REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIMS IN THE WEST: ALTERITY, DIASPORA AND IDENTITY IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY NOVELS BY IMMIGRANT MUSLIM WOMEN WRITERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

Muslims living in the West face numerous challenges. On the one hand, the Western assumptions which are shown in different types of stereotypes and communal prejudices influence Muslims' lives and, on the other, diaspora affects their identities. These challenges make Muslim identity unstable between a sense of belonging to the culture of origin and a sense of adaptation of the host culture. Consequently, Muslims in the West live in between two cultures, constantly negotiating their identities. Thus, this thesis pivots on representing Muslim groups within Western societies in fiction by three culturally deracinated contemporary Muslim women writers, exploring the postcolonial key concepts of identity, diaspora and alterity. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the challenges that Muslim characters face; to explicate how marginality influences them; and to explore the reasons and how they negotiate their identities in diaspora in the following selected novels: Umm Zakiyyah's *If I Should Speak* (2000) and *Muslim Girl* (2014) from the USA; Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005) and *The Lines We Cross* (2016) from Australia; and Naima B. Robert's *From Somalia with Love* (2008) and *Boy vs. Girl* (2010) from the UK. To do so, this qualitative and non-empirical research is conducted in a descriptive-theoretical analysis, using the selected novels as primary sources and library and online critical materials, such as books and journal articles, as secondary references. The selected writers' novels would further supply sufficient evidence on the forming of identity and identity conflicts that arise due to the contact between essentialism, diaspora and hybridity, and the fact that Muslims in the West are known for cultural diversity by examining the different and various cultures that are represented. Since in America, Australia and the UK Muslims are from different continents, countries, backgrounds and cultures, it is hoped that a rich cultural knowledge of their similarities and diversities would be elicited from this study.

ملخص البحث

يُواجه المسلمون الذين يعيشون في الغرب عددًا من التحديات، من مثل الادعاءات الغربية التي تُمارس ضد الإسلام والمسلمين وتنعكس سلبيًّا لتُنتج مختلف الصور النمطية والتحيزات العنصرية ضدهم، وكذا خطر ضياع الهوية وذوبانها تدريجيًّا في الحضارة الغربية؛ إذ يؤدي ذلك إلى عدم استقرار الهوية الإسلامية وازدواجية الانتماء الثقافي، وعليه؛ يهتم هذ البحث بدراسة الأقليات المسلمة في المجتمعات الغربية في ست روايات أدبية مختارة لثلاث كاتبات مسلمات معاصرات، ويرتكز على ثلاثة مفاهيم رئيسة في دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار؛ هي: الهوية، والشتات، والغيرية، ويهدف البحث إلى اكتشاف التحديات التي تواجهها الشخصيات المسلمة في تلك الروايات، فيناقش السياسات العنصرية الممنهجة ضدهم ويبيّن كيفية تأثير سياسة التهميش على هويتهم مما يؤدي بهم إلى التفاوض على هويتهم الدينية والثقافية والوطنية واللغوية، والروايات المختارة هي: "لو يجب أن أتكلم" (٢٠٠٠) و"الفتاة المسلمة" (٢٠١٤) للكاتبة أم زكية من الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية؛ و"هل يبدو رأسي كبيرًا في هذا (الحجاب)؟" (٢٠٠٥) و"الحدود التي عبرنا" (٢٠١٦) للكاتبة رندة عبد الفتاح من أستراليا، و"من الصومال مع الحب" و"فتى مقابل فتاة" (٢٠١٠) للكاتبة نعيمة بنت روبرت من بريطانيا، وقد وظَّفت الباحثة المنهج الكيفي غير التجريبي معتمدة على طريقة التحليل الوصفي النظري باستخدام الروايات المختارة مصادر أولية، مع مصادر ثانوية نقدية متوفرة في المكتبة وعلى الشابكة، من مثل الكتب والمقالات الأكاديمية، وبعد التحليل والمناقشة؛ ظهرت أدلة كافية على صراعات عدة تواجه الهوية الإسلامية في الغرب، ممّا يؤدي إلى ضياع هوية المسلم بين الأنا والآخر، فمن جهة ترغب الأنا المسلمة في الحفاظ على جوهرية هوية الأصل، ومن جهة أخرى تتعرض الهوية للضياع والتهجين والازدواجية بسبب السياسات العنصرية والثقافة الغربية والشعور بالتغريب، ومن أهمية هذا البحث تمكينه القارئ من تحصيل معرفة ثقافية غنية من خلال إظهار التشابه والاختلاف بين الشخصيات الروائية التي تنحدر من ثلاثة بلدان؛ أمريكا، وبريطانيا، وأستراليا، باختلاف خلفياتها وثقافاتها وعاداتها وتقاليدها.

