

**DEMYSTIFYING THE ORIENT: IMPERATIVE OF VEIL
AND MUSLIM WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION**

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The hegemonic discourse produced by West theorized veil as an imperative of Muslim women's oppression. This discourse further imprinted the binary of 'us' and 'they' aftermath 9/11. The discourse produced multifaceted interpretations to *other* the theocracy of its practitioners and sympathizes with the barbaric alterity of its followers. The controversy of interpreting and staging the otherness West attempts to protect the Muslim women from the oppression of misogynistic Muslim men and their religion. The current study deals with the dynamics of the discourse of otherness by posing the question of veil as an imperative of oppression or emancipation. To examine the factors of misrepresentation of Islam and Muslim women this research strengthens its argument in the frame of Orientalism by Edward Said. The study is significant to examine donning veil as an epitome of oppression or emancipation under the rubric of feminist scholarship while providing counter study of Qur'ān and *Aḥādīth*. This paper investigates the theological interpretations of traditionalists and contemporary readings of Islamic feminists to manifest the trouble of subjective interpretations. The study also helps to deconstruct the image of Islam as backward religion by highlighting the underlying sagacity of Islamic injunctions with specific reference to veil. The study concludes that Islam is an egalitarian religion that does not allow gender discrimination.

Keywords: Veil, Orientalism, Muslim Woman, oppression, emancipation

INTRODUCTION

The image of Orient in Occidental memory has always been othered by posing binary of barbaric, uncouth, uncivilized, mysterious and erotic

to civilized, modern, progressive and therefore dominant. The legacy of this binary has shaped new series of otherness as Muslims, Islam, fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism whose existence is a threat to civilization and democracy. This discourse is exacerbated after the tragic event of 9/11. The demonization of Islam is reinforced in media, political and academic rhetoric. Shaping the discourse of otherness enabled West to maintain its rule in the world. Devoted scholarship has perceived Islam as an opposing religion can challenge the existence of Western hegemony with its orthodox practices.¹ The Occidental mission is therefore accelerated in the guise of teaching civilization and saving veiled Muslim women from the oppression, backwardness and inferiority of gender apartheid society. West is engaged in promoting secular ideas to destabilize the orthodoxy of Islam that would go against the interests of West. The veil is therefore demonstrated as a tool of oppression of Muslim women to restrict their mobility in misogynistic public space. This practice is perceived by Western feminists as a dress code that propagates women's invisibility in public space with an assertion of social control and subordination. Unni Wikan argues that the stereotypical image of veil implies that with its "constraints on movement and self-actualization, seclusion must be inherently suppressive, therefore oppressive."² This stereotype is challenged by the Muslim scholars with positive note as an imperative of emancipation which enables Muslim women's accessibility to public space with guaranteed social safety and security.³ Farah Azari argues that for veiled women in Iran, the obligation of donning veil carries minimum amount in exchange with safe and secure social position which it promises.⁴

Nonetheless, the question of veil as a tool of oppression or agency is probed by traditional and liberal intelligentsia which reveals subjective intrusions as dominant to interpret the veracity of the commandment. The ambivalence of the imperative of veil is, therefore, heavily dependent over its conflicting interpretations. This study is significant to contextualize the dialectic of veil in theoretical framework of Orientalism in which Muslim women is known as oppressed *other*. Yegenoglu views Orientalism as a frame that builds an 'essential difference' in which *burqa* clad Muslim women remain other since the true nature of these women is hidden and they are exposed in false and deceitful manner.⁵ Thus, the strategic construction of veiled women in essentialist terms is represented as exotic and mysterious other.

Theorization of the discourse of otherness further reveals the

stereotypical representations of Islam as religion which promulgates thick chances of misinterpretations of sacred texts of the Noble Qur'ān and *Aḥādīth*. Amplified luminaries provide subjective interpretations which usually reinforce the Orientalized version of fundamentalism. In the rubric of Orientalism, this research examines the power dynamics that propagate the discourse of otherness with specific reference to oppressed veiled Muslim woman. This study aims at demystifying the orient Muslim women with reference to the politics of representation and interpretation in light of verses of the Noble Qur'ān and *Aḥādīth* of the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). While reading diverse scholarship the present study deconstructs the misinterpreted and misrepresented imperative of veil by highlighting the savvy imperative of veil as a symbol of emancipation, respect and modesty that is therefore epitomizes civilized practice of a civilized religion that is Islam instead of oppressive practice of backward and conservative religion.

