

THE IMAGE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN TV SERIES *WE ARE LADY PARTS* (2021)

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Abstract

This research looks at how Muslim women are portrayed in director Nida Manzoor's TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021). The research is using the representation theory by Stuart Hall and Islamic feminism by Fatima Mernissi. This research aims to determine two things: first, how Muslim women are portrayed in the TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021); and second, how Muslim women are described in the show. The results of this study are classified into two, namely first, the images of Muslim women in the TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021) consist of the characterization of women consisting of physical aspects, Muslim women and their interactions, Muslim women in dealing with difficult situations, and Muslim women in their daily activities. Second, the representation of Muslim women depicted in the TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021) produces representations of educated Muslim women, Muslim women with a culture of love and marriage, Muslim women who have careers and hobbies, Muslim women and the struggle of misrepresentation.

Keywords: Image, Muslim Women, Representation, *We Are Lady Parts*, Tv series.

INTRODUCTION

Muslim women in western society face the challenge of reconciling Islam's strict teachings with the prevailing culture. Muslim women face poor social support, interpersonal prejudice, and discrimination in the workplace. Muslim women who commit to wearing the hijab tend to be judged as having no personality, hobbies, or ability to have fun. This is an example of a view that is not entirely true, as Muslim women are as diverse as any other group of women. As Zeinab Nour (Nour, 2021) states in her article, she argues that the need to integrate herself or her eastern family in the new society, i.e., maintaining a balance between conservative heritage and the principles of the new and free host society in the West, as these are the problems of immigrant Muslim women.

One of the TV series that is oriented towards a group regarding the Muslim women community in the context of western life is "We Are Lady Parts". This TV series tells the story of a group of Muslim women in London who have activities to become musicians in a punk-rock band while wearing a veil at the same time. The TV series is produced by British writer and director Nida Manzoor and is broadcast on British and American television. This TV series shows how groups of Muslim women can have their right to express themselves, such as being musicians, being housewives and workers, being artists, being educated students, having hobbies, and participating and interacting in activities in society.

In addition, this TV series depicts Muslim women dealing with several issues, such as Muslim women characters who have difficulty dealing with negative stereotypes where Muslim women who have jobs related to music and art are considered bad women. Muslim women who have a job along with the role of being a mother and wife in the



household are considered to put aside household duties and prefer a career; on the other hand, they are also considered too restrained because they have to carry out the role of housewife in the house. Muslim women in this series are also portrayed as having part of the queer community, which is not part of Islamic traditions and values, all of whom face pressures from both conservative and moderate perspectives at the same time.

The Muslim women face the tension between adhering to the traditional and strict teachings of Islam and the culture of the western world in this series. The issues of Muslim women that are clearly depicted in the content regarding Muslim women with various beliefs regarding the use of hijab, household affairs, hobbies, work environment, and the lives of Muslim women in the context of western life should not create a narrow interpretation of Muslim women who follow conservative teachings tend to be oppressed or constrained, and those who adhere to moderate perspectives can be freely defined without respecting the limits of the religious rules they believe in.

This research is inspired and provoked by numbers of previous studies related to the issue of muslim women. The following includes an undergraduate thesis and journal :

The first previous study is entitled "The Image of Muslim Women in The Web Series "Sisterlillah" on the Youtube Teladan Cinema Channel" by Makiyah (Makiyah, 2021), this previous research examines the image of Muslim women in the web series, the research is uses the Roland Barthes semiotic theory and also supported by using Quranic verses to describe and analyze how the female characters here are in accordance or not with the principles of pious. The main differences between this previous research with this writer's research is while the previous studies used directly only the verses of the Koran to see the suitability of the image of women in the media with Muslim women according to the verses of the Koran, the write's study uses the theory of Islamic feminism to see the principles and rights of Muslim women in Islam to be compared with Muslim women depicted in the media.

Second, the previous study is the thesis by Haristin (Astuti, 2021) entitled "*Citra Perempuan Berhijab dalam Film Bulan Terbelah di Langit Amerika*", research about the image of muslim women with the use and interpretation about veil for Muslim women whose context is in the western world, this previous research use semiotic theory and also supported by Koranic verses to describe the principles of women in accordance with Islamic teachings. The difference between previous research and this writer's research is the problem of previous research shows that the image of Muslim women in this film focuses on how the wearing of hijab in accordance with traditional Islamic values and emphasises that the image of Muslim women can contribute to domestic and public affairs while this writer's research examines the complexity of the lives of Muslim women who have diverse ways of religion even within fellow Muslim communities (not only about hijab) living in the west as well as their efforts to play a role in maintaining the image of Muslim women in the eyes of the western world.

