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Islamic Tenets and Values in Laila Lalami's *The Other Americans*

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ABSTRACT

After 9/11, the stereotypes and generalizations against Muslims are exacerbated. By examining Lalami's *The Other Americans*, this paper aims to challenge the prejudice and orientalist perceptions towards Muslims and US-Muslims through the aesthetic strategies that the author uses: Islamic tenets and values. The method used for this analysis is a Critical Textual Analysis and engages with Postcolonial Studies, particularly Edward Said concept of the Othering. The analysis found that prejudicial perception is a challenge through Islamic tenets such as the practice of Qur'an recital and fasting (sawm) which promotes Islam as consolation and peace. The novel also challenges the image of savagery and backwardness in the orientalist views through Islamic values that reflect the qualities of the Prophet Muhammad by depicting the values of perseverance (istiqamah), compassion, and innovation through embracing entrepreneurship. The findings reveal that the prejudiced views of Islam that are maintained by insularity and ignorance are countered by the Islamic tenets and values that are promoted in Islam and practiced by its believers. Thus, Lalami's novel undermines anti-Muslim racism by exploring Islamic tenets and values, including the Quran and hadiths, practiced by Lalami's characters who have suffered from the exclusion of U.S. belonging for centuries.

Keywords: 9/11, Orientalism, Prejudice, US-Moroccan women's fiction, US-Muslims

INTRODUCTION

Historically, prejudice and a lousy image against Muslims existed long before 9/11 happened. Edward Said's *Orientalism* summed up the distorted conception of Muslim, Islam, and Arab culture. The orientalist understanding of Muslims has portrayed the West as rational, developed, humane, and superior to the East, which they perceived as undeveloped and devalued. In the U.S., for example, the result and media coverage of September 11, 2001, perpetuated anti-Muslim sentiment, which was increased and has created negative stereotypes and prejudices against the Muslim population in the United States. Since the incident, Arab Muslim American has often been associated with the limited perception of extremist and fundamentalist. Some time ago, the Muslim community in the U.S. was increasingly cornered and marginalized due to Trump's election as president. His idea of the "Muslim Ban" has made many racist communities dominated by Whites worsen the position of the Muslim community.

Tasmih Khan shared her experience when she stated that "my attire may not be considered mainstream, but it does not make me any less American. And it should never rob me of the dignity and respect every person deserves, let alone cost me my safety" (para.9). Her statement indicated insecurity for Muslims, which exacerbates the wrong image and

Muslim stereotypes. These parallel realities and cases are present in Lalami's *The Other Americans*; arguably, the experience that the protagonist described by Lalami has gone through is a real experience for an Arab Muslim American who not only struggles as an immigrant but is also perceived as "the other" in the modern days of United States.

Prejudice and a negative image of Muslims have existed in the past, long before 9/11. In the United States, the aftermath of 9/11 and media coverage exacerbated anti-Muslim sentiment, resulting in negative stereotypes and prejudices against the Muslim population. Prejudice as a kind of Othering is not just linked to an individual's perspective in the United States but also other factors such as immigration and religion (Khoshnevis 127). The most blatant example is directed at the Muslim population. Prejudice through the U.S. media is linked to the limited perception of the physical attribute of Islamic extremist individuals who carry out violence such as terrorism in the name of Islam (Nurullah 1042). As a result, this triggers social conflict, discrimination, and prejudice in which some of the Muslim community are considered "threats" to the social order.

Disproportionate levels of violence frequently occur, particularly in the Muslim community, where hate-motivated violence is "three to five times" more likely to target Muslims in the United States (Abdelkader). Sunar also addresses the critical issue of "widespread and intense propaganda circulating that the recent terror attacks have an Islamic character and that terror is an integral part of Islam" (41). It is implied that spreading the idea of Islam as a "violent ideology" has formed a limited perception of the majority in the U.S. mainstream society who view the Muslim community as the Other. Therefore, Muslims are regarded as culturally problematic because they are perceived to challenge the U.S. communal property. Equally important, by using new extensive data, Garteis et al. show that nearly half of the U.S. mainstream community perceives that Muslims "do not at all fit with their view of the U.S. society" and Muslims are associated with a variety of cultural and political issues in the U.S. (738).

