

**A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and
Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by
Randa Abdul-Fattah**

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Abstract

In *Does My Head Look Big in This?* Randa Abdul-Fattah explores the world of young people and to where their mentality turns. Of the many ideas handled in the novel, my paper underlines the attitude of young adult female Muslim minority towards the recurring "otherizing" images associating Muslims with terrorism: the West sees that Muslim men impose and exercise their patriarchal authority over subordinated passive Muslim women. Hijab epitomizes Eastern backwardness, oppression, otherness, and national insecurity. The novelist resents this defective Orientalist eye reawakened following 9/11 events and other terrorist activities. Through her characters, she makes an opposing statement. This paper tackles the issue of the "other" from a pure social perspective. It questions these Western views that otherize the Orient and its women. Also, it brings to light how "otherizing" may be inflicted, as well, upon "white young women" when they break the norms of the "exclusively" Western civilized way of life. The paper aims at conveying a real-life picture of a new-generation of solid young women ready to bear the burden of change. They seek to shape a third Western-Eastern history replacing the oppositional binary West vs. East. Applying the analytic method, four girls in their teens are spotlighted as typifying how women confront challenges and do strive against any suppression of their personalities. Supported with critical approaches of a number of theorists, post-colonial and current, the paper has shown how the

racial superiority is undermined and the Western ideology is refuted and proved futile. It also has indicated that Eastern women enthusiastically re-conceptualize the "other".

Keywords: acceptance; counter narrative; Orientalism; the other; women struggle.

رحلة تجاه إحتواء العرقيات وقبول الآخر في رواية هل تبدو رأسي كبيراً
في هذا؟ للكاتبه الأسترالية الفلسطينية راندا عبدالفتاح

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ملخص البحث:

تستكشف راندا عبدالفتاح في هذه الرواية عالم الشباب وإلى أين يتجه فكرهم فمن بين الأفكار العديدة التي تتناولها الرواية، يؤكد هذا البحث علي موقف الأقلية المسلمة من الفتنات الصغيرات في الدول الغربية تجاه ردود الأفعال والصور المتكررة التي توحى بفكرة " الآخر " وتربط العالم الإسلامي بالإرهاب: فالغرب يرى أن المسلمين يفرضون ويمارسون سلطتهم الذكورية على مسلماتٍ سلبياتٍ يوضَعْنَ في مرتبة ادنى وأن الحجاب يرمز إلى التخلف الشرقي والإضطهاد وفكرة " الآخر " وكذا القلق والخوف من جانب الغرب. ولذلك فإن

A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

الكاتبة في روايتها تشجب وتعبر عن إستيائها من هذه النظرة الإستشراقية المعيبة التي ازداد تأثيرها بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر وأحداث إرهابية أخرى وتقدم من خلال شخصياتها رؤية مضادة. ويتناول البحث فكرة " الآخر " من منظور إجتماعي بحت وي طرح للمساءلة تلك الرؤي الغربية التي تجعل من الشرق ومن فيه عالماً آخر لا يعرف للتحضر سبيلاً. كما يوضح البحث أن فكرة "الآخر" تطول الفَنَيَاتُ الغربيات أنفسهن إذا ما خالفن قواعد الحياة المتحضرة "القاصرة" علي الغرب "من وجهة نظرهم". ويهدف البحث إلي نقل صورةٍ من الواقع لجيل جديد من الفَنَيَاتُ اللاتي يَقْفَنَ بكل قوة علي أرض صلبة علي إستعداد لتحمل عبء التغيير ويسعون إلي تشكيل تاريخ غربي - شرقي ثالث بديلاً للثنائية المتعارضة : "الغرب مضاد للشرق". وبتطبيق المنهج التحليلي يسلط البحث الضوء على أربع فتياتٍ في عمر الثامنة عشره يجسدن كيف أن النساء يواجهن التحديات ويجاهدن ضد أي إخمادٍ لشخصياتهن. ولقد أظهر البحث، مدعماً بمناهج نقدية لعدد من المنظرين والنقاد الذين ينتمون لفته ما بعد الإستعمار وكذا الفته الحالية، أن التسيد والتعالى العنصري من جانب الغرب لا قيمه ولا معني له وأن الأيديولوجية الغربية برمتها قد فُنِدَت وأُدْحِضَت كما بيّن أيضا أن النساء الشرقيات يَقْدَمَن بكل حماسٍ مفهوماً جديداً لما يُطلقون عليه " الآخر " .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الآخر - الاستشراق - قبول - قصة مضادة - كفاح المرأة

Introduction

In her counter narrative, the Australian-Palestinian Randa Abdul-Fattah portrays never-backing-down girls in their teens striving to consolidate their existence, correct misconceptions and attain self-fulfillment. They refuse to be seen as strange or different. This paper handles the issue of the "other" from different

social perspectives giving a human character to the work. The three minority young adults reject altogether to be judged through a false well-worn Western lens. The Australian-Palestinian Amal is determined to affirm her multiple Muslim identity and reject the association of veiled women with terrorism. The Australian-Turkish Leila, engages in a battle against Patriarchal authority and the old barren traditions which have both originally grown out of a colonialist cultivation and popularization. The Australian-Palestinian Samantha is perplexed by the myth of mimicry adopted by her family, a blind imitation of Western life in an attempt to be accepted. Inevitably, mimicry marginalizes one's cultural origin and never entails but ridiculous people with no subjectivity. Samantha's perplexity, torn between her concealed cultural origin and her Australian life, implies a call for accepting the "other" to do without these copying practices. On the other hand, the pure Australian Simone represents how a young woman with a poor body image is stigmatized being overweight. To her society, she, as thus, deviates from the norms of the Western civilized way of life and couldn't attain the standard model of teenagers who appear in Western print and media. Challenging the societal rejection, Simone insists on accepting what she couldn't change.

