

Challenging Muslim Female Identity and the Conflict of Western Social Expectations and Religious Visibility: A Postcolonial Feminist View

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Abstract

This Paper examines Muslim women's struggles with social expectations and religious identities in two novels: "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" by Mohja Kahf and "Does My Head Look Big In This?". In the context of Muslim women's feminine identities amidst conflict due to religious visibility like Hijab in socially anticipated and demanding western settings, modern Anglophone literature is examined. Post-colonial feminist theory is used to analyse the text qualitatively through critical reading revealing literary aspects and representations that underscore Muslim women's struggles in Western countries. The research uses McKee's interpretive textual analysis, emphasising context and various interpretations as the autonomy, resilience, cultural integration, prejudice followed by identity were key words and themes in data collecting. The research revealed that Muslim women's complicated identity struggled between religious visibility and Western social expectations as in Randa Abdel-Fattah's work, the protagonist endured sleeplessness owing to the dread of wearing the headscarf in a potentially hostile situation. This internal conflict demonstrated how societal marginalisation affects Muslim women's mental health, as they must balance their religious identification with the dread of social discrimination. Additionally the conflict between cultural values and social inclusion is another important discovery as Uncle Joe's admonition to hide one's culture for social progress highlighted the conflict between cultural authenticity and social acceptability under which Muslim women and their families feel forced to sacrifice Islamic values for social and economic prospects in the diaspora. Similarly the protagonist's distress when her community is wrongly identified with Islamic radicalism showed how stereotyping affects relationships as this example demonstrated how daily micro-aggressions. On the other

hand, Khadra's hijab experience in "The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf" emphasised its symbolic and emotional meaning as her resolve to wear the broken hijab showed her tenacity in keeping her cultural and religious identity despite social pressures. Along with that the ideological conflict between Islamic and Western values is concluded by Khadra's condemnation of Western individualism as her prioritisation of community over self-interest showed the basic difference in values. The research highlighted that Muslim women in Western nations struggle to preserve their religious and cultural identities despite competing social expectations. Identity negotiation is complicated by psychological stress, assimilation pressure, stereotyping and ideological disagreements while the Cultural competency, empathy and inclusive policies that recognise and accept multiple identities are needed to facilitate Muslim women's free expression.

Keywords: Identity Negotiation, Religious Visibility, Cultural Integration, Psychological Strain and Stereotyping.

Introduction

The intricate relationship between Western social expectations and Muslim women's religious visibility reflected identity, belonging and social integration. This research examined how Muslim women negotiated their identities in Western countries when secular and religious standards conflict under which this study critically analysed these dynamics, concentrating on Muslim women who wear hijabs, niqabs or other Islamic attire. Muslim integration into Western countries is shaped by waves of migration from former colonies or conflict zones and this immigration created large Muslim communities in Western nations however these populations struggled to integrate because to prejudice, stereotyping, and cultural misunderstandings (Koenig, 2023). On the other hand many Western countries became more anti-Muslim due to geopolitical events like 9/11, ISIS, and Middle East crises because this intensified attention and distrust of Muslims, especially those who wear religious clothing (Crisis Group, 2016). In this manner policies and public discourse often depicted Muslim identities as incompatible with Western secularism and liberalism.

The current research analysed Muslim women's experiences using numerous theoretical frameworks as the intersectionality hypothesis demonstrated how gender, religion and race overlapped to generate distinct experiences of oppression and privilege making it essential (Tinner et al., 2023). On the other hand, knowing Muslim women's public scrutiny requires knowing "visibility" as Muslim women typically lead multiculturalism, secularism and national identity arguments due to their religious visibility however the visibility of Muslim women's clothing caused stereotyping and solidarity inside or outside their communities (Bakali, 2024). In addition to this

Muslim women in the West confronted widespread stereotyping that linked Islamic attire to tyranny, backwardness and militancy while media and political discourse fostered these prejudices, resulting in job, school and public space discrimination. Similarly western society value secularism which conflicted with conspicuous religious expression among the Muslim women as the France's prohibition on hijabs in public schools and Quebec's Bill 21 (Coletta, 2021), which banned religious insignia, demonstrated this tension.

Furthermore Muslim women must continually negotiate their identities in a system that frequently views their religious activities as incompatible with Western values. They must balance their faith with fitting within a secular, sometimes Islamophobic culture hence this balancing endeavour caused internal tensions and estrangement. In addition to these Muslim groups possessed different views of religious rituals and degrees of traditional norms under which Muslim women suffered internal and external pressures to dress and behave a specific way forcing them to balance internal and external expectations (Basem Attum et al., 2023). In compliance the struggles faced by Muslim women in Western society experience shaped their identities and agency because these women typically find methods to exert their autonomy and manage their identities to reject external and internal constraints. Along with that visibility of Muslim women also empowered communities because these women potentially defy preconceptions and validated their religious identities in public by visibly practicing their faith (Islam, 2019). Collectively the a complex interaction of elements shaped Muslim women's identities in the tension between Western social expectations and religious visibility while critically evaluating these relationships demonstrated Muslim women's resilience and agency as they negotiate identity and persecution. This study suggested a deeper knowledge of Muslim women's experiences and policies that respect religious diversity and promote social integration with equality.

