

# Muslim women and patriarchy

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**Muslim women and patriarchy: Struggles and resistance in the short stories of Randa Jarrar and Shaila Abdullah****<sup>1</sup>Zafira Hasna Indah and <sup>2</sup>Hasnul Insani Djohar**<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>zafirahndh@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>hdjohar@uinjkt.ac.idArticle History: Submitted November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025; Accepted April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026; Published April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026

**Abstract.** This study discusses how the Muslim female main characters in Randa Jarrar's short stories, "Accidental Transients and The Life, Loves", and "Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie" (2016), and Shaila Abdullah's "Amulet for the Caged Dove" and "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust" (2005), experience the struggles with patriarchal constraints. Moreover, this study examines how the Muslim female main characters resist the very patriarchal system that confines them. This study aims to reveal how patriarchy adversely impacts Muslim women's lives, how their patriarchal experiences are shaped, and their agency in liberating themselves. A descriptive qualitative method was employed using comprehensive textual analyses to examine the selected issues. This study employs several feminist theories, including Sylvia Walby's theory of Patriarchy, to explore how the Muslim female main characters' struggles are presented, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality to investigate how their gender intersects with their diverse social identities. In addition, James Scott's theory of Resistance is employed to examine how the Muslim female main characters resist patriarchy. The findings show that there is a private form of patriarchy perpetuated by both men and women within the short stories. Furthermore, patriarchal experiences occur due to the interaction between gender and cultural background, and the Muslim female main characters' resistance is illustrated through positive self-affirmations, self-perceptions, and eventually leaving the patriarchal environment. As a result, this study contributes to raising awareness of the struggles that Muslim women must face due to patriarchy and promotes Muslim women's empowerment in overcoming its adverse impact through resistance.

**Keywords:** intersectionality; muslim women; patriarchy; resistance

**Abstrak.** Studi ini membahas bagaimana tokoh utama perempuan Muslim dalam cerita pendek Randa Jarrar, "Accidental Transients" dan "The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie" (2016), serta Shaila Abdullah's "Amulet for the Caged Dove" dan "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust" (2005), mengalami berbagai persoalan patriarki. Selain itu, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana tokoh utama perempuan Muslim tersebut melawan sistem patriarki yang membatasi mereka. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana patriarki berdampak negatif pada kehidupan perempuan Muslim, bagaimana pengalaman patriarki mereka terbentuk, serta agensi mereka dalam membebaskan diri. Metode kualitatif deskriptif digunakan dengan analisis teks komprehensif untuk mengkaji isu-isu yang dipilih. Studi ini menerapkan beberapa teori feminis, termasuk teori Patriarchy Sylvia Walby, untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana perjuangan karakter utama perempuan Muslim dipresentasikan, dan teori Intersectionality Kimberlé Crenshaw untuk menyelidiki bagaimana gender mereka berinteraksi dengan berbagai identitas sosial. Selain itu, teori Resistensi James Scott digunakan untuk mengkaji bagaimana tokoh utama perempuan Muslim melawan patriarki. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa terdapat bentuk patriarki yang bersifat pribadi yang dilakukan oleh pria dan wanita dalam cerita pendek tersebut. Selain itu, pengalaman patriarki terjadi akibat interaksi antara gender dan latar belakang budaya, dan perlawanan karakter utama perempuan Muslim digambarkan melalui afirmasi diri yang positif, persepsi diri, dan pada akhirnya meninggalkan lingkungan patriarkal. Dengan demikian, studi ini

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*berkontribusi dalam meningkatkan kesadaran mengenai perjuangan perempuan Muslim akibat patriarki, serta mendorong pemberdayaan perempuan Muslim dalam mengatasi dampak buruknya melalui tindakan resistensi.*

**Kata kunci:** interseksionalitas; perempuan muslim; patriarki; resistensi

## 18 INTRODUCTION

Literature has been utilized as a medium of expression that functions as a reflection and a critique (Setiyawan et al., 2021), frequently addressing diverse prevalent real-life problems through a focus on a particular theme, such as gender. Gender as a literary theme is commonly represented through the issue of patriarchy, a system that positions men as the dominant and central authority (Alfian, 2016, as cited in Idrus et al., 2023). Muslim women, particularly those situated within diaspora and cultural contexts, have long been trapped under such a system that forces them to adhere to the norms that frequently dictate what is acceptable for them. Moreover, patriarchy causes specific expectations concerning the actions that are allowed for women, which are shaped by societal beliefs about their inherent nature as females (Gupta et al., 2023). These expectations then limit Muslim women's freedom in choosing how to live their lives and cause a reduction in their roles within society. Therefore, examining how controlling and negatively impactful patriarchy can be towards Muslim women through literary works is essential in recognizing the struggles that they have been experiencing.

