

The Imperative of Furnishing the Contemporary Novel with Manifestations of Violence: Fadhma El-Farouk as a Model

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Abstract:

This study examines a phenomenon that has become inseparable from the contemporary Arabic novel, evolving into a significant artistic and dramatic component in the construction of any narrative work: violence. Violence has increasingly imposed itself in various forms, shaping and reinforcing the text. It appears as an event, as a description, and even as a form of décor. This paper performs an analytical reading of these manifestations through the fictional writings of Fadhma El-Farouk.

Keywords: violence; woman; man; terrorism; revolution; Fadhma El-Farouk

Introduction

Violence is one of the most perilous and ancient social phenomena alongside humankind. Modern society is characterised by human violence that involves social events and problems engendered by the rhythms of urban, civil, and industrial life. A review of human history reveals it to be far from stable; indeed, history demonstrates that the human being is the only living creature that has not fully adapted to its environment. Instead, humanity has continually collided with and conflicted with its surroundings in pursuit of changes that may serve its ideas and interests, ultimately seeking comfort and happiness. Since human beings have been in perpetual search of ease and well-being and since history records violence, literary works have likewise adopted it as rich material with which to nourish their texts and creations. The names of certain poets and writers

have even become associated with the discourse of violence that they embody in numerous forms, and literary schools have emerged that call for the veneration of this mode of literary discourse and writing.

From the earliest myths, which depicted the gods' injustice and tyranny toward human beings, to poetry and beyond modern literature, violence has remained a recurrent and widely circulated phenomenon in literary production. Algerian literature, in particular, has embodied numerous brutal and violent practices experienced during the colonial era, and even after independence, the literature of the Black Decade emerged, representing the final decade of the past century. Many writers rose to prominence for their depictions of this period, immortalising its bloodiness, including the Algerian novelist Fadhma El-Farouk, who excelled especially in narrating politically motivated violence against women.

What is striking is that Algerian literature is, for the most part, suffused with an atmosphere of sorrow, pain, and melancholy; even expressions of joy and triumph are often intertwined with sombre and mournful emotions. There are undoubtedly reasons for this. Why, then, does the Algerian writer rely on violence and its manifestations to furnish and structure his or her creative work?

Concept of Violence: Linguistic and Terminological Definitions

In *Lisān al-‘Arab* by Ibn Manzūr, it is stated that “*al-‘anfū*, from ‘*annafa* and ‘*annafa* (with the nūn doubled), means roughness... Violence (*al-‘unf*) is harshness in dealing with a matter and the absence of gentleness; it is the opposite of gentleness. ‘*Anīf* refers to one who is not gentle... *al-‘anīf* is one who does not ride well, and a ‘*nafa al-shay’* means to seize it forcefully... *al-ta ‘nīf* denotes rebuke, reprimand, and blame.”¹ Violence, then, signifies harshness, brutality, injustice, hatred, and other qualities akin to these.

Terminologically, violence is behaviour or an act characterised by aggression, undertaken by one party to exploit another, weaker party, thereby causing the latter severe harm. Violence is "behaviour marked by cruelty, aggression, domination, and coercion. It is generally far removed from civility and urbanity, in which aggressive drives and energies are explicitly and primitively employed, such as beating, killing individuals, smashing and destroying property, and using force to coerce and subdue the opposing party. Violence may be individual, but it may also be collective."²

Sociologists, in interpreting the phenomenon of violence, tend to relate it both to an individual's environment and to the individual himself. Dr. Ma‘n Khalīl stated, “Violence, as a behaviour, is linked to the conduct of the individual, although its stimuli are usually verbal or physical. Since this is the case, it does not occur spontaneously or automatically unless there is a response to stimuli that are not necessarily equal to it in strength or direction; at times, they may be greater, and at times lesser. That is, the occurrence of violence requires the presence of a negative social relationship between

two individuals. This means that it is acquired rather than inherited, learned by the individual within his family, school, local community, or sect."³

This statement indicates that violence is an acquired impulse rather than an innate impulse and that the social conditions surrounding the individual are, in most cases, its principal cause. Although most "industrialised societies have initiated the rationalisation of all sectors of their activities, several manifestations have fallen under a movement whose sanctity must not be violated, and violence, in turn, has been part of this movement..."⁴ Moreover, what we witness in our present age, bloody wars, horrific acts of terrorism, and scenes of the killing of innocent women and children reveal that women are far more vulnerable to violence than men are, despite their significant role in society and the rights they possess over men, regardless of their status in relation to them. Indeed, many perpetrators of harm against women are often those closest to them.

