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***Hijab Politics as Part of the Cultural
Identity in Randa Abdel-Fattah's
Does My Head Look Big in This?(2005)***

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Master Degree in English: Literature & Civilisation**

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DEDICATION

With all of my gratitude, I would like to dedicate this work to:

Allah who made all this possible.

My dear parents who believed in me.

My brothers and sister who supported me.

My best friends who stood by me.

And all who have been there to support me in my study journey.

DEDICATION

I am pleased to dedicate my work:

First of all to my dear father who always supports me to achieve well and do my best.

To the light of my life, who always sacrifices to give me the best, my mother.

To my sisters and brothers: Seif Eddine, Sara, Abdelbasset, Maria

To my fiancé Mohammed and his family.

To my partner in the research Iman Ben Mahia.

To all my beloved friends and family.

Abstract

This dissertation is based on Randa Abdel-Fattah's first novel, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005). The novel is noteworthy because of its decisive representation of *hijab*-wearing Muslim women who lives in the West and had to represent their identity and religion after the world events of 9/11. The ultimate aim of this study is to try to investigate how Muslim families practice religious rituals and cultural traditions of Islam in a new land. This study focuses precisely on one particular period of time, the post 9/11, and on one religious code, the veil, which was widely practiced by Muslim women in Australia at the time as showing loyalty to Islam. A thematic descriptive –analytical approach is used with referring to the chosen concepts of Postcolonial Theory of Cultural and Ethnic Hybridity of Homi Bhabha and to the cultural and social psychological theories of identity to foreground the analysis of this study. This dissertation adopts the contest of young women's representation of the veil to contest the mainstream representations of Muslim women.

Keywords: rituals, traditions, identity, Post-Colonial Theory of Cultural and Ethnic Hybridity, social psychology, hijab or the veil.

ملخص

بني أساس هذه الأطروحة على الرواية الأولى لرندة عبد الفتاح "هل يبدو رأسي كبيراً في هذا؟" (2005). تكمن أهمية هذه الرواية في تجسيدها لالتزام المسلمات المغتربات بتعاليم الإسلام و تقاليد المجتمعات المسلمة و ذلك من خلال ارتداء الحجاب خاصة في الفترة الحرجة التي عقب أحداث 11 سبتمبر التي تميزت بشكل خاص بارتداء عدد كبير من المسلمات المغتربات للحجاب في أستراليا كوسيلة لإظهار إخلاصهن و التزامهن للإسلام و كرمز لهوايتهن. و اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على الأسلوب التحليلي الوصفي مركزة على نظرية التهجين العرقي و الحضاري "الهومي بابا". تتبنى هذه الدراسة الصراع الذي تعانيه المسلمات المحجبات في المجتمع الغربي من تفنيد و تمييز

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General Introduction

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

The events of 9 /11 of the United States and the Bali bombing marked a turning point in the field of literature in general and in Muslim women literature in particular. The events affected Muslim women in the West more than any group and attempted to rationalize a stereotypical position about Muslim women as being oppressed.

Muslim women writers like Leila Ahmed, Amiri Fizourah, Amrah Abdul Majid, Mohja Kahf and Randa Abdel-Fattah are one of these female writers who stood for their beliefs and used literature to proudly express their Muslim identity. Through their novels, which are considered as the most famous form of writing that best portray one's reality, fiction, dream and perspective into words, Muslim women writers had the chance to transform their social concerns into books and to symbolise their ideas in writing. This chance was of great deal for these writers. Many women writers therefore, took the chance to be the voice of all women and to express their ideas, beliefs and identity.

One of these outstanding figures is the above mentioned Randa Abdel-Fattah; She (1979-till now) in most of all her ten works that are intended for young adult readers, focuses on the stereotypical images of ethnicity, the social psychology and hybridity and the implications of identity of young Muslims. Her novels are remarkably written to open eyes and positively change the perceptions of multiculturalism and to educate the reader about the image of 'other'. All the same, her themes are concerned with helping children and young adult with their difficult

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life journey. This subject matter is interestingly underscored in her famous novels, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), *Ten Things I Hate about Me* (2006) and *Where the Streets Had a Name* (2008).

Does My Head Look Big in This? is considered as the first novel by Abdel-Fattah into the journey of these young adults. The novel highlights the twisted life of a young Muslim Amal who decides to wear *hijab* as a representation of her Islamic identity. Even with her strong character, Amal struggles with presumptions, bullying and stereotypes in her school at Melbourne. Nevertheless, Amal succeeds to challenge others by standing against their perceptions and against herself. This is how the author reflects her life experience and challenges in her main character. Therefore, she is motivated to easily express the idea that was widely talked about by many Muslim and non-Muslim writers after the major world events of 9/11.

The value of this study lies in the role of the novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* in attempting to undertake serious selected themes about the struggles of Muslim women in the west, between their inner circle of loyalty to the Arab roots and patriotism to the West. Because this hybridity and hyphenated ethnicities of Muslims that heralded post 9/11 had modified a race and ethnic politics in the West, studies needed to be carried and opinions needed to be expressed on the ground of proving the status of standing out as proud *hijab* wearing women of their religion and wearing the *hijab* as a traditional and religious ritual code to represent their loyalty, faith and ethnic background. And this was perfectly portrayed in Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?*. Therefore, this study will aim at highlighting the aforementioned concepts.

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Since *Does My Head Look Big in This?* deals with the lifestyle and Islamic rituals of Muslims in the West after the terroristic events in 2001, and since the author is an alive embodied witness that lived in the West as a Muslim woman, this motivated us to learn the way of narration that Abdel-Fattah used in her novel as a means of describing the changes of the daily life of Muslims and the way they practice Islam after being suspicious and questionable. This also set us in motion to explore the hard life of diasporic Muslim women and investigate on how they acted upon and also to stand for the way they challenge the surrounding obstacles merely to proudly keep their Islamic rituals alive in a different home from their own.

On the background of the study described above, this dissertation aims at answering the following questions; as a central question: how traditions and rituals are portrayed in Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?*. And as a sub-question: to what degree does Randa Abdel-Fattah succeed to represent these rituals of Islamic families in her novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

What is hypothesized, hence, is that Abdel-Fattah's representation of the decision of wearing the veil by an Australian born young teenage girl in a critical period of time reflects how much she succeeded to convey the right perception and opinion about Muslims living in the West. Secondly, cultural traditions and religious rituals in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* are best portrayed in the female protagonist's hybrid identity, as well as in her family's life style.

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The post9/11 of the United States and the Bali bombing in Australia created the struggles of revealing oneself as a Muslim in the West and the challenge of proving the diasporic Arab identity. An analysis based on social psychological theories, Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* raises the questions of whether *Does My Head Look Big in This?* comfortably allows Arab and Western identity to share space without conflict and how did this fragmentation and diasporic identity appear among Abdel-Fattah's Muslim teenager characters and what strategies are used to revive Islamic traditions and rituals in a mainstream society.

As a primary literature that deals with Islamic traditions, rituals and questions of identity, Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?*(2005) takes a journey as an alternative narrator of a young female Australian-born Muslim girl, Amal, who decides to put her veil on full time in her new Melbourne private school. Unlike any other Young Adult Islamic writers whose literature is more didactic and preachy, rather, Abdel-Fattah uses the sense of humour and fun in her protagonist's character and drops the drama that might cause exhaustion and bitterness to both Western and non-Western readers. Putting the protagonist as an average Australian-Muslim girl who is trying to figure out the question of her mixed negotiated identity, Abdel-Fattah draws on the Islamic culture and practices within her main characters as a means of standing for Islam as a whole and as a way of representing Amal's decision of wearing the veil to be the ultimate religious code for Muslim females. Therefore, no literature had ever combined and portrayed all the above mentioned concepts in one book than Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

Moreover, the literature about diasporic Muslim women had taken two different directions of opposed opinions since these world events. For this reason, it

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is compulsory to take an overview of the diasporic feminist writers and their views on Islamic feminism in the West as their second home. The chosen source that dictates it all is *Notions of Home for Diasporic Muslim Women Writers* by R. S. Hashim and N. F. Abdul Manaf. They survey the writings by two Muslim women writers. Despite the same Islamic origins, these two writers came from different backgrounds and therefore are chosen for having opposed opinions on their perception of home, of Islam and of the sense of identity which they express in their novels. As a positive enthusiast diasporic writer about Islam and the veil, Mohja Kahf is the first chosen writer by Hashim and Abdul Manaf as they see her as a regular fighter against any form of marginalization of Muslim women. Azar Nafisi is seen as the opposed Muslim exiled Iranian writer whose work depicts home and identity as filled of much anger and bitterness (Hashim and Abdul Manaf 2009). This comparison draws great attention to diasporic Muslim women writings and their images of the home they no longer belong.

