

**The Nature of Muslim Stereotyping in Rohina
Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace***

طبيعة الصورة النمطية للمسلمين في مسرحية روهينا مالك "قلادة ياسميننا"

إعداد

روينا مجري جبر الراضي

معيد بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية-كلية الآداب جامعة أسوان

Abstract

The negative stereotyping of Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 has led to widespread discrimination, violence, and challenges in preserving identity for Muslims living in Western societies. Many Muslims have felt compelled to conceal their religious affiliation to avoid prejudice, while others, who openly embrace their Islamic identity, face hostility, verbal abuse, and even physical attacks. Such stereotyping not only impacts individual lives but also perpetuates misconceptions about the Muslim community as a whole. This study investigates the causes and consequences of these stereotypes by analyzing Rohina Malik's play Yasmina's Necklace, a poignant work that sheds light on the struggles, resilience, and humanity of Muslims in a post-9/11 context. The research applies the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which highlights warmth and competence as central dimensions in the formation of stereotypes. By analyzing the dialogue, behaviors, and relationships of the characters, the study uncovers how language and perceptions influence attitudes toward Muslims in Western societies.

Keywords: Yasmina's Necklace, Stereotyping, Muslims

المخلص

بعد هجمات ١١ سبتمبر، زادت الصور النمطية السلبية عن المسلمين في الغرب، مما أدى إلى التمييز والعنف ضدهم. من ذلك الحين، شعر الكثير من المسلمين أنهم مضطرون لإخفاء دينهم لتجنب التحيز و التمييز، بينما واجه آخرون، الذين اختاروا الحفاظ على هويتهم الإسلامية، التمييز و العداء والاعتداءات. هذا التنميط لم يؤثر فقط على حياة الأفراد، بل ساهم في تعزيز الأفكار الخاطئة عن المجتمع المسلم ككل، مما أدى إلى عزلة دينية واجتماعية. لذلك يقوم هذا البحث بدراسة أسباب ونتائج هذه الصور النمطية من خلال تحليل مسرحية "قلادة ياسمينا" للكاتبة روهينا مالك، التي تسلط الضوء على معاناة المسلمين بعد أحداث ١١ سبتمبر في الغرب، و يعتمد البحث على نموذج المحتوى النمطي، الذي يركز على البعدين الرئيسيين، وهما المودة والكفاءة، في تشكيل الصور النمطية. فمن خلال تحليل الحوار والسلوكيات والعلاقات بين الشخصيات في المسرحية، تكشف الدراسة عوامل الصور النمطية السلبية تجاه المسلمين، وكيف تؤدي هذه العوامل إلى التمييز والعداء ضدهم وتساهم في تعزيز العزلة الاجتماعية.

1. Introduction

Muslims have suffered from negative stereotyping after the 9/11 attacks because they have been seen as terrorists in the Western world. This caused many Muslims to struggle with their identity, which is the main factor for experiencing discrimination in the American community. Some have decided to change their names so that they can be seen as non-Muslim Americans. However, Muslims, who have preserved their names, faced the results of the negative stereotyping of Muslims.

Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace* recounts the consequences of the 9/11 attacks on Muslims and Arabs living in the United States. Malik (2017) says, "I felt a strong need to write a play that examines the human cost of war." She is inspired by the negative stereotyping of Arabs/Muslims spread in America in the post-September 11. Thus, Malik imitates the lives of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks and the negative consequences of 9/11 on Muslims of different nationalities.

The negative stereotyping caused Muslims to struggle over introducing their identity in the Western world. Malik introduces several Muslim characters who have had troubles after 9/11 because of their Arabic names. She reflects on the consequences faced by individuals with Arabic names in the real world. The widespread negative stereotyping of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks led Americans to pay attention to the names of citizens in order to identify Arab/religious identity. Since then, Muslims have suffered from injustice and discrimination. For example, according to Ghazali (2008), Muslims were denied bank service and deprived of completing the citizenship application process because of their Arabic-sounding names (pp. 44, 87). There is also the Arab American passenger who is escorted back to the airport after finishing security checks because of his Arabic name, and then he is questioned about his identity by three FBI agents (p. 65). Furthermore, Malik also imitates the lives of Iraqi refugees who suffer because of their religious and national identity. Malik succeeds in applying many characters with different situations to show the consequences of the 9/11 attacks on many Muslims living in the United States.

2. The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to show the effect of stereotyping on the language of Muslims and non-Muslims after 9/11 and how Muslims respond to the stereotypical language against them. The paper applies the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) to Rohina Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace* in order to explain the reasons for positive or negative stereotyping of Muslims living in the United States and the consequences of each stereotyping by analyzing the speech of the Muslim characters.