Demystifying the Orient

By raising the slogan of *English as the Best Nation* endeavored to non-European territories in fifteenth century. These adventurous explorations produced a plethora of ethnographic calculations to demonstrate the uncouth and barbaric populace settled across boundaries and waiting passionately for their colonial fathers to teach them civilization. In *Orientalism* Edward Said perceives this oxymoronic representation through his enunciation of the *Orient* and *Occident*. The *Orient* epitomizes East, barbaric, uncivilized, conservative and feminine while the *Occident* is the West, civilized, modern and masculine therefore legalizes the notion of colonization to enlighten the barbaric aboriginals. The otherness of orient to the occident is further manifested through ethnocentric representations of media and literature.⁶ Contextualizing *White man's burden* as an “interested desire”, Gayatri Spivak elaborates the legacy of colonial expeditions “to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject.”⁷ The barbaric orient remains a subject of exploration of the unknown, mysterious yet interested to certify civilization and modernity of the occident. Said renders Orientalism as a “system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire.”⁸

While perceiving the existence of Islam as obdurate religion to subdue before the enlightenment of Christianity, Edward Said argues a development in othering the orient: “fundamentalism equals Islam equals

everything-we-must-now-fight against, as we did with communism during the Cold War...the battle is graver, more profound and dangerous with Islam.”⁹ Edward Said polemically scrutinizes West’s political interventions in non-Western world by incessantly being engaged in “covering Islam” that “obscures what “we” do, and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their very flawed nature *are*.”¹⁰ The stereotypical clichés of Islam reported by the Western discourses are filled with negative images for instance Islam as conservative religion is followed by fundamentalists whose presence is a threat to democracy. The end of Cold War thus introduced Western world with a new *enemy* as Islam that can potentially deteriorate the settled civilizations.¹¹ However, Riffat Hassan investigates this hostility even before the colonial collision; he argues that “propaganda against Islam and Muslims is nothing new in the West. It is as old as the first chapter of Islamic history, when the new faith began to move into territories largely occupied by Christians.”¹² Since the inception of *Islam as threat* the otherness of Muslims has been fixed as anti-democratic. This otherness is further affirmed after the fall of twin towers in September 11, 2001. The event is contextualized in the framework of Orientalism and the image of Islam traversed from fundamentalism to terrorism.¹³ Said argues that media plays significant role in perpetuating the ideological demonization of Islam but also it establishes historical connections of Orientalized versions of otherness.¹⁴

The discipline of Orientalism not merely provides cogent critique of Western discourse but also implies counter representations which Lughoud refers as “combating stereotypes work”¹⁵ to distinguish between the true and contrived representations. In postcolonial world constructed notions of otherness are continuously challenged by the colonized to suit their self interests on one end, and on the other the degree to which British imperialists’ aesthetic whims were altered by their colonial encounter.¹⁶ Said’s *Orientalism* identifies the differences of East and West in imaginary geography which is “an exclusively male province” where women remain absent or silent.¹⁷ Reina Lewis also contemplates over the absence of women in Said’s *Orientalism* as a dominant discourse articulated by a colonial subject that is incorrigibly male.¹⁸ Said’s male oriented monolithic elucidation of otherness is challenged by Lewis with an assertion that women are not merely subjects of colonial hegemony but they have provided lens to shape the Orient as other and different.¹⁹ In this backdrop, postcolonial feminists have produced epistemological reception of defining the subject orient and celebrating the differences.

