Research Journal of Language and Literary Studies
Fall 2024, Volume 4, No.2, pp 107-130

American Exceptionalism and The Dilemma of Muslim Immigrants in Post-9/11 American Life: An Analysis of *The Submission*

Sajid Ali Lashari[1], Saima Jabeen[2], Ahsan Chandio[3]

Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of South Asian Muslims in America after the 9/11 attacks, from the perspective of novel "The Submission". It also analyzes the effects of American Exceptionalism among Muslim and non-Muslim characters. By using Martin Lipset's idea of a distinct national identity of America, the study contrasts pre-and post-9/11 attitudes towards Muslims in America. Just before the attacks, there had been a rise in implicit prejudice against Muslims, but immediately after them, overt expressions of hatred, discrimination, and violence became prevalent. The protagonist, Mohammad Khan, became a symbol of injustices faced by South Asian Muslims, which ranged from denial of civil rights to being evicted, threatened, and ultimately, to forced self-exile. Asma and others like her, met tragic consequences, creating growing mistrust among Muslims against their fellow Americans. This would allow through analysis of these experiences a reflection of some of the implicit, complex interactions between Islamophobia and American

[1] M.Phil. English, Iqra University, Karachi. Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, Sindh Madressatul Islam University (SMIU) Karachi. Email: sajidalilashari@gmail.com
[2] M.Phil. Education, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad. Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education, Hamdard University Karachi. Email: saimayasir13@yahoo.com
[3] Lecturer, Shah Abdul Latif University, Kairpur. Ph.D. Scholar, University of Bologna Email: ahsan.xxx@studio.unibo.it Corresponding Author Email: sajidalilashari@gmail.com

Exceptionalism and the ways in which South Asian Muslims were kept marginalized after the attack on 9/11 in America.

Keywords: *American Exceptionalism, Unique Nation, Prejudice, Muslims, Attacks, 9/11*

Introduction

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks marked a drastic change in the nature of America's social texture, particularly in the way Muslim immigrants were perceived. The nation had reached a history-making juncture in its stride toward coming to terms with the complexities of the American identity and the concept of American Exceptionalism. Against this backdrop, the novel *"The Submission"* by Amy Waldman comes as an exciting account of the dilemma of the Muslim immigrant in post-9/11 America. The concept of American Exceptionalism has long influenced US policies and cultural narratives based on its underlying assumption that the nation is inherently superior and uniquely destined (Lipset, 1996). But the events of 9/11 catapulted that ideology into a reevaluation process that finally exposed hidden tensions and even prejudices that existed within American society. Muslim immigrants were caught in the vice of heightened suspicion and discrimination where the few acts of extremists became the grounds for unmerited hanging of responsibilities on them (Frel, 2006).

This study seeks to explore the nuanced dynamics of American Exceptionalism and how this relates to the life of Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America, as it is elucidated in Waldman's "*The Submission*." Analyzing the book with a close reading, we shall attempt to unravel the complexities of identity, belonging, and prejudice that Muslim immigrants experience in a nation that is partly trying to come to terms with its own sense of exceptionalism. Through experiences with such characters as Mohammad Khan and Asma, we will trace the ways by which American Exceptionalism is refracted into perceptions, attitudes, and actions toward Muslim immigrants. In order to accomplish this, we will clarify the long-term dilemmas facing

Muslim immigrants as they navigate American life in the wake of 9/11, but we will also probe further questions: how does American Exceptionalism shape claims to notions of inclusion, tolerance, and diversity? In summary, this study is expected to produce further discussion of how ideology, identity, and immigration intertwine in the United States of America.

Main aim of this research is to determine the nature of American Exceptionalism as portayred by Martin Lipset in the novel *"The Submission"*, based on textual analysis of the usage of language, tone, attitude of characters and prejudices towards Muslim American characters. Within the sub-purpose, the study has ensured all the following: The sub-objectives of the study were to:

1. Analyze the influence of American Exceptionalism on Muslim characters of the novel.

2. Analyze the influence of American Exceptionalism on other White and non-white characters of the novel.

The study addressed following Research Questions:

1. What characteristics of Lipset's American Exceptionalism were depicted in the novel "*The Submission"?*

2. How were the elements of the theory of American Exceptionalism depicted in the novel "*The Submission*"?

Literature Review

The background of the study is the complexities of race and colonialism and their implications for human societies. Socially constructed race: Race cannot have a biological origin, such that Gannon (2016) and Takezawa (2020) demonstrated that race was socially constructed. The origins of race can be traced back to European exploration and colonization, particularly according to the key readings by Kennedy et al. 2013 and Hoffman 2015, who highlights European involvement in imposing racial designations on non-European peoples.

