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# Muslim Youth: Prejudice and Responses in Saadia Faruqi's *Yusuf Azeem is not a Hero*

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## Abstract

This research aims to investigate the prejudice experienced by young Muslims in the United States and examine their responses as portrayed in Saadia Faruqi's *Yusuf Azeem is not a Hero* (2021). The writers use close textual analysis in analyzing the primary text to examine the prejudice and responses portrayed by the young Muslims in the novel. In doing so, the writers employ Gordon Allport's theory of prejudice to comprehend the prejudice experienced by young Muslims and Simpson & Yinger's theory of response to prejudice to examine the responses of young Muslims. The results of the analysis reveal that young Muslim-Americans experience prejudice in various forms, which affects their social lives and shapes their identities. Their responses to this prejudice also vary, depending on the specific situation, their personal experiences, and their understanding of the 9/11 tragedy. Thus, responses were seen in the form of resistance and negotiation of their identities. This study reveals that the 9/11 tragedy significantly impacted the Muslim community, especially Muslim youth who did not experience the tragedy but being subjected to discrimination and physical violence.

**Keywords:** *Contemporary Muslimah Literature, Negotiating Identity, Post 9/11, Responses and Resistance, Young Muslim-Americans.*

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## Introduction

The United States is a vast country that has various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. According to Curtis (as cited in Sholawati 288), Islam is currently recorded as the second-largest religion after Christianity, with more than 1.5 billion followers. The presence of Muslims in the United States demonstrates that this country is a multicultural country in various aspects, such as race, religion, culture, and others. However, Muslims in America, as a minority group, receive terrible treatment. They often face negative prejudices, which contributes to an unfavorable view of the Muslim community. Prejudice is defined as a negative attitude, emotion, or behavior towards others based on a prejudgment about those individuals with no prior knowledge or experience (Hanes et al., 2007).

In the United States, Muslims are often subjected to negative prejudice. Following the 9/11 attacks, the world's views of Muslims have become even more negative. On September 11, 2001 (9/11), massive attacks on the cities of New York City and Washington, DC, brought terror to the United States (U.S.) (Ai and Evans-Campbell 20).

The majority of the population in the United States acknowledges that the events of 9/11 have brought about a significant shift in the way of life for many individuals. However, the impact of this shift has been particularly profound for Muslim Americans, who have experienced far-reaching and consequential changes that have altered their daily lives in a multitude of ways (Ali 369). Additionally, Djohar said in her research that in the wake of 9/11, the prejudice towards Muslims living in the United States tends to increase (149). The number of individuals who unfairly stereotype and discriminate against others based on their religion and ethnicity is alarming. Muslims are then known as terrorists, extremist groups, dangerous groups, and others.

As a part of Islam community in the United States, one group that feels the long-term effects of this tragedy is young Muslims. Although they did not witness or experience the tragedy directly, prejudice against them is real and still ongoing. Their experiences are a form of traumatic legacy that is not caused by direct experiences but by social situations that continue to reinforce these prejudices through the media, social interactions, and social environments. It is reinforced by evidence that most of the studies analyzed post-traumatic symptoms (64.81%) in children who were indirect victims through exposure to media reports about the attack (33.33%) (Pereda 181). In this condition, young Muslims face the same challenges as adults after 9/11. However, they face it from a different background. It is because young Muslims grew up in a world filled with negative narratives about Islam influenced by the 9/11 tragedy, even though they were not directly involved in the event. They have no memory of 9/11 but live in an environment that often corners them because of their religious identity. Thus, the response produced by young Muslims to the prejudice they experience is different from the response of adult Muslims.

In this context, *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* provides an insightful look at how young Muslim characters deal with post-9/11 prejudice. Set in Frey, Texas, it follows Yusuf, a young boy dreaming of entering a robotics competition. However, the twentieth anniversary 9/11 casts a dark shadow over his path. Yusuf and young Muslims in Frey face intense scrutiny from a hostile group of townspeople simply because they are Muslims. The background of 2021, accompanied by the prejudice that is still attached to Muslims in this novel, is proof that Muslims in the United States are still experiencing the effects of the 9/11 attacks. This novel also shows that the impact of the 9/11 attacks was not only felt by adults but was also felt by children for two decades.

