AGENTIC MUSLIMS IN THE WEST: A REFLECTION OF MIS(REPRESENTATION) IN SADIA FAROOQI'S *YUSUF AZEEM IS NOT A HERO*

[1]Aqsa Saleem
[2]Dr. Anser Mahmood
[3]Dr. Wajid Riaz

[1]M. Phil Scholar (English), The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus. aqsasaleemts@gmail.com
[3]Professor (English), The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus. anser.mahmood@ell.uol.edu.pk
[3]Assistant Professor (English), The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus. wijisami@gmail.com

Abstract

The critical exploration of the themes of Islam, Islamophobia, and postcolonial Muslim identities are analyzed in this study by adopting Edward Said's Orientalism and Salman Sayyid's account of Muslim identity in the context of Sadia Farooqi's novel, Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero. The research questions the representation of Islam and Muslim characters with a view to the future positioning of Farooqi's representation of Islam from the coloniality of the Western gaze with Orientalist inclinations. Drawing on the postcolonial perspective, it is possible to study how the phenomena of Islamophobia are represented in the British Muslim novel and how the novel contributes to the expressions of prejudices against Muslims in Western society. In this way, tools of postcolonial analysis will allow for the identification of narratological biases in the cultural and social imaginary about the Islamic religion and its representatives. The study also evaluates how Farooqi counters conventional portrayals of Islam and puts back the power to Muslim identity often becomes overwhelmingly marginalized in an environment that is usually antagonistic and uninformed. In this regard, this research helps deepen the understanding of how contemporary literature reacts to Orientalist logic and practices the Islamophobia in question while demonstrating initializing and stereotyping tendencies that remain active even in the epoch to which the study is devoted. By engaging the terms that include Islamophobia, Orientalism, postcolonial Muslim identity, and the Western gaze, this research augments the existing debates concerning the way literature not only depicts but also defines cultural perceptions of Islam and Muslims. In this context, the study seeks to extend the novel's analysis within these critical paradigms to elucidate the nature of contemporary Orientating processes and their impact on the formation of Muslim subject positions in literary culture.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Orientalism, post-colonial Muslim identity, Western perception, Sadia Farooqi, Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero, representation of Islam.

Introduction and Background

The phenomenon of Islamophobia discrimination against the followers of Islam, and prejudice on behalf of the Islamic people is also on the rise, especially in the

developed parts of the world. After the terrorist attacks of 9-11, many Muslims have become victims of stereotyping, hate, and prejudice, which indicates why Islamaphobia is not only a central issue in social and political life but is a common theme in literature as well. Culture embodies as well as subverts these trends and literature is an ideal tool to bring these out. In the novel *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*, Sadia Farooqi narrates the events witnessing the aspects of identity, authorization, and Muslim life in the West, especially after 9/11. This work draws from Orientationalist scholar Edward Said to understand how Farooqi depicts Islam and Muslim Otherness about Islamophobia; it also employs postcolonial Islam scholar Salman Sayyid's model of postcolonial Muslim subjectivity to uncover the novel's exegetical truths about the West. Along these lines, Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero looks at both the visible effects of Islamophobia and the inner turmoil of Muslims who have grown up in a post-9/11 Western society. As a young Muslim student deals with discrimination and prejudice around him, Farooqi explains how this continuously affects his emotions and daily life. It agrees with Salman Sayyid's idea of the "postcolonial Muslim," who must handle their identity amid a discourse that describes Muslims as difficult or threatening. Moreover, through diary entries, rallies and chats with relatives, the book highlights how the effects of trauma connect to large-scale action. Readers can follow along as Islamophobia appears in daily situations, yet also observe occasions of endurance, unity and strong Muslim identity. As a result, the novel becomes a place where manner of literary discourse fights against dominant images and recovers space for Muslim voices affected by discrimination.