Lisa Lowe investigates Said’s Orientalism as monolithic study of

constructing difference of Orient and Occident. For Lowe, Orientalism signifies deviating frictions which indicates instability of the Orientalist discourse and its diversion from race, gender and class.²⁰ Her study provides an alternative perspective to perceive Orientalism beyond the binary logic of otherness by considering the differences of class and gender. Nashat and Tucker highlight the construction of differences in gender regime by including race, class, ethnicity, religion, time and space which underlines the intricate constitution of gender as homogenous as well as heterogeneous subject of otherness under the umbrella of Orientalism.²¹

Gayatri Spivak dismantles the hegemonic homogeneity of Western feminist discourse wherein the varied heterogeneity is subsumed under the process of generalization. Chandra Talpade Mohanty similarly notes the political oppression of the incongruity of the subject with the construction of “third-world difference”.²² She further notes that it is due to the ‘third-world difference’ western feminist discourse engages in a process of systematizing oppression through which power structure is established in the writings of Western feminists.²³ By generalizing the heterogeneous subjects through homogeneity Spivak criticizes the hegemony of western discourse for elusive representations by stating epistemic violence. The *difference* as well as the *generalization* involves appropriation to construe politics of representation by othering the orient as subject known and unknown.²⁴ As Orientalism according to Said is a form of *discourse* with its defining institutions, language, doctrines and the imperial administration²⁵, this disciplinary discourse is “essentialising other cultures, people and geographical regions”.²⁶ Therefore, Orientalism is specific discourse to create essential difference in prospect of women. Under the aegis of Western feminist discourse, the ‘third-world difference’ is essentialized through oppression, subordination and backwardness. The overarching concept of global sisterhood in Western feminist discourse is replaced by Mohanty with *solidarity*. She explains solidarity as a solution against the totalizing stereotype of oppression, backwardness, docility, uncouth and uncivilized, she exposit that diversity and difference are main triggers that should not be eliminated in building alliances.²⁷

White Men are Saving Brown Women from Brown Men²⁸

The construction of otherness of Muslim women and her veil as symbol of oppression is prevailing in the historical accounts of travelogues, diaries, government archives, missionary reports and fictional narratives

to reaffirm the colonial suzerain. This discourse manifests “Islam was a crude and dying religion, stressing alleged mistreatment of women as part of their anti-Muslim rhetoric.”²⁹ West with “inferiorising gaze” seems strive to liberate Muslim women from unjust oppression and subordination of Muslim men that is visible in practice of veil.³⁰ Nonetheless, the superior image of emancipation is presented in the form of *unveiled* western women.³¹ Veiled woman symbolizes conservatism and echoes inferiority which embodies the uncouth, mysterious and uncivilized natives; it is a metaphor of both the “oppression of women” in colonial discourse and according to contemporary reception of Islam renders “backwardness of Islam”³².

The stereotypical image of oppressive veiled women is elaborated by Katherine Bullock into six themes: i) hiding to oppress femininity; ii) veil is ostensibly refers to the difference of male and female which translates men as superior and women as inferior being; iii) it connotes women’s particular place inside the domestic sphere; iv) it is associated to patriarchal purport of female chastity and dignity; v) the veil can be obligatory; and vi) it is connected to the restrictions imposed on women on the name of Islam.³³ In this context, veiled Muslim woman is a dormant figure of victimization, oppression, conservatism and therefore *different* and *other* from Western unveiled woman who is modern, liberal and civilized. Diverse controversies are promulgated due to this enigmatic religious doctrine of veiling in the mayhem of representation of Orient/ Occident, modern/ backward, liberal/ oppressive. The prominence and visibility of veil is a threat to civilizing mission for colonizers therefore the attempts are made as “white men are saving brown women from brown men”.³⁴ Ample of ethnographic and historical contributions in making veil *other* and *alien*, strategize the mission of civilization and unveiling through imposing the generalizing representation of speaking for the silence and the oppressed.³⁵ Such mission of totalizing the oppression through secular Western feminist rhetoric, the Muslim women with all its oriental background are stereotyped and misrepresented. Hitherto Western representations of veil have been stigmatizing and prejudiced. The process of *othering* is Janus faced: it at first presents a vague picture of Muslim women’s position in the society and simultaneously deploys an ideal image of modernity and freedom Western women which is defined by Donnell in terms of “Despised difference”.³⁶

