

The Influence of Family on The Character Formation of Safwa in The Novel *The Bad Muslim Discount*

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze how family influences the character formation of Safwa as the main character. *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021) by Syed M. Masood depicts two families with different journeys, one of which is Safwa's family, who survived in a war zone and became immigrants in United State. This analysis focuses on the character formation of Safwa. This study uses descriptive qualitative analysis supported by a new critical theory approach to deeply explain to Safwa's characterization and factors family background. while previous studies that have main focused on the themes of western perspectives on Muslim identity and the issue of Islamophobia in this novel. This study makes a new contribution by emphasizing the importance of the family in shaping Safwa's character. The final results of the study examines that the family plays a significant role in shaping the characters, thinks, acts, and responds to her life.

Keywords: family; characterization; character formation

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana keluarga mempengaruhi pembentukan karakter Safwa sebagai tokoh utama. Novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021) karya Syed M. Masood menggambarkan dua keluarga dengan perjalanan yang berbeda, salah satunya adalah keluarga Safwa, yang bertahan hidup di zona perang dan menjadi imigran di Amerika Serikat. Analisis ini berfokus pada pembentukan karakter Safwa. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis kualitatif deskriptif yang didukung oleh pendekatan teori kritis baru untuk menjelaskan secara mendalam karakterisasi Safwa dan faktor latar belakang keluarga. Sementara penelitian sebelumnya lebih berfokus pada tema perspektif Barat terhadap identitas Muslim dan masalah Islamofobia dalam novel ini. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi baru dengan menekankan pentingnya keluarga dalam membentuk karakter Safwa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keluarga memainkan peran yang signifikan dalam membentuk karakter, berpikir, bertindak, dan merespons kehidupannya.

Kata kunci: keluarga; karakterisasi; pembentukan karakter

INTRODUCTION

In general, the family is described as the first place of growth and development of individuals (Roostin, 2018, p2). The family is an important aspect for living things to develop and grow for humans. The family becomes the first environment to survive for individuals (Sahani, 2023). In the family, individuals can obtain the right to education, health, and protection. In the family also gets attention, affection, and love from each



family member. The formation and change of an individual's character can be caused by their surrounding first environment (Gunawan et al., 2019). In literary works *The Bad Muslim Discount*, the novel raise family condition becomes a factor in character development in characters.

The novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021) by Syed M. Masood shows that family is a major factor in shaping a character's personality. The focus of this study is Safwa, a girl who grew up in a patriarchal family, was a victim of violence, strictly followed religious rules, and lived in a war zone. These conditions directly shaped her negative personality, making Safwa as a quiet, obedient, and dependent character. Several previous studies, such as Afzal & Saeed (2023) on neo-orientalism that appears in the depiction of Muslim characters in the novel, where the author shows the Pakistani people and their culture as seen through a Western perspective. Andika (2024) on Islamophobia, emphasize Muslim character stereotypes rather than the role of family. To date, there has been no research specifically examining how family influences the formation of Safwa's character in this novel. Therefore, this study fills that gap by analyzing how Safwa's family can influence her character formation.

The novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* is analyzed for presenting an interesting story about two perspectives of Muslim families with different backgrounds. This makes the work unique compared to Syed M. Masood's previous works, which mostly explore. In this novel, the most prominent issue is the stressful family of Safwa, ranging from patriarchy, violence, to tackling difficult tasks. This family issues make the novel rich in meaning and worthy of analysis. Research on *The Bad Muslim Discount* has been limited so far, and no one has specifically highlighted the role of the family in shaping Safwa's character. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth analysis of Safwa's family condition. To add analysis about the role of family in literary studies, this analysis fills a gap that emphasizes how these family condition influence character formation in the context of Muslim families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies discussing the novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* have been found. There are two studies, namely: Afzal & Saeed (2023) an article raise issue about on neo-orientalism of Muslim character and a thesis examine Islamophobia. On the study Afzal & Saeed (2023) focus on the representation of the concept of neo-orientalism and

the practice of exclusion against Muslims. The authors examine Pakistani society and culture from a Western perspective. Researchers found that Masood's work *The Bad Muslim Discount* displays stereotypical depictions of Muslim identity that are often constructs through a Western perspective. This study confirms that the narrative in the novel depicts identity tensions and cultural misunderstandings that stem from modern Orientalist views of the Islamic world.

