

**They're Just Like Everybody Else:
A Postcolonial Reading of Rohina Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace***

*Ingy Hassan**

“In a world of color prejudice ... the myth of mass inferiority of most men [has] built a wall which many centuries will not break down.”

W.E.B. Du Bois (1925, 407)

Contemporary American-Pakistani playwright, actress, and educator Rohina Malik is an artist whose drama is heavily engaged in an issue that occupies centre stage in the lives of minorities, namely stereotyping, together with the problematics of discrimination, identity crisis, resistance, and the different forms of attachment to/detachment from the motherland. In her drama, she challenges stereotyping through portraying its painful impact and presenting an alternative image of Arabs and Muslims as ordinary human beings with ordinary strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. In an interview with Dana Lynn Formby, Malik sheds light on the influence of stereotyping on the presentation of Muslims in the media:

I'm really concerned about the portrayal of Muslims in our media [...] It concerns me to see Muslims frequently represented as the villain, the terrorist, somebody who's plotting something evil. Rarely do we see Muslims as ordinary human beings, and that's so dangerous [...] I, as a Muslim playwright, can tell stories where Muslims are just normal people like everybody else. I'm hoping that things begin to change with time. (Formby 2017, para. 2)

In another interview, Malik points to the intended message of her play *Yasmina's Necklace*, namely putting to question the popular stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims:

* Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.

Cairo Studies in English – 2020(2): <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>

I wrote the play because I'm very disturbed that, when you see Muslim characters, we are never regular people [...] So I was hoping the play could take audiences into two living rooms of two normal, regular Muslim families, Yasmina's family and Sam's family. They're not perfect people; they're human. They're just like everybody else, with their faults and their contradictions. (Belanger 2017, para. 3-4)

Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace* dramatises the life of two Muslim families living in Chicago: the first is that of Ali, an Iraqi immigrant, Sara, his Puerto Rican Muslim wife, and their son, Abdul Samee, who has changed his name to Sam. The second is an Iraqi refugee family new to Chicago; this family consists of Musa and his only daughter, Yasmina – called Yasu by people close to her. Musa and Yasmina fled Iraq after the death of Yasmina's mother because of the war. Yasmina's and Sam's parents get them introduced to each other, hoping to help them get married and have a settled family life. As love develops between Yasmina and Sam, they unfold their innermost thoughts, feelings, fears, and sufferings, bringing stereotyping to the fore as the central issue in their experiences.

First published in 2016, *Yasmina's Necklace* was received with much critical acclaim; most interviews and magazine reviews focused mainly on Malik's attack on stereotypes created about immigrants and refugees, especially Arabs and Muslims. This article seeks to contribute to the critique on *Yasmina's Necklace* by attempting a postcolonial reading of the play, with particular focus on W. E. B. Du Bois and Edward Said. Various concepts at the core of postcolonial theory, such as othering, stereotyping, resistance, exile and the relation towards homeland, among many others, are tackled in the play. Analysing the play in the light of these concepts as presented by Du Bois and Said aims at presenting a deeper understanding of the text and the issues it addresses. Foucault's concept of the relationship between power and knowledge will also be drawn upon to inform an interpretation of the process of creating as well as promoting stereotypes, a process which builds borders that come to engulf the lives of minorities.

Although Du Bois' views focus on the suffering of African Americans under the yoke of racial segregation, and their struggle to attain their social and economic rights at the turn of the twentieth century, his ideas hold true of the

challenges faced by Arabs and Muslims as minority groups in contemporary American society.

