

Color symbolism and resistance in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*

Simbolisme warna dan perlawanan dalam *Saffron Dreams* karya Shaila Abdullah

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* portrays and resists Orientalists' stereotypes of Muslim women. Through *Saffron Dreams*, Abdullah attempts to put up a fight against the negative stereotypes of Orientalists toward Muslim women. It is shown based on how the main protagonist is portrayed as a Muslim Pakistani-American woman who lost her husband in 9/11, experiencing mistreatment from her host land society due to the spreading negative stereotypes of Muslim women. By utilizing Close Textual Analysis, this study focuses on examining how the novel depicts and resists the Muslim women's stereotype by Orientalists. This study discovers that the novel repeatedly portrays that Muslim women are perceived as oppressed by men and patriarchy who are forced to do arranged marriage and use hijab and also as the "Other" or dangerous foreigners unaccepted as part of Western society. Indeed, the novel depicts the main protagonist's response to orientalist's perspectives of Muslim women through the repetitive use of color symbolism, such as red, black, white, green, blue, brown, orange, gold, and yellow for the main protagonist representing her resistance of orientalism.

KATA KUNCI

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana novel *Saffron Dreams* karya Shaila Abdullah menggambarkan dan melawan stereotip para orientalis terhadap perempuan Muslim. Melalui *Saffron Dreams*, Abdullah mencoba untuk melakukan perlawanan terhadap stereotip negatif para orientalis terhadap perempuan Muslim. Hal ini ditunjukkan melalui bagaimana protagonis utama digambarkan sebagai seorang wanita Muslim Pakistan-Amerika yang kehilangan suaminya dalam peristiwa 9/11, yang mengalami perlakuan buruk dari masyarakat di negara asalnya akibat stereotip negatif terhadap wanita Muslim. Dengan menggunakan Analisis Tekstual Mendekat, penelitian ini berfokus untuk melihat bagaimana novel ini menggambarkan dan melawan stereotip perempuan Muslim yang dibuat oleh para orientalis. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa novel *Saffron Dreams* berulang kali menggambarkan bahwa perempuan Muslim dianggap tertindas oleh laki-laki dan patriarki yang dipaksa untuk melakukan perjodohan dan menggunakan hijab dan juga sebagai "Liyan" atau orang asing yang berbahaya yang tidak diterima sebagai bagian dari masyarakat Barat. Novel ini menggambarkan respon protagonis utama terhadap perspektif orientalis tentang perempuan Muslim melalui penggunaan simbolisme warna yang berulang-ulang, seperti merah, hitam, putih, hijau, biru, coklat, oranye, emas, dan kuning untuk protagonis utama yang mewakili perlawanannya terhadap orientalisme.

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Introduction

Orientalists do not have a good image in Western countries. It is due to the fundamental doctrines constructed by the West, namely Orientalism, which portrays a systematic distinction between the civilized West and the primitive East. Further, Orientalists build a binary opposition label that compares the Western world with the Eastern world by presenting Orientals as irrational, immoral, and infantile while Westerners as reasonable, moral, developed, and most importantly, "normal" (Said, 1978). However, the 9/11 tragedy strengthens the West's negative perspective toward the Orientals, especially Muslims. Since the tragedy was perpetrated by a group of men from Middle Eastern countries who were assumed to be adherents of Islam, it causes all Muslims to be labeled as dangerous because they are believed as extremists and intolerant people. Due to these negative stereotypes, Western society thus tends to stay away from Muslims and give them suspicious sights full of anticipation and accusation. Nevertheless, compared to men, Muslim women are more often targeted by Westerners' emotional outbursts because of the hijab they wear. The hijab is considered a religious attribute that displays the woman's identity as a Muslim and is believed to be proof of their identification as a "dangerous foreigner," which validates Westerners to avoid them. Further, the West is even more aggressive in building a new identity for Muslim women, such as being the "Other," submissive, oppressed, voiceless docile subjugates of men, and backward victims of their heathen and sexist religion who need to be saved (Edwards, 2021; Zine, 2006).

As a response, a large number of Pakistani writers have created literary works highlighting 9/11 and delivering the alternate interpretation of 9/11's consequences on their clan's identity as both Muslims and Easterners (Sadaf, 2018). Through their work, the authors also attempt to expose how the West treats the Muslim diaspora and offer justification for the prejudices fostered towards Islam and the East. One of the literary works written by a Pakistani writer highlighting 9/11 is a novel entitled *Saffron Dreams*, written by Shaila Abdullah, a Pakistani-American author in 2009. This novel mainly focuses on the life journey of the main protagonist, a Muslim diaspora, who loses her husband in 9/11 but also experiences alienation and accusation of having the same affiliation with the terrorists. Through this novel, Abdullah intends to put up a fight against the negative stereotypes of Orientals, especially Muslim women, that the West built. It is shown based on how the author makes the characters adopt the identical cultural and identity background to hers, namely as a Muslim Pakistani-American woman.

