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Disparagement of Islamic Femininity and the Pervasiveness of Racial Prejudice in Western Society: A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective of the Selected Narrative

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Abstract

This research article aims to highlight nature of racial prejudice in Western culture and its influence on Muslim women, as portrayed in the selected narratives, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* by Mohja Kahf and *A Very Large Expanse of Sea* by Tahereh Mafi. The objective is to examine how modern Anglophone literature depicts Muslim women in the diaspora, notably in terms of language discrimination, cultural identity and personal relationships. The thematic analysis and critical reading reveals literary aspects and representations that underscores Muslim women's struggles in Western Countries. The researcher has used qualitative approach based on post-colonial feminist theory to analyse the selected narratives and McKee's interpretive textual analysis as research method. The researcher has used the concepts like autonomy, resilience, cultural integration, prejudice and identity under consideration to dive deep into the study. The study primarily has revealed linguistic discrimination, power dynamics, ingrained prejudice, cultural inferiority, Western paternalism and racial biasness in the selected narratives. The study concludes the pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western society and its negative impact on Muslim women highlighting the linguistic discrimination, cultural hypocrisy, racial classification, marginalisation and disparagement of Islamic femininity. These narratives urge readers to examine their biases and fight for structural reforms to address deep-rooted injustices, encouraging a more inclusive and equitable view of human variety.

Keywords: Disparagement, Racial Prejudice, Islamic Femininity, Cultural Integration, Post-Colonial Feminism and Western Stereotyping

Introduction

Modern endeavours intended to abolish gender, class, race and nationality-based exploitation, and subordination under which the post-colonial feminism drawn attention from social science and humanities academics, theorists and researchers. This study examined Western racial prejudice and Islamic female disparagement as this study analysed chosen contemporary literature to reveal the marginalisation of Muslim women in the Western world, particularly following the September 11, 2001, attacks which had a significant impact on how Muslims are portrayed and treated (Wasif, 2021). Religious, cultural and ethnic biases all contributed to the disparagement of Islamic femininity in Western culture.

False Portrayal of Freedom Pinnacle- Context of Female Muslim Diaspora

The Western world is frequently portrayed as the pinnacle of freedom, development and advancement however Moshfeghyeganeh & Hazari (2021) demonstrated that this picture contrasted with the lives of the female Muslim diaspora. Western mainstream feminism often criticised third-world women while neglecting its own racial enslavement and marginalisation of Muslim women under which this study examined two books to analyse disparagement of Islamic femininity in Western countries. It intended to expose racial prejudice that marginalises Muslim women and critically examines how Western hegemonic feminist discourses promote ethnocentrism, prolonging their marginalisation.

The disparagement of Islamic femininity on numerous levels resulted from the stereotypical and inaccurate portrayal of them in Western society as in a 'foreign world' host countries mistreated diaspora women however mainstream imperialist feminists seldom address this treatment (The Politics of Women and Migration in the Global South, 2017). These moments typically ignored intersectional discrimination against women of colour and particularly Muslim women as the Emily Woo Yamasaki illustrated how women face economic, domestic and societal discrimination..

Mohja Kahf's "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" follows Arab-American Khadra as she navigated her identity in the US and despite her strong Muslim community, American culture questioned Khadra's Islamic identity. Her experiences, from school prejudices to pilgrimage disputed in Saudi Arabia, showed the challenge of maintaining one's cultural and religious identity in a predominantly non-Muslim setting (Younus, 2020). Contrary to this "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" by Teherer Mafi followed Muslim girl Shirin as she struggled with 9/11's xenophobia and intolerance while her story showed how school bullying and social isolation led to society's prejudice against Muslims and how she survives. These works questioned Western society's discrimination of Islamic femininity by showing how Western feminist discourses frequently ignored these difficulties of Muslim women.

