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The Representation of Muslim Women in the post-9/11
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and *Nazrah*

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HINWEIS

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In meiner Diplomarbeit untersuche ich wie muslimische Frauenfiguren in den folgenden Kulturprodukten *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* und *Nazrah* nach 9/11 repräsentiert werden. Mein Ziel ist es zu zeigen, dass die Darstellung der muslimischen Frauen in diesen Kulturprodukten sich von den westlichen Mainstream Medien, in denen muslimische Frauen als Opfer gekennzeichnet sind, unterscheiden.

Um zu illustrieren, in welcher Art und Weise die Darstellung der muslimischen Frauenfiguren in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* und *Nazrah* die Stereotypen dekonstruieren, stelle ich zuerst frühere Darstellungen von muslimischen Frauen in der westlichen Literatur und Kunst vor. Im Bezug auf Edward Saids *Orientalism* und Meyda Yegenoglus *Colonial Fantasies* erkläre ich, dass der Mythos von der passiven und gehorsamen muslimischen Frau aus dem Orientalismus stammt. Said definiert den Orientalismus als eine Beschäftigung mit dem Osten, das einen Diskurs über den Orient produziert. Er behauptet, dass der Orientalismus, der die Welt als in „West“ und „Ost“, „zivilisiert“ und „barbarisch“ kategorisiert, „ein westlicher Stil der Beherrschung, Widerherstellung und dem Besitz von Autorität über den „Orient“ ist. In diesem Sinn spielt die Vorstellung der muslimischen Frauen als Sklaven der muslimischen Männer in Kunst und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts eine wichtige Rolle um die Überlegenheit der westlichen Zivilisation zu beweisen.

Ich betone, dass nach dem 11. September 2001 die orientalische Darstellung der muslimischen Frauen als Gefangene der muslimischen Männer wieder entdeckt und neu produziert worden sind. Die Bilder von afghanischen Frauen in der *Burqa* dominieren die Medien und dadurch wird das Klischee der unterdrückten muslimischen Frauen verstärkt. Die Frage, die ich behandle, ist, ob die westliche Intervention den afghanischen Frauen eine Stimme gibt oder nicht. Im Bezug auf die Vorstellung der afghanische Frauen und der Frage nach der *Burqa* sagt Bina Sharif, eine afghanische Verfasserin, dass das Problem von Frauen in Afghanistan nicht die *Burqa* ist, sondern die westliche Politik und die Taliban Regime, die die Stimme der afghanischen Frauen ignorieren.

Nach der Erklärung, wie der hegemoniale westliche Diskurs die unterdrückte muslimische Frau konstruiert und wie dieser Diskurs alle muslimische Frauen zur einer fixen und singulären Kategorie beschränkt, zeigt meine Arbeit, dass *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* und *Nazrah*, ein TV Drama, eine TV Serie und eine Dokumentation, ein ganz anderes Bild im Bezug auf muslimische Frauen bieten. In diesen Kulturprodukten sind die muslimischen Frauen selbständig, kämpferisch und selbstbewusst dargestellt. Zum Beispiel ist im britischen Film *Yasmin* die muslimische Frauenfigur als Siegerin dargestellt und ist kein Opfer. Die Protagonistin kämpft nicht nur gegen den hegemonialen westlichen Diskurs sondern auch gegen die östlich patriarchale Kultur. Ebenso repräsentiert *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, die weiblichen Charakterinnen wie Rayyan und Fatima als aktive Mitglieder der Gesellschaft. Die muslimischen Interviewpartnerinnen in *Nazrah* werden auf ähnliche Weise als aktive Frauenfiguren vorgestellt.

Darüber hinaus gehe ich in meiner Arbeit der Frage nach, ob die muslimischen Frauenfiguren in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* und *Nazrah* als vielseitige und dynamische Frauen dargestellt sind oder nicht. Auf Stuart Halls Konzept von kultureller Identität bezogen, demonstriere ich, dass diese Kulturprodukte muslimische Frauenidentitäten als multiplen, veränderbaren und historischen Konstrukts definieren.

Zusätzlich zeige ich auf, auf welche Art und Weise das Kopftuch oder der Schleier in diesen Kulturprodukten eingesetzt werden. Im Westen werden das Kopftuch und der Schleier als ein Zeichen der „barbarisch“ islamischen Zivilisation und ein Symbol von Unterdrückung der Frauen gesehen. In *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* und *Nazrah* ist das Kopftuch als eine Metapher von Freiheit und Identität definiert. In diesem Sinn, sind diese Filme sehr dekonstruktiv.

Zum Schluss, behaupte ich, dass in den Werken *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* und *Nazrah* die muslimischen Frauenfiguren sich selbst ohne Einfluss der westlichen und islamischen Diskurse frei definieren und somit einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur Selbstdefinition von muslimischen Frauen darstellt.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 a great deal of attention has been paid to the Muslim World. The images of Muslim women in the veil or in the *burqa* have circulated in mainstream Western media, which report on Muslim communities. Many writers such as Jasmin Zine and Kristan Hunt claim that the images of veiled Muslim women in the post-9/11 media have reinforced the clichéd notions about the “Muslim woman”¹ as silenced and oppressed victims of Islamic culture. In my thesis I am going to analyze three post-9/11 cultural products namely *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah*, which can be categorized as a TV drama, a sitcom and a documentary film respectively. By using the methods of post-colonialist and feminist theories, I aim to show in what ways the representations of Muslim women in these cultural products deconstruct the conventional image of the “Muslim woman”.

In order to examine how these cultural products challenge the depiction of the “victimized Muslim woman”, it is essential to investigate how and when the portrayal of the “Muslim woman” as submissive was constituted. In Chapter 2, I will demonstrate that the representation of the “Muslim woman” as victim dates back to the eighteenth century when the West became economically, militarily and politically superior to the East and started to colonize the Muslim World. Colonization, military and economic power, enabled the West to produce the knowledge of the “Orient” that led the West to define itself by categorizing the world into the following binary oppositions such as, “the Occident” and “the Orient”, “the West” and “the East”, and “us” and “them”. According to Edward Said, Orientalism [the study of the Orient] is ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having an authority over the Orient’.² In this regard, it can be said that since the Enlightenment Muslim women have been an important part of the construction of the Orient because of

¹ I am using the term of “the Muslim woman” in the sense that the “Muslim woman” signifies a singular and stable category, which has been defined and redefined by the discourse of Orientalism. The term is also used by Mohja Kahf to ‘rip apart the seams the apparent fit between “the Muslim woman” as the object of representation in Western texts and real Muslim women with live cells[...]’ (Kahf, 1999:3).

² Said, 6.

their ways of clothing and living. The veil and the harem have been used as means of othering Muslim women. As Kahf indicates, the idea that Muslim women are oppressed and imprisoned in Islamic culture was ‘manifested in a kind of narrative shorthand by the veil and the harem’.³ In many books and paintings produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Muslim women were portrayed as passive, submissive and exotic. They were represented as the opposite of Western women, who were regarded as free. However, in these works Muslim women are silenced. It is not Muslim women who speak for themselves but Western travelers, writers and painters. As Said puts it, the Oriental woman depicted in Flaubert’s *Kucuk Hanim* does not represent her emotions, presence and history but she is represented.

In Chapter 3 I am going to demonstrate how gender plays a crucial role in reinventing the notion that Muslim women are oppressed by their Islamic culture in post 9/11 media coverage. *Burqa*-clad Afghan women represented in mainstream Western media reinforce the hegemonic discourse of Orientalism on Muslim women and evoke the idea that Muslim women victimized by their men are in need of Western “civilization”. According to many writers, such as Zillah Eisenstein and Jemima Repo, the portrayal of Afghan women in the *burqa* functions as the demonization of Muslim/Afghan men whereas this portrayal hypermasculinates Western men. In doing so, the war on the Taliban is justified.

However, after the 9/11 attacks and its aftermath, a counter-discourse has been produced against Western hegemonic discourse. The film *Yasmin*, the comedy series *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and the documentary film *Nazrah* challenge the dominant discourse of Orientalism which reduces Muslim women to a singular and stable category.

In the second part of my thesis, I will place my focus on an analysis of the ways in which Muslim female characters in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and in *Nazrah* are represented. I will show how the portrayal of Muslim women in these cultural products is similar to or different from the monolithic portrayal of the “Muslim woman” in Western literary texts, paintings and films.

³ Kahf, 9.

In my analysis, I will also show how the Muslim female characters who are stuck between Western and Eastern cultures construct their identities in the post-9/11 world. In *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and in *Nazrah* the Muslim female figures fight against both imperialist Western discourse that represents Muslim women as oppressed women who need to be rescued and also against patriarchal Eastern culture that reinforces traditional gender roles on them.

Then, I will also analyze whether the Muslim female characters in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and in *Nazrah* are manifested as multi-layered or not. Relying on Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity, I am going to show that there is not a fixed and singular Muslim female identity. Especially *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah* illustrate the fact that there is a wide range of variety among Muslim woman characters depending on their cultural, religious, national and educational background. Referring to Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, I am going to present that in these cultural products hybridity is shown as part of Muslim life which brings joy to life than chaos.

Additionally, I am going to explore the ways in which the veil and the *hijab* are represented in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and in *Nazrah*. As I have indicated before, the stereotypical representation of the "Muslim woman" in Western culture is a heavily veiled woman who lives in a harem. Muslim women cannot be defined without these two concepts in the West. However, the monolithic representation of the veil and the harem reveals 'the myths and stereotypes of Orientalism'⁴ rather than the true state of Muslim women's lives. Regarding the distorted image of the harem and the veil, Sarah Graham-Brown states:

Fantasies about harem life pervaded the Orientalist imagination and did much to cloud understanding of social, domestic and sexual lives of women in Middle East. The power of the harem imagination lay in the notion of a forbidden world of women, of sexuality caged and inaccessibility at least, to Western men, except a heap of imagination. It was this heap of imagination that shaped the literature, paintings [...] (Graham-Brown, 2003: 502)

⁴ Said, 63.

The veil or the *hijab* can be seen as an extension of the harem that functions as a barrier between Western men and Muslim women. In this respect, the veil, associated with the excitement of sexuality in the harem in the Western imagination, evokes a feeling of fantasy and fear. In *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and in *Nazrah*, the myth of the veil and the veiled woman are subverted. The female characters see the veil as a marker of liberation and statement of their identities rather than as a symbol of Islamic oppression or backwardness of Islamic culture as represented in Western literary texts and arts. Moreover, the portrayal of the veiled Muslim woman as licentious is reversed in *Yasmin* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie* because the female characters' private lives are revealed in them. The veiled female figures in these cultural products are shown without the *hijab*/ headscarf. In doing so, a Muslim woman's lifestyle at her home is exposed without eroticizing her. In this way, the concept of the harem and the veil lose their mystery/attractiveness.

Finally, I will seek an answer to the question of whether *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah* destabilize the binary between the East and the West and I will explore whether in these cultural products multiculturalism is promoted or not.

PART I

2 THE MYTH OF THE “MUSLIM WOMAN”

‘For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie - deliberate, continued and dishonest - but the myth-persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. Too often we hold fast to the cliché’s of our forebears’

(President John F. Kennedy, quoted in Shaheen 2001:5.)

In this chapter, I will examine how the myth of the “Muslim woman” was constructed by posing some questions, which will, I hope, lead to the core of the discourse about Muslim women and I will give some insight into how the contemporary image of the “Muslim woman” was fabricated. Therefore, I have divided this chapter into two parts. In the first part, I am going to deal with the question of what the contemporary image of the ‘Muslim woman’ has been like in popular Western culture. Then, I will present what kind of meanings this image communicates. In the second part, I will give an answer to the question of what kind of power relations were at stake in the production of the “Muslim woman” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

2.1 The Contemporary Image of the “Muslim Woman”

Before dealing with the question of in which ways the “Muslim woman” is represented in popular Western culture, I want to start by discussing the perceptions of Muslim women in the West. In order to explain how Muslim women are perceived in the West, I want to give an example. A male reporter working for the *Guardian* goes to interview a Muslim father of two schoolgirls, who wear headscarves at school in Athrington. However, the reporter is told by one of the girls that their father has no time for the interview; but she can help him if he wants. Taken aback, the reporter accepts the offer and interviews her. He reports the interview as follows: ‘Fatima then helped me for 40 fully assertive minutes. She is only 15 but her fluency and confidence would be remarkable in someone twice her age. She is

her own woman and knows what she thinks'.⁵ The way the reporter describes Fatima indicates that he was very surprised by Fatima's explanations and attitude. Why was the reporter so amazed by Fatima's speech and attitude, and why did he feel it necessary to share his experience with the reader? Apparently, this girl did not behave as he had expected her to do. She was not the stereotypical Muslim girl who is believed to be victimized and silenced by her Muslim father. How come that a Western reporter has the idea that Muslim girls are not able to think for themselves or to express their thoughts and ideas, but that their fathers think and speak for them? Perhaps it is the representation of the "Muslim woman" in Western media that imposes the idea that Muslim women do not know what they think.

This example leads me to investigate how Muslim women are represented in popular Western culture, which plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion on Muslim women in the West. As it is well known, representations are means of communication that carry messages and encode meanings. Regarding this influential function of representation, Richard Dyer states in his book *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*:

how social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life, that poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination (in housing, jobs, educational opportunity and so on) are shored up and instituted by representation. [...] Equally representation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a social group and their place and their rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them, [...] (Dryer, 2002:1)

Having underlined how effective cultural representations are, I can go on with the question of what the image of the "Muslim woman" in popular Western culture is that forms the perception of Muslim women in daily life. Generally speaking, the image of the "Muslim woman" is the one of the veiled woman. This image can be seen in advertisements, magazines, book covers, paintings, films and documentaries. The answer to the question as to what kind of meanings the image of the veiled woman communicates varies depending on the context. It may refer to exoticism, oppression, and backwardness of Islam. In the

⁵ The *Guardian*, 19 January 1990 quoted in Mabro, 1.

article “Western Representations of Muslim Women”, Butler Brook, Kristen Carbone and Hillary de Marchena, who analyze the images of the veiled woman in modern times, indicate that the image of the veiled woman is used to sell products ranging from movies to perfume and food. Regarding a cigarette ad that displays a woman wearing a transparent veil, which allows the audience to see the female model’s hair and face, the writers state that the transparent veil ‘gives her a mysterious, coy demeanor that appeals to Westerner sentiments’.⁶ The writers continue their analysis associating the female model with the East and say that ‘The East is seen as marketable and sexy in the West, and sex sells’. They also examine an advertisement for perfume that ‘juxtaposes a demure veiled woman with a care-free, exuberant American woman.’ According to them, this image evokes the notion that Muslim women are oppressed whereas American women are free by creating a contrast between the Western woman and Eastern woman. Regarding how the image of the veiled Muslim woman is used as a marketing tactic to sell magazines and airport books, Irene Donohoue Clyne states in her article “Muslim Women: Some Western Fictions” that in the covers of many airport books the image of the veiled woman is employed to attract the attention of Western travelers, who want to enjoy reading about the mystery behind the veil and fantasize exotic women in the harem. Similarly, Jack G. Shaheen argues in *Reel Bad Arabs* that in many Hollywood films the image of the veiled woman in the harem is repeatedly screened in order to reinforce the idea that the Orient is a place of exoticism where ‘young slave girls lie about on soft couches, stretching their slender legs, ready to do a good turn for any handsome stranger who stumbles into the room’.⁷ In films such as *Baghdad after Midnight* (1954) and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), the “Muslim woman” is displayed as a play tool of men in the harem. Muslim women are portrayed as either belly dancers or seductive slaves who entertain men. Apart from giving the idea that the “Muslim woman” is a sexual object, she is also represented as a “disposable item”.

In brief, it can be said that there are two important symbols through which the “Muslim woman” is defined and represented in popular Western culture; the veil and the harem. These two signifiers trigger the image of the “Muslim woman” as oppressed, secluded and

⁶ <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/arhistory/ah369/westernrepresent.htm>.

⁷ Zinzer quoted in Shaheen, 22.

exotic. The question that arises is how these meanings have been created. How did the veil and the harem become associated with oppression, seclusion and exoticism?

2.2 The Construction of the Oriental Woman

In her book *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: from Termagant to Odalisque*, Mohja Kahf, who analyses Western literary representations of the “Muslim woman” from medieval times to the Period of Romanticism, indicates that the image of the “Muslim woman”, which appeared first in medieval literature, ‘has been a changing, evolving phenomenon’.⁸ She explains in what ways the portrayal of the “Muslim woman” has changed in Western narrative since medieval times as follows,

The Muslim woman occupies as much smaller and less central place in that narrative texts than she does in the texts of the nineteenth century. [...] the Muslim woman in medieval literature typically appears as a queen or noble woman wielding power of harm or succor over the hero, reflecting in this the earthy might of Islamic civilization. These figures are loquacious and transgress the bounds of traditional femininity, reflecting the failure of their parental religion to inculcate proper gender roles. The rhetorical move of many medieval literary texts including a Muslim woman is to subdue her, not to liberate her. (Kahf, 1999:4)

As Kahf above remarks, the image of the “Muslim woman” as a noble queen was replaced by the image of a victimized Muslim woman in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Comparing the Muslim female character in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature with the Muslim female character in medieval literature, Kahf states that although ‘the Muslim woman could enter Europe as an equal- even more than equal- character in a story, [...] it could never happen so easily in nineteenth-century literature’.⁹ Similarly, in travel books and paintings produced in late eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries the “Muslim woman” was illustrated either as a sensual being waiting for a male company or a mysterious creature that hides either her ugliness or her strange beauty under the veil. What led the “Muslim woman” to lose her position as equal and powerful in nineteenth Western

⁸ Kahf, 4.

⁹ Kahf, 5.

narrative? What made her a victim or a harem slave waiting to be rescued/ liberated by a Western hero?

In order to find an answer to these questions, which is rooted in the discursive construction of the Oriental woman, I think it is crucial to examine the Western discourse on the “Muslim woman” at the levels of race and gender, because women of the Orient were othered firstly because they belonged to another race and culture and secondly because of their gender. Concerning the question of how Muslim women have been subjected to double discrimination, I think that it is necessary to explain both the representation of the Orient by the West and the position of women in Western societies. Therefore, I will firstly investigate what kind of power relations had an influence on the construction of the Oriental woman as submissive and sensual. Secondly, I will explore in which ways Western feminism has represented the Oriental woman. While discussing the contribution of Western feminism to the production of the Oriental woman, I will demonstrate how phallogentric Orientalism used feminist discourse to establish its hegemony over the Orient by creating a duality between the Oriental woman and the Western woman.

2.2.1 The West as a Sovereign Subject

One of the factors that contributed to the depiction of the “Muslim woman” as silenced and exotic in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western cultural productions was the rise of Europe as a super power due to economic, social and scientific developments going on within Western societies since the Enlightenment. In this respect, it is necessary to mention what a crucial role the Enlightenment played in transforming medieval Europe into a new modern society. In the age of Enlightenment, new concepts such as individuality, liberty, humanism and rationality, on which European philosophers such as Descartes, Rousseau and Kant placed a great emphasis, were at stake in the formation of a European sense of identity. Additionally, the phenomenon of racial hierarchy among human species emerged in the Enlightenment. Some Enlightenment thinkers claimed that European white men were superior to non-white Europeans. Concerning the notion of European superiority, David Hume, for example, wrote;

I am apt to suspect the Negroes and all other species of men to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white. No ingenious manufacturers among them, no arts, no sciences,¹⁰

Similarly, Hegel declared that ‘Africa has no history’.¹¹ It seems that Hegel, perceiving Africa as a land of barbarism, believed that only civilized nations could have a history. As Meyda Yegenoglu suggests, Europe constructed its subject position by setting its boundaries as human, civilized and universal. Accordingly, the Western subject created its ‘Other’- non-Western- and wrote the history of other nations and cultures by describing them as backward and traditional. In doing so, the West formed its sovereign subject position by placing the rest in the object position.

With the notion of cultural and racial superiority, the West started to explore the Islamic world, covering the East, North Africa and the Middle East and to establish an oversea domination in these lands. Economic, social and military power enabled the West to produce a body of knowledge about the East, which also helped the West to represent the East. As Edward Said puts it, the West, establishing its hegemony over the East, started to ‘Orientalize’ ‘the Orient’. Consequently, Muslim women living in the Orient became a part of the process of “Orientalization”.

In the light of this information, I am going to examine in what ways Muslim women have been orientalized from the eighteenth century onwards. However, I think, it is necessary to explain first of all what is meant by “Orientalism” and “Orientalization”. “Orientalism”, deriving from the term ‘Orient’, which refers to a geographical entity including the East, North Africa, and the Middle East, refers to a train of thought that categorizes the world into binary oppositions such as “the Orient” and “the Occident”, “the uncivilized” and “the civilized”, “them” and “us”, which correspond to the East and the West respectively. In his groundbreaking book, *Orientalism*, Said employs the term Orientalism to ‘describe Western approach to the Orient’.¹² He states that Orientalism is a Western discourse about the Orient that creates a body of knowledge about the Orient. He claims that Orientalism

¹⁰ [http://www.goacom.org/overseas-digest/History/1riseofeuropa\(18c\).html](http://www.goacom.org/overseas-digest/History/1riseofeuropa(18c).html).

¹¹ Young, 33.

¹² Said, 5.

represents the Orient as an object for investigation and control. Concerning the dichotomy between the East and West, Said states that '[...] "the Orient" and "the Occident" are man-made geographic terms that signify not only two opposite geographies but also two opposite cultures, ideas and histories. Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West'.¹³ According to Said, these two geographically, culturally and historically opposite entities 'support and to an extent reflect each other'.¹⁴ Defining "the Orient" as a Western invention with no corresponding reality, Said, states that "'the Orient" helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience'¹⁵; Europe needed and still needs its "Other" to define and represent itself. Concerning the question of how Orientalism functions as a discourse, Said indicates that Orientalism formulates the Orient by giving it an identity and a definition. Accordingly, it can be said that like any discourse that produces firstly the objects of knowledge and secondly its subjects by fixing them into one stable category, Orientalism produced the knowledge of the Orient and transformed the whole Islamic world into "the Orient" by giving it a unified racial, social, cultural, political and geographical identity and then represented it as barbaric, morally corrupt, childlike and mysterious through different discursive formations. It is this knowledge of the Orient that made the Orient "Oriental".

In this way, the Orient was "Orientalized". Regarding the discourse about the Orient, Said draws attention to the relations between power, knowledge and representation stating that 'ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood and studied without their force or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied'.¹⁶ He explains the relationship between the Orient and the Occident as 'the relationship of power, of domination, [...] of a complex hegemony'.¹⁷ In this respect, Said points to the cultural hegemony behind the discourse about "the Orient", saying that 'Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand'.¹⁸

¹³ Said, 5.

¹⁴ Said, 5.

¹⁵ Said, 1-2.

¹⁶ Said, 5.

¹⁷ Said, 5.

¹⁸ Said, 7.

In another word, the Western cultural hegemony not only has represented the Orient as backward and barbaric but has also dominated the discourse about the Orient by determining what can be said about the Orient and what cannot be said. In short, relying on Foucault's concept of power as a productive and constructive force, I would like to summarize that Orientalism 'is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths [...]'¹⁹ which functions as an instrument to assess Europe's cultural hegemony over the Orient, by creating an Oriental identity and culture that contrast Western identity and culture.

With this regard, it can be said that the portrayal of the "Muslim woman" in post-Enlightenment literature and art is also a reflection of the Western imagination. Representing the "Muslim woman" as harem slaves and victims of Islam, the West aimed to demonstrate its cultural superiority and maintain its hegemony over the Islamic world.

In order to explore in what ways the "Muslim woman" was "Orientalized" (made Oriental) by eighteenth and nineteenth-century European writers and painters, it is instructive to note that Western representations of the Orient and the Oriental woman is mainly male-dominated even though there are some woman travelers who wrote about the Orient and the Oriental woman. Concerning the phallogentric nature of Orientalist discourse, Yegenoglu states that

the nature of femininity and the nature of the Orient are figured as one and the same thing in these representations. This equivalence positions the Orientalist/Western colonial subject as phallogentric: the other culture is always the other sex. (Yegenoglu, 1998:56)

In this sense, Western representations of the Oriental woman can be classified in two groups. In the first group of the representation, the Oriental woman is associated with the Orient itself. In other words, in this type of depiction either the Orient is feminized or the woman stands for the Orient. Said exemplifies how the Oriental woman epitomizes the exotic essence of the Orient, which Western travelers dream to possess, commenting on Nerval's book, *Vaisseau d' Orient*,

The Orient symbolizes Nerval's dream quest and the fugitive woman central to it, both desire and loss. *Vaisseau d' Orient*- vessel of the Orient- refers enigmatically

¹⁹ Said, 6.

either to the woman as the vessel carrying the Orient, or possibly, to Nerval's own vessel for the Orient, his prose voyage. (Said, 2003:184)

Yegenoglu claims that the Orient was not only feminized by only nineteenth-century Western men but also nineteenth-century Western woman travelers such as Gertrude Bell.

The East is full of secrets-no one understands their values better than the Oriental; because she is full of entrancing surprises. [...] its essential charm is of more subtle quality. [...] it flashes upon you [...] from under the lifted veil of a beggar woman [...], then she sweeps aside her curtains, flashed a facet of her jewels into your dazzled eyes, and disappear[...] when you think you have at last caught some of her illusive grace, she will send you back to shrouded figures and blank house-fronts. (Bell, quoted in Mabro, 1996: 49)

In the extract, Bell describes the Orient as a woman full of secrets and tricks. Her depiction of the Orient proves Yegenoglu's claim that Orientalist discourse is phallogocentric even though it is supported by Western women.

In the second type of representation, the Oriental woman is displayed as an exotic woman who has excessive sensuality. Many Western travelers, deeply influenced by *Arabian Nights* that tells stories about the Orient and portrays it as a place of sensuality, corrupt despotism and mysterious religion, wanted to discover this exotic place and mysterious beautiful women in the Orient. The following extract written by Richard Burton illustrates perfectly the expectation of Western travelers, who came to the Orient to experience some sexual adventures with erotic and flirtatious Oriental women. Burton, a European traveler, pretended to be an Arab and went to the pilgrimage from Medina to Mecca to observe the Oriental woman. He describes a Muslim woman he has seen on his way to pilgrimage as follows:

She was a tall girl, about eighteen years old, with regular features, a skin somewhat citrine-coloured, but soft and clear, symmetrical eyebrows, the most beautiful eyes, and figure all grace.[...]. Unhappily she wore, instead of the usual veil, a "Yashmak" of transparent muslin, bound round the face: [...] Flirtilla fixed a glance of admiration upon my cashmere. I directed a reply with interest at her eyes. She then by the usual coquettish gesture, threw back an inch or two of head-veil, disclosing broad bands of jetty hair, crowning a lovely oval. My palpable admiration of the new charm was rewarded by a partially removal of the Yashmak, when a dimpled mouth and a rounded chin stood out from the envious muslin. [...] I

entered upon the dangerous ground of raising hand to forehead. She smiled almost imperceptibly, and turned away. The pilgrim was in ecstasy. (Burton, quoted in Mabro, 1996: 99)

As displayed in these two samples, in many Western literary texts, travel books and paintings the Oriental woman is described as veiled and hidden in the harem. The veil and the harem transformed into two powerful symbols that have orientalized the Muslim woman because they have seduced the Western male/female travelers by concealing the Oriental woman and the Orient and thereby making them exotic. These two concepts became influential tools that demonstrated Western cultural superiority over Eastern culture in the post- Enlightenment period. In the following pages, I will discuss how and why phallocentric Orientalism employed the veil and the harem to other the Oriental woman. Then, I will investigate the contribution of Western feminism to the production of the Oriental woman.