Muslim Women Obstacles in Western Setting- Conflict with Islamic Traditions

The subject of the current research analysed Muslim women's multiple obstacles in Western countries as the issue raised in the conflict between Islamic traditions, which include wearing hijabs or niqabs and Western conventions, which typically view such religious symbols with distrust or contempt (Koenig, 2023). This intersectional difficulty comprised stereotyping, discrimination and identity negotiation however the selected two novels, *Does My Head Look Big In This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf, be used to analyse these dynamics. Randa Abdel-Fattah's tale followed Amal, an Australian Muslim schoolgirl who wears the hijab full-time and this choice framed the novel's themes of identity, belonging and perseverance as Amal's experiences demonstrated numerous key issue statement elements including the Stereotypes and Discrimination, Identity Negotiation followed by value of Community and Support Networks (Fattah, 2005). On the other hand Mohja Kahf's story followed Syrian-American Muslim lady Khadra Shamy through her life in Indiana as this novel expand the issue statement's historical and cultural context via Cultural and Religious Identity followed by Resistance and Empowerment (Younus, 2020). Collectively *Does My Head Look Big In This?* and *The Girl in the Tangerine*

Scarf offer fascinating, narrative-driven insights on Muslim women's struggles in Western countries as they discuss stereotyping, discrimination, identity negotiation and community support. These novel examine Muslim women's identities in the face of social expectations and religious visibility via their characters hence these works' literary study illuminated Muslim female identities' persistence, agency and complexity in modern Western society, deepening the problem statement.

Muslim Female Identities Challenged by Conflict

The conflict between Western social expectations and religious visibility threatened Western Muslim women's identities as hijabs and niqabs intersect with Western secular norms, resulting in identity negotiation, discrimination and resilience. The historical backdrop of Muslim assimilation into Western society helped in explaining the Muslim women's present issues as described how post-colonial migration and Muslim immigration to Europe and North America created mixed societies. The presence of Islam, which is sometimes seen as a threat to secular and liberal norms, regularly tested multicultural beliefs (Tariq Modood & Sealy, 2021, p.868). Additionally in the conflict, Muslim women's religious activities, especially their clothing are visible under which Rauf et al. (2020) claimed that the hijab and other Islamic attire contradict Western secularism and gender equality by displaying religious identity. According to data from the Pew Research Centre Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crimes have grown as a result of Muslim women's greater visibility, which frequently leads to stereotyping and discrimination (Blazina, 2021). Similarly the media also supported the perpetuation of these prejudices as Susan (2021) found that Western media characterised Muslim women as subservient under which the perceptions that Muslim women's religious practices are incompatible with Western norms increased marginalisation and discrimination.

On the other hand the literature about Western Muslim women focused on identity negotiation as Rizzo et al. (2020) addressed how Muslim women deal with competing social expectations while pursuing their identities hence they must balance their religion with the urge to adapt into a secular society that frequently distrusts them. Additionally this identity negotiation is personal and psychological under which Muslim women frequently find ways to show their autonomy and keep their religious identity in unfriendly or discriminating public venues thus finding a balance between self-expression and societal conventions appeared uplifting and difficult (Mariña Fernández-Reino et al., 2022). Moreover the legal and policy frameworks in Western nations greatly affect Muslim women as (Narain, 2024) examined how religious attire laws, such as France's ban on hijabs in public schools and Quebec's Bill 21, forced Muslim women to choose between their faith and their careers. These regulations typically portrayed Muslim women's visibility as a problem to be solved rather than a genuine statement of identity, reflecting a larger conflict between secularism and religious freedom. Similarly intersectionality theory explained how many social identities cross to generate distinct oppression and advantage (Nair & Johanna Ray Vollhardt, 2020). Gender, religion, ethnicity, immigrant status and socioeconomic background all affect Muslim women thus understanding Muslim women in the West's various experiences required intersectionality.

In compliance Muslim women's identities are also shaped by intragroup interactions as Paff (2024) demonstrated how Muslim communities compelled women to dress and behave traditionally therefore Muslim women must negotiate their identities without the interference of their religious communities and secular society. Additionally many Muslim women declared their identities despite obstacles under which Muslim women utilised social media, activism and supporting networks to fight stereotypes and demand their rights thus how Muslim women handle external discrimination and internal conformity constraints highlighted their resiliency (Ponnadu, 2022). Collectively the conflict between Western social expectations and religious visibility provided substantial obstacles to Muslim female identities in the West. The literature displayed a complex interaction between stereotyping, discrimination, legal and policy frameworks, intersectionality and intragroup dynamics. Muslim women struggle with their identities but demonstrated perseverance and autonomy however there is a need for more nuanced understandings of Muslim women's experiences and policies and societal attitudes that respect religious diversity.

Gap in Literature

Despite a large literature on Muslim women in Western society, research gaps persisted as majority of the previous studies focused on Muslim communities or religious visibilities with legal and policy ramifications. However, more detailed, qualitative insights into Muslim women's personal narratives notably via literature would help in explaining identity negotiation's emotional and psychological aspects. In compliance the current study analysed two novels, *Does My Head Look Big In This?* by Randa Abdel-Fattah and *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf to fill this gap. Quantitative research and policy assessments cannot capture the richness of Muslim women's lives like these literary masterpieces (Samier & Eman ElKaleh, 2021) therefore the research examined how Muslim female identities are negotiated in the context of Western social expectations and religious prominence by concentrating on these tales. In addition to this the current research addressed the absence of intersectionality in Muslim women's identities as the lived realities of Muslim women managing many overlapping identities (gender, religion, ethnicity, and immigrant status) are rarely highlighted (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022). However by exploring these human narratives, the research illuminated Muslim women's internal and external tensions, providing a more complete picture of their challenges and successes.

