



Research Essay

Representative Fiction in Muslim Literature in South Africa

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A research project submitted to the School of Literature, Language and Media, Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Publishing.

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

To the resilient people of Palestine and all individuals facing dehumanisation under oppressive regimes, especially to the brave journalists risking their lives to reveal the truth, this is a tribute to amplifying voices akin to yours.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores Muslim representative fiction in South Africa, addressing the challenges of limited local readership and reliance on imported content in the South African Muslim publishing sector. It emphasises the need for more representative adult fiction and investigates how independent and hybrid models can amplify diverse Muslim voices. The study employs semi-structured interviews, analyses books by self-identifying Muslim authors, and uses Nielsen Book Data and the Muslim Book Reviewers (MBR) scale to examine epitextual and paratextual elements. Key findings indicate that local Muslim publishers face challenges such as small market size, limited readership, competition with international publishers, and distribution and marketing issues. To address these challenges, it is recommended to conduct regular surveys and focus groups to understand evolving preferences, strengthen networks with local retailers, expand online presence and social media marketing, improve publication quality to meet international standards and ensure culturally relevant and diverse content. Promoting local authors, investing in underrepresented genres, and fostering collaborations with community members and educational institutions are also essential for enhancing the quality, impact, and market reach of Muslim fiction.

Keywords: Muslim fiction, representative fiction, publishing

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Islamic publishing has a rich history in South Africa, dating back to the 19th century. The first Islamic newspaper in South Africa was a monthly publication called Al-Muathin, started by Mujiebo Rahman, an Al-Azhar University graduate renowned as a prestigious international university for Islamic learning, who was dedicated to writing and authoring several books on Islam (Mahomed Mahida, 2012). Since then, several Muslim publishing houses have emerged that have produced a wide range of books, magazines, and other publications in English, Arabic, and Urdu.

Muslim publishing refers to the process of producing and disseminating books, magazines, journals, and literary works associated with Islamic teachings and Muslim subjects. Books range from history books dating back to the first prophet, Prophet Adam to books on science by famous Muslim scientists such as Ibn Sina known in the West as Avicenna (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). Muslim publishers seek to preserve religious knowledge and history by documenting and sharing stories, traditions, and the lived experiences of Muslims worldwide. It also serves as a platform for Muslim authors and writers to share their perspectives and contribute to the global literary landscape. Muslim publishers aim to teach communities about their faith and to promote an understanding of Islam among non-Muslims who serve as secondary markets (*The Significance of Publishing Islamic Literature – Invitation Publishing*, 2023).

"Muslim" describes people who follow Islam, while "Islamic" refers to things, ideas, and events influenced by Islam. Misusing these terms perpetuates Western colonial thought and diminishes the contributions of Islamic civilisation. Misuse of labels can perpetuate discrimination and inequality, highlighting the need for careful use. Muslim content refers to works produced by Muslims or related to their experiences, covering cultural, social, historical, and personal themes, such as novels, films, and memoirs. Islamic content focuses on the religion of Islam, dealing with beliefs, practices, laws, and teachings, such as theology books, Quranic exegesis, and documentaries. The key difference lies in scope and intent: Muslim content is broader and more inclusive, while Islamic content is narrowly focused on religious elements and aims to educate about the faith (Souaiaia, 2016).

Muslim publishing houses in South Africa, owned by Muslims, publish both fiction and non-fiction books. While a small Muslim population forms the majority of their readership, locally produced books are primarily non-fiction. This study focuses on representative fiction in the local publishing sector and the development of smaller publishing houses that are gaining momentum in producing more fiction. Representative fiction alludes to literature that depicts and mirrors the encounters, points of view, and

characters of specific regions and their lived experiences. Literature offers valuable knowledge through the representation of nuanced narratives (Young, 1999).

The South African Muslim community is small, with only three per cent being Muslim in South Africa's population of nearly 60 million (Isilow, 2021). The limited Muslim population in South Africa creates challenges for the profitability and sustainability of the local Muslim book publishing industry as it faces competition from both international and local publishers. Local retailers often prefer imported books to locally produced ones, and local publishers have limited reach compared to international publishing companies (Haferburg, 2000). Several Muslim publishing houses in the country specialise in Islamic topics such as law, spirituality, history, and culture. While many conglomerates publish local Muslim authors, there is a lack of Muslim-owned conglomerates. Local Muslim publishing houses are small and unable to compete with larger international ones, often sourcing books from international companies. The limited reading culture adversely affects the expansion of local publishing houses in South Africa, as only 35% of South African adults view themselves as either passionate or regular readers, 22% self-identify as non-readers or fall into the category of non-readers due to a lack of reading proficiency. Subsequently, just below half of the adult population identifies either as individuals who could read more or those who aspire to read more (Polzer-Ngwato et al., 2023). Non-readers are also people who have the ability to read but choose not to engage in reading. This means that the category of non-readers includes not only those who lack reading proficiency but also individuals who are literate yet do not find reading appealing or do not prioritise it in their daily lives. Thus, non-readers encompass a broader group than just those with low literacy skills, extending to those who, despite being capable readers, opt not to read for various personal reasons.

Local Muslim publishing houses in South Africa face significant challenges due to their small size and the limited reading culture in the country. These challenges underscore the critical need for more representative fiction. With a small market and limited reach, local publishers highlight the importance of creating literature that reflects the diverse experiences and identities within the Muslim community. This ensures that readers have access to stories that resonate with their lives and cultural backgrounds. Representative fiction aims to accurately capture the variety and intricacies of these communities, offering deeper insights into their histories, societies, customs, values, challenges, and triumphs. By providing authentic and relatable narratives, representative fiction moves beyond generalisations and misconceptions. This allows readers to connect with the characters, even if they are fictional, on a personal level. (Polvinen & Sklar, 2019).

1.2 Problem Statement

The research is conducted in a context with a limited readership, where most content is imported. It examines the market offerings for this readership, emphasising the importance of accurate representation. The focus is on adult fiction within the Muslim publishing sector, which predominantly

features non-fiction content. Traditional publishing methods are not widely used because Muslim publishing companies are small, leading local authors to rely heavily on independent publishing due to limited support as fiction authors. This highlights the sector's unique challenges and the significant role that alternative publishing routes play in facilitating literary expression and dissemination within Muslim communities by providing more accessible platforms for authors to publish their works. Independent and hybrid publishing models help ensure that diverse voices and stories within the Muslim community are heard and shared. The need for expanding content and strategy, particularly in the domain of Muslim-representative fiction, is especially important because currently fiction is not focused on a Muslim adult readership (Baderoon, 2014).

In South Africa, Muslim publishers have been translating works from Arabic and Urdu, with an overwhelming spotlight on global imports. Disparities between South African and worldwide Muslim distributors are noted with regional influence, target audiences, and market needs because global Muslim publishing houses have larger distribution networks. The smaller South African publishers mainly distribute their works inside South Africa and adjoining African nations, stressing an emphasis on nearby settings which include books on Islamic philosophy, history, and spirituality (Sardar & Wyn Davies, 2007).

With the majority of the available books being imported, there is a lack of sustainable growth in local publishers' content. This study aims to analyse how publishers can break through into the market with more representative fiction. The goal is to ensure that local books continue to engage and resonate with their audiences, serving as a strong backlist for publishers. Research will be conducted to determine whether local books need to be produced at a higher standard to compete with international titles and cater to local contexts, such as incorporating unique selling points (USPs) that international titles do not address. This research will help the sustainability and growth of Muslim-run publishing houses and retailers. The research will explore the representation of Muslim identity in fiction, with a focus on the portrayal of Muslim characters and themes in literature. This research sheds light on larger societal concerns also evident in the investigation of Muslim representative fiction, self-identity in fiction, the #OwnVoices movement, and the relationship with Muslim representative fiction. By examining these aspects, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Muslim identity is depicted in literature and its implications for broader societal perceptions and discourses.

1.3 Research Question

This research report examines Muslim publishers, with a focus on enhancing their collaborations to promote local representative fiction. It investigates strategies for Muslim publishers to expand their reach through improved marketing and distribution channels. The report will evaluate current practices and make recommendations based on interviews with key participants, with questions informed by the existing literature. Furthermore, the report will analyse sales of Muslim-authored literature as the

primary target market and propose strategies for Muslim publishers to overcome challenges and increase their market presence effectively.

1.3.1 Main Research Question

The outlining research question that this study will aim to answer is: **What are the main challenges faced locally by Muslim publishers in producing representative fiction?**

1.3.2 Sub-questions

1. What are the needs of Muslim readers in South Africa with regard to fiction?
2. What strategies and approaches do local Muslim publishers employ to market their products?
3. How are local Muslim publishers adapting their title selection to align with readers' preferences and market demands?

1.4 Rationale and Objective

Despite the increased visibility and recognition of diverse authors the publishing industry remains saturated by white people and diverse world views are slowly having their voices amplified better (Chambers & Hussain, 2023). This research report primarily investigates the South African Muslim publishing sector, specifically focusing on challenges within the Muslim book industry. The study delves into the production, marketing, and distribution of Muslim representative fiction. A key aspect of the research is the examination of the sustainability of local industries, underscoring the role of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in building a resilient publishing landscape. By conducting a comparative analysis of publishers and scrutinising their strategies, the objective is to gain insights into the broader publishing potential in South Africa. The report aims to provide recommendations for potential enhancements that can empower Muslim-run publishers, thereby fostering their sustainability and enriching the diversity of the fiction landscape in the region.

Additionally, the research aims to analyse books that display a nuanced understanding of the cultural and societal contexts that shape the narratives within the Muslim book industry. Ultimately, the report seeks to provide recommendations for potential enhancements that can empower Muslim-run publishers, fostering their sustainability and enriching the diversity of the fiction landscape in the region (Chambers & Hussain, 2023). Muslim representative fiction which is the focus of this research emphasises the importance of equitable and comprehensive portrayal of Muslims in literature. Books need to cater to audiences whilst also accurately representing a community to promote fair representation in literature to not only counter stereotypes but also foster inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding. An in-depth understanding of the diverse local Muslim community can help overcome challenges in creating constructive representative fiction (Asmal, 2015).

1.5 Research Methodology

The methodology provides a robust framework for uncovering insights into the diverse landscape of Muslim representation in South African fiction. Through a comprehensive research design, including a literature review, epitextual and paratextual analysis, and semi-structured interviews with local Muslim publishing houses, the study aims to delve into publishing structures and enhance the portrayal of Muslim identity in South African fiction.

Sampling focuses on books by self-identifying Muslim authors, selected through a purposive sampling of publishing companies in major South African cities. Data collection involves Nielsen Book Data, a bibliography compiled through Muslim book reviewers, interviewees and publisher's websites.

Employing paratextual and epitextual analysis methods, the research assesses the representativeness and reception of selected books, while the MBR scale categorises them based on criteria like cultural authenticity and character representation.

Analysis of interview and Nielsen data will offer insights into publishing practices and market reach, culminating in recommendations to refine local publishing strategies. Despite acknowledging limitations such as the small size of the Muslim publishing industry and lack of sales data the research has used the means available to conduct this research. The research prioritises ethical considerations, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents and adhering to Wits Ethics Protocols through meticulous administration of participant information sheets and consent forms.

1.6 Limitations

This research report focuses on the Muslim publishing industry, which, although small, produces an even more limited amount of adult fiction that is most often self-published or published through hybrid models. The absence of large, established local Muslim publishers and a lack of comprehensive local publishing data limit our understanding of local best practices. Data will be collected from publisher interviews to account for this where possible. The gap in local precedents will be addressed through research on well-established international companies. Nielsen's statistics on South African book sales are inadequate due to their limited scope, and missing significant market segments. Local publishers also function as publishing service providers, necessitating interviews to gather accurate sales information and insights into the challenges faced by Muslim publishers. Acknowledged limitations include potential biases from interviews and the availability of sales data, especially with many local Muslim authors self-publishing. There is also a limitation on Nielsen data which is exclusive to print sales, does not include data from all retailers, only has data between 2009 and 2023 and the sample used for analysis is only 1000 books.

1.7 Conclusion

Chapter One identifies challenges faced by local Muslim publishers, particularly in producing representative fiction for adults. The research question explores these challenges, with sub-questions examining reader needs, marketing strategies, and title selection. The rationale emphasises the importance of SMEs in sustaining the publishing landscape. The overarching objective is to offer insights into the South African Muslim publishing sector, propose collaboration strategies, and contribute to the diversity of the fiction landscape.

The first chapter is the introductory chapter on the research background, problem statement, rationale, and research questions. The second chapter is the literature review that critiques and unpacks publishing in South Africa with a focus on Muslim publishing and the importance of representative fiction. The third chapter discusses the research approach, ethical considerations and limitations. The fourth chapter presents the paratextual and epitextual research and the responses obtained from key participants. The fifth chapter integrates all the data and answers the main research question. The chapter also provides conclusions, recommendations, limitations of the research and suggested areas for further study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review delves into broader societal issues reflected in the exploration of representative Muslim fiction, focusing on themes of self-identity, the #OwnVoices movement, and their intersections with Muslim narratives. It highlights the intricate portrayal of Muslim identities and underscores the vital role literature plays in cultivating empathy and understanding across diverse readerships.

By examining reader needs and societal impacts, this literature review sets the stage for a detailed analysis of the themes, challenges, and opportunities within the sphere of Muslim fiction. It explores how literature mirrors and influences societal perceptions, advocating for authentic representation by voices from within the Muslim community.

Furthermore, the review discusses strategies to enhance the appeal and competitiveness of Muslim fiction in the broader literary market, addressing how social movements shape literary landscapes. This exploration invites readers to appreciate the depth and complexity that authentic narratives bring to the portrayal of Muslim identity. This research will investigate the international landscape of publishing to assess if there is a move towards greater representation and to identify best practices and potential areas for improvement.

2.1 Reader Needs and Readership

Reader needs focus on what readers want and need from books, while readership describes who the readers are and their general reading behaviours and characteristics. Discussing both reader needs and readership is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the Muslim publishing sector. Reader needs focus on the specific elements and themes that readers seek in literature, ensuring that the content resonates with their cultural and personal experiences (J. Jacobs, 2023). Readership refers to the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the audience, helping publishers understand who their readers are and how they engage with literature. Addressing both aspects helps identify content gaps, tailor marketing strategies, and develop literature that effectively reaches and engages the target audience, supporting the growth and sustainability of local Muslim publishing houses.

2.1.1 Reader Needs in Muslim Representative Fiction

Muslim literature in South Africa encompasses a diverse range of literary forms, providing insights into the experiences and identities of the Muslim community. Through themes of identity, faith, and cultural heritage, these works offer a nuanced exploration of the Muslim experience within the country. Within literature and the media, Muslims are frequently depicted through a narrow storyline that fails to accurately capture the diverse experiences within the global Muslim community, often perpetuating stereotypes and presenting a poorly informed view (Nurullah, 2010).

Muslims often find books that gain popularity and extensive exposure through major publishing houses problematic because the narratives presented often do not accurately reflect the reality of Muslims. Women play a crucial role in the readership demographic, and gender significantly influences self-identification, with women showing a higher likelihood than men to identify as passionate or regular readers (Polzer-Ngwato et al., 2023). Some Muslim women may prefer reading fiction that represents their personal experiences, while others may enjoy science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, or other genres. Some may seek books with strong female protagonists, whereas others may be interested in theological or scholarly works related to Islam. Acknowledging this diversity within Muslim female readership and providing a wide array of literature that resonates with the various interests and perspectives of Muslims is vital for creating an inclusive and representative literary landscape. This ensures that Muslims have access to books that reflect their experiences and enrich their reading journeys.

Muslim readers have diverse backgrounds, cultures, interests, and preferences which come from various countries, ethnicities, and social backgrounds, and may interpret and practice Islam in different ways (Liesch, 2023). Muslim women are seeking literature that is both diverse and aligned with their Islamic values, which makes the female Muslim readership unique (bint Younus, 2022). Many books, even those by Muslim authors, include Islamic practices but depict behaviours and relationships that contradict Islamic principles. Furthermore, critical reviews addressing these issues are limited. This highlights the need for Muslim fiction to align more closely with Islamic values while still offering rich, relatable narratives (Zanafeer, 2023).

Zainab bint Younus's article "Navigating Muslim Representation In Books: The Good, The Flawed, And The Ugly" discusses how Muslim readers can discern between flawed Muslim characters and those that glorify sins (bint Younus, 2022). Muslim readers often seek stories with Islamic values and relatable characters but face challenges with diverse literature that either presents preachy, perfect characters or those that oppose Islamic values. The article identifies three types of Muslim characters in literature: perfect but unengaging ones, those who defy Islamic values, and flawed characters who improve spiritually over time. Younus emphasises the importance of positive character arcs. The article warns against literature that justifies unlawful actions and promotes Islamophobia. Younus advocates for critical thinking when evaluating books and stresses the importance of selecting literature that aligns with Islamic values, particularly for young readers (bint Younus, 2022). Muslim representative fiction serves as a dynamic lens for readers to engage with diverse Muslim experiences, offering narratives that portray cultural nuances and challenge authenticity. This genre contributes to personal growth, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding, challenging stereotypes and providing nuanced perspectives on Islam. Souaiaia (2016) critiques using new labels like "Muhammadan," "Islamicate," and "Islamicist," arguing that proper use of "Muslim" and "Islamic" is sufficient for accurately representing the contributions of

Muslims and Islam however bookstagrammer @bintyounus uses the term ‘Muslamic’ as a versatile descriptor that extends beyond the boundaries of strictly Islamic content, encapsulating a broad spectrum of fiction involving Muslim characters or influenced by Islamic culture. It's a nuanced approach, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of narratives that may not be entirely reflective of Islamic values but prominently feature Muslim elements. There is a clear distinction that needs to be understood between instructional Islamic texts and works of fiction, and fiction also diverges into fiction that has Muslim characters and fiction which has an authentic Muslim narrative. Whether delving into fantasy realms like the Daevabad series, exploring family dynamics in works like *The Ruins of Us*, *The Language of Miracles*, and *A Place for Us*, or venturing into unconventional formats like graphic novels in *Yes, I'm Hot in This* and fiction for younger readers. The term allows for the recognition of Muslim characters and the intricate interplay between Islam as a spiritual and cultural influence. Importantly, the inclusivity of the term doesn't imply an automatic endorsement or dismissal of appropriateness; it simply invites a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between Islam, culture, and storytelling. The application of ‘Muslamic academia’ extends this inclusivity to scholarly work about Islam and Muslims that diverges from traditional Islamic scholarship, fostering a more expansive and inclusive discourse. It is a nuanced lens through which the reviewer invites readers to appreciate the richness and diversity within the realm of Muslim fiction and academia, while also acknowledging its imperfections (bintYounus, 2023).

2.1.2 The Exploration of Modesty and Women's Roles in Fiction

In Muslim literature, a distinct pattern emerges as women who identify as Muslim tend to gravitate toward more conservative content within mainstream markets. This phenomenon reflects a nuanced evolution in Muslim literature, where contemporary Muslim authors are actively expanding their networks with publishers, engaging in social media platforms, collaborating with illustrators, and navigating a broader spectrum of literary spaces (Nelson & Koonse, 2017). As the industry undergoes transformative growth, efforts are being made to cultivate more inclusive literature. Notably, there is a deliberate focus on modesty as a critical consideration, aligning with religious conventions and contributing to the diversification of narratives that authentically represent the multifaceted experiences within the Muslim community.

The exploration of modesty and the role of women from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth century in England, as discussed by Ruth Bernard Yeazell in "Fictions of Modesty," resonates with the themes present in Muslim representative fiction (Yeazell, 1991). Yeazell delves into the debates surrounding the modest woman, analysing conflicting societal expectations and the complex desires covered by the discourse on ‘modesty’. In the context of Muslim literature, where cultural and religious values often intersect with discussions of women's roles, the exploration of modesty takes on a unique significance. Much like the English narrative tradition discussed by Yeazell, Muslim representative

fiction often grapples with the regulation of women's desires while opening up new possibilities for subjectivity and individual choice. The emphasis on courtship, choice, and the consciousness of women in English fiction parallels themes present in Muslim literature, where narratives often revolve around the agency and choices of female protagonists within the framework of religious convictions. By drawing parallels between the two traditions, one can gain insights into the evolving discourse on modesty, agency, and the representation of women in diverse cultural and historical contexts (Yeazell, 1991, p. 3-11).

2.1.3 Social Movements and Literature

This section discusses social movements and their impact on literature which is essential to provide contextual understanding, authenticity, and relevance to the narratives. These movements highlight systemic issues and challenges faced by marginalised groups, fostering awareness and education among readers. They empower and inspire by reflecting real struggles and triumphs, enriching themes of identity, community, justice, and resistance. Social movements mark significant historical and cultural shifts, preserving their impact and contributing to an inclusive historical record. Movements like #OwnVoices influence literary trends, advocating for authentic representation, thereby shaping a more diverse and equitable literary landscape.

