

## Discrimination by Western Society Forming A Self-Actualization on Afaf in *'The Beauty of Your Face'*

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this research is to study the fate of women in western society who always get discrimination of it, regardless of her personal life matter, especially if she's from the middle-east and specifically to those who stand behind Islam religion and try to blend in. The discrimination above had wrapped perfectly in the novel *The Beauty of Your Face* by Sahar Mustafah. The method of research that would be used is qualitative. Whereas the theory that would be used is feminist theory: Self-actualization by Abraham Maslow. The end result of this research would be the discussion of how the main character found her way to become a muslim who eventually could handle all of her obstacles either in personal life or as muslim women in western society.*

**Keywords:** *Western society, middle-east, Islam, Discrimination, Self-actualization*

### A. Introduction

Discrimination by general definition is an unfair or prejudicial treatment to those people or groups of people based on certain characteristics like race, ethnicity, sex, age, etc. An act of discrimination could occur by the local people who fear the possession of an outsider that could bring such influence to them. Or it could occur simply by a misunderstanding between local people and an outsider.

Sahar Mustafa wraps discrimination issue on women in different and unique ways, she delivers the story not only from the perspective of Muslimah who live in western society stereotypically speaking who had experienced a discrimination due to their religious beliefs. But it also happened to those who derive from Arabs ethnic regardless of what their religious beliefs are. This is only one of the bad habits of western society.

Discrimination had existed a long time ago even before the 21 century, especially discrimination against women. Thus, feminism had formed to get perceptions of discrimination. In hope of increasing the sensitivity to gender discrimination and understanding that women have been oppressed. Past research has found the relation on various types of social within feminist ideology. It concludes the perceived act of sexual-harassment and offensive behavior.

Diane Kobrynowicz and Nyla R. Branscombe stated that women who are derived from a historical position of disadvantage, detecting discrimination is similar to reinforcing their low profile/ status position. Thus, creating the perception of members of low-status groups may be inclined to accept the dominant cultural ideology. Which may inflict the conflict within the society itself.

Thus, it makes double oppression as a form of discrimination towards the main character. As she has to deal with her problems with the descendant blood of middle-eastern and as devout muslimah. It also makes separation on how she dealt her problem when she hadn't fully become a devout muslimah and after she had.

The plot of this novel shows 2 timelines in which it describes Afaf's struggle in the past trying to find her identity by following the flow of where she lives, then shows how the transformation process is full of all obstacles and after Afaf gets who she really is which is a devout muslimah.

As a woman who is limited to having blood descendants from the east (Palestinians) and also a muslimah, it is challenging for Afaf to survive in western society without a single discrimination, especially after the incident of nine eleven which occurred not long after Afaf had become devout muslimah . The steep obstacles either from western society or even internal like her family matters, it makes her formed in such a way even though in the process she often falls up and down but that does not make her desperate and for the sake of realizing one of the goals.

Self-actualization is probably the most based theory throughout all of the other feminist theories that existed, as it merely revolved around main character transformation by either self-development or redemption. Upbringing the purpose of becoming a better version of him/ herself. It can be achieved by generally reading the novel, or even watching the movie/ series. Thus, we conclude that self-actualization is the most based theory.

Abraham Maslow stated that self-actualization is the process of experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption.

Self-actualizing people are involved with something that is out of their own skin. They have finally found something precious within themselves, and they are determined to be devoted or working at something to achieve it.

This theory fits perfectly as a frame of what has happened in *The Beauty of Your Face* on Afaf's journey and the aspect of self-actualization is being devoted to something. It aligns as to what the purpose of self-actualization is, which is to analyze her transformation from a non religious person whose life had no purpose whatsoever and had been influenced by the place to where she lived in western society to a religious person by embracing her spirituality in order to achieve her true identity as muslimah who she found her purpose in life itself. Although she had found a purpose, that doesn't

mean her problems had swept away, it still exists regardless of having a religion or not. It's about how she handles her struggles with her new identity as devout muslimah.