Furthermore the research also analysed how community support and intragroup dynamics shape Muslim women's identities. Similarly current study contributed to Muslim women's resilience and empowerment rhetoric as less emphasis is placed on their agency and the methods they use to affirm their identities, despite the fact that many people focus on the difficulties and discrimination they experience. In this manner the research filled the gaps and improved academic discourse with qualitative insights that empirical studies typically lack by analysing these books hence this literary study empathetically understands Muslim female identities, enriching Western discourses on multiculturalism, diversity and social inclusion.

Significance and Limitation

Methodology

To analyse Muslim women in 21st-century Anglophone fiction qualitatively this research utilised a carefully designed methodology as understanding Muslim women's delicate relationship between Western society demands and religious visibility is the main objective. This method emphasised over depth, context and nuanced subjective experiences like qualitative research and qualitative research is best for investigating the complex nature of social processes (Priya, 2021). Qualitative research is suitable for understanding Muslim women's subjective reality in Western environments as it examined people's experiences, attitudes and behaviours while this method is needed to capture the diversity of human experiences, especially in the case of marginalised groups as their voices are often overlooked in mainstream discourse. In compliance this qualitative study examined "Does My Head Look Big In This?" by Randa Abdel-Fattah and "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" by Mohja Kahf via a critical reading and theme analysis methodology because these novels vividly demonstrated Muslim women's life and explore identity, cultural integration and religious visibility (Fatima, 2020), thus the researcher examined them to understand about Muslim women in the diaspora's problems and persistence. Along with that critical reading and theme analysis were used in the methodology to reveal textual meanings while the thematic analysis revealed how Muslim female identities are portrayed and managed in Western social expectations (Catalano & Waugh, 2020) hence this method aligned well for investigating how the authors describe the challenges of being a visible Muslim woman in a secular society.

Moreover McKee's (2001) interpretative textual analysis approach is important in the research because this strategy emphasised over context, cultural aspects and numerous interpretations in text interpretation. McKee's fluid method allowed for several readings and views, which are essential for conveying Muslim women's unique experiences hence this strategy, illuminated the power dynamics and social processes that form Muslim women in literature by emphasising the writings' cultural and contextual value. Additionally this qualitative technique excelled in describing and interpreting social processes in detail therefore by studying texts closely, the researcher determined character beliefs and values. Deep involvement is necessary to understand Muslim women's lived experiences and how they negotiate their identities under competing social expectations. Contrary to this qualitative research methodology also possessed drawbacks as the subjective nature of qualitative research and context-specific data restricted its generalizability while the analysis took time and required careful observation, meditation and interpretation (Yaprak Civelek, 2023). Similar to this researcher's opinions and preconceptions would skew conclusions which is a major problem therefore to overcome these constraints; the researcher adopted strict methodological standards, transparent reporting and data triangulation to improve outcomes validity and dependability (Gaglio et al., 2020).

The qualitative approach is justified by postcolonial feminist theory, which underpinned the research as the qualitative approaches are ideal for studying power dynamics, cultural discourses, and marginalisation in postcolonial feminism (Bhattacharya, 2021). This theoretical approach enabled a detailed, critical analysis of Muslim women in literature, revealing insights quantitative techniques would overlook.

Along with that reflexivity and ethics are stressed in the research as reflexivity required researchers to critically examine their biases, preconceptions, and positionality. This is essential for trustworthy and dependable findings as accurately expressing intentions of authors and safeguarding data confidentially are ethical issues (Secules et al., 2021). In this manner the adopted research methodology is deliberately developed to give a complete and nuanced picture of Muslim women's diaspora difficulties because qualitative approaches like critical reading and theme analysis allowed the researcher to explore texts and their intricate dynamics. McKee's interpretative textual analysis technique, supplemented by postcolonial feminist theory, allowed for a deep investigation of Muslim female identities. However qualitative research possessed inherent challenges and limitations, but comprehensive methodological standards and ethical considerations ensured the validity and reliability of the findings, adding to academic discourse on multiculturalism, diversity and social integration in Western societies.

Results

Psychological Impact of Hijab on Identity Negotiation

A critical extract in the novel of Randa Abdel-Fattah "*I worry so much about whether I dare to do it that I cannot sleep as Always use a head scarf when wearing the hijab*" (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p. 17) captured the protagonist's internal conflict and psychological strain from wearing the hijab full-time. This insomnia reflected the social constraints and worries of marginalisation Muslim women who wear prominent religious symbols confront as the word "dare" emphasised over the courage needed to traverse a new social setting where the hijab is often mistrusted (Syeda Sadia Mehjabin, 2020). Additionally "I suppose I feel like I am missing out when I am not wearing a hijab. I feel like that unique link was stolen from me" (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p. 27), such decisions acquired serious emotional and psychological consequences for Muslim women trying to combine their Islamic identities with society expectations under which the internal conflict illustrated societal marginalisation, where fear of breaking from norms caused uneasiness and self-doubt (Godwin et al., 2020). Muslim women must balance their cultural and religious traditions with their desire to blend into Western communities in this microcosmic drama of identity negotiation. In this manner by highlighting conflicting identity creation, the novel resonated with post-colonial feminist rhetoric as the experiences of characters displayed how Muslim women must negotiate societal expectations and personal convictions, underscoring the often-overlooked psychological consequences of Islam in a multicultural society hence, Muslim women endure mental and emotional challenges when they express their identities in unsupportive situations.