3. The significance of the study

The negative stereotyping of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks has had a great effect on the lives of Muslims of different nationalities. Thus, explaining the reasons for stereotyping can make people aware of the root of false stereotyping and how positive or negative stereotyping is motivated by the two factors of warmth and competence. The consequences of stereotyping are also explained to raise awareness of how false stereotyping harshly affects Muslims's lives and that stereotyping can lead to the victimization of many innocent Muslims. This study analyzes the speech of the characters in *Yasmina's Necklace* to show that stereotyping has a great influence on the language used by the characters and how negative stereotyping reflects the speech of Muslims and non-Muslims' general speeches.

4. Literature review

There are some studies that applied different theories on *Yasmina's Necklace* while considering the lives of Muslims and the perceived meaning of Islam in the Western World. Researchers focused on the various situations and characters inspired by reality to analyze Muslims' lives in post-September 11. Hassan (2020), for example, undertook a postcolonial reading of Rohina Malik's play, *Yasmina's Necklace*. The study focused on the theories of W. E. B. Du Bois and Edward Said to discuss stereotyping, othering, resistance, and citizenship in the play. The research helps to understand the messages of the play deeply through applying Du Bois and Said's theories.

Ahmed (2023) examined the transcultural feminist consciousness in Rohina Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace*. The study applied Nancy E. Downing and Kristen L. Roush's model of the development of feminist identity to the play. The model introduces five stages that explain the development of feminist identity. Thus, Ahmed analyzed the characters of the play through the five-stages of the model.

Salama (2024) examined Islamophobia in Malik's play *Yasmina's Necklace*. The study explored the representation of Muslim characters in the play and showed the impact of Islamophobia on them. It examined the resistance of the Islamic community to Islamophobia in the United States based on the Muslim characters of the play. For instance, one of the points discussed by Salama was the struggle of Muslims who change their Arabic names in response to Islamophobia in the United States—the issue that is portrayed in the protagonist Abdulsamee, who changed his name to Sam in *Yasmina's Necklace*.

5. Methodology

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) explains that the impression of a stereotype comes from two dimensions, warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002, p. 878). Warmth reflects traits such as sociability and kindness, while competence refers to traits such as skill, intelligence, and confidence (Cuddy et al., 2008, p. 63). Based on this theory, if the warmth and competence concerning a person are high, people would view him/her with pride, however, when warmth and competence are low, people feel disgusted about them. The ambivalent dimensions of high-warmth/ low-competence lead people to feel pity about that person, while the other ambivalent dimensions of low-warmth/ high-competence make people feel envious of him/her (Fiske, 2018, p.2). Thus, the emotional responses emanate from the four combinations of high versus low warmth and competence (Cuddy et al., 2008, p.69).

6. Discussion

The religious and national identities play an important role in how a person is perceived in the United States. Muslims, Arabs, and Iraqi refugees are seen as enemies after the 9/11 attacks. In *Yasmina's Necklace*, the perceived warmth and competence dimensions depend on the identity of the characters. However, if the characters decide to hide their real identity, they are viewed in a different way in the American community.

Initially, Abdulsamee has difficulty finding a job in the United States as his religious identity is visible because of his Arabic name. Abdulsamee says, *"I was just trying to get my foot in the door, but with a name like Abdul Samee Marcario Lopez Hassan, it's really difficult"* (Malik, 2017). He is perceived as low in warmth because of his religious identity. In addition, since he is seen as an enemy for his being a Muslim, his competence or professional skill is not regarded in his resume. According to Sides & Gross (2013), the dimension of warmth is more important than the dimension of competence when stereotyping Muslims (p. 584). Here, although Abdulsamee has the required skills for the job, he has been rejected for getting work.

Abdulsamee succeeds in finding a job only When he decides to change his name to Sam and gives up his identity. Abdulsamee says, *"I had to change my name. You don't know the racism of the corporate world."* Malik, 2017). Abdulsamee can't have a choice but to change his name to Sam so that he can be seen as an ally in the eyes of Americans. In other words, he changes his name to be perceived as high in warmth in the United States. He uses "had to" to convince his family that there is no choice but to give up his identity to be perceived as high warmth in the United States. Khosravi (2012) states that "Several name-changers mentioned their upset at breaking from their background and their anxiety about the reactions of their relatives and community. Some said that they liked their old names, but they felt that they had no choice if they wanted the chance of employment" (p. 77). In the same way, Abdulsamee struggles between his family's opposition to his decisions and his desire to achieve warmth with American citizens.

