

Representation of Muslim Adolescent and Hybrid Identity in Australian Muslim Teen Narratives

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Abstract

This study examines how Muslim adolescent identity is constructed, negotiated, and represented in Australian young adult literature within a multicultural and postcolonial context. Drawing on postcolonial theory, particularly Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space," and Hall's notion of identity as a process of becoming, the research adopts a qualitative textual analysis. The data sources are two *young adult* Australian novel: *Does My Head Look Big In This* (2005) by Randa Abdel Fattah and *The Tribe* (2014) by Michael Mohammed Ahmad. The findings reveal that Muslim identity is fluid and continuously negotiated through the interplay of religious commitment, family expectations, and national belonging. Both novels articulate the Muslim adolescent's identity differently through their narrative strategy. The first novel articulates an adaptive Muslim adolescent's identity, yet resist stereotyping. While the second novel shows a fragmented Muslim identity and confirm liminality in their community. The result also shows that cultural hybridity emerges as both a narrative strategy in the first novel as well as a lived experience in the second novel. The study accentuates literature as a critical space for challenging dominant discourses and rearticulating Muslim youth identity in contemporary Australia.

Keywords: Muslim adolescent, hybrid identity, Australia, teen narratives

Introduction

The spread of Muslims to western countries and Australia occurred for various reasons, one of which was the socio-political conditions prevailing in their countries of origin. This encouraged the emergence of Muslim diaspora communities in various countries. These Muslim diaspora live in groups within Muslim communities within multicultural societies. This has the potential to create problematic interactions due to cultural differences. One such issue relates to the identity of the Muslim diaspora, which merges with the identity of the multicultural society. This situation certainly requires a negotiation of cultural identities that allows for cultural interactions that, as far as possible, do not disrupt the lives of both communities.

Historical and sociological studies indicate that the presence of Islam in Australia cannot be understood solely as a product of contemporary migration, but rather as a long process that has been ongoing since the 17th century through contact between Muslim sailors from Makassar and Aboriginal communities in Northern Australia (Syachrir et al., 2021; Mansouri, 2012). These early interactions confirm that Islam was present in Australia before European colonization and has existed from the beginning within a non-hegemonic cross-cultural encounter. Subsequent developments were marked by waves of Muslim migration from Afghanistan, the Middle East, South Asia, Turkey, and Southeast Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries, which shaped the Australian Muslim community as a highly diverse group ethnically, linguistically, and religiously (Syachrir et al., 2021).

In Australia's multicultural context, Muslims live in a complex state of identity negotiation. On the one hand, multiculturalism policies opened up space for the expression of religious identity; on the other hand, the post-9/11 global political dynamics produced the construction of Muslims as a suspect community associated with discourses of radicalism and security threats (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). This discourse operates not only at the policy and media levels but also shapes the everyday social experiences of Australian Muslims, including feelings of alienation, vigilance, and the need to continually prove their civic loyalty.

However, various studies show that the Muslim community does not respond passively to this situation. Research on Muslim citizenship in everyday civic spaces shows that Australian Muslims, particularly the younger generation, actively cultivate active citizenship practices through social participation, volunteerism, and cross-cultural community engagement (Harris & Roose, 2018). Muslim community organizations function as in-between spaces that enable the formation of a hybrid citizenship identity: neither fully assimilated nor isolated from mainstream society (Amath, 2015; Peucker & Ceylan, 2017).

Muslim identity is characterized by a person's willingness to display subjective self-esteem, namely a commitment to presenting oneself as a Muslim and identifying as part of a Muslim group; and by displaying objective evidence, namely adherence to Islam through ritual practices and following established rules and norms within the Muslim community. This Muslim identity exists within a broader social context, namely the global conditions that determine the development of Muslim society and its culture (Zuriet, 2019).

The construction of Muslim identity is widely represented in various media, one of which is literary works, which play a role in shaping and reproducing understandings of Muslim identity. This role is very potentially carried out by young adult literature.

According to research conducted by Hayn et al. (2011) on 21st-century young adult literature, the majority of publications on young adult literature are still limited to teaching strategies, text analysis, author interviews, and bibliographies, rather than empirical impact studies. Most YAL research remains at a descriptive level and does not utilize sophisticated inferential statistics or complex case study designs. Hayn's research also observed a gap in YAL research when taught in a classroom setting. This research also examined the potential use of the YAL genre in the school curriculum (Hayn et al. 2011). Meanwhile, another study conducted by Crowe (1998) highlighted what YAL is. Crowe (1998) provided a conceptual clarification of the operational definition of YAL. Both articles above, Hayn et al. (2011) and Crowe (1998), agree that YAL/teen literature has great potential in increasing the engagement of young readers because YAL offers voices and realities that are increasingly relevant to the lives of these young people. This is possible because young people are in the process of searching for identity markers of their identity. Likewise, YAL features Muslim adolescent characters and addresses issues related to the complexities of Muslim youth. Issues of Muslim adolescent identity are not only represented in literary texts from Muslim-majority countries but also in literary texts from the Muslim diaspora around the world.

