

## Unearthing the Social Oppression of Muslim Identity under American Imperialism in *The Submission* by Amy Waldman

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Saif Raed Nafia Fakhrulddin, Ida Baizura Bahar, Zainor Izat Zainal, and  
Mohammad Ewan Awang  
*Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia*

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**Abstract:** This study is centred on the first novel published by the contemporary American author, Waldman, in 2011, entitled *The Submission*. The novel recounts the story of a Muslim architect named Mohammad who wins a contest to design the 9/11 memorial. Set in 2003, New York, the consequence is a serious public outrage swirling around Mohammad or, more precisely, the fact that he is a Muslim. This study highlights the issue of the social oppression of the identity of Muslim minority characters in America, and how they are perceived as inferior by their American counterparts using the concept of cultural imperialism and its related critical insights of oppression by the American socio-feminist philosopher, Young (1990). The objective of this study, accordingly, is to examine the author's depictions of the American society as the cultural imperialism persecuting Muslim characters. The findings show the multifarious peculiarities of oppression as a social phenomenon embodying the genuine critical nuance of America as the miniatures of cultural imperialism that oppresses Muslim characters.

**Keywords:** Amy Waldman, cultural imperialism, Muslim identity, oppression, *The Submission*

### 1. Introduction

The concept of oppression is associated with different literary studies. Critics have attempted to delve deep into the latent impetus of how oppression represents the way by which the oppressors exert their persecutions over a specific social minority. In this sense, oppression has been considered a decisive issue in recent decades. Scholars have accentuated the importance of exploring the contentious issue of oppression in literary works due to its vitality of perceiving the position of the oppressed minority. In addition, oppression plays an integral role in distinguishing the oppressed minority's identity from other identities because it is highly influenced by the oppressors' persecutory practices (Milligan 2020). Being so, examining the issue of oppression necessitates the possibility of also examining the issue of identity, and its gradual development and transformation in accordance with the radical cultural changes surrounding it. Here, the implicative meaning of oppression denotes the excessive negative demeanours of the oppressors against a certain minority through several cultural practices, such as deprivation, negligence and exploitation among others (Cudd 2006; Gilbert 2017; Fedotov 2021). Oppression, therefore, incarnates the unfair treatment of other ethnic groups for the

sake of imposing dominance and maintaining authority over the minority group or, simply put, “if oppression is anything, it is state-sponsored or assisted systematic actions against a group of people” (Wagner 2020: 32). The most apparent characteristic of oppression is the use of power which is utilised by the oppressors to deliver an implied message for the minority in order to intimidate them. By time, such minority group begins to be assimilated and mixed with the oppressors’ society. Consequently, the oppressed minority’s identity changes with regard to the dominant cultural identity in several ways, such as language, behaviour, beliefs and cultural traditions among others. Another distinctive feature of oppression is the cultural restriction in which the oppressors restrain the oppressed minority’s ability to prosper and thrive. In this respect, the burgeoning prosperity of the minority group represents a source of danger for the hegemonic oppressive culture and, therefore, it should be neglected to ensure healing its perilous existence.

It has been argued that cultural hegemony exemplifies cultural imperialism per se. In fact, cultural imperialism denotes any cultural hegemony over other cultures. Yet, the concept of cultural imperialism has been examined in different cultural critiques accentuating the American hegemony where American imperialism is described as still active and universally predominant as it is considered as the leading country in different fields (Gudova 2018). Hence, American imperialism “continues to be important because the US is still an Empire” (Filimowicz & Tzankova 2020: 56). American imperialism has been ascribed akin to the sense of “empire” because America is still an influential country in the world as the universal characteristics of American imperialism are a platform for influential leadership concerning the social values and norms in all over the world: “platform imperialism is also cultural, as it exerts influence upon the global norms and values” (Filimowicz et al. 2020: 56). In light of this view, American imperialism can be described as possessing strong influence. It could affect any subordinate culture related to its social dominance.