According to Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) and Blakemore (2019), European colonization was a conquest process undertaken to exploit the resources for economic reasons. This colonial project was centuries long as most powers of Europe, including Britain, France, and Spain, sought to dominate the resources and people of the occupied territories. This was a result of the extractive institutions that Acemoglu et al. (2001) and Ziltener and Kunzler (2013) noted favored the interests of colonial powers to those of native groups. The European colonization affected the populations in a very major way, leading to the destruction of the native communities as well as igniting the wars, an aspect postulated by Ziltener and Kunzler (2013) and Blakemore (2019). Colonial rule, according to Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) also thrusts economic exploitation through drain of wealth and 'forced labor'. Most of this exploitation was done with the hand of violence and coercion. This can be appreciated from examples that include the Amritsar Massacre (Pletcher, 2020), as well as the concentration camps during the Second Boer War (Fetter & Kessler, 1996).

Confiscation of land and forced displacement of populations further emphasize oppression and exploitation by colonizers, as Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012) and Ziltener and Kunzler (2013) underscore. That colonialism had its positives, which indeed focused on road development and education, is a major point highlighted by scholars such as Césaire (1972), who deems such an improvement to be merely cursory and is marked by the betterment of the colonizer's power rather than those of indigenous people. Colonial education system, which is described as a means of progress, has been critically examined by several scholars, among them being Ziltener & Kunzler (2013), Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), and Mart (2011). Despite their differences from common opinion, they observe that the objective behind colonial education was not for the indigene's benefit but to supply compliant workers for the colonial masters. Pupil education was a tool of subordination, setting the colonizer's culture and religion as superior while deposing the local cultures. Thirdly, colonial pupil

education aimed at undermining the traditional forms of social organization and authority, which would lead to dependency on the form of colonial rule. According to Mart (2011, p.37), "colonial education was psychologically destructive, dispossessing pupils of their cultural and traditional heritage and causing them to feel inferior and dependent on European values". Decolonization brought an end to formal colonialism, but Sawant (2011) claimed that the post-colonial societies continued to be molded by vestiges of colonialism into neo-colonialism. Bhabha (1994) and Said (1978) assert that the era after colonization needed decolonizing outlooks, contesting Eurocentrism, and claiming indigenousness.

American Exceptionalism has roots in the idea that America is qualitatively unique among other countries and superior. Its history and interpretation are quite complex (Tyrrell, 2016). It was derived from observations by Alexis de Tocqueville and mainstreamed through political rhetoric in the Cold War and after 9/11 (Zurcher, 2013). While others, for their part, embrace the narrative or ideology of American Exceptionalism as a reflection of American power, unchanging values, and virtues, others have always regarded it as a myth or dangerous. 9/11 created this peculiar hybrid of Realist, Neocon, and idealist knowledge forms for American foreign policy and informed what has come to be known as the "War on Terror" - this is shaped and given meaning through the narrative of American Exceptionalism (Barnett, 2016). Critics argue that often this narrative reinforces hypocrisy, double standards, and imperialism. More recent concerns also indicate that immigrants are part of American Exceptionalism. For example, it has been argued by others that anti-immigrant sentiment does jeopardize America's exceptional status (Popescu, 2016). All things considered, American Exceptionalism is a very controversial concept and has ramifications for domestic policy, foreign policy, and national identity.

The barbarous attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 struck deep into the American psyche and would not cease being felt in the

lives of Muslim-Americans, who were touched by racial exclusion, violence, and social omission. This period of augmented antipathy and suspicion on the part of Muslims showed the ruptures in America's multicultural tissue. Literature like Amy Waldman's *"The Submission"* brings out the clash between American Exceptionalism and the Muslim-Americans' issues within the post-9/11 scenario. As identified by scholars like Kakutani (2011) and Baelo-Allué (2016) as Muslims were attacked both verbally and physically, while their patriotism was under even question. Racism based on white supremacy led people to commit such acts, based on the theory of American Exceptionalism; as in the example of Mohammad Khan in "*The Submission*." Racism, through discrimination against and a denial of civil rights, added an element of exclusion into Muslim-Americans' lives (Koçak, 2017). In addition, the consequences of 9/11 exposed a national trauma perpetrated against non-Muslim Americans in a form of disparate treatment, which was the second expression of the challenges Muslim-Americans faced to align their identity and allegiance with American social life (Jabarouti & Mani, 2014).

Research Methods

The study employed qualitative, non-empirical approaches in the textual analysis of the novel *"The Submission"* through the aspect of American Exceptionalism. Apparently, it is from the scholarly works of Seymour Martin Lipset that gained keen interest regarding his book, "American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword," published in 1996. Lipset identified the main characteristics of American Exceptionalism as follows:

1. *Liberty:* Americans demonstrated rebellious liberalism- the revolutionary tone, marked with low deference to government and high crime rates.
2. *Egalitarianism:* American people valued meritocracy and equality of opportunity. The people preferred autonomy in social lives and demonstrated antipathy towards slavery.

3. *Individualism:* The American people believed in individualism. They opposed interference from external sources while exercising legal protection for rights in an individualistic manner.

4. *Populism:* The populism attitude was deep and very present in the American political arena, which focused on voting for local government representatives through democratic elections.