In the global Islamic context, this representation of Muslim adolescent identity in literature also exists in Australia, where Muslims are a minority and religion is rarely a part of social issues. The complexity of Muslim adolescent identity issues is also reflected in Australian Muslim youth literature. This theme is championed by Australian Muslim diaspora writers Randa Abdel Fattah and Michael Mohammed Ahmad. Fattah and Ahmad are part of the Australian Muslim community who strive to present a voice of Muslim identity through their young adult novels. Through their work, they strive to give a Muslim voice to Australia's multicultural society. This issue of Muslim identity is represented in the Australian young adult novels "Does My Head Look Big In This" by Randa Abdel Fattah (2005) and "The Tribe" by Michael Mohammed Ahmad (2014).

How the phenomenon of the presence of youth literature can be used as a reference to understand the discourse of Muslim youth identity within the framework of the dynamics of Islam in Australia is an interesting problem to study. The phenomenon that appears is suspected to be a manifestation of negotiation towards the existing social and political dynamics. Based on the description above, this study intends to examine the problem of how the novels *Does My Head Look Big In This* and *The Tribe* represent the identity of Muslim diaspora youth in the dynamics of multiculturalism in Australia, as a manifestation of their identity negotiation between their cultural identity of origin and Australia's multicultural culture in the intertwining of socio-political dynamics in the country. Thus, the formulation of the problem of this research is: How do the novels *Does My Head Look Big In This* and *The Tribe* construct the identity of Muslim youth through the negotiation of religious commitment (Islamic practice), family expectations and national belonging in the intersection of cultural identity of their country of origin with Australia's multicultural culture?

Literature Review

Several authors have previously conducted research on the dynamics of cultural identity in literary works in multicultural Australia. This research primarily explores novels that have significantly contributed to the voice of the Arab-Australian immigrant community. Among them is Randa Abdel Fattah's masterpiece, "Does My Head Look Big In This." The exploration of multicultural aspects and cultural diversity in "Does My Head Look Big In This" has been discussed by, among others, Hickey et al. (2017), Baer et al. (2010), and Letcher (2011).

Hickey (2017) highlights the novel's multicultural aspects, which have the potential to create a space for the expression of cultural diversity, in this case the Islamic religion. In contrast to Hickey, Sanders (2010) questions the "right" and "wrong" representation of religion in "Does My Head Look Big In This." On the other hand, Crowe (1998) and Hayn et al. (2011) highlighted the potential and legitimacy of young adult literature. This was later affirmed by Hickey et al. (2017) who stated that the potential of young adult novels includes enhancing critical literacy, which Hayn termed "building a global perspective."

More specifically, Baer (2010) highlighted the issue of ethnicity and Islamic cultural awareness, which are constantly under negotiation. This negotiation occurs, among other things, through multicultural literary texts, such as "Does My Head Look Big In This," as Hickey argues.

Meanwhile, Letcher questioned the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that frequently arise regarding differences in Islamic traditions and religion. According to Letcher, contemporary young adult literature can bridge these misunderstandings. This aligns with Crowe and Hayn's views. Crowe (1998) highlighted the contribution of young adult literature as a bridge between understanding classic texts and understanding the realities of life, especially for teenagers, its target market. This opinion is reinforced by Hayn et al. (2011), who highlight the potential for previously understudied research on Young Adult Literature by both literary researchers and practitioners. According to Hayn, this could increase the validity and recognition of the Young Adult Literature genre as a relatively new perspective

in literary studies. Hayn highlights the potential of Young Adult Literature as a means of building a global perspective, namely by enhancing intracultural and intercultural understanding.

Meanwhile, Sanders (2010) highlights several characters in the novel **Does My Head Look Big In This** who represent "One True Believer" who is fanatical about their religion, such as Amal's mother, Laila, who is Muslim, and Amal's neighbor, Mr. Vassali, who is Orthodox. Contrary to Sanders, Majid (2016) finds that the hijab, as a representation of Muslims and a symbol of Islam in the novel **Does My Head Look Big In This**, actually demonstrates a commitment to one's religion. Thus, the hijab, as a symbolic representation, is not only a symbol of spirituality but also a form of freedom of expression in public spaces. In this case, the hijab serves as a means of demonstrating identity and enhancing the wearer's sense of self/personhood.

Meanwhile, the novel *The Tribe* has also been extensively studied by several researchers, including Lahcen (2014), Hage (2014), and Bayeh (2017). Lahcen (2014) analyzed the experiences of the Arab-Australian immigrant community, particularly Lebanese Muslims, in *The Tribe*. Lahcen (2014) explored forms of racism and discrimination in public spaces that influence the identity of Lebanese immigrants. He also questioned the effectiveness of the multicultural approach in Australia. In his research, he found that Lebanese immigrants are often perceived as foreigners in public spaces. He further argued that the use of Arabic or an Arabic accent in English communication is a target of stigmatization, causing young immigrants to feel inferior. He also found that these immigrant youth engage in forced assimilation by abandoning ancestral traditions in order to gain social acceptance. This article demonstrates that racism is not only physical but also spatial and linguistic. It critiques Australia's multiculturalism policies, which are considered mere formalities, and the dominance of white supremacy in public spaces.

In contrast to Lahcen, Hage (2014) in his article analyzes the complex relationship between emotional experience and domestic space and kinship in *The Tribe*. Hage (2014) provides a critical analysis of this novel from an anthropological ethnographic perspective. Hage (2014) finds that the novel maps a communal space where individual privacy is negated by shared ownership. He also finds that the novel exhibits a genuine "naive art" effect due to the use of Bani's childlike perspective. Hage's (2014) article strengthens the argument that racially marginalized communities possess resilient spaces, namely, spaces of self-preservation where they can be themselves without fear of external judgment.

