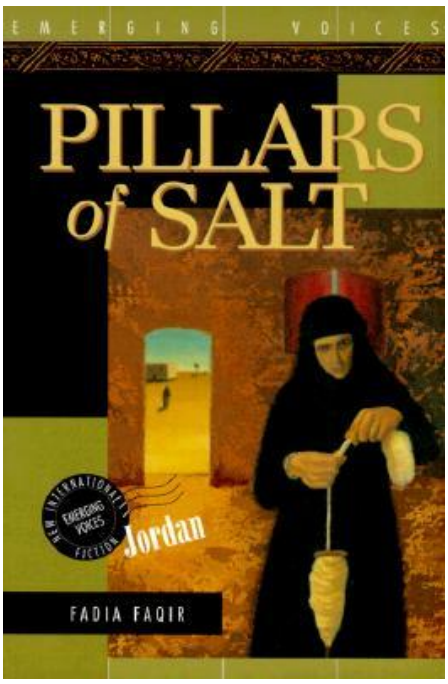

Pillars of Salt

Fadia Faqir

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Pillars of Salt Fadia Faqir
Pillars of Salt is the story of two women confined in a mental hospital in Jordan during and after the British Mandate. After initial tensions they become friends and share their life stories.

Pillars of Salt Details

Date	:	Published October 1st 1996 by Interlink Books (first published March 1st 1996)
ISBN	:	9781566562539
Author	:	Fadia Faqir
Format	:	Paperback 230 pages
Genre	:	Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Literature

From Reader Review Pillars of Salt for online ebook

Maddie says

Told through the perspective of two women, a young Bedouin living in the Jordan Valley, and a 'city woman' from Amman, as well as a male storyteller, Pillars of Salt is an interesting novel set in Jordan during and right after the British Mandate.

I really enjoyed the writting style (a lot more than Fadia Faqir's My Name is Salma), the story and the characters. I particularly enjoyed the use of multiple perspectives, as well the use of the fairy tale technique in the storyteller's perspective.

Here is my full video-review of this book:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BQ-A...

Cymackenzie says

Heartbreaking read that made me want to punch something. Evocative writing (but could have done without the 'storyteller' completely)

Diana Shamaa says

“Stalpi de sare” este cel de-al doilea roman al Fadiei Faqir, care exploreaza povestile a doua femei arabe aflate sub presiunile sociale si religioase ale societatii in care traiesc. Romanul urmareste povestile tragice a celor doua femei care se intalnesc intr-o institutie psihiatrica condusa de englezii aflati in timpul Mandatului din Iordania. Faqir foloseste personajul Maha, o femeie beduina, ca narator a propriei povesti, care, in capitole consecutive asculta povestea de viata a colegei de camera, Um Saad.
https://dianashamaablog.com/2018/01/0...

Nick says

Nothing pleases me more in reading than to find something astonishing from a part of the world whose literature I know nothing about, doubly if the writer is a woman, still rare in many places. Fadia Faqir's "Pillars of Salt" is a story from Jordan under and just after the British Mandate. Two women, one a young Bedouin, the other an older resident of Amman, reside in a room in a psychiatric hospital and once they overcome the city dweller's prejudice, tell each other their stories. The Bedouin Maha is slowly deprived of everything she loves, the land and even her son. But her voice isn't passive in the slightest; she is a fierce defender of the little that she has--family, her beloved orchard, her belief in who she is. Faqir's well-honed anger spares no one, as Maha is continually betrayed by every authority, religious, military, cultural, medical and familial. She's endures a folk treatment for barrenness that is horrifying. Um Saad the city-dweller's fate is in at least one way even crueler, as she is denied even the tragically short loving marriage that Maha has

when her father takes her to a marriage before telling her that she is the bride. Um Saad suffers from sharing a novel with the incomparably vivid Maha; Maha even tells Um Saad's story, although largely by reciting what the older woman tells her. As if all this were not enough,Maha's narration is shadowed by a traditional storyteller, who tells Maha's story as a patriarchal folk tale, magic realism in cruelly misogynistic hands. This is a hard book, because of its unflinching vision and its rejection of the exercise of power masquerading as God's will.

Boualam Fadia says

As far as I am concerned,this novel was one of the best I have read.What I liked most was Fadia Faqir use of code-swithing,particularly lexical borrowing and tranforming from Arabic,as a way of finding a "new English",a language between two languages.This mixed new English seeks to encompass both her new home and ancestral one in order to enable her to participate in both words.