Du Bois' social philosophy anticipated postcolonial theory while diagnosing the Negro Problem and exposing the superior race/inferior race dichotomy which was later developed by Edward Said. In his essay "Of the Dawn of Freedom," Du Bois analyses the African American strife, attributing it to racial prejudice: "The PROBLEM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY is the problem of the color-line, —the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" ([1903] 1994b, 9). Later, in his essay "The Negro Mind Reaches Out," he criticises

the curious, most childish propaganda [which] dominates us, by which good, earnest, and even intelligent men have come by millions to believe almost religiously that white folk are a peculiar and chosen people whose one great accomplishment is civilization and that civilization must be protected from the rest of the world. (Du Bois 1925, 407)

Du Bois' statement depicts racial prejudice as the product of a discriminatory ideology that was nourished until it became regarded as an indisputable belief, a truth. Hence, there is a compelling relationship between his philosophy and Foucault's theory of knowledge structures created by power and the shaping of those power relations. Foucault (1977) reads history as a "form of a war ... relations of power" (114) and relates the mechanisms of power to "the effects of truth that this power produces and transmits, and which in their turn reproduce this power" (93). It will be illustrated in the analysis that these concepts are inseparable from the experience of stereotyping as one where bias is created by specific knowledge forms shaped by power to ensure its grip on its objects.

In his essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," Du Bois first coined the term "double-consciousness" defining it as "a peculiar sensation ... this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on him in amused contempt and pity" ([1903] 1994a, 2). He further describes the pain which such an experience causes; he writes: "One ever feels his two-ness ... two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (2). For Du Bois, double-consciousness is at the core of the psychological experience of the African American, living "in this American world, —a world which yields him no true

self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (2). Regarded as a “poor race,” Du Bois continues, the African American is denied his social and economic rights (5). Exploring how, in the process of challenging racism, the racially segregated can overcome this “peculiar sensation” that he describes, Du Bois claims:

To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark ... the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him ... he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. (5)

That is, in such a dismal experience of prejudice and humiliation, it becomes a necessity for the oppressed not to lose sense of his/her true self. It is only by believing in and being himself/herself that he/she can prosper and earn self-respect as well as the respect of the world around him/her.

In the play, Sam and Yasmina represent this experience, though each dramatises it in a different way. The following lines will present an analysis of their experience in the light of this Du Boisian theory. Sam exists at this interstice between the American culture and his original heritage, which makes the Du Boisian concept of double-consciousness enlightening of his experience. In their first encounter, when Yasmina asks him about his heritage, he replies “salad,” referring to his Latino Arab Muslim family background (Malik 2016, 31). In his second encounter with Yasmina, he explicitly describes his feeling of being not fully embraced in any of these cultures: “When I’m with my dad’s family, I’m not Arab enough. When I’m with my mom’s family, I’m not Puerto Rican enough. High school sucked. I was never American enough” (44). This complex identity continues to influence Sam’s personal life. When his parents talk to him about Yasmina, he replies: “I can’t marry a girl from Iraq ... they have a completely different mentality, it would never work. I’m an American, and I need to marry an American” (19). However, ironically, Sam had already been married to a non-Muslim American and his marriage ended in divorce; while the marriage ended due to “some infidelity on her part,” as Sam tells Yasmina, he admits that before that, the couple had “stopped communicating” (47). His words portray this relationship as one which was based on love, yet lacking an element

which is crucial to its success, namely a shared background. Sam manifests double-consciousness and the torment it causes. Seeing his identity through the different cultural lenses he is examined by, it seems to him that his identity is a combination of various components which seem irreconcilable in certain situations. At the outset of the play, when his parents fail to convince him to “try [their] way of doing things,” he bursts in frustration: “I was born in the wrong family. Wrong name, wrong culture, wrong everything!” (13).

Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to see Sam as a person who looks at his culture and his religion with contempt and wants to dissociate himself from them. In fact, Sam is suffering because he clings to his culture with complete awareness that this presents an obstacle in his life. Examined closely in the context of Sam’s portrayal in the whole play, Sam’s previous statement discloses a situation more complex than its immediate meaning. “I know who I am” (14) as he confirms in the same scene, and later, in his first meeting with Yasmina he asserts, “I do value my culture” (32). However, he immediately describes his dilemma explicitly through adding: “*but I also want to succeed*” (32; italics mine). This reflects Sam’s awareness of the complexity of his situation. His statement exposes a juxtaposition which exists between his ethnicity and his prospect for success in the society he lives in, another manifestation of Du Bois’ elaboration on African American double-consciousness: “In this merging [the African American] he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost ... He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellow, *without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face*” (Du Bois [1903] 1994a, 2-3; italics mine).