The Tension between Cultural Values and Societal Integration

Uncle Joe's realistic yet controversial social integration technique is examined as he expressed that "*According to Uncle Joe's theory, it's better for Muslims to conceal their identity instead of practising their cultural values not just to assimilate but to go ahead in the society*" (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p. 252). This perspective views hiding one's cultural identity as a necessary sacrifice for social acceptability while the contrast between "practising their cultural values" and "concealing their identity" displayed the

conflict between cultural authenticity and social development in western setting (Wagner et al., 2012). Uncle Joe illustrated Muslim discussions about how to navigate Western cultures under which this novel demonstrated how Muslim women and families prospered using different perspectives and techniques. In line to this Randa Abdel-Fattah highlighted the multifaceted nature of the diaspora experience as; *"I remember people being very rude and calling me a bloody pom and telling me I was speaking gibberish. The fact that I was also wearing a veil, well, a beanie- and married to a Pakistani caused a lot of eyebrow-raising too"* (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, P 257), here the conflict between keeping cultural customs and seeking social acceptability generated a complicated terrain of identity negotiation (Brablec, 2021). Collectively this finding added to the discussion on how Western cultures maintained cultural and religious identities as it emphasised over the difficulties and Muslim women potentially have to make to develop socially and economically. The novel presented this counter-narrative to encourage readers to evaluate Muslim communities' different and often competing approaches to reconciling their cultural heritage with social needs.

The Impact of Stereotyping on Interpersonal Relationships

The protagonist's discomfort and the issue of Muslim women's stereotyping are captured in the statement, *"I wince every time Ms Walsh says the word 'massacre' with the word 'Islamic' as though this barbarian somehow belongs to my Muslim community"* (Abdel-Fattah, 2005, p. 566). This excerpt highlighted the protagonist's anger and isolation when her spiritual community is wrongfully blamed for bad things as it showed how Muslim women struggle to develop relationships in multicultural situations because they are often accused and distrusted (Ibrahim, 2022). On the other hand this scene also illustrated the keen awareness of social and cultural barriers to understanding and bonding among the Muslim females as using "wince" to describe the emotional discomfort produced by stereotyping emphasised over the psychological weight of being continuously judged by prejudice however this response to Ms. Walsh's words illustrated Muslim women's daily micro-aggressions which strained relationships and promoted marginalisation (Higgins et al., 2023). In this manner this textual piece stressed over the necessity to critically investigate how social narratives and stereotypes influenced Muslim women's lives from a post-colonial feminist viewpoint. It draw attention to Islamophobia's pervasive nature and its effects on Muslim women in the diaspora's social dynamics and self-perceptions hence the story highlighted the wider effects of cultural misconceptions and the need for more empathy with tolerance in heterogeneous society by focusing on these interpersonal issues.

Faith Attracting Marginalization and Identities Conflict

Khadra's response to her broken scarf in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* showed the hijab's emotional and symbolic power as the sentence, *"The scarf was messy, and she didn't want anyone in this building to see her bareheaded. She shoved her dishevelled hair under it as the brooch from Aunt Khadija was broken, Great there was a smear of blood on the scarf folds where the brooch had poked her, Just great because That'd never come out"* (Kahf 2006, p. 54), emphasising the hijab's personal and cultural Khadra's willingness to cover her head despite the scarf's condition

displayed her strength in a tough environment that threatens her identity. The scarf signifying her religious and cultural identity actually symbolised her battle to establish herself under hardship however Khadra's unwillingness to be seen bareheaded emphasised over the hijab's protective and declaratory roles as a shield of dignity and identity (Nigam, 2022). Similarly damage and bloodstain on scarf from her attempt to mend it represented societal pressures and discrimination's physical and mental effects (Chen & Mallory, 2021) however by illustrating; *"When she came home afterward she unwound her headscarf silently, shaking her head as She unzipped her long Hijab and folded it over her arm and went upstairs to take "the purification bath required of those who wash the dead"* (Kahf, 2006 p.42), Khadra's determination to keep the scarf established her resistance and devotion to her cultural and religious history. In this manner this textual finding illuminated Muslim women's experience in Western society where visible faith is often scrutinised and marginalised as the Khadra's struggle to wear the hijab despite its degradation demonstrated Muslim women's marginalisation. Additionally she demonstrated that the hijab is more than a religious garment and a powerful statement of identity and defiance to such demands under which this finding highlighted the intricate relationship between personal identity, cultural heritage and societal forces along with the bravery needed to keep religion and cultural symbols in a hostile society.

