-shaped scar at the end of his eyebrow" (93). The paradoxical significance of these minimal details lies in their very specificity and ordinariness. The physical marker of a scar suggests the kind of knowledge only available through close personal connection, creating credibility because it avoids grandiose claims or suspicious elaboration. In contexts of displacement and trauma, where mistrust is prevalent, such restrained disclosure may serve as effective truth-telling through understatement rather than overstatement. Najwa further supports her narrative by mentioning to Abu Baker, "my mother was called Raneen, and my grandmother is Zainab" (93). When he presses her again about her grandmother's name, Najwa emphasises her "Palestinian grandmother" (93). This reference to her Palestinian roots demonstrates Najwa's strategic use of cultural and historical knowledge to

build trust and reliability, as Palestinian identity holds particular symbolic capital in this context through its association with anti-colonial struggle, which is a shared framework of oppression that resonates with Abu Baker's own ideological stance. Her awareness of a certain geopolitical perspective that links the struggles of the Afghan and Palestinian people enables her to connect with Abu Baker on a successful level, making her narrative more persuasive to him, whose worldview is framed by solidarity with liberation movements and resistance to Western intervention. This adaptability is crucial in her quest to find her father, showcasing her growing ability to draw on the knowledge she has to accomplish her purposes. Ultimately, Najwa gains Abu Baker's trust, marking another move in advancing her mission, as he eventually begins to share important clues about her father and how they first met in one of the training camps. Abu Baker further facilitates Najwa's trip to Afghanistan, assisting her to continue her journey of exploration.

While on the way to Afghanistan, Najwa experiences a pivotal moment of awareness when the car she is traveling in is thoroughly checked by soldiers at a checkpoint, who are searching for weapons. Later, she notices a piece of weapon hidden under the seat by the driver, likely picked up from one of the stores after the checkpoint. Najwa's remark, "you gaze at the same spot for years and fail to see the whole picture" (121), marks a turning point in her views, highlighting her growing awareness of the ambiguities of surface-level perceptions and the likely deceptive realities of the world around her. It signifies her realisation in the sense that what she had already accepted may involve concealed implications and hidden truths. The symbolism of discovering the weapon after such attentive checks creates a powerful metaphor that contrasts surface security with deeper insecurities represented by the hidden weapon, symbolising the concealed truths and suppressed realities that official narratives fail to acknowledge. Significantly, this symbolism echoes Najwa's journey of exploration, both internal and external, which is not only about her physical relocation but also about the expansion of her knowledge and her evolving understanding of the world she inhabits.

As she begins to notice that her previous perception of her surroundings and the people she encounters might be superficial, she starts to discern the underlying realities that she once ignored. This transformation can be interpreted in Appiah's and Hannerz's terms. While Appiah suggests that cosmopolitan knowledge is "imperfect, provisional, [and] subject to revision in the face of new evidence" (144), Hannerz identifies cosmopolitanism as "an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity" (239). Najwa's search for hidden realities during her journey embodies this cosmopolitan stance, though it emerges not from pure ethical openness or intellectual curiosity, but rather as a survival strategy necessitated by her vulnerable position as a displaced woman navigating potentially dangerous territories. It reflects a process of engaging with unfamiliar experiences, reassessing previous assumptions and reconsidering her perception of the world. Her transformation embodies the fallibilist aspect of cosmopolitanism, as her beliefs are not fixed but remain open to change, as she continuously encounters new insights. This pragmatic necessity

transforms into ethical openness, as Najwa discovers that survival requires true engagement with difference rather than superficial tolerance, making her cosmopolitan development both strategic and transformative. This change in attitude demonstrates Najwa's flexible receptiveness to new knowledge–a characteristic of a cosmopolitan outlook that aligns with the theories of Appiah and Hannerz.

In Afghanistan, Najwa's time at one of Al Qaeda's camps leads her to new revelations specifically through her encounter with Gulnar. At first, she appears outraged to know that the Afghani woman is her father's second wife and that she has a half-sister named Amani. After her first reaction of anger due to the unexpected shock in her personal life, Najwa's attitude changes from resentment to a tolerant and accepting stance, acknowledging Gulnar and Amani's hospitality and kindness. This shift becomes evident when Najwa decides to "give [Amani] a hug" on the next day and "make a dress for her naked doll" (154). This gesture embodies Najwa's emotional resilience, agency, and adaptive identity formation, reflecting her psychological capacity to process unexpected trauma and transform it into meaningful connection. Rather than remaining fixed in her initial shock and betrayal, she exhibits an ability to adjust emotional responses and behavioural patterns when confronted with new information that challenges her existing beliefs about her family and belonging. It showcases her capacity for a dynamic sense of identity that allows her to transcend the emotional gap created by her initial anger and accept the newfound realities of her family. This psychological adaptability demonstrates not merely tolerance but active emotional reconstruction, where Najwa's affective responses become resources for building new forms of kinship that transcend conventional boundaries of legitimate versus illegitimate family structures.