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APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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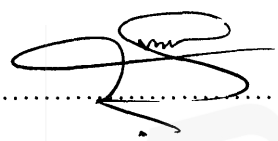
Signature  Date.....

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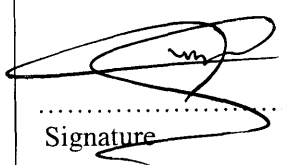

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This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my beloved parents, Rabah Brioua and Yamina Mesiad, who strongly inspired me to pursue my studies and laid the foundations of what I have turned out to be in life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Generally, being a Muslim in a Muslim (majority) country, society or Muslim groups can be a source of peace and freedom, especially when it comes to religious, cultural and even linguistic practices. Muslims, in this case, enjoy a degree of similarity. On the other hand, living in non-Muslim (majority) countries can create difficulties that Muslims need to overcome in order to maintain their identity. These include racism, communal/religious prejudice, discrimination, cultural bigotry, stereotypes and conditions of identity in diaspora. In this context, Tariq Ramadan (2004), a prominent Muslim scholar, writes: "The community of faith, in this Western world full of challenges, should pool its resources to in order to fashion this new Muslim personality – a deep, intelligent spirituality, a critical and independent mind, a free, humble, determined will, increasingly confident in its choices" (p. 221). Thus, they need to alternatively represent themselves within their own historical subjective context to resist what is claimed about them as Muslims and to correct the western assumptions associated with Islam/Muslims as well. Some Muslims in the West often not only keep their religious faith based on Islamic pillars, but they also present themselves in ways that fit their cultural identity. In this frame of reference, Haideh Moghissi (2006) writes:

> [Muslims'] Identities may change, but the transformation may involve a renewed emphasis on Islam, either as a culture, a religion or an ideology, even for those who were previously completely secular – hence, the growing tendency to identify with cultural values and practices of the originating country, or with an imagined 'Islamic World', indeed with a 'Islam' that is much more conservative, narrow-

> minded, unforgiving and intolerant than that which was actually experienced by the individual in the home country. (p. xv)

Being the "other" in western societies and being different from others religiously and culturally is not so unusual for Muslims in the West. However, if differences result in distinction and create conflicts among communities, especially between the majority and minority groups, then it brings adverse consequences, especially for the minority group/s. These conflicts often manifest in acts of racism, discrimination and prejudice. In this case, Muslims often face the dilemma of either maintaining their identities or integrating with Western societies. In addition to communal prejudice, nostalgia tends to make Muslims live in a world long lost. In this area, diaspora in the West and living in-between are examples of conflicts that plague Muslims living in the mainly Christian West. Therefore, this thesis explores the Muslim dilemma of maintaining and negotiating their identities in America, Australia and the UK. This point of view is apparently indicated in Haideh Moghissi's statement:

> The subjectivity of Muslims in diaspora is recomposed in direction that does not always represent a healthy departure from the past. That is to say, migration and relocation can shape a new awareness of the self, and this awareness under favorable conditions, can be riveting and transformative.... For the migrant, the fear of loss of identity may create a profound sense of insecurity and instability and a sharpening awareness of cultural marginality. (2006, p. xvi)

Regarding Muslims in the West, *The Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* in its eighth volume (2009), has included several articles about Islam in the West. One of these articles was written by Jocelyne Cesari under the title, "From Immigration to Global Islam." According to this article, the increased number of Muslim immigrants in North America, Australia and Europe, has given Islam an important position in the West and has opened the door for researchers to study the

conditions of Islam and the challenges faced by Muslims in multicultural and multi-religious societies in the West. Historically, the presence of Muslim communities in Western countries dates back many centuries. According to the Open Society Institute (2010), "There are estimated to be 15-20 million Muslims living in the EU and the number is predicted to double by 2025" (p. 1).