As the issue indicates, American imperialism also refers to the American hegemonic power to subjugate or dominate other ethnicities or minority groups that live within the wide American socio-cultural demarcations. Southeast Asian minorities, for example, are one of these minorities who have undergone horrible experiences due to American imperialism that tries to manipulate their lives: “the experiences of Southeast Asian Americans can help underscore this point. Scholars have acknowledged that US imperialism and colonialism has resulted in systemic violence toward and continued trauma within many Asian American communities” (Iftikar & Museus 2018: 940). In essence, the term “imperialism” sometimes exemplifies the ability of a great nation’s power. Consequently, this nation harnesses its power and hegemonic capacity to spread its political domination over another minority which is less powerful or advanced. In this sense, American imperialism is the basic antithesis of any minority community in America: “cultural imperialism fundamentally [is] incompatible with the more community-centred” (Buonanno & Nugent 2021: 21). In addition, the most blatant product of American imperialism is oppression (Chávez-Moreno 2021). In other words, oppression is created by America’s quest to prove its hegemony and domination over the other

ethnicities living in America. This is because American imperialism seeks to limit the non-American threat that might destabilise the public security of the whole American society. As a result, American imperialism starts exerting oppressive practices to restrict any threats lurking behind any chaotic events. In this regard, the sociologists Sirvent and Haiphong (2019: 15) argue, “that system, U.S. imperialism, remains a scary, if not unheard of, concept to many of the young people currently taking center stage in the resistance to oppression occurring around the country”. In this sense, the practice of oppression is a sort of a persecutory reaction to justify the American need for keeping its current security as well as ensuing peaceful future.

Oppressing Muslims in America has been a subject of cultural and social debates since the early years of the 21st century. As recalled, the 9/11 attacks of 2001 in New York, America, sparked the beginning of serious and critical studies on Muslim identity in America, in particular, and the whole world, in general. Muslims began to be connected with abusive, stereotypical terms, such as “extremism”, “fanaticism” and “terrorism” among others (Rosdiawan 2014: 217). As a result, the public reception of Muslims had drastically changed. More worryingly, the American cultural mainstream believed that Muslim oppression had been a kind of precautionary preparation to prevent extreme Muslim thoughts that might lead to severe attacks, similar to the 9/11 attacks. The American public response to the Muslim minority had created a new image of Muslims. In a striking way, Muslims had been perceived as a phobia-provoking minority, and it should be confronted with oppressive procedures in order to hinder their threat. In this respect, the position of oppressed Muslims in America, where the public and the political representatives collude with each other to marginalise Muslims living in America, has become a contentious research issue. Muslims are severely persecuted in America and they can no longer cope with the American political tendencies because they are deprived of their human equality within the American people. In addition, Muslims undergo resentment and negative human experiences. Together with the public, the American political representatives also “denigrate” Muslims and oppress them to the limits; “the politics and political causes of the American Muslim community are complex. In the mix, we have theology, Islamic law, political and pragmatic calculations, experiences of oppression, and a rancorous relationship with conservatives who denigrate Muslim at every turn” (Uddin 2019: 246). This lived experience highlights how Muslims undergo cultural and social plights in America. Such inhumane experience embodies the radical transformations of the safe social living of Muslims that had been endangered by unjust discrimination and oppression imitated by American imperialism. Muslims, accordingly, do not accept these matters as they are severely harmful to their culture and identity, and they react “against the backdrop of American imperialism” (Zafar 2020: 38). As such, the Muslims’ reaction is the manifestation of Muslim counter-position of American imperialism and all its relative issues.

In fact, the issue of Muslim identity in the world, generally, and in America, specifically, is in relation to the traditional meaning of Islam as a religion (Alkarawi & Bahar 2013; Helie-Lucas 2019; Fakhruroji 2021; Pinto 2021); that is, Muslim

identity does not entail the way by which Muslims differ or resemble each other but it also means that all Muslims are united under Islam as a collective religion. Muslim identity originates from this religious comprehensive entity: “Muslim practices differ, sometimes very sharply, yet they all belong to some notion of Islam” (Zaidi 2021: 11). In this respect, though Muslim minority groups have various cultural backgrounds, they belong to the same religion which has common beliefs adopted by its followers and practised as religious culture. Yet, their identity is oppressed by the larger American society that incarnates the very notion of cultural imperialism (Fakhrulddin & Bahar 2022). To further illustrate this point, the relationship between Americans and Muslims does not exist in accord. That is, they live in heterogeneous affinity as a result of the powerful American culture. The American aversive response to the presence of Muslim minority groups in its territories is justified since America “rejects both dogmatic Islamism” and “imperial modernism” that calls for cultural harmony between Muslims and their American people (Mesbahian 2021: 18). The elaboration of this cultural diversity is the core of the influence of cultural imperialism upon Muslim identity as a religious minority group. Therefore, American imperialism has created cultural aversion and heterogeneity between Muslims and their American opponents. More importantly, the culture of Muslim minority groups in the American society is “tied to Islam, meaning that it is not just culture but a kind of religious culture—rather than simply phenotype—that can racialised” (Guhin 2018: 89). In this sense, the Muslim religious culture perceives the American conception of Islam as an antithesis of Islamic traditions. Here, the role of American imperialism puts restrictions on this contradictory relationship between Islam and the Americans for the sake of evading a cultural conflict with Islam. In essence, such a restriction imposed upon Islam and Muslims “constitutes a form of particularly hypocritical cultural imperialism” (Harth 2018: 2). Being so, suppressive and restricting politics of American imperialism is the stimulus of oppressing Muslim minority groups and their identity in the American territories.