In the narrative, however, there is a major disruption to this newly emerging relationship between these three women: a destructive drone attack on the camp, causing Amani's death before Najwa can fully reconnect with and express her care for her half-sister. Najwa's ultimate reaction: "just like that, I left the land of the wronged, of victims and hard-done-bys, and entered the country of the guilty" (161), signifies a turning point in her understanding of the world and her place within it. Witnessing harsh events of violence and their moral dimensions, Najwa views herself and those around her as victims, who endure the indiscriminate and dehumanising nature of the attack beyond their control. The notion that the attack takes Amani's life before Najwa can reconcile the relationship with her underlines the grim reality that innocent people are not excluded from violent acts, with their arbitrariness and cruelty blurring the lines between victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, Najwa's reaction reflects that her previous perception of what is good and evil and what is right and wrong was simplistic, and the senselessness of the attack makes her reconsider the complexities of the world around her. It is a world replete with varying forms of violence, where everyone, including herself, is likely to be subjected to loss while being burdened by some responsibility in the face of threatening circumstances.

After these harsh situations, Najwa decides to move to England to continue following in her father's footsteps. This shows that Najwa is determined not to let

any cause slow down the progression of her journey or limit the attainment of her personal goals; that is why she manoeuvres within a framework of awareness in which she is prepared, when necessary, to adapt her presentation of identity to avoid being misperceived. This framework operates through ethical pragmatism, where she adopts acceptable identities not to assimilate permanently but to navigate systems of exclusion that would otherwise block her access to mobility and opportunity. On one occasion, for instance, she uses a forged student visa and a fabricated university letter of acceptance to gain access to England. She does this because she realises that traveling from Afghanistan to the West would be problematic at a time of intense geopolitical tensions following the Soviet invasion and the subsequent rise of religious fundamentalist groups, leading to widespread travel restrictions on individuals from this region. By presenting herself as a student, she circumvents both bureaucratic barriers and potential prejudicial assumptions, enabling her to pursue her search for her father.

Not only does Najwa manoeuvre by pretension in order not raise suspicion about her identity, but also in order to be accepted as a conformist expatriate, she also changes her appearance and adopts specific behavioural codes that comply as much as possible with the given normative standards of the different cultures. In this regard, Amani Abu Joudeh and Yousef Awad demonstrate that Faqir identifies dress "as a meaningful aspect of the construction of identity and an evocative metaphor of sociological, political, cultural and psychological web of codes" (13), and as they argue, "Najwa's choice of what to wear during her peregrinations … is ruled by self-perception and cultural positioning" (9). Remarkably, Faqir's novel represents the significance of personal appearance and individual dress code as constitutive elements in the recognition of cultural identity, serving as pivotal aspects that disclose how migrants are perceived and thus treated when they intend to integrate in certain social situations outside the borders of their home countries.

In the case of Najwa, these aspects intensify her sense of awareness and help her not to be situated at the risk of stereotypical segregation. As Abu Joudeh and Awad also observe, Najwa "is aware of the indicative role that dress plays in diverse countries including Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Britain; thus, she pays a close attention to the specificity of each region where in each place she emerges differently" (7). This geographic adaptability mirrors her psychological flexibility, one that refuses the coherence of a single self in favour of multiple, contextually appropriate performances that serve both survival and self-determination. In the Pakistani and Afghani conservative communities, Najwa follows the Islamic dress code by wearing a veil with a long chador; she also pretends to be a devout Muslim in conduct, one who does not look strange men in the eyes and refrains from shaking hands with them. Indeed, with her manoeuvres and manners fitting into the Muslim code of conduct, Najwa manages to achieve her purposes in these countries: in addition to overcoming stereotypical misrepresentation, she obtains useful clues about her father's whereabouts.