The following paragraphs will help establish the background and context of this thesis by studying the history of Muslim immigration in America, Australia and Britain, and their conditions in the West. Furthermore, this section provides background of the selected writers and their works chosen for this thesis. Moreover, I would like to shed light on cultural traditions, beliefs, pillars and women's clothing in Islam because they fit the topic of cultural negotiation of diasporic Muslims in the West. Although, it should be historically, I would like to point out that the order of the history of Muslims in the USA, Australia and the UK is in line with the order of the writers.

1.1.1 History of Muslims in the USA

Islam came to America before Christopher Columbus's adventure in 1492, when Muslims sailed from Spain and parts of the North Western Coast of Africa to both South and North of the American continent (Smith, 2010). In this context, Amir Nashid Ali in his book *Muslims in America*: *Seven Centuries of History* (2001) comments that in 1312, "African Muslims arrived in the Gulf of Mexico for exploration of the American interior using the Mississippi River as their access route; those Muslim explorers were from Mali and other parts of West Africa" (p. 3). In 1492, there were eight Muslim explorers and other Muslim translators with Christopher Columbus when he arrived to the New World. He brought along these

Muslims in his voyage because he was impressed by the 13th-century Arab scholar, Muhammad al-Idrisi (1099-1165), who served as an advisor to King Roger of Sicily (Ali, 2001, p. 3). During the years after the American Revolution (1786-83), many African Muslim slaves were brought from Senegambia (it was a region of West Africa occupying the area of present day Senegal and Gambia) because of their utility and effectiveness as household labour. Those Muslim slaves practiced their religion in difficult circumstances and some of them could not even practice their faith because of servitude (Nyang, 1999). Many African Americans are descendants of Muslims who were brought to America as slaves or were enslaved in West Africa, and some were lost in the Barbary Coast wars in North Africa (1801-05,1815) (Ali, 2001, p.7). In the early 1700s, there were notes in the New England history of African Americans stating that the slaves practiced Islamic customs, and "there were many women named 'Hugar' which derives from mother's name of prophet Ismail" (Ali, 2001, p.11). In fact, many slaves were forced to quit their culture (religion and language) and that is the reason why it is very difficult to determine the number of African Muslims among slaves (Sayed, 1985). However, "approximately 15% of the African slaves in North America came from traditional Muslim tribes" (Danni, 2002, p. 17).

The other waves of Muslim immigrants to the USA began in the post-civil war period when Arab immigrants from the Ottoman Empire began to settle along the Eastern Seaboards and into the heartland of America in the Midwest (Nyang, 1999). The first wave took place between 1875 and 1917, where Muslims migrated from rural areas of what was then called Great Syria under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (Smith, 2010). In the late 19th century, Muslim immigrants came from central Asia and from what is now called Ukraine, formerly part of the Soviet Union. Later, Chinese, Afghan, Cambodian, Champa (Vietnamese) and other Southeast Asian

groups added to the list of American Muslims. Furthermore, many refugees from Arab countries during the radical Arab Movements such as Bathism and Nasserism came to America. Similarly, Iranian Muslims came to America to escape the Khomeini Revolution of 1979. In fact, America as a land of opportunity has attracted Muslim immigrants who were looking for success and a better life (Nyang, 1999). By the end of the 20th century, Muslims and Islam started to grow fast in America. For instance, "in 2001, there were more than six million Muslims in the US" (Ali, 2001, p. 70).