This paper refers to critical approaches of a number of theorists, post-colonial and current, anatomizing and refuting the Western ideology.

Literature Review

The researches mentioned below are somehow or other relevant to the study in hand. They may accord with or differ from this study either in methodology, perspective or the ideas handled. A research entitled "Exploring Hybridity in Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*" is done by Cheah Lyn in 2006. Applying Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, the research tackles the exploration of identity on the part of four university students from different cultural backgrounds in pre-independence Malaya and Singapore. In such a multicultural society, each of the young men faces questions on his ethnicity and where it is in his life. The students are separated by

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Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

differences on race and culture. In the current study, the idea of identity formation is thoroughly examined. Abdul-Fattah uses multicultural Australia as a setting where hybridity passes beyond restraint. Referring to Bhabha's theory, the paper highlights the impact of hybridity on constructing very positive identities opening up the possibility for a cultural hybridity. On the other hand, it may generate negative people stripping themselves of their own ethnicity and subjectivity through mimicry.

A research done by Lana Zannettino in 2007 tackles the concept of hybridity through class and gender. It is a comparative study of three Australian young adult novels, Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi* (1992), Morris Gleitzman's *Girl Underground* (2004) and Abdul-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005). Based on post structural and postcolonial theories, Zannettino analyzes the structures of the texts through how each author has constructed the racialized-gendered identities of the female protagonists. The research also includes the struggles faced by the protagonists trying to cope with the dominant group. The current study only focuses on *Does My Head Look Big in This?* as a concrete reality covering serious social problems. The study builds its view on post colonialism, post-colonial feminism and post modernism.

"Reading the Hijab as a Marker of Faith in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*", is a research done by Amrah Abdul Majid. Unlike the current study which deals with four YA female characters, Abdul Majid only lays stress on Amal, the main protagonist. Building on Saba Mahmoud's *Study of Muslim Women Piety*, the researcher handles the novel from a pure religious perspective. Her viewpoint is that Amal's decision to wear the hijab springs from an absolute conviction that this act is "God's decree" and implies an acknowledgment of His "commandment". Faith is the support that further empowers her and strengthens her steps at

all levels. It's a personal, "apolitical" decision opposing the idea of hijab as socially hindering women or as a sign of subjugation.

Methodology

This paper adopts an analytic approach in handling the issues of the characters, the challenges they face and the ends they gain. The study relies on the idea of the view and the counter view through an application of post colonialism and Postcolonial Feminism. These schools of theory subvert Orientalism as a broad concept and Orientalist Feminism as an offshoot. They actually aid in exposing the Western biased views against the Middle East and its women. In addition, the paper refers to post-modernism as a late 20th century concept in criticism. Postmodern thought highlights ideas focused on in Middle East Feminist studies and supports the current study in opposing some Western views.

In the first part of the study, theorists explain Orientalism and how it has been a Western otherizing strategy justifying and facilitating a domination of a "presumed" inferior East. The second part puts forth the teenagers' issues stressing their resolution to affirm their own visions. Also, it indicates how theorists respond to the idea of excluding them as "the other" revealing contradictions in Western ideology. The third part includes excerpts revealing how the teenagers challenge rejection, assert themselves, and call for embracing the "other".

Orientalism: An Overall Look Through the lens of Theorists

Edward Said tells how Orientalism originated. He claims that the Western scholars and historians, studying the East, could not thoroughly grasp its culture being different from their own. Thus, they jumped to judgments regarding it as mysterious and inferior to theirs. Having this bias in favor of the West, they conveyed to Western people distorted, "sabotaged" information: they depicted a backward East, an "unfamiliar" wild place, demonic people, inferior by nature and need to be civilized. Scholars saw them threatening but conquerable. Then, through media and literature,

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مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

they infixed these unreal made up images in the minds of people. Orientalism, this way, is the representation of the East in a stereotyped way.