Lalami's *The Other Americans* story explores the ramifications of being viewed as culturally different, particularly for the Muslim minority. Such a phenomenon is addressed in Lalami's novel *The Other Americans*, which, according to Raia Lockerman, depicts the moral problem that immigrants face daily, making it relevant to the current experience of immigrants (para.2). *The Other Americans* also represent the problems faced by immigrants, particularly for generations of Muslim immigrants since 9/11, which has increased hatred against the Muslim community in the United States based on prejudices and stereotypes constructed by mainstream society, in which no amount of patriotism will ever be enough to gain acceptance (Giorgis, para.4). Hence, to challenge the prejudices and stereotypes towards Muslims, the novel explores how Islamic tenets and values help characters in the novel to regain their strength and present the neglected perceptions of Muslims.

Although the topic of Islamophobia, discrimination, and othering practices based on prejudice in the social sphere has been widely discussed, it can be inferred that negative prejudice has neglected the true virtues promoted in the Islamic tenets and values. Therefore, this paper senses the importance of considering how the Islamic tenets and values present in Lalami's *The Other Americans* challenge prejudiced viewpoints through the lenses of literary criticism. By raising the issue of prejudice, this paper aims to analyze how *The Other Americans* novel challenges the prejudice constructed against Muslims, especially post 9/11 and how the orientalist perspective on Muslims is challenged through Islamic tenets and values present in the novel. The analysis in this paper will not only be useful theoretically in the realm of literary criticism but also benefits readers by encouraging them

to be open-minded about how attitudes toward Muslims have changed and remained the same, as well as literary scholars interested in diaspora studies and scholars interested in developing the concept of Orientalism to see its relevance from the past to the present. In practice, this literary discussion can broaden perspectives on life in a diverse population, both for contributions to literary criticism and demonstrating the importance of cultural factors in literature studies and society in social life.

METHOD

This study focuses on Muslim characters in the novel *The Other Americans*. The method used in this study is Critical Textual Analysis (CTA). Critical Textual Analysis investigates the interaction between the internal workings of debate to figure out what makes a text convincing (Allen 136). According to Mike Allen, Critical Textual Analysis aims to expose the comprehensive, sometimes hidden tools that offer a text stylistic consistency and rhetorical impact. Critical Textual Analysis research may uncover hidden patterns that were previously ignored or underestimated (137). Along with the Critical Textual Analysis method, this research will engage with postcolonial studies, especially the theory of Orientalism by Edward Said, and focus and elaborate intensely on the concept of Othering. By using Critical Textual Analysis (CTA), this paper analyzes how the Islamic tenets and values that are present in the novel challenge prejudice against Muslims. This analysis also engages with the theory of Orientalism by Edward Said, specifically the concept of Othering and prejudice as a form of Othering practice.

The concept of Othering is not only limited to the understanding in the discourse of orientalism and postcolonialism narratives. The concept is still applied to the present society, where the Othering concept refers to an individual in a minority group who is attributed by negative characteristics representing the complete opposite of the ideal perception of mainstream society. Othering is the process of inserting certain elements where those who are othered are "irrationally feared" or "even hated". It is the practice of excluding those who do not fit the preconceived societal norms of mainstream society (Rohleder 1306, Bullock et al. 620). By adopting Said's Orientalism, the Othering process does not only refer to an act of stereotyping and discriminating but the practice of marginalizing a particular group or individual from the mainstream ideal norm. As complex as it is, Othering as a process can be used as a tool for homogenization and pejorative practices in which social exclusion and power imbalance possibly lead to a horrible act of crimes by projecting a particular group or individual into the margin of mainstream society. This prejudicial attitude in the Othering process may threaten a person's identity and sense of belonging because Othering fails to focus and accept people's similarities as human beings and integrates a particular group or one's identity into one-sided descriptions.

