

ADAPTING MIDDLE EASTERN ISLAMIC CULTURE: A JOURNEY OF WESTERN MUSLIM WOMAN IN G. WILLOW WILSON'S *THE BUTTERFLY MOSQUE*

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ABSTRACT

The 9/11 tragedy in America has created more intense tension between America and Middle Eastern cultures. Then, the term Islamophobia emerged, where many non-Muslims feared Islam. Even until now, they associate Islam with terrorism. However, this situation led Willow, the main character, to decide to study and convert to Islam. Although not the main point that caused Willow to convert to Islam, the decision was made after the 9/11 tragedy. Willow represents a western woman who intentionally learns Islamic teachings. This study will use a qualitative descriptive method to explore events and cultures surrounding the main character. Therefore, there are two purposes of this study. The first is to delve into how the culture of Middle Eastern Muslim women is portrayed. Secondly, is to examine how the main character adapts to the culture of Middle Eastern Muslim women. In analyzing the data, this study applies postcolonial feminism theory to understand the cultural differences between Middle Eastern and Western Muslims, particularly regarding women. This study shows that the main character faces cultural challenges different from her origin country in carrying out religious practices, especially Islam. Nonetheless, the main character can adapt to the values of both cultures.

Keywords: *Islam; Middle Eastern Culture; Muslim Women; The Butterfly Mosque; Western Culture*

Article information

(Filled by Editorial Management)

Received: 11 April, 2022

Revised: 27 April, 2022

Accepted: 27 April, 2022

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v9i1.74047>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/74047>

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INTRODUCTION

America is commonly known as a country of diversity. It has been famous for its phrases such as 'melting pot' or 'salad bowl' to describe how various its people are. Citizens of America have lived in unity, although they come from a variety of races, religions, and cultures. Yet, though those phrases have been echoed since a long time ago, there is still a question of whether people from diverse backgrounds can blend as one and live in harmony. Looking back through the history of America, particularly because Puritans "believed God had chosen a few people, "the elect," for salvation" (*People and Ideas: Early American Groups*, 2021), American-origin citizens believe themselves as more superior and have more privilege than their non-American-origin counterparts, moreover, those who come from the eastern part of the world. This sense of superiority is felt in the midst of society even though it is not constantly discussed and thus may lead to conflicts or clashes.

One of the conflicts or clashes that occurs in the land of America is contributed by religion. The unequal religious diversity, with the issues of immigrants, has created religious conflicts. To name a few are the Mormon War in the 1850s, Anti-Semitism at the end of the 1890s, and the 9/11 tragedy in 2001 (Wong, 2002). Despite the fact that the percentage is getting lower, Christianity is still the dominant religion in America (Jones & Cox, 2017). As the Muslim population is growing in America (Lipka, 2017), the conflict between two prominent religions, Christianity and Islam, is getting more

intense, and the 9/11 tragedy has worsened the situation. American citizens have become extremely uneasy, especially concerning the existence of Muslims. In addition, the term Islamophobia emerged, where many non-Muslims feared Islam. Consequently, U.S. Muslims experienced various kinds of discrimination and even violence, "including being treated with suspicion, singled out by airport security or called offensive names" (Masci, 2019).

A survey conducted on U.S. Muslims (*How the U.S. General Public Views Muslims and Islam*, 2017) shows that, although "more Americans express "warmer" feelings toward Muslims" nowadays, Islam is still "rated more negatively than a variety of other religious groups" because they think that "Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers." This view cannot be avoided because the 9/11 attack is still believed to be carried out by terrorists from Middle Eastern countries in which "the Middle East is perceived as predominantly "Islamic" due to the Muslim majority of the region's population" (Payind & McClimans, 2017, p. 34). Furthermore, most U.S. Muslims are immigrants, "roughly half of whom (56%) have arrived since the year 2000, come from a wide array of countries," as stated in the article (*Muslim Americans: Immigrants and U.S. Born See Life Differently*, 2018). It means that Muslims in America are not majority originated from the Middle East, though most Americans assume so. Hence, it even widens the boundaries between the two cultures, Western culture with Christianity as

its major religion and Middle Eastern culture with Islam known as its major religion.

