

The Representation of Muslim Women as The Other in "The Submission" Novel

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to analyze the representation of a Muslim woman in "The Submission", Amy Waldman's novel, which takes the issue of 9/11. The research design is descriptive qualitative. The primary data consist of the novel's words, phrases, sentences, expressions, dialogues, plot, and narrations. The supporting data are from books, e-books, journals, articles, websites, and other related references. It is conducted from the American studies perspective. It applies some perspectives, especially the theory of Orientalism, to scrutinize the construction of Muslim women in the novel. It also attempts to identify some constructions which differ from the reality of Muslim women generally and American Muslim women as described in other texts. The finding shows that "The Submission" perpetuates old Orientalism in the 21st fiction era, representing Muslim women as the Other. They are represented as sensual, libidinous, devilish, subordinate, oppressed, exotic, and requisite to the West's assistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature reflects society and expresses anything that happens in society (Albrecht, 1954). The September 11 attacks as a historical milestone in the United States of America is reflected in literary works. Several novels and short stories come along after September 11 attacks putting the event as the main subject of concern. This fiction generates a new literary genre in the twenty-first century and provides various issues related to the attacks. 9/11 fiction holds a panorama of global terrorism through characters in fiction (Eaton, 2016).

The September 11 attacks are deemed a traumatic event, represented by the characters in the 9/11 fiction as victims of the attacks who encounter trauma. As Ellen Verbestel (2010) has researched three 9/11 novels, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), and Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* (2006). The finding shows that trauma symptoms appear in the protagonist characters of the three novels, such as repetitive behaviors and nightmares.

On the other hand, Marana Borges (2013), in her research, criticizes the uncritical employment of trauma, which develops into terrorism in the 9/11 fiction. She examines two 9/11 fictions, Michael Cunningham's *Specimen Days* (2005) and Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011). She concludes that trauma cannot be represented in the literature and historical context because it is separated from its original meaning, legal-medical. Moreover, the representation of the September 11 attacks' original accident in the literature is reduced by the discourses of political interests.

Tinka van Wijngaarden (2015) observes two movies and two novels which have a theme of 9/11: Paul Greengrass' *United 93* (2006), Gavin Hood's *Rendition* (2007), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013). She discovers that the movie *United 93* and the novel *Falling Man* have similar points, whereas the movie *Rendition* and the novel *The Blind Man's Garden* are opposed to both previous works. There are two main definite gaps; *United 93* and *Falling Man* address the 9/11 attacks in the domestic context, focusing on American heroism and white American characters experiencing trauma. *United 93* and *Falling Man* represent the Muslim characters as dangerous and make a more dangerous impression on the terrorist characters. Hence *United 93* and *Falling Man* perpetuate the Orientalism stereotypes by representing Muslim characters as the Other and danger. While *Rendition* and *The Blind Man's Garden* deal with an

international context, those works are almost completely set outside the United States and provide non-Western perspectives on the attacks and their influences on other countries. The latter works elaborate on the Arab or Muslim characters in different varieties and complicated portrayals. Indeed, religious extremist characters are represented as complicated human beings, and therefore *Rendition* and *The Blind Man's Garden* challenge the Orientalist stereotypes.

Marandi and Tari (2012) examine two 9/11 novels, John Updike's *Terrorist* (2006) and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). The finding is that both novels perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes to represent Muslim women characters as oppressed women and victims of Islamic rules. The construction of Muslim women's characters disregards many different political and social realities of Muslim women's life and experience worldwide.

Most of the previous research investigated 9/11 fiction works by men writers and participated in discussions about various issues of 9/11. However, investigating 9/11 fiction by women writers is necessary. Therefore, this research examines 9/11 fiction by American woman journalist entitled "*The Submission*" (2011) and discusses postcolonial issues focusing on the representation of Muslim women in America.

2. METHOD

This research design is qualitative descriptive, which explains Muslim women's representation as the Other in America based on a 9/11 fiction. Qualitative research is mostly used to study social topics (Leavy, 2014). The primary data are taken from a novel entitled "*The Submission*" (2011) by Amy Waldman. The research uses close reading techniques to the novel, classifying and analyzing the collected data, including words, phrases, sentences, expressions, and plots that represent Muslim women characters in the novel.

