

Decolonizing the Stage: Exploring Postcolonial Narratives and Identity in Rohina Malik's *Unveiled*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the intersection of postcolonial criticism and contemporary literature through an in-depth analysis of Rohina Malik's play *Unveiled* (2018) and dissects how Malik's work delves into themes such as identity, assimilation, cultural heritage, and resistance within the framework of postcolonial discourse. Through an analysis of the characters' challenges and victories, besides the socio-political backdrop against which the play unfolds, this form of citizenship represents the aspiration of each postcolonial individual to be fully integrated as a genuine member of their adopted nation-state. By embracing environmentally conscious values that transcend ethnic boundaries, postcolonial citizens can forge meaningful connections within their new society. Regarding the methodology, this research employs a postcolonial critical approach, drawing on Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, to analyze Rohina Malik's *Unveiled*. Through the analysis of the text, the paper identifies identity, cultural resistance, and marginalization, and how the play resists stereotypes, relations of power, and postcolonial oppression in order to portray a story of agency, resilience, and belonging. Moreover, this study underscores the transformative potential of literature in shaping narratives of resistance, solidarity, and shared humanity in the postcolonial era. As postcolonial discourse continues to evolve, works like "*Unveiled*" serve as vital touchstones for understanding the ongoing complexities of citizenship and belonging in a world shaped by colonial histories and contemporary realities.

Keywords: citizenship, Contemporary Theater, Nostalgia, postcolonial criticism, resistance

1. Introduction

This paper explores the development of postcolonial criticism, tracing its trajectory from foundational theoretical texts to its contemporary applications. It then situates *Unveiled* (2018), a powerful one-woman play by Rohina Malik, within this theoretical framework to examine how postcolonial themes manifest in a post-9/11 context. The play intricately navigates issues of identity, assimilation, cultural heritage, and resistance, offering a rich lens through which to understand the complexities of marginalized experiences in the United States.

Through a close reading of key scenes and character interactions, this study demonstrates how *Unveiled* challenges dominant narratives by confronting stereotypes, exposing discrimination, and interrogating power dynamics. Simultaneously, the play highlights moments of resilience and agency, foregrounding the voices of those often relegated to the margins. The characters—Maryam, Noor, Inez, Shabana, and Layla—serve as narrative instruments to examine the struggle for identity and dignity within hegemonic sociopolitical structures.

Rohina Malik, a London-born playwright of South Asian descent, brings a unique perspective shaped by her experiences as a Muslim woman and immigrant. Now based in the United States, Malik uses theater as a platform for advocacy, empathy, as well as interfaith dialogue. *Unveiled*, her critically acclaimed play, addresses Islamophobia, identity, and the lived realities of Muslim women in the West. Alongside other works like *Yasmina's Necklace* and *The Mecca Tales*, Malik's storytelling reveals a commitment to social justice and representation. Her work enriches postcolonial discourse by giving voice to communities that navigate layered forms of marginalization and cultural negotiation.

Postcolonial criticism emerged in the late 1970s, pioneered by Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Further developments were seen in Spivak's *The Postcolonial Critic* (1990) and Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994). Huggan (2001), in *The Postcolonial Exotic*, defines postcolonialism as an "anti-colonial intellectualism" that identifies and celebrates social struggle within literary and cultural texts. Postcolonial criticism primarily focuses on "postcolonial literature," which has evolved from the experience of colonization (Martin & Ashcroft, 2002). It follows two major paths:

On the one hand, via the reading of specific postcolonial texts and the effects of their production in and on specific social and historical contexts, and on the other, via the 'revisioning' of received tropes and modes such as allegory, irony, and metaphor

and the rereading of 'canonical' texts in the light of postcolonial discursive practices. (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 191)

Exploring the effects of colonization on cultural identity, power dynamics, and resistance, Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* intricately captures the nuanced postcolonial experiences of five Muslim women navigating life in the post-9/11 United States. The play underscores the transformative potential of citizenship as both a legal and emotional anchor in the struggle for belonging as well as inclusion. To fully understand the position of the "postcolonial citizen," it is essential to ground the analysis within postcolonial criticism and its interrogation of how power, representation, and identity intersect.