Moreover, Najwa continues to alter her appearance on grounds of convenience and reinvents her sense of self and identity on her journey to England. On her way

while still on the plane, she turns back to her secular identity and habitually liberal look by taking off her veil and shirt and "exposing [her] arms and cleavage" (169). She is attentive to hide any sign that would label her as a Muslim woman. For this reason, she also keeps in mind to abstain from using any Islamic words such as "Inshallah!" and "Allah Willing" (173) in her verbal communication with English people. While this transformation demonstrates her adaptability, it also reveals the vulnerability inherent in having to suppress core aspects of her identity to move through new cultural spaces safely. This constant reinvention of her identity aligns with David Held's understanding of cultural cosmopolitanism. Held, in alignment with Scheffler, emphasises that cultural cosmopolitanism involves the "fluidity of individual identity" and the "remarkable capacity to forge new identities using materials from diverse cultural sources, and to flourish while so doing" (58). For Held, this approach also entails the ability to stand outside any singular cultural location and mediate between multiple traditions, navigating their core aspects with ease (58). In Najwa's case, her journey embodies cultural cosmopolitanism, as she continuously alters her identity depending on the different cultural contexts. By seamlessly navigating multiple identities, she embraces the cosmopolitan ideal of engaging in diverse cultures, mediating their norms through reshaping her evolving sense of self in pursuit of personal growth and fulfilment.

Najwa's action of changing her appearance in England is, in some way, unfailing and safe; what is more, it is women with Islamic dresses who are occasionally violated in this location. While sitting in a café in London, Najwa watches a discriminatory incident in which a young Englishman abuses a group of veiled women. He shouts at them: "O! Scarecrows! Camel heads! Go home!" (185). Although Najwa is only an observer of this incident, she notices that the violated women are unperturbed, indicating that they are most probably used to such religion- and race-based abuses. Witnessing this scene reinforces Najwa's decision to conceal any signs of a Muslim identity, as she recognises the precarious position of visible Muslim women in this society and the potential threats to her own sense of belonging. This incident highlights the pervasiveness of racism and Islamophobia in daily life, leading to the normalisation of these discriminatory acts. On a broader scale, it reflects a societal pattern in which xenophobia persists, contributing to the marginalisation of Muslim women, particularly those who wear the Islamic veil.

Najwa's own experiences in English society further illustrate this marginalisation. Her relationship with Andy, the Englishman she meets on the plane, serves as a significant instance. Initially, Andy appears helpful and kind to Najwa and hosts her at his house. However, as their relationship develops and they engage in a sexual relationship, he abruptly loses interest in her. Even though Najwa is attentive to avoid "emotional attachment" (173) to strange men, she feels attracted to Andy, which ultimately leads to her giving up her virginity to him. The superficiality of his commitment becomes evident when Andy begins making excuses to get rid of her, "my mother is going to France soon. You need to find alternative accommodation" (209). This pattern of behaviour exemplifies how the intersection of race, gender, and precarious migration status subordinates minority women in the English context.

Andy's treatment of Najwa demonstrates how her multiple marginalisation–as a woman, as an Arab, and as an immigrant–renders her vulnerable to exploitation. His transformation from apparent protector to dismissive exploiter reflects Najwa's broader struggle for acceptance in Western society, where she remains excluded from genuine integration and is viewed as an outsider. This dynamic reveals a pattern of objectification in which Najwa is reduced to an object of desire rather than perceived as a person with dignity.

Najwa describes her feeling towards Andy's betrayal in this way: "Andy cut me out of his life like a deft butcher, trimming off the fat" (215). This metaphor conveys not only the swiftness and precision of his actions, but also the painful detachment with which he discards her as if disposing of waste. In this sense, it reflects a dehumanising attitude in which Andy degrades Najwa to something devoid of value, akin to trimmed fat. It also implies the lack of hesitation in his exploitation and the sense of rejection Najwa feels, as she realises how he discards her without any regard for the emotional intimacy they once shared after he fulfils his desires with her. Whether as an observer of abuse or a victim of it, these incidents profoundly impact Najwa's perspective, reinforcing her awareness of the precarious position of Arab Muslim women in English society. This personal experience illuminates broader patterns of systemic inequality that marginalise immigrant women within Western societies. They represent politics of exclusion and othering that migrant women like her would face. Najwa comes to grasp how gender, racial, and religious identities can make women objects for abuse in a predominantly white society that is sometimes unwelcoming and intolerant of cultural differences–in addition to defining women as sexual objects of desire.