Social movements impact reader preferences, market demands, and cultural dynamics. Understanding these movements can highlight gaps in representation, reveal changes in societal attitudes, and promote inclusivity and authenticity in narratives. This understanding can enhance marketing strategies and community interactions, aiding the growth of representative fiction. Analysing social movements within the context of Muslim representative fiction enriches narratives by providing a historical foundation, exploring identity dynamics, challenging stereotypes, depicting the impact on communities, addressing challenges and resistance, examining intersectionality, and fostering dialogue and understanding. Social movements have historically influenced the content and themes of books, reflecting shifts in societal attitudes and values. This dynamic relationship underscores the connection between literature and broader social, political, and cultural contexts, comparing the needs of Muslim readers to those of South African readers and framing the niche for books with Muslim representation.

Understanding the historical timeline of literature in response to social movements is relevant to meeting reader needs and can enhance the appeal of representative fiction. The figure was created to show popular Muslim literature responding to changes with social movements.



Figure 1: Timeline of literature examples in response to social movements

Within the discourse on international social movements, the research discusses a few popular Muslim-authored books and their impact on representative fiction. The post-9/11 era for example created a shift in literature where Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* navigates the complexities of identity and belonging in a post-9/11 world, providing a look into the challenges faced by Muslims. The Arab Spring, a transformative movement, finds resonance in G. Willow Wilson's *Alif the Unseen*, where the intertwining of myth and reality reflects the upheavals and aspirations of the time seeking freedom. Addressing the narratives emerging from Muslim women's movements, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* delves into themes of empowerment and agency, capturing the evolving roles of women within societal shifts. Exploring the dynamics of migration and diaspora, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* unfolds a tale of love and displacement, resonating with the experiences of Muslims navigating global transitions during war. Sahar Mustafa's *The Beauty of Your Face* confronting Islamophobia, stands as a poignant narrative, addressing the impact of prejudice on personal identity and communal belonging. These literary works not only encapsulate the influence of international movements but also serve as powerful instruments for fostering understanding and empathy in the global discourse on Muslim experiences. These books identified are examples of books by Muslim authors responding to current social changes which will help discuss the representative nature of the books in the bibliography.

Depictions of Islam and Muslims in novels can be categorised into three groups according to Majed (2012):

- Stereotypical Representation, where novels like Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* and *Brick Lane* portray Islam and Muslims negatively, focusing on fundamentalism and female oppression.
- Moderate Representation, exemplified by Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*, which contrasts conservative Muslims in traditional societies with moderate Muslims in the West based on their practice location
- Sympathetic Representation, as seen in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, which challenges colonialist stereotypes by sympathetically depicting conservative Islam and Muslims in both Sudan and Britain, offering a positive image of Islam (Majed, 2012).

Aboulela's work contrasts with that of Kureishi, Ali, and Faqir, who marginalise Islam in favour of Western values. In *Minaret*, Aboulela presents conservative Muslim characters who harmonise Islam

with British culture. This novel challenges Western materialistic criteria and stereotypes, emphasising spirituality and closeness to God. Aboulela's diverse portrayal of Muslims and their social contexts resists the distorted images found in colonial discourse. Majed (2012) concludes that Aboulela's postcolonial representation of Islam facilitates a more authentic and respectful dialogue between Islam and the West. Islamic postcolonialism thus expands the scope of postcolonial analysis, encouraging Muslim voices and perspectives in the critique of colonial discourse, and fostering more realistic and authentic readings of the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in fiction (Majed, 2012).

Readers, both Muslims and specifically South African Muslims, share common interests in representative fiction characterised by authentic portrayals of diverse Muslim identities. Both groups seek relatable characters, cultural authenticity, narratives exploring intersectionality, and a variety of genres. However, the South African Muslim reader may have nuanced preferences influenced by the more recent post-apartheid context. Their focus extends to the legacy of apartheid, stories of Muslim apartheid activists in areas predating the Group Areas Act, such as District Six, Fietas, and Marabastad. Additionally, they appreciate narratives reflecting a multicultural society, a preference for local Muslim voices, an interest in global Muslim stories with local connections, and an inclination toward post-colonial perspectives. Fiction that addresses these aspects holds particular value for the South African Muslim reader, enriching their literary preferences with layers of historical and cultural specificity even within fiction.

Social movements, whether in South Africa or internationally, profoundly shape reader preferences, market demands, and cultural dynamics, impacting the landscape of representative fiction. These movements reveal gaps in representation and societal attitudes, prompting publishers to adapt narratives for inclusivity and authenticity. In the realm of Muslim representative fiction, social movements provide a historical backdrop, challenge stereotypes, and foster dialogue, enriching literature with diverse perspectives. Internationally, post-9/11 literature reflects themes of identity and freedom, while narratives from Muslim women's movements and migration resonate with global transitions. Based on insights from the literature the research observes South African Muslim readers, influenced by apartheid legacies, seek narratives reflecting multiculturalism and post-colonial perspectives. Key social movements in South Africa, such as the anti-apartheid movement and Islamic revivalism, have significantly shaped Muslim representative fiction, illustrating the complex and evolving nature of society. Social movements play a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of representative fiction, offering diverse perspectives and enriching narratives with historical, cultural, and social depth.

In relation to representative fiction, a shift in perspective emerged due to the social movements seen in the sixties and their impacts. While many representative fiction landscapes have been shaped by Western-centric narratives and ideologies, there is a growing recognition of the need for a more diverse and inclusive approach. With new approaches, a global orientation in representative fiction promises to

bring forth a more powerful and inclusive representation of human experiences in literature. Local Muslim writers contributed to resistance literature, depicting their experiences within the broader racial oppression, as seen in works like *Bitter Fruit* by Achmat. These narratives explore the intersectionality of racial and religious identities during apartheid, highlighting the unique challenges faced by the Muslim community.

2.1.4 #OwnVoices

The #OwnVoices Movement is an example of a social development that arose to advance and commend the true portrayal of marginalised and underrepresented voices in writing. Instead of relying on outsiders, it emphasises the significance of authors from underrepresented backgrounds telling their own stories and experiences. The movement ensures that people from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to tell their own stories and have their voices heard by encouraging literature to be more diverse and inclusive (Steffens, 2021).

The #OwnVoices movement holds significant importance in Muslim representative fiction, which features stories where both the characters and the authors are Muslims. This genre of fiction reflects the real-life experiences, perspectives, and identities of Muslim individuals and communities. By offering authentic and nuanced portrayals of Muslim characters, Muslim authors involved in the #OwnVoices movement challenge the stereotypes, biases, and misconceptions commonly seen in mainstream media. Through their narratives, these authors aim to provide a more accurate and empathetic understanding of Muslim identity, culture, and faith, effectively countering simplistic generalisations.

The Own Voices movement does not believe that only people from a certain background can write about those experiences but that those stories should be highlighted as authentic representation. Own Voices and Muslim representative fiction as advocated for by Muslim Book Reviewers (@muslimbookreviewers) is authentic representation, diverse perspectives, empowerment over narratives, countering stereotypes and visibility in the larger literary landscape.

2.2 Representative Fiction and Societal Impact

This section highlights the critical role of representative fiction in reflecting the lives and experiences of diverse communities, focusing specifically on Muslim communities. Readers are influencing the literature being produced and representative fiction seeks to authentically depict the variety and intricacies of these communities, offering deep insights into their histories, societies, customs, values, challenges, and triumphs. It plays a crucial role in promoting understanding, empathy, and appreciation of Muslim cultural and religious nuances by providing readers with a window into the unique experiences, challenges, and societal perspectives of Muslims. Hollis (2023) believes this enhances the personal connection readers have with the narratives, fostering a greater sense of belonging and validation of lived experiences (Hollis, 2023).

Additionally, representative fiction serves as a vital tool for dialogue, identity shaping, and promoting unity within the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of the Muslim community. It transcends mere storytelling to become a vehicle for knowledge preservation, spiritual growth, and cultural exchange, contributing significantly to the intellectual landscape of Muslims globally. This literary tradition not only provides access to information but also instils values of respect and continuous learning, ensuring its relevance across generations (Sardar & Wyn Davies, 2007)

The emphasis on education, dialogue, and awareness in Muslim literature is instrumental in shaping perspectives and fostering a community spirit. By focusing on English-language books about Islam written by Muslim authors, this research underlines the significance of cultivating a literary space that not only educates but also bridges cultural gaps, promoting a more inclusive understanding of Islam in the English-speaking world. This exploration into the niche of English Muslim fiction underscores its potential to counter prevailing stereotypes and offer a nuanced portrayal of Muslim culture and values in the global arena (Nelson & Koonse, 2017).

Exploring the intricate relationship between fiction reading and individual narrative identity, Mathies (2020) draws from Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity concept and Kendall Walton's theory of representations. Their model suggests that humans are inherently intertwined with stories, with emotions possessing a narrative structure. During the reading process, readers construct narratives that incorporate not only the fictional story but also sequences from their own experiences, leading to the generation of self-conscious emotions. These emotions can persist beyond reading, triggering self-reflection and potential self-narrative reconfiguration. This comprehensive analysis enriches our understanding of how reading fiction influences one's self-identity and unity, particularly by highlighting the enduring impact of these narratives and emotions on readers' lives (Mathies, 2020)

Hollis (2023) examined the impact of reading fiction and non-fiction on critical thinking and its implications for representative fiction, as well as how reading fiction can enhance critical thinking. The way fiction presents a storyline stimulates critical evaluation, whereas non-fiction books are more direct. Critical thinking is a useful tool for promoting intellectual and holistic understandings (Hollis, 2023). Literature stimulates our emotions and helps us understand personal concepts with complex meanings by allowing us to recognise similarities between ourselves and what is deemed 'other' and amend prejudiced perceptions (Johnson et al., 2014).

The context of South African schools promoting diversity through literature parallels the production of Muslim representative fiction for adults in several ways. Both aim to foster diversity, tolerance and the affirmation of diverse identities. Just as schools must address the varied needs and cultural sensitivities of their students, publishers must understand and reflect the diverse experiences within the Muslim community. Both require community engagement to stay attuned to the needs and preferences of their audiences, and both face challenges related to navigating cultural nuances and ensuring protections

against discrimination. In essence, addressing these components promotes a learning environment where students can explore and affirm their identities while respecting the identities of others. According to the National Policy on Religion and Education, the relationship between religion and education in South Africa should align with the values of the constitution. It recognises the diverse religious heritage of the country, emphasising the positive contribution of religion to education. The policy asserts that public schools have a responsibility to teach and learn about religion, distinct from religious instruction provided by homes and religious communities. In response to instances of religious discrimination in public education, the policy provides a non-prescriptive framework for schools to develop policies, ensuring that parents and communities are informed about their rights and responsibilities. It promotes a broad range of religious activities in schools, emphasising inclusivity and respect for diverse beliefs (Council of Education Ministers, 2003).

2.2.1 Local Muslim Representative Fiction

To ensure accurate and respectful representations of diverse groups, writers, publishers, and media professionals must adopt a more comprehensive approach to producing representative fiction. This includes employing fact-checkers who specialise in cultural accuracy to scrutinise content before publication and engaging cultural consultants to guide creatives towards more nuanced portrayals. Avoiding the homogenisation of diverse groups is crucial, as it not only distorts reality but also imposes creative limitations by presenting a narrow view of complex identities. This approach aims to enrich the narrative landscape, offering a more vibrant and inclusive array of perspectives (Jones, 2022).

Creating representative fiction for Muslim publishers in South Africa involves navigating various challenges, such as the diverse nature of the Muslim community, potential stereotypes, and cultural sensitivities. Striking a balance between tradition and modernity, addressing linguistic diversity, and acknowledging intersecting identities are crucial considerations. Additionally, access to mainstream publishing platforms, market recognition, and navigating complex political and social contexts pose further hurdles. Muslim publishers must ensure authentic portrayals by collaborating with diverse voices and promoting inclusivity within the industry. Overcoming these challenges requires an understanding of the multifaceted Muslim community in South Africa and a commitment to fostering genuine and respectful representations in fiction (Asmal, 2015; Baderoon, 2014; Booth & Narayan, 2021).

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMME) publishers in South Africa, particularly those focused on Islamic literature, confront challenges due to the limited market from the small Muslim population in the country. Despite these obstacles, there is an opportunity for local voices to create literature with global appeal. The research focuses on understanding reading trends in the South African Muslim community, aiming to develop representative fiction to compete with international conglomerates.

Market research is emphasised to enhance content diversity, incorporating Islamic themes and perspectives, potentially through localisation.

These approaches have recently embraced digital platforms, fostering community engagement, diversifying content offerings, forming collaborations and partnerships, maintaining a presence in traditional print distribution, exploring subscription models, participating in cultural events, and incorporating social responsibility initiatives. By combining these methods, these publishers aim to build a strong connection with their audience, ensure broader accessibility, and create a sustainable business model.

Specialising in publishing is suggested by Clark and Phillips (2020), with an emphasis on establishing a robust literary community through activities such as book fairs and conferences (Clark & Phillips, 2020). The research discusses strategies of international Muslim publishing houses and authors, considering challenges and growth potential in a relatively homogeneous market. Niche publishers are more open to ideas and diversification and are also more adaptable due to their scale (Clark & Phillips, 2020, p.57). Further research will explore how this will work in a local market. Distributing books and media can be challenging, particularly in remote areas, limiting the reach of publishers and retailers and hindering their connection with the target audience.

2.2.2 The Negative Impact of Harmful Depictions of Muslims in Literature

This section discusses the dangers of poor and inaccurate representation of Muslims in literature which is essential in a study on Muslim representative fiction, as it highlights the significant impact literature can have on societal perceptions and the lived experiences of Muslim individuals. International examples were included to emphasise the wider impact of literary misrepresentation, the global scope of the issue, and the need to foster understanding through more nuanced portrayals of Muslims.

Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* exemplifies this, sparking intense controversy and debate over its portrayal of Islamic figures. This controversy underscores the necessity for nuanced, respectful depictions that reflect the diversity and richness of Muslim experiences. Misrepresentations can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, leading to societal prejudice, discrimination, and misunderstanding. The backlash against Rushdie's work illustrates the delicate balance between artistic freedom and cultural sensitivity. Analysing such cases reveals the critical need for accurate and empathetic representation in literature to foster a more inclusive and respectful dialogue between cultures and to combat colonialist and Orientalist narratives that distort the image of Islam and Muslims.

Salman Rushdie from an Indian Kashmiri Muslim family and Khaled Hosseini who describes himself as a secular Muslim have known agendas that have not been towards fostering a better understanding and relationship with Muslims. They have used their platforms to reinforce stereotypes and misrepresent people. Rushdie's intent may have been to explore complex themes, but the controversy surrounding

his book has overshadowed potential opportunities for fostering understanding (Blumenthal, 2012; Kumar, 2015). It is essential to approach discussions about Rushdie and Hosseini's works with a nuanced perspective, recognising the complexity of their motivations, the political plays at work, the diverse reactions their works elicit, and the broader conversations about representation and responsibility within the realm of Muslim literature for ensuring ways to mitigate harm towards marginalised communities.

2.2.2.1 Salman Rushdie

The political, cultural, and socio-economic factors that influenced the reception of Salman Rushdie's book were due to being released at a time when tensions between the Western and Islamic worlds were strained due to global issues such as the Iran-Iraq War and the Cold War (Khattab, 2023). Rushdie, an acclaimed British-Indian author, gained worldwide attention and controversy with his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Published in 1988, the book sparked intense criticism and led to a fatwa (a legal opinion or decree) issued by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader of Iran at the time, calling for Rushdie's death for its portrayal of religious figures (Mazrui, 1990). Rushdie's case serves as a poignant example of the complexities surrounding the representation of Muslims in literature and the media, highlighting the need for nuanced and respectful portrayals that reflect the diversity and richness of Muslim experiences.

Salman Rushdie's works particularly *The Satanic Verses*, question whether even if you're from a community you can actually represent it accurately. His work according to most Muslims has inaccurate portrayals, lacks cultural sensitivity, and does not display the responsibility of authors. Critics believe his work is disrespectful and offensive, leading to a complex discussion within the Muslim community and beyond. The controversy touches on issues such as free speech, artistic expression, and the responsibility of authors when dealing with sensitive religious topics. While some defend Rushdie's right to freedom of expression, others contend that the novel perpetuates stereotypes and misinformation about Islam. Salman Rushdie's later works, delving into various themes, add complexity to discussions about his impact. The nuanced exploration of the balance between artistic freedom and cultural sensitivity is crucial in understanding the broader discourse on representation and power dynamics in the literary world. Rushdie's legacy remains intertwined in these discussions, serving as a point of reference in ongoing conversations about representation and religious sensitivity (Mazrui, 1990).

The Satanic Verses explores themes related to religion, identity, and cultural clashes, but it was the perceived irreverence towards Islam and its final Prophet that led to widespread condemnation. Critics argue that Rushdie's portrayal of Islamic figures and concepts in the novel is disrespectful and offensive. This controversy has led to a complex discussion within the Muslim community and beyond, touching on issues of free speech, artistic expression, and the responsibility of authors when dealing with sensitive religious topics. While some defend Rushdie's right to freedom of expression, others argue

that the novel perpetuates stereotypes and misinformation about Islam (Mazrui, 1990). Some supporters like Edward Said, philosopher and academic describe Salman Rushdie's writings as distinctly postcolonial, asserting that Rushdie's work represents something entirely new and post-colonial however writer Feroza Jussawalla offers a broader interpretation of Rushdie's postcoloniality (Majed, 2012). She argues that connecting Rushdie's postcolonial identity solely with post-British colonialism is Eurocentric and insufficient for understanding the complexity of his works. Jussawalla emphasises that Rushdie's hybridity stems not only from being 'post-British' colonial but also 'post-Mughal' colonial and Malak thinks that postcolonialism fails to take religion into account due to its secular stance (Majed, 2012).

Majed (2012) argues that while postcolonial theory is essential for defending formerly colonised peoples, it has limitations when applied to Islamic cultures due to its secular assumptions. These limitations necessitate a different form of postcolonial practice, which he terms Islamic postcolonialism. Postcolonial writers, including Muslims, aim to critique colonial discourse, however, some postcolonial writers engage with colonial and Orientalist ideas, especially when Islam and Muslims are targeted. The secular background of key postcolonial writers has led them to prioritise freedom of speech over religious sensitivities. Salman Rushdie, particularly in the 1980s, exemplifies this tension. As a postcolonial writer, Rushdie critiqued colonial discourse in British culture. However, many Muslims perceive his novel *The Satanic Verses* as targeting the history and tenets of Islam, thereby employing colonial and Orientalist imagery. Even Edward Said, a foundational figure in postcolonial theory, did not criticise the portrayal of Islam in Rushdie's work, prioritising instead Rushdie's freedom of expression. Majed (2012) argues for the need for Islamic postcolonialism, which targets colonial and Orientalist discourse in literature about Islam and Muslims (Majed, 2012).

Rushdie has a hybrid identity but he also speaks from a different level of privilege and by writing about Islam and Muslims, Rushdie's hybrid identity is outmoded by an extreme Western and secular identity. It's important to note that Salman Rushdie's later works have delved into a variety of themes, and he remains a prominent figure in contemporary literature. Discussions about his impact often involve a nuanced exploration of the balance between artistic freedom and cultural sensitivity. Rushdie's legacy is intertwined with the broader discourse on representation, religious sensitivity, and the power dynamics in the literary world (Mazrui, 1990).

In Islam, there is no separation between politics and religion which highlights the complex relationship between apostasy and what could be perceived as treason, often carrying severe consequences, including the death penalty. Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, is viewed by some as an act of cultural betrayal against Islam. This perception arises from the novel's controversial portrayal of Islamic themes, including its depiction of the Qur'an, which holds a central place in Muslim worship as a text that is often read and recited in its original language. This situation draws attention to allegations

of blasphemy associated with the novel's title and content, raising significant questions about the representation of sacred texts in literature and their interpretation as artistic expressions. The comparison between the Prophet Muhammad and William Shakespeare is drawn by Rushdie, emphasising the immense influence of the Qur'an on the Arabic language and its readership compared to Shakespeare's plays (Mazrui, 1990).

According to Mazrui (1990), Salman Rushdie's blasphemy in *The Satanic Verses* goes beyond asserting that the Qur'an is the work of Muhammad. It centres on Rushdie's suggestion that the Qur'an is the work of the Devil, as implied by the title *Satanic Verses*. Rushdie is accused of insinuating that Muhammad cannot distinguish between inspiration from an angel and inspiration from a devil. The use of the name 'Mahound' for the Prophet is highlighted as a representation of the Devil, according to Rushdie himself. Western defamation laws typically concentrate on individuals rather than entire groups and provide limited protection against libel for deceased individuals. In Rushdie's novel, he is accused of libelling various classes of Muslims, including Shiite believers and the wives of Prophet Muhammad. The portrayal of prostitutes adopting the names of the Prophet's wives is discussed, with Rushdie's play within a play compared to Shakespeare's technique. Rushdie's portrayal is a prostitution of the reputations of twelve respectable women, criticising the lack of legal protection for deceased individuals in Western libel laws. A comparison is drawn between *The Satanic Verses* and the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, asserting that the latter, despite being offensive, is less abusive as it depicts Jesus as essentially good (Mazrui, 1990).