This is what compelled Fadhila El-Farouk to raise a profoundly human cry, expressing some of the suffering endured by Algerian women, in an effort, at the very least, to make her readers aware of this heinous phenomenon and draw their attention to it. She has portrayed numerous forms and manifestations of violence and rape in her novels: some stemming from systems of customs, traditions, and harsh social values that confine women to the realm of oppression and violence; some arising from the national crisis and the humiliation, abduction, and rape inflicted upon Algerian women during the Black Decade, as forms of violence; and others resulting from the institution of marriage and the husband's arbitrary authority.

Customs, traditions, and social norms have long been causes of women's pain and suffering. Fadhila El-Farouk opens her novel *The Shameful Feminine "Tā' al-Khajal"* with the following words:

"Since my grandmother, who remained paralyzed for half a century as a result of the severe beating inflicted upon her by her husband's brother, an act applauded by the tribe and overlooked by the law.

Since ancient times,

Since the era of concubines and harems,

Since the wars waged for ever more spoils,

From them to me... to me myself, nothing has changed except for the variety in the means of repression and the violation of women's dignity..."⁵

From the beginnings of the family and long before women's destinies differed, repression, beating, and violation of their most basic rights occurred. It is a mentality inherited across generations that a man may exercise authority over his brother's wife so long as the latter is absent from his wife and children. It may do whatever he deems necessary to preserve his brother's honour and safeguard him in his absence.

The grandmother, who remained paralyzed and unable to move, was guilty only of the fact that her husband had left her for the sake of jihad, work, money, or other matters. She was also guilty of being the daughter of a society that does not acknowledge women as human beings equal to men, no different from him, thinking as he thinks and feeling as he feels. However, society refused to recognise this, and her fate, like that of her predecessors, remained unchanged. The author added:

“You are a continuation of your mother; your mother is a continuation of your grandmother; such is the human chain, like the light of the stars. Be certain that your life, no matter how precise you are in choosing your life partner, will resemble your mother’s life entirely.”⁶

The violence inflicted upon women in Algerian society, which the novelist has sought to portray, is in fact a lived reality, particularly when it concerns the relationship between brothers and guardians within the household, a relationship often marked by anxiety and tension. Ours is a closed society that knows nothing of dialogue, and this is precisely what happened to Bani when her brother saw her playing in the street with the boys. She says, “To me, Ilyas is a mythical dragon with ten heads; he could still reach me even if I were to return to my mother’s womb... He was fourteen when, one day, he saw me with the gang of the Rahba boys. He returned home raging like a mad bull and set fire to my bed... My father stood tall before his deed, proud of what had happened, and said to him in front of everyone: ‘Next time you must burn the bed while she is sleeping on it...’”⁷

If the image of her brother in her mind resembled that of a mythical dragon, then the matter is truly grievous. Perhaps this is what compelled her to take further precautions, for she became afraid to sleep in her bed a second time. She says, "I remember that it became difficult for me to return to my bed when I felt sleepy. I would throw myself onto any sofa in the house and sleep, and once I slept in the kitchen on the hide the cat slept on..."⁸ His act made her feel genuinely threatened with being burned again, causing her to lose the sense of safety in the very place that ought to have given her every form of love and reassurance. However, the masculine image and authority of the brother, father, and society prevent such a thing from occurring, as granting a girl the opportunity to express herself or to come into her own is considered forbidden.

Nor is she permitted to decide her own fate, or to accept or refuse a matter concerning her, not because the family, or the father or brother, are aware of what is best for her but because they wish to avoid the burden of having her remain dependent upon them. They arrange her marriage and reject her divorce, even if she lives in bitterness and torment with the one they have chosen for her. This is what happened to the protagonist of the novel *The Discovery of Desire*, who states, "The door was open to the alley. My brother, Ilyas, stood and cast a look outside, then asked me without anyone responding to the greeting: 'Where is your husband, Maud?'