Background of the Study

The disparagement of Islamic femininity in Western society is complicated by racial, cultural and religious biases as the literature presentations of Muslim women aligned with contemporary sentiments while reinforcing prejudices that dehumanise them. In compliance according to Gani (2022), "Orientalism" provided a framework for understanding how Western discourses have traditionally portrayed the East, especially Islamic countries as the "Other". Gani claimed that the West depicted Eastern countries as weird, primitive and inferior, justifying colonialism and imperialism while this theory helped in explaining how Western literature portrays Muslim women as downtrodden and mute, maintaining a binary dichotomy between the emancipated Western woman and the oppressed Muslim woman. Western feminism, according to feminist theorists like Mohanty (1984) universalized experiences without considering non-Western women however these theoretical approaches emphasised over the significance of addressing race, religion, and gender while analysing Islamic femininity disparagement.

Moreover Muslim women are typically portrayed as subservient and rescued in modern fiction as the critics with "Infidel" (2007) and "A Thousand Splendid Suns" (2007) reinforced unfavourable stereotypes (Shaikh et al., 2021). Collectively these tales raised awareness about gender-based violence but also essentialise Muslim women's experiences and frame their emancipation through a Western lens. On the other hand, modern literature illustrated Muslim women in the context of media and culture as (Haider, (2020) found that Hollywood films often portray Muslim women as exoticized objects or oppressed victims. Such depictions perpetuated racial and religious stereotypes. Additionally racial bias against Muslims is institutionalised in school, employment and law enforcement as Hanley (2023) highlighted that Western Muslims particularly women, encountered prejudice while fiction about Muslim women typically reflected only societal marginalisation. Collectively the scholars argued about Muslim women in literature as some illustrated that Western authors must represent Muslim women more nuancedly while others believed Muslim women should express their own experiences and be promoted.

Methodology

This research study utilised a qualitative approach based on post-colonial feminist theory to study Muslim women in 21st-century Anglophone literature. The objective of this research is to analyse textual elements, themes and representations in selected literary works to assess how current literature depicted Muslim female diaspora experiences. Qualitative research utilised non-numerical data to investigate social phenomena' origins, explanations and meanings, making it ideal for this study because this technique explored people's subjective experiences, viewpoints and behaviours in natural settings, providing depth and complexity that quantitative methods ignore (Liamputtong, 2023). Qualitative research analysed tales, characters and themes utilising theme analysis and critical reading thus qualitative research is suitable for understanding Muslim women in the diaspora's complex identities, cultural roots and experiences due to its depth (Asiyah, 2020). Additionally the books "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" by Mohja Kahf and "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" by Teherer Mafi are case studies for this research because these novels were chosen for their different views and storytelling styles, which weave a complex tapestry of Muslim women in Western society. In compliance the study design extracted important words and concepts from these books to show how Muslim female protagonists manage their identities and problems in hostile contexts (Loxston & Jachens, 2023, p.308). Collectively these themes were chosen because they were relevant to the study aims and shed light on Muslim women's experiences in the literature.

Discussion

Linguistic Discrimination and Power Dynamics

Mohja Kahf demonstrated the pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western society through linguistic discrimination and power dynamics as the conversation illustrated structural difficulties in which immigrants are regularly questioned about their language abilities, promoting a narrative of cultural inferiority. This linguistic dominance weakened Khadra's feeling of competence and belonging in a Western culture, showing how racial and cultural divided marginalise and oppress people. Hence the Kahf's portrayal of this exchange successfully analysed how racial and linguistic discrimination within western societies disparagement Islamic femininity. This notion from Kahf's novel established how linguistic discrimination, power dynamics and racial prejudice marginalised Islamic femininity as the assistant coroner's query concerning linguistic competency had racial undertones. The assistant coroner supported the notion that Middle Easterners and other non-Westerners are linguistically and culturally inferior by questioning Khadra's English proficiency thus this aspect is part of racial prejudice that maintained Western-non-Western hierarchies (Hazaveh, 2022).

Additionally, several other research study also supported this particular narrative of Kahf, illustrating the pervasive nature of linguistic and racial discrimination in Meltem Yilmaz Sener (2021) discovered that Americans who speak English with a British accent typically encountered prejudice and discrimination. This discrimination is founded in social preconceptions about linguistic and cultural supremacy, where non-native English speakers are typically seen as less competent and clever. On the other hand, Sender Dovchin (2020) found that linguistic discrimination promoted racial hierarchies in educational settings as they claimed that language competency is frequently employed as a surrogate for racial and cultural supremacy, with non-native speakers marginalised and excluded due to perceived linguistic shortcomings. In this manner similar to Kahf's narrative, Khadra's linguistic abilities are questioned to demonstrate racial and cultural superiority. In Kahf's work, Khadra's ability to speak English is questioned not on the basis of her real competency but rather on the basis of her racial and cultural heritage thus this viewpoint is similar to the assistant coroner's reaction to Khadra.

