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Table of Contents

Editorial Team

Table of Contents

Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi on Ummah and Its Relevance to Society 5.0.....(85)

Nabila Huringiin, Alia Safitri

Language Shift and Endangerment of Sundanese Banten Dialect in South Tangerang Indonesia(99)

Umi Kulsum, Azhari Dasman Darnis, Adang Asdari

Muhammadiyah's Tajdid and Sufism between Purification and Modernization(113)

Zubair, Muhammad Farkhan, Zakiya Darajat, M. Agus Suriadi, Masri Mansoer, Abdul Fattah

Rewriting '9/11 or US invasion of Iraq' Traumatic Memories in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams(129)

Hasnul Insani Djohar

The Correlation of Library Personnel Work Attitude and Work Motivation to Job Performance in Nigeria(141)

Qudus Ajibola Bankole, Mohammed Lawal Akanbi, Kabiru Gambari Sulaiman

The Strategies of Sufi Discourse in Fostering Communal Immunity: The Sufi as a Nomadic Subject(157)

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Rewriting '9/11 or US invasion of Iraq' Traumatic Memories in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams

Hasnul Insani Djohar

Department of English Literature, Faculty of Adab and Humanities
Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: [email: hdjohar@uinjkt.ac.id](mailto:hdjohar@uinjkt.ac.id)

Abstract

This paper examines how the US-Pakistani Muslimahs or Muslim women live in the US after US Invasion of Iraq (2003) in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams (2009). In the novel, Abdullah depicts her characters as victims of the 9/11 attacks to challenge US dominance in 9/11 narratives, which tend to show how the US becomes the victim, instead of the perpetrator of the US invasion of Iraq. By engaging with postcolonialism and 9/11 studies, this paper questions US anti-Muslim racism, which tends to associate Muslims with terrorism by exploring the ideas of trauma of being attacked by US extremists. This paper found that Abdullah's Saffron Dreams depicts US Pakistani Muslimah struggling to seek social justice and US belonging. In doing so, this novel resists anti-Muslim racism by depicting its protagonists as facing several trauma, which is ironically continued by her next generation, who is suffering from multiple born defect representing their endless traumatic experiences living in the US after US invasion of Iraq. By exploring US-Pakistani-Muslimah stories, this novel suggests how the Pakistani Muslim diaspora not only struggles to live in the US after the US invasion of Iraq but also faces multiple trauma, especially being attacked by US extremists. This multiple trauma work to question US-trauma centric in dominant narratives. Thus, it is important to investigate traumatic stories from marginal experiences to undermine dominant narratives, which tend to exclude marginal memories after US invasion of Iraq from US belonging.

Keywords: : *The US Invasion of Iraq, Muslim Diaspora, US-Pakistani Muslimahs, Anti-Muslim Racism, 9/11 narratives, Traumatic experiences and memories.*

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Introduction

Muslims have often portrayed as a difficult existence in orientalist debates as they tend to exclude Muslims from the idea of freedom and modernity. This is why although Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) is seemingly old; it is still relevant to challenge the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in the Western world, especially in the US and the UK. Indeed, no discussion Conclusion on of contemporary scholarship treating the representation of Muslims is complete without mention of Said's *Orientalism*. Said argues that "as much as the West itself, the Orient is an



idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that has given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other” (Said, 13). The questions raised by Said were ones he returned to as late as 1981 in *Covering Islam*, where he argues that “knowledge of Islam and Islamic peoples has generally proceeded not only from dominance and confrontation but also from cultural antipathy” (p. 155). The importance of and engagement with Said’s work is evident in Evelyn Alsultany (2012), Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin’s investigations (2011). Alsultany argues that Orientalism “has stereotyped and misrepresented Arabs and Muslims for over a century,” with very few exceptions that “sympathetic portrayals would appear during [the] fraught moment” (Alsultany, 2), although these sympathetic depictions work on very superficial levels, which substantially function to conceal U.S. foreign policies in the Middle East (p. 2). Alsultany expands the concepts Said explored in *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam* by thinking through these “sympathetic portrayals”.

Morey and Yaqin, however, explore the figure of the Muslim through the categories of “the enemy within” and “Outsider” (Morey, 1). These portrayals gloss over the controversies around “veiling, cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Israel-Palestine, or protests about the knighthood given to Salman Rushdie” (p. 1). Indeed, Muslims always appear as “a problematic presence, troubling those values of individualism and freedom said to define Western nations” (p. 1). Arguably, these images are “distorted abstraction,” which extrapolate from the context certain controversies as they not only frame Muslims as “a homogenous, zombie-like body, incapable of independent thought,” but also represent Muslims as “whipped into a frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging backward worldview” (p. 1). To challenge these reductionist views, it is important to investigate how U.S Muslim women, including a U.S Pakistani, such as Shaila Abdullah, tell their own experiences living as a diasporic woman in the U.S. to reveal various ways of life of Muslim diaspora to challenge limited representations of Muslim women in the orientalist debates.