In contrast to her experiences with Andy, Najwa also engages with other English individuals who treat her with compassion and helpfulness, valuing her efforts to reunite with her father. For example, she meets Edward, a man who endured personal turmoil, including a troubled family background with an addicted mother and an absent father, as well as an unfair prison sentence for allegedly attempting to kill his girlfriend. Subsequently, Edward undergoes a substantial change by converting to Islam, a decision inspired by his exposure to the Quran through Omar's recitations in prison. Omar's role here serves as a cultural and spiritual mediator, bridging Islamic teachings with Edward's Western context and highlighting how cross-cultural exchange can facilitate personal transformation. His conversion does not lead to extremism but rather a quest for meaning, structure, and freedom in his life. As Edward explains to Najwa, the holy book provides him with the guidance his past life lacked, stating, "[n]o one told me what to do or this is right or this wrong. The self needs a framework" (224). Edward's search for structure mirrors Najwa's own quest for stability and belonging, as she traverses different cultural contexts, suggesting that the need for meaningful guidance transcends cultural boundaries. More practically, Edward plays a crucial role in supporting Najwa, arranging her visit to her father in prison and facilitating her accommodation with Elizabeth, a kind English woman in Durham.

Elizabeth also treats Najwa with kindness and vitally assists her in her quest, even going so far as to write to the authorities to help schedule Najwa's prison visits. The discrepancy between Najwa's interactions with Andy and those with Edward and Elizabeth emphasises the diversity of human relationships within English social landscapes. While Andy represents the segment of society that rejects others and marginalises them, Edward and Elizabeth are depicted as compassionate individuals who recognise Najwa's humanity regardless of her different cultural background. They represent a social group capable of showing tolerance and acceptance towards otherness, thereby challenging xenophobia and exclusion of minorities in their country. This genuine support marks a significant shift in Najwa's experience with Englishness, disclosing that her earlier encounters with exploitation and discrimination do not necessarily encompass the entirety of English society but rather coexist with possibilities for authentic connection and mutual respect.

This diversity of human relationships corresponds with Stuart Hall's understanding of cosmopolitanism in which he notes that societies are increasingly becoming multiple in nature due to the constant movement of people. Hall argues that societies are "composed of communities with different origins, coming from different places, obliged to make a life together within the confines still of a fixed territory boundary or space, while acknowledging that they are making a common life, not living a form of apartheid or separatism" (25). Yet, as Feyzi Baban and Kim Rygiel argue, achieving this coexistence necessitates "a framework of interaction with others" that actively works to dismantle entrenched systems of "oppression, exclusion, and marginalization" when "people come together beyond their immediate circles of identity" (78). This framework parallels Najwa's own evolving sense of belonging within England's diverse social fabric. In the novel, Edward and Elizabeth's treatment of Najwa reflects Hall's cosmopolitan ideals of coexistence, mutual respect, and cross-cultural acceptance. Unlike Andy, who approaches Najwa with xenophobia and exclusionary attitudes, they engage with her through genuine connection that embodies the ideals of an inclusive and interconnected society, where individuals ought to, in Appiah's words, "develop habits of existence" and "of living together" (xix) in respect despite their different origins.

Ultimately, Najwa meets her father, but this encounter proves unsatisfactory to her, as his justification for abandoning her appears unconvincing. He attributes his extremist actions to a predetermined fate decided by God, whereas Najwa argues that individual destinies are guided by free choices. This fundamental disagreement reveals the emergence of Najwa's own ethical worldview, one that privileges personal responsibility and agency over fatalistic resignation. Right after this disappointing meeting, Najwa starts thinking about returning to her grandmother while taking a reflective walk by the river in Durham–a space that symbolises her transition towards a new understanding of herself and her place in the world. During this moment, she says, "[h]ere and now, I–the skin, gristle, bone and blood of me–seemed real" (261). This emphasis on her physical materiality signifies a crucial moment of self-recognition, where Najwa reclaims ownership of her body after experiences of objectification and displacement, asserting her concrete existence as

the foundation of her identity. By focusing on her physical presence, Najwa emphasises her embodiment and the concrete reality of her existence, contrasting with the emotional and psychological suffering that previously caused her to feel rootless and isolated. This visceral connection to her own body displays a form of healing, as she moves from being acted upon by others to reclaiming her own self-possession and autonomy. This realisation marks an evolving acceptance of her identity, transcending her condition as a deserted daughter, as she starts to view herself as a complete human being with a coherent sense of self. This reflection also encapsulates Najwa's empowerment in which she asserts her own existence, reclaims her agency, and acknowledges her adequacy and value.