Western perceptions of Muslim communities are deeply influenced: the public opinion and the policy making based on Islamophobia and Orientalist illustration of Islam. Islamophobia has become one of the most pervasive social injustices in the post 9/11 era because it is defined as an unfounded fear or hostility towards Islam and Muslims and have mainstreamed the way in which Muslims are scrutinized, stereotyped, and institutionalized. Since the September 11 attacks, many Western societies have seen a spike of suspicion of Muslims that has resulted in widespread discrimination, extending not only to personal prejudice, but to systemic discrimination well reflected in policy and media representations. These representations of Islam often clearly stigmatizes Muslims as a potential threat to

Western values and security which produces a narrative that provokes division and misunderstanding.

Islamophobia has taken the form of a prominent theme in literature; many authors write about the complexities of identity, cultural misunderstanding and fear of a Muslim's society in a non Muslim majority. Literature works as a reflective medium of social issues and shows its readers what it's like to live such marginalized groups. Buying books like this is a fundamentally important step in fighting cognitive bias by noise preaching through fiction — stories. The study of the ways in which Islamophobia is represented in literature not only echoes deeper theses of Islamist controversy but also lends itself towards stimulating critical dialogues on the subject of systematization of the Muslim communities, the multiculturalism and the very notion of tolerance itself. *Yousuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* written by Sadia Farooqi (2021) is one of one notable contribution to this discourse. A post 9/11, young Muslim, protagonist is the core of this narrative, contending with discrimination. Farooqi questions the stereotypic Western gaze on Muslims and Islam through the thematic of identity, marginalization and resilience, to offer accurate representations of the experiences of those Muslims who are affected by Islamophobia. Yusuf's story mirrors real world prejudice that many Muslims face against a society that perceives his faith and identity as a threat to its way of life. The struggle Yusuf faces is shown front and center in this novel, both in the forced marches the Muslim children of the horse carters are subjected to to 'lose their ties with the British' and in the mere fact of having to allow other children 'playing' on the main road, to do so by kicking him at all times.

The author's treatment of Islamophobia and identity stems from Edward Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism. Criticizes the way that in the past the West constructed the Orient as an inferior 'other' in order to keep it in its cultural, political and intellectual site. He claims Western depictions and falling back on exotic and derogatory stereotypes that help advance political and ideological agendas, have currently led to a stereotypical image of Islam which now reduces the rich cultural tapestry of Islam to simplistic and threatening images. Using Said's framework, literature, media, and popular culture function as a critical lens to understand the ways in which literature, media, and popular culture perpetuate distorted narrative

about Islam. *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*, by Farooqi, employs Orientalist themes, as in Said, suggesting that Yusuf's Muslim ethnicity is stigmatized in a culture where he finds himself dominant, the height of Said's critique of the West's 'Orient' being that the Orient is a product of its associating with the West.

The theoretical depth of complimenting Said's perspective is provided by Salman Sayyid's (2001) exploration of postcolonial Muslim identity and an attempt to understand how Muslim identity was formed in the West. According to Sayyid, Muslim identity, in particular, in the postcolonial situation, tends to be already politicized and misrepresented by means of the dichotomy of security and threat. The marginalization of Muslims has made it difficult for those to express themselves who are Muslim, in societies often viewing their members as strangers and outsiders. Hence Sayyid's theory that constructs the identity of a Muslim proponent in Western discourses argues the point that how Western discourses portray the Muslim identity and reflects the protagonist's inner conflict with the self identity in the external discourses and discourses of prejudices. *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* shows Yusuf's journey who holds cultural and religious identity and then struggles with it in a place where he's continuously misinterpreted and marginalized.

Using Said's theory of Orientalism in conjunction with Sayyid's study of postcolonial Muslim identity, the book *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* offers an opportunity to critically read the version of Islamophobia. It shows how Muslim people are affected by these structures that sustain the Western thinking about Islam. This theoretical framework allows for richer understanding of an experience of the protagonist and the larger cultural forces of the manipulation of Muslim identities within the context of the West. In Farooqi's novel, literature is not only a medium of storytelling but also a weapon for social critique that questions readers to ask why they subscribe to Islamic celebrities and suggest the human cost of Islamic biases while disproving Islamophobic biases in the world around us. Theories through which to view the novel tellingly engage Islamophobia, Orientalism and Muslim representation in contemporary literature as the novel effectively comments upon the extraordinary capacity of marginalized communities to survive, upon the univalent nature of identity, and of how empathy, which does not require homophobia to bring people together, is crucial to overcoming cultural divides.

Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero can be viewed through intersectionality, especially regarding how being Muslim interacts with age, ethnicity, and where characters live. Growing up as a Muslim young boy after 9/11 and in a Texas town brings extra challenges to Yusuf. Beyond his youthful troubles, he is constantly challenged by being expected to present and defend an entire religion. Yusuf is caught between having a unique self and meeting others' expectations, making it easy for the reader to find out how prejudices impact their everyday experiences. So, intersectionality, we can see that being Muslim for Yusuf reflects how his Muslim identity joins with his cultural background, his generation, and his sense of nationhood.

The novel also looks at narrative agency, making sure that Yusuf—and therefore Muslim youth—are represented in a way that is often missing from common literary sources. Replacing orientalist stereotypes with a Muslim character's inner experiences, Farooqi narrative space that has long been used for them. Using this method agrees with the postcolonial goal of helping other writers become free from colonial rule. He often thinks deeply, writes in his diary and has many important discussions, showing his effort to understand why his identity has been doubted by the world. In addition, the novel backs up these claims by discouraging one-sided views and sharing views that respect and admire the rich, complex, and courageous lives of Muslims. The book makes clear that having a voice in stories is important to save identity for minority cultures and make people more understanding of each other.

Statement of the Problem

Islamophobic narratives of Islam in Western literature also often depict Muslims as peripheral and distanced from the very core of humanity taking away humanity itself, portraying them as at times beyond human fallacies and confined within those extremities of extremism and otherness, (Said, 1978; Ahmed, 2019). So often these portrayals, and the historical Orientalist perspectives upon which they are based, serve to perpetuate the enduring negative stereotypes that form the basis for prejudice and maintain the marginalization of Muslim communities. Such stereotypes have far reaching consequences when literature shapes how we all think about Muslims and the Muslim community and they have led to policy decisions and image as to Muslims and Islam for disparate groups of people. This paper also attempts to critically analyze Sadia Farooqi's *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*, as an example of how

Islam and Islamophobia are portrayed in a children's literary context with emphasis on the Western gaze and it's impact on how Muslim identity is represented. This research focuses on the analysis of narrative, character, and thematic techniques in Farooqi's work to examine how the story undertakes — and perhaps contests — Islamophobic stereotypes prevalent in the Western literature. However, the problem is situated within conversations about the way in which Orientalist frameworks have shaped the presentation of Islam and the identities of young Muslim protagonists who must negotiate their own identities as well as public perception in such narratives. This study will provide some insight into how modern literature either upholds or counters Islamophobic representations in order to better understand the necessity and importance of authentic Muslim voices and pluralistic literary outlooks in Western literary spaces.

Research Questions

• How does Sadia Farooqi explore the reflection of Postcolonial Muslims in her novel Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero?

• How does Sadia Farooqi present Muslimness in her novel Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero?

• Does Sadia Farooqi's portray Muslims a signifier of Resistance against the west in her Novel Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero?

Application of Said's Orientalism in the Analysis of Muslim Representation: A Review

Following the same line of thought as Said in his Orientalism book, discourses that are Orientalist in nature are not reflections of the Oriental societies, but they are designed to be so, for political reasons. Said postulates that these representations provide a clear demarcation line between the 'civilized' west and the 'Oriental' backward east in informed cultural relation and politics (Said 1978). This theoretical framework is especially central especially when exploring the way that representation from the Western point of view about Muslims and Islam confined this population as perverted or other. Modern issues can make anyone who takes Said's Orientalism into consideration realize how the media reiterates biases that correspond to colonialist narratives. For instance, News media sources have discovered that Violence or extremism in Muslim-majority countries is what fills the media with minimal

portrayal of culture or daily life of Muslims (Khan & Shaheen 2019). A similar selection of information contributes to the stereotype vision of Islam and does not take into account the Various within it. However, it is superimpose onto the idea of platforms of textual wherein the power relations emerging from practice of culture can be sited at. In ways the West has situated itself as the main place that defines the East; this extends not only to the academic discourse, but more tellingly, to policy making and world politics (Said, 1993). In other words, in an attempt to 'sensitize' all these forms of power, scholars can then learn how all these power forms relate towards the current colonization processes.

