

**Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University**  
**Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences**  
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**CEDoc:** Esthétiques et sciences de l'homme  
**Formation Doctorale:** Langages et formes symboliques  
**Research Lab:** Moroccan Cultural Studies Centre

## **The Representation of Muslim Women in European Documentary Films**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Doctorate Degree.**

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**2019 - 2020**

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## **Acknowledgments**

First, I would like to seize this opportunity to acknowledge the people whom without their encouragement, this dissertation would not have been possible. In this respect, I am truly grateful to my supervisor Dr. Souad SLAOUI for her continuous support and encouragement. The completion of this dissertation would never have been possible without the patience and the generosity of my advisor and mentor, Prof. Souad SLAOUI. I am truly honored to have had her as an advisor who helped me a lot in this dissertation and who has bigheartedly showered me with her meticulous written and oral comments and criticism that always worked to enhance my arguments and improve my presentation. I sincerely owe her a great debt of enormous gratefulness and deeper appreciation.

I genuinely have the immense pleasure to extend my thanks and my appreciation to all professors of the Moroccan Cultural Studies Center, Prof. Khalid Bekkaoui, Prof. Sadik Rddad, Prof, Kebir Sandy, Prof, Mohammed Bennis and Prof. Abdellatif Khayati for their encouragements throughout the period of writing this dissertation. I would like to thank them for providing me with analytical tools, scholarly insights and invaluable skills which helped me in the examination of documentary films.

I also would like to thank my parents and my both sisters for their continuous assistance and motivational remarks which have boosted my confidence during this wonderful academic journey.

# **Dedication**

To my parents,

To my both sisters,

## مقتضب

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة و مناقشة الدوافع الثقافية والسياسية وراء الصورة التمثيلية و التقليدية للمرأة المسلمة في وسائل الإعلام الغربية وخاصة في الأفلام الوثائقية الأوروبية. فإنتاج هذه الأفلام الوثائقية يدخل في إطار إيديولوجي واستشراقي يهدف بشكل اساسي إلى خلق صور نمطية عن المرأة المسلمة و ترسيخها عن الإسلام و الملتزمين به. المراد قوله هنا هو أن وسائل الإعلام الأوروبية تساهم في تجسيد صورة إستشراقية عن النساء المسلمات و حصر الثقافة الإسلامية في صورة و نمط واحد و كأن الثقافات الإسلامية كلها متشابهة و متطابقة. لهذا السبب تركز هذه الدراسة أساسا على تحليل و محاولة تفكيك الصور المفبركة و المشوهة و بشكل رئيسي تهدف إلى كشف اللثام و دحض المواقف و التعميم الإيديولوجي المتبع من طرف مخرجي و مخرجات هذه الأفلام الوثائقية. فهذه الصورة الإستشراقية التي تمثل المرأة المسلمة كمضطهدة و ضحية لما يسمى بالتعسف الثقافي الإسلامي وأحيانا اخرى كإرهابية مسلحة تطورت و تأثرت بشكل كبير ببعض الأحداث السياسية مثل هجمات سبتمبر على الولايات المتحدة، و الحرب على أفغانستان و الثورة الإيرانية. هذه الأحداث الى جانب احداث اخرى كالربيع العربي ساعدت في تعزيز و تقوية الفكر الإستشراقي الاستعماري الأوروبي و بالتالي ساهمت في تشكيل و صياغة الوعي و الذاكرة الجماعية الغربية.

كلمات مفاتيح: فيلم وثائقي، المرأة المسلمة، ما بعد الكولونيالية، الخطاب الاستشراقي، تمثلات، حجاب، الإسلام النقد النسوي.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation inspects the cultural and the political motives behind the conventional portrayal of Muslim women in Western media particularly in European documentary films. The documentary films in this thesis are placed within a discursive framework that aims at stereotyping and representing Muslim women in a particular fashion. The idea here is that European media helps generate a specific knowledge about Muslim women as the “victimized other” and other times as the “terrorist other”. For this reason, this study focuses essentially on the analysis and the deconstruction of the deformed images, constructed opinions and overgeneralization. They are features that classically characterize the European representation of Muslim women. Some of these cultural products propose that the evolution of this portrayal has in fact been overwhelmingly influenced by some political events such as the 9/11 attacks, the war on Afghanistan, the Iranian revolution and the Arab spring. Such events helped in the reinforcement and in the reproduction of cultural and political prejudices that framed and shaped a great part of the European collective memory. In this context, this thesis also examines other documentaries that serve as counter-discourses to orientalism. They attempt to foreground the lives and the religious identities of Muslim women who are presented neither as oppressed nor as victimized by Islam but enthusiastically committed to their Islamic faith.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Documentary Film, Photograph, Islam, Veil, Muslim women, Representation, Discourse, Postcolonialism, Feminism.

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## Introduction

The topic of Islam and principally Muslim women appear to be one of the most highly debated issues tackled by European media. The European perception of the so-called “Non-European Other” has always been biased and homogeneous. Such tendency to totalize and homogenize the Eastern cultures has been primarily motivated by the 9/11 events followed by the war on Afghanistan and on Iraq. These events in fact contributed to the shaping and to the framing of the European perspective of the orient particularly Islam and Muslim women. In this respect, Jocelyn Cesari argues that

Islam in Europe has been a topic of interest for at least the last three decades. This period has been marked by a steady increase of books, articles, and reports that are devoted to the subject, as well as an increase in the variety of disciplines—including sociology, religious studies, and political science—that are engaged in this field.<sup>1</sup>

On this basis, one could deduce that European representation of Muslim women is not a recent fabrication but it has been systematic and deep-seated in the European conceptualization. In such representations, Islam is introduced as a backward and aggressive religion while Muslim women are represented as veiled and oppressed by male figures. This could be demonstrated by images of harems, veil, slave markets and other pictures where Muslim women are being depicted as extremely oppressed, inferior and systematically victimized. This is why, Mohja Kahf confirms that the notion of Muslim women as repressed and

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<sup>1</sup>- Jocelyn Cesari, “Islam in the West: From Immigration to Global Islam”, in *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, (2009), p. 149.

confined in Muslim culture is “often manifested in a kind of narrative shorthand by the veil and/or the harem.”<sup>2</sup> Leila Ahmed in the same context states that

the thesis of the new colonial discourse of Islam centered on women—was that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies.<sup>3</sup>

The veil, the harem and Islam are used as tools of orientalizing and othering Muslim women. These are just some of the images that the European world has come to comprehend, increasingly structuring their mindsets, their views and thoughts about the Muslim world. This can only confirm that the orientalist perspective takes precedence over the true image of Muslim women and more importantly tends to distort and to wipe out their truths.

Since the veil becomes a critical aspect and target by European media, it is often linked with cliché notions of inferiority, traditionalism and oppression. In this context, the European audience conceives of the veil as a sign of cultural backwardness, a dress that is not suitable for the modern and liberated world. This tendency to stereotype Muslim women has led to a rise in discriminatory, xenophobic and racist thinking in Europe. This is mainly related to the

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<sup>2</sup> - Mohja Kahf, *Western Representation of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> - Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Roots of a Modern Debate*, (Yale University Press, 1992), p. 151-52.

orientalist mentality that has impacted the reconstruction of European identity as always superior vis-a-vis the oriental identity which is deemed to be inferior.

This discursive practice not only exemplifies how Westerners or Europeans come to recognize the culturally different “orient”, but it also proposes how the Europe’s absorption with “otherness” still continues and still appropriated by European media particularly documentary films towards Muslim women and Islam

Mohja Kahf suggests that in dominant European representations, including media texts, the Islamic religion in general and Muslim women in particular are often denigrated and stereotyped. In addition, Muslim women are constructed as one of the most oppressed groups of women in the world. In this respect, she clearly says that

The dominant narrative of the Muslim woman in Western discourse from about the eighteenth century to the present basically states, often in quite sophisticated ways, that the Muslim woman is innately oppressed.<sup>4</sup>

In this Western discourse Muslim women's oppression is perceived as the consequence of Islam, which is discursively depicted as a faith imposed on Muslim women. Therefore, their emancipation from sadness and from this world of desolation is suggested to be bound to their detaching themselves from Islam and Muslim culture and adopting European ways of life.

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<sup>4</sup>- Mohja Kahf, *Western Representation of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*, p.177.

This dissertation is interested in inspecting and examining the representation of Muslim women in European documentary films. It does not concentrate only on displaying the Orientalist discourse and bring it to the fore but it endeavors to deconstruct this discursive representation. It also attempts to investigate the objectivity of documentary films.

In general, a documentary film does not replicate reality as it is but it does disfigure, deface and more importantly represent the subjects in accordance with a particular discursive point of view. Within the production of documentary films, the filmmaker makes use of many techniques such as language, photographs, sounds and other methods to convey his or her message. The idea here is that all these techniques are employed to give the intuition that the film “tells reality” and that the subjects are “authentically” represented. In this context, documentary films are not innocently produced; rather they carry and transmit hidden ideologies and discursive ideas that aim at tainting and disfiguring the image of Muslim women. According to Julie Reid,

Representations, it seems, have always been imbued and impregnated with rich ideological meanings and utilized as the disseminators of ideologies of all kinds.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, this dissertation attempts to dissect and unravel the ideologies imbedded in the representation of Muslim women in documentary films. It aims at examining their portrayal and offers a detailed deconstruction of their representation in terms of a deep analysis of its ideological and discursive content.

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<sup>5</sup>- Julie Reid, “Representation Defined” in *Media Studies: Policy, Management and Media Representation*, Vol 2, Eds. Peiter J. Fourie, (Cape Town: Juta, 2008), p. 226.

The documentary films that are the focus of the dissertation examination can be investigated and approached within the parameter of Edward Said's book, *Orientalism* (1978), in which he defines "Orientalism" as a mode of Western discourse or as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient."<sup>6</sup>

Orientalism is an ethnocentric conceptual framework that produces knowledge about the East and inscribes power over others. In other words, some of these documentary films strongly appear as politically charged images that are made and produced to justify the European domination and to reflect some social and political modes of Western and European imperialism. In accordance with this, the objective behind these films is mainly to articulate and to represent the Orient and particularly Muslim women

culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.<sup>7</sup>

Said's theory of orientalism has in fact provided a generation of researchers and scholars with practical tools to unravel, uncover, and better fathom out the profound politics and contexts of Europe's fluctuating views towards the East. In other words, Edward Said represents the core of the postcolonial theory.

This dissertation deploys a postcolonial as well as a postcolonial feminist approaches that aim essentially at contesting and destabilizing the European discourse about Muslim women. They are approaches that question the European power and attempts to shake up and to subvert the European legacy

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<sup>6</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> - Ibid., p. 19.

and knowledge about the Orient. These approaches are being deployed in this dissertation as they are theorized by Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Michelle Foucault, Lily Abu Lughod, Sara Mills and Mohja Kahf.

This concept of postcolonialism is not easy to define as it implies a range of interpretations and meanings. According to John McLeod, the concept cannot be limited to one definition as critics and scholars interpret the term differently and “cannot even agree on how to spell ‘postcolonialism’: with a hyphen (as in “post-colonialism”) or without?”<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, McLeod wants to avoid and circumvent the use of the word post-colonialism with a hyphen because it is taken literally to represent the period of time after colonialism or the epoch of independence. In this respect, McLeod explains clearly that post-colonialism is taken

to denote a particular *historical period or epoch*, like those suggested by phrases ‘after colonialism’, ‘after independence’, or ‘after the end of Empire’. (original emphasis)

The use of the hyphen in the concept seems to be probably problematic because the colonized world is still living in contradictions and conflicts domestically, regionally and internationally. Therefore, it is very important to accept the nature of the word “postcolonialism” as it does not simply refer to the period after the colonial era. In other words, postcolonialism can be seen as a form of a continuous struggle and resistance, through taking different forms and new relationships that concern mainly power, domination and production of knowledge.

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<sup>8</sup> - John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 5.

The concept "postcolonial" is used, as Ashcroft suggests, "to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day."<sup>9</sup> This means that postcolonialism tries to analyze and scrutinize the outcome of colonialism and more importantly produces a counter-discourse that defies the colonial hegemony and control over the colonized. To put it differently, postcolonial theory is employed in this dissertation to essentially connote a position against European imperialism and Euro-centrism. In accordance with this, the European production of knowledge turns into an object of study which is challenged and contested by the orient. As Narayana Chandran says, postcolonialism

is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many concepts of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of this passage, one could deduce that postcolonialism is a theory that allows scholars and researchers to interrogate the power and the knowledge of Europe that has amassed about the East throughout history. This Western

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<sup>9</sup> - Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Eds. (New York, Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> - Narayana Chandran, *Texts and Their Worlds Ii*, (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2005), p.222.

European knowledge is being disrupted and resisted by postcolonial countries that no longer accept the West as their representative.

Postcolonial theory is a deconstructive approach that aims mainly at providing a framework and a structure in which Western and European dominant discourses about Muslim women are being unsettled and unveiled. In other words, postcolonial discourse attempts to resist, to redefine and to deconstruct the orientalist discourse that bases its argument on the superior West vis-à-vis the inferior East. For this reason, this dissertation aims at challenging and criticizing the inherent ideas as well as questioning the discursive formations of Orientalism. In addition, it aims at problematizing and displaying the politics and the power that lie behind the construction of the discourse of “otherness” which is perceptible within these discursive modes of representation.

On the basis of this theory, this dissertation aims at writing back to the colonial discourse and opposing the European stereotypes and prejudices that tend to fix Muslim women in the image of the oppressed and the victimized. This means that the documentary films under study

need to be rethought if our reading practices are to contribute to the contestation of colonial discourses to which postcolonialism aspires.<sup>11</sup>

The issue of gender in postcolonial theory has been neglected or rather has been put on the margin. This is why, postcolonial feminist theory has been developed and attempted to offer a counter-discourse and a space where

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<sup>11</sup> - John Mcleod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, (2000), p. 33-34.

European Western power is being challenged, contested and undermined. In this respect, Sara Mills, in her book entitled *Discourse*, argues that

Feminist theorists are generally concerned to analyse power relations and the way that women as individuals and as members of groups negotiate relations of power. Recent feminist work has moved away from viewing women as simply an oppressed group, as victims of male domination, and has tried to formulate ways of analysing power as it manifests itself and as it is resisted in the relations of everyday life.<sup>12</sup>

In the light of this passage, Sara Mills suggests that postcolonial feminist theory attempts to question the universal thoughts on Muslim women. It aims at resisting the European colonial discourse that deforms the experiences and realities of Muslim women. As Bill Ashcroft states

In many different societies, women, like colonised subjects, have been relegated to the position of 'Other', 'colonised' by various forms of patriarchal domination.<sup>13</sup>

In accordance with this, the objective of postcolonial feminist approach is to address and investigate European representations that construct Muslim women as one oppressed group. For this reason, "Feminist and post-colonial discourses

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<sup>12</sup> - Sara Mills, "Feminist Theory and Discourse Theory", in *Discourse*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1997), p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> - Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 249.

both seek to reinstate the marginalised in the face of the dominant”.<sup>14</sup> This means that both postcolonial and postcolonial feminist approaches work together in an attempt to destabilize the European hegemony and more importantly offer a voice to the voiceless. In contrast with Western feminism, postcolonial feminism brings into light the problems, the experiences, the differences and the realities of “third world women” using Mohanty’s term.

This dissertation consists of two major parts, one is theoretical and critical and the second is analytical. The first part is divided into two chapters, the first chapter deals mainly with the types or the genres of a documentary film and the way documentary film works as a representational system as Stuart Hall says. In this chapter, I will shed light on some pertinent theories particularly documentary films. I will introduce a discussion and a critical background of a documentary film and try to explain some of the principal types or discursive modes that are adopted by filmmakers.

I will attempt to expose the dynamics behind the production of a documentary film and show that it is a problematic concept or “what we might call a “fuzzy concept.”<sup>15</sup> The reason behind this is that a documentary film cannot be yield to one homogenous definition as it is seen as a variegated discourse. This chapter brings into question the nature of representation in relation to reality and whether or not a documentary representation depicts the subject as it is or as an ideologically deformed subject. It is in fact a discursive medium mainly intended to represent the subjects in a way to serve the film maker’s ideology or vision. Therefore, a documentary film is fundamentally dealt with as a vehicle of power used to communicate ideological notions and hidden messages.

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<sup>14</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, (Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 21.

The second chapter concentrates on some postcolonial and postcolonial feminist theories which principally serve as analytical tools that help investigate and assess the representation of Muslim women in European documentary films. In this chapter, I will introduce Edward Said's theorization of the orientalist discourse which is perceived as an indispensable component in deconstructing some of the documentary films under study. Edward Said's *Orientalism* has left an enormous impact on the foundation of postcolonial studies and on the colonial discourse theory.

This chapter aims at discussing the politics of discourse as it is theorized by Michel Foucault; his notion of discourse helps to a great extent in the analysis of the documentary films. Foucault's paradigm of power/knowledge is considered so significant in understanding the construction of the subject. This chapter in fact provides a discussion on the way Muslim women are represented and theorizes on the issue of stereotyping which is used by the colonial discourse as a strategy to fix prejudices on Muslim women. In the same respect, this chapter focuses on the relationship between feminism and orientalism and tries to shed light on women's contribution to colonial discourse theory. This is discovered through the adoption of some postcolonial feminist's readings of Sara Mills, Spivack, Chandra Mohanty, and Meyda Ygendu.

The final part which is an analytical one examines or rather deconstructs eight documentary films *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before It is Too Late* (2010), *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* (2012), *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!* (2013), *Submission* (2004), *Honor Violence Rising in The West* (2011), *Truth Behind The Veil* (2010), *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* (2011), and *She's a Thoroughly a Modern Muslim* (2007).

This part is divided into two chapters, the first chapter examines five documentary films *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before It is Too Late* (2010), *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* (2012), *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!* (2013), *Submission* (2004), *Honor Violence Rising in The West* (2011). This chapter deals mainly with the visual ways or the procedures documentary filmmakers utilize to disclose the notion that Muslim women are permanently docile, subservient and always victimized by their Islamic culture. It underscores, through documentary photographs, how filmmakers tend to highlight and to make a blatant distinction between two contradictory worlds East Vs West.

The documentaries in this chapter tend chiefly to essentialize and totalize the experiences of Muslim women. More importantly, they are represented as being conventional, oppressed, and incarcerated in their Islamic faith. These documentaries produce and reproduce many European colonial tropes about Muslim women. Such tropes encompass images of oppression, blind obedience, violence and terrorism. In other words, such tropes become synonymous with the Muslim identity. Accordingly, it is deduced that these colonial tropes are still employed and more significantly renewed in order to uphold an imperial and a Eurocentric discourse.

The second chapter is also analytical and deconstructive one. This chapter is concerned with the analysis of three cultural products namely *Truth behind The Veil*, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* and *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*. In this context, I aim at explaining in what ways the representations of Muslim women in these cultural products subvert and reverse the traditional image of the Muslim woman. In fact, these documentaries serve as a counter-discourse and as a reaction against European hegemonic orientalist discourses.

I will show how the depiction of Muslim women in these visual products is analogous to or different from the monolithic representation of the Muslim woman in European media. Furthermore, I will investigate the ways in which the veil or the Hijab is culturally and politically represented. In other words, these documentaries tend mainly to go beyond this orientalist perspective and serve as a counter-discourse. They stage Muslim women as real and free agents, putting the emphasis on their individual stories and dealing with their experiences in an important and serious way. In doing so, these documentaries challenge and contest the European discourse and offer an interesting background that dismantles and questions the orientalist discursive narrative and assumption about Muslim women.

**Part I: Theoretical and Critical Background**  
**Chapter I: A Critical Overview of a Documentary**  
**Film and The Politics of Representation**

## **A- A Critical Background of a Documentary Film**

The documentary film was originally created or invented as the first genre of the cinema. In the period of 1890's<sup>16</sup> cinema came into existence and started to be seen as a new form and type of art that will contribute and will bring a major change in the perception of the image. In this context, several types of films were produced so as to respond to the need of people at that time. People or rather viewers perceived these films as instruments to portray the world outside and to present some sort of “actuality” film. In other words, it is a sort of film which endeavors to represent reality in the sense that it presents ‘actual’ people, places, activities and events. This type of films has contributed in fact to the invention or the production of documentary film which at that time relied mainly on the use of simple, uncomplicated methods and techniques such as the single shot and short unedited clips<sup>17</sup>. More importantly, it relied also on screening newsworthy events, discovering places of interest from unfamiliar lands as well as from everyday life.

As a matter of a fact, such films are perceived and produced as short films merely “of a couple of minutes in length documenting a single historical event, such as a train arriving in a station or factory workers being let out for the day”<sup>18</sup>. In this context, it could be said that the famous example of this could be the Lumière Brothers' recordings, which essentially appeared as early as 1895. During this year, the Lumière Brothers' projected about ten short films to a large

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<sup>16</sup> - Ian Aitken, *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, (Routledge, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> - Jessica Silby, “Filmmaking in the Precinct House and the Genre of Documentary Film”, in *Columbia Journal of the Law and the Arts*, (Dec 2005), p. 110.

audience in the Grand Café in Paris<sup>19</sup>. This huge event attracted many people from different walks of life. The first film which was projected in this event was about “A Train Arriving at the Station”<sup>20</sup>. The story of this short film revolved mainly around a train arriving into the station, and while

the train grew larger and larger on screen as it got closer to the station—the audience screamed and ran from the theater, afraid the train would run them down.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of this quote, it could be assumed that people were not accustomed to be exposed to see “actuality” or reality in motion pictures. This is why, most of the audience felt afraid of what would happen, screamed and even ran away from the theater as they feared for their lives. In other words, these early films caught the attention of viewers and overwhelmed them simply on the basis that these films were able to document the world out there. It should be noted that these documentaries were not long as they were shot in a single location from a stationary camera and more importantly were unedited. In addition to this, this type of documentary film is believed to describe “authentically” some aspects of daily activities and to capture some characteristics of everyday life. As a matter of a fact, the appeal of documentary lies in its promise to connect the spectators with a representation of the world in which people live. This idea is clearly

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<sup>19</sup> - Mark Freeman, “A Guide to The Study of Documentary Films: The Documentary from Flaherty to Verité and Beyond”, (1997), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> - Jessica Silby, “Filmmaking in the Precinct House and the Genre of Documentary Film”, in *Columbia Journal of the Law and the Arts*, (Dec 2005), p. 143.

defended and revealed in one of the articles about documentary films written by Nichols Bill who states evidently that

The origin of documentary film has long been settled. Louis Lumiere's first films of 1895 demonstrated film's capacity to *document* the world around us. Here, at the start of cinema, is the birth of a documentary tradition.<sup>22</sup>(my emphasis).