Third, the previous studies is thesis by Mauliedia entitled "*Representasi perempuan dalam film religi: Analisis wacana Sara Mills dalam film Merindu Cahaya De Amstel*". The research examines the representation of muslim women characters in the movie, and this study using Stuart Hall's Representation theory and Sarah Mills' theoretical concept of object-subject and the readers position to see how are the gender stereotype in this movie about muslim women. The research is resulting several representations of women from the movie of Merindu Cahaya De Amstel, those are the women as who empowered and religious at the same time (Mauliedia, 2022). The difference in research shows that previous studies produce uniform representation

findings where Muslim women are in accordance with strict Islamic teachings, while the author's research has diverse representation findings regarding Muslim women because the character of Muslim women studied is more than one.

Forth, a Journal entitled "The Portrayal of Moderate Islam Representations in Ms. Marvel (2022) TV Series" oleh Hanifah, Awaludin, Assiddiqi (Hanifah et al., 2024), this research uses Cultural Studies theory and Stuart Hall's representation theory. This research uses the negative Muslim stereotype to be positive stereotype in the media as a hypothesis that proves the image formation of a certain group identity (Muslim) in the media that the Muslim community is not always the same as the Muslim stereotype associated with 9/11 or terrorism. So this previous research reveals the influence on the positive image of the Muslim community portrayed in popular media, that is match with the hypothesis.

The main difference between this previous study and the author's research is the terms of the object and focus of research, previous research tends to seek how the representation of moderate Muslims has a positive or negative impact on the image of Muslims in western countries, while the author's research explores the diversity of images devoted to Muslim women portrayed by western media, the contribution of previous research helps to understand that the development of the image of Muslims in the western world today is not always negative.

This study is using Fatima Mernissi's Islamic Feminism and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory. This kind of research is included in qualitative research that uses a mimetic approach, uses the descriptive analysis method, uses documentation techniques for data collection and uses content analysis for data analysis. The objective of this study is first to analyze how the characters of Muslim women are characterized in the series "We Are The Lady Parts" (2021), and second, to analyze how Muslim women are represented in the series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The research discussion presents answers to two research questions that ask how Muslim women are characterized and how Muslim women are represented in this TV series.

The Characters of Muslim Women in TV Series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021)

The Image of Muslim women characters studied in this research is generated from four aspects which are physical aspect, the way they have interaction, how the characters respond to difficult situations, and the characters' daily activities.

Momtaz, the manager of the band Lady Parts, who appears conspicuous with her closed clothes and Niqab. Momtaz walking around in public in her all-black closed clothes with the headphones on her head while smoking a vape.



Figure 1 Episodes 1 (07:22 – 07:35)

Momtaz Character Introduction at the beginning of the story.

The physical aspect of Momtaz's character is described as a Muslim woman of Arab descent who is used to dressing who tends to be closed but has a cheerful gothic style, seen from her appearance that wears black niqab combined with fingerless gloves, leather jacket, black nail polish, spiked bracelet accessories and pods that are always in her hand, see figure 1. She tends to be stylish by choosing an aesthetic of looking with dark colors and has more of a relaxed image than mysterious, although wearing closed and all-black clothes tends to make her look mysterious, Momtaz looks confident in what she wears, looks cheerful enjoying relaxing time with music.

Based on all seven Muslim women characters that have been identified from the 23 data, it can be seen that the image of Muslim women in this TV Series that can be explored from their physical aspects are diverse Muslim women where they are all immigrants or mixed immigrants, many of them are women of color and black women. The term “people of color” is mainly used in the United States and the United Kingdom to refer to anyone who is not white, nowadays some black people refuse and only want to be called black people instead of using the term people of color. In addition, the appearance and style of each of them varies, seen from the Muslim women in this series who are depicted in different ways of dressing ranging from their appearance with the decision to wear hijab or not, feminine style or tending to tomboy, as well as smoking habits and physical changes are also shown in these Muslim women characters.