As to what this research will bring, it is to convey the audience of how the process of the main character had been developed on the matter of discrimination by western society before and after she had found the purpose of embracing her spirituality with self-actualization theory. The discussion would revolve around her family matters and western society.

## **B. Method**

This study discusses how a literary work can have a significant impact on humans, especially women. The issue in this discussion refers to Muslim women who in fact only need to take care of household matters including cooking, taking care of children and husbands and it is forbidden for women to do something like that. men do. Stereotypes that exist among women often become obstacles for them to have difficulty developing and progressing in any aspect. Apart from the stereotype itself, women have potential that is often lowered by the environment. Cases like this often occur and raise questions; why are women not equal to men?, why are women prohibited from working?. The question of women being labeled as having a low position and having no dreams will be refuted in a work written by a Muslim woman who voices women's rights and is also proof that women can be equal in several aspects as men and vice versa. However, in this research, the method that would be suitable to use is a qualitative method, which contains all forms of information in the form of expert opinions regarding a field, especially the field of literature, which is full of focus on issues relating to an environment. The qualitative method is to dissect and execute the intentions of a group of people regarding what they think, based on a problem and social environment (Creswell, 2007). This research is to criticize issues related to women which are problems and need to find a solution so that women can get the rights they should have. The novel entitled "*The Beauty of Your Faces*" is written by Sahar Mustafah, a writer from the descendants of Palestinian immigrants who explores his culture by creating literary works in the form of novels which can be an inspiration for women who feel constrained by circumstances so that they can make more efforts in all forms of efforts to voice their rights.

## **C. Findings and Discussion**

### **1. Unreligious Family From Middle East**

When Afaf was still at her youngest age, she had to deal with the absence of her big sister, who she later found out that her big sister ran away from home due to the promiscuity she had to experience at her school. This can be found in her diary, about how she's being vulnerable around the men, mistreated, measles, and felt betrayed by her beloved crush. This could occur due to the environment within western society itself. Considering Afaf's family derived from the middle-east, surely society perceives

this as a kind of unique new person due to the different appearance, from her olive skin, huge nose, and etc. Not only that, the toxic family relationship also became the prompt of her decision to run away. This leaves a huge impact on Afaf's family, especially her mother.

Despite the fact that Afaf's family derived from the middle-east, that doesn't mean they inherited its religion which most of them believe in Islam. As Abi-Hashem stated in his article about the difference between Middle Easterners and Arab Americans, that not all Arabs are Muslim and not all Middle-Easterners are arabic. Leading to what I'd believe as the first testament from God to the rebellion of Nada (Afaf's sister) who had guts to leave her family behind. However, most of their closest family are islam. Including Muntaha Saleem (Afaf's mother)'s sister, Khalti Nesreen (Afaf's aunt). Thus, when this incident occurred Khalti Nesreen tried to calm her down. This shows how in need of a religion their family is yet they're not realizing.

Afaf's family had been known for its different nationality by the neighborhood. Not once had she been treated silently by the neighborhood, but it was getting too frequent for them until they're not minding it anymore. Thus, after this incident occurred, many of her neighbors started to pay their condolences about it. Most of Afaf's classmates who once ostracized her turn to pay their sympathy. One of the mothers of Afaf's friend calms Muntaha by saying "Shayfa, shayfa! See what happens when you give a girl too much freedom in this country". This clearly refers to how far the western society had influenced Nada specifically on her habit that involved promiscuity. As we have mentioned before, that the western society's promiscuity is categorized as wild and sometimes it's beyond to even comprehend by most of muslim society, as it driven the perception of women to 'like' the sort of activity of sex, etc.

However the discrimination still occurs in Afaf's family. Even on Halloween, during the celebration of the event. One of the neighbors seemed to care about what had happened in the incident. Only to turn down the hope of recalling her sister. This is an act of indirect discrimination as he had(the neighbors) obviously mocking the misery of what Afaf had experienced. By uttering the word "I doubt she'll be back, that girl is gone".