In contrast to Lahcen and Hage (2014), Bayeh (2017) uses a comparative literary approach to examine several Arab-Australian diasporic fiction works, including those by Fattah and Ahmad. Bayeh (2017) maps the works of Arab-Australian authors within the Australian national literary landscape and the transnational network of Arab diasporic fiction. In her article, she found that Arab-Australian fiction shares core themes with Australian national literature, namely land, identity, and violence resulting from dispossession. Bayeh (2017) also found that these works demonstrate resistance to stereotypes and the representation of space. She proposed an analytical model that no longer compartmentalizes literature based on national borders but instead examines its transnational connections.

The articles discussing the novels **Does My Head Look Big in This** and **The Tribe** mentioned above do not specifically address identity negotiation and identity contestation within the Arab-Australian immigrant community represented in the literature, nor do they address the ideological perspectives of diasporic Muslim youth within them. However, identity negotiation and ideological perspectives of Muslim youth, as a hallmark of contemporary Muslim youth identity, are important to examine, especially when considering the voices of specific Arab-Muslim immigrant communities in relation to other Arab-Australian Muslim immigrant communities and the dominant power of Australian society. This gap will be explored in this research.

Method

This research uses textual analysis, a data analysis method that thoroughly examines the content and meaning of texts, their discursive structures, or discourse. Textual analysis is a term used to refer to various qualitative method models. Textual analysis is a method that enhances understanding of the construction of meaning in various cultural texts, including narrative analysis, discourse analysis, structural analysis, post-structural analysis, and postmodern text analysis. Textual analysis currently encompasses the ideological implications of factual and fictional texts, as well as various forms of texts that blend the two. Textual analysis is not intended to identify the "correct" interpretation of a text, but rather to explore various possible interpretations because texts are polysemic, meaning they have a variety of meanings and interpretations. (Given, 2008)

From a postcolonial perspective, the identity construction of diasporic Muslim youth is always intertwined with the identities of their homeland and host cultures. In this process, negotiations of bicultural blending occur, resulting in a hybrid culture. The concept of hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha is one of the main theoretical frameworks in postcolonial studies, particularly as formulated in **The Location of Culture**. In Bhabha's thinking, hybridity is not understood as simply the blending or fusion of two distinct cultures, but rather as a process of negotiation that takes place in what he calls a third space (Umar & Lawan, 2024). Bhabha emphasizes that hybridity is a dynamic and ongoing process, not a fixed end product. Hybridity emerges through unequal interactions between different cultures, where power relations, ambivalence, mimicry, and resistance are intertwined. This process presents an understanding of identity as fluid, contextual, and continually negotiated. In this context, Bhabha's theory of hybridity enables the analysis of cultural identities, including the identities of diasporic subjects, as the result of discursive practices that are always in the process of becoming, particularly in societies shaped by colonial experiences and their postcolonial legacies (Bhabha, 1994).

Through a critical examination of Bhabha's theory, Umar and Lawan demonstrate that hybridity is an analytical mechanism that opens up space for understanding identity, power relations, and the production of meaning in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Bhabha's hybridity theory is also applied in literary and cultural studies, particularly in the analysis of diasporic community identities. In this context, hybridity is used to explain how diasporic subjects maintain cultural ties to both their homeland and their host country, thus forming dual, fluid, and negotiating identities. Studies of cultural hybridity and identity formation in global society demonstrate the complexity of the adaptation and acculturation processes experienced by individuals in multicultural spaces. In this context, hybridity is seen as an almost inevitable process in the effort to integrate into the dominant society, even though individuals often face feelings of alienation and homelessness. The concept of the third space becomes an important analytical tool for understanding this condition, particularly in explaining experiences of ambivalence and in-betweenness (Umar & Lawan, 2024).

Bhandari further stated that the Third Space Theory proposed by Homi K. Bhabha is an important concept in postcolonial studies that offers an analytical framework for understanding cultural identity, hybridity, displacement, and cross-cultural interactions. This theory starts from the assumption that identity formation does not occur through a simple process of assimilation or cultural separation, but rather through the dynamics that occur in the in-between space, namely the space between where new cultural forms and subjectivities emerge. Third Space is understood as a space of negotiation and resistance, which critically challenges the meaning of fixed identities. Bhabha's Third Space Theory is used to analyze the construction of cultural identity in various contexts. In literary studies, this theory is used to examine how diasporic subjects form new identities under the influence of biculturalism, as represented by characters in novels (Bhandari, 2022).

In Stuart Hall's framework, identity is a process of becoming/becoming that is dynamic and always transforming. Identity is formed through social relations and representational practices that determine the socio-political positioning of subjects. This positioning will always bring the original identity (the past) in relation to the current identity (Hall in William & Chrisman (Ed) 1993).