In literature, there have been a number of notable authors who have explored the intricate fictional issues through their works to give an impression of the true existence of the oppression of Muslim minority groups and their identity as a result of the 9/11 attacks, described as “significant in investigating contemporary literary works” (Afzal, Pakri & Abdullah 2022: 259). The tremendous effects of the 9/11 attacks upon Muslim identity as a recurring issue in post-9/11 American narratives can be found, for instance, in the novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) by the contemporary American novelist Jonathan Foer (b.1977) (Altwaiji 2019). The novel abounds with several political clues that inform us of the position of the oppressed Muslim minority and America. Furthermore, it is an obtrusive example of Muslim identity. When the 9/11 attacks occurred, there had been a massive schism in the American society due to the intellectual dichotomy between the Muslim minority and the American society. For this reason, the American national unity was split between the American and Muslim identities. The attacks caused a dichotomy in the American society, which, in turn, oppressed the Muslims as being a destructive social minority. Being so, the core fictional issue treated in the novel

is the identity of the oppressed Muslim minority and, consequently, the novel “is an essential element in the formation of the national identity and expression of its intellectual life and national unity” (Altwaiji 2019: 63). In this way, 9/11 attacks could be argued as the lurking impetus of the transformation identity process of the oppressed Muslim minority. At this point, the American society could not withstand the terrorist actions of some extreme Muslims, and the Americans had decided to oppress all Muslims in order to halt their perilous actions in America. Henceforth, viewpoints of Muslim identity in America moulded the Muslims’ misconceptions and stereotypes, seen as “invisible citizens” (Naber & Jamal 2008: 2), driving to oppression and discrimination within American imperialism.

With regards to our selected literary text for analysis, the novel *The Submission* (2011) by the contemporary American novelist Waldman (b. 1969) also explores significant issues, such as discourses on domination and the comparisons between the liberal America and the Islamists. It is also based on real and genuine issues related to the 9/11 attacks and discriminations against Muslim minority groups and their identity. The novel recounts the story of selecting a memorial design to commemorate the victims of the 9/11 attacks. Thirteen New Yorkers form a jury to choose the best design, including Paul Robin, the head of the jury, and another twelve members. Two designs compete to win the contest. One is called ‘The Garden’, and the other is called ‘The Void’. After The Garden wins, it is revealed that the architect of The Garden is a Muslim, and his name is Mohammad Khan. To further complicate the issues, rumours spread saying that Mohammad was inspired by an Islamic design; thus, the jury finds itself in a complicated situation. The public in New York does not want Mohammad’s design because he is a Muslim and selecting his design means insulting the victims and their families. At this time, Debbie Dawson, who advocates right-wing ideology, enters the debate. She propagates racist ideas against Muslims and heads the opposition against Mohammad’s design. Le Sarge, who is a radio programme host and a member of the public, enters the debate too. He also propagates his biased and prejudiced views against Muslims in his radio show.

The novel has been examined by many recent studies that have accentuated various issues concerning Muslims; for instance, deconstructing stereotypes (Eikonsalo 2017), prejudices, terrorism and identity crisis (Muslim 2018), violence and exclusionary practices (Kushi & Rashid 2019) and reconstructing misconceptions (Abderrazag & Serir 2022). We, however, posit the view that the issue of American imperialism and its social oppression related to Muslim identity is an urgent need to be a research focus as it appears to have been overlooked in previous scholarship on this novel. The goal of the present study, therefore, is to investigate this controversial issue by analysing the selected novel, while the aim of the study, accordingly, is to examine the literary depictions of the low social positions and oppressions of Muslim minority groups in the American society that incarnate the very notion of cultural imperialism and its oppression. This study also aims to investigate the relationship between the Muslim minority characters and the American society through the conceptual lens of oppression and cultural imperialism. In the analysis part, the main focus will be on the persecutions of the

Muslim minority group characters in the American society by employing the concept of cultural imperialism and its related critical insights of oppression by the American social theorist Iris Marion Young (1949-2006). Besides that, selected Muslim and American characters in the novel will also be analysed based on the concept of cultural imperialism.