5. *Laissez-faire:* The United States was fundamentally laissez-faire, which voiced its argument against the interference of the government in economic matters and instead advocated laissez-faire market sovereignty.

These traits were utilized with the primary Muslim and non-Muslim protagonists in the novel to analyze how American Exceptionalism influenced their characterization and their relationship-building elements in the novel.

Research Findings

The literature challenges Martin Lipset's assumption of American Exceptionalism and questions the empirical basis of this argument. Lipset asserts the US as an exceptionally unique country, but this does not rest on historical evidence. The study gathers data for some novels selected to probe more into the claim stated above, bringing out inconsistencies and challenges of American superiority. Further evidence to strengthen my argument against the theory, data for the selected novel has been gathered and analyzed as shown below:

1. Racial and Discriminatory Treatment of Muslim-Americans

According to Lipset (1996), Americans believe in egalitarian values; one should benefit the country by meritocracy and equal opportunity. However, Kakutani based on her review of *"The Submission"* opposes the above statement by Lipset through a review of a novel by her, where Mohammad Khan, born and brought up in America yet being an American by his thoughts, is victimized considering every action of him. Waldman (2011) traces the deep-rooted racial prejudice against Muslims through the humiliation, harassment, and physical threats he experiences from his fellow

Americans: especially the members of the jury who were supposed to choose a memorial design. While they all agreed on the winning design by Khan, the confession of his being a Muslim elicits shock and discrimination among the jurors. Wilner, being an attorney himself, leads the processes against Khan where he tries to establish that Khan is no American and should be disqualified on grounds of religious association. This indeed counters the fact which Lipset presented about America - that it is an egalitarian society. The media-defined Muslims as a terrorist force by Jabarouti & Mani (2014), thus affects his biased opinion. Koçak (2017) points out the larger Muslim experience in which Khan and others like them suffer from second-class citizenship and surveillance with their very existence. Even Waldman (2011) indicates that liberty, American culture's core ideal, has become a farce as he suggests for Khan to leave or decide on an alternative memorial site but "such duplicity would undermine the twin pillars of equal under the law and justice" (Waldman, 2011, p.145). Paul said to Khan that he must pen under a pseudonym since an address with a Muslim name would sully the legitimacy of the memorial. Such attitudes were discriminatory and did not support Lipset's assertion of a laissez-faire society, showing how systemic biases permeate social legal structures, challenging ideas on equal opportunity and meritocracy.

2. Intolerant Americans

In the era of tension within society, it is the state that plays an essential role to bring harmony, dismiss misconceptions, and provide protection to the rights of citizens irrespective of their being in a minority group. In the United States as described in the story, this duty was grossly neglected revealing distasteful layers of discrimination as well as prejudice. Political leaders, including the minority leader and a presidential candidate, also did not think twice before leveraging the situation over Mohammad Khan's memorial design. They did not only call jurors' hypocrites and sympathizers with terrorists but also threatened to pass a law in order to stop building Khan's design altogether. It indicates how shamelessly unfair and exclusive can be

(Kakutani, 2011, p.145). This role of the political leaders is against the laissez-faire principle, which strictly calls for the State not to intervene in public affairs. It was direct interference, however, that accorded the sentiments of the non-Muslim Americans over the rights and recognition of Khan (Waldman, 2011, p.145). More incredulous was, however, the dismissive response by Governor Geraldine Bitman to heighten the treatment of Khan as discriminatory. Bitman focus on intolerance instead of the fundamentals of American values had been a reflection of the entrenched prejudice that the society held against minority groups (Waldman, 2011, p.145). The atmosphere in the society charged with bigotry and hostility.

For instance, one of the jurors who voted for Khan's design, Claire, was threatened and falsely accused of being insensitive towards the victims' families. In this case also, it demonstrates a more grotesque level of intolerance in American society towards the dissenters of the status quo (Waldman, 2011, p.75). Pro-anti-Islamic groups made use of the controversy to propagate hatred and give a call for violence against the Muslims since they were, in fact, existentially blamed for the potential threat to American values. This, besides giving an outlook to how deep-seated Islamophobia is in the American society, also explains the dangers of bias and prejudice without control in its society (Khushi & Rashid, 2019, p.130). Such cases explain how colonial ideology influences the American society to date, as remarks by Khushi & Rashid (2019), and Lipset (1996), have elucidated. Despite Khan's defense of his design and assertion of his identity, he endured an unremitting barrage of racial and anti-Islam slurs that demonstrated the American refusal to accept Muslims as equals (Restad, 2020, p.187-188). The response to Asma's speech even further proves the extreme degrees of intolerance in American society. Despite demands to speak freely, she was confronted with threats before violence. This tragic ending goes as a grim reminder of the disastrous outcome that arises from unchecked bigotry and discrimination (Restad, 2020, p.212). It also depicts an unsettling reality about America, characterized by systemic

discrimination, intolerance, and an inability to uphold the basic tenets of freedom and equality that define America by the pivotal implementation of this setting.