A stereotype fixes individuals or groups in one place, denying their own sense of identity, and presuming to understand them on the basis of prior knowledge, usually knowledge that is at best defective (Bhabha 67). Hence, taking control of the Orient is based on creating an image and a body of knowledge systematically studied (Paidar 5). Orientalists can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe (Said 94). Sardar asserts that Orientalism then is composed of what the West wishes to know, not of what can be known. He adds that even "when alternative correct information has been readily available, willful misunderstanding...has remained the guiding spirit of Orientalism. [Consequently], this faulty ideology "survived defiantly" and remained dominant"(19). Enforcing this image of inferiority and difference, Europe was able to control the East creating a "subaltern" excluded as the "other". In the light of all these facts, Stuart Hall emphasizes this colonialist strategy saying, "Not only, in Said's Orientalist sense, were we constructed as different and other...They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as Other" (233). Furthermore, Ashcroft et.al. indicate that the ex-colonized subject is characterized as "other" as a means of establishing the binary separation of the West and the East and asserting the primacy of the Western Culture. His book mentions how Lacan refers to the Western colonizer as the "grand autre", the great Other whom the subject imitates to gain identity (155). Bhabha elaborates the point: he states that the West, through colonial education, has created out of many Eastern people "inappropriate" beings "repeating" rather than "presenting". He tells how the post-colonial theorist, Frantz Fanon describes them as "black skins/white masks". Bhabha adds that this mimetic representation reflects an effective strategy affirming Western power and knowledge"(85-92).

Actually, 9/11 attacks and the "war on terror" have a lasting effect on the Western mind. They have thus ossified the stereotypes and intensified the binary opposition. Jackson indicates how the stereotypical representations "tend to lump Arabs, Muslims and Middle East into one...highly negative image of violence and danger". She adds that modern media magnifies this image (76). Said supports the point saying that the West finds in "an Orientalized Islam a new empire of evil. Consequently, both the electronic and print media have been awash with demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism, or Arabs and violence or the Orient and tyranny"(347).

The same 'otherizing' process with its degrading stereotypes directs its arrows to gender. Orientalist feminism confirms the binary opposition as well. Paidar clarifies it in three points. First, Oriental Muslim women are oppressed while their Western counterparts enjoy full freedom. Second, they are victims of a dominating male society, have no resistant role or agency supporting their "social transformation" and are thus in need of "saviors". Third, all Muslim women are living under the same conditions. Berrezoug states that for Westerners, hijab hinders the Muslim woman from coping with the modernizing lifestyle of the Western woman and "climbing the ladder of social mobility"(29). Also, Leila Ahmed asserts that the veil and segregation, to Western eyes, are fundamental reasons for the backwardness of Islamic societies. She adds that veiling becomes the open target for colonial attack on Muslim communities and she thus calls it "Colonial feminism"(151-152). Actually, the recovery of feminism in the Middle East and its re-questioning of Orientalism has proceeded from the Western strategy of inserting claimed gender issues condemning Muslim societies and, in this way, giving the whys and wherefores of intervention. In short, civilizing the East and emancipating Muslim women has continued to be the Western pretext for Colonial interference in Eastern countries. In addition, with the increasing terrorist activities, hijab for Western people

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Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

turns to be a threatening practice. Donnell explains saying: "The Orientalist gaze through which the veil is viewed...is now...Xenophobic, more specifically Islamophobic; gaze through which the veil or headscarf is seen as a highly visible sign of a despised difference"(123). *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission* has stated that Muslim minorities are seen as threatening the society due to the increased emphasis on national security post 9/11. It has repeatedly documented that tearing off women's hijabs is one the commonly reported acts of hostility against Muslims in Western countries (quoted in Ho 438)

Above all, the rights of women in Muslim culture continue to generate much media attention in the West. Said asserts that the Western world maintains that Islam creates out of Muslim women inferior subordinate beings and impose their "socio-economic inequalities"(336). Moreover, Kung says, "in Islam the women's role is generally...limited to that of spouse, house wife and mother"(565). Mirkin declares that for Western feminists, the Oriental woman is traditional; "a non-individual, psychologically and institutionally dominated". She is the "other, a passive and brainwashed victim of the patriarchy". He adds that Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* is the book that has popularized the idea among American feminists. Millet declares that men, empowered by religion and the family, have dominated women. For her, the family becomes, as thus, "an enslaving institution"(42). Furthermore, Rich clarifies that women are viewed as the passive servants of males; mothers are then the instruments through which daughters are taught to conform to their "degrading role"(247-250). Issaka-Toure as well, sees that Muslim women are "educated and socialized to accept hierarchical gender norms" and their male privileges (202).

This diffusion and reiteration of incorrect notions about the East and Islam has led to the idea that these faulty views have been ingrained in the minds of many Muslim men. It is really a colonial

cultivation, strengthened by misinterpretations of the religious teachings of Islam. Then, it remains permanent through incorrect traditions of Eastern families over and above lack of education on the part of past generation grandmothers and mothers. In brief, it is this wrong Orientalist thought that primarily creates these fallacies and then popularizes.