As a matter of fact, Postcolonial theory reveals that colonialism did not merely exploit people but also commodified land, nature, and cultural knowledge. European colonizers, as Plumwood (2003) observes, showed a pronounced interest in the non-human aspects of colonized territories, perceiving these lands as primordial spaces akin to a pre-Adamic world (Gebert, 2011). This romanticized vision of the East as a paradise rich in untapped resources drove colonial ambitions rooted in possessive ideologies (Adams, 2003). Colonizers sought to render these regions productive for the benefit of the First World, a process justified through narratives of economic necessity and civilizational superiority (Marzec, 2007).

This logic extended to the natural world, where colonial enterprises imposed extractive practices and environmental domination. Colonized subjects were often portrayed as primitive, exotic, and inferior, reinforcing a binary that justified colonial authority over both people and nature (Plumwood, 2003; Huggan et al., 2010). As Curtin (1999) notes, such perceptions led to a paternalistic stance, where colonizers positioned themselves as moral guides for allegedly underdeveloped societies—an ideology that ignored the universal human capacity for suffering, joy, and moral agency (Said, 1978).

One example of this imposition is the deforestation of colonized lands such as the Canaries, where colonizers sought to replicate European landscapes and establish a familiar notion of citizenship and order (Ghananim, 2025). In contrast, postcolonialism challenges the hegemony of "white criticism" (Talukdar, 2017), offering critical frameworks that resist Eurocentric models of development and highlight the long-term sociocultural damage inflicted on colonized regions. These frameworks are essential for analyzing works like *Unveiled*, which reclaims the narrative space for historically marginalized voices and critiques the lingering effects of colonial ideologies in contemporary societies.

2. Literature Review

Previous scholarship on *Unveiled* has explored its role in resisting Islamophobia, confronting post-9/11 stereotypes, and remapping Muslim women's agency. Analyses have primarily drawn from feminist, diasporic, and political perspectives. However, a focused postcolonial critique—particularly around cultural hegemony and performative resistance—remains underexplored. The following studies offer valuable insights while revealing this critical gap.

While *Unveiled* stands out for its intimate portrayal of Muslim women's experiences in a post-9/11 Western context, it resonates with works like Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced* and Wajahat Ali's *The Domestic Crusaders*, which similarly explore the tensions between cultural heritage and Western societal expectations. Unlike Akhtar's focus on internalized Islamophobia and public identity crises, or Ali's emphasis on generational conflict within a Muslim American family, Malik centers veiled Muslim women as narrators of their own stories, reclaiming agency in both private and public spaces. This comparative lens highlights how *Unveiled* contributes uniquely to postcolonial theatre by foregrounding female subjectivity and spiritual resilience.

Afzal-Khan, Bose, and Khoury (2016) examine how Muslim American playwrights, including Rohina Malik, use theater to resist Islamophobia and political violence. They recognize *Unveiled* as a counter-narrative to Western depictions of Muslim women in post-9/11 discourse, emphasizing themes of empowerment and resistance. However, their approach lacks a postcolonial theoretical lens and does not engage with questions of cultural hegemony, power relations, or intersectionality—central concerns of the present study. Additionally, their analysis does not delve into Malik's narrative strategies or the performative dimensions of resistance embedded in the play.

Stahl (2023) contextualizes the play within broader post-9/11 media and political narratives that often frame Muslim and Arab women as oppressed victims to justify military interventions. She reads *Unveiled* as a resistance to such essentialist portrayals, highlighting its portrayal of Muslim women confronting racism and nationalism in the U.S. and U.K. Her use of postcolonialism and transnational feminism sheds light on diasporic subjectivity and mother-child dynamics but focuses less on structural power and cultural performance as tools of resistance.

El-Sawy (2022) tackles the articulation of Muslim American women's voices in *Unveiled*, their agency and resilience in resisting post-9/11 stereotypes and discrimination. The study examines how Malik's characters resist Western hegemonic narratives, asserting autonomy and cultural identity through performance and narrative. It analyzes themes of marginalization, intersectionality, and resistance, demonstrating how the play retrieves Muslim women's narratives from orientalist and nationalist discourse. Despite its withdrawal, the research provides significant details on how *Unveiled* has contributed to Muslim women's experiences in gender, religion, and diaspora discourses in contemporary American drama.

