Postcolonialism, Islamophobia and Inserting Islam Facts in African-American Fiction: Umm Zakiyyah's *If I Should Speak*

دراسات ما بعد الكولونيالية، الاسلاموفوبيا وإدراج حقائق الإسلام في الأدب الأمريكي: رواية "لو يجب أن أتكلم" لأم زكية نموذجا

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Abstract

Islam has been growing quickly in the world, yet it is a predominately misunderstood religion. Othering Islam through media propaganda and western writings, and mis associating it with some assumptions are still rampant. Thus, the researcher attempts at showing these assumptions stereotypical prejudgments of Islam and Muslims that are commonly associated with Western assumptions resulted in Islamophobia and exploring the role of counter-discourses in contemporary Black-American Fiction by analyzing Umm Zakiyyah's If I Should Speak and showing to what extents the novel has an important role in correcting assumptions and narrating the Islamic facts. Thus, this article highlights Umm Zakiyyah's narrative of Islam's truth within its historical sources the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The paper analyses Umm Zakiyyah's reconsideration of Islam's truth, by focusing on the meaning of Islam and being a Muslim. To do so, this qualitative and non-empirical research is conducted in a descriptive-theoretical analysis, using the selected novel as a primary source and library and online critical materials, such as books and journal articles, as secondary references. Based on the analysis, it is found that Umm Zakiyyah narrates Islam and Muslims to counter the West's negative view on Islam. Furthermore, based on the story, the power of Muslim self-identification within the historical transparent knowledge based on the Quran's perspectives leads to the conversion of Tamika Douglass, proving that Islam can be perceived positively by non-Muslims; in this case, it is represented within its subjectivity. It is found that the novel can be a tool of Islamic da'wah [call for the faith]. Hence, the Muslim writers and novelists should write to solve the challenges facing Muslims and the Ummah by Islamizing English fiction.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Islamic Postcolonialism, Umm Zakiyyah, fiction, facts.

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الملخص:

يُواجه الإسلام و المسلمين و خاصة الأقليات المقيمة في الغرب عددًا من التحديات، مثل الادعاءات الغربية التي تُمارس ضد الإسلام والمسلمين وتنعكس سلبيًا لتُنتج مختلف الصور النمطية والتحيزات العنصرية ضدهم سواء باستعمال الميديا أو المنشورات الغربية. وعليه؛ يهتم هذا البحث بتسليط الضوء على هذه التحديات و خاصة الاسلاموفوبيا، و دراسات ما بعد الاستعمار و دور الرواية في تصحيح الشبهات و سرد الحقائق حول الإسلام و المسلمين من خلال اتخاذ رواية "لو يجب أن أتكلم" (2000) للكاتبة أم زكية من الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. وقد وظَّفت الباحثة المنهج الكيفي غير التجريبي معتمدة على طريقة التحليل الوصفي النظري باستخدام الرواية المختارة كمصدر أوليّ، مع مصادر ثانوية نقدية متوفرة في المكتبة وعلى الشابكة، من مثل الكتب والمقالات الأكاديمية، وبعد التحليل والمناقشة؛ ظهرت أدلة كافية على صراعات عدة تواجه الهوية الإسلامية في الغرب، ممّا يؤدي إلى ضياع هوية المسلم بين الأنا والآخر، فمن جهة ترغب الأنا المسلمة في الحفاظ على جوهرية هوية الأصل، ومن جهة أخرى تتعرض الهوية للضياع والتهجين والازدواجية بسبب السياسات العنصرية والثقافة الغربية والشعور بالتغريب، ومن أهمية هذا البحث. كما أثبتت الدراسة أنّ للرواية دور مهم في تصحيح الشبهات و سرد الحقائق، و لذلك نوصي بأسلمة الرواية و الكتاب بتسليط رواياتهم و أقلامهم على سرد الهوية و الثقافة الإسلامية بدل التقليد و التبعية للأدب الغربي دون مراعاة الهوية و مقوماتها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاسلاموفوبيا، دراسات ما بعد الكولونيالية و الإسلام، أم زكية، السرد.

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1. Introduction

The 9/11 events, resulting in Islamophobia and the "War on Terror", have created different challenges for Muslims living in the West and beyond through the negative media coverage of Islam, often portraying Muslims as terrorists and thereby creating further marginalization for them in the West. As a result, racism, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against Muslims have increased after these events. Furthermore, there are many Western ideologies such as globalisation, capitalism, Marxism, secularism and modernisation that directly clash with Islam and its values. In many instances, Islam and Muslims have also been represented in Western writings as uncivilized, irrational, violent, ignorant and weak. Moreover, the policy of "othering" Islam has been overtly practised in the Western Media. In this context, Akbar S Ahmad (1992) emphasizes that "nothing in history has threatened Muslims like the Western media" (p. 223). Islam has been represented as a religion connected with terrorism, violence, ignorance and hysteria. In "Islam through Western Eyes" (1980), Edward Said confirms that the Westerners know nothing about Islamic civilisation, history, and culture. They ignore the great Muslim writers, intellectuals or musicians because Islam is portrayed to the Westerners only in the image that fits the West's agenda which was described by Said as a "new style of imperialism without colonies" (1980, p. 7).

Like knowledge, Media also was considered by Said in his book, *Covering Islam* (1981), as a tool of power to continue control over the Muslim world. For instance, the West has fabricated a bad image of Islam. It has portrayed the Muslim world as terroristic and has associated Islam

with violence and fundamentalism to declare the "War on Terror". Similarly, in "Is Objective Reporting on Islam Possible? Contextualizing the Demon", Syed Farid Alatas (2005) links between covering Islam and power. According to Alatas, Islamic civilisation succeeded earlier in extending its power, control and influence like the Ottoman Empire, but today, the West is the dominant civilisation in both economic and cultural spheres. However, the threat of hostility towards Islam is deeply rooted in the West. Thus, the West followed its policy of oriental stereotypes and misconceptions of Islam. And in the same way, Amin Malak (2005) explains the colonial discourse in representing the claims against Islam stating that "many Western, so-called experts sometimes make presumptuous claims about Islam and Muslims, projecting often negative, stereotypical images and labels that are deployed regularly and systemically" (p. 152).