Furthermore, Muslim women are frequently viewed as passive victims of patriarchy, where they are constrained from resisting and are expected to follow the patriarchal system (Fatima, 2025). This perception raises an urgency for resistance to fight the restrictive norms that prevent Muslim women from accessing their opportunities, making their own decisions, and claiming their rights to live in accordance with their own choices. Literary works that incorporate the issue of patriarchy frequently present resistance distinctly through their narratives to show that Muslim women can reject and oppose the patriarchal system that confines them in certain ways. Thus, analyzing how literary works portray Muslim women's resistance to patriarchy contributes to underscoring how Muslim women can challenge the injustices and oppression that they must endure.

Muslim women have channelled their distinct perspectives into literature by addressing the issue of patriarchy within their works, including Randa Jarrar in *Him, Me, and Muhammad Ali* (2016) and Shaila Abdullah in *Beyond the Cayenne Wall* (2005). As diaspora writers, Jarrar and Abdullah draw on their Palestinian American and Pakistani American backgrounds to reflect not only gendered experiences but also the complexities of migration, cultural identity, and belonging. This study focuses on two short stories within Jarrar's book, namely *Accidental Transients* that revolves around the life of a 29-year-old unmarried woman named Dina who becomes the primary caretaker of her family, and "The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie" that tells the story of a half-human woman named Zelwa whom her father controls to her unusual appearance. This study also focuses on two short stories in Abdullah's book, titled "Amulet for the Caged Dove" which narrates the life of a married woman named Tannu who her mother-in-law pressures to bear children for her husband, and "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust", which centres around the life of a woman named Dhool who is married to a man who consistently mistreats her. These short stories collectively present patriarchy

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through the experiences of the Muslim female main characters, showing how it profoundly becomes a significant part of their lives.

Based on the selected short stories, this study aims to reveal how patriarchy adversely impacts Muslim women's lives in various ways, how their patriarchal experiences are shaped, and how they manage to liberate themselves from it. Thus, this study formulated three research questions: How do Muslim female main characters experience struggles under patriarchal constraints in the selected short stories? How are these patriarchal experiences shaped by the intersection of their social identities? and How do they resist the patriarchal oppression they experience? This study employs several theories to support the analysis, including the feminist theory of patriarchy proposed by Sylvia Walby to investigate how patriarchy shapes the lives of the Muslim female main characters, particularly in their domestic and familial roles. The intersectionality theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw is used to examine how their experiences are shaped by the intersection of their diverse identities, such as gender, culture, and religion. Moreover, the resistance theory proposed by James Scott is employed to analyze how the Muslim female main characters resist the challenges brought about by the patriarchal system. Collectively, these theoretical frameworks allow a deeper understanding of how the characters' experiences are shaped and portrayed within the narratives. By doing so, this study highlights the distinct ways literary works can address how Muslim women suffer against patriarchy and their strength in resisting it.

Previous studies on *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* (2016), and *Beyond The Cayenne Wall* (2005) have been conducted by scholars from various perspectives. Fitria et al. (2023) discussed *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* by focusing on the doubleness of cultural identity. Their findings reveal that residing as diaspora individuals in a country with a different culture is complex and affects the way they define their cultural identities. Meanwhile, Zainab (2024) took a humanist approach to analyse how the main characters in *Beyond the Cayenne Wall* grapple with restoring their humanist identities. She argues that personal experiences of gender and familial roles are profoundly interconnected with political structures and societal norms. In another study, Azhar and Bathool (2025) Utilise schema theory to examine how readers' prior knowledge influences their understanding of gender dynamics and psychological abuse in "Amulet for the Caged Dove" within *Beyond the Cayenne Wall*. Their findings show that cognitive mechanisms are important in normalizing and sustaining patriarchal systems and psychological abuse in Pakistani society. Collectively, previous studies have been done only through the lenses of cultural identity and the dynamics of psychological abuse. Therefore, this study addresses the remaining gap by exploring how patriarchy is experienced by the female characters, the intersection of their social identities, and how resistance is presented within the selected short stories, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the Muslim women characters' experiences under patriarchy.