Bogdan says

I simply struggled reading this and almost decided to drop it unfinished in two occasions. It simply did not fit my style and although I like very much the topic (women condition in islamic societies), I could not rate it higher than this.

David says

I read this for my Arab American Women Writers class. I don't really remember what the book was about. Something about an Arab woman escaping the clutches of her cruel brother, finding love, losing love, blah blah blah. The usual romantic stuff, except it was in Arabia in the early 20th century.

Reem Ka says

Let me start by just stating a fact which is that Fadia Faqir is a brilliant writer. Her style of writing just proves it every single time I read one of her novels. I just love her way of writing and you will know what I am referring to if you have read her books. Every time I read one of her novels, I’m fascinated by her way of writing.

This novel and her previous novels tend to focus on women in a way that gives the reader a very clear idea of their lives with utmost amount of details that I find it very pleasing to read. Usually when the author provides a high level of details, the reader tends to get bored quickly but the amount of details that Fadia provides is crystal clear and creative in its own way that it does not bore the reader putting in mind the fact of the excessive details and descriptions provided in her novels.

Also, her novels tend to focus on more than one character so we notice that the narrative is told from different characters sharing different points of view as we saw in this book.

I have read all of Fadia’s novels except her first novel and I am currently on the hunt for it.

5 out of 5 with no doubt.

Sarah says

Very torn about whether to go with three stars or four stars, though I'm going with four in the hopes that GoodReads may start recommending me books that actually sound interesting.

Fadia Faqir (who since this book published has definitely "emerged" onto the literary stage) has written a fascinating book focusing on the lives of two Jordanian women who meet in a mental hospital--though that last is used mostly as a framing device.

There were three shifting perspectives: First the male storyteller who claims to have witnessed most of Maha's story and heard her reciting the rest; then Um Saad, an older woman from Amman who grew up in the city and tells the story of her life; and finally Maha, whose family struggles comprise the largest portion of the book.

The differences are obvious: male and female perspectives, city and rural lives, a liar and two people who the reader trusts to tell the truth. All three tell their stories from the first person, but all of them take a slightly different approach. The storyteller's is very traditional, going so far as to insert elements of folklore, religion, history, and superstition to support the narrative. These aspects are only incidental to Maha and Um Saad's lives, even as they are incredibly prevalent in the background.

I had a bit of trouble trying to figure out when the story was set, even with the help of a timeline of Jordan's occupation at the front. There were radios but no televisions, airplanes and Land Rovers but telephones were unfamiliar, plastic sandals but almost no other outside goods described in the village. I wasn't too bothered by this, though. Still, it's part of the reason I'm not adding this book to the "great world-building" shelf--that and the fact that I think I would have had far less idea what the village might have looked like if I hadn't stayed in a rural village in Morocco (clearly even the images I imagined with that influence could be wildly wrong!).

I also appreciated the realism of Maha and Um Saad's situations. When bad things happened, they sometimes didn't even think of revenge because they were so aware that the consequences would be disastrous. As much as this book is a commentary on the place of women in society, matters of feminism are almost never spoken of directly--in situation rather than in wishing they had the same rights as men. Many aspects of the culture were valued and appreciated, even as many of them were implicitly rejected.

I'm making this sound very detached and scholarly, but the stories really drew me in and made me care about Maha, Um Saad, and the supporting characters. Nasra was an especial delight and Maha's brother Daffash was, frankly, terrifying. The only place I struggled was with the very last chapter from the storyteller, which described an almost apocalyptic future for Maha's village (apparently the Dead Sea is, in fact, on a fault line) and seemed to switch focus entirely from the evil man-hating Maha to a more hopeful future. I'll have to keep thinking about that one.

Quote Roundup

4) I am the storyteller.
My box is full of tales.
Yes, the yarn-spinner.
I spin and spin for days.
Looking at this now, I realize that for all Maha spends so many hours spinning, she never finishes the carpet her mother began. I can't even remember her working on it. A representation of her life, left unfinished when she was shipped off to the mental hospital? A larger statement about Jordan's occupation, which disrupted so much of the region to such an extent that its natural development could never be resumed?

37) My father would stop fighting the French, and then he might leave me and my mother alone. I did not like my father, but I really hated the French who made him restless and dirty.
Don't quite get how having the father around the house is going to make life more peaceful, but this could just be Um Saad relating her childhood thoughts.