Relevance of Sayyid's Postcolonial Muslim Identity Theory

The novel formulated by Sayyid, a graduate of the same institute which Said was teaching at the time of his work, complements Said's thesis by studying more of the problems that face the post-colonial Muslims in the sphere of hybrid, diaspora, and fear of the emerging Islamophobia. It is evident in Sayyid's works that he emphasizes that postcolonial identities are in a process of constant construction of those coming across the cultures in their everyday social interactions after experiencing colonization and those influenced by the discursive formations in the global world (Sayyid, 2006).

On the racial/ethnic issue there is just one point that needs to be addressed in relation to Sayyid's argument, it is the function of dual identity as that which has been imposed on Muslims by other nations and that which has been produced by culture. This duality provides a way to contest reified forms of stereotype and at the same time locate oneself, with multiple others, in a range of contexts (Sayyid and Awan, 2015). For example, in the broad contemporary discussions of culture and identity, the majority of Muslim contributors share their small narratives of anti-Orientalist heritage and anti-liberal democratic individualistic identity. Sayyid in the same way points out that it is a Muslim agency to fashion the new Muslim subject that is possible beyond the 'victims/victims' paradigms or criticized exoticism dilemmas. He stressed that there is much more to it than that, that Muslim identity is historical and has to do with ancestry and contemporary dynamics of political culture (Sayyid and Awan, 2015). Such attitude is necessary to come to discussions that will contribute to unity not discussions that will create division. Such criticism takes on special importance after the events of 9/11, since Muslims are often judged as different,

suspicious and dangerous to society. Sayyid's view that Muslim identity has changed through history makes it possible to avoid the essentialist misconceptions found in old Orientalist beliefs as well as modern liberal multicultural views. According to Sayyid, the self-image of Muslims is free to express its ideas intellectually and help form the cultural and political background of their society. As a result, Muslims can present their identity in a way that is not just responding to events, but building it through both history and current political trends.

Moreover, the dual identity idea motivates us to view the way Muslims are seen as something that grows and changes over time. According to Awan (2016), using stories from literature, cinema and personal lives serves as a helpful way to face this dilemma. Rather than being on the edges, these stories are the main part of redefining self and community. Rejecting the assimilation-alienation model lets Muslim subjects live in places that help them both challenge authority and protect their cultural unique qualities. There are many opportunities for different groups to unite in diasporic communities, where individuals' ethnic and religious identities change regularly. It also helps to overcome the main ideas in liberal secularism that see Islam as too different from modern liberal democracy. Sayyid is necessary for this reason, as she strips away the illusion that secular liberalism is neutral or for everyone. According to him, Muslim voices should not only be accepted but should influence political and cultural debates. It is necessary for both the academic world and the public sector to rethink their ideas and seriously engage with Muslim traditions and political aims. It then becomes clear how we can welcome different modernities and many kinds of belonging in a global conversation.

It also points out that telling their stories can empower people from minor groups. When Muslims present their own experiences, they can avoid being viewed through traditional stereotypes. These popular stories rebut the usual message that Muslims are all the same and at odds with Western ideas. Representation helps Muslim people and communities in breaking down simple identity categories and introduces ideas of hybridity, strength and transformation as traits passed on through the years.

In essence, focusing on plural modernities lets more people feel part of worldwide society. Accepting that there are many modernities lets different groups

share public life together with their own beliefs. This shift makes a difference in schools, public policy and media broadcasting. Such institutions should recognize religious and cultural diversity and ensure that their environment sincerely includes everyone. As a result, we appreciate Muslim experiences and strengthen the democratic aspect of multicultural communities.