I put my bag aside and searched for war in all their eyes; when I found it, I answered: 'He has divorced me.'

The shocking news turns giants into dwarves...

Then, Ilyas followed me and said, with his hollow arrogance, 'We will settle the matter tomorrow and everything will return to normal...'9

I said to him: 'Life between us is impossible. Do not try...'

However, he paid no heed to what I said and threw down his comment, saying: 'I am the one who decides, not you,' and he left..."9

Family violence, that is, violence perpetrated by a member of the household, is among the most challenging forms of violence and is harsher and more severe than spousal violence. This is because family violence creates numerous psychological knots for the abused individual, for by nature a human being seeks calm and safety in the place where he or she was raised and among people he or she loves and who love in return, not outside it.

Although domestic violence is widespread in our societies and affects both sexes and people of all ages, the primary victim is the woman at every stage of her life. Remaining silent and choosing to keep quiet becomes the best means by which she defends herself, as do the heroines of Fadhma El-Farouk's novels. In each of her works, *A Teenager's Mood*, *The Shameful Feminine (Tā' al-Khajal)*, and *The Discovery of Desire*, their stories resemble one another, as does their struggle with the Other in all its stereotypical forms.

A woman's exposure to violence in Arab societies is considered acceptable, not an issue to be raised or treated but rather an ordinary occurrence whose frequency can be counted daily in most cases.

The story of Bani in *The Shameful Feminine* highlights the extent of the suffering endured by the divorced woman, who becomes a rejected individual within her family, her society, and her environment. The beating she received from her brother, who refused her divorce and struck her whenever he found the opportunity, was not as painful as her mother's refusal to allow her to return to the family home, viewing her as a curse that would bring misfortune upon them. Meanwhile, the father stood in silence, casting at her a strange look of contempt; he did not wish to engage with her, yet he issued orders that she was punished and humiliated.

Bani and many women like her, regardless of their age, are striking examples of the violence and injustice inflicted upon women and of the brutality and rape to which women are subjected every day and in full view. This was the case with Mahbūba, who was extraordinarily beautiful. As soon as her husband, one of the symbols of the *Malouf* musical tradition in Constantine, passed away, many coveted her beauty, foremost among them a political figure. She says, "Months later, the governor visited Mahbūba in her house and offered her to become his mistress in exchange for providing her with a luxurious life that might protect her from the claws of society. I learned this from her.

The next day, she told me that she had spat in his face."¹⁰

Instead of her beauty being a blessing, it became a curse, and she found herself required to satisfy officials to live in peace of mind and without hardship. This is indeed what happens in closed societies, where women suffer under the authority of the domineering Other.

The author sought to draw a parallel between a woman and a man by highlighting the governor's request and Mahbūba's rejection of it despite her need and destitution. She also aimed to examine the sociological and ideological dimensions of both, mainly by emphasising Mahbūba's social situation.

A woman may likewise be subjected to the harshest forms of beating and injury by her husband, particularly if she does not meet his expectations or if he considers her negligent. A husband's manner of dealing with and understanding his wife does not depend solely on his level of education or culture; the matter is far more complex than that. She says, "He greeted me with a slap that knocked me to the ground, then continued to beat me. It was the first time he had ever been so violent with me..."

It was a mute night, without sound, without breath, without protest!

I could not open my eyes or move my hands or feet. In short, I was dead..."¹¹ The image of the husband in a woman's mind takes on various forms that all converge on the idea that he is the support, the safety, and the new life she hopes to make sweet for them both. However, in most cases, she collides with a world entirely different; instead of finding all that, she confronts the most significant problem she may ever encounter.

Having depicted the man as brother, father, and even husband, the author also pointed to other forms of relationship ,those involving relatives. The woman has often been the victim of decisions made by the older generation, represented equally by paternal and maternal uncles, because the father's absence can sometimes prompt relatives to intervene in determining the fate of the wife and children. "Louiza," the heroine of *A Teenager's mood*, was a victim of such decisions. She says, "I disguise myself so that the men of the family will leave me in peace..."¹² By mentioning her uncles' interference regarding her veil and her studies, the novelist sought to depict the generational conflict within her uncles.

