

The Nature of Muslim Stereotyping in Rohina Malik's *Unveiled*

طبيعة الصورة النمطية للمسلمين في مسرحية روهينا مالك "المكتوف"

إعداد

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Abstract

Muslims have suffered from stereotyping after the 9/11 attacks. Since then, they have been seen as terrorists and treated as less human,. In addition, Muslim women have been particularly targeted in the American community because they can be easily identified and they cannot conceal their identity unless they remove the veil that covers the hair and head. Therefore, this study discusses the lives of Muslim women in post-September 11 by examining Rohina Malik's play Unveiled, which imitates reality and shows how Muslim women of different nationalities have lived in the world of "Us" versus "them" because they have been seen as terrorists after the tragic attack of 9/11. The paper analyzes the speech of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in the play, and applies the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) to explain the reasons for stereotyping and its consequences so that we can be aware of the main stereotyping factors that result in positive or negative outcomes.

Keywords: Unveiled, Stereotyping, Muslim

الملخص

ازدادت الصور النمطية السلبية عن المسلمين بشكل كبير على الصعيد العالمي بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر ٢٠٠١، حيث غالبًا ما وُصف المسلمون بالإرهاب وتعرضوا لمعاملة غير عادلة وغير إنسانية. وقد كانت النساء المسلمات من أكثر الفئات تضررًا من هذه الصور النمطية، نظرًا لأن مظهرهن المميز، مثل ارتداء الحجاب، يجعل هويتهن الدينية واضحة ويعرضهن للتمييز وسوء الفهم، ما لم يتخلين عن زيهن الثقافي والديني. لذلك يناقش هذا البحث تجارب النساء المسلمات في حقبة ما بعد ١١ سبتمبر من خلال تحليل مسرحية روهينا مالك (المكشوف). تعكس المسرحية الواقع الاجتماعي وتصور حياة النساء المسلمات من جنسيات وخلفيات متنوعة وهنّ يواجهن تحديات العيش في عالم منقسم بين "نحن" و"هم". يحلل البحث حوارات الشخصيات المسلمة وغير المسلمة في المسرحية ويطبق نموذج المحتوى النمطي لتوضيح الأسباب التي تؤدي إلى الصور النمطية السلبية وتأثيرها على العلاقات الاجتماعية، مع تسليط الضوء على كيفية تأثير هذه الصور على تشكيل التصورات الإيجابية والسلبية تجاه المجتمعات المسلمة وتعزيز الفهم الثقافي.

1. Introduction

The negative stereotyping of Muslims has become a great issue for Muslims living in the United States after the 9/11 attacks. Muslims have faced the consequences of negative stereotyping that ranges from verbal attacks to physical violence. Since then, thousands of Muslims have complained about being treated as less human. American Muslims have faced attacks even by their fellow Americans because of the spread of negative stereotyping of Muslims. Thus, Muslims have generally lived in the world of “Us” versus “them” because they have been seen as terrorists after the tragic attack of 9/11 (Kopytowska & Baider, 2017, p. 135).

Muslim women have been particularly targeted in the American community. The reason is that Muslim women can be easily identified and they cannot conceal their identity unless they remove the veil that covers the hair and head. The discrimination against Muslim women starts with silent stares which can be escalated into verbal or physical offense (Byng, 2008, p. 669). Thus, many Muslim women decide to remove their veils to protect themselves and their families. In other words, they give up wearing the veil to hide their religious identity. However, Other women who insist on preserving their religious identity and keeping their veils have experienced anti-muslim attacks for they are seen as a part of terrorism.

Rohina Malik writes *Unveiled* to imitate the lives of Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. Malik sheds light on the negative stereotyping of Muslims and its consequences and tries to correct this spread of false stereotyping of Muslims in the post-September 11. She believes that art has the power to bring peace to Muslims when the negative stereotyping of Muslims is replaced with the fact that not all Muslims are enemies but there are many Muslims who deserve to be treated as human beings.

In the five parts of the play, Malik uses her five protagonists, Maryam, Noor, Inez, Shabana, and Layla, to focus on scenes from reality and situations that Malik has personally experienced. The events of the play display the stereotyping of Muslim women in the United States and its dangerous consequences of hate crimes which will not be solved unless the non-Muslims become aware of the real meaning of Islam.

