

Muslim Revert Narrative and American Gaze Post 9/11 in Jamilah Kolocotronis' *Rebounding*

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ABSTRACT

*This paper focuses on the manifestations of the American gaze post-9/11 as portrayed in the fictional narrative, *Rebounding*, by Jamilah Kolocotronis. Kolocotronis, a Caucasian American Muslim revert whose novels in the *Echoes Series* highlight the American Muslim revert's personal, interpersonal and multicultural complexities of living in post-9/11 America. Those complexities are made obvious through the American gaze post-9/11 as intentional views, behaviors and actions made by certain members of the non-Muslim American majority towards white and non-white Muslims minority, due to affiliation with Islam. By using the post-9/11 counter-terrorism perspective on national security, this article problematizes the American gaze post-9/11 by explicating how the protagonist Joshua Adams' material support to a Muslim fellow in Pakistan has brought serious repercussions on his personal and public life. Efforts are also devoted to delineate the transition of the American gaze post-9/11 from the private level, i.e., Joshua's clash with his father Sam, to the public level, through Joshua's incarceration by the Homeland Security agents. The findings reveal that the American post-9/11 gaze move beyond the realm of race and nationality into the space of religiosity. It positions Joshua in the grip of atonality, robbing him of his faith, selfhood, and citizenship on both private and public levels. Kolocotronis' *Rebounding* expounds how the severity of the post-9/11 American gaze fails to fully establish a sharp distinction between innocent Americans and terrorists. An essential feature of civic engagement which is neglected in post-9/11 America as illustrated in this novel is the recognition of the American Muslim revert's public service, virtues and achievements, which demonstrates the premises of separation and association with forces of terrorism.*

Keywords: American gaze; American Muslim Reversion Narrative; 9/11; war on terror; Rebounding

INTRODUCTION

The responses by Americans to the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 are imbued with trauma-related sentiments which led to the subsequent distrust and fear of Muslims. As Muna Ali (2011, p. 369) notes: "Discussions among and about Muslim Americans today inevitably take place in the context of the events of September 11th, 2001" which subsequently created a discourse of distrust and "negative images" (Esposito, 2010:45) among mainstream Americans, thus setting Islamophobia to the fore. Indeed, research shows that these responses create an inclusive/exclusive discourse within multi-religious, multicultural America, as Zabihzadeh et al. (2017, p. 49) assert that "little has been said on behalf of those whose lives were drastically altered for good in the aftermath of the attacks." Besides, in terms of recognising the other, studies have shown how innocent Muslims have carried significant overtones of multicultural misrecognition, as Jasser (2012, p. 278) shows that "Domestically, many Americans still think of Muslims as

being somewhat isolated from mainstream society and, more to the point, of being more loyal to Islam than to America.” Several elements of the Muslim consciousness which resonate universally with members of other religious communities including filial attachment, communal responsibility and recognition of differences are overlooked for the actions of those who committed the atrocities. Such misconceptions have led to the continuous profiling of Muslims as terrorists. In response to the assertion of Zabihzadeh et al. (p. 49), the missing point in the current reading of post-9/11 America is a narrative that accentuates and contests the myriad repercussions of living as Muslims in the American public and private realms.

The current paper thus attempts, in part, to unpack the essence and weakness of the American gaze post-9/11 vis-à-vis issues of religious discrimination against white American who embrace and practice Islam as problematised in the American Muslim reversion narrative, especially in Jamilah Kolocotronis’s *Rebounding*. Indeed, Kolocotronis’ *Rebounding* features the challenges that most American Muslims face in an increasingly Islamophobic and of course lack of tolerance environment while realizing that every single virtue has its own weakness.

AMERICAN MUSLIM REVERSION NARRATIVE POST-9/11, JAMILAH KOLOCOTRONIS AND THE *ECHOES* SERIES

The Muslim narrative in post-9/11 America depicts a distinctive literary exhibition not only on the aesthetics of the Muslim diversity across ethnic and racial lines, but rest entirely on the development of Muslim consciousness and its impacts on the Muslim community. Mohja Kahf’s research (2010, p. 166) captures the spirit of Muslim diversity with examples of American Muslim narratives across factual and fictional lines:

Pamela Taylor writes Muslim American science fiction. Iman Yusuf writes “Islamic romance.” This group of writers is not limited to genre writers, however. Dasham Brookins writes and performs poetry and maintains a website, MuslimPoet.com, where poets such as Samantha Sanchez post. Umm Zakiyyah (pseud.) has written a novel, *If I Should Speak* (2001), about a young Muslim American and her roommates in college.

Principally, the American Muslim narratives, as we perceive it, consist of fictional and factual narratives. While factual narratives reflect real life situations and reversion as experienced by American Muslims, fictional narratives are divided into two branches. The first category is the diasporic Muslim narrative which depicts the idea of displacement and estrangement of Muslims beyond the confines of their motherland. The second category deals with the notion of reversion to Islam. While the traditional idea of conversion refers to an individual who embraces a particular religion after being raised in a different faith or none at all, the notion of reversion to Islam is rooted in the belief that human beings are born with a sense of submission to God known as *fitrah*, or as Kamali (2015, p. 134) defines “fitrah, the natural "stamp" impressed upon human nature and soul, regardless of his color and creed.” Conversion and reversion to Islam, nonetheless, are varying concepts that depict the process of embracing Islam.