## 2. Women's Vulnerability

When she had stepped at her teen age a bad influence of western society also befallen Afaf as it did to Nada. On her first encounter with Micheal who they did on profanity action. She had been treated as if she's special amongst all women in the class by Micheal who only eying on Afaf's body. Although he almost convinced Afaf to become his harlot. There's a glimpse of Afaf that rejects that profanity action. She believed that her virginity is like precious stone that must be protected at all cost, her virginity is the vestige of childhood which cannot be taken away like that. This shows a first step of self-actualization within Afaf, something from the bottom of her heart told Afaf that it's wrong to do such things. Due to the rebellion against Micheal, it cost a continuous discrimination against Afaf at school. She's getting a direct discrimination by other women, called her a raghead, etc. Leading more insecurities within Afaf, yet she must survive somehow in this western society.

The occurrence in Afaf's mind slipped in. She starting to give a careful thought on the conscious realization of an action that has been done, it is a natural process that occurs in a person if there is still a sense of belonging to her which is also a process that he goes through in finding an identity in the midst of an environment that always presses her. The treatment of his surroundings is the biggest challenge that being a migrant is challenging to be able to adapt easily in an environment where discrimination against migrants is often an easy target for torture and it affects the subconscious in deciding a decision. "Tim drove Afaf to Marquette Park and kept his eyes closed the whole time he kissed her neck and face and touched her breasts over her shirt. She'd listened hard to Simple Minds on the radio, drowning out his soft grunts: "Don't you forget about me . . ." Every time Afaf is outside the house doing anything he will still get inappropriate treatment even though she doesn't care about the situation, on the other hand living life like nothing happened and it can be criticized that the environment shapes a person so hard that inappropriate treatment is normalized.

Afaf's struggle is still ongoing, which he undergoes as a worker in the food sector, there is no day without receiving unpleasant treatment from the environment where she works, until the question arises in her mind, "What if her parents had abandoned Afaf, left her on someone's doorstep? Would life have Been better? She wonders if one change in a person's life can undo everything that's happened, like pouring red dye into a bucket of clear water. What if she'd never been born? Would Nada have disappeared? Might Baba have still been unfaithful?" being a daughter in a family that is not at peace as if her presence is unwanted and she reflects on the actions she did not do, regardless of that she is just a child who wants to live in the warmth of her parents' love even though the environment is bad but there is still a family left that gives her feelings safe and comfortable when she comes home.

Due to all the testaments that bestowed upon her like either discrimination in her workspace, school, or her family problem whether comes from her Baba who always got drunk after work, or her Mama who seemed to lose her mind days after days. Afaf becomes more and more fragile and confused about her own identity. This later becomes what Afaf's need, which is a grasp of faith in other words is a religion.

#### An Embracement of Self-Actualization

Through the accident that occurred on Baba, At the time Baba was intently realized the purpose of religion he must have. "Baba has never spoken about God or religion He and mama don't pray never fast on Ramadhan as she knows Khalti Nesreen do". He tried to convince the rest of the family about the importance of religion they could've had. Yet, Mama is against it as she thinks it's too late for that, that they're an unforgiven family due to all the testaments that befallen them.

This occurrence on Baba's thought about religious rattles Afaf as it is a new side of her father that she can't quite understand, yet she is willing to try to share on what Baba's had so does Majeed. As he explained the base knowledge of Islam to them, she started remembering all those worse memories she had with the Boys. An unwanted hand from different Boys had roamed through her body from the first perpetrator Micheal Wilson, Tim Mackey the manager where Afaf worked, Jonathan Duke a stranger who gave her a compliment at library as third perpetrator. Being the objective

of most men in western society on top of that with the discrimination she's had, it must've left a scar that can't be patch easily. This is where the turning point would began on Afaf's journey to become a devout muslimah. With the initiation and guidance from her father, making it a second step of self-actualization within Afaf.