44) All the members of the tribe would wait outside the door for proof of my virginity. Young girls, young boys, half-naked children, toothless old men, and horsemen were all thirsty for my blood. My heart started beating fiercely. What would he do? I was about to lose some blood. Was it like an ordinary period?
The juxtaposition between the obsession with "virginity" and the lack of knowledge about what it is astounded me. On a larger note, I really liked this scene. Maha's quick thinking and her new husband's gratitude for her help was my first hint that maybe their marriage was going to be all right, at least for a while.

55) Dew and light, the sisters of the bedouins, gave me a hand and helped me see Hakim with his crooked back, black goat, and long stick. My father had assured me that Hakim, the embodiment of Arabs' anger and resistance, never stopped breathing, would never die, and would always roam the deserts and mountains of Arabia. Many sought his blood, but he managed to survive.
A bittersweet passage considering the ongoing fighting in the MENA region.

58) Maha - "bitter Indian fig" the people of Hamia used to call her - started working with a newly acquired enthusiasm on the farm. She would spend most of her time watering, weeding, ploughing, and even rubbing the oranges until they glowed in the sun. Why do you think? Can any of you tell me why? No, not because she was a hardworking peasant woman. The reason behind what she did was graver than that. The land. Yes, my masters, THE LAND. The source of all greed and every conflict.
-- She started farming vigorously as if the orchard belonged to her, not to her poor brother Daffash. Woman's cunning is great. A treasure, she thought, which she would inherit one of those days. If you divided the greed inside her it would have been enough for all our hearts. Allah's cunning devours the worshippers' cunning.
A perfectly reasonable love of hard-worked family land becomes sinister in the Storyteller's point of view. Nevertheless, that beautiful image of Maha tending each orange makes it through the bile. Not quite sure what to make of that last sentence...

86) Allah created the jinn out of fire, and if they get burnt to mud they become human beings like us. They lose their powers, grow old then die.
A note of interest for my badly languishing Moroccan-inspired story.

119) "He who gives birth is never dead."
My mind immediately started playing with this statement. Frankenstein's creature came to mind quickly, though I was also amused at the idea that almost all men would never have the immortality implicitly granted to most women by this statement. Which is pretty ironic, considering it's said in relation to a father instead of a mother. You have to work at playing with language, ignoring the usual use of the phrase "give

birth", if you want to apply this phrase to a man as a "giver" of birth.

131) "Maha, shall I tell you how to plant Iraqui jasmine?"
-- "I am a peasant and I know how to plant the damn jasmine."
I got a much-needed laugh from Maha's snappishness.

150) "Songs became shorter and lighter. When I was young, we used to sing about spring, crops, meadows, and life. By your life, all the songs nowadays are about love. For the younger generation, nothing is important except love and lust. When you cannot get something, you keep thinking of it all the time."
I think Um Saad and I would get along.

155) The pasha turned his head and smiled, "Do you like jasmine?"
-- "Yes."
-- He looked at my face for the first time. Really looked at my face and saw me, saw that I was a woman who loved jasmine flowers. Before, I was sure, I was for him one of the black tents roaming the valley.

172-173) My father loved Mubarak, loved me, and always stroked my hair with his flaky fingers and said, "My daughter, you are better than that scoundrel brother of yours. I wish you were a man because the land must go to its ploughman."
If this book had been written by an American, that would be the technicality that saved the day: Maha's not a man, but since she tends the land, it goes to her. Happily ever after. A very different kind of story.

181) I did not know how to pray so I aped Tamam who kept hissing incomprehensible words, bowing, kneeling, then prostrating.
This interested me because Muslims' prayer sequence is fairly generally known (or at least, I know what it looks like even if I don't know the exact pattern of standing, kneeling, and bowing). Is there a variation of the usual order for this particular occasion? Do styles of prayer vary the way styles of taking communion vary? Or is the emphasis on prayer itself rather than the formula for it, a la the Protestant Reformation? (Sorry I compare Islam to Christianity so much--it's my background.)

191) The shrine dominated the east side [of the town of Hamia] and the mansion the west. Samir Pasha on one side and Imam Rajab on the other. The village was besieged by sounds from the minaret and the noise from the mansion. Allah-u-Akbar. The husky music of the English.
Not exactly subtle, but a powerful image nonetheless.

(view spoiler)

Dana Qasas says

This novel one of my best I have read I like this type of novels which represents the stories and experiences of women in 19th century also it is beautifily written , Faqir’s switching between the two languages (Arabic and English) made the reading of the book more attractive . nice choice .