Reversion to Islam, as argued by critics, denotes a return to the original state of human nature or *fitrah*. Raihanah M. M. et al. (2014, p. 368), in discussing the issue vis-à-vis Joshua in *Rebounding* for instance, argue that: “From a Muslim perspective, Joshua’s reversion to Islam is seen as a return to the state of fitrah as the individual regains his state of God-consciousness and submission”. Substantially, reversion narratives are an integral part of the American Muslim narrative which reflects the verities of the reverts’ experiences across history as seen in the Muslim community in post-9/11 America.

Chronologically speaking, whilst Muslim reversion narratives in America dates back to Russell Webb in the 18th century (Curtis IV 2005, p. 25) and subsequently Malcolm X (Layton 2010, p. 8)ⁱ, the modern Muslim fiction as a subgenre has received noteworthy attention from a wide range of Muslim writers in post-9/11 America. The examples include Samina Ali's novel *Madras on Rainy Days* (2004); Mohja Kahf's poetry anthology *Learning to Pray All Over* (2001) and novels *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) and *E-mails from Scheherazad* (2012); Laila Halaby's novel *Once in a Promised Land* (2007); Naomi Shihab's poetry anthology *19 Varieties of Gazelle* (2002); Mohsin Hamid's novella *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012) and Umm Zakiyyah's novel *If I Should Speak* (2001). Within the revert Muslim fiction, the narratives capture the "ongoing, dynamic mediation between 'inner' interpretations and personal experiences and 'outer' structures, ideologies, and conventions" (McGinty 2006, p. 45). Such 'dynamic mediation' of the Muslim revert's life challenges as represented in fiction displays an attempt to fulfil both religious responsibilities as well as the commitment to culturally shared patterns with the rest of the American society. This signifies the struggles endured by American Muslims in the name of faith and nationality.

Although the reversion narrative tends to depict the Islamic principles including the pillars of faith, and the American democratic values such as liberty, equality and justice, it fosters the embracement of "*dawah*" by embodying the spiritual message of the holy *Qur'an* and *hadith* towards achieving excellence in private and public life while rejecting acts of injustice through the "commitment to a larger multifait community." (Abdul Rauf 2012, pp. 132-133). As stated in the *Qur'an*: "call unto the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exaltation, and hold discourse with them [the People of the Book] in the finest manner" (Sūrat *al-Naḥl* 16:125) Moreover Kamali, (2015, p. 111) ponders that Muslims are "advised to deliver the message of Islam, but not to impose it, nor indeed to decline the opportunity when it arises to hold dialogue and peaceful discourse." Therefore, it is given that advocating Islam in fictional narrative stems from the individual writer's representation of intellectual and experimental experiences of being a Muslim, as seen from his/her "authorial defined social reality" (Raihanah M. M. 2009, p. 55). Taylor (2006) argues that Islamic fiction features human challenges vis-à-vis moral-philosophical views and the capacity to reconcile the tensions experienced towards ensuring survival and wellbeing:

Fiction can be a powerful tool for *dawah* (outreach). ... [F]iction has a unique capability to touch people's emotions and bend their hearts. Even though the stories are not "real", fiction deals with real issues, real emotions, and the reader relates to the characters like friends or family members. As such, it can have a much greater impact on a person's feelings, thoughts, and beliefs than non-fiction. It can inspire them to question their values and their habits, leading to positive change, both for Muslims and non-Muslims.

(pp. 1-2)

Hence, most of the vital ingredients of the reversion narratives hold no conflicts with "*Sharia*" law. They do not contain any violations contrary to religious materials; the ideas and images that are articulated in the story are constructed within the parameters of the faith to reflect the positive aspects of Islamic principles. In short, notwithstanding the reader's differences and without any form of assault or disrespect to any human being, the features of Islamic fiction include an informative illustration of the fundamentals of Islam, the recognition of the self and the other in private and public levels and a non-violent vision of social-cultural being which coincide with life experiences. Therefore, the subject matter of the reversion narrative offers a valuable foundation for developing literary agency and thus making a significant impact in the lives of its readers. As Lewis Rambo (2003, p. 220) elucidates: "Conversion is not merely a passive or compliant survival strategy but a creative form of resistance and even subversion". Essentially, the configuration of the reversion

narrative in this debate contribute to Amin Malak's (2005) concept of the American Muslims' engagement in the American arena: "Serious Muslim thinkers cannot afford ignoring phenomena that are making constant inroads into humanity's political, economic, and social behavior. Muslims need to offer responses: confident, current, dialogical." (p. 153)