Findings

The findings of this study can be seen in the following table:

Aspect	Does My Head Look Big In This	The Tribe
Theme Focus	Adaptive construction of Muslim adolescent identity	Collective Identity Construction
Types of Conflict	External, against stereotypes	Internal, reinforcing marginalization/liminality
Narrative Strategy	Providing enlightenment/education through adaptation	Demonstrating Fragmentation through resistance

Result

Representation of the identity of Muslim diaspora youth in the novels *Does My Head Look Big In This* and *The Tribe*

The two novels studied present representations of Arab-Australian Muslim culture within the dynamics of religious commitment, family influence, and multicultural expectations. This is evident in the interactions between the main characters in **Does My Head Look Big in This?** and those in **The Tribe**. One issue raised in **Does My Head Look Big in This?** and **The Tribe** is the role of the family as the center of life and also as a social control for family members. This is closely related to the community's commitment to preserving ancestral heritage, particularly in relation to socio-cultural norms of origin. However, there is a shift in perspective, especially among adolescents; for example, Amal in **Does My Head Look Big In This** feels that her perspective differs significantly from her extended family's regarding the importance of covering women's bodies through the hijab in public spaces. Bari in **The Tribe** feels strange about the way her extended family maintains community integrity and preserves ancestral culture through arranged marriages.

I'm sick of obsessing about my body, what guys are going to think about my cleavage and calves and shoulder to hip ratio. And for the love of everything that is good and holy I am sick of worrying what people are going to think if I put on a kilo or have a pimple. (DMHLBiT Chapter 1 pp 6).

The novel *"Does My Head Look Big In This"* tells the story of Amal, a 16-year-old Muslim teenager of Palestinian-Egyptian descent, a student at an elite high school who decides to wear the hijab full-time, including at school. This raises questions from the principal and her friends. Amal's own parents even doubt their daughter's decision. After facing various obstacles, including from her parents, Amal finally steadfastly wears the hijab full-time as a sign of her identity. Amal's choice to wear the hijab as a marker of identity was made after much deliberation. She went through a process to arrive at her decision. Amal considered the potential reactions of various parties: her school, family, friends, neighbors, and the Australian community with a different culture from her own.

Meanwhile, *The Tribe* explains the importance of community as the guardian of ancestral culture, regulating the continuity of socio-cultural norms. Communal ties are maintained through arranged marriages, which ensure the continuity of kinship among community members. Elderly women are

presented as powerful and respected figures, but young women must submit to community rules, including regarding dress..

The girlfriends are always taller than everyone else in The House of Adam except for maybe Uncle Ali. They wear black high heels and tight black miniskirts and tight tops that are thin from the shoulders and tied up around the back, exposing flesh that my sisters are taught never to expose because a woman's body is sacred. (DMHLBiT Chapter 1 pp 24).

Both novels demonstrate that family structure, background, and religious practices play a central role in shaping the complex identities of Arab-Australian Muslim adolescent characters. This is primarily due to social pressures from the dominant culture, expectations of assimilation, and experiences of marginalization. On the other hand, the two novels also demonstrate differences, particularly in the strategies of negotiation and resistance employed.

In DMHLB, Amal, who is originally from an upper-class family, faces opposition from her extended family for upholding her Arab-Muslim heritage, specifically wearing the hijab. This occurs because her extended family is concerned that the hijab will limit Amal's social interactions in the multicultural Australian environment. However, Amal's interactions with her friends at school and outside of school are not hindered by her hijab, despite being accompanied by curious stares from her peers. Through Amal's character, these texts demonstrate that wearing the hijab is not a barrier to engaging in adolescent activities such as rollerblading, hanging out at the mall, or even simply dining out with friends. Even school, a public space, allows Amal to wear her hijab, despite the risk of being questioned by her peers regarding this identity marker. A different perspective is presented in *The Tribe*. In TT, their ancestral culture, Lebanese Arab, consistently dominates their family and community life. This text barely depicts the interaction of community members with the dominant culture of multicultural Australia. Communal living allows them to comfortably embrace the ancestral traditions maintained in Australia, where they now reside. This also demonstrates that strong family ties and a collective responsibility to preserve ancestral culture are a unifying force for each family member.

The representations presented in these two novels demonstrate the dynamic nature of Arab immigrant identity formation in Australia. In the context of **Does My Head Look Big in This?**, the identity Amal and her family present is more able to interact with the dominant culture and are comfortable with this interaction. This creates a hybrid space that allows for the integration of ancestral and dominant cultures. In **The Tribe**, the integration of ancestral culture with dominant Australian culture does not occur. The identity formations depicted demonstrate alternative identities within the dynamics of Arab Australian immigrant life. This dynamic also demonstrates that the meaning of Australian multiculturalism does not necessarily imply the integration of ancestral and dominant cultures. In *The Tribe*, despite the lack of integration, the Bani family is still able to live comfortably in Australia due to the communal ties they have maintained for generations. This demonstrates that Australian multiculturalism does not necessarily imply an understanding of the dominant culture and ancestral culture. Rather, multiculturalism can mean an inclusive space provided to every Australian citizen, including immigrants. Therefore, the necessity of understanding a multicultural Australia will necessarily bring values of inclusivity and respect for exclusivity.

Identity is a crucial aspect of a person's psyche, where people have specific concepts of who they are as individuals and what they should do. Identity also governs every aspect of our lives because we often make decisions based on who we are as individuals. Hall (1996) states that identity is a process of becoming, not a state of being, in which a person questions the historical, linguistic, and cultural resources that have influenced how they have been represented and how they can represent themselves. This process of becoming is what occurs in the character of Amal. This is evident in the following quote:

I'm terrified. But at the same time I feel like my passion and conviction in Islam are bursting inside me and I want to prove to myself that I'm strong enough to wear a badge of my faith. I believe it will make me feel so close to God. Because it's damn hard to walk around with people staring at your "nappy head" and not feel kind of pleased with yourself – if you manage to get through the stares and comments with your head held high. That's when this warm feeling buzzes through you and you smile to yourself, knowing God's watching you, knowing that He knows you're trying to be strong to please Him. Like you're both in on a private joke and something special and warm and extraordinary is happening and nobody in the world knows about it because it's your own experience, your own personal friendship with your Creator. I guess when I'm not wearing the hijab I feel like I'm missing out. I feel cheated out of that special bond. (DMHLBiT Chapter 2 pp 5).