2.2.2 Phallocentric Orientalism: Desire & Domination

I would like to discuss in what ways the discourse about the veil and the harem served the aim of the phallocentric discourse of Orientalism that displayed the East as morally corrupt, despotic and backward by illustrating the Oriental woman as veiled and placing her behind the walls of the harem. Kahf and Smith indicate that although the veil and the harem did not appear in medieval literature, these two terms emerged in the late seventeenth century and became two powerful metaphors for the imprisonment of the Oriental woman in the nineteenth century. The reasons why the harem and the veil gained negative meanings in the course of time are multifaceted and interrelated.

First of all, the veil and the harem were perceived as an obstacle to “the Western gaze”. They functioned as a barrier between the Oriental woman and European men, which dispossessed European travelers of the right to observe the Oriental woman. When European travelers came to the Orient to discover the mystery hidden in this exotic place, they were astonished by the fact that the Orient was not like the place they were told and that it was not so easy to communicate with Muslim women at all. Leon Michel expresses his disappointment as follows:

Whatever has been written about the Orient, French men happily believe that they will meet the famous odalisques, as beautiful as the morning star and just waiting to be loved. The European man thinks that he will find in Africa beautiful palaces with a balcony over the door to the street, where a charming prisoner will be waiting for a gallant French knight in shining armour to rescue her. They forget that the harems are well guarded and that the *moushrabias* at the windows make it impossible to communicate, even to exchange glances. (Michel, quoted in Mabro, 1996:32)

Why was the nineteenth-century Western traveler so eager to investigate the Oriental woman? In order to answer this question it is important to know the function of “the gaze” in modern Europe. Concerning the emphasis on “the gaze” in modern Western society, Katherine Bullock remarks that Europeans saw the world as an exhibition. Borrowing Timothy Mitchell’s concept of the world-as-exhibition²⁰, she points to the development of representation techniques in the modern world, stating that ‘zoos exhibiting the world’s animals, museums of other culture’²¹ and photographs enabled Europeans to ‘look down upon and grasp the world with a glance’.²² Therefore, the modern experience of the world-as-exhibition gave the priority to gazing. Thus Western travelers, believing that they had the right to gaze/observe the “Other”, were annoyed when they encountered Muslim women who did not display themselves.

Secondly, as I have already mentioned, the Oriental woman was associated with the Orient. In another word, observing the Oriental woman was equaled with observing the Orient. As Yegenoglu indicates, the act of observing the Oriental woman would enable the Western traveler to represent her and the Orient. Without seeing her, Orientalists could not have control over the Oriental woman and the Orient. Regarding the link between the “gaze” and control, Butler, Carbone and de Marchena, who examine the images of the “Muslim woman” in the Orientalist paintings such as the works of Gerome and Eugene Delacroix, two famous French painters, state that ‘[t]he ideas imbued in all Orientalist images of women were a male longing to capture, covet, objectify, and control of the terrain of the Orient’.²³

²⁰ . Cf. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* .

²¹ Bullock, 4.

²² Bullock, 5.

²³ <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/arthistory/ah369/westernrepresent.htm>.



<http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/arhistory/ah369/westernrepresent.htm>

Concerning Gerome's work above that displays an Oriental woman in the bath, Butler, Carbone and de Marchena indicate that the work provides the viewer with an example of the psychological power by enabling the Western gaze to 'intrud[e] upon a private female domain, one which Gerome and his audience would never have seen'.²⁴

Additionally, the veil and the harem that fascinated Western travelers creating a mysterious atmosphere also evoked the feelings of fear and suspicion, because the veil, according to Western understanding, conveying the meaning of 'hiding or concealing the true nature of something', not only covered the face of the Oriental woman but also hid the essence of the Orient from Western knowledge.

One of the axioms of the European Enlightenment is 'the disenchantment of the world' in which knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacle[...]knowledge as power is tied to a social program and strategy according to which space is organized in a particular way which makes its individual occupants and their behavior visible and transparent. With modernity comes a new form of institutional power which is

²⁴ <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/arhistory/ah369/westernrepresent.htm>.

based on visibility and transparency and which refuses to tolerate areas of darkness. (Yegenoglu, 1998:40)

As Yegenoglu has expressed above, the veil and the harem hindered the West to observe the Oriental woman and the Orient, which frustrated the Western travelers who embedded the principle of transparency highlighted by the Enlightenment. By investigating and observing other cultures, Orientalists believed that they would gain a superior position. However, the veil became not only a cloak or a mask that refused the Western gaze but a tool that reversed the relations between the Western subject position as observer and the Oriental woman in object position to-be-observed. Malek Alloula explains in what ways the veil transforms the Muslim woman into a superior position as follows:

These veiled women are not only an embracing enigma to the photographer but an outright attack upon him. It must be believed that the feminine gaze that filters through the veil is a gaze of a particular kind: [...] like the eye of a camera, like the photographic lens that takes aim at everything.

[...] Thrust in the presence of a veiled woman, the photographer feels photographed; having himself being an object-to-be-seen. He loses his initiative. (Alloula quoted in Mabro, 1996:5)

The idea of being gazed by the veiled woman instead of gazing caused an offense to the Western traveler, who saw himself/herself superior because of his/her knowledge about the world. According to the model of Western hegemony, the Western gaze is primary and active whereas native's gaze is passive.²⁵ By being gazed at, the Western observer lost his/her upper hand. This can be seen as the main motif that fueled the Western antagonism against the veil and its extension, the harem.

Similarly, John Foster Fraser, a British journalist and also the author of *The Land with Veiled Women*, expresses his anxieties about the veiled woman of the Orient as follows:

Some of them removed the veil in the shelter of dusk and revealed their charms. But as I wandered by their veils were dropped. A side-glance, each women peeping over the veil seemed to be looking at me with great liquid eyes. Fixing upon me the bold glance of one conscious she could see without being seen. I often felt there was something uncanny about those eyes of the solemn women, as always bright and

²⁵ Cf, Bullock, 13.

always black. Big, unblinking, dreamy sensuous eyes which filled one with a nervous curiosity about what their owners were thinking about. (Fraser, quoted in Mabro, 1996: 46)

Bullock draws a parallel between the feeling of superiority and photographing Muslim women unveiled and imprisoned in the harem. She states that French photographers, who took photos of Algerian women during the French occupation in Algeria so that they could provide Europeans with a glimpse into the Orient, wanted to hold a superior position by displaying the Muslim woman as captive and harem slave. However, according to her, it is not Muslim women who were prevented to see the Western traveler but the Western traveler because as Frantz Fanon puts it, the veiled woman can ‘see without being seen’.²⁶ Bullock argues that the French colonial photographer, who lost his initiative because he was photographed by the veiled woman instead of photographing her, placed the “Muslim woman” behind bars and ‘unveil[ed] the veiled’.²⁷ In this way, he aimed to gain his superiority. The photograph below, in which a woman placed behind bars, supports Bullock’s claims:



<http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/arhistory/ah369/westernrepresent.htm>

He [the photographer] places them [Muslim women] behind bars because he is the one who is barred from seeing her.The colonial postcard is the vulgar “caricature” of the European harem fantasy. It is also a way to confirm the men’s

²⁶ Fanon, quoted in Bullock, 12.

²⁷ Bullock, 15.

belief in their own desirability and superiority over the native men. With the woman behind bars (that is denied agency), the myth that they would choose a Western, Christian savior over their cruel master is preserved. (Bullock, 2003:17)

As Bullock makes it clear, Orientalist discourse using the rhetoric of the veil and the harem pretended to rescue ‘brown women from brown men.’²⁸ However, she argues that the Oriental woman, depicted as unveiled and placed behind bars, was subjected to a double “violation”, because the women in the photographs were not ordinary Muslim women, but most likely prostitutes. She also adds that the photographs were taken indoors in imaginary settings. In this regard, it can be said that the image of the Eastern woman in the photographs fails to reflect the reality about Muslim women in the East because they cannot go beyond the fabrication of photographer’s studio.²⁹ In short, it can be said that it was the feelings of fear, desire and superiority that entailed the desire to orientalize the Oriental woman. Only through unveiling the Oriental woman and displaying her naked in the imaginative settings such as harem and “hamam”³⁰ could the Western traveler and photographer feel safe, satisfied and superior.

2.2.3 Western Woman Travelers and the Oriental Woman

I would like to start this part of my paper by referring to Simone de Beauvoir’s statement on femininity; ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’.³¹ I think that this statement sheds light on what a crucial role socio-economic conditions play in the constitution of female identity. As it is well known, gender and gender roles, which are socially constructed, tend to change and range over time. Changes in the understanding of gender and gender roles are not confined to time but they are also related to race, class and ethnicity. In light of this information, I am going to explore how the modern Western female ideal and its opposition, the Oriental woman, were “invented” by phallogentric bourgeois ideology in the nineteenth century. I will also investigate to what extent nineteenth-century Western woman travelers contributed to the invention of the Oriental woman. In order to explore how the Oriental woman was portrayed by the Western woman

²⁸ Spivak, quoted in Ganhi, 94.

²⁹ Cf. Bullock, 15.

³⁰ Turkish bath.

³¹ Beauvoir, 295.

traveler, it is important to know how the Western woman was defined and what her role was in modern Western society. Therefore, I am going to discuss the statue of woman in post-Enlightenment Europe. Then, I am going to display the interaction between Orientalist and feminist writings in the constitution of the Orient and the Oriental woman.

One of the important factors that have shaped the perceptions of the West about the Oriental woman was the changes in gender discourse within Western societies since the mid-eighteenth century.³² As a result of European overseas trade and industrialization, a general decline in the power of Church and trends in secularization the social organization of gender was altered in the West. When domestic production was replaced by factory production, the bourgeois ideology of separate spheres developed: public and domestic spheres. Public sphere corresponded to men whereas the domestic one was associated with women. This phallogentric ideology also produced “a new ideal woman” who did not try to attract the attention of the male gaze as aristocrat women did in the earlier century but this ideal woman was supposed to fulfill her duty as a domestic woman. Kahf explains the birth of the new ideal woman as follows:

...the earliest beginnings of its (Western) expansion into Islamic lands was the rise of the “domestic woman”[...] This new ideology of middle-class female domesticity, coming into circulation in the eighteenth century, pushed against older, aristocratic notions of the female and the family, and against working-class realities. (Kahf, 1999:7)

Who fit into the category of domestic women? As Kahf has already remarked above, the new domestic female ideal referred to middle-class European women rather than aristocrat and lower-class women who had to work for a living. What did this domestic female ideal use to do? How did she pass her time? In contrast to the medieval European notion that did not allow women to study, the bourgeois ideology encouraged women to study but their education was confined to their domestic duties. The new ideal woman spent her time learning female accomplishments and paying visits. Rousseau describes the ideal woman’s duties in *Emile* as follows; ‘To please them [husbands], to be useful to them[husbands], to

³² Cf. Kahf and Mabro.

make themselves loved and honored by them [husbands], to educate them [sons-children] when they are young [...].³³

Regarding the question of sexuality, Mabro indicates that in the late eighteenth century it was accepted that sexual desire could exist in some women such as in lower-class women or women from different races, but not in the middle-class woman, because she was regarded as ‘the angel in house, preserving the home as a refuge from the harsh world outside’.³⁴

This bourgeois code of values created the modern Western woman who was defined as civilized, educated and liberated by distancing her from the backward Islamic culture’s female identity. Believing in their cultural superiority, Western male and female travelers judged what they had seen in the East with their Western perceptions. They tended to prove their cultural superiority by representing the Oriental woman as uncivilized, immoral, childish and sensual. In this respect, Mabro points out that in many Orientalist paintings Muslim women were depicted in exotic settings whereas Western women were portrayed with their children in a domestic setting. She states that the reason lying behind the portrayal of the “Muslim woman” as exotic and erotic is to reinforce ‘the developing bourgeois ideology’ which ‘was based on an opposition of two spheres- the male public sphere of alienated labor, the female private sphere of self-sacrificing, nurturing, non-alienated labor’.³⁵ She adds that ‘[t]o have depicted harem dwellers as ordinary women who cared for their children and looked after the home as women in Europe did would undermine the whole basis of Western family life’.³⁶

As Mabro’s explanations have made clear, phallogentric Orientalist discourse aimed at setting the Muslim woman as a negative ideal by depicting Muslim women as exotic beings rather than mothers and wives. In this way, “the new ideal woman” became distinctive from the Oriental woman, who, like aristocratic women, engaged in ‘frivolous amusements’.³⁷

³³ Rousseau, quoted in Mabro, 10.

³⁴ Mabro, 10.

³⁵ Mabro, 9.

³⁶ Mabro, 9 .

³⁷ Kahf, 116.

Therefore, it can be said that the Oriental woman was produced as a negative example to empower the image of domestic middle-class women in the West. Thus, imperialist, Eurocentric bourgeois ideology created not only the Oriental woman but also the Western woman.

Western women adopted the ideal female role determined by bourgeois ideology. For this reason, it is possible to trace the impacts of phallogentric Orientalist discourse in many Western female writings. Regarding the attitude of Western female travelers, who came to the Orient, Mabro states that these female travelers 'were torn between identifying with their race or their gender'.³⁸ She indicates that European female travelers treated the Oriental woman as European men treated women and natives. According to Western male perceptions at that time, women and natives were like children who were 'in need of the protection and care of male/imperial authority by virtue of their weaknesses and innocence and their inadequacy'.³⁹ As a result, Western woman writers seeing the Oriental woman through Western men's eyes displayed the Oriental woman as childish and ignorant. The following extract demonstrates that the Oriental woman was seen inferior to Western women in terms of motherhood:

A Muslim woman thinks and acts just as the wives of Mohammed thought and acted. Cut off from eternal life, they remain in the barbarity of ancestral customs. Compared to the condition of women of other religions, she is slave. A luxurious animal, a beast of pleasure of the rich; a beast of burden to the poor; she is nothing more than a poor creature sacrificed to the pleasure of the male, condemned to the egoism of man, she cannot even hope in the future. [...] her ignorance and barbarity weigh heavily on the children whom she raises and on whom she passed her prejudices and antiquated ideas. (Servier, quoted in Mabro, 1996:173)

Many female writers, believing in the superiority of Western civilization over Eastern culture, felt pity for the Oriental woman. These Orientalist female writers viewed the veil and the harem as a sign of oppression as the Orientalist men did. Unlike Western men, many woman travelers had a chance to communicate with Muslim women and to discover what kind of life Muslim women led, because they could enter the harem. However, instead of giving a voice to the Oriental woman, who had been represented for years by Western

³⁸ Mabro, 12.

³⁹ Groot, quoted in Mabro, 12.

male travelers, who had never been to the harem, the Oriental woman is described as stupid, boring and ignorant in the writings of many Western female travelers. Lady Anne Blunt, who went to a harem and talked to some Muslim women, expresses her impressions about the Oriental woman and her life style as follows:

The conversation was dull. Here as a sample. *I*. 'What do you do all day long?' *Zeh*. 'We live in the kasr.' *I*. 'Don't you go out at all?' *Zeh*. 'No; we always stay in the kasr.' *I*. 'Then you never ride.' [...] 'as we do'. *Zeh*. 'No, we have no mares to ride.' *I*. 'Don't you ever go into the country outside Hail, the Desert?' *Zeh*. 'Oh, no, of course not' [...] It seems odd, where the men are so active and adventurous, that the women should be satisfied to be bored; but such, I suppose, is the tyranny of fashion. (Blunt, quoted in Mabro, 1996: 163)

As seen in the quote above, it is not Zehra who complains that her life is boring. It is Lady Anne Blunt who thinks that Zehra's life is dull. In Lady Anne Blunt's writing like in many Western female travelers' travelogues/journals, the Oriental woman is not given a voice to express her ideas about her life but she is represented as captive in the harem. Mabro and Yegenoglu indicate that even though Western women also experienced male domination to some extent in Western societies, they disregarded their own oppression and highlighted the oppression the Oriental woman faced in the East. The following quote that I have taken from Mabro demonstrates perfectly the Western male domination over the female body,

When Lady Marry Montague was pressed by the women in a Turkish bath to take off her clothes and join them she undid her blouse to show them her corset. This led them to believe, she said that, she was imprisoned in a machine which could only be opened by her husband. (Mabro, 1996:23)

This anecdote told by Lady Marry Montague makes me ask why the notion that Muslim women have been oppressed so central to Western culture if Western women have also faced discrimination because of their gender. It seems that the reason why the Oriental woman was portrayed as slave and captive was to control the Orient under the cloak of civilization. In her book, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed indicates that 'the issue of women only emerged as the centre piece of the Western narrative of Islam [...] as Europeans established themselves as colonial powers in Muslim countries'.⁴⁰ She also

⁴⁰ Ahmed, 150.

indicates that the Victorian establishment, 'reject[ing] the ideas of feminism and the claims of feminism with respect to itself, captured the notion of men oppressing women and redirected it, in service of colonialism, toward Other men [...]'.⁴¹

Concerning the idea that Western feminism served the aim of phallogentric Orientalism, Yegenoglu claims that the writings of many Western female writers such as Montagu were a supplement to the lack of Orientalist men, who had no access to the harem. As I have underlined before, the Oriental woman was seen as the essence of the Orient. Knowing or penetrating the Oriental woman was equaled with capturing the truth and essence of the Orient. In this sense, Western female travelers' gaze that observed Muslim women in their inner space unveiled the truth about the Oriental woman and the Orient. They provided Western men with the truth about the Oriental woman that phallogentric Orientalist discourse lacked. Yegenoglu states that the gaze of Western female travelers turned into a phallogentric gaze because they took up the position of a male traveler and imagined how he would enjoy the sight of so many fine Muslim women. Yegenoglu exemplifies her claim quoting from Montagu:

To tell you the truth, I had wickedly enough wished secretly that Mr. Gervase could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very improv'd his art to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee of sherbet. (Yegenoglu, 1998:91)

The last point I would like to touch upon concerning the contribution of Western woman travelers to the invention of the Oriental woman is that Western women followed the phallogentric Western imperialist ideology that defines the Orient as "backward" and "uncivilized". As Said puts it, 'the essence of the difference between East and West is between modernity and tradition.'⁴² In this regard, Western women, convinced that Western civilization was superior to Eastern culture, came to the East with the mission of bringing European civilization to Muslim women who insisted on keeping the Islamic faith, which was seen as a false region that imprisoned women through the veil and the harem. Nineteenth-century Western women strongly argued that unless Muslim women adopted

⁴¹ Ahmed, 151.

⁴² Said, 269.

European norms and were educated with Western values they would be captives of male-dominated Eastern society. Therefore feminist ideology placed European women in a superior position and enforced the norms of universal feminism on Muslim women. Concerning male-dominated Western discourse of Western feminism about Muslim women, Ahmed states '[w]hether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of Western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on the native societies and support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe'.⁴³

In other words, it can be said that European female travelers were profoundly influenced by the phallogentric imperialist Western ideology that created a difference between East and West by 'pushing the Other back in time'.⁴⁴ While constituting its subject position by defining itself as modern developed and civilized the West distanced itself from the East not temporally but morally. Accordingly, European women associated themselves with phallogentric Orientalist discourse that placed European women in a superior position over the Oriental woman because European women belonged to an advanced culture. Being aware of their superior position, Western women aimed to "civilize" Muslim women by convincing them to give up their traditional Islamic faith. The main reason behind the attempt to educate Muslim women in terms of Western norms and values was to change the Oriental woman. To change the Oriental woman meant to alter the East and Eastern societies because it is the woman who bears cultural norms. Another key role of Western female travelers was that they had the access to the harem. The observations of European women in the harem enriched the knowledge of the Orientalist discourse on the Orient and the Oriental woman. They served the aim of unveiling the Orient and the Oriental woman. In this way, the West could dominate the East.

To summarize, in this chapter that I have called "the Myth of the Muslim Woman", I have tried to explain in what ways phallogentric Orientalist discourse represented Muslim women and thereby produced the myth that shaped the contemporary image of the "Muslim woman" in the West.

⁴³ Ahmed, 154.

⁴⁴ Fabian, quoted in Yegenoglu, 96.

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. (Barthes, quoted in Hall, 1997:182)

As Roland Barthes remarks, behind a “myth” there is always a purpose or a motivation. While “myth” is serving the aim of a particular purpose, it does not deny its motivation but naturalizes it. In order to read the motivation behind the myth of the “Muslim woman”, first of all, I have pointed to the interrelation between the Orient and the Oriental woman in the West. Then, I have demonstrated how the image of the “Muslim woman” as passive, exotic and sensual was naturalized through different discursive formations such as paintings, postcards, ads and novels. I have sought an answer to the question of to what extent the representation of the “Muslim woman” was invented by phallogentric Orientalist discourse. Therefore, I have touched upon the relations between knowledge, power and truth. Relying on Foucauldian frame work, if ‘truth is not outside power’ and if ‘each society has its regime of truth and its general politics of truth’⁴⁵, it can be concluded that post-Enlightenment Western knowledge produced power relations that set the norms and made these norms universal. Accordingly, Western hegemonic knowledge determined what was normal and what was not, who was modern and who was not, which culture was barbaric and which was not. This led me to conclude that the image of the “Muslim woman” that represented barbaric Islamic culture was a production of Western hegemony that mirrored the imagination of the West more than the reality.

Secondly, after underlining the distinction and similarity between the illustration of the Oriental woman in male and female Orientalist discourse, I have handled the question as to why “the Oriental woman” was portrayed as submissive and sensual by nineteenth-century male travelers, painters and writers. I have explained the fact that the Orient was described through feminine features not only by nineteenth-century Western male travelers and writers but also by Western female travelers because racist discourse of Orientalism has seen the Orient as the racial “Other”. For this reason, Orientalist discourse has emasculated the Orient by identifying it with femininity. Accordingly, Western female travelers gained a superior position over the Orient and its women due to their Anglo-Saxon race and they

⁴⁵ Foucault quoted in Hall, 49.

were masculinized. That was the reason why the Orient was feminized even in nineteenth-century female travelers' writings. Basing my argument on this idea, I have underlined that Western discourse on the Orient and its women had a phallocentric nature that wanted to penetrate the Orient/the Oriental woman. In so doing, it aimed to know her, possess her and dominate her. That was the main reason why the Oriental woman was central to Orientalist discourse that was craving for unveiling the Orient/ the Oriental woman. I have also underlined that the attempt to unveil the Oriental woman had different meanings; a sexual fantasy and a thirst for knowledge of the Orient.

Finally, I have mentioned that the picture of the Oriental woman is slightly different in the writings of nineteenth-century Western woman writers from the writings of nineteenth-century Western male writers. In female Orientalist narratives, the Oriental woman is displayed as racial and cultural "Other". She is no longer a sexual object but a victim of a barbaric culture, who needs liberating through Western institutions. According to many Western woman writers, the Muslim woman could not be free unless she gave up her uncivilized Islamic culture. In the following chapter, I am going to display in what ways the myth of the "Muslim woman" has been reproduced in post-9/11 Western media.

Patriarchal values are promoted by militarism, particularly the social construction of masculinities that revere the (false) notion of invincibility, relationship of domination and subordination, the eroticization of domination, emotional detachment, and the dehumanization of 'others' into enemies, like Arab 'terrorists' and Columbian 'drug lords'. Misogyny is also at the core of militarism. (Okazawa-Rey quoted in Zine, 31)

3 GENDERED REPRESENTATIONS OF 9/11 AND AFGHAN WOMEN

9/11 is defined as a historic event that has not only left its mark on the relationship between the West and the East but has also resulted in the reproduction of the myth of Islam as a brutal religion and of the "Muslim woman" as being in the hands of cruel followers of Islam. In this chapter, I am going to analyze in what ways the representations of 9/11 and the "war on terror" have been gendered by white dominant phallocentric discourse, because, as Jemima Repo states, 'gender is usually manipulated to support and legitimate violence and militarism'.⁴⁶ Therefore, first of all, I am going to explore how the events of 9/11 have been represented by white masculine hegemony and I will discuss in what ways the discursive formations of white masculine hegemony have reinforced the opposite binaries such as "good" and "evil", "civilized" and "uncivilized", and "democratic" and "undemocratic" since the attacks of 9/11. After examining how the Western Orientalist image of Muslim men as violent and oppressive has been reinvented in the hegemonic phallocentric racist narratives of the 9/11 attacks, I would like to deal with the question of in what ways the stereotypical portrayal of the "Muslim woman" has become instrumental in justifying the war against the Taliban. Finally, I am going to discuss the reaction of liberal feminism to the issue of Afghan women and the war against the Taliban.

3.1 9/11: A War between the "White Man" and the "Brown Man"

Does 9/11 symbolize a holy war against the West as some writers such as Samuel Huntington, the author of *The Clash of Civilizations*, and Thomas Friedman, a columnist for the *New York Times*, claim? Both men believe that the events of 9/11 reflect 'Muslim rage

⁴⁶ Repo, 2.

against Western civilization'.⁴⁷ In fact, what the 9/11 events represent is deeply imbedded in the narratives of the events and the "war on terror". Therefore, I think that it is very helpful to start with the question of in what ways the attacks of 9/11 have been represented in order to explore discursive formations behind the representations of the 9/11 events. Many writers argue that the attacks of 9/11 and the response to these attacks by the USA and its allies do not represent a war between Islam and the West, which 'hasten the clash of civilizations'⁴⁸; but they merely display a patriarchal war between the institutional powers of Western masculinity and the terrorist organizations of Eastern masculinity. Jemima Repo asserts that the representation of 9/11 and the "war on terror" are highly gendered, underlying that 'wars have always been and will continue to be reliant on hierarchal gender constructions'⁴⁹. What is meant by "hierarchal gender constructions" can be explained as follows:

Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. It is the social design of a biological sex, determined by conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society, in public and in private life. [...] There is a growing awareness that gender has to be considered also at a political and institutional level. Gender is not only a socially constructed definition of the relationship between the sexes. This construction contains an unequal power relationship with male domination and female subordination in most spheres of life. Men and their tasks, roles, functions and values contributed to them are valued –in many aspects- higher than women and what is associated with them. It is increasingly recognized that society is characterized by this male bias: the male role is taken as a norm for society as a whole, which is reflected in policies and structures. Policies and structures often unintentionally reproduce gender inequality.⁵⁰

In the article "Sex, Gender, and September 11", Hilary Charlesworth and Christine Chinkin point out the absence of women as 'decision-makers' both 9/11 attacks and the response to the attacks of 9/11, stating:

September 11 and its repercussions have appeared, then, to be all about men attacking, saving lives, and responding through further attack. This scenario does not strike us immediately as strange or remarkable or in any way connected with ideas of manhood. But imagine if the picture were entirely the opposite- if all the hijackers were women, and all the intelligence gatherers analysts and White House decision makers and world leaders were women, such a scenario would inevitably

⁴⁷ Friedman quoted in Abrahamian, 62.

⁴⁸ Huntington quoted in Abrahamian, 62.

⁴⁹ Repo, 2.

⁵⁰ Cf. Lithander, 14.

lead to an analysis of the events explicitly based on sex. It would be assumed first that the hijackings and the response to them were connected to femaleness in some defining way. [...] But sex remains unexceptional and unremarked if it is the male sex.⁵¹

Similarly, Repo underlines the fact that in the narratives of the 9/11 events women are portrayed either as victims of the hijackers or mothers and lovers of the victims, whereas the firefighters and rescuers are represented as “heroes”. This gendered representation of the attacks encodes the meaning that the non-Western men attacked the USA, terrorized the citizens, especially women and posed a threat to the state, which is always associated with femininity.⁵² Thus women, identified with the state, have been stereotyped as passive beings. They are depicted as vulnerable and in need of protection. On the other hand, men are displayed as doing their ‘manly duties by defending [their] nation’⁵³ and their women. In other words, American men, as the guard and protector of the nation and their women, need to defend their country. However, in the process of decision making, as Charlesworth and Chinkin argue, opinions of women about the attacks and the “war against terror” have been ignored. Charlesworth and Chinkin highlight that ‘when issues of homeland security, war and retribution is at stake’⁵⁴, it is only men who make the crucial decisions. Why are the voices of women regarding such issues as war ignored? Obviously, it is because femininity is associated with “loving”⁵⁵ and “caring”⁵⁶ while masculinity is identified with ‘waging a war to secure commercial, political and military interests’.⁵⁷ Finding a peaceful way to solve problems is seen as feminine whereas fighting, protecting and counter-fighting are associated with masculinity. With regard to Western masculinity in contrast to Western femininity in relation to the attacks of 9/11, Charlesworth and Chinkin state:

To be a leader, it seems, requires displaying masculine qualities, such as decisive military action as opposed to negotiation and compromise, which are coded as feminine. As a result, President Bush’s conduct of war was praised by even his former Democrat adversaries because he was seen as displaying resolute strength, in contrast to his opponent in the presidential election, Al Gore, who was seen as too much of a ‘talker’.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Charlesworth and Chinkin, 602.