Concurrently, Adhika (2024) analysis focuses on discrimination against Muslims, but with a focus on the issue of Islamophobia. This study aims to reveal the representation of Islamophobia experienced by the main characters and analyze the forms of injustice that befall Muslims in the Western world. This study found that the forms of Islamophobia depicted in the novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* consist of two main aspects, namely stereotypes and Western superiority. In addition, this study also highlights the struggles of Muslim characters in facing discrimination by showing a peaceful image of Islam and their ability to adapt in Western society.

From the previous studies, the researcher found both similarities and differences with the present research. The similarity lies in the material object, namely *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021) by Syed M. Masood, as well as the shared focus on the social context of Muslims and their representation in Western society. However, the differences appear in the use of theories and analytical focus. Afzal and Saeed (2023) examine neo-orientalism and othering to reveal the persistence of Muslim stereotypes in modern literature, while Andhika (2024) explores Islamophobia and injustices faced by Muslim characters. Unlike those studies, the present research specifically focuses on the influence of family in shaping Safwa's character in *The Bad Muslim Discount*. Thus, the analysis aims to fill the existing gap and contribute to sociology literary studies by examining conditions family shape the identity of literary characters.

RESEARCH METHODS

The analysis uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explain the collected textual data. A qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to produce an in-depth description of the data (Hunter et al., 2019). The main source of data for this study is the novel *The Bad Muslim Discount* (2021), by Syed M. Masood, specifically the main literary text. The data consist of selected phrases, sentences, and dialogues that are relevant to the research focus, that is the role of the family in shaping Safwa's character.

Data were collected through reading deeply of the novel to understand all of the storyline. During the reading process, the researcher identified textual to analyze Safwa's characterization and her family background. The data were analyzed using New Criticism theory, focusing on intrinsic element, particularly characterization. Through this approach, the researcher systematically described the data, analyzed it based on theory, research findings and drew conclusions with objective of study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Safwa's character was shaped by a family condition that was far from the image of a happy family. Safwa's family represents the negative side of a family that can impact a person's character development. The patriarchal family prevents family members from communicating with each other, the violent actions of Safwa's father instill fear among family members, her father's overly strict religious education puts pressure on family members, and also living in a war zone exacerbates the conflicts within Safwa's family, " ... I reached for the niqab Abu made me wear. I was young enough that no one thought I needed it, but Abu insisted that habit was character, and made me put it on whenever I stepped outside" (Masood, 2021, p31).

Safwa grow up in a Muslim family with a strict and patriarchal father. From an early age, she was required to obey religious rules, including wearing a niqab even though she was only ten years old. A niqab is a face covering worn by Muslim women along with a hijab. The quote "the niqab Abu made me wear" shows how her father ordered Safwa to wear the niqab. Additionally, the statement "made me put it on whenever I stepped outside" is proof that her father's orders had to be obeyed. And the dialogue "I was young enough that no one thought I needed it" that improve, her father only tells his child to wear without explaining its teaching. Through this upbringing, Safwa grow up to be a submissive child and obey all her father religion rules teaching "You're the woman of the house, Safwa. The kitchen is yours. The days of mourning are over. Time to go back to living now" (Masood, 2021, p34).

"You've given Fahd his medicine? He's resting? "I nodded" (Masood, 2021, p66)
Not only her religious education strict, Safwa's family is also patriarchal. After her mother died, Safwa's father told her to do all the women's work, including cooking. The patriarchal nature of the family is evident in the line, "You're the woman of the house,

Safwa. The kitchen is yours," Safwa should do all the housework and obey her father's doctrine that women must take care of and nurture the family.