In the light of this, it could be said that Lumiere Brother's films paved the way towards a new tradition in cinema known as documentary film. Documentary films were mainly produced so as to show and to expose the audience to foreign and anonymous places, landscapes as well as displaying daily activities. In other words, the objective of documentary film was to capture "life as it is" and to display daily activities as they are performed by the subjects without any intervention of the filmmaker. This indexical connection or linkage between representation and the subject filmed gave rise to theories implying that documentary appears to "bear unimpeachable witness to "things as they are"<sup>23</sup> while in fact they are not. This is not to say that documentary film is incapable of capturing some characteristics or aspects of real life, but instead documentary film tends to give explanations and give details about the thing filmed. In other words, the subjects that are represented in the documentary film

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<sup>22</sup> - Nichols Bill, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde", in *Critical Inquiry*, University of Chicago Press, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Summer, 2001), p. 581.

<sup>23</sup> - Jessica Silby, "Filmmaking in the Precinct House and the Genre of Documentary Film", in *Columbia Journal of the Law and the Arts*, (Dec 2005), p. 143.

cannot be tackled in isolation from their filmic impact. In the same context, Nichols Bill, who is a film critic and theorist, argues in his book entitled *Introduction to Documentary* while he was referring to Lumier's films that

These early works have typically served as the “origin” of documentary by maintaining a “faith in the image”...Lumière's films seemed to record everyday life as it happened. Shot without adornment or editorial rearrangement, they reveal the shimmering mystery of events. They appear to reproduce the event and preserve the mystery.<sup>24</sup>

It is worth mentioning that these films were short and lasted only for few minutes and this was mostly due to technological limitations. It is important to note here that the period between 1895 and 1905 a number of new and special types or rather genres of documentary film emerged. They are mainly what are called “topicals”, “travelogues”, and “sport films”<sup>25</sup> along with other types. To put it differently, these early genres of documentary films were in fact rapidly considered and perceived as existing and powerful modes of entertainment and more importantly of culture and politics. As a matter of a fact, it is in this period of time that documentary film becomes a major and a significant form of film tradition. This is mainly due to the improvements of the general concept of art which includes cinema and also thanks to the technological changes that have

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<sup>24</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, (Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 83-84.

<sup>25</sup> - Ian Aitken, *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, (Routledge, 2005), p. 1

enhanced the quality of documentary photographs. To put it differently, the rapid advance of information technology has witnessed an enormous boost in the use of visual forms of communication. As a consequence, visual forms such as photography and documentary films have grown. It is because of this that documentary films have been popular and even playing a major part in people's life as well as culture.

Documentary film has allowed people to record their views and their images of themselves. It has enabled them to picture the passage of their lives through visual mediums. Not only this but also it has allowed people to record and to select major political and sporting events as well as to capture celebration moments. In fact, a documentary film is used also as a source of information as it is mainly related to the social and the political conditions in which the documentary is produced. For this reason, it is believed that John Grierson is the first and the pioneer to coin the term documentary as it is confirmed by John Grierson himself in his book entitled *Grierson on Documentary*. He clearly states that

In the early thirties a new word and a new name began to appear with some regularity in the public prints of the English-speaking world. The new word was 'documentary' and the new name John Grierson.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> - John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. by Forsyth Hardy, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 13.

In accordance with the previous quote, it should be said that John Grierson developed a profound interest in cinema and media studies when he was in Britain. Accordingly, he travelled to the United States of America in order to pursue his studies. It is there where he reviewed and evaluated a film of Robert Flaherty called *Moana* and wrote about it in the New York Sun in 1926. He described the film and commented on it by saying

Of course, *Moana* being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value.<sup>27</sup>

In this context, it should be noted that this documentary film *Moana* was produced to expose the details of romantic rituals and traditions in the South Seas. More importantly, it was an attempt to invite viewers or spectators to have an insight into life in the South Pacific before the Western colonialism. This is why, it could be said that the term as such was approximately used in a relation to the modern meaning of the word “document” as it stands for a “factual” and “genuine” record.

John Grierson defines documentary as “the creative treatment of reality”<sup>28</sup>. That is to say, actuality or reality is in fact submitted to the creativity of the filmmaker because creativity is seen as the binding element of the documentary tradition. To put it differently, the creativity of the filmmaker

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<sup>27</sup> - Ellis Jack, “Chapter One: What is Documentary?” *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> - Hartwig Gunthar, “New Media Documentary: Explorations in The Changing Form, Theory and Practice of Documentary”, (Dec 12, 2001), p. 2.

seems to be very essential and even unavoidable in the production of a documentary film. The idea here is that the filmmaker endeavors to present reality or some aspects of it creatively and in a genuine way.

It is to be noted in this respect that John Grierson is perceived as the leader of the British documentary film movement of the 1930s<sup>29</sup>, whose objectives were principally and more precisely directed toward educating the public on the social issues and on the different social phenomena of their society. Grierson's definition also created a contentious debate on one of the most dominant features of documentary films which is about the truth. Does documentary film depict the truth or reality as it is or mostly tends to give audience a different version of reality? To clarify more his notion about reality in documentary film, he says that

In documentary we deal with the actual, and in one sense with the real. But the really real, if I may use that phrase, is something deeper than that. The only reality which counts in the end is the interpretation which is profound.<sup>30</sup>

In the light of this, it could be deduced that when a documentary deals with the actual events or real world artfully, it automatically, through the depicted subjects, creates an interpretation of it. This means that life of people is being

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<sup>29</sup> - Swann Paul, "The British Documentary Film Movement 1926-1946", (Cambridge University Press 1989), p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> - John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 145.

interpreted creatively and without any intervention of the filmmaker. Accordingly, it is assumed that documentaries here are oriented toward the real and rely on presenting 'real things'. In other words, the documentaries according to Grierson are not made to produce or embrace the effects of any traditional genre of film or cinema; rather they strive for the genuine representation of a lived experience. It is of paramount importance to mention in this respect that Grierson specifies and defines some essential guiding principles for the documentary. In this context, he evidently argues that documentary film is a

new and vital art form. The studio films largely ignore this possibility of opening up the screen on the real world. They photograph acted stories against artificial backgrounds. Documentary would photograph the living scene and the living story.<sup>31</sup>

As a matter of a fact, Grierson here contrasts documentaries with studio films in the sense that he presents documentaries as having the observational power to bring about a new form of art. Besides this, the characters and the scenes in documentary films are taken from the actual world, unlike studio films where actors or characters seem to be professional. For him, this would provide people or viewers with better opportunities for interpreting the material presented, be it a living story or a living scene. Unlike film studios, documentaries have the capability to capture real aspects and parts of life experience. In addition to this,

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<sup>31</sup> - John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary", *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 146-47

he regards the material taken from the world as a reflection of reality, capable of capturing unplanned and spontaneous behaviors. In brief, “The documentary is nothing more than a creative treatment of actuality”<sup>32</sup> as Grierson says.

What is more important is that as documentary film immediately began to participate in anthropology, war, colonialism, imperialism, feminism and many of other different discourses, the spectators and the photographic community in general started to question its supposed neutrality and so called transparent truthfulness.<sup>33</sup> To endorse this idea, the period of the First World War and later on the Second World War are seen as two fundamental periods that “gave a huge boost to documentaries when they became effective vehicles for *propaganda*”<sup>34</sup> (my emphasis). To clarify more, both parties, during First and Second World War, made an effective use of propaganda in their films and documentaries in order to frame the views and perceptions of their people.

Propaganda was used abundantly to convey social and political messages to the people. The idea here is that propaganda becomes the most common feature that documentary films adopt or share. This is why, filmmakers attempt to construct and more importantly to manipulate and to control reality through adopting deliberate processes of arrangement, selection and association. In this context, the assessment of the documentary film should be seen as a structure of a social and political critique as well as ideology and more precisely propaganda

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<sup>32</sup> - Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> - Andrew Walker, *Photo Albums: Images of Time and Reflections of Self*, (Columbia: Stephens College, 1989), p. 155.

<sup>34</sup> - Ekpenyong Ebok, “The Documentary Film Art and The Truth Question”, in *Global Journal of Humanities*, (Vol. 6, No. 1&8, 2007), p. 27-31.

which was quickly accepted and acknowledged by filmmakers. Through the employment of propaganda, truth is being constantly manipulated by power structures.<sup>35</sup> This is confirmed by Jowett when he said clearly that “truth does not separate propaganda from “moral forms” because propaganda uses truth, half-truth, and limited truth.”<sup>36</sup> This manipulation of the truth through propaganda is mainly delivered in several communication forms such as television, advertisements, social media and more importantly documentary films. In fact, these forms tend to construct certain beliefs and maneuver the perception of the truth which cannot be divorced from moral beliefs as Jowett says.

Documentary films are perceived as essential tools for any government vigorously searching for the mobilization and the control of its people. In other words, documentary films are considered as efficient and influential means of disseminating propaganda about people and especially about Muslim women. Their power stem from their capability to denigrate the enemy and at the same time emphasize the astonishing traits of a country and its people. According to Jowett,

Propaganda represents the work of large organizations or groups to win over the public for special interests through a massive orchestration of attractive conclusions packaged to conceal both their persuasive purpose and lack of sound supporting reasons.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> - Garth Jowett, and O'Donnell Victoria L, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Sage Publications, Inc. 2012), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> - Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> - Ibid, p. 3.

In the light of this previous quote, it could be said that propaganda is seen as a strategic instrument used by governments and other organizations to influence people's beliefs and more importantly to shape and frame their opinions. The fact that propaganda "conceals its persuasive purpose" means that it functions through subtle and more significantly through secret transmission of ideas and values.

Documentary films are the effective instruments to serve that purpose. To put it differently, in order for the documentary film to be efficient, the purpose of propaganda should be fulfilled which is "to convince, to win over and to convert; it has therefore to be convincing, viable and truthful within its own remit."<sup>38</sup> This is done through the manipulation of slogans, images along with ideas for the purpose of persuading and orienting people towards adopting a certain view on a particular issue. This is why, John Grierson evidently states that "I look on cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist."<sup>39</sup> As a matter of fact, this is a clear and strong confession made by the filmmaker John Grierson. He admits that he is a propagandist and that filmmakers tend to use cinema or documentary films for propagandist purposes. This means that filmmakers produce their documentaries with the intention to propagate a certain ideology and transmit specific notions about the issue they deal with, be it social or political in our case about Muslim women. In other words, the production of a documentary film often "entails the selection from a variety of facts only which vehemently articulates and strengthens the propagandists viewpoint."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> - Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> - John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 16

<sup>40</sup> - Essays UK, "Documentary Films as a Tool of Governmental Propaganda Media Essay", published on 23rd, March 2015, retrieved on July from <http://www.ukessays.com/essays/media/documentary-films>.

Documentary film is seen as historically significant because it provides an insight into the social history of the world by visually depicting and portraying the effects of defining moments that include colonialism and imperialism as well. In fact, there are many ongoing questions about the different aspects of the documentary film and more importantly questions about its relationship with reality. In this respect, reality is never to be described or to be documented authentically as it is mainly manipulated and controlled by the filmmaker in order to serve a specific vision. The same notion could be applied on the definitions of documentary film. There is no clear cut and precise definition to what a documentary film is.

It is of extreme importance to note that a documentary film does not have a particular and exclusively evident definition as there are various important ways of interpreting and defining the concept. In other words, it could be said that it is in fact a variegated discourse as there are a range of types of documentary films. The reason behind this resides in the fact that the documentary film is profoundly grounded in a political discourse. Accordingly, the concept could have several academic definitions as it is fundamentally interpreted from different perceptions and more importantly from different ideological positions.

As it has been mentioned previously, John Grierson defines documentary film as “the creative treatment of actuality”, giving importance to creativity and interpretation. A documentary film for him attempts to represent the real world in a creative art form. Besides this, his definition aims in fact to educate people

and to inform them about different social issues. In the same context, Malene Soegaard in her article entitled “What is a Documentary?”, she defines documentary as “a film that is an attempt, in one fashion or another, to show reality as it really is” or “to capture life as it naturally appears.”<sup>41</sup> In the light of this, one assumes that documentary film is a kind of reflection of reality, a film that is capable of capturing real life as she claims. Contrary to what this definition suggests, the theorist Patricia Aufderheid strongly refutes this definition by saying that documentaries cannot reflect life as it is because she thinks

that is precisely the problem; documentaries are about real life; they are not real life. They are not even windows onto real life. They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom, and for what purpose.<sup>42</sup>

According to this, a documentary film is seen as a genre which attempts to represent and more importantly to construct “real” people, activities and events. In consequence, viewers or spectators expect to be exposed to trustworthy events and scenes. However, these expectations are frustrated and disturbed by the fact that a documentary film does not present people as they are but it does

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<sup>41</sup> - Malene Soegaard, “What is A Documentary?” (Sept 11, 2009), retrieved on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015 from <http://suite101.com/article/what-is-a-documentary-a147555>.

<sup>42</sup> - Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

represent them and reconstruct them in accordance with what the filmmaker wants them to be.

The theorist Nichols Bill also suggests another definition of documentary film and says that “documentaries offer us a likeness or depiction of the world that bears a recognizable familiarity.”<sup>43</sup> This means that documentaries could bear a resemblance to reality, capable of providing the audience with real events that are close to theirs. In other words, documentaries take actual people and actual events and problems from the real world and then present them in a visual form. However, documentaries here are not equal substitute for the world out there; rather they are representations of it.

In her article “Documentary Notes”, Joanna Czachor defines a documentary film as the following, “The term ‘documentary’ stems from the verb ‘to document’ – to convey information on the basis of proof and evidence to support it.”<sup>44</sup> The documentary film here is mainly produced for didactic purposes as its main target is to inform and to provide the audience with different pieces of information. It is an attempt to transform a specific material raw that could be an event or a phenomenon and interprets it in a way which fits the instructive objectives of the film. The notion here is that the informative purposes are seen as an indispensable element in the production of a documentary film. Without implementing this instructive purpose, the documentary film could be emptied from its function.

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<sup>43</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p 2.

<sup>44</sup> - Joanna Czachor, “Documentary Notes”, (Sept 20, 2010), retrieved on Nov 20th, 2015 from <http://joannaczachor.blogspot.com/2010/09/documentary-notes-codes-and-conventions.html>.

Therefore, the importance and the magnitude given to the educational purposes are perceived as primary and inherently related to the assumption or rather the function of the documentary film.

This filmmaking tradition is in fact in a continuous process of change and development. It is on the process of evolving according to the cultural and the social context in which it is produced. For this reason, the theorist and the writer Nichols Bill patently states that the documentary film is a concept “without clear boundaries”<sup>45</sup> or restrictions. According to his explanation, it could be assumed that the politics or the idea of documentary is never fixed or stable but always changes and develops regarding time and space. This is clearly confirmed by Nichols Bill who affirms that “Documentary film practice is an arena in which things change.”<sup>46</sup>

The documentary filmmaking practice changes mainly due to the vision and to the ideology that individual filmmakers and sometimes collective institutions have of the works they are producing. This is why, it is of extreme importance to mention that any analysis or examination of documentary films should be linked to the notions of representation, power and domination. It is a discursive practice which is mainly and deeply related to the notions of power and ideology as it is produced within this framework. To endorse this idea, the theorist Carl Plantinga puts it in clear terms that

We must...take definitions seriously, because  
defining the documentary is often connected

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<sup>45</sup> - Cited in Roberta Sapino, “What is a Documentary Film: Discussion of the Genre”, (University of Turin, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, (Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 21.

with issues of power and control. Definitions often promote preferred uses of non-fiction film, or foreground characteristics thought to be desirable or “proper.” What various groups think non-fiction films *are* determines in part which films are funded, find distribution and receive recognition.<sup>47</sup>

In the light of this passage, it could be deduced that the notion of power is in fact profoundly associated with the practice of documentary film as well as the practice of defining the work. This is to say, a documentary film could be seen as a reflection work or more precisely as an embodiment of a certain ideology. This is primarily done through the adoption of processes of manipulation, selection and construction as well as employing other devices which are seen as essential elements in the production of documentary films. All are used and employed to convey particular ideas and more significantly ideological notions in order to serve the interests of some groups, institutions or the state. This idea is defended clearly by Jessica Silby who detectably observes that

The history of documentary film, specifically, teaches us that from its beginnings the genre took the form of *a collaboration between the filmmaker and the state*.<sup>48</sup>(my emphasis).

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<sup>47</sup> - Cited in John Arthur Little in “The Power and Potential of Performative Documentary Film”, (Bozeman, Montana State University, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> - Jessica Silby in “Filmmaking in the Precinct House and the Genre of Documentary Film”, in *Journal of The Law and The Arts*, Vol. 29, N. 2 (Columbia: Northeastern University School of Law, 2006), p. 112.

Therefore, a documentary film does not present the subjects or the objects genuinely or authentically but it does represent them in a way to respond to the filmmaker's expectations with the cooperation and the collaboration of the state he or she represents.

It is very essential here to point out that the various definitions of a documentary film should not be conceived and perceived as purely constricted, limited rules, but as different poles and trends of attraction in a constant debate and discussion. This is of course is attributed to the complex nature of the documentary film whose intricacy could encompass the richness of documentary film as a genre and more significantly as a discursive medium. In this respect, Nichols Bill in his book *Introduction to Documentary* describes documentary as “a fuzzy concept”<sup>49</sup> in the sense that it does not yield to one, homogeneous definition but it is seen as a variegated discourse that is open to other different perceptions. This is confirmed by Eitzen Dirk when he clearly states that

Still, the definition of the term remains a vexed and controversial issue, not just among film theorists but also among people who make and watch documentaries.<sup>50</sup>

It is worth mentioning that a documentary film is an efficient and a capable medium of engaging in social and more precisely in political and cultural issues. Thus, documentary film in this thesis is dealt with as an

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<sup>49</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> - Eitzen Dirk, “When is Documentary? Documentry as a Mode of Reception”, in *Cinema Journal*, 35, NO 1, (University of Texas Press, Fall 1995), p. 81.

examination of reality that is not reality itself but rather is a representation of it. It is a representation through which processes of manipulation and construction are employed in order to convey and to transmit particular hidden meanings and specific ideological notions.

Since there are multiple ways of defining a documentary film, the concept also is characterized by its different types of modes that are adopted by filmmakers. These discursive modes help filmmakers approach the subjects in a way to persuade viewers of the content being exposed. The following section will help identify the main documentary modes and the techniques filmmakers implement in order to produce documentary films. Also, it will shed light on the debate surrounding these modes that resides in the question of whether or not these modes reveal “the truth” or rather deforms reality.

## **B- The Discursive Modes of a Documentary Film**

As it has been pointed out before, documentary film is seen as a field of investigation and research that is exceedingly assumed to be contentious and debatable. To put it differently, it is a structure and a form of film that is produced to serve particular interests and more specifically to respond to an audience expectation of showing what is called “the truth”. The documentary film is mainly made to fabricate specific meanings and to promote certain ideological notions and more importantly to construct or to work within a certain discourse. As a matter of a fact, this is done according to the vision of the filmmaker and how he or she wants to present or more precisely to represent the footage or the subjects of the documentary.

A documentary film is seen as mode of representation and more importantly dealt with as a discursive medium. The idea here is that a documentary film can provide the spectators with a constructed version of life that they might be read it as a kind of truthful meaning or depiction of reality. In this context, the documentary film relies on some specific conventions and employs particular techniques so as to convey meaning.

One of the famous scholars and theorists of documentary films Nichols Bill who defines and identifies in his book *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* four major distinct discursive modes which are conceived as the prevailing models in this field. The significance of these modes essentially stem from the fact that they “stand out as the dominant organizational

patterns around which most texts are structured.”<sup>51</sup>These are the “expository, observational, interactive and reflexive.”<sup>52</sup>These modes of representations are often believed to be employed in the production of documentary films and more importantly are perceived “as basic ways of organizing texts in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions.”<sup>53</sup>According to his perspective, these modes are essentially derived from common components such as textual configurations, shared ideologies in addition to common assumptions. They are in fact styles which give rise to more contemporary methods and techniques of documentary. In other words, these modes of representation are conceived or rather constitute what Nichols calls “the voice of documentary”. With reference to this idea, Nichols Bill explains that

By "voice" I mean something narrower than style: that which conveys to us a sense of a text's social point of view, of how it is speaking to us and how it is organizing the materials it is presenting to us. In this sense "voice" is not restricted to any one code or feature such as dialogue or spoken commentary. Voice is perhaps akin to that intangible, moiré-like pattern formed by the unique interaction of all a film's codes, and it applies to all modes of documentary.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> - Nichols Bill, “Documentary Modes of Representation”, in *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>52</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>- Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> - Nichols Bill, “The Voice of Documentary”, *Film Quarterly*, (University of California Press, 36(3), 1983), p. 248-49.