The competence of Abdulsamee is only taken into consideration when he appears to be an American. Sam says, “*I changed my name, resent my resume and boom, instant responses from top companies. I got a position that hundreds of people applied for*” (Malik, 2017). Malik here portrays a lot of the same situations that Muslims encountered after 9/11. Khosravi (2012) introduces a Muslim who, like Abdulsamee, faced employment discrimination. The person says, “I had sought 150 jobs and only once was called for an interview ... After changing my name, I sought eleven jobs and was called for interview six times and was offered three jobs” (p.70).

It can be said that the warmth dimension is the main part of stereotyping. It has a great effect that if a person is perceived as low in warmth, his/her competence is sometimes not regarded. However, if the warmth is high, competence is undoubtedly viewed. Thus, when Sam applies for the job, he is seen as an American (high-warmth), and because he has the required qualities, he is seen as high in competence and is ultimately chosen or admired by the employer.

On the other hand, Osama and Saddam are taken as examples of Muslims who have decided to preserve their Arabic names in the Western community. They, unlike Abdulsamee and Muhammad, choose to declare their religious identity. However, Abdulsamee says about Osama that he “*always complains about the way people treat him*” (Malik, 2017). Osama is perceived as low in warmth because of his Arabic name, which defines his identity. Similarly, Sara says about Saddam, “*They give him hell at the airport. Hell!*”, and Ali says, “*Do you think his life is easy with a name like Saddam?*” (Malik, 2017). Saddam is also perceived as low in warmth because of his Arabic name, which is not welcomed by Americans. Although the competence dimension is not mentioned, Abdulsamee, Sara, and Ali show how they lack warmth and are treated as enemies in the United States.

Imam Kareem also shows how he is perceived as low-warmth in the American community. When Imam is talking to Abdulsamee, he says, "...do you think it was easy? A Black Imam running a mostly Arab and Pakistani Mosque?" (Malik, 2017). He explains that it's not easy to be an Arab, a Muslim, and a Black in the Western world. (*The U.S. national strategy to counter Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate*, 2024) explains that "Black Muslim communities have noted the challenges of confronting both Islamophobia and anti-Black racism" (p.10). Thus, Imam is perceived as low in warmth in the United States.

The Iraqi refugees, Yasmina and Musa, are perceived as low in warmth because of their national/religious identity. Yasmina and Musa are treated as enemies in the United States because they are Muslims, Arabs, and even refugees. According to Kopytowska & Baider (2017), immigrants and refugees receive aggression in the countries of "other" (p. 138). Furthermore, after the war in Iraq, Iraqis are seen as a group of terrorists in the Western world. In *Yasmina's Necklace*. Yasmina is called a terrorist by a woman because of her necklace of "IRAQ". The woman says, "*How can you be proud of being from that shit country. You are all a bunch of terrorists.*" (Malik, 2017). This situation shows how Yasmina lacks warmth in the United States. Although Yasmina doesn't harm the woman, she is seen as an enemy because of her necklace. Yasmina says, "*That's how I feel, here in Chicago. Like an Alien. I just don't fit in.*" (Malik, 2017) to explain how she is not welcomed because of her lack of warmth in the American community.

Musa is also aware that he is perceived as a terrorist in the Western world. He says, "*The way they look at me, as if I'm some dirty terrorist*" (Malik, 2017). He knows that he is seen as an enemy because of his religious and national identity. Despite his success as a dentist in Iraq, he has failed to get a job in the United States due to his being an Arab Muslim.

Although Sara is a Muslim, she doesn't see Yasmina and Musa as sa as friends. She rejects her son's marriage to Yasmina because she is a refugee. Sara says, "*He can't marry a refugee. What will people think?*" (Malik, 2017). She doesn't focus on her own opinion about them, but she cares about the negative stereotyping of refugees in the United States, saying, "*what will people think?*"(Malik, 2017).

