



Acculturation, Islamophobia and the Construction of Palestinian-American Identity in Sahar Mustafah's *The Beauty of Your Face*

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Keywords: acculturation, acculturative stress, cultural identity, diaspora, Islamophobia, The Beauty of your Face

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This study investigates the interaction between acculturation, acculturative stress and Islamophobia in Sahar Mustafah's novel, *The Beauty of Your Face* (2020). It analyzes the experience of cultural identity formation and belonging for Palestinians in America after the events of September 11th. The paper explores how Islamophobia and systemic discrimination hinder immigrants' ability to voluntarily integrate into their host society. The study also demonstrates the acculturative strategies the protagonist chooses and adopts during the complex acculturation process.

Methods: Utilizing Berry's theory of acculturation, this research employs a qualitative textual analysis. Excerpts were chosen due to their thematic significance regarding the protagonist's process of acculturation and the sociocultural strains she endures throughout her journey of acculturation. These elements of the narrative are then methodically examined through the lens of Berry's acculturation model, with specific emphasis on the concepts of acculturative stress, Islamophobia and systematic discrimination.

Results: As represented through the Palestinian-American protagonist, the findings reveal that identity formation and cultural adaptation among American Muslims are influenced by factors that extend beyond the individuals' choices and the traditional acculturation framework. The study also shows that the protagonist's religious conviction and sense of rootedness serve as vital mechanisms of resistance, enabling her to reconstitute a fractured selfhood when confronted with violence and marginalisation.

Conclusions: The study concludes that acculturation is a constrained process, rather than a voluntary strategy of adaptation. It is not merely an individual choice, but a complex process shaped by the pressures of racial scrutiny, systemic xenophobia and social exclusion.

التثاقف، والإسلاموفوبيا، وبناء الهوية الفلسطينية الأمريكية في رواية سحر مصطفى "جمال وجهك"

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معلومات البحث	المستخلص
تاريخ الاستلام: 15 تموز 2026	الأهداف: تتناول هذه الدراسة التفاعل بين التثاقف، والضغط المصاحبة له، ورهاب الإسلام في رواية سحر مصطفى "جمال وجهك" (2020). وتحلل تجربة تكوين الهوية الثقافية والشعور بالانتماء لدى الفلسطينيين في أمريكا بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر. وتستكشف الدراسة كيف يعيق رهاب الإسلام والتمييز الممنهج قدرة المهاجرين على الاندماج الطوعي في مجتمعهم المضيق. كما توضح الدراسة استراتيجيات التثاقف التي تختارها الشخصية وتتبنها خلال عملية التثاقف المعقدة. المنهجية: تعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهج التحليل النصي النوعي، مستندة إلى نظرية "بيري" للتثاقف؛ حيث جرى اختيار مقتطفات نصية محددة لأهميتها الموضوعية في رصد رحلة تثاقف بطل الرواية، والضغط الاجتماعية والثقافية التي تواجهها. وتُفحص هذه العناصر السردية فحواً منهجياً عبر نموذج "بيري" للتثاقف، مع التركيز على مفاهيم ضغوط التثاقف، ورهاب الإسلام (الإسلاموفوبيا)، والتمييز الممنهج. النتائج: تكشف النتائج، من خلال شخصية البطل الفلسطينية الأمريكية، أن تشكيل الهوية والتكيف الثقافي لدى المسلمين الأمريكيين يتأثران بعوامل تتجاوز خيارات الأفراد وإطار التثاقف التقليدي؛ وتظهر الدراسة أيضاً أن قناعة البطل الدينية وشعورها بالانتماء يشكلان آليتين حيويتين للمقاومة، مما يمكنها من إعادة بناء ذاتها المتصدعة عند مواجهة العنف والتهميش. الاستنتاجات: تلخص الدراسة إلى أن التثاقف عملية مقيدة، وليست استراتيجية تكيف طوعية. فهي ليست مجرد خيار فردي، بل عملية معقدة تتشكل بفعل ضغوط التدقيق العنصري، وكراهية الأجانب الممنهجة، والإقصاء الاجتماعي.
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1. Introduction

Contemporary society is witnessing cultural and social changes as a result of migration and interaction between different cultures (Arif et al., 2026). The negotiation of individuals' identity is often moulded through the lens of acculturation whereby people adjust themselves to a dominant culture while preserving their native culture (Barry, 2002). Acculturation is one of the most complex processes in shaping the cultural identity of individuals belonging to cultural and religious minorities. As global migration continues to bring people of vastly different backgrounds into contact with one another, the ability to navigate cultural difference with flexibility is rarely easy. Losses of language, of custom, or of a sense of place which acculturation process involves may lead to the emergence of challenges related to identity and belonging (Liboro, 2018).

Current studies in diaspora have complicated the acculturation model by focusing on such issues as race, religion, and power, viewing culture as a system of behaviours and symbols influenced by "social inequalities" and power (Ferguson et al., 2023, p. 382). Scholars have examined Muslim American narratives through the lens of Islamophobia, seen as a significant force that shapes identity formation. Khan et al. (2022, p. 256) argue that "the news media play a crucial and important role in shaping and then maintaining a certain discourse ... and fosters the atmosphere in which we acquire opinions about ourselves." They find that because of cultural suspicion and surveillance, Muslim individuals are often denied the possibility of seamless integration. This argument is further supported by Siddiqui (2022), who asserts that "heightened levels of Islamophobia in the U.S. ... have subjected South Asians—who are often perceived as being Muslim based on their physical appearance—to both surveillance and subjugation" (p. 2).

Cultural identity formation is a complex process that is neither chosen nor carried out freely, but it is a set of constraining conditions where an individual's "actual acculturation strategies" are restricted by the nonheritage receiving society's "inclusionary/exclusionary" attitudes and policies (Ferguson et al., 2023, p. 391). Although Berry's theory offers a valuable framework for understanding different acculturation strategies, the acculturation process itself is far more complex and non-linear than his model suggests. Khan et al. (2022) state that Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America encounter numerous obstacles that shape their integration into the host society. They are socially excluded and "frequently presented and divided as dangers to the public order" (p. 258).