This is precisely what Sam is going through; he wants to be recognized as a Muslim and an American, to be treated as an equal. Nevertheless, in many situations, he is rejected based on his ethnic background. He, along with other members of his community as we know from the play, namely Osama, Saddam, and Muhammad, face this problem of labeling: “The moment I open my mouth and say my name, I’m put into a box,” Sam explains to Yasmina (Malik 2016, 32). To his disappointment, “Every resume that had [his] name on it was ignored. So, [he] did an experiment. [He] changed [his] name, resent [his] resume and boom, instant responses from top companies. [He] got a position that hundreds of people applied for” (32). That is why he changed his name or rather, “*had to*” change it, as he emphasizes (11).

Thus, it can be tenably argued that by calling his family, his name and his culture “wrong,” Sam is expressing the perspective of the society rather than his

own (13). He is not trying to dissociate himself from his heritage, yet, at the same time, he is aware that it is not uncommon for many in the society to look to his community with some skepticism and, consequently, deny him privileges granted to others of different backgrounds. This makes him feel trapped in this unjust classification. He, therefore, decides to take the only course of action which he believes can help him get his right, a good job that he is qualified for. He changes his name so as to conceal his identity in the corporate world.

Exposed to racial prejudice, denied his rights, and aware of his image as inferior in the eyes of the Other, Sam's character carries the main elements that shape the African American experience according to Du Bois' concept of double-consciousness. Yet, Sam's way of handling this situation marks a departure from the African American model Du Bois portrays. Sam does not fall in the trap of "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on him in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois [1903] 1994a, 2). As previously mentioned, Sam does not lose sight of his identity or lose his pride in his culture of origin. At the same time, he does not have enough courage to face the world with his identity. What he resorts to is a kind of manipulation or deception, and he is aware of that. "I know who I have to be to the outside world," he says to Yasmina (Malik 2016, 64). Sam sees life as a game he has to play, and he believes that if he does not follow the rules of this game, he will end as a loser. He tells Yasmina that he believes he knows "how to play the game" and is ready to do "whatever it takes to succeed" (33). He is totally convinced that racial bias is real: "White people will always get a large slice of the American pie, with ice cream and a cherry on top. Minorities, well, let's be real. Crumbs were created for the people of color" (33). His tone is bitter, as his words imply being driven to that course of action where he avoids segregation by hiding behind a name that is "easier," and indeed, it has made his life easier in the corporate world (32).

Seen in this light and closely examined from a postcolonial perspective, Sam's experience of double-consciousness manifests the ambivalence in the power relation between the coloniser and the colonised, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2007) put it:

The problem for colonial discourse is that it wants to produce compliant subjects who reproduce its assumptions, habits and values – that is, 'mimic' the colonizer. But instead it produces ambivalent subjects whose **mimicry** is never very far from mockery. Ambivalence describes this fluctuating relationship between

mimicry and mockery, an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling to colonial dominance. In this respect, it is not necessarily disempowering for the colonial subject; but rather can be seen to be *ambi-valent* or ‘two-powered’. The effect of this ambivalence (the simultaneous attraction and repulsion) is to produce a profound disturbance of the authority of colonial discourse. (10)

In fact, rather than impersonating the Other as an act of compliance, Sam takes on a “very white” name as a way of challenging authority (Malik 2016, 32). In other words, Sam makes himself, seemingly, blend in the Other, not to “reproduce its assumptions, habits and values,” but, on the contrary, to defy these values and violate rules based on biased discourse and, finally, undermine the Other’s authority and attain his right which he has been denied (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007, 10). His “mimicry” of the name here becomes an act of resistance and ridicule against preconceived ideas, a way to reverse the rules of the game to his own advantage.

