

**Practice of Faith and Personal Growth in of Randa Abdel- Fattah's  
*Does My Head Look Big in This?***

by  
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**Abstract**

The paper explores how religious beliefs, rituals and practices shape the personal growth of the leading female characters in Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2005). The novel reveals Islam as portrayed by the author form an integral and empowering part of the women's lives. Such empowerment is only achieved after long struggles within the women themselves. The paper build on Saba Mahmood's study of Muslim women's piety, which argues that contrary to the general understanding of Islam as a restrictive religion, particularly for women, its rituals and practices can more properly be understood as tools for achieving self-actualization and self-improvement.

**Introduction**

Randa Abdel-Fattah's maiden novel, *Does My Head Look Big in This?* tells the story of sixteen-year-old Amal Mohamed Nasrullah Abdel-Hakim, an Australian-Palestinian girl and the implications of her decision to wear the hijab (head scarf) to an elite private school in Melbourne, the McCleans Grammar School. It was written shortly after the tragedies of September 11th2001 and the increasing terrorist activities in the Middle East. The novel is thus Abdel-Fattah's attempt at presenting the importance of maintaining religious and cultural identity while creating a strong relationship with the non-Muslim community. Amal is an only child to Mohamed, a doctor, and Jamila, a dentist. Both her parents were born in Bethlehem, Palestine and moved to Australia to pursue their studies. The family resides in Camber well, a wealthy suburb in Melbourne. They are also religious, taking care to perform Islamic practices and rituals regularly and to follow religious edicts in their everyday life. Despite this devoutness, Amal is a typical teenage girl who argues with her mother, gets annoyed at her father, enjoys spending time gossiping and shopping with her best friends, worries about her appearance, pushes herself to do well in school and even develops a romantic attraction to one of the most popular boys in school, Adam Keane. Amal is also depicted as a smart, confident and ambitious young woman. She is, then, Abdel-Fattah's attempt to present an alternative portrait of a young, religious Muslim woman and she stands in opposition to the stereotypical presentation of submissive and subjugated characterizations of Muslim women.

### **Amal and Her Decision to Wear the Hijab**

The novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* opens with the protagonist, Amal, coming to an abrupt decision to wear the hijab. As she belongs to a devout Muslim family, the action of donning the hijab is no stranger to Amal. Her own mother wears it, as did Amal herself when she was attending Hidayah, an Islamic college where it is formed as a part of the school uniform. As she narrates her decision, she explains the difficulties that she faced in making it. Amal recalls her early days growing up as a Muslim in a non-Muslim environment, particularly when she went to a Catholic primary school where her religion separated her from the rest of her peers. She says:

When I was in primary school, different coloured socks were enough to get you teased. So when you're a non-pork eating, Eid-celebrating Mossie (as in taunting nickname for Muslim, not mosquito) with an unpronounceable surname... a quiet existence is impossible.

Hey Amal, why does a sneeze sound like a letter in the Arabic language?

Hey Amal, want a cheese and bacon chip?

Hey Amal, do you have a camel as a pet?

Hey Amal, did you notice the sub teacher called you "Anal" at rollcall this morning? (p.10)

Being the only Muslim girl in the school created a sense of separation from the rest of her peers. Although she says that she had generally good experiences in primary school, this came at the expense of hiding her religious identity.

The feeling of insecurity remained as Amal grew up. With the hijab being a marker of difference the sense of being different affected the way she viewed it. As Amal explains, when she was studying in Hidayah where she had to wear the hijab, she viewed it only as a part of the school uniform:

I used to take [the hijab] off as soon as I stepped outside the school gates because man oh man do you need guts to get on public transport with it on. At the end of the school day the trains would be absolutely choc-a-bloc with schoolkids. I could

stay wearing it if I hopped on with a group of Hidaya students because I wouldn't feel so exposed. But the problem was that I had to change trains to get home and there was no way I had the courage to go the distance alone with it on.

When I first started at Hidaya I hated wearing the hijab... But then I got to know the other kids and it no longer felt awkward (pp.12-13).

Amal clearly felt more comfortable without the hijab whenever she was unaccompanied in public. This suggests that she does not stand out as a Muslim with her light skin and green eyes (p.49), so that without the hijab she has what she herself terms as “an unhyphenated Aussie” appearance (p.104), allowing her to pass easily as a typical Australian teenager. Therefore, Amal is only considered as a “racialized other” after she puts on the hijab.