This difference is inculcated by the Western ethnographic diligence as in *Our Moslem Sisters*, Van Sommer introduces her subject of Muslim women as oppressive who needs to be voiced and known, “they will

never cry for themselves, for they are down under the yoke of centuries of oppression, and their hearts have no hope for knowledge of anything better” and therefore it is the divine duty of the white sisters to voice this difference and oppression.³⁷ The book begins with reiterated gloominess of the oppressed Muslim women who appeal the Christian sisters to rescue them from the oppression on the name of religion and illumine the darkness in the ambiance.³⁸ Similar concerns of feminists were registered through their support of Afghan war as saving mission of white man to protect vulnerable women from the subordination of Taliban.³⁹ Laura Bush affirms the war against Afghanistan through their imperialistic version of *white man saving brown woman* by affirming that the owing to the militancy of the US in Afghanistan, the indigenous women are not incarcerated in their home”, despite they are free in their everyday lives, she asserts that the struggle to wrestle against terrorism is an endeavor to emancipate Muslim women⁴⁰.

This exposes that West invasion ensures freedom of Afghan women from patriarchal oppression of Taliban. To save Afghan woman from brutal practices of Taliban and to unveil the *burqa* clad women have been posed as the prior objectives of the war. This reinforced otherness demonstrates Occidental familiarity of Oriental subjects that is examined and protected during saving mission in *Tear off your Western Veil*, Azizah Al-Hibri argues how tactfully this hegemonic discourse is silencing the other. She claims that western feminists do not endeavor to learn about Islam or Muslims instead their knowledge of Islam is extracted from Orientalist understandings of Islam which unquestionably silences the voice of Muslim women.⁴¹ While analyzing post 9/11 media images of veil, Faegheh Shirazi exposit that how historically ingrained stereotype of mysterious veiled women which is reiterated during war is used by advertising agency to attract consumers especially to sell sex.⁴² The propagated cliché of veil that is *othered* and *alienated* is demonstrated as inviting consumers to purchase the product that would also mean to purchase the exotic veiled women. While gauging the eroticism of veil, Shirazi describes three main media strategies of manipulating the stereotypical image of Muslim woman: a) an enigmatic veiled woman waiting for a white man; b) the subjugated woman forced to cover herself behind the veil; c) and the generic veiled woman, epitomizes non-western culture and geographical otherness.⁴³ The politics of representation and otherness in the guise of saving mission is on the other hand, renounced in postcolonial context as being part of the “project of cultural

colonialism".⁴⁴ In context of saving mission, Muslim clergy denounces feminism as an ideological apparatus to attack on Islam by misrepresenting it as conservative and oppressive creed.⁴⁵

Imperative of Veil and Muslim Women's Emancipation

The society that Islam wants to establish is not a sensate, sex-ridden society. . . . The Islamic system of Hijab is a wide-ranging system which protects the family and closes those avenues that lead toward illicit sex relations or even indiscriminate contact between the sexes in society. . . . To protect her virtue and to safeguard her chastity from lustful eyes and covetous hands, Islam has provided for purdah which sets norms of dress, social get-together.....and going out of the four walls of one's house in hours of need.⁴⁶

Siddiqi's enunciation of veil classifies women's social position in the society. The generic reception of veil as specified dress code of Muslim women ensures her modesty, her seclusion from the public space and protection from nuisance of sexual pestering. Amplified scholarship is devoted to deem veil as symbol of modesty, liberation and protection or oppression and alienation. Muslim clerics define veil as a symbol of chastity and modesty, nonetheless, it is also opposed as a cultural imperative of patriarchal domain to evict women from male dominated public space. While probing the underlying differences of opinions Bullock states that the general postulation of veil as a tool of oppression is also shared by some Muslim clergy who contextualize its practice in conservatism and backwardness of Islam; nonetheless, the immediacy of this riposte is lurking in Orientalist discourse.⁴⁷ Those who are pro-veil provide reference from the Noble Qur'an and Ahadith. The practice of veil is traced back at the time of Holy Prophet (ﷺ) when Muslims were instructed and commanded to adopt proper code of behaviour while they are in contact with Holy Prophet (ﷺ) in His domestic space as Holy Qur'an explicitly states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَىٰ طَعَامٍ غَيْرَ نَظِيرِينَ إِنَّهُ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْسَبِينَ لِحَدِيثِهِ إِنْ دَلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيَ مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ.