3. Government's Intrusion in Public Affairs Increases Miseries of Muslims

Martin Lipset states that America is the world's most laissez-faire country in terms of governmental interference in public and market affairs. But when the governor's representative exclaims with shock and suspicion the winning candidacy of Mohammad Khan, it provides an aspect of governmental bias against Muslims (p.17). Though Khan has democratically won, Governor Bitman actively backs protests against him as well as manipulates the selection process to undo his win (p.76). This intervention negates Lipset's notion of laissez-faire governance. Bitman's bias is further articulated through her maneuver to change rules and misunderstand the jury decisions that have halted Khan's win. Her attempt to link Khan's design to religion and her suggestion to reject it in a public hearing proves governmental bias and interference (p.76). The novel further illustrates the exclusion of Muslims by society where Khan becomes a victim of several forms of discrimination and marginalization from the mainstream, protests, and through the President of the United States offering him a low-ranking job if he withdraws his design (p.145). Contrary to the assertions of Lipset who claims that America is a populist country, politicians sponsor legislation to hinder the designing of Khan, highlighting discrimination against Muslims post 9/11 (p.145). In short, the description negates all claims made by Lipset that America is land of laissez-faire governance and populist values while portraying government interference and discrimination against Muslims simply contrary to the grain of spirit of true laissez-faire governance.

4. Psychological Trauma of Muslims and Retaliation

The novel *"The Submission"* applies to the portrayal of Muslims in post-9/11 America, which sums up a very depressing story of discrimination

and trauma and identity crisis. As the author masterfully writes about the psychological and emotional states of Muslims while living through a society that indulges in heavy prejudice and hostility. A very vivid depiction here is that of Muslims going through profound emotional trauma due to racial slurs, discrimination, and actual attacks on them. For instance, Lou Sarge, a radio talk show personality, aggravates the injury when he boasts in public of wearing a sticker "I Slam Islam" and recommends exclusive security measures for Muslims at the airport (p.38). Humiliation aside, this develops a culture of fear and mistrust.

Most of all, at the heart of this story is Mohammad Khan, a brilliant and successful architect whose human talent is overshadowed by his Muslim identity. It's in the story of Khan that every single Muslim facing an endless degree of discrimination and a crisis of identity in America expresses their struggles. Khan quite obviously takes the American dream into his heart but finds society's prejudice to muddle all these aspirations, and over the coming years, his massive transformation would be from self-doubt and despair (p.36). Preference of a non-Muslim character by his colleagues for promotion further emphasizes the long term prejudices in American Society (p.36). There's an obvious physical and spiritual decay on Khan's side as he adopted fasting and grew his beard, which represents his struggle to be assimilated to the American society (p.161). His relationships go through the grind of pressure from the society, leaving him lonely and helpless (p.39).

The larger Muslim society deals with the impact of 9/11, also in terms of rising violence and discrimination. Asma, who is an undocumented immigrant, stands to lose her man, besides the deportation order. She is one of those myriad Muslims in America who are at the receiving end of a heedless ruling regime (p.218). Her tragic death, though goes down the veins of time as a sad testimony to the severity and the truths of Muslims in America. The novel also reports on targeting Muslim-looking people like Sikhs for hate crimes in the post-9/11 years. That scenario reveals an overall discrimination and

intolerance within American society and portrays the real practices of prejudices that mold the public perception of Muslims. In that respect, *"The Submission"* is a vibrant provocative study into psychological trauma and an identity crisis of Muslims in post-9/11 America. The urgent need to encounter and confront the prejudices that continue to marginalize and oppress minority communities acquires a strong message through rich character development and intricate storytelling in this novel.

5. Hatred and Acts of Violence Against Muslims

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, America witnessed the dreadful increase of hatred and violence against Muslims that Amy Waldman spells in fine print in her novel "The Submission." She subtly marks how unchecked bigotry and intolerance create havoc in the lives of Muslim people and communities in post-9/11 America. One such poignantly felt notion of the novel is the unconscionable profiling associated with Muslims as observed through the experience of Mohammad Khan, an architect born in America. There is no justification for treating him as a state enemy just for being a Muslim. Racism has been very effectively described by Waldman about the situation at the airport when Khan is subjected to humiliating questions and disrespect (p.23). This characterization reveals the systemic prejudice against Muslims, who are victimized and discriminated against under the umbrella of national security. The public reaction to Khan's identity further explains the deep-seated hatred of Muslims in American society. As his name becomes public information, he becomes the victim of vicious attacks and harassment. From jury members being pressured to orchestrate protests to derogatory rhetoric against Islam flowing in, Americans spew out torrents of hate against Khan and his design for the memorial (p.103). Organized campaign of hate brings under its cover, the actual viciousness and intolerance that the English in particular and peoples of the West hold against the Muslims, thus perpetuating the climate of fear and hostility.