Amal realized that the process of searching for identity that occurred within her began with a strong awareness of the truth of her faith, Islam. There was an inner drive that made her confident and bold in showing her Islamic identity through the symbolic practice of wearing the hijab. In this case, the hijab for her represented Amal's efforts to be closer to her God. Although initially there was doubt because Amal was aware of the risks that would occur with this decision. Amal knew that wearing the hijab would invite suspicious looks and negative comments from those who saw it. However, Amal convinced herself that she would be able to overcome these obstacles. Her hesitation was rooted in an awareness of the situation around Amal, who had a different perspective on the hijab. They generally still considered the hijab a symbol of difference. Meanwhile, Amal saw the hijab as a means of self-protection from worldly images of beauty. Furthermore, Amal also viewed the practice of wearing the hijab as a form of freedom and empowerment for women; at least free from the obligation to appear charming with makeup that seemed to be a woman's obligation. In the following quote, Amal expresses her feelings about wearing the hijab:

I felt protected from all the crap about beauty and image. As scared as I was walking around the shops in the hijab, I was also experiencing a feeling of empowerment and freedom. I know I have a long way to go. I still dressed to impress and I took ages to get my make-up, clothes and hijab just right. But I didn't feel I was compromising myself by wanting to make an impression. I was looking and feeling good on my own terms, and boy did that feel awesome. (DMHLBiT Chapter 3 pp23)

The quote above also implies a difference in Amal's perspective on beauty compared to most women. Furthermore, in her search for identity, Amal also recognizes the plurality of opinions among Muslim women regarding the hijab. In other words, Amal's thoughts as a teenager are already transitioning into adulthood, marked by a willingness to accept differences. Amal acknowledges the similarities within these differences. This difference is also demonstrated by her extended family, especially her aunt, who opposes Amal wearing the hijab. Her aunt represents the fear of society's perspective that Amal's hijab will further marginalize Amal and be considered an outcast by Australian society. In fact, Amal's aunt's attitude represents the majority of immigrants who attempt to enter the dominant Australian culture by abandoning their native culture. This attitude is taken, among other things, for reasons of survival, due to concerns about their survival in Australia. Meanwhile, Amal's mother, who supports Amal's hijab, demonstrates that, in her experience, the hijab is not a reason for immigrants to be marginalized. The differences in attitudes among immigrants, represented by Aunt Amal and Mrs. Amal, demonstrate that within the diaspora community itself, differing perspectives exist. These differences are not something to be disputed, but merely a manifestation of the diversity of immigrants in their efforts to integrate into Australia's dominant multicultural culture. Thus, this is done as an effort to socially integrate for the sake

of survival in Australia. This difference also shows that this text offers two voices within one community. It is inevitable that within a community, there will be differences in views on ancestral culture or the culture of origin. This text offers that culture of origin is not something static, but rather that immigrants can use it as a space to develop a new identity or maintain an old identity with compromise. Thus, what emerges is a hybrid space in which there is both ambivalence and adaptation. Amal's attitude towards these differences demonstrates an awareness that there can be harmony within existing differences. Differences in hijab use are highly personal, depending on culture and taste. This is evident in the following quote:

"So are they Muslim, like you?" "Yeah they are. But, every girl is going to interpret the hijab differently. It depends on their culture or their fashion sense, you know? There's no one uniform for it." "I get you," Adam says. (DMHLBiT Chapter 7 pp 55)

Besides the culture inherited from the family, another factor that determines the different perspectives on the representation of Muslim adolescents among Arab immigrants is the issue of fashion taste. Fashion taste is strongly determined by social class. In the novel "Does My Head Look In This," Amal comes from an educated upper class. Therefore, her fashion taste is quite stylish, as seen in the hijab she wears, which attracts the attention of her friends. In this regard, it will be seen differently in "The Tribe," which presents a woman not only as an uneducated immigrant but also as someone who tends to dress old-fashioned. The family as the center of life is clearly seen in "The Tribe," but in "Does My Head Look Big In This," the family plays a role of social control, but not as the center of life. In Amal's character, the family is seen as a dynamic social control in the sense that it is not coercive. Likewise, school is a place that is quite able to understand the differences in identity displayed by Amal. In fact, school becomes the area or area where Amal integrates her identity into the dominant Australian culture, among other things by providing enlightenment to her friends who are curious about her appearance. Amal also provides enlightenment about the variations found in her ancestral culture. Here, it appears that the text "Does My Head Look In This" attempts to open itself to dominant Australian culture in order to understand the culture of the Arab-Australian diaspora. This is further clarified in the following quote,

"So you and I, we believe in the same thing after all?" "Well . . . not exactly. See, we don't believe Jesus was God, or the son of God. We believe he was one of the mightiest prophets of God, and performed miracles with God's permission, like healing the blind, curing the lepers." (DMHLBiT Chapter 15 pp 111)