⁵² Cf. Repo, 17.

⁵³ Rygiel, 145.

⁵⁴ Charlesworth and Chinkin, 601.

⁵⁵ Grönfors, 202.

⁵⁶ Grönfors, 202.

⁵⁷ Grönfors, 202.

⁵⁸ Charlesworth and Chinkin, 604.

Like many writers, Martti Gönfors also sees the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as ‘strikes at the heart of the centers of male dominance, the temples of monetarism and war’⁵⁹ rather than an attack against Western civilization. He poses the question of how the power institutions of Western masculinity are going to recover over these attacks on the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon, which were the symbols of Western male capitalism and military power respectively; because these strikes, as Maggie Wykes puts it, ‘not only destroyed the huge buildings, damaged the Pentagon, and killed over two thousand people, but destroyed the United State’s sense of itself [...] and the rest of the world’s sense of American power as an autonomy.’⁶⁰ According to Gönfors, ‘the only way to restore lost male honor is revenge’.⁶¹ Thus after the 9/11 attacks Western male institutions decided to wage a war against the Taliban that threatens “masculine interests” of the West, namely Western economic, social and military dominance in the world. However, in order to justify this male-oriented war some discourses need to be produced. In this part of my thesis, I am going to demonstrate in which ways the power struggle between the “white man” and the “brown man” manifested itself in the attacks of 9/11 and in the wake of the 9/11 events. In order to understand in which ways Western dominant phallogentric discourse has reinvented the myth of “heroic Westerner” versus “evil Arab”, it is necessary to examine the representations of 9/11 in political speeches and media coverage.

The narratives of 9/11 that describe Osama bin Laden and the hijackers as violent “Islamic fundamentalists” recalls Orientalist discourse that has represented Muslim men as cruel and barbaric. Therefore, I would like to analyze, first of all, how white hegemonic masculine discourse has recreated the Orientalist image of ‘fanatical Muslim warrior threatening [Western] civilization’⁶² in order to legitimate its war against the ‘Other’ man. To discuss the question of whether violence is culturally, racially or religiously motivated or it is rooted in the nature of manhood would be useful to understand how hegemonic Western masculinity has constructed the image of violent Muslim men. In the article, “Could Osama

⁵⁹ Gönfors, 201.

⁶⁰ Wykes, 122.

⁶¹ Gönfors, 204.

⁶² Abrahamian, 62.

bin Laden have been a Woman? Masculinity and September 11”, Martti Grönfors points out the close relation between masculinity and violence by stating;

Being a man and being violent is inherently together. I go even further by saying that being a man and being violent totally normal. Male privilege, masculine socialization and institutional support for male dominance guarantee that. All systems of power require at least the potential use of violence as the means of maintaining that power. The male power system is no exception.⁶³

If the use of violence is a tool for establishing masculine dominance, how come violence committed by white masculine institutions is not perceived as violence; but non-European violence is regarded as appalling? Regarding the question of what violence is and by whom it is used, Grönfors states that in Western society ordinary men do not use violence because violence is seen as an act of deviance. Those who resort to violence are regarded characteristically “deviant”⁶⁴ and “bad”.⁶⁵ Those people who use violence are in general marginalized men in society. This clearly explains that there is a power struggle between men at different levels, such as race, class etc. Depending on the hegemonic structure and power relations, being referred to as violent and what violence is in general may vary. Concerning the hegemonic structure that determines what constitutes a crime and who is considered criminal in Western society, Wykes highlights the fact that racial discourse dominates the representations of different races and ethnicities in Western culture, referring to the common Western notion that links black skin to crime⁶⁶. She indicates that black people are thought to be more inclined to commit a crime than white men. She underlines the fact that “blacks” as racial “Others” have been replaced by a new discourse about Muslims, stating that the common enemy has been Arabs since the Gulf War. The portrayal of Muslim men in Hollywood films as “evil doers” reflects the emergence of a new racial discourse and a new enemy or criminal. With regard to the events of 9/11 and the discourse on Muslims in the USA, Roopali Mukherjee, who analyzes black media coverage of the 9/11 events, uses the game of musical chairs as a metaphor in order to explain how the politics of racial/ethnic difference in the United States which produces “national other” and “state enemies” has changed. She asserts that ‘the language of racial grievance has shifted

⁶³ Grönfors, 200.

⁶⁴ Grönfors, 200.

⁶⁵ Grönfors, 200.

⁶⁶ Cf. Wykes, 119.

overnight from cries “driving black” to “flying while brown”, adding that ‘we may be witness to critical shifts in who finally manages to snag a seat in the national-racial game of musical chair and who is left standing’.⁶⁷ According to her, the new loser of the game is Muslim men. Thus, white men try to maintain their dominance over the ‘Other’ man and the ‘Other’ sex by using violence to some extent. However power institutions of hegemonic Western male-centered discourse camouflage the crimes that white men in power have committed. In the following pages, I am going to explain the ways in which discursive formations serve the aims of white hegemonic masculine ideology and justify the use of violence in detail whereas the male ‘Other’ is repeatedly represented as brutal and barbaric, which is believed to be rooted in his religion namely Islam.

One of the important discourses employed in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks by European politicians was “justice” in order to legitimate the “war on terrorism”. For instance, President George W. Bush promised his citizens: ‘we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies’.⁶⁸ Regarding the question of “justice”, it is necessary to refer to Michel Foucault who underlines the close relationship between power and institutions of the dominant group such as the court. He states that the hegemonic class regulates the law and organizes the system of punishment.⁶⁹ Phil Scraton explains how power operates in legitimizing the “war against Taliban” as follows: ‘Regardless of international mandate, formal political debate or democratic political process and in contravention of international law and conditions, Bush prepared the ground for the inevitable’.⁷⁰ Thus, the war against the Taliban is considered inevitable so as to deliver justice not only for Americans but for Afghani people as well. Prime Minister Tony Blair stated in a speech on 28 September, 2001 that the aim was to destroy “the machinery of terrorism” so that “justice and prosperity” may be provided to “the poor and dispossessed”.⁷¹ He also addressed the injustice that the Afghani people had been subjected to under the regime of the Taliban saying:

It [the Taliban regime] is undemocratic. That goes without saying. There's no sport allowed or television or photography, no art or culture is permitted. All other faiths,

⁶⁷ Mukherjee, 30.

⁶⁸ George W. Bush quoted from Scraton, 4.

⁶⁹ Cf. Michel Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

⁷⁰ Cf. Scraton, 5.

⁷¹ http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/blairtext_100201.html.

all other interpretations of Islam are ruthlessly suppressed. Those who practice their faith are imprisoned. Women are treated in a way almost too revolting to be credible.⁷²

After arguing that the Taliban regime not only sells drugs to young British people but also ‘kills innocent people’, Blair stated that they were not waging “a war against the innocent” but they were looking for “the guilty”. Emphasizing that there was no diplomacy with the Taliban regime; he claimed that there was left only one choice remaining: ‘defeat it or be defeated by it.’ Similarly, concerning the events of 9/11, Vaclav Havel, the first President of the Czech Republic, stated that ‘evil must be confronted in its womb, and, if there is no other way to do it, then it has to be dealt with by the use of force’.⁷³ Thus, in order to deliver justice and protect freedom from terrorism, the enemy has to be found and destroyed.

Another important rhetoric employed in President George Bush’s and the Prime Minister Tony Blair’s speeches is the use of the terms *democracy*, *civilization* and *freedom*. For instance, Bush describes the hijackers in his speech to Congress on September 20, 2001 as ‘the enemies of freedom’ who ‘hate our [Americans’] freedoms – our [Americans’] freedom of religion, our [Americans’] freedom of speech, our [Americans’] freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other’.⁷⁴ Describing the Taliban regime as ‘repressing’ and ‘threatening’, he states that the war against the Taliban is ‘the civilization’s war’. Similarly, Tony Blair claims that ‘[d]emocracy is the meeting point for Europe and America’, adding that ‘Europe and America should be working together to bring the democratic human and political rights we take for granted, to the world denied them’.⁷⁵

Likewise, Western media have contributed to the hegemonic masculine discourse of patriotism, by empowering the image of the good Western hero against the evil Arab, who aims to destroy Western civilization. Concerning the stereotypical image of Muslims in the media and films, Wykes states that ‘the East at least Middle East has been thoroughly made

⁷² http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/blairtext_100201.html.

⁷³ Vaclav Havel quoted in Denton, ix.

⁷⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

⁷⁵ <http://keeptonyblairforpm.wordpress.com/tony-blair-speeches/>.

‘Other’ and negatively labeled well before September 11.’⁷⁶ She indicates that the negative image of Muslims were ‘honed to imply not just race but also religion; not just Afghanistan or Iraq as a country but Islam as a nation; and not war but terror.’⁷⁷ Regarding the representations of 9/11 attacks in the media, Zayzafoon, who analyzes the headlines of the media coverage of September 11, 2001, indicates that America and freedom are represented as passive female victims in many headlines as follows “America under attack” and “Freedom under attack”. Zayzafoon remarks that America is portrayed as a virgin needing to be protected and “freedom” is represented as a little girl raped by the hijackers. In doing so, the Orientalist profile of Muslim men as “dark rapist”⁷⁸ has been reinforced. According to her, the message conveyed in the media coverage is that America and freedom need to be defended and protected. She states that on the days following the attacks when the war was launched by the USA the headlines revealed a masculine voice saying that “America strikes back”. The American hero, as Zayzafoon puts it, Uncle Sam has reappeared to take revenge.⁷⁹ In this way, American men have been hypermasculinized whereas the “national enemy” is dehumanized and demonized.

In brief, even though President Bush and Prime Minister Blair stated that the ‘war on terrorism’ was a war against terrorists, and not against Islam, the articles published in the *New York Times* such as “Islamic Anger”, “the Core of Islamic Rage” and “The First Holy War” have reproduced the Orientalist image of Islam as a violent religion and Muslim men as cruel warriors. Abrahamian criticizes the writers of these articles, stating that ‘if these articles did not search for the source of the crisis in theology, especially in the Quran, the *hadith*⁸⁰ and the *sharia*⁸¹, they found it in medieval history, especially in the Crusades’.⁸²

⁷⁶ Wykes, 119.

⁷⁷ Wykes, 119.

⁷⁸ Cf. Brittain, 74.

⁷⁹ Cf. Zayzafoon, pg. 173-183.

⁸⁰ The *Hadith* can be defined as the record of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The sayings and conduct of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) constitute the Sunnah. The *Hadith* has come to supplement the Holy Quran as a source of the Islamic religious law.

Cf. <http://www.islamkorea.com/english/hadithdefinition.html>.

⁸¹ The *sharia* means that the code of Islamic conduct to regulate the lives of Muslims in their individual as well as collective capacities. The definition of *Sharia* can be further broken into two parts: one is the straightforward laws revealed in the Quran and explained and implemented by the Prophet (pbuh) during his lifetime, such as the inheritance law, the law dealing with capital crimes, etc; the other deals with the interpretation of the teachings of Quran and Sunnah (the conduct of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) in light of the emerging day-to-day situations. Cf. <http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/07/03/31/10114772.html> and

The narratives of 9/11 by both politicians and the media empowered the opposite binaries such as “good” and “evil”, “West” and “East”, “civilized” and “uncivilized”. As a result, the world is divided between “the good” and “the evil”, “the civilized” and “the barbaric”, “us” and “them”. The USA and its allies are represented as democratic, liberator and free-lover whereas the Taliban, associated with Islam, is represented as a dictator, freedom-hater and oppressor. In this way, the power struggle between the white Western man and the brown Eastern man is represented as a war between “civilization” and “barbarism”. However, the attacks of 9/11 and the “war on terrorism” that ignore the voices of Western and Muslim women do not symbolize a war between two cultures. Rather they mirror a power struggle between the “brown man” and the “white man”.

3.2 Power Struggle over the Bodies of Afghan Women

In *Covering Islam: How Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* Edward Said asserts that ‘the canonical orthodox coverage of Islam that we find in the academy, in the government and in the media is all interrelated and has been more diffused, has seemed more persuasive [...] in the West than any other “coverage” and interpretation’.⁸³ What is meant by “the canonical coverage” is a particular way of knowing the Islamic world which does not rely on the truth but is rooted in the depiction of Islam during the medieval Christian Crusades, namely as uncivilized and barbaric.⁸⁴ This canonical coverage of Islam and the Islamic world regulates the relationship between the East and the West in such a way that the West is placed as a ‘positional superior’ to the East.⁸⁵ And the status of women is at the core of this ‘positional superiority’. Women in the West, having the same rights as men, reflect Western civilization, whereas the status of women in Muslim societies, forced to wear the veil or the *burqa* and stay home, mirrors the ostensible primitiveness of Islamic culture. The representation of misogynic dictators and fundamentalists in some Muslim societies such as Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden has served the aim of strengthening the idea that Muslims are not able to integrate into

<http://themustardseed.wordpress.com/2006/12/27/muslims-and-sharia-the-real-sharia-democracy-and-patriarchy/>.

⁸² Cf. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*.

⁸³ Said quoted in Fallah and Nagel, 300.

⁸⁴ Cf. Fallah and Nagel, 303.

⁸⁵ Cf. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*.

democratic Western society. The depiction of these leaders has also reinforced the constructed dichotomy between the Western man as liberator and the Muslim man as dictator and oppressor. In his article “Girl Power: Do Fundamentalists Fear Our Women”, David Landes retells Orientalist discourse on oppressive Muslim men, stating that the 19 suicide hijackers ‘were outraged by how the West treated its women’⁸⁶ As a result of the dominant discourse that Muslim men are repressive towards women, the state of Muslim women has been placed at the center of the canonical coverage of Islam since the late eighteenth century, which I have discussed in the first chapter.

In this part of my thesis, I would like to show in which ways phallogentric Orientalist discourse of “saving brown women from brown men” is reinvented during the “war against terrorism.” Therefore, first of all, I am going to analyze how the image of Afghan women as dehumanized and unvoiced has served the aims of hegemonic Western masculinity that wants to control not only the ‘Other man’ but the ‘Other sex’. Then I am going to discuss how feminist discourse positions itself in terms of Afghan women and the ‘war on terrorism.’

3.2.1 The Burqa and Liberation

Kista Hunt and Kim Rygiel stress that following the terrorist attacks the image of the Afghan woman who has suffered under the Taliban regime since 1996 started to occupy a central place in the speeches of many Western politicians and the Western media. For instance, in his speech on ‘the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act’, President George W. Bush indicates that ‘the Taliban regime was a regime at war with women’.⁸⁷ He continues by depicting the suffering of the Afghan women as follows,

America is beginning to realize that the dreams of the terrorists and the Taliban were a waking nightmare for Afghan women and their children. The Taliban murdered teenagers for laughing in the presence of soldiers. They jailed children as young as 10 years old, and tortured them for supposed crimes of their parents. Afghan women were banned from speaking, or laughing loudly. They were banned from riding bicycles, or attending school. They were denied basic health care, and were killed on suspicion of adultery. One news magazine reports, “It’s hard to find

⁸⁶ Abrahamian, 62.

⁸⁷ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011212-9.html>.

a woman in Kabul who does not remember a beating at the hands of the Taliban.” In Afghanistan, America not only fights for our security, but we fight for values we hold dear. We strongly reject the Taliban way. We strongly reject their brutality toward women and children. (Applause.) They not only violate basic human rights, they are barbaric in their indefensible meting of justice. It is wrong. Their attitude is wrong for any culture. Their attitude is wrong for any religion.⁸⁸

Ellen McLarney questions the sudden concern of the politicians and the media about Afghan women, highlighting that Saira Shah’s documentary film entitled *Beneath the Veil*, which reveals the crimes that the Taliban regime committed against Afghan women, did not gain attention until the September 11 attacks, although it was first broadcasted on CNN in August in 2001. McLarney adds that the film was aired many more times after the attacks. Likewise, Phil Scraton asks the same question: Why had it taken so long for the invoicing and oppressing of Afghan women to become the concern of the Western media and politicians?⁸⁹ In order to find an answer to this question, it is vital to analyze the images of Afghan women and decode the meanings conveyed through them.



<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/afghanwomen.html>

The photo above, used as subordination to the article titled “The Women of Afghanistan” which reports that Afghan women were deprived of many rights by the Taliban regime that Western women enjoy such as going to school and working. In fact, the photo is much more influential and striking than the article itself because the image of the women carries over the discourse of Orientalism about the oppression of women in Muslim societies by

⁸⁸ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011212-9.html>.

⁸⁹ Cf. Scraton, 1-9.

displaying women in the *burqa*. Concerning the image of ‘*burqa*-clad Afghan women’⁹⁰ that permeated the media in the post-9/11 era, Jasmin Zine states that

[...] the archetypical image of the deprived and debased Muslim woman was resurrected to perform her duty as a signifier of the abject difference of Muslims; the barbarity and anti-modernism of Islam and its essential repression of women, and most importantly as camouflage for US military inventions. (Zine, 34)

In order to clarify the role of the image of ‘*burqa*-clad Afghan women in waging the “war against terrorism”, I would like to mention the close link between face and voice, humanization and representation,⁹¹ which Judith Butler highlights in her book, *Precarious Life*. Basing her argument on Emmanuel Levinas’ statement: ‘face and discourse are tied. It speaks [...]’,⁹² Butler discusses that the face can be used for humanization and dehumanization depending upon who uses the face. She asserts that humanization and dehumanization occur in the domain of representation, underlying that ‘those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human [...]’.⁹³ Bearing in mind the fact that the use of the face can also dehumanize the subject, I would like to discuss whether the women represented in this photo are humanized or dehumanized in this representation. At this point, it is necessary to state that the *burqa* functions as an important signifier to create the meaning that the Afghan women are dehumanized and victimized by the fundamentalist Islamic group. The image of the Afghan women wearing the *burqa* evokes the feeling of imprisonment and also the denial of individuality because their faces are covered. The representation of the Afghan women gives the idea that they need to be “saved” from Taliban’s oppressive rule, which is symbolized by the *burqa*. However, as Butler indicates, ‘dehumanization can also take place through the production of the face’.⁹⁴ According to Butler, the representation of the bared faces of Afghan women in newspapers gives the women a human face. Therefore, the photographed face hardly displays any emotions such as ‘the suffering over war’,

⁹⁰ Zine, 34.

⁹¹ Cf. Butler, 140-141.

⁹² Levinas quoted in Butler, 138.

⁹³ Butler, 141.

⁹⁴ Butler, 141.

‘vocalization of grief’ or ‘the precariousness of life’. Concerning the photos that reveal the bared faces of Afghan women, Butler states that

The American viewer was ready ...to see the face, and it was to the camera, and for the camera, after all, that the face was finally bared, where it became, in a flash, a symbol of successfully exported American cultural progress. It became bared for us, [...], and we were, as it were, in the possession of the face, [...] we arranged for the face to capture our triumph [...]⁹⁵

Similarly, Ellen McLarney argues in her article “The burqa in Vogue: Fashioning Afghanistan” why in Western culture Afghan women under the *burqa* are unintelligible. According to her, the bodies of Afghan women can only be intelligible to Westerners if they lift the *burqa* and wear make-up as Western women do. It is the signifiers of Western femininity (blond dyed hair, blue eyeliner, etc) that make them heard, seen and understood. She explains that unless Afghan women identify themselves with white, Western femininity they fail to become ‘a real person and achieve the subject status’.⁹⁶ Do Afghan women really gain a subject position and voice through the signifiers of Western femininity? Regarding this question, she states that an Afghan woman who wears make-up seems as if she were speaking, but it is not she who is speaking but through her face it is Western products such as the eyeliner and the lip stick that speak. McLarney underlines that the goal of encouraging Afghan women to adopt white Western femininity is to make them active participants of global economy. It seems as if the bodies of Afghan women had become a battle field between fundamentalist and imperialist regimes that tend to define, narrate and regulate the bodies of Afghan women. While the Taliban regime wanted to have control over Afghan women by imposing some rules on them by forcing them to wear the *burqa*, phallogentric Western masculinity has encouraged Afghan women to take off the *burqa* in order to have access to their bodies.

In Western media, the freedom of Afghan women and the success of the “war against terror” have been equalled with removing of the *burqa*. Shahira Fahmy’s analysis on the portrayal of the Afghan woman in the Associated Press during the Taliban regime and after the fall of the Taliban regime can be very helpful to explore in what ways the body of the

⁹⁵ Butler, 142.

⁹⁶ McLarney, 3.

Afghan women have been narrated, defined and used as a mask to mobilize the “war on terror”. Fahmy asserts that the media play a significant role in reinforcing the stereotypes of the “Muslim woman” by displaying Afghan women in their traditional clothing and roles. The *burqa*, seen as a signifier of oppression and primitiveness of Muslim society, is believed to be removed by the intervention of the US. Regarding the idea that the removal of the *burqa* is going to liberate the Afghan woman, the *Washington Post* reported that ‘Let Kabul be taken as soon as possible and then have earthly new cameras show [...] women taking off their *burqas*, music again being played, girls going back to school [...]’.⁹⁷ Fahmy also states that the majority of the photos taken during the Taliban regime ‘depict Afghan women inanimate positions such as sitting or standing’⁹⁸ whereas in the photos after the fall of the regime women ‘appear to be acting in less traditional and more interactive roles’.⁹⁹ The message encoded in these photographs is that Afghan women under the Taliban regime could not be a part of social life; however, the photos taken after the fall of the Taliban regime display Afghan women in the bazaar and outside the home. In this way, the photos convey the meaning that Afghan women can go out and work after the fall of the regime. According to her, these photos aim to convince the audience that Afghan women have been liberated by the West.

Likewise, McLarney underlines the connection between the *burqa* and liberation, indicating that the idea that the *burqa* dehumanizes the woman is closely linked to emancipation of women in the West. McLarney states that whereas women’s bodies [are] placed in organic communication with the social body’ the veil ‘shuts off from the penetration of Western values’¹⁰⁰ to Muslim women’s bodies. The representation of the *burqa* as a repressive tool of the Taliban regime to gain control over the Muslim woman’s body also evokes the idea that the Afghan woman are deprived of all rights such as free speech, human rights and sexual freedoms. However, in contrast to the assumptions of many Western thinkers that Afghan women are going to take off the *burqa* after the fall of the Taliban regime, Fahmy highlights that

⁹⁷ The *Washington Post* quoted in Fahmy, 92.

⁹⁸ Fahmy, 104.

⁹⁹ Fahmy, 104.

¹⁰⁰ McLarney, 7.

[...] the majority of women in Afghanistan did not get rid of their *burqas* for traditional/cultural reasons; there are a few women who did. Instead of portraying numerous photographs of these women to visually depict an instantaneous Afghan women's liberation, findings suggest 1 percent of AP photographs portrayed women revealing their face and their hair.¹⁰¹

As the result of Fahmy's analysis indicates, the *burqa* does not necessarily assign a negative meaning of oppression or imprisonment as represented in the West, but it may also imply resistance against imperial domination and loyalty to native/national culture.

In short, phallogentric Orientalist discourse re-emerging after the attacks has 'enacted to secure white, Western men's identities through the control over [Muslim] women's bodies'.¹⁰² Thus, in the post 9/11 era, Muslim women, especially Afghan women, are subjected to both racial and gendered representations that aim to regulate, narrate and define their bodies.

3.2.2 *Feminist Orientalism and the "War for Women"*

First Lady Laura Bush also contributed to 'the Bush administration's war story about women's liberation'¹⁰³ stating that '[t]he fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women'.¹⁰⁴ Zine Eisenstein argues whether 'W' in 'IS "W" FOR WOMEN?' the slogan used by the Bush '04 presidential campaign stands for woman or for war and world domination¹⁰⁵. Similarly, Krista Hunt stresses in her article "Embedded Feminism and the War on Terror" that 'the treatment of women in Afghanistan became a politically salient way to identify the enemy as 'barbaric' and the Coalition of (women) liberators'.¹⁰⁶ She indicates that feminist discourse is embedded in order to gain feminist support for the war just as it was used for the colonial project in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At this point, my concern is to show how feminist discourse in the post-colonial era places itself in terms of women rights and the "war on terror". However, it is necessary to state that there are different views among Western feminists concerning the "war against terror"

¹⁰¹ Fahmy, 107.

¹⁰² Rygiel, 151.

¹⁰³ Hunt, 56.

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Zine, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Hunt, 56.

and Afghan women. Presenting these diverse feminist approaches in relation to the “war against terrorism” is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, I am going to focus on only “Orientalist Feminism” or liberal feminism and explore whether it serves the aims of dominant phallogentric Western discourse in the name of women’s rights or it fights for women’s emancipation.

I would like to start by explaining what is meant by “Orientalist Feminism”. Roksana Bahramitash indicates that “Orientalist Feminism” refers to ‘a modern project and a type of feminism that advocates and supports particular foreign policies in the Middle East’¹⁰⁷ underlying that “Orientalist Feminism” derives from “feminist Orientalism”.¹⁰⁸ As I have already mentioned in Chapter 2, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many white middle-class women gained power and status by helping Western masculine discourse that invoked the idea that the Orient was a place of backwardness and the ill-treatment of women in the colonial area. Hunt points out that the discourse of “Orientalist Feminism” about the abuses of the ‘Other’ women by the ‘Other’ men is rooted in hegemonic white middle class feminism in the colonial area.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes hegemonic, white Western feminism, stating that white Western feminism continues to create monolithic representations of the Third World Woman, which stemmed from colonial knowledge and representation of the Eastern Woman. Pointing out that feminist scholarly practices such as reading and writing are interrelated with power relations, she states that ‘Western feminist writings on women in the third world must be considered in the context of global hegemony of Western scholarship i.e., the production, publication, distribution and consumption of information and ideas’.¹¹⁰ According to Mohanty, it is the dichotomy between the First World (developed, civilized, democratic) and the Third World (developing, barbaric and oppressive) that leads to the emergence of the term the “Third World Woman”¹¹¹. Concerning the influence of the power relations

¹⁰⁷ Bahramitash, 223.

¹⁰⁸ Roksana Bahramitash uses the term in reference to ‘Orientalists that used women rights as an excuse to legitimate their colonial presence and their modern version such as the current neo-conservatives who raise support for war in defense of women’s rights.’ Cf. Bahramitash, Roksana. ‘The War On Terror, Feminist Orientalism and Orientalist Feminism: Case studies of Two North American Best Sellers’ *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 223-237, Summer 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Hunt, 54.

¹¹⁰ Mohanty, 336.

¹¹¹ Cf. Mohanty, 353.

between the First World and the Third World on the representation of women in the Third World, she states that ‘in the context of a first/third world balance of power, feminist analyses which penetrate and sustain the hegemony of the idea of the superiority of the West produce a corresponding set of universal images like the veiled woman’.¹¹² This average image of the Third World Woman as powerless, dependent and oppressed helps the First World Woman to constitute her own identity which is associated with power, independence and freedom. As a result, the First World Woman gains a superior position and starts to speak for the Third World Woman by adopting and following the Marxist saying: ‘They cannot represent themselves. They must be represented’.