Furthermore certain studies confirm Kahf's novel's depiction of linguistic and racial discrimination but others offer a more nuanced view as some scholars believed the global dissemination of English empowered non-native speakers and in this view, speaking English would provide access to global opportunities and resources, challenging and possibly overturning power systems. According to Nurein (2021), English potentially used for resistance and empowerment despite its association with cultural imperialism thus non-native English speakers like Young Black Muslim Women (BMW) can question power dynamics and emphasise their cultural identities by adapting the language. Hence this view indicated that linguistic skill in English challenged and disrupted power systems rather than imply cultural inferiority.

In compliance this notion from the "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" is a strong indictment of linguistic discrimination and power dynamics as symptoms of racial prejudice in Western society. The patronising inquiry and rising voice reflected deep-seated prejudices and power imbalanced that disparagement and oppress Islamic femininity based on their perceived racial and cultural differences. Many studies demonstrated that linguistic and racial discrimination is widespread and ingrained in Western culture but some argued that English proficiency can empower and resist Islamic femininity disparagement under which Muslim women better comprehend the intricate relationship between language, power and racial prejudice in modern society by examining these views.

Disparagement of Islamic Femininity via Western Imperialism and Cultural Hypocrisy

In the "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" characters criticised Western imperialism and cultural hypocrisy as Khadra's displeasure with Western civilizations' claimed to sophistication and enlightenment exposed their hypocrisy and racial biases. Kahf challenged readers to rethink Western-Muslim biases and power disparities by emphasising these contradictions as the depiction of Western imperialism and cultural hypocrisy by Kahf illustrated the disparagement of Islamic femininity and pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western society (Sewpaul, 2016, p.30). In Kahf's story, readers are invited to critically evaluate how racial and cultural stereotypes shaped Western-Muslim interactions as she urged readers to confront their deep-seated prejudices against non-Western civilizations by exposing the hypocrisies and inconsistencies in Western claims of cultural superiority. Western imperialism and cultural hypocrisy continued to impact non-Western attitudes, as highlighted by multiple other research studies that validated this particular narrative mention in the novel of Kahf. According to landmark work of "Orientalism", Western images of the East traditionally been formed by a desire to dominate and control as Silalahi (2018) claimed that Western portrayals of the East as strange, primitive and uncivilised justified colonialism and imperialism. This supportive finding

and Khadra's indictment of Western cultural hypocrisy displayed how Western superiority built and perpetuated by demeaning non-Western civilizations like the Islamic femininity. Additionally, another vital study by Inam Ullah et al. (2020, p.828) on colonial discourse's ambivalence established imperialist ideology' weaknesses and inconsistencies as Inam Ullah found that colonial discourse intended to civilise and manage the colonised while retaining distance and superiority. In compliance Khadra's critique of Western cleanliness and politeness uncovered the hypocrisies behind Western claims of cultural superiority, showing her ambivalence towards the oppressed Muslim women.

Furthermore, modern Islamophobia studies demonstrated how Western society reinforced Muslim stereotypes and biases under which a research by Muhammad Kamran Sufi & Yasmin, (2022) on the racialization of Islam in Western nations claimed that colonialism and imperialism shaped Muslim identities through distrust and dread. In addition to this a critical research by Uzuegbunam (2020, p.97) on global cultural flows suggested that Western cultural practices created hybrid identities that undermined cultural purity and authenticity. However, individuals and groups can establish new forms of cultural expression by absorbing and modifying Western culture thus this view indicated that Western cultural practices empower rather than dominate.