The struggles caused by patriarchy highlight the significant impact of gender on how female main characters are treated by those around them. Societal pressures, expectations, and internal conflicts influence how they act and shape their lives. Resistance of Muslim women against patriarchy is shown through the female main characters' narratives to highlight the importance of advocating for equity that the patriarchal system has long been eroding through its dominance over women. As a result, this study contributes to raising awareness of the struggles that Muslim women must face due to patriarchy and promotes Muslim women's empowerment in overcoming its adverse impact through resistance.

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## METHOD

The method employed in this study was a descriptive qualitative approach, a research methodology that yields descriptive data, typically involving a substantial amount of text to support the findings (Fitria et al., 2023). In doing so, the short stories chosen were thoroughly read and examined multiple times to uncover pieces of textual evidence pertinent to the research topic, particularly those that pertain to the patriarchal struggles of the Muslim women characters, the intersection of their social identities, and their resistance. Moreover, textual evidence served as the primary source of this study and was taken directly from the dialogues and narratives within the short stories, analyzed comprehensively, and is written in italic to differentiate it from other quotations. This method was further utilized in this study, which applied and employed the theories of Patriarchy, Intersectionality, and Resistance to the textual evidence, serving as the theoretical framework and primary grounding for the profound analyses conducted. In addition to the primary evidence, this study relied on credible journal articles written by various scholars, which provided valuable insights into topics relevant to the research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The short stories reveal that Muslim women, particularly within diasporic and culturally specific contexts, are frequently valued through their domestic and reproductive functions. It is also disclosed that they are commonly expected to comply with male authority. Such conditions then lead to the constriction of their decision-making and affect the way they perceive themselves. However, every female main character eventually shows resistance in different ways. It manifests through how they resist the prevailing patriarchal practices around them and through how they take a firm decision to leave behind the environment in which patriarchy is entrenched. The short stories notably show that although patriarchy causes Muslim women to endure its challenges, Muslim women have their ways of asserting their agency and regaining their autonomy. These experiences are depicted differently across the texts, shaped by the contrast between Jarrar's diasporic focus and Abdullah's more local settings.

### Patriarchal struggles of Muslim women characters

It is widely accepted as common knowledge that every individual has the freedom of choice without being constrained by others, regardless of their background. However, such freedom is frequently limited for Muslim women through a patriarchal system that is shaped by sociocultural norms, which impose unwritten rules, expectations, and demands on them. This emphasizes how their lives are frequently regulated, leading to the numerous struggles that they encounter and are forced to endure. Patriarchy allows men to predominantly take control over women's sexual and reproductive rights, self-identity, self-esteem, and self-respect (Tong, 2009, as cited in Sibarani et al., 2020). Moreover, patriarchy operates as a structured system that aims at the oppression of women (Devseshan, 2025), as Djohar and Adhania (2022, p. 152) argue, "In a patriarchal society, men tend to believe that they are on a higher level than women." Patriarchy thus perpetuates male dominance against women and negatively affects them, even to their bodily and psychological autonomy, which commonly occurs due to men's needs or desires to control women.

Walby (1990, p.24) provides a classification of patriarchy to explain how it operates by stating, "I am distinguishing two main forms of patriarchy, private and public." Private patriarchy refers to the patriarchal practices that occur within the household, while public patriarchy refers to the collective

societal expropriation, domination, and exploitation of women (Hajir & Marsih, 2023; Rahman & Anwar, 2022). Such a division offers a nuanced understanding that patriarchy is neither simple nor narrow but rather exists across several domains in life, thereby emphasizing how hegemonic the system is. The patriarchal positioning of women within the domestic sphere is reflected in the short story "Accidental Transients" (2016), where Dina becomes responsible for handling all the household chores. Dina's role as the family caretaker underscores how restrictive patriarchy is for women because it appropriates their opportunities, which may be seen in the line where Dina's father confesses that their household would not go well without her presence, "*I got up and left the kitchen. 'Come back,' Baba shouted at me. 'Really, it won't be the same without you. Who would do the dishes?'*" (Jarrar, 2016, p.104). Having the role of someone who needs to take care of a family causes Dina to abandon her own needs, as she is unable to take care of herself well and focus on what she wishes to do in her own life. This occurs due to her family's reliance on her, which is subtly highlighted by her father's statement, "*Really, it won't be the same without you,*" to alert Dina to the importance and inevitability of her role and duties within the domestic sphere as a woman. Although simple tasks such as washing the dishes are a basic daily living skill that individuals must be able to do regardless of their gender, men's control and adherence to patriarchy compels women to manage the family domestically. Such a division of labour also indicates that the system creates the belief that women should always be dependent on men, which disregards women's capability to live independently. Through the text above, Dina's experience under the private form of patriarchy thus emphasizes how its restrictive nature operates within familial and social expectations.

