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Reinterpreting Identity Crisis as a Postcolonial theme in The Road to Mecca by Muhammad Asad; A conceptual framework

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Amrozia Nazar
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government graduate college for women, Sheikhupura, Pakistan.
Email: amrozianazar@gmail.com
Maryum
Independent Researcher, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Email: maryumshaheen66@gmail.com.

Abstract
Throughout English literature we come across many travelogues which describe the journey of a person from one place to another. The Road to Makkah is one of its kinds of an "autobiographical travelogue" which presents the writer's spiritual journey to "reach the ultimate goal", to reach the "end of the road". The present research deals with "identity crisis" faced by Muhammad Asad while searching for " definite orbit" of being. The research plans to reinterpret this identity crisis as a postcolonial theme by using discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis and content analysis.
Keywords: Postcolonialism, Identity crisis, Content analysis.

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Introduction:

The present research aims at analyzing Identity crisis faced by Muhammad Asad in his autobiographical travelogue named "The Road to Mecca" which is one of the leading themes found in postcolonial literature. The research design for the present study will be a mixture of quantitative as well as qualitative methods using content analysis, textual analysis and critical discourse analysis (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018).

The Identity crisis faced by Muhammad Asad in his early days of his life as a

newspaper reporter of a leading newspaper named Frankfurter Zeitung describes his spiritual journey and the crisis he faced while first being a Jew, then an atheist and then finally as a Muslim (Asad, 2000). He was first Leopold Weiss, born as a Jew and then went on to become Mohammed Asad after he travelled and researched the vast expanse of the Arabian desert and Arabian culture. He then became the advocate of Muslim unity among all the Muslim countries of the world. The present study would describe the linguistic patterns used by the writer in his autobiographical travelogue. The book also influences the minds of the readers as they would identify themselves with the writer, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. The research would analyze the content and contextual implications used by the author to describe identity issues and their resolution through the course of his journey from and to Europe and finally his 'Belonging to A Definite Orbit'.

In addition to this the current study aims to address various research questions; first, what type of Identity crisis is being depicted by Muhammad Asad in the road to Mecca? Second, what kind of effect had the age cultural background and marital status on the mind of the writer in shaping his views about Islam? Third, How the writer has described identity crisis in the travelogue. Fourth, which word/s, phrase/s, sentence/s and paragraph/s depict the writer's inner turmoil to search for Identity. Therefore, the study comes up with various research objectives i.e., to delineate the writer's spiritual journey, to disambiguate the writer's search for the ultimate truth, to spot out the identity crisis faced by the writer, to describe the alienating factors which led to the Identity crisis, to evaluate the perception of a westerner about Islam and finally, to highlight the linguistic implications and the textual delineation by content and critical discourse analysis.

Literature Review:

The book under discussion got instant critical appreciation from the notable and prestigious press of the New York Times where Simon and Schuster have published it. It has been widely read by many audiences ranging from the westerners to the orients and from the non-Muslims to the Muslims (Darr, 2011; Harder, Asad, & Simon, 1998). Some of the views of the critics about the book are delineated as under:

According to Beckert (2015) a book "an intensely interesting and moving book" which tells about the critical acclaim this book received shortly after it being published in 1954. The critic finds this autobiographical travelogue as the most authentic piece of writing about the spiritual journey of a person who was searching for the ultimate truth and not only for himself did he give words to his memories of becoming a Muslim after living with the Arabs for quite some time and during his visit to the Arabian peninsula in his youth as a newspaper correspondent, he also portrayed the Identity crisis faced by many youth of his times in particular and the soul searching process of the thinking minds of the westerners in general.

The New York Post appreciates work by Asad under the critical lens of discourse analysis in these words," a very rare and powerful book, raised completely above the ordinary by its candor and intelligence" (Fairclough, 2003).