Pakistani traditions and literature have been excluded from ethnic American literature, especially in Asian-American studies, although there are some Pakistani-American writers, such as Mohsin Hamid, Nafisa Haji, and Shaila Abdullah have published their literary works since 2003 when the US invaded Iraq. After the US invasion of Iraq, the Islamic world, including Pakistan has become the object of the media and literature themes. Muneeza Shamsie (2011) argues that Pakistan is “at the center of geopolitical conflict and has been overtaken by increasing violence and religious extremism” (1). Indeed, Pakistan represents a development of “new cultural expressions in music, art, and literature” (1). In the literary world, Claire Chambers (2011) argues that “the recent flowering of Pakistani fiction in English has received much news media coverage, and great critical attention when compared to the scant material on the subject before the 1990s” (p. 1). Indeed, British Pakistani writers, such as Nadeem Aslam and Mohammad Hanif, published Many Pakistani diasporic writings as Chambers adds, “these undeniably excellent Pakistani writers could give the mistaken impression that Pakistani writing is dominated by male writers” (p. 2). Moreover, there are some creative Muslim-Pakistani women’s writers, such as Kamila Shamsie, Leila Aboulela, and Tahmina Anam. However, many of them are British Muslim women writers, instead of Pakistani American background as this paper seeks to address. Additionally, when discussing Muslim women and literature, many of them are depicted as politically and religiously struggling to live in both homelands and host lands. As Asma Mansoor (2014) argues that in the context of South Asian Muslims, “the issues of political abuse and cultural constraints need to be considered in the evaluation of their struggles” (p. 2). These struggles can be seen through the way Shaila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* (2009) depicts the protagonist as struggling to challenge both anti-Muslim racism and reductionist views of Muslim women in orientalist debates as this paper seeks to address.

This paper examines how U.S Pakistani Muslimahs live in the U.S after the invasion of Iraq in Shaila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* (2009). There are some scholars, such as Deborah Hall (2010) and Sabiha Sorgun (2011) who also examine Abdullah’s work that mainly focus on issues of domesticity, such as motherhood and family. However, none of the scholars investigate how Abdullah’s novel explores the ideas of trauma experienced by Pakistani-Americans that work to question the dominant trauma narratives, which mainly describe how Anglo-Americans struggle to live after the 9/11

attacks. In doing so, this paper focuses on issues faced by the Muslim diaspora after the US invasion of Iraq by addressing the following questions: 1) How is a US Pakistani Muslimah or Muslim woman portrayed in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*? 2) How does Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* explore 9/11 traumatic experiences to counter anti-Muslim racism? Thus, this paper aims to investigate how a US Pakistani Muslimah is depicted in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*; to examine how Abdullah's novel questions anti-Muslim racism by exploring the ideas of trauma and by depicting Muslim women characters as struggling to fight for social justice and negotiate their identity. Thus, the significance of this research is to provide current debates in Muslim diaspora, in this case, Pakistani-Americans by using the colonized Muslim women's and Islamic perspectives, which are seemingly excluded in diaspora studies and world literature. Indeed, Abdullah's novel reveals the struggles of Muslim women living in the US, especially after the US invasion of Iraq, which can be seen through the way how the protagonist, Arissa, is often seen as a threat and enemy by the American extremists because of her faith and identity represented by her hijab. As discussed previously, this orientalist perception is criticized by Said who argues that the Orient is created to maintain Western history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary become reality for the West, in this case, Anglo-American society. To encounter U.S. dominance in representing the Muslim world, especially after the 9/11 attacks, in examining this novel, I use the term after U.S. invasion of Iraq, instead of after 9/11, as the former term is inspired by Neil Lazarus's Postcolonial studies after the invasion of Iraq (2006). Lazarus (2006) argues that "the invasion, occupation and long-term destabilization of Iraq will prove to be an event of such specific importance to postcolonial studies as to force a broad reconsideration of dominant assumptions and prevailing modes of practices; but the likelihood is that it will not" (p. 20). Lazarus suggests that the term "post-9/11" positions the U.S. as a victim and the invasion of Iraq, therefore, as a measured and appropriate course of action. To use the term "after the invasion of Iraq" challenges the "rightness" of U.S. incursions in the Middle East after the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. To both appreciate Lazarus's idea and challenge dominant discourses, in this paper, the terms "after the invasion of Iraq" will be used mostly to represent the larger cultural and historical scopes in contemporary American-Muslim writing. Indeed, Abdullah's text destabilizes anti-Muslim racism by depicting her characters as victims of U.S. racism after the Invasion of Iraq.