Many researchers have conducted studies relating to the novel *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah (2009) and the topic of color symbolism. There are four previous studies that are used as benchmarks to guide the researcher to produce credible research. The first previous research is Nair's (2020) *Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams: A Tale of Trauma and Travail*, which reveals the trauma, throes, and travails experienced by Arissa Illahi through terrible thoughts and memories always emerge in her mind. Further, the research reveals that Shaila Abdullah redefines and breaks down the false belief of Americans that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have completely uprooted the lifestyle of immigrants who face numerous obstacles in surviving in the US. Meanwhile, based on the findings of Ghasemi, Dashtpeyma, and Shooshtari's

(2022) *Trauma and Recovery in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams*, the trauma experienced by the main protagonist, Arissa Illahi, influences her character development and also guides her to recover. This research also reveals that trauma can be tracked using literary strategies and narrative techniques such as non-linearity, poetic prose, repetition, and stream of consciousness. Furthermore, the article entitled *9/11 Widow: A Study of Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams*, conducted by Syed Sarror (2019), finds that the 9/11 tragedy affected not only Americans but also affected Muslims' lives drastically. The research utilizes the Eastern perspective in experiencing the 9/11 accident impacts to analyze how the main protagonist, as a widow, survived the society where she is blamed for the terrorist attack. In addition, Zhang (2015) finds in her study *Symbolic Meanings of Colors in The Great Gatsby* that the symbolism used throughout the novel significantly contributes to the novel's plot development, development of characters, and thematic richness. The novel's six primary colors, such as green, white, red, yellow, blue, and gray, leave an indelible mark on readers since they recur across its pages and convey several layers of meaning.

By considering the previous studies that have been conducted, this study aims to analyze how Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* portrays and resists Orientalists' stereotypes of Muslim women. It is unfortunate that no one has yet discussed the depiction of color terms in this novel. Scholars should have assessed the color symbolism found in this novel, referring to orientalism that influences the emergence of a bunch of negative stereotypes aimed at Muslim women. Therefore, the researcher perceives this as a gap and chooses to study this topic. The color terms are possibly utilized as a literary device, namely symbols, that contain a broader meaning. As the novel highlights the 9/11 tragedy and the post-9/11 era, which marks the beginning of the West's attention turned to Muslim women, the color symbolism can be utilized as a tool to display the main protagonist's response and resistance to the major issue of this novel.

Methods

This study utilizes close textual analysis (CTA) approach to comprehend, explain, uncover, and investigate how the text might affect its audience in various ways. The study focuses on analyzing how *Saffron Dreams* depicts the portrayal of Orientalists' negative stereotypes of Muslim women and resists Orientalists' negative stereotypes of Muslim women by utilizing color terms as symbols referring to the theory of orientalism by Said and the conception Symbolism by Kennedy and Gioia.

Results and Discussion

Muslim women in Shaila Abdullah's Saffron Dreams

The study discovered several situations in the *Saffron Dreams* novel that align with Orientalists' stereotypes of Muslim women. First, this novel portrays a stereotypical image of Muslim women, oppressed by men and patriarchy, by depicting the main protagonist's biological mother, Ami, is represented as a *koyal* bird by her husband, whom she married through an arranged marriage;

"Abu said to me years later. 'Even on the day of our wedding, I had a sinking feeling that I had captured a *koyal* bird in a cage, bound her in a relationship that

her heart had not accepted. She was born to be a free spirit. You cannot assign roles to such a person" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 15).

There are several interpretations regarding the use of the *koyal* bird or a cuckoo as a symbol. First, Aslam (2021) states that a caged bird symbolizes a person who is never inclined towards freedom. Meanwhile, Vaz da Silva (2004) describes the cuckoo as a symbol of a child provider. Last, according to Wallace (2016), the cuckoo is seen as a portent of catastrophe in several parts of Europe. Therefore, based on how Abu perceives her wife as a *koyal* bird, it is concluded that Ami is represented as the party in charge of producing children who have wild personalities so that they become the source of problems in their household. Judging from how Abu describes Ami as a *koyal* bird, I assume that this portrayal of a female character aligns with the Orientalists' label of Muslim women oppressed by fanatical Muslim men (Zine, 2006). Since the West perceives Islam as a religion that upholds patriarchy, thus, a fanatical Muslim man is assumed to be Muslim man who adheres to religious teachings by sticking to patriarchy. Moreover, the text above also indicates Abu's disappointment with Ami, who did not fulfill her role as a good wife; "You cannot assign roles to such a person" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 15). According to Kelbert and Hossain (2014), in the patriarchal norm, women are expected to provide for their families without compensation, including cooking, cleaning, taking care of the sick and elderly, and socializing. Apparently, since his wife is unable to fulfill her role as a good wife based on the patriarchy, such as taking care of the children and doing the housework, it causes Abu disappointment. It is demonstrated by Ami hiring Mai Jan to do the housework instead of doing it herself;

"The days she didn't show up, the dishes piled high, and we ran around dirty, unwashed, with stinky knickers, sweaty undershirts, food stains and the day's grime coloring our shirtfronts, hair unruly and uncombed. Ami pretended not to notice. On such mornings, she sat in her room, painting her toenails, Lata Mangeshkar blaring out of the radio, curtains drawn" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 11).

Therefore, the way the main protagonist's mother is portrayed as a *koyal* bird, symbolizing her lack of freedom and being accused of destroying her marriage due to unable to carry out her role based on patriarchy, demonstrates one of Orientalists' stereotypes of Muslim women, which is oppressed by their husbands who are fanatical towards religion and patriarchy.