The answer to the question how “Orientalist Feminism” or liberal feminism approaches the slogan that ‘war is for women’s rights’¹¹³ is closely linked to the essentialist ethnocentric Western discourse that displays Afghan women as victims of the Islamic regime. In her article, “Contemporary Travel Narratives and Old Politics: American Women Reporting After the Gulf War”, Lory E. Amy points out the similarities between contemporary Western feminist writings and colonial feminist writings, stating that like early Western feminists contemporary Western feminist writers carry on ‘the civilizing mission’¹¹⁴. By depicting Muslim men as cruel and Muslim women as passive victims, who are in need of Western intervention, they contribute to racist phallogentric ideology. She argues that contemporary Western feminist narratives such as *Nine Parts of Desire: the Hidden World of Muslim Women* and *Behind the Veil: A Report on the women of Afghanistan*, which aim to “help” suffering Muslim women, actually ‘places feminist discourse in the service of Western political, economic, and military interests’.¹¹⁵ According to her,

No matter how sincere the authors may be in their desire to help, to extent that these texts uncritically reinscribe racist stereotypes of the threatening (male) and the victimized (female) “Islamic Other,” they succeed only in demonstrating the “positional superiority” of Western women and through them the Western world.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Mohanty, 352.

¹¹³ Cf. Hunt, 57.

¹¹⁴ Amy, 531.

¹¹⁵ Amy, 559.

¹¹⁶ Amy, 559.

In other words, racial and cultural differences play a key role in constructing white middle class Western femininity.¹¹⁷ According to Hunt, ‘hegemonic western feminism’, which focuses only on gender-based oppression, fails to fight for promoting women’s rights neither in the US nor abroad because it simply ignores power inequalities between women. Regarding ‘hegemonic Western feminism’ that represents itself as ‘saviors of the Third World Woman’, Iris Marion Young states that

I fear that some feminists adopted the stance of protector in relation to the women of Afghanistan. What is wrong with this stance...is that it fails to consider these women as equals, and it does not have principled ways of distancing itself from paternalist militarism...It is difficult for feminists in Western societies not to be heard as continuous with this stance of superiority and paternalistic knowledge of what the poor women of the world need.¹¹⁸

Additionally, hegemonic Western feminism that reduces the problem of Afghan women to the *burqa* has been criticized by many feminist writers. For instance, in her play entitled *An Afghan Woman*, Bina Sharif addresses Western feminists, who speak on behalf of Afghan women, as follows:

As far as the women of Afghanistan are concerned, that [to wear a burqa or not to wear] seems like the only question. With one leadership we are supposed to wear a burqa and considered to be a slave and with the next not to wear a burqa and be free all of a sudden. [...] Will everyone happily forget about us after they help us take our burqa off and go have sessions of congress with a western woman senator to discuss the relationship between the first world and the third world concerning freedom of the underdeveloped while I continue to stare at you through the colored TV screen without burqa this time but still as a deaf and dumb silent person silently staring [...] I want to be a part of the bigger picture not only a ghostly, haunting pitiful picture standing still waiting for someone to make a choice for me to show my face or not [...]¹¹⁹

As Sharif points out, it is not the *burqa* that invoices the women of Afghanistan but national and international policies, which narrate and control their bodies. Addressing liberal Western feminists, who believe that the “war on terror” is going to liberate Afghan women, she states that she wants to talk for herself rather than being spoken for herself.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Brittain, 74.

¹¹⁸ Young quoted in Hunt, 55.

¹¹⁹ Sharif quoted in Afzal-Khan, 254.

To summarize, in Chapter 3 I have shown the close relation between the ideology of masculinity and violence, referring to Foucault's concept of power relations. Then, I have demonstrated in which ways Western hegemonic masculinity employs gender in shaping and underpinning the discourse of war. I have underlined that gendered representations of American women as victims in the Western media after the 9/11 attacks serve the aim of demonizing the male 'Other'. On the other hand, representations of the firefighters or policemen in the Ground Zero as heroes empower and rephallicize white European masculinity. Additionally, I have tried to answer the question: Who is veiling Afghan women? I have mentioned that Afghan women have been silenced by the competing powers of Eastern and Western masculinities. As Eisenstein makes it clear, neither Eastern nor Western masculinist-militarist mentality promotes women's full economic and political equality or sexual freedom.¹²⁰ Regarding the approach of liberal feminists to the issue of Afghan women and "the war against the Taliban", I have drawn the attention to the parallel between liberal feminism and early Western feminist movement which viewed and represented the 'Other' woman as the victim of the 'Other' man. Due to the belief of cultural and racial superiority embedded in liberal feminism, liberal feminists represent themselves as the protector of Third World women. This positional superiority enables hegemonic Western women to speak on behalf of Third World women rather than helping Third World women to speak for themselves.

I would like to end the theory part of my thesis, stating that the image of the "Muslim woman" as victim, passive and submissive is a Western invention that has been repeated and employed for different purposes over time. In the second part, I am going to analyze in what ways Muslim women are portrayed in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Praire* and *Nazrah* respectively. My concern is to demonstrate whether these three post-9/11 cultural products carry the traces of the discourse of Orientalism about Muslim women or not.

¹²⁰ Cf. Eisenstein, 150.

PART II

4 YASMIN: A *FILM IN BETWEEN*

In this part of my thesis I am going to analyze the U.K film *Yasmin*, directed by Kenneth Glennan in 2004. The film, released three years after the 9/11 events, plays a crucial role in representing cultural identities of Muslim women in postmodern Western societies, which deal with the questions of multiculturalism and hybrid identities. As Aileen Twigg and Simon Schardt point out in their article “Cultural Representation and Stereotypes: An Analysis of *Submission: Part One*”, European homogenous identity has changed as a result of immigration from the East. European powers that formed a homogeneous identity by distancing themselves from non-Europeans/the Orient in terms of racial and cultural differences in colonial times have been challenged by the presence of the “Orient” in contemporary Europe. The “Orient”, which has been othered since the late seventeenth century, is ‘the next door’ now.¹²¹ The film *Yasmin* emerged at a time when the “Other”, who is living next door, starts to be perceived as a threat after the 9/11 attacks. In this respect, the film is one of the important cultural products that aim to reflect the issue of cultural diversities and split identities that contemporary Western societies deal with. The film is, therefore, closely related to my thesis on the representation of Muslim women in the post 9/11 area.

Before discussing in which ways the film depicts Muslim women within the dominant regimes of visual and cinematic portrayal of the “Muslim woman”, I would like to offer a brief summary of *Yasmin*. Then I am going to demonstrate how cultural identities of the Muslim female characters are represented in the film. Mainly, I am going to focus on the depiction of the female protagonist named Yasmin. My aim is to discuss whether the film goes against the conventional Orientalist depiction of the “Muslim woman” as victim and oppressed woman or not. Therefore, firstly, I am going to explore whether the film

¹²¹ Cf. Twigg and Schardt. <http://dspace.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/2103/1/final%20version.pdf>.

stereotypes Yasmin as a submissive victim of the Muslim men in the film or not. Secondly, I am going to examine in what ways Yasmin's identity is constructed in the film. I would like to deal with the question of the *hijab* both in relation to the victimization of the "Muslim woman" and the construction of Yasmin's identity. The *hijab*, having multiple meanings, is seen as a symbol of oppression in the West, whereas it is regarded as a sign of Muslim women's identity by many Muslim women in the West. The third question I am going to tackle is whether the film represents white Western feminine characters as superior over the protagonist or not. Furthermore, I am going to point at silences in the film and discuss whether these absences serve the aim of Orientalist discourse which affirms binary oppositions between the West and the East, or not. Finally, I am going to analyze in what ways the 9/11 attacks are narrated in the film. In light of my analysis, I am going to show to what extent the film subverts or fortifies the constructed image of the "Muslim woman" as oppressed and submissive.

4.1 A Brief Summary of *Yasmin*

The film displays the identity crisis that Yasmin has faced as a British, Asian, and Muslim woman in post-9/11 Britain. The film that takes place in northern England represents Yasmin, as a "caught-between-two-cultures" character: On the one hand Yasmin enjoys Western life style. She works as a social worker. She is in love with John, her British colleague. On the other hand, she tries to follow her Pakistani family's traditions. She is married to her cousin from Pakistan, whom she does not like. The 9/11 attacks and its aftermath, which cause her family and herself to be discriminated against and imprisoned in their house, lead Yasmin to re-constitute her identity and thereby enforce her to choose a "side": the East or the West.

4.2 Victim or Victor?

The film, *Yasmin*, deconstructs the Orientalist image of the "Muslim woman" in many ways. Some characteristics of Orientalist discourse, however, are still at the core of the film. I would like to start by exploring in what ways the film reverses the Orientalist depiction of the "Muslim woman" as oppressed and submissive. In order to examine

whether Yasmin is displayed as a victim or a victor, I would like to take a closer look into in what ways her relationship with the men in the film is represented.

First of all, it is necessary to outline that the film challenges the stereotypical Orientalist portrayal of a father- daughter relationship to some extent. Typically, the Muslim father is represented as an authoritarian, cruel and oppressive man. It is the father, the head of the family, who makes decisions for the rest of the family. Moreover, the *hijab*¹²² is generally represented as a means of victimization as in the film, *Not Without My Daughter*. However, in *Yasmin* even though Yasmin's father is represented as a traditional Pakistani Muslim¹²³, he is not illustrated as a cruel and oppressive father. He does not victimize her daughter by locking her at home. He is not shown in the film asking Yasmin to wear the

¹²² I think that it is necessary to mention briefly what *hijab* means. The meaning of *hijab*, an Arabic word for cover, is extended to modesty and privacy. In fact the word *hijab* is applied to both men and women. Muslims wear the *hijab* to show their love to God. The Qur'an and the Hadith ask both men and women to cover themselves when they are in public areas. For men, the *hijab* means that the body should be covered at a minimum from the navel to the knees in loose, thick clothing. Some interpretations of the Hadith suggest that the covering should be longer, from the navel to the ankles. All agree that the modest covering should be worn at all times, during prayer. For women, the rules of the *hijab* are more complicated. There is a great deal of debate in the Muslim world about how strict the rules are for women. Some Muslims interpret *hijab* as a minimal covering of the face and body, while others believe that *hijab* requires a complete obscurement of the entire body in heavy garments. In a basic form, the Hadith states that women should cover their bodies in loose, thick clothing to prevent the shape of the body from being seen. Hair and the upper chest should be covered, a rule many women accomplish by wearing a headscarf. Cf. <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-hijab.htm>.

¹²³ In order to make my analysis clear, I would like to explain what I mean by the concept of "traditional Pakistani Muslim". With this concept, I aim to underline three discourses/forces that shape a person's identity: national, traditional/cultural and religious. As it is well known, traditional and religious values and norms, which seem to be similar, are actually totally different. As Asma Barlas indicates in her book, *Believing Women in Islam*, Islam is revealed as a revolution to patriarchal traditions of society. Barlas states that the Qur'an has been interpreted by patriarchal norms since the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which has caused Muslim women to be treated unequally. In this sense, I think that it is useful to explain what patriarchy means. Carole Pateman defines patriarchy as the "law of the father, the untrammelled will of one man". (Pateman quoted in Barlas, 1) Regarding the question of whether the Qur'an sees the father/husband as a ruler or protector over their wives/daughters or as the head of the household, Barlas asserts that the Qur'an is inherently anti-patriarchal because it does not represent God as the Father. She states that the Qur'an also does not see the father/husband as an extension of God's sovereign on the earth. She underlines that the Qur'an, which does not privilege men over women on the grounds of sex (biology), gives women similar rights as it does to men, such as divorce and inheritance. In other words, women are given the right to divorce their husbands if they are not happy with them. However, patriarchal traditions, which see women as subordinators or property, do not allow women to divorce. For instance, in the film, Yasmin's father tells that if Yasmin divorces her husband, she will disgrace the family. The approach of the father to the issue of divorce is, in fact, not Islamic, but patriarchal/traditional. That is why I want to differentiate patriarchal traditions from Islamic ones. Cf. Asma Barlas, 1-12, 129-184.

It is also necessary to state that there are multiple ways of reading the Qur'an because of geographical and cultural differences in the Islamic world. In other words, the Qur'an read and practiced in different parts of the world is shaped by the traditions and cultures of a society, which creates diversity. This situation makes it obligatory not to generalize the attitudes of Muslims to the issues of divorce, inheritance etc. That is the main reason why I describe Yasmin's father as Pakistani, traditional and Muslim. These all three discourses shape his identity in different ways. However, the hegemonic Western discourse ignores the diversity in Muslim societies by fixing them into a monolithic and singular cultural category.

hijab. The audience does not know how and when Yasmin started to wear the *hijab*. It is not told whether she has ever been forced to wear it or not. However, the way Yasmin behaves may indicate that Yasmin wears the *hijab* not because she wants to do, but because she is somehow forced to do so. What I mean by this is that in the beginning of the film, Yasmin is shown as taking off her *hijab* on her way to work. Does this mean that she hates the *hijab* and wants to get rid of it? In fact, unlike in many popular books and films, the protagonist does not fight against any kind of patriarchal authority that enforces her to wear the *hijab*. The *hijab* is not represented as a tool of victimization in the film, but a sign of identity. To put it in another way, Yasmin wears and takes off the *hijab* because of her diverse social networks- her Pakistani family and her Western colleagues. Thus, it is left open whether Yasmin practices the *hijab* against her will or not at the beginning of the film. Nevertheless, towards the end of the film, Yasmin does not seem to feel uncomfortable when John sees her wearing the *hijab*, which Yasmin tried to avoid in the beginning. She looks quite self-confident with her appearance when Joan tells her that he cannot recognize her because of her clothing. Yasmin does not make any explanation about why she wears the *hijab* or why and how often she goes to the mosque as she has done in the local pub. (In the beginning of the film, Yasmin was a secular person. She felt very upset when John called her as Muslim. In order to prove that she is not a typical Muslim who practice Islam she said that ‘I have not been to the mosque for five years’. In doing so, she wanted to show that she was not different from John or her Western colleagues). This time Yasmin does not apologize for her national and religious background while she is talking to John. This shows that the *hijab* has gained a different meaning in the course of time. In the context of the film, the *hijab* asserts Yasmin’s religious identity rather than figures as a sign of victimization. In short, regarding the question of in what ways the *hijab* is represented, it can be said that the *hijab*, as Leila Ahmed claims¹²⁴, carries multiple meanings. In the film, it is clearly signaled that the *hijab* does not convey one monolithic meaning, a sign of oppression or victimization as represented by ethno-centric Western discourse; but it indicates a person’s religious identity as well, which I am going to discuss in detail later.

I would also highlight that the father is depicted as a protector in the film. When he understands that Yasmin has been beaten by her husband, Faysal, the father beats him,

¹²⁴ Cf. Ahmed, 156.

rather than finding his daughter guilty for not sleeping with Faysal. This incident illustrates that Yasmin's father does not see her daughter as a sexual object who is supposed to please her husband. Instead of forcing his daughter to sleep with her husband, he tries to negotiate between them. This depiction of a benevolent father shakes the stereotypical representation of the Muslim man/father as oppressor.

It is also necessary to point out that Yasmin and her father have a close relationship. The father shares his dream of having a nice house with her. This shows that Yasmin is not there only to cook and clean for him, but she is also a person with whom her father talks. Additionally, at the end of the film, Yasmin's father hugs her and weeps in her arms when he learns that Nasr, his son, has left home for good. This scene challenges the Orientalist discourse that claims that women are not seen as human in Islam, showing the intimacy between the father and the daughter.

Thirdly, I would like to examine the triangle relationship among the father, Yasmin and the brother, Nasr. It is important to answer of the question whether the father is stricter to Yasmin than to Nasr in terms of religion. Is Yasmin victimized on the grounds of her gender identity? As I have mentioned before, women are seen as the bearer of culture. Therefore, they are given more importance and responsibility than men in many societies including Muslim societies because it is women who pass on cultural and religious norms to the next generation. When looking closely at the film, it will become clearer that the father is as strict to Nasr as he is to Yasmin concerning the issues of Islam and traditional values. For instance, the father teaches Nasr the Qur'an. However, Nasr seems to be reluctant. He loses his attention quickly, but the father warns him and asks him to concentrate. Moreover, when Nasr describes the attacks of 9/11 as "style", which implies that he is very proud of what was done by the hijackers, the father yells at him and criticizes him saying 'Is it what I have taught you? Get out off my sight!' This shows that Yasmin's father is a conservative father, who wants to teach Islamic and traditional values to his children. He is not represented as oppressing Yasmin, because of her gender, whereas he is shown as tolerating Nasr's failures because of his gender. In other words, the father is not depicted as privileging Nasr over Yasmin, because Yasmin is female and Nasr is male. Additionally, Yasmin is not represented as having less freedom than Nasr because she is

female. In this sense, the film deconstructs the Orientalist depiction of the “Muslim woman” as a victim of Muslim men.

However, there are some depictions of Yasmin’s father that recall phallogentric Western discourse, which indicates that Muslim men are oppressive. For instance, Yasmin’s father feels irritated by the fact that Yasmin has bought a car. He wants her to give the car to Faysal so that he can taxi drive. When Yasmin says that he cannot even drive, the father tells her that she can teach him. When Yasmin refuses her father’s will, saying that she has bought the car with her own money, the father snaps her arm telling that she can do whatever she wants outside but she has to show respect at his home. Why does the father insist that Yasmin should give the car to Faysal? It seems as if he thought that her driving a car will humiliate the family. Yasmin threatens Eastern masculinity by showing that she is an independent woman who can do whatever she wants with her money. In the film, it is not clearly displayed whether it is Islam or patriarchal Eastern culture that enforces such ideas on Yasmin. When Yasmin leaves the house, the father tells that it is ‘too much freedom’ that makes her disrespectful. This expression evokes the idea that the father opposes the West which gives freedom to women. He is aware of the fact that his patriarchal authority is challenged by Western life style. All he can do is to maintain his patriarchal authority over the family members at his home.

Another important characteristic of Orientalist discourse embedded in the film is that when Yasmin tells her father that she wants to end her arranged marriage with Faysal, the father refuses her decision. He does not beat her or apply any kind of physical assault but he emotionally puts pressure on her when he says that divorce will humiliate his family. He also threatens Yasmin, stating that if she divorces Faysal, he will sell the house in which Yasmin lives. This image of the father fortifies Orientalist discourse which asserts that Muslim women are oppressed by their fathers and husbands.

So far I have explored in which ways the father is represented. A crucial question arises now: How is Yasmin represented as a wife and daughter in the film? I would like to discuss whether she is demonstrated as a victim who is forced to have a sexual relation with her husband or represented as a rebellious person.

In fact, Yasmin is not illustrated as a passive harem slave who accepts her father's and husband's orders. Even though Yasmin is compelled to continue her marriage with her husband, she does not give up her decision. She tells her father that he can sell the house if he wants; but she will divorce Faysal.

Regarding her relation with Faysal, it can be said that Yasmin is not a self-sacrificing house wife or a silenced woman. This can be seen in the scene where Yasmin comes home and finds the kitchen dirty. She becomes very angry at Faysal. She does not clean the kitchen without saying a word. On the contrary, she expresses her anger. Additionally, Yasmin is not depicted as a "harem slave". By contrast, she refuses to be with Faysal when he has forced her to sleep with him. Annoyed by being rejected, Faysal slaps her in the face. Yasmin neither cries nor accept to have sex with him, but she sends him away from home and complains to her father about Faysal. By throwing Faysal's clothes away, Yasmin humiliates him. This depiction of Yasmin challenges the portrayal of the "Muslim woman" who waits for a male companion to make her happy. Additionally, it is necessary to underline that in the film it is shown that it is up to Yasmin to have a sexual relation with her husband, referring to the scene where Yasmin has accepted to be with Faysal at her will. It is Yasmin who makes decisions about her body rather than her father and her husband. This is the way how the film destabilizes the ethno-centric Western depiction of the "Muslim woman" as submissive wife.

I would also like to point out that even though Yasmin is enforced to hold the traditional gender roles as a daughter and wife, who is supposed to cook and clean, Yasmin is shown as fighting against these socially constructed gender roles. Referring again to the scene where Yasmin comes home from work and prepares dinner for her family, I would like to show how Yasmin's struggle with the patriarchal authority that imposes certain roles on her is reflected. In this scene, it is shown that Yasmin is very angry at her husband, who has made an open fire in the garden and has also messed the kitchen and her brother, who takes no responsibility for anything. She challenges the patriarchal ideology that sees women responsible for housework saying that 'I work, I cook. You (the brother) cannot even switch on the oven'. When her father says that 'if you had not been outside buying fancy cars, you could have done it on your own' she replies, stating that 'it is not a fancy car.'

This depiction of Yasmin also shows that she is not a stereotypical Muslim woman who accepts to be confined to traditional gender roles.

Another important point I would like to draw attention to is that the film inverts the Orientalist image of the “Muslim woman” as a victim in need of Western protection: when Yasmin leaves home feeling desperate after the fight with her father, she goes to the pub where John and her female colleagues are. She tries to find some comfort and peace there. However, her British boyfriend, John, reminds her of her cultural and national origins. He states that Muslims should apologize for the 9/11 attacks, which hurts Yasmin deeply. This scene goes against the conventional Orientalist image of the Western man as savior or liberator. He does not act like a Western hero who saves the “Muslim woman” from the oppressive father or husband. On the contrary, he victimizes Yasmin by categorizing her as Muslim and equaling her with the hijackers of the 9/11 attacks.

In the film, it is illustrated that Yasmin is exposed to some discrimination by British police because of her Muslim female identity. Before the 9/11 attacks, she is stopped by traffic police because of no reason. However, she is not depicted as a silenced female “Other”. Yasmin talks to the policemen in a self-reliant way, saying that she has all necessary papers. Similarly, when she has been arrested after the 9/11 attacks, she is shown as a self-conscious person. In jail, where she is locked up, she is not depicted as crying. By contrast, her way of talking with the police officer evokes the idea that Yasmin is a very strong woman rather than a weak person.

Additionally, I would like to discuss whether the film victimizes Yasmin by eroticizing her. As I have discussed in the first chapter, by being unveiled by some Orientalist painters and photographers, Muslim women have been subjected to double violation because they are female and racial “Other”. In fact, in contrast to the phallogentric Orientalist depiction of the “Muslim woman” as exotic and erotic, in the film Yasmin is not unveiled and displayed naked. She is illustrated without her *hijab* at home, but this is not meant to erotize Yasmin¹²⁵. Moreover, her body is not exposed to the Western eye. The scene that shows

¹²⁵ Yasmin is not shown as wearing the *hijab* at home because the *hijab* is a type of clothing which Muslim women are supposed to wear when they go outside. Thus, removal of the *hijab* reflects the attitudes of

Yasmin hugging Faysal and the following scene in which Faysal is shown lying in the bed reveal that Yasmin and Faysal have had sex; however, this is not exposed to the audience. Thus, Yasmin's sexuality is respected by not being displayed openly.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to note that even though the film challenges the hegemonic Western depiction of the "Muslim woman" as submissive and exotic, there are still some traces of Orientalist discourse that show Western culture to be superior over Eastern culture. The idea that Eastern culture is "primitive" and "backward" can be seen in the male characters rather than the female characters in the film. The film represents the Muslim male figures either as aggressive or stupid. Although in the film it is indicated that the Qur'an suggests peace and forbids violence, the Eurocentric image of Islam as a patriarchal religion¹²⁶, which enforces women to marry the person whom their fathers choose, still exists.

Moreover, the film promotes the idea that Yasmin is an independent and self-reliant person not because of her national, cultural and religious background, but because she has been brought up in Western society, which is shown as much more liberal than Eastern society. This can be seen in the scene when Yasmin is given the Qur'an by the police officer so that she can read it in the cell. The representation of the police officer, who gives Yasmin the freedom of reading the Qur'an, juxtaposes the image of the Muslim father, who criticizes Western life style telling that too much freedom makes his daughter disrespectful.

In short, it is necessary to underline that in contrast to the stereotypical image of the "Muslim woman" as victim of her father or husband, Yasmin is neither represented as a passive and submissive woman nor is she depicted as an exotic harem slave who is 'childish and cunning'.¹²⁷ In contrast, she is represented as an educated woman who is able

Muslim women at home, which is not similar to the Orientalist illustration of Muslim women in the bath or in the harem where they are portrayed nude.

¹²⁶ What I mean is that the father, shown as a religious person who teaches the Qur'an, forces his daughter to marry somebody whom Yasmin does not love but accepts to marry 'in the name of the family'. She is also forced to stay married with Faysal so as not to disgrace the family's name. In this context, the film gives the idea that Islam is a patriarchal religion which is concerned with the name of the family/father rather than happiness/choice of women. In doing so, it asserts Orientalist discourse which claims that Islam is a misogynistic religion, which does not treat women equally.

¹²⁷ Pommerol quoted in Amy, 530.

to stand on her feet: She is economically independent because she works. Moreover, she has control over her money and body. She speaks English very well. This portrayal of Yasmin deconstructs the stereotypical image of the “Muslim woman” who is economically dependent on her father or husband and who does not integrate into social life but is locked at home. Furthermore, in the film, it is shown that Yasmin is not only victimized by Muslim men but also by Western men as well. Although Yasmin has been attempted to be victimized by men, she never allows them to silence her. She defends her rights against Eastern and Western patriarchal authorities. Nevertheless, the depiction of Yasmin as a victor rather than a victim may convey that Yasmin owes her victory to Western values, which offer her any kind of freedom, rather than her traditional Pakistani culture, which oppresses her by indicating that divorce is a shame.

4.3 Striving for “the Third Space”¹²⁸

As I have indicated in the previous chapters, the discourse of Orientalism is often used to fix Muslim women’s identities and reduce them to a monolithic and stable identity. In this part of the chapter, I would like to explore whether the film displays Yasmin as a woman with a dynamic and hybrid identity or reduces her to a singular and fixed identity. Firstly, I am going to show how Yasmin’s identity is constructed. Secondly, I am going to analyze whether the film celebrates multiculturalism, which promotes compatibility of Islam with the West or not.

It is necessary to stress that in the film Yasmin is depicted as a female character whose identity is shaped by contesting cultural, religious and national discourses. In other words, Yasmin is represented as a woman who is trapped between Eastern and Western patriarchal cultures in the film. Throughout the film, it is shown that Yasmin’s identity is re-constructed and redefined by her interaction with these contrasting discourses. Referring to Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, Yasmin can be defined as a mimic woman, who tries to be like a Western woman; but she cannot be quite a Western woman. As Bhabha asserts,

¹²⁸ Shahnaz Khan uses the term “the third space” in her article “Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third Space” in order to show the fight of Muslim women for creating a space outside the discourses of Orientalism and Islam. I have also adopted the term “the third space” to analyze in what ways Yasmin constructs her identity beyond Orientalist and Islamist discourses.

‘the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference’.¹²⁹ The film perfectly displays the struggle of Yasmin to negotiate with Western secular society and traditional Pakistani Islamic community. The dilemma that Yasmin has experienced between these two patriarchal cultures is manifested in her relationship with her Pakistani family and her British colleagues. In the film, it is demonstrated that Yasmin creates a third space to locate herself in a diasporic space. What is meant by the concept of third space is, as Bhabha explains, ‘[i]f the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs’.¹³⁰ This change of perspective leads to the emergence of the third space which is ‘a new, hybrid space of cultural difference in the negotiation of colonial power-relations’.¹³¹ However, since the 9/11 attacks identity construction allows Muslims to choose one stable identity. I will explain how in the film Yasmin’s hybrid identity is shifted to a singular identity, which does not seem to be compatible with Western culture.

Basing my analysis on Bhabha’s concept of hybridized subjectivity, I would like to start by exploring in what ways Yasmin is represented as a mimic woman, who forms her identity ‘from national as well as religious texts and often transforms them into Western symbols, signifiers of technology, language and dress’.¹³² I will also show how the film fails to deconstruct Eurocentric Western discourse which establishes a dichotomy between East and West.