Thus, contemporary Islamic fiction in postcolonial literature is the area of this study by exploring Umm Zakiyyah's narrative of Islam from historical perspectives in *If I Should Speak* (2000). To do so, this research has been conducted in a qualitative non-empirical method using descriptive analysis, mainly depending on textual analysis through a close reading of the selected text. Besides, the methodology used here is a qualitative approach that has been carried out through secondary sources' findings based on understanding and analysing the literary text of the selected novel as well as through secondary reading materials that were accessed like personal published interviews done with the selected writer, Umm Zakiyyah. Particularly, this paper tries to answer the following question and explores how Umm Zakiyyah narrates Islam within its historical subjectivity.

2. **Background of Study**

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During the post-colonial period, Islam in general and the Muslim world in particular, have faced different challenges in all aspects of life and at all levels, locally and internationally. These include the rise of Marxism, secularism and modernism, among others. Some scholars and the media in the West considered the Third World as the weak "Other" and sought to rectify it, often fallaciously, by imbuing it with power, peace, democracy, modern education and other propaganda reforms, especially in the Muslim countries, including the Middle East. However, their mission to "civilise" the East has been riddled with inherent conflicts and conundrums. On one hand, this group of people, who in fact share a lot in common with racists around the world, have always been looking after their own interests; they have constantly tried to exert their dominance and control over the lands and natural resources of the (Middle) East. On the other, they have been anxious about what is known as the "Islamic Caliphate." Thus, they have repeatedly endeavoured to prevent the establishment of any Islamic State in the region. Additionally, this racist group in the West has constricted the roles of Arab and Muslim leaders so that they will remain the most powerful entity in the world. For instance, Donald Trump seeks to remain the "greatest" by fighting industrial, commercial and economic progress in the Third World countries, including Iran, Turkey and China. He also continues to threaten and blackmail the Gulf countries in exchange for the so-called "protection", to keep America's eyes on Islam and the Muslim world.

2.1 Secularism vs. Islam

After decolonization in the Third World, there was an emergence of various radical and fundamentalist Islamic movements in the Muslim

world generally and in the Middle East in particular, such as the Salafi, Wahhabi and Muslim brotherhood which called for a revival of Islam and radical reconstruction of Muslim societies culturally and politically. Islamic revival came as a struggle to remove Western culture from all aspects of life and replacing it with the culture of Islam. Additionally, the idea of Islamism appeared as a reaction to the growth of secularism that called for a separation between religion and state. Secularism denies the religious principles and instead supports social and moral values of people. However, this restriction of religious ethos creates problems for the minorities in the West, including Muslim groups, especially Muslims through the application of political systems. Also, it aims to disregard the western cultural invasions and dominant controls and aims to impose one pattern of cultural and economic consumption and behaviour as being aimed at leading the world by the one-sided pole of America.

In this context, Holger Daun and Geoffrey Walford (2004) mention some writers' opinions about the Islamic revival movements such Ahmed Akhbar and Fred Halliday who consider that the movements' aim was to challenge the West. For example, Akhbar argues that the Islamic revival movements seek to make Islam a way of life and challenge the universal global view based on Western knowledge. Similarly, Fred Halliday (2005) argues that Islamic revivalism is a response to what is conceived as hostility to Islamic threat to the West such as racism in some European countries, above all France, where it has taken on a more explicitly anti-Muslim character. (p. 141). In the United States, anti-Islamic ethic is significant in political discourse (Ibid). Pam Nilan (2017) considers Islamism as "a re-

sponse to modernity that has transformed the religion of Islam into political ideology" (p. 25). It imposes on Muslims political, cultural and economic dependency that is adaptive to the principles of Islam.

Thus, Islamists want to impose strict Islamic laws on society to create a moral leadership through the political re-ordering of government and governance. For example, the Islamic Iranian Revolution of 1979 which was declared under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Mussavi Khomeini, to remove political subordination to the West. America interfered and supported the Shah against Khomeini. In this context, Daniel E. Harmon (2005) writes:

> Until the revolution of 1979, most Westerners viewed Iran with dreamy curiosity. The name brought to mind exotic, not chaotic, images. The West did not see a dangerously discontent people, but a land with a romantic history. Its leader, the Shah, was a reliable American ally—a good friend to have in a petroleum-rich but sometimes turbulent part of the world. (p.7)

2.2 Americanophobia vs. Islamophobia

The western presence and foreign interference in the rest of the Islamic countries, especially the Middle East, politically and administratively has continued. As a result, as mentioned by John L. Esposito (n.d), several Muslim countries have started to adapt Islamic ethos into their societies, educational systems and political systems, such as Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Senegal, as a way rejecting secularism. Moreover, extremist groups appear to defend their land, religion and beliefs. For instance, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Al-Qaeda as a group emerged to counter the Soviet invasion. Daniel Byman (2015) states: "Abdullah Azzam became the leading

ideologue of anti-Soviet struggle and issued *fatwa* in 1984 titled, 'Defense of Muslim Lands'" (p. 4). After defeating the Soviet, Osama Bin Laden wanted to fight against the western hand-makers (Muslim politicians who adapt secularism to Muslim regimes) in the land of Islam taking into consideration Sayyid Qutb's advice that "supported the struggles of Muslims across the globe, including uprisings against so-called apostate regimes in the Muslim world" (Byam, 2015, p. 9). Al-Qaeda started a series of explosions against America and the western presence in their affairs such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Sudan. The crisis between America and the other Jihadist groups such as Boko Haram, Taliban and Al-Shabaab have multiplied. As a result, anti-Americanism appeared. Actually, it is only an American pretext to fight against all those who stand against its foreign policies in the Middle East as well as to stop Al-Qaeda's expansion in Afghanistan, Damascus and Baghdad.