Meanwhile, there are previous studies that discuss the same issues such as *Countering Islamophobia to Live in Harmony in America After the 9/11 Attacks: A Religious Moderation Reflected in the Novel Yusuf Azeem is Not a Hero (2021)* by Dahlan, *Main Character's Responses Toward Prejudice in Angie Thomas' On The Come Up (2019)* by Nurul Lailatul Badriyah, and *The Prejudice and Discrimination Toward Moslem in America as Reflected in Mooz-Lum Movie* by Muhammad Apriliansyah (2017). The attention given in the analyses of previous research is directed towards adults and Muslim communities. The gap in previous research studies is in exploring the character of young Muslims in the object of research. Therefore, this study examines the forms of prejudice towards young Muslims and analyses young Muslims' responses to prejudice in the novel.



Through this novel, readers can see the experience of prejudice with resistances and negotiations as its response from the perspective of a young Muslim. They did not experience the events of 9/11 directly, but they still felt the impact. This causes a difference in response between children and adults. Analyzing young Muslim's responses to prejudice can help in understanding how they deal with problems, especially in situations that they did not experience directly but were the target of strong prejudice. This analysis is important to develop awareness of how prejudice can affect the development of children's identities, as well as to understand the mechanisms they use to overcome discrimination. This novel is an important means to increase understanding of young Muslim's experiences of prejudice and to highlight how children's literature can play a role in building social awareness. To support this research, the writers use the theory of prejudice promoted by Gordon Allport in analyzing the forms of prejudice that exist in the novel. The writers also use the second theory proposed by Simpson and Yinger regarding types of responses to prejudice.

### Method

This research examines the text to unveil the response of the characters in responding to the prejudice. By engaging in this process, readers can gain a deeper insight into the work and unlock its hidden meanings (Salsabila and Djohar 231). Furthermore, this research analyses the issue of prejudice using qualitative method that focuses on collecting data through in-depth observation and exploration of social phenomena. Thus, the results of this data analysis come from data collection during the research (Lambert and Lambert 255). In this study, qualitative analysis is used to examine the novel *Yusuf Azeem is not a Hero* by Saadia Faruqi. The research aims to uncover how prejudice is depicted and how characters respond to it through detailed exploration of the novel's text, including narration, dialogue, and character portrayals. To find relevant data, the writers started data collection by reading *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* novel in depth. The next step was categorizing, highlighting, and annotating specific passages. These findings are then organized into categories based on the types of prejudice and responses portrayed in the novel. To support the data analysis, the writers added additional information from secondary sources such as books, journals, and other sources related to prejudice, Muslims, and the 9/11 attacks.

In this research, the writers act as the main instrument in collecting data and analyzing the prejudices and responses of young Muslims in the novel. Related to this, the main unit of analysis in this research is the novel *Yusuf Azeem is Not a Hero*, written by Saadia Faruqi. It is a middle-grade book published by Quill Tree Books in 2021. After collecting data, the writers analyze the findings, which can be done using descriptive analysis. The writers can start by collecting data from various sources such as books, e-books, articles, and websites. After reading the novel, the writers collect the data and check the correlation between the research question and the data that has been found. Then, the analysis concludes explaining the answers to the research questions and highlighting the interaction of the novel's themes with broader social issues.





## Results and Discussions

### Portrayal of Prejudice Against Young Muslims

Prejudice can manifest itself in subtle ways in everyday life and its effects can be damaging, for example through antilocution. As an early stage of prejudice, this action is not physically expressed. Instead, it is disguised as hurtful words, sarcastic messages, jokes or even seemingly simple expressions of hatred. It is also supported by Bozhiwa (2024), who said that these subtle but insidious forms of prejudice manifest in a variety of ways, ranging from derogatory comments and stereotypes to exclusive behavior (37). Although these words do not always contain prominent threats, their power to demean and marginalize individuals cannot be ignored, especially in the context of prejudice that has been rooted in society. Furthermore, Garcia reveals that after 9/11, the discrimination experienced by Muslims began immediately and has continued for years until today (3). Then, it has an impact on the prejudice and stereotypes that are still attached to the Muslim identity, spreading to various generations. This can be demonstrated by examining the individuals who perpetrate prejudice and those who are its victims. Although they did not experience the event firsthand, they have become both victims and perpetrators in its aftermath. The repercussions of this event extend beyond their own lives, affecting the next generations as well. This prejudice spans across age groups, affecting adults and children, including the characters in the novel *Yusuf Azeem is not a Hero*. On the other side, Garcia reveals that being an individual in America means being surrounded by persuasive influences. Since 9/11, the majority of Americans continue to view Muslims as terrorists (7).