Although Said's Orientalism does not mainly use the term "Othering", the reception of his work and his interpretation of Orientalism discourse has been an analysis of the conceptual practice of Othering and has continued to serve as a reference point for further development of the concept. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has been one of the most significant inputs in understanding the power relationship by elaborating on the binary relations between the East and the West. Significantly, by developing a critique of the basic perception of the West (Occident) towards the East (Orient), Said's Orientalism enables people to understand the cultural misrepresentations in which the West has drawn up a stereotypical depiction of the East as the subject of the Other through inferior and objectionable representation (Said, *Orientalism* 29). For example, Orientalism points out

that the West has created a false definition of Islamic culture, including a perception that the essential qualities of a whole Islamic culture and its individuals can be unconditionally described.

By identifying Islamic tenets and values that are applied to Muslim characters in the novel, this analysis uses the excerpts in novels as primary data analysis. It is also supported by secondary resources such as scholarly journals and debates among several scholars related to the primary ideas of the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this discussion, the topic will be elaborated on and divided into three subtopics. In the first sub-topic, the discussion focuses on how the text depicted prejudice toward Muslims by referring to the event that occurs in the novel. In addition, in the second sub-topic, the discussion focuses on how generalized prejudice about the Muslim community based on Islamic extremist and limited perception of fundamentalist belief is challenged through Islamic tenets, which shows Muslims who find comfort and peace in Quran recital and Islamic teaching that promotes the virtue of calmness, harmony, resilience, and patience (*sabr*). Finally, in the third sub-topic, the discussion will focus on how the orientalist dogma that prejudices Muslims only from their backwardness is challenged through Islamic values that demonstrate the moral values of Islam such as perseverance, compassion, and cultivated innovation by embracing entrepreneurship.

Prejudice in *The Other Americans*

Within historical reference, Islam has been part of the U.S. heritage for a long time and has been part of the nation's foundation (Patel 6). Crucially, Patel highlights that many political agendas shape the perception of Islam before 9/11, including "the development of Islam-based civil rights parties in the U.S., the creation and role of Israel, the oil embargo of 1973, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the World Trade Center bombings of 1993" (6). Each agenda conveyed a set of messages which later became the center for the formation of the U.S. stereotypes about Islam and its adherents. This was significant because the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudice destroys the morale of the Muslim population and depicts the dangerous portrayal of Muslims in the minds of the U.S. mainstream community.

Indeed, *The Other Americans* have been reviewed as a novel that serves the issue of prejudice and bigotry. It is reflected in how the novel depicts the prejudice that appears toward the immigrants in the present time. One incident reflecting bigotry and prejudice against immigrants is when the novel shows how the U.S. mainstream society still socially excludes immigrant communities by showing an act of vandalism which shows anti-immigrant graffiti that reads "GO HOME in red block letters." (Lalami 251). The novel presents that "Go home" means immigrants to return to their home country. The insult targets the vulnerability of immigrants so that they do not feel comfortable and socially safe in society. The depiction of the anti-immigrant graffiti indicates an attack on immigrants' comfort and safety. Arguably, the graffiti also represents a sense of exclusion where the perpetrators of sentiment create categorizations between immigrants as minority groups and groups that are generally accepted in U.S. mainstream society. However, the rooted prejudice and sentiment toward immigrants are not only shown to immigrants in general, but *The Other Americans* show that the prejudice is also addressed to the Muslim community, especially after the events of 9/11.