Method

This research investigates how Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009) explores its protagonist's traumatic experiences of living in the US after September 11 attacks and after US invasion of Iraq. This traumatic experiences are important to explore to undermine US 9/11 traumatic narratives, which tend to exclude Muslim women or Muslimah immigrants from US belonging. This project uses critical and close textual analysis by evaluating the primary text, Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, by engaging with secondary texts, which discuss Abdullah's novel, and the contextual texts to support my thesis statement, which argue that Abdullah's novel utilizes marginal traumatic experiences of the 9/11 attacks to undermine dominant 9/11 traumatic narratives focusing on merely US trauma. With its engagement with 9/11 studies and the frameworks of traumatic memory studies, this paper reveals how Abdullah's novel excavates her women's traumatic memories, including memories of being a Pakistani Muslimah living both in the hostland, the US, and in the homeland, Pakistan. By examining these marginal traumatic memories, we understand what it means to be a US-Pakistan Muslimah who struggles to live in the US as a diasporic or immigrant Muslimah who is often attached to the ideas of terrorism and oppression. To resist to these limited views of Muslimahs, Abdullah depicts her protagonist, Arissa, as an independent woman who can raise her disabled son regardless the fact that she herself faced traumatic experiences of being attack by US extremists and being left by her mother who likely admires US dreamland to pursue her hedonistic dreams. These traumatic experiences and memories are explored in the following section of the findings and discussion.

Results and Discussion

This study discusses three main points. The first one is Pakistani Muslimah diaspora in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, which focuses on how Pakistani Muslimah diaspora live in the US after

US invasion of Iraq. The second one is rewriting US-Muslimah's traumatic memories and Journeys, which focuses on how this section questions US centric or dominant traumatic narratives after US Invasion of Iraq. The last one is rewriting 9/11 trauma and domestic trauma which focuses on how this section links the protagonist's domestic trauma to 9/11 or US invasion of Iraq trauma.

Pakistani Muslimah Diaspora in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams

The word diaspora derives from the Greek: dia (through) and speirein (to scatter), thus diaspora refers to a "dispersion from" (Webster's Dictionary). Avtar Brah (1996) argues that diaspora embodies "a notion of a center, a locus, a 'home' from where the dispersion occurs. It invokes images of multiple journeys" (p. 181). In Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009), the protagonist not only faces the dispersion of her family but also the fractions of her identity because of anti-Muslim racism. However, the fraction faced by the Muslim diaspora is often covered by the dominant narratives of the 9/11 texts, which mainly focus on the ideas of US-centric trauma. Dawn Alexander (2011) states that: "everyone always considers how America felt during 9/11, but no one ever considered how the Muslims have felt" (p. 1). Arguably, in the western perspective, Anglo-Americans are victims of 9/11, instead of the perpetrator of the invasion of Iraq. To challenge this limited perspective, Abdullah's novel provides a unique story from the view of a Muslim woman. In the novel, the protagonist's husband, Faizan, died while working as a waiter in a restaurant in the Twin Tower. Since then, Arissa has become a single mother who raises her son in complex and "racial" environments. A few days after the U.S invasion of Iraq, American extremists because of anti-Muslim racism assault the protagonist who wears the hijab. To challenge this racism, Abdullah depicts Arissa's son, Raian, as a disabled child to represent U.S. Muslims as marginal and vulnerable citizens who struggle to fight against anti-Muslim racism. In Abdullah's story, when Arissa was pregnant with Raian, the U.S. extremists attacked her and as the result, Raian was born as a "CHARGE defect" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 50). By depicting the protagonist as being attacked by white extremists, the narrator illuminates how Arissa and her family intersect with American society, which tends to have prejudice towards the Muslim diaspora, especially after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. This prejudice can be seen in the survey conducted by the Arab American Institute, which was published in the Washington Post on August 24, 2012, the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans deteriorated significantly after 2000. In 2000 (23 August), 41 percent of non-Muslim Americans had unfavorable views of Muslims, compared to 40 percent who held favorable views. In 2003, 47 percent of Americans viewed Muslims favorably compared to 32 percent who did not. This tension is increased in 2010: 55 percent of Americans viewed Muslims unfavorably, compared to 35 percent with favorable views. The latest poll surveyed 1,052 people between August 15-16, 2012. Based on these polls it can be argued that the prejudices towards Muslims in America have seriously increased, especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Historically, the reason why these extremist Americans attacking the protagonist is that some propaganda in both the media and white religious debates tend to perceive Muslims in prejudice and bias. For example, in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (2011) begin their book by questioning Franklin Graham's Christian evangelist statements: "Islam has attacked us.... The God of Islam is not the same God.... Islam is a very evil religion.... All the values that we as a nation hold dear, they don't share the same at all, these countries that have the majority of Muslims" (p. xxii). Such expression of Islamophobia results in "exclusion, discrimination, and false presumptions/stereotypes" (p. xxiii). These statements can be connected to the way the American extremists tend to perceive Islam and hijab in a limited way as they fail to understand Muslims in an open mind, instead of prejudice and hatred. To undermine this limited minded, Esposito and Kalin suggest fine lines, which distinguish between "the faith of Islam and those who commit violence and terror in the name of Islam, between the majority of mainstream Muslims and the acts of a minority of Muslim extremists and terrorists" (p. xxxiv). These distinctions should be highlighted in mainstream society to avoid the adoption of foreign and domestic policies that "promote a clash rather than a co-existence of cultures" (p. xxxiv). This is related to preachers of hate, "Muslim and non-Muslim, religious and political leaders, and political commentators" whose "rhetoric incites and demonizes, alienates and marginalizes" (p. xxxiv). This book allows me to investigate further, how American-Muslim women both recount their stories while living in