In the light of this previous quote, it could be said that there is recognition of indefinable elements that are amalgamated and put together within documentary films. The idea here is that voice is not restricted to one code; rather it works and collaborates with other essential elements so as to transmit meaning. In addition to this, voice of documentary is capable of conveying messages and ideological notions which are adopted by the filmmaker and according to the mode they choose.

The expository mode is one of the earliest documentary films which were established during the period of 1920's.<sup>55</sup> Though it might be perceived as old-fashioned mode, it is still widely used and highly influential. This discursive mode refers to the preference of filmmakers to adopt the role of the narrator or the reporter in order to address the spectator in a direct way. This is confirmed by Nichols when he clearly states that "The expository mode addresses the viewer directly, with titles or voices."<sup>56</sup> This is achieved through the use of the voice-over narration or more precisely what is called the "voice-of-God commentary".<sup>57</sup> A device as such is used mainly to help interpreting and commenting on the issues or the subjects of the documentary film. In fact, this is evidently confirmed by Nichols Bill who states that an expository documentary "adopt either a voice-of-God commentary (the speaker is heard but never seen), or sometimes "utilize a voice-of-authority commentary (the speaker is heard and also seen)."<sup>58</sup> This is to say, the storyteller in this mode is heard while describing

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<sup>55</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> - Ibid, p. 105.

<sup>57</sup> - Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> - Ibid., p. 105.

and speaking but never seen as they do not take part or participate in the events. Also, there are other films in which the narrator could be seen while talking and introducing the issue or the footage. To put it differently, the narrator's role is only to explain and to comment on issues, scenes and events that take place in the documentary without necessarily being watched. In this context, it could be assumed that the Voice of god commentary is employed to function as an apparatus to address and mainly to interpret the supporting imagery for the spectator. To emphasize this, Nichols conceives commentary as an indispensable element in documentary film as it is

(...) presumed to be of a higher order than the accompanying images. It comes from some place that remains unspecified but associated with objectivity or omniscience. The commentary, in fact, represents the perspective or argument of the film.<sup>59</sup>

According to this quote, it might be deduced that commentary represents the perspective of the film as it is capable of providing insight into the motivations and the feelings of all the characters. To clarify more, narration and images are classically used with this mode to advance a specific and a precise perspective or argument. This is to say, the voice of god commentary runs over photographs and accompany the footage to help the argument be developed so that to be

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<sup>59</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 107.

easily understood by the viewers. This is clearly explained in his book *Introduction to Documentary* in which Nichols admits that

(...) Images serve a supporting role. They illustrate, illuminate, evoke, or act in counterpoint to what is said. The commentary is typically presented as distinct from the images of the historical world that accompany it. It serves to organize these images and make sense of them just as a written caption guides our attention and emphasizes some of the many meanings and interpretations of a still image.<sup>60</sup>

In the light of this passage, one assumes that the narrator or the “voice of god” narrative guides directly and orients the spectators in order to build up an argument or a point of view about the social, the political as well as the historical world. Its significance stems from the fact that “it has the capacity to judge actions in the historical world without being caught up in them.”<sup>61</sup> This is why, this mode is believed to be descriptive and informative since it produces an argument about the historical world. As Nichols says such “documentaries rely heavily on an informing logic carried by the spoken word.”<sup>62</sup> This means that the importance of the documentary relies mainly on the use of language by the narrator or the reporter. Accordingly, language is no longer seen as an innocent

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<sup>60</sup> - Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> - Ibid.

speech but perceived as a discursive medium as well. The idea here is that the filmmaker selects specific words and particular speech in order to convey a message. This message is essentially related to the vision or rather the ideology of the filmmaker.

There is always a filmmaker whose argument or point of view is being captured by the camera and delivered to the audience through language. In this respect, Stella Bruzzi clarifies this notion by saying that

The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not.<sup>63</sup>

In the light of this, it becomes clear that the documentarist goes through processes of manipulation and arrangements so as to produce a documentary film. This does not mean that the documentary genre is seen as fiction from the beginning. On the contrary, all films whether they are based on real or actual characters and events are perceived as constructs. They are products made according to specific fundamental choices which themselves determine the form and the focus of the story being narrated. In other words, the choice of narrative,

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<sup>63</sup> - Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

plot, characters and the selection of who to exclude and who to include in the documentary film, makes it doubtful and questionable in terms of depicting or dealing with the “truth”.

It should be mentioned that viewers in the expository film feel that this form of documentaries helps not only in discussing and approaching an issue or a topic but also in providing a solution to a problem as it is the case in *Honor Violence Rising In The West* documentary film which is going to be analyzed later in the second part of this paper. What is more important here is that the voice of the narrator endeavors to build a sort of believability through adopting a policy of impartiality or neutrality and more precisely to give the audience the impression of “truthfulness” and “authenticity” which are thrown into doubt. In accordance with this, it could be deduced that the commentary voice is not only an instrument which conducts and orients the audience towards having a certain perception but also has the capacity to produce and more importantly to construct particular meanings. This is confirmed by Nichols when he states clearly that

The professional commentator’s official tone, like the authoritative manner of news anchors and reporters, strives to build a sense of credibility from qualities such as distance, neutrality, disinterestedness, or omniscience.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press 2001), p. 107.

In accordance with this previous quote, a documentary film can tell a story from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who is supposed to know everything that happened and will happen. The narrator in this case speaks from a superior position so that to give the impression that he or she is impartial and unbiased.

In addition, as the quote above reveals, the omniscient narrator has the ability to create detachment and a distance between the viewer and the events being filmed. This might help the audience understand the themes in a clear way. To put it differently, the narrator strives and struggles to build believability through an impersonal and objective voice. In other words, the narrator's voice becomes the basic element of the documentary as it does represent the perspective of the film. As Nichols puts it "The voice of documentary, then, is the means by which this particular point of view or perspective becomes known to us."<sup>65</sup>

Unlike the expository mode, the observational one is said to appear in the late of the fifties or as Nichols clearly states

(Observational filmmaking may have begun in the 1960s, for example, but it remains an important resource in the 1990s, long after the period of its greatest prevalence.)<sup>66</sup>

As the quote reveals, there was an increasing inquisitiveness among filmmakers about what possibly could be disclosed through the simple observation of reality. This in fact has paved the way towards the emergence of what is called Direct Cinema or observational cinema. In this context, it could be said that this

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<sup>65</sup> - Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> - Ibid., p. 33.

type of cinema is fundamentally concerned with the recording of characters, places and events without being aware of the presence of the camera. In other words, direct cinema operates within what Nichols Bill calls observational documentary or filmmaking.

This discursive mode, as its name suggests, relies mostly on the technique of observation. This means that this mode is mainly conducted in reference to the notion that the filmmaker is capable to portray “real life” without his or her intervention. The idea here is that the camera is used to follow the subjects around without shaping or guiding them toward behaving in a certain way or intervening in their activities. To clarify more this idea, the historical world or the world out there can be mediated in a “noninterventionist” way by the filmmaker. According to Nichols,

The observational mode stresses the *nonintervention* of the filmmaker. Such films cede 'control' over the events that occur in front of the camera more than any other mode. Rather than constructing a temporal framework, or rhythm ... observational films rely on editing to enhance the impression of lived or real time.<sup>67</sup>(my emphasis).

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<sup>67</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1991), p. 38.

In the light of this previous passage, one deduces that this mode enables the filmmaker to give the impression that he or she has not intervened as they do not appear in front of the camera. It is not just about the function of recording that is important there but it is also about selecting, presenting and editing techniques. The implication here is that the selecting and editing are employed to enhance the perspective of a lived experience or time by screening the events as they occur in “real” life.

The filmmaker turns into a neutral observer and that the documentary film in this case “functions as a window onto the world”<sup>68</sup> as Bill further claims. What is more significant is that the observational mode does not rely on narration as the main device used to convey meanings. The reason behind this is that such documentaries rely on the spectator’s acceptance as well as the participation of the people being filmed. This is why, Bill states clearly that the documentary film strives to represent the real and by following the method or the technique of observation, audiences are expected to identify with the subjects filmed as if

We look in on life as it is lived. Social actors engage with one another, ignoring the filmmakers. Often the characters are caught up in pressing demands or a crisis of their own. This requires their attention and draws it away from the presence of filmmakers.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 132.

<sup>69</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 111.

To clarify more this notion, social actors or the subjects are behaving in a natural and spontaneous way. They are engaging and interacting with one another without being confronted with the presence of the filmmaker. To put it differently, the camera while following the subjects and recording the events and activities should basically stay impartial, independent and more specifically remains “as unobtrusive as possible, mutely recording events as they happen.”<sup>70</sup>

This is mainly done with

No voice-over commentary, no supplementary music or sound effects, no intertitles, no historical reenactments, no behavior repeated for the camera, and not even any interviews.<sup>71</sup>

As a matter of a fact, the purpose behind the absence of such devices is chiefly intended to seek “truthfulness”, “objectivity” and more importantly allowing the viewers to come up with their own impressions and their conclusions about the film. In this regard, the observational mode struggles to make the involvement of the filmmaker invisible in order to search for some “objective” truth in the ostensibly genuine and un-manipulated events taking place in front of the camera. In this respect, the audience or spectators in general feel that they are forced and more significantly compelled to discover the fundamental message that the filmmaker wants to transmit. Here the role of the filmmaker resides in the fact that he or she only observes and notices the different actions, behaviors

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<sup>70</sup>- “Documentary Mode”, Retrieved on Nov 17. 2015, from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary\\_mode](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_mode).

<sup>71</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 110.

and relationships that take place in front of the camera. This is done in order to reinforce the notion that documentary film is about real life. In other words, this mode endeavors to enhance a sense of objectivity and spontaneity through the adoption of some essential noninterventionist methods. This is strongly confirmed by Bill when he states that

Observational cinema affords the viewer an opportunity to look in on and overhear something of the lived experience of others, to gain some sense of the distinct rhythms of everyday life, to see the colors, shapes, and spatial relationships among people and their possessions, to hear the intonation, inflection, and accents that give a spoken language its "grain" and that distinguish one native speaker from another.<sup>72</sup>

In accordance with this, it could be assumed that the camera becomes an instrument whose role is to stir and to provoke situations and responses as it fundamentally “becomes a kind of psychoanalytic *stimulant* which lets people do things they wouldn’t otherwise do.”<sup>73</sup>(my emphasis). Consequently, viewers will have the opportunity to identify with the people filmed, recognize the different special relationships that govern them, observe their behaviors and hear

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<sup>72</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, p. 42.

<sup>73</sup>- Micheal Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 127.

the language they use. To put it differently, this soundless, unobtrusive camera serves as the eye and the ear of the viewer as it makes them think that they are authentically sharing experiences with participants.

This observational mode is different from the other discursive mode which is the interactive one. This mode of representation sometimes is referred to as the participatory mode in which the filmmaker and the subjects are both directly engaged. The idea here is that the filmmaker takes part of the activities and the events being recorded either through the use of interviews or other forms. In other words, the filmmaker's presence is evident as he or she participates in the activities of the subjects and closely observes their behavior. This notion is defended by Nichols who clearly states that the filmmaker or

The researcher goes into the field, participates in the lives of others, gains a corporeal or visceral feel for what life in a given context is like, and then reflects on this experience, using the tools and methods of anthropology or sociology to do so.<sup>74</sup>

In the light of this statement, it could be said the filmmaker is deeply involved in the work of the subjects by mainly interacting, communicating and reacting with the other participants. Accordingly, the job of the filmmaker becomes similar to the work of the anthropologist whose main concern is to deeply participate and

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<sup>74</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 115-16.

engage in the people's culture and way of life. This is endorsed by Bill when he says that "Documentary filmmakers also go into the field; they, too, live among others and speak about or represent what they experience."<sup>75</sup> This means that the documentary filmmaker is also a researcher who goes into the field, lives among a certain community, participates in their ongoing activities, attends their ceremonies and more importantly records observations. In other words, the documentary filmmaker utilizes the method of participant observation which is used widely in social sciences such as anthropology and sociology. This does not mean that he or she is seen as only

a player in a particular social milieu but also fulfilling the role of researcher—taking notes; recording voices, sounds, and images; and asking questions that are designed to uncover the meaning behind the behaviors.<sup>76</sup>

In accordance with this, it could be assumed that the objective behind this participatory approach is that the filmmaker aims at revealing the so called "the truth" and present it to the audience. This is essentially produced through the usage of some methods and techniques or rather what Bill calls "interventionist tactics" such as the interview styles. As a matter of a fact, the tactic of interviews is conceived as the underpinning for the participatory mode as it is

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<sup>75</sup> - Ibid., 116.

<sup>76</sup> - "What is Participant Observation? Participant Observation", in *Sage Journals*, Retrieved on 24/02/2016, from [http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/48454\\_ch\\_3.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/48454_ch_3.pdf). p. 75.

believed to be a trustworthy source of knowledge about the subject of the documentary.

The significance of this interventionist tactic, which is the interview, stems from the fact that it “(...) stands as one of the most common forms of encounter between filmmaker and subject in participatory documentary.”<sup>77</sup> To put it differently, interviews are the most essential constituent of exploratory programs such as news, talk shows and journalism. For this reason, they serve as the convincing apparatus which is intended fundamentally to persuade viewers of the documentary’s authenticity. In this respect, the filmmaker’s presence is seen in the documentary image and heard in the documentary sound while engaging with the subjects. Therefore, it could be assumed that

The filmmaker’s voice could be heard as readily as any others, not subsequently, in an organizing voice over commentary, but on the spot, in face to face encounters with others.<sup>78</sup>

In the light of this quote, it could be said that the filmmaker instantly engages in and addresses the other subjects as he or she becomes a fundamental character in the documentary film. To put it differently, this participatory mode tends essentially to make the argument of the filmmaker more patent and more importantly it tends to involve the filmmaker in the story or rather in the discourse which is being constructed. In this context, this mode gives the

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<sup>77</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 121.

<sup>78</sup> - Waititi Kahurangi, “Modes of Representation in Māori Documentary”, (Intern Research Report 6, Mai Review, 2006), p. 3.

filmmaker the opportunity to interact, engage with the participants and more significantly gives him or her freedom to communicate with the people and the events taking place in front of the camera. This is strongly endorsed by Nichols who states in clear terms that the filmmaker has the possibility to be a social actor in the film. In this case, the documentarist

steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other.<sup>79</sup>

The idea here is that the filmmaker is no longer that character who hides behind the camera but someone who is evidently involved with the people and events being recorded. Therefore, the spectators will be able to effectively engage and be part of the language or rather the ideology communicated between the filmmaker and the participants. More notably, viewers will have the chance to understand what objective the documentary is intended to serve and what message or point of view does the filmmaker want to convey.

An example of this mode could be *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* and *Women Truth Behind The Veil* which are going to be analyzed in the second part of this paper. In both documentaries, the narrator becomes an important active actor whose role is to travel and to investigate about the truth of Muslim women and about the perception of the Muslim veil from the perspective of Muslim women themselves.

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<sup>79</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 116.

The fourth documentary mode that Nichols Bill suggests is the reflexive mode. It is one of the discursive modes which are identified later by Nichols Bill. Unlike the participatory mode in which the historical world is being negotiated, communicated and discussed between the filmmaker and the subject, in reflexive mode “the processes of negotiation between filmmaker and viewer become the focus of attention for the reflexive mode.”<sup>80</sup> This means that viewers become part and parcel of the representation being conveyed about the historical world. In accordance with this, this mode mainly centers its attention on the operation of filming to make the spectator more conscious of the filmmaking process. What is more important is that the nature of reflexive films is a constructed one. This is why, such documentaries tend to show the viewers and convey to them the notion that the documentary is not necessarily revealing the "truth" but just a construction of it. To support this idea, Bill states clearly that

we now attend to *how* we represent the historical world as well as to *what* gets represented. Instead of *seeing through* documentaries to the world beyond them, reflexive documentaries ask us to *see documentary* for what it is: a construct or representation.<sup>81</sup> (original emphasis).

In the light of this, it could be deduced that these documentaries go through a structural assessment of the documentary form itself, underlining a very significant component which is the constructed nature of both film and reality.

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<sup>80</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 125.

<sup>81</sup> - *Ibid.*, 125.

This means that the objective is to make spectators or viewers think about the different methods which documentaries represent or rather construct reality. To put it differently, the viewer is invited to witness the process of production, and the presence of the documentary maker in the various situations and events which he or she is representing. To confirm this, Bill states that

These films set out to heighten our awareness of the problems of representing others as much as they set out to convince us of the authenticity or truthfulness of representation itself.<sup>82</sup>

This discursive mode attempts to advance its trustworthiness and sincerity not through adopting an impartial and objective voice, but rather through revealing a certain ideological position expressed by that voice. The idea here is that the documentary maker tends essentially to expose the process of arrangements and manipulation of reality. This is done through the selection of characters, issues, and the adoption of a certain ideological position as well as revealing the production process.

The filmmaker in this documentary mode is seen and his or her presence is recognized by viewers. In addition, this discursive mode relies mainly on interviews which represent an important element in the documentary. The use of interviews is intended to distribute information among characters as well as between the filmmaker and the subjects. The objective here is to disclose and

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<sup>82</sup> - Ibid, p. 126.

expose not only life activities, but also some meticulous aspects of characters, which are under the control of the theme of the documentary.

It should be noted that a documentary film could incorporate more than one mode and share many techniques with others. In other words, each mode diverge in the way that filmmaker tends to use it. However, these modes also could be integrated and be amalgamated in various ways. This is why, Bill clearly confirms that

A film identified with a given mode need not be so entirely. A reflexive documentary can contain sizable portions of observational or participatory footage; an expository documentary can include poetic or performative segments. The characteristics of a given mode function as a *dominant* in a given film: they give structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organization.<sup>83</sup> (original emphasis).

In the light of this, it could be said that though these discursive modes existed and emerged in different periods of time, they still share common techniques and methods. To put it differently, there is no film that could solely depend on one mode but these modes in fact interact and overlap with each other in the documentary film.

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<sup>83</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 100.

Following Nichols Bill chronological division of documentary modes, there are two other modes which are still undefined the poetic and the performative. In this respect, it is of paramount importance to mention that these modes have been excluded from this discussion as they essentially lay emphasis on subjectivity over the possibility of objective knowledge. In addition, they are not perceived nor intended to be objective depictions of historical world. Rather they are conceived as reactions to the idea of objectivity. This is endorsed by Bill when he strongly states that “Performative documentary underscores the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasizing its subjective and affective dimensions.”<sup>84</sup> This is the same as the poetic mode that in fact tends to represent reality “in terms of a series of fragments, subjective impressions, incoherent acts, and loose associations.”<sup>85</sup>

It is of supreme significance to state and to highlight the fact that these discursive modes of representation are constructed techniques that give birth to specific meanings. In this context, it is very essential to take into consideration the intention of the documentary and more significantly to dissect the methods and the procedures that are used to facilitate communication with audiences. This is why, the production of the documentary film is principally dependent on the ideological tendencies and the political positions of filmmakers. It is these ideological visions that motivate the filmmaker to “place them within the same discursive formation at a given historical moment.”<sup>86</sup> To put it differently, these factors serve as rules that frame and govern how documentaries are filmed,

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<sup>84</sup> - Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>85</sup> - Ibid., p. 103

<sup>86</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, p. 32.

arranged and edited. Therefore, a documentary film is not a genuine or authentic depiction or reproduction of reality but it is a manipulation or rather a construction and a representation of what it seems to be “real”. The following section will elaborate more on the politics of representation in relation to documentary films

## C- The Concept of Representation and Documentary Film

As it has been mentioned previously, the predominant assumption resides in the fact that the most important function of the documentary film is to disclose the “truth”. Dealing with reality suggests dealing with truths, rather than the truth. Through the use of the camera, audiences think that documentary film is capable of revealing truths about subjects, issues and events. As a matter of a fact, the notions of objectivity and truthfulness of the documentary film have long been debated and still represent one of the most contentious topics about filmmaking. A documentary film does not deal with the truth as it is but it does represent it and distort it in a way to serve and respond to specific expectations and more importantly to satisfy the filmmaker’s vision or ideology.

As Nichols Bill states

(...) documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a *representation* of the world we already occupy. It stands for a particular view of the world, one we may never have encountered before even if the aspects of the world that is represented are familiar to us.<sup>87</sup>(original emphasis).

In the light of this, documentary film is seen as a representation through which subjects, events and the historical world are being constructed. Documentaries are not reproduction of reality; rather they are a representation of the world. The

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<sup>87</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 20.

fact that they do not replicate reality “gives them a voice of their own.”<sup>88</sup>The voice here refers to the filmmaker whose role is to make audiences attentive to the fact that there is someone is putting forward his or her argument about something. In this respect, everything the spectators hear or see is part and parcel of the world that the filmmaker is inclined to discuss and more importantly to represent.

The filmmaker tends to propose and convey a point of view that represents his or her ideological vision, which in fact frames and forms the representation of reality. The voice is not only the technique being adopted but there are other techniques that contribute largely to the shaping of the work of representation. This in fact has to do with many disciplines and domains that attempt to convince people of their supposed “true discourse”. What is more important is that the compilation of tactics, techniques, procedures which are employed to convey a certain discourse, also embodies a place where power and knowledge coincide or encounter. They cannot be separated or isolated because

knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit

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<sup>88</sup> - Ibid., p 43.

rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.<sup>89</sup>

In the light of this, it could be assumed that power in fact depends on knowledge and knowledge as well depends on power. Both depend on each other and interact with one another. The documentary film is in fact seen as a discursive medium and more significantly should be examined as a form of representation and discourse.