Aside from the play's cultural and political subject matter of resistance, *Unveiled* also utilizes everyday rituals—such as having tea—symbols of strength and solidarity. Shalaby (2023) and Handley (2011) discuss how these are moments of introspection of the triumphs and failures of the characters and how they exercise their agency in a world that attempts to marginalize them. In its intersectional framework, as critiqued by Sharma (2022) and Kabeer (2005), the play depicts a realistic picture of the struggles of Muslim

women. Ultimately, *Unveiled* is an affirming book that not only condemns past and present injustices but also fosters a deeper understanding of diverse cultural experiences.

Shalaby (2023) and Handley (2011) explore how Malik uses everyday rituals—such as sharing tea—as symbolic acts of solidarity and strength. These moments of introspection reveal characters' triumphs besides vulnerabilities while underscoring their agency in a marginalizing world. In dialogue with intersectional critiques such as Sharma (2022) and Kabeer (2005), these studies frame *Unveiled* as an authentic representation of Muslim women's lived experiences.

Additionally, Shalaby (2023) introduces the concept of the "postcolonial green citizen," analyzing the symbolic use of plants—tea, coffee, and oranges—as tools of environmental and cultural resistance. While her focus is primarily ecological, her reading of ritualized nature aligns with broader postcolonial themes, including the decolonization of theater and performative expressions of identity.

This study addresses a key gap by applying an integrated postcolonial framework to *Unveiled*, shifting focus from identity politics to issues of hegemony, intersectionality, and power. It advances prior research by offering close textual and performative analysis of the characters' resistance strategies. Additionally, it interprets symbolic acts—like tea rituals—as expressions of ecological and cultural solidarity. Drawing from postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and performance analysis, this work broadens the critical conversation around Malik's play and positions it within a more inclusive framework of postcolonial resistance, identity, and belonging.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a postcolonial critical framework, drawing extensively from the foundational theories of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha. It interrogates how colonial discourses are both reproduced as well as subverted in Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* through an analysis of the play's historical, social, and political contexts. The methodology centers on textual analysis, using selected monologues and character interactions to explore themes of identity, assimilation, cultural heritage, and resistance in post-9/11 America.

The analysis pays particular attention to cultural hegemony and its role in shaping identity and the representation of the "Other." It also examines how Malik's characters resist orientalist stereotypes and challenge dominant narratives by asserting agency and reclaiming space. The study is also informed by intersectionality theory, considering how ethnicity, religion, and gender co-construct the postcolonial experience.

Close reading of the text focuses on scenes involving Maryam, Noor, Inez, Shabana, and Layla—each offering insight into the layered impacts of discrimination, power imbalance, and marginalization. The methodology reveals how Malik's narrative techniques and symbolic elements—such as ritual, language, and silence—serve as performative acts of resistance. Additionally, this research situates *Unveiled* within the broader trajectory of postcolonial criticism, underscoring its relevance to contemporary literary and cultural studies. By combining theoretical inquiry with close textual analysis, this study aims to uncover how *Unveiled* contributes to postcolonial discourse, particularly in constructing narratives of resilience, solidarity, and belonging in the wake of colonial and imperial legacies.

4. Discussion and Results

By analyzing the play's narrative through the lens of postcolonial discourse, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary literature engages with and challenges colonial legacies. Malik's *Unveiled* is not simply a collection of monologues; it becomes a dynamic performative space in which identity, marginalization, and resistance are explored through the voices of Muslim women. The play confronts the racialized and gendered constructions of post-9/11 America and Britain, challenging hegemonic narratives that aim to silence and distort Muslim subjectivity.

Post-colonialism rises from the ashes of postmodernism, offering a theoretical framework for reimagining and accommodating the realities of marginalized voices, the "peripheral," representing the "other," and the voiceless people globally. It does not claim to be exhaustive; rather, it strives to carve out a space amidst the overpowering proclamations of Eurocentric absolutism. It challenges established norms while recognizing that conquest and its ideologies were constructed narratives, wielded as weapons of suppression to achieve their goals of subjugation, defeat, and silence. Yet, as the soothing balm of peace is applied to the wounds of the oppressors, the once-muted voices of the marginalized find resonance through post-colonialism. By rejecting the usurpation of power and amplifying silenced voices, post-colonialism grants agency to those who were previously shackled.