The novel also illustrates the Orientalists stereotype of Muslim women oppressed by patriarchy through an idiom regarding Faizan's response to Arissa's desire to take off her hijab. After moving to America, the main protagonist, Arissa, wants to assimilate the local culture to reduce the little difference between them, which is the way of dressing. She believes that it will be better if she takes off her hijab so that she will no longer stand out in the crowd. However, her husband's blessing hinders her; "I desperately wanted to lose my hijab when I came to America, but Faizan had stood in my way" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 58). She describes her husband's response to her concern about the hijab by using the phrase "stood in my way," which is an idiom. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the idiom "stood in my way" or "stand in someone's way" means "to prevent someone from doing something" ("Merriam-Webster," n.d.-a). Therefore, the text indicates that Faizan, the main protagonist's husband, forbids his wife to adopt the culture of their host land by taking off her hijab.

This circumstance aligns with the Orientalists label of Muslim women, lacking freedom and agency (Zine, 2006). The text demonstrates the loss of freedom and the rights to make decisions for Muslim women. Faizan forces Arissa to keep covering her head with an excuse that the hijab is the identity of a Muslim woman as the only excuse since the use of the hijab has become a tradition in several Islamic countries, one of them is Pakistan; “For generations, women in his household had worn the veil, although none of them seemed particularly devout. It’s just something that was done, no questions asked, no explanations needed” (Abdullah, 2009, p. 58). Hijab and veil are used by Muslim women in every family from generation to generation without having clear information about the reasons and purposes. Thus, women unconsciously do it without questioning it, and men unknowingly criticize women who leave this tradition. The text shows how Muslim women girls who grow up in a conventional Islamic environment being powerless over even the smallest things in their lives, forced to wear hijab/veil that have become a tradition without being given sufficient religious knowledge.

Moreover, the veil that is forced to be worn by the main protagonist makes her indicated to be a dangerous foreigner and causes her to be unable to avoid alienation in the host land. Faizan's instructions regarding hijab and veil do not have a good effect on Arissa's life, especially after 9/11. The tragedy that kills Faizan becomes the beginning of a worsening treatment given by the West to the Oriental community since the perpetrators are identified as Orientals, Arabs and Muslims. Due to this conception, the West conducts alienations to the Orientals, especially *hijabi* and veiled Muslim women, since they are believed as weird people who adopt extremist beliefs. Moreover, the text depicts the main protagonist experiencing alienation as a Western man shuns her after seeing the hijab she wears;

"Pardon me,' I apologized, adjusting my veil. The man frowned and looked away. There it was again, judgment by association. He seemed to be in his fifties but held a cane in his hand. 'This one's mine,' I pointed to the flyer of the young man. I have no idea what made me say that. "Which one's yours?" He stared at me in disbelief. "None," he said finally. I turned to leave. "I am sorry," I heard him say but I could not stop and answer" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 87).

The text demonstrates how Western society believes in the label they built for Orientals, especially Muslims. According to Nazeer and Connolly (2022), Arissa's hijab and religious attire hinder her integration into American social circles, complicating her sense of identity. This is depicted as the Western man labels Arissa as a person in the same association as the 9/11 perpetrators who are dangerous and need to be avoided after noticing her hijab. However, ironically, his belief is refuted after Arissa responds by pointing to a photo of a man who looks like her husband, displayed on the 9/11 victim list flier, as a sign that she loses her loved one in the tragedy.

The West considers the hijab and veil to indicate the wearer's identity as Muslim and their attachment to the association of terrorism. Therefore, Muslim women diaspora living in the West covering their heads with a hijab or veil (niqab) are identified as an adherent of backward teaching. The hysteria due to 9/11 influenced the West to misinterpret Islam and make them the scapegoat, the party responsible for the tragedy considering the religion of the perpetrators without conducting an in-depth study of that religion. Islam is then labeled as a religion that adheres to the teaching that killing people who are not Muslims is considered a noble act, called *jihad*. As a result, it is

tough for *hijabi* and veiled Muslim women to avoid being exiled and becoming the objects of irrational hostility for crimes they have never committed and heretical teachings they have never adhered to.

Further, the text depicts the stereotype of Muslim women as the 'Other' based on how the reporters do not perceive Arissa as the 9/11 victim. It can be seen from how the reporters terrorize Arissa over the phone, ask for a response, and blame her people for conducting a heinous terror to the West;

"I had had enough of answering pestering reporters and funneling my way in and out of the building through them. They were all looking for one story because they had beaten all the rest to a pulp. Muslim harmed by Muslim, how do you react?" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 123).

The text portrays that the West carries out alienation through the idiom "they had beaten all the rest to a pulp" or "to a pulp." It has the meaning "used to say that someone or something is very badly beaten, mashed, smashed, etc" ("Merriam-Webster," n.d.-b). Therefore, the idiom reveals that reporters exploit the main protagonist's story and squeeze her emotions "to a pulp" to increase their media rating. Arissa's experience is considered fascinating since she is a Muslim woman who lost her husband on 9/11, a tragedy committed by her own people. However, according to Said (1978), "the Orient and Islam are always represented as outsiders having a special role to play insider Europe." This concept of Orientalism is depicted in the text as the reporters hardly perceive Arissa as a victim. Instead, they see her as an adherent to the same religious teachings as the terrorists. The West believes that the 9/11 perpetrators are Muslims, while the victims are American people or the West. Therefore, based on how the reporters insult Arissa to answer why they do this cruel thing to the West as if she is in the same group as the terrorists indicate the West's lack of sympathy for Muslims who were also victims of 9/11. This is because the aftermath of 9/11 fractures multicultural America, subtly exerting pressure and ostracizing outsiders, which leads Arissa to conform to the majority by relinquishing her distinct marker of identity, the hijab (veil) (Majeed et al., 2017).