"Jihadist" Al-Qaeda and other groups called for violence by the beginning of the 21th century in America and a series of explosions took place. As it is said, "the magic turned on the magician". Frantz Fanon here indicates in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), that it is the nature of colonialism to incite violence and terrorism. He further explains that it is the process of colonialism that led to the emergence of antiviral resistance by vulnerable people and colonial countries. Similarly, U.S. military interventions in the Middle East have led to the creation of other Islamic groups that called for violence against the West. Halliday (2005) exemplifies with the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, who provided a new militant call which united Muslims from different countries, and the Pakistani founder of the Jama'at-i Islam-I, Mawlana

Maududi, who called for struggle, jihad, against secularism and all other western ideologies (p. x).

2.3 The West vs. Islam in post 9/11 Events

Finally, 9/11 events happened. Why, how and what happened is not this thesis' objective, however, some racists in America never ever forgive those who want to change their way of life, culture and foreign policy. It was America's opportunity to declare "War on Terror", or "War on Islam". Liz Fekete (2009) writes: "Post-September 11 the parameters of institutionalised xenoracism – anti-foreignness – have been expanded to include minority ethnic communities that have been settled in Europe for decades, simply because they are Muslims" (p. 44). Despite multiculturalism in the West, Olivier Roy and Sara Silvestri (2007) state that, "Muslims faced different forms of discrimination and experience differing disadvantages depending on a wide range of characteristics including perceptions of race, ethnicity and gender "(p. 93). Some activists in the West, and in particular in America, claimed of spreading peace in the Muslim world; however, "hostility towards Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and their subsequent exclusion from mainstream society and anti-Muslim hostility accepted as natural and normal" (Allen, 2010, p. 17).

Moreover, after the 9/11 events, these activists in the West have given rise to Islamophobia, which means irrational fear of Islam and discrimination against people who practice the Islamic faith. It is mainly a policy of "othering" Islam and Muslims because Islam has been considered the first enemy of the West. Islam has always been regarded as the "Other" that should be marginalized, controlled and ruled by some westerners because it creates the West's fear of the establishment of the Islamic

caliphate. Esra Mirze Santesso and James E. McClung (2017) define Islamophobia as "a means to binarize and polarize groups in society, and in so doing, it potentially marginalizes Muslims further" (p. 134). Islam became an evil in the West's eyes. Besides, Western media covers Islam with negative images that associate Muslims with terrorism, ignorance, violence and 'Religion of the Sword'. America, as said, never accepts changing its policy which was considered by Michael Fanon as symbol of domination, a centralized system based on the strength of knowledge, technology control, and subordinating the Muslim world.

Because of 9/11 events, America succeeded in providing arguments to the other Western countries and to the American Congress that the West needs to intervene in the Middle East affairs under the pretext of spreading peace, democracy, freedom of religion, freedom of expression and protection of individuals and fighting terrorists. Thus, America invaded Afghanistan as well as Iraq to bring the Third World under its control. In addition, the West has always seen the Third World as an oil field and a repository of other natural resources. Othering Islam and the Muslim world today is a continuous process. The Western control, power and hegemony continue over the Muslim world and in particular the Middle East. Political domination, economic sanctions and Western military interventions continue to be imposed on the Muslim world. Islam is still considered as the "other" which is seen as a threat to the West. Again, as the current American President Donald Trump recently said, "Radical Islamic terrorism is another challenge that we need to defeat" (Donald Trump's remarks on terrorism on August 15, as prepared for delivery by Politico Staff 2016. Trump's call

for banning Muslim immigrants from entering the U. S. is a manifest expression of the hostility that some people in America hold towards Muslim generally.

2.4 Background of the Author and the Novel

Umm Zakiyyah is one of the most prominent African-American Muslim authors writing about Muslims and Islam in the post-9/11 period. Her novels touch on the interfaith struggles of Muslims and Christians in a post-modern world and on the moral, spiritual and intercultural struggles of Muslims as minorities in a country where Muslims have been systematically marginalised after the twin-tower attacks of 2001 and the subsequent American invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). She also writes about racism, women's issues, the practice of Muslim women wearing headscarves, and polygamy. Based on an interview with Umm Zakiyyah conducted in late 2018 via email by me and my supervisor, Mohammad Quayum:

> Umm Zakiyyah was born in 1975 in Long Island, New York, in the family of American converts to Islam, Clark and Delores Moore. She grew up mostly in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she started writing articles for local newspapers at an early age. Later, as a student of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, she wrote articles for the university's publications and won many prizes for her leadership role as well as for her academic achievements. In 1997, she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education and embarked on a career of teaching. She also has a Master's degree in English language learning. She has given talks and interviews on radio and TV and given lectures at youth events and conferences within the United States and abroad. Umm Zakiyyah has since published several other novels, including A Voice (2004) and Footsteps (2007), which form the latter two volumes of her If I Should Speak trilogy. Her other novels include Realities of Submission (2008), Heart We Lost (2011), A Friendship, Promise (2012) Muslim Girl (2014) and His Other Wife (2016), which has been adapted into a short film. She has also published a self-help book for Muslim survivors of abuse: Reverencing the Wombs That Broke You (2017). Her books have been taught at several universities in the US, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, and have been the

focus of doctoral theses both at home and abroad. Umm Zakiyyah also writes under her birth name Ruby Moore. Because she was born the year her parents converted to Islam and because she was their first child to be born into Islam when the family changed their names to Islamic ones, her parents chose the name 'Baiyinah' for Umm Zakiyyah, because it meant 'clear evidence' – signifying that with her birth the family found its spiritual clarity and its right religious and spiritual path. (Brioua &Quayum, 2018, pp. 1-2)