2.2.2.2 Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini author of bestselling books *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* is known as the 'voice' of Afghanistan in the West. Despite being born to privilege as the son of a government diplomat, Hosseini portrays himself as an Afghan who escaped a violent society. However, critics argue that the physician's depiction of Afghanistan oversimplifies and reinforces Western stereotypes, focusing on ethnic and religious aspects while ignoring the complexity of the country's reality describing it as a nation of war, with religious extremists who are rapists of girls and boys with a society of subservient women (Blumenthal, 2012; Deziel, 2017; Kumar, 2015).

Hosseini's books are seen as fictional stories that, despite being set around real-world events, present a narrow view of Afghanistan that aligns with Western perceptions. His close ties to the Bush family and the timing of *The Kite Runner* release coincide with the US war in Afghanistan, leading some to criticise him for promoting anti-Soviet propaganda and justifying the American invasion. Hosseini's portrayal of the Pashtun people as evil and the Taliban as the embodiment of all that is wrong in Afghanistan oversimplifies the complex ethnic and political landscape. His focus on the oppression of Afghan women aligns with American narratives used to justify military intervention. While Hosseini's works are marketed as fiction, the criticism stems from his perceived authority and influence, especially with

his connection to the American political sphere. Critics believe he contributes to a distorted view of Afghanistan that benefits US neo-colonial aspirations (Blumenthal, 2012; Kumar, 2015).

2.2.3 The Role of Social Media in Reader Engagement

Social media amplifies underrepresented voices, connects communities, and provides direct feedback from readers. It facilitates cost-effective promotion, influencer and peer recommendations, and fosters cultural advocacy for diversity and inclusivity in literature. Social media also enhances accessibility, allowing readers worldwide to engage with content, and effectively reaches younger audiences who seek stories reflecting their diverse experiences. Social media also bridges the gap between what readers want and what is popular.

The rise of BookTok has transformed reading experiences by creating a digital space for readers to interact, analyse, creatively express, and evaluate books, including their adaptations. TikTok's algorithm helps users discover new books by tailoring the 'For You Page' to their interests, often featuring book-related content. Most videos involve book responses and evaluations, making it easy for users to find new reads. The romance genre, in particular, thrives on BookTok, prominently appearing in its content (Rozaki, 2023). Authors and readers alike are increasingly drawn to the importance of representation (Maan, 2023). On platforms like Instagram and TikTok, readers encounter more reviews with the growth of Bookstagram and Booktok that prompts them to reevaluate narratives and interpretations of their cultures. TikTok "could be a place where critical thinking could be taught" (van den Bremer & Siebelink, 2020). Reviews highlight instances where there is a lack of depth in minor characters, leaving readers yearning for portrayals that truly make them feel seen and understood.

2.2.3.1 MBR

Muslim Book Reviewers (MBR) are a group of four reviewers committed to raising the standard of Muslim literature by celebrating books with their seal of approval with the Muslim Bookstagram Awards (Safadi, 2019). This group is important because it provides a seal of approval for books that accurately represent Muslim experiences, showing that Muslim reviewers are actively engaged in discussions on #OwnVoices. Their efforts demonstrate how these discussions are helping Muslims address and improve their portrayal in the media.

The other way one can approach it when writing diversity you need to know yourself and your limitations, conduct a lot of research, get sensitivity readers involved and take ownership and responsibility for your work. However, this is a very expensive process for South Africa. Being able to effectively write from the experience of others requires more than just strong writing ability, but also a level of awareness about yourself and your role as a storyteller. Daniel José Older in his essay *12 Fundamentals of Writing 'The Other' (And the Self)*, believes it's a writer's job to enter into someone else's head (Jones, 2022).

The question then lies in,

“But can writers take ownership of the stories and experiences of another in the process? Would doing so help enrich the reading experience, or would it be considered a type of theft? Older suggests that writers ask themselves: “Why do you feel it falls to you to write someone else’s story? Why do you have the right to take on another’s voice? And should you do this?” (Jones, 2022).

2.2.3.2 AMWASA

Locally, a new consulting agency, the Association of Muslim Women Authors in South Africa (AMWASA), “aims to build a vibrant community and to create a supportive space for Muslim women writers in order to address their challenges, and connect, collaborate, and amplify their voices. The network aims to break down barriers and promote diversity in the literary industry” (Association of Muslim Women Authors in South Africa [@muslimwomenauthorssa], 2023). AMWASA's focus on highlighting positive portrayals of Muslims in literature contrasts with the broader, more international reach of the Muslim Book Review (MBR) platform, indicating a growing market for modesty fiction and accurate representation of Muslims in fiction (AMWASA, 2024) AMWASA operates on a local scale compared to MBR, which operates internationally.

2.3 International Muslim Publishing Houses

International Muslim Publishing Houses have been pivotal in shaping both global and local literary markets. By examining their strategies and outcomes, we can understand how these entities influence publishing trends and foster a broader acceptance and understanding of Muslim-authored narratives.

Unlike traditional trends where entities like Kube Publishing, located in Leicester in the United Kingdom have concentrated on non-fiction, there is a noticeable shift towards fiction. Daybreak Press located in Minneapolis, United States is actively seeking authors to write fiction, demonstrating a growing interest in Muslim representative fiction (*Kube Publishing | Islamic Books Catalogue*, n.d.; *Rabata | RABATA*, n.d.). This trend is supported by feedback from Muslim Book Reviewers' blogs, which show that even mainstream publishers are now hosting books by Muslim fiction authors.

Many Muslims feel let down by the content provided, even by Muslim authors, who may self-censor or alter their narratives to fit into a diluted, mainstream version that is deemed more acceptable by large publishing houses. In contrast, Muslim publishing houses are now actively seeking clean, inspirational romance stories that adhere to Islamic values, are devoid of intimate details and foul language, and ensure a happy ending, as evidenced by guidelines provided by Daybreak Press (Rabata, 2024). Daybreak Press is a traditional publisher that focuses on amplifying women's voices and fostering positive cultural change across various literary genres and academic fields. They welcome submissions

from both new and established writers on their website. Currently, they have a special call for clean (inspirational) romance stories that are driven by the characters' faith, avoid intimate details and foul language, and conclude with a happy ending. Authors are advised to thoroughly revise, seek feedback from beta readers, and polish their work before submission (Rabata, 2024).

Publishers are turning to social media for tactical engagement, utilising platforms to gather reader feedback which then informs editorial decisions. This feedback loop is crucial for aligning content with reader expectations and market demands.

Initiatives like those by the Young Muslim Writers Awards (YMWA) encourage young talent, while collaborative projects such as *Once Upon an Eid*, featuring prominent Muslim authors like S.K. Ali and Hena Khan, illustrate the power of community in literary creation (*About | Young Muslim Writers Awards*, n.d.; Ali, 2020).

Publishers are navigating the delicate balance between religious content and secular themes to produce literature that is both authentic and appealing to a broad audience. Large international houses and their imprints, such as Salaam Reads, an imprint of Simon and Schuster in New York and Farrar, Straus and Giroux an imprint of Macmillan in New York are making concerted efforts to counter stereotypes by promoting original and compelling narratives by Muslim authors (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux - Macmillan Publishers*, n.d.; *Salaam Reads by Simon & Schuster*, n.d.).

To stay relevant and competitive, Muslim publishing houses are exploring new technologies and literary genres, aiming to enhance the reader's experience and expand their market reach. Through diverse literature, these publishers are enhancing cultural dialogue and understanding, slowly changing the landscape of how Muslim narratives are perceived and consumed. The strategies used by international Muslim publishing houses can be adapted for local markets. Engaging with local Muslim authors before they turn to larger mainstream publishers can help preserve cultural nuances and religious values in their narratives. Addressing the challenge of investment in local entities rather than focusing solely on small publishers can help nurture a robust market for Muslim representative fiction that is true to its roots yet broad in appeal. International Muslim Publishing Houses serve as powerful precedents for both embracing and promoting Muslim literature globally and locally. By learning from their strategies, successes, and challenges, local publishers can adapt these lessons to foster a more inclusive and representative literary environment. This proactive approach not only benefits the Muslim literary community but also enriches the global literary landscape, offering nuanced and diverse perspectives that bridge cultural and religious divides.

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

In summary, the literature review looks at the landscape of representative fiction within the local and global Muslim community, emphasising the need for diverse and authentic narratives. The terms

representative and authentic are key in discussing Muslim fiction. Representative refers to how well literature reflects the diversity of Muslim experiences, capturing the variety of cultural, ethnic, and religious expressions within the community. Authentic refers to the accuracy and sincerity of these portrayals, ensuring they genuinely reflect lived realities. Both terms raise challenges in interpretation, as Muslim experiences are diverse, and it is important to avoid narrow or stereotypical depictions when applying these concepts.

The research discusses the impact of social movements on literature and highlights the pivotal role of literature in shaping self-identity and fostering empathy. The literature review underscores the significance of South African publishers in producing representative fiction and examines the growth of the modesty fiction genre in South Africa. The literature review acknowledges the challenges faced by SMME publishers in South Africa and discusses international trends including digital publishing and specialisation in Muslim publishing houses.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter dedicated to research methods, we discuss the research design, methodology, and data analysis plan. The research focuses on Muslim representative fiction in South Africa, employing a sampling strategy targeting books by self-identifying Muslim authors. It utilises various data instruments including Nielsen Book Data and the Muslim Book Reviewers (MBR) scale to analyse epitextual and paratextual elements. Semi-structured interviews with local Muslim publishing houses are conducted to understand publishing strategies and consumer preferences. Data analysis aims to assess the representativeness and commercial success of the selected books, comparing practices and market reach.

3.1 Research Design

The research design aims to investigate publishing structures and enhance the representation of Muslim identity in fiction within South Africa, building on the literature review. With the majority of the available books being imported, there is a lack of sustainable growth in local publishers' content. Local books need to adapt to readers' preferences and be more relevant in ever-changing environments which involves staying attuned to current trends, addressing contemporary issues, being culturally sensitive, embracing diversity, and potentially maximising the use of technology. The goal is to identify strategies to access the market with relevant and important products of Muslim fiction.

The research does a sales analysis after compiling a bibliography list through Muslim book reviewers found on social media, websites and interviewee inputs. The literature review will help formulate questions for interviews with Muslim publishers. Expected outcomes encompass insights into challenges with Muslim literary representation, trends in fiction, and recommendations for improvement. The research contributes to the discourse on diverse representations and offers practical strategies for stakeholders in the South African Muslim fiction landscape.

The research identifies reader needs, and representation, and discusses publishing strategies. The study employs qualitative research methods, including a literature review, paratextual analysis, epitextual analysis, and semi-structured interviews with key participants from local Muslim publishing houses. The publishers will be interviewed about their decision-making processes, marketing strategies, and the challenges they encounter, as well as how they address these challenges.

3.2 Data Instruments

Data collection is done using Nielsen Book Data, interviews, the bibliography compiled through Muslim book reviewers, and the MBR scale to interpret the data.

3.2.1 Muslim Book Reviewers (MBR) Scale

The research will use an epitextual analysis through Muslim Book Reviewers (MBR), a group of four reviewers committed to raising the standard of Muslim literature by celebrating books with their seal of approval, offering their beta reading services before publication, and highlighting the best books every year with the Muslim Bookstagram Awards (Safadi, 2019). They are book reviewers who have diverse opinions but aim to work towards the promotion of Muslim literature. They also have blogs representative of Muslim identity (Muslim Book Reviewers, 2023).

The Muslim Bookstagram Awards were started in 2021 with the requirements that authors must be Muslim, the books have Muslim characters, the books are Islamically appropriate, they are published in the current year, and the books are in English (Muslim Book Reviewers, 2023).

The criteria that Muslim Book Reviewers use when discussing representative fiction: **MBR Scale**

<p>Highly Representative and Authentic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The literature presents a nuanced perspective of Islam, emphasising its multifaceted nature and the diversity of beliefs and practices within the Muslim community. • Characters' spiritual struggles are depicted as integral to their personal growth and development, avoiding facile attributions of their challenges to Islam. • Depictions of religious people are rich in nuance, reflecting a wide array of personalities and backgrounds. • Both devout and less devout Muslims are portrayed as complex individuals, displaying a range of personality traits and attitudes. • The "good Muslim" character transcends superficial traits, defined instead by their intelligence, character, values, and actions. • Islam serves as a meaningful factor in character development, with characters drawing strength, guidance, and personal growth from their faith. • Muslim characters are depicted with authenticity and respect, with careful attention to details such as prayer, cultural practices, and personal struggles. • The narrative avoids tokenism and delves into the intricate identities and experiences of Muslim characters while sidestepping stereotypes and inconsistencies (Muslim Book Reviewers [@muslimbookreviewers], 2023).
<p>Moderately Representative and Authentic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The portrayal of Islam carries some depth, though occasional simplifications or generalisations may be present. • Characters' faith-related struggles are explored, but there may be moments where Islam is somewhat unfairly implicated in their challenges. • Religious parents and less practising Muslims are depicted with varying degrees of nuance, with occasional instances of stereotyping. • The "good Muslim" character may possess some stereotypical attributes, but there is room for character development and complexity. • While Islam's role in character development is evident, it may not consistently achieve a high level of development. • Muslim characters are generally authentic, but their portrayal might lack some depth (Muslim Book Reviewers [@muslimbookreviewers], 2023).
<p>Problematic and Stereotypical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islam is presented in a one-dimensional or antagonistic manner, reinforcing harmful stereotypes. • Characters' struggles with faith are unjustly attributed to Islam or portrayed as weaknesses. • Religious parents are consistently depicted as strict and harsh, while less practising Muslims are idealised. • The "good Muslim" character is rigidly defined by outward appearances and religiosity, with minimal character depth. • Islam is unfairly scapegoated for characters' problems and obstacles, playing no meaningful role in their development. • Muslim characters are reduced to superficial stereotypes and tokenism, failing to authentically represent their experiences. • Readers can utilise this assessment framework to critically evaluate the depiction of Islam and Muslim characters in literature, thereby encouraging the creation of narratives that

	offer more nuanced and authentic insights into the Muslim experience (Muslim Book Reviewers [@muslimbookreviewers], 2023).
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Figure 2: MBR scale

The research will interpret data by utilising the MBR scale rankings, analysing publisher catalogues, and evaluating the results of epitextual analyses. These findings will help formulate recommendations for advancing and refining local Muslim publishing practices.

3.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with key participants from local Muslim publishing houses are a primary research instrument that will provide insights into consumer preferences and the effectiveness of current publishing strategies and will compare with other local fiction. Interview questions are informed by the literature review.

3.3 Sampling

The inclusion criteria for the study involve an epitextual analysis of books authored by self-identifying Muslim writers, specifically those that are written in English, categorised as adult fiction and published in South Africa. Purposive sampling of publishing companies in major South African cities (Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban) will focus on business models and publishing strategies. Books were carefully selected through a methodical process that included consultations with publisher website catalogues, recommendations from local radio stations (Book Bytes by Shafinaaz Hassim on Salaamedia Radio Station), suggestions from interviewees and Muslim book reviewers such as [@faatimah](#) (*Faatimah* | *Bookstagram* [[@faatimahreads](#)], 2024).

The study will analyse Nielsen's data to track sales of locally produced books, specifically those represented by larger publishing houses. Although few books from traditional publishers focus on Muslim representation, alternative avenues such as Book Bytes, local Muslim bookstagrammers, and sites like AMWASA offer ways to discover these books without relying on traditional methods. This analysis will help identify best practices and assess the market reach of Muslim representative books.

3.3.1 Bibliography

This will look at books found by local Muslim book reviewers (Book Bytes by Shafinaaz Hassim on Salaamedia Radio Station), and catalogues from publishers. Books will be analysed based on reviews from book reviewers through Goodreads. Goodreads is a popular social cataloguing website where users can create virtual bookshelves, rate and review books, and connect with other readers. By sourcing reviews from Goodreads, the study ensures access to a diverse range of reader opinions and critiques. Reviews on Goodreads often include detailed feedback on themes, representation, and reader engagement, which are crucial for assessing the effectiveness of Muslim publishers in producing representative fiction. This approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in authentic reader

experiences and perceptions, enhancing the study's relevance and depth. The reliance on Goodreads for reviews in the study can be justified by its accessibility, popularity, and focus on reader perspectives. It provides a consistent and practical source of general public opinion. However, using only Goodreads may limit the depth of analysis, as incorporating diverse review sources could offer a broader range of insights. Despite this limitation, Goodreads was used due to the constraints of the research report and the lack of other appropriate channels.

Book Title	Author	Publisher	Year Published
The Hajji	Ahmed Essop	Ravan	1978
A Shattering of Silence	Farida Karodia	Penguin South Africa	1993
Bitter Fruit	Achmat Dangor	Kwela Books	2001
The Wedding	Imraan Coovadia	Picador	2001
Confessions of a Gambler	Rayda Jacobs	Harry N. Abrams	2003
The Silent Minaret	Ishtiyahq Shukri	Jacana Media	2005
The Story of Maha	Sumayya Lee	Kwela Books	2008
Onion Tears	Shubnum Khan	Penguin South Africa	2011
SoPhia: a novel	Shafinaaz Hassim	WordFlute Press	2012
The Thunder that Roars	Imran Garda	Penguin Random House	2014
Diary of A Guji Girl	Qaanitah Hunter	WordFlute Press	2015
What Will People Say?	Rehana Rossouw	Jacana Media	2015
Mirror Cracked	Raashida Khan	Kwarts Publishers	2018
The Pink Oysters	Shafinaaz Hassim	WordFlute Press	2020
The Economics of Love and Happiness	Shafinaaz Hassim	WordFlute Press	2021
A Gathering of Robins	Iram Yousuf	Independently published	2022
Stirring the Pot	Quraisha Dawood	Penguin South Africa	2022
The Tears of the Weaver and Other Stories	Zaheera Jina Asvat	Modjaji Books	2022
Kismet	Waheeda Joosab	Baitul Hikmah	2023
Darlings of Durban	Shafinaaz Hassim	Kwela	2024
Zahra and Yaseen	Tasneem Gaffoor	Wilman Fikker	2024

Figure 3: Bibliography titles with authors, publishers and year of publication

These are all the books identified from the entire local market through reviewers, publishers' websites, and interviewees. Books highlighted were withdrawn due to insufficient information about Muslim representation in their blurbs and a lack of reviews addressing the subject matter adequately. Additionally, certain anthologies and series such as Zahra and Yaseen by Tasneem Gaffoor were removed because each story could not be analysed thoroughly.

3.3.2 Selected Publishers for Interviews:

Purposive sampling was used to select publishing companies in the major cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban for their significant roles in South Africa's publishing industry and diverse market dynamics. This strategic selection ensures a comprehensive overview of the challenges and strategies faced by Muslim publishers in producing representative fiction, aligning with the study's objectives to understand business models and market adaptation.

1. Baitul Hikmah: A book distributor and publisher based in Durban and a registered member of the PASA (Publication Association of South Africa). Their press and bookshop have a dual role as a publisher and retailer, emphasising affordability and promotion of local authors (Baitul Hikmah, 2023).

2. Wilman Fikker: Self and Hybrid Publishing (Wilman Fikker Publishing House [@wilmanfikkerpublishing], n.d.)
3. Anonymous by request (operational between 2013-2019)
4. Yiz House is a boutique book publishing company offering books for the South African market (*Facebook*, n.d.).

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Interview Data

Responses from semi-structured interviews will be analysed to gain insights into current publishing practices, challenges, and opportunities. This will discuss the MBR scale and will also be analysed in comparison to information from the literature review.

3.4.2 Paratext and Epitext

3.4.2.1 Paratextual Analysis

Paratext encompasses all the supplementary material surrounding a book, often providing crucial information about its publisher, author, and content. When exploring Muslim representative fiction, delving into the paratextual elements like book blurbs becomes imperative. These blurbs serve as a gateway into the narrative, offering insights into character descriptions, plot themes, and the author's intentions.

Analysing these blurbs helps assess the representativeness of the work within the context of Muslim representation in literature by providing insights into how the book is positioned and marketed. Blurbs highlight key themes, characters, and plot elements, allowing researchers to evaluate if the narrative addresses stereotypes or promotes authentic portrayals of Muslim identities. This analysis also reveals the intended audience and how the publisher perceives the market for Muslim-focused literature, aiding in understanding the book's potential impact and relevance. By scrutinising how characters are depicted and the themes highlighted, readers can gauge the authenticity and inclusivity of the narrative portrayal, empowering them to make informed decisions about engaging with fiction that accurately reflects Muslim experiences and identities.

Employing tools such as the Muslim Book Representation (MBR) scale enhances the systematic evaluation of these works. By categorising books based on criteria like cultural authenticity, diverse character representation, and nuanced storytelling, the MBR scale facilitates data collection and comparative analysis. This structured approach not only assists researchers in identifying patterns and trends but also provides readers with a standardised framework for navigating the diverse landscape of Muslim representative fiction.

3.4.2.2 Epitextual Analysis

An epitextual analysis involves examining elements outside the main text of a literary work. This can be blogs or social media but in this case, reviews are sourced from Goodreads as discussed under the bibliography heading.