During the last decades, the Arab diaspora to the United States of America has increased significantly driven by a complex interplay of political instability and socioeconomic prospects (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Though regional conflicts, such as the Lebanese Civil War and the Syrian Civil War—have historically triggered waves of migration, many people have also

moved in search of academic qualifications, professional advancement, or family reunion (Minority Rights Group International, 2020; Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). The rising number of Arab immigrants in the United States led to the emergence of Arab American organizations that were founded to "defend the Arab point of view and to combat negative stereotypes of Arabs in the popular press" (Ludescher, 2006, p. 94).

To explore acculturation and unravel its complexities, the study examines Sahar Mustafah's *The Beauty of Your Face* (2020). This novel revolves around the life of a culturally conflicted Palestinian-American Muslim woman, Afaf Rahman. The protagonist spends much of her life in Chicago where her immigrant parents, Mahmood and Muntaha, lived after they were expelled from Palestine and migrated to America. Flitting between past and present, Afaf recounts her childhood traumas and the pressures exerted on her by her white peers and American materialistic society during a confused adolescence. Despite facing hostility and discrimination from the American community, Afaf continues to power ahead toward integration. She reconciles her internal and external conflicting identities, building a positive relation with the larger host society while maintaining her cultural integrity. In contrast, her older sister, Nada adopts an assimilation strategy. She embraces American culture and detaches herself utterly from her Arab cultural heritage, and finally she abandons home seeking the freedom she desires (Parween & Mahapatra, 2025; Alkhider, 2025).

As an adult, Afaf works as the headmistress at the Nurideen School for Girls and at a center for refugees. Expressing an affinity for faith, she wears the hijab and embraces the Islamic beliefs. Although Afaf seems to overcome the challenges and difficulties of the acculturation process and appears to align herself with the integration category, a closer examination discloses a further complex and controlled process. Afaf's acculturation is not voluntary or stable; it is marked by the prevalent forces of racial discrimination, systemic Islamophobia, and different forms of acculturative stress that she struggles with along the way.

Literature review

Despite existing scholarship on acculturation themes, relatively few studies have explicitly integrated acculturation theory in the analysis of Muslim American fiction, or delved into how these narratives illuminate the complexities of acculturative stress and cultural negotiation in contemporary society. Therefore, this study addresses this issue and contributes to scholarly discussion on acculturation and integration of Muslim immigrants in the diaspora.

The Beauty of Your Face (2020) has emerged as a fertile ground for critical study investigating the intricate realities of Palestinian immigrant experience in America following 9/11. The existing literature examines the novel through the lens of postcolonial, transnational, feminist, and

sociological frameworks. It explores the complexities of Palestinian-American identity, intergenerational trauma, and religious belonging in the post-9/11 American context. Alkhider (2025) and Chahrazed (2025) focus on the internal, inherited wound of displacement. They study the themes of Islamophobia, spatial exclusion, and systemic discrimination as host-country integration barriers. Alkhider (2025, p. 436) draws on Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory" to elucidate how the second generation (Afaf, Nada, Majeed) assimilates and internalises the communal trauma of the "1948 Nakba" and displacement despite not having directly experienced it themselves. Alkhider's framework, centered on trauma, relies heavily on clinical concept of "intergenerational trauma" (p. 435). This model is deficient because it leans toward pathologizing the characters' responses. It presents characters' alienation as internal psychological trauma rather than as a conscious, rational form of resistance to persisting Islamophobic violence and imperialist exclusion.

Applying "postcolonial and transnational theoretical frameworks of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, Edward Said, and Carol Fadda-Conrey" Chahrazed (2025, p. IV), analyzes the complex relationship between "transnationalism, identity, and belonging." She explores whether transnational ties impede or intensify immigrants' feeling of belonging, especially within the socio-political climate of post-9/11 American. Chahrazed shows how patriarchal expectations, white mainstream norms and racism complicate the process of identity formation and undermine immigrants' belonging within both American society and Arab-Muslim community. She frames identity not as something rooted in geography, but as something shaped through spiritual reconnection. The researcher argues that transnational connections give immigrants an avenue to recover "agency, identity and belonging" in a world that often renders them unseen. However, Chahrazed (2025, p. 23) overemphasises conflict at the expense of creative hybridization. She portrays Afaf's early life purely through a lens of 'wrecked' invisibility.

Based on Burke's identity theory and Brah's cartographies of diaspora, Javid (2024, p. 4) investigates how characters in the novel "navigate their dispersed identities in response to cultural discrimination." He explicates that different generations adopt divergent coping strategies: first-generation immigrants like Muntaha retain a nostalgic and fixed memory of the homeland, refusing to adapt or acquire the new language. Second-generation immigrants like Afaf, uses varied acculturation strategies in response to acculturative stress and displacement. Javid (2024) also examines the public degradation Afaf endures in host country, displaying how the racial microaggressions causes lasting psychological harm. The divide between generation signifies that intergenerational trauma and structural Islamophobia function compounding rather than parallel pressures. Nonetheless, Javid's study lacks clarity in distinguishing first-generation experiences;

marked by the direct trauma of migration and displacement as with Afaf's parents from second-generation experiences, navigating dual cultural exposure and postmemory, as with Afaf.

Safeer et al. (2025) show how internal cultural pressures and patriarchal institutions lead to acculturative stress, reducing the protective defense of ethnic community belonging. Employing an Islamic feminist perspective, they argue that the immigrant community imposes rigid gender roles on women to protect its cultural integrity, using concepts of shame and decency to restrict female independence. They say that the experience of Afaf mirrors the social obstacles Muslim women encounter while navigating "their identity and faith in a patriarchal society." As a Muslim woman, she grapples with the constraints imposed on her such as wearing a hijab and conforming to traditional gender roles. Simultaneously, "she is challenged by the negative perception of Muslims in post-9/11 America" (p. 1580).

Safeer et al. (2025) seem to have distorted the novel's text to support a rigid, predefined rebellion against the patriarch feminist thesis. A comparative reading of their study discloses a critical textual error in their analysis. They claim that Afaf affirms her autonomy by "marrying a non-Muslim man" to rebel against her father. The authors write that Afaf "rebels against her father's strict rules, marries a non-Muslim man . . . and defies her father's traditional views" (pp. 1580, 1582). But the text of the novel clearly states that Afaf marries "Bilal Hamzić," a Muslim refugee whom she met while teaching English classes at the Islamic Center (Mustafah, p.120). Besides, Afaf's father was supportive to her: "In the absence of Mama's approval, Afaf turns to Baba—has done so for years—clinging to her father's esteem as if it were a branch on a cliff" (Mustafah, p. 128). Hence, Safeer et al. (2025) present a flawed, highly politicized reading that sacrifices textual fidelity for ideological alignment. They distort the real plot of the novel, and exhibit a strong ideological bias.