“O Ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! That would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.”⁴⁸

This verse of Surah Al-Aḥzāb is usually referred as the first commandment over veil which specified the separation of private and public space. Pro and against veil luminaries have grounded their initial arguments on the basis of this verse. Mauwdudi has analyzed the verse as obligatory for all women; it is not only specified dress code of Holy Prophet’s (ﷺ) wives.⁴⁹ Madani provides similar illustrations of the following verse. According to him the specified dealings with Prophet’s (ﷺ) wives epitomize the appropriateness of similar commandment to all Muslim women.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Rehman argues that the verse indicates distinguished social status and privileged position of His (ﷺ) wives, “in no way could this obligatory duty of the wives of the Prophet be forcibly thrust upon other Muslim women as a compulsory duty” however, if they adopt this dress code then it signifies “noble gesture on their part”.⁵¹ This contradiction seems visibly resolves when Allah Almighty states:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ
فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا.

“O Prophet (ﷺ)! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.”⁵²

This verse categorizes the Muslim women in general to observe the commandment of veil. However, it draws a dividing line between the believing and non-believing women. Al-Ṭabari elucidates this distinction as Prophet (ﷺ) has been asked to tell His (ﷺ) wives, daughters and the women of the believers that “they should not dress themselves like slave women by revealing their hair and face. Rather they should bring their cloaks closer to themselves so that no dissolute person harasses them when he knows that they are free women.”⁵³ Al-Ṭabari’s

interpretation suggests that Muslim women are not restricted to private space however when they go to the public realm their dress code should not appeal other men. In Surah Al-Nūr, Allah Almighty states the observation of screening with meticulous details:

وَقُلْ لِّلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ بَعْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا
وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ
أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ
أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّبِيعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولَى الْأَرْبَابَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا
يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ.

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands’ fathers, or their sons or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers or their brothers’ sons or sisters’ sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who have no sense of the shame of sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment.”⁵⁴

Shahrur contends that female body is “visible adornment” that is therefore should not be exposed. In the absence of palpable evidence of adornment, Shahrur divides female body into two anatomical sections. The first consists of the parts that are visible by creation as limbs and head, whereas the other part is not visible in creation for instance the armpits. He suggests that the anatomy that is not visible by divine design needs to be concealed, however, the societal moors and norms further determine the extent of concealing the body in the public.⁵⁵ This contradiction seems resolve in a *Hadith* narrated by Hazrat Ayesha (R.A.) in which Holy Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the exposure of body and explicitly highlights the conditions and body that can be uncovered:

إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْمَحِيضَ لَمْ تَصَلُحْ أَنْ يُرَىٰ مِنْهَا إِلَّا هَذَا وَهَذَا وَأَشَارَ إِلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ وَكَفَّيْهِ .

“When a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this, and he pointed to his face and hands.”⁵⁶

In various ahadith abundant of direct or indirect references of veil are present that explicate and reinforce the imperative of veiling. These ahadith supply a comprehensive amount of understanding the conditions that are not explained in the Noble Qur'an. Hazrat Ayesha (R.A.) has narrated a Hadith in which Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said:

لَا يَقْبَلُ اللَّهُ صَلَاةَ حَائِضٍ إِلَّا بِخِمَارٍ .

“Allah does not accept the prayer of a woman who has reached puberty unless she wears a veil.”⁵⁷

In the same context a Hadith is narrated by Zaid ibn Qunfudh that his mother asked from Hazrat Umm-e-Salamah (R.A.) that:

مَاذَا نُصَلِّي فِيهِ الْمَرْأَةُ مِنَ الثِّيَابِ فَقَالَتْ نُصَلِّي فِي الْخِمَارِ وَالذَّرْعِ السَّابِغِ الَّذِي يُغَيِّبُ ظُهُورَ قَدَمَيْهَا

“In how many clothes should a woman pray? She replied; she would pray wearing a veil and a long shirt which covers the surface of her feet.”⁵⁸

In another Hadith that is narrated by Hazrat Umm-e-Salamah (R.A.), in which Holy Prophet (ﷺ) aptly states that:

إِذَا كَانَ لِإِحْدَاكُنَّ مَكَاتِبَ وَكَانَ عِنْدَهُ مَا يُؤَدِّي فَلْتَحْتَجِبِ مِنْهُ