the U.S., and encounter Islamophobia, especially after the invasion of Iraq. Thus, this paper offers various ways to understand the US-Pakistani diaspora in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* and relates it to contemporary cultural and religious realities.

Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* reveals the struggle of the Muslim diaspora living in the U.S. who is suffering, especially after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. This pain can be seen through the way the narrator describes Raian's condition a month after his birth to emphasize how the Muslim diaspora living in the U.S. faces difficulties. Arissa states: "we finally had a name for all Raian's trouble: CHARGE. Not as in charge ahead and get through it but a syndrome that was attached to him and would continue to pose challenges for my child at every stage of his life. CHARGE was an acronym for multiple birth defect" (p. 170). Raian's tough life represents how US Muslims have to deal with difficulties to be included as American citizens, including convincing the American journalists that they are not terrorists, as the U.S. media speculates. The narrator describes this speculation when an American reporter interviews Arissa: "how does it feel to be attacked by your people?" (p. 123). Arissa answers, "They are not my people." The reporter replies, "They have the same religion as you." Arissa continues to explain, "No, they don't. They don't have a religion. When you put all your potatoes in a sack, you should know they all have unique flavors. Some are rotten, some fresh. Just because they are clumped together doesn't make them all the same" (p. 124). Abdullah uses potatoes to represent the hegemonic generalizations about Islam and Muslims as Arissa states that the terrorists "are not my people" and they "do not have a religion" to challenge the reporter's limited views of Muslims, which tend to be associated with terrorism in U.S. media. Potatoes also represents the nature, which reflects the nature of the dominant society tends to generalize Muslims in old-fashioned stereotypes or association to terrorism leading to Islamophobia. By representing Muslims as potatoes or the nature, Abdullah's text reminds Anglo-American society to recall their nature or their habits to perceive Muslims in a more open-minded way, so they can understand and see the fresh potatoes, which are moderate and heterogeneous Muslim cultures, especially from Asian Muslim traditions, including Pakistan where this novel set.

Moreover, in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, Muslim diaspora are depicted as struggling to resist to American extremists who often attack Muslims, especially Muslimahs as they are wearing the hijab. The first narrator describes when an American extremist almost kills Arissa because she shows her cultural and religious identity by wearing the hijab. When the protagonist is searching for her husband's body at ground zero, Arissa walks home but a loud voice scream at her: "Stop or I'll slice you" (Abdullah, p. 61). This voice comes from one of four white American extremists, who attack Arissa underground. The first narrator describes how the man intimidates and questions her: "Where is the good in you? The blond guy suddenly moved in and grabbed my chin, cupping it in his palm roughly. You race of murderers. How can you live with yourself?" He jerked his hand from my chin. I felt the rising ridge where his nail had scratched me" (p. 62). Arissa describes her nightmare experience: "the knife to my throat this time, so close it itched where it rested. If I leaned toward it, I might bleed to death" (p. 63). The knife, which represents threat and violence, can function to emphasize how the Muslimah diaspora in the U.S. lives under the risk to be violated and killed because of anti-Muslim racism. The white Americans are depicted as racialists as they assume the protagonist and Muslims are abusers and killers, although the men are the ones attacking Arissa. In this sense, this text shows how white Americans, who are frequently portrayed in the media as the victims of 9/11, also act as victimizers by attacking an innocent Muslimah. Additionally, Arisa is depicted as questioning the rightness of the American extremist to attack a Muslimah by using a loud voice. The narrator describes when the extremists attack Arrisa: "Next he moved the knife down to my long black jacket. Where is your God now? Do you think He is watching?" (p. 62). The narrator illuminates how Arrisa encourages herself to reply: "You're a moron," I taunted, my heart void of fear. "My religion does not preach terror. They are using it as a crutch to fulfill their objectives. But you will never see that" (p. 62). Arissa is depicted as a veiled woman with a loud voice, who has the power to articulate her own opinion to defend her faith and identity. This hijab and the loud voice highlighted to resist the reductionist views of the veiled Muslimahs as generally being misrepresented as voiceless and oppressed in orientalist discourses. In fact, throughout this text, the veiled woman is independent and courageous, not only able to protect herself but also to defend her

culture and identity. By depicting Arissa as a valiant Muslimah who is brave enough to contest the men's invalid accusations about Islam, this text both undermines reductionist views of Muslimahs in Orientalism and questions the idea of 9/11 trauma as US-centric narratives.