Ayeesha, Saira, Bisma and Momtaz come to Amina in the laboratory where she studies, they intend to invite Amina to join their punk-rock band, Lady Parts. Although the conversation seems serious, they seem to have a hilarious interaction because Bisma keeps teasing Amina because she argues that he went to Saira's place just to find a man because he was looking for a mate or husband, not to join the recruitment as the new guitarist of their band.



Figure 2 Episodes 2 (01:14 - 01:32)

Saira, Bisma, Ayeesha and Momtaz ask Amina to get in to their punk band.

Amina: Punk? No, sorry. I cant.

Momtaz : We know what you want.

Amina : What?

Momtaz : Microbiology, P.hd. muslim, enjoys minigolf and stimulation conversation.

Saira : Oh, you reaching.

Bisma : Reaching for the D.

Amina : No, no, I'm looking for a husband to settle.

Bisma: To settle onto some the D.

Judging from data 2 through figure 2, the conversation between Amina and Lady parts, Bisma teases Amina by saying that Amina is actually looking for a man just because she uses the term “reaching for the D,” which refers to the male genitalia, which is a slang expression that tends to be dirty. But Amina refuted this by saying that she was looking for a man to be her husband because she wanted to get married or have a family. Based on the data above, the image of Muslim women shown in this scene is that interactions between Muslim women can also involve slang expressions that tend to be dirty, meaning that Muslim women are not always perceived as saints who look pure and completely clean because in reality things like this interaction occur in the Muslim women's community.

Noor lectures Amina on what to write on Amina's dating app profile page. Noor feels that Amina doesn't need to mention anything about music, as he doesn't think a good Muslim man would marry someone who has an obsession with musicians, referring to the poster on Amina's wardrobe door.



Figure 3 Episodes 1 (10:45 – 10:52)



Figure 4 Episodes 1 (10:45 – 10:52)

Noor lectured Amina not to associate with things that he thought were inappropriate.

Noor : Wow, why you mentioning you teaches guitar?

Amina : It's my charity works. I thought i look good If I say teaches underprivilege kids guitar.

Noor : No, it doesn't, it's good for university but not picking a husband. Leave it your music obsession private and here keep it halal yeah.

Amina : [laugh] Come on it's not an obsession.

Noor : Do you think? Any self reflecting godfairy muslim man wanna marrying you when you have this old white man in your wardrobe? (see figure 3 and 4)

In the conversation data above, Noor is one of Amina's best friends whom she has known for a long time. Noor's character in this series shows herself as someone who tends to be strict about what she thinks is appropriate even for her friend Amina. She often gives the impression of a judgmental, bossy and domineering friend, although at other times she makes suggestions for her friends and is sometimes friendly. The character embedded in Noor's character here shows a Muslim woman who has clear and strict standards about what she considers appropriate and not, as seen from her views on music that she thinks is not good.

Character formation shown in interactions with each other, Muslim women's characters are portrayed in diverse ways of interaction where some of them have a slang style of speech, full of slang, a choice of words that are rather rude and sound inappropriate. Some of them also have the opposite style of interaction, which tends to be polite, polite, very careful about the choice of words that are rude or dirty. In interacting, Muslim women in this series also cannot avoid misunderstandings and quarrels in certain situations, they also interact with jokes, gossip, tell stories, give each other advice, and express gratitude. From all the interactions of the character, it can also be seen that the thoughts or views taken by the Muslim female characters here are varied; some of them are conservative because they respond to things a little strictly based on what is appropriate and inappropriate according to religion, such as how to dress, music, and dating. Some of the other characters look more relaxed and less restrictive.

Amina's mother is a supporting character who supports Amina in every decision she makes and is always ready when she experiences difficulties.



Figure 5 Episodes 6 (17:27 – 18:00)

Amina's mother advised Amina.

Amina's Mother : I hope you listen, I think it's vitally important more than anything that you do exactly what just you want to do, not what anyone tells you to do, not what anyone expects you to do, what you want to do.

Amina : It's not that easy.

Amina's mother : I know. it's never been that easy, but it's crucial.

Amina's mother in data figure 5 above shows that she is an understanding mother who tends to liberate her child. She wants Amina to really do whatever she wants without thinking too much about what other people think. She has an understanding nature that is depicted in her sensitivity to Amina's feelings who is sad and feels surrounded by judgment from the world around her. Here the character displayed by Amina's mother shows a supportive, understanding, and assertive attitude but on the other hand, she shows politeness by giving Amina freedom. Amina's mother shows the image of a loving mother and is far from the stereotype of Muslim women who are always identified with violent or coercive women. She respects Amina's decision on her beliefs about being a

Muslim woman who pays attention to traditional teachings but at the same time she hopes Amina will not be too burdened because she always feels judged.