Mama rarely gave voice to her opinions, and when she did, Abu would get upset. I don't think he understood how his wife could disagree with him about anything (Masood, 2021, p32).

I could say that my father was an angry man, and it would be true. He was severe and rigid. He could be unkind, as he so often was to Mama (Masood, 2021, p66).

Besides strict with religious and patriarchal rules, Safwa's family also does not give her the right to communicate comfortably. This can be seen from the fact that Safwa's mother never exchanged opinions with her husband because she is afraid. Safwa's mother's fear grows because of her husband's violent actions. This is evidenced by Safwa's statement that her father often treats her mother harshly. Her father's treatment of her mother makes

Safwa's family closed off. The impact of the closed family on Safwa, settles her to grow up to be a quiet child because she has not communicated comfortably in her family, "I bit back my response, got up and went to sit by Baba Adam's goat" (Masood, 2021, p66). She became close and limit communication with family, especially her father. In the dialog "I bit back my response" she controls her opinion and communication with her father because father is patriarchal, quick-tempered, and prone to violence. Therefore, Safwa avoids communicating with her father, which has made her a closed-off person.

" ... He came by every night, bringing food. I was waiting for him now. It was all I ever did. Wait for someone to save me. It was worse than hunger" (Masood, 2021, p83). In the Safwa's family, father is very dominant in everything, whether it be actions, orders, or decisions. This made all family members very dependent on him. When Safwa's father was arrested by the American army and there was no news about his whereabouts, the family fell into chaos. They experience food shortages and are even unable to pay their rent. The dependent on father figure makes she lack of agency in the urgent situation. When her father missing, Safwa was confused about how to survive, so she looks for a replacement father figure in Dr. Yousef. Because of the lack of agency when she is in a difficult situation and without a father, she didn't know what to do. The lack of agency character carry until she grows up.

Are you daydreaming again? "I couldn't help but wince at the irritation in his tone. "No, Abu. What use are dreams to a girl like me? (Masood, 2021, p66).

...When pain is always there. I didn't speak Fahd's name again, but it didn't matter. Abu would hit me for any reason at all, for things I did, for things I failed to do ... (Masood, 2021, p109).

In the dialogue "No, Abu. What use are dreams to a girl like me?" Safwa said like her lose her enthusiasm for daily life. And in additional, Safwa's despair evident in her admission that no matter what she does, her father still beat her. She never responds to her father violence and chooses to let it happen. She receives harsh treatment, living in the zone war with an unsupportive family, she grows up without a clear purpose and follows her father's every command without understanding its meaning. This pattern gradually influences the way Safwa's thinking and action, shaping her into a passive and discouraged.

CONCLUSION(S)

the finding of study can be concluded that Safwa's family condition, which has issues in the aspect patriarchal, violence, and strict of teaching. The issues play a major role in shaping her personality. Patriarchal treatment of her father cause Safwa to grow up as a quiet and closed-off. Furthermore, the verbal and physical violence she obtains, coupled with her father's demands that take care of her family from an early age, create Safwa be passive and discouraged. The strict way Safwa's father educates her turns Safwa into a submissive person. The problem in how teaches, he imposes rules without providing any explanation or understanding. As a result, Safwa becomes submissive not out of awareness, but be she follows commands without knowing the meaning. All the problem in Safwa family makes her lack of enthusiasm for life.

An analysis of Safwa's family also provides a deeply understanding of how the family is represented in contemporary Muslim literature. The family is not only portrayed as a space for moral education and share love, but also as a place grow patriarchy and violence aspects, that issues can stifle individual development. Thus, Safwa's family condition reflects a critique of repressive family in Muslim society, while also highlight how contemporary literature depicts the negative impact of the family condition on a child's character development.

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