

The Two of Many Identities Occupied by Muslim Women Shaped by Their Living Conditions, as seen in Lalami and Abu-Jaber's Works

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Alief Muhammad Rizky¹ Hasnul Insani Djohar²

Abstract

This study aims to analyse two literary works within the confines of Muslim literature, both of which presenting two contrasting ideas about the identity of Muslim women, and how those differences may be caused by the surrounding living conditions of these individual Muslim women. As such, this study will predominantly use the theory of gender as a means to closely examine how one's identity may or may not be affected by this aspect, in addition to the previously stated living conditions of an individual. By making this study, it is expected for readers to obtain more knowledge about the inner machinations of how an identity of an individual or a collective group can be formed, as well as the various factors that may impact its development in some way, shape, or form.

Key words: Muslimah, Identity, Living Conditions

1 Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia. E-mail:mitaub@student.ub.ac.id

2 Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia. E-mail:mitaub@student.ub.ac.id

Representation is a very powerful showcasing tool in media, and can be an important first impression for those who are not familiar with a particular ethnic group, or whatever subject it is that one chooses to represent in a literary piece that they had written. More often than not, whenever a writer chooses to represent a certain group in their works, it is best for the writers themselves to be either a part of said group, or at the very least ask for assistance from someone who is. In the context of Muslim literature, one may find a plethora of examples of representations of many specific kinds of Muslims, whether it be a distinctive Muslim group from a specific country, or the Muslim population as a whole. One such group that can be represented is that of the Muslimah, the term of which is a broad and general designation for women who just so happen to be Muslims. As such, the main topic of discussion that will be tackled by this paper is that of the identities of the titular Muslimah, and especially concerned with how their identities can be shaped by their surroundings.

When representing Muslim women, various subtopics of discussion can come into mind. One writer may find it intriguing to start a discussion on Muslimah traditions, while other writers may prefer to further explore their fashion style. However, one rather obvious subtopic seems to be discussed a lot more than the rest—that being a discussion about the identity of Muslim women, especially when it is a discussion that relates to their surrounding environment and thus living conditions. It also can be argued that the identity of a Muslim

woman is potentially shaped by those factors.

With the numerous amounts of Muslim literature content out in the world, there are bound to be countless examples of these kinds of representations, yet in this paper, only two instances will be analysed and compared to each other, in order to see the difference in the creative minds of both authors in how they chose to represent and build Muslim women Identities. The two examples in this instance are taken from two separate stories that tackle different subjects from one another, yet both still retain the consistent theme of representations for Muslim women.

The first of the examples that will be discussed here, is seen in the Novel titled *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* by Laila Lalami, a novel that, in general, heavily tackles themes such as gender and immigration, as well as how those themes are presented in a manner that opposes the common patriarchal system (Djohar, 2024: 106). In particular, this study delves into the characterization of one of its main female characters, Halima. In the novel, Halima is a mother of three children, whose abusive husband kept her from becoming a truly free woman. This motherly role of hers can be reflective of a symbol in South Asian nationalism, wherein women are seen as metaphorically as “mothers of the nation”, giving a sense of empowerment to women, and especially those of a motherly role (Chaliza, Djohar, 2022). Essentially, the novel partially follows as she tries to escape from his clutches by fleeing to the country of Spain, which was specifically chosen by Lalami as a means of reminding the readers about what remains of the Islamic Spanish

kingdom (Djohar, 2024: 121), the attempt of which did not go as planned. As for the second example, it is seen in the novel *The Language of Baklava* by Diana Abu Jaber, wherein the author decided to represent herself as the main character of the novel, which mostly follows Diana's growing life as a Muslim woman in America, in a story that uses the titular food as a means to represent the status of Islamic Identity, such as in the way of the food's multiple culminating layers represent the amalgamation of several ethnicities into the Islamic culture (Djohar, 2024: 17). As such, this paper aims to compare the two representation in both their contextual content and the writing style of the two authors, in order to see how the identity of a Muslim woman is shaped by her surroundings as much as it is by her own will.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several theories that can be attributed to this discussion, yet in this instance, there will be only three theories that are tackled and attributed to the general topics of this discussion. The first of which being food studies, which is chosen due to one of the novels being heavily food themed, which is apparent in its title, and the other novel having an interesting depiction of food that pertains to the character that will be discussed. Secondly, the theory of gender will also be used, as it is in support of the overarching feminist narrative that this paper is analysing. Finally, the theory of global issues will also be used, to reflect on how these two stories heavily hinge on how their characters handle their increasing global issues.