The first instance of prejudice towards Muslims is depicted through slurs directed at Nora Guerraoui as Driss Guerraoui's daughter, who comes from a Moroccan immigrant family. By referring to the term "ragheads" and "talibans" the novel depicts that prejudice through labeling a person or group perpetuates the offensive term to describe and generalize an individual or group. The term indicates the generalization which Muslims are identified as a part of Islamic extremist and terrorist groups such as the Taliban and degrading them by using the pejorative slurs through the term "ragheads." Moreover, the prejudice legitimates and perpetuates a false perception of the Muslim community and those who are racially generalized regardless of ethnicity and religion. Zheng argues that "they were uniformly profiled as the enemy in the U.S.'s War on Terror." (Zheng). By depicting prejudice that "uniformly profiled" certain groups, the novel reflects that this social label worsens the Muslim situation and sustains wrong perceptions.

Another example of prejudice is depicted through the hate-motivated violence that occurred at Driss Guerraoui's shop. To depict the prejudicial conception, the novel refers to post-9/11 hate-motivated violence reflecting the permeated prejudice in U.S. mainstream communities. During the process of investigating her father's death, Nora recalled an incident where her father's business was being around after the incident of 9/11. She said, "We turned onto Kickapoo Trail to find Aladdin Donuts burning like a stack of hay" (Lalami 34). Concerning this Islamophobic action, the novel depicts that hate-motivated violence rooted in prejudice against Muslims reflects the misrepresentation of Muslims, especially after the coverage of 9/11, which displays Muslims as simply a threat. The excerpt shows that prejudice toward Muslims not only frame the image of Muslims where they are associated with the image of extremist, but the prejudice also results in hate crime where the Muslim community is antagonized and becomes vulnerable to being a target of violence.

Another fuelled prejudice and ignorance towards Muslims in the text is depicted, for instance, when Jeremy, Nora's best friend and lover and predominantly white, is arguing with his father about his participation in the war against Iraq. The conversation discusses the debate about the United States' participation in its war with Iraq, including how Saddam was seen as a threat to the U.S., how WMDs triggered the war, and how the bombs are affecting the innocent, including children and women. It ended with, "It didn't matter what I said, my father would always return to the same point. Saddam was a bad guy, we're the good guys." (Lalami 132). The conversation between Jeremy and his father explores prejudice and generalization towards the Muslim community in the U.S. by correlating that the Muslim community and Islamic codes are close to a tyrant and violent culture. By deploying the reference to Saddam Hussein, the text explores how the mainstream community in the modern U.S. still perceives Islam as problematic and perpetuates negative stereotypes against Muslims.

Moreover, the narrative that emerged after the event of 9/11 brought a detrimental experience to the Muslim communities in the United States, including immigrants. It is not only a form of prejudice through Islamophobia but also stereotypes and stigma against the Muslim communities. It is depicted in the novel when Nora Guerraoui, one of the daughters of Driss Guerraoui, confronts the longstanding stigma that permeated every Muslim community in the United States. In the trial of the Driss Guerraoui hit-and-run case, Nora expresses her feelings towards the outcome of the trial that acquitted her father's hit-and-run suspect; "Growing up in this town, I had long ago learned that the savagery of a man named Mohammed was rarely questioned, but his humanity always had to be proven." (Lalami 169). Nora indicated that there is always a stigma that plunges the Muslim

community into the attribute of savagery through the excerpt above, and it plays a role in confronting and defying the stereotype of Muslims through the case of his father, Driss Guerraoui. It shows that the text alludes to the tendency of the general public to always have a prejudice against Muslims, especially after the 9/11 incident.