If I Should Speak: A novel published in 2000 by Al-Walaa Publications in Maryland, America. In 2008, the novel received the Muslim Girls Unity Conference Distinguished Authors Award and it has been used for multicultural studies in schools and universities in America and abroad, including Indiana University, Bloomington; Howard University; and Prince Sultan University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It was further featured at Georgetown University and in the Publication Multicultural Perspectives through Saint Cloud State University and University of Saint Thomas affiliation. It has earned praise from writers, professors and filmmakers and has been translated into multiple languages. Robert D. Crane, the advisor to former U.S. President Nixon, has the following to say on Umm Zakiyyah's novel *If I Should Speak*:

> I could not put it down…. I was fascinated not only by the plot of the novel but especially by the brilliance of the writing itself. As a life-long, professional writer and editor, I can say that I have never encountered Umm Zakiyyah's equal in portraying the nuances of encounters between persons at all levels from the most superficial to the most profound. She is a clear example of a person who has natural talent. A person can be trained to write well, but no amount of training can bring a person without the superb, natural talent to captivate the reader as she does and exert a permanent intellectual and emotional impact". (*A Voice*, 2007, p.1)

3. Theoretical Considerations: Islamic Postcolonialism

The Islamic world has witnessed a series of events and challenges during the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century that have led to changes in various fields of life. One of these challenges was colonialism that led to the occupation of many Muslim countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Thus, the Islamic world has witnessed a mass exodus of Muslims to the West, especially during and after colonization. However, the 9/11 events, resulting in Islamophobia and the "War on Terror", have created different challenges for Muslims living in the West and beyond through the media coverage of Islam negatively, often portraying Muslims as terrorists and thereby creating further marginalization for them in the West. As a result, racism, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination against Muslims have increased after these events. Furthermore, there are many Western ideologies such as globalisation, capitalism, Marxism, secularism and modernisation that directly clash with Islam and its values. In many instances, Islam and Muslims have also been represented in Western writings as uncivilized, irrational, violent, ignorant and weak.

Thus, misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in colonial discourse has led to the emergence of Islamic Postcolonialism as a way of defending Islam, Muslims and the culture of Islam in the postcolonial era. According to Majed (2012), "Islamic postcolonialism applies the anti-colonial resistant methodology of postcolonialism from a Muslim perspective, exploring the continuance of colonial discourse in part of the contemporary western writing about Islam and Muslims" (p. 1). Islam has been discussed in postcolonial discourse theoretically through critical analysis of colonialism from the perspective of Islamic sources.

There has been an emergence of a group of critics, scholars, writers and novelists, whether they belong to the minorities in the West or to the Third World. They criticise colonialism's effect on the national and cultural identities in the colonized countries and raise their voices to speak for Muslim subaltern groups in the West and the "Rest". Additionally, they destabilize the Western dominant discourse through the creation of post-colonial theory as an alternative. In this context, Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) contributed to the emergence of the Muslim, African, migrant, Asian and other subaltern literature texts as a reaction to the Western discourse of representation. In this context, Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia (2001) argue that "recognising that a 'rhetoric of blame' is ultimately stultifying, Edward Said advocates a process he calls 'the voyage in', where post-colonial writers take hold of the dominant modes of literary writing to expose their culture to a world audience" (p.8).

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other. Also, the Orient has helped to define Europe or the West. (Said, 1978, p. 9)

Said's writing concerning Islam helps to identify Islam and Muslims through the eyes of the West from one side, reflecting negative representation. Said explained the relationship between Islam and the West in particular and between the West and the rest in general. Through *Orientalism,* Said helped to understand the Oriental discourse regarding the Muslim world that is based on otherness, the "Other" for power, authority and hegemony. What "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do (Said, 1978, p. 20). The idea that Western culture is superior compared to other cultures is not true, but it is only a part of cultural imperialism.

Bobby S. Sayyid has also contributed to Islamic postcolonialism with his writings that criticize the colonial discourse regarding Islam. For instance, in "A Fundamentalism Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism," Sayyid (1997) identifies challenges faced by Muslims in reforming Islam to be the basis of their life, especially Eurocentrism and Empire-desire. Sayyid uses a theory of eurocentrism to criticize Orientalists regarding anti-Islamism as a project of hegemony. In this context, Sayyid (1997) writes that "the emergence of Islamism marks the erosion of eurocentrism" (p. 151). According to Sayyid, Islamism is an alternative to Western imperialism that de-centers the West. Sayyid represents "essentialism" in terms of Islamism to talk about those who want Islam to be the signifier of the political position in the Muslim world, whereas, he uses the word eurocentrism as a challenge faced by Muslims in terms of anti-essentialism stating that "eurocentrism is a project to recentre the West, a project that is only possible when the West and the center are no longer considered to be synonymous" (1997, p. 128). Similar to Said's orientalism, Sayyid's eurocentrism is the Western policy to keep power, control and hegemony on the Muslim world culturally, politically and economically. Sayyid states that the orientalists consider Islam as a limit to the invisible Empire. Additionally, Sayyid considers eurocentrism as a Western element that shows the West as essentialist, emphasizing that the Rest's identity is linked with the West.

S. Sayyid, also in his article "Racism and Islamophobia" (2011), has criticized the colonial discourse regarding their writings that show racism emphasizing Martin Amis's views on Islam, which express hostility and intolerance to otherness. Sayyid has explained the concept that white

race is superior to other races as a policy to marginalize other groups, especially Muslim communities, as well as to create a distinction between Europeanness and non-Europeanness. Sayyid states that "By relying on Orientalism, in which Islam historically functioned as a counter-factual paean to What Went Right With the West, the demonization of Islam and Muslims becomes the implicit valorisation of everything that is considered to be western" (2011, p. 3). According to Sayyid, Islamophobia is as sordid as racism, stating: "Islamophobia has been denied as a problem and defended as a practice. Islamophobia has been presented as nothing as sordid as racism, but rather a rational response to real threats to western, nay universal, values" (Ibid).