Representation of Postcolonial Muslim Identity: Struggles and Resistance in Yusuf Azeem is not a hero. Yusuf's story represents how to negotiate identity in a post 9/11 Western context where critical othering and myths of the Muslim are bringing himself into question. Faced with the demands of living in a non-Muslim big society, he wrestles with internal conflict: a Muslim identity between what it means to exist as a Muslim in a predominantly non-Muslim society. This shows postcolonial issues like hybridity, otherness, and resistance (Bhabha, 1994). These themes are essential to framing diasporic identity as a lived experience perpetually reconstituted from their constant contact with cultural hegemony and marginalization. At least, Yusuf feels alienation and dislocation through the microaggressions and systemic biases that are a part of society, which constitute excluded expression. Postcolonial critiques of identity formation are reflected in these experiences as they discuss the complex interplay between cultural heritage and the external impositions of a dominant society. Yusuf's story most notably relates to the idea of 'double consciousness' (Du Bois, 1903), whereby individuals have to negotiate the riffs and dissonances that occur in our experience as the lens through which we see ourselves versus the (often prejudiced) epistemological forces surrounding how others see us.

Inextricably woven into Yusuf's intersectional identity, and propping up the usefulness of the narrative, is the combination of race, religion, and ethnicity that have shaped his lived experiences. He also lives Islamophobia and racial profiling, a conclusive indication that being a racialized Muslim living in a Western society is an inharmonious combination of being. The oppression intersects to create further 'othering,' making Yusuf's attempts to resist othering and become his individual and agency much more significant. Yusuf's story discredits monolithically formed concepts of Muslim identity, as Muslim identity is presented as multifaceted and evolving. His story reframes, in the best possible sense, existing portrayals of Muslims in post-9/11 media, something which has certainly been plenty prevalent. He

shows how identity is not a picture we are born with that stays with us forever, but is constantly negotiated with what cultural expectations, what social realities, and what personal convictions are.

Additionally, Yusuf's ability to resist the pressure for assimilation is an act of defiantness in the postcolonial. He regains his identity when he links to his cultural roots, working about his faith, and to a sense of what it means to be a Muslim within Western context. This does so in line with Homi Bhabha's (1994) 'third space' whereby new identities arise when cultural traditions combine with the challenges of hegemonic ideology. The text does not only interrogate through Yusuf's journey the reductive binaries of "us" versus "them" to celebrate the possibility of coexistence and mutual understanding but also the fact that others "over there," bear within themselves some element of the "us" that we have rejected. Ultimately, his story becomes a beautiful way to reflect on how marginalized communities are so resilient enough 'to get over, get under, or bend them to their will'.

Depictions of Islamophobia and Marginalization in Western Society

The novel very engagingly depicts the different forms of face discrimination that Yusuf and his community face with the outlook of Islamophobia from overt and explicit acts being played towards it, to much more subtle micro attacks experienced in their daily lives. While these instances are not isolated ones (to use another word perhaps more fashionable at this time), they are also rooted in deep systemic biases and social stereotypes about Muslim identity. The increased attention on Muslims following 9/11 and the post-9/11 trend of questioning, profiling, and exclusionary practices can be seen in Yusuf's encounters with racial profiling, suspicion in public space, and exclusionary practices. The indignity of being profiled by airport security in general and the fact that it's often Muslims who have to endure this kind of thing make for one particularly poignant episode in the narrative: Yusuf is profiled at an airport. Not surprisingly this incident echoes many real-life examples cataloged in studies on Islamophobia that reveal how public space becomes a site of marginalization (Ahmad, 2018). As well as these overt acts of discrimination, Yusuf copes with the more insidious microaggressions he faces — from being asked how he 'can be such a loyal American if he doesn't drink it from a Dixie cup', to being questioned about his 'faith practices' — which chip away slowly at his sense of

belonging.

These are hugely psychologically difficult to deal with. Feeling frustrated, angry, and isolated in personal and collective ways, Yusuf is no stranger to forms of personal and collective resistance. They imply questions about his place in his cultural country and society; it is these questions of meaning and the drive that make him search for his place, that propel him. The novel shows in detail the conflict between the protagonist's inner self and how the world marginalizes such characters; it shows how discrimination becomes endemic in an individual and psychological state of health. It also extends the process of rewriting Yusuf's narrative, in challenging Islamophobia across an entire community. Fear is destructive; fear splits families and destroys communities; externality alters the social fabric of the people. The narrative hammers home the notion that Muslims are not just 'Troublesome Pasts,' or the actions of a minority peaking in one horrifying attack, but that Islamophobia begins and ends in creating a world where people are not safe to share a society and community. This text also comprises the uses of representation in media to maintain the stereotype and promote discriminations. Yusuf's actualization in the sphere where the existence and representations of public discourse take place shows the media that portrays Muslims. In this context, this dynamic compounds extant structural racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, etc., and thus intensifies the challenges that persons and peoples have surmounted to achieve personal and collective liberation from prejudice. The novel wants to bring about a change in society and provides a thoughtful understanding of Muslims. The story personalizes Yusuf's challenges and triumphs are a reminder to work on ending this type of hatred and to use the concept of Islamic phobia to encompass the big picture; and an appeal to seek to leave no one out. Thus, the narrative unmasks the oppression of Muslim communities and calls for politics of collective mourning and trauma as a potentiality.