Furthermore, Amal's preoccupation with the hijab is not limited to her worries over the public perception of her Muslim identity but is also accompanied by the yearning to be seen as attractive. This is supported by Amal's memory of her struggles with the hijab in Hidaya:

When I first started at Hidaya, I hated wearing the hijab. I found it itchy and I absolutely despised wearing it during sport. I also thought it looked daggy on me and in the first two weeks I was always styling my fringe and letting it out at the front so that everybody knew I had nice hair. Talk about being a love-me-do (p.13).

Amal's worries about how she looks in the hijab is an effect of societal and peer pressures. Although Amal eventually moves beyond this vanity, she remains concerned with the physical presentation of herself in the hijab thus she tries to ensure that it does not only represent her Muslim identity but also portrays her as an attractive female. The following excerpt from the novel highlights the wearing of the hijab as a fashion statement:

I've decided on a navy blue veil and baby blue cotton headband to match my jeans and blue cardigan. I pull my hair back into a low bun and put the headband on... The contrasting shades of blue also spice up the look up a little. I fold the veil in half, into a triangular shape, and even it out over the headband. I wrap it around my head and face, taking care that there are no creases and that the front part of my headband is showing. When I've perfected the shape I fasten the veil with a small safety pin at my neck. I fling the tail ends across my shoulders and join them together with a brooch (pp.26-27).

It is clear that Amal's concern about how others will respond to her wearing of the hijab comes "not from her avowed demonstration of her Islamic faith but from the pressure to conform to a Westernized construction of female identity" (Zannettino, 2007). This can be seen through the critique of the hijab by Tia Tamos, a classmate who dislikes Amal:

"I just don't know what I'd do without my long hair!" [Tia] says to Claire and Rita... "I mean, what's a woman without hair? You have to have a model's face to get away with covering up. Don't you think so?" (p.77)

Tia's view of the hijab is based on the conceptualization of the sameness of all women regardless of backgrounds, cultures and traditions, encouraging the assumed universal prescription of women's role and their physical appearance, even where there may be differences in the definition of female beauty in different cultures. This puts Amal at the centre of the feminine sphere, where the representation of all women is considered to be identical to the gender identity of the Western female without considering the social, political and even personal context of the often non-Western wearers (Grace 2004).

### **The Hijab and the Belief in God's Commandment**

The novel explores this struggle and how the protagonist learns to overcome her anxiety. At the beginning of the novel, when Amal decides to wear the hijab, there begins a recognition of an inner consciousness which prompts a reaction towards the performance of a religious practice. Consider what she says to her parents:

"But this decision, it's coming from my heart. I can't explain or rationalize it. OK, I'm doing it because I believe it's my duty and defines me as a Muslim female but it's not as... I don't know how to put it... it's more than just that" (p.52).

This connection can be explained by looking at anthropologist Talal Asad's (1993) conceptualization of religious practices and rituals, which Mahmood adopts. There is an important connection between physical behaviour and inner motive in the performance of religious actions. Emotions are manifestations of that inner motive, as portrayed in the outer physical performances: "the body [works] as an assemblage of embodied aptitudes not as a medium of symbolic meanings" (p.175). For Amal, her decision to wear the hijab is her own choice, which is based on her personal aims. She not only desires to be recognized as a Muslim

within the Australian public; she also views the hijab as a tool to affirm her personal devotion to Islam.

This struggle emphasizes Abdel-Fattah's use of irony in naming Amal's Islamic school, Hidayah. In the Arabic language the term hidayah means guidance, giving the connotation that the school is responsible in ensuring the development of Amal's Islamic identity. However, as she only decides to wear the hijab after leaving the school, it suggests Abdel-Fattah's attempt at ensuring that this decision is not determined by collective pressures from an authoritarian power that may exist in the school. This condition suggests that religious guidance is not something that can be imposed, reflecting the Islamic belief that only God has the right to give hidayah to any individual, seen in the following verse of the Qur'an, "It is true thou wilt not be able to guide every one, whom thou lovest; but God guides those whom He will and He knows best those who receive guidance" (Surah Al-Qasas 28:56). Family, social and educational environments only work to move one towards what can be considered proper religious behaviours. Thus, Amal's decision is an association between the inner emotional need to create a relationship with God and the outer physical act of wearing the hijab.