1.1.2 History of Muslims in Australia

As opposed to America where the history of Muslim migration is generally classified by time period, Muslim migration to Australia is mainly defined by ethnic, cultural and background diversities. In Australia, Muslims are a diverse group of people. They came from more than 70 different countries from the Middle East, Russia, Europe, South Asia, Africa, Southeast Asia and even China, with various linguistic backgrounds ranging from English, Arabic, Turkish, Italian, German, French and Greek. Most Muslims in Australia are Sunnis, but there are also Bektashis, Ahmadis, Alwis and Druze (Saeed, 2003, p. 2).

According to International Center for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding (2015), the first Muslims who came to Australia in the 1750s were Macassan fishermen from the east-Indonesian archipelago who came to the coast of northern Australia to catch a type of sea slug called the *trepang*. Similarly, Afghan Muslims came and settled in Australia through the camel transport business, and "there were around 3000 Afghans who worked as camel drivers across Australia" (Saeed, 2003, p. 7). The period of mass migration started with Pakistani migrants who made their way to Australia in the 1960s. The cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity in

modern Pakistan is reflected in the Australian Pakistani community. Pakistanis are keen to maintain their ethnic and national identities through the use of the Urdu language, religious education as well as through arranged marriages. Furthermore, Indonesians were another group who arrived in Australia. The second Indonesian group came to Australia with scholarships that were given to students by the Australian government between the 1950s and 1960s, and between the 1980s and 1990s. What is more, many wealthy Indonesians sent their children to study in Australia. Generally, Indonesians have integrated into Australian society quickly. They tend to attend mosques established by other ethnic groups (Ibid).

In addition to Asian immigrants, many others from the Middle East have migrated to Australia. Turkish Cypriots who were skilled tradesmen entered Australia in the late 1940s and 1950s. The earlier group of Turkish-Cypriot Muslims who came to Australia between 1963 and 1974 "had developed harmonious community relations with the Anglo-Australian society and had integrated well. However, official immigration from Turkey did not begin until 1968 after the advent of the Australian-Turkish Assistance Passage Scheme, a bilateral agreement signed in 1967" (Deen, 2012, p. 74). The vast majority of Turkish Muslims are Sunni. It's the expanding manufacturing industries in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1960s which marked a major turning point in the history of Muslims entering Australia because the government welcomed them with open arms (Ibid). For the first time in Australia's history, Muslim families – Turkish Muslim families – were encouraged by the government to settle in Australia permanently and this marked the beginning of the dismantling of the Immigration Restriction Act. The first generation Turkish migrants experienced the same settlement problems that all immigrants of non-English speaking backgrounds do, such as lack of housing, employment difficulties, poor

English, and unfamiliar cultural norms (Ibid). Later on, "the first phase of Lebanese Muslim migration began in the early 1970s, during the civil war in Lebanon. Lebanese Muslims of Sunni background established the Lebanese Muslim Association in Sydney and they built the Imam Ali Mosque in Lakemba, New South Wales in 1976" (Deen, 2012, p. 76). Similarly, Shia Muslims built Al-Zahra Mosque in Radcliffe in 1983. According to Abdulla Saeed (2003), "by 2001, there were 29321 Lebanese-born Muslims in Australia" (p. 9). Additionally, "Muslim refugees entered Australia in the 1980s from the Horn of African countries, such as Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea" (Deen, 2012, p. 80). In the 1990s, Bosnian Muslims claimed refugee status as well, fleeing from the horrors of Sarajevo. "Prior to this influx, only small numbers of Bosnian Muslims had come to Australia" (Ibid). Migrants to Australia did not only bring their religion with them but also their culture, and quite often these cultural identities figure as strongly in their daily life as their religious identity (Saeed, 2003).