"The older generation ,the fathers who clung to their customs and traditions, wished the same path for their children in pursuit of an ideal.

The younger generation ,the sons and daughters, yearn for freedom, are thirsty for the future, rejecting the customs and traditions they perceive as shackles that bind them.¹³ Perhaps this is what pushed her to challenge them and excel in her studies to obtain her freedom, for she realised from a young age that knowledge is the best means to freedom and to defeating tyrants and that submitting easily to such matters only aids the oppressor

and gives him the strength to continue employing the policy of violence and marginalisation against the weak.

“A woman may not realise that through her patience, she destroys herself and, in another way, contributes to the violence practised against her. Studies and statistics on women and domestic violence have shown that nine thousand women are subjected to domestic abuse, yet only 15 percent of them seek a medical certificate documenting the traces of violence.”¹⁴ This is entirely consistent with the reactions of the French police when they wished to interrogate Bani after her husband had eaten her. She says:

"At the police station, the officer shrugged his shoulders and said mockingly: 'Oh... Arab women.'

He said this after I told him that I was waiving my rights..."¹⁵

When the family ought to protect one another, being wary of one's relatives becomes a duty, and rape becomes the family's entertaining pastime. She says, "He also knew all the paths leading to my weakness that sought refuge in him, and I think I erred when I opened all my doors to him. I erred when I imagined him a hope for my salvation from a household whose sanctity was violated by my uncles..."¹⁶ Her pairing of the word "rape," an act punishable by both religious law and civil law, with the word "uncles," those who are supposed to protect the honour of their families, reveals to us the extent of the mockery and the disorder permeating the relationship between her family and her uncles.

In one passage, Louiza describes her father's warning to her about the men in the family. She says, "Beware of the male cousins before you, beware of strangers..." The exploitation she suffered at the hands of her cousin, his manipulation of her emotions, and his deception in making her believe in love and stability constituted a violent shock for her. It caused her to lose even more trust than ever before in every member of her family, beginning with her father, who fled the country and left her mother with the responsibility of raising and caring for them, and extending to all members of her extended family, from whom her immediate family gained nothing but marginalisation and ill-treatment.

The man, the abuser, may also be entirely unrelated to the woman, the victim, such that no kinship ties or similar connections exist between them. This is what happened to her when one of the young men assaulted her because she had not voted for his party. His reason for beating her lies in the fact that she wore the veil; therefore, he believed she ought to vote for the Islamic party because she adhered to Islamic dress. She says, "His hand came crashing down on my cheek with such force that it knocked me to the ground. I screamed as he lunged to kick me, and had it not been for the intervention of some young men who held him back while he shouted: 'Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar, your veil is invalid, your veil is invalid, you liar...'¹⁷

Thus, the imposition of the veil has become obligatory, enforced by the stranger before the relative, something a woman must accept once it is imposed, for customs and

traditions in Arab societies require a woman to obey the man in all his decisions, to follow him, and to respect his choices. The matter may even reach the point where she relinquishes her own opinion in favour of her husband's, her father's, or her brother's.¹⁸ This indicates that the era of harems and concubines has not ended; only its names have changed.

Another matter that must also be noted is the backwardness in which women in our societies live. The rejection and neglect they experience from men stem from men's refusal to acknowledge their intelligence or their capacity to learn and teach, as men do. Instead, men continue to see in them an idol clothed in servitude and submission.

For men, a woman is nothing more than an appearance, and servitude is the essence of that appearance. The more marginalised and excluded she is, the less threatening she becomes, for she was not created for matters undertaken by men; instead, she was created for one purpose only :"to please the man." This restriction imposed on women "serves the interests of a patriarchal social system and leads to specific consequences, including lowering women to the lowest rank within a social order that relies on reprimand... and including also the confinement of women to the home, which means using them as a conservative force that unconsciously supports the existing order established by men. By confining her to the domestic sphere, a woman is deprived of the freedom to access forms of authority, status, or cultural value that are privileges of men."¹⁹ The author says:

"Given my mother's ignorance of the country's affairs, my father finds the opportunity to satisfy his vanity. In everything she says, she makes mistakes, and he corrects them. When his vanity reaches its peak, he walks out and leaves her because she has wearied him with her lack of understanding.