Rohina Malik, a contemporary American Pakistani playwright, actress, and educator, addresses issues affecting minorities, particularly stereotyping, discrimination, identity crises, resistance, and complex relationships with their homeland. Through her drama, Malik confronts stereotyping by illustrating its detrimental effects and offering a portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as ordinary individuals with typical strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. In an interview with Dana Lynn Formby, Malik discusses the impact of stereotyping on the portrayal of Muslims in the media:

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

In the first section of *Unveiled*, titled *Chocolate Chai*, Malik introduces Maryam, an American of Pakistani descent, navigating her sense of self in the world after 9/11. Maryam, who has long embraced her American identity while maintaining aspects of her Pakistani

heritage—such as wearing the veil—finds herself confronted with discrimination as well as prejudice following the tragic events of 9/11. Individuals like John question Maryam's Americanness based on her appearance and cultural practices, highlighting broader themes of identity and belonging in a society that is shaped by colonial ideologies. John's disparaging comments toward Maryam's hijab, referring to it as "shit" (Malik, 2010, p. 9), reflect a colonial mindset of superiority and control over cultural identities. His insistence on the removal of Maryam's hijab echoes historical colonial attitudes of erasure and imposition, denying individuals agency over their expressions. Through Maryam's narrative, Malik sheds light on the enduring impact of colonialism on contemporary notions of citizenship and belonging, emphasizing the ongoing struggles faced by marginalized communities in postcolonial societies (Abou Adel et al., 2024).

Maryam, well aware of her constitutional rights as an American citizen, calmly stopped and turned to confront John, asserting, "Sir, I'm in America, where I have my constitutional right to practice my religion and dress how I like" (Malik, 2010, p. 9). Despite Maryam's assertion, John persisted in insulting her. Her words seemed to agitate John, preventing him from considering her argument rationally. This agitation led him to escalate the confrontation, accusing her of being a terrorist Arab and instructing her to return to Afghanistan, a country he assumed she hailed from: "You Arabs are all terrorists. Go back to Afghanistan!" (Malik, 2010, p. 9). Maryam's attempts to clarify her citizenship and ethnicity were futile as John insisted, "If you're American, then dress like one!" (Malik, 2010, p. 9). Maryam, steadfast in her conviction, responded assertively, stating, "I am dressed like one" (Malik, 2010, p. 9). This exchange between them vividly illustrates the intersection of postcolonialism and identity politics in contemporary America (Abou Adel et al., 2025). Maryam's assertion of her constitutional rights as an American citizen reflects the struggle for recognition and acceptance faced by marginalized communities in a society shaped by colonial ideologies. John's derogatory remarks and assumptions about Maryam's ethnicity echo historical colonial attitudes of racial superiority and control. By challenging Maryam's right to express her cultural identity through her dress, John reinforces the colonial notion that certain cultural practices are inferior or incompatible with American citizenship. Maryam's refusal to conform to John's narrow definition of Americanness underscores the resilience and agency of individuals in resisting colonial impositions on their identities. Through this confrontation, Malik highlights the ongoing complexities of postcolonial identity negotiation in a society marked by racialized hierarchies and cultural prejudices.

Maryam's insistence on her American citizenship and attempts to engage in rational discourse provoked intense anger in John, leading him to hurl insults and false accusations. He falsely labeled her as a radical Muslim advocating violence, stating, "You people are crazy. You want paradise—kill all non-Mozlems" (Malik, 2010, p. 9). Despite Maryam's patient efforts to correct his misconceptions about Islam and Muslims, John's responses became increasingly hostile and derogatory. His verbal abuse escalated to physical aggression, as he attempted to harm Maryam before his companion restrained him. This exchange highlights the intersection of postcolonial dynamics with identity politics, revealing the persistence of colonial stereotypes and the challenges marginalized individuals face in asserting their identities in the face of prejudice and violence.