From the quote above, it is clear that this text seeks to provide an understanding that the ancestral culture of the Arab-Australian diaspora actually has similarities with the dominant Australian culture, especially in the quote above, regarding the context of divinity. This text provides the view that their divine concepts of God and Jesus are actually concepts of divinity that exist within the faith of the Arab Australian diaspora community, as well as within the dominant culture of Australia's multicultural society. This text provides a gap for social integration through the concept of divinity, which is actually very personal. This is because matters of faith are rarely made public consumption in Australia. Matters of belief are considered a private domain that should not be discussed in public areas. This novel breaks this taboo, that to understand a community group, it is inevitable to also understand the concept of divinity that it adheres to. This is, among other things, so that social integration that occurs is not only on the surface related to cultural and religious practices, but also goes deeper, even related to concepts of faith that are not displayed in public. The fundamentals of religious belief are crucial in young adult novels, given that the search for identity is a natural process for adolescents.

Meanwhile, in **The Tribe**, religious issues are localized to the religions practiced by members of the diaspora community. **The Tribe** completely ignores life outside its community. Consequently, there is no discussion of the friction between the communal life of the Arab diaspora and the dominant Australian society. This absence of issues related to interaction with the dominant cultural society appears deliberate, indicating that the text does not allow for cultural hybridity. This contrasts sharply with **Does My Head Look Big In This**, where the main character, Amal, is the agent of cultural hybridity. In **The Tribe**, the text does not address issues related to social integrity at all, but only shows the internal life of the community with all its dynamics. Among other things, the community acts as a social control, monitoring each member to ensure they remain within the corridors of collective awareness of their connection to their ancestral homeland. This is evident in the following quote,

The problem is that everybody in The Tribe is related to everybody else so a personal matter like this affects the entire community. Saad isn't only related to my mum, he's also related to the bride, because he's married to Zubaida's cousin, Randa. (TT Chapter 2/The Children of Yocheved pp 57).

The quote above demonstrates the strong familial bonds among the community members, making them feel connected and preserving the memory of their ancestral homeland. A small problem experienced by a community member will affect all members of the community. This also concerns the lives of the community's adolescent members. What happens to these adolescents will be the concern of all community members.

On the other hand, in the novel **Does My Head Look Big In This**, Amal, as a teenager, is aware of this attempt to standardize identity. This is especially true during pre-adolescence, when the foundations of religious beliefs are being established. This is considered crucial because it provides a foundation for the identity search process in later life, especially for adolescents like Amal. With a strong foundation, the adolescent's identity search process becomes more focused. Meanwhile, the concept of identity refers to (a) identity as a non-instrumental form of social action; (b) identity as a collective phenomenon of group similarity; (c) identity as a deep and fundamental form of self; (d) identity as a product of interactive, processual, and contingent social action. and (e) identity as a fluctuating, unstable, and fragmented mode of 'self' (Malevic, 2006).

Some of these notions of identity seem to align with Amal's experience. In Australia's heterogeneous and multicultural society, Amal was aware of cultural differences outside their community as a child. They were encouraged to recognize that there was an ancestral culture from their home country that must be preserved and that informs their lives today. This is evident in the following quote:

At Hidayah we were all going through the same thing. Whenever we felt like a mishmash of identities and started to wonder what our place was here, there was Mr Aziz telling us we didn't need to apologize for our heritage. Sometimes I just don't know what to think and I can't even be bothered trying to work it out. I know one thing though. There's nothing scarier than fearing your future won't live up to all you've dreamed it to be. (DMHLBiT Chapter 26 pp 172-173).

From this quote, it is clear that Amal experienced her parents attempting to instill a unified identity within their community through uniformity, including at school. This uniformity led Amal to question her own identity, as on the one hand, she was being pressured to conform to her identity at her old school. Meanwhile, Amal realized that there were different identities outside of school. This triggered an identity crisis among diaspora youth, especially when many of her friends questioned her identity markers, such as why she was Muslim, why she wore the hijab, and so on. Amal's role as an agent who enlightened the Australian community about all their curiosity about Islam, on the one hand, made her an important

Muslim teenager to bridge this cultural hybridity. On the other hand, as a teenager, she also felt the limitation that just because she was Muslim did not mean she could answer all her friends' questions. Her friends' expectations of her as an all-knowing person were a burden for Amal. However, on the other hand, this created a very potential space for the creation of a hybrid identity. In fact, Amal herself is not much different from her friends, especially when it comes to the practices of everyday teenage life. While Amal is aware of the limitations outlined by Islam on several matters, such as relationships between men and women and women's appearance, this does not mean that Amal is an expert in these matters.

"No? Oh, come on, Amal! Please. It'll really spice up our next Forum meeting. Everybody's got loads of questions and you're the perfect one to answer them." "Why? Because I'm Muslim?" "Yeah, obviously." She gives me a "well, duh" expression. (DMHLBiT Chapter 30 pp 198)

Some of these cultural differences include relationships between men and women and attitudes regarding them. In Amal's Islamic faith, kissing between men and women is forbidden, while in Western (Australian) culture, it is considered a manifestation of affection and love. This difference in views on kissing practices led to a misunderstanding between Amal and Adam, her schoolmate who had feelings for her. Based on her beliefs, Amal felt that kissing should only be done with the man who would become her future husband. Adam viewed Amal's views as archaic and backward.