Sara doesn't like refugees because she knows how they are perceived in the Western world. According to Bye (2020), when some participants were asked about how they think about refugees, their personal views were more positive than their perceptions about the opinions of others. Refugees are perceived to elicit pity for them, but they are thought to elicit contempt and disgust for the "other" (p. 9). In the same way, Sara says, "*I feel badly for them, but this is marriage..... My son will marry into a good family*", and she also says, "*We will pray for them. But we can't give them our son.*"(Malik, 2017). Sara explains that she feels pity for them, but she doesn't see them as a good family because she knows how refugees are perceived by others. Sara is aware that refugees lack warmth more than others of Arabs and Muslims. Kira et al. (2010) points out that refugees receive more discriminatory practices than Arabs and Arab Americans (p. 60). Here, Musa and Yasmina are not only Arabs, but they are also refugees. Here, Sara doesn't consider them as friends not because they are Arabs/Muslims, but due to their being refugees.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, Malik shows how Muslims are seen in the post-9/11 and the war in Iraq. Muslims, Arabs, and Iraqi refugees are treated in the same negative way because of the spread of negative stereotyping about them. In *Yasmina's Necklace*, we can see Abdulsamee escape from his real identity by changing his name so that he can be considered an American and avoid employment discrimination. He changes his name because he used to be perceived as low in warmth because of his Arabic name which identifies his identity and he can't find a job unless he gives up his

religious/ national identity. On the other hand, Malik introduces some other Muslim characters, Saddam and Osama who don't change their names, to show the consequences of living as a Muslim in the United States. Saddam and Osama are perceived as low in warmth and treated as enemies in the post-9/11. Thus, Abdulsamee explains that they will be treated as human beings only when they hide their identity and change their names.

Iraqi refugees are also seen as terrorists after the war in Iraq. In the play, Yasmina and Musa explain that they are perceived as low in warmth in the United States because of their national/religious identity. Musa fails to work as a dentist because he is seen as a terrorist in the American community, and Yasmina recounts her experience with an American woman who calls her a terrorist. Thus, Yasmina and Musa lack warmth after the war in Iraq.

The competence dimension is not taken into consideration in some situations of the play. When Abdulsamee has been perceived as low in warmth, his competence is not regarded although he has the required skills. However, once his name is written as " Sam " in his resume, he immediately gets a job in the United States. This situation corresponds with the supposition of Sides & Gross (2013) that the warmth dimension is more important than the dimension of competence when stereotyping Muslims (p. 584). In the play, it can be said that the competence is only regarded when a person is high in warmth. Thus, Abdulsamee's professional skill is only taken into consideration when he appears to be a non-Muslim American.

References

- Ahmed, M. T. I. (2023). *Trans-cultural feminist consciousness in selected plays by three American women playwrights: Wendy Wasserstein, Suzan Lori Parks, and Rohina Malik*. [Doctoral dissertation, Aswan University].
- Bye, H. H. (2020). Intergroup relations during the refugee crisis: Individual and cultural stereotypes and prejudices and their relationship with behavior toward asylum seekers. *Frontiers in psychology*, 11, 612267.
- Cuddy, A., Fiske, S. & Glick, P. (2008). Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The Stereotype Content Model and the BIAS Map. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 40 (1), 61–149. CiteSeerX 10.1.1.169.3225. Doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(07)00002-0
- Fiske, S. T. (2018). Stereotype Content: Warmth and competence endure. *Current directions in psychological science*, 27(2), 67-73.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417738825>
- Fiske, S., Cuddy, A., Glick, P., & Xu, J. (2002). A model of (often mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from Perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82 (6), 878–902.
Doi:10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878. PMID 12051578
- Ghazali, A. S. (2008). *Islam & Muslims in the post-9/11 America*. Modesto: Eagle Enterprises.
- Hassan, I. (2020). They're just like everybody else: A postcolonial reading of Rohina Malik's Yasmina's Necklace. *Cairo Studies in English*, (2), 86-101.
- Khosravi, S. (2012). White masks/Muslim names: Immigrants and name-changing in Sweden. *Race & Class*, 53(3), 65-80.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396811425986>
- Kira, I. A., Lewandowski, L., Templin, T., Ramaswamy, V., Ozkan, B., & Mohanesh, J. (2010). The effects of perceived

discrimination and backlash on Iraqi refugees' mental and physical health. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 5(1), 59-81.

Kopytowska, M. & Baider, F. (2017). From stereotypes and prejudice to verbal and physical violence: Hate speech in context. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 13(2), 133-152. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lpp-2017-0008>

Malik, R. (2017). Yasmina's Necklace [Transcript]. Goodman Master Script.

Salama M. S. (2024). "You think changing your name will bring you peace": Breaking the chains of Islamophobia in Rohina Malik's Yasmina's Necklace. *Mansoura University*, 74(74), 35-46.

Sides, J & Gross, K. (2013). Stereotypes of Muslims and support for the war on terror. *The Journal of Politics*, 75 (03), 583-598.

The U.S. national strategy to counter Islamophobia and anti-Arab hate. (2024). The White House Washington.