On the other hand, Dhool's struggles under patriarchy in "*Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust*" (2005) is narrated to occur inside her marriage, as written in the line, "*whenever he was home, which was rare nowadays, he considered himself the primary focal point, almost as if he owned the air inside the four corners of their mud house as well as the occupants, and he expected Dhool to be a slave that tended to his every need.*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.22). Patriarchy constructs how men and women are divided into different roles (Rahma, 2023), and the short story reflects such a construction where Dhool's husband holds the position of the dominant, which allows him to take absolute authority in their household, while Dhool acts as the subordinate, positioning her as the one who takes care of the domestic duties. Dhool's experience thus depicts how private patriarchy may also appear through the control of a husband. Although Dhool describes her role in taking care of her family in an exaggerated manner by using the word "slave", this eminently exposes how patriarchal experiences may significantly influence how Muslim women perceive themselves, where they come to view their own role as being as degrading as that of someone regarded merely as another person's property and is forced to work and obey them. Consequently, Dhool's story reveals that the private form of patriarchy deeply influences individuals' beliefs and perceptions that women are assigned to their own roles and are required to meet them.

Patriarchy is generally known to predominantly operate through domestic responsibilities (Hajir & Marsih, 2023), however, "*The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie*" (2016) broadens this knowledge by portraying how patriarchy is not solely ingrained in how the system creates gender division of labour, but is also manifested through the control given by a father that is imposed onto his daughter. This is evident in the line, "*'You're nothing,' he said. 'Tomorrow, we're getting on my plane and I'm taking you to Montana. You will get that operation done and this nightmare will be over,'*" (Jarrar, 2016, p.198), where Zelwa's father forces her to get a plastic surgery due to her unusual appearance that is deemed to deviate from the societal beauty ideals towards women. The way Zelwa's father assertively tells her that she is "nothing" reveals that, without careful consideration, men openly define women's worth as they like, which occurs because patriarchy has inherently given

men the right to devalue women, which aligns with the argument that Djohar et al., (2023, p.180) note, "A male-dominated culture is one in which women are seen primarily as objects for men to use." Even though religious teachings teach Muslims to acknowledge the importance of Muslim women to be modest (Zubair, 2022), the line above portrays that objectification of women remains to exist regardless and reduces them to be perceived merely as objects that must meet the standards of how women should appear. Their familial dynamics also portray how patriarchy not only profoundly influences the interaction between men and women, both in society and marriage, but also extends into the more intimate space of the relationship between fathers and daughters. Although Zelwa's father's control is narrated through how he dictates what to do precisely with her bodily features, it deeply harms her mentally, where she grapples with her own self-identity and self-esteem, resulting in Zelwa perceiving herself through her father's eyes and silently accepting how she does not conform to society's standards of being a conventionally attractive woman. The struggles Zelwa has to endure that go beyond her status as a woman under a man's control then solidify the notion proposed by Tong (2009, as cited in Sibarani et al., 2020) regarding how patriarchy affects multiple facets of women's lives, including their psychological well-being. From Zelwa's experience, the short story insightfully shows that patriarchy may occur through loved ones and reinforces men to treat women in ways that do not reflect how respect should be accorded to them by not perceiving women merely through their physical qualities.