In short, *Saffron Dreams* portrays Muslim women based on the Orientalists' perspective. Muslim women are depicted as oppressed by the patriarchy, which is assumed to be highly upheld by their religion, Islam. They are forced to adhere to gender roles firmly held by the patriarchy. This is exemplified in how Ami is described by Abu as a wife who is disobedient to her husband because she does not conform to her prescribed role as a housewife. Similarly, her daughter, Arissa, is depicted as a woman who is compelled to obey her husband, even when it comes to maintaining her hijab in America. In Western perspectives, the hijab is often associated with negative stereotypes, with wearers frequently being identified as dangerous foreigners or comrades of the 9/11 perpetrators.

Color and resistance

Not only illustrates the stereotypes and mistreatment that Muslim women receive in the US, but the novel also reveals the character's resistance to the Orientalists' negative stereotype of Muslim women. The narrator repeatedly uses color terms to describe things and deliver a broader meaning. Therefore, based on how the use of color terms

reoccurred, I believe the novel attempts to depict the Muslim female characters' portrayals in contrast to the Orientalists' perspective through color symbolism.

(1) Red

The first color term found in *Saffron Dreams* is red, portrayed as the color of the shirt worn by the main protagonist, Arissa Illahi, at the scene of the 9/11 incident, accentuating her identity as a harmless Muslim woman. Orientals, especially Muslims, have been labeled negatively by the West long before the 9/11 incident occurred. Said (1978) also discusses this idea by asserting that the West or the Occident believes Islam symbolizes terror, catastrophe, demonic barbarians, and lasting trauma. Based on this belief, Western society perceives Muslims, especially Muslim women identified by their hijab and veil, as dangerous foreigners that should be avoided. Therefore, the novel demonstrates the main protagonist showing bravery revealed through the clothes she wears in the 9/11 incident shortly after hearing the news that her husband's workplace collapsed due to the attack;

"In front of dear friends who have never seen me out of my hijab, I peeled off my nightgown and put on a pair of jeans and a red shirt, my modesty of little importance to me. I saw some avert their gaze and some look on as if spellbound. As an afterthought, I picked up the neatly folded veil from the top shelf" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 52).

The text illustrates how the tension and anxiety do not seem to be able to prevent Arissa from choosing her clothes. Unlike selecting the veil randomly, Arissa appears very assured when choosing the red shirt. However, according to Cerrato (2012), wearing a red outfit is assumed to make the wearer appear heavier and more visible. Moreover, Tollance (2020) emphasizes that a red dress is endowed with the ability to relocate identity, connecting it with the color and experience of a place rather than with skin color. On the other hand, red is also applied as the color symbolism of the South in some countries and early Middle Ages fiction (Goldberg, 1992; Yu, 2014). However, the South indicates the main protagonist's place of origin, Pakistan, part of South Asia. Thus, the red dress indirectly reveals Arissa's identity as an Oriental woman, precisely a South Asian and Muslim. Therefore, the text refutes the Orientalists' stereotype of Muslim women as dangerous foreigners by illustrating the main protagonist comes to the scene of the 9/11 incident to find her husband wearing a red shirt showing her Oriental identity as an Asian and Muslim woman. The red shirt displays her position as a harmless woman since she loses her beloved husband in the tragedy, not as an accomplice to the attackers.

Furthermore, the color red is also utilized to symbolize the main protagonist's anger refuting the stereotype of being dangerous foreign. The Western media intensively reports the identities of the 9/11 perpetrators, citizens of Middle Eastern countries affiliated with militant Islamic groups. This persistent information has strengthened sentiments on Islam teaching violence and the attachment of a dangerous foreign label to Muslims which is challenging to be avoided by veiled and *hijabi* Muslim women. Therefore, the novel emphasizes red in the main protagonist's painting to show her emotions toward 9/11. By applying the Impressionist style with a unique blend of postmodernism, Arissa's paintings deliver subtle themes featuring a peaceful combination of objects and colors. However, her painting style undergoes a drastic change after her husband

passes away. Arissa's paintings become more striking and mysterious, marking her drastic emotional changes caused by her husband's death due to the tragedy;

"I didn't know how to answer that. My subject matters were never hidden, but since Faizan's departure they have become more intense, almost fiery, invoking disturbing feelings in the onlooker—red magnolias oozing blood instead of nectar, a man in his last dying moments with his killer, a mother holding a dead infant" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 139).

In her "red magnolias oozing blood instead of nectar" painting, Arissa combines a striking red color and a disgusting bleeding magnolia flower object, which I believe these objects convey her emotions. According to Fontana (1993), the color red represents the energy flowing within the body, the hue that brings a flush to the face and swirls before the eyes during intense emotional arousal. Meanwhile, Pamies and Natale (2015) state that Magnolia is represented as the symbol of femininity and noblesse. Further, the red color Arissa chooses for the Magnolia shows dominant, aggressive, brave, competitive, and demonstrating anger or aggression characters (Elliot & Maier, 2014). The color is also associated with fire and blood, which Arissa displays in her paintings (Yu, 2014). Therefore, the red color chosen by the main protagonist for the painting of the Magnolia illustrates her emotion toward the specific traumatic event in her life, the day when her husband dies on 9/11.