The documentary film utilizes different methods, techniques, procedures, modes and tactics which are the basis of a network of relations. In accordance with this, filmmaking becomes a discipline or a domain in which knowledge is produced. It is a discipline that has its own system of producing a discourse or rather a regime of truth<sup>90</sup> as Foucault says. Truth here is produced, maintained, and regulated by a chain of procedures, techniques and mechanisms. They constitute a field and network of power relation that are capable of disseminating knowledge. At the same time, this knowledge tends to strengthen

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<sup>89</sup> - Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> - Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, (New York: Pantheon, 1972-1977), p. 133.

and more significantly induce effects of power. In this respect, truth is understood as system of procedures or as the strategic domain within which truth is essentially related and

(...) linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth.<sup>91</sup>

The idea here is that documentary film works as a mechanism of power for its ability to produce, regulate and distribute knowledge. This does not mean that it is satisfactory for the documentary to be solely described as a discursive medium, but the methods and the techniques of this discourse should also be carefully deciphered and critically deconstructed and examined. This means that the documentary does make a good use of crucial techniques so as to produce a certain discourse and create a kind of 'reality' through which the audience is invited to witness and sympathize with. They are used mainly so as to construct meaning and to convey particular notions about a certain issue or topic. In other words, a documentary film derives its power and influence from the use of three major techniques of power which are the image, the music or the sound and language. In fact, these three elements work together chiefly to create meaning, to endorse ideologies and to represent the subjects according to a certain point of view implemented by the filmmaker. The implication here is that a documentary

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<sup>91</sup> - Ibid, p. 133.

film is seen as a documentary text that needs to be analyzed and more importantly to be deconstructed.

A documentary film is one of the new media forms that has the ability to change perceptions, to change the structure of society and could be as manipulated as any other form of representation. In other words, documentary film relies fundamentally on the use of photography or images as they are powerful and influential discursive mediums. As Susan Sontag states

to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge-and therefore like power.<sup>92</sup>

This means that photographs are visual tools that produce knowledge about a specific topic, in our case about Muslim women, so as to inscribe certain ideologies and deliver specific meanings. They are not mere descriptions of a place or people. They are not simply innocent products that are shared by people. Rather, they are there in order to say something about the world. This idea is defended by the writer Terry Barrett who says clearly that “photographs are more than mere things”<sup>93</sup>, which means that they are pictorial fabrics that shape our knowledge and perception of things. The idea here is that photography has the capability to influence people, to make them change their perspectives of things and to replace them with new ones. In accordance with this, documentary photographs are utilized or employed to teach the viewers how to reflect on

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<sup>92</sup> - Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Rosetta Books LLC, 1977), p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> - Terry Barrett, “A Theoretical Construct for Interpreting Photographs”, *Studies in Art Education*, (Vol. 27. No.2. 1986), p. 55.

things, how to perceive them and how to act in accordance with them. In this conjuncture, Terry Barrett explains this process by saying that

It would be conceptually more accurate to see all photographs as more or less metaphorical in that a photograph always shows us X as Y, and attempts to have us see X as Y. In a strong sense of metaphor most photographs show us the subject as something; they show us a man as a laborer, a bureaucrat, or as a father, and attempt to persuade to see him as such (...). Finally, *all photographs are not so much “straight” as they are “manipulated”*, sometimes greatly and overtly, and sometimes less noticeably, but always importantly.<sup>94</sup> (my emphasis).

The assumption here is that photography could be as manipulated as any other form of representation. In other words, photographs go through a process of manipulation which starts from the production to the publication of a photograph. Documentary photographs can be manipulated and constructed to promote a certain ideology. They are not referential to the truth because they are fabricated so as to disseminate and circulate certain discourses and representations. As a matter of fact, they are produced and filtered through political and social colonial discourse in order to sustain the growth of a global culture.

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<sup>94</sup> - Ibid., p. 54.

The manipulation of photographs includes many aspects such as enhancing the quality of the image, the process of selection as well as positioning of the subjects. This is further clarified by the critic Geoffry Batchen who clearly asserts that the process of manipulation is essential in the production of photographs. He states that

(...) traditional photographs - the ones our culture has always put so much trust in - have never been “true” in the first place. Photographers intervene in every photograph they make, whether by orchestrating or directly interfering in the scene being imaged; by selecting, cropping, excluding, and in other ways making pictorial choices as they take the photograph; by enhancing, suppressing, and cropping the finished print in the darkroom; and, finally, by adding captions and other contextual elements to their image to anchor some potential meanings and discourage others.<sup>95</sup>

It becomes clear that the documentary maker resorts to this technique so that he or she could convey their message and their point of view in a clear form. Here , the filmmaker tends to select the subject, arrange the scene and utilize tools such as cropping, excluding and adding captions. To put it differently, all these tools are employed in an attempt to tell viewers that they see the truth. However, this

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<sup>95</sup> - Geofary Batchman, “Phantasm: Digital Imaging and the Death of Photography”, (San Francisco: Minor White, 1994), p. 48.

manipulation can only confirm that truth is being distorted and what is shown to the audience is a constructed version of reality.

It is obvious that photographs are the most powerful and the most influential communicator filmmakers possess. There are things that one cannot express in words or translate them into language but photographs can best demonstrate them. A documentary photograph could convey more than a thousand words, and it could also inspire a thousand words because it has the ability to refresh people's imaginations and help them waken their sense of understanding. As a matter of fact, the power documentary photographs own also could bewilder and perplex spectators. They can stop at a moment and start reflecting, contemplating and pondering about the meaning, the message, or the discourse that the documentary photograph tries to transmit. To put it differently, they try to decode, to decipher and to deconstruct the meaning embedded in the image. For this reason, documentary films that are going to be analyzed later on in this paper serve as cultural images or rather as cultural texts. This is confirmed by Victor Burgin when he states clearly that the lucidity or what he calls

the intelligibility of a photograph is no simple thing: *photographs are texts* inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourses,' but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself, the 'photographic text,' like any other, is the site of a complex 'intertextuality,' an overlapping series of

previous texts ‘taken for granted’ at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture.<sup>96</sup> (my emphasis).

The idea here is that the relationship of the image with the text is interconnected as they cannot be read in isolation. They are both carriers of ideology and they have the same function of the language system. In other words, documentary images have the same acts of speaking and writing as “these photographs are analogous to statements of facts in verbal language”<sup>97</sup> Barrett further explains.

Since images are similar to the practice of language, they are conceived and perceived as tools of power or as discursive practices as the French philosopher Michel Foucault believes. In this respect, it could be said that the producer or the filmmaker is really the only one who knows exactly what is going on when the documentary photograph is selected, arranged and put in a series of other images. However, the role of viewers and readers can only be limited to the involvement in the processes of interpretation, examination and analysis. This is revealed by Terry Barrett and Kenneth Marantz who evidently state in their book, *Photographs as Illustrations*, that

Like all forms of history, *the photograph is constructed and ought to be examined critically before it is accepted as truth.*<sup>98</sup> (my emphasis).

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<sup>96</sup>- Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd 1982), p. 144.

<sup>97</sup>- Terry Barrett, “A Theoretical Construct for Interpreting Photographs”, *Studies in Art Education*, (Vol. 27. No.2. 1986), p. 55.

<sup>98</sup>- Terry Barrett, and Kenneth Marantz, *Photographs as Illustrations*, (University of Ohio, Vol. 2. No. 4, Fall of 1989), p. 227.

Narration is also one of the most important components in the documentary film. It is perceived as another technique of power that documentary film relies on. Its importance and power stems from the fact that narration, voice over or speech is capable of convincing viewers and persuading them of a particular point of view. This is clarified by Nichols Bill who clearly asserts that

speech added to images is like captions added to pictures: they steer us toward one understanding and away from others within an arena of social interpretation where meaning is inevitably up for grabs.<sup>99</sup>

Speech here does not only refer to spoken words, conversations or voice-over. On the contrary, speech or narration refers to the entire perception that the filmmaker is using when creating the documentary. To put it differently, the voice of the documentary addresses audiences with all the resources reachable and available in the documentary. This is further confirmed when Nichols says “The voice of documentary speaks with all the means available to its maker.”<sup>100</sup> These means can refer to the arrangement and the selection of images and sounds which of course entail other techniques such as how the documentary is edited, how shots are cut and composed, the recording of sounds, the organization of scenes and events, the footage used, the commentary, the lighting, the sound effects, the commentary and the type of

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<sup>99</sup> - Quoted by Andrew V. Dickerson in “Nothing but The Truth and The Whole Truthiness: Examining Markers Of Authenticity In The Modern Documentary”, in *SJSU Scholar Works*, (San Jose State University), p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 46.

documentary mode that is chosen<sup>101</sup>. In other words, narration is perceived a discursive technique or medium that speaks to audiences through these tools and more importantly it conveys ideological messages through “the juxtaposition of interview and image that affirm or undercut what is said”<sup>102</sup>. All these means and techniques contribute largely to the shaping and to the framing of the representation of documentary film.

Documentary films play a very fundamental role in constructing and reconstructing our understanding of things because they provide an opportunity to investigate the relationship of visual images with notions of identity, class, gender, race, culture and politics. Therefore, documentaries are treated and approached as cultural documents and more importantly as modes of representation. Representation is the keyword in this respect as it is regarded as one of the most crucial key concepts in cultural research. The concept itself can be described in various different ways as it embodies a whole range of meanings and usages. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the concept of representation is defined as "An image, likeness, or reproduction in some manner of a thing".<sup>103</sup> This definition puts forward that the work of representation functions through its capability to bear a resemblance to an object or something else. “To represent” means to carry the name of a certain area or a group<sup>104</sup>. For example, people can represent their community, their sports team, or their country by shouting out, or wearing the same color of T-shirts or a specific piece of clothing. Furthermore, to represent means to loyally carry the

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<sup>101</sup> - Ibid, p 46.

<sup>102</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> - Mai Vukceovich, “Theories of Media”, (The University of Chicago, winter 2002).

<sup>104</sup> - “Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies: Decoding Cultural Oppression”, retrieved on Nov, 26 2015 from: [http://www.pineforge.com/upm\\_data/13286\\_Chapter\\_2\\_Web\\_Byte\\_\\_Stuart\\_Hall](http://www.pineforge.com/upm_data/13286_Chapter_2_Web_Byte__Stuart_Hall).

identity of an area or a group and more importantly, to do it with honor and to make others aware of it. As an example of this could be the veil as it is worn by Muslim women and perceived as the major, distinctive cultural aspect that identifies women as Muslims. The veil here becomes the piece of clothing or the distinctive feature that unifies the identity of Muslim women. In this conjuncture, it could be assumed that the process of representation becomes or turns into an expression and an experience of social solidarity and commonality<sup>105</sup>.

There is also an experience of power in representing. When you represent, it means that you are responsible of how other people see you and how they see your group or area. However, this is not always the case as documentary films do not represent the people or the objects loyally, but they seem to have power and take control over the depiction or the representation of people in the documentary film. In this regard, Solomon Godeau says in clear terms that “the camera produces representations – iconic signs translating the actual into the pictorial.”<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that a documentary photograph bears a likeness to reality, it is not an identical replacement for reality itself. Rather, it is a representation of reality or rather a distorted version of the real as it is affirmed by the filmmaker Michael Renov who clearly admits by saying “Yes, the camera *deforms*”<sup>107</sup>. Therefore, it could be assumed that filmmakers endeavor and strive

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<sup>105</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> - Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Who is Speaking thus? Some Questions about Documentary Photography Chapter”, in *Photography at The Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices*, Media & Society 4, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 169.

<sup>107</sup> - Micheal Renov, *The Subject of Documentary*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 127.

to make their intervention invisible. Efforts as such are fundamentally made in order to seek some transparency and more significantly some truthfulness. However, notions of truthfulness and objectivity are thrown into doubts and into questions. In other words, they are unattainable as the “camera deforms” reality.

The concept of representation illustrates a variety of interpretations and meanings. In this context, representation can be understood as a presentation produced not by giving an accurate picture of the object or the subject as it is but by representing it and more precisely re-fabricating it in a new shape. In early days, representation played a very important role in studying and understanding literature, aesthetics and semiotics<sup>108</sup>. Since then, it has developed

into a significant element to analyze the contemporary world’s creation audio visual as well as textual arts, such as films, museum exhibition, paintings.<sup>109</sup>

And of course documentary films, however, what is more important in this respect is that none of these representational forms are impartial because it is impossible to disassociate them from the norms, the culture and the politics that give birth to them. For instance, documentary films are cases in point of cultural limitations that put the pressure on the society’s effort to have power over different representations of Muslim women and modify them to uphold a set of European ideologies and principles.

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<sup>108</sup> - Renée Hoogland, “Representation in The Post-Colonial Analysis”, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 172.

<sup>109</sup> - Ibid.

The other explanation or definition given to representation is that it is one that represents or is represented as “A material image or figure; a reproduction in some material or tangible form.”<sup>110</sup> Contrary to what this explanation provides, the writer and the theorist Stuart Hall perceives representation as an act of construction rather than a mirror image or likeness. For example, the image of Muslim women in documentary films does not reflect or mirror what women look like, but it rather reconstructs their image in connection to how they are perceived in tradition and culture. Their representations come in different forms such as paintings, photographs, documentary films and others. They could take written forms as well like academic texts, journals, narratives and novels. All these forms are significant representations which in fact lead researchers to pose some important questions, how could one interpret or analyze the work of representation? To what extent representation could hold some truth in its content? In his analysis of the work of representation of the orient in *Orientalism*, Edward Said puts the emphasis on the fact that representations can never be true or realistic simply because

In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a re-presentation, or a representation. The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the

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<sup>110</sup> - Ann Marie Baldonado, “Representation”, in *Postcolonial Studies at Emory*, (Fall, 1996), retrieved on Dec 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as “the Orient.”<sup>111</sup>

In the light of what Edward Said mentioned in this passage, it could be assumed that representations can never truly be authentic, real or objective. Instead, they are seen and perceived as constructed images, images which more importantly necessitate a meticulous examination of their ideological content. In other words, behind the image there is an entire world of beliefs, values, ideas, and themes that must be decoded and cautiously deciphered. Therefore, representation turns into an act of an ideological practice that serves the specific interests of those who control the media.

It is within this framework that the following documentaries *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam, Submission, Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before it is Too Late* and *Honor Violence Rising in The West* are going to be analyzed. The idea here is that these documentaries are mainly produced and deeply filled with stereotypical representations that impute negative meanings to Muslim women. They are not meant to reflect and to describe their reality as it is but they are rather meant to construct a form of reality within which fake notions and ideologies are embedded.

In his book, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (1997), Stuart Hall sheds light on the relationship between politics,

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<sup>111</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 21.

culture, representation and the structures or the rules governing them. Hall approaches representation as the medium or the channel through which meaning is produced. He also assumes that objects, people, and events do not have stable, correct and accurate meanings. For him, meanings are fundamentally produced by human beings who are considered the effective participants in a specific culture and more significantly who have or who possess the power to make things mean or signify something. In accordance with this, Hall affirms in clear terms that

Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve *the use of language, of signs and images* which stand for or represent things. And surely it is *not a simple or straightforward process*<sup>112</sup>. (my emphasis).

According to this statement, it is clear that the work of representation is seen as a principal key factor by which a meaning is created and shared between members of a culture. It encompasses the use of language, signs, images and more notably the intent to represent things. The process of representation requires the understanding and the comprehension of the language as well as the notion of discourse. This means that representation entails a process of understanding of how language and systems of knowledge production work together in order to produce and particularly to circulate meanings. In this sense,

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<sup>112</sup> - Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (London: Open University Press, 1997, ed.), p. 15.

it could be said that language is created to produce meaning and to serve as a tool which helps people communicate. In addition, language provides people with the capability to envisage something or describe it, to symbolize concepts through objects. As a matter of a fact, language here embodies the function of the connector between the work of representation and meaning.

As Hall states “language is the privileged medium in which we ‘make sense’ of things, in which meaning is produced and exchanged.”<sup>113</sup> To put it differently, representation becomes the process or the medium through which these meanings work together so as to produce and spread certain meanings. This means that the meanings are forms of discourse that are constructed within the process of representation which is not a straightforward process as Hall says. Accordingly, he continues saying that

The relationship between things, concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is *what we call representation*<sup>114</sup>. (my emphasis).

In the light of this quote, it could be assumed that representation signifies that the filmmaker tends to use language, sounds, signs and images to represent something to other people. In this context, it could be said that we give things meaning by the way we are inclined to represent them. That meaning is constantly formed, produced and contained by language. It is perceived as a

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<sup>113</sup> - Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> - Ibid., p. 19.

representational practice which is principally created by the use of the process of signifying. To elucidate more, the real world or the world out there does not transmit meaning. On the contrary, the creation of meaning or its production depends chiefly on two dissimilar but more importantly interconnected systems of representation which are as the previous quote reveals language and concepts. To support this, Hall explains the notion of concept by saying that

(...) one could say then that the conceptual maps in our heads, which allow us to come to a sense of what is going on in the world, is itself a system of representation: our concepts, our way of representing the world.<sup>115</sup>

In accordance with this quote, it could be deduced that the idea of concepts or the process of conceptualizing is considered a representational system. The idea here is that concepts become “our mental representations which we carry around in our heads.”<sup>116</sup> They might possibly be constructed from concrete, tangible things or objects which we are recognized through our senses such as a table, a chair, or they might be abstract and intangible things which we are not directly noticed, sensed, or touched such as culture, peace and love. What Halls wants to say is that it is in our minds that we arrange, collect, organize and categorize diverse concepts and more importantly assemble an intricate representation to portray the relations governing them<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> - Stuart Hall, “Representation & The Media”, in *Media Education Foundation* (MEF 1997), p. 10.

<sup>116</sup> - Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, p. 17.

<sup>117</sup> - Ibid.

The fact of having a concept in our minds for something means that we know its meaning. However, this meaning cannot be communicated and conveyed without the second system of representation which is language as it has been mentioned before. The system of language could consist of spoken or written words, as it also could incorporate gesticulations, photographs, and sounds. What should be noted here is that the system of language is utterly arbitrary, often bearing little similarity to the objects to which they refer. As Stuart Hall illustrates:

By 'arbitrary' we mean that in principle any collection of letters or any sound in any order would do the trick equally well. Trees would not mind if we used the word SEERT – 'trees' written backwards – to represent the concept of them. (...) But it is not at all clear that real trees know that they are trees, and even less clear that they know that the word in English which represents the concept of themselves is written TREE whereas in French it is written ARBRE! As far as they are concerned, it could just as well be written COW or VACHE or indeed XYZ.<sup>118</sup>

In the light of this statement, it could be assumed that knowing the meaning of the veil does not completely reside in the object itself or in the word itself. However, it is us who tend to establish or place the meaning so powerfully that

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<sup>118</sup> - Ibid, p. 21.

soon it turns to appear normal. In other words, meaning is produced when someone allocates a particular word to a thing or an object. The thing might have existed before but it didn't contain a meaning until someone came along and gave it a name. To clarify more this notion, Stuart Hall while lecturing about the different aspects that the work of representation entails and how this system functions he evidently states that

(...) the word *representation* or *representation* does sort of carry with it the notion that something was there already and, through the media, has been *represented*.<sup>119</sup> (original emphasis).

In the light of this, it could be said that the idea of representation being able to represent a meaning that is previously there is a very common practice in media. In this sense, representation tends to introduce or rather represent something which is already there. Accordingly, media and in particular documentary films shift or rather transfer the real meaning or what is already there. Therefore, what is given to us is the representation of what is already there; hence the truth is inexorably distorted.

It is in fact a process of representation that helps frame and shape the image people have of themselves and of others as well. Therefore, one assumes that the politics of representation revolve around issues of power and control of one's own self and his or her representation and reproduction by others.<sup>120</sup> To

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<sup>119</sup> - Stuart Hall, "Representation & the Media", p. 6.

<sup>120</sup> - Renée Hoogland, "Representation in the Post-Colonial Analysis", *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 172.

exemplify this, we often find one side tends to dominate and to have power over others (male over female, West over East, us over them), by concentrating mainly on issues of differences and power within the process of representation. In this context, documentary films work as a “representational system” using Hall’s terms, because they are capable of producing meanings, transmitting ideas and communicating them through the use of photographs and language. Images always try to show us that the dominant group is the only one that has the power and the authority to represent and to speak on behalf the supposed subjugated and the oppressed. This is done through the production of negative, connotative meanings and discourses about them so as to serve certain interests and to promote a particular ideology.

Michel Foucault is also concerned and interested in understanding the work of visual representations. His notion of discourse as well as knowledge/power paradigm are very indispensable to the dissertation’s examination of documentary films. Foucault employs the word representation to refer mainly “to the production of knowledge (rather than just meaning) through the use of discourses (rather than just language).”<sup>121</sup> This is to say, representation does not produce only meaning but also produces knowledge about a certain topic. This knowledge is mainly shaped and framed within a specific discourse that combines both systems, one of language and the other of practice. The concept of discourse in this situation is not employed as a purely linguistic concept rather

It is about language and practice. It attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between

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<sup>121</sup> - Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, p. 42-43.

what one *says* (language) and what one *does* (practice).<sup>122</sup>

In the light of this, it could be deduced that discourse is primarily about representation of knowledge as it tends to exterminate the rupture between language as words and practices as deeds. The idea of language and practice being incorporated to form knowledge resembles to a great extent the representation of a documentary film. In this respect, the filmmaker tends to amalgamate both photographs and techniques with the adaptation of a certain discourse so that knowledge could be produced and conveyed. It should be noted here that the concept of discourse is defined as

a group of statements which provide a language for talking about - a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment.<sup>123</sup>

In accordance with this, it could be said that discourse tends principally to construct a particular topic and more importantly, identifies and generates objects of knowledge. In addition, discourse attempts to administer the way the topic is chosen and meaningfully talked about. The same could be applied on documentary films. The filmmaker selects the subjects, chooses a certain topic, employs particular techniques and methods and more significantly adopts a specific discourse. In other words, “discourse is about the production of

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<sup>122</sup> - Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>123</sup> - Ibid.

knowledge through language”<sup>124</sup>. This is clearly confirmed by Foucault when he vehemently declares that “it is discourse- not the things-in-themselves- which produces knowledge.”<sup>125</sup>

It is not about the existence of objects or things that matter, but more importantly about their meaning. An example of this could be the veil as a fabric and as a product does exist and takes many forms with different colors. However, the meaning of the veil does not complete unless if it is put into practice. To put it differently, the veil could have a meaning only when it is put and framed into a discourse. This is why, Foucault clearly states that “nothing has any meaning outside discourse.”<sup>126</sup> In this sense, everything that does have a meaning requires to be described, framed and shaped in discourse. Consequently, it could be assumed that “the concept of discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from.”<sup>127</sup>

What is important is that through the different practices of representation within mass media, there are some forms of knowledge that are produced about the “orient” or rather the “other”, meaning here Muslim women. These Muslim women become profoundly incriminated within the procedures and the configurations of an unbalanced or rather what is called an asymmetrical relation of power. On this foundation, I would like to inspect Foucault’s conception of “discourse” by examining how the documentary photographs that are perceived as discursive practices generate not only meanings, but also

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<sup>124</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> - Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>126</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> - Ibid.

knowledge about Muslim woman as the “oppressed other” and sometimes as the “liberated other” or the “fanatic other”. This further suggests that, the documentary film as a medium of communication, and consequently, of ideology could be conceived as highly charged especially when it is put in a political and imperial context that is essentially framed and motivated by the colonial discourse.