2. The Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to shed light on the language of stereotyping used in Rohina Malik' *Unveiled*. The study aims at paying attention to the language used as a result of Muslim Stereotyping in the post-9/11. In addition, the study applies the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) to *Unveiled* to illustrate the reasons for Muslim stereotyping which is based on the dimensions of warmth and competence and show how stereotyping elicits certain emotions towards Muslim characters as a result of the perceived warmth and competence.

3. The significance of the study

Stereotyping can lead to dangerous consequences including bullying, violence, and crimes. Many Muslims have suffered from these consequences because of the spread of negative stereotyping of Muslims in the post-September 11. For this, the study explains the effect of stereotyping on Muslims' speech and identifies the language of stereotyping against Muslims to illustrate how negative stereotyping has a great influence on the speech of Muslims who are aware of being seen as terrorists. The study also shows the factors of stereotyping and its consequences on Muslims as manifested in the language used in *Unveiled* to make people aware of the reasons behind stereotyping and the pain caused to Muslims as a result of the spread of false stereotyping which has been propagated by the Media for years.

4. Literature review

Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* gives researchers ways to discuss many theories depending on the different situations and characters adopted in the play. Stahl (2016) explored women's response to Muslim stereotyping in *Unveiled* and showed their pursuits to redefine their existence as Arabs or Muslims based on the historical and political circumstances in the post-9/11. The study applied several theories to the play, such as trauma theory, feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and theories of cultural change through characters' costumes, props, and language. The study also focused on the form and structure of the plays; that is, it examined the semiotic implications of the characters that show the misconceptions of Arab and Muslim women after 9/11. In addition, it explored veiled Muslim women and their diasporic identity; meantime, it analyzed detailed information about the characters' culture and religion to examine the self-identification process and its pedagogical approach and focused on the role of political theater in post-September 11 and how female playwrights, including Rohina Malik, challenged the widespread narratives of the media during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Stahl (2023) also examined dramatic literature and focused on the theme of motherhood in her book *(M)other's perspectives*. Regarding the chapter *Unveiled*, she discussed versions of motherhood and the role of mothers as manifested in the play. The chapter explored the relationship between motherhood and citizenship through the performances of the characters and showed motherhood's relationship to cultural and religious traditions. The chapter also discussed biopolitics along with the lives of veiled women and their diasporic subjectivity in *Unveiled*.

Shalaby (2023) applied a postcolonial eco study to the play *Unveiled*. A postcolonial eco study connects postcolonial citizens and nature. Based on this theory, the study explained that nature has a big role in a human's life and applied postcolonial ecocriticism to *Unveiled* in order to show the effect of food and drinks (e.g. orange, coffee, tea) on the five Muslim women who are seen as strangers in the post-September 11.

Ahmed (2023) explored the transcultural feminist consciousness in Rohina Malik's *Unveiled*. The study applied Nancy E. Downing and Kristen L. Roush's model of the development of feminist identity to the play. The model introduces five stages that explain the development of feminist identity. Thus, Ahmed explored the protagonists' five-stage feminist consciousness development in Rohins Malik's *Unveiled*.

5. Methodology

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) explains the reasons and consequences of Positive and negative stereotyping. Fiske et al. (2002) introduce two dimensions of warmth and competence which are the main factors of stereotyping (p.878). Warmth reflects traits such as sociability and kindness, while competence refers to traits such as skill, intelligence, and confidence (Cuddy et al., 2008, p. 63).

Stereotyping centers on the degree of perceived warmth and competence dimensions. If the warmth and competence are high, the person is seen as an ally and is perceived with admiration. However, if both dimensions are low, the person is seen as an enemy and is perceived with contempt, anger, or disgust. On the other hand, a person who is viewed with high-warmth/ low-competence, receives pity and sympathy, and a person who is viewed with low-warmth/ high-competence, receives envy and anger (Fiske, 2018, p. 2). Overall, Stereotyping is based on the degree of warmth and competence which elicit specific emotion towards the stereotyped person.