Theory 1 – Gender: The primary theory of which is relevant to this study, is that of the gender theory. In both literary works and real life, we often associate one gender with a certain identity, of which becomes a collective stigma for said gender, particularly with how often femininity is framed as a mark of oppression due to the existence of the patriarchal system (Hoskin, Blair, 2021). However, there are a few ways to circumvent this motion, one of which being the fact that if the country or government were to put female figures in a position of nobility, it may change the public's reflection on those particular individuals, and eventually women as a whole (Apriatin, Djohar, 2022). In this instance, it is also true that the gender of these characters reflect their position in each of these novel's narratives. Due to the gender of both of these characters being female, their position in each story also reflects that, whether it is for the better or for the worse. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, Halima is a mother whose a victim of patriarchy, due to her husband being abusive and often does a beating on her. Unfortunately, even Halima's mother is in support of her position, with her line in page 31, wherein she said "See? This is why he beats you. You talk back." (Lalami, 2005: 31) The treatment of Halima, both by her husband and her surroundings, provides an unfortunate outlook on how the patriarchal society sees and treats women, as well as preventing them from forging their own identities outside of being a housewife for their husbands. In the narrative of the novel, this position of hers is what drives Halima to have a need to illegally immigrate, due to the sole fact that she needs to be free from the clutches of her husband.

In *The Language of Baklava*, the representation of gender identity for female Muslims is not anywhere near as harsh as in Lalami's novel. In this story, there is a line in page 15 that reads *One day Bud takes me through the streets to a place where little girls in uniforms are lined up in rows*. Which seems to only imply that young girls are seen as proper and coordinate, not yet touched by the rusty fingers of the patriarchal world—a far cry from the treatment that was seen in Lalami's novel.

Theory 2 – Food studies: This second theory mostly pertains to how food is used as a literary device, whether through their significance in their narrative or the subliminal meaning behind the food itself to the characters within said narrative. In this case, the two novels that are discussed do indeed handle the usage of food rather differently, in that one story uses it as a device to further leverage the story, while the other more so uses the symbolism of food and what it means to the characters.

In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, specifically the part of the story that involves Halima, the author proposed the food as a part of the story itself, by representing the food as an object that Halima had laced with sorcery, in order for her to win back her husband's love. This is evident in a line from page 31, which reads *and if indeed actions were judged by one's niyyah, then she had already sinned by intending to use sorcery, so she might as well go through with it*. On the other hand, the author of *The Language of Baklava* used food, and sometimes the act of cooking as a whole, more as a device that

builds character, and that is imbued with some symbolism in them that sometimes dictates the characters' inner machinations. One of the earliest examples of this can be seen in the page 14 line that states *Making shish kabob always reminds the brothers of who they used to be—the heat, the spices, the preparation for cooking, and the rituals for eating were all the same as when they were children, eating at their parents' big table. But trying to kill the lamb showed them: They were no longer who they thought they were*.

Theory 3 – Global Issues: Globally, there are numerous issues that people have to face every day, whether it be a personal issue, or a more communal one. Knowing that, it should be no surprise that the two novels that are discussed, do tackle several of those global issues themselves. As has been stated, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* represents patriarchal issues faced by a mother, or more specifically for this case, the issue of divorce—one that is unfortunately rather easy to come across in the world. This issue can be seen in a page 63 line that states *He told everyone that if all Halima wanted was a divorce, then why didn't she just pay him, like he'd asked her? He'd have divorced her. And what's five thousand dirhams for a woman whose brothers work in France?* Meanwhile, in *The Language of Baklava*, one of the global issues discussed is an even more common one, which is the difficulty in settling and finding a job in an immigrated country. In this story, it was first implied that Diana had a perfectly adequate family with no financial troubles, which was then unfortunately debunked in a page 23 line that reads *Mom leans forward, brushes aside the hair that is always in my eyes, and tells me that Bud*

has gone to Jordan looking for a job and a place for us to live.

theories are an important aspect in literary works, which may help elevate them to the status of relevancy if they are utilized well by the authors. In these particular stories, there are a plentiful amount of issues that become a topic of narrative interest within them, all of which having a theory that pertains to them. It is with these theories that we may dig deeper into the narrative techniques of these respective authors, and learn the way they use them for their works.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

During this part of the discussion, the topic that is chosen, of which is the closest to the overarching theme of feminism, is that of gender. As what has been established, the theme of gender, and especially identity in gender, specifically that of Muslim women, is very prominently featured within the two discussed literary works. And thus, with analysing five secondary texts, it may further deepen our understanding of the topic at hand, therefore making a more cohesive final product for future readers to understand.