**Chapter II:**  
**Edward Said and The Colonial Discourse**

## **A-Orientalism: Theory and Visual Arts**

Edward Said is one of the most important literary and cultural critics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Said is known as one of the founding figures of postcolonial studies. Said's book *Orientalism* remains to this day an important and an influential work that offers an interesting and deep analysis of Western portrayal of the oriental other especially when dealing with Arab and Islamic culture and in our case the oriental woman. It is the oriental woman that has always been seen as "an occasion and an opportunity"<sup>128</sup> for European scholars and orientalists to practice their domination over the orient.

Before I proceed in the discussion of orientalism its theory and its discourse, it is important to give an historical background of orientalism and the context of its emergence. As a matter of fact, it remains difficult to be accurate about the exact period in which the two opposing labels the "West" and the "East" or the "Occident" and the "Orient" emerge, however, it can be assumed that the antagonistic relationship between the two worlds began with the rise of Islam and Christianity.

This rise of both religions and the desire of both to expand and to spread out in more regions have in fact generated a sharp religious, cultural and more importantly a political division between the two civilizations. According to Edward Said, the West has long been interested in Islam and this interest goes long back in history since after Mohammed's death in 632 A.D. As a matter of a fact, the cultural, military and religious power of Islam grew tremendously, so that by "the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Islam ruled as far east as India, Indonesia, and China."<sup>129</sup> As a result of this expansion, Europe responded, as

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<sup>128</sup> - Edward W. Said *Orientalism*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1979), p. 187.

<sup>129</sup> - Ibid, p. 60.

Said argues, with very little as they only showed fear of a strong opponent to Christianity. As Said says

Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma.<sup>130</sup>

This fear and aggression towards the religion of Islam has in fact continued to the present day, both in scholarly and non-scholarly work where debasing and humiliating stereotypes relate together Islam with terrorism, Muslim women with oppression, Arabs with violence.

Orientalism emerged and provided a validation and more precisely a rationalization for European domination and colonization based on a self-serving history in which “the West” constructed “the East” as extremely different and inferior, and therefore in need of European intervention or “rescue”. To support this, Said mentions that a whole constellation of thoughts were produced, a body of information and ideas were expressed to describe the orient by showing and exposing “the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability.”<sup>131</sup> It is here where the concept of orientalism was formulated and the orient became a place isolated from the mainstream of European development in sciences and arts. Therefore, the orient turns to be “a locale requiring Western attention, reconstruction, even redemption.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 60.

<sup>131</sup> - *Ibid*, p. 207.

<sup>132</sup> - *Ibid*.

During the middle Ages, people of the East and their cultures as well as their way of life have been presented as wicked, backward and threatening to the Christian world. However, in the eighteenth century, the world witnessed the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate and hence an increase of many problems that came along in the region. This was an occasion and opportunity for Europe to extend its knowledge, expand its domination and produce a certain mindset and discourse about the East. This was done through representing the East in different forms, written and visual representations. Western artists and Western literary works on the orient indicate that there was an enormous fascination with the myth of the orient as mysterious, exotic, and more importantly feminine. Edward Said explains that

Suddenly it seemed to a wide variety of thinkers, politicians, and artists that a new awareness of the Orient, which extended from China to the Mediterranean, had arisen.<sup>133</sup>

Such awareness of the orient was a result of the relationship and the way Europe envisioned the East which in fact later was culminated in military assaults and occupations. This relationship was mainly set by the invasion of Napoleon to Egypt between (1798- 1801), “an invasion which was in many ways the very model of a truly scientific appropriation of one culture by another, apparently stronger one.”<sup>134</sup> This invasion has in fact brought a new interest and developed curiosity in the Near and Middle East. It could be said that during this period Europe has truly encountered the East. This rapid colonial domination reinforced diplomatic and commercial bonds which made travel easier to “antagonistic” countries. As a consequence of this, European thinkers, scholars

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<sup>133</sup> - Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>134</sup> - Ibid.

and more importantly painters went in search for the mysterious, motivated by the impulse to discover the other, inquisitive to record the traditions, the clothing and the architecture of the other. Some of these Orientalist painters spent many years with the locals, either participating in their activities and accompanying the nomads or living in the more Westernized cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Their curiosity and their investigations led them to travel and reside in Constantinople so that they could collect information and document the culture of the Middle East. This has created an outstanding public interest in Middle Eastern cultures; a true passion has appeared to discover the East. In accordance with this,

the Napoleonic expedition, with its great collective monument of erudition, the *Description de l’Egypte*, provided a scene or setting for Orientalism, since Egypt and subsequently the other Islamic lands were viewed as the live province, the laboratory, the theater of effective Western knowledge about the Orient.<sup>135</sup> (original emphasis)

As matter of a fact, the publication of "Description de l’Egypte" (1809–22),<sup>136</sup> demonstrates the geography, culture, architecture and social traditions of Egyptian people. Such demonstration worked as a cultural propaganda to support and justify French colonialism. This clearly means that early Orientalist painters were nothing more than supporters of French imperialism, portraying the orient “as a place of backwardness, gratifyingly enhanced by French rule.”<sup>137</sup> In the light of this, it could be assumed that the East has become and turned into

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<sup>135</sup> - Ibid., p. 42-43.

<sup>136</sup> - “Orientalist Painting, History & Development of Orientalism”, in Encyclopedia of Art History, retrieved on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2017 from <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/orientalist-painting.htm>

<sup>137</sup> - Ibid.

a theater or a laboratory, as Said says, where European experiments on the orient take place.

The French and the English Orientalist painters were abundant that they can be classified as schools. Though there might be a difference in how both envision the East, both of them remain expansively enthralled, fascinated and passionate about learning more about Harem life and Muslim women. Their obsession of Muslim women and their portrayal of oriental women emerged in different literary and visual representations of imagined stories of how an oriental woman looks like. Ranna Kabbani, in this respect, says

French Orientalist painting, as exemplified by the works of Gérôme, may appear more sensual, gaudy, gory and sexually explicit than its British counterpart, but this is a difference of style not substance ... Similar strains of fascination and repulsion convulsed their artists.<sup>138</sup>

In this context, Edward Said also refers to orientalist portrayals of Muslim women in European literature and painting. He describes their obsession and argues that they always tend to represent oriental women as they are “packed inside Oriental clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments, and so on.”<sup>139</sup> All these fantasies of oriental women and imagined stories about them were motivated by the admiration and the curiosity to discover the mystery and the unknown. This has resulted in having numerous Europeans making efforts and endeavors to explore the lavish, private and more importantly inaccessible space of the oriental woman.

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<sup>138</sup> - Kabbani, Rana, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*, (London: Pandora Press, 1994), p. 123.

<sup>139</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 190.

The concept of orientalism ,as Edward Said argues, was often appropriated and used to examine and to analyze nineteenth century European productions on the oriental other especially on Muslim women represented through literary texts and paintings. To put it differently, orientalism encompasses

the entire system by which one culture come to interpret, to represent, and finally to dominate another. It includes, in other words, the discourses of colonialism as produced in such forms as imaginative literature, journalism, travel writing, ethnographic description, historiography, political speeches, administrative documents, and status of law.<sup>140</sup>

In the light of this, it can be assumed that in order to make the other familiar, it has to be submitted and placed under the parameters of the European culture. Not only orientalism was appropriated and exposed in the forms Spur mentioned, but the system of orientalism is still appropriated and still functions in cinema, journalism, photography and more importantly in documentary films.

By making a correlation between colonial narratives which were produced in the past and the present situation after 9/11, Edward Said asserts that in the times of political unsteadiness, of crises as well as insecurities, the media in general, with the assistance of photographers, documentary and film directors and scholars, help to a great extent in the construction of an unidentified enemy labeled as an Islamic terrorist and backward other.<sup>141</sup> Such labels are in fact used to serve colonial

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<sup>140</sup> - David Spur, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 4-5.

<sup>141</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 132.

purposes and imperial domination. David Spurr in this respect elaborates more on this issue and says that the relationships that govern the two entities West and East are

antagonized by the “instrumental role” which the colonized society is forced to play, so that in order to maintain its authority the colonizing society not only to force, but also to a series of “pseudo-justifications and stereotyped behaviors”.<sup>142</sup>

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said inspects the different processes by which Western or European culture comes to interpret the other one, or comes to represent Eastern cultures or the so-called Orient. By exploring Western images and examining Western texts, which were produced, reproduced and written about the Orient particularly from the late eighteenth century onwards, Said criticizes their historical, political and cultural perspectives about Orientals.

Edward Said attempts to demonstrate and to elucidate how European culture gained its power, superiority and identity by exposing itself against an opposite, inferior “other”. It is through the other that Europeans come to recognize their identity and identify themselves as superior. This dichotomy has resulted in introducing a European or a Western colonial ideology that divides the world into two fundamental contrasting geographical poles known as the “West” or the “Occident” against the “East” or the “Orient”. This separation or rather a sharp ideological division is often based on imagination, on a set of notions and fantasies that, according to Spurr, split the two different cultures into

one fast-moving, technologically advanced, and economically powerful; the other slow-moving and

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<sup>142</sup> - David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, (1993), p. 6.

without advanced technology or a complex economy.<sup>143</sup>

What is more important, this world partition “as both geo-graphical and cultural entities”<sup>144</sup> is seen as a device by which the West comes to define itself. To confirm this, Said clearly says that “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”<sup>145</sup> The role of assisting Europe define itself is mainly done by forming and fabricating an "Other" whose distinctive features were recognized as being in conflict and different from Europe. The Orient, here, was seen and considered as stagnant and moribund in time and space. In other words, it is understood as being “eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself.”<sup>146</sup> This was in opposition to Europe which presented itself as being vibrant, innovative, and expansionist. In this context, it could be said that the orient has turned to embody

an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.<sup>147</sup> (original emphasis)

In the light of the previous quote, it could be assumed that Orientalism must construct its own different version which is the other. The other here contributes to the strengthening of European identity, culture and supremacy. In this context, Europe is believed to set off against the Orient as “a sort of surrogate and even

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<sup>143</sup> - Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>144</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 5.

<sup>145</sup> - Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> - Ibid, p. 301.

<sup>147</sup> - Ibid, p. 2.

underground self.”<sup>148</sup> Said also asserts that the system of Orientalism is not distant from the collective perception that classifies Europeans as “us” against those non-Europeans who are classified as “others”. Here European culture and identity turns to be far-more better superior and better than all other cultures and people.

The European sense of cultural and intellectual superiority granted Westerners the power of spectatorship which entitled them to be the judge and jury of Oriental behavior. As Said says, Europe becomes “the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior.”<sup>149</sup> As early as 1810, the French author Chateaubriand in his book *Itineraire de Paris à Jerusalem, et de Jerusalem a Paris* (1810—1811)<sup>150</sup> called upon Europe to take on the responsibility of civilizing the orient. Chateaubriand wanted to complete his circle of studies and decided to visit the orient and to learn about its “monuments of knowledge”<sup>151</sup>. In this context, Chateaubriand claimed to study the Quran and said that “the Koran was "le livre de Mahomet"; it contained "ni principe de civilization" and it "preaches neither hatred of tyranny nor love of liberty.”<sup>152</sup> This clearly means that the orient, be them Arabs or Muslims, have no idea about values such as freedom and liberty. They are immersed in a backward and corrupted life, and unable to resist or oppose despotism. Even their holy book, the Koran which is supposed to free them, is also flawed and is calling only for submission and oppression. Therefore, the West has to intervene in order to rescue those Orientals from tyranny and make them convert to European values such as freedom.

Not only did Chateaubriand defame and deform the teachings of the Koran, but also his observations and his studies were based on a certain principle which is calling Europe to play their civilizing role in the region and inviting them to teach the orient the principles of freedom, justice and liberty. As a matter of a fact, the theme

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<sup>148</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

<sup>149</sup> - Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>150</sup> - Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>151</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> - Ibid.

of Europe teaching the Orient the meaning of freedom and liberty has obsessed the French author Chateaubriand. He blatantly declares that

Of liberty, they know nothing; of propriety, they have none: force is their God. When they go for long periods without seeing conquerors who do heavenly justice, they have the air of soldiers without a leader, citizens without legislators, and a family without a father.<sup>153</sup>

For him, the Orientals lack human values and they require invasion not for European material profit but as instruction in liberty. Invasion and occupation was seen and presented as a redemptive act to unshackle and free a deteriorated world. The characteristics of the Oriental mindset are expressed patently in Orientalist discourse and can be seen in oppositional terms to the Western mindset. The oriental mind is about “sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness”<sup>154</sup> while the Western one is rational, developed, free and has an inclination towards justice, progress and liberty.

Such imaginative differences have led to a division of this world “between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them").<sup>155</sup>In accordance with this, a new world structure has been formed; a conflictual relationship has been established in which both the West and the East are classified as extreme poles. To put it differently, “Orientals lived in their world, "we" lived in ours.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> - Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>154</sup> - Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>155</sup> - Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>156</sup> - Ibid., p. 44.

Orientalism aims at elaborating the manner in which Europe comes to portray the East. It is a process of representation that attempts to institutionalize the imaginary boundary between the two opposites. This is why, it is recommended to investigate and to examine the binary opposition of the West and the East and contextualize this relationship within the framework of power and domination. To support this, Said believes that

ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied. To believe that the Orient was created—or, as I call it, "Orientalized" —and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.<sup>157</sup>

As a matter of fact, Said here tends to deploy orientalism to politicize this relationship and to unravel the ideological as well as the cultural domination of European imperialism. This means that Said insists on the fact that knowledge about the orient and conceptualization of the other are profoundly shaped, framed and influenced by the politics of power and hegemony. In other words, domination and hegemony are undertaken in the form of colonization and taking control over the orient particularly Muslim countries. Said presumes the notion of orientalism to coalesce the West and the East within “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”<sup>158</sup>.

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<sup>157</sup> - Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>158</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 6.

It is noticed that in every society, specific cultural forms preponderate and prevail over others. By using the term hegemony, coined by Antonio Gramsci, Said attempts to identify this specific form of control and leadership. The basic principle of the theory of hegemony “is one with which few would disagree: that man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas.”<sup>159</sup> This clearly means that the notion of hegemony is understood to connote domination by consent and refers to its mobilization to the social order. Antonio Gramsci explains this notion by defining hegemony as

The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.<sup>160</sup>

In accordance with this, it is understood that hegemony signifies the capability of a group of people to hold power over social and political institutions, and hence, to powerfully impact the daily thoughts, behavior, and prospects of the rest of society. This is done mainly by directing the normative notions, values, and beliefs which become the leading worldview of a certain society. More importantly, cultural hegemony functions by achieving the consent of the masses to obey and precisely to conform to the social norms and the law of the state. Here, the state or the ruling class attempts to indoctrinate to the masses the norms, the perspectives and the rules set up by the dominant group.

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<sup>159</sup> - Thomas R. Bates, “Gramsci and The Theory of Hegemony”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 36, No. 2 , (University of Pennsylvania Press, Apr. - Jun., 1975), p. 351.

<sup>160</sup> - Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader Selected Writings 1916-1935*, edited by David Forgacs, (New York University Press, 2000), p. 306-07

Domination is not exercised and displayed by force, as opposed to more atrocious and direct forms of coercion and oppression, but rather “by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy and over state apparatuses such as education and the media.”<sup>161</sup> Significantly, this encompasses the belief that the economic system along with the political system are legitimate, and thus, the rule of the dominant class is legitimate. In a fundamental sense, this process can be understood as instructing students in a school how not to break rules and follow them, to show obedience to authority figures, and behave according to expected norms.

Edward Said employs the term hegemony in order to describe not only how orientalism is bolstered and given strength by this form of cultural power but also how colonized people’s aspiration and hope for self-determination has been suppressed by a hegemonic notion of a 'greater good', “often couched in terms of social order, stability and advancement, all of which are defined by the colonizing power.”<sup>162</sup> This is to say, the values of the European imperial power are strongly linked to stability and progress. It is therefore “hegemony or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength”<sup>163</sup> that it maintains.

Said argues that generations of scholars, artists, writers, photographers and politicians have contributed extensively to the systematic knowledge about the Orient. Their objective is mainly to reveal and to describe the authority of European culture over the East. In this context, Edward Said defines the system of Orientalism as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.”<sup>164</sup> For this purpose, the orient first should be recognized and known which means that Said gives importance and priority to

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<sup>161</sup> - Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies*. (London, Routledge, 1998), p. 116-117.

<sup>162</sup> - Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>163</sup> - Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (1979), p. 7.

<sup>164</sup> - Ibid., p. 2.

knowledge as it is perceived as the first procedure towards controlling the other. This knowledge of the other or the Orient later has been transformed into power structures and appears in different forms such as colonialism and imperialism. This is why, Said puts the emphasis on the fact that Orientalism should not be considered or thought of as “a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away.”<sup>165</sup> The idea here is that orientalism is not merely some “airy European fantasy about the Orient”<sup>166</sup>. It is, rather, a system of knowledge about the Orient,

(...) a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture.<sup>167</sup>

In his book *Orientalism*, issues of race, colonialism, representation, femininity and identity are considered the major ingredients of his theory. As a matter of fact, the two geographical entities, meaning here the West and the East, Occident or Orient, support and at some level reflect each other since the development and the construction of every culture requires fundamentally the existence of a potential other or an opposite. The theorist Edward Said elaborates more on this perception of how a culture functions and exercises its dominance over its different version that is the other. Said argues that the backward and the irrational "Orient" is constructed and

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<sup>165</sup> - Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>166</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> - Ibid.

represented in the binary opposition against the civilized and the rational “Occident”, as the “Other”. To support this, Said states clearly that

The construction of identity — for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, *is* finally a construction — involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us". Each age and society re-creates its "Others".<sup>168</sup>

In accordance with this passage, it can be assumed that notions of identities, cultures are also seen a production or rather a construction. This construction, and therefore, creation of opposites turns orientalism not so much into a discourse about the Orient, but rather about the power and domination of the West.

Orientalism is strongly connected and linked to the concept of the Self and the Other because as Said highlights in his definition “Orientalism, is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident.”<sup>169</sup>Such a dichotomy projects the oriental and presents him or her as radically other, he or she is strange, violent, exotic, barbaric, oppressed, and alien creature. He or she is different in all levels, culturally, religiously, mentally and racially. Accordingly, he or she deserves to be contained, controlled, colonized and enlightened by the civilized Europe. In this context, the conclusion of Orientalism appears to be the building and the forming of a relationship that is mainly based on an ontological and epistemological division

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<sup>168</sup> - Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>169</sup> - Ibid., p. 3.

between the orient and the occident, or rather an establishment of a binary opposition between West and East,

a hierarchy in which one is privileged and the other is unprivileged. Binarism ranges from general binaries such as light/dark, white/black to some more complicated and culturally weighted as man/woman, the colonizer/ the colonized and in the case under consideration the self/other.<sup>170</sup>

In accordance with this, the system of Orientalism is closely and strongly linked to the concept of the Self and the Other because as Edward Said points out in his second definition of Orientalism, it makes a distinction between the Occident= self and the Orient= the Other. In this context, Muslim women were transformed into an object of deformations, myths and more importantly thrown in to a world of stereotypes.

Since the period of French and British colonialism, Muslim women have long been exposed to a process of objectification and sexualization. Europe in fact has evolved around the notion and the belief that Orientals are deemed to be irrational, always feminine, primitive, despotic by nature and uncivilized. Besides this, European imagination has discursively been filled with such distortions as it has always perceived the orient as numb, stagnant, and incapable of making progress or moving forward. To put it differently, Said clearly says that

the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself"<sup>171</sup>. Not only this but “the Oriental is

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<sup>170</sup> - Moosavinia S.R., N. Niazi, Lorestan, “Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and The Study of The Self and The Other in Orwell’s *Burmese Days*”, in *Studies in Literature and Language*, (Vol. 2, No. 1, 2011), p. 103-113.

<sup>171</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (1979), p. 301.

given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, in need even of knowledge about himself.<sup>172</sup>

All these distortions were part and parcel of the European colonial discourse so as to find a place in the East and justify its colonialism. In other words, the system of Orientalism as a Western and European discourse about the East is guilty of authorizing civilizing mission, approving essentialism, and permitting imperialism. It is also responsible for convincing natives of the East of their own lowliness and weakness.