6. Discussion

The reasons and consequences of stereotyping are inherent in the two dimensions of warmth and competence. In *Unveiled*, Muslim stereotyping partially results from the perceived warmth and competence. Muslim characters are perceived as either allies or enemies based on their warmth and competence dimensions. Furthermore, the outcome of the perceived dimensions can elicit one out of the four emotions (admiration-

pity-envy-contempt) and consequently lead to positive or negative behaviors toward Muslims. The play consists of five parts which introduce several Muslim characters facing stereotyping in the United States, except for Shabana, who lives in London but still suffers from the negative consequences of Muslim stereotyping.

In the first part of the play, Maryam is perceived as low in warmth for her wearing the veil. An American boy says to her, *"Take that shit off"* (Malik, 2009). The veil is seen as *"shit"* in the United States. Then he goes on to say, *"You are in America, take that shit off"*, and *"if you are an American, then dress like one"* (Malik, 2009). The American boy sees that The United States is not a place for wearing the veil and that the veil can't be worn by Americans. Thus, Maryam can't prove that she is an ally because of her veil and is perceived to be low in warmth because the veil is a symbol of supporting terrorism in the United States.

Maryam also shows how she is perceived as low-warmth in the workplace. She says, *"I have gone without work for months because I did not feel a connection with the client."* (Malik, 2009). Malik shows the difficulty of a warm feeling to Americans after 9/11 and reflects the consequences of that tragic attack on Muslims' lives including their workplace (Ghazali, 2008, p.4). Maryam is seen as an enemy in the streets of the United States and in her work as well. She is perceived as low-warmth because of her religious identity.

In the second part of the play, Noor is also perceived to be low in warmth because she wears the veil. A group of Americans make fun of Noor calling her *"towel head"* in the American streets. The veil is seen as something ridiculous by Americans because it's against their standards of beauty and, at the same time, the veil becomes a metaphor for terrorism after the 9/11 attack (Blakeman, 2014, p1). In the encounter between Noor and the Americans, they laugh at her wearing the veil and then they begin to pull it off by force in revenge for the attacks of 9/11. Hence, Noor's veil is the reason why she is seen as an out-group and lacks warmth in the United States.

On the other hand, Noor is perceived as high-warmth by Joe. Although he is an American, he sees her as a friend because they both share the same religion. Noor says “ *he spoke to me in Arabic*”, and, “ *he told me that he converted to Islam*” (Malik, 2009). Noor and Joe can speak the same language and they share the same religious identity in the world of racism against Muslims. Thus, there is a connection between Noor and Joe that makes Noor to be perceived as high in warmth by Joe. In addition, Noor is perceived as low in warmth as Joe sees her crying for her inability to defend herself in front of the Americans. According to Fiske (2018, p.2), a person who is perceived as high-warmth/ low-competence elicits pity and sympathy. In the play, as Noor is perceived as high in warmth and low in competence, Joe feels pity for her. He decides to help Noor when he sees her as an ally (high-warmth) who is unable to take action against the attack (low-competence).

In the third part of the play, the American woman, Inez, is not seen as an American anymore since she decides to convert to Islam and wears the veil. She is perceived as low in warmth because of her reverting to Islam. Her husband and grandmother show how Muslims are generally perceived to be enemies in the United States. Inez says about her husband that, “*he's worried some fool might do something to me*” (Malik, 2009). In the post-September 11, Some Muslim women, such as Nabra Hasan, were attacked and killed because of wearing the veil (Khalil, 2018, p.48). Thus, many Muslim women have decided to stay at home after 9/11 (Zahedi, 2011, p.188). In the play, Malik imitates this reality by showing how Inez's husband is worried about her going outside home. Her husband doesn't want her to go for a walk because he knows that she will be perceived to be low in warmth even if she is a fellow American. Moreover, Inez's husband is also aware of Muslim stereotyping in the United States. She describes Inez's conversion to Islam as a “*strike*”, which means that Inez will get into trouble because of her religious identity.

Inez is also deprived of her identity is also stolen because of her being a Muslim. The store owner whom she has known for years treats her as an enemy and considers her as an Arab because of her veil. He says, "*We need to bomb those A-rabs back to the stone ages.*" (Malik, 2009). The veil is seen as a metaphor for being an Arab even if the person has a different nationality. Here, although Inez is an African American woman, she is seen as an Arab who is part of terrorism. Inez is perceived to be low-warmth in the eyes of the store owner despite the fact that she is an American who used to be considered as an ally for years before her conversion to Islam.