Challenging Prejudice: Islamic Tenets

To challenge the prejudice and generalization toward Muslims, the novel presents Islamic tenets which describe Islam as a religion that is close to peace. One of the main tenets of Islam is its belief in God's revealed messages, namely the Quran. For example, in the novel, the Quran helps Maryam, Nora's mother, and Driss's wife, reconnect with her peace of mind. She finds comfort in reciting the verses from the Qur'an to find peace. When Maryam and Driss have a problem, Maryam turns to the Qur'an to regain her calm towards her trouble. Maryam also finds peace in the Qur'an to overcome her concerns after the incident of 9/11. Her daughter narrates;

“And the more they argued, the more my mother turned to her Qur'an. She had found solace in it after the attacks, reading it to calm herself every morning after listening to the stream of tragedies on the news. At the dinner table, she would often quote from the holy book in her perfect Arabic enunciation, which none of us could ever hope to replicate” (35).

The excerpt shows the side of Islam that is rarely exposed by the western media and opposes the narrative that Islam is full of violent ideas. In the novel, Maryam uses one of the main tenets of Islam, the Qur'an (Muslim holy book), as a support for her peace of mind every morning amid the media coverage, which in the excerpt above refers as the stream of the tragedies that have created generalizations against Islam as the religion which perceived as “the cause of so much violence and wars” (Yazdani 154). Hence, the text challenges the misunderstanding of Islam which is perceived as the religion that promotes the use of violence to spread the faith (Yazdani 154). It shows the significance of Islam as a religion that promotes peace and calmness and condemns extremism and violence (Akhter and Qadoos). As an example, one of the Arabic enunciations that reflects peace is *salaam*; in Arabic, *salaam* is translated as “peace and is considered as one of the holy names of God” (Yazdani 154). The phrase *salaam* refers to a social order that is peaceful, harmonious, and far from violence or conflict (Ibid., 155).

Another example that shows the main tenets of Islam through the practice of the Quran recital is when Maryam uses Surah An-Nas to gain peace of mind when her daughters are fighting. The circumstances are concerning to Maryam, but to find peace of mind amid her daughters' arguments, Maryam recites surah An-Nas as the surah functions to ask for protection from all the possible temptations in the world. Maryam said, “folded my hands in my lap, closed my eyes, and recited the Surat Al-Nas, over and over again.” (Lalami 79). Through the excerpt, the text not only opposes the limited perception of Islam but also shows that Islam is a religion that promotes the virtue of mindfulness and refuge through the main tenets of Islam. Surah An-Nas is the last surah in the noble Qur'an. The surah advises humankind to ask for help and protection only from Allah SWT. Both against all bad influences that come from humans and *jinn* who stay away from all orders and violate the prohibitions of Allah SWT.

Moreover, not only does the Qur'anic verse help Maryam find her peace of mind and refuge, but reconnecting to the practice and belief of Islamic tenets has helped her find a sense of consolation. After Driss's death, Maryam found peace in the process of fasting in the month of Ramadan; she narrates:

"Ramadan was difficult that year—not because of its many deprivations or because it fell in the middle of the summer when the days were long, but because I missed my husband so much. Yet the fast had a healing effect on me, too, each sunrise and sunset restoring a little more of my peace, so that, by the time Eid arrived, I finally gathered up the courage to take care of something I had been dreading." (281)

One of the main tenets of Islam which is included in one of the five pillars of Islam is the Islamic teaching of fasting (*sawm*) in the month of Ramadan. In Islamic culture, Ramadan is the holiest month. It is a time for Muslims to reflect on their faith and grow spiritually (Trafalgar). It is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and features *Laylat al-Qadr*, the night when the Holy Qur'an was first revealed to mankind (the night of decree). As a result, the month of Ramadan marks a significant moment for humanity and requires special devotion from Muslims (*Sawm - Fasting*). During the month, from sunrise (*fajr*) to sunset (*maghrib*), Muslims abstain from eating or drinking and resist temptation from lust. Muslims are also encouraged to cultivate the virtues of self-control, piety, and generosity. In the novel, the excerpt indicates that instead of deprivation, Maryam finds Ramadan as a restoration of her calmness

By engaging herself with the healing effect of Ramadan, the text introduces the knowledge of Islamic tenets, which are often obscured by the narrative of fundamentalism and neglects the real values of Islamic teachings, which promote the path of peace and harmony for its adherents (Akhter and Qadoos). The text shows that Maryam's way of using Ramadan as a process to gain her consolation and get healing from her grief after Driss's death contests the prejudice of Islam based on ignorance of Islam. Hence, by introducing the practice of Ramadan, as one of the main Islamic tenets include in one of the five pillars of Islam, the text shows that the practice not only has a healing effect on Maryam, but the presence of Islamic tenets contests the insularity of the mainstream community towards Muslim in the U.S.