Other researchers study the notions of faith and forgiveness in the novel as transformative tools for reconstructing identity. Utilizing "psychological and religious theories" and "Erik Erikson's psycho-social development theories," Parween and Mahapatra (2025, pp. 44-45) contend that Islam grants Afaf a moral code and self-restraint that enables her to "reconstruct her identity." They aver that Afaf's embrace of religious faith and her decision to forgive serve as an active, empowering instrument—one that mitigates acculturative stress, helps resolve fragmented identity and aids in healing emotional trauma. Unlike (Safeer et al., 2025) who interpret religious symbols like the hijab as a sign of patriarchal domination, Parween and Mahapatra (2025) see the spiritual renewal at the Islamic Center and solidarity within a supportive Muslim sisterhood as a basis for fortitude, independence and collective belonging.

Although Parween and Mahapatra (2025, p. 42) aptly identify the psychological aspects of Afaf's identity crisis relying on Erikson's developmental stages, their analysis demonstrates cultural and methodological inconsistency. They seek to investigate an Islamic and Palestinian-American narrative by integrating unrelated Hindu theological concepts such as "Kaliyug age" and "karma" to discuss the theme of forgiveness. Imposing these foreign notions onto a text that is firmly anchored in Qur'anic verses of patience (sabr) and submission (tawakkul), the authors weaken the specific socio-cultural context of the novel and politically unstable dimension of the Palestinian-Muslim experience following 9/11. Parween and Mahapatra misrepresent Afaf's healing framework grounded exclusively in Quranic principals, thereby revealing a weak theoretical alignment and cultural translation bias.

Evidently, most of the previous studies on the novel emphasize that Islamophobia and racial discrimination operate as systematic forces that impede voluntary integration into the host society. These factors constitute structural barriers that compel immigrants to adopt defensive coping strategies in the acculturation process. This elucidates the underlying psychological dynamics of acculturative stress, and shows how intergenerational trauma complicates the trajectory of identity formation.

Despite the valuable contributions made by the reviewed scholars, a significant theoretical and analytical gap remains within the existing literature. The scholarship abounds with descriptive accounts of belongings and assimilation, yet it lacks an organized, rigorous examination of how characters negotiate the four acculturation strategies: Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalisation. Therefore, none of the existing studies on *The Beauty of Your Face* applies Berry's psychological framework of acculturation. The current study bridges this gap by employing Berry's to show how systemic discrimination, and Islamophobia function as an active structural obstacle in the host country—one that limits an immigrant's capacity to integrate voluntarily, thereby producing severe acculturative stress.

Theoretical framework: Berry's Acculturation Theory

Many emigrants usually find themselves trapped between two cultures: the culture of their homeland and that of their host country. So, they may have hybrid identities. According to Berry (2001; 2005; 2009), acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological transformation that results from the contact between two or more groups. The assimilation of a different culture leads to permanent psychological and social adjustments of groups and results in adaptation to their cultural identity (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). So, taking part in the acculturation process, generates significant transformations in the cultural affiliations of the immigrants and their identities.

John Berry's acculturation model (2001; 2005; 2006) elucidates that to integrate into a new society, immigrants are either maintaining their ethnic home culture or adopting the host culture. Hence, Berry (2006), classifies his Acculturation Model into four strategies: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Integration is the immigrants' adoption of the host culture while maintaining their native cultural identity. Assimilation is adopting the identity of the host culture, and abandoning the original identity. Separation involves strong connections with cultural native identity and avoidance, or few interactions with the host culture. In marginalisation, people manifest a lack of identity with both home and host cultures (Bulut & Gayman, 2020; Abu-Rayya et al., 2023; Kunst & Mesoudi, 2025).

Berry's model is crucial in the domain of acculturation research and contributes significantly to the cross-cultural enquiry, but it is not without drawbacks. Işık & Ayran (2026, p. 608) declare that this model has been criticized because it does not refer to the impact of the "structural and contextual constraints" along with the correlating psychological strains on the process of acculturation. Moreover, it emphasizes individual choices and does not pay attention to structural inequalities. Karim (2021) faults Berry's model is for failing to account for the dimension of culture learning, which underpins acculturation's behavioural aspect. Karim (2021) faults Berry's model is for failing to account for the dimension of culture learning, which underpins acculturation's behavioural aspect. van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2022) challenge the fixed character of Berry's model, contending that it inadequately accounts for recent demographic and technological transformations, including heightened societal diversity and modern digital connectivity.

While Berry's model paves the way for conceptualizing acculturation, these criticisms offer compelling grounds for underscoring its central deficiencies. Its fixed, bipolar framework falls short in addressing the fluidity of identity formation within technologically interconnected contexts. Further, its disregard for culture learning as an active process leaves the model theoretically incomplete.

Acculturative stress

Acculturative stress refers to the psychological pressures and distress triggered by such challenges as "perceived discrimination, homesickness, social exclusion, identity confusion, and uncertainty about the future." It is a long-lasting process that requires people to negotiate between their own home culture and the dominant cultural settings. Acculturative stress is not only caused by cultural differences, but it is also produced by racial, prejudice and social separation that may impede the acculturation process "in ways that extend beyond individual acculturation strategies" (Işık & Ayran, 2026, p. 608). Acculturative stress "often includes difficulties with having to learn another language, struggling to balance different social values" (Siddiqui, 2022, p. 2).

Scholars generally view acculturative stress as a product of the acculturation process, since adopting the culture of the dominant society requires individuals to undergo changes in behaviours, attitudes, norms, language, and values, resulting in the combination of two cultural identities: the original culture and the host culture. Thus, the acculturation process becomes a source of confusion and anxiety for immigrants.

Acculturative stress and Islamophobia

Research on acculturative stress has received considerable attention, especially after the September 11th, 2001 attacks, focusing mainly on Muslims in the United States who contend with a different cultural climate marked by its discriminatory practices, racism and systemic exclusion. Muslim Americans communities have been endured covert and overt forms of xenophobia and islamophobia not only on the individual level, but also on the structural and sociopolitical levels. They are stereotyped as terrorists and security threats (Acim, 2019).