Islamic Values vs. Western Individualism

Khadra's condemnation of Western individualism in *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf*; *"Isn't all this self-focus selfish? Is it simply Western individualism? Muslims worship God, not themselves as she hid stray hairs behind her cotton scarves"* (Kahf 2006, p. 99), symbolising the ideological conflict between Islamic and Western ideals. Muslim women negotiating their identities in Western environments acquired inherent contradictions since Khadra emphasised God's centrality above self-centeredness (Neila Miled, 2020). Khadra's criticism highlighted a fundamental divergence in values as Western societies stress individuality, self-expression and personal fulfilment while Islamic teachings favoured community, communal well-being and God. Muslim women in diasporic groups must balance their religious and cultural identities with host society standards due to this ideological struggle (Boland, 2020) hence Khadra's internal conflict and external censure represented Muslim women's battles between two value systems. Additionally the clash between Western individualism and Islam's social and spiritual orientation in identity building is especially noticeable because Muslim women struggle to retain their religious and cultural identity while participating with a culture that values various things, as Khadra said but her experience displayed how Western standards push and how one must resist to preserve own ideas and behaviours (Haron et al., 2020). In compliance this textual finding highlighted the Muslim female diaspora's identity negotiation discourse and the necessity to comprehend their ideological and cultural tensions. Khadra's critique of Western individualism illuminated the challenges of being a Muslim woman in a Western culture, when balancing faith and society is difficult while this story illustrated multicultural cultures' need to recognise multiple value systems.

Discussions

Muslim Women's Internal Conflicts and Societal Pressures- Psychological Impact of Hijab

The novel "Does My Head Look Big in This?" by Randa Abdel-Fattah explored Muslim women's internal conflicts and societal pressures in Western societies via the psychological effects of the headscarf. The protagonist's sleeplessness brought on by her worry over wearing the hijab full-time illustrated the psychological strain of outwardly displaying one's religious identity while highlighting the emotional turmoil and fear of marginalisation that accompany wearing the hijab in a predominantly non-Muslim environment (Paolini et al., 2021). Similarly many Muslim women face societal suspicion and prejudice due to their prominent religious insignia, as Saherwala et al. (2021) illustrated that such decisions induced serious emotional and psychological effects on Muslim women trying to balance their Islamic identities with societal expectations. On the other hand the insomnia and worry demonstrated the psychological strain of reconciling cultural and religious traditions with Western assimilation while similar to post-colonial feminist discourse this microcosmic drama of identity negotiation highlighted the challenges of juggling of often competing identities. Additionally in Western societies, Muslim women who wear the hijab typically faced psychological difficulties, including anxiety and social isolation as Elshamy et al. (2023) explored Muslim women's mental health issues, emphasising the role of societal prejudice and internalised stigma in their psychological struggles.

On the other hand some other research studies displayed a nuanced picture of the hijab's psychological effects as the headscarf served as a source of strength and identity validation for many Muslim women. In compliance Jhanghiz Syahrivar (2020) found that the hijab elevated self-esteem and connected women to their cultures and religions thus the hijab's psychological benefits are contrasted with Abdel-Fattah's novel's unfavourable characterization indicating a conflict between religious identities and western social expectations. Similarly Gulamhussein & Eaton (2015) also displayed how the headscarf enabled Muslim women to defend their identities against Western cultural imperialism as this research established that while the hijab cause psychological distress due to outward prejudice but it also provided many women agency and resilience. On this account this particular aspect of negative psychological effects of Hijab leading to identity conflict mentioned in "Does My Head Look Big in This?" potentially not properly portray Muslim women's different hijab experiences. The protagonist's struggle and psychological pain are touching yet they are only one aspect of life while the headscarf provided some Muslim women strength, solidarity and empowerment but others endured severe obstacles and marginalisation. Additionally, the novel's focus on the psychological difficulty of wearing the headscarf reinforce unfavourable perceptions about Muslim women but focusing on hijab issues risks reinforcing a homogenous narrative that Muslim women are oppressed or victimised.

Therefore this approach concealed Muslim women's autonomy and different experiences because many of whom wear the hijab to express their faith and identity (Suraya Sintang & Mohd, 2019). Collectively this particular finding clearly highlighted the psychological consequences of identity negotiation for Muslim women in Western

society but it is important to understand their broader context and various experiences. The novel's representation aligned with other research on the psychological obstacles of wearing the hijab but it's also important to recognise its powerful and affirming features. In this manner to understand how the headscarf affects Muslim women's identities Muslim females must consider its psychological costs and possible strengths with empowerment in the context of religious identity despite having the conflict with social expectations in western settings.

Tension between Cultural Values and Societal Integration- Challenging Muslims Female Identities

Uncle Joe's viewpoint in the novel depicted the intense tension between societal integration and cultural values for Muslim women in Western nations. Uncle Joe believed that it is better for Muslims to conceal their identity instead of practising their cultural values because it is controversial but practical for social integration thus the apparent need to repress cultural identity in order to flourish socially and economically in the West is problematic (Hurrell, 2019). Uncle Joe believed that hiding cultural values is essential for societal acceptance and success but Dizon et al. (2021) explained that minority groups must adapt to mainstream culture to find acceptability and opportunity resulting in complicated identity negotiations. Similarly in this novel scene highlighted Muslim women and their families adjust to Western society while Uncle Joe's realistic approach illustrated internal conflicts about integration strategies among the Muslim communities (Maysoon Taher Muhi, 2023).