1.1.3 History of Muslims in the UK and Europe

The history of British Muslims does not differ a lot from their history in the United States. This is because Muslims escaped the same circumstances in the Muslim world to move to the UK. Generally speaking, Muslim migrants in Britain came from different countries, backgrounds, cultures and languages. Some came from wealthy families and others came from poor circumstances. Some of them were landholders and labourers and others were students and craftsmen. Some were educated and others could not even speak English. For example, African Muslim migrants were students and had a good command of English, whereas, the Pakistani migrants were landholders and they spoke very little English (Ali, 1996). The Muslim community was ethnically diverse, including people of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, East European

and African backgrounds. They came from different cultures, traditions, ethnic groups and spoke in different languages. However, as roughly half the community shares South Asian ancestry, it is this ethnic and cultural tradition that often frames the British Muslim community. The term "South Asian" refers to a diverse community group that includes people of various backgrounds (including Indian, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi and Pakistani descent) and numerous religious affiliations, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam (Baxter, 2007).

The history of Muslims in Europe can be traced back to the arrival of Muslim scholars and Sufis in the 11th century. The Ottoman Turks first entered Europe in 1353. Between 1451 and 1481, with the downfall of Constantinople, Albania, Bosnia and Serbia, Muslims became the masters of the whole of South-Eastern Europe (Ali, 1996). From North Africa, Muslims sailed to Europe, taking Sicily, the south of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula and reaching close to England in 1132. After the fall of Granada in 1492, the last major Muslim stronghold in Spain by the successful alliance of Queen Isabel of Castile and her husband Ferdinand of Aragon, Muslims were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, and they spread into different parts of Europe. During the early 17th century, the captured ships in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic by the British sailors during the rule of Charles 1, including men and women from North Africa (Algiers, Tunis, Sally and Tituane) contributed to the spread of Islam (Mattar, 1998). However, during the First and Second World Wars, migrants from the Muslim world came to Britain for different social, economic, political and religious reasons because there were sailors, traders, diplomats, exiles and students who visited Europe either to explore the world or to spread the word of Islam (Jawad, 2012), or to find a better living.

In the United Kingdom, the first settler community after WWII comprised economic migrants who sought employment in post-war Britain. In 1962, individuals born throughout the Empire held the status of British subject and upon arrival to the UK were offered full citizenship. These early Muslim settlers maintained distinct ethnic and cultural identities. As the 1960s and 1970s advanced, the early settlers became established especially with the arrival of children. Despite many challenges, the Muslim communities in Britain developed quickly. They were increasingly identified as a faith-based group providing a significant challenge to the multicultural status quo (Baxter, 2007). In the late 19th century, there were different migrants in Britain from various religious backgrounds like Pakistanis and Indians. Ali Kose (1996) states, "Muslims of India and Pakistan were much more influenced by the 20th-century religious groups, like the "Jamaat-I- Islami" –Muslim group – and the "Tablighi Jamaat" –"Tabligh Group" (p. 6). It is not easy to mention the exact number of Muslims in the UK, however, Muhammad Mumtaz Ali in his book *Muslim Community in Britain*: *A Historical Account* (1996) states that, "the number of Muslim migrants to Britain during the 1990s was estimated to be approximately 2 million" (p. 7).

Based on this history of Muslims, this research addresses Islam in the West generally and Muslim identity specifically. In particular, it focuses on Muslim minorities in America, Australia and the UK. In addition to the maintenance of identity by majority of Muslims in the West and the resistance to what is claimed about them by their native counterparts to undercut their identity, this thesis takes into consideration the identity conflict of Muslims in the West in terms of diaspora. It deals with matters of the Muslim women's dress code, religious practices, family values in Islam (marriage, dating and faith), language and other traditions.

Furthermore, this research investigates "alterity", or how Muslims make themselves "different" from others and how it becomes a type of stereotype in terms of "Othering".