### **The Hijab as a Tool towards the Improvement of Other Religious Practices**

Amal's comfort in the act of praying helps create a sense of certainty with her decision to wear the hijab. This suggests the inter-related connection that exists between one religious act and other religious acts. Amal's determination to wear the hijab is to be understood in the context of the belief that performing religious actions involves training the body towards a more all-round 'becoming' –the physical, bodily push towards doing things in a specific manner in order to produce a specific subject.

For Amal, the ideal religious self does not stop at wearing the hijab. In fact, it becomes the bodily gesture which creates a desire towards the performance of other larger acts of worship. Soon after she starts wearing the hijab, she is prepared to make the efforts to perfect her practice of Islam, without fear of being ridiculed and judged: I need a place to pray, so at lunch time I go see Mr. Pearse [her teacher]. All through the year I've been carrying out my two afternoon prayers at home after school but I'd go through them at supersonic speed so that I could make it in time to watch Home and Away. It never felt right and now I really want to try to pray at the set times, the way it's supposed to be (p.46). The self-directed actions create a specific form of the self that desires to continuously submit to God. While the hijab is a sign

of recognition of God's power and the realization of her desire to submit to Him, it is also the motivation towards the performance of other rituals; a recurring process that reinforces her desire for submission to God. Amal's desire for the improvement of her religious self also underscores the fact that religious behaviours and norms are not ingrained in the individual but are part of a continuous learning process. This can be further understood from Amal's narration of her varied experiences performing the Ramadan fast. Her early training began when she was in Year Four and when she begged her mother to let her fast for a whole day. The fast first lasted until recess but gradually, as she grew older, "recess became lunch time, lunch time became an afternoon snack [and] [p]retty soon [she] was fasting for the full haul." (p.325). It is only because of the continuous training from an early age that fasting then becomes a natural act.

However, within a majority-non-Muslim society, this process of achieving a desired behaviour of the religious self is not an easy one. In the novel, Amal's experience of fasting in the month of Ramadan is a particularly difficult one as it falls at the beginning of summer when days are longer and dusk begins much later in the evening. As a result, Amal is always tempted to cheat, particularly because she knows that nobody will suspect her of not fasting.

This is where her belief in the Higher Power comes in, where she pushes herself to ignore such desires by remembering one of her favourite verses from the Qur'an: But it kind of dawned on me then that at the end of the day nobody knows what I do behind closed doors. Except God... "We have created man and know what his soul is whispering within him. We are closer than his jugular veins". Boy does that verse give me the shivers. I think about my jugular vein, how it collects the blood from my head, runs it down my neck to unite with my other major veins and I suddenly grasp how certain I am that God is watching over me (pp.326-327). This clearly demonstrates the connection that exists between religious practices and her belief in God. It not only invites her to develop a desire to perform religious actions, the belief also becomes the reason for her to follow through with those actions, hence shaping a specific behaviour of the self. The desire to fast begins as hers alone, but is supported and encouraged by her belief in God, thus becoming the cause and reason for the performance of this religious practice.

Her position around others who do not observe the Ramadan fast teaches Amal a deeper meaning for the ritual of fasting, rather than negatively affecting her intention to fast. Amal is

able to learn this through her placement in a non-Muslim environment where her inability to avoid temptations works to teach her exactly what fasting entails –a disciplinary regime to avoid temptation and waste.

### **The Hijab as a Reflection of an Already Established Identity**

When the readers are introduced to the character of Amal, she has just decided to wear the hijab. At the very beginning of the novel, the narration begins by explaining how Amal comes to her decision. It is a sudden decision, arrived at as she watches television, exercising on a treadmill at home:

It hit me when I was power-walking on the treadmill at home, watching a Friends rerun for about the ninetieth time.

It's that scene when Jennifer Aniston is dressed in a hideous bridesmaid's outfit at her ex's wedding. Everyone's making fun of her and she wants to run away and hide. Then she suddenly gets the guts to jump onstage and sing some song called "Copacabana", whatever that means. I'm telling you, this rush of absolute power and conviction surged through me. I pressed the emergency stop button and stood in my Adidas shorts and Winnie-the-Pooh T-shirt, utterly captivated by that scene... The next minute this courage flowed through me and it just felt unbelievably right.

I was ready to wear the hijab.