Additionally, another example of the Islamic tenets in the novel that opposes the perception of Islam being equal to terror and fundamentalism is depicted through Maryam, who recites the tafsir of Surat Al-Imran, which describes the Qur'anic commentary about death as she narrates;

"There were so many pills and cures and ointments, useless protections against the inevitable—the Surat Al-Imran teach us that every soul shall have a taste of death, and the life of this world is only the comfort of deception." (281).

The excerpt refers to the surah Al-Imran, verse 185. It can be argued that Maryam correlates the concept of death in this surah with Driss's death; as a form of grief, Maryam recited Al-Imran to remind herself that in Islamic belief, all living things will face death and does not matter whatever form of protection man seeks, all mankind will meet his death because this world is only a temporary place.

This recital does not only contest the fundamentalist concept of Islam, which is conceived as terror and militant, but the excerpt also shows that through Islamic tenets, Maryam can find a sense of reconciliation for her grief as she recounts that "life has to be faced, even when it can't be accepted" (124). By drawing attention to this, the novel also introduced the concept of resilience and patience (*sabr*) in Islam. Patience (*sabr*) is the reaction of an individual who condescends and willingly obeys the commands of Allah SWT, restrains from all His prohibitions, and accepts all of life's trials and tribulations (Salleh et al. 5487). Following this concept, Maryam's way of reconciling with surah Al-Imran also reflects the virtue of patience of Prophet Ya'qub, who said, "I confide my sadness only to Allah." (Q.S. Yusuf, [18]:86) (Ibid.). By introducing this concept, the text challenges the Islamic codes that are often linked to the prejudice of Islamic fundamentalists, which only represents "aggression as coming from Islam because that is what "Islam" is." (Said, *Covering Islam* 15).

In analyzing Mohja Kahf's and Randa Jarrar's fiction, Djohar indicates the importance of sacred texts (the Qur'an and hadiths) in developing the protagonist's personality and spirituality. She also emphasizes how religion is significant for the protagonist's personal and spiritual journey (Djohar 65). Similar to this, by depicting Maryam, who finds comfort in reciting the Quranic verse as a form of overcoming her grief and seeks patience (*sabr*), the novel not only implies how religion helps Maryam as a refuge but also shows a variety of insights into Islamic tenets which contests the ignorance and prejudiced views of the U.S. mainstream community.

Another Islamic teaching which contests the prejudicial views towards fundamentalist Islam is depicted through Driss Guerraoui, who practices the teachings of the sunnah in Islam, including the fasting of *Shawaal* and *Sha'baan*. Driss describes;

"I had recited the Qur'an at the masjid, hardened my knees on the straw mats of our neighborhood mosque, and kept the fast not just in Ramadan, but for a few days in Shawaal and Sha'baan as well. These rituals consoled me; they told me that the world was what it was because of sin, whether its manifestations were seductive or repellent, and all I needed to do was resist it. There was a mathematical elegance to faith like this: belief in God, follow His rules, and you will be rewarded; disbelieve, disobey, and you will be punished." (59)

The excerpt deploys the values of Islam, which promotes individuals of its adherents to have high self-discipline and perseverance (*istiqamah*) through the practice of fasting (Harun et al. 74). *Shawaal* and *Sha'baan* are not obligatory fasting (*Sunnah*) but provide tremendous benefits for those who practice them. Fasting strengthens one's willpower, allowing one to resist lust and conduct good deeds (Harun et al. 78).