Within the context of post 9/11 America, Muslim fiction has evolved to become a mirror reflecting the social and political chaos in society. Layton (2010) remarks that the tragedies of the 9/11 attacks "has influenced writers living in the United States" (10) in many ways. This applies to writers of Muslim narratives, who express a wide engagement of issues and controversies emerging from the American milieu post-9/11. The American Muslim reversion narrative involves a comprehensive spirit that embraces the diversity of the Muslim community within the unity of Islam. Although there are very limited American Muslims reversion narratives that traces the American path from an American abstract cultural orientation to a more Islamic sensitivities to attain sense of coherent self, the visibility of these writings can be attributed to crises of identity, issues of sociocultural recognition, acceptance, controversies over national belonging and the burden of 9/11 consequences which hold back the blossoming of a community's social, cultural and religious propensities. For example, writers of such genre include Umm Zakiyah and Jamilah Kolocotronis whose works trace different challenges for Muslim Americans in tandem with post-9/11 America. Umm Zakiyyah in *If I Should Speak* captures the racial impact of 9/11 attacks on a young Christian African American woman who experiences the road not taken when she reverts to Islam (See Raihanah M. M. et al. 2011) As a post-9/11 reversion narrative, Huber-Warring and Bergman (2007, p. 51) stress the prominent racial effect of post-9/11 America: "Zakiyyah's novel follows the Islamic conversion of Tamika, a Protestant African-American college student, which reveals many of the stereotypes and prejudices that non-Muslim youth direct towards Muslims."

Besides, a significant example of post-9/11 American Muslim reversion narratives can be seen in the works of Jamilah Kolocotronis, the author whose novel *Rebounding* is the focus of this paper. Born in St. Louis, Missouri on August 2, 1956, Linda Kay Kolocotronis changed her first name to Jamilah when she became a Muslim in 1980 at the age of twenty-three. Being an American Muslim revert for nearly thirty years, Kolocotronis affirmed the continuous journey she experienced as a Muslim: "I am still learning, and still struggling to be closer to my Creator. And I am still working to integrate my American self with my Muslim self. Life is a journey, and I'm still on the road" (Kolocotronis 2006, p. 4).

Jamilah Kolocotronis's *Echoes* Series provide insights into the way America views its own minority Muslim community following the 9/11 tragedies. The *Echoes* Series consist of five novels which revolve around an inescapable societal, cultural and often religious series of dialogues between Muslim and non-Muslim individuals in the American milieu. These literary works which include *Echoes* (2006), *Rebounding* (2006), *Turbulence* (2007), *Ripples* (2008) and *Silence* (2009), confront several 'taboo' subjects concerning religious attachments, political and social inequality, as well as personal struggles that may be experienced by American Muslims.

An important narrative feature of the *Echoes* Series is Joshua's struggle to mold a life of equilibrium in line with the American values and Islamic principles as he indicates in the second novel, *Rebounding*: "Now we all have job and families" (p. 36) Besides, Joshua is a white American revert Muslim and the husband of an African American Muslim woman Aisha, the father of 'mixed-race' children who works at a community center called the Hope Center. The center as Joshua describes is the go-to place for members of the community to receive services needed: "So far we have a food bank, a wellness clinic, a youth program, and a small thrift store. We offer classes in basic life skills, and help for those who want to start their own small businesses. We're careful to make our services available to all, regardless of

background or belief.” (*Rebounding*, p. 36) Kolocotronis portrays the bond between Joshua and the American society based on cooperative interaction and peace to help and educate the needy or the homeless Americans irrespective of racial and religious affiliations. The narrative also problematises an important relationship, between the newly revert Joshua, and his ultra-nationalistic father Sam Adams. Through this relationship, Kolocotronis addresses issues of recognition and misrecognition of minority communities and minority religion in post 9/11 America. How does the post 9/11 American gaze affect Joshua’s life both as an American and as a revert? The following section addresses this issue.

THE AMERICAN GAZE AND MUSLIM REVERTS IN *REBOUNDING*

This section problematises the notion of the American gaze in post-9/11 milieu and illustrates how Kolocotronis characterises the effects of being a terrorist suspect in the reversion narrative of *Rebounding*. Sturken and Cartwright (2009) examine the meaning of the gaze with an emphasis on the discourse of knowledge construction: “The gaze is integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge.” (p. 103) The gaze reveals the overlap between what was previously said and thought about; for example, the body’s meaning or any other construct in the past, and what can be said about the body in discursive language known as discourses. Therefore, a gaze informed by a discourse, in this venue, is not set texts that are retained by civilisation, but rather rests entirely on a set of certain cognitive and behavioral practices, which in turn, systematically produces knowledge of the body and experience.

In the American context, we argue that there are two types of American gaze: the pre-9/11, and the post-9/11. Although the American gaze exists in the inter-group relations of the American majority and minority with regards to the status of conflicting beliefs and assertions, the pre-9/11 American gaze entails the utilisation of the white majority as the racial marker for black identification and categorisations. For example, this can be seen in Park Robert Ezra’s (1950, p. 81) explanations of race-based relations as:

The relations existing between peoples distinguished by marks of racial descent, particularly when these racial differences enter into the consciousness of the individuals and groups so distinguished, and by so doing determine in each case the individual's conception of himself as well as his status in the community. (p. 81)