Jo Lampert's analysis (2005) of *Does My Head Look Big in This?* was based on the background of the post 9/11 events. Arabs in the West at the time found themselves in difficult position. Young Adult fiction Arab writers faced the same with their characters. As Lampert states, that for the protagonist Amal, in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* finding a mere stability between being western and holding to the commitment to Islam is of hard task. Lampert supports his analysis relying on the postcolonial theories of racial and ethnic hybridity of Bhabha explaining how people like Amal may adopt different identities at different times. According to Lampert, Abdel-Fattah is presenting the conflict of identity within her main character as being one of 'us' the westerns or one of 'them' the terrorists. But unlike other different Muslim women writers' characters, as Lampert compares it to

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Labibeh in *Alone and All Together* where she seeks to be 'all together' with her American family, Abdel-Fattah's is rebellious and keeping her Muslim identity with pride. At last, Jo Lampert concludes: '*Abdel-Fattah's novel constructs the possibility of a more vocally resistant Muslim identity*'.

Identity is a complex changing process through which we understand and make sense of our surroundings. Our sense of belonging and our striving for recognition is formed through relations between different members of a society. An introductory statement used by Ouazzif in her book *Veiled Muslim Women in Australian in Public Space: How do Veiled Women Express their Presence and Interact in the Workplace?* as to illustrate veiled Muslim women's diverse identity in Australia. Like Lampert, Ouazzif's analysis is linked to post 9/11, and basically the Bali bombing in Australia. But unlike Lampert, Ouazzif goes really deep in the process of wearing the veil in public spaces and the way working Muslim women deal with it. Since *Does My Head Look Big in This?* deals with a young Muslim teenager Amal, deciding to put the veil on and be exposed in her school as a Muslim girl in public space, this source is of great help to base the analysis of how do veiled women express their presence in public spaces to Amal's decision and how does she interact in her study place. Ouazzif concludes: "*They understood the hijab to be empowering and concluded that being veiled and an active professional proved that wearing the hijab did not hinder women from achieving what they want*".

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The represented study is essentially based on the thematic analysis of the traditions and rituals portrayed in Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* at the objective of exploring the life of Islamic families after 9/11 and the Bali bombing in Australia and to highlight the way they practice Islam and the hardships of it. The material sources for this research will be collected from both primary and secondary data. The primary data will be chosen from the novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* as the first literary work written by Randa Abdel-Fattah. The secondary data will be collected from other books, articles, newspapers and magazines.

The suggested study is a thematic analysis of the traditional and religious aspects in Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* The work thus, is divided into three chapters; one theoretical chapter and two practical chapters. Chapter One deals with the Historical Overview of the study and Theories on Veiled Muslim Women. The Historical overview engages the literature written by diasporic women on the basis of the effects of the events of the 9/11 and the Bali bombing on the living conditions of Muslims there during that time. The overview of Theories on Veiled Muslim Women as a complementary part focuses on the Social Psychological Theories of Religious Identity and the Postcolonial Theory of Ethnic and Cultural Hybridity and Muslim women writings in post 9/11. For the practical part that highlights a literary analysis of the novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* we analyse, in Chapter Two, how the wearing of *hijab* by Muslim women was taking as a code for representing their religion; and in Chapter Tree we demonstrate the traditions of Islam as an identity of Muslims in the West.

Chapter One

A Theoretical Part: Islamic Literature and Theories on Veiled Muslim Women: Historical Overview

Introduction

1. The Voice of Muslim Women Writers in Literature

1.1. Diasporic Muslim Women Writers and the Veil

2. The Historical Overview and the Representation of *Hijab* in The West

2.1. The Veil as A Representation of Islam In the West

2.2. The Historical Background of *Hijab*

2.3. The Term *Hijab* in Literature

2.4. The West Media and Stereotypes on *Hijab*

3. The Social Psychological Theories and Hybridity

3.1 The Social Psychological Theories of Religious Identity

3.2. Postcolonial Theory of Ethnic and Cultural Hybridity

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Introduction

Since the recent world events including the destruction of the World Trade Central, the London bombings and the Bali bombings¹ in Australia, Islam and Muslims caused controversy and were under microscopic views. But no other form of controversy was stressed in the West more than the veiling of Muslim women. These events caused more than ever an Islamic rising in the field of literature. Writers, female writers in particular, were the outstanding figures who represented the veil from a tradition to a religious symbol of Islamic identity. This chapter will shed light on such writers and their representation of veiled Muslim women. Among these writers is Randa Abdel Fattah whose novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005) will be the focus of this study. Then the chapter will provide a historical overview of *hijab*² as a tradition and as a symbol of religious identity as the Muslim women authors portray in their narratives. Finally, this chapter will include an examination of various theories of identity and their relation to traditions and rituals that shape the inner and outer circle of veiled Muslim women during that time which motivated Abdel-Fattah to write *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

¹ Run by Islamic fundamentalists, the Bali bombings took place outside the Australian soil in 2002 and killed 88 Australian holiday-makers traumatizing the general public in Australia.

² K. M. Mackay (2013) defines it as: the fixed headscarf worn by Muslim women.

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1. The Voice of Muslim Women Writers in Literature:

Many of the Muslim women living in different homes of their own tend to use literature as a concrete passage to their voices, opinions and feelings of being far from home. These women found that the religious code, the veil, is seen as the finest representation of Muslim women's identity in the West.

1.1. Diasporic Muslim Women Writers and the Veil:

The feel of returning and being home for diasporic Muslim women writers after leaving their countries for various reasons was expressed and revealed through their creative works, embodying the diasporic notion of being of two minds of their homelands and their host lands. This is how the term 'diasporic writers' took place; it is about those people who no longer live in their motherlands but still return to their respective homelands in their writings. Among these diasporic women writers are Leila Aboulela, Mohja Kahf and Randa Abdel-Fattah whose fictional works in particular are differentiated from many other fictional works not only because they had a great impact on changing perspectives of Muslim readers as well as non-Muslims, especially after 9/11 but also because their main characters deeply stress and strongly engage Islam and Islamic rituals and traditions in their lives.

Initially, Mohja Kahf, is a Syrian-American Muslim writer, who teaches comparative literature at the University of Arkansas and won many writing awards. The choice of such diasporic woman is not only because she has always stood against any form of marginalization of Muslim women but also underlined the veil

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issue in all its corners. This is why her first novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006)³ deals with the complexities that face a young Arab migrant who moves to the American Midwest in the 1970's and as a Syrian-American girl, her journey begins with doubting her religious faith as a Muslim and eventually embraces a stronger faith than she had before. Kahf's representation of the challenges of the stereotypical image of Muslim women is strongly present in her book where she indicates Muslim women identity and the question of nationhood. *TGTS* is a positive representation of transnationalism and integration where Kahf describes a realistic world in her novel.

Secondly, Randa Abdel-Fattah (2005), an Australian Palestinian Muslim writer, brilliantly symbolizes the conflict that it solved and dealt with in her writings. Like Mohja, Abdel-Fattah is the award-winning author of the novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005), *Ten Things I hate about Me* (2006) and many other novels, mostly made for young adult fiction. *Does My Head Look Big in This?*, her first novel, is the novel that most highlights the concept of identity of a Muslim girl making radical choices and important decisions concerning Islam and its rituals and traditions. Fascinatingly, Abdel-Fattah through her narrative tries to create a sense of awareness in all her teenage readers regardless of what their beliefs might be or on what culture and faith they stand for. Mainly, Abdel-Fattah challenges the presumption of *hijab* wearing Muslim women as being victims of religious oppression. Thus, the reading of the novel emphasizes multiculturalism which is related to Homi Bhabha's theory of the third space and hybridity (A. Abdul Majid 2016). Therefore, Abdel-Fattah is considered to be one of the most knowledgeable

³ Thereafter referred to as *TGTS*

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poignant diasporic Muslim women writers who stood for the Islamic identity and confronted *hijab*'s common perceptions.

To wrap up the idea, being a diasporic female writer in the typical society rises the urge and responsibility of defending the Islamic code that is *hijab* as being a tool of representing Islam and maintaining commitment to it. These writers also used literature to be the voice of all veiled Muslim women living in diaspora. Between Islam and the West and between contemporaries and traditions, veiled Muslim women for that reason became the interpretation that many writers and scholars used as a justification for such rising conflict.