After a distressing encounter at the police station, Maryam foregoes attending her best friend's wedding and experiences a profound realization that shakes the foundation of her life. She acknowledges the suggestion made by John's female companion that she is deemed unworthy by certain Americans because she does not conform to the traditional roles of an American mother, wife, or daughter. In John's eyes, she is reduced to being merely a "Mozlem," a "terrorist," devoid of her humanity (Malik, 2010). This traumatic revelation leaves Maryam questioning her acceptance as an American citizen among her peers, prompting her to seek validation of her cultural identity. Believing that finding common ground with others could ease her anguish, Maryam views tea as a symbol of shared space. While tea is a universal beverage, each culture has its distinct recipe. Maryam decides to offer her unique tea blend, chocolate tea, as a gesture of cultural exchange. As a postcolonial citizen, she shifts the dynamics of interaction with her white client by insisting they sample her new concoction before conducting business. Through this act, Maryam seeks to assert her cultural identity and challenge Western colonial hierarchies that position her as inferior. Unlike John, a female white client who empathizes with Maryam's story treats her as an "equal partner" (Bellamy, 2008, p. 114) and enthusiastically accepts the chocolate tea. This mutual exchange fosters a sense of camaraderie, leading Maryam to offer to design the client's wedding dress with excitement: "I will design your wedding dress. Let's celebrate with some Chocolate Chai" (Malik, 2010, p. 10).

The play transitions with a blend of Pakistani and Moroccan music, ushering in a new story titled *Shay bil Nainai*, set in Moroccan lawyer Noor's office. Noor, who has faced a traumatic ordeal challenging her U.S. citizenship, shares her narrative with a client while bonding over Moroccan mint tea, symbolizing unity. Recounting her past as a veiled American girl, Noor recalls instances of bullying and discrimination at school, where classmates subjected her to derogatory labels and attempted to remove her hijab. However, the intervention of a white peer prevented potential harm, underscoring the significance of unity in combating prejudice (J. Sharma, 2009).

While the boys denied Noor's American identity and cultural rights, including the freedom to wear different head coverings, Joe a fellow U.S. citizen, demonstrated acceptance of this fact. This acceptance may stem from Joe's own traumatic experiences, as Noor learned after befriending him. Noor later learned that Joe, a musician, converted to Islam after a life-threatening accident. During his hospitalization, he reflected on the significance of an orange and a candy bar he consumed. Although both were sweet and packaged similarly, Joe recognized a deeper meaning in the orange:

If I threw the candy bar away, it would just decompose. But if I threw the orange away, the seeds could grow into an orange tree...The candy bar was designed by someone, so must the orange, which is a miracle because it can reproduce. Existence can't come out of nothing. (Malik, 2010, pp. 14–15)

Joe's conversion to Islam transcends individual narrative; it symbolizes a deeper postcolonial truth. His belief in a singular creator responsible for the intricate cosmos, devoid of hierarchical structures, underscores a philosophical departure from colonialist paradigms. The metaphor of the orange as a symbol of universal interconnectedness resonates with postcolonial discourse, emphasizing the dissolution of centralized authority and the potential for growth and regeneration across all spaces. This worldview extends to human relations, advocating for recognizing inherent equality among individuals and rejecting arbitrary divisions perpetuated by colonial ideologies. Joe's evolution into a postcolonial citizen epitomizes this ethos. His embrace of diverse cultures, exemplified by his interest in and integration of different cultural practices, including his marriage to Noor (N. Sharma, 2022), challenges colonial hierarchies and promotes inclusivity. Despite potential perceptions of Noor as an outsider by segments of American society (Lister, 1997), Joe unequivocally affirms her status as an equal American citizen deserving of cultural respect and religious freedom. In doing so, Joe embodies the principles of acceptance and inclusivity inherent within postcolonial thought.