Adam's opinion represents the dominant Australian society that attaches backward stereotypes to diaspora youth like Amal. This reinforces the idea that, despite Australia's multicultural society, the backward stereotypes they attach to immigrants will never disappear. This leads diaspora youth to be perceived as outsiders. The view that Muslims like herself are backward is also shared by Amal's other friends. They asked Amal if she could operate modern household appliances. As seen in the following quote::

"Amal, do you think I'm going to walk around like a wuss just because you didn't – because of what happened at my party? So I tried to kiss you and you didn't want to because your religion says you can't have a normal relationship with a guy before you find the one. That's fine and good luck to you. It's your life. I mean, it was something that just happened in the moment so don't stress, I'm really very over it." "Oh. . ." This is the wrong moment to be speechless. Where is my comeback line? Come on brain (DMHLBiT Chapter 31 pp 205)

The quote above shows that there is still a gap between the practices of diaspora youth and those in the dominant Australian society, particularly regarding their perceptions of the marginalization of immigrants. Faced with such stereotypes, Amal represents middle-class diaspora youth who are actually in the same educational class as Australians. Therefore, these stereotypes are merely inherent thoughts, not actual conditions. With her parents as doctors, it would have been easy for Amal to dismiss these stereotypes. However, Amal still experiences ambivalence: a situation where she feels equal to the dominant Australian society, yet the stereotype of marginalization remains unshakable. This is evident in the quote above, "This is the wrong moment to be speechless. Where is my comeback line? Come on, brain." This implies that she must be able to explain to her friends that as an educated diaspora, she is not only Arab but also Australian. This means that Amal may be of Arab descent, but her education, attitudes, and thinking are as advanced as those of the dominant Australian society. This is what she must express so that her friends understand that the stereotype does not apply to her.

However, Amal wasn't surprised, as this wasn't the first time she'd experienced such stereotypes. Unbeknownst to her, Amal had become an agent of enlightenment for her friends and herself. She had also

become an agent for immigrants, especially diaspora youth, who had long been victims of stereotypes. Therefore, Amal tried to explain all the answers to her friends' questions for the benefit of diaspora youth, so they wouldn't become the next victims of stereotypes. This is evident in the following quote,

"This is my second. The first was in the foyer, when we first arrived. She wanted to know if I was a Muslim, what my TER score was, and did I attend university or technical college. This one now asked me if I was Christian and knew how to cook and speak Arabic. I told her I was a Muslim who could use a microwave and speak a little Urdu, and would that do?" "No way!" (DMHLBiT Chapter 34 pp 221)

The same thing is also shown in the novel *The Tribe*, that Arab-Australian immigrants are indeed uneducated, thus reinforcing the dominant Australian society's view that Arab immigrants are a different race. This is evident in the following quote;

He will walk in, crawl up into the sheets and whisper into my ear, 'You know I love you the most. That's why I always buy you books.' He actually means magazines, but neither of us knows the difference. I am never sure if he is telling the truth, but it's always enough to get me back into the living room. (TT Chapter 1/The House of Adam pp 23).

The Tribe shows that both characters cannot even distinguish between books and magazines. This demonstrates the low literacy rate within the Arab-Australian community. It also demonstrates the novel's uniqueness, which does not attempt to establish social integration between Arab culture and Australia's multicultural culture. Instead of explaining the conditions, the novel only shows the internal situation of life within the Arab-Australian community. This contrasts with the novel **Does My Head Look Big In This**, which attempts to explain Amal's condition as being on the same level as her white friends. The second novel, however, does not attempt to show leveling up or striving to be equal to white society. Herein lies the true representation the novel seeks to convey: that in Australia's multicultural society, immigrants are also fragmented. Some, like Amal's extended family, are educated and always strive to exist in a hybrid space, striving for social integration with the dominant culture. On the other hand, there are immigrants in the same situation as the second novel, living within the Arab community and making no effort to make their lives equal to most white Australians. This appears to be deliberate, demonstrating that not all immigrants have to live in a hybrid space. They aren't trying to be understood by mainstream culture. Nor are they trying to escape Islamophobia. They're simply being themselves.

The stereotype of immigrants like Amal as backward is a manifestation of Islamophobia in the West, including in Australia. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (2010) defines Islamophobia as discrimination and prejudice against Muslims based on their religion. Meanwhile, Said (1978, p. 317) argues that the Western perception of Islam is typically one of a fearful mass phenomenon. This often results in various forms of bigotry and prejudice directed at Islam and its followers. American Muslims are tormented by the Western perception of Islam as a major terrorist threat, especially after 9/11.

Some people might find this ironic, but when I think about it, it's mainly been the migrants in my life who have inspired me to understand what it means to be an Aussie. To be a hyphenated Australian. It's been the "wogs", the "nappy heads", the "foreigners" the "persons of Middle Eastern appearance", the Asians, the "oppressed" women, the Greek Orthodox pensioner chain-smoker, the "salami eaters", the "ethnics", the narrow-minded and the educated, the fair-dinkum wannabes, the principal with hairy ears who showed me that I am a colourful adjective. It's their stories and confrontations and pains and joys which have empowered me to know myself,

challenged me to embrace my identity as a young Australian-Palestinian-Muslim girl. (DMHLBiT Chapter 45 pp 276)

The quote above implies that Amal feels, as an Australian Muslim immigrant, isolated and discriminated against, with various labels attached to her, such as "wogs," "nappy heads," "foreigners," and "persons of Middle Eastern appearance." These labels certainly demonstrate othering from a postcolonial perspective. Rather than being bothered by the stereotypes, discrimination, and othering she experiences, they actually make Amal even more determined to solidify her identity as an Australian Muslim teenager of Palestinian descent or an Arab-Australian Muslim teenager.