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2. Historical Overview on *Hijab* and the Representation of it in the West:

Because *hijab* became the widely-talked about subject after 9/11, historians and scholars from both Islamic origins and Western ones attempted to look for the origins and background of this term and where and when and by whom it was and still worn; not only is worn by Muslim women but women from different cultures and religions.

2.1 *Hijab* in Qur'an and as the Representation of Islam in the West:

After the world events of 9 /11 of the United States and the Bali bombings in Australia, the wearing of *hijab* became an issue and a subject that strongly should be looked at in the Western context. Although the wearing of *hijab* for Muslim women existed as a religious requirement in the Quran long before these recent events took place, these global events stressed more than ever a new rising image of Islam and *hijab* wearing women perceived the veil as a symbol of Islam. These veiled women have been attached with those who had carried out the 9/11 attacks in the United States and were stereotyped as being terrorists.

Firstly, *hijab* was and is worn as a religious constraint for Muslim women. The background of this constraint is from the Muslim holy book, the Quran, which is applied as the basis for the wearing of *hijab*. Many Muslim and non-Muslim

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scholars relied on the translated verses in the Quran and used them as a reference to the background of *hijab* wearing. As an order from Allah, the message of *hijab* was to protect women from harassment as many scholars have argued. For this reason, women were given a strict dress code, which is *hijab*, to distinguish the pious women from the non-pious. This view has been detailed further by many writers and scholars in the feminist discourse. Mackay (2013), for instance, carries out a feminist standpoint research and with her interviews gives many Muslim women the opportunity to explain the wearing of the hijab. It is at a time of *jahiliyya*⁴ where the revelations about women's dress came when women were in danger from men.

Despite the representation of *hijab* in the Quran on the view that is an identity symbol for Muslim women and that it represents the freedom of choice that Muslim women should be given in signifying their bodies, many Muslim scholars do not agree that *hijab* is a religious requirement and insist that what is required in the Quran is modesty for both men and women. Therefore, the way the veil was represented in the West for veiled western Muslim women has undermined the diversity of Muslim women's identity. The issue of veiling was present, but not in the same way that the name *hijab* is used in the West today. In such a globalised world where cultures and civilisation complexes are paradoxical more than ever, *hijab* wearing women held the responsibility of changing the dominated popular representations of the veil as being a symbol of oppressive and violent Islam because they are all in search of positive representations to feel that they are recognised and their choice is validated and respected.

⁴ *Jahiliyya* is the term for the time in the Arab world before the coming of Islam and before the message of the prophet Mohamed.

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The choice to veil can be divided into four categories, religious fulfillment, cultural identity, women's perception of sexuality and political resistance (Ouazzif 2007). Whether it is worn as a necessity linked to the teaching in the Qur'an, a representations of identity or a political means to express a sense of solidarity with Islam in the political scene, the hijab stressed a strong attention in the West and caused an interaction in public space, building bridges for Muslim women to rise with Islam and encouraging them to share their experiences and spoke their minds.

2.2. The Background of *Hijab* in Literature:

Many books have defined the term *hijab* on the basis of religious feminist Muslim point of view or on the ground of the impact of the major world terroristic events that were held by Muslims. Some of this voluminous and growing literature written by Muslims is used to encourage Muslim women to wear *hijab* while other Muslim and non-Muslim authors use it to define *hijab* as an internal and an external icon. The latter translate the religious orders from Arabic into other languages, including English, to be reachable to non-Muslims who want to find out about the wearing of *hijab* and where exactly the original orders can be found.

First of all, *hijab* is a result of other alien concepts that are grouped together and stood as foreign Islamic terms from western notions, for instance, the concepts of *sharia* law, *jahiliyya* and *Quran*. There are other terms that books use to refer to the piece of fabric that is worn on the head of Muslim women such as the veil and the headscarf, but *hijab* is the most common term that is used in literature. Central to

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the portrayal of Muslim women in distress is the veil in all its forms: a head-wrapping *hijab*, a *nikaab* revealing only their eyes, or a face covering *burqa* (Mohibullah and Kramer, 2016). Mohibullah and Kramer study many historians' views and relate the existing of *hijab* not to Islam as the background of the word but to the pre-Islamic Jews, Christians, and the women of Classical Greek and Byzantine empires.

However, the literature that is most familiar to the West about *hijab* wearing Muslim women focuses excessively on the symbolic description rather than the literal one; at the same time for Muslim women, it is the face of Islam in the West and is used for purposes of power, not for that of "freeing women". Guven (2013) sees it as more than an object and defines it as a controversial term that is always referred to issues such as resistance, oppression, identity, colonialism and patriarchy. As long as for Mernissi (1991), Fizourah quotes for her that the dimensions of *hijab* include three key significances: "the visual dimension, hiding from view, the root of the word *hajaba* is to hide". The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark a boundary, establish a threshold. The last dimension is ethical, that relates to prohibitions" (2007).

One can solely understand the literal and symbolic meaning of *hijab* by searching back for the background of such term so as to stress that *hijab* as being the bridge between tradition and rituals and even more, between the West and Islam. The wearing of the veil as a tradition started long before Islam would take it as a religious code for Muslim women. Predating Islam, the veil was worn by

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Zoroastrian⁵ and Byzantine upper-class women to keep them distant and secured from the hoi polloi⁶. When Islam's armies first arrived at Persia, they were traumatized at this arrogance; then they adopted the custom they hated; the control of women was hard-wired into their psyches.

From a western point of view, and since this study is related to the perception of veiled Muslim women and girls living in the West, it was indeed a necessity to shed the light on the literature written by Western Muslim and non-Muslim authors to define the hijab internally and externally from varied mixed minds and via different interpretations.

2.4. The Western Media and Stereotypes on *Hijab*:

The media is considered now as the most powerful tool that strongly affects and shapes people's perspectives all over the world. Western media likewise, whether it is print media, articles and magazines, or visual media, interviews and movies, has always portrayed *hijab* wearing Muslim women by spreading negative stereotypical image to the society. The main frames in which Western media presents veiled Muslim women are the image of oppression, terrorism and backwardness. Although most women in the West gave the impression that the veil made them feel stronger as feminists in public, the media turned the matter of the veil into a subject for suspicion and question.

⁵ Zoroastrianism, or more natively Mazdayasna, is one of the world's oldest extant religions of the old Persians, Iranians, ascribed to the teachings of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra).

⁶ The term was first used by the Greeks and then the Byzantines and Persians to refer to the popularity or majority. In Greek, hoi polloi means simply "the many". Women at the time therefore used the veil to be distinguished from hoi (the) polloi (many). Today it's generally used by people who think of themselves as superior.

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Concerning the print media, specifically speaking, one of the most Islamophobic news magazines about Muslim women are *The Guardian* and *The Times*. In her article “As a Muslim woman, I see the veil as a rejection of progressive values” in *The Guardian*, Alibhai-Brown refers to the rise of *hijab* wearing as being only an Islamic policy to resist Western domination. She compares the achievements and progress of Muslims of the past twelve centuries to the current times in which she argues that Muslims were advanced in science, art and politics but now, with the idea of *hijab* wearing women, they are moving backward and withdrawing the progressive values. In the same magazine, Dodd (2005) quoted a leading Muslim scholar statement that with this rise of attacks on Muslims, Muslim women should remove their veils not to be recognised. Likewise, for *The Time magazine*, the most controversial reports that the western media broadcasted were Jack Straw’s columns, Leader of the House of Commons. In his interviews, Straw was asking his interviewed Muslim women to take off their veils before speaking to him and he refused to interview any Muslim women with her *hijab* or *niqaab* on. *The Time* in 2006, instead of only reporting Straw’s comments, it explains ironically what types of dress Muslim women wore for the interview and why.

Just as in the print media, western visual media broadcasted many reports, interviews and even made films that harmed and evoked negative attention to Islam as being a terroristic religion and Muslim women as being victimized visible objects practicing the religion. A disreputable example is the short film *Submission* (2015) directed by T. H. Gogh and written by A. H. Ali. The film criticised the treatment of Muslim women who had Qur’anic verses inscribed in their bodies and were asking God to explain and justify the meanings of their encounter with male violence. The

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film outraged Muslims in Holland and was described as a racist film that offended Islam and Muslim female body. When the film was broadcasted, a Muslim fundamentalist reacts to the film by assassinating Van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004. This last event raised the image of Islamophobia and the western media accused Islam as being responsible of such actions.