At the beginning of the film, Yasmin is shown as changing her Islamic dress on the way to work where she works as a social helper. Removing her *hijab*, she dresses like a Western woman. She also goes to the pub with her British workmate, John. Yasmin’s wearing of Western clothes and her going to the pub evoke the idea that Yasmin aims to assimilate to the dominant British culture. However, in the pub to which she has gone with John a man sitting in a corner glances at her in an unfriendly way. What is the function of this glance in

¹²⁹ Bhabha, 86.

¹³⁰ Bhabha, 112.

¹³¹ Bhabha, 112.

¹³² Khan, 306.

the film? I read this glance as a signifier which points to Yasmin's skin color. The glance reveals that a "brown woman" is in the pub with a white British man. This gives the idea that Yasmin is the "Other", even though she dresses the way Western women do. Her color of skin is one of the important markers of her ethnic identity, which makes her different. Thus, whatever Yasmin does to open up a third place to exist beyond binary cultures, her identity is constructed by her "difference" just at the beginning of the film. The racist discourse, which excludes Yasmin from the British community, also exists among her female workmates. They make fun of John, who is interested in Yasmin, saying that 'You are a bit into brown.'

Another crucial signifier employed in the film which mirrors Yasmin's fragmented/split identity is alcohol¹³³. At the pub John orders a beer for himself but an orange juice for Yasmin. This shows perfectly that Yasmin has an 'in-between' identity who finds a way to negotiate between Eastern and Western cultures. She does not wear the *hijab*, as a marker of Eastern Islamic culture, but she does not drink alcohol, a sign of Western culture, either. As Shahnaz Khan puts it, the third space is 'a space of contradiction, repetition, ambiguity, and disavowal of colonial authority that does not allow original signifiers and symbols in the oppositional polarities'.¹³⁴ In the film, it is displayed that Yasmin's hyphenated identity is threatened by the dominated culture that aims to shape her identity. For instance, John teases Yasmin during the birthday party at work, telling that she keeps apologizing for not drinking alcohol. Yasmin seems to accept his offer. She takes a glass of beer. Nevertheless, instead of drinking it, she pours the drink into the pot of the plant in the corner. This scene also illustrates the difference of Yasmin from her Western workmates.

As I have indicated, Yasmin is illustrated as an in-between character. However, she seems to be more identified with Western culture rather than Pakistani Islamic culture. There are two significant events that lead Yasmin to reconstruct her cultural identity. The first event is her decision of divorce. When Yasmin tells her father that she is going to divorce Faysal, her father tells that it is Yasmin's mother's wish that she should marry him. What Yasmin says is that her mother does not have another choice, because according to her, her mother

¹³³ Alcohol is forbidden as a drink in the Qur'an.

¹³⁴ Khan, 306.

dares not to disagree with her husband. This shows that Yasmin is not identified with her mother, who is depicted as passive and submissive. Rather she challenges his father's patriarchal authority. She leaves home without her *hijab*. What does this mean? What is the significance of the *hijab* in her construction of identity?

In order to understand what the removal of the *hijab* symbolizes, it is necessary to analyze the importance of private and public spaces in shaping Yasmin's identity. What I mean by private space is the Muslim Pakistani community settling in northern England where Yasmin lives with her family. It is this space that determines the boundary of Yasmin's Pakistani Islamic identity. In this space, she holds her home culture's dress codes. She is never shown wearing Western clothes in this space. Instead, she wears the traditional Pakistani dress, *shalwar kameezes*¹³⁵, at home. When she goes out, she wears a black cloak and a black headscarf. Even though she cooks Pakistani food, she is never shown speaking Panjabi. She describes her husband as "thick Paki" or "banana boat". She rejects being described as a 'typical Paki'. Additionally, when she sees a Pakistani man talking on TV in the pub, she yells at him saying 'Go back to your country, Paki!' This indicates that Yasmin is a Westernized person, who feels like a Brit; however, she is somewhat part of her Pakistani community as well. This is displayed in the scenes when Yasmin helps her illiterate neighbor. Thus, she is torn between Eastern and Western cultures. However, after the row with her father about her decision of the divorce, she leaves home wearing jeans and make-up. This attitude conveys Yasmin's resistance against patriarchal Pakistani culture, which dominates her body through imposing certain dress codes and moral values.¹³⁶ Leaving home without the *hijab*, she drives to the pub. In so doing, Yasmin displays her rebellion against Pakistani patriarchal culture, rather than transforming her culture into Western culture or negotiating it.

¹³⁵ *Shalwar kameeze* is a two piece top and bottom baggy pants, which can be made with contemporary patterns, different designs and materials. They are worn by Muslim Pakistani women and women from northern India. Cf. <http://www.socsci.flinders.edu.au/wmst/awsa2001/pdf/papers/Rodan.pdf>.

¹³⁶ What I mean by moral values is that in the context of the film divorce is represented as a shame in Pakistani traditional culture. The concept of respect is also shown as an important moral value. It is underlined in the film that children are supposed to show respect to their parents in Pakistani culture.

The pub and the place where she works signify the public space where British culture is dominant. In this space Yasmin negotiates the hegemonic British culture by wearing jeans and abandoning her headscarf. After the row with her father, she comes to the pub and drinks alcohol, this time, at her will. This representation of Yasmin shows that Yasmin's identity is fluid and tends to change. The removal of the *hijab* and the attempt to drink alcohol reflect that Yasmin is apt to adopt a Western identity.

However, the 9/11 events become a turning point for Yasmin's subject position. Yasmin is ostracized at work and in the pub by her colleagues because of her national and religious background. When she complains about becoming 'a number one public enemy', John says that none of Muslims come out and say that they are sorry about the events. When Yasmin asks why Muslims have to apologize, John says that the 9/11 events were conducted in the name of Islam. Feeling guilty, Yasmin asks 'Should I say sorry being Muslim?' To calm Yasmin down, John says that he is on her side. Yasmin expresses how hurtful the word 'side' is, saying that 'Ohh, we are taking sides now'. This is the second important event that pushes Yasmin to redefine her identity as a Muslim, Pakistani woman living in a British community.

Apart from that, Yasmin is not supported by her boss when she goes to the boss to report about the nasty notes hung on her locker even though she has been chosen as the employee of the month. The boss offers her to take a week off. In the film, it is shown that being positioned as the "Other" leads Yasmin to reevaluate her Pakistani Muslim identity. Before the events, she is depicted as if she had not been aware of her national and religious identity, which differentiates her from white-Westerners. Her ignorance or neglect of her national and religious identity can be seen in the scenes that depict Yasmin listening to music rather than the radio speech of George Bush about the 9/11 attacks. If she had been identified with Pakistani Islamic culture, she would have known who Osama bin Ladin was. Only after being discriminated against and being imprisoned has she realized that the reason why she has been alienated is her national and religious background.

The following question arises now: how is Yasmin's identity constituted in the rest of the film? Is Yasmin's identity re-constructed as hybrid or not after such an experience of exclusion and discrimination? In her article, "Muslim Women: Negotiations in the Third

Space”, Shahnaz Khan points to the trap in which Muslim women fall, saying that ‘when women “alienated” by Orientalism turn to Islam for identity, they often face Islamist attempts to contain their bodies within rigid sexist structures’.¹³⁷ As I have touched upon before, Islam is not a misogynist religion which privileges men over women. However, patriarchal interpretations of the Qur’an lead sexist interpretations. Therefore, as Barlas indicates in her book, re-readings of the Qur’an by women are necessary to establish gender equality in Muslim communities. In fact, the scene that shows Yasmin reading the Qur’an as a main source of inspiration in her cell fosters the idea that Yasmin does not get involved in any Islamic discourses that shape her identity on the grounds of patriarchal readings of the Qur’an. Instead, it is shown that she develops an Islamic identity by reading the Qur’an on her own.

As I have underlined, in the film it is reflected that religious, cultural and national discourses are in flux when constituting Yasmin’s identity. In this sense, it is worthwhile to note again that even though religion and culture seem to be the same, they are totally different. It is a fact that religion and culture are intertwined. The division between Pakistani culture and Islam as two contesting discourses can be seen in the last scene of the film when Yasmin is represented in the *hijab*. She tells John that she is divorced. This clearly shows that Yasmin embraces a religious identity by overturning Eastern patriarchal culture which enforces her to marry against her will and prevents her from divorce. While Yasmin refuses Eastern patriarchal culture to some extent, she distances herself from Western culture as well. She even defends Eastern culture/tradition against Western criticism. The shift in the subject position of Yasmin is illustrated in the scene when John sees the goat in Yasmin’s garden, which Faysal has brought. John cannot hide his surprise when he says ‘What the fuck is that?’ Yasmin’s reply is quite interesting: ‘You have got a cat, haven’t you?’ Her answer is interesting because she has criticized Faysal for having brought the goat. She has told Faysal that they cannot keep it. What has changed her mind? It seems that racial discourses and injustices contribute to Yasmin’s embracing of Pakistani culture. This becomes even clearer in the scene when Yasmin goes to the prison so as to ask Faysal to sign the divorce papers. However, she is kept there for a while and questioned by the police. This event makes her sympathize with Faysal. She waits for Faysal until he is

¹³⁷ Khan, 310.

released from prison and she talks to him in Panjabi for the first time. In the first scenes, Yasmin is depicted as avoiding Panjabi. This shows that Yasmin is no longer identified with the West. She now seems to embrace a Pakistani Islamic culture.

Refusing both Western and Eastern patriarchal cultures, Yasmin develops a religious identity in the end. The best sign of her re-defined identity is her *hijab*. In the last scene, Yasmin wears a red dress rather than her black cloak and headscarf. The way Yasmin dresses may indicate that Yasmin personalizes the *hijab*, which was a sign of cultural-traditional identity at the beginning of the film. The color of her dress and her scarf reflects Yasmin's re-constructed identity and personality.

Another point concerning the question in what ways Yasmin's identity is constructed in the film is that, in contrast to hegemonic Western discourse which constitutes the Muslim woman's identity as dangerous and terrorist, Yasmin is not represented as having a fundamentalist Islamist female identity. Unlike her brother whose identity is shaped by fundamentalism, Yasmin is not shown to have any contact with any kind of Islamic groups that see Western culture as the enemy. The film gives the idea that it is Eurocentric discourse that causes Yasmin to adopt an Islamic identity.

Moreover, the film represents different Islamic identities: Yasmin's father displays a traditional Pakistani Islamic identity, Nasr adopts a fundamentalist Islamic identity and Yasmin reveals an Islamic identity. In this sense, the film shows that there are multiple Islamic identities which are constituted by cultural, social and economic events.

I would also like to discuss whether the film shows that a hybrid British Pakistani Islamic identity is possible or not. It seems as if the film negated heterogeneous identities of women who identify themselves as Muslims. This can be seen in the last scene in which Yasmin is depicted as a devout Muslim with a headscarf, who goes to the mosque. In this scene, Yasmin coincidentally meets John on the way. When John offers her to go to the pub, she refuses his offer. Similarly, John does not accept to go to the mosque with Yasmin. Their ways are separated. Both of them go to different directions. What does this mean? Can a Muslim woman not go to a pub? The last scene does not 'diffuse the rigid boundaries

between Islam and the West' and does not 'give women individual freedom of choice at the intersection of the two'.¹³⁸ In doing so, the film does not form Yasmin's cultural identity as hybrid and dynamic at the end of the film. Thus, it is revealed that Yasmin cannot create a third space for herself in British society beyond assimilation and isolation.

Regarding the question of multiculturalism, in the film it is demonstrated that different cultures cannot co-exist. The last scene evokes the idea that Yasmin, being identified with Islamic culture, cannot negotiate with John who represents Western culture. Thus, the film repeats Orientalist discourse by presenting the West and Islam as two dichotomous poles.

Additionally, it can be said that in general the film depicts white Westerners as xenophobic and racist who scribble nasty notes on Yasmin's locker and make snide comments about her in the pub, whereas Muslims especially Muslim women are shown to be subjected to victimization. In the film, there is no scene that shows any negotiation/interaction between these two cultures except for the scene that depicts an old woman coming to help a Muslim woman (Yasmin's neighbor) who is assaulted by a gang of youngsters in a Keighley shopping precinct. What is special in this scene is that in fact this elderly woman was not aware that 'she had stumbled on to a film shoot'.¹³⁹ In the real script, it is only Yasmin who is supposed to rush and comfort her Muslim female neighbor. However, the producer, Sally Hibbin, and the scriptwriter, Simon Beaufoy, decide to leave this scene as it is.¹⁴⁰ Thus, it can be said that the film fails to celebrate multiculturalism by displaying only conflicts between two cultures rather than negotiations and cultural interactions.

¹³⁸ Khan, 332.

¹³⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/13/broadcasting.film>.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/13/broadcasting.film>.
<http://www.culturewars.org.uk/2005-01/yasmin.htm>.

4.4 REPRESENTATION OF WESTERN WOMEN AND THE MYTH OF WESTERN SUPERIORITY

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, Muslim women are usually compared with Western women in hegemonic Western discourse. In this juxtaposition Muslim women are generally shown as submissive, powerless, dependent, and oppressed whereas Western women are perceived as self-reliant, powerful, independent, and liberated. Accordingly, Western women, seen as a sign of Western civilized culture, are represented as models for Third World women. In this part of Chapter 3, I am going to analyze in what ways the relation between the Western female characters in the film and Yasmin are displayed. My concern is to explore whether the discourse of feminism is employed in the film to affirm Western superiority.

Unlike the traditional Orientalist depiction of the relationship between The Third World woman and the Western woman, the lifestyle of Yasmin is not compared with any Western female characters in the film. Yasmin does not have any Western female friends whom she consults and shares the problems she has with her father and husband. By contrast, Yasmin is discriminated against mostly by her Western female counterparts rather than by John. When she finds a note, calling her Osama bin Ladin on her locker at work, she goes to John and asks him ‘Who is Osama?’ None of her female colleagues come to her to support her emotionally. Apart from John, Yasmin does not have any close friends at work. In this respect, it can be said that the film does not display Western female characters as role models for Yasmin whom she can imitate. She is not represented as if she admired the lifestyle of her Western female workmates. She does not try to be as free and as independent as they are. In other words, in the film the binary opposition between the Third World woman as dependent and the Western woman as independent is not repeated.

Additionally, as Lory E. Amy indicates, Muslim women are generally seen as a threat to Western women's sexuality, because of Western men's desire to unveil the veiled.¹⁴¹ However, in the film *Yasmin* is not shown as a threat to Western female characters' sexuality. On the contrary, the Western female characters, especially the blond female figure, poses a threat to Yasmin's sexuality, by drawing John's attention. The conflict between Yasmin and the Western female characters is manifested in the scene in which Yasmin sees John dancing with a blond female figure in the pub. Feeling jealous, Yasmin leaves the pub instead of fighting for John. After telling her decision to divorce her husband to her father, Yasmin kisses John in the pub, looking at the woman who has danced with John. This is the first time that Yasmin has kissed John. Why has she not kissed John or shown her emotions to him before? In the film, Yasmin and John have not been displayed as having a physical/sexual contact before. The reason might be that Yasmin has been waiting for a divorce to reveal her emotions to John. In the meantime, John feels attracted to a Western woman. The dancing scene may illustrate the threat of Western female sexuality. However, Yasmin as a married woman, even if she is forced into an arranged marriage, is not depicted as betraying her husband. This depiction of Yasmin's sexuality challenges the image of the Muslim woman as "an amoral soulless animal".¹⁴² In short, on the grounds of cultural and moral values, the Western female characters are not represented as superior over Yasmin in the film, which inverts the notions of Western cultural supremacy.

4.5 Silences/ Absences in *Yasmin*

In his interview on the film, *Yasmin*, Kenny Glenaan states that he aimed at reflecting prejudices that Asian society, especially Muslims, have faced in the U.K since the 9/11 attacks. He tells that "I don't think any film has ever changed the world, but we made it to give the (British Muslim) people some dignity".¹⁴³ In spite of the film-makers' good

¹⁴¹ Cf. Amy, E. Lory, "Contemporary Travel Narratives and old Style Politics: American Women Reporting after the Gulf War". *Women Studies International Forum*, Vol.22, No.5, (1999): 525-541.

¹⁴² Cf. Amy, 530.

¹⁴³ <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/mag/2004/11/14/stories/2004111400270200.htm>.

intention of subverting the stereotypical image of Muslims as cruel and oppressive, there are some lacks in the film, which cause the film not to fulfill its purpose. The most important absence is a mother character. The representation of a mother/wife character could be very helpful to subvert the distorted image of Islam as a patriarchal religion which privileges father/husband and sees them as a reflection of God's rule. The absence of the mother character fortifies the idea that the father is the head of the family and is given an authority over the family members. Regarding the position of Yasmin's mother in the family, the dialogue between Yasmin and her father gives the idea that Yasmin's mother is subordinated rather than a decision-taker. She seems to be an obedient wife, who accepted her husband's decision of forcing Yasmin into an arranged marriage. In fact, she is absent in the film, but she is represented by the dialogue between Yasmin and her father.

However, it is a fact that representation cannot reflect reality truly. Accordingly, it can be said that the way how the mother is depicted cannot reflect the ideas of Yasmin's mother on the question of Yasmin's marriage exactly, because it is only the representation of Yasmin's mother's ideas that the viewer gets. In other words, the portrayal of the mother by the dialogue does not give a voice to Yasmin's mother. On the contrary, this portrayal silences her voice, because the audience is not told by the mother what she thinks about Yasmin's marriage. Did she really not dare to say 'No' to her husband? Additionally, it would be quite interesting to hear the voice of Yasmin's mother on the issue of divorce. Does the mother support Yasmin's decision or not? It seems as if the lack of the representation of the mother empowered the image of the "Muslim woman" as submissive and obedient in the West.

Moreover, the absence of Yasmin's mother in the film recreates the identity of the "Muslim woman" as static and fixed: Yasmin's father tries to convince Yasmin not to divorce Faysal by giving his marriage as an example. He states that he and his wife did not know each other before they got married. He says that they were also strangers in the beginning. When Yasmin disagrees with her father's point, her father reminds her that Yasmin's mother wanted her to get married to Faysal. This representation of the mother's view shows that Yasmin's mother's cultural identity has not shifted or changed in the course of time. The

mother, who does not transform her Pakistani identity to contemporary Western society, is portrayed as having a fixed identity. The question is: Concerning Yasmin's decision of divorce is the mother also as traditional as her husband? In this sense, the representation of the mother character could be very helpful in subverting the ethnocentric notions of the Muslim woman's identity as static and fixed.

Secondly, the absence of the mother character empowers the Orientalist image of a Muslim family as corrupt, because the film does not reflect the relationship between a husband and a wife in a Muslim community. In the film, the only couple is Faysal and Yasmin, who are in an arranged marriage. In this sense, the film does not show how a marriage runs in a Muslim family. It does not give any picture of the relation between husband and wife in an Islamic society. In other words, the film does not mirror any Muslim family and partnership in this family. In doing so, it fails to invert the Orientalist image of Muslim family, in which it is believed that the wife is oppressed and placed in a secondary position.

Thirdly, the function of the mosque in the lives of Muslims is not clearly represented. Muslims are not shown in the mosque except for Nasr, who is supposed to be there because he is the person who calls for prayer.¹⁴⁴ Rather Muslim men are depicted waiting outside. Additionally, there is no depiction of Muslim women neither in the mosque nor out of it. The only thing that the audience is told regarding the relation between Muslim women and the mosque is that Yasmin has never been to the mosque for years before 9/11 and she starts to go to the mosque after the events. This lack of representation of Yasmin or any Muslim female characters in the mosque gives the idea that the mosque is a patriarchal institution which undermines women or where women have a limited space.

Finally, I would like to address in what ways the reaction of Yasmin to the events of the 9/11 and its aftermath is represented. Does she position herself among Islamic fundamentalists as Nasr, who evaluate the attacks as positive? Or does she distance herself from any fundamentalist group like her father, who regards the attacks as murder? What does she think about the attacks and its aftermath? In fact, in the film the answer to these

¹⁴⁴ The call to prayer is named *adhan* in the Arabic language. The *adhan* announces that it is time for the ritual prayer. Cf. <http://www.islamonline.net/english/introducingislam/Worship/Prayers/article03.shtml>.

questions is not given. What is shown in the film concerning the approach of Yasmin to Islamic fundamentalism fueled after 9/11 is that when Nasr comes home to ask for Yasmin's blessings, because he has decided to go to Palestine to fight with Palestinian Muslims, she refuses to give her blessings to him. Why does she not do it? Is it because she does not support the *jihad*¹⁴⁵ or because she is sorry that she will not see her brother again? Thus, Yasmin's approach to the issues of 9/11 is not clearly reflected in the film, which seems to me an important lack, because as I have underlined in Chapter 3, the 9/11 attacks and its aftermath are gender-related. The consequence of the attacks, as shown in the film, has influenced the Muslim female characters more than the Muslim male ones. However, the representation of Yasmin's voice as a female Muslim woman in relation to the attacks is absent, whereas the father's and Nasr's reaction are displayed.

4.6 Narration of 9/11 and Western Masculinity

It is also crucial to discuss in what ways the events of 9/11 are represented in the film. Referring to Chapter 3, I would like to analyze whether the film emasculinates Muslim men whereas it strengthens Western masculinity. I am also going to discuss whether the film demonizes the Muslim male characters by showing the British police as heroes and rescuers. The last point I am going to deal with is how Yasmin is positioned in the representations of the 9/11 events. My focus will be on whether Yasmin is used as a vehicle to justify the antiterrorist acts and the "war on terror".

Concerning the question of whether Muslim men are demonized in the film so as to represent Western masculinity as powerful and savior, it can hardly be said that the film portrays the policemen as heroes. By contrast, the film, *Yasmin*, questions the notion of Muslim men as the number one public enemy through irony. The film criticizes the

¹⁴⁵ The *jihad* is a very controversial concept discussed within Muslim societies as well as Western societies. B.A. Robinson explains the term referring to the Qur'an's verses and the words of the Prophet Muhammad. He tells that there are three jihads such as personal, verbal and physical. Stating that personal jihad, which involves in purifying one's soul, is the most difficult and important jihad. He explains that verbal jihad is to strive for justice with words through non-violent actions. The physical jihad, which many Muslim fundamentalists misinterpret or misuse for their own profits, is to fight back to defend or struggle against oppression. In the context of the film the word, jihad, refers to the physical jihad. Cf. http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_jihad.htm.

government's policy and the police officers' attitude by showing how the policemen misunderstand Faysal's conversation with his relative in Afghanistan on the phone. The scene that depicts how the policemen come into Yasmin's home and arrest the family members including John, who happens to be there, does not strike a feeling of sympathy towards the policemen in comparison with other portrayals of the policemen in the post 9/11 media coverage.¹⁴⁶

It is also necessary to explore whether the Muslim men in the film are emasculated or not. The scenes that show the Muslim male characters being arrested by the policemen weaken Muslim masculinity by displaying the Muslim male characters as powerless and helpless. Especially, the scene that depicts Faysal crying in the arms of Yasmin after he has been released shows that Muslim masculinity is feminized. On the other hand, the film illustrates that Nasr is not feminized but his masculinity is empowered as a result of his arrestment. He reacts against the pressure of Western masculinity on him with his decision of going to Afghanistan. The scene that illustrates Nasr's anger towards the policemen and his father, who claims that the policemen might have a right to arrest Faysal, can be read as an attempt to empower Muslim masculinity. In this sense, it can be said that the film points out the power struggle between Western and Muslim masculinity rather than empowering Western masculinity.

The last point I would like to analyze is how the attacks are presented in relation to Yasmin. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, Afghan women are shown as victims of the Taliban regime in order to justify "the war on terror". I am going to discuss whether Yasmin is depicted as a victim who needs Western masculinity in order to be protected from Muslim masculinity? The answer to this question is that unlike the depiction of Afghan women in the post 9/11 media coverage, Yasmin is depicted as a person who is not in need of Western protection. Thus, it can be said that *Yasmin* deconstructs the discourse of 9/11, by exposing Muslim male characters as innocent. Moreover, the portrayal of the British police does not evoke a feeling of patriotism, but fear. Additionally, Yasmin is not shown as a victim of

¹⁴⁶ As I have stressed in Chapter 3, in post-9/11 Western media the policemen, firefighters and rescue workers are represented as "hero" and "protector of the nation". They are praised for their courage and endeavor. Cf. Jemima Repo, 49.

Muslim fundamentalists, so that the antiterrorist acts and “the war on terror” can gain public support.

As Stuart Hall indicates in his article “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation”, ‘[t]he practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write- the position of enunciation’.¹⁴⁷ In this regard, the film challenges many films and books which assign some stereotypical traits to Muslim women such as submission and oppression. Nevertheless, the film reproduces the Orientalist depiction of the Muslim man as oppressive and primitive to some extent. Accordingly, Yasmin is displayed as a victim of her patriarchal culture. What the film deconstructs is that Yasmin is represented not as a silenced person but as a fighter against both her patriarchal culture and ethno-centric Orientalist discourse. In other words, Yasmin is not portrayed as a victim even though she is victimized by both discourses. She wins her struggle against the patriarchal Eastern and Western authorities which aim to shape Yasmin’s identity. At the end of the film, it is illustrated that Yasmin constitutes her identity neither on the base of patriarchal Pakistani culture nor on the base of Western secular culture. Thus, she is represented as a victor rather than a victim.

On the other hand, the film fortifies the discourse of Orientalism, which establishes a dichotomy between the East and the West. In the film, Yasmin’s identity is constructed in terms of “difference” from the beginning onwards rather than “sameness”. The difference between Yasmin and her Western workmates reflected by her skin color is extended to her religion towards the end of the film. The last scene that depicts Yasmin and John going different directions implies that Muslims and Westerners cannot mingle and live in harmony. In this way, the film fails to deconstruct the idea that the East is the binary opposite of the West. As a result, it promotes the idea that Muslims and Westerners cannot go beyond binary constructions. Thus, the film does not foster multiculturalism and pluralism. The film does also not give an answer to the question of whether Yasmin can constitute a hybrid identity as a British, Pakistani and Muslim woman in post-9/11 Britain by crossing racist, ethnic and political boundaries. Additionally, I have shown in what ways the relation between Yasmin and her female Western counterparts are portrayed. I

¹⁴⁷ Hall, 210.

have underlined that in the film *Yasmin* is not compared with any Western women in terms of freedom and independence. Moreover, none of the Western female characters has a 'civilizing mission' to save Yasmin from her oppressive father. However, the antagonism of the Western female characters to Yasmin is centered in the film. The hatred of the Western female characters, stemming from racist discourse, is manifested in the scenes that depict Yasmin standing alone in the birthday party and being excluded at the pub. Another important point which I have drawn attention to is the lack of a mother figure in the film. Yasmin's mother is not represented in the film, but she is referred by Yasmin's father so that he can extend his patriarchal hegemony over his daughter, Yasmin. In this sense, the representation of the mother character as oppressed can be read as an affirmation of Western cultural supremacy. What I argue is that the mother character is not given a voice in the film. She is silenced. It is either her husband or her daughter who speak for her. Accordingly, it can be said that the absence of the mother character serves the aim of the patriarchal Orientalist discourse about the 'Muslim woman' as submissive. Thus it can be concluded that the film, *Yasmin*, inverts the stereotypical portrayal of the "Muslim woman" as victim and oppressed only to some extent, while it also reproduces some Orientalist tropes which asserts the binary oppositions between the East and the West.

5 LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE

As I have underlined in Chapter 3, even though the film *Yasmin* contests the clichéd notions of the “Muslim woman” as submissive and passive, the idea that Muslim women are subject to violation in their Muslim community still exists in the film. In this chapter, I would like to discuss the following questions: Does the Canadian sitcom named *Little Mosque on the Prairie* subverts the image of the “Muslim woman” as being victimized entirely? Or does it confirm the portrayal of Muslim society as unchanged and ahistorical by showing them as traditional and conservative.