Rewriting US-Muslimah's Traumatic Memories and Journeys

To question 9/11 trauma as US-centric narratives, the protagonist is rendered as facing several traumatic experiences since she was young. To illustrate these painful experiences, the narrator describes the results of being attacked by the US extremists, Arissa has to accept that her son, Raian, is a disabled child. In the hospital, the narrator speaks to herself: "I first found out about Raian's health problems—heart defect, breathing abnormalities, some vision impairment. Was there anything normal with my child?" (p. 167). The heart defect is a symbol of the broken heart of US Muslim diaspora, who have a dream and love to live in the US to improve their educated and economic developments, but after the US invasion of Iraq, this dream has changed, become a nightmare, as Muslim diaspora is often associated with terrorism in the media. The breathing abnormalities can represent the difficult breathing and the tough life of being a US Muslim who is struggling to negotiate her/his identity as both American and Muslim descent. Finally, the vision impairment is a symbol of US partial vision toward US Muslims who are suffered from US surveillance and interrogations, especially at the public place and US airports. Thus, to resist the prejudice and discrimination toward US Muslims, the narrator continuously describes Arissa's difficult life: "Our lives were dictated by specialist appointments, check-ups, surgical consults, tests, early intervention sessions, punctuated by frequent feeding therapies as nearly every part of Raian was explored, probed, refined, fixed, and adjusted" (p. 170). Arissa and Raian's life is controlled by arrangements and activities, which prevent them taking control over their own lives and desires. They are also studied, explored, and corrected that represent how US officers in public space often observe Muslim diaspora. All these activities have treated the Muslim diaspora as an object of investigation and interrogation. As a result, US Muslims remained passive and become the target of US surveillance and US imperialism, which links to global neoliberalism and capitalism. In this sense, Abdullah's text highlights what it means as being a US Muslim who is invisible and disabled represented by Raian who is struggling to survive and protect his fragile body, which has suffered from US examination and investigation. Thus, this depiction also reflects the vulnerability of the Muslim diaspora, as their identity is frequently controlled, investigated, and monitored in both U.S. media and orientalist discourses.

In diasporic literature, the characters often experience multiple traumatic journeys. Indeed, Abdullah's text records various journeys that the protagonist experiences. Hall (2010) argues that *Saffron Dreams* "chronicles the journey of Arissa from Pakistan to American, from widow to recovered woman, from traumatized daughter then traumatized wife to a professional editor and single-mother devoted to her special-needs child" (p. 92). These journeys can also be seen through the way Abdullah depicts her characters as having various voyages starting from Ma, the protagonist's mother who immigrates to the U.S. to search for her freedom. However, Ma's journeys left traumatic experiences for the protagonist as the mother left her family to pursue her US hedonistic dreams. The protagonist who follows her husband, Fauzan, to the U.S., continues Ma's journey. However, after following her husband to the US, Fauzan left Arissa because he died after US invasion of Iraq. Simultaneously, Arissa's migration is followed by her parents in law who move to the U.S. to accompany Arissa who is pregnant after Faizan died in the 9/11 attacks. However, the protagonist's son was born with multiple born defects after being attacked by white extremists. Thus, these multiple traumatic experiences work to resist US traumatic centric, which tends to dominate US traumatic memories and US belonging.

These Muslimah diaspora living in the U.S. is often intersected with politics, religion, and racism. Brah argues that the concept of diaspora is "an interpretive frame for analyzing the economic, political and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy" (p. 16). The protagonist migrates to the US also involves these three main aspects of forming the migrancy. Economically, the characters move to the US because of working in the US as Faizan works as both a waiter and a writer of his unfinished manuscript, *Soul Searcher*. By using Faizan's manuscript, Abdullah's novel can be categorized as a meta-narrative as this novel is intertwined with another text to emphasize how

Arissa's Muslim identity is often crisscrossing with Muslimah's traumatic memories and experiences. In *Soul Searcher*, the central protagonist, Yavar, is a *Musafir* or traveler. The narrator writes that Yavar "goes through a rough childhood after he loses some family members in a mysterious fire. His father who survives the disaster is devastated and becomes a beggar, leaving Yavar to fend for himself" (p. 102). Yavar is portrayed as an eleven-year-old orphan who lives on the street in Karachi and works carrying lunches and polishing shoes who is haunted by his dying family memories. Although Yavar grew up on the street and had a hard life, he becomes a *tiffin wallah* who is the confidant to many clients and finds out the truth about the fire, which took some of his family members that left Yavar living with his traumatic memories of his beloved families linked to Arissa's memories of her families. Moreover, the idea of *Musafir* and the fire is reflected in how Faizan is killed in the "fire" of the plane, which attacked the Twin Tower Centres (the North building), where he worked as a waiter in a restaurant. Similar to Yavar, who struggles to find the truth about his family's death in the mysterious fire, Arissa also struggles to search for Faizan's body after the terrorist attacks. Thus, Abdullah illuminates how an immigrant who lost her family in a fire life alone, and struggles to establish her identity and memory. The fire can also be understood literally and figuratively as a symbol of power for immigrants to continue their lives in a new country. Thus, *Musafir* in these two intertwined stories struggles to reconstruct their homes and their traumatic memories. In this sense, this text reveals what it means to be diasporic people who live separately from their homeland and family members and struggle to establish their identities and memories in a new land.