In the situation where Muslims are not able to live peacefully in America, Muslim women have the worst. Islamophobia, exacerbated by negative media coverage after the 9/11 tragedy, has created even worse discriminatory behaviors toward Muslim women in America. Part of the reason is that “Muslim women are more likely to stand out in society due to their physical appearance” (Gecewicz, 2017). However, the discrimination against Muslim women is believed not only by non-Muslims but also in Islam itself. Non-Muslim Western society sees head covering worn by Muslim women as a symbol of being submissive to men. “A veiled Muslim woman has long been used as the epitome of the oppression and patriarchy of the Islamic world” (Janson, 2011, p. 183). This belief has been used as the stereotype of Muslim women’s depiction in western movies, literature, and many other media. They are, most of the time, portrayed as uneducated, insecure, and socially restricted. It is in line with an article written by (Soltani & Thinyane, 2019) that “stereotypes say Muslim women are docile, self-segregated, and their faith and hijab prevent them from engaging in public life.” This stereotype is extremely opposite to the image of women from the western culture who are independent, confident, smart, and socially respected. Accordingly, is it possible to have a middle ground with these two contradictory depictions? Can an American have a positive view of Islam, especially Muslim women?

Such questions shall be answered when people are willing to learn and adapt a new culture into their lives. This process is extraordinarily narrated by a character named

Willow in a memoir, *The Butterfly Mosque*, written by G. Willow Wilson. Wilson is well-known as an American comic writer as she has been working with D.C. Comics for the *Wonder Woman* series and Marvel Comics as the latest writer to take on the *Ms. Marvel* title launched in 2014 (Tolentino, 2017). In addition, “she is also an accomplished novelist, praised for her debut novel, *Alif the Unseen*, and the recently released *The Bird King*” (Derby, 2019). In her memoir, *The Butterfly Mosque*, Wilson represents a western woman who intentionally learns Islamic teachings. To fulfill her goal, she even leaves America to probe more deeply into Islam in Middle Eastern culture. Her effort to learn a new religion and even adapt to a new culture can bridge the boundaries of two opposite cultures that seem to be getting wider. Thus, reading and examining *The Butterfly Mosque* is noteworthy because this is a memoir. The author, G. Willow Wilson, “writes on her experiences crossing cultures and embracing Islam as an American girl raised in an atheist home in Denver, Colorado” (*The Butterfly Mosque Summary*, n.d.). Because it is a memoir, readers may also get valuable insights into the Islamic world from a different perspective that is “dispel myths of cultural homogeneity, and, above all, to mitigate bad press on the role of women within Islam” (Shlezinger, 2010). In *The Butterfly Mosque*, Wilson “manages to avoid the extremes and writes a meaningful memoir that reflects the beauty and ugliness of being a Muslim and an American” (Rashid, 2011).

Considering the two opposite cultures faced by the main character, Willow, in the memoir *The Butterfly Mosque*, this paper will delve into how the culture of Middle Eastern

Muslim women is portrayed seen from the point of view of the main character as an American woman. Moreover, in her journey to learn more about Islam, this study will examine how the main character, as a western woman, adapts and embraces the culture of Middle Eastern Muslim women into her life.

The study of women has been conducted since a long time ago, but “the feminist mobilization of the 1960s and 70s provided an undeniable impetus to the field of women’s history” (Bourbonnais, 2016). A need for acknowledgment and appreciation for women in a patriarchal society led to the birth of the feminist movement. The existence of women in the midst of society is still underrated. Although women worldwide obtain many achievements, even becoming the president and head of government in several countries, women are considered unequal to men. For these reasons, the feminist movement has attempted to change this stereotype. In its journey, this movement spread its influence into various fields of study, including literature. Many short stories, novels, poems, and movies still depict women as inferior to men, and only belong to the domestic sphere. Even more so, in the Islamic world, this kind of image is no longer foreign.

Feminism is understood to seek gender equality which attempts to ensure the practices of rights that women and men are the same. In Islam, the Qur’an “enunciates the equality of all human beings within a system of social justice that grants the same fundamental rights to women and men” (Badran, 2002, p. 199). However, in a patriarchal society, Muslim women are frequently limited in exercising many rights.