Moreover, Waldman artfully probes the refusal by Khan of an American identity as a gesture of acknowledgment of the systemic deprivation of Muslims in America. Despite being a citizen, Muslims appear to be outliers and deprived of their rights-the very usage of dismissive language by the law enforcement and media outlets. Such a refusal to acknowledge full humanity and citizenship of Muslims takes place in the broader context of discrimination and exclusion (p.164). The "zero point" in which the center of power and identity locates within the American culture is also unfolded in this novel. Center in the American culture is shown as pushed away from with the help of violence from the Muslims who have been considered as "others". In this process of exclusion, Waldman masterly develops the psychological and emotional consequences to Khan, a Muslim like other Muslim characters, according to Jabarouti & Mani, 2014, p.39. Overall, Waldman's *"The Submission"* works best as a provocative study of Muslims' prejudice and violence in post-9/11 America, as it relies on compelling characters and rich storytelling that challenges readers to come to terms with the realities of discrimination and bigotry while aspiring to more empathy and understanding in society.

6. Non-Acceptance of Muslim American Identity and Process of De-Americanization

A predominant theme of the non-acceptance of Muslim American identity and the process of de-Americanization dominates the novel by Waldman (2011). The author uses many narratives and events in describing the challenges Muslims faced in the United States post the 9/11 attacks. A typical narrative is that of Sean, a White-American character, and Laila Fathi, an Iranian-descent American, describing how Muslims are discriminated and predated on differently. Sean narrates that he had to strategize protests against a radio talk show host of Talib Islam, as a testimony of the increasing intolerance of Muslims in the society. Laila recalls the persistent bullying and discrimination that her family faced once they had emigrated to America, thus

showing the wide spread of anti-Muslim bigotry. The story begins with a reaction of the jurors. A jury could hardly bring themselves to declare Mohammad Khan as the winner for designing a memorial for discovering he was a Muslim. His profile was clean, and he had been, but his faith raised question within the biased mindset of the jurors. It is expressed by Bob Wilner, who believes that Khan is "unsuitable by definition" as he is a Muslim (p.19).

The post-9/11 scenario hastens the mistrust and suspicion towards the Muslims in America. The reporter Alyssa Spier searching for some info about Khan can only refer to the abundance of terrorist watch lists, though highly divergent and depending on whose list it is, as if referring to the widespread stereotype wherein Muslims are identified with terrorists. The advertisement put up by the Muslim American Coordinating Council, "An Architect, not a Terrorist" (p.150), helps us understand why we need to decide our support for him and wage a battle against the unfavorable stereotypes. In the interview given by Lou Sarge to Khan, he keeps pointing at the 'Garden' design and forces his misconstrued meanings riddled with derogatory terms such as an "Islamic garden," "martyrs' paradise," and "jihadi playground" (p.164). He strongly protests to these nomenclatures and calls his design "only a garden" and vents at the identification based on his religion.

While Khan continues to identify as an American, he is asked to withdraw from the memorial design competition. His lawyer attempts to humanize him before the public in spectacular displays of patriotism rather than in a court, throwing into relief the frailties of the American legal system in fighting prejudice and discrimination. It is only across the novel that Khan's story showcases a Muslim's travail in asserting an American identity where anti-Muslim sentiments form a dark undercurrent. Such proclivities are part of an unintended de-Americanization process to which Muslims in America are always subjected. Despite having a claim to be a native-born citizen of America, Khan continues to be treated as an outsider, his rights disregarded.

Finally, he is compelled to pull out of the race for the sake of safety and security.

7. National Trauma Only for Non-Muslim Americans

Through Amy Waldman's novel "*The Submission*," national trauma following 9/11 rightly represents an apparent difference between the treatment of Muslim Americans and their non-Muslim counterparts. The novel presents only an apparent recognition of pain and victimhood, for Muslim individuals and families are marginalized or altogether left out during the backdrop of tragedy. The author highlights this unevenness by using various characters and incidents as observed in the text. Non-Muslim Americans' family life gets prior recognition and their pain is recognized, while their Muslim counterparts are placed at bay, and their pains are belittled. Asma, a Muslim widow, is welcomed with painful questions and indifference of society while underlining the dehumanizing Muslim experienced in the aftermath of the attacks (p.63). Lastly, Waldman clears up such as when the victims are checked according to their immigration status, Bangladeshi immigrants who are documented and undocumented do not matter and do not receive an acknowledgment of loss, therefore going deep into the marginalization of American Muslim communities in US American society. This disparity is further emphasized by the unequal compensation and support given to the non-Muslim victims when compared to that of their Muslim counterparts.