That's right, Rachel from Friends inspired me (pp.1-2).

This situation reflects Abdel-Fattah's emphasis on the multiple relations that Amal has with various social environments. It represents another aspect of Amal's individualism –her position as an Australian teenager influenced by popular culture. The popular TV show Friends is often associated with strong sexual references; thus, the fact that it is responsible for triggering Amal's aspirations to wear the hijab suggests Abdel-Fattah's deliberate attempt at irony, outlining the synchronization that a young Muslim woman may share with the Australian society that she lives in. What is striking about this 'revelation' is the paradoxical nature of the situation. The popular show is a representation of a secular way of life, discussing openly, among other things, freedom to express sexuality, demonstrating a stand that is in total contrast

with the veil, an emblem of Muslim women's modesty. Amal's ability to relate to the event in the show, however, is a sign of an already inherent identity that is able to connect to the non-Muslim society around her.

The scholar, Firouzeh Ameri suggested that Amal's interactions with the Western society around her are representative of reconciliation between her Muslim self and the non-Muslim society. These interactions result in her being recognized as a hybrid individual, as the novel is focused on Amal's gradual search for comfort at being who she is –an Australian Muslim. She suggested that as Amal is preoccupied with how the people around her –especially her non-Muslim peers who see her as the 'other' –making her "suddenly... aware of her identity issues [thus] los[ing] her confidence in herself as someone with the identity of Australian Muslim" (p.131). Ameri further noted that this has to do with her feelings of alienation from the rest of the community (p.131).

Amal's story is also intertwined with her non-Muslim friends' challenges in their lives as teenagers in Australia. One of her best friends, Simone, for example, who is no more than slightly overweight, is acutely self-conscious of her body, and her discomfort is made worse by her mother's constant pleas for her to lose weight in order for her to be seen as attractive. Meanwhile, her other friend, Adam Keane, struggles with his relationship with his mother who left the family when he was eight. Personal stories like these explain to Amal that there are various challenges implicit in experiencing one's formative teenage years in Australia. Her friends' experiences set her on parallel track to that of her non-Muslim friends and remind her that everyone has his or her own personal struggle to confront. This can be seen when she says to Simone when her friend complains of her weight:

"You know what? Who cares what normal is, Simone. Let's protest. From now on we're the anti-normal, anti-average, anti-standard. You can eat what you want to, I'll wear what I want, and we'll die with a packet of chips in our hand and a tablecloth on our head" (p.81).

The sense of self-certainty can be further explained through a deeper analysis of the particular scene in *Friends* that triggers Amal to decide to wear the hijab. Abdel-Fattah picks the scene from the episode "The One with Barry and Mindy's Wedding" (Lembeck 1996), reflecting the confidence and strength of the character, Rachel, in overcoming a difficult situation. She is asked to be one of the bridesmaids at her close friend's wedding to her former fiancé, whom

she left at the altar a few years earlier. She agrees to this as she feels that she has moved forward since then, but is embarrassed to find out that most of the guests at the wedding think that she is mentally unstable. Towards the end of the episode, Rachel jumps on stage and starts singing as a way to redeem herself after realizing that her circumstances could only be worse if she does not face these embarrassments. Abdel-Fattah's choice of this specific scene suggests that she is focusing on her protagonist's confidence-building. Amal realizes that the hijab should not be considered as working against her selfhood, but can instead be a tool to portray not only her Muslim identity, but also her confidence in being a Muslim in Australia. Thus, that particular scene in *Friends* becomes the metaphorical reference to two elements of Amal's self-development. First, it represents Amal's gradual growth of strength and confidence in making the difficult decision to wear the hijab, and secondly, it shows how Amal has acquired the courage to express her identity openly.

Amari's (2012) interpretation of Alma's journey as one essentially of reconciliation between Muslim and non-Muslim society, misses the point. It would be suggested that Amal does not struggle with self-acceptance, nor does she view herself as different from other Australian teenagers. The decision to wear the hijab suggests that she is comfortable being who she is; she is merely nervous at how others will react to her due to her previous experiences of racism. However, she is reassured and relieved of her nervousness when she first wears the hijab in public for a 'test run' –to Chadstone, a popular local shopping complex, where she runs into a group of Muslim girls who are all wearing the hijab:

While I'm walking through the food court I pass three women who are all wearing the hijab. They're huddled around a table, talking and eating ice-cream. One of them catches my eye and smiles.