Similar to this, Abu Sadat Nurullah (2008) proposed in his study on hybridity and globalisation the Western and non-Western cultures including the Muslim culture could create new cultural expressions that challenge power structures. Blending cultural traditions would allow people and groups to express themselves and their experiences while cultural interaction fight Western cultural dominance according to this view. Collectively in the novel, Mohja Kahf's powerfully criticised Western imperialism and cultural hypocrisy, demonstrating how these practices continue to impact Western perceptions of non-Western civilizations. In compliance the particular agreement with Khadra's criticism of Western arrogance and paternalism exposed Western cultural superiority's flaws and hypocrisies.

Racial Classification and Identity- Insight into the Pervasive Nature of Racial Prejudice

Khadra and Seemi's conversation on racial classification and identity in the novel of Mohja Kahf "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" offered important insight into the pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western culture. According to Seemi Origins are myths and race does not exist that calls into question racial hierarchy and discrimination which justified colonialism, imperialism and structural oppression (Dunn, 2022). Similarly Seemi encouraged a more nuanced vision of human identity across racial borders by saying "we're all mixed", while Khadra's comment "*Racism exists... You can't say racism doesn't exist*" highlighted daily racial prejudice (Bian, 2022) thus the conflict between academic principles and practical experiences illustrated disparagement Islamic femininity battle against institutional racism. Multiple credible studies confirmed depiction of Muslim women's intersectional prejudice in Western countries in this novel as Muslim women experience more religious discrimination than Muslim males, including insulting comments, distrust and career barriers (Zempi, 2020). These findings supported Khadra's awareness of pervasive racism and the compounding impacts of discrimination on her Muslim identity. Additionally Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) categorised gender, religion and ethnicity discrimination "triple threats" for Muslim women (ISPU, 2016) as the intersectional discrimination causes anxiety, despair and social isolation (Brandt et al., 2022) thus Khadra's understanding of racism emphasised on how Muslim women face these compounded biases daily in western societies. Similar to this scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality emphasised over the necessity of recognising intersecting identities like race, gender and religion in constructing oppressions (Walton, 2023). This paradigm provided a powerful analytical tool to examine Khadra's experiences and Muslim women's issues in Western countries and in line to this, Ansari & Patel (2024, p.11) revealed

that Muslim women are harshly stereotyped in political, social and sociological discourses due to restricting and damaging labels and a reluctance to respect their agency. Challenging the oversimplification of Muslim women, notably via clothes ignored their diverse identities and differing levels of religion hence Muslim women's homogenization misrepresented their identities and experiences.

Furthermore, despite the huge scholarly support to this particular research findings based on concepts presented by Kahf, certain literature sources argued for a more complex explanation of the dynamics. Researchers emphasised over Muslim women's resilience and autonomy in navigating and challenging repressive institutions as "Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today," by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, shows how Muslim women fight misconceptions and establish their identities (Haddad et al., 2011) this displayed that Muslim women are agents of change rather than passive victims of prejudice. On the other hand, Muslim communities must also recognise diversity as the ethnicity, social class and personal beliefs influenced Muslim women's lives. A one-size-fits-all approach to comprehending their experiences neglected their varied and deep identities under which Giorgi (2021) advocated for an intersectional approach that recognises the diverse and nuanced nature of Muslim women's lives in "The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought" for instance thus this perspective broadened their experiences and challenged a homogenous Muslim identity. On the other hand, some experts believed that Muslim women's identities and contributions to society are sometimes overshadowed by prejudice and victimisation.

In this manner Mohja Kahf expertly tackled identity and racial classification via Khadra and Seemi because this debate draw attention to the conflict between the theoretical denial of race and the lived reality of racism, providing a critical lens for examining the disparagement of Islamic femininity and the pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western culture. Additionally, Kahf offered a balanced perspective that invite readers to analyse the intricate relationship between identity, power and prejudice by noting the manufactured nature of racial categories and the real effects of racial discrimination. In compliance other studies also supported Khadra's experiences and displayed the intersectional nature of Muslim women's prejudice in Western society. Alternative viewpoints emphasised over the importance of Muslim agency and variety, offering a more holistic approach to interpreting their experiences because by studying these viewpoints Islamic femininity would comprehend Muslim women's struggles and perseverance against racial and religious prejudice hence this holistic study illuminated Islamic femininity and Western racial prejudice more comprehensively with the lense of Racial Classification and Identity.