At the time, when she arrived at Islamic Center of Greater Chicago, She felt something that she had never experienced before, which is a form of tolerance and love. She was greeted instantly by other muslimah there. "Afaf hasn't belonged to any place. Sameera and the other arabiyyat flash across her mind. The taste of rejection is sharp on her tongue. Still, she climbs out of the car, and Baba squeezes her shoulder" This shows how she considers the words of her mother as the unforgiven. Although she hasn't shown any of her behavior towards her mother or family, yet she realized it by herself.

Within Islamic Center of Greater Chicago, she recognized one of her classmates who would later be one of her turning aspects towards the transformation within Afaf. Kowkab was her name, she's one of the middle easterners as well. Thus, she also had experienced the same thing as Afaf did. A double discrimination due to her nationality and her beliefs as devout muslimah. Even a bully tempted targeting her name as it means a planet. But the western society with its bad habit and bad spontaneous utter words contain an ambiguity within it. 'Uranus' is a planet that exists in the solar system, as it can be separated into 'Ur (Your)' and 'Anus'. Which is a verbal discrimination that is quite sharp.

After the brief re-introducing phase toward each other. She was invited by Kawkab to play at her house, after arriving and being invited into Kowkab's house, a warm welcome from his family immediately accompanied Afaf's presence. Afaf's dream of family harmony was felt in Kowkab's family, something he did not get in his own family, and she also did not feel the complicated feelings between family members when she visited Kowkab's family. Activities in the dining room were also time-consuming, carefully placed and filled with affection from family members. On the other hand, God's guidance has come to Baba, which has also significantly improved Afaf's family atmosphere and Baba's relationship with Mama. One of the family traditions in the dining room is to exchange news between family members, the support expressed is a sign that family members love each other and not forgetting in the middle of chatting Afaf is asked about the work they are doing and as fellow immigrants. We hope that foreign policy in the west will be improved for the convenience of immigrants, especially Muslims.

All the warmth in Kowkab's family made Afaf sick and wanted to vomit because she was already drowning in jealousy of the things she could not have, Kowkab realized. Kowkab's mother shouted from the hallway to remind them that prayer time had arrived, then Kowkab gave Afaf a mukena and prayer mat to pray, but Afaf asked "why do you want to be friends with me? I'm not like you, I'm a rotten person, Kowkab replied "You're not a rotten person but just a person who is lost and then also said you just need time and Allah will direct you and want us to be happy". The word she uttered towards Afaf had moved Afaf's heart. She's in the stage of Abraham Maslow's statement which is a devotion towards something. She had found the values and

purpose in life. In this case she had devoted to beauty and truth in Islamic lens through the influence of Kowkab, not to mention the first initiator being her own father.

“Kowkab’s words hanging above her: ‘It’s never too late, Everyday we can be better, there’s no limit, no end, you only have to believe Afaf’” The more she delves into Kowkab's word the more she conceives it with full of embracement. This was the first time she felt like a family where she’d felt truly belonged anywhere. As it had also been mentioned by Abraham Maslow an experience of the person who is wholly and fully human, an experience without the self-consciousness of the adolescent. Also, self-actualization is an on-going process; it means making each of the many single choices about whether to lie or be honest, whether to steal or not steal at a particular point, to make each of these choices as a growth choice.

The next process that was taken was that Afaf began to want to hijrah to the right path, by starting prayer and fasting with the initial intention of whether by doing so it would miraculously change her mother and make her family close even before the disappearance of Nada. Afaf wonders if religion can unite family members with each other so that when bad things happen, they cannot be separated? Kowkab replied that you will find out then turned to Kowkab who invited her to pray.

Afaf's decision to hijrah is in the final phase where she is slowly living what Allah has commanded of her as a Muslim woman who tries to be istiqomah to worship and obey her religion. However, even though she tries to live her life by using a new identity as a Muslim woman, it is not easy because there are many obstacles that come in the way, starting from her own family, especially her mother who may have a different perspective on organized religion. The point is not to be a person who is fanatical about religion but only to follow people who obey according to the rules taught without any deviant ideology. Perhaps she’s gotten too comfortable with the environment that western society offers, plus with the scar regarding Nada still has its impact.