Consequently, Arissa's painting described as the "red magnolias oozing blood instead of nectar" is interpreted as her portrayal of herself illustrated by the Magnolia flower, a symbol of femininity, full of anger, represented by the color red, over the 9/11 tragedy that she perceives as an event of murder against her husband portrayed by the blood. Based on how the main protagonist expresses her anger through the object and color selection in the painting strengthens the evidence for her disconnection from the 9/11 perpetrators. This circumstance contrasts with the stereotype of Muslim women being dangerous because they are in the same religion as the 9/11 perpetrators.

(2) Black

The novel also applies the color black to display the main protagonist's emotions contrasting the voiceless stereotype of Muslim women. Through the media, Orientalists represent Muslim women with voiceless and docile images as victims of their religion and men (Shabir & Khan, 2022). Consequently, Islam is perceived as forcibly silencing Muslim women by commanding them to serve their husbands, which becomes a boomerang that prohibits them from voicing their disagreement and their feelings towards the actions and decisions taken by their husbands. This certainly affects their psychology and mindset, which causes them to normalize hiding their thoughts and emotions. Therefore, the novel tries to depict the breakthrough made by the main protagonist, Arissa Illahi, who expresses her feelings through paintings.

Besides objects such as flowers or human figures, Arissa often conveys her feelings through abstract paintings with many color combinations. However, there are times when a variety of these various colors blend into black, which Arissa does not fancy and wants to forget; "In the end, the hodgepodge of colors that dripped off the canvas all bled into one: scorching black, the only color I wanted to forget" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 5). However, Kaya and Epps (2004) state black evokes negative emotions such as depression, fear, and anger because it is associated with mourning and tragic events. Further, Fontana (1993) asserts that within Western culture, black serves as the emblem of

death, grief, and the realm of the underworld. Therefore, the color black in the painting symbolizes the main protagonist's depression and anger due to the tragic death of her husband.

The main protagonist also believes that every color refers to specific events in her life, including black. Arissa associates black with tragic events in her life; "But black reminds me of all that is sad and wrong in my life." As explained by Fontana (1993), thus I believe that the sad and wrong reminded by the color black refers to the death of Arissa's husband due to 9/11 and the accusation of being in the same group as the 9/11 terrorists that she receives constantly from the people around her. Therefore, through the use of black in the main protagonist's painting, the novel presents a Muslim woman who understands and can convey her thoughts and emotions well, unlike the concept developed by the Orientalists.

Further, the novel also resists the Orientalists' stereotype by using black as the color of the main protagonist's hijab, symbolizing men's oppression;

"But black reminds me of all that is sad and wrong in my life. Ironically, in this country, it validates my state of being a widow. It is also the color of my hijab—the dividing line between my life with Faizan and the one without him" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 6).

I believe that, as becoming the color of Arissa's hijab, black indicates the hijab is the oppression of her husband, limiting her to live peacefully because of the Westerners' negative perspective towards *hijabi* and veiled women. However, according to Frank and Gilovich (1988), black is associated with aggression, while white refers to its absence. Additionally, this concept is also related to the term "the dividing line" used by the narrator describing the black hijab indicating the different roles of hijab in Arissa's life after and before the death of her husband, Faizan Illahi. Before he dies, Arissa fulfills her husband's wishes by wearing a hijab and veil as a sign of her devotion to her husband. However, after becoming a widow, Arissa decides to stop carrying out her late husband's orders and dresses more openly to prevent her child from being affected by the alienation she receives. I believe that the main protagonist takes this action to resist the label of hijab as the symbol of men's and patriarchal oppression of Muslim women.

It is discussed by Djohar (2023), emphasizing that American radicals have a limited understanding of Islam and hijab because they fail to regard Muslims with an open mind rather than prejudice and hostility, and they have misunderstood veiled Muslim women as largely voiceless and oppressed. The West believes that Muslim women have always been forced to wear the veil by the men around them so that their faces and body curves do not invite the gaze of other men. In addition, Muslim women are also believed to be unable to fight and refuse the oppression they receive. However, the novel refutes this thought by showing Arissa removing the black hijab/veil, indicating her attempt to escape from the painful memory of her husband's death and as well as escaping from her husband's oppression; "I went to the bureau and kissed a folded veil that lay on top, a reminder of my past and a symbol of what I had given up" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 10).

By presenting the main protagonist removing her black hijab, a symbol of the traumatic events and oppression, the novel emphasizes that not all Muslim women merely

accept and do not fight against the oppression they receive from their husbands. Through the character Arissa, Muslim women are portrayed as women who can decide to get out of their slump and free themselves from their husband's orders. Therefore, the West is considered to have mistakenly judged Muslim women as voiceless and oppressed.