On the other hand, Yasmina stands in for the next stage in Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness where the oppressed figure acquires emotional maturity, realizing its worth and becoming itself. When Yasmina says “I want people to know where I’m from” (Malik 2016, 29), not only does she proudly embrace her heritage, reflect “self-consciousness” and “self-respect” (Du Bois [1903] 1994a, 5), but—as opposed to Sam—she also shows courage and determination to face the world with her identity. Here comes the significance of the play’s title. Yasmina always wears a necklace with a pendant in the shape of Iraq with “IRAQ” inscribed on it. Sam is surprised that she has “guts to wear that necklace, in these times,” and sees this as a “political statement” that is likely to expose her to trouble “with all the madness in the world today,” believing that “people are ignorant” (Malik 2016, 29). Yet, Yasmina is ready to face any possible consequences: “if something happened, I could handle it,” she replies (29). This implies the lack of truth in the preconceived ideas about her country, and her confidence in the fact that when people’s eyes are opened to the truth about this part of the world, there will be no room for prejudice.

Interestingly, this ignorance which restrains Sam from revealing his background in public in fear of being mistreated is the same reason that urges Yasmina to show her religious and cultural identity. It is suggested that Yasmina feels she has a duty to fulfill, namely, to illuminate the Other about her country of origin and her culture, and, consequently, correct the false ideas about her homeland. An instance of such preconceived ideas about the Arab World is

shown in the situation Yasmina narrates to Sam. She tells him she has met a woman at the grocery store where she works as a cashier. When the woman saw Yasmina's necklace, she burst, "How can you be proud of being from that shit country. You are all a bunch of terrorists ... Get back on your camel, and go back to I-raq" (29). Yasmina reveals her surprise as to the ignorance of the Other and throws light on the false image people have about her country: "It's funny. Iraq was known for having the most educated women. Now it's known for violence" (30).

Yasmina's family too suffers directly as a result of this prejudiced image. Her father used to be "a professional. People respected [him]. [He] was the best dentist in [their] neighborhood and everybody knew it!" (16). Now, he has no job and no prospect of being hired because of this prejudice which is a result of ignorance. "Nobody will hire me! The way they look at me, as if I'm some dirty terrorist," he says to his daughter (15). Yasmina feels responsible for changing this image of Iraq as violent and backward, and she embraces this duty through always proudly showing her heritage. Immigration for her – though not voluntary, as she is a refugee whose father left his homeland because he "had no choice" – becomes a way of bridging the gap between two worlds through informing the Other about the truth of her ethnic heritage (23). It is as if she crosses physical borders to eliminate religious and cultural prejudice.

Yasmina's way of dealing with prejudice is similar to the African American model of reacting to racial discrimination according to Du Bois ([1903] 1994a): "he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, *'to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another'*" (5; italics mine). Indeed, Yasmina believes in one's awareness of who he/she really is and in the assertion of one's identity as the shields that protect him/her through life's turmoil. She believes in her mother's notion that "people with no roots allow others to define them, because they don't know who they are, where they are going, or where they come from" and that, as such, they are similar to "the wicked tree, whose roots are weak, so weak that any storm can blow you away" (Malik 2016, 48). In contrast, Yasmina is determined to be "like the goodly tree [whose] branches reach high towards the heavens. No storm, no matter how violent, can uproot [it because its] roots are *deep*, established firmly in the earth" (48). This is not to say, however, that trying to be oneself in the context of bias is an easy course of action for the oppressed. Despite Yasmina's strength, there are times along the play's course of action where her emotional vulnerability comes to the surface. Feeling rejected because of her ethnic background, she sometimes sees it impossible to cross the border

of prejudice and loses hope in any change. For instance, she says to Sam “I’m a tree who has been uprooted and placed in a strange land. I can’t grow here, and every day I die a little bit more” (80). Yet, she resumes the battle against bias. She never loses sight of her goal; she is able to quickly regain her belief in herself. “I’m strong! I survived!” she says in the same scene (80).