### 3. Afaf’s Challenges on Her New Challenges

However, it wouldn’t be the case as she simply doesn’t want to acknowledge the beliefs that Afaf and Baba possess. This once again recalls the fact that not all middle easterners are muslims, according to the database, the percentage of religious affiliation of Arab-Americans, is only 25% Muslim. Afaf’s mother wouldn’t want to relinquish her misery on prayer and fasting as devout muslimah would do. She has been a ghost clinging to her past searching for a portal back to her past. Her pain and herself are alone, no higher being can ever claim that.

“Afaf touches the hem of her scarf, wondering if she’s made a mistake, and a sense of preserve disappointment comes over her: She still wants mama’s approval” She began developing a self-doubt within the actualization she’s made. The urge of her mama’s approval lingering in her mind, as she rejects the path that Afaf and Baba walk into. Yet she manages to convince herself that perhaps Baba is enough to stand by her side. The Impact of the different mindset of faithness had become more vast within Afaf’s family as now Majeed who not only followed Afaf and Baba’s path but also put boundaries among them.

“Her son Ayman shifts in his chair listening, his brows furrowing as he tried to comprehend their conversation. The planes collided, a classmate called him a terrorist, a word he’d never heard before, as insidious to Afaf as rapist or pedophile.” This quotation is obviously referring to the 9/11 that happened in 2001. The time skip of Afaf to where she’s had a family and her son now becomes a target discrimination by western society in the form of verbal abuse/ new mockery. Not only was it targeting her son but as a whole islamic society. The Islamic society had gone from towel-heads to terrorists. According to Anne Padersen, the Middle-easterners are more likely to experience this than their male counterparts since 9/11. As printed by HREOC. Even after the new discrimination that befallen islamic society, Afaf still manages to believe in her faith and face these new challenges. She still attends the Nurideen Highschool with her scarf wrapped around her head not like most teachers would do even though Majeed had warned her regarding this situation, that it could endanger herself. She wouldn’t do so because she felt more humiliating surrender than protection. The discrimination had become worse overtime in western society as now not only in the form of verbal abuse but also a direct discrimination or a physical assault targeting muslimah. Others wouldn’t be so lucky to escape with bruises on their face and some injuries.

The western society had also implement an act of awareness that referring more on discrimination towards Islamic society Western societies have also implemented awareness actions that refer more to discrimination against Muslims as experienced by Afaf and her husband at the airport who were about to go on Hajj, this treatment is what Muslims focus on especially when living in an occupied country and not all western countries treat Muslims like that. When Muslim migrants talk about their rights against civilians, it is thought that there will be attacks if Muslim wishes are not met, but despite this, migrants just want to feel comfortable as civilians feel and be treated fairly.

#### 4. Afaf’s Resolvment

After the brief debate with his brother Majeed regarding the religion. He quoted ‘Religion doesn’t make reality go away’ She replied ‘But it shields us from ugliness sometimes, we need that Maj. Even if it’s not permanent. Isn’t this what civilization has been doing since the dawn of time?’ Meaning that the fact they had been dealt with by the act of discrimination in western-society, he doesn’t believe in the presence of God as Afaf did. The contradiction and the distinct mindset within the Afaf family has led them into disunity, Afaf with Baba and Majeed with Mama yet She tries to tangle it through her beliefs. That is the goal of Afaf’s resolvment.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Self-actualization is the highest point where humans realize the potential they have, there are many processes they go through to reach that stage. The case that can be learned from the novel by Sahar Mustfah is *The Beauty of Your Face*, the depiction



of the character Afaf as a tough woman who has gone through so many challenges that she can achieve her potential as a superior Muslim woman, but not forgetting her nature as a Muslim woman who is obedient to the husband and religion. Obstacle after obstacle was overcome from a dark past which included searching for identity, conflict within the family, a cruel environment for Muslim immigrants and finally being faced with an attack where he worked as a school principal. The environment can influence a person's personality depending on the person's response, whether being there can develop him or make him drift away with the current which makes him destroyed. It is important as a human being to be aware of every step he takes so that there will be no regrets in the end.

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