Orientalism becomes the inspiring ideology of the West particularly Europe. Despite the fact that Europe encompasses a variety of countries, which each one of them is characterized by its own disciplines, discourses, systems of ruling and institutions, they all remain one entity sharing similar interests and benefits in the East or the Orient. Western scholarship, art and cinema have evolved around the depictions of Orientals as unreasonable, ominous, untrustworthy and more importantly anti-Western. These portrayals are appropriated, accepted and perceived as ideological truths and precisely conceived as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by Europe. Said explains this procedure and states clearly that

The hold these instruments have on the mind is increased by the institutions built around them. For every Orientalist, quite literally, there is a support system of staggering power, considering the ephemerality of the myths that Orientalism propagates. The system now culminates into the very institutions of the state. To write about the Arab

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<sup>172</sup> - Ibid, p. 309.

Oriental world, therefore, is to write with the authority of a nation, and not with the affirmation of a strident ideology but with the unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force.<sup>173</sup>

In the light of this passage, it can be assumed that orientalism turns to be the mechanism that Europe mainly relies on to facilitate the process of colonialism and domination over the other. In other words, the insinuation is always clear the orientalist documentaries and writings about Muslim women or Arabs are demeaning “by definition, by training, by the mere fact of their Westernness.” This is the culmination of Orientalism as a dogma that not only degrades its subject matter but also blinds its practitioners.”<sup>174</sup> In this conjuncture, Said puts the emphasis on the fact that the system or the mechanism of orientalism survives as it has always been based on what he calls

a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires—British, French, American—in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced.<sup>175</sup>

This clearly means that there was a kind of cooperation and collaboration between scholars, filmmakers, writers, politicians and photographers of these three great empires especially in terms of sharing and producing knowledge about the orient.

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<sup>173</sup> - Ibid, p. 308.

<sup>174</sup> - Ibid, p. 319-20.

<sup>175</sup> - Ibid, p. 14-15.

The orientalist and colonial discourse was shared by both European and American scholars and artists. It is within this framework of orientalism that both empires, Europe and America, share the same representational structure that ultimately conform to the Western-White standards and confirm the White supremacy over other races. This structure allowed the West to intervene in Eastern countries and legitimize its domination and control over all the regions, cultures and people who have negatively been portrayed. Though there might be different discourses, attitudes and experiences towards the East, both empires deal with it as the “Other”. Therefore, the representation of the other or the orient is perceived as

a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.<sup>176</sup>

Said’s theoretical framework or perspective on orientalism is essentially concerned with two great European empires which are French and British. As a matter of a fact, Said mentions different types of Orientalism and suggests that the distinction consists in the difference between the relationships with the East. To put it differently, Said deals with different types of Orientalism and argues that the most important difference resides principally in the difference between the relationships with the other, meaning here the Orient. He identifies Britain and France which represent European Orientalism and the United States which represents American Orientalism. According to him, both are involved in the two major types of Orientalism, direct in

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<sup>176</sup> - Ibid, p. 63.

the case of Britain and France and indirect in the American one. Said clearly explains that unlike Americans,

Britain and France dominated the Eastern Mediterranean from about the end of the seventeenth century on.....But I think it is also true that the major steps in Oriental scholarship were first taken in either Britain or France.<sup>177</sup>

In the light of this quote, it could be argued that orientalism has in fact originated in England and France, and then was disseminated to include other European countries as well as America. Indeed, “From the last decades of the eighteenth century and for at least a century and a half, Britain and France dominated Orientalism as a discipline.”<sup>178</sup> In this respect, the system of Orientalism is inherently Eurocentric because it tends to situate and to position the Orient in an oppositional and antagonistic relationship with the European self as the archetypal Other. This is to say, the orient is conceived as allegedly most different, most eccentric to civilized Europe.

Following this logic, Europe is therefore purportedly capable of defining and describing itself by essentially gazing at the Other as its inverse reflection. This inverse reflection becomes lucid in the way European filmmakers represent the other through documentary films. Therefore, the colonial orientalist discourse is being adopted in order to represent Muslim women as the different other.

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<sup>177</sup> - Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>178</sup> - Ibid, p. 98-99.

## **B-Documentary Film and The Orientalist Discourse**

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were “like a movie”; an idea or a feeling which was expressed by several people in reaction to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001. The events of that atrocious day were put on air worldwide and reminded spectators all over the world of a scene in a Hollywood thriller, as Rickli says “already on the day of the attacks, the simile “like a movie” was voiced”. However, the problem with this reaction was that, as Christina Rickli writes, of course, "September 11 was clearly *not* a movie"<sup>179</sup>. Generally speaking, films about America under attack always tend to position or to show “good versus evil in a fictitious, predetermined setting where the American side wins.”<sup>180</sup> In this context, Rickli continues saying that finally America “rises up and eventually defeats the perpetrator”. However, the perpetrator here was not defeated and therefore the 9/11 attacks lacked the component of U.S. triumph. As a result of this, they “confronted the American public with a defective and thus unsettling reference to prototypical scenes of an important Hollywood genre”<sup>181</sup>. The movie-like events were outrageous, but the absence of a happy ending, which people are used to see, caused an even bigger shock.

Due to the solemnity of the assaults and the shock, film and documentary makers were motivated to produce various films and documentaries that tackle the cultures and peoples of the East particularly the Muslim ones. The idea here is that 9/11 events sparked an enormous interest to know and to discover the East or the Orient. In other words, New York attacks paved the way towards the

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<sup>179</sup> - Christina Rickli, “An Event “Like a Movie”? Hollywood and 9/11”, in *Current Objectives of Postgraduate Studies*, (Vol 10, 2009), p. 4

<sup>180</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>181</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 4

revitalization of Orientalism, as the Muslim and Middle-Eastern background of the suicidal terrorists reawakened Orientalist stereotypes. The process of orientalizing the other through mass media specifically through documentary films does not take into account the realities of the non-western people. This process in fact has always been based on Western imagination and stereotypes. In this respect, Edward Said talks about this notion of reinforcing stereotypes through media; a notion that has characterized the postmodern world. Said clearly states that

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of "the mysterious Orient."<sup>182</sup>

In general terms, it can be assumed that media is considered as the most important method which reinforces stereotypes on a certain group. In addition, media is perceived as a major way through which government, institutions and politicians convey their ideologies and messages. As a matter of fact, the role of the mass mediated image in society is fundamental to the conception of the "culture industry" as theorized by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1944). For them, the culture industry revolves around the production and reproduction of standardized art in order to render the general population into a state of

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<sup>182</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (1979), p. 27.

obedience and conformity. Adorno elucidates more this notion by stating clearly that the cultural industry creates predetermined ideologies and messages through art, meaning here documentary films, TV, music, and other forms of mass media. These media forms tend to socially control and ideologically condition mass audiences to conform to the established social and political structure. In this respect, Adorno says that

The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable. How this mentality might be changed is excluded throughout. The masses are not the measure but the ideology of the culture industry, even though the culture industry itself could scarcely exist without adapting to the masses.<sup>183</sup>

The quote evidently suggests that by being an industry or being responsive to the needs and wants of customers, mass media loses any impartiality in its desire to remain popular, hence producing culture as a commodity. To support this, Adorno argues that "consumers appear as statistics on research organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green, and blue areas;"<sup>184</sup>. Through manufacturing the desire and need for art and entertainment the industry is capable of assigning ideological codes and meanings into these commodities. Through this process, popular stereotypes are reproduced so that other cultures are effortlessly understood and grasped regardless of the facts.

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<sup>183</sup> - Adorno, W. Theodor, and Max Horkheimer *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, Bernstein, Ed. (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 86.

<sup>184</sup> - Ibid, p. 34.

The culture industry tends to repeat and reiterate these stereotypes in order to create an atmosphere of social influence and pressure through all mediums. Therefore, people or mass audiences will be led to accept these stereotypes as truths and more importantly conform blindly to them. To put it differently, the objective of the culture industry, as Adorno believes, resides in the fact that “Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance with his previous determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type.”<sup>185</sup> This process results in establishing and forming of a reinforced power relationship in which the spectator has control over the “Other”. However, this power relationship is entirely established to keep consumers pleased; or rather, to keep them consuming. Adorno again describes their position as being inherently incorrect, because they are part of media manipulation,

Although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object.<sup>186</sup>

In other words, the culture industry manipulates the masses, hypnotizes them, and renders them helpless and victims to what is imposed on them. In this context, European documentary films work in similar fashion in manipulating audiences and mobilizing them against a supposed and constructed enemy which could be anyone who is different from Europe.

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<sup>185</sup> - Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>186</sup> - Ibid, p. 99.

Since the culture industry or mass media contribute to the establishment of a power relation in which people are given the power and the control over the “Other”, Stuart Hall builds upon the notion of the other to examine the issue of cultural representation. As a matter of fact, Stuart Hall deals with cultural representation in terms of relating the subject study which is the Other or the Orient to “the set of representational practices known as stereotyping.”<sup>187</sup> In this sense, representations are conceived as bridges that connect and attach meaning and language to culture, and are therefore profoundly ideological and political. In this context, the representational practice of stereotypes turns to be a significant sphere of influence in theorizing identity politics and social change.

According to Hall's definition of stereotypes, "stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature."<sup>188</sup> This means that stereotyping is kind of representation in which a group of people is believed to share few or often exaggerated aberrations. It is a process that aims at setting a social and political order that separates the familiar and the normal Europe from the unknown and the strange East. Edward Said, in his analysis of Orientalism, he addresses this notion and says that cinematic representations, including documentary films, tend to strengthen and produce a specific mindset that deliberately distort the image of Muslims particularly Arab ones. In this conjuncture, Said explains that

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed de-generate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low. Slave

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<sup>187</sup> - Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the Other” in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. (London: Sage Publication, 2003), p. 257.

<sup>188</sup> - Ibid.

trader, camel driver, money changer, colorful scoundrel: these are some traditional Arab roles in the cinema.<sup>189</sup>

In accordance with this, it could be assumed that Arabs are labeled as bad and dangerous people by nature. Such stereotypes are not only limited to Muslim males but also includes pictures of Muslim women who are depicted as always oppressed, veiled and deemed to live under patriarchy as sexual beings. In fact, these are the stereotypes that European and American media feed their masses. The role of cinema including documentaries is to reduce Muslims and Muslim women to an essential characteristic that is fixed in time and space. To clarify more this point, Hall clearly states that

stereotypes get hold of the few ‘simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics’ about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.<sup>190</sup>

Accordingly, the first strategy of the process of stereotyping is that it “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’.”<sup>191</sup> The first involves separating people outside of the European or Western norm on the basis of differences, be them cultural, racial, religious or historical ones. The stereotype here works as a boundary indicator as “*it deploys a strategy of ‘splitting’.*”<sup>192</sup> The idea here is that the stereotype tends to identify and classify those people as “others” through

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<sup>189</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (2004), p. 287.

<sup>190</sup> - Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, (1997), p. 258.

<sup>191</sup> - *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> - *Ibid.*

splitting them into categories and through typifications which is the second phase of the system of stereotyping. In this conjuncture, typifications are constructed generalities which are mainly identified with the “others”. These types are later essentialized and then naturalized and believed to be intrinsic predisposed traits that are then amplified and more precisely fixed in the minds of those who produce and believe in stereotypes.

Muslim women are always typified, judged and often described as veiled, downtrodden, and uneducated. Other times, they are presented and represented as dangerous and terrifying creatures hiding behind their Burqas and veils and ready to spread terror in the world. However, this fantasy or imagination can only become reality if Muslim women behave in such a way. Because of this, the Europeans now have the evidence to justify and authenticate their views and stereotypes. Though this fantasy or imagination could have a meaning and entail part of a truth, it cannot be explicated through a tangible and a physical representation. For this reason, Stuart Hall states clearly that if the differences between the West and the East are natural,

then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed. ‘Naturalization’ is therefore a representational strategy designed to *fix* ‘difference’, and thus secure it *forever*. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure’.<sup>193</sup>

Some of the documentaries under study do not only reinforce stereotypes and transmit ideologies about Muslim women but also promote and fix differences. They tend to label and give identities to Muslim women as different others who do not belong to the mainstream culture and civilization.

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<sup>193</sup> - Ibid., p. 245.

The postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha also offers an interesting discussion and a deep analysis of the issues that tackle the colonial or Western stereotype as well as racial and cultural differences or otherness. In his article entitled “The other question”, Bhabha offers an influential treatment of these topics, a treatment that emerges from his post-structural and psychoanalytic background and theorization. As a matter of a fact, Bhabha tends to give priority to the notion or the concept of ‘fixity’ as a primary and fundamental characteristic of colonial discourse. Bhabha states in clear terms that “An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness.”<sup>194</sup> Fixity here is perceived as the marker of otherness, a normalization or a naturalization, using Hall’s term, of difference. To support this, Bhabha again defines fixity and says that it functions,

as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.<sup>195</sup>

In accordance with this, it could be said that fixity is seen as an attempt to generate notions of European superiority and more importantly to uphold different identity categories for Europe and East. In this context, fixity, as Bhabha suggests, is a founder element and an essential constituent within the ideological construction of otherness. It does not only designate the precincts of cultural and racial differences, but does so in forms that are both essentializing and paradoxical.

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<sup>194</sup> - Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 66.

<sup>195</sup> - Ibid.

From this theoretical perception, the stereotypes of Muslim women as they are revealed by some of the documentary films under study can be approached as the strategy of the discourse to create the already known, the unchanged images of the oriental women as uneducated, oppressed, and backward. Fixity may accordingly be understood as the outcome and effect of the stereotyping process.

Otherness is produced and generated through a paradoxical mode of representation. The process of stereotyping or fixity paves the way towards these paradoxical operations. On the one hand, as Bhabha asserts, fixity connotes a rigid and unchanging order of being and on the other hand it brings to minds a sense of degeneracy and a daemonic repetition. What Bhabha tries to clarify here is that when a Muslim woman, for instance, is presented as a victim of the stereotyping system, she is believed to be essentially and ontologically other. In the mean while, and for the construction of otherness to be something obviously recognizable, it must be repeated. In this respect, Bhabha evidently says that

The stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.<sup>196</sup>

Through repetition, the stereotype becomes a cliché that is stuck with the identity of Muslim women. Stereotypes of Muslim women have been repeated and reiterated for decades and for centuries, despite the different historical contexts in which Muslim women lived. For this reason, repetition as a process

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<sup>196</sup> - Ibid, p. 66.

tends not only to ensure what Europeans perceive of Muslim women but also tends to questions this very fixity that repetition sets out to maintain and sustain.

According to Bhabha, the stereotype functions as the “major discursive strategy” of the colonial discourse to bring into being fixed images of the colonial subjects. In our case, it produces oppressed identities and perpetuates social inequalities especially when dealing with Muslim women. In order to understand more how the stereotype works, it is of paramount importance to comprehend how the colonial discourse functions. In this respect, Bhabha elaborates more on the colonial discourse and states clearly that the colonial discourse is

an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/ historical difference. Its predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a ‘subject people’ through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited. It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of the colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated.<sup>197</sup>

The colonial discourse, based on the previous passage, aims at setting up a cultural and racial hierarchy and this can be accomplished through the articulation and the organization of several differences. As a case in point, the colonial discourse in documentary films tends to tell audiences that racially “not

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<sup>197</sup> - Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 84.

all people are the same”. Therefore, one of differences that is generated here is that Muslim women and “Arabs are backward and savage unlike Europeans who are civilized and noble”. As a matter of fact, differences could take many forms and can be detected, as Bhabha suggests, through “those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts.”<sup>198</sup>The idea I would like to make is that through this discursive production of stereotypes and differences, the other is constructed. Bhabha, in this respect, argues that

The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction.<sup>199</sup>

In the light of this, it could be deduced that the ultimate purpose of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized or the orient as a social reality or as

a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. (...) It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth, that is structurally similar to Realism.<sup>200</sup>

Like Michel Foucault, Bhabha employs the term “regime of truth” to propose that the colonizer or Europe is inclined to have power and control over the orient. This power is achieved through finding out everything about him (the orient) and at the same time making use of knowledge to demarcate and delineate the orient in a specific way. This means that one of the major

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<sup>198</sup> - Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>199</sup> - Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>200</sup> - Ibid., p. 70-71.

objectives of colonial discourse is to know, identify, comprehend, reduce, segregate, and categorize everything about the Orient.

Bhabha links this notion of colonial discourse to what Edward Said calls *Orientalism*, in which he defines it “as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it”<sup>201</sup>. To put it differently, the orientalist power is perceived as a strategic procedure whereby anything that is known or made known about the orient by Europe is employed to construe and to construct a certain identity of the orient and fix it in a purportedly cogent way.

According to Said, Orientalism is not the misrepresentation of an Oriental quintessence. Said's main idea is that Orientalism is expressed mainly by what he calls the copula “*is*”, a tense that is fixed and “timeless eternal”. The copula tends in fact to fix a certain image on the orient and more importantly to convey “all the figures of speech associated with the Orient—its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness, and so forth.”<sup>202</sup> In this respect, Said elaborates more on this notion and states clearly that

the Orientalist will designate, name, point to, fix he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality.<sup>203</sup>

In the light of the previous statement, the orient therefore is represented without any real background “as the evidence necessary to convict (the east or the orient) is contained in the “*is*”, as Said suggests. On this foundation, the work of the documentarist or the filmmaker is also seen and perceived as an orientalist

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<sup>201</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

<sup>202</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 73

<sup>203</sup> - *Ibid.*

whose main work is to fix and to naturalize all those stereotypes and figures of speech on the orient particularly Muslim women.

The documentaries that are under examination are approached within the frame work of Orientalism and dealt with as orientalist programs which are filled with stereotypes and more precisely are inclined to fix, to name and to essentialize tropes on the orient and particularly Muslim women. To put it differently, European art and literature, when dealing with ‘otherness’, are not interested in depicting the real picture of the orient and detecting the real aspects or details of their lives. On the contrary, both endeavor to display differences that are effectively created and deliberately exaggerated. Said attentively notices that the Orient is always if not “almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”<sup>204</sup> Muslim women here are in fact exoticized, construed and more importantly created and orientlized to serve a certain ideological purpose. Documentary films that are dealt with in this thesis as orientalist texts tend to create a fictitious image of Muslim women as they can never reveal or reflect their realities. To clarify more, Said states that

In the system of knowledge about the Orient, the Orient is less a place than *a topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> - Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>205</sup> - Ibid, p. 177.

In the light of this passage, it could be presumed that the orient exists in European discourse as a fantasy and a creation or rather an invention, thus, a representation. The orient becomes a place or a space of distortions, myths, lies and stereotypes. Such representation is based on an orientalist and European structure that “is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which, were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away.”<sup>206</sup>

Orientalism turns into a form by which distortions and clichés are essentialized and fixed by a word, a phrase or a photograph that does not depict reality as it is but as it is supposed to be. In this context, Said lists four basic categories or rather dogmas of orientalism which exist in today’s studies on Muslims, Arabs and the Middle East.

one is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a "classical" Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically "objective." A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (...) or to be controlled.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> - Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>207</sup> - Ibid., p. 300-01.

Undoubtedly then, the East is represented as primitive, traditional and inferior while the West is endowed with the power of reason and superiority. This also means that the Muslim world becomes a space of danger and more importantly a source where all kinds of evils flourish. The Muslim, therefore, turns to be desperately ineffective, completely different and utterly motionless in time and space. In this conjuncture, the system of orientalism aims principally at “disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region.”<sup>208</sup>

Having these characteristics in mind, documentary pictures or photographs, which are going to be analyzed in the practical part, can no longer be approached as simple and innocent products. On the contrary, such images are imbedded with Eurocentric notions and ideological tropes that tend to dehumanize and fix the Muslim world particularly Muslim women into a static position. In this way, documentaries are perceived as being inextricably linked to colonialism and imperialism where Eurocentrism becomes their inspiring ideology. In other words, documentary films are dealt with as discursive practices where power, knowledge and discourse interact with one another.

Foucault’s notions on power, knowledge and discourse are not only pertinent to Said’s work on orientalism but are indispensable to this paper in the examination of documentary films. These documentary films depict and narrate the lives and experiences of Muslim women who are often, if not always, denigrated and objectified in the orientalist discourse. The Foucauldian power/knowledge paradigm is an elementary model or a concept for understanding Orientalism.

Said’s formulations are much indebted to both Foucault’s work on discourse and Gramsci’s conception of cultural hegemony as stated before in this paper. In

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<sup>208</sup> - Ibid., p. 108.

these connections, Said uses the concept of discourse to re-order the study of colonialism. This means that he has moved outside the traditional academic sphere into the arena of discourse and ideology. In addition, Said puts the emphasis on the significance of Orientalism as what he describes “a textual reality” that persistently rehearses and reiterates a specific kind of knowledge about the Orient. In this context, Said explains that

Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.<sup>209</sup>

In accordance with this paradigm, the concept of discourse in fact enables Foucault and Said as well to analyze and to examine an extensive variety of texts which belong to different historical periods. In this context, Edward Said attempts to deconstruct the conventional Orientalist history as he clearly affirms that everything thought or written about the orient could not be autonomous or objective in any way. The assumption here is that European knowledge about the East is not derived from facts or reality, but from prearranged notions that foresee all oriental cultures as essentially the same. This knowledge is supported by a production of fictional, visual texts and historical documents that are both constructed and more importantly are of limited understanding of the realities of the Muslim world.

Like Michelle Foucault, Said attempts to link and to relate texts to structures of thought and more importantly to the mechanisms of power. This explains the reason why Edward Said refuses Derrida’s notion of textuality in which he claims that

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<sup>209</sup> - Ibid., p. 94.