Unlike the version of the American gaze indicated by Ezra, which sees race as the principle factor in determining social relations among Americans, the post 9/11 gaze revolves around Muslims. However, it is not a ‘move’ beyond skin colour, but rather another branch of the gaze. The gaze against one’s skin colour is still there. Therefore, in this paper, the post-9/11 American gaze refers to the deliberate activities that are conducted by certain followers of the American non-Muslim majority and directed towards the adherents of Islamic faith, i.e. both white and non-white Muslims minority, either in explicit or implicit manners. Indeed, this post-9/11 gaze specifically targets the Muslim religious minority in America. As critics of American identity like Haddad and Harb (2014) reveal, the post-9/11 American gaze is motivated primarily on religious grounds: “A major marker of this post-9/11 paradigm shift was, and for some remains, religion, including levels of religiosity and what it means to hold a particular religious view or identity in the United States.” (p. 478)

Based on Haddad and Harb’s assertion, the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 have led America to develop a new American gaze. The post 9/11 American gaze places Americans into a predetermined network of power relations namely the ‘war on terror’, where most Muslims are perceived as terrorists and blameworthy citizens who pose threats to the general stability and safety of America. As

Amrah Abdul Majid (2017, p. 222) contends, “the American-Muslim writing products are also subjected to the religious and cultural profiling based on the American policy towards Arab-Muslim countries”. Her comment dovetails Mohammed Safaei’s (2016, p. 172) assertion the post-9/11 American gaze as a reflection of Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism that helps illustrate the experience of othering: “The logic of incriminating ‘other’ and hence the dichotomisation of the world into ‘us’ versus ‘them’ or good against evil is interconnected with other factors such as vulnerability, mental illness, and identity confusion.” Similarly, another American Muslim scholar, Abdul Rauf (2012, p. 16) views the gaze as a revelation of binary relations experienced by Muslim today with phrases such as “Muslims versus the West” or “the U.S.-Muslim divide.” In addition, a study conducted by Esposito and Kalin (2011, p. 17) substantiate the post-9/11 American gaze when the Muslim minority is “Confronted with guilt by association and communal stigmatisation.” Overall, the emerging trends of conceptualizing the post-9/11 American gaze must take into consideration the non-Muslim American majority’s readiness to recognize Muslim minority as an equal member of the society despite the difference in religion.

In *Rebounding*, the American Muslim novelist Jamilah Kolocotronis problematizes the contestation of the American gaze post-9/11 at both private and public levels. At the private level, the American gaze grows and flourishes upon Sam Adams’ return to visit his family after over thirty years of estrangement. Sam Adams is an ultra-conservative white American, the ex-husband to Evelyn and father of Brad, Chris and Joshua. Sam decides to reconnect with his estranged family. As Evelyn reflects, “We all agree to meet at my house on Monday evening. Sam has never seen my new place, even though I’ve lived here for nearly thirty years now. That shows how completely he has been out of our lives” (*Rebounding*, p. 13). Ostensibly, Sam confesses that he had been a bad father to his long-deserted family: “during these past years, I have had a lot of time to think. I am an old man now. I know that I have made many mistakes in my life. And possibly, the worst mistake was the way I have treated our boys” (p. 6).

After accepting his offer of reconciliation with reservations, Joshua begins to speak about the work that he does at the Hope Center: “My brother-in-law and I run a nonprofit agency on the south side. It’s called The Caring Center. We established the center to meet the needs of the underprivileged. And I’ve been a Muslim for the last thirteen years.” (p. 16) Sam’s snide remarks towards Joshua’s work and reversion to Islam indicate his profiling of Muslims: “I was wondering. That would explain the beard, then, and the strange clothes....Just as long as you don’t blow up any buildings. Guess your center doesn’t do any of that, does it?” (*Rebounding*, p. 16)

Sam’s direct response towards Joshua’s reversion demonstrates suspicion and thus emulating an image of the post-9/11 American gaze as he sees his son as a potential terrorist by sheer association with Islam. Such profiling remains vibrant to produce “misrecognition” about the Muslim identity. In this vein, Peek (2011) reinforces the formation of the American Muslim minority misrecognition: “Based on religious affiliation alone, the entire Islamic community had become associated with the perpetrators of the terrorist assaults.” (p. 141) The notion of misrecognition, to quote Charles Taylor (1994, p. 25) creates a damaging effect on a person’s self-worth: “Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.”

As a perennial line of divergence in *Rebounding*, Raihanah M. M. et al. (2015) captures the effects of the post-9/11 gaze in the Adams family as separating Joshua his religious identity from his national one: “In Kolocotronis’ *Rebounding*, the polemic of “splitting” ... is seen from Joshua’s perspective as he experiences firsthand the true repercussions of being a revert in post 9/11 America.” (p. 111). This conflict is revealed by Sam when he draws a line of distinction between Brad, Joshua and Chris at their family

reunion: “I got it. Brad makes the buildings, Joshua blows them up, and then Chris comes to pray for everyone. Don’t you see? Isn’t that funny?” (*Rebounding*, 16) The idea of splitting in *Rebounding* is widely informed by the embodiment of the post-9/11 American gaze. While the return of Sam has disturbed the everyday aesthetics of his family, Joshua enjoys little recognition from his father. That is to say, Sam often mocks Joshua’s way of life as a practicing Muslim: “And Joshua, I guess you have a whole herd of kids. I’ve heard how you Moslems like to pop those babies out, one right after the other.” Sam laughs. “Do you have a whole harem of wives, too?” (*Rebounding*, p. 17) There are two elements that Sam is being prejudiced about, i.e., his son’s procreation duties as a Muslim and the practice of polygamy. Put differently, Sam’s stereotyping sentiments reveals a prejudicial-based impression of Muslims and Islam.