As established previously, there will be five secondary texts that will be taken a look at in this paper, each of them talk about gender and/or feminism in some way, shape or form. The first of these texts is an article by three students from Brawijaya University, titled *Hijabers' Identity Construction as Muslimah through Consumption Structure in Food Lifestyle*. This article tackles the subject of Muslimah identity in Indonesia, and how it may be constructed by the structure of

one's consumption tendencies, such as the place in which a Muslimah prefers to eat, or whether or not they like to take pictures before they eat. Apart from gender, this article seem to also use food studies in its analysis, due to the importance of food in how it can shape someone's identity. According to Qurrantain, N, Dwi, B.P., Dwi, (2021), the food lifestyle is one that is an inseparable aspect from modern society as a whole, especially with its role in creating a gap of difference in between differing social classes. However, as argued by Djohar (2024: 17), the representations of food such as baklava in Muslim literature, is mostly used as a means of showing a result of assimilation of differing cultures and statuses, rather than differentiating them from one another. With the two differing views of food in the literary space, it further amplifies the possibility of differences in Islamic Identity as well, with each Muslim or Muslimah having a contradictory view on one subject or another.

Secondly, there is an article titled *Islamic Moral Education in Shaping the Character of Muslim Identity in the Millennial Era*, and mostly discusses about the importance of moral education in Islam, and how it may help in shaping up a good identity for a Muslimah, due to its well intended teachings. Whilst this article isn't as lenient on gender study as the previous one, it still provides an interesting insight in character building for Muslim women. The fact of the matter is that Muslim women identities have gradually changed from their conservative past, with modern Muslimah lifestyle and identities being more adaptive to what people now consider the modern norm. In fact, today in this era of digitalization, Muslim

women identity has had more variety than they have ever had in the past, with some Muslim women preferring to go with the flow of the modern lifestyle, while others prefer to remain close to their Islamic heritage. (Zahira, F, Shofi, A.H., Sarvina, A.T., Nasywa, N.F., Romadhoni, R, Hidayat, 2024) (besok tambah textual evidence)

For the third article, it is titled *Beyond the Veil: Deconstructing Gender Activism and Islamic Identity in Post-Secular Public Spaces Among Muslim Women in Indonesia*, and discusses the challenges faced by Muslim women activists in challenging their religious and political norms in order to forge a new identity for Muslim women as a whole, i.e. one that is more aligned with the modern feminist view. This article shows that the identity of one's gender is not something that they are born with, but rather something that they have to build and earn, as is the case with Muslim women who have the urge to challenge people's perception on them (Setiyani, W, Hidayati, N, Nuhairunnisa, Hasan, M.U, 2024)

The next article is one titled *Exploration of the Value of Islam-Based Multicultural Education in Local Wisdom Traditions National Culture Adab*. The topic of discussion in this article is rather specific, in that it discusses about the multicultural values of the culture known as Nasi Adab, that is located in the West Kotawaringin district. Whilst on the surface it seems to not include any discussion of gender, we can still implement it into the topic, due to the multiculturalism encompassing any and all forms of people and their culture, one of which being the cultural identity of

a Muslimah (Hamdanah, Muslimah, Muslimah, H, 2023)

Finally, the last article is one that is titled *The Identity of Modern Muslim Women on Instagram*, which predictably tackles the phenomenon of social media celebrities, and how they influence the building of identities in Muslim women. This particular article is especially relevant to the current social status, with the increasingly accessible social media being an inevitability in our daily lives. As the title suggests, the article goes into detail about the ways in which Muslim women might be influenced by their favorite online celebrities, whether it be in a positive or negative manner. (Ariadne, E.S.D., Khairina, T.Y., Fuady, I, 2024)

With all of these theories in mind, it should be clear to us that it is easy to find numerous insights into discovering the inner meaning of gender identity, and how its something that is forged, rather than instantly gained since birth. Such a case obviously applies to Muslim women, which have to face the twofold challenges of both religion and gender. By learning and absorbing necessary information from these theories, it will become easier for us to assimilate said information into one cohesive paper that cohesively discussed about Muslimah identity, particularly by looking at Muslim literary works.