(3) White

The novel once again depicts its disapproval of the dangerous foreign label by using white as the focal point of the main protagonist's painting. Due to the 9/11, Orientalists assume all Muslims to be terrorists since they are considered to implement Islamic religious teachings related to violence. This conception is in line with Said's (1978) explanation, which emphasizes that in the view of Orientalism, Islam represents violence, devastation, barbarians, and a long-lasting trauma for the West. In fact, the teachings of terrorism adopted by the 9/11 perpetrators are not Islamic. These are heretical teachings spread by certain groups, such as al-Qaeda, which claim to be part of Islam. However, all Muslims have already been generalized as foreigners who threaten the West.

Yet, unlike Muslim men, it is more challenging for Muslim women to avoid this prejudice. Muslim women, especially the *hijabi* and veiled ones, are considered more harmful because they are believed to be hiding something under their clothes. Therefore, the novel demonstrates the main protagonist voices her disapproval of this negative stereotype of Islam and Muslim women by displaying a painting with the main focus being white;

"I remember Faizan being pleased with the wall, but I hated it as soon as it was done, even before I'd put all my supplies away. A framed painting of mine with two sunflowers and a rose on a stark white background served as a focal point. The painting was one of my favorites" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 100).

The painting portrays a combination of two types of flowers, the sunflower and rose, with white as the background color. In fact, flowers can be applied as symbols for moral and religious issues. According to Heilmeyer (2001), the sunflower symbolizes human submission to religious teachings that lead them closer to God, which is judged by how it grows following the direction of sunlight. Meanwhile, the rose symbolizes the sweet perfume of virtue. However, the main point of Arissa's painting is the white background. Fontana (1993) suggests that white embodies purity, virginity, and the transcendent, yet it also connotes the pallor of death, and in Eastern cultures, it is associated with mourning. In addition, Vaz da Silva (2007) explains that the white color is used in tales to represent luminous heaven's luminosity and untainted sheen as much as purity. Yu (2014) also emphasizes that white symbolizes truth, purity, innocence, and the sacred or divine. Judging from how the two aspects of the painting have interpretations related to religion and purity, Arissa's painting of sunflowers and roses with a striking white background is interpreted as a manifestation of her belief that her religion, Islam, is innocent as it guides Muslims in the right direction to God by teaching good things, not deviant ones. By emphasizing the white color in the painting, the novel tries to show the main protagonist's efforts as a Muslim woman to reject the West' believing Islam teaches violence and regards Muslim women as dangerous foreign.

The novel also displays that the main protagonist utilizes the color white as sarcasm resisting the passive stereotype of Muslim women. Djohar (2023) explains that veiled

Muslim women are generally labeled as passive and victims of the patriarchal system by Orientalists. However, the main protagonist seems to have a different nature from the concept of Muslim women based on the perspective of Orientalists because she can voice her thoughts out loud through sarcasm; "Does white come in shades? I wondered. Technically, is it white even a color? At some point in my life, I had grown to accept my colorless life" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 195).

Considering the previous analysis, the white color used in this novel is interpreted as a symbol of the purity and innocence of her religion. Therefore, I believe the novel tries to reveal that the West is reluctant to admit that Islam and Muslims are innocent of all criminal acts committed by misguided individuals, such as 9/11, especially in the quotation, "Does white come in shades? I wondered. Technically, is it white even a color?" The West's reluctance to reject the innocence of Islam and Muslims is demonstrated by how the text reveals Arissa's doubts about the perspective of other parties who either do or do not recognize white as a color, mocking the West, who consistently ignores the facts and the truth of Islam. Using white, a symbol of purity and innocence, indicates the main protagonist expresses her belief in the virtues of Islamic teachings and her innocence for crimes committed by misguided persons. The novel depicts Muslim women who actively voice their thoughts against negative stereotypes about their religion, undoubtedly breaking the passive label attached by Orientalists to Muslim women.

(4) Green

Furthermore, the novel utilizes green to portray the main protagonist loving her religion by always being grateful to her God, in contrast to the stereotype of Muslim women victimized by their religion. Orientalism constructs Muslim women as dangerous foreigners who become victims of their anachronistic faith, lacking agency and voice (Zine, 2006). As a result, the West declares the mission of saving Oriental and Muslim women who are considered victims of this backward culture (Edwards, 2021). However, the novel does not indicate the main protagonist, Arissa, as a victim of her religious heresy. Instead, she is portrayed as a Muslim woman who implements her religious teachings to be a good Muslim mother by showing affection to her disabled son (Schleifer, 1986). Raian, Arissa's son, is later diagnosed with CHARGE syndrome, which causes him to have disabilities and growth retardation. Unlike normal children, Raian's growth is a bit delayed. Therefore, Arissa cherishes every stage of growth Raian shows as an achievement by placing a green sticker on the chart she creates;

"My life fell into a single-minded routine, milestones measured by Raian's accomplishments. I created a chart of my own and put green dots on days he did something new, like walk, eat, or laugh—all the events delayed but occurring at their own pace if I just held on one more day" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 174).

The green color chosen by Arissa as a marker of her child's achievements is certainly believed to have a deeper meaning. Meanwhile, Jung (1964) states that green is utilized in folklore as a symbol of hope, implying the possibility of growth and differentiation. Moreover, Yu (2014) explains that besides symbolizing awakenings, new beginnings, and growth, green represents the spiritual in Islam as it is the sacred color of the Prophet and divine providence. Rodrigues (2008) adds that green is commonly acknowledged as a symbol of Islam and esteemed Muslim figures. Its symbolic significance

stems from the belief that Mohammed often wore a green cloak, indicating his preference for the color green. Therefore, the green dot sticker Arissa symbolizes gratitude to God that she prays in every growth of Raian. Therefore, the Orientalists' stereotype associated with Muslim women, victims of their anachronistic faith, is countered by presenting the character of a Muslim woman who loves her religion and God through the use of green dots to celebrate the growth of her disabled son.