"there is nothing outside the text" [it n y a pas de hors-texte]).<sup>210</sup> Said comments on this and explains that

Whereas Derrida's theory of textuality brings criticism to bear upon a signifier freed from any obligation to a transcendental signified, Foucault's theories move criticism from a consideration of the signifier to a description of the signifier's place, a place rarely innocent, dimensionless, or without the affirmative authority of discursive discipline.<sup>211</sup>

In other words, Said's criticism is derived from the fact that Derrida gives importance to the inside of the text as he is mainly and only concerned "with reading" a text and that a text is nothing more than the "traces" found there by the reader (...) Derrida's criticism therefore moves us into the text, Foucault's in and out of it."<sup>212</sup> This clearly suggests that any text, be it a visual or a literary one, should be examined in accordance with a framework that takes into consideration its political dimensions and ideological implications. To put it differently, texts are analyzed as "part of the social processes of differentiation, exclusion, incorporation, and rule,"<sup>213</sup> as Edward Said suggests.

Said deploys Foucault's concept of discourse in his analysis of orientalism and states in clear terms that orientalism is defined and approached as a discourse, as a materialization of power-knowledge paradigm. In this respect, Said vehemently confirms that

without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously

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<sup>210</sup> - Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, Evanston, (IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 136.

<sup>211</sup> - Edward Said, "The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions Author(s)" in *Edward W. Said Source Critical Inquiry*, (Vol. 4, No. 4, Summer, 1978), p. 709.

<sup>212</sup> - Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>213</sup> - Ibid, p. 704.

systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.<sup>214</sup>

Discourse is defined here as a way of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or a practice. It is about the utilization of knowledge and thoughts that in fact have a great impact on people's behavior as well as their way of thinking. In other words, discourses are, therefore, not just ideas but also ways of producing knowledge that shape and frame the world accordingly.

In his examination on how human beings are made subjects, Foucault situates the subject in relations to multifarious power relations. His purpose is not to assault and attack an organization or an institution of power or a group but rather to describe a procedure or a structure of power. Power relations are, according to Michel Foucault, engraved, inculcated and imprinted in the social behavior. He clearly states that

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

<sup>215</sup> Michel Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and Power" in Hubert L. Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 212.

The execution of power is, however, not only perceived as a relationship between individuals or partners, but also as a way in which particular actions modify others. The concept of power, according to him, exists only when it is put into action, and what characterizes a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action upon an action. Similarly to the concept of orientalism, the subjects are the natives, the orientals who are being exposed to different forms of European coercion and exploitation. They are in fact exposed to the permanent gaze of the colonizing power through different forms. As Foucault says, “if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others”<sup>216</sup>.

The assumption in this respect is that orientalist scholars, artists and writers create a powerful discourse built on suppositions and stereotypes that in fact help them protract and maintain images as well as ideas about the orient; thus, exercising power and domination over them. The subject becomes, in this context, not an individual with a self-governing and stable entity, but rather functions within the perimeters of the discursive formation of a particular period and culture. As a consequence, the subject, meaning here the orient, is produced and more importantly framed within discourse.<sup>217</sup> In this conjuncture, the colonial discourse as a field has not only been approached by postcolonial male theorists but also has been a space where postcolonial feminist writers developed their own understanding to the universalizing tendencies that frame and shape the colonial discourse.

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<sup>216</sup>- Ibid., p. 786.

<sup>217</sup>- Ibid., p. 55.

## C- Women's Representation between Orientalism and Feminism

Muslim women have always been presented as one of the most subjugated groups in the world. The issue of Muslim women has brought much discussions and debates in academic circles especially in the West. Besides this, the veil, as a cultural aspect that defines Muslim women, has also been the most recurrent them and topic of discussion. In this context, the status of women in Islam is defectively exploited and represented by different media outlets. To support this notion, Abukhattala states clearly that

The combination of misinformation and lack of depth of knowledge about the role and position of women in Islam contributes to fostering the notion that Islam puts women firmly in a second-class position.<sup>218</sup>

In accordance with this, it could be said that the Muslim world today seems to be inundated with stereotypes and fallacies about women's role within Islam and society. Such fallacies and misconceptions do not emanate from the lack of knowledge but also are produced, reinforced and disseminated "from informal education provided by the media and popular culture, such as, movies, television, radio, newspapers, comic books and advertisements."<sup>219</sup> Documentary films, in this respect, contribute to the cultivation of a culture that tends to discriminate against Muslim women and to relegate them to a lower position

In his seminal book, *Real Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack Shaheen, who is a well-known scholar in film studies, affirms that most of the films he analyzed share the same principle which is to deform and taint the images of

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<sup>218</sup> - Ibrahim Abukhattala, "The New Bogyman Under The Bed: Image of Islam in The Western School Curriculum and Media", in *The Miseducation of The West*, Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg, Eds. (Library of Congress, 2004), p. 161.

<sup>219</sup> - Ibid, p. 154.

Arabs and Muslims and never show their real, genuine life. To clarify more, Shaheen says that Muslim and Arab women are “humiliated, demonized, and eroticized in more than 50 feature films.”<sup>220</sup> In this context, Muslim women appear to be thrown into a world of stereotypes and clichés as they are depicted as

bosomy belly dancers leering out from diaphanous veils, or as disposable “knick-knacks,” scantily-clad harem maidens with bare midriffs, closeted in the palace’s women’s quarters.<sup>221</sup>

Apparently, the Arabian Nights stories and fantasies that in fact produces stereotypical tales about fictional harem maidens seems to have profoundly affected and framed the Western perspective on Muslim women. The “Arabian Nights’ created a literary *frisson* that affected mainstream works of English (and more generally, European) fiction.”<sup>222</sup> In Arabian nights, women are depicted as

demonesses, procuresses, sorceresses, witches. They are fickle, faithless and lewd. They are irrepressively malign, and plot to achieve their base desires in the most merciless manner imaginable.<sup>223</sup>

Shaheen argues that the negative notions ascribed to Muslim women by media are much more ubiquitous in a number of Hollywood feature films, such as *The Beast of Morocco* (1966), *The Sheltering Sky* (1990), *Saadia* (1953), and *Cleopatra* (1917) along with other films. The notion that Shaheen wants to state here is that the majority of films tend to portray and to give a fixed as well as an essentialized image

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<sup>220</sup> - Jack Shaheen, *Real Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), p. 183.

<sup>221</sup> - Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>222</sup> - Rana Kabani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*, (1996), p. 29.

<sup>223</sup> - Ibid., p. 48.

about Muslim women. It is an image that always displays Muslim women “as shapeless Bundles of Black, a homogeneous sea of covered women trekking silently behind their unshaven mates.”<sup>224</sup>

Muslim women also are denied love and discouraged from loving Western men. Shaheen gives another example of a film where women are not allowed to love Westerners. Shaheen states clearly that “The majority of movies, such as *Outpost in Morocco* (1949), posit that an Arab woman in love with a Western hero must die.”<sup>225</sup> As a result of this, in media’s representations, Muslim women emerge to incarnate evil and to embody all the vice. In other words, Muslim women are not only denied agency and independence in documentary films but also portrayed and stereotypically perceived as always “voiceless, submissive, and weak.”<sup>226</sup>

In his book *Covering Islam*, Said examines the issue of Islam and how the Western media portrays the religion along with its people. His idea is that media has in fact effectively contributed to a large extent in producing a specific way of seeing Islam as “a threat to Western civilization.”<sup>227</sup> In the same context, Said puts the emphasis on how media intensifies the binary opposition between West and East and the divide between “us and them”. It is argued that the rapid growth and expansion of Islamic empire and the flourishing of the Islamic civilization posed and still pose a direct threat to the West. As John L. Esposito says “the Muslims were a threat to Western Christendom long before they became a problem”.<sup>228</sup> This altercation and hostility is often, if not always, portrayed as a “clash of civilizations”, a term coined by Samuel Huntington in his famous book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations:*

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<sup>224</sup> - Jack Shaheen , *Real Bad Arabs*, p. 183.

<sup>225</sup> - Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>226</sup> - Ibrahim Abukhatala, *The Miseducation of The West*, p. 159.

<sup>227</sup> - Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How The Media and Experts Determine How We See The Rest of The World*, (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>228</sup> - John L. Esposito, “Islam and The West: Roots of Conflict, Cooperation and Confrontation”, in *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 37.

*Remaking of World Order*. In this context, Edward Said clarifies this relationship and exemplifies this division by analyzing Steven Emerson's documentary film *Jihad in America* (1995). He clearly states that

the purport of the film is to agitate against Islam as a sinister breeder of cruel, insensate killers, plotters, and lustfully violent men. In scene after scene—all of them isolated from any real context— we are regaled with fulminating, bearded imams, raging against the West and Jews most especially, threatening genocide and unending warfare against the West.<sup>229</sup>

Indeed, Said draws the conclusion that the West discriminates against Islam and its followers, incriminates Islamic practices and more importantly convicts Muslim women. To put it differently, Said not only does he display how the orientalist discourse functions on Muslim women but also laments the fast dissemination of stereotypes by media that is supposed to be unbiased.

Edward Said has in fact offered a critique of Western offensive treatment of oriental women depicted in dominant male or masculine representations. As a matter of a fact, he is criticized for discussing few female writers and rebuked for paying little attention to female agency. To support this, Lily Abu Lughod believes that Said did not involve women in his analysis of the colonial and orientalist discourse. His theory lacks the aspect of gender and sexuality which seem to be discarded and even absented. In her article, “Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies”, Lila Abu Lughod noticeably declares that the book *Orientalism* is “not meant to be a work of feminist scholarship or theory, yet it has engendered feminist scholarship and debate

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<sup>229</sup> - Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How The Media and Experts Determine How We See The Rest of The World*, (1997), p. 85.

in the Middle East.”<sup>230</sup>This in fact has generated criticism and led many feminist scholars such as Sara Mills, and Meyda Yegnoigo to attack Said for his gender-blindness of *Orientalism*. This gender-blindness refers not only to a factual blindness to the centrality of gender and sexuality in Orientalist discourse, but also to Said’s strong affirmation that Orientalism was “an exclusively male province”. Said admits in clear terms that orientalism is

exclusively male province; like so many professional guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writing of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.<sup>231</sup>

In the light of this quote, Said confesses that the orientalist discourse is discriminatory against women and does not deal with women’s issues, sexuality and gender in depth. This is due to the fact that the system of orientalism is naturally a male field or province. Valerie Kennedy confirms in lucid terms that “it was, perhaps, Said’s almost total neglect of gender in orientalism that prompted women critics to turn to the field and often, but not always, to focus on women’s writing.”<sup>232</sup> The same could be said about Homi Bhabha’s work on the ambivalence of colonial discourse. Bhabha investigates the relationship between a “colonizing” subject and a “colonized” object without reference to how the specifics of gender might confound or complicate his model.

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<sup>230</sup> - Lila Abu Lughod, “Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies”, in *Feminist Studies, Inc.* (Vol. 27, No. 1, Spring, 2001), p. 101.

<sup>231</sup> - Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 207-08.

<sup>232</sup> - Valerie Kennedy, “Orientalism and The Study of The Imperial Travel Narrative”, in *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction*, (Polity, 2000), p. 102.

In reaction to these theorists, Sara Mills asserts in her book *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, that it is “the first book to set women travelers within the colonial context.”<sup>233</sup> She adds that her study in fact documents and reveals “many hundred of women travelers, a fact which Shirley Foster, also working on this area, has confirmed.”<sup>234</sup> This affirmation enabled the female writers a degree of agency in the way they both represented themselves and the native female that was formed as their subject.

Sara Mills eulogizes female travel accounts for the way they foster or cultivate a personal engagement with the objects of their study. This means that traveling and writing has in fact empowered women, offered them the opportunity to discover other cultures and more importantly to write about them. Through writing and traveling, women have been brought back to the field of politics and decision-making. In addition to this, Sara Mills criticizes Edward Said and other male theorists for their systematic neglect of gender. According to her, these male theorists such as Said, have failed in bringing up women's issues and more significantly did not pay attention to the gender element in their analyses and examination of the colonial discourse. She states that

Neither Said nor other analysts include women's writing within their accounts of colonialist writing. There is a tradition of reading women's writing as trivial or as marginal to the mainstream, and this is certainly the attitude to women's travel writing; which is portrayed as the records of the travels of eccentric and rather strange spinsters.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> - Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

<sup>235</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 61.

This means that the texts written by women travelers have largely and systematically been discarded by male postcolonial theorists. According to Sara Mills, women's writing about the colonial condition as a whole has been ignored or disapprovingly viewed. Indeed, Western women effectively contributed to literature and were active in their writings about the orient. However, they were given little attention and their work was depicted as trivial and frivolous. In this context, Mills suggests that

Although women feature largely in the colonial enterprise as potent objects of purity and symbols of home, their writing is not taken seriously in the same way that male Orientalist writing is.<sup>236</sup>

As a matter of fact, Mills argues that female travel writing of the Orient should not be subsumed within patriarchal conventions, because patriarchy as a discourse itself is intrinsically tumultuous. For her, women have been able to manage “against the odds, to write and react against the supposed rules, thus transforming those rules.”<sup>237</sup> This assertion has in fact allowed female writers to express themselves freely away from the patriarchal convention. It enables them a degree of agency both in the way they represent themselves and others.

Sara Mills theorizes and analyzes women’s writing based on readings of Marxist theory as well as Foucault’s concept of power and discourse. Despite the fact that Mills rebukes Foucault for not dealing with gender in his writings, she deploys his theoretical framework of power, knowledge and discourse. Mills confirms that “Foucault’s work is particularly useful because of his insistence on the centrality of power, especially when instantiated in knowledge.”<sup>238</sup> She in fact uses Foucault’s paradigm and model of “discontinuity and subversion in order to map out the

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<sup>236</sup> - Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>237</sup> - Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>238</sup> - Ibid., p. 15 -16.

discursive specificities and complexities of texts she reads”<sup>239</sup> in an attempt to unravel and uncover the characteristics of every text, as Khalid Bekkaoui suggests.

Sara Mills strongly objects to the complete immersion of female voices and travel texts into a solely patriarchal body of Orientalist discourse. This framework further complicates Said’s unitary notion of Orientalist discourse as it ignores elements of gender and sexuality. In this conjuncture, she states that

this is not a call for more analysis of the ‘images of women’ in male colonial texts, but rather a call for a fundamental analysis of the way that gender, amongst other factors, structures texts in both their production and reception.<sup>240</sup>

She also criticizes Said for his consideration of the colonial discourse as a homogenous and for dealing with it as a male province, discarding other important elements in the text. She argues that

Said’s failure to take account of other elements in texts and his view of Orientalism as a unified discourse with clearly identifiable author-intentions and volition is obviously an effect of his professed liberalism.<sup>241</sup>

This means that Said has failed to admit the significance of other voices, knowledges and elements that could in fact disturb the colonial enterprise particularly those at the

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<sup>239</sup> - Khalid Bekkaoui, *Signs of Spectacular of Resistance: The Spanish Moor and British Orientalism*. (Casablanca: Imprimerie Najah El Jadida, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>240</sup> - Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 196.

<sup>241</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 54.

margins of the dominant discourse. For her, Said has approached colonialism as a unified structure and has asserted the homogeneity of the orientalist discourse. In other words, he did not allow the other voices to emerge in the text. This clearly suggests that Edward Said entirely dismisses sections of the text and overlooks important elements in the text. In this context, she notices that there is no established structure or position within colonial discourse and texts. These texts, for her, are filled with contradictions and elements that might endanger the colonial enterprise and render it vulnerable and weak. Mills clarifies this notion and goes on explaining that

Each discursive position is undermined or called into question by other elements within the text, and while some elements may be dominant, there are sections of the text which temper a straightforward position being offered.<sup>242</sup>

This unsteadiness of the colonial discourse is especially accurate and congruent to “women’s texts produced within this period of colonial history, because of the complexity of the way that women are constituted as producers of texts”.<sup>243</sup> Therefore, the lack of an unwavering and stable position within the colonial discourse has allowed critics to scrutinize and to examine “these texts less as simply replications of or reaffirmations of colonial rule, but rather as symptoms of the contradictions inherent in that power relation.”<sup>244</sup> The contradictions here are exemplified and communicated in the form of errors and omissions in texts produced by writers. However, for Mills, these contradictions are not important but the lack of gender that is essential and responsible for the indiscretion in the colonial discourse. To support this notion, Mills undoubtedly states that “elements of women’s travel writing are more heterogeneous and that these elements may act as a critique of the

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<sup>242</sup> - Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>243</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> - Sara Mills *Discourses of Difference*, p. 195.

colonialist enterprise since there is a stress on personal involvement and investment on the part of the narrator.”<sup>245</sup>

Sara Mills, in her book *Discourses of Difference*, examines three works of women travelers, Alexandra Davis Neel, Mary Kingsley and Nina Mazuchilli. For her, these texts transgress both the norms of colonial discourse as well as the norms of femininity. To put it differently, these texts are not seen or perceived as colonial products neither as feminist texts, rather they seem to “be caught up in the contradictory clashes of these discourses one with another.”<sup>246</sup> Accordingly, no stable position is provided nor can finally be given to the text. In this context, Mills suggests that women writers occupy a marginal position at home and in the colonies, thus are confronted with what she calls “different textual constraints”<sup>247</sup> from those inflicted on male writers. Consequently, women affirm and take part in the dominant colonial discourse while at the same time attempting to transgress boundaries of literary male conventions. This is apparent in the way they depict recognizable native people or individuals, in contrast to an unidentifiable mass as portrayed in male colonial discourse. Mills here confesses, as Khalid Bekkaoui says, that the

colonial authority is strongly inscribed in the colonial stereotypes which represent the natives as culturally different and racially inferior Others who deserve to be conquered and civilized by Europe.<sup>248</sup>

However, Mills again puts the emphasis on the idea that women are not capable of adopting an imperialistic voice like males do. This is due to the fact that women always have been on the margin of imperialism and enjoyed a secondary position

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<sup>245</sup> - Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>246</sup> - Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>247</sup> - Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>248</sup> - Khalid Bekkaoui, *Signs of Spectacular Resistance*, p. 44.

vis-à-vis colonial authority. She states that despite male “privileged class position, women writers tended to concentrate on descriptions of people as individuals, rather than on statements about the race as whole.”<sup>249</sup> It is these discursive elements and strategies linked to Western women’s writing which account for the heterogeneity and complexity of female representations. For this reason, it is noticed that there is no unified structure or a homogenous male or female writer; rather there is a gendered discourse that tends to upset and disturb the colonial enterprise. Mills clearly puts it

Orientalism is not, then, the unified discourse that Said describes, but is rather made up of diverse elements which both contest and affirm the dominant discourses and other discourses of which it is composed.<sup>250</sup>

This means that orientalism tends to suppress and restrain the immense heterogeneity and diversity of the Western discourse without taking into account the diverse elements within the colonial discourse. In this conjuncture, it could be said that women’s writing is capable of undermining and unsettling the colonial discourse. If men write and travel as colonial agents or as representatives of colonialism, then women travel and write as gendered individuals.

In her book, *Colonial fantasies Towards a Feminist Reading*, Meyda Yegenoglu examines the connection between postcolonial theory and feminist criticism. She in fact concentrates on the persistent Western interest in the veil and veiled women, introducing a new level of debate and criticism to the questions of the veil, sexuality and gender in relation to orientalism. For her, Orientalism offers a

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<sup>249</sup> - Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 55.

powerful structure where different western discourses amalgamate and present Islam and the orient as an object for examination and control. To put it differently, Yegeneglu perceives orientalism not as the only way, the only means through which the orient is portrayed, but the system of orientalism also provides, as she says,

a fruitful arena where questions of a more general nature, questions that pertain to the representation of cultural and sexual difference and the nature of the discursive constitution of otherness, could be raised.<sup>251</sup>

In the light of this, Meyda tries to display that the very desire to penetrate the veiled facade of "otherness" is constitutive of hegemonic as well as orientalist colonial identity.

Yegeneglu in fact criticizes and disapproves of the excessive employment of illustrations of woman and images of sexuality in Orientalist discourse which principally serve as a trope that is exclusively linked to the portrayal of Oriental woman and of sexuality. To put it differently, Yegeneglu affirms that “neither the images of woman nor the images of sexuality are understood as important aspects of the way Orientalist discourse is structured.”<sup>252</sup> To exemplify how this discourse functions, European colonialists believe, especially during their colonial occupation of Arab and Muslim societies, that the reasons behind the backwardness and the decadence of Muslim societies are due to the systematic barring of women from public life and to the imposition of the practice of veiling on women. These practices turned to symbolize the emblem of both women’s oppression and their culture’s backwardness. Accordingly, Europeans felt the urge to act against these practices

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<sup>251</sup>- Meyda Yegeneglu, *Colonial fantasies Towards a Feminist Reading*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>252</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 24.

and took them as pretexts in order to justify and legitimize their intervention in Arab and Muslim societies. Such intervention is conducted through adopting the strategy or more precisely the policy of the “civilizing mission” which principally aims at bringing the orient to light and civilization. For this reason, Loubna Skalli believes that “The veil and segregation were taken as an expression of the general backwardness of the cultures, and hence, all the cultural customs and norms need to be cast away and replaced by Western enlightening lifestyles.”<sup>253</sup>

This inclination to unveil Muslim women in the name of liberation was fundamentally “linked not only to the discourse of Enlightenment but also to the scopoc regime of modernity which is characterized by a desire to master, control, and reshape the body of the subjects by making them visible”<sup>254</sup>, as Meyda Yegeneglu argues. Since the veil is capable of preventing and discouraging the colonial gaze from penetrating, its lifting becomes crucial to the colonial enterprise. The idea here is that the European subject, be it male or female, becomes fascinated and absorbed by the veil. They try to uncover the hidden world behind the veil, attempting to unravel the mystery behind it. She explains this notion by saying that

(...) whether male or female, the Western subject's desire for its Oriental other is always mediated by a desire to have access to the space of its women, to the body of its women and to the truth of its women. What explains such an obsession with the Oriental woman is the metonymic association established between the Orient and its women.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> - Loubna Skalli, “Loving Muslim Women with a Vengeance: The West, Women, and Fundamentalism”, in *The Miseducation of The West*. Kincheloe and Steinberg Eds. (Library of Congress, 2004), p. 47.