My mother never went to school, and without us, her children, she is worth nothing. When she tries to see things with her own eyes, she sees them upside down. That she was deprived of education is a crime committed by her parents, not her own. However, my father's crime is greater, for he constantly makes her feel that she is a trivial being, and she has come to believe this to the point that she sometimes belittles herself before us, as a natural reaction lest anyone else belittle her."²⁰

The denial of women's education is not an unfamiliar phenomenon in Algerian society. Statistics confirm that "the illiteracy rate in Algeria after independence approached ninety percent, the majority of whom were women. After ten years, it equalled or approached seventy percent or less, with women again constituting the largest group. In the final decade of the past century, the rate of schooling within the country surpassed eighty percent. However, some remote villages and hamlets remained unequipped with the infrastructure and urban housing necessary to facilitate children's education, remaining somewhat distant from the new reality imposed by new mechanisms."²¹ Once war reappeared for a second time, however, the phenomenon of illiteracy resurfaced, and most of the population abandoned the schooling of their children because of the abductions, rapes, and killings that the youngsuffered before the old during that horrific period in Algeria's history. As people accustomed to oppression, we cannot free ourselves

all at once; we require a revolution inherited generation after generation to rid ourselves entirely of the prison system we have come to regard as a mode of life. Here, neither man nor masculinity itself is the sole cause, but rather society, the nation, customs, traditions, religion, and the conventions that govern this shared existence between woman and man.

The domination, oppression, and tyrannyness to which the entire country was subjected were not the product of the man's mentality or the product of his authority over the woman. They were the result of inevitable circumstances that surrounded him and caused his land to bear not flowers but bullets, as the author states: "No flowers in Algeria from this day on..."

No fields... the earth is planted with rifles whose barrels are sharpened; the trees bear grains of lead... everything in the country has grown accustomed to war and fighting... Algeria has been in a state of combat since the Greeks and the Romans, since Byzantium and since the Vandals... since the Turks and since France. Fighting has become her bad habit, her ill-fated step..."²² From the era of the martyrs onwards, violence has been practised against everything that is Algerian: colonialism oppressed the people from without, and the man oppressed the woman from within, which has burdened both an inferiority complex and a shared sense of injustice.

The torture endured by Algerians in the hands of French colonialism has constituted one of the most atrocious crimes committed since the beginning of history. The French refined their methods of harming the Algerian people and diminishing their worth in every encounter in which the French army prevailed. They even resolved to end the lives of some between earth and the sky, as happened with physician Ahmād Melkemi. The author writes, "My grandfather will no longer be honoured; his breaths will remain suspended between a land that did not know how to embrace him and a sky that recorded the remnants of voices that relished his death..."

One of those voices may have cried out: 'Come now, fly, little bird,'

Moreover, another may have accompanied it, saying, 'Jump, Muhammad, your life will end here in the air.'

Moreover, perhaps they laughed with biting mockery, as beasts do, before my grandfather fell from the aircraft door, pushed by one of those criminals. He likely heard something of this sort before he plunged into the arms of the air: 'How fortunate what a splendid death.'"²³

The French had mastered the killing and torture of Algerian *mujāhidīn*, even reaching the point of imagining new and extraordinary methods of death, as they did with the grandfather, the physician. This form of violence ,known as deliberate killing or premeditated murder ,arises when an individual or an authority violates the rights of a person or an entire group in an attempt to diminish the status of the one whose rights are violated, whether in terms of his feelings or his social standing. It may take various forms, the mildest of which involves belittling, insulting, and humiliating the person to

diminish his worth. At the same time, it may refer to wounding, kicking, beating, kidnapping, rape, sexual harassment, terrorism, or genocide by multiple means ,the harshest of which is to die suspended between earth and the sky, with no grave to embrace the remains of one's body.