As a Caucasian American, Sam goes further to spell out his racially motivated America gaze when he shows disrespect towards Joshua’s African-American wife and their children. “Now Joshua” he says slowly, “these three older children are fine looking, very fine indeed, but the younger ones are little dark, aren’t they? Don’t tell me you went and got yourself married to a nigger” (*Rebounding*, p. 17). Sam’s lack of respect for Joshua’s personal choices is rooted in his ideology of White supremacy. With the effects of the American gaze post-9/11 at the domestic level, Sam fails to recognise and accept that his biological son is now a Muslim who is married to an African American woman with whom he has brown-skinned children.

With that insight in mind, Joshua’s response to his father enlarges the schism between them: “You are my father. One little drop of liquid made you my father...I would not smash your face in. A Muslim is not allowed to hit his father, even if his father is a damned idiot” (*Rebounding*, p. 18). It has to be stated that Sam’s bigotry and racist attitude, and Joshua’s response to such intolerance resembles the complex interracial relations in America and reinforces the design of the American racial and post-9/11 gazes. Sam seeks to maintain the supremacy of his race against any other, including that of his daughter-in-law and grandchildren, but the reason for the irrepressible tendency that some Americans have towards American Muslims and other minorities in post-9/11 reality remains unanswered.

Although the Adams family have reverberated a feeling of frustration towards Sam’s presence, Joshua is the first to react to his father:

This picture was taken on our wedding day. This beautiful woman here is my wife. And this man here; he is my Dad. He’s the one who taught me. He’s the one who loved me like a son. He’s the one who didn’t want to leave me. He’s been dead for eleven years now and he’s still a hundred – no, a million – times more of a man than you are. You aren’t good enough to kiss his feet. (*Rebounding*, p. 18)

The above quote shows how Joshua falls prey to Sam’s bigotry and in so doing estranges himself further from his father. The altercation between Joshua and Sam as the narrative illustrates causes the latter to retaliate in a way that will physically and emotionally hurt the former. Sam decides to secretly report his son Joshua to the American Department of the Homeland Security. By doing so, Sam extends the scope of the American gaze beyond a personal issue to include a public contestation of Joshua’s loyalty to the nation in the face of his new found religious affiliation. In reporting Joshua to the Homeland Security, Sam justifies his altercation with Joshua as an act against the enemy of the State.

Such binary mindset is akin to the ‘war on terror’ which stipulates that: “The war was justified as a defense against those who have chosen to be the enemies of American values and civilisation, of democracy and freedom.” (Haddad, 2006, p. 19) In fact, the ‘war on terror’ keeps the persistence of security; stability and well-being and safety of the Americans as first priority that can never be sacrificed. Besides, in his remarkable book *US-UK Counter-*

Terrorism after 9/11: A qualitative approach, Edgar Tembo (2014) captures the trends of the ‘war on terror’ as a revelation of the post-9/11 American gaze at the public level: “The post-9/11 strategies redefine the interactions between the state, the international community and the domestic populations of states” (p. 45). In essence, the effects of the post-9/11 reality have considerably reproduced the domestic network of relationships among the American majority, the Muslim minority and the official state. Having said that, what the department does to Joshua after his father’s report? In this vein, Richard Jackson (2005) exhibition of ‘war on terror’ can be read as abiding to the post-9/11 American gaze at the American official level: “The ‘war on terrorism’ therefore, is simultaneously a set of actual practices—wars, covert operations, agencies, and institutions—and an accompanying series of assumptions, beliefs, justifications, and narratives—it is an entire language or discourse” (p. 8).

The Homeland Security agents come to arrest Joshua while he was working at the Hope Center. The federal agents acknowledge: “We are with Homeland Security. We need to ask you some questions” (*Rebounding*, p. 83) Although the federal agents seem determined to take Joshua into custody for suspected terrorism offence, Joshua insists on obtaining a conceivable justification for his arrest:

“Take it easy. You don’t need those. You said you had some questions. You didn’t say anything about arresting me. I didn’t do anything wrong. Don’t you at least have to read me my rights?” [Joshua]

“Not anymore. Not for terrorists.” [Man from Homeland Security]

(*Rebounding*, p. 83)

The above-mentioned excerpt indicates Kolocotronis’ creative capacity in depicting the arrest of an American Muslim without a warrant while signifying the personal repercussions of this event on Joshua’s life as a suspected terrorist. As scholars attest, the personal consequences inflicted by the war on terror have unfortunately gone unnoticed. Haddad and Harb (2014) suggest some thoughts to compensate the lost values of Islam and Muslims in post-9/11 reality:

While the whole world has heard of the tragic loss of life perpetuated by the 9/11 attacks, relatively few outside of academia have paid attention to the impact of 9/11 on the lives of the thousands of American Arabs and Muslims who were detained without warrant under the auspices of the USA PATRIOT Act. (p. 479)