This survey of Orientalism makes clear how Europe and America are all along obsessed with their supremacy and their being the universal norm that embrace the notion of civilization and modernism. It's as Edward Said puts it: "Civilization per se exclusively Western". It is well known that Western society lays stress on the necessity for young women to pursue a highly civilized modernized female lifestyle. Non-conformity to these rules on the part of obese teenagers create out of them "others" at home rejected and oppressed. In fact, Saguy states that fat women suffer from poor body images that terrorize them because they are "subjugated to bias, discrimination and abuse" precisely because they are fat women(600).They are really stigmatized by the Western stereotypical image associating them with laziness, weakness, ugliness and lack of will power. Chrisler declares, "Self-control is a marker of femininity; moreover, fat represents turpitude, irresponsibility, greed and undisciplined behaviors"(205). Fat women are less likely to marry and if they do marry, they have partners of lower status, whereas men's weight has no effect on marriage (Fikkan et al. 577). Also, Ambjornsson says, "talk about fat became talk about being a girl...it is something you face because you are a girl...fat became part of the discursive construction of femininity itself"(117-119). All these views signify that men are out of the question; they have nothing to do with such issues or beauty problems. They also indicate how fat stigma suppresses personality and inevitably leads to damaging and frustration. To conclude, it appears that the claws of "otherization" grip whites whenever they break the Western standards and precepts; whenever they come with the non-Western. This and

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مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

what have been said earlier assert, once and for all, the Western one-sidedness, fanaticism and non-acceptance of the "other".

**An Analytic Approach to Resistant Young Women
*Critical Responses to the Western Exclusion of the "other"***

In this novel, all four young women head for the same end: self-assertion, the acceptance of the "other" and the effacement of debasing images ascribed to nations and people. As for Amal, the first character, she is an Australian-Palestinian- Muslim girl. The novel illustrates the challenges she faces as a result of her decision to wear the hijab. Actually, Amal's multicultural upbringing, the influence of her parents, their open-mindedness and their positive diasporic experience endow Amal with a fixed self- identification. She stands by her decision to wear the hijab as a marker of her faith and as an important step in her search for self-fulfillment. But, for Australian society, Amal wearing the hijab is a racialized other, a terrorist and a symbol of patriarchal oppression. The West denies the explanation of hijab as a sign of belonging. To them, it turns to be an excluding practice. Nevertheless, she remains clinged to her own beliefs and is not a victim of the acts of bullying of her non-Muslim classmates.

Amal's interactions with the Western society result in her being recognized as a hybrid identity (Ameri 29). Thus, one couldn't help examining the racist reactions against Amal through Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the third space. Hybridity, i.e., the mixture of races, cultures or languages, has become one of the most repeated concepts in post-colonial cultural criticism. Bhabha has revealed contradictions in Western ideology stressing the colonizer's ambivalence as regards his attitude towards the Eastern "other". He asserts that hybridity is meant to exclude the forms of purity inherent in imperial theories. According to Bhabha, the fact that the West includes the pure white race and excludes all other races is deconstructed by the entry of the formerly excluded colonials into the Western discourse. He says that the migration of

yesterday's "savages" from their marginal spaces to the homes of the West implies a "third-worlding"(86). In fact, diaspora and migration has led to the creation of the in-between spaces that initiate a new sense of identity. It is the hybrids who occupy the third space, neither Eastern nor Western but a mixture of both. Bhabha refers to the third space as the "liminal space", namely, the threshold to either the white or the black races. This space affords access to the two worlds producing hyphenated identities. He sees that far from being condemned or marginalized, Easterners occupy such a space where they resist rejection. He subverts the Western ideology and deconstructs "the binary opposition of civilization/savagery"(4). Amal is then, the in-between, the "link" and the "connective tissue" between the Australian and Palestinian cultural identities.

Furthermore, Spariosu supports Bhabha's interpretation of the liminal space as productive. For him and Bhabha, there is a great distinction between liminality and marginality. In Spariosu's words "Marginality can't provide access to new worlds whereas liminality can do"(38). Those who live on the borderline of two cultures belonging neither wholly to this nor wholly to that, create a new space where they live a third culture, shape a third history and become no more marginalized. Moreover, Dash States that liminality has become a source of creative energy for all people of color. The figure of the "other", that was once effaced and marginalized, has now the right to speak and speak back: colonized, women, subalterns, minorities and migrants. Those who live on the border zone- half Westerners, half natives- are inevitably related to the West and have a sense of belonging there though denied and rejected (148). Consequently, Amal, the hybrid teenager, courageously speaks and defiantly speaks back.

The second character is Leila, an Australian-Turkish-Muslim girl and a friend to Amal. She sets her mind on becoming a lawyer. As a Muslim born and brought up in Australia, she has ambitions to realize. But she encounters old traditions possessing her over-strict uneducated mother and engages in a battle against

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Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

patriarchal authority. Gulchin, Leila's mother, sees that work is unfitting for a girl. She has been taught all her life that the Muslim girl's job is to do the household activities and look after the family. This traditional mother doesn't want her daughter to pursue her studies so Leila always complains of matchmaking trials to marry her off at the age of sixteen. On the contrary, her brother Hakan, known as Sam, is allowed to do whatever he likes being the boy. He assimilates the Australian majority; has his girlfriends, and runs wild at bars drinking and doing drugs. Moreover, he mistreats his sister and verbally abuses her. Hence, the oppression and the unfair treatment force Leila to run away and seek safety in a shelter for women. Though pressured by her family's wrong beliefs, Leila needs the place she is used to and that is why the principal takes her back home. Leila challenges all circumstances and resists the psychological mental disturbance brought upon her by her family. To Leila, priority is to education then comes the choice of a partner by her free will. Amal, Leila's friend, tries to convince the mother that Islam is where women's rights come from so [she has]to forget any crappy cultural rule that dictates to throw out education or sit at home for backward life"(331).In fact, Gulchin, the mother, is a victim herself; she has a limited understanding of Islam. Her Islam is the practices of her mother, grandmother and the generations before. One sees that, sometimes, Islamic teachings and cultural traditions are wrongly interlocked by some Muslims. Despite her illiteracy, the mother could see her failure and her attachment to barren traditions wrongly attributed to Islam. Leila insists that she'll not abandon her studies. With innate affection, Leila's parents recede a bit and accept to give her some freedom than before. Though Leila is fully convinced that things never change in a minute, she will continue her struggle wholly determined to act after her own ideas.