Furthermore Muslim female identities are challenged by Western social standards and religious exposure making this finding relevant as it established Muslim women's struggles to navigate Western society often at the expense of their culture and religion (Tamer Koburtay et al., 2022) as the Uncle Joe's attitude in the novel reflected Muslim women's societal pressures to adhere to Western values, which can lead to alienation and cultural identity loss. Similarly this tension is also illustrated by Oktaviani et al. (2021) as they described how Muslim women in Western society fight identity conflict by balancing their cultural and religious traditions with the urge to fit in. Stress and marginalisation emerged from this balancing act while Muslim women are pressured to adapt to Western beauty standards and social norms, which conflicted with their cultural and religious traditions. Contrary to this Amer (2019) argued that some Muslim women utilised their religious and cultural identities to strengthen themselves rather than hinder their integration hence this arguments demonstrated that Muslim women potentially establish their identities and achieve acceptance without adhering to Western ideals, despite major hurdles. Similar to this another vital study focused on Muslim women's agency in identity negotiation highlighted how young Muslim women intentionally created hybrid identities to balance their cultural background and Western aspirations (Ariadne Driezen et al., 2021) thus instead of passively accepting societal pressures, Muslim women build their identities.

In addition to this discussions regarding diversity and the inclusion of minority groups in Western nations are also reflected in the tension between cultural values and societal integration. Pressure to hide cultural identity implied that multicultural policies lacked acceptance of diversity instead, it suggested superficial acceptance that

compels minority groups to adapt to the mainstream culture (Gowan, 2023). This critical notion supported the research finding that advocate for more inclusive and supportive multiculturalism that respects and celebrates cultural variety. On the other hand the novel's counter-narrative also invited readers to critically assess Muslim communities' frequently conflicting integration strategies. The internal variety and disputes in these groups challenged monolithic depictions of Muslim women hence this particular extract of the novel offered many views to better comprehend Muslim women in the diaspora's identity conflict. Collectively the final thoughts from Uncle Joe revealed the enormous tension between cultural values and societal integration for Muslim women in Western nations. This discovery helped in explaining how these women balance their cultural and religious identities with Western conventions while the scene underscored the psychological and societal consequences of hiding cultural identities and calls for a critical evaluation of multicultural policy and more inclusive, diverse methods. In this manner this particular findings emphasised Muslim women's autonomy in negotiating these complicated environments and the need for a more supportive and inclusive society that would allow them to freely express their identities.

The Burden of Stereotyping Challenging Muslims Female Identities

The protagonist's statement "*I wince every time Ms Walsh says the word 'massacre'...*" expressed her deep discomfort and frustration with religious stereotyping because this reply demonstrated the struggle and how Muslim women are unfairly connected with violence and extremism. Muslim women suffered emotionally and psychologically from stereotype, as seen by the protagonist's grimace and this answer displayed how daily micro aggressions and discrimination make Muslim women feel alienated and marginalised. The distrust and hostility Muslim women face due to their religious identity negatively influenced their mental health and social well-being (José, 2021). Additionally Muslim women struggled to develop meaningful connections in multicultural situations, as shown by the protagonist's emotional discomfort while a visceral reaction to prejudice, like "wince" highlighted a strong sensitivity to preconceptions as Kalin (2020) suggested that daily bias hindered the development of trust and mutual understanding between Muslim women and their non-Muslim friends, increasing sentiments of isolation and exclusion leading to conflict between the social expectations and religious identities in western world.

The protagonist's reaction to Ms. Walsh's statements highlighted how societal and cultural obstacles prevent Muslim women from connecting with society as this illustrated Islamophobia's pervasiveness and its negative consequences on Muslim women's diaspora social dynamics. The scene within the novel emphasised over the need to critically evaluate how societal narratives and stereotypes influenced Muslim women by concentrating on the protagonist's interpersonal struggles (Chadi Chahdi, 2024). Additionally post-colonial feminists also recognised this scenario as a reminder of how gender, religion and ethnicity marginalise Muslim women. The novel depiction highlighted how Muslim women are marginalised as women and religious minorities as the post-colonial feminist literature emphasised over the special obstacles of women of colour in predominately white, Western society (Coetzee et al., 2024). In compliance to the current finding the other research studies also established that stereotyping affect

Muslim woman's identities and relationships as due to unfavourable Islam stereotypes, Dr. Sawsan Jaber (2022) discovered that Muslim American teenagers particularly girls, feel vulnerable and alienated thus stereotypes lower their self-esteem and impair their connections with classmates and instructors, causing a sense of alienation. Additionally Taghreed Jamal Al-deen (2019) found that young Muslim women in Australia endured daily racism and discrimination as the findings displayed how such events marginalise them and limit their social and educational participation.

Furthermore despite these obstacles, several research studies demonstrated Muslim women overcoming unfavourable preconceptions as claimed that some Muslim women challenge stereotypes through community action and public debate hence these women promoted community understanding and acceptance by declaring their identity with challenging unfavourable representations (Loxston & Jachens, 2023). Contrary to this the novel's focus on interpersonal issues emphasises the need for more nuanced and sensitive diversity as the policies and procedures should promote diversity to make everyone feel respected and included while this entailed educating the public about preconceptions and encouraging good public discourse portrayals of Muslim women. Collectively, this particular notion in "Does My Head Look Big in This?" highlighted how stereotyping influenced Muslim women's relationships and their struggles to navigate Western social norms and Islamic prominence. This result established the psychological and social costs of stereotyping referred as cultural obstacles to understanding and bonding, with the consequences for a more inclusive and empathic society without any identity conflict between social expectations and religious identity of Muslim women in western countries.