Moreover, the US Muslim diaspora lives under the trauma of the political frameworks of Muslims, which is "War on Terror" and anti-Muslim racism. This slogan seemingly works to develop prejudice about Muslims among mainstream society as this novel describes through the way a white mother verbally abuses the protagonists and her family in a garden. The narrator describes when Arissa goes for a picnic in a park with Ma, and a ball that children are playing with almost hits her face. The children's mother speaks to Arissa and Ma: "I'm sorry, she began, her expression sullen like a lit flame. We hurried to set her mind at ease, assuring her that the ball had not hit us. No, she waved away our concerns and glared at us. I am just sorry they missed you" (Abdullah, p. 110). Here, the mother is depicted as a racist who feels upset as the ball misses Arissa and Ma who wear the hijab. The ball represents a means to hit back at Arissa representing Muslims, whom the media frequently associate with terrorism. This text reveals how Arissa and Ma are perceived by certain characters to support the terrorists because of their hijabs. This perception can be understood through the way Arissa describes that "a veil is only supposed to convey so much. Lately, it had transcended into another role: the wearer was associated with supporting the acts of the attackers" (p. 106). The hijab has not only been transformed into a symbol of the attack's supporters but it is also depicted as a symbol for a foreign citizen, who is excluded from American citizenship. In this sense, this text not only reveals how dominant society faces Islamophobia after the U.S. invasion of Iraq but also undermines the idea of US-centric trauma in the 9/11 narratives by describing various traumatic experiences faced by Abdullah's women.

These traumas can be seen through the way the narrator depicts Arissa as having various painful experiences since she was a child. Thus, the protagonist's heart is firstly broken by her mother who left Arissa to pursue her own "free spirit" (p. 3). The first narrator learns that the reason Ami left was because of her unhappy marriage with Baba, the protagonist's father. The first narrator explains that "the air-filled quickly with thick hurtful breathing when they were together, the unanswered questions conveying more than words could: bitterness, disappointments, and a drawn-out sadness. Like a dismal cloak, those emotions landed on us" (p. 15). Here, Abdullah uses a metaphor "dismal cloak", which means old-fashioned clothes to represent how stereotypes of Muslims as terrorism is also old-fashioned views; thus, Anglo-Americans need to update their views in perceiving Islam or Muslims in such reductionist views.

Furthermore, another traumatic memory experienced by the protagonist is when her mother, Ami, abandoned Arissa to live with her lover, Uncle Jalal. The protagonist often "wondered if Abu knew about Ami's relationship with Uncle Jalal. there was no threat of the laws of the land among the elite class, although such an alliance anywhere else in the country was punishable by law" (p. 13). Ami and Uncle Jalal are rendered as aristocrats who are above the law, so they can leave their

families to pursue their love. As the result, the protagonist faces this painful experience of being betrayed and abandoned by her mother. By depicting Ami as being brave to pursue her dream and her love, Abdullah's text questions orientalist perspectives which tend to perceive Muslimahs as passive and victims of patriarchal system. Instead, in this novel, Ami who is a Muslimah is decisive and active in pursuing her desires, including her love. Unlike her mother who comes to the US to pursue her career, Arissa, comes to the US to accompany her husband who works and has died in a restaurant in the Twin Tower. The narrator describes when Arissa watches the Twin Tower collapse: "It was the North Tower of the Trade Center. The world we know was crumbling down in front of us, glass chunk by glass chunk, metal piece, floor by floor. It was 8.55 a.m. I had slept through the moment that would forever alter my life" (51). The crumbling buildings represent the fragments of the protagonist's identity and memory. Since the 9/11 attack, the protagonist's life has transformed from a happy wife to a distressful widow who is struggling to raise her special needs child. This child reminds of Arissa's both good and bad memories while living in the US as Arissa is attacked by the American extremists when she is pregnant. These traumatic experiences is discussed further in the following section.