Based on this, Muslim women have attempted to develop their feminist discourse, which has its basis on the Qur’an as the principal and fundamental text in Islam. The term Islamic Feminism becomes more noticeable in the 1990s. “Islamic feminists are reinterpreting Islamic sources in order to achieve equal rights for women within an Islamic framework” (Mirza, 2008, p. 30). In her article written in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an* (Badran, 2002) states that “key formulators of the new Islamic feminist discourse are women who utilize their advanced training in the religious sciences and other disciplines to reinterpret the Qur’ān.” In short, this movement seeks to assert that social justice and human equality must be righteously granted to women as it is a fundamental message in the Qur’ān.

The inequality encountered by Muslim women is also faced by women worldwide, including those in the western world. Western women firmly believe that their rights are not as severely restricted as women in Middle East countries. This belief is largely based on cultural and religious differences. In Western culture, in this case, America, human rights are more respected than in Middle Eastern culture. Moreover, as Christianity is the majority religion in America, Islam, the majority in the Middle East, is blamed for strongly encouraging women to wear a veil. Thus, this study uses postcolonialism to see how an American woman, as a westerner, views women from the Middle Eastern culture but finds herself embracing the latter culture into her life. In this direction, the postcolonial theory’s concept of Hybridity by Homi Bhabha is used for the analysis in this study that states:

“It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a

colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory ... may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38).

Many studies examine the memoir, *The Butterfly Mosque*, by G. Willow Wilson. However, to point out the novelty of this paper, the writers present two studies that have analyzed the memoir. The first one was written by Ali Mikaeli titled "Western Whiteness in an American Way of Religious Conversion in Willow Wilson's *The Butterfly Mosque*." In his article, using postcolonial theory by Albert Memmi, Mikaeli attempted to "delve into the matter of religious conversion of the narrator in Willow Wilson's *The Butterfly Mosque* who is deemed to be a representation of a western ideology and society, the USA" (Mikaeli, 2019). This study presents a different approach because it tries to explore more into the adaptation of an American woman into the Middle Eastern culture by using Homi Bhabha's concept of Hybridity. Another study was "In-between Self and Other: Re-reading Islamic Women Identity in Wilson's *The Butterfly Mosque*," written by Sri Hariyatmi. "Identity formation is central to Hariyatmi's article that examines the main character in Willow Wilson's *The Butterfly Mosque*" (Hariyatmi, 2015). Hariyatmi's article is different from this study because it does not analyze the main character's identity but rather explores her journey to adapt to the new culture. Although this study examines the same memoir and the same character as both of the previous studies, the focus of the analysis is thoroughly different.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze events and cultures surrounding the main character, named G. Willow Wilson, in *The Butterfly Mosque* memoir. Library research is used to obtain data and references related to the objectives of this study. The data in this study are quotes related to the topic analyzed taken from the memoir. In gaining the data, firstly, the writers conducted an in-depth reading of the novel. Then, the writers found a topic to be examined. The data were collected related to the research topic. Afterward, the collected data were analyzed by using a postcolonial feminism theory. It aims to get the results of the analysis according to the topic.

DISCUSSION

The discussion presents two main topics of the study: how the culture of Middle Eastern Muslim women is portrayed and how the author, as a western woman, adapts to the culture of Middle Eastern Muslim women.

Middle Eastern Muslim Women

Cultural diversity and social environment are two of the main factors that distinguish Muslim women in certain areas. It can be proven by the existence of cultural differences between the Western region and the Middle Eastern region. Apart from cultural differences, the differences in the treatment of Muslim women in the West and the Middle East are distinctly different.

Suppose this case is seen from the way or the point of view of the two regions toward Islam; the Western view of Islam is arguably still taboo. Of course, this is because Muslims in the West are still in the minority. It is different from the Middle East

region, where they are more or less familiar with the culture of the Islamic religion.

Geographical location affects cultural differences, likewise Egypt and America in this memoir. The main character named G. Willow Wilson, was an American woman who converted to Islam on her journey to Egypt. She represented Western culture since her behaviors and ways of thinking were Western. Those were different from the Egyptian women she met in Egypt. Egyptian women in the novel represented Middle Eastern culture. Their differences can be seen in this quotation:

Alone our origins didn't seem to matter, but as soon as we found ourselves in a group he became an Egyptian and I became an American. It was automatic. Aside from love – which made us more sensitive to cultural differences, not less – there was nothing we could take for granted. When I talk about those early months, most people still make the optimistic assumption: surely there were things to build on. Surely at some point the expectations of two cultures must intersect (Wilson, 2010, p.66).