“When a slave of one of your women has made an agreement to pay for his freedom (i.e. he is a Mukatib) and can pay the full price, she must veil herself from him.”⁵⁹

Mawlana Mawdudi with support of the above mentioned verse⁶⁰ authenticates the veil of full body since her body is itself adornment. The verse not merely confines physical concealing instead it also suggests screening of her gaze that will purge her body and soul and endow her dignity and honour. While concealing their body and gaze the Muslim women escape the possibilities of promiscuous intentions. Muslim jurists from various schools of thought have diverse opinions on visible adornment and to cover the face and body. Hanafi jurists including Al-Sarakhsi and Ibn Abidin opine that woman has to cover her body including face to avoid the possibilities of seductive temptation.⁶¹ Māliki jurists such as Al-

Dasuqi and Al-Sawi explain that whole body of a woman is considered as adornment including face and hands.⁶² Shāfi‘ī jurists do not permit woman to show any part of a body even she is instructed not to talk to a stranger.⁶³ Imam Ahmad Ibn Hambal denotes “woman adornment” is her whole body that also includes the nails of her hands and feet, he continues to explain that if a woman comes out of her confined social space neither her hands nor slippers be shown because the slippers describe the foot.⁶⁴ Imam Ibn Qayyim further elaborates the piousness of gaze is inevitable along with the full body concealing because it is the underlying reason of all licentious thoughts that can potentially impinge on negative feelings to astray mind and heart of any individual.⁶⁵

In theological frame veil is referred to modesty, chastity and respect which manifests its maintenance of civility instead of backwardness and barbarity of oppression. The imperative of veil was pronounced as an act to discriminate the barbarity of pre-Islamic society wherein women used to invite other men through their ostensible physical appearance. Ali connotes this commandment as not to confine women’s liberty instead to conserve them from the molestation and harassment prevail at that time.⁶⁶ Both *Aḥādīth* and the verses of Qur’ān highlight veiling as an imperative of affirming modesty, scrupulous faith system and chastity which surely demonstrate the epitome of civilized behaviour. This particular dress code defines the ethics of a well established society where the erotic licentiousness is invisible and controlled however, in the society where women move while exposing their bodies seems more vulnerable to sexual lechery.⁶⁷ By following the complete ethics and injunctions of Islam the society provides as totality of civilization. The religion which underpins the piousness of gaze for both men and women cannot promote repression of one and dominance of the other.

While contextualizing veil in historical frame the contemporary discourse of Islamic feminists reiterates the need of reinterpretation of Islamic principles according to the need of the hour. These feminists perceive patriarchy as primary force of oppression which is legalized on the name of Islam.⁶⁸ According to Amina Wadud, patriarchal norms of Arabian society has deeply influenced the nature of the Qur’ānic enunciation and is still in practice for centuries with “interpretation and implementation”⁶⁹, she further argues that the values of Qur’ān challenges advocacy of women’s oppression on the name of dignity which is legitimized through narrow and reductionist interpretations of Islam and its sources.⁷⁰ While scrutinizing women as “subjects of male construction”

Wadud argues “*what* the Qur’ān says, and *how* it says it, what is said *about* the Qur’ān, and *who* is doing the saying, have been supplemented by a recent concern over what is left *unsaid*: the ellipses and silences”.⁷¹ Asma Barlas also claims male dominated exegete to confine women’s mobility and affirm their inferiority as weak and thus subordinate sex with misogynistic teachings of women’s innate inferiority which supplies a justification of women’s subservience and denial of her rights in patriarchal milieu further affirms their religio-social subordination.⁷² On the question of donning veil, Fatima Mernissi perceives the hegemony of male conceptualization to standardize women’s spiritual uprightness by restricting her mobility within private space⁷³.