(5) Blue, Orange, Brown

On the other hand, blue, orange, and brown are used simultaneously in the main protagonist's painting, displaying her feelings and life journey, contrasting the stereotype of lacking agency accepted by Muslim women. Apart from being dangerous foreigners, terrorists, and victims of their anachronistic faith, Orientalists also describe Muslim women as lacking agency and voice (Zine, 2006). Bilge (2010) emphasizes that the West perceives veiled Muslim women as lacking agency since they are assumed to either be coerced to wear the veil by the men around them or develop a false consciousness of using it. Consequently, the novel reveals the main protagonist full-consciously making decisions regarding the use of her hijab through the choice of paint colors in her paintings;

"The frantic slish-slosh on canvas was deafening in the quiet room; the errant brush had its own mood. I looked at the hopeful blues on the canvas that with repeated strokes had turned the brilliant orange to sad murky brown" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 5).

The narrator utilizes three color terms, blue, orange, and brown. According to Zhang (2015), blue is a color full of sadness and fantasy, portraying the character's loneliness, sorrow, and fancifulness. Thus, the "hopeful blues" paint chosen by the main protagonist reveals her hope to get out of her grieving period, the days she has a hard time accepting the death of her husband. Then, she adds orange, symbolizing the character's hope as it becomes the hopeful light that lightens people's journey (Yin, 2018). Further, orange is also described as a combination of red, symbolizing burning energy, and yellow, representing happiness (Cerrato, 2012). Therefore, the "*brilliant orange*" symbolizes her unborn son, the primary source of the main protagonist's happiness, and motivates her to escape from her grief. As a result, considering her desire to get out of misery and the presence of her baby, the main protagonist is encouraged to start a new, happier, and safer life for the sake of her son, which then later brings out the "sad murky brown" in her life.

However, the brown color conveys a sense of stability and allows one to blend into the backdrop unnoticed (Edwards-Wright, 2011). Considering this concept, the "sad murky brown" refers to Arissa's tough decision to remove her hijab. This is due to the double consciousness adopted by the main protagonist causing her to be aware of how the host land builds standards for harmless Muslim women. Thus, Arissa decides to remove the hijab to reduce the slight differences that exist between her and other women in western society;

"I was certain there would be plenty of times when he would be regarded differently, and the least I could offer him was one less deviation from the norm. Assimilate and accept it all, I decided. Only this society can give my unborn child what my own can't—a chance for a better life and abundant opportunities that he could seize and avail." (Abdullah, 2009, p. 105).

The novel conveys that the main protagonist is a Muslim woman who adopts a double consciousness, not a false consciousness, regarding using her hijab. The double consciousness is depicted by how Arissa is aware of the norm in her host land, which leads her to hide her identity as a Muslim to blend with Western society so that her disabled son can be given the opportunity to live more peacefully and securely in America. Therefore, by demonstrating brown as the result of a pile of endless grief or "blues" and the presence of her son radiating bright hope through the "brilliant orange," the novel attempts to present the main protagonist's capability of making decisions about the use of hijab. In other words, the novel indicates that every Muslim woman has agency or the right to decide what is best for themselves, such as prioritizing their safety over religious attributes that potentially can attract harm to the wearer.

(6) Gold, Red, Brown, Yellow

Finally, the novel illustrates the end of the main protagonist's resistance to many Orientalists' stereotypes of Muslim women through the use of gold, red, brown, and yellow colors simultaneously, echoing themes of resistance found in literary theory. The use of the colors intricately portrays significant moments in the protagonist's journey, culminating in her ultimate resistance against Orientalist narratives. Through these colors, the character of the Muslim woman is depicted as resilient against alienation and discrimination, challenging the negative portrayals perpetuated by the West without external assistance.

As a Muslim diaspora, the main protagonist is described as experiencing struggles living in America, a non-Muslim country. Not only adapting to cultural differences, but every Muslim diaspora must also survive the "otherness" label that the West always attaches to Orient and Islam. Furthermore, they add the tag "dangerous" to this stereotype and then juxtapose it with veiled Muslim women due to the West's persistent perception of the veil as a powerful sign of 'otherness,' making its wearers easily recognized as Muslims and hence 'legitimate' targets of anti-Islam movements (Chakraborti & Zempi, 2012). Therefore, the novel attempts to show the main protagonist's final resistance to the misinterpretation that the West continues to echo through the use of the term color to visualize the journey and essential decisions in her life;

"All around me were walls of fog; it was just as well. This year the trees of the mid-Hudson Valley were reluctant to shed their leaves. A few fallen ones—the glowing golds, the bloodlike reds, the brazen browns, and the somber yellows—cracked under my feet, crisp and lifeless but not without a voice" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 1).

The text depicts four colors that indicate significant events in the main protagonist's life that are interconnected and influential. According to Ghiotto and Wijanarka (2016), gold is a symbol of wealth, prestige, and successful life, mainly associated with the American Dream of material prosperity. As a result, the term "the glowing gold" as one of the visualizations of falling leaves is interpreted as the fall of the dreams that the main protagonist, Arissa Illahi, and her husband, Faizan Illahi, have composed in carrying out their new life in America as a married couple.