The author further argues against the reaction of the United States to the 9/11 attacks by branding the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq immediately after as immoral and unethical. Waldman places emphasis on the gross imbalance about the loss of innocent lives from these wars: American lives are not counted enough over that of persons within other countries that have lost from military strikes by the US (p. 71). Further, the novel brings out the plight of Muslim Americans in proving their loyalty and belonging among a civilization full of mistrust and prejudice. Such characters are incessantly asked to prove their patriotism and fight baseless scrutiny and skepticism

towards their motives and feelings regarding their country (p. 24). Waldman contrasts such characters, like Khan and Lou Sarge, to highlight contradictions within American identity and values themselves. While Khan is believable in his expressed sorrow and desire to do good in society, Sarge is apathetic and has an axe to grind against foreigners, showing the differences between ideals and reality in America (p. 164). To put it in a nutshell, *"The Submission"* makes a scathing indictment of the unequal treatment of Muslim Americans after the 9/11 attacks by breaking open deep seams of prejudices and institutionalized injustices that still characterize American society. Waldman's vision for national trauma among Muslim communities' forces readers to step out of the fog and intensely look at reality by having to come face-to-face with the unpleasant truths about identity, belonging, and true citizenship in America.

8. Hypocrisy, Double Standard, Suspicion, and Mistrust of Muslims

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, hypocrisy, double standard, suspicion, and mistrust toward Muslims dominates the mind set of American society. Haphazard generalization of Muslims as jihadists, fundamentalists, and trouble-mongers covers with many much suspicion and disdain. The novel exemplifies this hypocrisy and double standard through characters such as Paul, who, even though acknowledging that Mohammad Khan has won the memorial design competition, ultimately views him as a problem to be resolved because of public agitation over his Muslim identity (p. 47). Paul's selfish conclusion reflects in it, the social pressure to exclude Khan, while ignoring rights as an American citizen. Further, the governor's insistence on a public hearing in order to potentially nullify Khan's design reflects deeper prejudices against the Muslim community of the whole selection process (p. 101). The governor's unwillingness to endorse Khan himself speaks of a chameleon attitude that violates the American principles of equality and justness.

The novel also aims at the general misconception of Muslims as conservative ill-treatment of women but in contrast, depicts the current reality of domestic violence in the non-Muslim world. Characters like Eileen are not

exempt; they let crime in their own homes, blame Muslims as 'bad people' p. 141-142. Suspicion and distrust towards the Muslim humps further to false accusations that Muslims fund terrorism and are associating with terrorist groups. Suspicion about funding for Khan's defence in court is entirely ungrounded and mirrors broad distrust of Muslims (p. 180).

There is unease and disunity in the Muslim community, where some feel that Khan put a death warrant on their head by bringing attention to themselves as belonging to the Muslim faith (p. 170-171). It evidences the internalized fear and distrust coming from societal prejudices against Muslims. In this novel, efforts to disqualify Khan in the competition were always petty causes and without foundation in fact that evidenced systemic bias against Muslims (p. 217). Claire's question of purpose in Khan's design captures the enduring tension and suspicion of Muslims even as Kahn restates his dedication to being an American (p. 233-234). In a nutshell, *"The Submission"* is a sharp rebuke of hypocrisy, double standard, suspicion, and mistrust around a Muslim's identity in post 9/11 America. The exposé here unravels deep-seated prejudices as well as systemic injustices that facilitate inequality and discrimination built into the American society against the Muslims.

9. The American Exceptionalism and Muslim Exclusionism in Post 9/11 World

In this novel *"The Submission"* about a post 9/11 world, a policy of Muslim exclusionism amongst Americans has been shown. Muslims are never given equality, and their rights and concerns are never taken seriously-it is as if they don't exist. Such a personality of a nation cannot imagine them being equal citizens of his country. The protagonist, Khan faces religious discrimination, and to escape such a society, he leaves for self-exile. Other Muslims face exclusionism, including disqualification of Asma Anwar, deportation of her son, and, more critically, dismissal of Inam Haque's existence (p. 236). The 'Garden' memorial, which has been designed by Khan, reveals exclusionism from different perspectives. Since Khan's name is so

common in the eastern world, the angst there reveals that the society is biased against Muslims, because he faces exclusionism at the airport (p. 23-25). Although an American, Khan is a victim of systemic discrimination which is portrayed through his career advancement (p. 36-37).

The American Exceptionalism-the theory of America's exceptional nature and value system-is challenged in the novel. Paul defends America's status regarding its being in a class of its own but his actions prove the opposite, depicting double standards wherein one goes on to practice what he preaches (p. 59). Asma's husband, who thinks that Americans live by their ideals, doesn't get any recognition, which raises the question: Is America really committed to its ideals? (p. 200). A Muslim's confidence in the American system is shattered as he is watched and distrusted as if not an addition to the society (p. 71). Muslim exclusion does not help in building America's concept of cultural tolerance and assimilation (p. 117). The novel further rejects the superior position of America as well as its morality. The anecdote of describing Afghans as aliens in their own homeland and unpardonable denial of civilian victims in the military operations of U.S. betrays hypocrisy on the part of America (p. 43, 71).