Racial Prejudice Impacting Personal Relationships

The interracial romance between Muslim girl Shirin and American boy Ocean in "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" explored how racial prejudice influenced personal relationships. Shirin's understanding of their relationship's social ramifications displayed racial prejudice's prevalence as her conversation with Ocean demonstrated their different views on racial bigotry because Ocean felt that his own will can overcome social judgement but Shirin became habitual with prejudice and sceptical over it. Shirin possessed reservations about dating after experiencing racial prejudice but Ocean is protective but she knew that being a Muslim in a white culture disadvantaged her (Our World, 2016) however Ocean's well-intentioned idealistic viewpoint ignored everyday struggles of Shirin with racial preconceptions and disparagement of Islamic femininity. Similarly, according to this particular research finding, Shirin's protection displayed her efforts to protect herself and Ocean from the inevitable persecution of their connection as this scene in the novel highlighted how racial prejudice affects interracial couples emotionally and psychologically as the contrast between Ocean's optimism and Shirin's realities established

how racial prejudice strain relationships and led to disparagement of Islamic femininity (Davis-Secord, 2019).

In line to this previous study, on the effects of racial prejudice on intimate relationships, especially Muslim women's, supported this particular research finding. According to the Soltani (2016) Muslim women in Western nations frequently faced severe prejudice; including unpleasant statements and social ostracism which impaired inter racial and intercultural relationships thus this data support Muslim women hesitation to actively interact with western men due to the disparagement of Islamic femininity in western society. Additionally, the psychological effects of racial prejudice in interracial partnerships are examined in a research by Elmer et al. (2022, p.2269) which showed that social criticism and prejudice raise relationship stress and anxiety under which Shirin's worry that Ocean's drive would waver under social pressure is plausible based on many interracial couples' experiences. Along with that a vital study on race and gender displayed how Muslim women like Shirin face complicated prejudice because in interactions with people of diverse racial or cultural origins, this intersectionality made them more vulnerable while Shirin's knowledge of these relationships and her protectiveness of Ocean show her comprehension of Muslim women's struggles in Western countries (Alexander, 2020).

Furthermore, this particular finding of the current research and accompanying evidenced established Muslim women's struggles in interracial partnerships however certain studies developed their resilience and autonomy. Sadeghi et al. (2020) examined how Muslim women build good social identities despite prejudice because despite major cultural barriers, Muslim women typically prosper and exercise their autonomy however this perspective complicated Shirin's character, suggesting that she would be cautious but resilient enough to overcome these hurdles. Similarly, Jeffery & Qureshi (2022) also criticised the victim narrative of Muslim women, emphasising their active responsibilities in shaping identities and relationships.

Shirin and Ocean's experiences in Tahereh Mafi's "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" demonstrated how racial prejudice influenced human relationships as the Shirin's careful approach to her emotional connection with Ocean is influenced by her knowledge of racial prejudice, highlighting the emotional and psychological burden. Supporting research confirmed similar experiences, underscoring Muslim women's multidimensional obstacles in Western countries however contrary results emphasised over Muslim women's resilience and agency, claiming that their experiences are determined by their ability to manage and reject societal constraints. Collectively this particular finding established disparagement of Islamic femininity and Western racial injustice as the Muslim women's broad and nuanced social interactions comprehensively developed by scrutinizing their obstacles and perseverance.

Western stereotyping Impacting Muslim Women's Identity and Experiences Demonstrating the Pervasive Nature of Racial Prejudice

A critical scene in the novel of Tahereh Mafi analysed how Western stereotyping influenced Muslim women's identity and experiences demonstrating the pervasive nature of racial prejudice. According to the protagonist Muslim women in particular, must adapt to popular culture while retaining their cultural identity due to Western cultural influence. Shirin's story highlighted how Western preconceptions of Muslims as fanatically hostile and oppressive towards women contributed to the disparagement of Islamic femininity. According to Younssi (2022) a preconception promoted antagonism between Westerners and Muslims, limiting their normalisation while the disparagement of Islamic femininity is exacerbated as a result of the constant scrutiny and abuse that Muslim women like endured in western settings. In line to this previous research studies also discussed that such stereotypes harmed Western Muslims emotionally and psychologically. According to the Pew Research Centre (2006), inflammatory activities such as making derogatory caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and blaming