Drawing upon Foucault and Said gives more insight into understanding this fluctuation in Yasmina’s position. In *Power/Knowledge* (1977), Foucault describes a power relation as “an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces” (200) which is “structured essentially round a certain number of great prohibition functions” (122). Seen in this light, Yasmina is an object of power struggling against preconceived ideas about her ethnicity. Being indoctrinated in the consciousness of a considerable part of the society, these ideas have become too steady to change and, also, powerful enough to enforce restrictions that constrain the lives of those who are prejudiced against. This power relation involved in the concept of stereotyping determines the extent to which the object of power can achieve his/her goal. In his article “On Lost Causes,” Said defines the phrase “a lost cause” as “something you support or believe in that can no longer be believed in except as something without hope of achievement” (Said [2000] 2013a, 487). This definition implies a power relation where power dominates ideology and controls its outcome. Said’s definition describes Yasmina’s situation; she believes in the necessity of changing the popular stereotypes about her community. Yet, there are times when this goal seems impossible to achieve because the society’s narrative of power typically determines the loss of the weaker side’s cause (Said [2000] 2013a, 487). That is, being the object of power, Yasmina seems unlikely to attain her goal of changing the preconceived ideas undermining her culture.

Foucault and Said proceed with their theories, adding the idea of resistance which, conversely, explains Yasmina’s resilience. Foucault states that “there are no relations of power without resistances” (1977, 142). As an object of power, Yasmina shows resistance and her dilemma lies in the fact that the goal she strives to achieve involves “subversive recodifications of power relations,” that is, disruption in the power relation where she is the weaker side subjected to racial prejudice (Foucault 1977, 123). The strength she regains can be elucidated by Said’s argument that whether a cause is lost or not depends on judgement rather than an objective situation (Said [2000] 2013a, 487). Yasmina fights stereotyping attempting to assert herself through her identity, thus an individual worthy of recognition and respect. Had she succumbed to the objective view of her situation, she would have seen “the survival only of powerful nations and

peoples” (487). Her position, however, is based on her judgement, on believing in the legitimacy of challenging and changing stereotypes, regardless of the challenges which hinder her from reaching her goal. It is this judgement which gives her strength.

Yasmina believes in firmly adhering to her identity as the only way for change because hiding her identity implies being ashamed of it, which in turn helps reinforce the negative image propagated about her homeland. This is expressed in her first encounter with Sam. When she knows that he has changed his name, she calls him “phony” (Malik 2016, 34), and later explains, “by changing your name, you are denying your culture” (38). Yasmina sees this attitude of giving in to white supremacy as integral in enhancing it. She makes this clear when she tells Sam, “*Because of people like you! You’re the reason nothing changes*” (33). That is, what Sam sees as success is, in fact, a defeat in her eyes. Having “watched [her] culture and history slip through [her] fingers,” Yasmina is completely aware of the danger this poses (38). She warns Sam that “the storm is coming,” and advises him, “Begin with your name” (48). In other words, to her, this danger means the loss of identity which is the beginning of a complete fall, and she does not accept that fate. She is resolved to preserve her culture and put an end to racial prejudice by being true to her heritage.

Malik’s characters suffer from “the standardization and cultural stereotyping [which] have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century ... imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’” (Said 1978, 26). The way the lady at the grocery store insults Yasmina is nothing but the reflection of the “contemporary Orientalist attitudes [that] flood the press and the popular mind. Arabs, for example are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose underserved wealth is an affront to real civilization,” (108) as “the embodiment of incompetence” (287). Yasmina’s challenge of this prejudiced image of her culture makes her the dramatic mouthpiece of Malik who says “To me, writing this play was that hammer to smash those stereotypes” (Belanger 2017, para. 5). When Yasmina says to Sam, “I speak with an accent, but I don’t think with an accent” (Malik 2016, 39), she is implicitly suggesting that not having the physical features of the people of the “superior” West does not make her “aberrant, undeveloped, [or] inferior” (Said 1978, 300). With her reasoning, courage, and intellectual independence, Yasmina is, thus, destabilizing the Orientalist “ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (42).