Rewriting 9/11 Trauma and Domestic Trauma

The struggle of Abdullah's protagonist living in the US relates with the major debates in 9/11 studies which tends to argue that 9/11 trauma mainly focuses on domestic trauma instead of international problems, such as terrorism and migration. Richard Gray (2011) argues that 9/11 novels are often "flawed" because "difference is diminished, a crisis is distanced or even suppressed by being accommodated to familiar and often conventional narrative structures" (Gray, 114). Although Abdullah's novel explores the ideas of domestic trauma, such as being left by a mother and a husband, this text works to question the 9/11 trauma as US-centric narratives by depicting how Muslim women have faced painful experiences while living in the US, especially after the US invasion of Iraq. The narrator describes after the 9/11 attack, Arissa is directly walking on the "Hudson Street" (52) looking for Faizan, Arissa catches "the first glimpse of the six-floor-high flaming pile of debris: glass, steel, concrete and metal that were once the towers that defined the New York skyline blown away by raging swords of fire" (53). Steel and concrete representing the American superpower can be destroyed by the 9/11 attack to question Anglo-American dominance both in the US and in the world. After US invasion of Iraq, the protagonist not only loses her beloved husband but also almost loses her beloved son. This is another traumatic experience that the protagonist has to deal with; she finds out that after being attacked the underground, her unborn baby will be a disabled child. Thus, the heart defect has both literal and figurative meanings, which can be related to the Muslim diaspora who has a fragile life, as a symbol of their vulnerable identity and memory, and their struggles to find a home in the U.S. and question American belonging. By exploring the ideas of trauma related to the heart defect in her novel, Abdullah highlights the vulnerability of the Muslim diaspora living in the U.S. because of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. To undermine these ideas, the narrator uses the male characters to show that Muslim men honor their women and treat them respectfully instead of being oppressed as often represented in US media. In doing so, the narrator depicts Baba, Arissa's father-in-law, as a husband who is willing to serve his wife: "[Baba] always brewed three cups of tea before breakfast for Ma, himself, and me when I woke up" (p. 78). Thus, this text shows how Muslims in the U.S. live with respect and has modern views by participating in domestic spheres. This depiction works to interrogate the way US media tend to misrepresent Muslims as oppressed and violent. Thus, this text invites readers' sympathy toward the Muslim diaspora by illuminating the struggles of US Muslimahs in facing various traumatic moments both in their homeland and in the host land. However, the protagonist's men: her husband, her father, and her father in law, often support her no matter how hard her life is as being a diasporic Muslimah living in the US with its prejudice and discrimination.

Another traumatic experience is when an extremist white American accuses the protagonist of being a hypocrite as she wears a hijab to hide her terrorist actions. The first narrator describes when a white man states that: "The veil that you wear, he continued, pulling out his knife and aiming the point at my hijab. It's all a façade. You try to look pure, but you are evil inside. You are the non-believers,

not us” (p. 62). The man believes that the hijab is a symbol of hypocrisy covering a bad attitude for the protagonist to be seen as pious. This can be related to how mainstream society, in general, is misled about the meaning of the hijab for Muslim women. The hijab is a part of a submission to God, freedom of expression, and protection from men’s gaze, instead of being oppressed or violent as debating in orientalism. Because of this degrading meaning of wearing the hijab in the US and the protagonist is often seen as a terrorist, Arissa has to lose her identity, the hijab. To protect herself and to live securely with the dominant society, Arissa has to lose her identity as she removes her hijab. The first narrator speaks to herself: “It was a matter of perspective—to an onlooker I had removed my veil, but from where I stood, I had merely shifted it from my head to my heart” (Abdullah, p. 3). The hijab for the protagonist is a means to cover her heart, shielding it from bad attitudes and behaviors, instead of covering her head, which invokes feelings of fear and prejudice from the American extremists, such as those who attack her at the station. By removing her hijab, Arissa detaches her identity from her heritage, and thus this text questions the way the colonial people tend to perceive non-Europeans based on their looks and appearances as Brah argues previously. Brah argues that “looks mattered a great deal within the colonial regime of power” (p. 3). Looks counted because of “the history of the racialization of ‘look’; they mattered because discourses about the body were crucial to the constitution of racisms. And racialized powered operated in and through bodies” (3). In Arissa’s case, her looks are not only racialized through her skin color but also categorized through her different clothes, the hijab. In this sense, this text shows how Arissa has to lose her religious and cultural identity to undermine US centric and US racism toward Muslimah diaspora.