Edward Said's Orientalism theory is used to find the framework of the representation of the Orient in the novel as sensual, libidinous, devilish, subordinate, oppressed, exotic, and requisite to the West's assistance. The classified data is analyzed according to facts and the life of Muslim women in America from other texts.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The plot of "The Submission"*

The September 11, 2001 attack influenced the world of literature, which emerged 9/11 fiction genre. One of them is "*The Submission*", written by Amy Waldman. It is her debut novel and was published ten years after the attacks in 2011. The novel covers America's reactions to the tragedy involving Americans' trauma and grief experiences after the tragedy and how they deal with them. In addition, it describes minority issues related to American attitudes toward Muslims and immigrants. The novel also portrays political and media maneuvering in America. "*The Submission*" comprises complex elements of American life after the 9/11 attacks.

The novel begins in 2003, two years after the attacks in New York City. A design competition is held for the September memorial built on the site of the fallen buildings. Juries choose a design named "*The Garden*" of many anonymous submissions which is made by unexpected designer, a Muslim American architect known by his name, Mohammed Khan. It drives juries in a guessing to him, whether he is an American and what kind of American he is. They also debate any ambiguity of the design and the meaning of Islam. They realize that it brings public confrontation because everything relating to Islam is sensitive issues after the attacks. This news is leaked to the post and it causes fierce controversy in society. It encourages movements of two groups in American society which is pro and anti the Muslim designer wins the competition.

American people who stand for rejecting the juries' selection are represented by a group named Save America from Islam (SAFI). They do demonstration and refuse to receive a Muslim architect as the winner for the design competition. They are afraid that the architect as part of Islamic terrorist group who attack and kill in the 9/11 attacks. They interpret his design "*The Garden*" which relates to a code of jihad and as a symbol of Islamic garden in heaven for martyr's paradise. It becomes the terrorist's intention and it will be achieved through attacking to their enemy. Meanwhile, Mohammed Khan gets support from Muslim American Coordinating Council (MACC) which advocates him to win the competition. The institution helps him to achieve his rights as an American, although he is a Muslim. He has the right to participate and win the competition, but ultimately he decides to withdraw.

In addition, the story of "*The Submission*" is built with minority issues in America which increase after the 9/11 attacks. Both Muslim men and Muslim women in America deal with those problems such as discrimination, prejudice, racism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and Islamophobia. Mohammed Khan is presented of Muslim men in America who gets discrimination and prejudice from American citizens. Whereas there are some Muslim women characters who face the same problems and have complexity in their life, such as Asma Anwar, Laila Fathi, Zahira Husain, Hasina, and Mrs. Mahmoud. This research analyzes the representation of these Muslim women characters in the novel.

3.2. Identification of Muslim Women Characters in "The Submission"

Asma Anwar. She is a Bangladeshi illegal immigrant in America and threatened to deport. She was eight months pregnant when her husband died by the attacks and she became a widow. She gets compensation for death victim's family by the attacks from government. She lives in Mrs. Mahmoud's apartment in Kensington, a neighborhood in Brooklyn borough of New York City. She gives birth in America and therefore her son gets American citizen. She wears salwar kameez, a traditional outfit of Indian subcontinent and she covers her head with chunni scarf daily. She has a good mind although she does not access higher education and she speaks English very little. She is also a brave woman who fights for her rights and a piety who practices ritual prayers frequently. Asma and Abdul are deported when their identities as illegal immigrants are revealed publicly in newspaper. She passes away when she is leaving the apartment for returning to Bangladesh.

Laila Fathi. She is an Iranian American lawyer and uncovered her hair. She dresses modern clothes and wears make-up on her face. As a professional lawyer she has some job experiences. She advocates Asma to receive compensation for the attacks' victim, although she is an illegal immigrant. She also works in Muslim American Coordinating Council (MACC) who agrees on advocating Mohammed Khan to win the memorial design competition. She is the only uncovered woman in the organization. She has an affair with Mohammed Khan and she keeps working professionally.

Mrs. Mahmoud. She is an owner of the apartment building where Asma lives in. She is a Bangladeshi American and uncovered her hair. She likes to gossip about everything and often invites Asma in gossiping. She is frequently unaware that she hurts and harms other by her arrogance, recklessness, and prejudice. She becomes surrogate parents for Asma after her husband passed away.

Hasina. She is a Bangladeshi immigrant and next-door neighbor of Asma. She comes to America with her husband. They have married in thirties and they do not have children. These couple do not live in harmonious, they frequently quarrel each other. They are conservative Muslim family. It is so through strict purdah which is dressed daily by her. She never leaves the house without her husband. She lives under her husband's control who does not give freedom, for example, forbidding Hasina to socialize with their neighbor. She also gets domestic violence from her husband.