"We learned about it in fifth grade," Madison finally said. "It was a bunch of terrorist attacks a long time ago, when my mom was a teenager."

"Yes," said Miss Terrance, writing 9/11 on the whiteboard with a bright red Expo marker. Then she wrote Never Forget under it.

A boy with wispy red hair raised his hand. "It was Arab terrorists. Like him."

Yusuf felt the hair on his neck rise in protest. "Like me?" he squeaked. Why did people think all Muslims were Arab? His family was from South Asia, not that anyone in the class cared (Faruqi, 83).

The quote above is an example of an antilocution with the same message as the previous quote, which considers Yusuf, a representation of a Muslim, as a terrorist or perpetrator of the 9/11 attacks. This incident began when Yusuf and other students studied and discussed about 20 years of the 9/11 tragedy in that timeline. Unexpectedly, prejudice against Muslims directed at Yusuf occurred. Antilocution becomes obvious when a student easily makes a prejudiced statement, "It was Arab terrorists. Like him." This taunt, although not intended as a physical threat, has an equally strong impact in reinforcing the negative identity assessed of Yusuf based on religion and ethnicity. In addition, it shows that Yusuf's identity is generalized because of the stereotypes that are still attached to Muslims.

Spreading these stereotypes can strengthen prejudices and convince others of the truth of those stereotypes. In addition, the media can be an essential factor in the portrayal of Muslims. Haner et al. mention that empirical studies show that general media coverage that portrays Muslims as terrorists or extremists raises fears and



concerns about terrorism among the public and creates out-group prejudice (4). On the other side, compared to the previous quote, which shows antilocution in everyday contexts among classmates as constant verbal insults, this quote provides about how this prejudice is systemically reinforced through narratives and teachings in school.

Furthermore, the antilocution found implies another sensitive call directed at Yusuf as a Muslim, a call that is not only insulting but also has stereotypical meanings. Furthermore, the antilocution found implies another sensitive call directed at Yusuf as a Muslim, a call that is not only insulting but also has stereotypical meanings.

Ethan turned to the principal. "It's true. We're best friends, aren't we?"

Principal Williamson looked from one boy to the other. "Are you? What's Yusuf's last name?" Yusuf waited with bated breath. Did Ethan know his last name? They didn't share any classes except PE.

Ethan shrugged. "Ahhhh . . . I forgot . . . maybe Osama or something?" (Faruqi, 168).

The quote above describes the situation where Ethan and Yusuf entered the principal's office to be asked to explain the small commotion they caused at school. When the principal asked for an explanation, Ethan pretended to think that Yusuf was his friend, but Ethan expressed prejudice when asked about Yusuf's last name. He expresses his prejudice in an antilocution, expressing prejudice disguised as ignorance. From Yusuf's perspective as a young Muslim, when Ethan guesses his last name as "Osama," it is not considered a guess but rather a direct attack on his identity. It is because Ethan offended Yusuf by associating him with Osama bin Laden, a figure associated with the 9/11 terrorist attack. As a young American Muslim, Yusuf faces a prejudice that weighs on him and the entire Muslim community, where every interaction has the potential to lead to the collective judgment of his religion.

As a child still in the process of understanding the world around him, Yusuf faces the reality that, regardless of who he is, the prejudice expressed by others can obscure his identity and turn him into a harmful stereotype. This certainly undermines his self-confidence as a young person trying to fit in with his environment. Moreover, Yusuf's prejudice highlights the struggles faced by young Muslim in post-9/11, stemming from fear and misunderstanding tied to a global tragedy.