Religious Visibility Attracting Marginalisation and Challenging Identities

The experience of protagonist in "The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf" demonstrated the emotional and symbolic value of the hijab, especially in situations where religious visibility leads to marginalisation as Khadra's battle with her messy scarves and bloodstained from a broken brooch illustrated Muslim women's problems in Western countries. The Statement, "*brooch had poked her, Just great because That'd never come out...*" expressed her determination to maintain her religious and cultural identity despite the physical and emotional conflicts. The reaction of Khadra as the Muslim women to her scarf's condition demonstrated that the hijab is more than clothing it symbolised identity and tenacity. Khadra showed the hijab's protective and declarative power by covering her head even when the scarf is messy under which Nigam (2022) revealed that many Muslim women use the hijab to empower and express themselves in marginalised or scrutinised contexts. On the other hand the bloodstains and damage of scarf represented Muslim women's social pressures and prejudice. Chen and Mallory (2021) highlighted that prominent religious symbols like the hijab often draw unwanted attention and can harm wearers psychologically and physically however despite its deterioration Muslim women opted for wearing scarf in the western societies showing their opposition to society's attempts to erase her religious and cultural identity.

Furthermore the struggle of Khadra represented Muslim women in Western nations' fight between personal identity and social expectations as her decision to keep

her headscarf despite its deterioration demonstrated Muslim women's marginalisation that made hijab more than a religious garment and a powerful statement of identity and resistance against social norms (Christian, 2020). Additionally discussions regarding Muslim women in the West often focused on the delicate link between personal identity, cultural heritage and societal forces however Muslim females wearing the hijab to affirmed their individuality and culture in a world that seeks integration (Hass, 2020) however this defiance highlighted the strength needed to defend religious and cultural icons in a harsh climate of conflict between western social expectations and religious visibility in western setting. Numerous studies showed the headscarf as a sign of identity and resistance as Barth et al. (2024) examined how the headscarf symbolised Islamic identity and resisted Western conventions that marginalised Muslim women hence their research showed that wearing the hijab is typically a choice to affirm one's individuality and question society. Similarly Sabah Rahmath et al. (2016) found that Muslim women in Canada face prejudice and unfavourable attention when wearing the hijab but despite this, many women wear the hijab to reflect their faith and culture showing the conflict and resistance under which Khadra saw the hijab as a declaration of resistance and individuality, not merely a religious symbol.

Contrary to this certain research revealed that Muslim women's hijab experiences vary considerably and are not always bad because in some multicultural settings Attia (2022, p.88) found that wearing the hijab promoted good results, such as Muslim community togetherness and enhanced visibility of Muslim women's problems. Additionally the hijab allowed Muslim women to participate in public life while keeping their religious identity, which can help with social integration hence the hijab would help Westerners negotiate identity not just cause conflict at societal level (Rojan Afrouz & Crisp, 2022). In this manner "The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf" highlighted the need for a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim women's struggles in Western countries as the scene in the novel emphasised over respecting religious and cultural symbols as part of identity. This promoted empathy and tolerance in multicultural society, celebrating multiple identities rather than marginalising them however challenging prevailing narratives and promoting good Muslim women images would increase acceptance and understanding.

Collectively this particular research finding based on hijab issue illustrated Muslim women's struggle to balance their religious and cultural identities with Western expectations as the work depicted the headscarf as a significant symbol of identity, fortitude and marginalisation resistance. Supporting research also showed that wearing the headscarf in Western cultures is both difficult and empowering but critically exploring these concerns would help western societies in building a more inclusive society that values different identities of individuals including the Muslim females.

Ideological Conflict between Islamic and Western Values

Khadra's critique of Western individualism in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* illuminated the ideological conflict between Islamic and Western values as the line, "Isn't self-centeredness selfish? Just Western individualism? Muslims worship God, not self" captured this tension. The inherent tensions Muslim women experience while

navigating their identities in Western surroundings are highlighted by this ideological battle while Khadra's focus on God's primacy over self-centeredness demonstrated a fundamental difference in values, showing the challenges of identity construction for Muslim women in the diaspora. Western civilizations value individualism, self-expression and fulfilment but these values contradicted with Islamic values of community, well-being and God. Khadra's internal conflict and outward censure illustrated effort of Muslim women to balance two value systems under which Neila Miled (2020) argued how this ideological divide made it difficult for Muslim women to combine their religious and cultural identities with host society expectations. Hence it is affirmed that maintaining one's faith and cultural heritage in a society that values individuality and self-determination is difficult. Additionally this particular finding of the study criticised Western individualism for its materialism and self-centeredness as the Islamic culture values spiritual and community responsibility displayed by worshipping God rather than oneself (Maimun et al., 2020) however this is especially important for Muslim women, who struggled to balance Western expectations with their religious and cultural customs.