In *Rebounding*, Kolocotronis problematises the contestations of the post-9/11 interactions among the family members i.e. Joshua and his father Sam are squabbling among themselves and the agents from the Department of Homeland Security by portraying Joshua as a terror suspect based on racial profiling. To put the depiction of the post-9/11 American gaze in perspective, Sam’s action of telling on his own son to the American Homeland Security Department clearly signals how the ‘us/them’ binary could affect filial relationship. In answering Joshua’s question, “Why did you tell them to come after me?” (*Rebounding*, p. 283), Sam is candid about his actions:

I was angry. I wanted to hurt you, the way you hurt me that time in your mother’s house. ... “They weren’t supposed to take it that far. I only wanted them to scare you a little. Shake you up. Teach you a lesson about having respect for your father. They were supposed to take you in for questioning, maybe hold you overnight. That’s all. But once they got started, they wouldn’t let up. It turned out all wrong (ibid).

The Homeland Security is meant to be the macro-level voice of concern that echoes the majority of America’s “fears and worries” as explained by Rousseau et al. (2015, p. 174):

“The fear associated with terrorism has different effects for different communities. In post-9/11 reality, it elicits the majority’s fears and worries about the radicalization of Muslim minorities.” Hence, in *Rebounding*, Sam’s information against his son albeit done to teach Joshua to mind his manners, is read as an act of patriotic impulse by the Homeland Security agents who then set out to incarcerate Joshua for months without trial. Scholars suggest that ‘the war on terror’ has stimulated, in particular, a notable desire for patriotism amongst most Americans, and more prominently an “upsurge of nationalism after 9/11” (Graham 2014, p. 224). This episode in the Adams’ household illustrates how racial profiling and the ‘war on terror’ could infiltrate the American filial bond as Kolocotronis narrates the deepening estrangement between Sam and the rest of the family due to his actions against Joshua.

Given the debate outlined above, the emerging trends from Joshua’s arrest indicate the hard grip on any citizen who becomes a suspected terrorist in post-9/11 reality. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf (2011, p. 59) explicates: “The American Muslim is often viewed with suspicion; his patriotism and commitment to American values are habitually questioned.” Given that reasoning, it is apparent that although violence triggered by terrorism is somewhat difficult to manage and resolve, the Homeland Security agents will do whatever it takes to save America. In *Rebounding*, federal agents who arrested Joshua on terrorism charges offered Joshua’s friend Tony, who was also arrested for his association with Joshua, an official pardon, i.e., a government official release form from any penalty due for breaking the law:

“What about Tony? Have they questioned him yet?” [Joshua]
“Yes, but he’s an easy client because he doesn’t readily give information. They offered him amnesty if he would agree to testify against you. He adamantly refused. You two are close, aren’t you?” [Joshua’s lawyer Mr. Walt Thompson]
“I can’t believe they did that, though I guess I shouldn’t be too surprised. Yes I know he won’t turn against me. Not even to save himself.” [Joshua] (Rebounding, p. 107)

Although Joshua’s arrest on grounds of terrorism seems totally unsurprising, the idea of offering freedom to a suspected terrorist in custody in return for a confession incriminating another echoes a counter position to the ethos concerned with firm adherence to societal norms. In light of the post-9/11 American gaze, an American Muslim who is stigmatised with terrorism charges is likely to fall under enormous pressure and consequently unable to disassociate himself from terrorist groups. Arriving at this observation, the Homeland Security agent seems to be more concerned with leading Joshua to confess against his will:

What was the purpose of your trips to Pakistan? Why have you been sending money to Karachi? How well do you know Armed Ali, also known as Abu Hamza?... We know that members of Al-Jahidia have been responsible for at least three fatal bombings in the last month. What is your connection with them? (Rebounding, pp. 91-92)

Such inquiries were designed to aggravate citizens like Joshua, steering them away from any chance of proving their innocence. When someone is charged and suspected of terrorism, all of his activities are viewed from the perspective of social anarchy. The post-9/11 American gaze puts the individual under constant suspicion with relentless attempts to link him to terrorism.

In Joshua’s case, the American gaze post-9/11 explicate how Joshua’s traveling to Pakistan and sending material support to a Muslim close friend in Pakistan called Abdul Qadir has brought serious repercussions on several aspects of his life as seen in the narrative. Joshua’s lawyer Mr. Walter Thompson explains the reason for his arrest: “You are accused of participating in a money laundering scheme to provide funds for terrorists operating out of Karachi. It is alleged that you, and your brother-in-law, established The Caring Center for this purpose. Is that a plausible scenario?” (Rebounding, p. 97) Joshua reaction acknowledges

the reason of sending money to his friend Abdul Qadir's as he explains to Mr. Thompson: "Yes. He and his wife have a small business, but they have trouble making ends meet. In Islam it is highly encouraged to give in charity." (*Rebounding*, p. 99)

In fact, when one of Abdul Qadir's daughters met with an accident in Pakistan, Abdul Qadir sought financial help from Joshua. In good faith, Joshua helped him with a small payment for the medical expenses, but failed to declare the payment in the Centre's accounting records. This oversight gave the Homeland Security the needed leverage to accuse him of terrorist activities, as Tembo (2014) puts it, "The Department of Homeland Security, although concerned with counter-terrorism strategy domestically, was focused on areas such as migration of peoples and funds" (p. 136).