Despite the marriage between Joe and Noor and Noor's entitlement to express her cultural identity through her veil, certain Americans rejected this. Merely a month later, Joe scheduled his Oud concert at the college, wearing a Jalaba. Before the performance, Joe and Noor arranged to meet for coffee. However, upon Noor's arrival at the designated rendezvous point, she was startled by screams coming from the garbage cans. Investigating the source of the commotion, she discovered a group of attackers ruthlessly assaulting Joe. Despite Joe's pleas for her to leave, two perpetrators forcibly restrained Noor, subjecting her to a brutal ordeal while callously chanting derogatory slogans, denigrating individuals of their cultural background as "terrorists." Despite Noor's screams, the assailants persisted in their reprehensible actions until the sound of a siren startled them into a hasty retreat. Tragically, Noor found Joe wounded, his last moments marked by the recitation of the Shahadah (Malik, 2010). The perpetrators arrogated to themselves the prerogative to impose their cultural hegemony upon individuals perceived as outsiders or "non-citizens." This entitlement led to attempts to alter the outward appearance and cultural expressions of individuals such as Noor, who veiled herself, and Joe, who wore a Jalaba. Noor, profoundly traumatized by the attack, retreated into a debilitating state of depression, initially declining to provide testimony against her assailants despite the urging of the state's attorney. With the encouragement of her mother, who implored her to uphold the sanctity of truth and the imperative of denouncing injustice, Noor took a step forward and testified against the perpetrators. Emboldened by her mother's counsel, Noor transcended her fear and vocalized her dissent against the violence perpetrated against her and Joe (Malik, 2010).

Noor's journey towards reclaiming her identity as a U.S. citizen amidst the challenges of erasure and discrimination is deeply intertwined with postcolonial themes. Prompted by her mother and the memory of Joe's symbolic orange story, Noor embarks on a path of resilience and communication with the broader society. Central to her strategy is the cultivation of common ground with her white compatriots, symbolized by the shared ritual of tea consumption. Embracing tea as a unifying element, Noor sees it as a potent tool for breaking down barriers and subverting hierarchical binaries imposed by colonial legacies (Handley, 2011). By offering Moroccan tea with fresh mint to her client, Noor actively asserts her cultural rights, including the right to wear a veil, while fostering dialogue and understanding. This gesture is a powerful act of resistance against silence and marginalization, empowering Noor and her clients to taste the sweetness of hope and forge bonds of solidarity (Malik, 2010). The seamless fusion of Moroccan Oud music with Southern Blues tunes after this scene marks the transition to the play's third part, titled *Kahwa Saide*. Here, the narrative shifts focus to Inez, a Black woman grappling with the complexities of her identity as an American citizen. Inez's grandmother's counsel serves as a reminder of the systemic challenges she confronts due to her race and gender: "Inez, you better learn to be tough, cuz you were born with two strikes against you, you're Black, and you're female" (Malik, 2010, p. 20). Despite these adversities, Inez adds a third "strike" to her identity by embracing Islam at the age of twenty-one. This decision, particularly her choice to wear the hijab, presents her with profound challenges as an American citizen, exacerbated by the post-9/11 climate. On that pivotal day, Inez finds herself compelled to remove her veil in a grocery store to assert her American identity to the mainstream populace. However, she is met with shock, hostility, and racist remarks, prompting her to depart from the store in fear (Malik, 2010).

Though Inez has suffered significantly from marginalization due to being a Black and veiled female, this is the first time she feels fear toward her fellow American citizens. Both Jim and the man who threatened Inez embody the image of the old colonizer or master who imposed power by force on those he considered to represent "an earlier stage of human development" (Plumwood, 2003, p. 52). Even as Inez walks out of the grocery store, she is shocked to realize that other Americans seek to impose their dominant culture over her (Castles, 1999). These individuals not only stared at her or terrified her, but they also attempted to touch her veil, sending a clear message: if she did not remove it, she would not be safe, and they would take it off by force. A woman approached her, touched her hijab, and said, "Sweetie, take that off. It's not safe to wear that right now" (Malik, 2010, p. 20). At that moment, Inez realized that if she did not conform to the mainstream expectations, her safety would be at risk, and she could face a violent act. She sensed this from the expressions on the faces of people on the street, which sent "chills up her spine" (Malik, 2010, p. 20). This distressing realization led her to remove her hijab, an essential part of her identity as an American citizen. She lamented, "I took it off, in front of everyone, and I ran home" (Malik, 2010, p. 21).