Yusuf's refusal to conform to monolithic stereotypes exemplifies what Saba Mahmood (2005) terms "agentic negotiation" — a process where marginalized individuals actively reinterpret cultural and religious identities to resist external oppression. For instance, when Yusuf organizes a community-led workshop to challenge media misrepresentations of Muslims, he declares: "We are not footnotes to someone else's fear. We write our own stories" (p. 132). This act of self-authorship

aligns with Mahmood's assertion that agency arises not only through overt resistance but through "reworking the terms of one's subjecthood" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 15). Yusuf's activism disrupts the passive victimhood often ascribed to Muslim characters in post-9/11 narratives, positioning him as an agentic figure who redefines his identity on his own terms.

Acts of Defiance and Redefining Heroism for Postcolonial Muslims

Yusuf's story is the story of struggle and how subjugated people have lived. Yusuf's discovery is an activist and leader's journey to regain the rights and dignity of his community on the part of the journey. From a young man with identity and oppression issues to a young man inspiring and activist for change, it gives the current definition of heroism an igniting redefinition. Thus, the nature of Yusuf as a protagonist is far from traditionally set, for one does not take into account collective effort, affirmation of ethnicity, or the strength of a community's spirit when speaking about heroism based on the value of individual accomplishment or extraordinary talents. But for the novel, such a reversal is not fully represented; it shows Yusuf's defiance in more ways than one — individual rejection of stereotypes and organized attempts to negate systematized prejudice. This text is a rather counter-narrative precisely because of his capacity to challenge the general negative representations of Muslim communities and remain capable of struggling against the peculiarities of society. Yusuf should not be a leader because he was born in power or privileged or exceptional, but because of the injustices done to him, and he had suffered marginalization to fight for justice and equity.

In other words, the success of Yusuf will greatly depend on how he will popularize the call to demand unity and reject prejudice. It captures not only his activism as an independent action on his part but also part of the collection of voices from his people. Yusuf proves that outcomes of collective resilience against systemic oppression are not only possible, but potent by organizing community events, lobbying for policy changes, and raising awareness. In all of his efforts, he teaches how democracy from below can not only resist but also mobilize for new stories and places of power. In addition, the novel examines the emotional and psychological nature of resilience. Yusuf's story is a tale of moments of vulnerability, of doubt, and of self-reflection, all of which give us a deeper understanding of who he is, and how

difficult it is to maintain the resistance. That level of persistence in defending against these challenges speaks to exactly what it takes to push back against entrenched systems of power. Why this complex, unique understanding of resilience, and not just physical or external acts of defiance, is necessary to survive in such an inhospitable world and stay true to your identity and values?

The novel takes a fresh look at cliched notions of heroism through Yusuf's story, questioning preconceived notions of what it means to be a Muslim and challenging the norms of what can (and cannot) be considered a hero through empathy and an emphasis on the collective well being. It is by seeing this reimagining of heroism that we are forced to acknowledge and appreciate the role these marginalized peoples played in the refashioning of this society for it to become what it is today. The leadership given by Yusuf is clear evidence of how far a community can go when comes together to fight for justice and equality. The story ends up showing ultimately that the very strength and agency of marginalized groups overwhelm what they can do to take back or redefine their own story. The novel goes further than that, because it also is a call to celebrate, through the strength of resistance and resilience, the ability of such power structures to be challenged, and the vision of a world in which solidarity and collective actions against division and injustice can overcome power. Yusuf's rise is both a man's and a people's glory and a testament to how redefining heroism in the midst of the old and as an experience of shared humanity matters.