Conclusion

It becomes evident from an examination of the novels of Fadhlila El-Farouk under study that she narrates violence, engages with it, and resorts to it as a necessary element in the fabric of her fictional narratives. After analysis, we reached a set of findings, the most significant of which are as follows:

- ❖ The author has taken upon herself the task of narrating and writing about violence to criticise society and expose the falsehoods that permeate it.
- ❖ The issue of women and the attempt to help them liberate themselves from an environment that oppresses them and a society that inflicts upon them the most severe forms of violence and degradation was the central concern the author addressed in all the novels analysed. She strove earnestly to free them from all this through the victories of her heroines and their aspirations, even by unusual means that defied imposed frameworks.
- ❖ The violence, injustice, tyranny, repression, and prohibition inflicted upon women in Arab societies are far greater than anything a man is subjected to in the same society and under the same laws and rulings.
- ❖ The author practised everything in her writing :love, killing, torment, departure, and many other matters ,and this practice indicates an endless creative fervour that drives her to furnish her novels uniquely and distinctively, a quality not found in the writings of others.
- ❖ The purpose of writings that narrate violence has always been to break free from the glaring contradictions experienced by society and to liberate oneself from customary accumulations deeply rooted in people's beliefs.

Endnotes:

¹ Ibn Manzūr, Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram. *Lisān al- 'Arab*. Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, Lebanon, p. 303.

² Muḥammad Sabīlā. *Madārāt al-Hadātha*. The Arab Form Society for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 2009, p. 189.

³ Ma 'n Khalīl al- 'Umar. 'Ilm Ijtīmā ' al- 'Unf. Dār al-Shurūq for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 1st ed., 2010, p. 9.

⁴ Nūr al-Hudā Bādīs. *Dirāsāt fī al-Khiṭāb*. The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 2008, p. 131.

⁵ Fadhlila El-Farouk. *Tā' al-Khajal*. Dār al-Rayyes for Books and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 2002, p. 11.

⁶ Fadhlila El-Farouk. *Mazāj Murāhaqa*. Dār al-Fārābī Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd ed., 2007, pp. 36–37.

⁷ Fadhlila El-Farouk, *Tā' al-Khajal*, p. 14.

⁸ Ibid., p. n.

⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰ Fadhila El-Farouk. *Iktishāf al-Shahwa*. Dār al-Rayyes for Books and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005, p. 68.

¹¹ Fadhila El-Farouk, *Iktishāf al-Shahwa*, p. 58.

¹² Fadhila El-Farouk, *Mazāj Murāhaqa*, p. 64.

¹³ 'Abd al-Rahmān Tībarmasīn et al. *al-Sard wa-Hājis al-Tamarrud fī Riwayāt Fadhila al-Fārūq*. The Arab Scientific Publishers, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2012, p. 119.

¹⁴ Za'aṭouṭ Ramadan. "al-'Unf al-Mastūr," in *al-'Unf wa-al-Mujtama'*, Proceedings of the First International Symposium (9–10 March 2003), University of Muḥammad Khayḍar Biskra, Algeria, p. 230.

¹⁵ Fadhila El-Farouk, *Iktishāf al-Shahwa*, p. 59.

¹⁶ Fadhila El-Farouk, *Mazāj Murāhaqa*, pp. 31–32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁸ Ṣaleḥ Mafkouda. *Ṣūrat al-Mar'a fī al-Riwāya al-Jazā' iriyā*. Dār al-Hudā for Printing and Publishing, Algeria, 1st ed., 2003, p. 321.

¹⁹ Karen Sacks. "Women's Associations among the Ijo," p. 323, in Turki 'Alī al-Rabī'ū, *al-'Unf wa-al-Muqaddas wa-al-Jins fī al-Mīthūlūjīyā al-Islāmiyya*. Arab Cultural Centre, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd ed., 1995, p. 154.

²⁰ Fadhila El-Farouk, *Tā' al-Khajal*, pp. 123–24.

²¹ Ṣaleḥ Mafkouda, *al-Mar'a fī al-Riwāya al-Jazā' iriyā*, p. 17.

²² Fadhila El-Farouk, *Tā' al-Khajal*, p. 93.

²³ Fadhila El-Farouk, *Mazāj Murāhaqa*, pp. 58–59.