The prejudice faced by Yusuf verbally reflects that prejudice has been embedded in everyday social interactions. The more often antilocution appears, the bigger the opportunity for prejudice to rise to the next level. In this novel, the form of prejudice does not stop at antilocution. Yusuf and other young Muslims experience discriminatory treatment. Discrimination is a concrete manifestation of prejudice through actions that can directly affect individuals or specific groups. These actions show unfair treatment and include restrictions on access and opportunities or unequal treatment in various aspects of life. Discrimination continues to increase after 9/11, and the Muslim community often experiences exclusion, negative stereotypes, and unfair treatment by the society around them. In *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*, discrimination does not stop at individuals but also reflects how society treats the Muslim community. As a young Muslim, Yusuf is aware of the differences in treatment that occur in everyday life. Yusuf proves it with his experience, which states that even though he and his family have long been part of society, they are still considered "outsiders".



Yusuf gulped, then turned to face the class. Everyone looked bored already, which was a good thing. It meant they weren't listening and wouldn't care what he said. "I've lived in Frey since the day I was born. So has my sister, Aleena. My mom was born in Houston. My dad is an immigrant, but he got his citizenship years ago. Still, lots of people treat us like outsiders." (Faruqi, 270)

The quote above describes Yusuf, who wanted to present his school report on 9/11. Before explaining his report, Yusuf uses his personal experience as an introduction to the report. Yusuf's statement implies an attitude of discrimination in the social environment. The quote demonstrates Yusuf's realization of injustice at being treated differently when they should be seen as part of the same community. This condition may represent discrimination against an individual based on their origin and identity. Yusuf's family identity as Muslims and Abba's origin from Pakistan became a form of prejudice and discrimination. This was driven by stereotypes or negative stigmas still attached to how the community viewed them. Thus, even though their family had fulfilled the requirements to be accepted as citizens, society did not admit Yusuf's family as part of the Frey community.

The discrimination experienced by Yusuf increasingly involves more parties, especially adults. In such circumstances, adults should act based on facts, not prejudice. In fact, Officer Strickland, the official authority handling this situation, actually showed a discriminatory attitude towards Yusuf, treating Yusuf as a suspect.

"I'm sorry, son, we'll need to take you to the police station downtown," Officer Strickland said quietly.

Yusuf blinked hard. "Why?"

"Nothing to worry about," the officer replied. "Just to ask you a few questions."

Yusuf felt faint. "What about my parents?" he whispered.

"I've already let them know. They'll meet us downtown." Officer Strickland grabbed Yusuf's shoulder and pulled him up. Yusuf hoped fervently his shaky legs would keep him standing. Another officer pulled both of Yusuf's lifeless arms behind his back. He felt the cool touch of metal on his wrists.

Handcuffs." (Faruqi, 294-295)

The quote above illustrates the situation of Officer Strickland's subsequent actions in confronting Yusuf, who was accused of carrying a bomb in his backpack. The quote reflects an act of discrimination demonstrated through Yusuf being treated excessively by Officer Strickland. Although there was no hard evidence that Yusuf was involved in a criminal act, the decision to take him to the police station, put him in handcuffs, and treat him as if he were a threatening suspect demonstrates a hidden bias that influenced Officer Strickland's judgment. Discrimination is the result of negative assumptions that have no basis in strong evidence against Yusuf. In this situation, the prejudice that influenced the officer's perception of Yusuf led to handcuffing him. The use of handcuffs reflects an overreaction that is not proportional to the situation. Moreover, abusive behavior is not a measure of discrimination, as evidenced by the situation experienced by Yusuf. Discrimination can also be shown through a person's decision, such as Officer Strickland, who made a decision that did not follow the standards of handling children or teenagers.



Prejudice in this situation has reached the discrimination stage due to related to the stereotypes of Muslim. Prejudice has been around for a long time and has changed one's perspective towards Yusuf, with a supportive environment being the foundation. Thus, this kind of prejudice can form into a person's mindset without realizing it and can create a negative response when facing what is perceived as a threat. Officer Strickland was one of the people who had a negative perception towards Yusuf. By doing so, his judgment influenced his actions in handling the situation by handcuffing Yusuf's hands. The structure and procedures in law enforcement further worsened the overreaction to Yusuf. This further supports overreaction without considering anything else.