Even though Willow learned about Arab and Islam and lived in Egypt when she was with the Egyptians, she still felt the differences in culture, point of view, and way of thinking between her and them. Besides, Willow noted several things from Middle Eastern Muslim women when she was in Egypt. The reason why women are discussed in this study is that “the women view themselves as “cultural mediators” between a religious minority and the majority society” (McGinty, 2006, p. 154).

Picky about the Social History before Getting Married

In the course of building a household, choosing a life partner is needed to be done in order to live a marriage life peacefully and happily. Middle Eastern Muslim women tend to choose a future husband from his social history. The first requirement has to be a Muslim. It is because Muslim men are considered the *imam* in the household. Besides, in deciding life partner, the background of the family is important too, as seen in the following quotation.

Not openly, not in the middle classes. It would make the whole family look bad—like they'd raised an irresponsible, irreligious son who isn't a good candidate for marriage. The families of girls can be really, really picky about the social history of any guy their daughter might marry (Wilson, 2010, p. 166).

This dialogue happened between Josh and Willow. Josh asked her about the girlfriend thing in Middle Eastern culture, and Willow said it was not as open as the dating culture in America. Willow also explained that dating could create a bad impression, especially for middle-upper families from the male side. In Middle Eastern culture, the male side would be considered irresponsible. His family would also be regarded as educating someone who was not religious if he found out that his son was dating. It did not only arise because of the public view in the Middle East of the dating culture but also because the family of the woman was very picky in choosing a husband for her daughter. Especially in terms of historical records of behavior of the men. Islam also does not recommend a dating culture to avoid adultery unless you get married, as explained in surah al-Isra verse

32, which means, “And do not approach adultery – it is indeed a shameful deed; and a very evil way” (Khan, 2021). It shows that women in the Middle East care about their future imams. Their choice would decide in guiding them to live their life in the world and hereafter. The husband is not only seen as someone who is able to provide physical and spiritual support, but he is also expected to lead his wife into Jannah. It was different with Willow, who could choose freely with whom she would get married. She got married to Omar, a man she met for the first time when she arrived in Egypt.

Less Free than West, but Far More Appreciated

Women’s freedom in the Middle Eastern is arguably not as free as in Western countries. Women still have to strive for their rights to achieve freedom. Egypt can be an example of a Middle Eastern country. Afary (2004) explains that there is a regulation related to divorce, in which women who file for divorce must return all the goods or assets they received during their marriage with their husbands.

Besides the regulations, it is written that women are still in the process of striving for their rights to freedom. Afary (2004) also mentions that there are regulations in which Egyptian women who wish to travel abroad must first obtain the approval of their husbands. If not, then they cannot do that.

However, in contrast to Egypt, which has regulations that do not give women freedom, Turkey is a Middle Eastern country that removes the stigma that women’s position is not equal to men’s. It is reinforced by Afary’s statement (2004), which describes that Turkey has changed the regulations in

which the regulations provide a little leeway on the welfare of women both educationally and economically.

America is known as the Land of Freedom, where every citizen is able to speak, behave, act, and do freely whatever they want. Willow’s behavior could prove that she could freely do anything even though she was a woman. She also freely wore anything she wanted. It is different from the Muslim world, especially for women. There are rules in behaving, speaking, and even dressing in front of the public.

It was such a tantalizing contradiction, being a woman in the Middle East—far less free than a woman in the West, but far more appreciated. When people wonder why Arab women defend their culture, they focus on the way women who don’t follow the rules are punished, and fail to consider the way women who do follow the rules are rewarded. When I finished an article or essay, all I received was an e-mail from an editor saying, “Thanks, got it.” When I cooked an iftar meal during Ramadan, a dozen tender voices blessed my hands (Wilson, 2010, p. 181).

Willow realized a significant difference in the treatment of women. She explained that Middle Eastern women had slightly less freedom than women in the West. However, the positive thing is that Middle Eastern women are more valued both in terms of existence and otherwise. Non-Muslim people see these things as restricting women’s freedom. It is also supported by the argument that “women with a Muslim background were mostly perceived as passive victims of an oppressive culture or religion” (van Es, 2016, p. 56). However, it is meant to respect and protect women from verbal abuse and violence.