Relying on a Foucauldian framework, I am going to seek an answer to these questions in this chapter. Foucault, pointing at the close link between power/knowledge and representation, states that ‘power does not function in the form of a chain’ but ‘it is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization’.¹⁴⁸ According to him, power, held by a hegemonic group who produces a body of knowledge about the “Other”, can also be positive because power is “productive”. He states that power traverses and produces counter-discourses. Similarly, Stuart Hall discusses in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* whether a dominant regime of representation can be challenged or contested. He states that there are three strategies of subverting racial stereotyping. One of these strategies he mentions is humor. Bearing this in mind, it can be said that the discourse about Muslim women is entirely inverted in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, produced by a Muslim woman film maker named Zarqa Nawaz.

Before analyzing how the constructed image of the “Muslim woman” is deconstructed in this sitcom, it is necessary to give some information on the producer of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. As Hall indicates in his article “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representations”, cultural identities are “never complete” and “always in process”. For this reason, it is crucial to know who the speaker is and from which position s/he speaks in order to understand whether people and cultural identities are misrepresented or not. It is also beneficial to find an answer to the question of what is happening in the screen writer’s

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, 98.

community at the time when the cultural product is released so as to make sense of the enunciation.¹⁴⁹ After talking about the creator of the television comedy and the time it was broadcast, I am going to summarize the plot and introduce the characters. Then I am going to illustrate in what ways *Little Mosque on the Prairie* subverts the Orientalist portrayal of the “Muslim woman”. Furthermore, I am going to explore how the *hijab* is represented. Finally, I would like to discuss whether the film fosters the idea of a hybrid culture or not.

5.1 Who is the Speaker?

Recalling the statement of Judith Butler: ‘who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human [...]’¹⁵⁰, I want to assert that the most contesting trait of the sitcom is that it was created by a Muslim woman of Pakistani origin, Zarqa Nawaz, who was born in Liverpool and raised in Toronto. Nawaz, the producer and the screen writer of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, asserts that the sitcom is based on her own observations she collected while growing up as Muslim in North America. In this regard, the sitcom, unlike many other Orientalist films and books, does not talk about Muslim women, but a Muslim female screenwriter shares her own experience of being a Muslim woman in a Canadian context. In other words, the sitcom is not a Western mainstream product, which represents Muslim men and women. On the contrary, the sitcom is a self-representation which speaks back in the language of Orientalists.

Additionally, Nawaz does not speak from a position that sees Muslim women as the “other”. She does not address the dominant powers within Western community by reinforcing the static and singular representation of the “Muslim woman”. Instead, she also addresses Muslim women and men. The portrayal of the Muslim community in this sitcom reflects a unity and sameness stemming from common culture and history by highlighting diversity among the Muslim community. In this way, she forms one collective “self”, which is defined as *imaginative rediscovery* by Hall.¹⁵¹ Hall’s notions of cultural identity which entails that cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being” appears

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, 211.

¹⁵⁰ Butler, 141.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Stuart Hall, *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, 210-213.

in the sitcom, which reveals the dynamic and diverse nature of the Muslim women and men in the sitcom. In doing so, it reconstructs the monolithic and unchanging depiction of Muslim women in the dominant regimes of Western cinematic and visual representation.

The last point I want to underline is that Nawaz, as a Muslim woman screenwriter, plays a crucial role in contesting the image of the “Muslim woman” as oppressed and desperate. As Ghazi-Walid Fallah indicates in her article on the visual representations of Muslim women in daily newspapers, Muslim women are usually portrayed as crying passively. According to her, these photos encode the meaning that Muslim women are victims of their culture and religion. Nawaz, wearing the *hijab*, evokes the idea that Muslim women are well-educated and as independent as Western women. Nawaz asserts in one of her interviews that even though she is a mother of four children, she does not give up making a “demanding career” in the television sector.¹⁵² She adds that she has a supportive husband, who does not mind being a single parent. Moreover, Nawaz employs humor to show that Muslims especially Muslim women are witty and know how to enjoy life. In this way, the image of the “Muslim woman” as hopeless victims is replaced by the picture of Muslim women who smile.

5.2 9/11 and Humor

I would like to point at the time when the sitcom was created. The sitcom was produced after the 9/11 events. As I have mentioned before, the attacks on the twin towers caused many misconceptions about Muslims. The sitcom premiered on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Cooperation) in 2007 and depicts how in a post-9/11 Canadian community Muslims and non-Muslims are handling their prejudices against each other in a funny way. In this regard, the sitcom plays a crucial role in breaking down the “us” versus “them” and “Muslims” and “Westerners” binaries through a sense of humor.

¹⁵²Cf. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070109.wlivezarqa0110/BNStory/specialComment/home>.

Before analyzing in what ways the sitcom inverts the stereotypical depiction of the “Muslim woman”, I would like to offer the plot and introduce the characters briefly.

5.3 Introduction of the Plot and Characters

The sitcom deals with a Muslim community living in the fictional prairie town of Mercy, Saskatchewan. The primary setting of the film is the local mosque located in the rented parish hall of the Anglican Church. The sitcom which aired on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation mirrors the diversity within Muslim and Canadian communities by tackling controversial topics such as polygamy, gay marriages, segregation in the mosque, etc.

The choice of the characters plays a crucial role in contesting the ethnocentric Orientalist discourse because each of the characters represents a different racial, sexual, cultural and religious group. Thereby this comedy promotes pluralism and multiculturalism. I would like to start by introducing the Imam of the local mosque, Amaar. He is actually a lawyer, but he gives up his future career as a lawyer in Toronto and comes to Mercy to be an Imam¹⁵³ of the Mercy Mosque. Amaar, who is a clean-shaven Imam, represents liberal movements in Islam. He is criticized by conservative Muslims for not having a beard. Amaar’s wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt instead of traditional Pakistani dress, surprises not only the characters in the sitcom but also the Western audience.¹⁵⁴ In this way, the film deconstructs the cliché about Imams, who are generally displayed as men with a beard and in a long white dress like Baber. Amaar’s counterpart is Reverend Duncan Maggie, the priest of the Anglican Church. He is also portrayed as a liberal religious leader, who accepts to perform a gay marriage in the church. He also rents the church’s hall to Muslims. The most important female figure in the sitcom is Rayyan, who is the 25-year-old daughter of Sarah and Yasir Hamoudi. Rayyan represents Muslim feminists, who struggle with both conservative Muslim men and ethnocentric Western men in the series. Rayyan’s parents, unlike her, are secular. Sarah, a Muslim convert, works as a public relations agent in the

¹⁵³ The male prayer leader in a mosque. Cf. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Imam>.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/01/15/news/journal.php>.

Mayor Ann Popowicz's office, whereas her husband, Yasir, is a contractor, who runs his business out of an office at the mosque. Baber is a conservative and traditional Muslim man, who is shown as anti-Western. Baber's counterparts are Fred Tupper, a host on the local radio station and Joe, a local farmer. Both of them equate Muslims to terrorists. Layla is the teenage daughter of Baber, who navigates between Islamic and Canadian culture. Another important female character is Fatima, a traditional Muslim Nigerian widow, who runs a café in the town.

5.4 The Representations of the Muslim Women in the Sitcom

In this part of Chapter 4, I would like to illustrate in what ways the image of the "Muslim woman" is subverted. First of all, I am going to analyze how Muslim women's identities are portrayed in the sitcom. My concern is to demonstrate how Eurocentric Western discourse, which represents the "Muslim woman" as an unchanged and unified category, is challenged. Secondly, I am going to show whether in the sitcom Muslim women are given a voice to express their views on political, religious and cultural issues or not. Thirdly, I am going to analyze whether the film stereotypes the Muslim female characters as submissive and passive or not.

5.4.1 A Range of Muslim Female Identities

Judy Mabro discusses in her book that phallogentric Orientalist discourse undermines the diversity among Muslim women. In doing so, it confines them to a singular and stable category, "the Muslim woman". Similarly, Kahf points out that the term, "the Muslim woman", is quite nebulous and ahistorical, stating that her aim to write a book about Western representations of the Muslim woman is to 'rip apart at the seams the apparent fit between "the Muslim woman" as the object of representation in Western texts and real Muslim women with live cells'.¹⁵⁵ As these two writers underline, in order to represent Muslim female identities, it is necessary to refer to the dimensions of region, class, ethnicity, history and culture. In this sense, it can be said that the sitcom goes against the

¹⁵⁵ Kahf, 3.

dominant discourse on Muslim women by presenting the diversity among the Muslim female characters in the television comedy. I would like to demonstrate how the monolithic image of Muslim female identity is shattered in the sitcom in detail.

First of all, this sitcom displays a wide range of Muslim women coming from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. For instance, Sarah is a Canadian convert. In the sitcom it is shown that Sarah's Anglican background plays a crucial role in her understanding of Islam. She is defined as a secular person, who hardly practices Islam. However, she identifies herself as a Muslim and tries to protect the rights of the Muslim community in the town. She is displayed as a bridge between the Mayor of the town and the Muslim community. On the other hand, Fatima is a traditional Nigerian woman, who represents black, immigrant and Muslim women in Canada. She tries to preserve her home culture, but she is also keen on integrating into Canadian society. For instance, she takes a Canadian citizenship test. After passing the test, she becomes a Canadian citizen. Another female character is Rayyan. Portrayed as a Canadian feminist who practicing Islam, Rayyan can be defined as a hybrid person. She is a doctor wearing a *hijab*. She is not displayed experiencing any discrimination at the hospital where she works. In contrast, she is portrayed as a part of her social network. One of the important figures that display diversity among the Muslim women is Layla, the daughter of a very conservative Pakistani father, Baber. She is represented as a free-minded person. Even though she is forced to wear a *hijab* by her father, she somehow manages to follow her own rules. She listens to Western music, which her father is entirely against. Layla is not depicted as a person isolated from Canadian society. On the contrary, she is shown as taking a part in the Run for the Ring competition in the town and the Christmas carols program at school. In this way, she is represented as a part of both Canadian and Islamic culture. Thus, the sitcom illustrates that Muslim female identities can also be multiple and hybrid rather than singular and stable.

Secondly, the series dealing with various topics such as barrier in the mosque and *burqa*, show that the Muslim female characters are usually in conflict with each other as a result of their distinct ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds. In other words, even though the female characters are Muslim, they have different perspectives and opinions on certain issues. For instance, the conservative Muslim men, especially Baber, want to build a

barrier between men and women, claiming that men are distracted by the women in the mosque during prayer. Rayyan, as a feminist Muslim woman, opposes this sexist behavior and tries to erect the barrier, asserting that even the Grand Mosque in Mecca does not have a barrier. While her mother, Sarah, who visits the mosque only at Friday ceremonies, supports Rayyan wholeheartedly, Fatima disagrees with Rayyan and wants the barrier stating that she does not want any men to see her praying.

Another episode which displays that the Muslim women in the sitcom do not have identical opinions is the debate about hiring a female life guard in the public pool of the town. When Fatima's knee is hurt, Rayyan advises her to swim. Rayyan and Fatima, in their swim suits, enter the local swimming pool. They are surprised when they discover that the life guard is not a woman but a man. They try to cover themselves with towels. Even though the life guard implies that he is gay and not interested in women, Rayyan and Fatima do not accept to swim in the pool stating that their swim suits are 'too revealing'. What Rayyan suggests is to hire a female life guard. She goes and talks to the Mayor and her mother. The Mayor says that she does not have a budget for that. However, she adds that on the condition that Sarah give up going on a trip to China, which is very expensive, and Rayyan gather one hundred signatures for a female life guard, the Mayor can afford to hire one. Sarah, who dreams about seeing China, sabotages Rayyan's attempt to find public support for a female life guard by informing Fred Tupper about the event. The idea of enabling the Muslim women to have access to the local pool of Mercy turns into a personal conflict between Rayyan and Sarah. This episode reveals that the Muslim women in the sitcom have different points of views, aims and desires.

Another important point I would like to highlight is that the Muslim women in the sitcom are dressed in different ways, which shows that they are individuals rather than a group, which can be categorized by clear cut definitions. In order to clarify what I mean, it is necessary to refer to the depiction of the "Muslim woman" in current Western media coverage, in which she is portrayed in a black burqa or veil. The depiction of the "Muslim woman" in the veil evokes the idea that all Muslim women look identical. Their individualities are veiled as a result of the monolithic representation of Muslim women. However, in the sitcom some of the Muslim women such as Rayyan and Fatima wear the

hijab, whereas some of them, such as Sarah and Layla do not. There is diversity even among the Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. The way Rayyan covers her hair is totally different from the way Fatima does. Moreover, their *hijabs* are not only black or blue in contrast to the photographs and pictures shown in the mainstream media. Thus, the illustration of the Muslim women who adopt different dress codes contests the static and singular depiction of the burqa-clad women in Western media.

In short, the sitcom deconstructs the conventional image of the Muslim woman as a singular and unified category represented in the mainstream Western media by displaying differences within the Muslim women in the sitcom.

5.4.2 Voiced or Unvoiced?

As I have highlighted before, Muslim women are given voice neither by their male-dominated Muslim societies nor by the ethnocentric Western feminist discourse. Muslim women's ideas and feelings about many issues, which also engage them and their community, are generally not asked and represented. While analyzing the film *Yasmin*, I have underlined that Yasmin's mother is absent, because it is either her daughter or her husband who speak for her. Similarly, in many Eurocentric feminist writings, as Mohanty asserts, Muslim women are not given a chance to speak for themselves. Bearing this in mind, I would like to explore whether in the sitcom the Muslim female characters are silenced or not.

On the whole, it can be said that the sitcom enables the Muslim woman characters to reveal their ideas on the issues that involve them. The episode that deals with the question of the barrier in the mosque is very helpful in showing that the Muslim women are given voice to express their feelings and ideas about the issue of the barrier. The mosque is not shown as a location where the Muslims only pray, but as a place where the Muslim community shares their problems and makes announcements on different subjects. As a result, some of the women in the mosque want to reveal their views on the topics handled in the mosque. However, the women sitting behind the barrier cannot see the speaker and they are not seen by her/him. Thus, they are placed in an abject position.



In this scene the Mayor is speaking to the community. To be sure she asks whether the women behind the barrier can hear her. So the women including Rayyan are holding their hands to show that they are listening to her.

For instance, in one of the scenes, the Mayor comes to the mosque to give a speech. She is not able to see the women. How can she address the Muslim woman characters then? How can the Muslim women react to the speech? The Muslim women demand their rights to have a space in the mosque which enables them to interact. Rayyan and her supporters fight for having a space in the mosque. In other words, the resistance of the Muslim women against being pushed into the abject position is shown in the sitcom. In this way, the Muslim woman characters are given voice to speak to their patriarchal community.

Similarly, the Muslim women speak against the imperialist feminist discourse which claims to help Third World women. Regarding the issue of the barrier, a group of feminist women come to the mosque in order to protest the sexist attitude of the Muslim community. The community, which is about to go for a vote in order to decide to have a barrier or not, comes out of the mosque when they hear the feminist protestors shouting ‘Oppressed Muslim women of the world cut your chains and be free’. Sarah talks to the leader of the group and says that she agrees with her, but there are some Muslim women in the community who want a barrier. She convinces the feminist woman asserting that they, as privileged Western women, have no right to tell these Muslim women how to pray. This scene reveals that the Muslim women can speak for themselves and they do not need to be “saved” by liberal Western feminists, who undermine the voices of the Muslim women in the mosque of Mercy. In this way, the Muslim women are given voice to tell their opinions on the topics which engage them.

5.4.3 No Longer Passive Harem Slaves

Now I will show how the sitcom deconstructs the image of the “Muslim woman” as passive harem slaves by referring to the post-9/11 media depiction of the Afghan women who are displayed in “inanimate positions such as sitting or standing”.¹⁵⁶ As I have discussed in Chapter 3, the portrayal of the burqa-clad Afghan women in current Western media coverage as passive beings evokes the idea that Muslim women do not participate actively in their community. However, in the sitcom the Muslim women are not depicted as passive figures that are emotionally and financially dependent on their men: Sarah works for the Mayor. Fatima runs a café and Rayyan is a doctor. None of the Muslim women figures fit in the monolithic depiction of the Muslim woman as passive in the Western media.

Moreover, the women in the Muslim community are shown as having active roles in the mosque. For example, Fatima and Sarah come together to organize Ramadan and Sacrifice feasts¹⁵⁷ in the mosque. When Rayyan learns that Baber is ill, she insists that Amaar should choose a woman to make announcements after Friday ceremonies. In the end, Sarah is chosen to make announcements in the mosque. In this way, the mosque represented as a male-dominated institution becomes an institution which also gives space to Muslim women.

It is also crucial to add that the portrayal of oppressive Imam is questioned in this sitcom. In one of the episodes, Amaar, the Imam of the mosque, asks Rayyan to help him organize a Muslim youth day, which he has coined “Islamapalooza”. Amaar also ends the problem of the barrier, which is seen an act of segregation, in a very democratic way stating that the half of the barrier will go and half of it will stay. In this way, he explains, the ones who want the barrier can pray behind it and the ones who do not like it can pray without it. Thus, the image of the misogynist Imam, which prevents women from contributing to social life, is challenged.

¹⁵⁶ Fahmy, 104.

¹⁵⁷ The feast of Sacrifice is the second important religious festival in Islam after Ramadan feast. The festival commemorates the day on which the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) tried to fulfill Allah's command to sacrifice his son Ishmael (Ismael), but was prevented from doing so by an angel. The festival lasts for four days and is a time of feasting, rejoicing and remembrance. Cf. http://www.babylon.com/definition/Eid_al-Adha/English.

Regarding the question of whether the Muslim men want their wives and daughters to be passive, it is necessary to note that even Baber motivates his daughter to do something to improve herself. He offers her two choices. She will either work with him at university or she will look for a job to gain experience. As a result, Layla starts to work as an assistant of Fred Tupper at the local radio station. This portrayal of Baber as a quite conservative father twists the Orientalist notion that the “Muslim woman” imprisoned at home are forced to be passive slaves of Muslim men.

In short, the portrayal of Muslim women in the television comedy shatters the myth of the “Muslim woman” who does not engage in daily life but sit at home. Moreover, the idea that Muslim men do not allow Muslim women take part in social life is also shaken.

5.4.4 Submission

Submission is one of the stereotypical traits ascribed to Muslim women by the dominant Eurocentric discourse. Muslim women are shown as obedient to their men, to Allah and accordingly to their Islamic culture.¹⁵⁸ In order to explore in what ways the image of the submissive Muslim woman is turned upside down in the sitcom, I would like to take a closer look into the relationship between the daughters and fathers and the wives and husbands.

5.4.4.1 Daughters and Fathers

I am going to start with Layla and Baber. The relationship between Baber and Layla is depicted fairly different from the classic Orientalist portrayal of Muslim father- daughter relationship. As I have mentioned before, the stereotypical Muslim father establishes his patriarchal hegemony over the family members. The family members, especially daughters never break the rules set by the father. However, even though Baber is depicted as a traditional Pakistani man, who is worried that his only daughter is going to assimilate into Western culture, which is according to him poisoning, he fails to control Layla. For instance, Baber wishes her daughter to wear the *hijab* when she menstruates. When he

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Twiggs and Schardt. <http://dspace.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/2103/1/final%20version.pdf>.

discovers that Layla has menstruated, he cannot go to her and say that she has to wear the *hijab*.¹⁵⁹ Instead, he goes to Fatima to ask for some advice. Fatima gives Baber a scarf saying that the *hijab* is a part of being woman. Holding the scarf, he goes to Layla. However, Baber cannot ask her to wear it when he learns that some pupils at school make her feel that she is an outsider. Thus, even though Baber is shown as a conservative man, who is not liked very much by his fellow Muslims because he is quite judgmental, he is not strict to his daughter.

On the other hand, Layla is not represented as an obedient daughter. She finds a way to compromise with Baber. For instance, she wants to go to Sarah's tap dancing. However, Baber refuses to go there saying that a woman's dancing before men is not appropriate in Islam. But he has to change his mind when Layla shows him a cassette of the wedding where Baber is dancing with Layla's mother among a mixed group of audience. In short, Baber's attempts to control Layla are in vain. Layla is not a submissive daughter who accepts Baber's authority without questioning. In contrast, Layla is depicted as a rebellious person. However, her way of challenging Baber's hegemony is not shown as a rebellion against Islamic culture but against Baber's unreasonable fears. Moreover, Layla finds some solutions to solve her problems with her father in a clever and peaceful way.

I now want to explore how the relationship between Rayyan and her father Yasir is portrayed. Yasir, who comes from Lebanon, is described as a secular person. He hardly takes Islam and Islamic rules seriously. He is additionally not shown as a patriarch, who wants to impose his own rules on the family members. He is depicted as a man who cooks and cleans. In this respect, he challenges the image of "violent" or "terrorist" Arab men. He is also a very caring father rather than a strict and repressive one. On the other hand, Rayyan is shown as a self-reliant Muslim woman. She wears the *hijab* whereas Sarah, her mother, does not. This shows that Rayyan adopts Islamic dress code not because of her father and her father's Islamic culture. I also want to add that Rayyan as a devout Muslim criticizes Yasir for breaking Islamic rules. For instance, when she finds out that Yasir has played lotto, she expresses her disappointment. In fact, in the sitcom the notions that

¹⁵⁹ According to Islam, Muslim women are supposed to cover their body except for their face and hands when they reach the age of menstruation.

Muslim fathers are more religious than their daughters are subverted by the representations of Rayyan and Yasir. Moreover, Rayyan, who criticizes her parents, can hardly be described as submissive.

5.4.4.2 *Wives and Husbands*

I would like to mention briefly how the relation between Baber and his ex-wife is displayed. In the episode, which deals with celebrating New Year, Rayyan invites Baber and Amaar over for dinner. At the table each person talks about what they were doing five years ago on New Year's Eve. Baber explains that on New Year's Eve his ex-wife came to visit him. He says that he hoped that his ex-wife would accept to reunite with him. However, he tells that he failed to impress her at the first moment. How he messed everything up is shown through a flash back scene as follows:

When he opens the door to welcome her, he says that she does still not have a *hijab*. As an answer, she tells him that he has still difficulty in accepting the fact that she will not wear a *hijab*. She adds that she is going to get married and move to Pakistan. Feeling upset, Baber says that he wants their daughter Layla to live with him. However, his ex-wife explains that Baber, who has just moved to his flat, does not seem to be capable of taking care of Layla. But when she sees the picture of Layla on the wall, she realizes that Baber loves their daughter very much. Then, she allows him to look after Layla.

Actually, this scene inverts the typical submissive Muslim woman depiction, because Baber's ex-wife looks like a self-reliant woman, who makes decisions on her own. It is not mentioned how and why they got divorced. However, Baber's ex-wife seems to be an independent woman, who stands on her own feet. She announces her decision to remarry a man from Pakistan. The portrayal of the relationship between Baber and his ex-wife puts the notions that Muslim men have control over their wives into question. Moreover, the constructed dichotomy between Western women and Muslim women is shaken through the representation of the ex-wife as an empowered and liberated woman.

Finally, I would like to analyze the depiction of Sarah and Yasir as a couple. As I have mentioned above, Yasir does the cleaning and cooking in the household, which is totally

different from the portrayal of strict Arab men in Western media. On the other hand, Sarah is not represented as a submissive wife, who obeys her husband's rules and decisions. For instance, on the issue of the barrier, Yasir backs up Baber because Muslim men support the mosque financially. When they threaten Yasir that they will not pay the rent for the mosque, he decides to take up their side, fearing that he is going to pay for his office in the mosque. In order to change Yasir's decision, Sarah says that until he changes his mind, he will sleep on the sofa. This picture of Sara gives the idea that she is not turned into a submissive wife after her marriage with a Muslim man of Arab origin.

5.4.5 Well-Respected Women instead of Victims

Finally, I would like to investigate whether the Muslim female characters in the sitcom are stereotyped as victims. My concern is to analyze if the women are subject to any physical, emotional and sexual abuse by men. In fact, in contrast to the film, *Yasmin*, which reinvents the image of the victimized Muslim to some extent, in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* Muslim women are not portrayed as victims. In this sitcom, there is no scene that shows any physical or emotional assault inflicted upon the women by their men. In this respect, the sitcom does not repeat the Eurocentric discourse which asserts the superiority of European identity by defining Islam as an innately violent religion, which encourages Muslim men to treat their wives and daughters harshly.

In contrast to hegemonic Western representations of Muslim women as victims, the Muslim woman characters are shown as wise in this sitcom. In other words, the ideas of the Muslim women are respected by the Muslim men in the comedy series. For instance, on the arrival of Amaar to the town of Mercy he is not welcomed by the local Muslim and non-Muslim public. Baber is not fond of Amaar because he is going to be replaced by the "beardless Imam". On the other hand, Fred Tupper, who is furious about the news that the Anglican Church has rented a space to "terrorists", fuels prejudices about Muslims on his radio show. Amaar appears on Tupper's radio show in order to stop Fred "fanning the flames of hatred". However, he loses his control and claims that Toronto is a much more improved city than the small town of Mercy. This makes Amaar's new presence in the town harder. In the end, he decides to leave for Toronto. However, Rayyan manages to persuade Amaar to stay in Mercy, saying that he is a rival Imam, who should not give up so easily. The

scene that displays the conversation between Rayyan and Amaar shows that an Imam listens to a Muslim woman and follows this Muslim woman's words. The scene which demonstrates how wise and rational a Muslim woman can be also displays that Muslim men are not despots who do not take women's word into account.

Similarly, Baber goes to Fatima whenever he is in trouble. Fatima gives him some advice on how he can deal with the problems he has faced. For instance, when he learns that Layla has her period, he does not know how to talk to her. Fatima suggests that he should not put pressure on Layla. The scenes which depict Baber asking Fatima for help not only illustrate that Muslim women are wise but that Muslim women's ideas are well-respected in the Muslim community. Thus, in the sitcom the portrayal of the victimized Muslim woman is replaced by the illustration of well-respected Muslim women.

5.5 Analysis of the *Hijab* Scenes

As I have indicated before, the phallogentric discourse of Orientalism aims to show that 'Islam [is] innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil or segregation epitomized that oppression [...]'.¹⁶⁰ In the sitcom, the *hijab* is not represented as a monolithic symbol of oppression. In contrast to dominant Orientalist discourse, which assigns the *hijab* one fixed meaning, the sitcom demonstrates that the *hijab* has the potential to produce multiple meanings.

5.5.1 *Oppression or Resistance?*

As Stuart Hall underlines, no one has control over meanings and images. Meanings and images slip and slide. Old meanings are replaced by new ones. Thus, 'Words and images carry on connotations [...], allowing different meanings to be constructed [...]'.¹⁶¹ In this part of Chapter 4, I would like to show in what ways the meaning of the *hijab* is "wrenched" and "inflicted into another direction"¹⁶² in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

¹⁶⁰ Ahmed, 152.

¹⁶¹ Hall, 270.

¹⁶² Hall, 270.

In one of the episodes, a Muslim woman wearing a face covering comes to the mosque, which attracts the attention of the whole Muslim community there. While Baber is fascinated by the woman, stating what a modest woman she must be, Sarah feels very irritated by the face covering. At Fatima's café, Sarah brings out the issue of the *burqa* once again asking 'What is she hiding?'. Fatima's answer is quite ironic. She says that the woman in the *burqa* covers her mouth because she cannot eat properly in public. Rayyan goes on making fun of Sarah's suspicious question stating that the spider man has the same problem. Then Fatima explains that the *burqa* symbolizes modesty for some Muslim women, who do not want to show their faces except to their husbands. When Fatima is asked why she does not wear one, she replies that she would not wear it for the sake of her husband. Fred Tupper joins the discussion about the *burqa*, asserting that he is not comfortable with seeing any woman in the *burqa*. He goes and talks to the Mayor and Sarah about the issue of face covering. When Fred accuses Sarah of supporting 'traditional, repressive, sexist face covering', Sarah expresses that she pities the woman in the *burqa*. Finally, Sarah decides to find a law to ban the *burqa* for the sake of her Muslim sisters with the help of Fred Tupper.