Leila's story stresses the complete difference between religious teachings and cultural traditions. Through this resolute character, Abdul-Fattah aims to change the old image of the

traditional uneducated Eastern woman who misunderstands and misapplies Islam: the "other" in the eyes of the West and the Western feminists. It is this image that Orientalist Feminism tends, on purpose, to stress and reiterate. Instead Leila presents a true image of the Oriental Muslim woman: civilized, broad- minded, ambitious aspiring for playing a role in society.

As a response to Orientalist Feminism, Al-Sheha states that Islam guarantees gender equality and identity. He adds that Islam calls for material and emotional justice, and fair treatment from parents to all their children. Moreover, Allah's prophet concentrated throughout his teachings on giving more care and attention to females"(31-32). Piela refers to Islamist Feminists who stress the necessity for women to have societal roles and actively participate in all aspects of life. At the same time, they should not ignore their main roles as wives and mothers. Muslim feminists assert that Islam calls for gender equality since the message of the Qur'an is "egalitarian". To them, gender inequality stems from a misinterpretation and in turn, a misapplication of Islam's teachings. Thus, they advise women to educate themselves, reject biased readings and resort to the authorized Islamic sources to uncover the true message of Islam (430-431).

From the other side of the spectrum, one should refer to post-modern theories and how they have influenced feminist thought in the latter half of the 20th century. Postmodern feminists build their standpoints on the work of thinkers such as Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrido, and Roland Barthes. They attack the prevalent idea of male dominance and hierarchical definition of sexuality. They see that modernist thought presupposes the essential inferiority of women while post-modernism focuses on understanding gender in non-essential "discursive" terms. Rejecting, then, "logocentrism" and "essentialism", postmodern feminists have unsettled the patriarchal norms that have entailed gender inequality. They support, to the contrary, multiple

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Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

discourses and seek to promote subjectivity and "self-referentiality".

In addition, Christina Ho refers to Mary Hawkesworth stating that "post 9/11 media coverage rarely included Muslim women acting on their own behalf". Ho asserts that many "well-established women's groups...have been active in speaking out against oppressive laws in Muslim countries". Also, she indicates how Middle East feminists oppose the Orientalist assumption of "a monolithic Islamic culture" stating that "this approach fails to recognize the plurality of gender regimes that co-exist with Islamic culture. Above all, if Islam, according to Orientalist feminism, is oppressive to women, what about Western "women's vulnerability to gendered violence and inferior access to resources [that] shape their lives the world over" (435-437). Middle-East feminists raise the same question criticizing and devaluating the role of feminism in the West.

The third character is Samantha, Amal's cousin; she is an Australian-Palestinian Muslim girl. But the concealment of that Palestinian Muslim part, perplexes her, and leads her to raise such an issue in her mind. Her problem springs from the idea that she is raised up by Muslim parents who adopt the lifestyle of the white Australians. Samantha is forced by her parents to live a kind of free life like any white teenagers. Her father, Joe believes that Muslims have to conceal their identities in order to be accepted by the white Australians and proceed in society. He scolds Amal for wearing the hijab and criticizes her family for fasting, praying and buying halal food. Joe sees that "multiculturalism is a joke". He is proud of his family as they seem to belong to the wider Australian community and not "stuck in Palestinian or Egyptian or Turkish ghettos"(185). However, Samantha wonders at her parents' ambivalence: they know that she smokes, drinks and has a boyfriend; but when they suspect that she may have a disgracing relationship with her boyfriend, they go mad. They always quarrel with her because they

cannot accept such behaviors. They want outwardly to live as Whites but inwardly are still Muslim Palestinians. Actually, Samantha is torn between her cultural origin and the Australian way of life she has to adopt.

Harles indicates that the negative side of assimilation appears when the outsiders totally "immerse into the dominant group trying to 'adapt, adept and adopt" to the foreign culture which can lead to mimicry...the complete disappearance of the group's identity" (711). Bhabha comments on this negative mimicry confuting the Western view which sees that this practice verifies the Western mastery. He asserts that those mimic men destabilize the imperial subjectivity and destroy the Western authority by their repeated "slippages". They create "fissures" or points of weakness in the imperial structures (86-88). In this way, this mimicry that never elevates or adds to the person, is by no means an entry to acceptance. In reality, Samantha's perplexity bears in itself a message addressed to the Western society: shouldn't the 'others" be embraced and accepted on the Western land interacting, practicing their culture and religion with no necessity for such parroting?! As a victim of her parents' ambivalence, she will never stop raising the issue in her mind and will continue striving to unveil and affirm the hidden parts of her identity. In an interview, Abdul-Fattah reflects Samantha's thoughts wondering: "Is a Muslim voice seen as some deviation from the norm, or can we accept that Muslim voices contribute to the mainstream space and are part of the mainstream? [Muslims] are not just ... an exotic other but are actually part of this 'us' collective. Or are we constantly going to be referenced as 'them'?" (2018)