By referring to sunnah's good deeds, the novel challenges the negative conception of the Orientalist views where Islam is perceived as a dreadful thing where "fundamentalism equals Islam equals everything-we-must-now-fight-against" (Said, *Covering Islam* 14). It contests the dreadful conception of Islam by mentioning sunnah's practice, which shows that Islam is not equal and limited to fundamentalist ideas but also establishes good morals among its adherents, including resilience, patience, and diligence. By mentioning the sunnah fasting, the text not only introduces the positive aspect of Islamic teaching as the main tenets of Islam that contests the negative prejudice but also deploy that through the good

deeds of sunnah such as fasting, Islam also promotes the adherents to strive with perseverance (*istiqamah*) and consistency (Harun et al. 83).

Challenging Prejudice: Islamic Values

The novel challenges prejudice through Islamic tenets and values, which are demonstrated through the portrayal of Driss Guerraoui, who embraces entrepreneurship and leadership from Islamic viewpoints. The text challenges the prejudice and stereotype against Muslims by depicting Driss as a Muslim man who aspires to be a successful businessman by demonstrating the value of hard work, diligence, and perseverance (*istiqamah*).

Islamic values in the novel are shown when Driss first established his business in the U.S., reflecting that "Islam encourages the pursuit of opportunities, risk-taking behavior and innovation among its believers" (Ayob and Saiyed 4). For instance, when Driss and Maryam recently arrived in the U.S. and built their first business, the narrator describes;

"On Fridays, we went to senior centers, police stations, local schools, and construction sites, bringing samples in pink boxes that bore the logo of our shop. People who tasted my special honey glaze raved about it to their friends. Word began to spread. The shop turned a profit. We were able to move into a proper apartment and, three years later, into a house. Nora was born. Maryam quit the shop to take care of the girls. That was how we came to this country." (43).

The excerpt proves that the portrayal of Driss Guerraoui as a hardworking person confronts the idea that Islamic culture is limited in the notion of backwardness and is perceived as lazy. Mamdani argues that one of the dogmas of orientalists is that "the Orient lives according to set rules inscribed in sacred texts, not in response to the changing demands of life" (Mamdani). As a counter-response to this dogma, the novel portrays Driss Guerraoui, who demonstrates the values of diligence and settled businessman, to challenge the preconception that Muslims cannot adjust to the changing demands of life. The fact that Driss pursued and embraced the value of diligence through his entrepreneurship and business also represents that Islam is a knowledge-based religion, and Islamic tradition has always had a good attitude toward economic activities, as evidenced by the fact that the Prophet Muhammad SAW was a merchant before his prophetic mission (Faizal et al. 193).

The text showcases that Driss is creating more opportunities and helping economic growth. By demonstrating the value of diligence by depicting Driss as an immigrant who embraces entrepreneurship and hard work, the text also contests the economic malaise towards immigrants. For example, by establishing his donut shop, Driss opposes the prejudice that most immigrants steal job opportunities. The excerpt above shows that the text presents Driss Guerraoui as a Muslim immigrant who is far from threatening perceptions and defies the idea that the arrival of Muslim immigrants to the United States is merely perceived as trouble. The text contests the generalization of Muslim immigrants who are seen as backward and primitive or lazy by showing Driss Guerraoui, who embraces entrepreneurship and business, bringing back values of Islam that are aware of business practices and capable of being innovative.