When Rayyan finds out "the unjust law", she covers her face and gets herself arrested in order to protest her mother. The Mayor tries to convince Rayyan to uncover her face, saying 'You have never covered you face before'. However, Rayyan does not give up her decision, asserting that no one has the right to say what a woman can wear or cannot wear. Feeling guilty, Sarah starts to look for a law to undo the ban on the *burqa*. She asks the Mayor for help. When the Mayor tells her that she cannot do anything, Sarah takes the Mayor's scarf around her neck and covers her hair and face with it. As a result, she is also arrested and put into the jail where Rayyan is. Finally, Amaar, the Imam of the mosque, discovers that the law was outdated years ago. In this way, he helps Rayyan and Sarah to solve the problem about the *burqa* ban.



In this scene Rayyan is covering her face with her headscarf in order to protest her mother, Sarah.

This episode shows that the *burqa* seen as a sign of oppression may also indicate resistance against injustice. Rayyan asserts that imposing on people what they are supposed to wear or not to wear is also repression. Thus, the notion about the *burqa* as a sign of suppression is replaced by the symbol of liberation and freedom.

What I find very conventional about the portrayal of the woman in the *burqa* is that the woman is not given a chance to speak why she puts on the veil. Does she wear the veil because she is forced to or because she wants to? It is either Rayyan or Sarah who speaks for her. Almost all the characters in the sitcom talk about her veil. However, she is absent in all the discussions. In this sense, the representation of the woman in the *burqa* recalls the portrayal of the Afghan woman in mainstream media in which she is represented as an abject person. Everybody talks about her and her way of dressing, however, she does not reveal her own view, or is not given a voice to speak. Thus, even though the *hijab* is not represented as a monolithic sign of oppression, the depiction of the woman in the veil is still conventional and Orientalistic to some extent.

5.5.2 The Hijab is “Beautiful”

In *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall explains that negative images can be turned into positive ones. According to him, reading a negative

image positively can be helpful in inverting the negative image. I would like to show how the negative image of the *hijab* is trans-coded in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

The question of the *hijab* comes up many times in the sitcom. In these episodes Baber is represented as a traditional father, who asks his daughter, Layla, to wear one. His request is ignored and refused by Layla each time. In one of the episodes, Layla feels compelled to wear the *hijab*, not because her father wants her to embrace the traditional modest dress code, but to cover her blond-died hair, thinking that Baber is going to be mad at her when he sees her hair. Layla does not take off her *hijab* at home, and behaves very suspiciously. This makes Baber think that Layla hides something from him. In order to discover what makes her to wear the *hijab*, Baber goes to school with her and gives a lesson on economy as a guest lecturer to Layla's classmates. Thus, Layla is pushed into a situation where she has to wear her *hijab* among her friends. In fact, she has done everything not to be seen wearing her *hijab* in front of her friends so far. Feeling ashamed of her headscarf, Layla tries to avoid having eye contact with her classmates. However, one of the girls in the class says that she likes Layla's headscarf. This leads Layla to change her mind about the *hijab*. On the next day, Baber drives Layla to school as usual. Layla is in her *hijab*. Even though Baber convinces her that she does not have to wear the *hijab*, Layla insists on keeping her headscarf. When Baber forces her to take it off, she just loosens her headscarf and keeps it over her shoulders. Nevertheless, Layla puts her *hijab* on again when she becomes sure that her father has gone. Thus, the *hijab*, represented as a sign of oppression, turns into a piece of ornament that makes women beautiful.

5.6 Marriage and Muslim Women's Sexuality

The notions that Muslim women are not allowed to choose their future husbands and they are forced into marriage and sexual relationship are visible in many Orientalist films and books about Muslim women. The basic message given in these Orientalist narrations is that Muslim women are subject to lead an unhappy life and to suffer from physical and sexual abuse without a chance to divorce. In this way, Western culture that gives freedom to Western women is shown as superior over Islamic culture which is represented as

oppressive to Muslim women. However, in the sitcom, the picture of the “Muslim woman” who is condemned to marry someone against her will is twisted in many ways.

5.6.1 Islam or Muslim Masculinity?

The differences between Western society, which liberates Western and Eastern women, and Muslim communities, which repress Muslim women, are fixed by the discourse of Orientalism on Muslim women. In the episode called “Playing with Fire”, the notion that Muslim women do not have control over their bodies and sexuality is subverted. In this way, the constructed dichotomy between Western women as liberated and Muslim women as repressed is shaken.

A big pressure is put on Rayyan when she is seen re-bandaging a fireman’s hand at Fatima’s café by Baber. Let me explain first of all how and where Rayyan and the fireman have met. A fireman called Jeff goes to hospital where Rayyan is a doctor in order to have his burned hand looked after. He likes Rayyan and invites her out; however, Rayyan refuses him gently, saying that she cannot date since dating is not part of Islamic culture. Jeff tells Rayyan that he is interested in “Islamism”¹⁶³ and asks her whether she can help him learn details on Islam or not. Then Rayyan gives him a pamphlet on Islam and sends him away.

On the day when Baber arrives at the café, he sees Jeff telling Rayyan that he has read the pamphlet, aiming to flirt with Rayyan. Baber interrupts the conversation between Rayyan and Jeff, telling Rayyan that she is setting a bad example for his daughter. Even though Rayyan tries to explain that they have been talking about Islam, she fails to convince him. Babar goes and talks to Yasir, feeling anxious that Layla is going to imitate Rayyan, who seems to date a non-Muslim man. He tells Yasir that Rayyan is setting a bad example for his daughter by holding the hands of an “infidel”. At first, Yasin says that he trusts his daughter. However, he cannot help asking Rayyan questions about the fireman and what they were doing at the café. Being unsatisfied with Rayyan’s answers, Yasir invites the fireman to the mosque. In this way, he tries to get to know the guy who is interested in his

¹⁶³ The term “Islamism” disturbs Rayyan because Islam is not an ideology like communism or Marxism. This expression also shows that Jeff knows very little about Islam.

daughter. On the other hand, Sarah is very happy that her daughter finally starts to do something else than work. She encourages Rayyan to date the good-looking fireman after seeing his nude photo on a calendar. Jeff visits Rayyan the next day again in order to convince her to have a dinner with him. Rayyan makes it clear that she cannot date him and comforts him by saying that he should not take it personally. Meanwhile, Baber goes and talks to Amaar about what he has seen at the café. Amaar feels very upset when he learns that Rayyan is dating a man. He immediately asks whether Rayyan likes him or not. Like Yasir, he also invites Jeff to the mosque so that he can inform Jeff on Islam. Being jealous, Amaar, actually, wants to tell Jeff that a man and woman cannot have any physical contact before marriage in Islam. When Jeff asks if he can kiss an unconscious woman, Amaar loses his control and shouts at him: “You keep your mouth away from Rayyan!” Probably, the fireman was talking about a kiss of life. Realizing that it is necessary to talk to Rayyan, Amaar invites her to his office. He explains that she is a Muslim and she needs to submit to the Qur’an. Rayyan does not understand what Amaar is talking about and asks what his point is. Then, Amaar states that she cannot date a non-Muslim man.¹⁶⁴ She defends herself asserting that she is not dating Jeff. Still, Amaar, worried about losing Rayyan, insists that she is not behaving like a proper Muslim woman. Getting annoyed with accusations, Rayyan states that Amaar is like every other Muslim man who thinks that Islamic rules apply only to Muslim women. She adds that she was not dating Jeff but after Amaar’s ironic suggestion that she should pick up a non-Muslim man as a partner if she does not like Muslim men, she has decided to date Jeff. When Rayyan arrives home, she calls Jeff and invites him over for dinner. Meanwhile, she asks Sarah and Yasir to stay at home. After she introduces Jeff to her parents, Sarah and Yasir go upstairs. Yasir does not approve of Jeff because, according to him, he is shallow. He thinks that Jeff is a type of man who dates one girl after another. On the other hand, Sarah tries to calm down Yasir, saying that Rayyan is the recent girl that Jeff is dating.

¹⁶⁴ In her book titled *Sexual ethics and Islam*, K. Ali discusses the controversial topics such as intermarriage in Islam. Quoting a couple of *surah* from the Qur’an, she states that Muslim men are allowed to marry women of the book. What are meant by the women of book are Jews and Christians. However, she argues that it is not mentioned whether Muslim women can marry Jewish or Christian men. According to her, Muslim male scholars interpret the absence as a forbid. Ali points out the fact that Muslim male scholars base their interpretations on male-dominated traditions. Therefore, she states, their arguments why Muslim women are forbidden to marry non-Muslim men are very weak. It seems to me that Nawaz also aims to lead Muslims to rethink about this patriarchal interpretation of the *surah* through this episode.

When Jeff wants to kiss Rayyan, she steps back saying that she is sorry. Then she explains that because she is angry with Amaar, who has falsely accused her, she has invited Jeff. She apologizes to Jeff for using him. Even though Jeff says that he does not mind being used, Rayyan asks him gently to go. Feeling guilty, Rayyan goes to the mosque to pray. There she meets Amaar, and admits that he is right that she cannot date a non-Muslim man because Islam is very important to her.

This episode is very important because it shows that the conflict between Rayyan and Muslim men results from their demand to control Rayyan's body. She has already made her decision not to date Jeff. However, Amaar's, Baber's and her father's attitude to dominate her body leads her to date Jeff. At the end of the episode, it is clearly underlined that the motif why Rayyan has broken up with Jeff is not because of her father's anxiety or Amaar's speech, but because Rayyan thinks that Islam is important for her. In fact, in some Islamic societies Muslim men try to have their hegemony over women's body under the cover of Islam. However, the reason behind their aim to dominate women's body is either jealousy or anxiety. This is also shown in the episode through the reactions of Yasir and Baber who want to protect their daughters. On the other hand, Amaar is afraid of losing Rayyan as a lover rather than an Imam. Nevertheless, Rayyan's attempt demonstrates that no one has right to establish hegemony over her body. The episode illustrates that if she wants to date Jeff, nobody can prevent her from dating him.

Another important scene which reveals that Muslim women's sexuality is not repressed by Islam but by Muslim men is the last scene of the episode titled as "Ban the Burqa". In the scene, the woman in the veil comes to Baber after the prayer. She says that she has noticed that Baber is interested in her. Actually, Baber is in love with the veiled woman but he does not dare to speak to her. The veiled woman tells Baber that she wants to introduce herself, adding that they might go out. However, Baber interrupts her, saying "Introduce yourself? You call yourself as a modest Muslim woman". In fact, in this scene it is shown that according to traditional Muslim men like Baber, Muslim women in the veil do not propose marriage. However, in Islam it is proper that a Muslim woman can ask a Muslim man to marry. The idea that Muslim women's sexuality is silenced by the veil is shattered through

this episode. At the same time, it is revealed that even though Muslim men try to dominate Muslim women's bodies, the Muslim women in the sitcom do not allow to be controlled.

5.6.2 A Different Look at Arranged Marriages

In *Little Mosque on the Prairie* arranged marriages are represented rather differently. As it is well known, arranged marriages are shown as forced marriages in many Orientalist films and books about Muslim women. The future couple does not know each other beforehand and they are not given any chance to get to know each other before marriage. Moreover, the daughter's opinion is not asked by the father whether she wants to marry the chosen groom or not. In the last three episodes, the issue of arranged marriages is depicted in a deconstructive way.

Rayyan and her childhood friend J.J meet many years later. J.J, who is also the son of Yasir's friend, is an engineer. He makes a lot of money. For this reason, Yasir wants Rayyan to marry J.J. When he asserts his idea at dinner, Sarah becomes very angry. She disapproves of Yasir's suggestion, stating that arranged marriages are outdated. However, when Yasir tells her how wealthy J.J's parents are, Sarah changes her mind. Yasir gives Rayyan some time so that she can think. In the end, Rayyan agrees that she can give it a try. Then, Rayyan goes to a "shopping around" with J.J. After the "shopping around" period, J.J tells his father that he wants to marry Rayyan. Finally, J.J's father calls Yasir to ask his daughter's hand for his son. After the fathers of the both sides agree, J.J proposes to Rayyan. The sitcom ends with the scene that Rayyan goes to Amaal to talk about J.J's marriage proposal. It is not clear what her decision is going to be. Perhaps she will accept the proposal. Perhaps she will not.

Whatever Rayyan's decision will be, the sitcom reveals many unknown aspects of arranged marriages, which reverse the portrayal of arranged marriages in Western media. One of these aspects is that the future couple is given the possibility to get to know each other. The period that the couple meets is called "shopping around". During the shopping around process, the couple comes together. For instance, in the episode the couple goes to a movie. Secondly, Rayyan is not forced to marry J.J. Instead, she is asked whether she wants to "go

shopping around” with J.J. Finally, her decision is asked whether she wants to marry J.J or not, after she has got to know him.

In contrast to *Yasmin*, which also deals with the issue of arranged marriages, in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* it is shown that Rayyan is encouraged to marry J.J not in the name of family. Yasir tells Rayyan that it is his duty as a father to marry off his daughter. He states that J.J seems to be a good partner for Rayyan, who is educated like her. Unlike Yasmin’s father, Yasir is concerned about whether J.J is an appropriate partner for Rayyan or not.

In short, the discourse about Muslim women, which claims that Muslim women are obliged to accept to marry a man whom they do not love because of Islamic rules, is challenged by the sitcom. Moreover, it is highlighted that arranged marriages are actually traditional rather than Islamic. And it is the duty of the father to ask the daughter whether she wants to marry the one whom the family has proposed her. On the other hand, the procedure¹⁶⁵ is generally based on culture and tradition of the community.

5.6.3 The Myth of Polygamy and Gay Marriages

The episode titled as “Mother in the Law” demonstrates that polygamy, which is represented as a sign of Muslim women’s exploitation by Islam in many Orientalistic books and films, is displayed as a tradition which is imposed by the parents on their sons rather than Islam itself. On the other hand, the issue of gay marriage is dealt with in the sitcom, which is quite revolutionist because in Islam gay marriages are not approved of. Firstly, I would like to analyze to what extent the representation of polygamy is deconstructed. Secondly, I am going to explore how gay marriages are depicted in the sitcom.

¹⁶⁵ What I mean by procedure is that in the sitcom J.J calls his father to say that he wants to marry. Then his father calls Yasir. During the decision-making process, Sarah’s ideas are not asked. She has no role in the procedure as a mother, which disturbs Sarah very much. When she complains to Rayyan about why she is not asked whether J.J is Mr. Right or not, Rayyan says that it is her life and her decision. Similarly, Sarah asks Yasir why her permission is not asked by J.J’s parents or J.J, Yasir says that it is traditional that the daughter’s hand is asked from the father. This procedure is different in Turkey.

In this episode Yasir's mother comes from Lebanon. Mrs Hamudi is described as a traditional, strong Lebanese woman who tells Yasir that he should take his widow cousin as a second wife in front of Sarah and Rayyan. Mrs Hamudi is not fond of Sarah, because she cannot cook Lebanese food. According to Mrs Hamudi, Sarah is not a good wife. She talks to Amaar and wants him to perform his son's second marriage. Amaar explains that it is illegal to have a second wife in Canada. She tries to convince Amaar, saying that the second marriage will be unregistered. However, Amaar does not accept to perform the marriage. Yasir finds himself between his beloved wife and his beloved mother. Even though Yasir does not marry his cousin, he cannot tell this to his mother because he does not want to upset her. Meanwhile, Sarah leaves home and stays at the Mayor's office until Yasir tells Mrs Hamudi about his decision. In the end, Yasir decides to find a trick to solve the problem. He writes a pre-marriage contract¹⁶⁶, which says that Yasir has guaranteed that he is not going to marry another woman as long as he is married to Sarah. While he is showing the contract to Mrs Hamudi, Sarah and Rayyan come in and hear Yasir saying "Mum, I cannot marry my cousin Samiha."

What is deconstructive about the episode is that the idea of marring a second wife does not stem from Yasir but from a traditional Muslim woman, his mother. Moreover, Rayyan criticizes her grandmother saying that a second marriage is a dying tradition which is hardly performed even in many Arabic countries. When Fatima asks Mrs Hamudi whether her husband has a second wife, she tells that she was more than four wives for him. Even though Mrs Hamudi did not allow her husband to marry, she encourages her son to have a second wife. Why? This may indicate that Mrs Hamudi is not fond of her daughter-in-law like many mothers-in-law. As a dominant woman who always manages to have what she wants, she wishes Yasir to marry his cousin, whom she thinks as a best wife for Yasir. By encouraging Yasir to marry the woman she wants, she will be happy and satisfied.

¹⁶⁶ Marriage (nikah) is a solemn and sacred social contract between bride and groom. This contract is a strong covenant (mithaqun Ghalithun) as expressed in Quran 4:21. The marriage contract in Islam is not a sacrament. It is revocable. Both parties mutually agree and enter into this contract. Both bride and groom have the liberty to define various terms and conditions of their liking and make them a part of this contract. <http://www.soundvision.com/info/Islam/marriage.nikah.asp>.

Another point I would like to highlight is that a taboo topic such as gay marriages is handled in the same episode. The parallel drawn between polygamy and gay marriages as two illegal marriages is very interesting. While the Muslims are discussing polygamy, the news that Reverend Maggie is going to perform a gay marriage in the church causes upheaval in Mercy. Fred Tupper accuses the Reverend of opening a door to gay couples. In this regard, it can be said that the sitcom is quite revolutionist in dealing with the controversial issues such as polygamy and gay marriages. It reveals that even though gay marriages are unacceptable for some Muslims and Christians in town, Fatima accepts to make a pie for the gay wedding.

5.7 Multiculturalism

Finally, I would like to analyze whether in the sitcom the idea of hybrid culture is fostered or not. I am going to seek an answer to the question whether the constructed binaries such as “East” and “West”, “us” and “them” and “Islam” and “Christianity” are recreated. In order to find an answer to this question, it is necessary to analyze the representations of the local buildings such as the mosque, the café and the relationship between the local communities of Mercy.

5.7.1 *A Mosque in the Hall the of Church*

Mosques and churches symbolize a specific religion and a specific culture, which are regarded as the emblems of the two opposite cultures and religions. As a result of the ethnocentric discourse on Islam, the mosque and the church, which are located close to each other in many old Eastern cities such as Istanbul and Mardin¹⁶⁷, start to be seen as institutions where polarized groups come together. Especially mosques are seen as a place where Muslim terrorists are trained rather than a place to pray and integrate in society after

¹⁶⁷ Mardin is a city located in south eastern Turkey. The city, having a rich cultural heritage with Kurds, Arabs, Turks, Armenians and Syrian Orthodox Christians, is seen as a city of tolerance and diversity. The city reflects cultural diversity through its ancient churches and mosques.
Cf. http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/newsandgallery/news/hrh_visits_the_ancient_town_of_mardin_in_turkey_514.html.

the 9/11 events. Thus, the spiritual link between mosques and churches are cut. The church and the mosque are represented as binaries.

In *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, the idea that Islam and Christianity cannot coexist is put into question. Reverend Maggie rents the hall of the Anglican Church to Yasir for his construction company, without knowing that he is going to turn half of the space into a little mosque. In this way, Yasir is not going to pay for his office space, because the Muslim community is going to gather money to pay the rent. When Reverend Magee learns that there is a mosque in the church's hall, he simply makes some changes in the contract and allows the Muslim community to use the hall for multi-purpose activities. This scene perfectly shows that an interaction between two different cultures and religions is possible. In doing so, it gives the idea that Muslims and Christians can live together. Moreover, the scene that depicts Reverend Magee opening his door to the Muslim community deconstructs the monolithic representations of Westerners as anti-Muslims.

Additionally, the mosque is represented as a place which is open to every one. For instance, the local public of the town are invited to the mosque to celebrate Ramadan and Sacrifice feasts. Moreover, Amaar suggests organizing an Open House Day so that the local public from different religions can have a chance to get to know Muslims. In this way, the mosque is shown as a place open to every one. Similarly, the Muslim community goes to the church so that they can help Reverend Magee, who is afraid that when the Arch-Deacon comes to visit the church, he will close it because the church has some financial problems. Therefore, the Muslim community fills the church, pretending that they are Anglican. This scene that shows Muslims singing hymns conveys the idea that Islam and Christianity are not two opposite poles which cannot co-exist.

In connection with the depictions of the church and the mosque, I would like to underline that Amaar and Magee are represented as two good friends who help each other. For instance, when Amaar's friend Ali comes to town, Amaar becomes very jealous of him, because Ali has gained popularity among the Muslim community with his speech and his appearance. (He wears traditional Pakistani dress and he has a beard). It is only Magee who understands Ali and supports him emotionally. Similarly, Amaar encourages Magee to

improve his painting, when Magee tells him that he is a failure. In the sitcom there are uncountable scenes which portray Amaar and Magee as friends rather than as leaders of the opposite football teams that fight for a score.

Apart from the mosque and the church, another place which depicts Muslims and Christians interacting is Fatima's café. Fred Tupper hardly appears at the church and the mosque. Even though he talks about Muslims in his radio show in a negative way, he goes to Fatima's café where he talks to the Muslims. He exchanges his ideas with the Muslim community at the café. He even helps Sarah to ban the *burqa*. Moreover, when he has ailing in his back, Fatima gives him some medicine. The scene that depicts Fatima helping him for his ailing back evokes the feeling that Mercy is a town where tolerance and diversity exist.

Finally, I would like to highlight that Fred is portrayed as a progressive character, whose prejudices are changing about Muslims. For example, in one of the episodes Layla becomes the assistant to Fred. When he misuses the information about Muslims he has got from Layla, Layla criticizes him. In the course of time, Fred starts to like Layla and avoids hurting her by fueling prejudices about Muslims. He finds different topics to talk about such as taxes. As a result, his show loses rating. Witnessing that Fred is rebuked by the manager, Layla finds another assistant who can replace her. Then she quits the job. The depiction of the relationship between Fred and Layla conveys the idea that the dialogue between people from different cultures enables them to understand and respect each other. Even Fred, who gains a reputation for saying that he does not like Muslims, is shown as negotiating with Layla. Thus, the notion that Muslims and non-Muslims cannot communicate with each other is challenged.

In short, in the film the public places such as the mosque, the church and the café are not illustrated as places where marginalized group of people go. In contrast, the constructed binaries between the mosque and the church are shaken through the representation of these places where the Muslim and Christian folk eat and talk. The café plays a crucial function in demonstrating that the Muslims and the Christians have many things in common, such as coffee. Additionally, even the radio station opens its door to a Muslim girl. In this way, the

idea that people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can live together and share the same spaces is promoted.

5.7.2 Special days and Cultural Identities

Special days such as Christmas, Sacrifice feast and Halloween are parts and parcels of national, cultural and religious identities. How do Muslim Canadians celebrate national and cultural holidays in Canada? Can a Muslim living in Canada celebrate Christmas or Halloween?

The episode entitled “Eid’s A Wonderful Life” deals with the question of Christmas and Sacrifice feast celebrations, which are very close. The episode shows that Rayyan suggests decorating the mosque with Christmas ornaments and cooking Christmas pudding for the Sacrifice feast. Sarah, who is longing for the traditional Christmas celebrations, becomes very happy with this idea. However, they have a problem: what would Fatima, who is fairly conservative about the feast, say about the decorations and the food. As Sarah and Rayyan have guessed, Fatima becomes very upset when she realizes that the traditional decorations she has given to Rayyan are not used. She decides to organize another feast at her café. She promises everyone that she is going to serve fresh lamb meat for the feast if they come to her feast. However, she cannot find enough “halal meat”¹⁶⁸ and fails to sacrifice the lamb she has bought. In the end, she comes to the mosque in order to join the community. Meanwhile, Sarah and Rayyan try to find a way to supply food for the guests because the turkey they have cooked was too chilly. While they discuss hopelessly what they are going to do, Reverend Magee comes in. He offers the food which he has prepared for his community, saying that his community has not come to the organization.

The episode ends, showing the local public of Mercy who come from different religions, cultures and classes, as eating food and talking with each other. This episode evokes the idea that special days which empower national and cultural identities can also play a role in fostering the idea of multiculturalism and pluralism.

¹⁶⁸ Meat that has been slaughtered in the manner prescribed by Islamic law.
Cf. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/halal>.

Similarly, in another episode, Baber does not allow Layla and Jamal, Fatima's son, to carve pumpkins at the Mosque for Halloween. According to Baber, Halloween is an "evil practice" and it cannot be celebrated.



Fatima and Layla is discussing about whether carving pumpkins is Islamic or not.

Amaar interrupts the debate between Baber and Fatima, who discuss whether the children can participate in Halloween celebrations, which is seen as a pagan tradition. Amaar says that the children can join in celebrations if they dress up as items from the Qur'an such as an olive or a fig. In this way, he gives Halloween an Islamic twist calling it "Halaloween".¹⁶⁹ Moreover, he says that the children can go out to gather sweets if an adult escorts them. Layla and Jamal do not enjoy the feast because their costumes as fig and olive do not seem familiar and original whereas Baber, in his ordinary dress, becomes the hit of Halloween because he is dressed as a "terrorist". Thus, these episodes show that Muslims in Canada are members of Canadian society and there is no harm in participating in national and cultural celebrations organized in the country as long as they are also loyal to Islamic rules. In this way, the sitcom empowers hybridity and multiculturalism.

To sum it up, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* created by Nawaz is deconstructive in many ways. First of all, Nawaz herself wearing a *hijab*, deconstructs the idea that Muslim women

¹⁶⁹ *Halal* is an Arabic word, which literally means permissible- and in translation it is usually used as lawful. "Halaloween", the word coined by Amaar, conveys the meaning of *halal* Halloween. Cf. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/halal>.

are oppressed and imprisoned by their men by producing such a sitcom, which addresses both Muslims and non-Muslims. Secondly, the sitcom itself challenges the dominant notions that Muslim women are silenced through the portrayal of the Muslim female characters as active participants of the Muslim community. Thirdly, the homogenized representation of the burqa-clad Muslim woman is replaced by the dynamic depiction of Muslim female characters in the sitcom, whose dress codes and understanding of Islam diverge depending on the dimensions of class, ethnicity and culture. For instance, while Rayyan wears a long T-shirt and jeans, Fatima wears a long dress. On the other hand, Sarah and Baber's ex-wife do not have a *hijab*. Furthermore, I have analyzed whether the *hijab* is reduced to singular and static meaning in the sitcom or not. The episodes that deal with the question of the *hijab* encode that the *hijab* has many meanings. In contrast to the Orientalist depiction of the *veil* as a symbol of imprisonment and oppression, the *veil* is shown as a sign of resistant against oppression in the name of freedom and liberation. Moreover, in the sitcom the negative meaning of the *hijab* is trans-coded. It is represented as an ornament that makes women beautiful instead of a sign of dehumanization.

I have also addressed how marriage is illustrated in this sitcom. The idea that marriage is a tool of controlling Muslim women's body is deconstructed by the sitcom. Marriage is represented as a contract between a Muslim woman and man, who decide to marry at their will. Moreover, arranged marriages are not shown as forced marriages. The misconception about arranged marriages is shaken by the scene in which Yasir asks Rayyan whether she wants to get to know Jeff and marry him. The way Yasir talks to Rayyan shows that Rayyan is not forced into a marriage. By contrast, she is given a chance to meet Jeff regularly and decide if she wants to marry him. It is her own decision whether she will give her hand to him or not.

Moreover, I have explored how polygamy and gay marriages are represented. In contrast to the general view in Western culture that polygamy is an Islamic rule which promotes gender inequality, polygamy is not represented as a natural and Islamic process in the sitcom. Additionally, the Muslim women are not displayed as silent victims of Muslim masculinity, who claims that polygamy is a given right by God. Interestingly enough, polygamy is shown as a dying tradition, which is also taken up by old women like

Rayyan's grandmother. Moreover, gay marriages are not shown as an evil practice, even though it is a taboo topic in many Muslim communities. In contrast, it is revealed that the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the sitcom have different views on the issue. Some of them approve of the gay wedding while some of them are protesting it.