Meanwhile, the factor that causes the collapse of the main protagonist's American dream is related to the next fall leaf color highlighted by the narrator, namely "the bloodlike reds." According to Shi (2019), red is associated with blood, war, death, and war misery. In addition, based on Indian culture, which is also adopted by the main

protagonist's homeland, Pakistan, red is the color that is always associated with marriage and wedding dresses (Alnasuan, 2016). Thus, the color term "the bloodlike reds" is interpreted as a symbol referring to the death of the main protagonist's husband, Faizan Illahi, which automatically marks the end of their marriage. Nevertheless, the term "the bloodlike reds" is related to "the glowing golds" as the death of Faizan becomes the factor in the ruin of Arissa's American dreams. As a consequence of the death of her husband, Arissa has to lose her primary financial source, which forces her to rearrange her life plans in America as a single parent who has to support all the needs of her family.

The third falling leaf the narrator mentions is "the brazen browns." According to Edwards-Wright (2011), brown is a color that is usually used by someone when they want to try to blend better with the background. Thus, I assume that the color term "the brazen brown" is used as a symbol to refer to the act of assimilation taken by the main protagonist, frankly taking off her hijab. As described experiencing hardships in carrying out her daily activities due to attacks and alienations, Arissa decides to assimilate by taking off her hijab, allowing her to blend in more with the Westerners and being free from any mistreatment caused by her hijab;

"I slid the hijab from around my neck. The wind felt chilly on my bare head. It was a new sensation. You can do anything you set your mind to, Arissa Illahi, a voice from the past whispered to me" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 6).

Nonetheless, the last color term in the text above is "the somber yellows." According to Bourenane (2020), yellow is known as the trope of Orientals that highlights and enriches Orientalist iconography while allowing for a dreamlike ambiance in an exotic place. Meanwhile, Hext (2011) emphasizes that the yellow color conveys both a sense of exoticism, aesthetic excess, and pleasure as well as a frivolous rejection of reality for absinthe-induced revelry, moral degradation, and the threat of racial and sexual otherness. Thus, the term "the somber yellows" symbolizes the dim identity of the main protagonist as an oriental woman caused by the assimilation she does in the first place. This possibility can be seen in how the main protagonist, who initially tries to adjust to the norms of her host land, ends up enjoying the new culture that he gets from her new identity; "After shedding the veil, it was interesting for me to see how easily I crossed the cultural barrier to accept another man in my arms" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 203). Even though Arissa aims to conform to the criteria of a good Muslim woman constructed by the West society, the impact she receives from removing her hijab is enough to scrape her identity as an Oriental (Asian and Muslim). It is portrayed in how the main protagonist does something prohibited by her homeland's culture and religion: sexual intercourse with a man who is not her husband.

Thus, after examining the depiction of four falling leaves with different colors, I believe the novel attempts to display a sequence of significant events in the main protagonist's life, leading her to the final act of resistance against the Orientalists. The destruction of her dream of living a secure life in America due to her spouse's death on 9/11 causes Arissa to decide to take off her hijab to hide her identity. Based on these circumstances, I believe that the novel endeavors to present the character of a Muslim woman who is able to resist alienation and discrimination due to the negative label that the West constantly spreads without any help from others. However, in the end, she

has to conceal her identity as an Oriental and Muslim woman to carry out her life without being haunted by accusations of being a dangerous woman. Not only showing resistance to the dangerous foreigner label, but the novel also succeeds in presenting Muslim women in contrast to the passive, voiceless, oppressed, and lacking agency stereotypes built by the Orientalists all at once.

Conclusions

Saffron Dreams is a novel written by Shaila Abdullah in 2009 that highlights the life journey of the main protagonist, Arissa Illahi, a diaspora Muslim woman who has difficulty surviving in her host land after 9/11. The research strives to study how the novel portrays the negative stereotypes of Muslim women constructed by Orientalists and also how the text resists the negative stereotypes by utilizing color symbolism. The study discovers that the novel repeatedly depicts that Orientalists perceive Muslim women as oppressed by men and patriarchy and as the "Other" or dangerous foreigner. On the other hand, the text also demonstrates the main protagonist's response to negative stereotypes of Muslim women built by the Orientalists through the repetitive use of color symbolism. It is illustrated by how the main protagonist, Arissa Illahi, is portrayed repeatedly using color terms to describe things and connect events in her life: red as the symbol of Arissa's identity and anger; black as the symbol of Arissa's depression, mourning, tragic events, and freedom from oppression; white as the symbol of the purity and innocence of Arissa's religion; green as the symbol of Arissa's love for her religion as it is highly associated with Islam; Meanwhile, the colors blue, orange, and brown are used together to symbolize Arissa's hope, the unborn son, and the decision to be unnoticed; and gold, brown, and yellow are the symbols of the Arissa's fallen American dreams, acts of assimilation, and dim identity as an oriental woman. Further, we recommend further research to discuss the meaning of the title "Saffron Dreams" itself and other metaphors that frequently emerge in the text. These two topics are fascinating to study because there are many hidden meanings and hidden intentions the author wants to convey that we have not been able to solve.

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