In addition, as a form of perseverance, Driss also did not give up after his business slowed down and became the target of hate crimes. After 9/11, the shop becomes a target for Islamophobic acts as her daughter, Nora, narrates, "You remember his business was arson after September 11th? They never found out who did it." (23). In the wintertime,

especially, Driss claimed that his business had slowed down, and he had to compete with other business owners who were a couple of miles from where he opened his business. To overcome this obstacle, Driss demonstrates the value of perseverance when he innovates and expands his business. To increase the growth of his business, Driss continues to strive and improve his business to be better and more convenient as he narrates;

“so I was considering a few changes, I wanted to drop the corn hash and fried cheese sticks from the menu, add new salads and fruit smoothies, replace the vinyl flooring in the entrance, and maybe look into that alcohol license. And, more urgently, because the highway runs fast and I only have one chance to grab the attention of tourists, install a new sign.” (307).

By showing his eagerness to improve his business, such as installing a new sign to grab tourist attention, Driss demonstrates courage and determination, which is included in one of the Islamic values of leadership and entrepreneurship. Rafik argues that courage and determination are some of the leadership and entrepreneurship values in the Islamic viewpoint, along with perseverance, knowledgeable (*ma'rifah*), enterprise (*iqdam*), conviction (*yaqin*), etc. (Rafik et al. 7). Driss's initiative to expand his business and upgrade his shop appliances reflects one of the business values practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For instance, Driss upgraded and ensured the target market's convenience as he explains, “I decided to upgrade the lightbulbs to 75 watts—bright enough to see the menu, but still intimate enough for a cozy meal.” (309). Suwandi argues that during his time as a merchant, the Prophet was proficient to “read the market opportunities and learning cultural and geographical conditions of each target market” (Suwandi 54). These attributes and values of the Prophet as a merchant also lead him to higher profits than the other merchants (Suwandi 54). Similar to the novel, Driss's perseverance and his initiative also lead his shop to higher recognition, which is featured in Los Angeles Magazine, which his daughter, Nora, describes that;

“a writer for Los Angeles Magazine came out here to do a feature about Joshua Tree, and she included the Pantry in her write-up. The article had a picture of my dad pouring coffee for a customer, and the restaurant quickly got popular with tourists.” (158–59)

The text suggests that the recognition from the magazine marks his achievement toward his business and demonstrates the value of persistence and compassion in embracing entrepreneurship. It does not only reflect the values that are practiced in Islamic entrepreneurship viewpoint by reflecting the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) but also shows that Arab Muslim Americans such as Driss Guerraoui, who are coming from the immigrant community, are capable of demonstrating good entrepreneurship qualities and able to show his innovation in the middle of the competitive market. By demonstrating Driss as a Muslim man who is implementing perseverance to embrace entrepreneurship, the text not only reflects Prophet Muhammad during his time as a merchant but also challenges the essential ideas of orientalist discourse which is merely perceived for "its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness." (Said, *Orientalism* 407).

CONCLUSION

The prejudicial perception toward Muslims has been long permeated before the event of 9/11. However, the study finds that the novel challenges the prejudiced view through Islamic tenets by depicting a Muslim who finds comfort and consolation in Islam by reciting the Qur'anic verses, including surah An-Nas which promotes seeking refuge, surah Al-Imran to reconcile, recites the Qur'an to find peace and calmness, regain peace of mind. The text also introduces the holy month of Ramadan as one of the main Islamic tenets, which are included in one of the five pillars of Islam that has a healing effect and promotes surrender and patience (sabr), which contest prejudice and ignorance towards Muslims. To counter the prejudiced views of Islam as militant and the dreadful conception of Islam that is linked to a limited view of fundamentalist ideas, the novel also introduces the main tenets of Islam through Islamic teachings, including the sunnah of Shawaal and Sha'baan, which shows that Islam promotes good deeds to its adherents and promotes resilience, perseverance (istiqamah), and diligence through its practice. This study also finds that through Islamic values, the novel challenges the prejudiced views by depicting Driss Guerraoui as a Muslim who embraced entrepreneurship and possessed the values reflected by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he was a merchant. It shows that the novel *The Other Americans* (2019) provides Islamic tenets and values that promote the virtues and qualities of Islam that are often neglected and counter the existing negative preconceptions that are permeated this present time

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