After prejudice is expressed through antilocution and acts of avoidance or discrimination, uncontrolled prejudice can escalate into aggressive physical actions against the targeted individual or group. Such actions are usually expressed through aggressive physical actions against the targeted individual or group. This stage is a continuation of the discrimination stage. Physical attack is dangerous because specific individuals or groups experience physical violence or intimidation based on identities such as race, religion, or ethnicity. A person or group expressing prejudice at this stage exhibits a form of violence that aims to intimidate, harm, or destroy the target, which is considered 'the other.' Therefore, physical attack not only cause harm to the victim but also aggressively convey the message that their existence is not considered. An example of such a case can be seen in the aftermath of 9/11. Despite the passage of two decades, Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims still exist, starting from verbal attacks to physical violence and destruction of property. As an illustration of the concept of physical attack, *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* illustrates how young Muslim characters are targeted for physical attack.

The next minute, somebody pushed past Yusuf. It was Ethan, followed by Sammy. The crowd was thick, but the two boys elbowed their way through. They were headed straight toward Saba. Before Yusuf could wonder why, Ethan was right next to her. "No hats allowed in the school," he growled and reached up.

Yusuf watched Ethan's hand with a strange fascination. He watched as if he was frozen in a movie, watched as Ethan took a fistful of Saba's red hijab and pulled it viciously downward. Saba screamed and put up her hands to grab the hijab, but he held on to it. They pulled in opposite directions for just a nanosecond, and then it was off. (Faruqi, 231-232)

The quote above describes Yusuf meeting Saba in the cafeteria. At the same time, the cafeteria was filled with other students because the bell had rung. At this moment, the physical attack on Saba can be seen through Yusuf's point of view. An act of physical attack is shown when Ethan grabs Saba's hijab. This act is identified as a form of physical attack rooted in prejudice that develops into actual violence. This attack was not only intended to hurt physically but also to humiliate and intimidate Saba based on her identity as a Muslim woman. In addition, Muslim women who wear the hijab are frequently subjected to physical and verbal attacks from non-Muslims in the United States, a phenomenon that reflects a broader pattern of violence against religious symbols in society (Selod in Abderrazzaq 31).

The prejudice that has reached the stage of physical attack in this situation explains that Ethan's level of hatred is uncontrollable and has gone beyond verbal



expression and discrimination, which means that he needs more extreme and aggressive actions than his previous actions. Therefore, Ethan, who previously expressed prejudice with antilocution and discrimination, now feels the need to express it through physical violence against other Muslims, which in this situation happened to be the right target for Ethan. His aggressive actions can be identified as his attempt to assert his dominance by eliminating things considered different and threatening to the majority group. Physical attack is also used because measures such as antilocution and discrimination are not enough to intimidate Muslims at school. Therefore, Saba's experience of physical violence demonstrates Ethan's attempt to intimidate Muslims further. Finally, prejudice against Muslims that emerged after 9/11 converted to violence.

This situation shows that the perpetrator of the physical attack was a child. Basically, children have mentality and emotions that are still growing. However, prejudice in children can occur because they adopt the direct actions and stereotypes of their family and culture (Kite et.al., 2022). The conditions in the quote above can imply the psychological effect of Islamophobia in children. Thus, he accepts what is in the environment and people around him and projects it into a hatred towards Muslims. Ethan's actions can illustrate how the social environment affects a person's actions or views.

#### **Young Muslim Resistances and Negotiations toward Prejudice**

Avoidance is the basic level of responding to prejudice. It is a complex mechanism that includes two different directions: individuals can withdraw from their minority group or, conversely, move closer to their group while reducing contact with the dominant group (Simpson and Yinger 139). On the other hand, Carnelley and Boag suggest that insecure individuals tend to respond to out-group threats with more significant prejudice. People with high levels of attachment anxiety have a hyperactive attachment system, which makes them focus on threats in their environment (4). In the novel, the avoidance response appears as a strategy to avoid confrontation with the dominant group manifested in various forms. One of the following quotes shows how the characters in the novel choose to avoid conflict to deal with a stressful situation.

A few kids pointed to Yusuf and Danial as they passed under the black banner that still hung over their heads. "Terrorists!" someone called out, hard and sharp.

A flash of plaid moved past, bumping into Danial.

"Hey!" Danial shouted, but Yusuf saw Ethan Grant's tall frame and put a hand on Danial's arm.