This quote makes Amal feel as if she is being forced to become Australian, while feeling unable to separate herself from her Arab-Australian Muslim identity. The name Arab-Australian Muslim itself conveys an identity that conveys belonging to her country of origin and to Australia, where she now resides. As an Arab-Australian Muslim teenager, Amal strives to embrace all of these complex identities, making Amal a Muslim of Arab descent living in Australia. This labeling means that Amal, who clearly comes from an educated family, will forever experience Islamophobia and marginalization, despite her educational and financial standing as the majority of Australians. This situation places Amal in a complex hybrid space, as she cannot fully identify as Australian or Arab. Amal will always remain an Arab-Australian Muslim teenager.

Conclusion

The novels "Does My Head Look Big in This" and "The Tribe" represent the cultural identities of diasporic Muslim youth within the dynamics of Islam in Australia, as a manifestation of negotiations within the country's socio-political dynamics. This contestation of Muslim immigrant cultural identity with the dominant Australian culture is carried out, among other things, by creating communal bonds within the Arab-Australian immigrant group. These communal bonds serve as a means of negotiating cultural identity.

Within Stuart Hall's framework, diasporic identity is formed through the interaction between pre-existing conditions of "being," such as shared cultural and religious histories inherited from ancestors, and current conditions that combine new experiences in a new place with those ancestral heritages, creating "becoming." In the first novel, the character of Amal clearly demonstrates being and becoming. Amal expresses her Muslim identity through her decision to wear the hijab full-time, symbolizing her attachment to her ancestral homeland, cultural heritage, and her family's religion. Meanwhile, in her new experiences, Amal confronts the social realities of school, wearing the hijab, which raises questions about stereotypes and prejudices from her peers and the school administration. Amal's decision to wear the hijab is a political statement that affirms her Muslim identity in the Australian public sphere. This is evident when Amal encounters discriminatory behavior from people regarding her hijab, reflecting how identity is formed within the intertwining relations of power and representation. Hall emphasizes that diasporic identity is never static; it is always in negotiation. In this context, Amal negotiates her position as a Muslim every time she interacts with an environment that questions her hijab, simultaneously testing her religious commitment to it.

Meanwhile, in the second novel, the identity of the main character, Bani Adam, is shaped primarily by "being," the cultural and religious heritage brought to her by the Lebanese Muslim community where she lives. Bani's life is almost entirely within the community, so she uses Arabic and performs Islamic rituals and Lebanese customs as part of her identity in Australia. Therefore, Bani's becoming process is not clearly visible. This is due to Bani's minimal interaction with the dominant culture of Australian society. Bani's change and search for identity proceed through her observations of the internal life of her community. This encompasses several differences of opinion between the older and younger generations regarding kinship

relationships, among community members, and the patriarchal system applied to these women. In this case, Bani's identity change begins with conflicts within the community, not from direct interaction with the dominant culture of Australian society. This is what differentiates the process of becoming Amal in the first novel from Bani in the second.

Furthermore, Amal, in the first novel, forms a hybrid identity that blends Islamic values with Australian social practices. This is evident in her daily activities as she engages in secular school life, interacts with friends of various faiths and ethnicities, and engages in the activities of metropolitan Australian youth. Amal does all of this within the boundaries of her beliefs. This hybrid identity is compromising and shapes Amal's unique identity as both a Muslim and a metropolitan Australian youth. Amal's hybrid identity combines a "traditional" identity, namely Muslim, with a "western" identity, namely Australian. This identity positions Amal as neither fully Western nor fully other. Thus, Amal exists in a space that places her outside of stereotypes.

Meanwhile, in the second novel, this Muslim community physically lives within the geographical territory of Australia but culturally maintains a social space as if they were living in their ancestral homeland. Thus, they are part of Australia yet separate from Australian society and the dominant white Australian culture. This hybrid identity is evident in the use of English mixed with Arabic in everyday conversation. In this case, her hybrid identity is more controlled by the community than by external interactions with Australian society.

Intergenerational conflict plays a crucial role in Amal's identity negotiations, demonstrating the first generation's awareness of the challenges of integration. Younger generations, like Amal, are more willing to assert their Muslim identity. Furthermore, Amal's interactions with her non-Muslim friends demonstrate Amal's cultural identity negotiations, particularly when Amal attempts to avoid physical contact with the opposite sex while maintaining emotional closeness with them. Negotiations also occur when Amal must explain religious practices such as fasting during Ramadan and prayer. This reflects the cultural dynamics described by Bhabha, where Muslims attempt to translate the values of one cultural context into a language understandable to those in another.

Meanwhile, in the second novel, the most dominant conflict is intergenerational negotiation. The older generation, born and raised in Lebanon, upholds traditional values of strict kinship ties and a patriarchal system. Meanwhile, younger generations, like Bani and her cousin, demonstrate greater adaptation to Australian culture, even within the confines of their community, due to limited interaction with the outside world. Observing these community dynamics, Bani begins to recognize the presence of these "two worlds." This shows that Bani identity is negotiated within the internal dynamics of the community which prepares Bani to interact with other cultures, not only in majority-minority cultural encounters.

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