Inez is not only perceived to be low in warmth by the store owner but also by all Americans in the store. When the store owner talks badly about Arabs, all the people in the store stare at Inez as if she is not a fellow American but an Arab. Inez says, "*Everybody in the store turned and looked at me.*", "*the looks on people's faces sent chills up my spine*" (Malik, 2009). One of them even threatens her by pretending to slice his throat. Inez is treated as an enemy because of her Muslim appearance. According to (Khalil, 2018), Americans who appear to be different are considered to be un-American and are encouraged to change what they believe to gain his/her rights in their country (p.14). In the play, Inez loses her right to be an American and lacks warmth because she is seen as an enemy who should be punished like other Muslims and Arabs.

Inez is perceived as low-competence in the eyes of Americans. Although she seems to be a very confident woman at the beginning when she says, "*I will not let fear cripple me*", "*You have to be strong in life.*", and "*My grandma raised me to be tough as nails*" (Malik, 2009), she is perceived to be weak in the eyes of the Americans in the store. When Inez is attacked by Americans verbally and with their silent stares. She removes the veil to regain her right as an American. Inez says, *I was crying. I felt like a coward. I kept asking Allah to forgive me for being so*

weak.” (Malik, 2009), to show her inability to defend her rights in the American community. Thus, Inez is perceived to be low in warmth for her wearing the veil and low in competence for her inability to defend herself, hence, the Americans feel disgusted about her.

In the fourth part of the play, Shabana shows how she is perceived as low-warmth in London through her rap. She responds to the negative stereotyping about Muslims saying, “*I’m not a bomber...London’s callin...Terrorist Iraqi.*” (Malik, 2009). Shabana also shows the role of the Media in spreading false stereotyping of Muslims. She sings, “*And Muslims are not ISIS. I said, Muslims are NOT ISIS.You watch the media Switch of your mind Swallow what it feedin ya.*” (Malik, 2009). Inez explains that the Media has the power to misinform people and cause them to be blinded to the truth. The media has a great effect on how anti-Muslims judge many Muslims and how they perceive Muslims with the same negative dimensions.

Shabana also mentions how she is seen as an oppressed woman because of wearing the veil. Although Asians are known for their high competence (Fiske, et al., 2002, p.878), Shabana is perceived as low in competence as the veil sometimes refers to the oppression of women. Shabana sings, “*I wear Hijab.....You can call me oppressed. But I won’t be undressed.*” (Malik, 2009). Malik shows her own experience and says as well, “As a woman, a stereotype that I often come across [in the West] is that I am anti-American, oppressed or that I need to be saved. People also feel I can’t think for myself or someone forced me to wear the veil; that I’m weak, submissive and pathetic,” (Salialn, 2014). Shabana also says, “*The veil is a symbol of controversy, right? Except when it’s on a Nuns head! But a Muslim woman, she’s oppressed*” (Malik, 2009). Thus, the veil is seen as either a symbol of oppression or terrorism.

Overall, Shabana is seen as an outsider for she says *"I'm not a bomber."*, *"London's callin...Terrorist Iraqi."*, *"I said, Muslims are NOT isis."* (Malik, 2009), meanwhile, she is seen as an oppressed woman for wearing the veil; she mentions the veil and oppression several times; *"You can call me oppressed...But I won't be undressed"*, *"the veil is a symbol of controversy, right? Except when it's on a Nuns head! But a Muslim woman, she's oppressed"*, *"People always talking about veils and oppression"* (Malik, 2009). Therefore, she is hated by non-Muslims around her because she is perceived as low in both dimensions of warmth and competence.