As a term, Islamophobia was used first in "the late 20th century in the context of Muslims in Europe and the U.K." It was first defined in a report written by "the Runnymede Trust" where islamophobia is referred to as "an unfounded hostility towards Islam and a fear or dislike of all or most Muslims." The report stated that Islamophobia encompasses bias reflected in everyday discourse and media portrayals, marginalization from employment and leadership roles and acts of violence including verbal harassment and property damage (Rehman & Hanley, 2023, p. 140). Kozaric (2024) says that scholars define islamophobia differently. First, it is conceptualized as a number of negative attitudes, opinions and behaviours about Islam that characterize certain individuals or social communities. Second, it is viewed as a phenomenon that is displayed through actions against Muslims, or has the potentiality to do that. The aggregate impact of such actions can lead to diverse social effects.

The Beauty of Your Face portrays Islamophobia as functioning across multiple levels instead of as a one dimensional concept. It shows individual prejudice through instances of interpersonal hostility that Afaf repeatedly endures throughout her life — from slurs at a gas station (Mustafah, p. 124) to a stranger flicking water at her hijab (Mustafah, p. 174)—culminating in an extreme, violent form when a gunman attacks her school (Mustafah, p. 110). The novel also depicts Islamophobia as structural discrimination, exemplified by Afaf's invasive airport security search before hajj (Mustafah, p. 173), which reveals how state institutions embed and enact suspicion of Muslims.

Kathawalla et al. (2024, p. 832) say that islamophobia is "a perceived fear or threat of Islam/Muslims and an engagement in prejudicial attitudes and/or discriminatory actions." Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008) contend that Islamophobia dates back to the medieval epoch,

arising out of the perception of Muslims as the “other” during religious and military encounters connected with the Crusades. In a similar vein, Said (1979) thinks that the Western perceptions of Muslims and Islam have been framed through literature and discourse that have described the East as the uncivilised 'other', propagating cultural stereotypes and forming a dichotomy between the East and West.

Rehman and Hanley (2023, p. 140) state that "discrimination and hate crimes" geared towards Muslims have been on the rise, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the war on terrorism. These hate crimes have a negative impact on the mental health of Muslims all over the world. They precipitate impaired mental, societal wellness and fear of bias-motivated crimes intensified by negative portrayals of Muslim community in the media. Concurring with this idea, Rivera Baeza, et al. link between acculturative stress and mental health. They notice that the migrants who endure a high level of acculturative stress, generated from "discrimination" and "adaptation difficulties", suffer from psychological illnesses, such as "depression, anxiety, and general psychiatric disorders." This, as a result, has had a bad effects on immigrants who demonstrate homesickness, and "negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, uncertainty, and frustration" (2022, p. 2).

According to these viewpoints, acculturative stress is a symptom of racial discrimination and adaptation problems. It acts as a trigger for the psychological troubles. The sociopolitical pressures directed against Islam and Muslims may lead to the separation of Muslim Americans from the governing host culture. In response, they will detach themselves totally from a host culture, showing adherence to their home culture and its values (Naidu et al. 2023). In the USA, for example, the procedures taken against immigrants signify a total prejudice. The government imposes rules on travel and immigration from several Muslim countries on behalf of national security. Further, early Muslim immigrants have been racialized as nonwhite and denied citizenship due to Orientalist perspectives that portrayed Islam as irreconcilable with 'Christianity.' (Al-Khersan & Shahshahani, 2022, p. 143). In addition, the enforcement of security rules, anti-terrorism, the strict plans of immigration besides the physical abuses and assaults would reinforce Islamophobia (Kozaric, 2024).

Overall, Islamophobia is an old phenomenon that has intensified and persisted across historical eras. It is a practice that grows and spreads because of systematic bias and mass media that propagates negative stereotypes about Muslims to the Western world, fostering discrimination and framing them as culturally inferior and barbaric. Islamophobia does not simply imply unreasonable fear; it is a deeply rooted prejudice created by the existing stereotypes that show Muslims as terrorists or extremists. The stereotypical image and the public categorization of Islam as innately violent religion commonly echoed by the media as well as discriminatory and political dogmas

serve to strengthen islamophobia. It cultivates mental negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, and perpetuate a process of othering, marginalising Muslim communities. Apparently, Islamophobia impedes the process of acculturation and makes it more difficult for Muslim Americans to integrate with the host culture or involve themselves in sociopolitical and cultural activities.

2. Methodology

Utilizing Berry's theory of acculturation, this research employs a qualitative textual analysis. Excerpts were chosen due to their thematic significance regarding the protagonist's process of acculturation and the sociocultural strains she endures throughout that journey of acculturation. These elements of the narrative are then methodically examined through the lens of Berry's acculturation model, with specific emphasis on the concepts of acculturative stress, Islamophobia and systematic discrimination.

The study uses Berry's acculturation theory to investigate Sahar Mustafah's *The Beauty of Your Face*. It traces Afaf's navigation between American and Palestinian cultures. The study highlights the influence that systemic Islamophobia, sociocultural contexts and structural constraints exert on the protagonist's identity formation and her adoption of acculturation strategies. Besides, it captures the intense acculturative stress Afaf endures as a result of social and religious bias, a dynamic that complicates the acculturation process beyond the scope of Berry's framework.

This approach provides a thorough analysis of identity development and exposes the tensions between personal aspirations and communal demands placed upon Afaf throughout her journey. Berry's acculturation model enriches this analysis by illuminating the challenges met by individuals who pursue various paths in their pursuit of cultural identity and a sense of belonging amid a hostile environment rife with fear and misapprehension.

3. Results and discussion

Afaf in *The Beauty of Your Face* is a Muslim Palestinian woman who works as a principal of an Islamic school in Chicago. While navigating her identity, Afaf experiences different ethnic tensions and personal crises, reflecting the complexities faced by ostracised individuals in diaspora. The acculturation process of Afaf goes through a complicated web of rejection, discrimination, and social support. Her early childhood and adolescent years demonstrate the aspects of acculturative stress, viz., the contrast between the host culture and home culture as well as social and familial separation. Through her journey, Afaf portrays the sociopolitical setting of Islamophobia that permeates American society, exemplifying multiple forms of acculturative stress.