Additionally the aspect of Muslim women in Western society faced a major ideological conflict between Islamic values and Western individualism is supported by various other findings of the previous literature. Primarily Qazi Sarah Rasheed (2023) analysed how Muslim women in the diaspora balance their Islamic convictions with Western secular, individualistic values and revealed that this conflict frequently led to alienation and marginalisation as Muslim women try to reconcile their identities in surroundings that not respect their cultural and religious traditions. On the other hand Haniya Rumaney & Sriram (2021) found that pressure to adapt into an individualistic society caused identity issues for Muslim women in the India. According to their study, Muslim women often struggle to wear the hijab and adapt into a culture that considered these customs as strange or incompatible with Western ideals under which Khadra displayed her dedication to Islamic values as opposition to the mainstream cultural narrative. Similarly Jansen (2021) highlighted how identities of Muslim women are constantly negotiated in Western countries as the study emphasised over that Islamic community values and Western individualism conflict, forcing Muslim women to combine religious commitments with cultural expectations. This balancing endeavour caused stress and identity issues as women struggle to fit into a society that may not comprehend or respect their cultural and religious roots.

Contrary to this certain scholars argued that the aspect of individualism also possessed certain benefits which indicated that the ideological conflict between Islamic values and Western individualism appeared difficult, but integrating certain principles would benefit Muslim women. According to Syed Zamanat Abbas (2023), the focus on individual rights and liberties by Western countries provided Muslim women more chances for self-expression and empowerment than in traditional circumstances hence the individualistic values empowered Muslim women to advocate for their rights and question cultural conventions. Similarly Saber (2024) further added that Muslim women in Europe managed mixed societies' identities because balancing individualism with social values created a more complex self-image. Muslim women who effectively

combine multiple value systems typically feel more empowered and autonomous because they rely on the strength of both their cultural history and their host society's emphasis on individual rights and liberties. In this manner, the larger ramifications of Khadra's criticism of Western individualism within this particular finding of the research suggested a more sophisticated view of Muslim women's struggles in Western countries. Cultural, religious and social aspects complicated the conflict between Islamic values and Western individualism under which the findings emphasised over the need for inclusive settings that respect and accommodate varied cultural and religious traditions. Cultural competency and sensitivity policies would reduce ideological clashes while the education and awareness programmes promoted mutual tolerance and understanding can also help bridge value systems (Saaida, 2023).

Collectively within the discourse of Khadra's criticism of Western individualism in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* aligned with the wider ideological conflict Muslim women experience while trying to reconcile their religious and cultural identities with Western aspirations. Muslim women struggle to adapt while preserving their faith and culture due to the conflict between individualism and communalism under which previous research supported the complexity of this conflict, showing the challenges and possible benefits of integrating multiple value systems however critically exploring these challenges would help us create more inclusive and empathic cultures that value unique identities.

Conclusion

The research findings demonstrated Muslim women struggles to maintain their religious conflict and Western social expectations as the critical insights developed via findings offer different but interrelated perspectives on how these women navigate their identities in a culture that marginalises their cultural and religious displays. The psychological effects of the headscarf in Randa Abdel-Fattah's work highlighted Muslim women's deep internal conflict as the sleeplessness of protagonist, caused by dread and worry over wearing the hijab in a hostile atmosphere illustrated the emotional and psychological toll of this decision. Muslim women must combine their religious identity with the fear of social exclusion, highlighting marginalisation while the societal pressures to adhere to Western norms followed by preserving cultural and religious identity caused psychological tension and self-doubt. Additionally the perspective of Uncle Joe showed the diaspora's identity negotiating challenges between cultural values and social assimilation as the realistic but controversial advice of Uncle Joe based on hiding one's cultural identity for social progress. Similar to this many other research facts by Wagner et al. (2012) and Brablec (2021) also addressed the complexity of diaspora experiences, and this approach emphasised over the conflict between cultural authenticity and social acceptance. Similar to this Muslim women and their families must balance traditional preservation with Westernisation, and the impulse to sacrifice cultural values because social and economic opportunities complicate identity negotiation under which the discomfort and loneliness of protagonist's over being wrongly accused of Islamic radicalism for the violence demonstrated Muslim women's daily micro-aggressions hence the Islamophobia hindered the human interactions.

Moreover in “The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf”, the determination of a Muslim female to wear the damaged hijab symbolised her will to maintain her cultural and religious identity despite social pressures. On the other hand her scarf's bloodstain symbolised discrimination's physical and mental wounds yet her persistent dedication showed her strength. The hijab is more than a religious garment and this highlighted the courage needed to retain religious and cultural symbols in a culture that scrutinised and marginalised visible beliefs. Similarly the ideological conflict between Islamic and Western values is captured in Khadra's rejection of Western individualism as her criticism of self-centeredness and focus on community over individualism showed a fundamental value gap. Muslim women in the diaspora must combine religious commitments with social expectations due to this ideological debate while the conflict between these value systems is highlighted by several other studies on Muslim women under which this research also established the Muslim female diaspora's identity negotiation discourse and the need to comprehend their ideological and cultural contradictions. In this manner the findings of the current study demonstrated that Muslim women in Western society confronted complex and frequently conflicting expectations as the psychological strain, pressure to adapt, stereotyping, persistence in keeping religious symbols and ideological disagreements make identity negotiation complicated. The ladies must balance their ethnic and religious identities with societal expectations under which the study emphasised over the need for cultural knowledge, empathy and inclusive policies that respect and accommodate multiple identities.

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