Muslims for their responses escalated tensions between the Muslim and Western communities however the provocation and animosity, making it hard for Muslims to integrate into Western societies. Additionally, Kanal & Rottmann (2021) found that Muslim women struggled to maintain their cultural and religious identity while being pressured to adhere to Western cultural norms since their presence and identity are often resisted thus these women suffer tremendous emotional and psychological pain.

Moreover Nura Sediqe (2022) showed how race and gender intertwine to make Muslim women vulnerable to prejudice as in a largely white and secular culture, being a racial with religious minority increased disparagement and isolation. Nura's results are consistent with Shirin's experiences of discrimination, intimidation, and hostility due to pervasive Western prejudices. Along with that Goleen Samari et al. (2018) examined Islamophobia's social and psychological effects on Western Muslim women as the constant exposure to negative stereotypes and prejudice caused anxiety and a lack of belonging. Hence this research validated Shirin's hardships in Mafi's novel, showing how Western stereotype affects Muslim women's lives. The aforementioned studies provided a complete picture of Muslim women's struggles owing to Western stereotypes but some additional research showed their resilience and autonomy. Mahmoud (2021, p.165) illustrated the victim narrative of Muslim women by emphasising their active actions in fighting stereotypes and claiming their identities while his findings imply that Muslim women potentially overcome severe hurdles with resilience and autonomy.

Conclusion

The results from the textual analysis of "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" and "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" established the pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western society and how it contributed to the disparagement of Islamic femininity. Each study illustrated how Western preconceptions, power dynamics and cultural hegemonies disparagement and oppress Muslim women in western setting. Primarily the non-Western biases through language discrimination and power dynamics reinforced the belief that Middle Easterners know less English. Power dynamics reinforced this idea of inferiority as the assistant coroner raises his voice to demonstrated supremacy thus these discussions showed how daily interactions reinforce cultural preconceptions and power systems that marginalised Muslim women followed by undermining their competence and sense of belonging. Additionally, Kahf's work criticised Western imperialism and cultural hypocrisy, revealing the contradictions in Western claims of cultural superiority and civility while Khadra questioned Western pride and cleanliness with civilization, revealing hypocrisy and racial prejudices. This criticism invited readers to consider how Western-Muslim power inequalities and biases lead to the disparagement of Islamic femininity in Islamic societies however, "The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf" questioned racial hierarchy and discrimination by claiming that "racism exists" and showing the daily repercussions of prejudice.

Moreover, Shirin and Ocean's relationship in "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" demonstrated how racial prejudice impacted human relationships as Shirin's hesitation to date Ocean demonstrated the pervasive nature of racial prejudice. Ocean's idealism and Shirin's protectiveness to extend their connection showed how racial prejudice damaged human bonds and divided individuals of different races and cultures. Additionally, the element of western stereotypes shaped Muslim identity and Islamic femininity disparagement in "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" because the western portrayal of Muslims as fanatically hostile and restrictive towards women created antagonism, making it hard for Muslims to integrate under which the Shirin's antagonism increased disparagement of Islamic femininity. Collectively, these findings showed the pervasive nature of racial prejudice in Western society and its repercussions on Muslim women as criticising Western imperialism and cultural hypocrisy highlighted racial

prejudices behind Western claims of superiority while racial categorization and identification underlined institutional inequalities with personal racism.

Additionally, the impacts of racial prejudice on relationships illustrated the emotional and psychological burden while these narratives challenged readers' prejudices and preconceptions to advocate for structural changes to address the deep-rooted injustices that perpetuate Islamic femininity disparagement and promoted a more inclusive and equitable view of human variety. They also raised awareness of current racial prejudice and its effects on marginalised populations by presenting a realistic portrayal of the issues faced by Muslim women therefore these identified ideas helped us better understand the pervasive nature of racial prejudice and its detrimental effects on individuals and society.

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