A reviewer in the Christian Science Monitor commented about this book by applying psychoanalytical theory using these words," A book trenchant with adventure magnificently described and a commentary upon the inner meaning of Arab and Muslim life, helpful to all who would achieve more accurate understanding of the Arabs and their land (Fairclough, 2013). The psychoanalytical approach can also be seen by reviewing the review list in United Kingdom in 2007 when we read the following words, "This is a book about travel and journey of one man through the geographical roads of the material earth as

well as the spiritual Odyssey he makes through the hills and plains of his own soul."

New York World-Telegram has used the lens of comparative study and described the book by comparing it with the writers of critical acclaim. These are the exact words used in the review," As suffused with Arab lore as Sir Richard Burton and almost as adventuresome as T.E. Lawrence, Muhammad Asad offers a similar blend of daring action and thoughtful observation. In addition, he surpasses either of these great predecessors as a prose stylist and interpreter of the Islamic faith. The review answers both the questions about what the writer has written and how he has written it (Lewis, 2014).

In Book of the Month Club New York, Nawwab, (2002) used his personal views in describing the book by saying," The road to Mecca combines the adventure and scenic beauty of a good travel book, unusually informed comments on near Eastern affairs, and a deeply thoughtful account of a man's finding of his own path. These words clearly describe the writer's point of view in terms of deconstruction and politico cultural depiction of the Arab world. The reviewer also describes the book using content analysis. In the next lines the reviewer uses the following words "An interesting and inspiring way to learn more about Islam in a way especially accessible to the Westerner as the author is a Westerner who chose to accept the faith of Islam. The reviewer has delineated one of the major themes of postcolonial literature, the difference between a westerner's point of view about the Orient.

Beckert (2015) has used dramatic compression in the chronological sequencing of the major events in the book as well as the life of the author. "In this extraordinary and beautifully written autobiography, Asad tells of his initial rejection of all institutional religions, his entree into Taoism, his fascinating travels as a diplomat, and finally his embrace of Islam." The review gives us an

overview as well as the complete autobiographical notes about the author (Impact International, 2002; Kramer, 1999).

In the words of Charles Haywood," This is a fascinating book—half travelogue and half conversion memoir. His critique has used the canon of dialogism. He gives us a clear picture of how a person's relationship to the past shapes his future (Rubin, 2016).

Husnain Yousaf in his review uses a conventional approach of his appreciation of this travelogue which lends authenticity to his point of view as he uses the same words of the author. He writes," The book is not all about the travelling of a person, but it also gives the reader a clear picture of cultures of middle east also. Apart from being a travel story it is a "story of story" as the author himself has described" (Weiss, 2022).

Nawwab, (2002) is the next critic who gives us the idea behind the present research. He uses the following words to express the dilemma of people nowadays which lends this book universality. He recommends this book to," Anyone interested in learning more about Islam or the search for personal-identity, religious-quest" (Islamicpedia, 2014).

Amin (2011) has taken the help of Structuralism to talk about how the book has been written. He says, "Structurally the book is written as a series of flashbacks during his last 23-day journey to Mecca."

From the above discussed reviews of literature, it is obvious about the writing techniques used by the writer and about what he has written. But much research is needed on the present book as a postcolonial piece of literature as it deals with unhomeliness, alienation, hybridity, and Orientalism. But Identity Crisis needs to be researched from the text using content analysis, textual analysis, and discourse analysis.

Proposed Methodology:

The methodology used in this research would include content analysis, textual analysis and critical discourse analysis. It is an effort to bring to light the identity crisis faced by a westerner and his final association to a definite orbit of ideas presented by Islamic ideology. The focus is on the identity crisis faced by the author and its depiction through the words and phrases used by him.

Conclusion:

The research hopes to draw the following conclusions from the findings. The work helps to redress the Islamophobic views of the Westerners as a first-hand experience of a Jew among Muslims as a non- Muslim and then as a Muslim among the Muslims. The author presents the solution to the problems posed by the non-Muslims against Muslims. The work's authenticity as an autobiographical travelogue provides a vivid picture of a person searching for the ultimate truth.

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