## **2. Oppression and cultural imperialism as a two-pronged conceptual framework**

In her seminal book titled *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young (1990) discusses the concept of oppression as a system imposed upon every individual, where she refers to the oppressed persons or people as individuals who are the subject of persecutory treatment. These individuals suffer from social restrictions imposed upon them by their dominant peers. Furthermore, these individuals are the archetypes of oppression because they are the target groups of mistreatments. To put it another way, the oppressed individuals are the meticulous components of minority groups that are intentionally oppressed by another higher social class. Here, the stereotypical characteristics of oppression find its way through these individuals who are forced to be oppressed in very vicious and inhumane actions (Oshana 2017: 14). Such actions are directed towards the oppressed by “identifiable agents”; that is, the victimised individuals who are oppressed by the collective identifiable agents. They, in turn, are the true higher persecutory class that ruthlessly exerts oppression over the minority groups. In this case, Young proposes that the oppressive agents impose social restrictions upon the minority groups in order to achieve their aims and agendas regarding the position of the minority groups because they think that the minority individual would be harmful to the entire society.

The oppressive agents, accordingly, are the exemplification of oppression in the whole society, where Young reiterates the persistent description of the oppressors as the hegemonic power in the society. In other words, the oppressive identifiable agents are powerful and they could curb down any attempt by the oppressed minority groups. This is ascribed to the low and limited presence of the minority group which does not have the sufficient means and capacity to be equal to the dominant society (Gil 2013: 90). For this reason, the oppressed groups become powerless. Being so, the oppressed minority groups would be defined by describing them as whimsical “outsiders” who do not originally relate to the dominant society. Hence, this group becomes excluded from other original societies as Young (1990: 46) states:

a group may be identified by outsiders without those so identified having any specific consciousness of themselves as a group. Sometimes a group comes to exist only because one group excludes and labels a category of persons, and those labelled come to understand themselves as group members only slowly, on the basis of their shared oppression.

In this sense, the shared oppression relates to the experience of the minority groups' individuals that are “outsiders” and treated in a negative way. In this study, the Muslim minority groups will be discussed as the oppressed “outsiders” who are

treated by the American society in a discriminatory manner. The dominant American society, accordingly, is the comprehensive social periphery for Muslims; yet, Muslims suffer from the American society as hegemonic cultural milieu. Due to this, they could not interact properly with their American counterparts in a peaceful social co-existence. As such, we will apply it to the selected novel to examine the authorial depictions of the Muslim bitter experiences in America after the 9/11 attacks.

More importantly, Young proposes that the concept of oppression is an embodiment of prejudice. To put it simply, the oppressed minority groups are victims of prejudice and discrimination, where Young describes the social dilemmas of the oppressed minority groups as problems emanating from the main integral social class which is the higher class itself. Being so, the oppressed minority group is identified collectively; for example, it includes all oppressed individuals whereby every individual represents the whole persecuted minority groups:

From this point of view, problems of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion exist because some people mistakenly believe that group identification makes a difference to the capacities, temperament or virtues of group members. This individualist conception of persons and their relation to one another tends to identify oppression with group identification. (Young 1990: 46)

Consequently, prejudice is a detrimental fact that degrades the position of the minority group and its capacity to cope with the dominant cultural surroundings. Here, oppression is a process of elimination; that is, it attempts to obliterate the existence of the minority group as a whole (Weil 2001: 54). In this study, similarly, we will focus on the Muslim minority group in America and how it is socially oppressed. At this point, we hypothesise that the American society tries to obliterate the Muslim minority group on the grounds that Muslims are merely terrorists.