3.1 Fiction and Islamic Postcolonialism

Islamic Postcolonialism also has been featured in literature by Muslim writers, especially those who live in the West. Generally, postcolonial literature refers to literary writing by writers belonging to or originating from colonized societies. Postcolonial writers represent different themes such as racism and nationalism, and represent their historical, cultural and traditional heritage to revive their national identity against the effects of colonialism. Additionally, their writings embody a reaction to the representation of imperial dominance and criticize the colonial discourse regarding the Third World using the power of appropriation in postcolonial discourse. Self-identification of the West has created identity-desire for subaltern speakers who spoke for Islam, Muslims and the Third World generally. There has been an emergence of a group of Muslim writers and nov-

elists who criticise colonialism's effect on the Muslim world. They destabilize further the Western negative views on Islam and Muslims through the creation of writing back as an alternative.

Most of the postcolonial writers pen their fiction in English to reach the widest audience and to spread their message to the broader world. Muslim writings in English have emerged as a counter to the "Empire writings." Muslim migrant works provide Muslims' Sown discussion on literary and socio-cultural issues. For instance, in *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2005), Amin Malak uses the term "Muslim" as an identity signifier in English writing which gives Muslims and non-Westerners voices to participate in postcolonial literature as a part of postcolonial theory discourse. Postcolonial narratives by Muslim writers have been used as a platform for giving a voice to voiceless Muslim communities in the Muslim world as well as voiceless Muslim minorities in the West. These characterized Writers represent the self in the language of the other.

In this context, Amin Malak (2005) writes: "Muslim narratives in English prove that the English language, despite all its colonial evocations and its atavistically anti-Muslim connotations, can be utilized as a sophisticated Muslim currency of credible communication" (p. 7). Muslim authors living in the West wield their pens to write for Islam and Muslims to defend their identity, religion and heritage. They portray Islam and Muslims from an Islamic perspective as opposed to the Western perspective. Generally, they discuss the effects of colonization on identity and culture in the Muslim world and colonized countries. Additionally, they incorporate different themes such as racism, nationalism, diaspora experiences, alterity, migrancy, multiculturalism, culture and otherness regarding

"us/them", "we/they", "ours/theirs" and "the West/the rest" and Muslim minorities' experiences in the West. Regarding Muslim fiction, Amin Malak (2005) writes:

> Muslim fiction in English emerged confidently with Ahmed Ali's landmark work *Twilight in Delhi* and is now an established literary tradition, a recognized and respected one at that, popularly and academically. One could point out several prominent works: in 1981, Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* received the Booker Prize; in 1994, M.G. Vassanji's novel *The Book of Secrets* received the prestigious Giller Award in Canada; and in 1995, Bangladeshi-Australian Adib Khan's novel *Seasonal Adjustments* received the Commonwealth First-Novel Prize, with the awarding committee praising it for "provid[ing] a Muslim voice to Australia's multicultural literature" (*Chimo* 40). Moreover, both Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* and Ahdaf Soueif 's *The Map of Love* were shortlisted for the Booker in 1994 and 1999, respectively. Whatever our critical, religious, or ideological responses may be to these works, the corpus of Muslim-English narratives is and should be, a fascinating source for investigation and appreciation, thus creating the impetus for producing this book. These writers have taken up a daunting linguistic, aesthetic, and intellectual challenge and have given a voice, with varying degrees of clarity and commitment, to the erstwhile unrepresented, underrepresented, or misrepresented Muslims. (p. 12)

Some Muslim migrant writers living in the West exhibit Islam as their identity. They identify their novels with Islam to show a sense of belonging, identity and cultural affiliation as well as to reflect the effects of migration on Muslims in the West. Moreover, Muslim migrant writers depict different struggles faced by Muslims living in the West such as racism, discrimination, stereotypes and the policy of "Othering" over Muslims. They also enhance the acceptance of the "other" by personifying the rest's cultures in terms of alterity/otherness. Furthermore, as Amin Malak indicates in the last sentence of his statement above, Muslim migrant writers illustrate Islam in opposition to its depiction by the Western Media or writings. For example, Malak quotes an early South Asian feminist writer

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's statement: "Our religion is based on Love and Truth. It is our religious duty to love one another and to be truthful" (2005, p. 30).

Interestingly, immigrant Muslim women writers, contribute successfully to Islamic postcolonialism. They write about Islam and Muslim women's issues to both indicate and criticize the colonial discourse concerning the misrepresentation of Muslim women in Western writings. They further define Islam and Muslims from an Islamic perspective to correct the image of Islam as well as to defend Muslim issues, especially the *hijab* as a part of Muslim woman's identity and not as a kind of oppression. Post 9/11 Muslim women writers have produced many novels that address the issue of post-colonial Muslim identity from their perspectives within the Islamic worldview.

For instance, the Black-American Muslim writer, Umm Zakiyyah is one of those writers, who wield their pens to write for Islam and Muslims to defend their identity, religion and heritage. They portray Islam and Muslims from an Islamic perspective as opposed to the Western perspective. Umm Zakiyyah reflects, in her fiction, Islam as identity. She identifies her novels with Islam to show a sense of belonging, identity and cultural affiliation. Additionally, she depicts different struggles faced by Muslims living in the West as racism, discrimination, stereotypes and the policy of 'Othering' over Muslims. According to Umm Zakiyyah, the Muslim writings should be represented within Islamic teachings, beliefs and roots. In *Umm Zakiyyah in Conversation* (2018) Umm Zakiyyah says:

> I believe that the role of the Muslim writer should be different from other writers in that we have a greater responsibility to share Islam with the world. However, some Muslim writers feel that religion and writing should not overlap. I find this separation impossible, even for those who

imagine they are separating their beliefs from their writing. We cannot ever separate our hearts and souls from our actions or writing. It simply is not possible, even if we never overtly mention religion… Islam is at the heart of everything I write. When I'm writing, I am conscious of my Muslim identity because Islam forms the basis of my entire life and decision-making. As I mentioned earlier, I generally pray Istikhaarah before publishing any book, so I'm very conscious of my responsibility to my soul and meeting my Creator after I die. (Brioua & Quayum, p. 3)

4. Analysis and Discussion

In *If I Should Speak* (2000), Umm Zakiyyah covers different topics, including the misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims by a Black-American Christian, Tamika Douglas, and her negative prejudgments based on her ill-informed knowledge from the media and her family. To oppose Tamika's prejudicial stereotypes of Islam and Muslims, Umm Zakiyyah depicts the beautiful face of Islam and Muslims through the Black-American Muslim character, Aminah Ali, a roommate of Tamika. Aminah's moral principles, unique personality, powerful knowledge and a strong sense of religiosity lead Tamika to research Islam. In addition to scripting her research paper, Aminah's historical transparent knowledge about Islam helps Tamika to reconsider her prejudgments, discover the truth and ultimately, by the end of the story, become a Muslim.