Although Walby (1990) conceptualizes patriarchy as a system in which men dominate and oppress women, "Amulet and the Caged Dove" (2005) perceptively builds on this notion by portraying how such a system may also be perpetuated by women, particularly through Tannu's mother-in-law. Tannu is not as fertile in conceiving after trying to get pregnant several times, and this leads her mother-in-law to force her to visit a shrine where many women desperate for offspring go to pray, resulting in deep internal pressure for Tannu. The perpetuation of patriarchy by the mother-in-law may be seen in the line, "*I would die if a thing to Raja's son, 'Amma said, biting her lower lip in apprehension and gazing at Tannu's flat stomach. She was again referring to the would-be grandchild as a boy,*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.4). The hyperbole that the mother-in-law uses, saying she would "die" if something terrible happened to her son's child, indicates that it is used to assert that even she has the right to exert control over Tannu. The line then reveals that patriarchy may cause women to be capable of imposing control on other women, which is further shown through the mother-in-law's desire for Tannu to bear a boy for her son. Such a desire discloses that women may internalize gender ideology within patriarchy, where they adopt the patriarchal belief that men are superior to women. As patriarchy is rooted in male dominance, this internalization then creates a double burden for victims like Tannu, who not only have to endure the patriarchal norms that privilege men but also the actions of women who perpetuate those norms instead of supporting one another as they share the same gendered experiences. The mother-in-law's demand additionally depicts how patriarchy does not simply confine women to the domestic sphere; it also manifests in the belief that women are inherently made to be mothers and will be frequently seen as less of a woman if they fail to fulfill such a role. Ultimately, Tannu's story demonstrates the complexity of patriarchy and how deleterious it is, where it may shape the ways women treat other women, despite the system itself placing them as the most impacted victims.

#### **Intersectionality in Muslim women characters' patriarchal experiences**

Muslim women's struggles under patriarchy are not entirely experienced because of their gender, as women are positioned as the subordinate; instead, their gender interacts with their other social identities, such as religion, culture, and sexuality. This notion is established by Crenshaw (1991, p.1252) in which she states, "because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same

as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women...” to emphasize how discrimination against women does not occur within an isolated identity and that their experiences are different and more complex compared to men who are less of the impacted and controlled victims of patriarchy. Crenshaw’s argument further notes that women who live in an environment where systems of domination are not as profoundly ingrained also have distinct experiences from those who live in the opposite settings. This can be seen in women who live in West Asian countries., particularly in the Arab and Pakistani region, where their society’s collective identity is intricately connected to their customs and traditions, creating the basis for the expected roles and behaviors for Muslim men and women (Mansour et al., 2024). It should be noted, however, that there is an important line that differentiates Islam as a religion and the patriarchal customs that have been mistakenly associated with it (Khan & Arain, 2025). The patriarchal experiences portrayed in these short stories are not generalized to all Muslim women, as they are shaped by specific cultural, national, and diasporic contexts. Therefore, gender-based struggles faced by Muslim women because of patriarchy cannot be fully comprehended without recognizing how their social identities intersect with one another.

The female characters in the selected short stories of Jarrar’s *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* (2016) are narrated as Muslim Arab women, and according to Gruenbaum et al. (2023), the patriarchal culture in their background is known to be deeply rooted. The dominance of patriarchy causes women in Middle Eastern countries to experience significant restricted rights and freedoms (Akhter et al., 2023), which is reflected in the control of Dina’s father that surpasses the traditional domestic roles classified for women. This is presented through how Dina is subjected to a marriage where she must wed to an Arab man, as told in the line, “*My parents once hoped I would become a scientist, marry an Arab (even though there are none around), pop out three or four kids, and win the Nobel Prize for science.*” (Jarrar, 2016, p.97). The choice to wed with an individual of desire is a right that even Muslim Arab women have, not just every individual of other faiths in general. However, the dominance of patriarchy in the Arab region deeply influences its men’s perception that their lineage must be preserved and ends up restricting women’s freedom in arranging their own marriages according to their own choices, which is reflected in Dina’s story through the line above. This occurrence also aligns with Djohar & Komalasari’s (2024, p.133) notion that state, “Muslim women girls who grow up in a conventional Islamic environment being powerless over even the smallest things in their lives, forced to wear hijab/veil that have become a tradition without being given sufficient religious knowledge,” which underlines how traditional Islamic settings frequently takes a significant control in Muslim women’s lives. Meanwhile, Zelwa’s story extends the intersectionality in patriarchy that Arab Muslim women experience by illustrating that her struggles are influenced by how the Arab region men strictly view women compared to Westerners. This contrast highlights a diasporic condition as an Arabian immigrant who lives in the US, where differing cultural perceptions exist simultaneously, influencing how Zelwa’s identity is navigated between acceptance and marginalization. This is evident in the line, “*Nonetheless, there are about five thousand of us halfies in the country, mostly residing in Wyoming, Montana, Texas, the Bay Area, and New York, where no one bats an eye when we trot down the street, our upper bodies suited, our leather briefcases strapped to our furry backs.*” (Jarrar, 2016, p.190). Respect towards women has essentially been asserted but is frequently deprived by the patriarchal system that enables men to objectify them, which is reflected in how Zelwa is consistently perceived as peculiar due to her ‘unattractive’ physical appearance. This explains why Zelwa’s father strongly forces her to have plastic surgery to fix her deemed unusual appearance, because he may be ashamed of having a daughter with such a look, further highlighting how patriarchy adversely reduces women’s worth to their physical qualities. Collectively, Dina and Zelwa’s story underscores how there are more complicated factors as to why they, as Arab Muslim

women, are trapped under the patriarchal system and must not be overlooked to thoroughly understand them.