As for cultural imperialism, Young discusses this concept in light of oppression as it is the basic tenet of oppression as a concept. She asserts that the concept of cultural imperialism as connected with oppression includes the oppressors who have the power to make the oppressed minority groups devoid of any social mobilisation in the society. Oppression, as a concept, refers to the troubled relationship between the oppressed minority groups and the oppressors, where the oppressors are the dominant group that exerts devastating oppression upon the oppressed minority groups. Accordingly, Young (1990: 58) disputes the crucial connotations of the concept of cultural imperialism:

[d]elimit people's material lives, including but not restricted to the resources they have access to and the concrete opportunities they have or do not have to develop and exercise their capacities. These kinds of oppression are a matter of concrete power in relation to others—of who benefits from whom, and who is dispensable.

In this context, the main characteristic of cultural imperialism as a concept is power. This means that the oppressors have the enormous social power to be dominant and eminent over the oppressed minority groups. Thus, Young's argumentation about

the concept of cultural imperialism embodies the inseparable connection between cultural imperialism and oppression.

In particular, the relationship between the concept of cultural imperialism and minority groups is obvious when individuals are treated in an unfair way in society. This is due to the fact that the individuals could not be separated from the whole society because they are the atoms of its construction (Healy 2000: 26). In this regard, Young (1990: 58-59) argues that the concept of cultural imperialism means “to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other”. As such, cultural imperialism is a sort of cultural hegemony exerted upon the persecuted minorities: “cultural imperialism involves the universalisation of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (Young 1990: 59). In this study, accordingly, the American society will be discussed as the representation of cultural imperialism that oppresses and devastates the Muslim minority’s presence. Moreover, society plays a crucial part in defining the notion of cultural imperialism.

Young proposes that the cultural aspects of the concept of cultural imperialism depend on the colonial manifestations of cultural imperialism in colonial contexts, such as literature and political discourses. In this manner, the concept of cultural imperialism embodies the colonial circumferences that unify the common and discrepant political viewpoints in the world: “those living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them” (Young 1990: 59). The significance of the concept of cultural imperialism lies in its representation of society in literary texts. Being so, it enables critics to argue that the concept of cultural imperialism could be applied to analyse and interpret many literary works. Moreover, it facilitates the understanding of politics and its practices which are depicted in works of literature.

Readers could easily grasp the cultural imperialism by absorbing the political affairs depicted in the literary works. Consequently, a wide perception of cultural imperialism would be more inclusive of the political power in America. Another prominent example is that, while cultural imperialism in works of literature exploits and harnesses the oppressed group for different purposes, the political exploitation of the oppressed group severely contradicts with the human sense of freedom and self-discipline. Just so, political-cultural imperialism positions the oppressed group in critical conditions where they find themselves pressured to be rid of this political-cultural imperialism in order to obtain freedom. For this reason, they begin to find suitable and appropriate ways to eliminate cultural imperialism in different attempts, “the dominant culture’s stereotyped and inferiorised images of the group must be internalised by group members at least to the extent that they are forced to react to the behaviour of others influenced by those images” (Young 1990: 59-60). In all cases, authors have depicted this experience in relation to characters that are tools utilised by them in order to treat the position of the oppressed group in reality (Corlett 2010: 293). In this study, the Muslim minority groups are portrayed as the



oppressed group, while the dominant American culture that embodies American imperialism overwhelms their existence and does not allow them to gain any form of power. As a result, it oppresses them. This study, therefore, will seek to demonstrate how the Muslim minority groups are not able to cope with the dominant American culture since they come from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

### **3. Social oppression of Muslim identity under American imperialism**

Young (1990: 59) discusses the oppression that minority groups have experienced at the hands of dominant groups by arguing how “[t]hose living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them”. This seemingly complex relationship oppresses and, at the same time, alienates the minority groups. Similarly, in *The Submission*, the jury, who is supposed to be neutral in the selection of the best design for the memorial, appears biased, as seen in the following example from the text, “I’m not sure I want it with the name Mohammad attached to it. It doesn’t matter who he is. They’ll feel like they’ve won. All over the Muslim world, they’ll be jumping up and down at our stupidity, our stupid tolerance” (Waldman 2011: 18). In this textual evidence, a member of the jury confides his inner fears as well the fears of other members with regard to Mohammad’s design. Although they have all chosen his design, they fear the attachment of the name ‘Mohammad’ to it. As the novel unfolds, it appears that this is the sentiment of the families of the victims as well. The attitude towards the Muslim minority seems antagonistic, especially in the era after the 9/11 attacks.