1.1.4 The West vs. Islam in the Postcolonial Era

During the post-colonial period, Islam in general and the Muslim world in particular, have faced different challenges in all aspects of life and at all levels, locally and internationally. These include the rise of Marxism, secularism and modernism, among others. Some scholars and the media in the West considered the Third World as the weak "Other" and sought to rectify it, often fallaciously, by imbuing it with power, peace, democracy, modern education and other propaganda reforms, especially in the Muslim countries, including the Middle East. However, their mission to "civilise" the East has been riddled with inherent conflicts and conundrums. On one hand, this group of people, who in fact share a lot in common with racists around the world, have always been looking after their own interests; they have constantly tried to exert their dominance and control over the lands and natural resources of the (Middle) East. On the other, they have been anxious about what is known as "Islamic Caliphate." Thus, they have repeatedly endeavoured to prevent the establishment of any Islamic State in the region. Additionally, this racist group in the West has constricted the roles of Arab and Muslim leaders so that they will remain the most powerful entity in the world. For instance, Donald Trump seeks to remain the "greatest" by fighting industrial, commercial and economic progress in the Third World countries, including Iran, Turkey and China. He also continues to threaten and blackmail the Gulf countries in exchange for the so-called "protection", to keep America's eyes on Islam and the Muslim world.

1.1.4.1 Secularism vs. Islam

After decolonization in the Third World, there was an emergence of various radical and fundamentalist Islamic movements in the Muslim World generally and in the Middle East in particular, such as the Salafi, Wahhabi and Muslim brotherhood which called for a revival of Islam and radical reconstruction of Muslim societies culturally and politically. Islam means the rule of life by Islamic laws based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. In fact, Islamic revival came as a struggle to remove Western culture from all aspects of life and replacing it with the culture of Islam. Additionally, the idea of Islamism appeared as a reaction to the growth of secularism that called for a separation between religion and state. Secularism denies the religious principles and instead supports social and moral values of people. However, this restriction of religious ethos creates problems for the minorities in the West, including Muslim groups, especially Muslims through the application of political systems. Also, it aims to disregard the western cultural invasions and dominant controls and aims to impose one pattern of cultural and economic consumption and behaviour as being aimed at leading the world by the one-sided pole of America.

In this context, Holger Daun and Geoffrey Walford (2004) mention some writers' opinions about the Islamic revival movements such Ahmed Akhbar and Fred Halliday who consider that the movements' aim was to challenge the West. For example, Akhbar argues that the Islamic revival movements seek to make Islam a way of life and challenge the universal global view based on Western knowledge. Similarly, Fred Halliday (2005) argues that Islamic revivalism is a response to what is conceived as hostility to Islamic threat to the West such as racism in some European countries, above all France, where it has taken on a more explicitly anti-Muslim character. (p. 141). In the United States, anti-Islamic ethic is significant in political

discourse (Ibid). Pam Nilan (2017) considers Islamism as "a response to modernity that has transformed the religion of Islam into political ideology" (p. 25). It imposes on Muslims political, cultural and economic dependency that is adaptive to the principles of Islam.

Thus, Islamists want to impose strict Islamic laws on society to create a moral leadership through the political re-ordering of government and governance. For example, the Islamic Iranian Revolution of 1979 which was declared under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Mussavi Khomeini, to revive Islam both in social and political fields and remove political subordination to the West and establish Islamic rule. America interfered and supported the Shah against Khomeini. In this context, Daniel E. Harmon (2005) writes:

> Until the revolution of 1979, most Westerners viewed Iran with dreamy curiosity. The name brought to mind exotic, not chaotic, images. The West did not see a dangerously discontent people, but a land with a romantic history. Its leader, the Shah, was a reliable American ally—a good friend to have in a petroleum-rich but sometimes turbulent part of the world. (p.7)

In America vs. Khomeini, the latter was seen as a challenge to the West, who wanted to make Islam the supreme and fundamental law of administration of the Iranian Republic, declaring hostility and resistance to the aggressive and hegemonic American policies. As opposed to this, America wanted the Shah to continue looting Iranian natural resources, especially that Shah was opposed to Khomeini's Islamism. Additionally, America was combative with Khomeini because he was an enemy of its friend Israel, a country that has been viciously persecuting the Muslims in Palestine. Regardless of America's relentless propaganda against Khomeini and his regime as being fundamentalist, extremist and terrorist, Khomeini succeeded in standing up for Iran with his own Islamic ideologies against America until his death.