3.1. Afaf's early marginalisation: Identity crisis and the invisible child

Afaf belongs to the second generation of immigrants that was born and raised in America. Her childhood undergoes an interrelated combination of internal stressors: psychological, emotional, and societal. Her deep identity crisis originated from feelings of loneliness and marginalisation caused by the ill effects her mother exerted on her self-confidence. As a child, Afaf suffered from a lack of belonging to either culture. She is emotionally trapped between her family's immigration distress, and the pressure of a host environment. Afaf lives within a home filled with her mother's dissatisfaction and obsession with the crumbling native culture. She endures a state of marginalisation and inner estrangement: "Azmiya was so unlike how she herself had been at her age, a mousy girl with no sense of self, an invisible child... wrecked and lost" (p. 9). Muntaha's psychological deterioration, the absolute lack of maternal warmth, and the climate of domestic fear lock Afaf in an early state of psychological displacement. They motivate her acculturative stress and impede her progress to a stable cultural or personal identity.

Afaf's acculturative identity is shaped by parental expectations, the sociocultural setting and hostile cultural boundaries. At school, Afaf encounters racism and rejection from American society. She becomes the object of ridicule to teachers and classmates. Therefore, she always feels inferior and vulnerable among her peers: "She's always felt indefensible around white people. Inferiority had slowly fermented inside her, beginning when she was a young girl and teachers squelched her potential because they didn't believe she was smart enough" (p. 213). Socially, Afaf is stereotyped as the terrorism that threatens the societal stability and people's existence, accentuating the Orientalist myth that Arabs and Muslims are violent: "In her daily life, white women silently look down on her as though she is a threat to their existence. Men sneer at her, a noiseless storm of violence in their eyes when she passes them in airports, in parking lots" (p. 213).

As a Muslim American girl, Afaf experiences a sense of social marginalisation, and alienation among her white classmates and American people. Consequently, she adopts marginalisation strategy for she has no association with her heritage culture, or with the dominant American culture. The stereotypical image of Muslims and Arabs as extremists, that was formed and spread through various western media outlets especially after the attacks of 9/11 and the war on terror, affects their integration and coexistence with American society. It contributes to the negative stereotype about Muslims in the minds of the Western people and leads to discrimination. Research indicates that Muslims particularly women are often looked upon as inferior. It has been observed that negative attitudes toward Muslims are considerably more prevalent among boys than among girls. Muslim women are frequently characterized as socially disconnected, lacking education and autonomy, and are consequently categorized under the standardizing labels of 'Muslim women' or 'Muslimas' (Yüksel & Butter, 2021, p. 9).

3.2. Racialized assimilation and sexualized othering

As an adolescent, Afaf experiences isolation which strongly affects her: "her teenage years were a blur of indifferent white boys, a deep loneliness engulfing her" (p. 10). She encounters social marginalisation and a feeling of not belonging to either culture. So, loneliness defines Afaf's adolescent years which she spent in the company of American boys who treated her indifferently and only as a support for their ego. She felt trapped beneath an invisible wall separating her from her peers, unable to create any kind of emotional bond with them. Her white peers constitute an isolated social world with which Afaf struggles to connect.

In an effort to integrate into American culture, Afaf assimilates the behaviours of American teenagers and rebels against her family's restrictions and cultural norms. Her lack of faith together with parental negligence serve as the driving force behind Afaf's rebellion. Because her parents did not provide any religious or spiritual anchor during her upbringing, Afaf feels completely untethered. Deep down, she realizes that a lack of faith left them defenseless against their tragedies: "And though neither of her parents were religious, it had felt like the loss of a talisman—something that might keep them all safe. Afaf sometimes wonders, if they prayed—the way amarkan went to church every Sunday—whether things would have turned out different" (p. 80). Actually, Afaf's acts of rebellion are not driven by desire, but by a desperate need to feel that she exists: "Truth is, Afaf didn't even like Tim—she doesn't like any of the white boys, not even a little. None of them make her feel any better, only that she exists, that someone notices her" (p. 73). "WILSON whispers in her ear, "Don't worry, A-faf. I can do it in away so you'll still be a virgin. I know how it is with your family".... Afaf lets Michael Wilson go farther" (p. 61).

The sexual encounters with schoolboys during adolescence hint at Afaf's attempt at cultural integration and reflect her painful struggle to assimilate and find acceptance within American society: "she's tried hard her whole life to be like amarkan" (p. 107). She is longing to be seen in a world where she feels entirely displaced. Afaf knows that white peers' sexual behaviour was not born out of genuine desire, or because they see her beautiful, rather "they think she's exotic—To the white boys, she's something to conquer and explore, not keep" (p. 74). This statement demonstrates the 'otherness' as a part of a non-white appearance. In his traditional Orientalism theory (1979), Said posits that the West constructs a stereotypical and "Othered" image of the East to assert superiority. It often simplifies the East, renders it as backward, exotic and inferior, creating a negative self-image of its people. Likewise, Kabbani (1994) argues that the Western writing creates false stereotyped images of the Eastern women. The women have been reduced to fetishized objects, and exotic, inferior creatures who typify and promise the expected extreme sexual delights of the Orient. This interprets why Michael Wilson's sexual desire for Afaf stems

from being different and exotic and why he feels superior to her: "You're different, Michael had told Afaf But she realizes it's not in a good way, because different is never good" (p. 63). Being exploited sexually by the white boys, Afaf feels inferiority and social exclusion.

Afaf symbolises the innocent brown girl who unconsciously captures the attention of the white boys who attempt to free her from her heritage culture. She comprehends the negative connotation of labels, "lost girl" and "slut" "A-fuck", A-virgin, "You bitch!" (pp. 62, 63, 64), used in reference to her sexual relationship with Michael; yet, she continues to go out with schoolboys because she thinks that sex is the only form of integration available to her: "She knows what they say about her at Hoover High School: A-faf will let you make out with her. . . ., but Afaf doesn't care" (p. 61).

Afaf's interaction with her school peers reveals how racial stereotypes shape her self-image and her struggle for acceptance. This is seen in the school cafeteria when Kelly McPherson pours "green Jell-O," on her and "whispers in her ear.... "Slut," "Stay the fuck away from my boyfriend" (p. 66). This bullying scene unveils racial superiority imbedded in the Western minds concerning the Others. Kabbani (2008) states that eastern women are presented in literature as sexualized and fetishized creatures. European travel writers described them as the sexually wanton, immodest females available to men. Similarly, they were painted by artists as naked and in erotic poses that arouse sexual desire. The bullying incident implies that the host inhabitants see Afaf as a mere sex object, made fun of and exploited for their own sexual satisfaction. Meyda, (1998, p. 73) refers to this fact, saying that the orient is treated as the embodiment of sensuality—its place in Western imagery has always been created through the simultaneous gesture of racialization and feminization.