As previously stated, yet will be reiterated once more, the primary texts that will be relevant to this discussion are two novels that tackle the themes of Muslimah identity in some of the characters they represent. The first one is the novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* by Laila Lalami, wherein the character of example

is that of Halima, a mother of three with an abusive husband that she wants to be free from. The other example comes from the novel *The Language of Baklava* by Diana Abu Jaber, wherein the character discussed will be Diana herself, who sometimes struggles with her multi heritage. Along with these primary texts in mind, there will also be five more secondary texts that are separate from the previous segment, of which will help further flesh out the theme of Muslimah identity. Whilst not all of these secondary texts talk about Muslimah specifically, their messages can still be implemented appropriately within this paper, and their presence will hopefully aid in fleshing out the theme of Muslimah identity that is discussed within this paper.

First and foremost, it is worth noting that while the five secondary texts discussed will not necessarily tackle a subject that is exactly adjacent to the stories, they are still able to be stripped down to their core theme, of which will still be able to be implemented into the discussion regarding the two novels that are of importance to this paper. An example of this principle can immediately be seen in the first text, which is titled *Female Muslim Identity and Modest Clothing Consumption in the UK*, the contents of which primarily argues about Muslim women's fashion choices in the United Kingdom. However, the research conducted in this article might actually be able to give us more insight on the behavior and tendencies of Muslim women, thus incorporating it more into what we may know as their identity. Case in point, the article states that as the amount of Muslims globally increases, the demand for more conservative and modest clothing from reputable brands begin to skyrocket as well (Ashraf, Williams, Bray,

2023). What this implies is that, in the modern era, there are still Muslims, particularly women, who choose to stick to their religious heritage, by way of showing demands for clothing such as the hijab within the wider confines of the clothing industry. However, by the same token, there are also Muslims who have further adapted into the globalized world, whom do not care as much about how much of their bodies their clothes would cover, as exemplified by a line in *The Language of Baklava*, which reads; "I go into the bathroom and change into some clothes he's given me: a soft cotton shirt and a pair of jeans that droop from my hips." (Abu-Jaber, D, 2005: 173). As one may be able to observe, in said line, Diana did not mention the presence of a hijab in the clothes that she wore, implying that her western heritage had taken up a part within her wider Muslimah identity, most likely caused by the way in which she was raised.

The second text is titled *Dual Identity, Bicultural Identity Integration and Social Identity Complexity Among Muslim Adolescents*, and talks about the dually diverse identity of Muslims who are a creation of two different cultures. This makes the article automatically relevant to Diana's character in *The Language of Baklava*, due to her stance as someone who is half Caucasian and half middle eastern, as such the contents of said article gives us more to work with on the identities of those who are bicultural by nature. The article suggests that Muslim immigrants who integrate themselves better with the cultural group that they were raised, as well as balancing it with their ethnic Muslim Identity are more likely to show signs of a well maintained

psyche. Unfortunately however, this is contradicted by the Western society's notion of the two cultures being incompatible with each other (Spiegler, Schmid, Saleem, Hewstone., & Benet-Martínez, 2021). Despite such a statement, there are still numerous examples of immigrated Muslims who do indeed happily integrate themselves with their host culture, as Diana Abu-jaber from *The Language of Baklava* is a particular example of such, with her maintaining an Islamic Identity and connection with her family, while being born in the Western country of the United States.

Moving on from that, the third text is titled *Identity and Leisure Time: Aspiration of Muslim Influencer on Instagram*, and predictably discusses about the identities as well as dichotomy between Muslim influencers and Muslimist influencers who are prevalent on social media such as Instagram. Whilst the social media aspect is not relevant to the primary texts, the theme of there being multiple identities associated with Muslims remains relevant to the current topic of discussion, as it shows how non monotonous the Muslim and particularly Muslimah people actually are. (Putri, Kailani, 2021)

The fourth theory is more so relevant to *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, as it is titled *Negotiating Cultural and Religious Identities: The Javanese Women who Use Shamanistic Services*, and thus can be applied to the moment wherein Halima tried to use sorcery in order to win her husband back. Although not as common, it is still imbedded within some Muslim and Muslimah people, in that it is okay to use sorcery in order to help them achieve their goals, even though it is

clearly stated in the holy Quran that using such methods is greatly forbidden. In essence, when one takes up a certain identity, in this case pertaining to religion, then they must also follow the inherited rules of said religion. In the case of Islam, one such way of following said rules it is to steer clear of objects and activities that are forbidden in the Qur'an, one of which being this particular use of shamans and shamanistic rituals (Indriana, Nurchayati, 2023). Whilst the article puts a focus on Indonesian Islamic culture, that does not necessarily mean Islamic traditions from other countries are a stranger to similar rituals. This is apparent by the fact that in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, a book that mostly took place in European countries, Halima, whilst unwilling, was shown to be guilty of such practices. However, as the will to use said practice was fully her mother's, it again comes into the territory of a Muslimah whose identity is not only shaped by her own will, but also from those who surrounds her.