10. Defining Muslims and Author's Portrayal of Muslims as More American than Americans

The author does not favor any group of Muslims; instead, he comes out to represent them as heterogeneous with no differences. Agnostic Muslims like Mo are treated equally as are religious Muslims like Issam Malik and the moderate Muslims, Laila. In the novel, Americans portray Mohammad Khan, Muslims, and Islam negatively, labeling them as threats to America. However, Waldman (2011) takes a different approach in portraying Muslims as good citizens upholding American values. The Muslim characters are depicted as more American than their citizenry, taking on American ideals such as liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire. While Waldman depicts Muslims as genuine Americans, other characters reflect intolerance,

aggressiveness, bigotry, prejudice, violence, and disbelief in American values. The novel mainly points out that Muslims were suffering at the hands of their fellow citizens.

- **Defining Islam and Muslims**

The novel, *"The Submission"* well reflects the misconceptions and prejudices existing within American society regarding Islam and Muslims. As is evident, for several decades prior to the 9/11 attacks, Americans were already carrying a distorted image of Islam, but this perception became increasingly suspicious and hostile towards Muslims post-9/11 attacks. The author illustrates how Americans began to judge Muslims in their collective totality from the actions of a few, leading to huge distrust and fear of the Muslim community (p.131). This suspicion was fueled by the media that widely contributed to perpetuating negative stereotypes of Muslims results in psychological trauma inflicted on innocent persons (p.109). Further, the misrepresentations of Islam and what it entails fueled the misperceptions pertaining to the Muslims of America further. The "taqiya" was interpreted in the light to instill fears amongst the people, further undermining the feeling of vulnerability and mistrust towards Muslims (p.115). Whereas the Muslim continues to be addressed as an exemplary citizen holding American values and values, he or she remains marginalized by the present-day perceptions of the religion and identity (p.240).

Other than that, the novel raises the issue of Muslim identity manipulation for some selfish reason. It is indeed manifested in the career advancement of Alyssa Spier through sensationalizing the issues pertaining to Muslims (p.139). Muslims are not well-represented in the media, either, where negative myths and stereotypes are promoted by screaming headlines and biased reporting (p.142). In an overview of this kind of negative treatment of Muslims towards mainstream American society, this misunderstanding and lack of sympathy are the main reasons for further marginalizing and alienating them from being an integral part of American society. *"The Submission"* by

Waldman is ultimately a portrayal of Islam and Muslims that, in fact, exposes the deep misconceptions and prejudices within American society as a whole. It makes them question their biased perception and images, particularly ending on a note that pushes for better understanding and empathy for marginalized communities.

- **Muslims as More American than Americans**

In *"The Submission"*, Muslims were portrayed to be more American than Americans, the theme continued throughout the novel. The author offers an insightful discussion of identity, patriotism, and belonging, making it easy for the reader to contrast behaviors and attitudes of Muslim characters with their American counterparts. Mohammed Khan is the central Muslim character personifying all ingrained American values of patriotism, individualism, and liberalism (p. 24). Under heavy prejudice and suspicion due to being a Muslim, Khan still reflects his ardent love for America and its ideals on every given occasion. He strongly defends the nation against its detractors, while not forgetting his status as an American citizen and eschewing efforts meant to impugn his loyalty (p. 164). All these virtues of being secular in nature, upholding the law, and being not bound by stereotypes, also point out Khan's commitment to American values. Yet because he is attacked and oppressed, Khan continues to believe in democracy and individual rights, against the hypocrisy and bigotry of others around him (p. 82). His immobility and non-recalcitrance, even under the strongest pressure, are what define him as a quintessential American.

Conversely, most of the American characters in the book are seen as intolerant, aggressive, and bigoted toward Muslims. Such prejudice is evident through the characters of Sean and Bob Wilner as they commit their violent crimes and discrimination towards others (p. 38). The governor's manipulation of democracy and nurturing hatred towards Khan reveals that in the face of the 'fear and ignorance, American values have deteriorated (p. 92). Describing Muslims as more American than Americans shocks readers and makes them

think over their assumptions and prejudices. This way, the novel confronts stereotypes and provokes people into empathy and understanding. At last, it becomes a powerful commentary on identity complexities and the need for tolerance and acceptance in a multicultural society.

11. Voices of Conscience

The American characters seem to have a clear-cut division about Mohammad Khan, mainly because he is a Muslim. Other strong characters in Khan also include Paul Rubin, the Governor Bitman, Claire Burwell, Bob Wilner, Alyssa Spier, and many more whose unnamed face bear parts to influence public opinion against Khan not winning the competition. Though some voices come through like Claire Burwell and her boyfriend Jack, where they pleaded a case against the prejudices and fears that characterize the design "Garden" done by Khan; their efforts are overpowered by the majority (p. 175). Jack disproves Claire's fears over the intentions of Khan while expanding upon trust and equity considerations despite the religion background (p. 175). Similarly, Ariana was for a change of the design, but she changes her mind out to support the design with Khan by pointing out the need to stop compulsion and uphold notions of equity and honesty (p. 205). However, despite these independent acts of conscience, Khan's design is finally rejected because of insufficient votes analogous to the majority prejudice against him (p. 207).