"Assalamu Alaykom," she says, greeting me with the universal Islamic greeting, Peace be upon you.

"Walaykom Wassalam," I reply, smiling back at her. The other two girls also greet me and I reply and they all smile warmly at me... it is now that I think I begin to understand that there's more to this hijab than the whole modesty thing. These girls are strangers to me but I know that we all felt an amazing connection, a sense that this cloth binds us in some kind of universal sisterhood (p.28).

This brief interaction reassures Amal that the hijab may not necessarily mark her as different from the rest of the larger society as there are many other people who are doing what she is attempting to do. In portraying what the women are doing –eating ice-cream while chatting– the author has created an everyday activity that works to represent the normality of being a Muslim in Australia. It reminds Amal that the hijab may physically differentiate them from the larger non-Muslim society, but it places no bounds on the extent of being Australian. The hijab, therefore, reinforces the sense of collective identity that Amal has been preoccupied with ever since she was a young girl growing up in Australia.

Being born in Australia to Palestinian Muslim parents also pushes Amal to recognize the different identities of the self to which she could refer, supported by her experiences at a Catholic primary school, the Hidaya and finally, as she experiences her days in the McCleans Grammar School. Her engagement with multiple identities is thus a result of her diasporic status. This can be seen at the beginning of the novel when she declares, “I’m an Australian-Muslim-Palestinian. That means I was born an Aussie and whacked with some seriously confusing identity hyphens” (p.6). She soon explains that those ‘identity hyphens’ are not confusing for her but for those around her:

I wasn’t one of those children who had a mixed up, “syndrome” childhood. Yeah, sure, it didn’t matter how much my parents told me to feel proud of my identity, there was always somebody in the playground to tell the wogs to go home. But as it turns out, I was pathetic at sport and obsessed with boy bands featured in Dolly magazine, so there were plenty of other ways to make me feel like an idiot. I learnt how to suppress my Muslimness, and I pretty much got on with having a fun and religiously anonymous primary school life (pp.11-12).

These words stress Amal’s realization that her religious identity is just one of the many reasons for her being teased at school. Hiding her Muslim identity is therefore a futile attempt at running away from being bullied. For these reasons, Amal’s decision to wear the hijab is a step forward in her self-attestation as an Australian Muslim, which no longer requires her to hide her religiosity. Amal’s confidence in her identity is a result of her parents’ struggles when they first arrived in Australia.

They first felt overwhelmed by the differences in the language and culture but eventually overcame this to develop self-certainty and comfort at being Arab Muslims in their

adopted country. On one occasion, Jamila, her mother, recalls the early days in Australia, particularly focusing on her lack of proficiency in English as a language and cultural barrier: "...but oh the problems I had with English! We felt so disabled. I remember going to the supermarket and asking for a kilo of mashed meat. The boy could not understand what I was saying and called somebody over to help. I kept insisting I wanted mashed meat. When they finally realized I meant minced, they couldn't stop laughing at me. I felt so embarrassed." ... "I'll never forget when Mohamed took me for a barbeque at a park when we were engaged. He came running to me in panic, shocked that there were people eating dogs, and they were eating them hot. I didn't realize what he meant until I saw a family over a barbeque, talking about cooking hot dogs. We were horrified. When we later learnt what they were, we were in hysterics." ... "We cursed this wretched country where people ate dogs, and wondered whether cats were meals too!" (pp.107-108).

The anecdotes from the past stand in contrast with Amal's descriptions of her parents now. Her father, Mohamed, "drives a metallic-red convertible... [while having] Italian opera or Palestinian folk songs blasting from his car stereo system" (p.3), and her mother is described as a Muslim woman in hijab who wears Gucci sunglasses when picking her daughter up from school, while driving "a car with an 'Islam means peace' bumper sticker" (p.10). Her parents' constant shifting and switching between Islamic and Arabic cultures and Western influences suggest a balanced transition between their traditions of origin and new cultural demands. So, unlike her parents, who had to create their subjectivities as a response to their background, Amal finds herself starting from a different place: her experience of life in Australia is mediated by the adaptability that her parents have shown in the past. This allows her to easily recognize and position herself between the Palestinian Muslim and the non-Muslim Australian cultures. The positive experience of Mohamed and Jamila and the effect it has on Amal suggest that the term 'diaspora' can be defined, not as a label of disadvantage but as a badge of growing confidence worn proudly by members of minorities as they maintain and practice their cultural and religious traditions.