Through *If I Should Speak* in general and the characters of Tamika and Aminah in particular, Umm Zakiyyah not only gives attention to the importance of knowing about Islam rather than knowledge of it, she narrates the conversion of Tamika after she becomes informed about the truth of Islam as well. Umm Zakiyyah raises different issues in Islam from the Islamic perspective through Aminah, who redefines Islam, Muslim women's issues in Islam and reconsiders the issue of *jihad.* In the third

chapter of this thesis, I have explored different stereotypical concepts associated with Islam and Muslims narrated by Umm Zakiyyah in *If I Should Speak*. Hence, the following paragraphs in this section focus on Aminah's explanation of some issues related to Muslim women in Islam, including the *hijab* and their status. Besides, Aminah explains who is Jesus and what is *Jihad* to Tamika from the Islamic perspective to make the latter understand the historical facts. Umm Zakiyyah emphasizes that Islam is a way of life. Additionally, Umm Zakiyyah states that Islam is not a religion of oppression, violence and terrorism as it has been viewed through some western eyes. In fact, through Aminah Ali's explanation to Tamika, Umm Zakiyyah highlights what is expressed as positive knowledge. In this context, in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay stress that the production of positive knowledge is a way that helps in deconstructing essential assumptions.

Starting with Islam, Umm Zakiyyah gives attention to the core of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim. She tries to elucidate the concept of Islam from its primary source, the Qur'an. When Tamika asks for Aminah's help while doing a research paper on Islam, the latter tries to make Tamika understand Islam by explaining its basic teachings. Aminah gives Tamika a book, *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam* (written by the Canadian-Qatari Muslim convert, Bilal Philips). She also asks Tamika to read the Qur'an and understand it before writing about Islam. "How can she write a paper on a religion if she had never even opened its holy book, the foundation of the entire faith?" (p.45). Aminah shows her surprise when Tamika refuses to read the Qur'an before starting to write her paper on Islam. Here, Umm Zakiyyah is portraying those who prejudge

Islam and Muslims based on the media and other resources without knowing Islam. Due to this, Aminah advises Tamika to reflect on the Qur'an because she does not want Tamika to incorrectly report on the religion, saying that "feel free to read it, because I think it'll give you a better understanding for your report" (p. 45).

Furthermore, Umm Zakiyyah narrates Islam within its historical, cultural and textual contexts through a dialogue between Aminah and Tamika. In this context, the dialogue between Aminah and Tamika reflects Tariq Ramadan's statement: "Dialogue is an act of conviction, of listening, of self-awareness, of self-knowledge, and the heart: together, these qualities constitute wisdom" (2004, p. 204). As a matter of fact, through the discussion narrated between Tamika and Aminah, Umm Zakiyyah shows the importance of dialogue between people from different backgrounds and how it can solve indifferences between them, making them accept alterity/otherness. Umm Zakiyyah, here, embraces the interaction and acceptance between people, regardless of their different backgrounds, rather than create cultural and especially religious indifferences. Undeniably, through Aminah's explanation of Islam from its historical subjectivity, Tamika reflects the role of transparent knowledge in opposing western assumptions. The dialogue between Aminah and Tamika proves Sylvie Avakian's statement, "Dialogue assumes the signification of the relationship between the "I" and the "Other"" (2015, p. 83). Zakiyyah also interestingly portrays Aminah's self-representation as an alternative voice; the Muslim voice that speaks to break Tamika's western assumptions about Islam.

Umm Zakiyyah highlights the essence of Islam and its difference from Christianity through the conversation between Aminah and Tamika. As we have seen in Chapter One, Tamika's knowledge about Islam is taken from the media and her prejudgments. Hence, misrepresentation of Islam encourages the wrong perceptions of Tamika which later becomes a source of stereotypes. Thus, Aminah explains to Tamika what Islam is and what it means to be a Muslim. The character, Aminah mirrors Umm Zakiyyah's statement in "Interview with Umm Zakiyyah*"* (2018) when she emphasizes that a Muslim writer should take the responsibility of sharing Islam with the world. Therefore, Aminah represents Islam from her understanding of it and shows its difference from Christianity, saying that:

> Islam literally means submission or surrender. But, in the religious sense, it's complete, voluntary submission to God alone. It's different from Christianity mainly in its concept of God. In Islam God, or Allah in Arabic, is the Creator, and everything else is creation. And these two, Creator and creation, are separate and never overlap, in that the Creator is not creation, half-man, half-God, or anything like that, nor does the creation share any attributes of the Creator. (p. 52)

Umm Zakiyyah's statement, here, explains that in Christianity, God is the creator and the created at the same time because they believe that Jesus is the son of God. However, in Islam, *Allah* is the only Creator who has no progeny. Aminah's reply reflects the meaning of *Surah Al-Ikhlas*, when Allah says, "He is God, [who is] One, God, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent" (Qur'an 112:1-4).