Moreover, Muslimahs are forced to wear a mainstream dress to survive living in the U.S. the narrator describes, “some women took down their hijabs, afraid of being targeted, and adopted a conservative but Western style of dressing” (p. 60). This also suggests that Muslim women face double consciousness living in the U.S. since they must be aware of the dominant society’s demand on them, and simultaneously they have to perceive themselves through the eyes of the dominant society. This demand is also discussed in Brah’s book as she argues that “such operation of power constitute modes of differential racialization” (p. 3) and such orders were “lubricated through economic and political imperatives” that shape racism (p. 3). Hence, Muslimahs’ difference from mainstream society may lead to U.S. racism as the dominant society tends to perceive the hijab through the eyes of political constraints, which associate the hijab with terrorism instead of cultural and religious identity, which is obligated for Muslimahs. This hijab can also be related to the long history of a wimple in the eighteenth century when nuns also wore the hijab or the wimple in the church, which was seen as an honor. However, in the U.S. in the contemporary period, the hijab has been degraded as a symbol of oppression and violence, instead of respecting the women and devoting to God as the nun’s headdress previously had been. This might be as straightforward as the wimple being worn by nuns who represent the dominant religion in the US. Thus, Islam has been seen as a foreign religion in the US, regardless Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, including the US. By questioning the way, the extremists misunderstood Islam and the hijab, Abdullah’s text destabilizes the idea of the hijab associated with oppression and violence to maintain anti-Muslim racism. Arguably, anti-Muslim racism has remained established in the U.S. because misconceptions of Islam or the hijab have been repeated over and over again in Orientalist discourses, and even long before 1978. Thus, this paper reveals how Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* encounters the idea of anti-Muslim racism by depicting the characters as struggling to live peacefully in the US and by illuminating how the protagonist has to lose her religious identities to resist to US centric. Indeed, US centric often highlights US dominant traumatic narratives of the 9/11 attacks instead of US invasion of Iraq. Moreover, this losing identity can be linked to the history of Pakistan, which was colonized by the British Empire, which occupied both Pakistani lands and culture. British colonialism has legalized its power to US imperialism linked to global neoliberalism and capitalism. Pakistan has lost its land and now continued by losing its culture as occupied by US imperialism and racism, which tend to exclude marginal groups, such as Muslims and immigrants from American belonging and US ideology with its political tone indicating global neoliberalism and capitalism. However, these Pakistani-Muslimah diaspora remained struggled to live in the US since the eras of colonialism to the periods of global transnational capitalism.

The major findings of this research are Pakistani Muslimah diaspora is depicted in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* as victims of anti-Muslim racism, especially after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In doing so, Abdullah's novel contests US anti-Muslim racism by depicting the protagonist, Arissa, as struggling to fight for her rights as an American citizen who has suffered from prejudice and discrimination, especially after the US invasion of Iraq. The protagonist also faces some painful experiences and trauma, including being attacked by American extremists underground because she is wearing a Muslim identity, the hijab. This can be related to Avtar Brah who argues that "the look" is often led to prejudice and racism. This research is important as it highlights how U.S. racism has remained existed and has seemingly never ended for centuries as this racial experience has remained lived in the protagonists' memories as they faced trauma living in the US. Ironically, this trauma has been passed from generation to generation as the protagonist, Arissa, is likely passed her trauma to her next generation, Raian, who is suffering from "multiple birth defect" representing their multiple trauma of living as Muslim diaspora in the US.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that Abdullah's novel questions the US political tone indicating global neoliberalism and capitalism by depicting the protagonist as struggling to establish her Muslim identity and memories in the US. Thus, this research contributes to Postcolonial studies as it extends Lazarus's idea of using the term "U.S. invasion of Iraq," instead of "the 9/11 attacks" to challenge the rightness of the U.S. to attack Iraq. Based on these findings, I recommend further researches to investigate how Muslim women in other countries, such as the U.K., Australia, and Asian states, tell their own stories concerning their experiences living as diasporic Muslimahs who have dispersed from their origins to search for a better place. These experiences are explored in literary writings, Women's Literature of the Ummah, which explores the stories written by Muslim women or Muslimahs from around the world, especially the US, the UK, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. Which is the largest Muslim population in the world. Thus, this paper functions as a pioneer for women's literature of the Ummah, which explores various stories of Muslimahs by using women's and Islamic perspectives from around the world. Indeed, these kinds of writing work to undermine reductionist views of Muslimahs who have been sufferings from orientalism to global neoliberalism and capitalism.

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إنسانيات

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Vol 7, Number 2, May 2023

**Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi on Ummah and
Its Relevance to Society 5.0**

Nabila Huringiin, Alia Safitri

**Language Shift and Endangerment of Sundanese Banten Dialect
in South Tangerang Indonesia**

Umi Kulsum, Azhari Dasman Darnis, Adang Asdari

**Muhammadiyah's Tajdid and Sufism between
Purification and Modernization**

*Zubair, Muhammad Farkhan, Zakiya Darajat, M. Agus Suriadi,
Masri Mansoer, Abdul Fattah*

**Rewriting '9/11 or US invasion of Iraq' Traumatic Memories
in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams**

Hasnul Insani Djohar

**The Correlation of Library Personnel Work Attitude and
Work Motivation to Job Performance in Nigeria**

Qudus Ajibola Bankole, Mohammed Lawal Akanbi, Kabiru Gambari Sulaiman

**The Strategies of Sufi Discourse in Fostering Communal Immunity:
The Sufi as a Nomadic Subject**

Tayeb Bouchoir

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