How Muslim women face the situations that tend to be difficult to construct their character which turns out to make them Muslim women who do not give up even in difficult situations. Not only stigma, perceptions regarding Muslim women also vary. Muslim women are considered like saints who cannot make mistakes or get angry, but like humans in general who have emotions, here it is shown that when faced with an unpleasant situation they have emotions of anger, anxiety, sadness, and disappointment. Their way of dealing with difficult situations also varies; some have to be lash out of anger, patient, afraid, silent, and harbored; there are also those who immediately move to solve the problem and immediately get up.



Figure 6 Episodes 2 (07:22 – 07:35)

Momtaz gives an explanation of her plan regarding online band promotion.

Momtaz : We need to talk band's strategy, Saira is a great leader in front women so we got instead of her fancyful ideas but we all know this Amina's thing it's gonna fly if we get some smash.

Bisma : What you're thinking?

Momtaz : Lady Parts online present.

Ayeesha : Have you ask Saira about this?

Momtaz : No, not yet, but anyway I'm the band manager, not Saira, so to me to get some approval get some gigs, so yeah we're goin on line.



Figure 7 (07:28 – 07:35)

Momtaz works at the store.

In data figure 6 Momtaz in her daily activities shows how her seriousness in becoming a band manager, she makes a strategy to make her band grow by making an online performance, from here Momtaz's character looks active, has the ability to take initiative and is full of ideas. In addition, his assertive, strong-willed and ambitious nature is portrayed from his conversation with Bisma and Ayeesha when trying to insist on his idea despite Bisma and Ayeesha telling him to question Saira's approval. In addition, how Momtaz interacts with members in a way that is direct to the point, straightforward and rational, and the way she presents her ideas is visionary and organizing.

In data figure 7, Momtaz is seen in an underwear shop, where he works as a shopkeeper and cashier. He serves the customers well. This activity is her daily routine besides being the manager of the band Lady Parts; unlike other characters, Momtaz, with her daily work as a shopkeeper, seems to do it as happily as when she was a band manager. Momtaz's daily activities based on data 50 and 51 show her character as a productive, professional, visionary, and organized Muslim woman.

The overall data shown by some characters in their daily activities illustrates that they have an image of Muslim women who are productive, creative, resilient, smart and empowered. From the daily life of the characters that have been identified, Muslim women here tend to have independence and rely on their own abilities as seen from not depending on others to work alone and not being limited by others in doing what they want to do. In addition, the image of productive, professional, diligent and full of ideas is also shown in the character of Muslim women here.

Representation of Muslim Women in TV Series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021)

This research found several representations of what Muslim women are like in the context of the western world as told in TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021). The research found representation of muslim women and education, muslim women and their interpretation of religion, representation of muslim women with love-life and marriage culture, and representation of muslim women and the struggle of misrepresentation.

In this TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021), this research found that Muslim female characters in the story were involved in academic activities, had thinking abilities, and had certain knowledge. These things indicate that this TV series contains efforts to reject the negative stigma regarding Muslim women as backward individuals and lacking intelligence.



Figure 8 Episodes 2 (18:39)

Amina is in the campus area with some friends.

Based on the seriousness of the character Amina in doing her work in the laboratory and how she has achieved an education degree depicted in the story, it means that it represents Muslim women who are able to have intelligence. This certainly dissolves the stigma about Muslim women, who are often said not to need education because they are considered incapable of having intelligence. When Muslim women get the opportunity to access education, it turns out that they are able to train their intelligence.

This TV series *We Are Lady Parts* Muslim women are depicted once more in data figure 8. It implies that these Muslim women are accustomed to learning activities and are studying there. Furthermore, Amina can be seen welcoming a few hijabi ladies on campus who are likewise opposed to books and bags in data figure 8. It also indicates that Muslim women there have access to education and can pursue higher education.

The portrayal of Muslim women in this TV series entirely breaks the stereotype of them as uneducated, regressive, and restricted by rigid limitations. The actions of the Muslim female protagonists in the story mirror the representation of educated Muslim women in this work. Their ability to complete the assignment and achieve the degree, along with their readiness to get into college, indicates their intelligence and capacity for thinking.