The sexual relations with teenage boys represent Afaf's attempt for assimilation into the American community. Rather than finding comfort in a shared heritage, Afaf intentionally separates herself from other Arab youth at school because she feels unable to fit into their traditional social roles. Afaf observes that she has "always been on the wrong side of the window, unable to conform to a mold Sameera and the other arabiyyat easily fit" (p. 69). While they maintain traditional limits and engage in harmless infiltration with Arab boys, Afaf searches for affirmation through relationships with white peers. This evidence paints a picture of a young girl who anxiously links American-ness with invisibility and refuge from her family's domestic hardships. However, Afaf fails to acculturate and coexist with people of the host culture because her classmates refuse to accept her assimilation into their own culture. Berry (2009) avows that acculturation is a two-sided process in that its success or failure depends on both the individuals in the host society and on heritage culture.

Hence, Afaf's teenage experience embodies the intricate interplay of assimilation pressures, integration efforts, and social marginalisation. Being treated as a secret sexual object rather than an equal peer intensifies Afaf's acculturative stress: "The white boys don't take her to public places. . . . What would [Michael's parents] think of him now. . . . making out with an Arabian girl in his room? Would it matter less if it were Kelly McPherson? (pp. 61-62). According to Berry (2009), "when acculturation experiences cause problems for acculturating individuals, . . . acculturative stress [emerges] with variations in levels of adaptation" (p. 367).

3.3. Rejection of Palestinian/Arab identity

Throughout Mustafah's novel, Afaf's adolescent years are marked by an agonising tension between her Palestinian heritage and her longing to assimilate into American society. This identity crisis manifests as a rejection of her family's Arab cultural traits and a frantic, often self-destructive attempt to embrace American norms. Afaf's effort to discard her cultural identity in favour of an American one is apparent in how she disavows her physical Arab features. Having absorbed Western standards of beauty, Afaf develops a bitter discontent with her own appearance, seeing it as an impediment to acceptance. In pursuit of resembling her white peers, Afaf subjects her hair to damaging chemical treatments: "Afaf's hair has turned frizzy from constant relaxers, her ends splitting into tiny brittle pitchforks," contrary to her classmate Kelly's "blond tresses [that] fall in shimmering waves" (p. 61). Even as a young girl, she gazes at her peers with longing for their "white skin, blue and green eyes" (p.18). Afaf views her natural features through a highly racialized lens: "Her nose seemed to double in size by the time she reached puberty; her skin was dark like a peanut husk" (p. 74).

Additionally, Afaf feels sharp shame whenever her family's Palestinian domestic culture seeps into her public, school-centered world. She shrinks from the smell of her mother's cooking when white classmates are around. She flushes with embarrassment at "a pot of maklooba emitting the pungent aroma of fried cauliflower and eggplant" (p. 27). Afaf also shows shame over her mother's failure to assimilate into American society, wincing when her mother navigates the English-speaking world, noting her mother's "stony silence" (p. 74) and how she looks "lost and flustered at the first error she commits in public places" (p. 26).

In search of belonging, Afaf takes up American holidays, dressing up on Halloween and expressing eagerness for Thanksgiving. For Afaf, adopting American traditions offers the only fleeting sense of true cultural integration. She feels a sense of liberation when she can hide her ethnic identity behind an American cultural costume: "Afaf is happy to move about the neighborhood in disguise [with] her Wonder Woman mask" (p. 39). For Afaf, Thanksgiving holds

particular appeal because her family's preparation of turkey, "stuffing, and candied yams" allows them to participate in a shared national ritual: "It was the closest she'd ever felt like amarkan" (p. 52).

3.4. Spiritual rebirth, cultural integration and emotional exhilaration

After a long journey of setbacks and pursuit of belonging, Afaf finally succeeds in achieving cultural integration. She comes to terms with her dual identity: Palestinian, Muslim, American. She embraces Islam out of personal conviction, wears the hijab and becomes the manager of an Islamic school for girls in America. Afaf successfully manages "Nurrideen School" according to official American educational laws and curricula, demonstrating her ability to maintain her roots and religious identity while actively participating in the host community.

As an educational pioneer, she defends the rights of her students and synthesizes Islamic identity with modern American educational standards. Afaf's leadership and support for human rights mark a victory over past traumas, transforming her from an ostracized, isolated child into a pillar of resilience and cultural synthesis: She "had cultivated a reputation for patience as principal of the Nurrideen School, . . . providing each young woman enrolled at this school with a competitive education" (p. 7). Berry avers that "those pursuing the integration strategy experience less stress, and achieve better adaptations than those pursuing marginalisation" (2005, p. 697).

After years of loss and grief, Afaf finds in Islam and the Islamic Centre a surrogate family she was deprived of in her childhood. She discovers a profound sense of community and self-worth in faith and hijab, contrasting this with her 'lost' youth: "The first time, really, she'd felt she truly belonged anywhere. . . . Before she discovered God, she'd found family at the Center (p. 115). The hijab and the religious community function as selective acculturation tools and a shield of protection. They grant Afaf the ability to alleviate her early acculturative stress and navigate her way towards adjustment: "After she joined the Center, being alone didn't feel like a plague. It wasn't the same as loneliness, the kind she'd felt for so many years" (p. 121).

Further, Afaf's marriage to Bilal Hamzić, a Muslim refugee, precipitates a change in her life and provides her with emotional stability. It "filled up a space, like rainwater gathering in a watering can" (p. 121). This romantic and spiritual fulfillment marks a complete break from her mother's destructive path of separation, shifting Afaf firmly into a secure state of cultural and personal synthesis. Hence, Afaf's "newfound faith" and her relationship with Bilal afford her self-confidence and healing, filling the emotional void left by her family's trauma: "For the first time in her life,

Afaf discovers that to be desired by another human being—to be needed—is an exaltation, one she hadn't anticipated" (p. 122).

3.5. Navigating public Islamophobia and the micro-aggressions of hijab

As a director in an American public school, wearing the hijab makes Afaf feel tension. She is confronted with a stark juxtaposition between the suspicious and prejudiced gazes of her colleagues and the naïve curiosity of her students' questions. The acute acculturative stress and social micro-aggressions Afaf encounters in school reflect the strains American Muslims face within dominant society: "She imagines they'll ask . . . Can she wear that thing in a public school? Doesn't that cross a line of church and state? Is she some sort of radical?" (p. 132).