However, this represented image of stereotype and terrorism due to the attacks had encouraged Muslim women to find out more about their religion and many unveiled Muslim women in the workplace made their choice to wear *hijab* after what the media has projected Muslim women as oppressed. The Lebanese born Senior Constable Maha Sukkar is one of the greatest working veiled women icons who fought the prejudice against the Arabic-Muslim communities after the events of September 11 and ended up of being an important figure on *The Point Magazine* of Australia as a veiled women who joined the police force to educate the Australian community about the Muslims and try to bridge the gap between the two.

Veiled Muslim women all over the West faced a double struggle of standing up against the negative image that the western media shows and the stereotypical reception of them as being strangers and terrorists from their second home, the west, which the media delivered to the society.

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3. The Social Psychological Theories and Hybridity:

With the rise of controversy, attention, and rumours about Muslims in the post 9/11, veiled Muslim women became more visible to the public with their *hijabs* on. This formed a sense of reconstruction and stimulation of identity of Muslims living in the West. The need for representing the social Islamic identity of the community and the psychological identity of the individual Muslim became a part of every Muslim's Islam. Muslim women in particular held the most visible part and the responsibility to highlight Islam as a religion was held mostly by Muslim feminists who wore the hijab as to present their identity in its both corners. Traditions and rituals were upon the edge of negotiation where both social and socio-psychological theories of identity needed to be highlighted.

1.1. The Social Psychological Theories of Religious Identity:

Initially, the search for religious identity was not of much of a deal prior to 9/11. Muslims, especially Muslim women, did not have issues with being both Arab Muslims and Westerns. But after the terrorist attacks, the social psychological struggle of Muslims rose more than ever. This struggle for proving identity of veiled Muslim women in particular reappeared as a result of the community's perspectives and thoughts about these females. Hence, the socio-psychological theory of identity is a prevailing perspective that provides the theoretical underpinnings of traditional understandings of identity. Imtiaz Israel and Tajfel's (1972) uses a description of the social psychology as being a discipline that its aim stands for either the traditional 'explanation' or the traditional 'understanding' of the social life of

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individuals and of groups, large or small. The discipline, thus, that is felt to be required by Muslim women with their veils on is to simplify the psychological understanding, as an individual, of the reason why they adopt the instruction of their religion of wearing *hijab* as a tradition and ritual discipline, and at the same time clarifying and explaining to the society this social discipline of keeping faithful to their Islam. Consequently, that is the most difficult challenge that faced *hijab* wearing women within their inner psychological struggle that had to be affected by the social theory of the community that they lived in.

1.2. Postcolonial Theory of Ethnic and Cultural Hybridity:

From Homi Bhabha's (1992) *Postcolonial Theory of Hybridity* to Gonzalez-Mena and Pulido-Tobiassen's *Teaching diversity*, the concept of identity is best portrayed by these theorists as being conflicted and difficult to take a side of identity when living within the adaptation of the concept of multiculturalism (Edvinsson 2011). Bhabha refers to the cultural quarrel between the individuals' choice of adopting an ethnicity and the cultural domination of the mainstream society as the 'third space'. Many scholars and theorists apply Bhabha's theory of hybridity in their analyses of hybrid, diasporic and immigrant individuals and ethnic groups, and it is widely used in the literature. Colin Haines (2015) for instance, stresses how the conflict of identity is solved or at least dealt with, by analysing a work of fiction; that is the novel *Does*

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My Head Look Big in This? in which the character can act upon and create strategies for fighting the non-Muslim perspectives.

Kristin Edvinsson (2011) demonstrates how literature can be useful tool that would educate students about multiculturalism and the conflict of identity. Edvinsson finds that the novel would be of great example to teach students to be more critical thinkers about the surroundings and not taking stereotypes as a means of describing whatever international groups are. Like Haines, Edvinsson's analysis is also based on theories such as *Your teen's search for identity* by Bellows and *Teaching diversity* by Mena and Tobiassen. She examines the internal and external conflict of the young people hybrid personalities, stating that the teenage years are two sides of the same coin; it could be both wonderful and hard and that this would facilitate for students the search for their identities as well as appreciating the things that differ between people and cultures.

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Conclusion

Accordingly, fictional works of Muslim authors or diasporic Muslim women writers work well as a tool of changing preconceptions on things and encourage *hijab* wearing women to stand for their Islamic identity. These major theories therefore, are the base for the deeper and practical research of the postcolonial theories of hybridity, of searching for identity in a mainstream society and of challenging one's internal and external conflicts that appear in one's self as a result of the presumption of others; and in this case is veiled Muslim women's responsibility.

Chapter Two

Religious Rituals in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

Introduction

1. The Figures of the Religious Aspects in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

1.1. The Novel's Background

1.2. The Impact of Bali Bombing and 9/11 on Australia

1.3. *Hijab*: The Central Theme of the Novel

2. Abdel-Fattah's Proclamation of Rituals

2.1. Abdel-Fattah's Devotion to Islamic Rituals in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

2.2. Amal's Sense of Belonging and Pride

Conclusion

Introduction

The figures of religious rituals are widely portrayed in Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* particularly in the life of the protagonist Amal as a female character. The analysis is done to find out to which extent Abdel-Fattah is devoted to illustrate the presence of identity in a foreign home. It is worthy therefore, to investigate Amal's inflexible experience in a multicultural society as being an Australian girl with Islamic background. Abdel-Fattah describes the difficulty that Amal encounters through her self-recognition journey, particularly after the 9/11 attacks and the Bali Bombing of Australia. Amal experiences a drastic change in her social life where she decides to reveal her identity to the divergent world. The inner and outer contradictions become the core reason that later leads Amal to determine her identity as an Australian Muslim girl by deciding to wear the veil.

1. The Figures of the Religious Aspects in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

The standing figure that the novel holds as the central object of it is the veil that a young girl decides to wear to define and prove her Islamic identity in a mainstream society. Like the female protagonist, the writer herself is an Australian Muslim woman who used to wear the veil as part of her Islamic school uniform. This state persuaded more Abdel-Fattah to be the outstanding voice that speaks on behalf of all young Muslims who try to find and revitalize their Islamic identity in a dominant society.

1.1 The Novel's Background:

Does My Head Look Big in This? is categorized as Young Adult fiction and as a form of the Ya literature. The role of the Ya writer is that he addresses not merely young adults as it is its primary aim but also widen its field to adults who face similar difficulties in the journey of growing up.

“Not only are Ya authors delving into new topics for teens, but authors are also giving new twists to classic young adult coming-of-age problems and issues” (Howell 2011, 7).

Thus, Abdel-Fattah is seeing as a writer who predominantly concentrates on the worries of young people with trying to seek the realisation of multiculturalism and have the experience to deal with such hyphenated identity. So, her first novel came as a result of impulse to verbalize her voice from a point of view of a young person. Abdel-Fattah wrote *Does My Head Look Big in This?* when she was fifteen where she felt very passionate about being an Australian Muslim girl who felt a sense of being misunderstood by her Australian community because of her beliefs and because she wears *hijab* as part of her school uniform. So, for her, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* was the book that allow readers to look pass the veil and see the person within. Nevertheless, her first draft was turned down because the narration was very didactic and preachy. She later changed the way of narrating the book and made it more funny and humorous than trying to lecture the reader; she finally had her book published in 2005.

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Abdel-Fattah wanted to speak on behalf of young people who do not have a platform and be an alternative narrative. Subsequently, she represents this alternative voice in an average Australian Muslim girl, named Amal, who is trying to negotiate her place in the world and figure out her hybrid identity but at the same time experiencing the challenge of dealing with people's prejudice because of her decision to wear the veil where she is in a private school in Melbourne.

Therefore, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is a great depiction of a young Muslim girl who is learning to belong and to be accepted for who she is. It also stands for the cultural and religious aspects of Muslim families and how one's entire world changes because of a piece of cloth.

1.2. The Impact of Bali Bombing and 9/11 on Australia:

Australia is a multicultural country with diverse ethnic orientations. In recent years, Islam has become a central theme for Media discourse. It is clarified by Belnaves and Aly (115) in their work "They Want Us to be Afraid":

"The media and popular discourse on terrorism in Australia has evolved into a debate on the Islamic presence in Australia portrayed as a clash of cultural values" (115). This statement provides a picture of Australian Muslims and how they were under siege. After 9/11 and the Bali bombing, Muslims in Australia felt as if they were targeted to suspicion and considered as terroristic threat¹. These drastic events and changes that happened in the West were the central part that caused tense and

¹ All of that was motivated by the media discourse in Australia as mentioned in the International Journal of Diversity in Organization, Communities, and Nations.