Furthermore, Umm Zakiyyah interestingly emphasizes the peaceful, just, civilized and beautiful faces of Islam through positive learning and knowledge. Perhaps, she is rectifying Islam's negative representation in the West, which is its association with oppression, violence, darkness

and terrorism. In this context, in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1996), Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay emphasize that the production of positive knowledge is a way to help deconstruct essential assumptions. Umm Zakiyyah (2000) writes:

> Islam is a comprehensive religion. But all of its laws are for the protection of a civilized, moral society and individual, the society's rights taking precedence at some points and the individual's at others, depending on whatever brings the greater good. Islam complements our natures completely. It did not come to oppose our nature but to perfect it. And that sometimes means permitting things we don't want and forbidding things we might want because what a person desires is not always what's best or even complementary to his or her nature. In reality, in Islam, there is nothing in which the benefit outweighs the harm except that Islam permits or mandates it. And likewise, in Islam, there is nothing in which the harm outweighs the benefit except that Islam cautions against it or forbids it. And if we carefully and honestly analyze each rule or allowance in Islam, even polygamy, we are forced to admit that, whatever potential harm it can cause, the benefit is so much greater. (p. 115)

In opposition to the negative image of Islam associated with ignorance, Umm Zakiyyah's words above illustrate its positive aspects. She asserts the fact that Islam is a religion of civilization that calls for intellectual, economic, political, social, historical, technical, scientific, aesthetic and traditional developments. Based on the statement above, Umm Zakiyyah also indicates the importance of building societies based on morality, coexistence, righteousness, prosperity and advancement in Islam. By the same token, she sheds light on the position of individuals in Islam and how Islam safeguards justice, stability and protection towards them. The last part of Umm Zakiyyah's statement accentuates Islam's keenness on providing comfort, safety, health, happiness and goodness for individuals. In other words, in Islam, all that is lawful or allowed permitted (*halal*) for Muslims while all that is harmful is forbidden (*haram*). This is exemplified

in the prohibition of alcohol consumption in Islam due to its negative effects on the mind, health and budget of Muslims.

Aminah also explains to Tamika that Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is the messenger of Allah sent to both Muslims and non-Muslims like other messengers like Jesus who was sent to all people, including Christians, to call them to obey Allah, to believe in Him and to love all people regardless of their differences. Here, Aminah corrects Tamika's view of the Islamic prophet as a saviour. She says,

> Prophet Muhammad, prayers and peace be upon him, was simply a man, a prophet and messenger, with no power to save anyone. He was here to convey to humans the Qur'an, God's last book, and to show us how to live by that book, and we call his example the Sunnah. (Umm Zakiyyah, 2000, p. 54)

Umm Zakiyyah underscores that Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was not the saviour of Muslims, but a messenger of God; a man chosen by Allah to direct people to Him through His message. Another difference between Islam and Christianity narrated in *If I Should Speak* is Jesus's death. Christians believe that Jesus died for their sins, whereas, Muslims believe that Jesus, as mentioned in the Qur'an, is alive and will be sent back again. Aminah tells Tamika that "we believe that he was not crucified and that God raised him, body and all, and he will return as a sign of the Day of Judgment" (p. 56). Aminah's statement here is demonstrated by Allah in Surah Al Imran, "O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify [i.e., free] you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you [in submission to God alone] superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your return, and I will judge between you concerning that in which you used to differ" (3: 55).

Umm Zakiyyah narrates religious diversity. Within this frame of reference, Aminah confirms to Tamika, trying to correct stereotypical pre-judgment, that the existence of different religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, was "due to certain historical factors that caused the evolution of what is commonly referred to as 'the three Abrahamic faiths'" (p. 92). Umm Zakiyyah substantiates the uniqueness of Islam regarding Muslims' belief towards the messengers; Muslims believe that all messengers, including Jesus, were sent by Allah to call people to believe in God as the One creator. Along these lines, Umm Zakiyyah (2000) writes:

> When Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, the last messenger and prophet sent by God to humankind, came to call people to the religion taught by Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, people of all nationalities, races, cultures, and religions, including Christianity and Judaism, accepted his message, and Islam became the fastest growing religion on earth and remains so today. However, like some Jews during the time of Jesus, people rejected God's messenger and continued to teach and live what is now common day Christianity, and thus became disbelievers by rejecting a messenger of God. (p. 92)

As we have mentioned above, Tamika's prejudice against Muslim women is associated with weakness and oppression due to wearing the *hijab*. Umm Zakiyyah shows that a Muslim woman is like other women who live their own lives freely, but she considers her beauty her property. Umm Zakiyyah's representation of women here is limited to physical beauty because she tries to consider assumptions associated with the *hijab* as an "object". In fact, [Muslim] women's true beauty is in their moral and spiritual beauty as well as the power of their mind. Umm Zakiyyah also addresses the issue of the oppression of women in Islam. Tamika thinks that Islam allows men to oppress women, saying: "I can't accept any religion where the men can oppress the women" (p. 105). Aminah ratifies that Islam protects Muslim women and makes them equal to men. Notwithstanding, as

men tend to oppress women all over the world, there exist some Muslim men as well who oppress their women. She clarifies that Muslim women can be mistreated by Muslim men as it happens across different societies because the woman is considered as the "Other" of men. Here, we should differentiate between religion and culture; religion is perfect, but people are not. "If you're asking about the man being the head of the household in Islam, then yes, this is true. Just like in Judaism and Christianity" (p. 106). Aminah also gives attention to the role of the Muslim man within his family as the leader who guides his wife and children, but it does not mean that the woman does all of what her man wants because, as Umm Zakiyyah writes, a true Muslim wife is one who has the power of religious identity and remains committed to the Creator rather than thinking about her position in family or society:

> If I know something is essential for my soul, I'm gonna do it. I don't worry about being 'inferior,' because I'm not here for my husband. I'm here for God, and if God is pleased with me, who cares? I look at my role as a wife as I do with any role I fulfill, whether a student or employee or what have you. When I register for school, I accept that my teacher decides what assignments I'll have, but does that make me inferior to her? (p. 106).