An epitextual analysis, combined with employing the MBR scale, will assess how the books are received. MBR will be used as a tool for data collection looking at reviews. Reviews will be taken from Muslim and non-Muslim readers and will be analysed to assess the representativeness and commercial success of the books using the MBR scale to categorise the books. The scale will assess which of the three tiers a book fits into based on how many of the criteria it meets within that tier.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

This research report has chosen to focus on the Muslim publishing industry which although small produces not a lot of books for adults. Adult fiction is usually self-published and produced through hybrid models which will be accounted for by collecting data from publishers' catalogues. There are no large and established local Muslim publishers to compare with and there is a lack of data on local publishing. This limits our understanding of local best practices and this will be overcome through research on well-established international companies.

While the available statistics provide limited data specifically on Muslim publishers, they do not offer a comprehensive view of book sales in South Africa. This approach may not capture the full complexity and nuances of the narratives. This gap in data largely stems from the limited scope of Nielsen's retail respondents, which does not capture the full market spectrum. Additionally, local publishers often serve not just as distributors but also as publishing service providers for authors. To address this lack of detailed sales information, data will be gathered through interviews with these publishers. This approach will help to obtain a more accurate and complete picture of the publishing landscape, particularly regarding the contributions and challenges faced by Muslim publishers in the region.

There is a potential for bias from respondent interviews which could affect reliability which is acknowledged particularly in the context of using interviews as a primary data collection method. Another limitation could be the availability of data especially where many local Muslim authors self-publish.

This analysis offers a preliminary overview rather than a comprehensive evaluation, as it is based solely on an examination of the blurbs. It lacks the depth that a thorough reading of the actual texts would provide. This approach restricts the scope of insights into the thematic and stylistic elements of the works being discussed, relying instead on secondary information which may not fully capture the nuances or the broader context of the literature. Consequently, while useful for gaining a basic

understanding, this analysis might miss subtleties and more complex interpretations that a detailed reading of the full texts would reveal.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research conducted must be ethical and reliable. With Wits Ethics Protocols in mind, the research will not divulge the identities of respondents, and anonymity (and confidentiality, where necessary), will be ensured. Accordingly, interviewees requesting anonymity were coded e.g., Anonymous Participant. Personal information was gathered from respondents, necessitating careful attention to ethical considerations where one participant requested anonymity. To address these concerns, a comprehensive participant information sheet and consent forms were administered to all participants. The participant information sheet provided detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, ensuring that participants were fully informed about their involvement. Consent forms were used to obtain explicit permission from participants, confirming their voluntary participation and understanding of their rights. These measures were designed to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, adhering to ethical guidelines and ensuring that their personal information was handled responsibly and securely throughout the research process. (See appendices). The research data will also be deleted after 5 years.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents paratext and epitext to assess the representativeness of local Muslim fiction. The qualitative approach utilises tools such as the Muslim Book Review (MBR) scale to systematically evaluate books. The process begins with purposive selection, focusing on books that align with the study's objectives. Following selection, the methodology involves a detailed examination of book blurbs and reviews, particularly from Goodreads, to identify indicators of representation. Applying the MBR scale objectively categorises each book based on its level of Muslim representation. The analysis integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, offering insights into prevalent themes and identifying areas for improvement within the genre. Books are analysed by reviews and given a rating according to the MBR scale, providing a comprehensive understanding of their representativeness and authenticity.

4.1 Paratext and Epitext Methodology

The methodology uses a qualitative analysis of paratextual elements and utilising tools such as the Muslim Book Review (MBR) scale for assessing the representativeness of Muslim representative fiction involves a systematic approach. It begins with the purposive selection of books, followed by a careful examination of book blurbs and reviews to identify indicators of representation. The MBR scale is available in Appendix D.

Applying the MBR scale objectively allows for the categorisation of each local book based on its level of representation. Data collection and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, provide insights into common themes and areas for improvement within the genre. Books are analysed by reviews in chapter 4 and given a rating in chapter 5 according to the MBR scale which is in Appendix D.

4.1.1 Book Selection and Analysing Book Blurbs

Books were carefully selected through a methodical process that included consultations with publisher websites, recommendations from local book reviewers, and suggestions from interviewees. These books are in English, categorised as adult fiction, and published in South Africa. The selection was informed by insights from local Muslim book reviewers, including *Book Bytes* by Shafinaaz Hassim on Salaamedia Radio Station, and from catalogues provided by the publishers. This effort also incorporated contributions from prominent Muslim book reviewers such as @faatimahreads (*Faatimah | Bookstagram* [@faatimahreads], 2024).

4.1.1.1 Confessions of a Gambler by Rayda Jacobs

Publisher: Harry N. Abrams

Year Published: 2003

“In this timely novel, Abeeda, a South African woman in her late forties, is struggling to hold on to both halves of a double life. To others, she is a pious Muslim mother of four, coping with the death of one of her sons to AIDS. But Abeeda has also developed a gambling addiction, winning and losing huge amounts of money. In a series of flashbacks, her life is traced as a woman in her twenties, through a torrid affair with her younger sister's fiancé, Imran, and her history of taking wild risks. In all, this is a gripping story of family, addiction, religion, and redemption” (R. Jacobs, 2004)

The blurb introduces Abeeda, a complex character grappling with dual identities and struggles. Described as a pious Muslim mother of four, she faces the challenge of coping with the death of one of her sons to AIDS while simultaneously battling a gambling addiction. The blurb hints at the cultural context of South Africa and the themes of family dynamics, addiction, religion, and redemption. Abeeda's past, including a torrid affair with her sister's fiancé, Imran, adds depth to her character and hints at the complexities of human relationships and morality. The blurb seems to offer a nuanced exploration of Muslim identity, as it portrays Abeeda's internal conflict and the challenges she faces within her community. It also touches upon cultural practices and religious themes, making it potentially representative of diverse backgrounds and experiences within the Muslim community. These representative themes present a compelling narrative that delves into complex themes while providing insights into the Muslim identity and experience.

According to a book reviewer Rogerio, (2017) through Goodreads, this book offers a captivating narrative, particularly for those familiar with Cape Town. The book presents a multifaceted story where gambling is just a small part. The book delves into her escapades to Grand West, her intoxication with gambling, and her quest for help, but these are merely fractions of the larger story. The blend of spiritual battles, addiction, risk-taking, and the female world is compelling, as are the confessions and descriptions of sin. The narrative highlights the importance of religious practices, friends, and family, and Beeda's thoughts and actions resonate with many readers' struggles. The story provides an insightful look into local habits and the lifestyle connected to the Muslim community. The book includes Afrikaans names as well as Arabic terms related to Muslim religious practices. It alternates between two storylines: one following her life after divorce and the other 20 years later, which can be challenging to follow and is best read continuously. It is a page-turner, well-written and genuine. The main threads include Braima leaving Beeda with three kids and one on the way, Beeda's affair with Imran, who is engaged to her sister, her descent into gambling addiction and the desperate means to fund it, family illnesses, including the death of her gay son from AIDS and the loss of her mother and Zulpha, and the overarching struggle to reconcile these events with Allah and Islamic traditions. This book is highly recommended for its painful yet poignant sharing of personal successes and failures, offering a reflective mirror for readers (Rogerio, 2017).

MBR

Confessions of a Gambler by Rayda Jacobs: This novel would likely be rated as Highly Representative and Authentic. The story presents a nuanced exploration of Abeeda's dual life as a pious Muslim and a gambler. Her complex character and the deep cultural context exploring themes of addiction, redemption, and the interplay between faith and personal challenges align well with the criteria for a nuanced and authentic depiction of Muslim characters.

Analysis

These representative themes offer a poignant exploration of personal struggles and moments of growth within the Muslim community in Cape Town which links to reader needs. Muslim literature in South Africa encompasses a wide range of literary forms, offering insights into the experiences and identities of the Muslim community. It highlights themes such as identity, faith, and cultural heritage, which provide a nuanced exploration of the Muslim experience within the country. There is a narrow portrayal of Muslims in mainstream media and there is importance in diverse representation in literature. Muslim literature in South Africa serves as a platform for reclaiming narratives, challenging stereotypes, and promoting dialogue and reflection within the community fostering social change and understanding in South African society.

4.1.1.2 The Story of Maha by Sumayya Lee

Publisher: Kwela Books

Year Published: 2008

"The child of a forbidden marriage, Maha grows up happily in Cape Town until her world changes forever when her parents are killed at a political rally. At the age of eight, Maha is reclaimed by her loving but staid Indian grandparents and taken to live in Durban. Growing up in the claustrophobia of the suburbs what she dubs Slumurbia Maha reveals a love for the outrageous as she clashes with the conventions of her community. Always a free spirit, she soon learns how to weave around the strict boundaries of Muslim life and as a rebellious teenager, nothing holds her back from experiencing first love, a bit of partying and a tantalising romance (all between prayers, of course). But when it counts the most, rules must be obeyed and as she heads towards her twentieth birthday, there is no way Maha can avoid Marriage to a Suitable Boy. With refreshing energy, Maha treats us to the ups and downs of her passionate (though sometimes quite vulnerable) young heart and a life in which she's not quite in charge" (Lee, 2008).

According to Goodreads reviewer Naima (2020), *The Story of Maha* by Lee should be praised for its unique and powerful narrative about a South African, Muslim Indian-African mixed girl. The book is commended for addressing the sexuality of Muslim girls, challenging stereotypes, and providing vivid, realistic storytelling. The reviewer highlights the rarity and importance of such representation in literature, particularly for African Muslims. The protagonist, Maha, is depicted with exceptional depth,

navigating her identity and the sociopolitical issues of Apartheid-era Africa. Her struggles with colourism, racism, and her mixed heritage are portrayed authentically. The book does not shy away from difficult topics, including Maha's experiences with sexual desire and assault, offering a nuanced view of Muslim women's lives. The character development is praised, particularly Maha's growth from adolescence to adulthood without abrupt transitions. Her interactions with other characters, like Zeenat, add layers to her story, showing positive influences and realistic, flawed human relationships. The review also appreciates the book's honest portrayal of parental figures, breaking down idealisations and presenting them as complex individuals. It addresses potential concerns about internalised stereotypes, particularly regarding Maha's father, and resolves them thoughtfully within the narrative. The reviewer finds the book a compelling and necessary read, providing a refreshing and realistic perspective on a rarely represented demographic (Naima, 2020).

MBR

The Story of Maha by Sumayya Lee: This book also aligns with the Highly Representative and Authentic category. It delves into the life of Maha, depicting her struggles with cultural identity and personal freedom within a Muslim context. The portrayal of her navigating the boundaries of Muslim life, experiencing first love, and confronting societal expectations offers a rich, complex view of Muslim identity that is both respectful and detailed.

Analysis

The blurb introduces Maha, the protagonist, who navigates life after the tragic loss of her parents at a political rally. The cultural context is set in Cape Town and Durban, South Africa, highlighting Maha's Indian heritage and the clash between tradition and her free-spirited nature. Themes of identity, rebellion, and love are explored as Maha grapples with the constraints of Muslim life while asserting her independence. The blurb suggests a nuanced portrayal of Muslim identity through Maha's experiences, including her journey through adolescence, first love, and the pressure to conform to societal expectations, particularly regarding marriage. The blurb indicates diverse character backgrounds, an accurate portrayal of cultural practices, different societal norms within South Africa and a nuanced exploration of Muslim identity in the context of South African society.

4.1.1.3 Onion Tears by Shubnum Khan

Publisher: Penguin South Africa

Year Published: 2011

“Love, loss and life are the themes that weave through this tale of three generations of Muslim women living in suburban South Africa. Khadeejah Bibi Ballim is a hard-working and stubborn first-generation Indian who longs for her beloved homeland and often questions what she is doing on the tip of Africa. At thirty-seven, her daughter Summaya is struggling to reconcile her South African and Indian identities, while Summaya's own daughter,

eleven-year-old Aneesa, is a girl who has some difficult questions of her own. Is her mother lying to her about her father's death? Why won't she tell her what really happened? Gradually, the past merges with the present as the novel meanders through their lives, uncovering the secrets people keep, the words they swallow and the emotions they elect to mute. For this family, faintly detectable through the sharp spicy aromas that find their way out of Khadeejah's kitchen, the scent of tragedy is always threatening. Eventually, it will bring this family together. If not, it will tear them apart” (S. Khan, 2011).

Based on a Goodreads review by Govender (2011) the book delves into themes of love, loss, and identity through the lives of Khadeejah Bibi Ballim, her daughter Summaya, and Summaya's daughter Aneesa. Khan's depiction of strong female characters reflects her own experiences within her family, emphasising the challenges women face and their resilience. The novel explores the fluid nature of identity and the impact of past experiences on shaping individuals' futures. While rooted in Indian culture and Muslim identity, the story transcends stereotypes, presenting diverse perspectives and highlighting the uniqueness of each character's journey. Khan's narrative encourages readers to reflect on universal themes and challenges societal norms regarding women's roles and strengths. The book offers a compelling narrative that celebrates the complexity and strength of women's experiences (Govender, 2011).

MBR

Onion Tears by Shubnum Khan: This novel fits within the Highly Representative and Authentic category. It explores the lives of three generations of Muslim women, focusing on their struggles, cultural identity, and the impact of their choices on their lives. The detailed portrayal of each character's journey through life's challenges within the Muslim community of South Africa provides a deep, respectful representation of Muslim identity.

Analysis

The blurb introduces three generations of Muslim women living in suburban South Africa, highlighting themes of love, loss, identity, and family dynamics. Khadeejah Bibi Ballim, the matriarch, is depicted as hard-working and stubborn, grappling with her Indian heritage and her place in South Africa. Her daughter, Summaya, struggles with reconciling her South African and Indian identities, while Summaya's daughter, Aneesa, faces questions about her family's past.

The blurb suggests a rich cultural context, with references to Indian heritage and the challenges of navigating identity within a multicultural society. Themes of secrecy, betrayal, and the impact of past traumas are also hinted at, promising a narrative that delves into complex family dynamics and the consequences of keeping secrets. In terms of representation, the blurb offers a nuanced exploration of Muslim identity within the context of South Africa, as well as diverse character backgrounds shaped by cultural heritage and personal struggles. It portrays the characters' experiences and challenges with

depth and sensitivity, indicating a potential for an accurate portrayal of cultural practices and the interplay between tradition and modernity within the Muslim community.

The representation of Muslim characters in the novel offers readers an insight into the idiosyncratic culture and experiences of South African Indians, particularly in the post-apartheid era. By focusing on three generations of a single family, the book seems to unveil the complexities of identity and culture, moving beyond a mere examination to present a captivating narrative. The novel's value lies not only in its portrayal of South African Indian culture but also in its ability to engage readers with a beautifully written story that transcends political themes and enriches the literary landscape by offering a nuanced representation of Muslim characters within the broader context of South African society

4.1.1.4 The Thunder that Roars by Imran Garda

Publisher: Penguin Random House

Year Published: 2014

“Yusuf Carrim has made it in New York. His tech-savvy coverage of the Arab Spring saw his journalism career skyrocket. But when his wealthy father asks him to help look for Sam, a missing family friend, he must return to South Africa. Yusuf’s search takes him to places he could never have imagined. Enlisting the help of an eccentric professor and Sam’s exotic uncle, Yusuf discovers facts that undermine a lifetime’s assumptions about his own identity – and prompt him to step up the search for Sam before it is too late. From the suburbs of Johannesburg to the streets of Bulawayo, from Dubai airport to an immigrant facility on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, Yusuf’s quest to find Sam turns into an inward journey of his own. The Thunder That Roars is international journalist Imran Garda’s cosmopolitan, fast-paced debut” (Garda, 2014).

The Goodreads reviewer Hasan (2017) discusses its portrayal of Yusuf Carrim, a young South African Muslim journalist in New York who embarks on a journey to find a missing family friend named Sam. Set against the backdrop of cities like New York, Johannesburg, and Bulawayo, the narrative weaves together the lives of diverse characters, including refugees and immigrants. The reviewer appreciates the debut novel's exploration of identity, family secrets, and global issues such as the Arab Spring and refugee crises. It highlights the diverse range of characters, including marginalised voices, and their impact on Yusuf's journey. The review also commends the realistic portrayal of South African society, particularly in addressing issues of racism and apartheid's legacy. The reviewer finds the book to be a compelling, fast-paced read that offers authenticity and thought-provoking insights into contemporary issues. Garda's rich storytelling and descriptive prowess immerse readers in the complexities of South African Indian Islam and identity politics, offering a refreshing departure from Eurocentric fiction. Praised for its authenticity and depth, the novel resonates with readers interested in exploring the intersections of race, religion, and migration in a multicultural world (Hasan, 2017).

MBR

The Thunder that Roars by Imran Garda: This book would be rated as Moderately Representative and Authentic. While it explores the identity and challenges of Yusuf, a Muslim journalist, the focus is more on his professional

life and less on the nuances of his faith. The cultural and religious aspects are present but do not deeply influence the core of character development as extensively as in other books.

Analysis

The blurb highlights Yusuf's tech-savvy skills and his rise in journalism, particularly through his coverage of the Arab Spring. The cultural context spans across continents, from South Africa to the streets of Bulawayo, Dubai airport, and an immigrant facility in Lampedusa. Through Yusuf's search for Sam, the novel explores themes of identity, family, and belonging, suggesting a nuanced portrayal of multicultural experiences and the complexities of diasporic life. The inclusion of diverse settings and characters, along with the protagonist's inward journey, promises a cosmopolitan and fast-paced narrative that delves into the intersections of personal and global events.

4.1.1.5 Diary of A Guji Girl by Qaanitah Hunter

Publisher: WordFlute Press

Year Published: 2015

“Amina is a first year student at the University of Johannesburg. Coming from small town Newcastle, this is the freedom she has been waiting for all through high school.

Between juggling the buzz in her head inspired by the super-cute popular Moe in his sports car and the growing bond she shares with Sue, she is learning the tricks and trials of being out in the big world. Or is she? It really is a challenge. If it isn't about family pressure to get married then it's the feeling of drowning in the crazy world of young people.

Will Amina achieve her big Houghton dream? Or is she destined for betrayal?” (Hunter, 2015)

According to a reviewer Fatima Bheekoo Shah (2019) from SISTERS magazine also posted on Goodreads, the book presents a captivating narrative set in South Africa that has gained significant popularity among readers. The story revolves around Amina, a young woman from a small town with aspirations of finding a wealthy husband and living a pampered life. However, her encounters with Moe challenge her preconceived notions and lead her to question her identity and values. Through Amina's journey, the novel offers insights into the Muslim Indian communities in South Africa and addresses prejudices surrounding class, culture, and wealth. Despite being unfamiliar with the blog from which the book originated, the reviewer praises Hunter's engaging writing style and her ability to tackle stereotypes with humour and sensitivity. The reviewer finds the story entertaining and uplifting, highlighting Amina's growth and resilience amidst challenges (Bheekoo Shah, 2015).

MBR

Diary of A Guji Girl by Qaanitah Hunter: Likely to be rated as Moderately Representative and Authentic. Although the protagonist Amina's Muslim background is implied, the narrative focuses more

on her adventures and less on how her faith shapes her character and life choices, which do not fully meet the highest standards of representation.

Analysis

The blurb introduces Amina, a first-year student at the University of Johannesburg, who is experiencing newfound freedom after coming from a small town. *Diary of a Guji Girl* is commended as an excellent and engaging read, offering a refreshing perspective on cultural identity and personal growth with representative themes. The blurb hints at themes of independence, navigating relationships, and cultural pressures, particularly concerning family expectations and the challenges of adapting to life in a bustling city. While the blurb does not explicitly mention Amina's cultural background or religious identity, her name suggests she may come from a Muslim background. However, there is limited indication of cultural practices or nuanced exploration of Muslim identity in the blurb. The focus appears to be more on Amina's journey and the universal experiences of young adulthood, such as relationships, academic pressures, and finding one's place in the world. Therefore, in terms of representation, this blurb may lack the depth needed to fully explore diverse character backgrounds and accurately portray religious practices associated with Muslim identity and is more relatable than representative.

4.1.1.6 Mirror Cracked by Raashida Khan

Publisher: Kwarts Publishers

Year Published: 2018

“What if the perfect life is threatened by absolute betrayal? If control is cruelly wrenched away? How does one survive? This a story of love, betrayal, hope and surrender.

Azraa Hassim is a strong, modern, Muslim woman, successful in her professional and personal life. She is confident and driven to provide the best life for her husband, herself, and their two daughters. This is made impossible when she is shattered by a revelation: her husband loves another. His betrayal destroys her. She questions her identity, her beliefs, her relationships ... her entire life.

She is pushed to breaking point when her youngest child becomes terminally ill. Azraa must conjure up all her strength to hold onto herself long enough to get through this tremulous storm. If she does not, everything that she knew to be true about herself may be lost to the cracks of time, forever disjointing the image reflected back to her from the mirror” (R. Khan, 2018).