Post 9-11 American Muslims could avoid being falsely accused and implicated of any terrorism-related activities by staying away from channeling money and engaging in social community initiatives, because once they are suspected of supporting any Muslim organisations outside the nation, they will most likely carry that stigmatisation like a scarlet letter. With or without evidence, the suspected individual, like Joshua, will come under constant torment to the extent that his freedom is usurped in a country where absolute freedom is guaranteed for all its citizens. Due to such misconception and mistreatment, upon release from prison, Joshua loses access to the social center he founded and becomes viewed as the 'other' in his own society.

The impact of this episode on Joshua continued for five and a half months, and the impact of the post-9/11 gaze squandered any opportunity for him to defend his innocence and subsequently placing him, his family and close friends in so much physical and mental distress. In the public realm, his admissibility and relevance as an American citizen are under question. The center that he founded, for example, is forcibly closed by law:

"The center has been shut down. Computers and files were confiscated and the account has been frozen. It's gone. I'm sorry." [Joshua's lawyer Mr. Walt Thompson]
"Shut down? They can't do that. What about all the people we were helping? What happens when they show up to get food from the food bank or help from the clinic? What about the classes? And the youth center? We have to build the youth center."
My voice is getting louder. I pound the table as I speak [Joshua]

(*Rebounding*, p. 107)

Joshua's frustration and suffering escalate when his non-profit agency is closed and he finds himself publicly denounced as a terrorist in the local media. This creates a split in his rights as a free American citizen as the authority is given complete autonomy over his possessions. In this vein, Jonker (2009, p. 51) elucidates that Muslims in post 9/11 American had to contest their basic rights such as equal citizen: "The ensuing War on Terror only exacerbated disputes on loyalty and citizenship. It still threatens to narrow down the debate on multiculturalism to the position of the Islamic minorities in Western countries." Ultimately, Joshua demonstrates cooperative actions at the social level, but it is not enough to set him free from being a suspected terrorist.

As a personal repercussion, Joshua continues to suffer from psychological trauma even after being released from the incarceration while awaiting trial for "fraud, money laundering, providing material assistance to terrorists and promoting terrorism" (*Rebounding*, p. 119). The effect of being a suspected terrorist feeds vastly on the politics of association. Even without solid proof, anyone who is labeled as a terrorist is deemed to be worth punishing. In an attempt to mirror the reality of the American society post-9/11, Kolocotronis manages to paint a landscape that depicts Joshua as a prisoner with no national pride due to his suspected association with terrorism.

The notion of association allows for a sense of camaraderie among the members of a particular community. For Joshua, the trauma he experienced only strengthens his association

with his fellow American Muslims. Muzaffar Iqmal (2008, p. 105) explains this: “In a world that has been left with no choice but ‘to be with us or against us’, the onus of proving that they are ‘with us’ has been put on the shoulders of Muslims.” While traumatic individuals may possibly react to their traumas in different ways, Joshua reveals the effects of witnessing a deep transformation of his traumatic experience at the federal prison:

Would they go after my wife, and my son, to get revenge from the deaths of the people they love? Because they think I’m a terrorist. They think I killed them...when I try to sleep again, I am haunted. I close my eyes, and I see Thompson lying there, bleeding, on the floor.
(*Rebounding*, p. 153)

Joshua seemed to be a poised and responsible head of family. But, he reveals a tone of unceasing fear about the safety of his family due to being a terrorist suspect. The aforesaid quote exposes the significance of the family as an ideal for Joshua. While he seems preoccupied with assessing the potential risk surrounding the fate of his family in society as he is incarcerated, at the core of Joshua’s trauma is his vulnerable feelings to the overwhelming power of the society’s retaliation towards being a revert in post-9/11 America.

Joshua’s recognition of his traumatic experience features two trends. First, his responses can be seen as normal reactions toward abnormal situations. Second, Joshua as the ‘other’ has allowed the post-9/11 American gaze to impose a sense of collective trauma on him as explored from a risk assessment point of view. Joshua has a lot of conviction in his confidence to start anew life after leaving the federal prison. Yet, Kolocotronis indicates that the hope of attaining a job for Joshua seemed remote. Even though Joshua has a hard time convincing the federal agents of his innocence, the effects of being a terrorist suspect causes him to go back to his old job frying burger but in a different kitchen: “I got a job at one of the restaurants. The owner calls a few days after the barbecue. He hires me on the spot.” (*Rebounding*, 229) Indeed, with the seizure of his properties and freezing of his accounts, Joshua is unable to resume his life pre-incarceration. It can be surmised that, for American Muslim like Joshua the effects of the post-9/11 American gaze is characterised by a sense of fixity thus embodying a profound and irreconcilable burden in daily life. Eventually, after seemingly managing to overcome the situation, Joshua reflects:

We’re finally getting back to normal. We will always carry the emotional scars, and I have a few physical scars from the fight--- including some mild but permanent nerve damage to my left arm and some hearing loss--- but we’re making it. I’m even getting used to the noise again.
(*Rebounding*, p. 230)

Despite the psychological, social, emotional, professional, material and economic suffering and loss, Joshua seems to have come to terms with the effects of the trauma. His personal choices in adapting to the new conditions of his life indicate his strong faith to overcome difficulties he is faced with. However, the emotional scar that he speaks of indirectly signifies the long term damage of the traumatic experience. Hence, Kolocotronis continues to wave the effects of psychological trauma in her protagonist’s life as an inherited social dimension, after being released from the federal prison. Despite having the charges against him dropped nearly a year later, the profiling and misrecognition continues with the periodic harassments by two men “in black suits” (*Rebounding*, p. 270).