Inez understands that she removed her veil to appease fellow citizens still entrenched in colonialist ideals, seeking to prove her American citizenship by conforming to their narrow perceptions of Americanness. This act of sacrificing her hijab, a fundamental part of her identity, was unnecessary, as she already enjoys the same rights as any other American citizen. She recognized this as an attempt by some citizens to strip her of her cultural rights, leaving her feeling as though her rights as an American had been unjustly taken away. In realizing the superficiality of this cultural pressure, Inez resolved to challenge future situations where her Americanness might be questioned. She

sought to impart the lesson that one's attire does not define citizenship, emphasizing the need for unity and mutual protection among all Americans (Malik, 2010).

Inez annually commemorates the victims of 9/11 by mourning their loss, praying, and reading the Quran, followed by drinking "Kahwa Saide." This ritual reflects her identity as a postcolonial citizen, seeking to bridge the gap between herself and her fellow Americans without compromising her cultural rights. "Kahwa" symbolizes unity, being part of her roots that transcends differences, serving as a spiritual connection between Inez and the diverse victims of 9/11. Through this act, Inez aims to foster solidarity (Kabeer, 2005) and fraternity (Isin & Turner, 2002) among all Americans, irrespective of race or religion. The transition to the fourth part of the play, "Kashmiri Chai," accompanied by Southern music blending with hip-hop, signifies a swift shift to the UK. Here, the playwright explores another society where citizens of Eastern origin are treated as outsiders, highlighting the enduring colonial mentality exacerbated by the 9/11 attacks.

In this segment, Malik introduces another character to her audience, Shabana Abdul Aziz, a veiled Muslim woman from a South Asian immigrant family residing in West London (El-Sawy, 2022). Employed as a rapper at a Mic café Shabana experiences profound distress over being labeled a "non-citizen" by certain members of her community solely due to her choice to wear a veil. She conveys this frustration during an interview with a reporter at the Mic café explaining that despite wearing Western clothing such as hooded sweatshirts and baggy jeans, she is still perceived as an outsider. She notes a shift in attitudes following the 9/11 attacks, as some fellow citizens began treating her as if she were from a supposedly primitive society in need of rescue from patriarchal control. These individuals viewed themselves as modern-day colonizers attempting to "develop" and civilize their subjects; however, Shabana realizes that their intentions are not truly about her development but rather about imposing Western clothing norms on individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Malik, 2010). This becomes particularly evident when Shabana compares the treatment of veiled Muslim women like herself to that of veiled nuns. She observes that Western citizens refuse to acknowledge that her choice to wear the veil is based on personal modesty, while nuns in similar attire are respected for their devotion. This disparity highlights the double standard faced by Muslim women, where the hijab is seen as oppressive, yet the habits worn by nuns are deemed symbols of piety. She expresses this sentiment in her rap song, asserting her English citizenship and rejecting terrorist stereotypes. Shabana seeks recognition as a fellow citizen with cultural rights and hopes to be accepted within British society (J. Sharma, 2009). As a postcolonial citizen, she finds comfort in her Kashmiri tea, which she views as a symbol of unity and equality with her fellow citizens. She emphasizes the importance of respecting her cultural differences, including her hijab, as an essential part of her identity—one that blends her original and present homes. Refusing to compromise on her identity, she firmly asserts her stance to the reporter and audience through her rap performance in the café.

The final part of *Unveiled*, titled "Shay bil Maramiya," introduces Layla as the protagonist, a veiled American citizen originally from the Arab world. Her sense of American identity is profoundly shaken by the events of 9/11; an unforgettable day etched into her memory. Unable to reach her brother Kareem in New York during the attacks, Layla's attempts at communication leave her in a state of distress and uncertainty. Layla experiences a realization that she is not regarded as a true American citizen. A disturbing incident at her children's school, where a mob chants xenophobic slogans and accuses her and others like her of terrorism, further exacerbates Layla's sense of alienation. The mob's hateful rhetoric exposes deep-seated colonial attitudes among some of Layla's fellow citizens, who view her as an outsider unworthy of belonging in America. This bigotry reflects an enduring belief in the superiority of the colonial mindset, with Layla and those similar to her deemed primitive and undesirable (Marzec, 2007). The mob's demands for Layla and others to leave the country underscore the pervasive prejudice and discrimination faced by marginalized communities in America.