Finally for the fifth article, it is one that is titled *Transformation of Dakwah Media in Inspiring Muslimah in the Digital Era*, which clearly shows that the identity of Muslims are not static, and can change accordingly to the passing times, even having their own compensations in the era of digitalization. (Utami, Al-Adawiyah, Quddus, Kasyifatudduja, 2024).

As stated previously, it becomes apparent that not all of the five secondary texts outwardly reflect on what is shown in the primary texts. However, if they are stripped down to their core concept, they all still discuss about some topics that still pertain to the concept of Muslimah identity in some way, shape, or form. It is

because of these secondary texts that we start to gain more external knowledge about the given topic, thus making them a useful asset in the research of this paper

The main aim of this paper at the end of the day, is to discern about the two types of identities that each of the discussed characters possess. By that token, it should be mandatory for textual evidences from the discussed primary texts to be brought up and examined for the purpose of the study at hand. Furthermore, in order to enhance and solidify those textual evidences, it is also imperative for theories and/or secondary texts to be used, once again, in order to solidify the existing evidence and implement it better with the overarching aim of this paper. Because of this, it has been decided that for this paper, it will be provided five textual evidences, three from *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, and two from *The Language of Baklava*, as well as secondary texts or theories that support the idea of said textual evidences.

First and foremost, it should be noted that desperation should be considered as a factor that might affect one's behaviour, and therefore identity as a whole. In this particular case, it is seen when Halima, from the novel *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, committed a forbidden act in Islamic views, wherein she used a kind of sorcery in hopes to maintain her husband's loyalty—an act that is evident with a line in page 31 that reads "Nevertheless, the money was already spent, and if indeed actions were judged by one's niyyah, then she had already sinned by intending to use sorcery, so she might as well go through with it." (Lalami, 2005: 31) According to Indriyana and Nurchayati (2023), it is

possible that Muslims that use Shamanistic services in adulthood are those who do it out of desperation, due to the challenges that they face in adulthood, as compared to their childhood. This desperation may in turn affect one's dynamic psychology, leading them to be more lenient on what they allow themselves to do. (Indriyana, Nurchayati: 2023) With this, we can denote that Halima's living conditions do indeed affect her identity as a Muslimah, for if it weren't for her abusive and unreliable husband, she would have no reason to resort to an act of which is forbidden by Muslim laws.

Another piece of text from the novel that feeds into the previously discussed theme of the effects of desperation, can be found in this line from page 63 which states "Crazy woman, they said, fingers tapping temples. You have to forgive her, they said, she's been through so much." (Lalami, 2005: 63) The presence of this text further solidified the aforementioned point about one's identity being affected by their conditions and surroundings, as in context, the line refers to how Halima had survived an illegal trip to Spain, which as eluded to earlier, simply would not have happened if Halima were to have a sustainable, peaceful life.

If the observation made towards Halima's character and her living conditions is about how hard her life seems to be, it is not the case in how this issue will be discussed when talking about Diana's character in *The Language of Baklava*, whereby it more so focuses on Diana's dual heritage due to her parents having completely different backgrounds

from each other. In essence, Diana was a Muslim girl who was born in America, whose father is from Jordan, whilst her mother is Caucasian. This in turn leads to some pondering of her true identity, like as what is shown in a line in page 15, which reads “But I don’t understand this yet. I was born into this snowy Syracuse world. I have no inkling of what other worlds are like.” (Abu-Jaber, 2005: 15) Whilst other cases where a Muslim is born within a Western country might invite feelings of prejudice projected onto the Muslim in question, said prejudice might still be avoidable if this individual is clever enough to use their way of speaking as well as rhetorics to alter the perceptions of those around them, so that they may view this Muslim individual as something more than what their mindset has reflected onto them (Salsabila, Djohar, 2023). In the case of Diana however, she was fortunate enough to have been born onto a neighborhood and community that could accept her for who she was, and in turn giving her some friends who accompanied her for some time, an example of such can be seen in the line which reads; “In a matter of days, I am familiar with the labyrinthine windings of our ancient neighborhood. There are buildings so rickety and narrow that they look as if they’re built on stilts; there are staircases leading into murky darkness that I gape at but refuse to ascend; there are apartments—many apartments—that smell powerfully of babies and dinner all the time. One day my gang of friends takes me to the roof of our building and I discover yet another world of children running around, women gossiping, clotheslines brightly draped and flapping gaily as sails. I lean over the precariously low railing, five stories from the ground, and someone