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worries to Muslim families and that Abdel-Fattah clearly points at and speaks about within her protagonist's words.

I cry, but it's bizarre because I can't even break down and grieve without wondering about what people are thinking of me. I wince every time Ms Walsh says the word 'massacre' with the word 'Islamic' as though these barbarians somehow belong to my Muslim community. (Ch 29)

At the moment she hears about the attacks, Amal reacts as any concerned Australian person. She is deeply hurt by her friends' comments on the tragic event where those comments were visibly racist "*Those bloody Islamic terrorists! Has to be them!*".

In the post Bali bombing, people of the west had already developed and constructed a war on terrorism idea as a battle between 'us' and 'them', between what is called 'the west and the rest'². Thus, Amal's internal feelings of confusion in this statement "*I have nowhere else to go and nowhere else I want to go. Once again I don't know where I stand in the country in which I took my first breath on earth*"

² See also kassemeris, Jackson. (2011). The West, the rest, and the 'war on terror': representation of Muslims in neoconservative media discourse. *Contemporary Politics* Vol. 17. No.1

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resembles the state of fear that Muslim Australians had at that time. Amal feels that the urge of explaining herself and defending her identity become more needed after these events that were held by people from her same religious background. Her emotional conversation with her friend Adam explains the competitive feeling of rejection.

Do you have any idea how it feels to be me, a Muslim, today? I mean just turn on the television, open a newspaper. There will be some feature article analysing, deconstructing, whipping up some theory about Islam and Muslims. Another chance to make sense of this phenomenon called 'The Muslim'. It feels like you're drowning in it all. (Ch 16)

Hence, Amal's attitude and reaction is very obvious as she feels an inner anger and sadness because the accused group for such cruel actions are Muslims; the one who have the same religion as she does.

1.3. *Hijab*: The Central Theme of the Novel

Through her writings, Abdel-Fattah targets many themes and aims at modifying and adjusting peoples' thoughts via her books and stories. In *Does my Head Look Big in This?* she tells the story of the daily life of a 'second generation' Palestinian teenage girl who makes the choice of wearing 'full time' *hijab* in a non-Muslim school in Melbourne. The protagonist negotiates her 'in between' identity as she succeeds in making balance between admittance of Muslim faith and embracement of its ritual, the veil, on the one hand, and challenging the wrong allegation and skepticism that she faces with her Australian society on the other hand.

Amal experiences prejudice and racist remarks when she permanently sets her mind on wearing *hijab and be* 'full-timer'. These manners of hostility and unacceptance that she deals with justifies her hesitation as she states:

I can't sleep from stressing about whether I've got the guts to do it .To wear the hijab, the head scarf, full-time. "full- timers" are what my Muslim friends and I call girls who wear the hijab all the timeyou should know that right now the thought of stepping into my home room with the hijab on is making my nostril hear stand on end. (Ch 1)

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The lines reveal Amal's fight with her difficult decision and how it is a big challenge for her to wear a full-time hijab that would threaten her comfort zone after being known as an Australian born girl. It is the Kristal clear code of being a Muslim in a prejudicial group.

I'm terrified" she said "I am ready for the next step, I am sure of that but I am still nervous .Agh! there are million different voices in my head scaring me off" and "I can't imagine what my class will say if I walk in with the hijab on ... I'm walking in fully covered and yet I'm still breaking out in sweat.

The fear of people's reaction is always present but the anger of thinking about the idea that they would try to make her recede and change her mind pushes her to be more determined to make her mind.

Does My Head Look Big in This? is a lesson in a form of a novel; it gives the reader a microscopic view on what is it like to be a Muslim today. Amal is described as a strong girl who does not make an effort to hide neither her culture nor background. Yet she is affected by the society in which she lives. This cultural collision appears at the moment Amal enters the school with the veil on. She suffers

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with trying to explain herself and the veil she is wearing to the headmistress of the school as she believes that Amal was forced to wear it. Amal tries her best to convince everyone the opposite.

In Amal's case, acceptance is more flexible for her because she has similar characteristics as any Australian girl as it is described of being "*Blond*" and "*fair haired*" Still, she makes the decision to wear the hijab and be a "*full-timer*". The new 'her' receives various aggressive comments and attitudes from her School mates. She consciously realizes that she would face obstacles; she weighed them 'unfailingly' and decides to embrace them, as she declares:

The next day I resolve to write an official To wear or Not To wear list .In the left-hand column I am going to write a list of all people I know who won't hassle me for wearing the hijab. On the right-hand side I'm going to list all the people I suspect might give me attitude, stare ozone holes into me or tut-tut behind my back. (Ch 3)

The drastic results of the 9/11 and The Bali bombing on Australia caused a brutal aggressive and intolerant accusation towards these descendants from Islam and particularly those celebrating its rituals and traditions in a foreign home. In a book entitled *Feminist Discourse Analysis in Islamic Feminism*, the author clearly states the

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comments and attacks concerning westerner's interference in Muslim's values as an obvious violation of the Human Rights:

Why we are obsessed with the thing that is exclusively a personal issue or this is a narrow mindness of the westerners who cannot see the Muslim values . . . the leaders of the west are interfering in the personal life's of the Muslim women then how they claim that they are respecting the universal charter of human rights as they have declared Hijab as crises point. (30)

2. Abdel-Fattah's Proclamation of Rituals:

Performing the religious rituals in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is used by the writer in her characters with a strength of conviction that reveals the well-built relationship between Muslim families and their fidelity to Islam.

2.1 Abdel-Fattah's Devotion to Islamic Rituals in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

Randa Abdel-Fattah through her novel tries to transport the living situation of Muslim teenagers in the West in general and in Australia in particular in a search for identity. In other words, she illustrates how they construct a religious identity in a non-religious society regardless of all the challenges that they would encounter.

Nevertheless, dealing with the relationship between multiculturalism and religion is not flexible when living in different society with different rituals and practices. In this manner, Venkuyten (2007) frames religion as being an important dimension for developing a positive social identity and that it is an important factor in social divisions in conflicts in many societies around the world.

Therefore, the construction of identity through religion and religious rituals attracted scholars from different disciplines to engage in the academic research. This research highlights the idea that around the world, social divisions and conflicts are primarily based on religious diversities. Furthermore, for those believers, the essence of their religion is non-negotiable: "*Religion is about convictions and divine truths,*

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and for most observant believers. The core of the religious identity is non-negotiable making the idea of religious changes or compromises an oxymoron” (Venkuyten, 2007).

For Muslim women, *hijab* is a symbol of faith and religion. This headscarf, as a piece of cloth, caused a diverse public dispute in the West. Moreover, wearing a headscarf or *hijab* for Muslim women in a non-Muslim country is a matter of choice and embracement of consequences to prevail themselves in the majority and to shed a light on their existence as to reflect and practice their beliefs.

The headscarf (veil) is a controversial symbol. If you are working in the defense of women’s rights, you should know that by now. Some consider it a religious symbol; others see it as a tool of patriarchal control and oppression.³

Indeed, the significance of wearing *hijab* widely opens the door to growing debates. Some regards it as a sign and symbol of faith and religious commitment while others see it as a symbol of oppression. However, practicing a religious ritual remains part of each person’s identity and conviction. And in this case the religious ritual is embodied in the *hijab*. It becomes unbreakable part of every *hijab* wearing women’s identity.

³ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/womens-march-why-use-the-headscarf-viel-as-a-symbol_us_5884a1ede4b0111ea60b971c

2.2. Amal's Sense of Belonging and Pride:

After the tragic events, many Muslim women have attached new significance to the hijab and other related Islamic symbols such as pride and consciousness. Muslims attempted to express awareness to their identity through the revival of their native religious rituals symbols. Aquil (2011) notes that Muslim women should decide their fate and not to wait for their governments to better their lives; even though their government has taken strides towards women's progress:

Muslim women should take the matter into their own hands. As noted, several individuals have come up with remarkable ideas and literally have taken the problems into their own hands. (29)

Evidently speaking, it is up to Muslim women themselves to impose their thoughts and opinions for their own rights and do not wait others to do that for them.

Muslim women are provoked in non-Muslim Societies to revive their religious ritual of wearing *hijab*. Abdel-Fattah depicts, through the voice of her protagonist Amal, how to be proud of her religion, and of her belonging to an ethnic minority in a dominant majority.