According to Goodreads reviewer Andrew (2019), *Mirror Cracked* follows the lives of Azraa and Fareed Hassim, a married couple balancing successful careers with their Muslim beliefs. Their two daughters embody a blend of Azraa's modern Muslim outlook and Fareed's traditional values. However, their lives are upheaved by unforeseen turmoil, challenging their relationship and family dynamics. At its core, the novel explores relationships and moral complexities, blurring the lines between right and wrong. The author, Khan, creates compelling characters in Azraa and Fareed, portraying their strength

amidst turmoil while also conveying vulnerability, making them relatable and deserving of empathy. Set in a Muslim community in Cape Town, South Africa, the book provides vivid descriptions that bring the world of the Hassim family to life. Readers are drawn into the family's experiences, feeling like active participants rather than mere observers. *Mirror Cracked* fearlessly confronts its readers with the challenges faced by its protagonists, yet remains engaging and immersive throughout. It's a compelling read that offers both thought-provoking themes and a captivating narrative, making it a must-read for audiences (Andrew, 2019).

MBR

Mirror Cracked by Raashida Khan: This could be considered Highly Representative and Authentic. The story of Azraa, a modern Muslim woman dealing with personal betrayal and severe family issues, presents a deeply nuanced exploration of her faith, personal identity, and the complexities of life within a Muslim context, adhering closely to the criteria for authenticity and nuanced representation.

Analysis

The book blurb portrays Azraa Hassim as a strong, successful, and modern Muslim woman whose life is shattered by her husband's betrayal. She is depicted as navigating complex challenges in both her personal and professional life, prompting her to question her identity and beliefs. The story explores themes of love, betrayal, hope, and surrender, as Azraa confronts adversity, including her youngest child's terminal illness. The representation of Muslim identity is nuanced, offering readers a complex portrayal of a woman grappling with profound challenges.

Muslim identity is portrayed through the lives of Azraa and Fareed Hassim, a couple balancing their careers with their faith. Their marriage and family dynamics reflect a blend of modern and traditional Muslim values. The novel delves into universal themes such as betrayal and identity crisis, set within a specific Muslim community in Cape Town, South Africa. Characters like Azraa and Fareed are depicted as nuanced individuals, facing personal challenges while navigating their religious and cultural identities. The representative themes offer a complex and authentic representation of Muslim life, challenging stereotypes and inviting readers to empathise with its characters' experiences.

4.1.1.7 A Gathering of Robins by Iram Yousuf

Publisher: Independently published

Year Published: 2022

"After being sentenced to death for the murder of his king and father, Alexander must travel across the Kingdom of Dorian to the Tree of Memory to prove his innocence. Accompanied by the sorceress Medina, they meet common people and magical creatures along the way, all of whom teach Alexander what it means to be a king.

But, there are those who do not wish for him to succeed, and if he is to take the throne, he must live long enough to recall the memory and make the journey back home” (Yousuf, 2022).

In a BookBytes discussion on SalaamMedia regarding *A Gathering of Robins*, the author highlighted her incorporation of supernatural elements into the narrative (Salaamedia, 2023). She emphasised drawing inspiration from Islamic beliefs about Jinn (invisible spirits) to shape her understanding of the supernatural occurrences within the story. This statement suggests a deliberate effort to infuse the narrative with cultural and religious depth, reflecting the author's engagement with Islamic traditions and folklore. By grounding the supernatural elements in Islamic perspectives on Jinn, the author adds a layer of authenticity and richness to the storytelling, inviting readers to explore themes of spirituality and the unseen world within the context of Muslim belief systems. This approach not only enhances the narrative's cultural authenticity but also provides an opportunity for readers to engage with Islamic concepts in a literary context, fostering deeper connections and understanding. The author's incorporation of Islamic beliefs about Jinn into *A Gathering of Robins* adds depth and complexity to the narrative, enriching the reading experience for audiences familiar with Islamic traditions while offering insights into these cultural elements for others.

MBR

A Gathering of Robins by Iram Yousuf is a book that primarily falls under a fantastical narrative with little direct focus on Muslim identity or Islamic cultural practices. The main storyline revolves around Alexander's quest for innocence in a richly imaginative setting filled with magical elements and mythical creatures. However, the inclusion of Medina, a sorceress who might draw subtly from Islamic folklore concerning Jinn, introduces a layer of cultural depth. The author's mention of integrating concepts from Islamic beliefs about Jinn to enrich the fantasy elements suggests an effort to infuse the narrative with aspects of Muslim spirituality and folklore, potentially making the narrative more resonant with Muslim readers familiar with these concepts. This creative approach by Iram Yousuf could be seen as an attempt to provide a Moderately Representative and Authentic portrayal, where the Muslim identity is not front and centre but is instead woven into the fabric of the fantasy world through cultural symbols and themes. The book's strength lies in its ability to engage with Islamic cultural elements in a way that supports the fantasy genre without resorting to stereotypical or superficial portrayals of Muslim characters or themes.

Analysis

The blurb outlines a fantasy adventure set in the Kingdom of Dorian, where the protagonist, Alexander, faces the challenge of proving his innocence after being sentenced to death for regicide. The presence of magical creatures and a sorceress, Medina, suggests a rich fantasy world. The blurb indicates themes of redemption, self-discovery, and the journey of becoming a true leader. However, there are no clear indicators of representation or accurate portrayal of cultural practices related to Muslim identity. The

blurb focuses more on the fantastical elements of the story rather than on cultural or religious themes associated with Muslim characters or settings. Therefore, in terms of representation, this blurb does not seem to meet the criteria for depicting diverse character backgrounds or nuanced exploration of Muslim identity and is more relatable than representative. The book may lack full representation, but it does not appear to be offensive.

4.1.1.8 Stirring the Pot by Quraisha Dawood

Publisher: Penguin South Africa

Year Published: 2022

“At Summer Terrace flats in hot and humid Durban, the friendships between the women are as intricate as the curling patterns of henna tattoos.

Meet old Auntie Ruki, who lives with her domestic worker, Joyce, an arrangement that ruffles many feathers. There’s Zaina, who has her sights on becoming an architect, and her mother Rabia, a florist, and yes, she’s divorced. Zaina hides a secret that could cause a rift in their his name is Imraan, and dating him simply isn’t allowed.

Dive into this swirl of madams and maids, women and their husbands, children, grandchildren, and in-laws, a world bristling with life and vitality, amid judgements and forgiveness, secrets and lies, expectations and disappointments.

Prepare for a wedding, a theft, Ramadaan, and a passing, while delicious recipes for traditional cuisine add local spice to life at Summer Terrace” (Dawood, 2022).

A Goodreads reviewer Cassim (2022) commends the novel for its excellent writing style, with vivid descriptions that immerse readers in the story. It bravely tackles the controversial subject of the interactions between Muslim households and their domestic workers, offering honest reflections that may make some readers uncomfortable but are essential for fostering introspection within the community. The diversity of characters in the novel is praised, and while the focus on the character Zaina dominates much of the narrative, it is seen as a matter of personal opinion whether this detracts from the overall story. However, the review expresses a desire to explore more of the lives of the domestic workers outside of Summer Terrace, recognising their complexity and potential for further depth. *Stirring The Pot* is lauded for its engaging storytelling, relatable characters, and thought-provoking exploration of social dynamics within the Muslim community (Cassim, 2022).

MBR

Stirring the Pot by Quraisha Dawood offers a vivid exploration of the lives of a diverse group of Muslim women in Durban, reflecting on their personal and communal struggles within a vibrant and complex social setting. The portrayal of characters like Auntie Ruki, Zaina, and Rabia highlights the multifaceted

nature of Muslim identities, showcasing a range of experiences from dealing with divorce to challenging cultural norms. The inclusion of cultural practices such as Ramadaan and the depiction of traditional cuisine deeply root the narrative in its Muslim cultural context. The book extensively explores the nuanced dynamics of Muslim women's lives in a multicultural setting, making it a strong contender for the Highly Representative and Authentic category. The depth of character development, respect for cultural authenticity, and avoidance of stereotypical depictions align well with the highest standards set by the MBR scale. The narrative delves deeply into the intricacies of individual identities, community relationships, and the broader societal impacts of these interactions, providing a rich, complex picture of Muslim life in South Africa.

Analysis

The blurb introduces the vibrant community of Summer Terrace flats in Durban, South Africa, where the relationships between the women are complex. The characters represent a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences within the Muslim community. Aunty Ruki, living with her domestic worker Joyce, reflects the complexities of class and power dynamics. Zaina, aspiring to be an architect, and her divorced mother Rabia challenge societal norms, while Zaina's forbidden relationship with Imraan adds tension to the narrative. The blurb hints at themes of family, friendship, tradition, and societal expectations, as well as the challenges of navigating cultural and religious boundaries. Cultural practices such as Ramadaan and traditional cuisine are woven into the narrative, adding authenticity to the portrayal of Muslim identity. The blurb discusses a rich and nuanced exploration of community life, with a focus on the dynamics between women and the complexities of their relationships in a multicultural setting.

4.1.1.9 Kismet by Waheeda Joosab

Publisher: Baitul Hikmah

Year Published: 2023

“In this spellbinding story from author Waheeda Joosab, a beautiful, intelligent, and strong-willed Muslimah, Zainub Habib, finds herself in a nikah, arranged over-night, thanks to her terminally ill father, with a successful, good-looking, and free-thinking lawyer, Ahmed Mia.

Ahmed Mia never intended to marry, EVER! When his late dad's friend, Uthman Habib calls on him to help wind up his estate so that his daughter, Zainub, wouldn't have to, he wasn't counting on being asked to marry her too! Zainub Habib dropped out of medical school to become her father's primary caregiver when he became terminally ill. Tending faithfully to her father's daily needs, the last thing she expected when Ahmed Mia appeared on their doorstep one fine morning was that he was about to become her husband overnight. Life becomes complicated when Ahmed realises that the union compromises his lifestyle and preconceived philosophies. Living with a simple, unpretentious Niqabi, whose charming simplicity and mesmerising beauty was attractive and intriguing, hooked him enough to scare him away from the temptation of ever loving her fully. In her quest to be a loving

wife and daughter-in-law, Zainub must wait to find out whether the roses she thinks she sees in Ahmed will blossom from the water she pours on his thorns...” (Joosab, 2023).

According to a Goodreads reviewer Haniyah (2023), the book resonates with the essence of Muslim representative fiction by portraying the protagonist, Zainub Habib, as a relatable and strong-willed Muslim woman navigating the complexities of an arranged marriage. Zainub's character is depicted as multifaceted, with her resilience and devotion to her terminally ill father serving as central themes. The book delves into universal themes of love, sacrifice, and personal growth, while also exploring the cultural context of arranged marriages within Muslim communities. Through Zainub's journey, readers are offered insights into the challenges and obstacles faced by individuals balancing traditional expectations and personal desires. Additionally, the portrayal of Ahmed Mia's internal conflict and transformation adds depth to the narrative, reflecting the nuances of Muslim identity and marital relationships. The reviewer believes the book delivers an engaging and insightful story that authentically represents the experiences and struggles of Muslim characters (Haniyah, 2023).

However, according to reviewer Janice Templeton (2023) believes the Muslim representation in this book appears to be problematic and lacking depth. The characters, particularly Ahmed and Zainub, seem to perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce negative portrayals of Muslim relationships. The gender roles portraying Zainub as primarily a caregiver, cooking, cleaning, and serving Ahmed, while he disregards her, reinforces traditional gender roles within Muslim communities. This depiction does not offer a nuanced understanding of Muslim women's roles and agency. Their marriage is depicted as lacking in romance and respect. Ahmed's treatment of Zainub, ignoring her needs and emotionally abusing her, reflects toxic masculinity and an unhealthy power dynamic. The story touches upon cultural expectations, such as arranged marriages and familial obligations, but fails to explore these themes in a meaningful or insightful way. Instead, it presents them as superficial plot devices without delving into their complexities. While the characters are identified as Muslim, their religious identity seems superficial and disconnected from the narrative. There is little exploration of how their faith influences their actions, beliefs, or relationships. Both Ahmed and Zainub appear one-dimensional and lacking in character development. Their motivations and actions are not adequately explored, leading to shallow and unengaging storytelling. The reviewer seems to believe the representation of Muslims in this fiction seems to be riddled with stereotypes, lack of depth, and problematic portrayals of gender dynamics and relationships. It fails to provide an authentic and meaningful exploration of Muslim identity and experiences (Templeton, 2023).

MBR

Kismet by Waheeda Joosab centres on the arranged marriage between Zainub and Ahmed, exploring themes of love, duty, and personal agency within the framework of Muslim cultural practices. The narrative attempts to provide a nuanced look at the challenges and growth that come from such a union,

focusing on character development and the impact of cultural expectations. However, the depiction has received mixed reviews regarding its depth and authenticity. While the book aims to portray a complex and nuanced view of Muslim marital relationships, the feedback suggests that it may not fully succeed in avoiding stereotypes or providing a deeply authentic exploration of Muslim identities. Depending on the perspective, it could oscillate between Moderately Representative and Authentic and Problematic and Stereotypical. Critics argue that it reinforces certain stereotypes about Muslim relationships and lacks depth in exploring the characters' religious and personal growth, which are crucial for a higher rating on the MBR scale. These analyses reflect the diverse ways in which Muslim identities and themes can be represented in literature, highlighting the importance of depth, nuance, and cultural authenticity in achieving a truly representative portrayal according to tools like the MBR scale.

Analysis

The blurb introduces *Kismet* a story by Waheeda Joosab, centred around Zainub Habib, a strong-willed Muslim woman who finds herself in an arranged marriage with Ahmed Mia, a successful lawyer. Zainub's character is described as beautiful, intelligent, and dedicated to caring for her terminally ill father, showcasing her strength and devotion. Ahmed Mia, on the other hand, is portrayed as initially resistant to marriage and grappling with his lifestyle and philosophical beliefs. The cultural context of arranged marriages and familial obligations within Muslim communities is presented, highlighting the complexities and challenges faced by individuals navigating traditional expectations and personal desires. Themes of love, sacrifice, and personal growth are explored as Zainub and Ahmed navigate their unconventional relationship. The blurb suggests a nuanced exploration of Muslim identity and the intricacies of marital relationships, with Zainub's character embodying resilience and Ahmed's character reflecting internal conflict and transformation. The blurb explains a compelling narrative that delves into themes of love, duty, and self-discovery within the context of Muslim culture and tradition.

Kismet highlights the diverse ways in which Muslim identities and themes can be represented in literature. It underscores the importance of depth, nuance, and cultural authenticity in achieving a truly representative portrayal. This analysis reflects the broader challenges in representing complex cultural identities in fiction, emphasising the need for more nuanced and in-depth portrayals to achieve a higher rating on the MBR scale.

4.1.1.10 SoPhia: a novel by Shafinaaz Hassim

Publisher: WordFlute Press

Year Published: 2012

"A story of love and violence, and a community's silence. Love and violence make strange bedfellows. Sophia is a novel set between South Africa and Mauritius When a man hits his wife for the first time, he hesitates. It takes a shaky hand to strike someone you love. We all have our demons. Pain and frustration clash with fear and self-

loathing. They play havoc with us. Once that first time has passed, it becomes easier; allowing the attacker a temporary relief from the demonic craze. Zarreen Kader knows that this is true of her encounters with her husband, Majid Akram Noorani. And her parents are happy that she is happily married. So she resolves not to tell them about the abuse. After all, he loves her. And he loves the children. So she does what she has to do, to hold her marriage together. Until the lies catch up with her. And her life begins to fall apart. Are they, as a family, ready for the skeletons that burst out of their past? Akram must face the dark memories that threaten his sanity, or be engulfed by them, while Zarreen travels to the island of Mauritius, where her Sufi great-grandfather once lived. Will she escape her reality or try to make sense of her struggles? As these stories occur side by side, often with their inextricable overlaps, the drama of personal life, confrontation and a victim's silence is made whole. SoPhia is a love story set primarily in Johannesburg, South Africa. This is not a romance novel, but rather a compelling narrative of hope, compassion and self-realisation” (Hassim, 2012).

According to a reviewer Fatima Bheekoo Shah from SISTERS magazine (April 2014 edition) also posted on Goodreads, the protagonist, Zarreen Kader, is depicted as a victim of domestic abuse, highlighting the harsh realities faced by women in such situations. The novel courageously confronts the issue head-on, presenting a raw and honest portrayal of the struggles Zarreen and her family endure. Through compelling storytelling, the author creates a narrative that immerses readers in the characters' lives, allowing them to empathise with their experiences. The review commends the novel for its exploration of themes such as hope, compassion, self-realisation, and forgiveness amidst the turmoil of domestic violence. The book is praised for initiating a much-needed conversation about domestic violence within Muslim households, shedding light on a crucial but often overlooked issue in society (Bheekoo Shah, 2014).

MBR

SoPhia by Shafinaaz Hassim presents a deeply engaging narrative that examines the life of Zarreen Kader as she deals with domestic abuse within her marriage, which is a significant and challenging topic. The story delves into themes of love, violence, personal crisis, and self-discovery, set against a backdrop that spans both South Africa and Mauritius. The references to Zarreen's Sufi heritage introduce an element of Muslim spiritual identity, enriching the cultural context of the narrative. The portrayal of Zarreen's spiritual and personal struggles, as well as her journey towards self-realisation amidst profound challenges, aligns well with the criteria for a Highly Representative and Authentic depiction. The narrative goes beyond superficial traits and focuses on her profound internal conflicts, her growth, and the complex dynamics within her family and community. The story respects the intricacies of Muslim identity by integrating spiritual and cultural elements meaningfully into Zarreen's journey, thus avoiding tokenism and providing a multi-dimensional portrayal of a Muslim woman facing real-world issues.

Analysis

The blurb introduces the complex and harrowing story of Zarreen Kader and her experiences with domestic violence in a multicultural setting spanning South Africa and Mauritius. The themes of love, violence, silence, and self-realisation are prominent throughout the narrative. Zarreen's internal struggle with the abuse she faces from her husband, Majid Akram Noorani, is depicted with raw honesty, highlighting the psychological and emotional toll of domestic violence. The blurb suggests a cultural context influenced by South African and Mauritian settings, with references to Zarreen's Sufi great-grandfather and the themes of family secrets and ancestral connections. The portrayal of Zarreen's decision to hide the abuse from her family and the subsequent unravelling of her life reflects the complexities of navigating cultural expectations and personal trauma within a Muslim community. While the blurb focuses primarily on Zarreen's perspective, it hints at the broader themes of family dynamics, confronting dark memories, and the pursuit of self-discovery. In terms of representation, the blurb offers a nuanced exploration of Muslim identity and the cultural and social dynamics that shape Zarreen's experiences based on the word Sufi we can derive she is from a Muslim background. It delves into the challenges of breaking the cycle of violence and finding empowerment and hope amidst adversity. The blurb promotes a compelling and thought-provoking narrative that sheds light on important social issues while offering a message of resilience and redemption.

4.2 Paratext and MBR

The paratextual analysis of books reviewed offers deep insights into the representation of Muslim identity and experiences within fiction. Each book provides a unique perspective on themes like family, identity, cultural dynamics, and societal challenges across various contexts. These books explore the complexities of Muslim life through diverse characters, settings, and narratives, both within specific cultural settings and a broader global context. The nuanced portrayal of Muslim characters, their struggles, aspirations, and relationships enriches our understanding of Muslim representation in contemporary fiction. Paratextual elements, particularly book blurbs, play a crucial role in signalling to readers the themes and perspectives explored, helping to attract a broad audience and enhancing the visibility of diverse Muslim narratives.

Muslim representation in South African literature is notably complex and nuanced, influenced by the country's rich history of racial segregation and cultural diversity. The authors explore the intricate intersections of religion, race, and identity within the Muslim community, reflecting the multifaceted experiences of its members. Themes of tradition, modernity, assimilation, and resistance are navigated through narratives that provide a nuanced understanding of Muslim life in South Africa. This rich cultural backdrop allows authors to explore the complexities of Muslim identity more authentically.

Using the MBR scale as a framework, the books analysed show varying degrees of representation and authenticity. Titles like *Confessions of a Gambler* and *The Story of Maha* rate highly for their nuanced exploration of complex Muslim identities and cultural contexts. Conversely, books like *The Thunder*

That Roars and *Diary of A Guji Girl* show moderate representation, focusing more on broader narratives with less emphasis on the intricacies of Muslim life. Books like *A Gathering of Robins* achieve a delicate balance: they are neither offensive nor entirely representative but manage to be relatable to a Muslim audience. Such books often tread a fine line, avoiding controversial topics or stereotypes that might offend certain groups while also not fully capturing the nuanced experiences and identities of a specific community. Instead, they focus on universal themes and emotions that resonate with a wide range of readers, providing a sense of connection and relatability. This approach allows these books to appeal to a diverse audience, offering stories that many can see themselves in, even if they do not fully reflect the intricacies of any particular identity. The application of the MBR scale helps in objectively evaluating the authenticity and depth of Muslim characters in literature, underscoring the importance of nuanced and culturally sensitive portrayals in enhancing the genre's authenticity and appeal.