gives me a play shove from behind that swipes the breath from my lungs and makes stars pop in my head. I swing around and lay eyes on Hisham for the very first time.” (Abu-Jaber, 2005: 25). The existence of this heavily implies how easy it was for Diana to adapt with and know her neighborhood, especially with her having a resident group of friends to help her trudge through her journey into said neighborhood, and eventually, the world as a whole.

Growing up in a country like America can seem scary to any minority groups, including that of Muslims. It has often been established that America sees Islam more so as a kind of political nuisance rather than a religious group that is to be accepted and respected, one that also invites a sense of controversy rather than a fascination of their culture (Djohar, 2021). Despite this motion, it is still possible for an immigrant Muslim to accept their American identity, whilst still not brushing away any and all traces of the Muslim heritage that they inherit, in turn assimilating both cultures into their identity when they are fully matured and are ready to serve as an example of the possibilities of a Muslim Identity. One such example can be seen in Diana Abu-Jaber herself, with her line in *The Language of Baklava* that reads; “After growing up with Bud’s idea that Jordan is our truest, essential home, a part of me has come to believe it. My grant proposal describes a novel that I will write about characters undergoing ambitious self-excavation, recovery, and reconciliation as they move between countries. It is set in both America and the Middle East, and it is meant to draw together my own deep cultural

ambivalences—to try to look right at the conundrum of being Arab-American.” (Abu-Jaber, 2005: 198). The aforementioned passage has shown the full effects of the environment that Diana had grown up in, with it eventually leading her to fully accept her bicultural identity, showing that it is indeed possible for a Muslimah immigrant, or at least a descendant of such, to overcome the challenges of living in a western focused world, so long as said world is full of positive elements as well as people who can accept who she is and lead her to accept both of her cultural heritage when she eventually becomes an adult.

As we jump forth to discussing *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* once more, we need to establish again that, unlike Diana who lived within a fairly healthy society which is adequate enough to support her identity as a whole (Abu-Jaber, 2005), Halima did not have any such luxury, as most of her adulthood was spent under the patriarchal conditions brought forth by the presence of her ex-husband (Lalami, 2005). The patriarchal system itself is incredibly notorious in how it affects the lives and freedom of women, what with the fact that it is by definition a force that sees women as being shameful and in general that an inferior position in comparison to men (Chaliza, Djohar, 2022). Particularly and even more so in this case, the patriarchal system is specifically directed towards Muslim women. In order to break free from such an oppressive system, women need to show their independence, as well as their capabilities in leadership (Djohar, Oktaviano, Utami, 2024). Fortunately, in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, it was shown that Halima was indeed

capable enough to eventually break free from the chains of her husband’s patriarchy which can be seen in the following passage; “Halima stood, stunned. The fear that had knotted her stomach at the sight of her now ex-husband subsided, and in its stead she felt the rush of blood to her temples.” (Lalami, 2005: 65). The aforementioned passage was the culmination of Halima’s journey of freedom, culminating in an act of divorce that she had been wanting the entire time. It shows a declaration of freedom and independence of a respectable degree for an oppressed Muslimah, all while finally carving her own identity in its process.

CONCLUSION(belum)

Through this observation, it has been made apparent that it is indeed possible for the living conditions and surroundings of an individual to affect their behavioural choices, which will in turn affect their identity as a whole. As seen in what has been observed in the characters of Halima and Diana, they both have surroundings that affect their identities in different ways. By looking at gender theory, amongst other secondary texts, the researcher was able to conclude that the two Muslimah depicted within this research have both formed two different identities, both of which were highly influenced by their surroundings and living conditions. Diana was a descendant of a Muslim immigrant born in the United States was eventually able to accept her dual Identity as an Arab-American personality, partially due to the mostly supportive influences from the people around her. Halima meanwhile, was an oppressed housewife whose goal was to break free from the boundaries set by her patriarchal

husband, thus when she finally managed to free herself from said boundary, she can truly form her own identity without being restricted by an external force.

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