On the second day of Ramadan I see them again. The men in the black suits. For the third time since the charges were dismissed. ... The first two times they came, my heart beat faster, I started sweating and I felt like running away. ... They’re just another annoyance. But I am very careful. I return my library books on time. I don’t use my cell phone while I’m driving. I don’t jaywalk. And my heart still beats faster.

Joshua reveals the effects of living as a suspected terror in a culture of vast domestic surveillance. Though the domestic surveillance in post-9/11 America aims to protect Americans against terrorism, the two men “in black suits” continue to misrecognise Joshua as the other in the American society. Perhaps more penetratingly, Joshua’s tension between living freely and constraints imposed by the culture of surveillance voices his profound concerns about the status of his privacy and his rights as an American Muslim revert in post-9/11 America. By the same token, Graham’s (2014) observation of the culture of post-9/11 surveillance is akin to Joshua’s experience living with little freedom after being falsely accused of a crime he did not commit:

It is crucial to stress that new cultures of digital surveillance are not simply of coerced over oppressed citizens as in some Orwellian Big Brother. Very often, as with the use of webcams, mobile phones tracking of geolocation, they are embraced and actively taken up as the means of organizing new expressions of mobility, identity, sexuality and everyday life- as well as resistance. (p. 228)

Although the culture of surveillance sustains the momentum of the post-9/11 American gaze in the 21st century, Joshua remains lost in the fog of being accountable not only for his American Muslim identity, but also for the way the American reality manifests itself in his experience.

CONCLUSION

The post-9/11 American gaze is the deliberate action rooted in a binary mindset and White Supremacist ideology. This paper engages the post-9/11 counter-terrorism lens to illuminate the manifestations of the post-9/11 American gaze in the Muslim fictional reversion narrative of *Rebounding*. *Rebounding* reveals a condemnation account of the impacts of the post-9/11 American gaze towards American white revert Muslim. The textual analysis of *Rebounding* reveals that the infiltration of the American gaze is unsurpassable in Joshua’s experience as an American Muslim revert. From the fabricated terrorist group, to the fabricated terrorist act, to the fabricated charges against Joshua, the authorities have managed to use a small evidence, i.e., the financial assistance that Joshua gave to his former religious mentor, Abdul Qadir, to fashion a fictionalised narrative about Joshua. Joshua’s experience demonstrates that several American Muslims are highly vulnerable to the effects of the post-9/11 American gaze, a fact that the media oftentimes overlooks. Though the projection of the ‘war on terror’ in Joshua’s life has changed the way we contemplate the shortcomings of Americans with the likes of Sam, *Rebounding* indicates that in a highly politicised environment even the practice of virtues such as honesty and service to others when read within an interreligious or a post-9/11 counter-terrorism lens can sometimes be misinterpreted as an act of terror against the entire nation. *Rebounding* thus exposes American Muslims as the untrusted ‘other’, with a sieged mentality contributed by the culture of surveillance in post-9/11 American. Indeed, the novel dissents the perfect concord between innocent American revert Muslims, who are law abiding and embrace the American system, and individuals who are directly involved in terrorist assaults. Moreover, *Rebounding* offers individual and collective strategies, which resemble a will to keep living life as American Muslim, to cope – with the repercussions of the post-9/11 American gaze without compromising the democratic values and the Islamic principles by any means.

This inquiry has several implications to the recognition of the American Muslim minority within the discourse of the post-9/11 multicultural America and the American Muslims reversion narrative. The post-9/11 American gaze, despite the passage of sixteen

years, is still evident in the current American landscape. In this light, the persistent association of Muslims, be that reverts or born Muslims, as terrorists and the other continue to spark public discourse. The idea of ‘guilty until proven innocent’ needs to be addressed. Besides, the paper contends that members of the American non-Muslims family and society can play a vital role in reducing the intensity of the American Muslims reverts othering, prejudice, decimation and, indeed, the whole sense of the self. This can be achieved by taking out the idea of us versus them, and above all else, not reducing the Muslim identity to acts of hostilities by a minority community

END NOTE

¹In explaining the context of the Muslim narratives to quote Amin Malak (2004:7) definition: “the term Muslim narratives suggests the works produced by the person who believes firmly in the faith of Islam; and/or, via an inclusivist extension, by the person who voluntarily and knowingly refers to herself, for whatever motives, as a “Muslim” when given a selection of identitarian choices; and/or, by yet another generous extension, by the person who is rooted formatively and emotionally in the culture and civilization of Islam.

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