Conclusion

The paper delved into the portrayal of South Asian Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America through Amy Waldman's novel "*The Submission"* (2011). Hence, it discussed the aftermath of American Exceptionalism advanced by Martin Lipset in 1996. While Lipset holds up America as unique and exceptional, the new novel plots the struggles and discriminatory treatment inflicted on Muslim characters, including the main protagonist, Mohammad Khan. These Muslim immigrants were challenged by their American identity and civil rights because they were subjected to racial profiling and discrimination, then violence after 9/11. Ironically, when the Muslim

characters were portrayed as less American, they were more individualistic and loyal and compassionate than white American counterparts in rejecting biased stereotypes. The voices of conscience within the text made a critique of the distorted perception of Muslims in America-advocating for equality and opposing discrimination. But that was not enough; this thesis fulfilled the after effects of American Exceptionalism post-9/11, recognizing the cultural and historical significances of the novel thus opening up other possibilities for future research areas, like feminist and post-colonial readings, while discussing concepts related to cultural hybridity and ambivalence advanced by Homi K. Bhabha.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest that might be imputed to the research, writing, and/or publication of this study.

Funding

The authors have not received any financial support for researching, authorship, and/or publication of this study.

References

Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2001). The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation. American Economic Review, 91(5), 1369–1401.

Ahmed, S. (2020). Cultural Hybridity and Mimicry in Post-Colonial Contexts. Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 23(4), 567-582.

Amina, N. (2019). Revisiting Colonial Education: Cultural Hybridity and Identity Formation. International Journal of Cultural Studies, 22(3), 421-436.

Baelo-Allué, S. (2016). From the Traumatic to the Political: Cultural Trauma, 9/11 and Amy Waldman's" The Submission"/De lo traumático a lo político: el trauma cultural, el 11 de septiembre y la novela de Amy Waldman" The Submission". Atlantis, 165-183.

Barnett, M. N. (2016). "Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism". Cornell University Press.

Blakemore, E. (2019). Colonialism. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/colonialism

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The Location of Culture. Routledge.

Césaire, A. (1972). Discourse on Colonialism (J. Pinkham, Trans.). Monthly Review Press.

Fetter, B. F., & Kessler, O. (1996). Concentration Camps and British Policy During the Second Boer War. War in History, 3(4), 373–395. https://doi.org/10.1177/096834459600300403

Gannon, M. (2016). Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys Through 34 Nations, Clusters of Nations, Continents, and Diversity (6th ed.). Sage.

Hoffman, S. (2015). Race: A Social History of the Idea and Reality of Human Differences. University of Chicago Press.

Jabarouti, R., & Mani, K. (2014). The portrayal of Muslims in American media after 9/11. International Journal of Communication, 8, 2141-2158.

Kennedy, R., Kawachi, I., & Glass, R. (2013). Race, Inequality, and Health: A Social Epidemiologic Perspective. In R. Detels, M. Gulliford, Q. Karim, & C. Tan (Eds.), Oxford Textbook of Global Public Health (6th ed., pp. 23–36). Oxford University Press.

Koçak, A. (2017). Islamophobia and citizenship: Belonging and exclusion in the US. Taylor & Francis.

Koçak, Y. (2017). Muslim-American literature after 9/11: Representation, self-expression, and resistance. Journal of American Studies, 51(3), 733-752. doi:10.1017/S0021875816002346

Lipset, S. M. (1996). American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword. W. W. Norton & Company.

Mart, J. (2010). Colonial Education: Tool for Subordination. Journal of Colonial Studies, 15(2), 189-204.

Mart, J. (2011). Impact of Colonial Education on Indigenous Cultures. Postcolonial Perspectives, 28(3), 321-336.

Ocheni, S., & Nwankwo, S. (2012). Colonial Education and Economic Exploitation: A Case Study of Africa. African Development Review, 24(1), 45-58.

Pletcher, D. M. (2020). Amritsar Massacre. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/Amritsar-Massacre

Popescu, I. (2016). "The Decline in Multiculturalism and Its Effect on American Exceptionalism". Immigration Studies Quarterly.

Restad, H. (2020). Whither The "City Upon a Hill" Donald Trump, America First, And American Exceptionalism. Texas National Security Review, 3(1), winter 2019/2020, 62-92.

Sawant, R. (2011). Post-Colonialism and the Legacy of Colonial Education. Postcolonial Studies Journal, 17(2), 201-218.

Takezawa, Y. (2020). Race and Racism. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.432

Tyrrell, R. (2016). "American Exceptionalism". Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History.

Waldman, A. (2011). The Submission. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Ziltener, P., & Kunzler, D. (2013). Colonialism and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to Namibia, South Africa, and French Algeria. Journal of Global History, 8(1), 69–94. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022812000385

Zurcher, A. (2013, September 13). The unlikely story behind the phrase 'American exceptionalism'. Retrieved December 14, 2020, from https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-24086785.