"Just . . . don't say anything." (Faruqi, 82)

The quote portrays a circumstance where Danial and Yusuf walked past a black banner that says NEVER FORGET—TWENTY YEARS. Somebody yelled terrorist remarks at them, and Ethan Grant hit Danial. The circumstance has two diverse responses. Danial responded by yelling spontaneously. In the meantime, Yusuf's reaction was to maintain a strategic distance from the circumstance and stop Danial's attitude. "Just ... don't say anything" is Yusuf's reaction, which appears to be an attempt to maintain a strategic distance from a showdown in a circumstance that might emerge. Yusuf tried to control



himself and calm the situation by avoiding members of the dominant group and saying nothing.

Yusuf's response is seen as avoiding the dominant group by reducing communication. The existence of Yusuf and Danial as new students at school, their existence as minorities in the school environment, and that they are not having the same strength as Ethan are the reasons why Yusuf chose to avoid the situation he was facing. Even though it seems difficult for Yusuf to control himself to prevent a worse situation, this shows that Yusuf understands the importance of avoiding conflict. He is also trying to maintain calm in tense situations. This also aligns with Uncle Rahman's way of dealing with prejudice. He suggests the same way to Yusuf, as in the following quote.

Uncle Rahman lowered his voice and looked intently at Yusuf. "And hey . . . don't worry about things, all right? I survived 9/11, didn't I? You can survive twenty years later."

Yusuf thought about this as he lay awake in Amma's old bedroom. Uncle Rahman was right. He could survive everything that was happening in Frey. All he had to do was stay on the sidelines, not get involved. Not try to be a hero. (Faruqi, 263)

When Yusuf chooses to avoid confrontation in response to the prejudice he faces, a similar attitude is also reflected in Uncle Rahman's advice. Uncle Rahman encourages Yusuf to persevere in challenging situations, including through avoidance strategies. He also advises Yusuf not to worry too much and to use his own experience to survive the post-9/11 situation. The main point of the advice that Yusuf got and wanted to apply was to avoid confrontation and conflict with the situation and not try to be a hero. Therefore, Yusuf took an avoidance response based on the advice he received from Uncle Rahman. This reflects that actively participating in conflicts or directly addressing prejudice is dangerous and may worsen the situation.

Moreover, Uncle Rahman's advice is coherent with the social issues of the time, where marginalized and minority groups used avoidance as one of the strategies to overcome systemic prejudice. This means that minority groups prefer personal safety over the consequences of prejudice in such social situations. The constant trauma and hostility Yusuf experienced may have also influenced his decision to avoid prejudice by managing fear and maintaining personal safety in a prejudiced environment. In addition, his decision to keep a low profile helped him reduce his vulnerability to conflict caused by perceived risks and the fact that he had no personal opportunity to counter strong prejudices. This strategy aligns with Uncle Rahman's recommendations, describing cultural and family practices emphasizing self-preservation over conflict.

The changing response to prejudice can be observed in a broader context, where Muslim children often struggle to face any discrimination due to the stereotype. In school and community settings, avoidance responses are often the first defense mechanism for children to protect themselves from verbal or physical attacks. However, as these experiences continue, they may shift to acceptance responses—an attitude in which individuals or minority groups choose to accept the circumstances they face without trying to change them.

This shift is important to understand because it shows the adaptation experienced by children in situations full of prejudice. The acceptance response does not mean that they agree with discrimination but rather a survival strategy in an unfriendly



environment. This response signals that even though the conditions faced are unfair, individuals are trying to find ways to function and adapt to the situation. This is in line with Simpson & Yinger's theory, which suggests that although this attitude may sound passive, in many cases, it can be a smart choice to avoid further conflict and protect oneself. In the novel *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*, this acceptance response is seen through the character of a young Muslim named Cameron.

“What is his problem?” Danial whispered furiously. “What do you mean?” Yusuf was still staring at the group. “He acts so . . . white.” Danial said the last word as if it was an insult. “Like, changing his name, talking in an accent, hanging out with those guys . . .” (Faruqi, 33)

The quote above tells the story of Danial and Yusuf, who were talking, but suddenly, a group of children came while doing bad deeds to other children. One of the groups was Cameron. Seeing this, Danial criticized Cameron for acting like the children in the group, speaking with an accent, and changing his name. Danial said this reflects a veiled prejudice against Cameron's efforts to adapt to an environment dominated by the majority group. Danial's attitude implies that Cameron has attempted to adapt to white social norms by changing his name, speaking with a specific accent, and associating with specific groups. Cameron's approach might represent his desire to reduce the stigma and prejudice he may experience as a minority. In a society where prejudice and stereotypes about minority groups are common, Cameron's actions could be interpreted as an adaptive strategy to eliminate gaps and minimize discrimination.