In discussing prayer with her good friend, Adam Keane, for example, Amal relates the five compulsory daily prayer sessions to taking a time-out during a basketball game: "You're running up and down the court, doing your lay-ups, shooting hoops, smashing your body into exhaustion. You've got nothing on your mind except the game. Nothing is distracting you from

it. But when it's time-out, you get this three or four minutes of calm. You get to drink your slurpie, catch your breath, rethink your strategy, who's getting in your way, who's working with you, who you could work with more. How much you owe your coach. What was the tip he gave you? What did he say was the best way to get a goal?" ... "That's how prayer is for me" (p.142). Here, Amal actively relays her identity in the context of broad social relationships through the desire to achieve a cross-cultural fluidity in her friendship with Adam. The reference to a cultural context that is familiar to Adam—the popularity of basketball—works to her advantage. She constructs what she perceives as good and desirable through her engagement with both Islam and the Australian society and thus, these elements are presented as being parallel to one another, rather than in conflict.

### **Challenges after Wearing the Hijab**

Creating a protagonist who, of her own volition, decides to don the hijab may be at the core of Abdel-Fattah's fictional representative of young Australian-born Muslim women as independent individuals but it is not the only strand to the work. The novel also explores how the wearing of the hijab can be a burden to these women as it forces them to become public representatives of the Muslim community in Australia. This challenge is emphasized through the response that Amal receives from her parents when she first tells them of her decision:

At dinner I tell my parents that I'm thinking about wearing the hijab and to my disbelief they look at each other nervously. I was expecting a cheerleader routine around the family room. Not two faces staring anxiously at me.... my dad says [,] "... Are you sure you are ready to cope with such a huge change in your life?" "What's the big deal? It's a piece of material. "My mother snorts. "Since when do people see it as a mere piece of material? You and I both know that's being a tad optimistic, ya Amal" (pp.23-24). The cautious response indicates that even though Jamila wears the hijab herself (p.10), Amal's parents do not expect her to follow suit. Although they eventually declare their support for her, they are genuinely surprised by Amal's decision. The response suggests a sense of parental concern that is centred on their understanding of the public perception of the hijab and the person wearing it. It also suggests their surprise at Amal's readiness to openly associate herself with her Muslim identity, considering her experiences of racism and this marks a staging post in Amal's developing maturity. As her mother says, the hijab is more than a piece of material. This is because it openly identifies Amal as a Muslim, making her vulnerable to public judgment and

examination. This is reinforced by the advice of her principal, Ms Walsh, after agreeing to allow Amal to wear the hijab to school:

“Amal, I hope you appreciate that this is something... rather novel. I respect your decision and your right to practice your faith, but you do look different now, dear. I don't want you to interpret this incorrectly but I hope you realize that I am going out of my way to accommodate you. I'm sure that there are grammar schools in Australia which would forbid you from wearing the hijab because of strict uniform codes.” “... I hope you also appreciate that I have to think of the broader scheme of things. Anything can happen in today's climate. If the media get a word of it, I'm sure they'll be interested...” “... But I do need to advise you, Amal, that you are now under an even greater responsibility to represent this institution faithfully. With your veil, all eyes will be on you outside of school, so I trust you will not do our reputation any disservice...” (pp.60-61).

Here, Amal becomes not just any student of the prestigious McCleans Grammar School. Instead, the wearing of the hijab in the school uniform situates her as the student of the school who is different from the others. The hijab enhances the visibility of her actions and they can now be easily scrutinized.

## **Conclusion**

In *Does My Head Look Big in This?* Abdel-Fattah's portrayal of her protagonist, Amal, is an attempt at challenging the common stereotypical representation of Muslim women in Australia. By painting Amal as an intelligent and outspoken individual who is confident of who she is and with what she wants in her life, Abdel-Fattah dismantles the image of the submissive Muslim girl. The author portrays Amal as a teenager who decides to wear the hijab as an action of self-assertion rather than cultural and religious oppression. Her endeavour in return leads her towards becoming more respectful of the people around her. At the same time, the hijab also works as a sign of her confidence in demonstrating her faith in front of her non-Muslim peers.

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