The fourth character is Simone, an Australian teenager who faces a societal rejection and is put under severe pressure by her family and her peers for being overweight. She desperately tries to achieve the standard image of females who appear in Western print and media, a criterion always validated and always followed. Her graceful slim mother complains about how Simone will end up

A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

lonely and single if she does not get thinner. Simone is vainly immersed into self- destructive activities such as bingeing, purging and smoking to suppress her appetite. She gets frustrated, as she does not feel that she can fit in. In a Scholastic interview with Abdul-Fattah, she indicates that body image issue is one of the hardest experiences teenagers face. She says, "I hated the fact that a pimple or extra couple of kilos could make or ruin a person. That kind of stress was hard enough." According to Rothblum and Solovay, fat studies is a field of scholarship that severely attacks and strictly criticizes the negative stereotypes and assumptions stigmatizing fat and the fat body. Scholars state that "the issue of fat and fatness should be approached with the same...academic rigor with which we approach stereotypes about women, queer people, and racial groups." It is really a problem worthy of a stern progressive and systematic examination. Supporting this viewpoint, the Fat Acceptance movement has emerged; it is also known as 'Fat Activism', 'Fat Pride', 'Fat Empowerment'. It is a social movement that aims to change the stereotype that misogyny is associated with sizeism and anti-fat bias. The movement aims at eliminating discrimination and the otherizing attitude towards obese persons (2).

Consequently, Simone with courage and self-acceptance, takes a decisive step in her life; she insists on being how she is and ignores the familial and societal negative energy imposed upon her. Self- acceptance bestows upon her a positive body image. In addition, she finds, Josh, the only one male who accepts her as she is. It is this acceptance Simone calls for and the embracement she aspires to.

As it has been mentioned earlier, post-modern feminists, "reject essentialism and universal truths." Hence, they highlight the differences that exist amongst women as indicating that "not all women are the same". In their opinion, if a universal truth is applied to all women of society, this underestimates individual experiences. In short, this feminist theory states that there can

never be an overarching conception or a fixed determined nature applying to all women. Apparently, post-modern feminism refuses and fights the Western prejudices and prejudgments passed on people.

Excerpts from *Does My Head Look Big in This? Stubbornness in Face of Rejection*

Amal indicates how children referred to her as a "darkie" or vexed her because of her mom's "towel head". They always infuriated her saying, "Hey, Amal, do you have a camel as a pet" (10-11). When she decides to wear a "badge of her faith", her dad says, "Are you sure you are ready to cope with such a huge change in your life?", Amal insists bravely on wearing a headscarf. She replies, "Call it what you want. Defiance. Pig-headedness. It's burning me to think that I might not have the right to choose"(24). The school principal hints at the idea that the Muslim woman is oppressed by guessing that Amal's parents force her. But, Amal definitely says "No, I made this choice...this decision is coming from my heart. I can't explain or rationalize it "(52). She keeps eavesdropping her peers saying the words "oppressed"; and "looking like a slob"(63). Nevertheless, Amal is brave enough to defy them. Doing *wuduh* before prayer, her peers make fun of Amal as she is barefeet washing her legs. Tia says, "You're not walking in the desert, you know. We do have shoes in this country"(117). She goes on mocking at her, so Amal defiantly says, "I wash my feet five times a day so that means that at any given time of the day, my feet are cleaner than your face"(118). When she prays, they "walk past and start thinking [she's]into sola Yoga"(47).

According to Haines, Abdul-Fattah uses parody, i.e., the stereotype is willfully repeated but in such an exaggerated way so to overthrow and destroy the supposed truth the stereotype means to convey. He adds that in Diana Fuss's words, it is simply "to undo by overdoing"(31). Amal manipulates the anti-Muslim stereotypes of backwardness and forced marriages as a means of parody. Thus,

A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

when her peers suddenly have the "guts" to approach her and ask, Amal replies with indifference using parody: "Did your parents force you?" Kristy asks, all wide eyed and appalled". Amal replied, "My dad told me if I don't wear it, he'll marry me off to a sixty-five old camel owner in Egypt"(170). Also, when another one asks her "what's the deal of that thing on your head?", she replies, "I've gone bald"(171). Rather than engaging in heated arguments, she adopts this strategy of exaggerating these stereotypes to prove their futility.

Amal faces racism everywhere, whenever she walks in the streets, people look at her wondering whether she's got an "Ak 47 assault rifle inside her jean Jacket"(84). Amal comments saying "a piece of cloth turns "us" into "them"; the Muslim girls are transformed into UCOs (unidentified covered Objects)" (38). Amal is always stigmatized by the terrorists' crimes and misdeeds. A number of situations spotlight how she is terribly misjudged and degraded by her peers' comments and anti-Muslim bias. She says,

I'm sitting in the homeroom on Monday morning fuming over a newspaper article about crime and people of middle Eastern appearance when Tia walks up to my desk:"Hey Amal, did you watch that interview with those girls who were raped by those LeboMuslims? You must feel so ashamed...Don't you have any feelings?"