The opening scene of the TV series in the first episode here shows the difference in dress between Ayesha, Bisma and Saira while praying together during their band practice schedule. Ayesha, Bisma, and Saira are Muslim women who perform the same prayers, but their differences in dress during worship show that there are different interpretations of their beliefs.



Figure 9 Episodes 1 (04:47 – 04:50)

Saira, Ayesha, and Bisma doing prayers in between their band practice schedule.

Data figure 9 Ayesha with her hijab and closed clothes that only show the palms and backs of her hands, Bisma and Saira who are not like their daily clothes in public spaces where Bisma wears a short-sleeved t-shirt and turban that still shows his arms and neck, while Saira who leaves her hair exposed when praying. This is enough to show that there are different views on their religious interpretations of the practice of worship in Islam among the three of them, even though they are both described as Muslims.



Figure 10 Episodes 4 (20:50)

How Amina and her bandmates dress.

The data in figures 10 are also the same as the previous data, there is a diversity of interpretations of their religion, the data shows the way of dressing and hijab among Amina and Saira's band group which is equally diverse. Some of them do not wear full hijab like the character Saira and Amina's friend named Zeyba, some use turbans like Noor, her friend Sahar, and Bisma, some wear short veils like Amina and her friend named Sabah, and some use long headscarves like Momtaz, she is also the only one who wears a Niqab. This shows that there are various interpretations of the meaning of hijab among them.

Muslim women in this series are portrayed as misrepresented as in the scene where Ayeesha, Bisma and Momtaz protested to Zarina for posting an article that initially aimed to promote their band instead became an uproar on the internet because their interview results were twisted. This scene shows the annoyance of Saira, Bisma and Momtaz towards the fake news posted by Zarina because it has an impact on the bad image of their band which is considered to mock Islam. Lady Parts has a song title and lyrics that seem strange and are viewed negatively by most Muslim communities so that they get hatred, the title of the Lady Parts song mentioned here is "Kill my sister" which has the context of expressing Saira's feelings for her sadness over the death of her sister named Ruksana, but Zarina wrote it incorrectly in her post.

This depiction represents the state of the Muslim community which is often misrepresented in western and non-Muslim media due to several factors, some of which include a lack of deepening knowledge of the real Muslim women's community, just looking to profit from the uproar, pure ignorance aimed at spreading misrepresentation of the Muslim community. The stories in this series represent the difficulties of Muslim women in dealing with stereotyping by the West and the defamation of Islam in the eyes of fellow conservative Muslims. The media often simplifies the conclusions of what they know about Islam and Muslim women in particular. In the story of this TV series, the misrepresentation is made deliberately for profit because it gets a lot of negative attention.

Here Momtaz speaks up that she was unhappy with the misrepresentation of them which turned out to have been designed by Zarina solely to make the article explode and get the attention of many people. Zarina denied admitting any wrongdoing when Momtaz confronted her over her misleading portrait of their band, insisting that she was only trying to gain an audience for them.

Momtaz : It's not often we get any kind of platform, so you'll understand we're not thrilled about being misrepresented.

Zarina : Okay. Wow. This is really cute. But let me explain something. I have 1.2 million followers because I understand how to engage with an audience. I built that following from nothing. You know what? I don't need this. I'm gonna go.

Based on this data, the TV Series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021) illustrates the anxiety that Muslim women communities in the West often feel as they have to deal with misrepresentations of their identities on the internet. This misrepresentation is usually done in an attempt to attract attention and attract a large audience without considering the person being represented. This demonstrates the difficulties faced by Muslim women in the West in dealing with misrepresentation.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the image attached to each character in this TV series does not have a tendency to lead to a completely negative or completely positive portrayal of Muslim women. But overall it does not give a bad portrayal of the character of Muslim women, all Muslim women in the TV series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021) discussed all have diverse physical images, characters, traits and habits. The prominent image displayed by Muslim women in this TV series is that of Muslim women who are empowered, productive, professional, talented, educated, relaxed, cheerful, supportive, and have a sense of humor.

The representation of Muslim women in the TV Series *We Are Lady Parts* (2021) serves to highlight the social issues faced by Muslim women in Western nations where they must adhere to Islamic teaching while also being unable to avoid the impact of Western society. The Muslim women in this TV Series are representative of a variety of Muslim women, some of whom hold moderate views and some hold conservative views.

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