4.3 Publisher Interviews

Purposive sampling was used to select publishing companies in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, focusing on their business models and publishing strategies in order to understand the publishing landscape for Muslim literature in South Africa. Interviews were conducted to understand the specific literary needs and preferences of the Muslim readership. These interviews, conducted via email and Zoom and audio-recorded for accuracy, provided detailed insights into how publishers cater to these needs, the strategies they use for marketing, and their title selection processes. The gathered information is crucial for understanding the challenges and solutions Muslim publishers face interpreting trends, offering stakeholders valuable knowledge to develop effective strategies for producing and promoting representative fiction.

4.3.1 YIZ House Publishing

YIZ House believes effective marketing and promotional tactics are crucial for reaching the intended audience, particularly in the face of stiff competition from established publishers and limited resources.

Initially established as a self-publishing venture, YIZ House has primarily focused on curating anthologies, which is why none of their books are included in my analysis. These anthologies have been created through reading workshops and collaborations with Modjaji Books, an independent feminist press based in Johannesburg that specialises in publishing works by southern African women writers.

YIZ House has discovered that partnering with various organizations, charities, and reputable publishers has been instrumental in developing profitable publications. While their anthologies have encompassed both fiction and non-fiction works, they have not ventured into producing fiction novels aimed at adult readers. Instead, they have focused on producing a series of young adult books, as they have not found publishing to be profitable. They prefer anthologies, as co-authors help with the sales of the copies.

The insights gained from observing how YIZ House has utilised hybrid publishing by collaborating with diverse stakeholders have been valuable in illustrating the range of options available to authors.

4.3.2 Anonymous Participant

Anonymous Publisher, founded in 2009 by a participant who has asked to be anonymous stopped accepting submissions in 2021 to reassess its strategy post-COVID. They focus on specific anthologies with thematic elements and have published memoirs, short fiction anthologies on social issues, poetry, and fiction. Changes in marketing access over the years, particularly through social media, Booktok influencers, and Instagram reviewers, have shifted their approach. Previously reliant on distribution companies, their model has evolved, necessitating new strategies. They stress the importance of maintaining relationships with independent bookshops, which significantly impacts their personalised service and willingness to stock older titles.

Book printing has transitioned from requiring large initial runs to more flexible Print on Demand (POD) options, reducing costs and allowing for smaller, more manageable print runs. The competitive design market has also lowered prices, highlighting the need for tailored distribution strategies, such as engaging with schools for children's book launches and ensuring material authenticity through meticulous editing.

Anonymous Participant's experience illustrates the unique challenges faced by Muslim publishers in producing representative fiction. They emphasise the necessity of adapting marketing strategies to leverage digital platforms while maintaining strong retailer relationships. Continuous market assessment and adjusting title selections are crucial for staying relevant. Further research into Muslim reader preferences could enhance their understanding and effectiveness in meeting these needs.

An example of a positive publishing experience is provided by an author who worked with a larger publishing house. Unlike typical publishing processes, they were involved at every stage, from editing to design, maintaining their voice throughout the process. This experience highlights the importance of preserving the author's independence and continuing to produce diverse literature, reflecting the critical need for diversity as explored in the author's master's thesis on Muslim representative fiction.

4.3.3 Anonymous Publishing House

This publishing house functions remotely, where all team members, including the manager, telecommute. The operation integrates stay-at-home mothers skilled in editing and proofreading, effectively utilising their academic backgrounds to achieve a satisfying work-life balance. The team includes former educators and individuals with master's degrees in publishing. The manager holds a degree in English literature, enhanced by various additional courses over time.

They closely monitor emerging trends in publishing, focusing on creating characters that resonate with their niche audience, especially young adults who prefer contemporary, relatable narratives. Their recent series exemplifies this approach, designed to deeply engage the intended readers and is being launched locally and internationally. This series was excluded under the heading of it being an anthology.

While their audience is specific, they consciously choose not to expand beyond their niche. This strategy allows them to concentrate on literature that serves underrepresented segments, particularly South African Muslim women, often overlooked in mainstream literary circles. In reviewing the evolution of Muslim representative fiction, they note both advancements and areas needing further enhancement. Their publishing efforts aim to deliver stories that are enjoyable, educational, and reflective of the authentic experiences of their community, set against South Africa's unique socio-political backdrop, including the remnants of apartheid and the Indian caste system.

Their manuscript submission process is stringent, underscoring their commitment to disseminating valuable knowledge. They evaluate potential publications to ensure they uphold ethical standards, promote Islamic teachings, and positively impact the community. This selective approach helps preserve the integrity of the brand and prevents the inclusion of content that fails to meet these standards.

Their marketing strategies focus primarily on encouraging authors to build their online presence, with necessary support from the publishing house. This aligns with their values of modesty and privacy, particularly concerning female authors.

Concerning digital platforms, they tread carefully due to issues like piracy and potential dilution of content quality. Their primary focus remains on physical books, which constitute the majority of their publications. In distribution, they have found success by partnering with small bookstores and home industries, which allows them to bypass the significant cuts taken by larger distributors. This not only supports local businesses but also ensures a fairer distribution of profits.

One of their significant challenges is ensuring the authenticity of their stories. By promoting narratives written by authors from within the community, they maintain a genuine narrative that resonates with their readers. They also incorporate reader feedback through a team of beta readers who ensure their publications meet the community's expectations and preferences. Their small, dynamic team is capable of efficiently managing a variety of projects. Despite their modest size, their impact and productivity are substantial, demonstrating the effectiveness of their focused approach to publishing.

An interesting aspect of their services is that non-Muslim authors use them as fact-checkers when discussing Muslim characters in their novels. While using Muslim sensitivity readers can significantly enhance the accuracy and sensitivity of non-Muslim authors' portrayal of Muslim characters, it should not be the sole method of ensuring authenticity. Authors should engage deeply with the subject matter

through comprehensive research, personal interactions, and a genuine commitment to understanding the Muslim experience. Moreover, the voices from within the community should be given priority and platforms to tell their own stories. Ultimately, a balanced approach that combines the use of knowledgeable sensitivity readers with rigorous self-education and respect for the #OwnVoices movement can lead to more authentic and respectful representations of Muslim characters in literature.

This detailed insight into their operations and philosophy highlights their dedication to representing and uplifting the voices within their community, ensuring these voices are heard and respected on their terms.

4.3.4 Baitul Hikmah

Baitul Hikmah a Durban-based publisher and bookstore considers themselves highly attuned to prevailing market trends, heavily basing their decision-making process on consumer demands and the performance of international book markets. When evaluating manuscripts for publication, the focus is on potential profitability and market trends, particularly those observable through social media and prominent Muslim or Islamic publishing houses.

In terms of manuscript selection, priority is given to projects that promise financial returns, as achieving profitability with books from unknown authors is often challenging. For less promising manuscripts, self-publishing is recommended to the authors, allowing them to take on the marketing and financial responsibilities.

The publishing strategy differs by genre; children's books, for example, are more marketable than adult titles and that is the niche mainly focused on. Global trends also affect the selection process; books that gain visibility on platforms like TikTok or Instagram, regardless of their origin, are more likely to be embraced by consumers. This perception, though not indicative of the inherent quality of the works, influences the acquisition decisions.

Marketing strategies for fiction at this publishing house have been minimal, focusing more on genres like self-development and Islamic studies. Social media and book events are used collaboratively to enhance visibility. However, the effectiveness of digital platforms like Bookstagram or BookTok in South Africa remains uncertain due to their lower usage rates.

The adaptive strategies of the publishing house are gradually aligning more with consumer interests, particularly in self-help and Islamic genres. Product development has expanded to include Quran journals, responding to increased consumer interest in engaging with religious texts. While the approach has traditionally valued literary quality, market demand now plays a more significant role in publishing decisions.

4.4 Conclusion of Chapter

Muslim publishers face a myriad of challenges in today's publishing landscape. Among these hurdles is the need to cater to the diverse preferences and backgrounds of Muslim readers while ensuring authenticity in fiction because readers deserve to see themselves reflected in stories about them. Representative fiction is important because it serves as a mirror reflecting diverse human experiences, fostering empathy, understanding, and connection across cultures and perspectives. This requires a delicate balance to represent various cultural nuances within the Muslim community. Another significant challenge lies in adapting title selection, where publishers must navigate between providing unique narratives and ensuring commercial viability while aligning with readers' preferences and market demands. Overcoming these challenges demands collaboration, innovation, and a profound understanding of the local Muslim community's needs and aspirations. By addressing these obstacles head-on, Muslim publishers can continue to produce representative fiction that resonates with audiences across South Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 examines the paratext, epitext, and gathered data, contextualising the findings in light of existing literature, and correlating them with insights from discussions with Muslim publishers in South Africa to conclude the study and recommend future action and research.

This research has explored the challenges and opportunities within the South African Muslim publishing industry, particularly focusing on the production and dissemination of representative fiction. The initial chapters have established a historical context, demonstrating the longstanding tradition of Muslim publishing in South Africa and the evolutionary shifts that have led to the present scenario. Local books need to adapt to readers' preferences and be more relevant in ever-changing environments which involves staying attuned to current trends, addressing contemporary issues, being culturally sensitive, embracing diversity, and potentially maximising the use of technology.

Muslim publishers in South Africa use a diverse set of strategies and business models to navigate the challenges of the publishing industry and cater to the varied needs of the local Muslim community. The research discusses models used on a small scale and needs to be expanded to yield more significant results.

5.2 Synthesis of Findings

The industry faces unique challenges such as the small market size, competition with international publishers, and a limited reading culture within the local community. Despite the potential for storytelling to reflect diverse experiences, most locally published works are not aligned with adult readers' tastes and expectations according to a participant who runs an independent publishing house. (Anonymous publisher, personal communication, April 18, 2024).

5.2.1 Integration of Literature Review and Empirical Data

Local books need to adapt to readers' preferences, stay attuned to current trends, address contemporary issues, be culturally sensitive, embrace diversity, and maximise the use of technology. Research indicates that local books need to be produced at higher standards to compete with international titles (Anonymous Publisher, personal communication, April 18, 2024).

5.2.2 Sales Analysis

The sales analysis discussed functions as a crucial paratextual tool, enhancing our understanding of the market dynamics and consumer preferences that influence the success of literary works, particularly in niche genres like Muslim representative fiction. By offering insights into sales figures, editions, publication dates, and pricing strategies, this data aids stakeholders—publishers, authors, and marketers—in making informed strategic decisions. It allows for an evaluation of distribution effectiveness, the impact of pricing, and the popularity of different formats, genres and titles. This also sheds light on the cultural and economic factors affecting literary consumption.

The table below gives sales details derived from Nielsen:

ISBN	Title	Author	Imprint	RPG	Volume	Value	ZA RRP	ASP	Binding	Publication Date	Product Class	Country of Publication
9780795701603	Confessions of a Gambler	Jacobs, Rayda	Kwela Books	NB Uitgewers/ Publishers	852	R136 273,08	R225,00	R159,94	Paperback	Nov 19, 2003	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9781585678976	Confessions of a Gambler	Jacobs, Rayda	Harry N. Abrams, Inc.	Penguin Random House (Pty) Ltd	1	R356,00		R356,00	Hardback	Jul 10, 2007	General & Literary Fiction	United Kingdom
9780143527961	Onion Tears	Khan, Shubnum	Penguin Books (South Africa)	Penguin Random House (Pty) Ltd	1 080	R203 403,64	R200,00	R188,34	Paperback	Apr 1, 2011	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9780143528470	Onion tears	Khan, Shubnum	Penguin Books (South Africa)	Penguin Random House (Pty) Ltd	716	R92 362,75	R64,00	R129,00	Paperback	Sep 11, 2011	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9780143528623	Onion tears	Khan, Shubnum	Penguin Books (South Africa)	Penguin Random House (Pty) Ltd	5	R654,00	R120,00	R130,80	Hardback	Oct 12, 2012	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9780620519625	SoPhia: Novel	Hassim, Shafinaaz	WordFlute Press	Porcupine Press	69	R11 025,75	R130,01	R159,79	Paperback	Dec 1, 2012	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9780620590877	Diary of a Guji Girl	Hunter, Qanintah	WordFlute Press	Porcupine Press	113	R22 874,48	R125,00	R202,43	Paperback	Jan 1, 2015	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9781485904670	Stirring the Pot	Dawood, Qurasha	Penguin Books (South Africa)	Penguin Random House (Pty) Ltd	932	R249 664,14	R290,00	R267,88	Paperback	Mar 1, 2022	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa
9780795710964	Darlings of Durban	Hassim, Shafinaaz	Kwela Books	NB Uitgewers/ Publishers	185	R57 498,28	R320,00	R310,80	Paperback	Feb 1, 2024	Romance & Sagas	South Africa
9781770109223	Onion Tears	Khan, Shubnum	Pan Macmillan	Pan Macmillan South Africa	33	R8 077,10	R250,00	R244,76	Paperback	Mar 4, 2024	General & Literary Fiction	South Africa

Figure 4: Sales analysis table derived from Nielsen data (Books are ordered according to publication date)

Sales and lists analysis emerge to allow for strategic decision-making. A qualitative analysis shows visible trends and differences in the data. To conduct a quantitative analysis and derive precise metrics, the data would need to be organised into a coherent format. The scope of this research is somewhat constrained by the limited selection of titles, reflecting the niche market size. Despite this, the study aims to highlight the growth potential within this genre and forecast its trajectory.

Books with higher volumes, such as *Onion Tears* and *Stirring the Pot*, suggest they are more popular or have been more effectively distributed. Titles such as *Confessions of a Gambler* have very different sales volumes between the two editions, with the Kwela Books edition outperforming the Harry N. Abrams, Inc. edition which could be due to a variety of factors including market reach, pricing, and publication dates. *Onion Tears* appears in multiple editions, with the Penguin Books (South Africa) edition having the highest volume, which may indicate brand recognition or marketing effectiveness. The Pan Macmillan edition of *Onion Tears* has lower volumes, which might be due to newer releases as indicated by their publication dates. Shubnum Khan is a South African author of *Onion Tears* and *How I Accidentally Became a Global Stock Photo and Other Strange and Wonderful Stories* whose latest book *The Djinn Waits a Hundred Years* is a colourful U.S. debut by Viking Books (Venters, 2024). Her book demonstrates that authors from varied backgrounds are increasingly valued for creating more inclusive literature, particularly following the success of her earlier works published within the local sphere. *The Djinn Waits a Hundred Years* provides a rich tapestry of cultural nuances and historical

depth that resonates with a broad audience. The narrative's setting in Durban—a city with a vibrant history and diverse population—adds layers of authenticity and engagement, making it a compelling case study for the success of culturally rich, locally set fiction in the international market. Khan's work demonstrates how deeply rooted cultural narratives can transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, appealing to global readerships interested in exploring new perspectives and experiences (Venters, 2024).

Penguin Random House South Africa shows a strong presence with several titles listed, indicating a significant market share. NB Uitgewers/ Publishers also has a couple of titles, with *Confessions of a Gambler* showing a strong performance in volume. WordFlute Press, which is a small publishing house, shows moderate performance with *Diary of a Guji Girl* and *SoPhia: Novel*.

There is a discrepancy between the Recommended Retail Price (RRP) and the Average Selling Price (ASP) for most of the books, with the ASP generally being lower than the RRP which suggests discounts are a common practice to incentivise sales. The ASP provides insight into the actual revenue generated per book sold and varies as seen with *Diary of a Guji Girl* which has a higher ASP compared to its RRP.

Paperbacks are more common showing they are preferred and the hardback edition of *Confessions of a Gambler* has a significantly higher ASP compared to the paperback edition, which is typical given that hardcovers are more expensive.

Publication dates range from 2003 to 2024, and older books generally show higher sales volumes, likely because they have been available longer, allowing them to build a strong backlist which shows significant market value to publishers, which motivates further investment. This sustained sales performance may also reflect a lack of competing titles over the years. Most books are labelled General & Literary Fiction with one entry under Romance & Sagas which suggests that general fiction is the main category for this selection of books.

Zooming into the realm of Muslim representation in fiction, there needs to be a discussion for a dedicated genre. We need a nuanced understanding of Muslim representation in fiction, reflecting on its implications for publishers, retailers, and the broader literary landscape. While the study contributes significantly to addressing research objectives, limitations are acknowledged, paving the way for future explorations. The research underscores the transformative potential of inclusive representation and strategic adaptation within the realms of data analysis and literary production, reinforcing the significance of scholarly inquiry in driving societal progress and fostering inclusivity.

The research highlights significant challenges and strategic adaptations faced by publishers in South Africa in producing Muslim representative fiction. It underscores the importance of understanding market dynamics and consumer preferences to stay competitive and meet the needs of Muslim readers effectively. Larger publishers like Penguin Random House South Africa, with more substantial financial

resources, demonstrate more robust market reach and brand recognition, largely due to their capacity to invest in effective marketing and distribution strategies. This is evidenced by the variations in sales volumes across different editions and publishers. These resources allow them to set competitive pricing strategies, like lower Average Selling Prices (ASP) compared to Recommended Retail Prices (RRP), to boost sales and attract more readers. On the other hand, smaller publishers such as WordFlute Press attempt to carve out niche markets with diverse titles like *Diary of a Guji Girl* and *SoPhia: a Novel*, indicating a strategic adaptation to reader preferences and market demands, albeit with limited financial capacity for extensive marketing. This situation points to a broader trend where financial clout in larger publishing houses enables a significant competitive edge in marketing, crucial for the success and sustainability of literature that resonates with and accurately represents the Muslim community. There is a gap in information especially with local Muslim representative fiction and how in a small population of Muslims the industry is growing. Many small publishing houses are starting and growing through collaborations with different publishing models.

5.3 Challenges Faced by Muslim Publishers

The local market's size significantly affects the profitability and sustainability of the publishing industry. There is a limited reading culture within the local community, affecting the reach and impact of local publications. International publishers often overshadow local publishers, making it difficult for them to find a foothold in the market (Z. Jina-Asvat, personal communication, April 15, 2024).

Distribution and marketing are major hurdles for Muslim publishers due to limited resources and reach. Without the financial backing and extensive networks that larger publishing houses possess, getting books into bookstores, libraries, and readers' hands becomes a significant challenge. Limited marketing budgets mean that Muslim publishers often struggle to promote their titles through mainstream channels, leading to lower visibility and sales. Additionally, the niche market for Muslim fiction can make it difficult to secure partnerships with distributors and retailers, further restricting access to a broader audience. These constraints hinder the growth and sustainability of Muslim publishers, making it crucial to develop innovative strategies and leverage community support to overcome these barriers.

5.4 Needs of Muslim Readers

A nuanced understanding of Muslim representation in fiction has significant implications for publishers, retailers, and the broader literary landscape. Muslim readers require fiction that resonates with their cultural and religious identities, depicting diverse experiences authentically and respectfully. However, there is often a misalignment between the needs of these readers and the available literature, particularly in local markets. Most locally published works focus primarily on a local audience, framing stories in ways that may not appeal to adult readers seeking more diverse and representative narratives. This

disconnect limits the reach and impact of local publications, highlighting a gap in the current offerings that publishers need to address to better serve their audience and enhance their market competitiveness.

Muslim readers in South Africa require fiction that resonates with their cultural and religious identities as shown through reviews on Goodreads and publisher interviews. *Kismet* is popular because people locally find the story relatable according to Amra who runs Baitul Hikmah bookshop and also publishes local authors (T. Amra, personal communication, April 25, 2024). The document discusses the importance of providing literature that depicts the Muslim community's diverse experiences authentically and respectfully. This includes addressing stereotypes, promoting cultural sensitivity, and offering a variety of narratives that reflect the complexity of Muslim identities.

5.5 Strategies and Approaches of Local Muslim Publishers

Current marketing strategies for Muslim fiction focus on culturally relevant content, community engagement, and leveraging digital platforms for e-publishing and marketing. Publishers adopt various approaches to title selection and adaptation, staying attuned to current trends, addressing contemporary issues, ensuring cultural sensitivity, and embracing diversity (T. Amra, personal communication, April 25, 2024). Independent and hybrid publishing models are instrumental in promoting diverse voices and catering to niche markets. These models emphasise research to understand evolving audience preferences, strengthening networks between publishers and local retailers, and expanding online presence through e-books and audiobooks. Social media is a key tool for marketing efforts while improving publication quality to match international standards remains a priority. Ensuring culturally relevant and diverse content, along with community involvement in the editorial process, further enhances the appeal and authenticity of the published works (Anonymous Publisher, personal communication, April 18, 2024). In literature, something not being representative and possibly becoming offensive often relates to the portrayal of characters, themes, or cultures. Publishers need to ensure authenticity and sensitivity when depicting diverse experiences and identities. Failing to do so can lead to stereotypes, misrepresentation, or perpetuation of harmful biases. Publishers should approach their work with empathy, research, and consideration for how their books may impact different audiences. Additionally, receiving feedback from diverse perspectives can help identify and address any potential issues of offensiveness or lack of representation in their writing.

The strategies found are focusing on culturally relevant content to engage the local Muslim readership effectively. It also mentions the use of digital platforms for marketing, which can help reach a broader audience (T. Amra, personal communication, April 25, 2024). There is a push towards community engagement through events and partnerships, which can help bolster the visibility and appeal of locally produced content.