"Tuesday morning...Tia walks up to my desk again". Did you watch that doco on those Muslim fundamentalists last night? You're Arab aren't you? It must feel awful knowing you come from such violent culture". Wednesday morning... Adam is suddenly in front of my desk. There was a mad doco last night on [9/11] ...they were showing how these guys were all religious and holy and shit. Spinout! (154-5).

Amal stubbornly says that being a Muslim doesn't mean she's "a walking ambassador or a walking T. V guide" (156). When the school principal associates the word "massacre" with Islam, Amal has to set things right saying, "These people are aliens to my faith, they are the thorn in my community's side. They have an identity that they don't deserve"(250). Amal affirms her Australian identity as well. When Tia cries and tells Amal, "You bitch...Why don't just get out of our country and go back to some desert cave where you belong?". With a tone of solidity, Amal explodes saying, "This is my country and if you ever forget it again I'm going to rip your head off"(245).

At school, Lara wants Amal to deliver a speech on the topic of Islam and terrorism and explain why terrorists commit such horrible crimes and how Islam justifies it. Amal defiantly says, "You're Christian, right? OK, well I'll give the speech if you give a speech about the Ku- Klux- Klan" Yeah, Why not? They were really religious, so obviously, what they did was textbook Christianity, right? And how about those Israeli soldiers bombing Palestinian homes or shooting kids? (256).

Amal sums up the issue in final decisive words: "It's been the 'darkies', the 'towel-heads', the 'foreigner', 'the persons of Middle Eastern appearance', the 'Asians', the 'oppressed women'...the 'ethnics' [that] showed me that I am a colorful adjective. It's their confrontation...which have empowered me...challenged me to embrace my identity as a young Australian-Palestinian-Muslim girl"(359)

Elaborating on Amal's solidity in face of racism has its own reasons: it is actually the false accusations disparaging the Middle East after 9/11 that have primarily motivated Abdul-Fattah to write her novel. In her conversation with Seabrook, she asks, "What does it feel like when your prime minister gets up and talks about Muslims as terrorists and is lazy in his language associating entire communities and countries with terrorism? How does that impact

A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

on you as a sixteen-year-old."(quoted in Haines 31) Through the daring voice of Amal, Abdul-Fattah aims to suppress these fallacies. Then she magnifies the picture presenting other examples of courageous young women standing steadfast against this barren ideology.

Leila, the second character, resents her brother's ill-treatment saying that "she'll feel one atom of sadness if any harm happened to him"(191),"Ya Allah, I don't know how I'm related to this idiotic family"(114). "And my brother, Hakan, he gets to do whatever he likes. He's changed his name to Sam and I'm the one with cultural denial"(262). Leila comments on her mother's attachment to traditions: "Do you know that my mum hasn't even read the Quran? She goes on what her mother told her and what her mum's mum told her. That's her *scripture*"(89-92). Leila mentions how her mother tried many times to get her out of school and the school principal came over to Leila's house and "spent the whole night banging his head against the wall trying to change her mind". If he didn't swear and guarantee that Leila wouldn't meet any men or boys, disgrace herself or seen in public alone, Leila wouldn't return to school (91-345). Actually, Leila's words to Amal's mother are very effective summarizing her persistence; "If I know [my mom] wouldn't do it again, I'd go back...and study and get what I want and then I wouldn't be vulnerable ever again. I'd have choices, do you know what I mean?"(344). In reality, Leila yearns for acceptance but at the same time, she insists on challenging misconceptions.

As for Samantha, the third character, her cousin, Amal, sums up the state of mimicry Samantha's family are immersed in. She says,

Uncle Joe and Aunt Mandy crack me up. Big-time. Uncle Joe is the complete opposite of my mother. He was born Ismail and Aunt Mandy was born Aysha. I'm still trying to

figure out where Joe and Mandy came from. They're not into Islam or Arabic culture like we are. They're more into changing their names, bleaching their hair, and acting like they were born on Mars and not in Jerusalem. They're always freaking out about us being "fanatics". For example, in Ramadan, we're "crazy" to fast. When it's prayer time, they ask us why we bother. When we buy halal food, we're "too extreme" (100).

Amal clarifies how Joe and Mandy are keen all the time to appear as Westerners. Joe, in his fifties, wears "gold chains hanging down his shirt, uses more gel than the guys at school". His wife, Mandy is in stilettos and tight Wearing flip-flops and Jeans, and bleaches her hair blonde (182). They hide their Palestinian Muslim identity and try to be fully "Aussie" and to live as whites. His theory is that "Muslims are better off concealing their identity not only because they need to assimilate but also to get ahead in society"(107). He raves all the time about "how broad-minded his family is for socializing with people outside the Arabic community"(185). Samantha portrays her bewilderment when she comments on her father's ambivalence: "Then, imagine this. Dad springs the cultural theory on me! He kept going on about how it's not part of our culture. I couldn't handle it from there. I mean, he can't just use the cultural argument whenever it suits him. For two decades we get the 'we must be assimilated' crap lecture and then in a minute we've suddenly got *Arabic roots* and *cultural expectations*"(106). Samantha relates how she and her brother George "get it rammed down their throats that [they]are supposed to forget[their]culture and live as Aussies, whatever that means". That is why she is shocked because "when she does something he doesn't like, "he does a one-eighty turn"(106). In fact, the core of Samantha's problem lies in her father's ambivalence. In short, acceptance on the part of the Western majority and the insistence on asserting origin, religion and culture are by all means the solution and the way out.