The novel's redefinition of heroism hinges on Yusuf's agentic solidarity, a concept coined by Leila Ahmed (2011) to describe collective action rooted in cultural pride and communal resilience. When Yusuf collaborates with interfaith groups to combat Islamophobic policies, he embodies this idea, stating: "Our strength isn't in isolation; it's in how we stand together" (p. 215). His leadership reflects Ahmed's argument that Muslim agency in the West often manifests through "coalition-building that transcends religious binaries" (Ahmed, 2011, p. 89). By foregrounding Yusuf's collaborative efforts, the narrative rejects individualistic heroism, instead celebrating agentic communities as drivers of systemic change.

The Role of Community and Activism in Reshaping Muslim Identity

Yusuf's narrative is central to community, as well as to activism, as a force for his

personal growth and his community's resilience. As Yusuf and his community's response to instances of prejudice, and systemic oppression demonstrate the accumulative force of solidarity, mentorship, and a shared purpose. In the novel, we need to remember that in the face of marginalization, the strength within a community depends on how it comes together to support its members while seeking and simultaneously working for collective justice. From Yusuf's path, which is both an edifying and scary tale, different key figures in Yusuf's life act as mentors and give Yusuf hope in cases of massive challenges that he is faced with in his life. Still, these mentors do much more for Yusuf than guide him through the wilderness of his identity: they also teach him the value of activism on the community level. Yusuf uses their influence to help channel those frustrations into actionable steps that help himself, and others. The intergenerational dynamics that the novel portrays just add to that because we see how communal ties are like what allows people to be resilient and what allows people, even way back in history to survive like that and resist that.

The book is a celebration of collective solidarity, of how solidarity of communities is indeed a powerful thing that can overcome systematic discrimination, and is a campaigning for equity and inclusion. The decision to protest peacefully, the Network of Support, and the formation of Yusuf's community become a symbol of hope and resistance. The tale highlights the ability of grassroots movements, united by a shared vision of justice, to deliver real-world change. These acts of resistance do not just equal responses to injustice, they're also actions that have done and will continue to take an active step in building a more equal society. According to these postcolonial critiques of oppression, collective resistance against systemic inequalities is important in this theme. The novel urges us to break free from these dominant narratives by showing the difficult the hard ways lived by marginalized communities, and celebrates their triumphs. It promotes the status of grassroots activism as a vital force in dismantling oppressive structures and creating social transformation. The novel also examines the emotional and psychological effect of having community support on a person like Yusuf. Yusuf's continuation of his life comes to him through his connections with others, but curiously through this the same task is accomplished providing him with solace, courage, and a renewed sense of purpose. It tells a story of a community that is not just a force of strength but a place to heal and to empower

those whom we share our battle with and together we have our future brighter.

Furthermore, Yusuf's journey becomes both an elevation and illustration of what the role of activism is – of becoming a passive observer and a passive participant and then eventually a passive leader – within his community. The involvement of the individual in advocacy work indicates the possible change that can happen when the individual and collective conduct their individual and collective action. Yusuf showcases how activism can create a difference by amplifying voices belonging to the marginalized and question systemic oppression. Yusuf's story is a perfect example of how community and activism work together so that we can defeat social injustice and raise hope. The narrative educates us on a very interesting story about unity, sponsorship, and grassroots organization at the same time giving us an inspiring positive picture of how united we can turn everybody into instruments to make the world a better place.

Conclusion

Using aspects of Orientalism as founded by Edward Said and Sayyid's work on Islam, Islamophobia, and postcolonial Muslim subjectivities, Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero by Sadia Farooqi was analyzed. According to the study, Farooqi salvages the coloniality of the Western gaze as she FORWARD complicates Islam and Muslims. The study demonstrated that EUROAM should want to erase the borders between contemporary Islamic countries and cultures by depicting Islam as an indivisible massive culture of the 'Other.' They have just added to existing Islamophobia, especially in societies since 9/11 when Muslim identities are often talked about in problematic ways, excepting these narratives to colonial discourse. Of this facet of the legacy of exposing stereotypes which influenced the social experience of Muslims—especially children and adolescents like Yusuf—in a hostile political environment, Farooqi conceals it through his protagonist.