Zahira Hussain. She is a student of Columbia University who studies double major in literature and economics. She covers her head with headscarf. She is a member of Memorial Defense Committee and joins a protest in a plaza opposite the site which is simultaneous protest from Save America from Islam. Her headscarf is pulled by a member of SAFI, Sean Gallagher in the protest. It gives domino effect and encourages other headscarf pulling in America. Zahira asks Sean to meet her and do apologize so that she drops the charges of his headscarf-pulling crime.

3.3. The Representation of Muslim Women in "The Submission"

This research focuses on how Muslim women characters are represented in "The Submission" novel. It considers the writer's comprehension to observe the representation of the Muslim women characters in the novel. According to Said's Orientalism, the writer's background influences s/he to construct the non-Western characters in the novel. "The Submission" is written by Amy Waldman. She was an American woman journalist and a newspaper reporter for eight years and co-chief of the New Delhi bureau for three years. She also has experience as a national correspondent for The Atlantic. She also has some academic records; for example, she is a Yale University graduate, a fellow of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and a fellow of the American Academy in Berlin. She lives in Brooklyn.

Oriental characters are accustomed to appearing in 9/11 fiction, especially Arabs and Muslims — both men and women. Westerners author some 9/11 fictions; consequently, the Oriental characters are represented in Western perspectives. It preserves Edward Said's old Orientalism in the twenty-first-century era, which regarded the Orient differently from them, or the Other. Muslim women characters in "The Submission" novel are represented as sensual, libidinous, devilish, subordinate, oppressed, exotic, and requisite to the West's assistance.

3.3.1. Sensual

As male scholars dominate the Orientalism tradition, they regard female Orientals in a sexist view. Female Orientals are created in male fantasy as dense and boundless sensual objects (Said, 1978). One of the characters is portrayed through the characterization of Laila Fathi. She is a Muslim woman who uncovers her head with a hijab or headscarf, and she also wears modern clothes and make-up,

"The lawyer, he said, was an Iranian American. A Muslim, but unlike any Muslim Asma knew. Her dark hair, unlike Asma's, was uncovered. The skirt of her snug-fitting turquoise suit struck just above the knee. Her pale legs were bare; her heels, which matched her suit, high. Her lips were painted the color of a plum" (p. 157-158).

Laila wears a plum lipstick shade which gives a sensual impression. Lipstick color reveals its user, a plum-colored lipstick is sensual (Color Psychology, June 3, 2016).

The portrayal of Laila's physical appearance and style shows that she is represented as a sensual character. Another passage describes her sensuality, "She was small but curvy, and her features were bold, as were the lipsticks she favored. Her suits were vividly colored and her passions" (p. 242). The passage's words "curvy and bold" draw Laila's body in detail and express her sensuality. The word 'curvy' is associated with sex and sexuality, which is applied to sexualize women and women's bodies (Caldas-Coulthard and Moon, 2010). Moreover, the phrase "Her suits were vividly colored" asserts that she is the Other. Vivid color relates to colonization experiences which are the color of the Otherness. It belongs to colonized people who are primitive, uneducated, and uncivilized. The very antithesis of Western culture avoids vivid color. Goethe states that in Northern Europe, people of refinement wore white for women and black for men instead of wearing colored wear. They also avoid the colored objects around them (Taussig, 2009).

Furthermore, the representation of Laila as a sensual character is narrated from Mohammad Khan's point of view. "He barely slept himself. Instead, he memorized the fan of her dark hair, the fullness of her mouth, the voluptuousness of even her bones" (p. 371-372). The phrase "the fullness of her mouth" and the word "voluptuousness" in the passage describe how sexually attractive Laila's body is for Mo. This expression strengthens the statement that female Orientals are represented in a sexist view which attenuates them as an object of male sexual desire.

3.3.2. *Libidinous*

Muslim women, as the object of male sexual fantasy, are portrayed as sensual characters and libidinous characters. It is manifested in the love affair between Laila and Mo,

The roar grew louder; Laila's eyes opened; she smiled. He twisted his mouth, all he could manage, in return. In the shower he sponged her back and held her to him, cupping her breasts from behind. With the water raining down on them, blocking all sound but its own, they were safe. But she wrestled free (p. 372).

The unmarried relationship between Laila and Mo contrasts with Islamic values which only allows woman and man to have a full-blown relationship in marriage. Islam does not prohibit humans from fulfilling their sexual desire but admits it in marriage (Shihab, 2004). Since the unmarried relationship is awful and harmful, it is forbidden in Islam, "And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way" (Qur'an 17, 32).