Women’s freedom also is penetrated in another field. When it comes to choosing a leader, women are underestimated by the majority even though they have the ability, likewise in this quotation.

There are as many women sheikhs in the East today as there were in the past,” she said. “In westernized countries like Egypt and Lebanon, people don’t accept female religious leaders. But in Syria it’s something natural... Westernization has made it worse? This was the first time I had heard the suggestion that the relaxed western attitude toward gender was having a negative impact on Muslim women (Wilson, 2010, p. 194).

Westernized countries like Egypt and Lebanon consider that women cannot lead government or even in small organizations. Essentially, men are considered to be imams who could lead and women as the *makmum*.

Besides, Middle Eastern Muslim and Western women’s social habits are different. Western women are so familiar with kissing on the cheeks to greet their relatives. It will not happen in Egypt. Even though kissing on the cheeks is not a kind of sexual activity, but they would not do this because it is inappropriate and taboo for people who do not have any marriage relationships, especially in public places.

American men kiss women on the cheek in greeting, for example, but not other men. In Egypt the opposite is true. Each side claims that a kiss on the cheek is not sexual, which raises a question: Why, then, should Egyptian men refrain from kissing women, or American men be afraid to kiss other men? (Wilson, 2010, p. 59).

Unlike Western culture, kissing on the cheeks is common to greet relatives. It shows affection and warm relationships between them. This difference is affected by different

points of view and ways of thinking. At first, Willow was confused about breaking this habit when there was a male friend greeted her by kissing her cheek in front of Omar or public places. Over time, she had to tell and explain to her family and relatives about her conversion so that they could respect her as a Muslim woman. “Women are the manifestation of God’s beauty, which on Earth is veiled from men’s eyes,” he said. “So to put women on display in front of men is unworthy” (Wilson, 2010, p. 181). In Surah An-Nisa, verse 34 also mentions,

Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them first, if they persist, do not share their beds, but if they still persist, then discipline them gently. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great (Khattab, 2016).

Adapting Middle Eastern Islamic Culture

Willow went to Egypt and converted herself into a Muslim. It was a hard and big decision for her. She had to be far away from home, where she was always before. “As I walked home and mulled the scene over in my mind, I realized that my status in Egypt had changed. I was still a foreigner, but I was no longer simply a foreigner” (Wilson, 2010, p. 154). She considered herself a foreigner at first because the majority in Egypt treated her like other foreign tourists.

Willow’s life in the foreign country recalled her missing home. However, she had a strong will to be a Muslim even she often dreamed of it, likewise in the quotation.

The change manifested first in my dream life. Dreams have always been important to me—since childhood I’ve remembered mine almost every night. Together, they form a kind of parallel personal history or unconscious narrative. Dream symbols figured largely in the events leading up to my conversion. As more and more Muslim rituals became habit, the character and content of my dreams began to alter. There was less clutter, fewer indecipherable gibberish images. What was left came into focus (Wilson, 2010, p. 70).

She could not escape from fate and destiny. “We say unto it: Be! And it is” (Quran 16:40) (Wilson, 2010, p. 10). She did believe everything that happened in her life was because of Allah’s will, including her decision to be a Muslim. She ever wanted to be a Jew, but fate said otherwise. Since she had already been a Muslim, she would not be halfway in living her life to be a Muslim.

One of the cultural differences is in the wedding traditions in the Middle East. Willow also clearly stated that he felt the difference. Willow, as someone who grew up as a Westerner, is more familiar with one of the series of wedding events that are in accordance with Western culture, namely the bridal shower. The bridal shower tradition cannot be found in Middle Eastern culture. However, on the other hand, Middle Eastern also has a tradition that is more or less similar to the bridal shower tradition, namely henna night.

Henna night itself is a tradition carried out by the bride a few days before her wedding. The tradition also involves several close relatives to participate in applying henna to the hands and feet of the bride. In addition, like the fast in general, family and

relatives who attended were served certain foods and entertainment. The same thing happened to the groom. Family and close relatives will gather to eat together and enjoy Middle Eastern music.

Moreover, she believed that religion and faith were the most important things in her life rather than culture.

I learned to trust my religion, because it became one of the central arbiters of my daily life. More often than not, Egyptian culture and American culture demanded opposite things (Wilson, 2010, p. 78). Even though she went home to America, she would not leave her religion and identity as a Muslim. She combined the values of both cultures.