As pointed out earlier, stereotyping and its resultant racial prejudice are inseparable from a kind of ignorance, an idea that lends itself to one of Said’s

main arguments about the “general relationship between culture and empire” which he elucidates in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994, xi). In *Yasmina’s Necklace*, when Sam refers to racists as ignorant, he implies that stereotypes about the people of “other” places is the result of the obscure knowledge the West has about “the mysterious East,” “the distant lands and peoples” (xi). However, based on Said’s assertion in his introduction to *Orientalism* that “men make their own history, ... [and that] what they can know is what they have made” (1978, 50), this ignorance, this stereotyping, acquires an additional level of interpretation that is best informed by Said’s concept of Orientalism and Foucault’s view of the power-knowledge relation. Said’s statement suggests that the stereotypes which form the knowledge of the Western world about the East are products of the former’s mind. Seen from a postcolonial perspective, this process of stereotyping is essential for maintaining the Orientalist dichotomy of “‘We’ are this, ‘they’ are that” (237). Therefore, this biased idea does not exist out of the lack of knowledge or information.

In fact, examined in the light of Foucault’s power/knowledge theory, it can be argued that this bias represents a specific knowledge structure that has been created by power and has later become popularly adopted as unquestionable. Foucault uses the word “truth” to refer to this kind of knowledge, stating that this truth “is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power” (1977, 131). In other words, truth is attached to the knowledge produced by power, and it is through these knowledge structures or schemes that power sustains itself. This confirms Said’s idea about the “unbroken arc of knowledge and power [that] connects the European or Western statesman and the Western Orientalists; it forms the rim of the stage containing the Orient” (1978, 104). Thus, to use Said’s words, “His [the Orientalist’s] Orient is not the Orient as it is, but the Orient as it has been Orientalized” (104). Worthy of note here is that it is necessary to distinguish between the creator of knowledge and the recipient, that is power and those who adopt the knowledge it creates. In *Yasmina’s Necklace*, Sam and Yasmina become victims of a knowledge scheme that stereotypes them and makes them rejected even prior to knowing them. This suggests the dispersal of power and, therefore, knowledge, a central idea in Foucault’s thought. To illustrate, racial discourse with its preconceived ideas about Arabs and Muslims as backward and violent influences Sam and Yasmina through individuals who have received it and eventually adopted it as the knowledge structure accepted and supported by power.

Although in relation to Sam and Yasmina those who reject them show as victimisers, those victimisers can simultaneously be seen as victims, as objects of power. Having a certain structure of knowledge imposed on them through being established as irrefutable, they are ripped of their independent reasoning and pushed into blindly conforming to that knowledge characterised by “human detachment” and “absence of sympathy” (Said 1978, 104). Thus, the recipients of knowledge, in *Yasmina’s Necklace*, are intellectually and emotionally coerced. It can be argued, therefore, that the dehumanising effect of racial discourse, of the ideology which Said refers to as “the web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology,” extends to include both the subject and the object of racism (Said 1978, 27). In this context of dehumanised individuals following an ideology of whose truth they are ignorant, Yasmina’s determination and her attempt to change this knowledge, these stereotypes, become a mission toward enlightening the Other. This is a subversion of the Orientalist notions about “bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples” (Said 1994, xi), with the object of racism—Yasmina—bringing the truth about her homeland to the minds of those whom truth has been obscured by biases and stereotypes. Yasmina is resolved to be true to the promise she had made to Amir, her lover and childhood friend, before she left Baghdad. In the last memory scene in *Yasmina’s Necklace*, we see Amir telling her: “tell them our story, tell the world who we are. (*He cries.*) Tell them we are human beings! Tell them we just want clean water to drink, we want peace, we want to marry our childhood sweethearts. Tell them, Yasu. *Tell them we are human beings!*” (Malik 2016, 78). This subtle reversal of the Orientalist roles of those who are racially prejudiced against as ignorant and the racist as enlightening powerfully contributes to Rohina Malik’s purpose of shattering stereotypes.