...I feel like my passion and conviction in Islam are bursting inside me and I want to prove to myself that I am strong enough to wear the badge of my faith .I believe it will make me feel so close to God...That's when this warm feeling buzzes through you and you smile to yourself, knowing that God's watching you, knowing that he knows you are trying to be strong to please him. (Ch 2)

Amal is having a clear strength of conviction toward Islam. She wants to build up this spiritual relationship with God and try to redefine her religious identity, belonging and spiritual satisfaction, with best embrace of the consequences.

This is also reflected in Amal's feeling of jealousy from the proud hijab wearing women around her. *"...I started really to respect their courage .I was even a bit jealous because there I would be ripping it off as soon as I was off school property...."* For that, she wants that feeling; and she tries to talk to her parents about her decision. *"...I want to try...and I want that identity. You know. that symbol of my faith. I want to know what it meant to be strong enough to walk around with it on and stick up to my right to wear it"*.

Her sense of belonging is revealed in the admiration that she holds for her mother; stated in:

My mom gets this .she walks and talks as though she doesn't even realize she's wearing the hijab. It makes me feel kind of protected because she is so confident and dignified. I wonder how long it will take me to feel and act that way. (Ch 3)

Amal explains that after she has made the decision to wear hijab as identification to her Islamic background and as a bond between herself and God. After experiencing how it feels like to stress the new identity, she recognizes the sense of freedom and self-identification within.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to explore how Randa Abdel-Fattah in her novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* presents religious rituals that walks through the bridge that connects religion to identity and bonds *hijab* wearing to devotion to God. Thus, the writer indeed, succeeded in glorifying Islamic rituals. It also attempted to focus on a literary analysis of Amal's character and sufferance in her journey of self-discovery.

Chapter Three

Orientation to Islamic Traditions

Introduction

1. Islam as Part of the Culture Identity

1.1 Cultural Dimension in Abdel-Fattah's Novel

1.2. The Heroin's loyalty toward Australia & Islam

1.3. Amal's Commitment to Islam

1.4. Amal's Hybrid Identity

2 The Formatted Aspects of Culture in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

2.1. The Significance of the Title

2.2 The Linguistic Aspect of the Cultural Identity

Conclusion

Introduction

Every individual has his own identity. This personal identity is a result of mixed interactions with people which eventually make up one's culture. This chapter will analyse the role of the cultural practices in Abdel-Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* in constructing Muslim individual identity. An emphasis will be held on the psyche and spiritual aspects of Amal's character. A related examination will also take place on how does Abdel-Fattah project Islamic traditions and depicts the mixed 'Australian-Muslim-Palestinian' cultural identity in Amal through the practices that show her choices, actions, attitudes, inner convictions and language use.

1. Islam as Part of the Culture Identity:

Abdel-Fattah tends to tackle the issue of cultural divergence via her writing. Thus, this section will examine the symbols of cultural depth presented by the narrator with reference to the social psychological theories by analysing Amal's loyalty to Australia and faithfulness to Islamic traditions that would later form the hybrid dimensions of her identity.

1.1 Cultural Dimension in Abdel-Fattah's Novel:

Traditions in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* are shown in concern to the diverse perspectives of the society. Amal experiences a confusion in developing her “in between” identity; minority and dominant culture and becoming a multicultural person¹. In “Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism”, Peter Adler (2002) describes the multicultural individuals and the quest of identity process as following:

*The identity process of the multicultural individual represents a new kind of person unfettered by the constricting limitations of culture as a total entity. Yet, like women and men in any age, the multicultural person must negotiate the difficulties of cross-cultural contact.*²

Abdel-Fattah therefore, uses her writing as a means of expressing her thoughts and opinions of overcoming prejudice by delivering a fulfill image

¹ The multicultural person is ,at once, both old and new .He/she ,like great philosophers in any age ,can never accept totally the demands of anyone's culture nor are they free from the conditioning of their culture

² <http://www.mediate.com/articales/adler3.cfm> Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism peter Adler November2002

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about the life of Australian Muslims and concentrating on the relationships between Australians and Muslims separately.

The novel manifests a mixture of cultures in one society. It reveals that no matter how people can be open-minded about the idea of Islamic culture and *hijab* from an angle of multiculturalism, the presumption that Muslims are ‘others’ and that their women are oppressed still exist within their relationships with these Muslims.

Well, obviously not. It's rather public, don't you think? Personal is something tucked in your shirt. Personal is rosary beads in your pocket. I would submit, Amal, that your veil is not, of all things, personal. Now don't get me wrong; I respect your religion. We live in a multicultural society and we should accept and tolerate people no matter what their creeds, race or colour. But you must understand that I have an educational institution to run and there are certain guidelines. I'm sure your parent will appreciate that. (Ch 4)

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Even Amal's decision to wear *hijab* is personal, the principal Ms Walsh has an already fixed presumption that it is impulsive by Amal's parents and that her decision should be approved by the educational institution.

Amal attempts to hold an incompatible culture which is highly difficult to achieve due to the increasing tensions after the Bali bombing and 9/11 terroristic attacks. The task for both the writer and the protagonist is challenging. Bhabha (1994) explains in his "Post-Colonial Theory of Cultural and Ethnic Hybridity" that identity goes beyond the diversion of Self and Other, East and West, which shows the dimensions of culture that Abdel-Fattah stresses within her characters behavior. In the clash of cultures that Amal encounters during her journey of self-identification, Islam is her religion while the anti-Muslim community is her environment. She defends her choice as it is an expression of her faith, like the crucifix for the Christians. The narrative explains many aspects of the Islamic Culture: *hijab*, religious holidays, language and beliefs. Additionally, Western culture is explored within the story through the life style adopted by the protagonist and her parents. Amal is in a critical position to seriously negotiate her Cultural Identity³ between Palestinian-Muslim and Australian-Western one.

Another choice is introduced which is sitting on an intermediate layer between both cultures. It is difficult for oneself to change where living in an opposed culture from one's own:

³ Cultural Identity is sense of belonging to a particular group or groups. One develops a cultural identity in his/her relationship with family, community, geography, language...etc.

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Life isn't like the movies. People don't change overnight. People don't go from arrogant and self-righteous to ashamed and remorseful. They don't suddenly give in when they've spent years taking out. No doesn't magically become a Yes.

(Ch 43)

Amal in this situation explains how she agrees with that life varies. It is not similar to that of the movies where the former promise you laughing, crying, magic, flexible options and unprecedented tenderness.

The montage is made with high precision where it presents life in two hours format simulating perfection. In contrast, people shape their identities and characters by struggling in life going over some rough and radically changing problems, as in the case of Amal's friend Leila, who is fed up by her mother's attempt to arrange a marriage for her; therefore, she decides to stand against her mother's will and fight for her own goals and defend her opinion and choice in life, disobeying her mother's decision.

1.2. The Heroine's Loyalty toward Australia:

As mentioned above, Abdel-Fattah presents the protagonist in a position of negotiating her identity so that she can get along with people in multicultural space, that is 'Australia'. In the novel, a passage describes

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Amal's feelings of both empathy and sympathy; all of her family and friends are showing respect to the victims of the Bali bombing as one person with no consideration to religious or cultural differences; they just blend in with the rest in the tragedy:

After two hard days at school we go to a peace vigil on a weekend. My parents, Uncle Jo's family, Yasmeen, and her family, Eileen and Josh. We stand there in the crowd, holding candles, clutching on to each other, singing prayers and John Lennon songs, swaying together in a gentle, evening breeze that smells of birthday cake candles and tragedy and agonizing incomprehension. (Ch 29)

Culture and tradition are an integral part of everyone's character. Thus, one could not recognize his/her identity unless there is a clash against someone with different beliefs, values and lifestyle. Amal proves a contradictory view. She has an Australian lifestyle like any teenage girl in her age. As she listens to Shania Twain and Celine Dion when she is overwhelmed with love feelings, she expresses:

This is my corny, mushy, sappy moment and boy oh boy am I lapping it up. I am lying bed listening to a CD of love ballads which includes Shania twain's "from This Moment" and yes, I will admit, a couple of Celin Dion. It is obvious that I have a serious case of the blues because I am finding that each line in each song is a perfect description of my life. (Ch 30)

Amal enjoys her daily life watching her favorite TV series: Sex in The City, Friends; the series through which she has that 'Sputnik moment' and it becomes her inspiration. Furthermore, she reads about actors as she describes *"I am at my desk in home room, reading an article about Jennifer Lopez's exercise regime..."*

Those passages further reinforce the widely used Australian tradition presented by Abdel-Fattah in the story.