Furthermore, Abdullah's *Beyond the Cayenne Wall* depicts the distressing experiences of Pakistani women and aligns with the narratives found in Jarrar's selected short stories when approached through intersectionality, as Djohar (2024, p.140) notes that "characters in short stories in Shaila Abdullah's *Beyond the Cayenne Wall* (2005) and Randa Jarrar's *Him, Me, Muhammad Ali* (2016) reveal their personal, painful experiences, which can be linked to wider collective memories of the Muslim experiences." The intersection of the female characters' social identities emerges through Pakistan's culture that supports arranging child marriage (Kakal et al., 2023), which contributes to explaining and comprehending why they are forced to endure the struggles that the patriarchal system perpetuates. Such child marriage is told in Dhool's story, where it not only illustrates how culture has a part in sustaining patriarchy, but also shows how it eventually leads to Dhool being trapped under her abusive husband's authority. This can be seen in the line, "*Her father was a harried old fisherman who barely made ends meet in the dying fishing industry and was pleased when at the age of fourteen, his eldest daughter was married off to young Dilawar;*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.23). It is narrated through the line that, aside from Pakistan's child marriage culture itself, Dhool is forced to marry because her father made her do so. Underage children are not yet suitable to be a part of something that only adults should be in, but Dhool must adhere to her father's control, as patriarchy positions women as submissive and obligated to follow men's desires even within the context of father-daughter relationships. Closely similar, Tannu is subjected to child marriage just like Dhool is. However, this force is instead perpetuated by her mother, which is shown in the line, "*If only her Ma had not married her off so hastily, she'd still be at home amidst friends living her childhood, not worrying about a new life to come when she herself had not let go of her own youth,*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.2). The line further demonstrates that women's subjugation with their freedom taken away does not solely occur because of their gender, but also because their culture reinforces and legitimizes such oppression. Tannu's child marriage also illustrates how it deprives her of her childhood, which highlights how disadvantageous it is for Muslim women. Through the stories of Dhool and Tannu within the Pakistan's culture of child marriage, it is thus accentuated that patriarchal practices influenced by certain nations' culture may go beyond accepted boundaries, such as in the legal context or laws that strongly prohibit children from marrying at a young age, and continue to emphasize how pervasive the system is across numerous aspects of life for Muslim women.

#### **Muslim women characters' resistance to patriarchy**

The misperception that Muslim women are passive or submissive victims of patriarchy has persisted for a considerable time and results in the ongoing perpetuation of subjugation against Muslim women, which calls for the urgent necessity for actions to cease the struggles that Muslim women have been experiencing and to reject such an adverse perception. As literature has served as a medium of expression that reflects real-life problems, writers take advantage of this use by delivering resistance to support the oppressed characters in their narratives (Fikri et al., 2025), which mirrors what individuals may or can also do. In this regard, Jarrar and Abdullah emerge as some of the writers who not only enclose the experiences of Muslim women under patriarchy, but also their resistance against the system. Drawing from Scott's (1985) theory of resistance, individuals may perform their defiance as the oppressed to undermine the authority that dominates them in subtle ways. Scott coined the concept of 'everyday resistance' to explain this by comparing the concept with institutionalized political resistance that aims to change laws or power structures formally, in which he states, "Where everyday resistance most strikingly departs from other forms of resistance is in its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. Where institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with

systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains" (Scott, 1985, p.33). This comparison highlights the difference in how resistance should not frequently manifest in huge or widely seen movements but may also occur through small acts that individuals perform in their everyday activities. In essence, Muslim women's resistance against patriarchy may be presented within literature in numerous personal ways throughout their narratives, which helps to highlight that Muslim women can advocate for themselves and be their own agents of change.