The entanglement of certain minority groups is carried even further. As depicted in the following example, Paul, the head of the jury, is talking with his driver Sami about the 9/11 attacks:

Oh sir, I hope it’s not the Arabs. Sami wasn’t Arab, but he was Muslim. (Eighty percent of Muslims were not Arab: this was one of those facts many learned and earnestly repeated in the wake of the attack, without knowing exactly what they were trying to say, or rather knowing that they were trying to say that not all Muslims were as problematic as the Arab ones, but not wanting to say exactly that). (Waldman 2011: 13)

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the American public starts to blame the Arab minority. As seen in the above textual evidence, Sami, who is a Muslim, assumes the responsibility of the Arabs for the attacks and tries to distance himself. As Young asserts, assigning stereotypes in such a manner is one of the effects of American imperialism. Generalising certain ideas in such a way oppresses and alienates the Arab minority group. The evidence from the text appears to show that the Arab Muslims are all perceived as suspects of the attacks. Although they are Americans, the Arabs have been cast away as problematic and possibly dangerous in American society.

In addition, Young discusses the failures of cultural imperialism to understand the perspective of minority groups and to acknowledge their

experiences and existence. As Young (1990: 60) maintains, “[c]ultural imperialism involves the paradox of experiencing oneself as invisible at the same time that one is marked out as different. The invisibility comes about when dominant groups fail to recognise the perspective embodied in their cultural expressions as a perspective”. In this regard, the existence of the minority group is at risk since their perspective is undervalued. Similarly, in the following example from the text, a character named Le Sarge, who works as a radio programme host, talks about the possible danger posed by the Muslim minority group, “Two years on we still don’t know whether we’re up against a handful of zealots who got lucky, or a global conspiracy of a billion Muslims who hate the West, even if they live in it” (Waldman 2011: 20). Here, we argue that the message primarily directed towards the Muslim minority is that they are not part of the American society. The fear invoked in Le Sarge’s comment alienates the Muslim minority from the rest of the society as if they are the enemy. Thus, we suggest that this treatment is part of the oppression of American imperialism.

One of the injustices carried out by American imperialism is dealing with minority groups according to limitations and stereotypes. Young (1990: 60) maintains, “[t]hese dominant cultural expressions often simply have little place for the experience of other groups, at most only mentioning or referring to them in stereotyped or marginalised ways. This, then, is the injustice of cultural imperialism”. Thus, minority groups find little room for expressing themselves without being attached to certain stigmas. In the following example from the text, an activist named Debbie Dawson, who is portrayed as unsupportive of Mohammad’s design, talks to a group of protesters about the dangerous attitude of the Muslim minority, “Islam was violent. It believed killing innocent people was acceptable. It didn’t like women. It didn’t like other religions.” It was as hateful as her nausea. She was going to puke again. “The problem with Islam is Islam” (Waldman 2011: 106). The hateful message in this textual evidence is more than obvious. In line with Young’s argument, evoking false stereotypes about Islam hinders the Muslim minority to be fully integrated into American society. Therefore, we argue that, in the novel, the injustice of American imperialism is directly related to viewing Muslims according to false images, which ultimately oppresses the Muslim minority, making their life harder in the wider society.

In particular, the character, Mohammad, is portrayed as someone who cares less about Islam, as a religion, or his fellow Muslims. Part of the antagonism against Mohammad is the wish of the American general public to understand his commitment to his religion. In the following example from the text, airport agents have taken Mohammad for interrogation because they suspect that he is a terrorist, “You have not just the wrong man but the wrong kind of man. The wrong kind of Muslim: he’d barely been to a mosque in his life” (Waldman 2011: 28). Here, Mohammad explains to the agents that he is not a terrorist and he equates this with his lack of serious commitment to the Islamic practices. This incident further illuminates the kind of treatment that the Muslim minority experiences within the oppression of American imperialism. In this context, we argue that oppression

operates in perceiving Muslims as dangerous or possibly dangerous subjects which ultimately puts the Muslim minority in a tight circle of suspicion and insecurity.