Mernissi argues veil as a tool of oppression that is derived from repressive social practices “mediocrity and servility” of male dominated society which does not have any link with the sacred texts of Qur’ān and *Aḥādīth*. Without supplying scriptural references in support of her argument Mernissi cogently bolsters her anti-veil discourse by framing Qur’ānic inferences in historical context.⁷⁴ Haida Moghissi’s study scrutinizes veil as one of the conservative practices of Islam that poses constraints over women’s mobility in public space. She refers to Iranian revolution and Algerian imposition of *veil* or *die* as an epitome of oppression.⁷⁵ Badran analyses that the concept of Islamic feminism is filled with issues of agency and such revolutionary diligence in postcolonial context is regarded as Western, and therefore being stigmatised as antithetical to Islam⁷⁶. This discourse perceives the barbaric practices of patriarchy in pre-Islamic society as reshaped through the misrepresentation of divine text. However, the pro-veil clerics reinforce the notion of gender apartheid as code of conduct for a civilized society because Qur’ān refers to gender egalitarianism by stating the oneness of soul either men or women⁷⁷. It reveals that women is not different from male counterpart since she is originated from the same soul and Allah will bestow His celestial reward for both men and women for protecting their modesty⁷⁸. Thus the notions of oppression are not visible from the theological teachings of Islam instead these are underlying in non-Islamic and pre-Islamic states where women were and still are regarded as object of amusement and subordination. On the name of re-readings, reinterpretations in post modern world of mini-narratives the underlying sagacity of Islamic injunctions are obdurately challenged by post modern deconstructionists who do not provide textual references in order to escape the paradoxical explanations.

Lughoud asserts the agency of women who veil. She argues that despite of Orientalized version of stereotyped oppressed Muslim women, the women are fully conscious of using veil as a tool to assert their agency in particular community. She emphasizes over the need “to work against the reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women’s unfreedom” also “to reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing” and she suggests that “it is time to give up the Western obsession with the veil and focus on some serious issues with which feminists and others should indeed be concerned”⁷⁹. For Bullock the controversy of donning veil as an emblem of repression or emancipation is highly dependent over the social constraints in which the sagacity of this imperative is lost. She argues that the Muslim women are dispossessed from emancipated status because these obligations define concept of veil in the minds of common people which has little support from sacred text of Qur’ān, the Sunnah, which is later on imposed as a common practice on the rest of women⁸⁰. She examines the divided Muslim community in prospect to interpret the divine book into two main extremes the traditionalists and the liberals. The corollary of traditional discourse is to present women as an *oppressed ideal* whereas secular attempts to liberate her from this oppression. Bullock’s study concludes that there is some possibility of misinterpreting Islamic discourse in light of Patriarchal dynamics though, it is not essentially dominating its general principles⁸¹, however, it is necessary to believe the savvy proposition of veil that “‘Islam’ does not oppress women, and that where ‘Islam’ finds its expression in law, that law should not oppress or discriminate against women; and that where such burdens are to be found in law, they should be amended or removed, and that the Qur’ān and Sunnah provide the legitimacy and wherewithal so to do.”⁸²

Conclusion

This study has concluded that in contemporary situation the imperative of veil is stereotyped as the only practice of Islam to alienate and oppress women from mainstream society. This stereotypical image of demonization of Islam which promulgates patriarchal infrastructure is demonstrated through media, politics and academic discourse under the aegis of saving mission. Through this saving mission and Orientalized version of Islam West maintains its dominance over Islamic countries that need support and succour of their Western civilized philanthropists.

In the backdrop of diverse scholarship contemplating over pro-veiling and anti-veiling thesis, this study has argued that the religion of Islam is misrepresented through hegemonic Western discourse. It has been investigated that the dialectic of veil as tool of oppression as well as of emancipation is defended through subjective interpretation of the Noble Qu'rān and *Aḥādīth*. It is examined that counter mini-narratives are produced to deconstruct the misinterpretation of the sacred texts though postmodern readings are also challenging the prudence of the holy texts. The societal disequilibrium which promulgates oppression is not because religion is interpreted in true sense instead the practices which seemed favorable to the dominant group are adopted as the true imperatives. This study has argued that the trouble of representation and misinterpretations provide subjective insights to question the underpinned savvy prescriptions of Islam. The stereotypical image of veiled Muslim women as oppressed does not have any connection with Islam instead it is more close to the barbarity of patriarchy. Muslim women as compare to non-Muslim women are more strong and powerful because they gained all their rights of emancipation and equality fourteen hundred years ago without roaming in the streets, nonetheless, white women acquired the consciousness of their rights in the end of 1960s. Therefore, it has become inevitable to reinterpret the Holy texts by reinstating the underpinned prudence of Islamic doctrines.

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