In accordance with the concept of 'everyday resistance' proposed by Scott, the story of Dina in "Accidental Transients" (2016) reflects the manifestation of resistance against patriarchy in an individual manner. This resistance is evident in the line, "At the end of my shift I swept up the floor, which I like to do because it brings me comfort, like gathering stray strands in my mind," (Jarrar, 2016, p.108), in which the line takes place when Dina tidies up the salon she works in. Sweeping the floor has been frequently associated with the patriarchal division of gender roles, as it is considered a domestic duty where women are the ones who hold the responsibility to clean. However, by saying "I swept up the floor; which I like to do because it brings me comfort," Dina redefines the meaning of sweeping the floor itself by treating it as an activity that helps to release her stress, as she states, "like gathering stray strands in my mind." This small, personal act thus illustrates Dina's resistance against patriarchy, where she openly accepts that cleaning can serve as a form of coping mechanism for herself, not as the obligation that is necessitated of her as a woman to do, which then shows that Dina eventually rejects the patriarchal division of gender roles. Moreover, Dina performs her act of resistance by confronting her father, which can be seen in the line, "I stood up, the mannequin head still in my arms. And what the hell say do I have in this? This is my house too, Baba. Where do you get aaff telling Catholic brides they're welcome in my house? I have a Michigan accent. I can't help it," (Jarrar, 2016, p.99). The dominating nature of patriarchy causes the inability of Muslim women to raise their voices and opinions. This then may lead to the negative perception that Muslim women are viewed as 'mute' (Jeffery & Qureshi, 2022). Nonetheless, Dina's statement, "And what the hell say do I have in this? This is my house too, Baba." shows that although patriarchy may instill a sense of fear for Muslim women to speak up for themselves, Dina dares to defend herself when her father seems to disregard her rights to express her opinions. Consequently, Dina's resistance against patriarchy showcases that Muslim women have their own resolution and bravery to resist patriarchal norms that reinforce gender inequality and patriarchal thinking that negatively shape who they are, even in subtle or personal ways.

As patriarchal norms allow men to dictate how women should appear in accordance with their measurement of what is acceptable or desirable for women, Muslim women may perform their resistance against such gendered control by changing their perspectives on how they view themselves. This manifestation of resistance is reflected in Zelwa's story, in which she states, "...I'm a grown woman now. I own my own house. I have a good job. I am successful and happy. Why change who I am? What's wrong with the way I look now?" (Jarrar, 2016, p.198). The reduction of women to their physical appearance leads to dehumanized views of them, which is particularly concerning as it contributes to negative self-perceptions among women (Sáez et al., 2025). Nonetheless, Zelwa demonstrates her refusal to conform to such a reduction of women by assertively affirming to herself that she is more than sufficient and thus there is nothing about herself that requires alteration by saying, "why change who I am?" Through the line above, Zelwa claims her resistance by rejecting the beauty standards rooted in patriarchy and consistently upheld by men, while simultaneously reflecting on all the positive attributes that she has always possessed. Moreover, Zelwa's resistance is also illustrated through this line where she states, "I wanted to run after him and scream, to trample

*him under my hooves. I wanted to tell him I was beautiful, and of all the people in the world who've pointed and laughed at me, he had been the first,*" (Jarrar, 2016, p.198-199). Showing physical retaliation does not fully align with Scott's notion of everyday resistance, as it is done in a confrontative way. However, the line above shows that Zelwa solely contemplates her rebellion in her mind. Although she may not actually practice such thought, her desire and eagerness to finally resist her father's control over her showcase her agency in fighting for her autonomy and reclaiming authority over her own life. Therefore, Zelwa's story underscores that Muslim women's resistance can be achieved by personally changing their self-perception and can also begin as an internal assertion of self before it manifests in direct action.