From a different perspective, patriotism is an elusive term if seen in the context of American imperialism. It includes and excludes certain members of American society. In the following example from the text, a discussion occurs between the head of the jury, Paul, and another member in which they discuss the problem of excluding Mohammad's design based on his religion, "'How did it happen? Was that what you asked? As I recall, people like you-you, the families-you wanted a competition, a democratic exercise everyone could participate in. And so everyone did.'" "That's not who we meant by everyone'" (Waldman 2011: 128). As shown here, Paul tries to defend Mohammad's right to participate in the competition by asking members of the jury about their initial decision to give equal opportunity for everyone to participate. Nevertheless, a member of the jury puts it bluntly that Mohamad is not what they mean by "everyone". As implied here, the name "Mohammad", which is connotative of the name of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad, and the Muslim minority, in general, are not welcomed to be active members of American imperialism. Therefore, true citizenship and patriotism are exclusive traits of American imperialism. As Young has discussed, members of the dominant group decide who is in line with their perspective and who is not. In such an atmosphere, we argue that the opportunity for the Muslim minority to exercise their full rights as American citizens is hindered due to the limiting beliefs of American imperialism.

As discussed earlier, Young (1990: 60) has debated extensively about the failure of cultural imperialism to accept the perspective of other minority groups; "[c]ultural imperialism is enacted partly through the ability of a dominant group to assert its perspective and experience as universal or neutral. In the sphere of the polity, I argue, claim to universality operates politically to exclude those understood as different". In this context, exclusion based on difference oppresses minority groups who live under American imperialism. In the following example from the text, Le Sarge attacks the Muslim minority based on false propositions, "For generations immigrants came to this country and assimilated, accepted American values. But Muslims want to change America-no, they want to conquer it. Our Constitution protects religious freedom, but Islam is not a religion! It's a political ideology" (Waldman 2011: 151). In this textual evidence, Le Sarge, being part of the dominant group, asserts his perspective concerning the Muslim minority whom he believes are not part of the American society. In this way, Le Sarge views Muslims as different from the rest of the society. In line with Young's argument, then, American imperialism works in oppressing the minority group with different perspectives and values. In this context, Muslims are a threat to American imperialism because they embrace and represent different viewpoints.

In addition, the same message that Muslims are terrorist suspects is carried out through different media. In the following example from the text, Asma Anwar, a Bangladeshi widow who has lost her husband, Inam, in the 9/11 attacks, talks to her neighbour, Mrs Mahmoud, about the prevailing news in the media, "Now they-the English newspapers, the radio-they're saying Muslims don't belong here!"

(Waldman 2011: 135). The same spirit of exclusion is carried out here through the media which is a powerful tool to influence the general public. In this context, we argue that American imperialism distances the Muslim minority group; hence, this act oppresses Muslims and further alienates them as potential threats to society.

Furthermore, Young maintains that minority groups are not alienated but they are seen as deviant from the mainstream consciousness of American imperialism as Young (1990: 60) suggests that: “the group defined by the dominant culture as deviant, as a stereotyped Other, is culturally different from the dominant group because the status of Otherness creates specific experiences not shared by the dominant group”. It appears that the process of distancing certain minority groups accumulates over a period of time. Here, Young has proposed that American imperialism devalues deviant bodies. In the following example from the text, the press evokes hateful sentiments against the Muslim minority, “It would appear to be a covert attempt at Islamisation”, the paper intoned. “Two decades of multicultural appeasement have led to this: we’ve invited the enemy into our home to decorate” (Waldman 2011: 116). In this textual evidence, an article in *The Post* talks about Mohammad’s design as a threat and an attempt to Islamise the memorial landscape. In the newspaper, the reference to the Muslim minority as the enemy reinforces the spirit of antagonism within the sphere of American imperialism. Consequently, we argue that the oppression of the Muslim minority acts in rejecting not only Muslim views and perspectives but their architecture as possibly denoting a kind of Islamic symbol to conquer and challenge American imperialism.

In discussing the attempt by Mohammad’s parents to convince him to forget about the competition and withdraw his design, Mohammad’s father tells him, ““Look at the history of Nazi Germany. The Jews thought they were German until they weren’t. Here they’re already talking about us as less American. Then they’ll say we need containment, and next thing you know we’ll be interned”” (Waldman 2011: 175). Evoking the history of the Jews during the Nazi’s regime, Mohammad’s father fears the same destiny. He warns his son not to think of himself as an American citizen with the same rights as the rest of the American citizens. His awareness of the media’s attack on his son’s design propels him to conjure such a comparison. Thus, we argue that the safety of the Muslim minority living during the time of American imperialism is threatened due to such misconceptions that are spread widely through the media.