1.3. Amal's Commitment to Islam:

"Belief means nothing without action" and "What is the good of being true to your religion on the outside, if you change what's on the inside,

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where it really counts?" From the narrative's point of view, this text defines how the protagonist's Muslim beliefs are not a matter of negotiation. The sense of loyalty is evident in Amal's choices, especially concerning her "crush" for Adam when she refuses to kiss him despite her desire to do so: *"His face is inches from mine and as he moves in to kiss me I jolt back."* Her faithfulness to Islamic traditions gives her the strength to explain for him why she can have neither a kiss nor physical intimacy *"But you know I can't in Islam. You know the whole thing about no sex no physical intimacy before marriage."* Furthermore, *"It's...look...in my religion we both have to be...pure...untouched"*

Amal is intensely criticized for her decision by her friends, society and even by her relatives, precisely her uncle Joe. He accuses Amal's mother as being the one who pushed Amal to put on her veil: *"Yes, Jamila why would you go and make her do that?"* Then without any attempt to understand, he yells again *"Isn't it enough you wear it, so you have to force your daughter to do as well?"*

Another incident happens to Amal that tests her ethnic loyalty is when she applies for a job and the employer confronts her with what is considered as a racist answer *"Sorry, Love, we can't accept people like you."* *"What do you mean?"* she replies. *"The thing on your head, love, that's what I mean. It's not hygienic and it just doesn't look good up at front of the shop. Sorry,*

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love. Try somewhere else.” He answers. Amal got mad but that did not in any way made her have a second thought about the decision that she made.

I can't stop thinking about Hidayya and I feel sick with longing for my friends and teachers .sick with longing for a school where you learnt what every other student in any other Melbourne school learnt but you could also pray and fast and wear a hijab and get on with being a teenager without having to answer questions or defend yourself against new headline. (Ch 02)

The emotional state described above indicates a sincere pride. It is not declared directly yet implemented within.

1.4. Amal's Hybrid Identity:

Amal makes a radical change in identity; she wants to be Australian yet, put her Islamic background in the lead. She creates for herself a flexible

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space by her determination and strength in belief. At the last day of school, she seems happy to be “hyphenated”⁴ and an Australian in a multicultural space. Amal’s multicultural identity finally appears when she blends easily with other friends from different cultures and religions.

I have a sleepover at my house on Sunday night with Eileen and Simone..... We are in my bedroom pigging out on Pizza. Luckily, criss-crossing my two sets of friends have never proven to be a disaster since everybody gets along”. (Ch16)

Such situations demonstrate that the differences on the level of traditions are not an issue as long as both sides; majority and minority can get along and mix together. Amal’s friends come from different origins. Eileen is her Japanese Australian friend at McCleans. Simone as well, is a school friend who is purely Australian. Leila is Amal’s best friend and they descend from the same origins. If this is to prove anything, it would show that this mixture of cultures is easy to be adopted as long as the willingness for coexistence is present.

⁴ Hyphenated: of a person, is to have more than one Nationality or Ethnicity (such as French-Canadian, Afro-Argentine, etc.). Wiktionary.

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Islamic rituals and traditions are vastly celebrated in *Does My Heart Look Big in This?* Amal and her family never seem to miss one of Islam's Pillars, mainly prayers and fasting without any reluctance: “*My dad wakes me up for the morning fajr, prayer. I’m not my best at dawn and sometimes I throw the pillow and tell him to go away. But most mornings I get up with them to pray.*” Her devotion to tradition is very understandable in her quest for a place to pray in McCleans School in which Mr. Pears, her teacher, manages to provide her with a suitable one.

Additionally, the description of *wuduh*, that Abdel-Fattah explains, exposes her devotion to tradition: “*Then I perform wuduh .The ablution, wetting my hands, face, arms, feet and crown of my head. And then pray.*”

Moreover, “*I remember my first Ramadan fast; I’d begged my mom to let me fast from dawn to dusk*”. Amal at the end of the book declares that she is “*Through with Identity*”.

2. The Formatted Aspects of Culture in *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

Language is a tangible symbol of cultural identity. It is the expression of intellects of a particular culture. Subsequently, an inquiry into Abdel-Fattah's novel aims at detecting the cultural aspects embodied in the language used and in the choice of the title.

2.1. The Significance of the Title:

Abdel-Fattah's choice of the title for her first novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is significant. The title conveys a particular image with specific details. It functions in three different contexts: as an independent isolated unit; in relation to the body of the work and in relation to all of Abdel-Fattah's writings. Our main focus would be that our interpretation of the title means a study of the entire work or rather the primary case that Abdel-Fattah devoted her life to, including human rights, as the Australian website MACMILLAN denotes: "*Randa was a passionate human rights advocate . . . Randa has also been deeply interested in inter faith dialogue and has been a member of various interfaith networks.*"⁵ Since the body of the book is about a teenage girl wearing the Islamic veil and about questioning the consequences of making that choice, the title gives a sense of an internal anger coming from Amal who poses the question *Does*, by this, wearing the veil. *My Head Look Big?* meaning does my head look abnormal just because I am putting on a piece of cloth. She sounds absurd and fed up in that sentence; the expression conveys a complex meaning. The title as presented provokes the reader into many questions, reflections and expectations which can only find satisfying answers within the body of the work.

⁵ <http://www.panmacmillan.com.au/author/randa-abdel-fattah/>

“The title can encapsulate the text’s theme or it can act as an extension or an explanation of the theme” (Briffa and Caruana2009, 3). Through time the depiction of outsiders or “aliens” was and still is via an image of a hideous creature with BIG head, harkening back to the remarks that Amal expects, *“I’ve predicted all the smart-arse comments people can through at me. Nappy-head, Tea-Towel head, camel jockey”* and she encounters these as nicknames.

2.2 The Linguistic Aspect of the Cultural Identity:

Language is part of one’s identity and culture. It is expressed in *Muslim Australian: their beliefs, practices and institutions*, where Saeed, A (2004) further gives details to the concept by stating:

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The Islamic weekend school (Saturday and/or Sunday school) plays an important role in the life of Muslim children in Australia. Many go to the weekend school based at the local mosque or prayer facility or even a rented property to learn about Islam, to read the Qur'an, and study the language of their parents. (56)

Furthermore, Frantz Fanon frames the relationship between language and culture in his famous work *Black Skins, White Masks*, in which the backbone of his book is about discrimination of African descent, but inhabits France or neighboring it. In other words, he speaks French, yet he doesn't feel embraced by the host culture.

To speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.⁶

⁶ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markman. New York. Grove Press. Print.

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Fanon's goal is calling attention to the discrimination and inferiority at the level of language. In parallel, Abdel-Fattah in the narrative intentionally portrays the protagonist in varied situations using two different languages from two different civilizations of Arabic and Australian to preserve the mother culture.

In term of religion, Abdel-Fattah purposely uses the Arabic language concerning some particular religious terms to add a sense of credibility to the novel, and to reinforce the idea of tradition as to Amal's attachment to her religion and Arabic language.

In the context, Saeed (2004) explains: *"These differences are important in the life of Muslims, and include the language they speak, the cloth they wear and other costumes"* (28).

There are many terms in Arabic which are used in the novel to assure for the readers that there is no abandon of the Arabic language and that there are ties between the characters and Arabic culture. As it is illustrated in Amal's comment:

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Even though my parents speak to me predominantly in English there are some Arabic words which are instinctively part of their everyday vocabulary. Yallah means “come on” or “hurry up”. (Ch 3)

She displays furthermore, that whenever her parents are in affectionate of emotional mood they add a prefix to her name ‘*Ya Amal*’ meaning ‘*Oh Amal*’; or when they are in a hurry, they use ‘*Ya Amal! Come on!* and *Yallah!*’

There is a usage of the full form of a universal Islamic greeting ‘*Assalamu Alaykom*’ and ‘*Walaykom Wassalam*’. Several terms are used in Islamic Arabic tradition to convey a full meaning such as ‘*wuduh*’, ‘*fajr*’, ‘*hijab*’, ‘*Koran*’; ‘*Allah*’ instead of ‘*God*’; the term ‘*Halal*’ as for food .”*She is forever saying Insallah, God willing, or Mashallah, God be praised even when it doesn’t quite fit*”. Also on *Eid* day the greeting is “*Kola Sana Winta Bikhair*” equivalent to “*Happy Eid*” while it means “*May every year bring you happiness.*” And thus, Abdel-Fattah could never dismiss these terms as being an identical concepts for being Muslims, and furthermore, for being a Muslim-Palestinian *hijab* wearing woman. And that what a real loyal hyphenated devoted-to- Islam person really means.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed basically at shedding the light on the way people differ in terms of cultural traditions, and being treated unfairly and inferior by the society, in Abdel-Fattah's narrative. It also highlighted the traditional practices celebrated by the protagonist. Consequently, it was necessary to investigate on Amal's strength and loyalty that are vivid through the manifestation of traditions.