A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

The Australian Simone bravely challenges the rejection of her peers, family and the whole society. "The world is yours...but only if you aren't fat. This is the message media and film industries give to women (Bordo 216). Simone is fat-shamed and bullied by her classmates and taunted by her parents. With an expression of repulsion, Tia pokes fun at her saying, "The fat girl finds her voice, does she? Has it been hiding under all your rolls? (173). According to her peers, "fat girls should be deported, girls should starve, and implants should be a civic duty". So, she must get into this unbearable struggle because girls are not respected for their minds, but for their sizes (9). Simone's mother forces her for weeks to lose weight before her sister's boyfriend comes so that she may seem attractive in front of him (153). Simon daringly resists all these challenges. She sees that people should stop comparing themselves to others and stick to their own personalities. The teenagers end up insisting on being themselves. Amal says to Simone with a strong tone of challenge: "Let's protest, From now on we're anti normal, anti-average, anti-standard. You can eat what you want and I will wear what I want and we will die with a packet of chips in our hand and a tablecloth in our head"(83).

Conclusion and Discussion

A detailed analysis of four girls in their teens clarifies their never-fainting defiance over the road to self-assertion. The paper presents these female characters as vivid examples symbolizing the struggle of women everywhere to be themselves. It also questions the Western otherizing process against the East and the Eastern women. In addition, it shows how "otherizing" may extend to "white young women" themselves when they break the Western norms. They are then regarded as "others" at home, opposed and rejected.

Accordingly, the paper does not only concentrate on Amal, the main protagonist. It does not even handle her hijab as being merely a "symbol of her faith". The novel has also yielded other

Amals. Through these resolute teenagers, Abdul-Fattah has managed to draw a wonderful picture of women: how they endeavor to ossify their existence, assert subjectivity, and set things right. They present their female world as a site of power and solidity and as a source of creative alert minds. The four teenagers reject to be otherized, stereotyped, or misjudged. This reminds one of Abdul-Fattah's request in her interview with Handal when she says, "As a writer, I invite readers to suspend their judgments and prejudices and enter the life worlds of the misunderstood, the misrepresented and the mistreated." She wants readers to "look past the veil", the poor body image, the color, and "see the person within"(Abdul-Fattah, 2018).

Though the title of the novel literally refers to the way Amal wears her headscarf, it has deeper implications that may apply to the four characters. These brave teenagers have big heads, namely great minds and wonderful mentality. They are awake to what happens around them and have definite opinions. They use their own minds and are not persuaded by what others think. These young women see the big picture, think the matter over, take the responsibility and go far beyond their youngness.

Abdul-Fattah reflects her characters' enthusiasm to counter the misconceptions and see a Western-Eastern world not opposing but complementing one another. She says, "Muslims -especially young people- living in the West ... need to be able to find who they are, to ignore the media... and the way [war on terror] feeds into how people perceive Muslims, to overcome the Islamophobia, and make something of [their] contributions to [the Western country they live in]. That is positive...I mean to be able to create rather than just react.

Applying the context of the study on a wider scale, one may say that the now independent nations, should fold the dark pages in their histories; pages that carry pains of injustice and racism. They should then write down new ones recording changes,

A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

breakthroughs, and positive interactions with the Western world. This task is to be accomplished at the hands of their new generations of women and "men" bringing the partners together.

Proving the futility of the Western ideology, the paper has a message to convey: It is high time for both East and West to reconcile. They have no alternative but to stand together against the aliens; devilish people hiding under religious or political masks, internalizing devilish thought that may threaten humanity as a whole. It's time for co-existence keeping home, religion, and cultural origin in heart and mind, living with people wherever they are. But, is the West ready to reconcile and accept the other or will it widen the road more and more for ceaseless conflicts? a question posed before the Western world to answer.

Further Research

Handling other works by women writers of the Middle-Eastern minority is recommended. *A Very Large Expanse of Sea* (2018) by the American-Iranian Tahereh Mafi is about the devastating impact of prejudice. Mohja Kahf, as well, is one of the Muslim women writers in Western Diaspora. In her novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), she questions the view that holds identity to be fixed and affirmed. She also problematizes the stereotypes of gender and nationality. From the other side of the perspective, *Written in the Stars* (2015) by Aisha Saeed, presents a Pakistani-American girl, caught between American upbringing and her Pakistani traditions. She lays stress on women self-determination and independence.

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A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

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A Journey Towards Embracing Ethnicity and Otherness in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* by Randa Abdul-Fattah

Dr. Nayera Mohammed Hassan

مجلة وادي النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربوية (مجلة علمية محكمة)

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