3.3.3. *Devilish*

In the works of British Orientalists, Sir Richard Burton and William Lane represent Muslim women as libidinous and devilish persons (Haddad, Smith & Moore, 2006). The devilishness of Muslim women means they have bad morals and behavior, represented in the character of Mrs. Mahmoud. She is a gossip monger who is keen on talking about other people and their private life, "Tea with Mrs. Mahmoud was never just tea, rather it was a lubricant for the gossip that would be disseminated or collected, the measuring of everyone else's situation and the landlady's own" (p.283-284). Gossiping ridicules and hurts others through words and acts. It is wrong behavior and forbidden activity in Islamic values, which instructs Muslims to treat other people with honor as a sign of believer (Qur'an 49:11-12). Islamic principle teaches us to behave well when socializing with others. In addition, Mrs. Mahmoud is described as an arrogant and petty person who hurts others, "Often these little dramas, revealing how Mrs. Mahmoud's feelings, her pride, were so easily hurt, almost as a child might be, brought Asma's affection for her to the surface" (p.284-285). The passage shows that the attitude of Mrs. Mahmoud causes hurt and discomfort for Asma.

3.3.4. *Subordinate*

It is a tenet of Orientalizing gaze in the representation of Muslim women that they are weak and under male control domination. Since Westerners have an interest in their colonization, they describe Muslim women as subjugated (Haddad et al., 2006). Muslim women are subordinate and have less important positions than Muslim men. This is portrayed in Hasina's character: "Hasina lived in strict purdah, never leaving the house without her husband. Sometimes she would ask Asma to bring her something from the market, an ingredient she needed for cooking, or sanitary napkins, or once even underwear, telling Asma her size" (p. 312). According to Susan (1998), purdah is a custom of isolating between male and females in public and domestic. It originated in Persia, then spread to Middle Eastern land. It is not an Islamic custom; even developed since pre-Islamic tradition. Muslims who live in Iran and India adopt the custom of purdah. The woman is placed separately from the man,

and a curtain covers the place. The woman cannot leave the house without a companion covering her face. Purdah has a detrimental impact on Muslim women, alienating them from interactive activities in society (Yusuf, 2014).

The passage shows that Hasina's life is delimited by purdah. She lives under the control of her husband. She cannot leave the house without him, although she has to go out for fulfilling her needs. Moreover, this is opposite to Islamic values, which permit women to leave the house if necessary with particular provisions. The Holy Prophet said, "Allah has permitted you to go out of the house for genuine needs," as contained in the Collection of Hadith by Muslims and Al-Bukhari. It means that Muslim women get freedom and rights to make movements, for example, working outside the house, visiting the mosque, performing Hajj, participating in Friday and Id Prayers, attending funerals and visiting graves, and even participating in battle.

3.3.5. *Oppressed*

Orientalism portrays Muslim women as oppressed by brutal Muslim men. The oppressed Muslim woman is represented in the character of Hasina. She suffers from domestic violence, "Twice she had heard Kabir hit Hasina, or at least she thought so from the sharp scream and muffled cries that followed" (p.312). "Then Kabir opened the door, and Asma pushed past him to Hasina, who was huddled on the couch, her face red and puffy, her right eye starting to swell" (p.316). Domestic violence is one of the types of violence or abuse that occurs in domestic settings involving family members or intimate partners when one person attempts to dominate another. Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence threatening family members such as a wife, husband, child, or elderly family member. However, women are mainly being the victim of domestic violence. It includes physical, psychological, and sexual abuse (Kenney, 2011). The passage shows that Hasina is physically abused by her husband.

Meanwhile, domestic violence is condemned in Islam. It is stated in the holistic approach of Islamic sources, which involves the Qur'an, the saying and teaching of the Prophet, and Islamic scholarly sources (AlKiek, 2017). The Qur'an, by its verses, provides a set of models and standards for the relationship between wife and husband. It instructs the spouse to love, help, share, and respect each other. As instructed in these Qur'an verses, "live with your wives in kindness and equity" (4:19).