Kozaric (2024) mentions that Muslims have distinct awareness of the behavioural traits and visible characteristics that mark them as identifiably Muslim, such as personal names, ethnic background, skin tone, and hijab. Aware of this reality, Afaf feels pressured. To relieve tension and mitigate her acculturative stress, she smiles at her colleagues, "pretending nothing's changed", and jokes with her students: "So you don't sleep in it?" . . . "Do you take a bath with it?" . . . "Oh, no, . . . I hope you don't take baths with your clothes on!" The children giggle, . . . She can see they're relieved" (p. 132). Humour is used here as a defense mechanism against threat and its negative effects (Abel, 2002).

This scene demonstrates how Muslim women are heavily scrutinized and politicized in the host society of post-9/11 America, where the hijab's presence often entails discrimination and identity threat. This Islamophobic prejudice has a significant impact on how individuals manage their sense of selfhood. It makes communal participation more difficult and costly. It too has long-lasting effects on their personal lives and societal relationships (Balazard & Peace, 2023). Studies conducted by Addison et al. (2023) illustrate that the marginalisation ensuing from such experiences influences people's psychological health and hinders their social cohesiveness within societies.

In her account of past events, Afaf exposes Islamophobic discourse within public spaces, where ethnic identity of Arabs is reduced to a derogatory stereotype: Afaf "remembers . . . when she stopped at a 7-Eleven [and] . . . overheard a white man joke, TWA—Trouble With A-rabs" (p. 104). In this instance, the joke operates as a micro-level articulation of structural racism. Such an event undermines the possibility of integration and signals that belonging is conditional. It clarifies how everyday interactions, where identity becomes a target of ridicule and exclusion, generate acculturative stress. Afaf's witnessing of this moment illuminates the psychological burden of

hypervisibility, where she is positioned as both observer and potential target of racialized discourse.

Balazard & Peace (2023) note that some Muslims perceive themselves as being held responsible for terrorism, extremism and various global crises, a perception that engenders a climate of hostility, distrust and mutual suspicion. The pejorative remark Afaf overhears, "TWA—Trouble With A-rabs", represents a microcosm of the broader structural racism, embodying the disdain aimed at her identity. Afaf's effort to reconcile her cultural identity with prevailing societal perceptions discloses how those in marginalised positions are often rendered targets for mockery. Her sense of alienation, exacerbated by public ridicule and the pressure to conform, captures the intricate complexities of her acculturative experience—an ongoing battle for acceptance in a society that ostracizes her identity.

The stereotypes propagated by social media and television often links Muslims with violence and savagery: "The Islam they've seen on TV is a dangerous religion that plunges through buildings with planes regardless of life" (p. 169). In his *Orientalism* (1979), Said contends that the denigrating stereotypical views about Muslims have affected the way in which the West views the East, Islam, and its beliefs. This explains why Afaf and the Palestinian community are continually threatened with violence perpetrated by some American extremists:

Afaf heard a sound like a firecracker. . . . Troublemakers again. People around the neighborhood tossed M-80s over the school fence on a regular basis. It was a message booming loud and clear: You don't belong here. The vandalism had gotten worse, too. Last week they'd spray-painted a pig's head on the field house, and two days ago a beer bottle shattered the window of . . . art classroom (p. 14).

These episodes elucidate how negative media narratives, following September 11 terrorist attack, contribute to the reinforcement of a dominant Islamic threat discourse. Azeez and Jimoh (2023) maintain that Islamophobia has developed recently into a new form of racism characterized by xenophobia and negative profiling. It permeates daily life and professional settings in the form of xenophobic practices and violent acts, namely property vandalism, mosque burnings, and the abuse of veiled women. The terror attacks which target Nurrideen school are a reaction to the broader socio-political strategies that perpetuate a cycle of fear of Islam, connecting it with terrorism. The claim that Muslim identity functions as a main predictor of threat for violent extremism in the West is a construct of particular strands of Western discourse deeply rooted in the stigmatizing storyline that links Islam and Muslim people with threat and violence (Abbas, 2025). Fortified by fears of danger, this discourse fosters the othering of marginalised groups, thereby exacerbating

feelings of withdrawal and isolation within non-dominant communities. The anti-Islamic image exported by the media and Western discourse justifies aggressive actions against them (Khan et al. 2022). The consequences are a serious rise in the levels of xenophobia and hostility towards Muslims.

The framing of Muslims as a major security threat to the public safety often results in a communal sense of humiliation, hinders social integration, and disrupts the acculturation process. Within the multicultural society of America, the journey of cultural identity formation for Afaf is, then, difficult. The incidents of vandalism and violence against Nurrideen School reveal how external societal barriers inhibit Afaf's voluntary integration into the mainstream culture. So, Afaf's trajectory of acculturation is constantly obstructed by systemic Islamophobia and discrimination.

3.6. The explosive climax: Confronting the xenophobic attacker

Participating in American professional life while maintaining her Islamic identity, Afaf's character initially appears to embody full integration. However, this outward balance is worn down by the constant surveillance she confronts as a visibly Muslim woman. Her hijab becomes a site of anticipated suspicion and public interpretation. Afaf encounters the most brutal forms of external acculturation pressure that stems from Islamophobia and racism: "Young girls screaming. Terrifying and unfamiliar sounds. Then came loud thuds. Like bags of cement dropping to the floor" (p. 15).

The armed xenophobic attack on Nurrideen school epitomises the climax of Afaf's journey and captures the physical clash between her and the terrorist. It depicts the moments of her symbolic death and spiritual rebirth, then her survival and return to school with a scarred body and a psyche fortified by reconciliation. The scene of violence and survival mechanisms mirror the hostile host environment and portray how institutional acculturative stress culminates in physical terrorism. The armed attack is converted into a direct confrontation between the white attacker and Afaf, who challenges him with a moral and existential question: "How am I your enemy?" (p. 201). In the words of Khan et al., (2022), Muslims, through this exchange, are cast as subjects of negativity while Islam itself is depicted as an unwelcome intruder.