Central to Edward Said’s thought as well as in *Yasmina’s Necklace* is the motif of exile and the relationship between the exiled and his/her homeland. In his essay “Reflections on Exile,” Said maintains that attachment to one’s homeland is at the core of the experience of exile: “Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and bond with, one’s native place; what is true of all exile is not that home and love of home are lost, but that loss is inherent in the very existence of both” (Said [2000] 2013b, 190). Yasmina is a refugee, a person who unwillingly leaves her homeland. “I never wanted to leave Baghdad,” she says in more than one instance in the play (Malik 2016, 33; 41). Her homeland always exists in her heart, her memories, and her art. When Sam asks her what she is painting, she answers, “Baghdad. Always, Baghdad” (52). Brokenhearted as she is, Yasmina is far from weak. Her love for and attachment to her homeland are

not only the reasons of her agony; they are also the very sources of her strength. “Yasmina draws her strength from her homeland, which is never far from her mind” (Friswold 2017, para. 8). Friswold’s statement is compelling; Yasmina’s attachment to Iraq as empowering her shows in her pride of her identity, being a prolific artist who is always inspired by her native place, and in her plan to start an organization to help refugees. Thus, while away, her native country is still the driving force behind everything she does.

In “On Lost Causes,” Said further elaborates on the experience of separation from one’s native country, highlighting the effect of the bond to one’s homeland on the exiled person’s life in the new land:

Every culture that I know of emphasizes [...] the idea that there is more to life than doing well: the “higher things” for which everyone is taught to strive are loyalty to the cause of nation, service to others, service to God, family, and tradition. All are components of the national identity. To rise in the world, that motif of self-help and personal betterment, is routinely attached to the good of the community and the improvement of one’s people. ([2000] 2013a, 489)

This holds true of both Yasmina and Sam. In her first encounter with Sam, Yasmina emphasizes the importance of being true to one’s national identity, seeing this as a higher cause in life that should be placed ahead of all other goals. In explicit contempt of Sam’s changing his name, she tells him, “You deny your heritage. And for what? To have a fat wallet?” (Malik 2016, 33). With her powerful attachment to her country guiding her life, Yasmina’s actions can be understood as manifestations of her “loyalty to the cause of nation, service to others, service to God, family, and tradition” (Said [2000] 2013a, 489). In addition to verbally expressing her pride in her national identity, Yasmina symbolically reflects this pride by wearing her necklace, giving voice to the sorrow and suffering of her people through her art, and trying to help refugees through the organization she is starting. All these actions dramatise her unbreakable bond with her homeland and the idea that her own life and “the good of the community” have coalesced (489). Yasmina manifests Amir’s statement that “That land [Iraq] is a part of you. It’s in your blood” (Malik 2016, 39), and fulfills his will: “always stay connected to it” (33). It is particularly significant that Yasmina believes that contributing to “the improvement of one’s people” is a responsibility she eagerly and happily embraces (Said [2000] 2013a, 489).

After she and her father were settled down in Chicago, she tells Sam, she “knew that the best way to thank Allah, was to help other refugees” (Malik 2016, 31). In other words, rather than being detached from her native community, Yasmina develops more sympathy and a stronger bond with her community through being forced to leave her homeland.