Local publishers are adapting by focusing on representative fiction that resonates with the local Muslim community's lived experiences and preferences. The research suggests that there is a growing awareness of the need to balance global trends with local narratives to ensure the content is both appealing and relevant to South African Muslims. There is also an emphasis on improving the quality and accessibility of books to compete with international titles effectively (Anonymous Publisher, personal communication, April 18, 2024). The findings underscore the importance of inclusive representation and strategic adaptation in driving societal progress and fostering inclusivity within the literary community.

Small and medium-sized publishers take advantage of the gaps created by larger competitors that are overburdened by bureaucratic processes and regulations red tape by acting quickly and creatively. Even while they run the danger of losing authors to larger organisations, they concentrate on carefully selecting titles and developing authors for long-term success. Even while well-known titles frequently drive income, they provide individualised service and are more willing to share breakthroughs. Thanks to digital advances, start-up costs are very modest, but it usually takes years to become profitable. Industry dynamism is driven by serial entrepreneurs needing to constantly start a new venture. Medium-sized publishers are acquisition targets because they lack the agility of smaller players and the scale of majors. They can, however, be successful if they have rich backlists and digital assets, drawing on well-established communities and brand awareness and scale is not necessary for success (Clark & Phillips, 2020).

5.6 Representation in Muslim Fiction

Current literature often lacks alignment with international adult readers' tastes and expectations, focusing mainly on local audiences (Z. Jina-Asvat, personal communication, April 15, 2024). Effective representation can significantly enhance reader engagement by resonating with their cultural and religious identities.

Local works need to compete with international titles by adapting to readers' preferences and improving quality and relevance. The international success of authors like Shubnum Khan demonstrates the potential for such works to resonate globally. Muslim-run publishing houses in South Africa play a pivotal role in shaping the cultural and intellectual landscape of the community. By addressing the outlined challenges and implementing the suggested strategies, these entities can enhance their market presence and contribute significantly to both local and international literary scenes.

Despite facing significant hurdles, Muslim publishers possess tremendous potential for growth and influence in the literary world. The recommendations offered aim to enable Muslim publishers to not only survive but also excel in a competitive market, making substantial contributions to the cultural richness and diversity of the literary landscape. This effort will enhance global understanding and

appreciation of Muslim narratives, challenging stereotypes and fostering inclusivity. The suggestions acknowledge the difficulties these publishers encounter and provide practical strategies to help them succeed, thereby broadening the global appreciation of Muslim narratives. By empowering these publishers, the proposed actions aim to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity, building on the initial discussion of challenges to offer solutions that utilise the unique role of Muslim publishers as significant contributors to the literary world.

For publishers, this underscores the importance of investing in stories that reflect diverse backgrounds and connect with universal themes of heritage, identity, and belonging. By championing such works, publishers can tap into the growing demand for books that entertain, enlighten, and foster a deeper understanding of the world's rich cultural diversity. This approach can also catalyse a shift towards more inclusive publishing practices, potentially leading to wider success in the global literary marketplace.

5.7 Recommendations for Enhancing Muslim Publishing

To effectively address the challenges faced by Muslim publishers, several strategies are recommended. Firstly, it is crucial to conduct regular surveys, and focus groups, and participate with the community to understand evolving preferences. Strengthening networks between publishers and local retailers can enhance distribution while expanding online presence and leveraging social media can significantly boost marketing efforts. Publishers should also focus on improving the quality of their publications to match international standards, ensuring that content is culturally relevant and diverse. Conducting effective market research and providing robust editorial support are essential. Promoting local author lists, adopting diverse marketing strategies, and specialising in underrepresented genres can further enhance the quality and impact of Muslim fiction.

Investing in stories that reflect diverse backgrounds and connect with universal themes can broaden appeal and market reach. By doing so, publishers can attract a wider audience and increase the visibility of Muslim fiction in the global market.

Enhancing distribution networks through partnerships with educational institutions and local retailers is vital. These collaborations can promote a reading culture and support tailored educational content, making books more accessible to a broader audience (Z. Jina-Asvat, personal communication, April 15, 2024). Fostering collaborations with community members and other stakeholders can enhance content relevance and impact. By involving diverse voices in the editorial process, publishers can ensure that their publications accurately reflect and respect the community.

Leveraging digital platforms and social media for marketing and direct engagement with readers is essential in the modern publishing landscape. Publishers should capitalise on these tools to reach a

wider audience and engage with readers more effectively (T. Amra, personal communication, April 25, 2024).

Ensuring high-quality publications that are competitive with international standards is critical. Publishers should strive to produce books that are not only well-written but also culturally relevant and diverse, reflecting the nuanced realities of different Muslim identities and experiences.

Based on research findings, several strategies are recommended to enhance the sustainability and relevance of local Muslim publishing houses. Firstly, publishers should continually research to understand the evolving preferences of their audience. This could involve regular surveys, focus groups, and engagement with readers at community events. Strengthening networks between publishers and local retailers, as well as partnerships with educational institutions, can promote a reading culture and support tailored educational content. With the growing influence of digital platforms, expanding online presence, including e-books and audiobooks, is essential. Improving the quality of publications to match international standards and ensuring culturally relevant and diverse content is also crucial. Involving community members in the editorial process can ensure that diverse voices are authentically portrayed.

Conducting effective market research and analysing genres is crucial for understanding reader interests. For example, deeper market insights could help tailor narratives that resonate more profoundly with contemporary audiences. Providing robust editorial support and promoting local author lists are crucial steps in enhancing the authenticity and marketability of novels. Adopting diverse marketing strategies that adhere to Islamic principles while leveraging platforms like Muslim Bookstagram can significantly increase the visibility and reach of these works. Specialisation in underrepresented genres can meet specific reader preferences, enriching the local literary scene and offering a wider array of narratives that resonate with diverse audiences. By addressing these trends and recommendations, stakeholders in the Muslim literary community can enhance the quality and impact of Muslim fiction. This would not only elevate the narratives within the community but also enrich the global literary landscape with diverse and compelling stories from the Muslim world. Mentioning international publishing practices and standards can provide a benchmark for local publishers to aspire to, ensuring that their publications can compete on a global scale.

Genre-specific niches in publishing are vital for targeted marketing, meeting reader expectations, and enhancing visibility and discoverability. Without clear genre connections, marketability becomes challenging due to difficulties in creating effective promotional strategies, catering to reader preferences, and building author brands. Established genres benefit from higher consumer trust and loyalty, while niche-specific expertise allows publishers to allocate resources efficiently, thus preventing lower engagement and sales. Baitul Hikmah, for example, focuses on children's books due to their higher marketability compared to adult titles. Additionally, global trends influence their selection process, with books gaining visibility on platforms like TikTok or Instagram being more likely

to be embraced by consumers, affecting acquisition decisions despite not necessarily reflecting the works' inherent quality (T. Amra, personal communication, April 25, 2024).

In South Africa understanding the advantages of agility, niche focus, and personalised service can empower small publishers. By identifying underserved markets, adapting quickly to changes, and strategically selecting and marketing titles, they can compete effectively. Leveraging digital tools, fostering author relationships, and collaborating with peers can further enhance their success. Embracing these strategies can help South African small publishers carve out their place in the industry and reach both local and global audiences.

5.8 Limitations and Future Research

The study recognises significant limitations due to the small market size and limited data availability, which constrain the scope and depth of the analysis. There is a pressing need for greater support and investment in Muslim fiction, which includes encouraging new publishers and authors to initiate efforts to cultivate a stronger reading culture.

Further exploration of self-publishing's impact is crucial. Investigating the potential and impact of self-publishing within the Muslim fiction genre will help understand its benefits and challenges. International collaborations can also be explored as a way to increase the reach of books.

Conducting a detailed market analysis with more comprehensive data is also essential which requires more researchers to look into Muslim representative fiction. This will provide a better understanding of trends and preferences within the Muslim fiction market, aiding in more targeted and effective strategies.

Finally, comparative studies with international markets should be undertaken. These studies will enhance understanding and help refine strategies specific to diverse cultural and market environments, ensuring a more global perspective in addressing the challenges faced by Muslim publishers.

Future research should explore the impact of these narrative strategies on reader engagement and the broader literary market. Understanding shifts in international publishing could offer valuable insights into improving local practices. Comparative studies could also provide deeper insights into effective strategies tailored to specific cultural and market conditions. Recommendations focus on adopting hybrid publishing models, aligning marketing strategies with Islamic principles, and specialising to better meet the needs of Muslim audiences. These strategies aim to enhance the literary landscape for Muslim narratives, fostering a more inclusive and diverse environment within the literary community.

For future research following the discussion in section 2.1.2, it may be valuable to also explore potential parallels between other religio-cultural publishing arenas and the challenges and opportunities surrounding 'representative fiction'. A comparative analysis could provide insights into the current state

of publishing programmes in other major religions, identifying key developments and trends. This could be useful in discussing parallels in modesty discussions.

For future research, a broader examination of paratextual elements beyond the blurb could be highly valuable. While Chapter 4 focused heavily on blurbs, paratext includes much more, such as cover art, title pages, forewords, illustrations, footnotes, and end pages. A deeper exploration of these elements would have been beneficial; however, I was constrained by the format of the research paper. Investigating cover design could provide further insights into the books and their target audiences. Research could also explore how South African publishers might improve the visual appeal of locally produced works, especially considering the observation that international publishers often overshadow local ones (page 55). The absence of human figures on book covers in Muslim publishing could be a significant area of inquiry, given the religious sensitivities surrounding human imagery. Although book cover analysis was beyond the scope of this study, future research could explore reader reactions to provocative imagery and themes, offering insights into how Muslim audiences engage with works that challenge traditional norms. Additionally, investigating the presence of endorsements or praise on covers from prominent Muslim authors, such as Leila Aboulela, could reveal ways to enhance the marketability of local fiction and foster a collaborative network of Muslim writers. These connections may also help South African Muslim authors reach a broader international audience.

Future research should explore several areas to build on this study. It would be valuable to investigate how factors such as pricing, market reach, and publication dates impact book sales. Additionally, examining the influence of social movements or current events, such as the Arab Spring or the Iraq War, on market trends could offer insights into their effects on interest in specific genres or themes. Detailed sales data specific to South Africa would enhance the understanding of market contributions. Analysing the dominance of female authors could reveal gender dynamics and potential biases, along with thematic differences between male and female authors. Male authors were removed in some cases as they did not meet the criteria of the research.

It is also important to explore how the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of South African Muslim authors influence their portrayal of Muslim identities. Understanding how marketing strategies aligned with Islamic principles affect modesty and promotional practices would provide valuable insights. Furthermore, investigating the impact of Print on Demand (POD) solutions on cost reduction and opportunities for Muslim authors, and examining the role of digital platforms like BookTok and Bookstagram, as well as the growing market for audiobooks, could uncover new ways to reach wider audiences. Lastly, studying informal book-sharing platforms, such as local book clubs, could offer

deeper insights into readers' preferences within the South African Muslim community. The sample selected looked at authors who worked with publishing houses.

5.9 Conclusion

The role of Muslim-run publishing houses is pivotal in shaping the cultural and intellectual landscape of the community. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in publishing play a crucial role in promoting diverse voices and narratives. By addressing the outlined challenges and implementing the suggested strategies, local publishers can enhance their market presence and contribute significantly to both the local and international literary scenes. This contribution not only enriches the diversity of available literature but also ensures that the voices and experiences of the Muslim community are authentically represented and heard on a global stage.

The analysis highlights significant challenges and strategic adaptations faced by publishers in producing Muslim representative fiction, emphasising the importance of understanding market dynamics and consumer preferences.

5.9.1 Answer to Main Research Question: What are the main challenges faced locally by Muslim publishers in producing representative fiction?

The research found that the main challenges faced by local Muslim publishers include small market size, limited readership, competition with international publishers, and distribution and marketing issues. The research found that the challenges faced by local Muslim publishers in South Africa, particularly focusing on the small size of the Muslim population affect the profitability and sustainability of the publishing industry. There is also a significant emphasis on competition from international publishers, which often makes it difficult for local publishers to find a foothold in the market. The need for content that is more representative of the Muslim community in South Africa is highlighted as a priority to engage the local audience better.

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APPENDICES

A) Ethics Certificate

CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCE IN RESEARCH ETHICS

Name: Fathima Paruk
Student/Staff No: 801900

Date of Certification: 12 April 2023- 11 April 2026 (This certificate is valid for a period of three years)

TRAINED BY:
PROF. JASPER KNIGHT
(RESEARCH ETHICS)
SIGNATURE

 UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

J. Knight

ISSUED BY:
DR ROBIN DRENNAN
(DIRECTOR: RESEARCH OFFICE)
SIGNATURE

R. Drennan

This certificate is confirmation of successful completion of a training course in Research Ethics for Non-Medical human research, based upon achieving a minimum level of competence in different assessment tasks.

B) Research Questions

This research report seeks to interview publishers on their experience with book publishing.

1. How does your publishing house interpret and respond to emerging trends?
2. How does your publishing house commission or accept manuscripts in various genres, and what factors influence your decision-making process?
3. What marketing strategies has your publishing house employed for fiction titles?
4. How do you leverage platforms like Bookstagram, book clubs, and Booktok to reach diverse audiences?
5. How is your company adapting its title selection to align with readers' preferences and market demands in the ever-evolving landscape?
6. What is your relationship with retailers, and how do you believe this relationship can be improved to better promote and distribute titles?
7. When producing books for diverse audiences, how do you navigate creating books that cater to various backgrounds?
8. Does your company use digital platforms, and what impact has this had on the accessibility of books?
9. Given challenges in distributing books, what strategies has your publishing house employed to overcome obstacles and connect with a wider audience, especially in remote areas?
10. What challenges have you faced in the production of fiction, and what opportunities do you see for growth and enhancement within the genre?
11. How does your company ensure authentic portrayals of various characters and cultural nuances in fiction?
12. How does your publishing house aim to represent international experiences in fiction, considering the diverse global audience?
13. How does your company incorporate reader feedback, and what role does it play in shaping your fiction publishing decisions?

C) Interview Responses Notes and Transcripts

YIZ House Publishing – Dr Zaheera Jina Asvat

My Notes

- Focuses on effective marketing and promotional strategies to reach audiences amid competition and limited resources.
- Began as a self-publishing venture, and now primarily curates anthologies.
- Worked with Modjaji Books, a feminist press specialising in works by southern African women writers.
- Partners with various organisations, charities, and reputable publishers to develop profitable publications.
- Produces anthologies including both fiction and non-fiction.
- Focuses on young adult books rather than adult fiction novels.
- Uses hybrid publishing models by collaborating with diverse stakeholders to offer a range of options to authors.

Anonymous Participant by Request

Anonymous Participant hasn't been accepting submissions since 2021. We're reassessing the space based on changes post covid. I'll try my best to share some experiences since we launched in 2009.

Commissions are usually considered for specific anthologies with thematic considerations. We've published memoirs, short fiction anthologies documenting social issues, and some poetry and fiction.

In the past, we've worked with distribution companies. Their model has also changed post-pandemic. This has brought about a need to re-strategise.

Access to marketing has definitely changed over the years making it easier to reach readers via social media, Booktok influencers and Instagram reviewers.

Print has also changed where in the past one needed to print 1000+ copies via litho and now a single copy via digital is of trade industry quality. So the outlay is less. A book could be printed at 50-100 copies with reruns as needed.

The design market is also far more competitive bringing prices down.

It's important also to rely on ongoing networks and relationships built over time with independent bookshops. The indie stores have a great impact due to their personal service attitude toward locally produced books. They're also far more willing to keep older titles.

It's important also to make tailor-made solutions to distribute different kinds of books. For example, going into schools for kiddies' book launches works better than just leaving them in bookstores.

The authenticity of the material requires researching the language nuances and working with editors who understand the terrain. Astute editing is the greatest asset in the process.

During your Kwela journey, did you ever feel compelled to censor your work or yourself to cater to a specific audience?

* There's this assumption that publishing traditionally takes away independence but I'm pleased to report that Kwela was rather mindful of my participation. I was made part of every step of the process from editing to design. * in my case I didn't have to tailor my writing to suit the publisher as such, as they asked to read an already written manuscript and then chose to publish it.

~~And finally, if available, any sales data or insights you could provide would be greatly appreciated for my research.~~

~~* no updated sales data~~

Lastly, what do you believe is lacking in fiction, and what improvements are needed to enhance representation?

*I believe we need to write more of our stories.

Anonymous Publisher by Request

We are home-based and we all work from home. It's in essence, we are a home-based company, but we all work remotely. My editors and my proofreaders, all are stay-at-home moms and we all work remotely and we all have left our careers and that's what makes it so beautiful because we have now found a new lease on life while working from home and being stay-at-home moms and then our education is not lost, it's a fixed system. So, Alhamdulillah, I've got a lovely, lovely group of ladies who we work with. Some are teachers who have been teaching for up to 13 to 15 years. And some have, you know, a master's in, publishing also. I have a degree in English literature, which I studied through UNISA for over three years. And then I did other courses and stuff like that. So, we are all stay-at-home moms and we are very much a home business.

FP: Great, I would like you to respond to my research questions and anything else that you'd want to add, about Muslim representative fiction and how you've seen, how, if anything you've noticed that has changed over time that's improved or digressed in any way that you can give me some input, that would be great.

Okay, Bismillah. How does my publishing house interpret and respond to emerging trends? This is a very broad question because, on the one hand, you have reading trends which have stood the test of the

latest reading trends. So for example, they tend to gravitate towards books which feature protagonists, which reflect us, right? So everybody is in search of a protagonist who reflects who they can relate to and who reflects their lifestyle. Am I right? So in that way, I feel that's not particularly a general trend. So in that way, we aim to create protagonists who our little niche community and our little niche target audience can relate to. It makes sense to them. So in that way. But when you talk about emerging trends, then we notice, for example, young adults, prefer a tone of voice where their kind of language, the Gen X kind of language. We have a new series, which is a young adult series and it's written in the tone of the audience and by capturing their voices and experiences, we try to make the books as relatable as possible. I hope I'm making sense of what I'm saying, right? So there's a broad trend, which has to do with the test of time, where we tend to gravitate towards books which feature protagonists, who reflect our own identities. Now, our target audience is a very, very small percentage of the population. We work within a very niche audience. And this may seem counterintuitive in a world where bigger is better. We don't intend to grow further than our niche audience if that makes sense. Because we find that in this niche market that we are aiming for, a lack of literature available for us. Hence, we need to develop the company, and that's why we started in the first place. Right? So I hope that answered your question.

Now that was interpretable. How do we respond? If you're asking about specific trends, we've noticed that hint towards young adult books written in the language and tone of the audience and we try to keep it engaging and relatable. And while halal books have become more accessible in recent times with a lot of Muslim publishers, for example, Kube Publishing in the UK and then we have Rukaiya's Bookshop in Canada. Halal books have become more accessible, but they still, I feel, remain the lack of literature that authentically portrays us as South African Muslim females specifically. So Alhamdulillah, that's where we came in with our response to provide this for our generation. I also find that we are in a very, very peculiar part of our growth in South Africa. We have remnants of apartheid and remnants of an Indian caste system still in today's Muslim Indian society. And it's becoming less and less apparent with future generations so our generation is different, like my parents' generation, my generation, and my children's generation, I feel our stories need to be captured because we find ourselves in a very, very different situation in history. Where nobody has been through what we've been through, and nobody will go through what we've been through. You know what I'm saying? So, with the remnants of apartheid and the remnants of an Indian caste system, we find ourselves in a very peculiar instance in history, and I would really, really like to capture that. That's why on my Instagram page, when I say, we're trying to capture or encapsulate the stories of our generation, that's what I mean. And our standards and style of writing tend to align with international norms. Our content is distinctly tailored to cater to our niche audience, forming a Western-centric approach. So we tend to write, and we tend to edit to international norms, and our niche community.

Nice, I took so long to answer the first question, with the next question: How does my publishing house commission or accept manuscripts? So, first of all, we aim to share beneficial knowledge. And

beneficial knowledge served as our guiding principle. So the biggest influencing factor when we receive a manuscript, is that we first view it through the lens of our intentions and the lens of whether or not it will impart valuable knowledge to the reader. Our main list of intentions which we go through with every manuscript that we review is number one, to please Allah, Al Fatiha. Number two is to seek knowledge and spread it. Number three, we want to make sure that every one of our publications is some form of dawah. So Dawah through print is an intention of ours. Number four, to highlight the beauty of Islam. So if any manuscript comes in which, is South African, follows community guidelines, but portrays Islam in a negative light, then ideally we, we, we don't go forward or maybe we speak to the author to get their visions to align with ours and see if they're willing to. And then number five is to tell the stories of our generation. As I said, we are in a very unique position in history, where our generation has different stories to tell, and I think they ought to be on the pages of literature. So, Alhamdulillah, that's how we select our manuscript, which is very, very specific. And like I said, in a world where bigger is better, it may seem counterintuitive for a small company, which obviously is seeking growth for us to now, you know say no but so many manuscripts, I think it's in keeping with our principle that this is what we're aiming for, and this is what we're going for. And to be honest, there are lots of other publishers on the market. I mean, I'm sure on your publisher list you've seen how many publishers there are in South Africa and the world. So there are lots of other publishers but for this niche, there aren't that many. There are other traditional publishers. So, honestly, I feel that if somebody speaks against Islam, then we're not the right fit for you. Then you might as well go to the traditional publishers who are very happy. Many of my authors have been to traditional publishers. Specifically, one of my authors said that another publisher, I won't mention the name, wanted to add intimacy scenes in their novel because that's what sells. And then, so she came to me and she said, look, this manuscript means a lot to me, but I really don't want it in the wrong hands. So then we had to make sure, do our visions align, and then alhamdulillah, we accepted it, and shukran, alhamdulillah, the author was really, really happy with it. So we're in a market where it's saturated with publishers. What makes us different is that this is our vision. So if that stands in the way of our growth, then so be it. I don't mean to be arrogant or obnoxious, but this is what our aim is. That's why I said I don't specifically know if interviewing me will actually have all the answers to your questions because we are such a tiny little niche company, you know what I'm saying?