The confrontation between Afaf and the shooter personifies the negative stereotypes embedded in the mind of the people of host society. It describes the racialised and religious stigmatisation of a Muslim Arab American woman and gives a picture of how the visible Muslim identity (hijab) becomes the battleground for belonging and 'othering': "The shooter's eyes flit over her body, rest on her hijab. "Naw, lady, you don't belong here at all." "I'm not your enemy." "Yes, you are," he

responded" (p. 159). Azeez and Jimoh comment that Muslim individuals are often dehumanized and reduced to violent caricatures. They are viewed as "a conservative, barbaric, intolerant perspective of life and was posited as blood thirsty savages under the banner of a monolithic religion" (2023, p. 1329). Hence, Afaf's acculturation is not freely negotiated, but shaped by external constraints. The hostility and surveillance she encounters disrupt any stable sense of belonging, producing a fragmented identity.

Abbas (2025, pp. 12-15) contends that the Western security policy is based upon a false assumption that religious devotion leads to extremism. But, the prime mover behind violence is "structural racism" and "social exclusion." Muslims are treated as expendable, perpetually "other," and objects of suspicion: "It was a message that suddenly resounded louder than all the times he'd heard it or read it online over the years: They don't belong here. Like most true citizens, he'd perceived them as mere outsiders, a nuisance" (p. 159). This quotation, referring to the shooter's thought, implies that racialised narratives and media impose a predefined identity on Muslims, representing them as terrorists and the other.

The dialogue between Afaf and the American attacker is reduced to the "veil" and the phrase "you do not belong here" (p. 158). He is a xenophobic and individual who harbours hatred for and bears a grudge against Muslim women: "Take that thing off your head," he commanded. I want to see your hair," "Will taking it off save my life? Will it make me a human being?" (p. 207). The veil scene shows that Western society views a Muslim woman's hijab as a symbol of aggression and anti-Western religious extremism. Yüksel and Butter (2021) affirm that headscarf-wearing women constitute the primary targets of Islamophobic discrimination directed at Muslims. Therefore, the American attacker rejects Afaf's assimilation into American society: "That rag makes you evil. You don't belong when you choose to wear it" (p. 215). Berry (2009) mentions that the clash between the host and ethnic cultures results when one of them doesn't accept or assimilate the cultural characteristics, norms and values of the other.

Afaf challenges the attacker with existential questions that force him into a verbal ideological retreat: "This is my country. You don't belong here (p. 206), "I was born in this country," she tells him again. "Like you." (p. 215). Afaf's dialogue with the xenophobic attacker serves as self-defense against radicalisation and aims at curbing his terrorist violence. Azeez and Jimoh (2023) say that Islamophobia forces individuals to adopt hyper-vigilant behaviours to ensure their safety. They add that the universal rise of Islamophobia is ascribed to the systematic portrayals of Muslims as threats. This, in turn, reinforces the embedded accounts of Muslim otherness and fosters a sense of insecurity among majoritarian populations. The violence scene displays the severe psychological stress that Afaf suffers because of her feeling defenseless around white people.



The racist and offensive language used by the shooter highlights the boundaries of exclusion, making integration structurally unstable rather than personally attainable. The clash between the host and heritage cultures hinders Afaf's acculturation process, producing acculturative stress. Berry (2009) posits that acculturative stress arises when the challenges of integrating into a new society become overwhelming, leading to varying degrees of adaptation among individuals. The stereotypical images and distortions of the Arab-American community, perpetuated by media and narrative discourse, impact Americans' perceptions and play a significant role in shaping the cross-cultural dialogue between Afaf, a Muslim-Arab figure, and the attacker, an American citizen. Although it is often presumed that members of minority groups can freely choose their own means of cultural integration, the reality is that systemic pressures and external circumstances frequently constrain this choice. In brief, post-9/11 America acts as a hostile environment in which Arab-Muslims undergo intense racialization and surveillance. This structural hostility extends across multiple spaces, turning institutions intended for learning and safety into sites of trauma.

3.7. Fragmented acculturation under surveillance

Following an aggravated assault by an anti-Muslim hate American attacker, Afaf's life undergoes a radical change to culminate in cultural integration: "She still carries fear, though it's tucked behind a wall of invulnerability. It's not courage—but resignation" (p. 226). However, Afaf is able to face the cultural traumas and transform their pressures into strength and psychological resilience. "She survived the worst thing imaginable; she could go on with her life" (p. 226). Drawing on the spiritual support she finds in Islam, Afaf's acculturation journey terminates in her spiritual rebirth, and physical survival of white supremacist terrorism. For her, Islam becomes a profound locus of psychological defense and spiritual sanctuary. It equips her with the means to grapple with suffering and reclaim her identity, building a feeling of belonging in the face of persistent exclusion: "She follows the white man's slow movements, her eyes blurring with tears. She silently prays. . . There is no power or strength except in Allah" (p. 211).

Afaf's journey of acculturation signifies that the integration with the host culture and identity formation are not an individual adaptation process. The acculturation process is structurally controlled by such systemic factors as Islamophobia and racial discrimination. Berry (2009) asserts that integration can only succeed when the dominant society is unprejudiced, multicultural, and accepts cultural diversity. Achieving integration requires mutual agreement in that the individuals of both host and heritage cultures agree to live together as a culturally distinct community. This strategy necessitates that the non-dominant groups adopt the core values of the wider society. Simultaneously, the dominant group must meet the needs of all groups living in the pluralistic society.



4. Conclusions

In *The Beauty of Your Face*, Mustafah identifies acculturation as a constrained process, rather than a stable or voluntary strategy of adaptation. Based on Berry's acculturation model, the study reveals that Muslim female subjectivity, in the novel, is framed by coercive structures and constitutive conditions, including Islamophobia, discrimination, racial scrutiny, and marginalisation. The negative stereotype of Muslim people as national threats is structurally and institutionally entrenched which brings about a multilayered social exclusion of Muslims across Western countries. The demonstration of Muslims as terrorists are particularly reinforced via the narrative discourse and social media that imbed harmful perceptions and induces xenophobic reactions.

In her quest of assimilation into the American society, Afaf was exposed to a structural form of racism and Islamophobia. She was also subjected to a series of psychological and social burdens. However, she was able to transform the acculturative pressure into strength and psychological resilience. Afaf's religious faith helps her tolerate the stiff resistances of a hostile host environment and end up in full cultural integration. This experience demonstrates that the acculturation process is not a matter of an individual choice—it is influenced by external factors that directly impact individual's cultural identity formation and development.

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