General Conclusion

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion

Over the decades, literature had fascinated foreign readers because of its ability of portraying the life and death of the human beings, their voices and conscience and their relationships and hardships. And over the recent years, especially after the years of 9/11, literature had largely focussed mainly on these relationships and hardships of a particular kind of beings and their lives in a mainstream society; Muslims happens to be the charged kind to point the finger at and to be the core focus. Diasporic Muslim women writers predominantly, held the responsibility of setting free the words that many Muslims, basically Muslim women could not speak.

The self described as an Australian born Muslim Palestinian Egyptian chocoholic writer Randa Abdel-Fattah is an in plain- sight figure that her first novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* perfectly embodies the life of Muslim families after 9/11. Abdel-Fattah goes a step further as an Australian Muslim women and narrates the phases and challenges that a sixteen-year old teenage girl, Amal goes through when making the decision of wearing the veil full-time as part of revealing to the public her new identity as a Muslim girls and make this hijab a cultural religious code of being what it means to be a hijab wearing Muslim girl in a mainstream society, Australia.

The protagonist, Amal receives an inner as well as an outer challenge and mixed feelings of putting on the veil but the sense of humour that Abdel-Fattah puts in her character's behaviour as a means of educating and directing young adults about Islam and how to face prejudice and stereotypes and how to be proud of their

GENERAL CONCLUSION

identity, religion and tradition in a different way is one of its kind. And as she stated, it makes *Does My Head Look Big in This?* a funny book and helps the reader, both Western and non-Western, Muslim, to find their way in any challenge they face concerning traditions and religion and know how to deal with it. This leads to the key purpose of writing and analysing the novel.

Therefore, the aim of analysing and investigating *Does My Head Look Big in This?* was to find the link between the traditions and rituals of Muslims in the West and how did the veil stood as an Islamic code between the two. It is important hence, to study the features of *Does My Head Look Big in This?* to highlight Abdel-Fattah's strategy of narrating and educating readers as her main goal; that is her novel to be more influential and helping young adult and children than to be only didactic.

From our analysis of the novel, we have discovered that the way Abdel-Fattah portrays the traditions and rituals of Muslim families in *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is, for the most parts, embodied in a sixteen-year old Muslim teenage girl Amal, and in her big decision to wear the hijab as a complementary part of her Islamic rituals and traditions. Abdel-Fattah succeeded to represent Islam to the young adults and to make her book an easy resource of literature to be learned about Islam and multiculturalism.

In short, we have proved that *Does My Head Look Big in This?* is an important helping tool that could be best used to teach students about multiculturalism, means of identity, culture, rituals and others. It could also be seen as a handbook to help readers from different cultures and religions to know how to deal with their mixed identity and confusion that might appear in the teenage years.

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“Transculturation and Aesthetics_Conference Abstracts”, sorted by workshop.Bergen conference.

Appendices

Appendix A

Randa Abdel-Fattah's Biography: Abdel-Fattah was born in Sydney in 1979. She is a Muslim of Palestinian and Egyptian heritage. She grew up in Melbourne and attended a Catholic primary school and Islamic secondary college. Randa has worked as a lawyer, human rights advocate and community volunteer with different human rights and migrant and refugee resource organisations. Randa has used her opinion editorials in newspapers and TV and radio media appearances as a medium for expressing her views about racism, multiculturalism, human rights, the occupation of Palestine and asylum seekers. She is a regular guest at schools around Australia addressing students about her books and the social justice issues they raise. Randa also has been a guest at international writer's festivals. She recently completed her PhD in the Department of Sociology at Macquarie University, researching Islamophobia, racism and everyday multiculturalism in Australia. Randa lives in Sydney with her husband and three children. She has just released her latest novel, *When Michael Met Mina*, which was inspired by her PhD fieldwork examining issues of race in Australia.



Appendix B

(1)

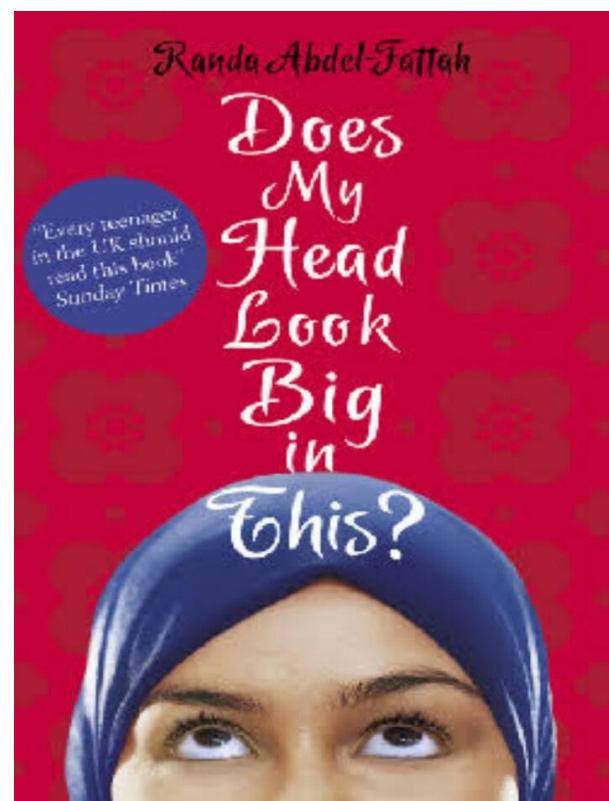
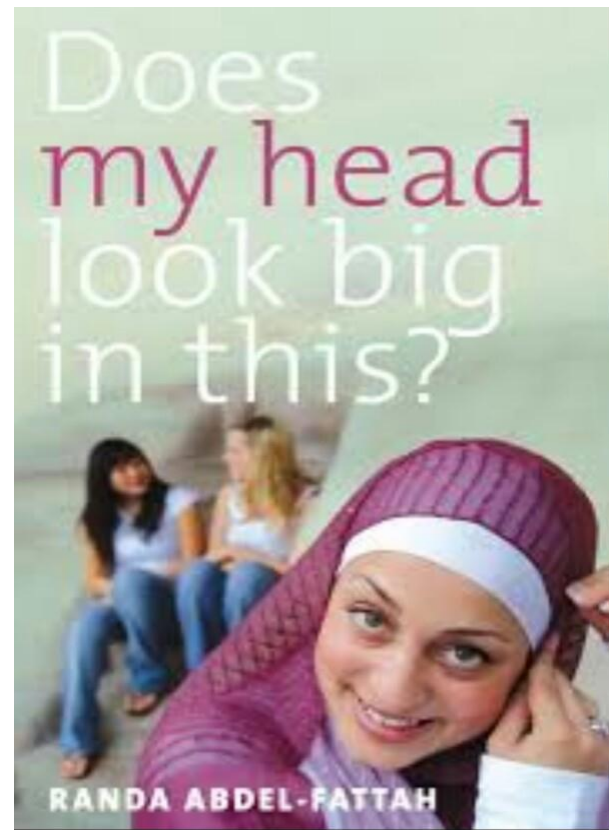
Does My Head Look Big in This? Was published first in Australia, by Pan MacMillan, on August 1, 2005. It won both awards; Australian Book Industry as well as Australian Book of The Year for older children. Picture (1) is the Australian Cover of the novel while Picture No (2) is the US. In the website “Reading In Color Books, Reviews, Memes & More” reviewers of the book diverged between those who preferred the Australian book cover, and the Us one. Via Google accounts they expressed and justified their opinions as following:

“Hm. Visually, I think the American cover is more striking. However, I think the trend of only showing part of the protagonist's face or body is troublesome, and I like that Amal is

HAPPY on the second cover. I'd love to see a compromise--the style of the American cover, but with Amal's full face showing, looking sort of quizzical/half-smiling to show both that she's confident in her decision and that she's questioning the world around her”

“I prefer the Australian cover. The US one is just too bright and glittery - though they both convey the humorous qualities of the book”

“I liked the US cover better just on visuals”.



(2)