Overall, the different situations that Najwa witnesses through her long journey of exploration bring her close to a conscious understanding that feeds her a sense of her own perspectives, beliefs, feelings, and desires. With a flexible identity, she adopts a pragmatic and chameleon-like approach and attitude to her own sense of identity, changing the performative aspects of her identity depending on the ideological implications of the specific cultural contexts. She turns out to be a person who is open to having her identity redefined and her roots resettled in various locations. She becomes a person willing to adapt to diverse cultures and embrace diversity without denying the coexistence and validity of otherness. This readiness to reshape herself in response to different environments suggests both adaptability and a strategic performance of identity, an ability to navigate complexity without fully relinquishing self-awareness. Hence, she evolves into a cosmopolitan individual who is inwardly ready to embrace a balanced attitude amongst differences, signalling not only openness to but also meaningful engagement with cultural plurality.

4. COSMOPOLITAN AND COUNTER-COSMOPOLITAN SUBJECTS

Faqir employs a distinctive narrative style that intertwines Najwa's retrospective first-person account with her father's narrative, presented as a fictional diary, in alternating sections. Through this nuanced juxtaposition, the novel explores the tension between cosmopolitanism and anti-cosmopolitanism. The story takes readers through four countries, offering a close presentation of how the characters' interactions with various cultural, political, and religious ideologies reshape their sense of identity. It provides critical insights into how their lives are reshaped and how their cultural identities are reconstructed under the influence of radicalism, secularism, terrorism, and extremism. The narrative lines intersect at the point when Najwa eventually meets her father in Frankland prison in Durham, England. This convergence underscores the disparity in their worldviews, a direct result of the distinct ideological and experiential paths they have followed. Whereas Najwa comes to terms with the knowledge that sets her free with a stance of openness towards cultural diversity, her father is imprisoned for his terrorist deeds and blames himself for his strictness.

The narrative accentuates that Najwa's fluidity of identity, growing self-awareness, and agency provide a framework for the emergence of cosmopolitan

subjectivity amid multiple counter-cosmopolitan individuals and entities. Unlike her father, who turns from a non-strict Muslim but secular student of nursing in Jordan to a religious fundamentalist, and who serves as a medic in one of the Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, Najwa appropriates a cosmopolitan consciousness that makes her identity different from and arguably opposed to the idea of exclusive belonging or allegiance to a particular culture or ideology. In contrast to Najwa, her father's misunderstanding of many realities and his blind allegiance to religious extremism render his identity rigorous. Analysing Omar's transformation of identity, Majed Aladylah argues that Omar "lacks understanding of this implosion" (228), elaborating that "[he] is emotionally and intellectually confused; his world is shattered between reality and illusion" (228). In his diary, it is revealed that Omar and Hani, who used to go to bars and drink alcohol, and therefore, initially appear as religiously impious individuals, are misguided by the illusory thought that they can fight the injustice of society by joining the political movements of local resistance. Before they become members of the global movement of Al Qaeda Islamist organisation in the mountains of Afghanistan, their misguidance starts in Jordan when the two friends attend a confidential study circle that regularly assembles next to the Grand Mosque in Amman.

As presented in the novel, this meeting is arranged by an Islamist political brotherhood established in Jordanian-controlled Jerusalem in 1953, likely referencing Hizb ut-Tahrir (party of liberation), a pan-Islamist and fundamentalist political organisation that aims at reuniting the Muslim community (Umma) and implementing Sharia law, thereby rejecting liberal and secular paradigms exported from the West during the imperialist age. As Omar and Hani discuss, this organisation "works at all levels of society to restore the Islamic way of life under the umbrella of the Caliphate" (44), with the call for global Jihad as one of its core principles to achieve its broader objectives. This fictional representation reflects real-world dynamics that Sharabi identifies in his analysis of contemporary Arab politics. He contends that the evolution of "fundamentalist Islam into a militant political movement" in the contemporary Arab setting is intrinsically linked to "its dialectical relation to imperialism and modernization". According to Sharabi, "[t]he Islamic trend, in its reformist as well as conservative and militant forms, viewed history and the West in ideological terms and could see the past only as the embodiment or repository of the truth of Islam and its golden age, and the West as the negation of both". This ideological positioning produces "forms of consciousness, within neopatriarchal society, which reflect varying responses to the problem of distorted modernization" (71-72). Faqir's novel embodies these theoretical insights, blending references to reality with fictional representation to critique social conditions in Jordan and other Arab countries during a period marked by the disintegration of national identity due to rising radical organisations. The characters Omar and Hani exemplify Sharabi's analysis, as their transformation from non-strict Muslims into radical Islamists, which is characterised more by disillusionment and manipulation than by genuine conviction, illustrates the influence of fundamentalist ideologies in their society.