It also indicates that Cameron's attitude shows an acceptance response to the prejudice in the environment. He accepts that he, as a member of the minority group, cannot do much against the dominant group. Therefore, his way to survive is through his attitude of accepting the situation towards prejudice by changing many things in himself. Instead of fighting back, Cameron masks his acceptance response by taking other attitudes that make it seem as if he has a new identity and is part of the dominant group. This attitude can be caused by social pressure and the desire to be accepted in the majority environment, so he forces himself to conform in ways that could be perceived as a betrayal of their original identity.

After individuals use the acceptance response, acceptance is used for personal and group change as a collective strategy. This can be seen in the next analysis Cameron gave to Yusuf.

Cameron leaned closer. “Listen to me. There’s only one way to survive this. To assimilate. That’s what your dad and my dad are doing. That’s what we all are doing.” Yusuf thought of Saba and her red hijab. Of Sameena Aunty and her sad face. Of Mrs. Levy and her Jewish ancestors. “I don’t like that word,” he whispered. “Assimilate. It sounds like you have to give up everything that makes you, you.” (Faruqi, 281-282)

The situation tells the story of Yusuf, Danial, and Cameron, who are gathered together and talking about the threats that Yusuf received as a form of prejudice against him as a Muslim. In response, Danial suggests using an assimilation strategy that reflects Cameron's acceptance response in the face of prejudice and social injustice. By suggesting to accept the situation and assimilate into the dominant group, it is clear that



Cameron responds to prejudice with acceptance. He considers that although the circumstances and prejudices present cannot be controlled, assimilating and accepting the circumstances can make survival in the majority group. Therefore, acceptance is considered a way to gain security in the social environment, as he has done by changing his name from Kamra to Cameron. In addition, the thing that makes Cameron use acceptance in dealing with prejudice is that he realizes that avoiding conflict is a less effective way to deal with prejudice and change social conditions. That is why the quote shows Cameron facing prejudice, which leads to an acceptance response even though the situation is different.

Cameron responds to prejudice by adapting his acceptance to be accepted by society. In contrast, Muslim women like Saba encounter prejudice in more complex ways due to her identity as a Muslim and the hijab she chooses to wear.

The crowd parted as if trying to run away from Ethan. Sammy also took a few steps back, uncertain. On the ground lay the hijab, like a deep red stain. Saba, her black hair disheveled, tears on her face, stood in the middle. In that moment she looked like Aleena, her eyes wide, her mouth quivering. Yusuf realized that apart from that one scream, she hadn't said a word. The look on her face said everything. (Faruqi, 232)

The quote above shows Saba experiencing a physical attack with Ethan pulling her hijab apart. The statement "she hadn't said a word" clearly illustrates this attitude of acceptance, where Saba chose not to fight or be the perpetrator. The silence and crying reflect Saba's helplessness or inability to respond to the situation actively. Saba feels that she has neither the strength nor the power to fight Ethan, who she feels has far more power than her, and his existence as the dominant group is acceptable to the society compared to her. Thus, the passive attitude shown by Saba means that she does not fully accept Ethan's attitude, but she accepts Ethan's attitude because of the circumstances that force her to do so.

Research by Ghaffar Kucher et al. (in Bozhiwa 35) confirms that after the events of September 11, immigrant Muslim adolescents experienced increased surveillance, where various aspects of their identification, such as names, clothing, and language were often indicators of discriminatory treatment. It means that the US government did Muslim profiling in order to prevent any bad actions. This is relevant to Ethan's attitude of pulling off Saba's hijab because he wanted to target her Muslim identity directly. Also, Saba is aware of her identity as a member of a minority group surrounded by a dominant group, making her feel even more powerless to resist. Moreover, her response suggests that direct resistance may be ineffective or even risk worsening the situation. Therefore, acceptance is the primary way to go in this situation.