Nicole Nikolova says

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kari says

A disturbing, haunting story of two women who have very little in common - just their daring to oppose their treatment, and the punishment that follows. Lyrical, intense, and painting a dark image of a country regaining its identity.

Sara says

Not only a fascinating exploration of the kind of life many arab women face, it was also a page-turning, good read. I'd definitely recommend this book to anyone looking to get into woman-centric Arab literature, and to those in love with literary criticism. It seems easy on the surface, but this novel is an incredibly complex exploration of truth, lies, and whether we can ever really separate the two.

Kristin says

Oh, how to review this book? I was excited to read this book given that it was a "new international fiction emerging voices" book from Jordan. I love reading authentic voices from non-western countries, especially from the Middle East, where we get too many western voices trying to tell us how women, in particular, there supposedly experience life.

And, well, I guess this IS one voice. And it IS a legitimate voice. The truth is that there are a lot of women abused and subjugated by men, especially in villages, in the Middle East according to longstanding cultural beliefs, as well as so-called religious beliefs (uneducated men, totally uneducated in religion, believing that their misogynist cultural ideas are actually religion). And the book totally and completely focuses on this fact in its story, and it does it in a very lyrical, poetic manner. This, for me, was really the only strength of book (the quality of its poetic writing). There are three main voices in the book: two women and one storyteller. The two women represent women's voices, both totally and completely subjugated and destroyed by the men in their lives (one by her brother and the men in her village; the other by her husband and then her son's disloyalty to her). The storyteller is a disgusting voice that shows the reader, in all its (dis)glory, how the misogynist Arab male thinks about woman (they're dirty and temptresses and align themselves with black magic against men).

Throughout the book I did get to know the various characters. I appreciated Maha's attempts to build a life for herself, despite her brother's attempts to constantly keep her down. Her attempts to build a home (both a house and trees and crops and a community) and a family. And, yes, I greatly disliked her brother and all of the horrible things he did to Maha and the other women in her community. I also appreciated Um Saad's attempts to build a family and a marriage, despite the sheer weight of constant housework and the lack of love or appreciation from her husband. But somehow... I just never really grew terribly connected to any of these characters. Or invested in them. Not in the same way that I have with characters in other books that I have read.

I understand that books are not expected to cover ALL aspects of a society. Or cover all voices. And that the point of this author's book was to express the voice of suppressed, subjugated women in Jordan (in a particular time, the 1950s, before Jordanian independence). But what disappointed me was that in the West, we already hear from every single corner how, yes, Arab women are oppressed. Yes, they don't have voices. Yes, Arab men are misogynists and and just see women are human beings. And yes, Islam is to blame for all of this hatred towards Arab women from Arab men. So for an Arab woman to *confirm* all of these western beliefs... I think, just adds to a general lack of REAL understanding of the complexity of the Middle East. Because while YES, there is a ton of suppression of women in the ME, and yes, a lot of it is due to cultural beliefs and mid-educated religious beliefs, and yes, a lot of it is done by men, that is not the ONLY Middle East. And due to the lack of REAL education among the West regarding the Middle East, one more author not adding NUANCE to understanding the region to me... does everyone a disservice. Because the truth is that there are educated, practicing Muslim men who treat their wives with the love and respect that Islam demands of them. And fathers and brothers and community male leaders and religious leaders as well. And there are educated Muslims (and non-Muslim educated religion women such as Christians and Orthodox Christians and Jews) who are STRONG and opinionated and demand their rights (legal rights, religious rights, moral rights) from the men and women around them because they know it is their RIGHT to demand them. There are kind men, loving men, kind women and loving women, who all work together to raise beautiful, loving and compassionate boy and girl children to be leaders in their communities. Personally, I

would like a more NUANCED book. In the village in this book, I know there were loving marriages, loving relationships, brothers and sisters who were friends to each other, etc. I just didn't need another book confirming western stereotypes (i.e. Arab women, throw off your veils and demand your rights! Leave your religion and become western and you'll be free, like us! See, even the Jordanian author, now living in England, raised in Jordan agrees!).

Me, I'd rather read some books written by Jordanian authors about the untold Jordanian women fighting for their rights, changing their communities, running schools for hundreds and thousands of girls, running for and winning elections, starting businesses, and yes, the Arab men working alongside them, with them, believing in their sisters' and mothers' and daughters' and wives' rights as well. Because YES, those are stories of Jordan as well.

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