Despite facing the hateful attitudes of some of her fellow American citizens, Layla remains steadfast in her belief in her American identity and her rights as a citizen. When she witnesses her friend Imm Asad being attacked by a young man from the mob, Layla intervenes, choosing to speak to him calmly rather than engage in conflict. She emphasizes their shared American citizenship and the common anger they feel towards the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. Layla's worry for her brother in New York adds a personal dimension to her plea for understanding and unity. However, Layla's attempt to foster solidarity with the young man is met with hostility as he spits at her, influenced by his prejudice against Layla's veil. Despite this, Layla remains composed, urging the young man to remove the veil of prejudice from his heart and see their shared humanity. She emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding and acceptance, urging him to get to know her and her community and emphasizing the peaceful nature of Islam.

When the young man is about to be arrested, Layla shows compassion and asks the officer not to arrest him, hoping to end the cycle of hatred and anger. This act of tolerance appears to impact the young man as his demeanor changes, suggesting a moment of realization. Layla's ultimate hope is for the young man's heart to be *unveiled*, symbolizing a transformation towards understanding and acceptance. She prays for this transformation, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to fostering unity and empathy even in the face of bigotry. Layla's belief in fostering unity and understanding among citizens, particularly in the aftermath of her brother's heroic actions during the 9/11 attacks, is underscored by her commitment to serving "Shay bil Maramiya" at her Middle Eastern restaurant. Through this act, Layla symbolically communicates the message of unity and shared humanity to her guests, emphasizing that despite differences in culture or background, they are all part of one human family. The choice of "Maramiya tea" serves as a metaphor for this unity, as tea reflects the ability to incorporate. By sharing this tea with her fellow citizens, Layla seeks to bridge divides and affirm her rights as a citizen with cultural identity (Lister, 1997). Ultimately, tea becomes a catalyst for creating a sense of shared belonging and citizenship among all Americans, regardless of their origins (J. Sharma, 2009).

5. Conclusion

By examining *Unveiled*, this research contributes to postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating how theatre, both as a space of resistance and a way of remapping identity, is possible. Rohina Malik's play resists dominant narratives about Muslim women, offering instead a polyphonic representation that blends spirituality, cultural pride, and emotional vulnerability. By decentering Eurocentric drama and centering marginalized others, *Unveiled* exemplifies a decolonial aesthetics that not only subverts Western perceptions but also retrieves performative space for rich Muslim identities. This close reading reinforces the critical significance of diasporic theatre today in reshaping public knowledge and academic discourse of postcolonial identity and representation.

Moreover, the study of Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* through the lens of postcolonial criticism illuminates the enduring complexities of cultural identity, power dynamics, and resistance in contemporary societies shaped by colonial legacies. Through nuanced characters and layered narratives, Malik explores the intersectionality of postcolonial experiences, reflecting on the struggles and resilience of marginalized individuals seeking recognition and agency. Addressing themes such as assimilation, discrimination, and cultural heritage, *Unveiled* transcends its narrative form to become a compelling critique of hegemonic structures and a call for inclusivity. The play reclaims space for Muslim women, challenging dominant post-9/11 Western discourses and asserting their right to visibility, dignity, and self-definition. As postcolonial discourse evolves, works like *Unveiled* serve as vital cultural texts for understanding the shifting dynamics of citizenship and belonging in a world still marked by imperial residues and neocolonial structures. This study reaffirms the transformative power of literature as a site of resistance, empathy, and solidarity, highlighting how Malik's work not only represents marginalized voices but also reimagines the narratives that shape power and identity in the postcolonial era.

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Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

The authors confirm that ethical approval and consent to participate are not applicable to this study, as it is literature-based research that does not involve human or animal subjects.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have made substantial contributions to this research. MAA and MAO were responsible for conceptualization, data collection, and initial drafting of the manuscript. MA and AE contributed to the analysis, interpretation of data, and critical revision of the manuscript. SK supervised the research, provided intellectual input, and finalized the manuscript for submission. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data is available.

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