Praying and Adapting Veil

It was not easy for Willow to start worshiping and praying in a new way and culture. Before being a Muslim, she did not pray. Then, she considered praying as a way to communicate with Allah. “On my own, in small, quiet increments, I began to inhabit Islam. Once I wrestled my ego into obedience and faced Mecca” (Wilson, 2010, p. 68). That was why she did not care about the direction of Mecca, which she had to face during praying at first. Then, she was obedient to her ego and started to face Mecca and prayed together with other Muslims, as apparent in this quotation.

The call to prayer went up, vibrating across the courtyard. Without a word, the woman on my right pulled me closer, so that my shoulder touched hers. The woman on my left reached over to gently rearrange my scarf, veiling an exposed stretch of my collarbone (Wilson, 2010, p. 107).

Willow realized the importance of praying and adapting the veil. “As Omar and

I were leaving I reached for a black silk veil, then hesitated, reached out, and took one that was deep red” (Wilson, 2010, p. 168). She tried wearing a veil and hesitated at first, but she still wore it. Even when she came back to America, her new identity as a Muslim would be a big issue in her family and relatives. She still got used to praying and wearing the veil. It was not only about to show identity as a Muslim, but it also proved that she had faith and consistency in being a Muslim. Likewise in the quotation below that showed how Willow dressed herself up to cover and protect herself.

I dried mint and coriander in bundles at the kitchen window, and began to wear a long cotton galibayya around the house; I began, also, to understand the psychological difference between living in a foreign country temporarily and living in one indefinitely. Jhumpa Lahiri calls living in a foreign country “an eternal pregnancy”; an uncomfortable wait for something impossible to define (Wilson, 2010, p. 155).

She did all of these because she had faith and will to be a good Muslim. She realized that a foreign country would not be as comfortable as her hometown, but she would try to learn anything in the foreign country. She would bring her new habits when she was home. Then, she would not lose her identity as a Muslim even though she was not in the Muslim country anymore.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Middle Eastern Muslim women have less freedom than Western women in various matters, for example, in choosing a career and behaving. The first thing is the basic need of human beings which is to get married. Middle Eastern

Muslim women tend to be picky in choosing their future husbands. They would see the background of their religions, families, even social histories. Those considerations aim to build *Sakinah, mawaddah, warahmah* families. The background of religion is the main important point in deciding the future husbands because women need an imam in their lives to lead and guide them to Jannah. It proves that women in the Middle East should prioritize their hereafter life rather than worldly things.

The second thing is Middle Eastern Muslim women have limitations in choosing a career. Middle Eastern Muslim women have a lot of things to be considered before they decide to apply for jobs. Even though they have higher education, skills, and abilities to gain higher positions, they would not be a leader in certain organizations or institutions. However, in Muslim countries, they are considered *makmum* who cannot be a leader. It happens in the name of respect and protection. The majority claim that they have to respect and protect women since God created women in beauty.

Then, Willow as a Western Muslim woman, had to adapt to their culture since she lived in Egypt. However, she had to adapt to wear a veil in order to cover herself. It had to be done, once again, in the name of respect and protection, to protect herself from verbal abuse or violence. It was because men's desires would be aroused since there was encouragement from women who did not cover themselves. Moreover, Willow tried to put her ego aside by worshipping and praying in the mosque with the other Muslims. Her journeys in living her life to be a Muslim woman were not easy. There were many challenges that she had to face. Her

will and faith were so strong in being a Muslim. That was why she did not regret what she had done, and she tried her best to be a good Muslim and also a wife of a Muslim man.

Willow's journey teaches a lot for the readers in living their lives. Many lessons could be taken from her struggle in defending her faith and belief even though she went back to her hometown, where the majority feared Islam because of the 9/11 tragedy. From her memoir, Willow wants to show the world that Islam is a peaceful and serene religion that can respect and protect women and others in gratifying ways.

Coming home to America would not make her be an unreligious person. She is still an American Muslim because belief and faith have been stuck in her life. Even though how many challenges that she would face in living her life as a Muslim, she believes that God's power is bigger to help her. Then, her experiences in the Middle East have taught a lot about cultural diversity since she has learned how to practice Islamic teachings and values from Muslims in Muslim countries. Thus, combining both values of the two cultures is the best way.

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