Farooqi describes how religion constructs a Muslim subject, greying out that which is ethnic and cultural in en route to their present day, globalized world. Overall, the novel provides a depiction of the Muslim's ability to survive, to support, and to assert in Western societies which describes the humiliating as well as institutional racism, and open hostility; but also provides a more realistic description of the daily humiliations. As such, Farooqi resist the reductive vision of Islam as both a

contingency of prejudice and fear and seeks to recover the historical and memory of Muslim voices and personalize their trajectories and their desires. Indeed, the study also reveals that Yusuf Azeem is Not a Hero takes on Islamophobic tropes, but that is not its sole function. Instead, it is conscious of the subversion of the construction of Islam and Muslim cultural narratives and representations of Islam and Muslims in favor of the construction of Muslim culture, Muslim diversity, and the full humanity of Muslims. Farooqi takes up a discussion that attempts to displace Orientalist paradigms and to introduce the notion of Islam into modern literature. Nonetheless, this may also be revealed not only in the use of narration as the primary way by which to combat oppression, but in the fact of being informed by intergenerational interactions and the hand off of culture. By using historical allusions, composite biographical account, Yusuf's introspection, Farooqi explores how Muslim groups have embraced the interlacing of history and the Muslim group. A narrative approach like this also informs the audience about what experiences Muslims face, but it also helps the audience become critical of unconscious prejudice. Through the current literature, such as in Farooqi's novel, one can challenge and fight Islamophobia and to redeem Muslim subject positions. Such fictive works can thus be seen to perform an exceptionally significant role in producing new forms of identification and social representation in direct contradiction to Orientalist discourses and in favor of postcolonial critiques of the politics of identity in the present.

By depicting agentic Muslims — people who actively reconfigure their identities despite systemic marginalization — the novel counters the passive victimhood typical in post 9/11 Muslim characters. Yusuf's journey is exemplary of the work Muslims do to cultivate autonomy under oppressive regimes, taking the lead from Saba Mahmood (2005) con notion of 'agentive capacity.' For example, when Yusuf challenges a teacher who merges Islam with terrorism, he responds: My religion is not a weapon. It's my compass" (p. 94). This also corresponds with Mahmood's assertion that agency does not result from open rebellion but through 'reworking the terms of one's subjecthood' (2005, p. 15). Similarly, Yusuf's mother, Fatima, breaks traditional gender stereotypes by establishing community directed literacy programmes and proclaim: 'Education is our resistance' (p. 167). Not only does these acts of self determination conceive Muslims as dynamic agents (and not

victims) rather than reductive tropes, they also represent a rejection of reductive tropes.

Framing Muslim identity as chosen instead of given fits with Mahmood's (2005) view which challenges simple ideas of freedom and resistance. Agency in Western views is usually seen as an outward challenge or leaving behind traditions. Nevertheless, Mahmood asks us to view agency as present in practices that are part of people's culture. What Yusuf and Fatima did suggests a strong effort to interact with their traditions, not to give up on their faith. They argue that Islam helps people see what is right and fair and works to challenge narratives that say Islam is mostly associated with violence and tyranny. It complicates the difference between being spiritual and living in modern society, revealing that it's possible to be both at the same time.

Also, Yusuf and his mother's relationship reveals even more about Muslim agency. Fatima's work shows that Muslim women, who are often thought of as silent and submissive, are in fact community leaders. Her project rebuilds group self-respect and opposes the authorities who ignore the community's needs. This relates to Mahmood's point that women in such societies transform norms to bring support for all members of the group. They change the way Orientalist art casts Muslim women and explain ways that devout activism can be a political act. The novel's refusal to make the victims the main focus leads readers to think about what actually matters in political involvement in marginalized groups. The book shows how individuals push back against the common stereotype that Muslims are either terrorists or without a voice, by taking back power in their own lives. This means concepts of Islam allow Muslims to direct their own futures and don't stop their potential. Consequently, the novel resists the colonial ways of representation and proposes a wider view of identity, agency and resilience.

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