FP: No, but that's, that's the whole reason I wanted to focus this for my topic, because it's such a small niche, I want to see what kind of improvements you're seeing or where you would see it going and how you'd want to improve it in any way. Even if you're keeping it small, what kind of quality content you're trying to create and how you're trying to create that is important.

So, okay, I'm sure that will come up in the next question. Let me carry on. Number three, marketing strategies. Our publishing company is still very small. And we don't yet have a dedicated marketing department. So at the moment, we make it very clear to the authors when we're sending out our

contracts, so the authors are then encouraged to create their online profiles, which we obviously help them with and encourage them for, and we are here to guide them as well. If they have an active following because people want to know who the person is behind the book, especially in our small community with a niche audience. They want to know who the person is behind the book and that helps with their sales when they use their personal Instagram account, to promote their book.

So with regard to marketing this is very much author-based at the moment. And we are, inshallah, working on creating a market which allows authors to sell their books without selling themselves. So we deal with female authors and Islamically, women shouldn't leave the house unnecessarily, and women shouldn't have their faces on TV, ideally. I mean there are mixed views on this, but if you're actually looking at that, we are aiming to create a marketing solution which facilitates for the Muslim woman, ideally not having our voices heard. Our faces should be ideally nowhere because I feel that the authors are selling their books and not selling their faces. So Inshallah we are working on social media marketing to give our authors a substitute, a halal way of doing things so that's also part of our growth that we're looking for, Inshallah.

How do you leverage platforms such as BookTok to reach diverse audiences? This is amazing. In this day and age, where such platforms are available to us, there is very little need for us to leave home so our authors use these platforms. BookToks and Bookstagrammers offer an invaluable service and because we don't have a dedicated marketing department, we encourage our authors to use the services of these reviewers. So, for example, if you have a big review on, Bookstagram who gets your word out there it's going to create intrigue for the book.

How is the company adapting its title selection? This is where I said I feel like number one answers this question because to align with reader preferences and market demands we feel that creating protagonists that are relatable for our niche community so that they can understand and see a bit of their identity as well. I think that's how we're adapting our title selection to the reader's preferences. That was very much answered in number one.

What is the relationship with retailers? This I have to tell you, was our biggest obstacle. I had never before I started publishing, I never actually realised how much of a profit margin the big bookstores take, sometimes 60 per cent in a lot of places, and they do not accept books from publishers. They want it through a distributor, who then takes another significant portion of the profit, which leaves authors with obviously very little in their pockets. Part of our reason also for starting our company is to make sure that you don't get taken advantage of and it's unfortunate in this day and age, it's an industry that is meant to celebrate creativity and expression. You know, there's so much exploitation in the market that honestly, I don't think very many people can make a living off being a writer, unfortunately. So in our little way, we are using small bookstores and home industries, we're encouraging relationships between our authors and the small bookstores and home industries. By developing close relationships with these

booksellers, for example, Baitul Hikmah is awesome, and supportive of all our authors, Alhamdulillah, they happily take the books and we offer a good discount to them. So Baitul Hikmah, Al Ansaar Bookstores, Iqra Bookstores in Laudium, and very many other home industries, for example, in Polokwane, in Standerton, and we have a lady in Lenasia. These little home industries and small bookstores by offering them wholesale prices and providing our promotional material to them, I feel we're developing some sort of our own network which Alhamdulillah keeps the profit in the author's pocket where it belongs. So Alhamdulillah, it's coming right, it's very slowly a work in progress, but it is coming right, Shukr Alhamdulillah. And one of our authors does have their books in, I think, Bargain Books, and Exclusive Books. So, obviously, she did that, she said, just to get the name out there, and it's definitely not profitable for her.

When producing books for diverse audiences, we do not as there are many publishing companies available that offer less conservative, more traditional options, and that are not seeking Islamic-based content so we are not specifically aiming our books for diverse audiences, but if our books do come into the hands of diverse audiences, we would love it, we would love for it to be an opportunity to promote understanding, empathy, and acceptance in a world that's so Islamophobic right now, unfortunately, we have to accept that if our books do get into the hands of a critique, for example, we would like it to promote acceptance and understanding, to show that we, too, are regular people. We, too, have one's needs and a love life, for example. So we don't specifically cater for a diverse audience, but we would like to project ourselves in a very positive way to promote understanding and acceptance.

Does your company use digital platforms and what impact has this had? We have used digital platforms, in fact, the bulk of our marketing has been digital, oh sorry, you're saying digital platforms for the books. Right. Okay. So we give our authors the option of having it printed and in e-book form. So far all of them have declined and their biggest issue, so, um, if you're looking at authors who, who write, and they need, or as we said about the profit margins, need to be decent enough, and that's the reason they're not sending it to the big bookstore, then in the same way, offering digital platforms of the book, But the piracy concerns also have the same effect on authors, so far I think one book of ours is available as an e-book. The rest are not. In a world where this approach may seem unconventional, and we do recognise how different our niche is, I would say a safe 90 per cent of our authors choose to not have their books on digital platforms.

Number nine, given challenges in distributing books, what strategies has your publishing office employed? I think I spoke a little about this by collaborating with small businesses and passionate readers. We are trying to establish grassroots networks that help us to distribute books to the smaller areas the process isn't completely streamlined yet but we recognise the immense potential for this by keeping it small, keeping it within the small businesses, booksellers and home industries, we get maximum profit for the authors, which is at the end of the day, our main prerogative, our main idea in

our business is to make it as profitable as possible for the authors that they're not taken advantage of, even if it means we run, with no profit. I don't advertise myself as a non-profit, but I'm very much a non-profit. Almost so, I would say. As long as I get enough to pay my editors and to pay my proofreaders and graphic designers, there are many times that I come out with nothing, and I don't mind. Alhamdulillah, I don't mind, because I am serving the community, I am doing it through, the intention to please Allah, I am doing it for da'wah, and also I am doing it to uplift and empower the authors. That's my intention, Alhamdulillah. I don't always tell anybody that. I don't know if you want to write that down.

Concerning publishing fiction, what challenges have you faced in the production of fiction? The biggest challenge we've faced, in fact, we might use, maintaining originality in our storytelling. So on the one hand, we don't like, for example, seeing this in a ** series we are working on, which is aimed at a target audience of young adults. We don't want it just to come off as a loud, sweet, very high school book we wanted to be authentic, we wanted to be original, and we wanted to be very much rooted in our way of thinking and our lifestyle. We strive for authenticity and uniqueness, and we want to resonate deeply with our community, while also remaining relatable and also teaching lessons. So, for example, if the youth of today have a substitute for the regular books that we used to read, our Enid Blyton and Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew and stuff like that, which is what we used to read, and now it's the idea of, okay, let's look at the older books, Hunger Games and stuff like that. If we're trying to come into the market where we are telling our youth, look, I have a substitute for you, I have a more halal substitute for you, which is equally entertaining, has equal literary value, but will also subconsciously teach you better lessons in life. We have to strive to keep it as entertaining as possible because we're living in an era where our youth specifically look for instant gratification and if they read the first page of a book and it doesn't interest them, thank you very much. I'm putting the book down. So I noticed most of our customers are usually the parents of these youths. We are trying to encourage, to put them on the straight path, to help them to see life differently. We can choose halal without looking backwards. We can choose to make better choices for our faith, which are not backward and are accepted. And seeing protagonists who are actually choosing the right way of doing things can Inshallah, guide our youth towards a better way of doing things. Another challenge which we noticed is our dialect, our specific South African way of speaking, especially in the Indian community, is valued and appreciated in our books. For example, when we use slang like chow in a book, right, it definitely intrigues our readers who haven't read a book with the word chow in it. So the trick and the challenge is to get our dialect into the book, but also to strike a balance between linguistic correctness. So you have to make it linguistically correct, but also relatable. So that's also another challenge that we face when we want to show our voice, but we also have to be linguistically correct. And Alhamdulillah, you know, many, many people, I don't know if you read articles about African writers are often condemned for writing for a Western audience. That's one of the biggest challenges all African writers face. Most of them write for a Western audience. Jane

Austen never wrote for a Western audience. She wrote about her life, and she has immortalised those little places that she wrote about. Am I right? So in that way, we also aim to immortalise our little community and the little places that we live in. We don't intend to write for a Western audience. We intend to immortalise us and our generation and our little niche community here in South Africa and let it be on the pages of literature that we were here and we existed and this was our dialect.

How does your company ensure authentic portrayals of various characters? Essentially we're telling our own stories and that's what makes it authentic. I am within this community. My authors are within this community, and we are telling our story. So we are 100 percent authentic. So we don't have to try to make our characters sound authentic, because, in essence, we're writing about ourselves. And that's what sets this women's fiction publishing house apart.

How does your publishing house aim to represent international experiences in fiction? Our commitment is to portray authentic South African experiences and that's what makes us unique. If the international experience is about a South African on holiday or a South African expat, our book ** which launched overseas was well-received

Number 13, how does your company incorporate reader feedback and what role does it play? We have a team of beta readers who we have specifically hand-chosen, who represent our target audience for each of the titles that we're working on. In that selection of beta readers, they give us, uh, valuable insights and they give us different perspectives on the manuscripts before publication. So usually by about stage 3 of developmental editing, before it goes into the nitty gritty of copy and line editing, that's when we now send it out to our beta readers and await their insights and perspective before we continue with the nitty gritty editing. So, we actively seek and value the input of these beta readers, and their feedback informs our editorial decisions. So even if it means now, from the feedback of the beta readers, we have to go back to the drawing board and take it back to developmental editing, then that's what we do. So a lot of our editorial decisions do come from our beta readers, and they really, really provide valuable insight for us.

FP: have you considered registering for PASA for the Publishers Association of South Africa?

Yes, I did. Yes, I did. And their costs are extremely high. If I have to tell you that I don't make that much in a year and if I do register for PASA, it will directly influence how much I then have to charge my authors, which is not something I'm willing to do. Our authors have a limited budget. They're generally females and they're generally mothers and in our community, unfortunately, we have to be very open about it. They don't have a huge budget and everybody has a story worth telling and if we allow cost and affordability to stand in the way of getting our stories out there, then I think we're really doing an injustice to society.

FP: How do you feel about flawed characters in your books?

Uh, I think flawed characters are very realistic. So I did a poll on Instagram, I think just last week, asking if they prefer flawed characters or do they believe that reading is an escape and generally the main characters should be flawless. Ideally, we need to escape there are enough problems in the world and you want to just live in the moment in a novel. I gave them an option or a bit of both and amazingly a bit of both is what everybody wants. So, we have to strike a balance between realistically flawed characters who you know, are more relatable and, having these flawless, perfect characters, who people can aspire towards and also escape real life. Yeah, but also have like a happy ending at the end where they figured it out in a way.

FP: My second last question is how would you approach if a non-Muslim author came to you? How do you feel about non-Muslim authors writing about Muslim experiences? How would you advise them in your capacity?

I did encounter a few, um, unfortunately, in a very polite, dignified, and respectable manner. Initially, I try to understand their intentions. However, there are numerous alternatives available, especially in South Africa and internationally, for such a book that has been previously undertaken. This isn't quite the focus of our current work. I am very interested in providing advisory services. I have experience in this area, and it often involves lively debate. One must be prepared for the challenge. In a world where the Muslim voice is frequently marginalized and lacks sufficient intellectual advocacy, I believe such a role is crucial.

FP: And my last question is basically about the size of your company. Just out of curiosity

I have about five editors who I pick and choose according to the project requirements. For example, I receive a manuscript, a poetry manuscript, and I know my team, alhamdulillah, and I know who's capable of handling which workload. And then I will specifically handpick the editors for the book, and then we will work on it together. So ideally I am the head of all the teams that we create, only because I need to keep my finger in the pie by checking our intentions at all times. And then from there, I pick and choose the editors to work with me as a team. And that's why we produce so few books. It's because everything is very personal with us. So I will specifically choose a team and then we will work together on it. And it takes a lot of my time. I'm a stay-at-home mom. I've got five children as well. But it's such a beautiful and rewarding experience to be able to produce these books and especially to make the authors happy. You know many authors say, I'm so sorry. I just need to change this. I said, please don't be sorry. That is our job. We will not complete the book until you are completely happy. At the end of the day, it's your voice. It's your vision. We are just here to polish it and that's something I feel that unfortunately, it has to be said that this lack of respect and moral ethics in our community is degrading and it's not a norm. It's not a norm to offer this kind of service and I will continue working until you are happy at no additional cost. And it's become so out of the norm that people thank me for it, and I view it as a norm. I feel as a Muslimah, it is my duty to take on the amanah of somebody else, of your

intellectual property, and to handle it with care. And to make sure that you're happy with it at the end of the day. So, that's my little company and I know people have told me I'm crazy. I know family have told me, I don't know how you expect to grow in this publishing company. And I'm adamant. We have 3 books in the pipeline, due to be launched in 2024.

Jazakallah. You know, uh, in every, uh, in every company, every new endeavour, we get the lovers and the haters. Of course. And make dua you know, we get more lovers than haters. Let's just say that. Inshallah.

My Notes

This publishing house operates remotely, where all staff, including the owner, work from home. This setup involves stay-at-home moms who are professionals in editing and proofreading. This arrangement not only leverages our educational backgrounds but also provides a fulfilling work-life balance. The team is comprised of skilled individuals including former teachers and those with master's degrees in publishing. Some hold a degree in English literature from UNISA, supplemented by various courses over the years.

In terms of emerging trends in publishing, they focus on creating relatable protagonists for their niche audience, which includes a significant focus on young adults who prefer modern, relatable tones in literature. Their recent series is a testament to this approach, designed to resonate deeply with the intended audience. Despite the narrow focus of their audience, they do not aim to expand beyond the niche. This strategy ensures they address the underrepresented areas within the literary market, especially catering to South African Muslim females—a demographic often overlooked.

Addressing changes in Muslim representative fiction, they've seen both progress and areas needing improvement. Their efforts are geared towards providing literature that not only entertains but educates and reflects the authentic experiences of their community, against the backdrop of South Africa's unique socio-political landscape, including the remnants of apartheid and the Indian caste system.

Their submission process for manuscripts is rigorous, reflecting a commitment to beneficial knowledge. They assess potential publications through a lens that ensures they align with their values, promote Islamic teachings, and contribute positively to the community. This focused approach has helped maintain a clear vision and avoid diluting the brand with content that does not meet these criteria.

Marketing strategies are primarily author-based, encouraging them to build their online presence while they provide the necessary support. This approach aligns with values of modesty and privacy, particularly concerning female authors. Regarding digital platforms, while they offer potential, they tread carefully due to concerns about piracy and the dilution of content quality. The primary focus remains on physical books, which constitute the majority of their publications.

In distribution, they have found success in partnering with small bookstores and home industries, which allows us to bypass the hefty margins taken by larger distributors. This not only supports local businesses but also ensures a fairer distribution of profits.

One of our significant challenges is ensuring the authenticity of our stories. By telling our own stories, written by authors from within the community, we maintain a genuine narrative that resonates with our readers.

Lastly, we continuously incorporate reader feedback through a team of beta readers who ensure our publications meet the community's expectations and preferences.

Our small team is dynamic and adaptable, allowing us to manage a variety of projects efficiently. Despite our modest size, our impact and output are significant, demonstrating the effectiveness of our focused approach in publishing.

This detailed insight into our operations and philosophy highlights our dedication to representing and uplifting the voices within our community, ensuring they are heard and respected on their terms.

Baitul Hikmah – Tazkiyyah Amra

My Notes

- Based in Durban
- Closely follows market trends and consumer demands - looks at international book market performance.
- Manuscript selection - focuses on potential profitability and trends if authors have a social media presence and have been published previously.
- Recommends self-publishing for less promising manuscripts to shift financial responsibilities to authors
- Specialises in children's books over adult titles due to better marketability
- Influenced by global visibility on platforms like TikTok and Instagram for international authors
- Minimal marketing for fiction, with a focus on self-development and Islamic studies.
- Uses social media and book events to enhance visibility
- Uncertain about the effectiveness of platforms like Bookstagram or BookTok in South Africa
- Aligns with consumer interests in self-help
- Expanded product development to include Quran journals.
- Shift from valuing literary quality to prioritising market demand in publishing decisions.

D) MBR Scale

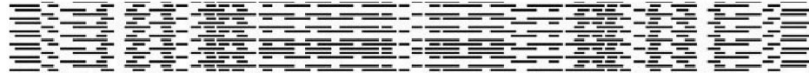
<p>Highly Representative and Authentic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The literature presents a nuanced perspective of Islam, emphasising its multifaceted nature and the diversity of beliefs and practices within the Muslim community. • Characters' spiritual struggles are depicted as integral to their personal growth and development, avoiding facile attributions of their challenges to Islam. • Depictions of religious people are rich in nuance, reflecting a wide array of personalities and backgrounds. • Both devout and less devout Muslims are portrayed as complex individuals, displaying a range of personality traits and attitudes. • The "good Muslim" character transcends superficial traits, defined instead by their character, values, and actions. • Islam serves as a meaningful factor in character development, with characters drawing strength, guidance, and personal growth from their faith. • Muslim characters are depicted with authenticity and respect, with careful attention to details such as prayer, cultural practices, and personal struggles. • The narrative avoids tokenism and delves into the intricate identities and experiences of Muslim characters while sidestepping stereotypes and inconsistencies (Muslim Book Reviewers [@muslimbookreviewers], 2023).
<p>Moderately Representative and Authentic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The portrayal of Islam carries some depth, though occasional simplifications or generalisations may be present. • Characters' faith-related struggles are explored, but there may be moments where Islam is somewhat unfairly implicated in their challenges. • Religious parents and less practising Muslims are depicted with varying degrees of nuance, with occasional instances of stereotyping. • The "good Muslim" character may possess some stereotypical attributes, but there is room for character development and complexity. • While Islam's role in character development is evident, it may not consistently achieve a high level of development. • Muslim characters are generally authentic, but their portrayal might lack some depth (Muslim Book Reviewers [@muslimbookreviewers], 2023).
<p>Problematic and Stereotypical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islam is presented in a one-dimensional or antagonistic manner, reinforcing harmful stereotypes. • Characters' struggles with faith are unjustly attributed to Islam or portrayed as weaknesses. • Religious parents are consistently depicted as strict and harsh, while less practising Muslims are idealised. • The "good Muslim" character is rigidly defined by outward appearances and religiosity, with minimal character depth. • Islam is unfairly scapegoated for characters' problems and obstacles, playing no meaningful role in their development. • Muslim characters are reduced to superficial stereotypes and tokenism, failing to authentically represent their experiences. • Readers can utilise this assessment framework to critically evaluate the depiction of Islam and Muslim characters in literature, thereby encouraging the creation of narratives that offer more nuanced and authentic insights into the Muslim experience (Muslim Book Reviewers [@muslimbookreviewers], 2023).

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F) Consent Forms

Consent Form



I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the student researcher of the purpose, procedures, and my rights as a participant. I have received and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I have also been informed of:

- The reasons why I was selected to participate in this research project
 - The nature of my participation in the form of an interview
 - The duration of the interview
 - The voluntary nature, refusal to answer, and withdrawal from the interview
 - There is no payment or incentives
 - No loss of benefits or risks
 - My guaranteed confidentiality
 - How the information will be used and disseminated
-
- I will waive anonymity (if you want to be anonymous do not tick this box)
 - I agree to participate by undertaking the interview
 - I agree to the audio recording of the interview

Interviewees signature

18 April 2024

Date

Researchers signature

18/04/2024

Date

Consent Form



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- I will waive anonymity (if you want to be anonymous do not tick this box)
- I agree to participate by undertaking the interview
- I agree to the audio recording of the interview

 Pamra

Interviewees signature

 25/04/24

Date

 [Signature]

Researchers signature

 25/04/2024

Date

Consent Form



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Interviewees signature

3 June 2024

Date

Researchers signature

15/04/2024

Date

Consent Form



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 - I agree to participate by undertaking the interview
 - I agree to the audio recording of the interview



Interviewees signature

22 April 2024

Date



Researchers signature

22/04/2024

Date