Finally, Umm Zakiyyah reconsiders the issue of *Jihad* represented in the media from the western perspective. She does so through a conversation between Aminah and Tamika. When Tamika says, "I could understand obeying a man and covering her body, but she did not support terrorism, even if done in the name of God" (p. 110), it becomes clear to Aminah that Tamika believes *Jihad* to be synonymous to terrorism. However, Umm Zakiyyah points out that *Jihad* is an Arabic word, meaning "a struggle". Aminah makes Tamika aware of misinterpretation of Islam by associating it with terrorism in the media, saying:

> We have to be careful of stereotypes. Just like you wouldn't want a person to view Blacks as they're portrayed on television, you shouldn't view Muslims, or any people for that matter, based on what you see or hear on television. Even if it's the news. I don't think I have to convince you that even that's biased. (Zakiyyah, 2000, p. 110)

Aminah further explains to Tamika that *Jihad* is not terrorism; those terrorists who kill innocent people in the name of *Allah* do not belong to Islam. In this context, Umm Zakiyyah emphasizes the fact that killing innocent people is prohibited in Islam, stating that "this prohibition is so strict that even when Muslims do fight, they aren't even allowed to harm as much as a tree" (p.110). However, the true Jihadists are those who fight for the sake of Allah against enemies, giving the fights that American soldiers partake in as an example to be compared with Jihadists. Here, Allah says in Surah al-Baqarah: "Fight in the way of God those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed, God does not like transgressors" (Qur'an 2: 190). Likewise, Aminah explains that Muslims should defend the oppressed, and protect themselves. Interestingly, Umm Zakiyyah affirms Allah's punishment in the Hereafter to whoever takes part in terrorism regardless of claim to be a part of any religion, confirming that Islam is a religion of peace. "But true peace will never come unless people are permitted to defend themselves from attack and can help others who are being oppressed" (p. 111), Aminah tells Tamika.

By the end of the story, Tamika becomes a Muslim. On the day of Tamika's presentation, she appears in *hijab* and speaks powerfully, presenting her paper on Islam. She also announces her conversion to Islam at the end of the representation, calling her teachers and fellow classmates to re-consider the core of Islam from its historical perspective to oppose the assumptions that have been held by them. Within this framework, Tamika states:

As we can see, Islam, the fastest-growing religion in the world, is holistic, its teachings affecting every aspect of the Muslim's life. Its roots reach back as far as Adam, and given its followers' strict adherence to its original teachings, it holds an authenticity that no other religion can rightfully claim. History shows that other religions have changed tremendously, their teachings having been adapted and compromised over time. And although, as we saw earlier, some heretical groups of Muslims seek to adopt the religion, Islam is the only religion that remains in its orthodox form. The teachings of Islam are profound and its message convincing, which is why I chose the religion for myself. (p. 192)

Based on the above statement, despite assumptions associated witth Islam, it is still growing fast. Islam dates back many centuries yet it is neither distorted nor changed. Islamic teachings attract various people around the world due to their convincing message. Tamika, in this sense, submits to the truth that is "Islam was true after all" (p. 96). By becoming a Muslim, Tamika returns to the religion that God intended for every human being and was practiced by all his chosen messengers, beginning with Adam and ending with Mohammed (PBUH). By writing objectively about Tamika's conscious conversion, Umm Zakiyyah counters the western assumption that Muslims are oppressed by Islam and Islamic practices. Islam, here, is neither defeated nor oppressive; in other words, it does not spread with the "sword" as claimed, but through its convincing teachings. Interestingly, Umm Zakiyyah exemplifies Tamika's submission to Islam after the latter's research to convince non-Muslim readers of the power of transparent knowledge. Umm Zakiyyah stresses the truth of Islam, which is the religion that Muslims identify with.

5. Conclusion and Findings

To conclude, this article highlights the insertion of the truth of Islam and being a Muslim in Umm Zakiyyah's novel, *If I Should Speak* (2000). It does so by focusing on the message of Islam that is represented in the

Quran to humankind by the sole creator, *Allah*, through His last messenger, Mohammed (PBUH). Being a Muslim means that s/he must: submit to Allah as the sole sustainer; believe in Him as the only creator; believe in his religions and his messengers, including Mohammed as the last prophet; believe in his holy books, including the Quran, as the constitution of life; and be a peaceful, civilized, wise, educated and sociable person who does what is allowed and avoids what is forbidden.

By presenting Islam, Umm Zakiyyah has provided the truth of Islam to be known within its historical and transparent subjectivity and for non-Muslim readers to realize the meaning of both Islam and Muslim. The importance of her elucidation of the concept of Islam within its historical, subjective and cultural contexts is that it challenges western assumptions in general and the association of Islam with violence and ignorance in particular. Tamika's voluntary conversion to Islam proves that Islam is, in itself, a religion that can be accepted as faith by people around the world who understand it from its historical resources rather than the western media. To sum up, the study seeks to approach the representation of Islamic identity to explore the embedded rhetorical policies that drive the religious narrative in building its images and representations of the "Self" and the "Other". Umm Zakiyyah, in this novel, represents Muslims in the West by reflecting the latter's negative assumptions of prejudgment, stereotypes and racism towards the "other". Umm Zakiyyah here presents the theoretical concepts attached to the postcolonial theorists' views to deconstruct the colonial discourse, which concerns the Western superior "Self" over the inferior [Muslim] "Other". Regarding religious marginalization, the depicted characters deconstruct the inferiority of Islam by letting it exist

as a religion alongside other religions in the host societies. Based on the analysis, the writer reconsiders the negative views that link Islam and Muslims with violence, fundamentalism, extremism, ignorance and fanaticism. The construction of religious identity among the Muslim characters narrated not only refers to differences between their religion and others' but also to the differences between the true face of Islam and the misrepresented one. We have found that The Islamic identity is shaped in this text in the distance of narrative and cognitive tension between the ideology of the West, which seeks to distort the image of Islam and Muslim identity and the narrative of the Muslim writer who acts as a discourse contrary to Western hegemony, which leads to the dismantling of its destructive patterns that are offensive to the image of Islam in Western society, leading to the production of new images of The Islamic identity and discourse on the "other".

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