Finally, I have sought an answer to the questions whether the sitcom celebrates multiculturalism and pluralism. According to my analysis, the sitcom, which depicts interactions between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in the town of Mercy, proves that Muslims and non-Muslims can live in harmony in many ways. Firstly, Sarah and Yasir's cross-cultural marriage gives evidence of the possibility for hybrid identities. Even though Sarah is a Canadian and Yasir is an Arab, they run a happy marriage. Secondly, the mosque and the church are represented as institutions which foster the idea of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. The celebrations in the mosque are open to non-Muslims living in town. This indicates that the Muslims do not want to be isolated from the rest of the local public but they want to be a part of it. The celebrations and the Open House organized in the mosque evoke the feeling that the Muslim community wants to mingle with the local public of Mercy. Moreover, the episode on the feast of Sacrifice and Christmas show that two festivals can be celebrated together. The interaction between the two cultures is not represented as assimilation but integration. Moreover, even extremists like Baber and Fred are portrayed as progressive characters. Both of them slowly learn to live with a different culture. For instance, Baber accepts the idea that Muslims can celebrate Halloween. On the other hand, Fred avoids talking about Muslims on his radio show in a negative way for a while not to upset Layla, his assistant. Thus, the sitcom, which derives its humor from the contradictions between both the Muslims and the non-Muslims and the liberal Muslims and the traditionalist Muslims, serves the aim to bridge the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims. Moreover, it encourages Muslims to find new ways to integrate into Western societies by reinterpreting Islamic faith. As a last word, I want to underline that through the representations of Rayyan and Ammar, the sitcom shows that Islamic identity and Canadian identity do not clash but that the combination of the two identities leads to the creation of a hybrid identity, Canadian Muslim identity.

6 THROUGH THE LENSES OF MUSLIM WOMEN: *NAZRAH*

Nazrah, produced in the U.S.A in 2002 by Farah Nousheen, is a documentary film inspired by Nousheen's experience of being a Muslim woman in a post-9/11 North American context. Like the film *Yasmin*, *Nazrah* deals with the question: 'Who are you?' which many Muslim women in the West have faced since the 9/11 attacks. As Nathalie Handal points out in her article "Shades of a Bridge's Breath", even if 'you answer [the question of who you are] [...], *others* still find it necessary to redefine your identity without your permission'.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps, Handal goes on, you know who you are: However, this time you have to 'struggle with the boxes *others* put you in'.¹⁷¹

Through *Nazrah* Nousheen aims at answering two main questions: who is she? And how do the Muslim women in the local community define themselves? Being aware of the wide variety among Muslim women, Nousheen chooses a diverse group of Muslim women and asks them about their points of views on various topics so as to enable these Muslim women to locate themselves in post-9/11 North American society, independent from the hegemonic discourse which places Muslim women in a static and fixed category. In doing so, she defies the constructed image of the Muslim woman as an unchanging and singular category. What makes *Nazrah* different from many documentaries about Muslim women is that the Muslim women in the documentary are given a platform to assert their ethnic, racial and religious identities. From these two perspectives, the documentary will be very insightful to demonstrate in what ways the Muslim women in *Nazrah* challenge the Western Orientalist and male dominated Islamic discourses.

In this chapter, I am going to deal with three basic questions. First of all, I am going to explain why I see *Nazrah* as a cultural production that deconstructs hegemonic discourses. Secondly, I am going to demonstrate in what ways *Nazrah* reconstructs the image of the Muslim woman as oppressed and submissive. Thirdly, I am going to answer the question of how the Muslim women in the documentary reform their identities in a post-9/11 North American context.

¹⁷⁰ Handal, 158.

¹⁷¹ Handal, 158.

6.1 *Nazrah* as a Deconstructive Documentary

Farah Nousheen starts her documentary stating that Islam is a personal journey for her, which she shares with her close friends. Sitting in front of a fireplace, Nousheen is shown as writing a diary and her voice is heard by the audience, which creates authenticity and intimacy. Watching *Nazrah* is like reading the diary of Nousheen in which she seeks answers to the questions about her religious, national and cultural identities. Her interviews with Muslim women from various classes, nationalities, religious and educational backgrounds illustrate that these Muslim women try to create a space where they can assert their identities as female Muslim Americans. In this sense, it can be said that the documentary functions, on the one hand, as an awakening factor, an eye-opener so to speak, which leads Muslims especially Muslims in North America to re-conceive certain issues such as gender inequality in Muslim communities. On the other hand, it aims at bridging a gap between Muslims and non-Muslims showing that Muslim women in North America regard themselves as Americans and that their religious identities do not prevent them from defining themselves as Americans. Thus, *Nazrah* motivates the audience to reconsider about the current issues such as multiculturalism, hybridity and negotiation rather than reinforcing the stereotypical image of the Muslim woman as victim.

Additionally, Nousheen points out the fact that the 9/11 attacks have strengthened the distorted perception of the Muslim woman as submissive in the West, through which Muslim women are othered. After having been bombarded with the pictures of Muslim women by the media, which, she says, do not represent her and many Muslim women, she asserts that she has decided to make a documentary in order to give Muslim women including herself a chance to represent themselves. This is one of the important features that makes *Nazrah* very challenging in comparison with many documentaries in which Muslim women are spoken about.

Another significant feature of the documentary is the title. Firstly, the word “*Nazrah*” is an Arabic word. Secondly, the word is also written in the Arabic alphabet. In fact, Arabic scripture is generally used in many Orientalist books and films so as to other Islamic culture. However, in the documentary it does not evoke any feeling of fear. By contrast, the

Arabic scripture is followed by the word “Nazrah” and its English subtitle *A Muslim Woman’s Perspective*. The title and subtitle may imply that the producer of the documentary comes from a hybrid culture and that she chooses a hybridized title to represent her multiple perspectives. In this sense, it can be said that the title implies the idea that the issue of Muslim women is fairly complex and multidimensional.

In connection with the title, I would also like to add that the meaning of “Nazrah” conveys the idea that what is articulated in the documentary is not meant to reveal any facts about Muslim women or Islam in general but a relevant point of view of the speaker. Accordingly, Nousheen states that the documentary reflects a Muslim woman’s perspective. Thus, it does not make a claim to represent all Muslims and Islam. This expression points to the fact that Muslims in the world do not necessarily share the same ideas and perspectives. Therefore, they cannot be categorized as one static and singular group. In this regard, *Nazrah* distinguishes itself from many mainstream documentaries about Muslim women which claim that they represent all Muslims or Muslim women.

The last point I want to draw attention to is that in the documentary there are not any male Muslim speakers. It is all Muslim women who reveal their ideas about Islam, American policy, economic and social problems within Muslim communities. This is very important because the image of the Muslim woman was a subject of Orientalist and nationalist Islamic discourses in Muslim communities. However, the Muslim women in this documentary are no longer in an abject subject position. They challenge any discourse which tends to determine their social and political space in the North American context. In this way, the audience is given an opportunity to see the world through the lenses of Muslim women, which adds to the deconstructive agenda of this documentary.

6.2 Resistance against Male-Dominated Islamic Culture

As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, Muslim women are trapped between Orientalist discourse of the West and male-dominated Islamist discourse. In this documentary, it is illustrated that Muslim women do not have to be stuck between these two discourses.

6.2.1 Patriarchal Imams and the Question of Equality between the Sexes

After Nousheen's introduction, three Muslim women are shown to discuss the question of equality in Islam. A woman called Mahnaz, described as a community activist, states that *hodjas*¹⁷² give more power to men than women. She claims that Muslim men want to see their women behind themselves. One of the women interrupts her, asserting that in many cultures women are placed in lower positions. However, Mahnaz refuses this comparison, making it clear that she wants to be compared with the women described in the Qur'an rather than with the women from other cultures and religions. Andrea, a law student, adds that Muslim women should achieve the quality of studying the Qur'an. According to her, in this way they can prevent Muslim men from imposing their patriarchal rules on Muslim women under the guise of Islam. Finally, they come to the conclusion that the reason why Muslim women suffer from gender inequality is that Muslim women do not know their rights guaranteed in Islam. Instead of blaming men, they should start to become educated and demand their rights given in the Qur'an such as having property and making their own money.

This scene demonstrates that the conventional portrayal of the "Muslim woman" carved in the minds of many people as submissive is essentialist because these three Muslim women evoke the idea that Muslim women fight against gender inequality rather than accepting it as God's rule. Moreover, the debate going on among the women shows that Muslim women can be activists, who do not merely produce theories but try to put these theories to action by calling for a Muslim women movement against a patriarchal Islamic culture.

6.2.2 What about Segregation in Mosques and at School?

Nousheen interviews a couple of Muslim girls from the Islamic School of Seattle, which was founded by a small group of American Muslim women in 1980. Nousheen asks the girls what they think about segregation in mosques and at school. The answers to the question vary. While one of the girls says that in mosques women's voices are not heard

¹⁷² A devout Muslim man who is respected for his knowledge of Islam and who may perform a specific duty within an Islamic community, for instance as a teacher. Cf. <http://www.readliterature.com/glossary.htm>.

because they are behind men, another girl indicates that segregation at school enables her feel comfortable. On the other hand, a girl states that women and men should be mixed except from religious events.

The interview made with the girls is very crucial in many aspects. First of all, the documentary gives Muslim girls a space to affirm their views on the topic, drawing the attention to the fact that children are individuals as well. Rather than asking adults what is good for girls and boys, the girls' opinions are highlighted. This indicates that Nousheen is aware of the fact that the young Muslim generation raised in a multicultural society has different perspectives from their immigrant parents. The interview makes it clear that most of the girls do not perceive gender apartheid in a positive way. Secondly, it is necessary to underline that segregation is one of the issues which are not questioned in many Muslim societies. However, the interview demonstrates the fact that young Muslim women who grow up in Western societies will challenge the sexist traditions of Arabic culture embedded in Islam. In this way, the documentary displays that Muslim societies in the West are dynamic and progressive rather than static and fixed as represented in the media.

6.2.3 *Sufism*¹⁷³ Rather than *Wahabism*¹⁷⁴

Nazrah carries traits of *Sufism*. One of the important traits is that each chapter of the documentary starts with a statement of a Sufi.¹⁷⁵ The second one is that some Muslim women discuss the immense influence of *Wahabism* on many Muslim societies in the Middle East especially in Egypt and Afghanistan, which is very strict to women. Mona Eltahawy, a journalist, underlines that Saudi Arabia trains many Muslim men from poor Islamic countries for free. In this way, Saudi Arabic version of Islam (Wahabi Islam)

¹⁷³ *Sufism* can be defined as Islamic mysticism. It is the way of purifying the heart from bad manners and characteristics. Cf. http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sufism_1.shtml and <http://www.naqshbandi.org/about/aexplain.htm>.

¹⁷⁴ *Wahhabism* is a puritanical form of Sunni Islam and is practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, although it is much less rigidly enforced in the latter. The word "Wahhabi" is derived from the name of a Muslim scholar, Muhammad bin Abd al Wahhab, who lived in the Arabian peninsula during the eighteenth century (1703-1791). Cf. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21695.pdf>.

¹⁷⁵ A Muslim mystic who emphasizes strong denial of self for the purpose of communion with god. Cf. http://www.4truth.net/site/c.hiKXLbPNLrF/b.2904187/k.74C0/Popular_Islamic_Terms.htm.

spreads in many Muslim societies. She encourages Muslim women to struggle against *Wahabism*, which violates not only Muslim women's rights but also human rights.

Similarly, Atefeh, a law student, underlines that she has visited many Muslim scholars' conferences in North America. However, she says, she has never heard any Muslim scholar talking about the threat of the Taliban¹⁷⁶ until the September 11 attacks. She affirms that after the attacks many Muslim scholars denounced that they did not approve of the hijackers and their evil deed. However, according to Atefeh, the scholars should have talked about *Wahabism* and should have criticized such movements, which are contradictory to the nature of Islam. She claims that Muslims should not hesitate to discuss radical movements in the Muslim world instead of closing their eyes to the misuse of Islam. According to her, Muslims in the West have a big responsibility, because they have freedom of speech. They should resist dictator leaders in the Muslim world such as Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden. Likewise, Ifrah explains that the word "Islam" means peace. She advocates the idea of finding peace within yourself. Referring to the teachings of *Sufism*, Ifrah indicates that if a person submits *the self*¹⁷⁷, this person will find peace within himself/herself. This peace permutes to the family and the community at large. The interviewees stress the fact that *Whabism* is a threat not only to the West but also to the Muslim world because of its intolerant ideology. At the end of the documentary, the interviewees are shown to be performing a *Sufi* ceremony. This may indicate that the women purifying their hearts from any kind of bad thoughts and feelings submit *the self* and thereby foster the idea of tolerance, multi-nationalism and peace.

6.3 What *Hijab* Means

As I have mentioned many times before, the *hijab* is one of the controversial issues which has been foregrounded in Orientalist discourse. The *hijab* is used either as a fetish object to erotize Muslim women or as an emblem of dehumanization. The pictures of the Muslim women I have analyzed in the previous chapters reveal the fact that the question of the

¹⁷⁶ Taliban is also influenced by Wahabism. Osama bin Ladin is originally from Saudi Arabia. Cf. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS21695.pdf>.

¹⁷⁷ Atefeh explains that according to *Sufi* teachings, a person consists of three parts: the body, the self and the spirit. The body is like a shelf. The self is emotions. The spirit is the command of God.

hijab is a battle ground between the Eurocentric discourse and male-dominated Islamic culture. However, what Muslim women think about the *hijab* is never asked. In this part of Chapter 6, I am going to discuss how the issue of the *hijab* is handled in the documentary.

6.3.1 Muslim Women Love their Scarves

In the scene dealing with what the *hijab* means for Muslim women, a group of Muslim women are shown in a bazaar choosing scarves in different colors and styles. Meanwhile, a woman's voice, which belongs to Amina, is heard. She defines her headscarf as a symbol of modesty, adding that the *hijab* is very feminine. She states that Muslim women love their scarves as much as they love their dresses and jewelry. She also underlines that every country has its own style of scarves. While some scarves have patterns, some have flowers. Amina's statement and the depiction of the women in the bazaar demonstrate that the *hijab* is not seen as a tool of dehumanizing by some Muslim women. On the contrary, it is regarded as a garment that makes them beautiful in a modest way.

6.3.2 Huge Responsibility

Sarah thinks differently about the issue of the *hijab*. She says that she is supposed to wear the *hijab* because God tells her to do; however, she explains that she does not adopt the *hijab* for two reasons. Firstly, she underlines that wearing the *hijab* requires a level of consciousness. According to her, women in the *hijab* have such a consciousness that they are removed from the opinions of people. All they care is the opinion of God. Asserting that she has not achieved that level of consciousness, she tells that when she wears the *hijab*, she is worried about what she looks like, which, she claims, defeats the purpose of wearing the *hijab*.

Another point Sarah underlines is that women in the *hijab* represent Islam in the West even though women in the *hijab* do not symbolize Islam in a Muslim country. She expresses that if women in the veil make a mistake, the whole Muslim society might be held responsible for that person's fault. Therefore, she admits that she does not want to take such a huge responsibility.

6.3.3 Do Muslim Women Cover themselves to Save Men?

The last part of the debate about the *hijab* is the most interesting one because in this part Nousheen asks Semiha some questions, another Muslim woman described as community activist. Nousheen's question is that whether Semiha, as a woman who wears the *hijab*, feels oppressed, since Nousheen expresses that she sees the *hijab* as a sign of male oppression even though she confesses that this is as an Orientalist way of thinking. What makes Nousheen think in this way is that she believes that unlike her brother, she has to fulfill some obligations because she is a girl.

Semiha clarifies that wearing the *hijab* is a process starting in childhood. According to her, the *hijab* is a self-discovery rather than oppression. However, Nousheen wants to learn what men's responsibility is. Why do women have to cover themselves, whereas men do not? Semiha explains that Muslim men also have responsibilities such as wearing loose clothes and lowering their gaze (not looking at women as if they were sexual objects). This statement makes Nousheen ask Semiha's opinion on a feminist cartoon, which depicts a woman wearing a short skirt. The woman says pointing at her mini skirt: "This is not an excuse to rape me." Semiha tells Nousheen that men and women have the same responsibilities for sexual temptation/adultery. Making it clear that there is nothing wrong with being beautiful in Islam, Semiha states that women do not have the right to tempt weak-willed men through their beauty.

The whole discussion about the *hijab* demonstrates that the Muslim women in the documentary have different opinions on this issue. Moreover, the documentary does not focus on only the women who wear the *hijab*, but it also asks the ideas of Muslim women who do not adopt the *hijab*. In this sense, the documentary gives voice to a variety of Muslim women.

6.4 Back to the Roots

In this documentary, some women express how they see Islam and Islamic culture and in what ways Islamic culture shapes their identities. The interviews made with Amina, Aishah

and Maliha evoke the idea that the Muslim women rediscover their religious identities by going back to their roots.

6.4.1 A Civilization

I have already mentioned that in the West Islam is perceived as a barbaric religion, which oppresses women and makes men violent. In the media, Islam is persistently shown as a cruel religion, which is programmed to ruin and destroy the world. It is never mentioned how Islam has enabled Arab tribes living in the desert to found many civilizations, which has also influenced Western culture.¹⁷⁸ Amina, an American Muslim convert, states that she wanted to go to the Muslim world and learn details about Islamic civilization after she had visited an exhibition about Islam in art in Grand Palace in Paris. She tells that she fell in love with Islamic art after the exhibition. Her description of Muslim culture provides the audience with another perspective on Islam: Islam is not only a religion or ideology which limits Muslims' lives to a set of rules. On the contrary, Islam inspires Muslims to see the world from a different perspective, and thereby enables them to reflect their views in the art and to create new civilizations.

6.4.2 Homecoming from all Levels

Aisha, a South African filmmaker, expresses her feelings about her first visit to South Africa as "homecoming from all levels". She says that when she went to Cape Town in South Africa in 1994, she was embraced by the Muslim community there. She explains how amazed she was when she heard the *adhan*.¹⁷⁹ Aisha describes the Muslim community in Cape Town as devout Muslims, but she adds that they also lead their lives stating that 'they were a part of life in South Africa'. She states that South African Muslim women go to the mosque with their head-coverings; however, they also wear Western clothes. Aisha

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Transfer of Islamic Technology to the West by Prof. Ahmad Y. al-Hassan.
<http://www.muslimheritage.com/topics/default.cfm?ArticleID=625>.

¹⁷⁹ The call to prayer is named as the *adhan* in the Arabic language. The *adhan* announces that it is time for the ritual prayer, *Salah*. The person who calls for the prayer is called *muadhaddin*. Cf.
<http://www.islamonline.net/english/introducingislam/Worship/Prayers/article03.shtml>.

asserts that these women do not see any contradiction in wearing both Western clothes and the head-covering. She also mentions that at the victory party she saw the Imam dancing.

6.4.3 A Feeling of Belonging

Maliha Masood, the writer of *Zatar Days*, *Henna Nights*, is one of the interviewees. She talks about her journey to the Middle East. She states that during her travel to Lebanon, Turkey and Syria she had a feeling of belonging. She says that she has never felt that way anywhere before. Maliha tells that Syria is her favorite country. She describes the country as authentic and the local people as the most “civilized” people she has ever seen. She says that stereotypical Arab man is rude and barbaric; however, according to her, the people in Syria are very “civilized”. She states that she was humbled by what she had experienced there.

Maliha’s statement about her journey and her feelings about the Islamic culture deconstruct the image of Arab people and the Islamic culture portrayed in many films and documentaries. Apart from that, Maliha admires the Islamic civilization rather than seeing it through the lenses of Orientalist discourse. She positions herself by stating that she belongs to Islamic culture. The interview and her photos shown in the documentary imply that Maliha re-frames her identity by looking for her cultural roots. It seems as if after the rediscovery of her *imaginary identity* through her journey, she had reformed her identity as a Muslim American woman.

6.5 Can the West and Islam Reconcile?

In one of the scenes, Maliha, Mona and another woman are discussing the issue of freedom in the West and Saudi Arabia. Mona, a writer and journalist, says that she decided to become a journalist so that she can break the cultural taboos of women traveling alone in South Arabia. She indicates that it is necessary to divorce Islam from cultural interpretations and traditions that Saudi Arabia has imposed. She states that Muslim women in the West should not hesitate to criticize Saudi Arabia if they ban women from driving and becoming educated because this discrimination is against religion. She highlights that

Islam affords women education and mobility. Regarding the issues of freedom and women's access to social life in Saudi Arabia, Maliha states that living in the West provides them with the opportunity of creating a pure form of Islam. She tells that Islam in the West is closer to the ideal form even though the ideal form of Islam does not exist anywhere. She stresses that Muslims in the West can be a role model for Muslims in the Middle East because there is not an Islamic state but Muslim citizens. Similarly, Amina expresses the fact that the USA is a country where immigrants have come for freedom of religion. Stating that her grandfather was a revolutionist and fought for freedom of religion, she says that she carries the same torch as a Muslim American woman.

What is very interesting about these expressions is that Muslim Americans do not see the USA as their enemy. By contrast, their statements reveal the fact that they are very proud of living in North America rather than living under the oppressive regimes in Middle Eastern states. Thus, these women reconcile their American identities with their religion. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of pursuit of happiness are in their blood.

In short it can be said that *Nazrah* offers a different perspective on the lives of Muslim women. In the documentary, a diverse group of Muslim women reveals their ideas on controversial issues such as the *hijab*, the 9/11 attacks and the issue of hybridity. Their ways of seeing the world and the solutions they offer to solve social and cultural problems not only in North American society but in the Muslim world give the feeling that Muslim women are active participants of their societies. They are culturally and politically involved in the world that they live in. In this sense, *Nazrah* deconstructs the portrayal of the Muslim woman as submissive and oppressed. Moreover, the interviewees, who regard themselves as Muslim Americans, show that Islam and the West are not dichotomous. They perfectly display that it is possible to be both Muslim and American at the same time.

7 CONCLUSION

In my thesis I have demonstrated that the representations of Muslim women in some post-9/11 cultural products differ from the conventional image of the “Muslim woman” as victim, oppressed and submissive in mainstream Western media. In order to show the shift in the representation of Muslim women in the post-9/11 cultural products namely *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah*, I have divided my thesis in two main parts. The first part of my thesis, which consists of Chapter 2 and 3, aimed at reading the discourse concerning the myth of the “Muslim woman”. The second part, which comprises Chapter 3, 4 and 5, deals with the analysis of the cultural products.

In Chapter 2 I have investigated how the myth of the oppressed Muslim woman was constructed, relying on postcolonial and feminist theories. I have pointed out that the image of the “helpless victim” was fabricated when power relations between the East and the West became unbalanced in the eighteenth century. Referring to Said’s *Orientalism*, I have demonstrated how Western economical, political and militarist power enabled the West to produce a body of knowledge about the Orient. Defining the Orient/East as “backward”, “uncivilized” and “barbaric” in the eighteenth century, the West constituted its identity as “modern”, “civilized” and “democratic”. Accordingly, Western hegemonic discourse invented the myth of the “Muslim woman” as dehumanized and silenced. The women represented behind the veil and the bars in many Orientalist paintings reflect the idea that Muslim women were imprisoned by their Islamic culture. Thus the manifestations of Muslim women in eighteenth and nineteenth century Orientalist literature and paintings as “victims” and “slaves of Muslim men” reinforce the notion that Western culture is superior over Eastern/Islamic culture.

Additionally, I have discussed the reasons why many Orientalists disliked the veil by pointing out the phallocentric nature of Orientalist discourse, which epitomizes the Oriental woman with the Orient. I have stressed that the veil and the harem disabled Orientalist travelers to discover the mysterious and exotic Orient, which was identified with the Oriental woman. To unveil and penetrate a Muslim woman was equaled with gazing and possessing the Orient.

I have also stressed that the idea that Muslim women are to be rescued by “Western civilization” was also rooted in nineteenth-century feminist discourse, which was under heavy influence of phallogentric Western discourse. In the writings of nineteenth-century Western woman travelers Muslim women were represented as childlike and primitive, who were supposed to be civilized by their Western sisters. According to many Western woman writers, the “Muslim woman” could not be free unless she gave up her uncivilized Islamic culture. The way liberal Western feminists regarded and treated Muslim women indicates the belief of these Western female writers in the superiority of Western culture.

I have shown how the image of the victimized Muslim woman has been rediscovered by Western hegemonic discourse after the 9/11 attacks. The violent binaries such as the “civilized” West to the “barbaric” East, the “heroic American” to the “evil Arab” and the “liberated Western woman” to the “oppressed Muslim woman” have been refreshed in post-9/11 Western media. In chapter 3, I have displayed how the bodies of Afghan women became a site for the fight between imperialist Western discourse and fundamentalist Taliban regime. I have illustrated how both male-dominated discourses have exposed Afghan women’s bodies according to their interest. While the Taliban regime silences Muslim women’s diverse voices under the cloak of Islam, imperialist Western discourse tries to gain public support for “the war against the Taliban” by portraying *burqa*-clad Afghan women as imprisoned and dehumanized. In doing so, hegemonic Western discourse evokes the idea that the subjugated Afghan woman will be saved by the war. I have also illustrated how liberal feminists, who think that Afghan women will be liberated if they dispose of the *burqa*, serve the aims of male-dominated Western discourse referring to Sharifi, who indicates that what would make Afghan women free is not to unveil them but to give them a voice.

In the second part of my thesis, I have demonstrated that hegemonic male-dominated Western discourse, which has monopolized Muslim women as a singular and stable category since the eighteenth century has been challenged in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah* in many ways.

First of all, I have shown how the restrictive category of the “Muslim woman” is contested in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah*. The Orientalist depiction of the veiled “Muslim woman” in popular Western culture evokes the feeling that all Muslim women look alike and think in the same way. However, the representations of the characters in these cultural products reflect a range of variety among Muslim women. The female characters in these cultural products adopt different dress codes. They have different opinions on the same topics. In this sense, the cultural products challenge the uniform image of the “Muslim woman”, which undermines the diversity among Muslim women.

Secondly, I have explored to what extent the cultural products resist the notion that Muslim women are victims. I have stressed that even though in *Yasmin* the Muslim male characters are portrayed as violent and primitive, the female protagonist, Yasmin, is not shown as a victim. She struggles against both Eastern and Western male-dominated cultures, which aim to control her body. Similarly, in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, Rayyan stands up to oppressive Eastern patriarchal traditions. Likewise, the women in *Nazrah* reveal that the only way to stop male oppression under the cover of Islam is to study the Qur’an. In these cultural products the woman characters are neither represented as oppressed, nor are they shown as submissive. By contrast, all the female characters are depicted as challenging, socially-involved, intellectual and independent. In this respect, the constructed image of the “Muslim woman” who needs to be saved from her “brown man” is contested. Moreover, the representation of the self-reliant and empowered Muslim women, who reconcile their faith with Western values, also challenges the notion that Muslim women should give up their faith so that they can be as liberated as Western women.

Finally, I have shown that the *veil* is not represented as a sign of male oppression in *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah*. On the contrary, the veil is displayed as a sign of self-definition and liberation. In doing so, the monolithic representation of the veil is challenged. I have also pointed out that the idea that the veil silences and dehumanizes Muslim women is shaken through the depictions of the female characters, such as Rayyan and Fatima as active participants of their society.

To conclude, relying on Foucauldian framework which indicates “where there is power there is resistance”,¹⁸⁰ I have shown that the gendered representations of the 9/11 attacks and the depiction of Afghan women have entailed the myth of the “Muslim woman” to be questioned in the West. In this sense, the post-9/11 cultural products *Yasmin*, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and *Nazrah* can be seen as the pioneers which deconstruct the Orientalist depiction of the “Muslim woman” who is in need of rescue. In other words, in these cultural products the Muslim female figures speak for themselves and fight for their spaces in multi-cultural Western society. Thus, they are no longer represented, but they represent can themselves.

¹⁸⁰ Foucault quoted in Storey, 78.

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