3.3.6. *Exotic*

Muslim women are also represented as exotic. In "The Submission" novel, it is portrayed in the character of Asma Anwar. She is presented as a Bangladeshi illegal immigrant in the United States of America, "Like Inam, Asma was in America illegally. All of this official attention, she was sure, would end with her deportation." (p.150). Asma is considered an alien because of her illegality. Illegal or undocumented immigrants are considered aliens in America (Camarota, 2015). In addition, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, exotic is defined as 1: introduced from another country: not native to the place where found <exotic plants>; 2: archaic: FOREIGN, ALIEN; 3: strikingly, excitingly, mysteriously different or unusual <exotic flavors>; 4: of or relating to striptease <exotic dancing>. Therefore, Asma's exotic representation is seen in her status as an illegal immigrant.

The representation of Muslim women as exotic is also portrayed in the character of Zahira Husain. She is presented as a well-educated Muslim woman who studies at university with a double major. In addition, she is a brave Muslim woman who is an activist of the Muslim group and does movement activities to support Mo's memorial design, The Garden. However, Zahira is represented as exotic. Besides, she is represented differently from other Muslim women characters in the novel. It is described in Sean pulling off Zahira's headscarf when they unintentionally meet in protest, "What made you pull my scarf? Had you planned it?"..... "No!" he said. "Your sign made me mad." Aware of how childish this sounded, he borrowed Debbie's words: "But also, we don't make women cover their hair in this country." (p. 389). The exoticism of Zahira is portrayed in the differentiation between her and American women as she wears a headscarf. Staszak (2008) states that exoticism relates to a place, object, or person different from the West. It emerged when Western imperialism in explore and colonized the East. Zahira's headscarf denotes the Otherness. Thus, she is represented as exotic.

3.3.7. *Requisite the West Assistance*

Since the West needed to maintain the colonization of the Orient, they used Orientalism which produced knowledge of the Orient, which is extremely disparate from the West. The West is civilized, contrary to the Orient, uncivilized. Muslim women are portrayed as the victim of oppression and backwardness. They need the contribution of the West to liberate and civilize them, described in the character of Asma Anwar. She receives compensation from the American government because her husband died from the attack. She uses the money to buy her needs and newspaper too,

"At Mr. Chowdhury's fish-and-grocery store, Asma loaded up on wheat flour, rice, tomatoes, milk, cooking oil, four kinds of vegetables, and the Bengali-language papers. She paid for her papers along with her groceries, pleased not to be one of those cheapies who stood at the checkout counter reading the papers for free like it was a library, although she had to confess that until her windfall, she had done just that." (p. 210).

Asma is delighted with her ability to buy the newspaper, although she has to get compensation. The newspaper symbolizes literate activity. Without the windfall of the American government, she will not be able to access it. This means that Asma needs the assistance of the West to be civilized.

After Asma's husband died, she only lived in America with her son. But she made an effort to stay in America for a better life. Living in America liberates her while living in Bangladesh is the other way, "Clinging to America, to the possibilities it dangled, was her small war of liberation if a lonelier one" (p. 314). The passage shows that America, as the West, can provide freedom for Asma. She is going to get freedom if she stays there. Thus she has to get the West contribution to be free and liberated.

Moreover, the representation of Muslim women who need assistance from the West is described in the passage, "Except maybe God, the greatest of all plotters, meant for her to return home. She had her money and the American experience, which told her that hard work made any enterprise possible, even if Bangladesh's corruption and chaos would test that. She would find a girls' school there. Maybe they couldn't change a country of 140 million people now, but if each girl founded a school, and each of those students founded a school ..." (p. 541-542). If Asma is deported back to Bangladesh, she will build a school for Bangladeshi girls. She has gotten American funds and the American experience. It represents that she is an agent of the West who has been salvaged, then she has a mission to save and civilize other the Orient in her country by building a girls' school.

4. CONCLUSION

Develop from Edward Said's Orientalism to analyze the five Muslim women characters in "The Submission" novel: Laila Fathi, Asma Anwar, Hasina, Mrs. Mahmoud, and Zahira Husain; this research finds that the five characters are represented as the Other. They are represented as sensual, libidinous, devilish, subordinate, oppressed, and exotic. They are also portrayed as unable to take action individually; rather, they are requisite to the West's assistance. Consequently, Amy Waldman perpetuates old Orientalism by representing such Muslim women characters in "The Submission." Although she is a journalist and expected to have a neutral perspective on viewing Muslim women, she is still unable to leave behind the stereotypes of the Orientals as the others. Thus, her work strengthens Said's argument that the Orientals are still considered the others who cannot have equal positions in Western society. Although Waldman has attempted to portray the complexity of Muslim women, she still presents her biased view toward Muslim society, especially Muslim women. Muslim women characters in the novel are portrayed differently from the reality of Muslim women, as described in the other texts.

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