In the novel, Islamist fundamentalist groups establish themselves in the UK, with their actions influencing both natives and migrants. Najwa reads in a newspaper that

> Lisa French, 32, was on the top deck of the number 30 London bus blown up in Tavistock Square by suicide terrorist Hasib Hussain, killing 13 people and himself. Lisa had a phobia. 'Until now, buses have looked like coffins on wheels to me–because that was the image I was left with' (187).

As a reaction to this news, Najwa narrates, "I looked up phobia in my pocket dictionary: A fear, aversion or hatred" (187). This moment suggests that the news provokes Najwa to speculate the nature of fear, the aversion resulting from horrifying events, and how they occasionally pervade her lived experiences. Lisa's story, in which she is exposed to terroristic violence leading to internal anxiety, prompts Najwa to associate her internal fear with her struggles to search for meaning amid the violence and discrimination shaping her existence. Najwa's attempt to look for the meaning of "phobia" underlines the impact of external events on her internal world, embodying her dilemma to find a sense of her personhood in a life characterised by both personal and collective fears.

By the same token, the narrative includes a reference to the three terrorist bombs in the underground train in London in the same year. The novel portrays Omar as a member of the radical network responsible for these attacks and a participant of these terrorist events. His occupation is "to teach the bombers how to make simple and quick explosives" (32), something that he learned in Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. The novel highlights how these horrible actions cause the outburst of discrimination and Islamophobia against Arab and Muslim immigrants, who are at times misperceived by stereotypical implications as terrorists within the English community. In this way, Islamist fundamentalist groups fend off Najwa's cosmopolitanism and impact her efforts to assimilate in the English culture in particular, but they also lead to a stereotypical discrimination against Arab and Muslim migrants in diaspora in general. In this vein, one can refer to Appiah's juxtaposition of the cosmopolitan and anti-cosmopolitan in which he asserts that despite their "transnational networks and global moral aspirations", religious fundamentalist movements like Al Qaeda are counter-cosmopolitan, for they "appear to espouse singular truth and demonise the other" (qtd. in Werbner, 11). Appiah further critiques how such radical movements distort traditional religious values, weaponising Jihad as a political tool under the guise of religious doctrine (140). Within the novel, both Najwa's father and Al Qaeda embody this rejection of pluralism, insisting on their ideological exclusivity as the sole legitimate truth. The father's enactment of this exclusivity is absolute; he serves the cause not just with belief but with action, leveraging the skills he gained in Afghanistan to teach others how to build the very bombs used in the London attacks. Their recourse to violence not only reinforces fear and insecurity, but it also intensifies xenophobic anxieties, influencing both native citizens and migrants alike, even undermining, among others, Najwa's sense of self and position in society.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has analysed Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, focusing on how the Arab protagonist Najwa's difference leads to her estrangement within her local patriarchal community, and how her dynamic identity and cosmopolitan subjectivity serve as latent agency in the diasporic context. Deploying cosmopolitanism as a theoretical apparatus, the textual analysis has revealed that Najwa faces prejudices due to her secular identity in Jordan, where she does not conform to the cultural and religious practices of her conservative community. As a diasporic subject, Najwa's journey of exploration, however, allows her to develop a flexible identity and cosmopolitan positionality, empowering her to establish a unique sense of belonging to the different cultures she traverses. By addressing the encounter between religious fundamentalism and liberal secularism through juxtaposing Najwa's narrative with that of her extremist father, the analysis has demonstrated how their opposing worldviews shape their contrasting destinies. While her father's rigid ideology leads to his imprisonment for terrorist activities, Najwa emerges as an empowered cosmopolitan whose trajectory embodies a resilient and inclusive alternative to fundamentalism through her embrace of social, cultural, and religious diversity.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on cosmopolitanism in diaspora literature by exploring how hybrid identities can function as forms of agency in the face of patriarchal control, diasporic discrimination, and ideological extremism. Practically, the findings of this study offer insights into how flexible, adaptable, and inclusive identity formations can reinforce cross-cultural understanding and coexistence in multicultural societies. Future research could inspect how cosmopolitan subjectivity is negotiated in other Arab diasporic texts or conduct comparative studies examining how different gendered experiences frame the response to religious, cultural, and ideological boundaries in transnational contexts.

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