In the last part of the play, Layla recounts her experience after the 9/11 attacks and shows how she is perceived as low in warmth in the United States. Layla faces a group of Americans shouting, *"U.S.A! U.S.A! Go back to your country you terrorists!"* (Malik, 2009), which is a popular sentence that many Muslims used to hear after 9/11 (Zahedi, 2011, p.189). Layla also says, *"There was no mercy in their eyes"* to show how she is perceived as low in warmth following the 9/11 attack (Malik, 2009). Although her brother died during the attack, Layla is treated as if she were responsible for the death of 9/11 victims. Furthermore, Layla and her Muslim friend experience physical attacks from an American boy. The boy hits her friend and spits on her when she is trying to correct his false stereotyping of Muslims. Layla says, *"Do not call me Terrorist, I am not Terrorist!"* (Malik, 2009), but the American boy is still motivated by his anger with all Muslims.

Layla is perceived to be high in competence for her bravery in helping her friend who is physically attacked by the American boy. Although Layla seems to be a weak character at the beginning of the story for she says, *"What power Mama? I so weak.. I always felt weak"* (Malik, 2009), she appears to be a very confident woman in the eyes of the American boy who is violating her and her Muslim friend. While all people escape from the American boy, Layla is the only one who decides to take action against the attack and help her friend. Thus, Layla is perceived as low in warmth and high in competence so she receives anger from the American boy.

Although Layla is perceived as low-warmth/high-competence and so she is hated by the American boy, everything changes at the end of the story. After the American boy has violated Layla, she decides not to take her revenge on him. She intelligently tries to correct his false stereotyping of Muslims by showing the real meaning of Islam which guides her to peace. Moreover, Layla stops the officer from arresting him although he has physically attacked Layla and her friend. Layla says, "*This hatred and anger must end here*" (Malik, 2009) to show that she, like many Muslims, wants to live in peace because we are all human. She says, "*Human beings come from the same source. We are one family.*" (Malik, 2009). Layla's effective reaction leads the American boy to consider her as a friend and not as an enemy. Although the American boy has been extremely affected by the false stereotyping about Muslims; "*his eyes looked like a wild animal*", he then sees Muslims in a different way; "*The boy's eyes changed. They looked human*" (Malik, 2009). Layla is, in the end, seen as a friend so that she can be perceived as high in warmth for the American boy. Her friendly confident personality leads the American boy to respect Muslims because she is perceived as high in both dimensions of warmth and competence.

7. Conclusion

Many Muslims are perceived as low-warmth because of their religion. Even American Muslims, like Inez, are treated as un-American because of wearing the veil, which identifies their faiths. Malik introduces many Muslim characters of different nationalities who are perceived to be low in warmth in the United States and London, and the low warmth is shown in the language used by both Muslim and anti-Muslim characters in the play.

Muslims are only perceived as high-in-warmth when anti-Muslims become aware of the real meaning of Islam. In the play, Nour is perceived as high-warmth by the American man, Joe, because he is also a Muslim and knows the real meaning of Islam. In addition, Layla is also seen as a friend when she doesn't want to legally punish the American man who attacks her to show him that many Muslims are innocent/kind and deserve to be treated as human beings.

In terms of the competence dimension, the language and behaviors of the Muslim and un-Muslim characters explain how Muslims are perceived in the competence dimension. For example, Shabana shows that she is seen as an oppressed woman because of her veil. Shabana is perceived as low in competence as the veil sometimes refers to the oppression of women. Inez also explains through her speech that she is a weak person who can't take action against stealing her right to live as an American after her conversion to Islam. While Laya appears to be high in competence for her strong personality for she confronts an American boy who physically attacks her Muslim friend. Although all people decide to escape being afraid of hate crimes, Layla shows how she is competent in the eyes of the American boy.

The consequences of stereotyping are also displayed in the play. For example, Joe feels pity for Nour because he sees her as a friend (high warmth) who is crying for her inability to defend herself under anti-Muslim attacks (low competence). While Inez receives anger in the American community after her conversion to Islam, because she is not considered a friend anymore (low-warmth) and she describes her weakness in the racist world (low-competence). Finally, Lalya shows how the degree of warmth can be changed from low to high when anti-Muslims become aware that not all Muslims are enemies, but there are many Muslims who are victimized as a result of false stereotyping. Thus, Malik introduces Muslim and anti-Muslim characters to imitate reality after the 9/11 attacks. She is keen to use familiar speech which is said by Muslims and anti-Muslims in the real world so that she can reveal the effect of 9/11 on the language used by Muslims and anti-Muslims after the tragic attacks.

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