

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The number of migrant and refugee Muslims has increased in the Western hemisphere over the last decade. Muslim immigrants came to Western countries to make a better life or escape from the political or ideological pressures in their homeland (Lebl, 2015, p. 3). Hackett (2017) further states that migration was the biggest factor for the growing Muslim population in Europe. The migration of Muslims to Europe began in the 1950s and 60s, mainly due to European economic prosperity and the constant recruitment of low-skilled laborers from various continents meanwhile in the United States, especially after the Immigration Act of 1965 was issued, it has allured many Muslim students and professionals from South Asia and the Middle East (Lapidus, 2002, p. 790-805). Muslims constitute almost five percent in the United Kingdom and one percent in the United States in 2010 which will presumably be doubled in 2050 (Hackett, 2017).

The concept of diaspora has been known as the dispersal of people from their original homeland through migration, refuge, and exile (Butler, 2001, p. 189). The diasporic people such as the Muslim immigrants from many different cultures are exposed to the new cultures and go through transformation processes of cultures, especially for the second-generation diaspora. Steven Vertovec (1997) further argues that diaspora is a term that is often used to describe a population that is considered to be 'de-territorialized' or 'transnational'. Transnational here means

that they came from a country other than what is now occupied and owns social, economic, and political networks across national borders, nations, and even the world. The difference in ethnicity in a transnational society such as the Muslim diaspora did not hinder the feeling of unity. According to Moghissi et al. (2009), Muslim immigrants as a transnational community are connected through a sense of religious solidarity. The religious community of Muslims in diasporic space reflects a religious cultural identity. Although Muslims as immigrants tend to assimilate to the dominant culture of Western countries, it is not rare for them to still retain the religious cultures, practices, and beliefs in both private and public realms of the host countries in the West (Wardana, 2014, p. 219).

Religion as a cultural identity marker could be seen from the contrasting values and practices that Muslims brought to Western society. In contrast to the secularization and Christian core culture of Western countries, religious customs such as wearing *hijab* or veil, fasting in Ramadan, and celebrating *Eid* creates a distinctive symbol of identity for the Muslim diaspora (Kilp, 2011, p. 217-218). As Hall (1990) states in his work *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, cultural identity can be seen as both a state of “being” and “becoming”. As a state of being, cultural identity is a reflection of the similarity of history and cultural codes that form a group of people into one. Although apart from the similarities and cultural codes that unite them, cultural identity can also undergo a transformation as a state of becoming or positioning. In Muslim immigrant case, Islam that is supposedly a dominant socio-cultural force in their home countries repositioned due to being situated in a foreign land, surrounded by different traditions and values (Duderija, 2007, p. 145). Hence, the religious cultural identity of the Muslim diaspora is

challenged in a different socio-cultural context. Muslims in the diaspora are forced to choose between practicing Islamic values that are against the Western culture or adjusting the Islamic culture with the Western traditions.

Several studies on the issue of the Muslim diaspora in literature have been conducted by various researchers. Abderrahim Ait Abdeslam (2018) conducted a study on the portrayal of the Muslim diaspora in two French novels *Soumission* (2015) and *Petit Frère* (2008). Drawing on textual content analysis, the researcher investigates the vilification of Muslim immigrants by the French writers. The study found that French writers of both *Soumission* (2015) and *Petit Frère* (2008) presented their ideas about Muslim immigrants from a negative standpoint and stigmatized them. The result of this study revealed how negative portrayal and stigma in literary works can criminalize as well as endanger the Muslim diaspora.

Maheen Aamir (2019) also conducted another study on Muslim diaspora in the novel *Home Fire* (2017) written by Kamila Shamsie. The study accentuated the hardships and suffering of the Muslim diaspora in Britain through the depiction of literary work using the post-colonial lens. In this study, the researcher examines the concept of 'othering' of the Muslim diaspora in the multicultural space of Britain. The study found that the novel portrayed the emergence of colonial binaries of Self and Other in the contemporary world. It revealed how Muslims were treated as 'other' whose nationalities can be revoked at any time by the culturally radical West. The 'othering' resulted in marginalization and discrimination that deprives the Muslim diaspora to live freely and equally in the West.

The studies above have looked into the reflection of the Muslim diaspora in the literature using orientalism theory and textual content analysis. However, the research on the religious cultural identity of the Muslim diaspora in the collection of short stories *Once Upon an Eid* has not been conducted. The collection of short stories *Once Upon an Eid* exhibits diverse perspectives of fifteen Muslim voices from a multicultural point of view. The literary work is edited by New York Times best-sellers, S. K. Ali and Aisha Saeed, and has a high rating of 4.29 on the website Goodreads. It covers short fiction, poetry, and comic illustration inspired by the Muslim religious holiday celebration of Eid. This study will focus only on the first section that is the short fiction. The short stories talk about the Eid celebration of the Muslim diasporic community in Western countries such as American countries, European countries, and Australia. Eid al-Fitr is a celebration that indicates the end of the holy month, Ramadan. Ramadan is a month of spiritual journey through fasting and prayers throughout the day. In the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims all across the world participate in fasting—abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations—that begins at the Fajr prayer before dawn and is broken at dusk when the sun is set (Raheem, 2007). Eid is a national holiday in Muslim majority countries. Although in Western or non-Muslim majority countries, Eid is not marked as a national holiday unlike Christmas and Thanksgiving (Joshi, 2020). The condition of the Eid celebration of the Muslim diasporic community in Western countries is depicted in the short stories.

The short stories will be analyzed using cultural identity theory by Stuart Hall (1990) and the theory of dominant, residual, and emergent culture by Raymond Williams (1991). The research specifically focuses on the ten short stories in the

collection of short stories *Once Upon an Eid*. The study attempts to examine the religious cultural identity reflected through Muslim diaspora living in the non-Muslim majority countries such as American and European countries. The concept of dominant, residual, and emergent culture is used to conduct the study of Muslim immigrants in the Western countries reflected in *Once Upon an Eid*.

### **1.2 Research Question**

How is the portrayal of Muslim diaspora's religious cultural identity reflected in the collection of short stories *Once Upon an Eid*?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

Based on the research question above, the objective of this study is to scrutinize the portrayal of the Muslim diaspora's religious cultural identity reflected in the collection of short stories.

### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on ten short stories in the collection of short stories *Once Upon an Eid*— “*Perfect*” by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow; “*Yusuf and the Great Big Brownie Mistake*” by Aisha Saeed; “*Kareem Means “Generous”*” by Asmaa Hussein; “*Don’t Break Tradition*” by S. K. Ali; “*Just Like Chest Armor*” by Candice Montgomery; “*Gifts*” by Rukhsana Khan; “*Searching for Blue*” by N. H. Senzai; “*Not Only an Only*” by Huda Al-Marashi; “*Maya Madinah Chooses Joy*” by Ayesha Mattu; “*Eid and Pink Bubble Gum, Insha’Allah*” by Randa Abdel-Fattah. The research analyzes the portrayal of the religious cultural identity of the Muslim diaspora in the direct and indirect speeches of the characters as well as the

narrations given by the authors. The limitations of this study are the phrases, clauses, and sentences that indicate Muslim diaspora in the ten short stories within *Once Upon an Eid*.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to be useful as a reference study for those who are interested in studying and analyzing the religious cultural identity of the Muslim diaspora in literature specifically the collection of short stories. Moreover, the result of this study is aimed to give academic input to Islamic literary work through the cultural identity approach. This study is also expected to give a better knowledge of post-colonial literary criticism especially for English Literature students who are interested in the issue of diaspora and its aspects.