The vigour Yasmina acquires through this attachment to her homeland extends beyond her, she inspires others with the same strength. A substantial change is noticed in Sam’s attitude toward showing loyalty to his Arab identity after he knows Yasmina. In the past, he did not have the courage to assert his identity in public. He tells Yasmina:

I’ll never forget the first day of the invasion [...] I went out with my friends to a bar. I just wanted to forget about what was happening. In the bar, the news was on, and one of my “friends” who knows my Dad’s Iraqi, started to cheer with everyone else as we watched Baghdad get bombed [...] I wanted to just scream at him and pound his face. But I didn’t. I didn’t say or do anything. Here was my dad’s family hiding in a mosque, trying to survive the bombs, while I was in a bar watching people celebrate. *And I did nothing*. It just made me feel like shit. (46)

It is true that Sam has been to Baghdad only once long ago as a child, yet he still retains his bond in it even in this situation where he did not stand up to his friends’ disregard of the destruction of his homeland. The mere fact that he felt guilty for being passive before the humiliation of his native country implies his attachment to it. Later, after he knows Yasmina, he starts to take practical steps toward expressing this attachment. For instance, he connects her to a lawyer who can help her with starting the refugee-help organization. Later, this change in Sam becomes more explicit. In drastic contrast to his previous concern regarding Yasmina’s wearing her Iraq necklace, at the end of the play, he tells her “I want you to wear your necklace, it’s a part of you. Iraq was your past” (80). Thus, Sam starts to believe in one’s right to uphold one’s heritage and show pride in it in the face of the Other, regardless of the latter’s view of him.

Yasmina’s Necklace, thus, contributes to portraying the image of the American society as being “at the forefront in dealing with issues of ethnic interface” (Kim 1995, 347). Set in post-September 11 American society, the play depicts the lives of Arab characters struggling with the negative dogmatic image ascribed to them by stereotypes that were created and elevated to the level of the

sacred by an extremist ideology. Double-consciousness becomes an inevitable outcome in such a situation where a person is aware of being looked to with skepticism due to his/her ethnicity. It has been the purpose of this study to explore this experience as dramatised in Rohina Malik's *Yasmina's Necklace* from a postcolonial perspective. With the concept of othering and the superior/inferior dichotomy at its core, postcolonial theory significantly informs a critique of this text, as the characters' relationship to the society they live in comprises several elements characteristic of a typical coloniser-colonised relationship. The ways the two main characters react to the experience of double-consciousness represent different modes of dealing with racial prejudice; yet, at the end, those two modes converge to reveal being true to one's roots as a precondition for self-realization and self-respect.

Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. 2007. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge.
- Belanger, Christian. 2017. "Playwright Rohina Malik on Portraying Diverse Muslim Characters and Using Art as a Hammer." *Chicago Magazine*. Oct. 19, 2017.
<https://www.chicagomag.com/arts-culture/October-2017/Rohina-Malik-Yasminas-Necklace/>.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. (1903) 1994a. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1-7. New York: Dover.
- (1903) 1994b. "Of the Dawn of Freedom." *The Souls of Black Folk*, 9-24. New York: Dover.
- 1925. "The Negro Mind Reaches Out." *The Negro Mind*, edited by Alain Locke, 385-414. New York: Touchstone.
- Friswold, Paul. 2017. "Mustard Seed's *Yasmina's Necklace* Illuminates the Lives of Muslim Immigrants." *Riverfront Times*. Feb. 1, 2017.
<http://2016.mustardseedtheatre.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Yasmina_review_riverfronttimes.pdf>.
- Formby, Dana Lynn. 2017. "'It Started with a Necklace': Meet Playwright Rohina Malik." *Goodman Theatre*. Oct. 9, 2017.
<https://www.onstage.goodmantheatre.org/2017/10/09/it-started-with-a-necklace-meet-playwright-rohina-malik/>
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon.

- Kim, Y.Y. 1995. "Identity Development: From Cultural to Intercultural," *Information and Behavior: Interaction and Identity*, edited by B. H. Mokros, 347-369. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Malik, Rohina. 2016. *Yasmina's Necklace*. Woodstock: Dramatic Publishing Company.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- (2000) 2013a. "On Lost Causes." *Reflections on Exile And Other Essays*, 487-509. London: Granta Books.
- (2000) 2013b. "Reflections on Exile." *Reflections on Exile And Other Essays*, 180-192. London: Granta Books.