Lastly, the dominant group in American imperialism monopolises the means of interpretation to their favour as Young (1990: 59) argues, “[s]ome groups have exclusive or primary access to what is called the means of interpretation and communication in a society”. In this sense, American imperialism directs and manipulates the means of interpretation. Similarly, in the following example from the novel, we see commentators discussing the issue of pulling Muslim women’s headscarves, ““This is America. What these men pulling off the headscarves are doing-it’s an act of liberation.” Mr Mahmoud snorted at this. “Yes, our women feel so liberated they’ve stopped going outside.”” (Waldman 2011: 170). Mr Mahmoud, a Bangladeshi Muslim living in New York, is watching the *Fox News* while they have been discussing the multiple incidents of pulling Muslim women’s

headscarves committed throughout the country. These incidents were invoked after Mohammad's winning the competition. Nevertheless, the broadcasters at the *Fox News* view it as a sign of liberation. In line with Young's argument, the Americans have an exclusive means of interpretation to convince the general public that these incidents are signs of hatred. Ironically, Mr Mahmoud's comment provides the counter-argument to this issue. Therefore, American imperialism not only directs viewpoints but also manipulates and oppresses them as well.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study presented a hermeneutic, textual analysis of cultural imperialism and oppression in Amy Waldman's novel *The Submission*. The focus of the study has been on the way by which the Muslim minority group suffers from oppression at the hands of the American society that, in turn, embodies the notion of cultural imperialism and its oppression. We applied the concept of cultural imperialism to examine Waldman's portrayals of Muslim minority characters in America. Through applying Young's concept of cultural imperialism for our analysis, we have unearthed a striking theme on the oppression of Muslim minority groups as cultural imperialism is one facet of oppression that can suppress any minority group in society. This issue has been clearly addressed in our study through the protagonist, Mohammad, who has been treated as an inferior entity, or more accurately because he is a Muslim, in the American society when he was elected as a 9/11 memorial designer. At this point, our study has examined the Muslim protagonist's treatment as an indication of the growing hatred against the Muslim minority groups due to American imperialism. On this account, our analyses have revealed Waldman's truthful depictions of American imperialism that oppresses and violates the rights of members of the Muslim minorities in American society.

Furthermore, this study applied Young's concept of oppression to examine how the Muslim minority groups are treated extremely on the basis of discrimination and bias by the Americans as Young's concept of oppression indicated American imperialism's excessive cultural despotism. In this regard, the characters Debbie Dawson, Le Sarge and the jury strenuously try to preclude Mohammad and the rest of the Muslim minority groups from involvement in the American society, especially when each one of them, on several occasions, announces that Mohammad and the rest of the Muslim minority groups are the main threat in the society. In this matter, Waldman portrays Debbie, Le Sarge and the jury as representations of American imperialism and its stereotype that oppresses the Muslim minority groups in the American society. As a result, our study has pinpointed the social characteristics of cultural prejudice among the Muslim minority group represented by Mohammad and the dominant American group represented by Debbie, Le Sarge and the jury, ascribing it to Young's concept of cultural imperialism as an aspect of social oppression.

Thus, it is safe to conclude that, through applying Young's concept of cultural imperialism and its related critical insights of oppression, our analyses have demonstrated reflections on the social oppression of the Muslim identity under American imperialism. The study is, of course, limited to Waldman's depictions of

both American imperialism and the social oppression of Muslim minority characters in *The Submission* and to the two-pronged conceptual framework of cultural imperialism and its related critical insights of oppression. Moving on from our findings, future research on this novel can be carried out by applying the theory of justice by the American philosopher John Bordley Rawls as this theory can be used to further investigate the issue of the Muslim characters' freedom and equality in the dominant American society.

Saif Raed Nafia Fakhruddin

PhD Candidate at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ORCID Number: 0000-0002-0350-711X

Email: fakhruddin1992@gmail.com

Ida Baizura Bahar (PhD)

Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ORCID Number: 0000-0003-2987-1574

Email: idabb@upm.edu.my

Zainor Izat Zainal (PhD)

Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ORCID Number: 0000-0001-5071-4181

Email: zainor@upm.edu.my

Mohammad Ewan Awang (PhD)

Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ORCID Number: 0000-0001-8328-3138

Email: [ewan@upm.edu.my](mailto:ewan@upm.edu.my)

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