Saba's feeling of powerlessness is also felt by Danial as a minority in the social environment. The power difference between the dominant and minority groups makes Danial feel that his group is weak, so he cannot fight against the injustice caused by the dominant group.

Yusuf watched Ethan at the other table, laughing loudly. Yusuf gritted his teeth. "Someone just has to be brave enough to do something."  
Danial rolled his eyes at him. "And that someone is you?"  
Yusuf kept his eyes fixed on Ethan. "Why not?"





"Because of what happened to your father's store, obviously." Danial gave him a disgusted look. "You and your dad both think you're heroes, fighting against bullies. But guess what? We're few and weak, while they're strong. They will win, every time." (Faruqi, 249)

From the dialogue between Yusuf and Danial, the writers focus on Danial's response to their situation. Danial's response to the prejudice he faces at school and home shows acceptance. Danial sees that his current situation cannot be changed and considers the struggle against injustice meaningless. The reason is because of his status as a Muslim, a minority group in Frey. Even though Danial does not directly accept the prejudice he faces, this can be found in how he responds to his discussion with Yusuf. The sentence "We're few and weak, while they're strong. They will win, every time" clearly shows Danial's view of Muslims, who are considered weak by him because they are a minority group and cannot do much in the face of prejudice. Moreover, this dialogue also justifies the dominant opinion about Muslim and glorifies the mainstream narratives on 9/11.

In contrast, groups like Ethan or Patriot Sons are considered strong because they have power. His position as a dominant group and a supportive environment makes the perpetrators of prejudice continue to win and control the situation. Through this view, the prejudice is due to the power imbalance between the oppressor and the oppressed. From this consideration, Danial felt neither he nor Yusuf could fight Ethan. How Danial reacts to the situation may be influenced by past traumatic experiences, such as the discrimination Danial experienced repeatedly. Feelings of helplessness and the difference in power between Danial and the perpetrator shape Danial's response, which tends to avoid conflict or accept the situation, depending on what situation he faces. In this situation, resisting Ethan's attitude is considered futile because of the difference in power and the negative consequences received. This also means that Danial is pessimistic or loses hope in fighting prejudice to lead himself to acceptance. This response indicates that resisting or acting is considered ineffective and risky, so Danial accepts the situation rather than trying to change it and confirms the discrimination and illogical narrative within Muslim terrorist narratives.

## Conclusion

This study aims to analyze prejudice and the character's response to it in *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*. Set in 2021, this novel shows that after more than twenty years, the prejudice and discrimination still occur in the United States. Instead, prejudice and negative stereotypes against Muslims still exist in society and are even passed down to the next generation. In this research, the writers analyze two main points. First, the writers discuss the prejudice against young Muslims that appears in *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero*. Second, the writers analyze how young Muslims respond to the prejudice they experience.

This study shows that prejudice against Muslim children in the novel appears in various forms, ranging from verbal actions to physical violence. This prejudice affects their social lives and shapes their identities in society. In facing various prejudices in school and social environments, Muslim children in this novel respond in different ways. Their responses are influenced by their understanding of the 9/11 tragedy, the situations they faced, and their experiences related to the event and the prejudice they experienced. The results of this research also confirm that although the 9/11 tragedy



occurred two decades ago, its impact is still felt today, especially for the younger generation of Muslims who were born after the event. Thus, the 9/11 tragedy not only claimed lives at the time of the event but also triggered prolonged discrimination against the Muslim community, including the younger generation of Muslims who had to deal with its negative impacts.

Through this novel, the writers focus on the issue of prejudice by analyzing forms of prejudice and Muslim responses to prejudice itself. Also, not only focusing on the issue of prejudice, the writers found other interesting topics to be analyzed further in this novel. First, other researchers can analyze Yusuf's characteristics in dealing with conflict. Readers can follow Yusuf's journeys in dealing with conflict in the novel. Second, Islamic values can be a topic raised in research. Lastly, the interesting part of this novel is Uncle Rahman's journal, which tells his experiences facing the 9/11 attacks and helping Yusuf face a similar situation. Other researchers may be able to explore Uncle Rahman's journal by applying specific theories to gain a deeper understanding and uncover new perspectives. This section is quite interesting to analyze because it delves into the complexities of the research focus, which is centered not on the story characters but rather on the analysis of the journal or the act of self-writing.

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