Similarly, Tannu's story in "Amulet and the Cage Dove" (2005) illustrates her resistance against patriarchy in an internal self-affirmation manner. This is reflected in the line that narrates Tannu's thoughts during her labour, *"there was so much anger within her. She wanted to shake Amma until her teeth rattled and screamed that the child she carried within her wasn't the grandchild she had vowed to give up,*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.16). The line expresses Tannu's inner desire to retaliate, which demonstrates her refusal to be continuously confined by patriarchal demands perpetuated by her mother-in-law. It reveals that Tannu's frustration becomes a way for her to reclaim control over her choices and reject the expectations imposed on her. Moreover, this internally driven resistance is further told in another line in which Tannu states, *"To Raja she wanted to shout, the child isn't from your loins; he was conceived in that shameless hour when it is neither night nor day, a time when passion ruled and bodies obeyed and all that was pure was washed away as if water from a sieve,*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.16). The line emphasizes Tannu's internal assertion of autonomy regarding her own life and her strong determination to reject the patriarchal demands perpetuated by her husband, Raja, who ceaselessly controls her body. Furthermore, Tannu expresses her frustration towards both her mother-in-law and her husband simultaneously, as they have been the ones who have been sustaining the patriarchal dominance over her, *"She wanted to show them how when their clenched fists closed around her life, they had lost her heart,*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.16). The line shows that prolonged control through patriarchy, perpetuated by those within the familial circle, may significantly result in an emotional rupture. Such psychological damage then leads Tannu to distance herself from her mother-in-law and her husband emotionally, which serves as her subtle manifestation of resistance. These inner dialogues thus highlight that even when social constraints prevent Muslim women from expressing their true desire verbally, Tannu has her own quiet and potent act of self-definition, which reveals her resistance against the patriarchal forces that attempt to remove her freedom by silencing and disregarding her agency.

In a strictly patriarchal environment that severely disrupts and harms the lives of Muslim women, making the personal decision to leave such a setting can constitute an effective form of resistance to halt the continuous adverse effects imposed upon them. Victims of unhealthy relationships, which may also stem from the reinforcement of patriarchal norms, are frequently found to struggle to leave such relationships. This occasionally occurs because the victims become entrapped within their partner's control, which may lead to manipulative strategies that cultivate various concerns about leaving (Karakurt et al., 2022). Within the context of "Amulet and the Caged Dove" (2005) Tannu presents a different reality for Muslim women who find themselves trapped inside a patriarchal environment by at last performing her resistance by eventually leaving her mother-in-law and her husband, which is told through this line, *"Perhaps in her escape she had only switched one kind of paucity for another, but she was sure of one thing—it would be a state in which her child would finally have a place to call home,*" (Abdullah, 2005, p.17). As it is narrated throughout the story that Tannu has to endure the extensive control exerted by both her mother-in-law and her husband, making a

significant personal decision may become exceedingly difficult for Tannu to undertake. This is because such control leaves her with limited space to act independently. By describing her departure as an “escape”, Tannu’s courage and determination in finally choosing to leave thus signify her assertion of agency. In line with this, Dhool’s resistance in “Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust” (2005) is illustrated through her decisive act in expelling her patriarchal husband out of the house in which she resides with her children, as narrated in the line “Dhool closed the door behind Dilawar fiercely and faced her children. ‘From now on in this house we will do as I say! And I say your baba is gone forever. He is to never come back in here, ever, do you hear?’” (Abdullah, 2005, p.26). As Scott (1985 as cited in Apriliyani et al., 2022) notes that the oppressed utilize resistance as a means to defend their rights, Dhool assertively takes control over the household as a mother whose hard work in constantly taking care of the family is disregarded. Dhool’s resistance thus illustrates that Muslim women can reclaim the authority that had long been denied to them to ultimately live their lives according to their own desires without any patriarchal control disrupting them. As a result, Muslim women’s resistance portrayed through the story of Tannu and Dhool demonstrates that Muslim women have the inner courage to act against oppression even within restrictive environments and profoundly reveals that Muslim women can reconfigure the domestic space as a place that no longer accommodates patriarchal domination.

## CONCLUSION

The short stories illustrate that patriarchy has a consequential role in the lives of the Muslim female characters, where it influences and shapes their personal choices, relationships, and sense of self in multiple ways. The multi-faceted nature of patriarchy is presented through the Muslim women’s experiences, such as those that occur within the familial circle, marriage, and society. Through their different and unique narratives, the short stories effectively reveal the intricacy of patriarchy. Different aspects of these Muslim women’s lives are also presented as the underlying factors as to why they are the primary sufferers of patriarchy, where their living background and culture intersect with their gender to reinforce the domination, oppression, and discrimination they are subjected to. Nonetheless, every Muslim woman character’s story narrates their resistance against patriarchy, which manifests in numerous subtle acts of positive self-perceptions, self-affirmations, internal defiance, and their determination in reclaiming their autonomy. Consequently, this research contributes to media literacy by encouraging readers to critically engage with narratives that highlight the struggles faced by Muslim women that are frequently dismissed or ignored by society, to fully recognize and assist in spreading awareness of the gender inequalities that they face, particularly under patriarchy.

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