<sup>254</sup> - Meyda Yegeneglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading*, p. 12.

<sup>255</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 72 -73.

Therefore, The desire to enter or break into the private space of women and more particularly to “penetrate the mysteries of the Orient and thereby to uncover hidden secrets (usually expressed in the desire to lift the veil and enter into the forbidden space of the harem) is one of the constitutive tropes of Orientalist discourse.”<sup>256</sup>

The failure to access harem by European orientalist males helped to a great extent perpetuate the image of harem as a space that is merely sexual in nature. This of course has contributed to the reinforcement of an imperial, colonial discourse that placed the orient as inferior to the occident. This is why, the orientalist discourse, according to Yegeneglu, is powerfully articulated and expressed in women’s work. Since the male gaze seems to be limited and unable to break into the hidden space of oriental women, this discourse resorts to the use of every possible means to unravel this mysterious place including Western women. This is confirmed by Yegeneglu when she says that

When the "inner" space is closed in this way, the only available means for the Western man is to rely on the Western woman's accounts of the harem's forbidden space, her description of the unveiled women, the details of their everyday life, etc. It is thus only through the assistance of the Western woman (for she is the only "foreigner" allowed to enter into the "forbidden zone") that the mysteries of this inaccessible "inner space" and the "essence" of the Orient secluded in it could be unconcealed; it is she who can remedy the longlasting lack of the Western subject.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> - Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>257</sup> - Ibid., p. 74.

In the light of the previous passage, it becomes clear that women's representations and recounts of Harem and oriental women fill the blank in the male orientalist discourse. This means that only with the appearance of female travelers and writers that Europe was introduced to the hidden world of harem. To put it differently, their failure to observe and "have access to the interiority of the other and to the space of woman reminds men of their limit, their *lack*."<sup>258</sup> It is at this point that Western women become reliable sources and able to "remedy this gap" in the colonial discourse, as Yegenglu believes. Gautier, who is a French painter, also confirms this by saying that

the only method to employ, in order to really obtain any authentic information, is to request some European lady, who is well introduced and has access to harems, to recount to you faithfully that which she has seen.<sup>259</sup>

This in fact expresses and reflects the deep frustration and disappointment of men as they are solely able to see "the marginal" in Muslim societies compared to what women can see. Gautier gave an example of this particularly when he visited Turkey. He says, quoted by Yegeneglu, that

In Constantinople, when our curiosity is allowed to run the streets, enter the houses, it irritates us to be unable to go past the selamlik with our cups of coffee and chobouks, we often say to ourselves "Only women should go to Turkey what can a men see in this jealous country? White minarets, guilloche fountains, red houses, black cypresses, many dogs,

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<sup>258</sup> - Ibid., p. 74-75.

<sup>259</sup> - Ibid., p. 75.

hammals with loaded camels . . . or photographs and optical views." Nothing more. For a woman, on the contrary, the odalisque opens itself, the harem has no more mysteries; those faces, doubtless charming, for which the bearded tourist searches in vain . . . she contemplates stripped of their veil, in all the brilliance of their beauty; the fregge [cloak], a domino from Islam's permanent carnival, could not conceal more gracious bodies and splendid costumes.<sup>260</sup>

These observations seem to indicate that women writers, travelers and photographers provide “reality or the truth” about Muslim women. Nevertheless, this also suggests that Western women in fact do identify with the male discourse and fill its gaps. They do not offer an alternative as they mainly work within the male framework and particularly adopt the male perspective. In this context, Yegeneglu says that

Being called upon to supplement the masculine subject's lack, Western woman is happy to report "faithfully" what she witnesses in this hermetically sealed world. In fact, as many of them say, they see themselves as fulfilling an important function for their male counterparts: completing their deficiencies.<sup>261</sup>

This means that despite the fact that women's representation is perceived as an ‘authentic’ portrayal of the life of Muslim women, their faithfulness and loyalty

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<sup>260</sup> - Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>261</sup> - Ibid., p. 75-76.

“constitute the fullness and coherence of the narratives of men”.<sup>262</sup> In other words, this faithfulness to the masculine colonial discourse questions the authenticity presented by women. In addition to this, being a supplement rather than a creator, Western women are given a secondary and limited role in the orientalist representations. Yegeneglu affirms this by saying that

The fact that such accounts (women’s texts) are positioned as simple additions implies that they are in fact "no-thing" because they are added to a full and completed account of the Orient.<sup>263</sup>

Reina Lewis in her assessment of colonial photography in *Race- Femininity-Representation: Women, Culture and The Orientalized Other in the Work of Henriette Browne and George Eliot, 1855-1880*, tries to explore the different manners through which European women contributed to colonial representations of the natives. She in fact criticizes Said for not paying attention to gender. For her, he used gender just as a metaphor without taking into consideration the possible effects of gender positions in texts. In this context, Reina Lewis states clearly that Said commits a serious mistake when he omitted gender from his analysis about the orient. For her, Edward Said “never questions women’s apparent absence as producers of Orientalist discourse or as agents with colonial power”<sup>264</sup>

Reina Lewis and Sara Mills share the same perspective that resides in the fact that women’s representations seem to be different from that of their male counterparts. Their accounts and their stories enabled a different relationship with the

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<sup>262</sup> - Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>263</sup> - Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>264</sup> - Reina Lewis, “Race-Femininity-Representation: Women, Culture and The Orientalized Other in the Work of Henriette Browne and George Eliot, 1855-1880.” (University of Middlesex, 1994), p. 39.

colonized and more significantly enabled an alternative reading of orientalism. In this vein, Lewis clearly argues that

In a period marked by heightened imperial activity and increasing female participation in the cultural sphere, the interaction of the identificatory relational terms of race and gender could produce positions from which to enunciate alternative representations of racial differences.<sup>265</sup>

From the point of view of Lewis, women's representations are seen as contributions that do not only add to the colonial orientalist discourse but more importantly tend to reshape it and reframe it and even disrupt "the masculinism found in accounts and critiques of imperialism."<sup>266</sup> Besides this, Lewis believes that the European female discourse tends to desexualize and deconstruct the depiction of oriental Muslim women. To clarify more, Lewis provides an example of Brown's work that for her offers a feminized vision of the orient. She observes that her painting in fact does not eroticize women but more significantly tend to domesticate them in the sense that it represents them as mothers or wives. As Lewis states, "European women desexualized the harem, domesticating it to reproduce the haremluk (the segregated quarters of women and children) as an 'image of the middle-class "home": domestic, feminine and autonomous"<sup>267</sup> Such depiction, for Lewis

(...) challenges Western assumptions about the inimical otherness of the Orient by portraying points of similarity between the two (the oriental domestic as analogy for the Occidental domestic); this threat to

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<sup>265</sup> - Ibid., p. 34- 35.

<sup>266</sup> - Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>267</sup> - Ibid., p. 197.

the conventional assumption of absolute difference is also a challenge to the West's assumption of absolute superiority.<sup>268</sup>

In accordance with this, European women seem to establish a strong opposition toward the colonial enterprise to which they belong. As a matter of fact, they attempt to set up a site of resistance and a kind of confrontation against the absolute power represented by her nation and the institution they are part of. Following this logic, European women try to find place in the colonial organization by adopting a minimum of male theoretical discourse through placing documentary photographs “in a field considered appropriate for women artists.”<sup>269</sup>

The theorist Sara mills argues that “although women’s travel writing is not given authoritative status (...) the texts add to the affirming and contesting of knowledges about the empire.”<sup>270</sup> Like travel writing, documentary filmmaking and the process of photography

(...) enables us to see oppositional forces at work in colonial texts. What are generally regarded as limitations on women’s writing (the discourse of femininity restricts what can be written, women are unable to draw on colonial discourse in the same way as men) can in fact be seen to be discursively productive, in that these constraints enable a form of writing whose contours both disclose the nature of the dominant discourses and constitute a critique from its margins.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> - Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>269</sup> - Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>270</sup> - Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, p. 21.

<sup>271</sup> - Ibid., p. 22 -23.

This means that despite the fact that Muslim women are being filmed and photographed by a male or a female filmmaker, oriental subjects still confront the usual dichotomic and oppositional treatment from Europeans. This suggests that European filmmakers tend to preserve their identity, superiority and keep detached from the oriental exoticism. Reina Lewis illustrates this point and says that

the majority of women's visual representations of the orient, and of the harem, are morally untroubling could be either because (for those that actually travelled) they never actually saw anything immoral, or that they edited it out of their accounts lest it impinge on them as witnesses of the scene.<sup>272</sup>

This quote suggests clearly that an alternative discourse on Muslim or oriental women is being developed through women's way of filmmaking. For this reason, it can be assumed that women filmmakers and photographers can be perceived as

neither more pure (truthful and nonimperialist) than men, nor as more susceptible to fantasy (the dangerously gullible female tourist) but as agents whose mixture of observation and fantasy about the East is specifically gendered because of the social and psychological restraints on their experience and representation of the Orient.<sup>273</sup>

The essential difference between the East and the West resides in the fact that the Eastern system is perceived as static, motionless and the situation of women is

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<sup>272</sup> - Reina Lewis, "*Race- Femininity- Representation*", p. 290.

<sup>273</sup> - *Ibid*, p. 334- 35.

assumed to be stagnant. Such conditions are due to the "backward" and "barbaric" Islamic traditions, which are believed to be fundamental in the enslavement and the incarceration of Muslim women. Woodsmall, quoted by Yegeneglu, expresses this prevalent tendency in the following way, the Eastern system

remained practically unchanged throughout the centuries. The Islamic world, with its integrated system of religion and society, has preserved with little if any variation, the social customs of the seventh century.<sup>274</sup>

This clearly means that the Eastern world is unable to change, incapable of making progress and development. This inability includes also the situation of Muslim women who seem to be thrown into a world of utter darkness and permanent oppression. This is expressed evidently by Juliet Menice who says that

What is particular and problematic is that while women elsewhere gradually liberated themselves to some extent from the total supremacy of men, *most women in the Muslim world continued to be totally subordinate. They live under a system which has barely changed despite the undeniable evolution of their societies* and of certain would-be "revolutionary" governments to grant women greater equality and rights, in keeping what we would call desire for "Modernization".<sup>275</sup> (emphasis added)

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<sup>274</sup> - Meyda Yegeneglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading*, p. 98- 99.

<sup>275</sup> - Cited in Meyda Yegeneglu's book *Colonial Fantasies*, p. 99.

It is striking to notice that there is no difference between the observations of Mince and Woodsmall toward the Eastern world. It appears that both agree on the fact that the oriental world need to break up with tradition and adopt the Western civilized model. To put it differently, both observations were made within the same representational orientalist framework that tends to negate and to discard any positive trait or civilized feature in the orient. The capability of the Eastern world to modernize itself is supposed to be possible and achievable only by its fundamental break from tradition.

The repressive and unfree status of the Muslim woman is not only ethically deplored, but also she is transformed into a symbol that represents the entire oppressive cultural, social, political and religious tradition of the country. Conceived as the most visible emblem of tradition and religion, the veil or hijab is perceived as an evidence of oppression and regression in Muslim oriental societies. Therefore, these societies need to be modernized and civilized while their Muslim women need to be unveiled because the veil is regarded as obstacle to progress and more importantly “an impediment to modernization.”<sup>276</sup> In accordance with this, the veil turns into a permanent problem, a quandary that needs to be solved and the desire to lift the veil becomes an urgent need.

This relationship between the orient and its women, between tradition and modernity can explain the constant fascination or rather the European obsession with the veil. They take the process of unveiling women as the privileged indication of progress. In other words, the removal of the veil becomes one of the most important key concepts of social change in the Muslim world because it is seen as the first step towards freedom and liberty. This is why, Ruth Woodsmall links the process of progress and freedom with the practice of lifting of the veil. In Meyda Yegeneglu’s

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<sup>276</sup> - Ibid., p. 99.

book *Colonial Fantasies Towards a Feminist Reading*, Woodsmall notices clearly that

although there is no concerted move to discard the veil, one is conscious of a very strong urge for freedom which is symbolized by unveiling (...) although there is little unveiling as individuals, there is a growth in freedom in collective unveiling.<sup>277</sup>

In the light of this, the European colonial ideology suggests that the removal of the veil and its elimination from public life as well as allowing women to have access to public spaces are practices that liberate women from the shackles of oppression. In addition to this, the Western or European colonialist vision of taking control over the orient is implied in the unveiling strategy. To put it differently, lifting the veil is taken as an act or rather as a strategy to exercise domination over the orient and more importantly to take hold on Muslim women's bodies. This is confirmed by Meyda Yegeneglu when she vehemently declares that

It was only by rendering Muslim women's bodies visible that they became capable of being recodified, redefined, and reformulated according to new, Western codes. The regime and control involved in colonial power needs the creation of docile, obedient subjects.<sup>278</sup>

Addressing the same issue of the veil, Chandra Mohanty tries to demonstrate how the Western discourse on veiling has contributed to the distortion of images of Muslim women or third world women. In her article entitled *Under the Western*

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<sup>277</sup> - Cited in Meyda Yegeneglu's book *Colonial Fantasies*, p. 100.

<sup>278</sup> - Ibid., p. 116.

*Eyes*, Chandra Mohanty criticizes homogeneous perceptions and assumptions made by some of the Western feminists who in their texts put the emphasis on women in the third world. She in fact opposes Western feminists who rather than investigating the social, economic and the historical conditions that oppress women, they tend to construct a singular monolithic and ahistorical image of the powerless victimized “Third World Woman”. This classification leads to an essential universal categorization of a huge group of women in the orient or in the East, labeling them as “sexually constrained (...) ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.).”<sup>279</sup> Accordingly, all women in the East are and should be treated as one singular unit negating all the differences of experiences that different women from different places in the world have.

Mohanty attempts to expose and to unravel ethnocentric ideas that not only discard diversity among women, but also lead to classifying them with one universal identity. The over-generalization of women, Mohanty argues, destroys the harmony, unity and solidarity among women. Besides this, it stratifies them into two conflicting groups: Western women, who are generally free, enjoy equal opportunity, and who are also clever, superior and cultured, vis-à-vis the group classified as the “Orient World” where Muslim women are universally depicted as uneducated, victimized, sexually battered, and thus in need of some sort of escape or deliverance. This inherent labeling entails asymmetries of power which puts Western feminism as doorkeeper of knowledge through texts and language.

One of the key characteristics of colonial discourse has been its misrepresentation or denunciation of the diversity of non-European people. In order to dominate their subjects, colonial administrators developed highly structured classificatory schemes under which all people could be subsumed. For example,

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<sup>279</sup>- Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”, in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. (Durham and London: Duke University, 2003), p. 22.

Mohanty states that European feminists do neglect the specific social, historical and cultural contexts that surround the process of veiling. Rather than viewing Muslim women as agents, colonial theorists reduce them to mere objects and more importantly equate veiling with oppression and sexual control. In this respect, she states that

While there may be a physical similarity in the veils worn by women in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the specific meaning attached to this practice varies according to the cultural and ideological context.<sup>280</sup>

This clearly suggests that though Muslim women seem to wear the same veil, sharing the same practice of veiling, their motivation to put on the veil is not the same. The implication here is that Muslim women wear the veil for different reasons, serving different purposes. She gives the example of Iran where women used to veil themselves to express their opposition to the Shah regime. She says that

Iranian middle-class women veiled themselves during the 1979 revolution to indicate solidarity with their veiled, working class sisters, while in contemporary Iran, mandatory Islamic laws dictate that all Iranian women wear veils.<sup>281</sup>

This passage suggests that there are different contexts and reasons which motivate women to wear the veil. In the first example, Iranian women chose to wear the veil by themselves in an attempt to show their resistance and their opposition to the Shah regime and at the same time to show solidarity and cooperation with their sisters. In

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<sup>280</sup> - Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>281</sup> - Ibid.

this case, Mohanty tells us that, “the veil is both an oppositional and a revolutionary gesture”<sup>282</sup>. However, in the second instance, when the Iranian Islamic party took over the state and controlled the social life in Iran, the new regime began a process of the islamization of the state. In accordance with this, the new regime issued laws that impose the veil on Iranian women and oblige them to cover themselves. In this context, women of Iran become obliged to abide by the state laws and accept Mullah’s orders to wear the veil not out of conviction but out of coercion and fear. This is why, Mohanty says that in the second example the veil turns into “a coercive institutional mandate.”<sup>283</sup> This clearly demonstrates how the practice of veiling differs according to the cultural, ideological, political, and historical circumstances. For this reason, to perceive the process of veiling as the only method to control female sexuality and oppress women seem to be invalid and unacceptable. In other words, the veil should be examined in accordance to the context and to the circumstance that surrounds its emergence. To confirm this, Mohanty states that

To assume that the mere practice of veiling women in a number of Muslim countries indicates the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation not only is analytically reductive but also proves quite useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy.<sup>284</sup>

In the light of this, it could be assumed that the veil in fact takes another dimension and another meaning that of opposition and resistance. The fact that Iranian women wore the veil during the revolution demonstrates and reflects a feminist consciousness of their rights. In this context, the veil is seen as a political act and more importantly as an “oppositional political strategy”, using Mohanty’s words.

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<sup>282</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> - Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>284</sup> - Ibid.

This depiction of the veil as a weapon and as a political strategy used to oppose and to resist colonial power is reflected and clearly depicted in Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). It is a film that intelligently portrays the struggle against colonialism and one that forcefully sets up the legitimate right of the people in every subjugated country to resist imperialist occupation. As a matter of fact, this film reveals how Algerian women during the war of independence used the veil to express their resistance towards French colonialism. Frantz Fanon, in his article entitled "Algeria Unveiled", explores the dynamics, the politics behind the veil and the role of women in this struggle. He argues that the role of women in revolutionary struggles, involving themselves in dangerous activities, military and political ones, might reveal that these roles are no longer exclusive to men. In this respect, Fanon clearly states that

deciding to incorporate women as essential elements, to have the Revolution depend on their presence and their action in this or that sector, was obviously a wholly revolutionary step.<sup>285</sup>

Fanon also contends that the veil appears to maintain a confusing and a disturbing status in the mind of the French colonizer. It was perceived as a fitting affirmation of all the most malicious and hateful stereotypes about Algerian women in particular and Muslim women in general. In other words, the veil stood as confirmation of Algeria's decadence and backwardness.<sup>286</sup> Accordingly, the colonial gaze in the film projected women as others, perceiving them as a danger to the colonial existence. However, this colonial gaze is subverted and undermined by the resistance of these women as well as by their defiance to colonialism. Through wearing the veil Algerian women were capable of surveying and observing the

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<sup>285</sup> - Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled", in *A Dying Colonialism*. Trans, Haakon Chevalier. (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 48 – 49.

<sup>286</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 38.

colonizer without being seen. This act perfectly destabilizes the colonial process of ordering and categorizing. This also suggests that behind the veil the thoughts of the women are indecipherable and cannot be known. To put it differently, Fanon celebrates the courage and the bravery of women and more importantly treats them as allegories or metaphors of the nation. Algerian veiled women are no longer treated as oppressed but as having nationalistic values, capable of disturbing and unsettling the colonial reign.

On the basis of previous discussions, this dissertation tends to analyze the image of the Muslim woman in European documentary films. It attempts to investigate their representation and discusses the dynamics and the politics that govern their portrayal in film documentary. This examination in fact adopts a postcolonial as well as a postcolonial feminist theories which help deconstruct the documentary images and revisit the orientalist discourse employed in them.

**Part II: Thematic Examination of Documentary Films**

**Chapter I: Deconstructing Five Documentary Films *Islam Vs Europe: Decide Now Before It is Too Late, The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam, British Women Joining Jihad in Syria, Submission, Honor Violence Rising in The West***

## **A-The European Orientalist Perception of Muslim Women in *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before it is Too Late and The Violent Oppression of Women In Islam***

A documentary film does not deal with reality as it is but it does represent it and deform it in a way to serve and respond to particular expectations and more significantly to satisfy the filmmaker's vision or ideology. What is more important is that the documentary does employ some of the techniques that are mentioned above so as to create a kind of "reality" through which the audience is invited to witness and sympathize with. They are used so as to construct meaning and to convey specific notions about a certain topic. In other words, a documentary film derives its power and influence from the use of three main elements which are images, sound and language. These three elements work together mainly to create meaning, to promote ideologies and to represent the subject according to a certain perspective implemented by the filmmaker.

A documentary film or rather a documentary "text" is seen as the product of the three speech acts<sup>287</sup> mentioned above, they work in combination with one another and carry out many of the functions for which language is employed. For instance, in the following documentary entitled *Europe Vs Islam: Decide now before it is too late*, the filmmaker does not resort to the use of language to support and to explain the content of the documentary film. Rather, he gives more attention and more focus to images as they are powerful tools of promoting ideologies and for their ability to function as language. He resorts to

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<sup>287</sup> - Aguayo, J. Angela. "Documentary Film and Social Change: A Rhetorical Investigation of Dissent", (University of Texas, 2005), p. 80.

the use of images along with music so as to influence the audience and convince them of the idea or the perspective being dealt with in the documentary.

Images are powerful and influential means as they have the propensity to change perspectives, to alter the vision of the world and could be as maneuvered as any other form of representation. To put it differently, images or documentary photographs can be manipulated and constructed to promote particular propaganda and to serve the European Western interests. They are not simply innocent products that are displayed, but they are visual means which produce knowledge about the East or the Orient so as to inscribe certain messages, ideologies and to convey particular meanings.

The documentary photographs are not there to describe a place, an individual or a group of people; rather they are there in order to have an idea about something. This idea is defended by the theorist Terry Barrett who says that “photographs are more than mere things”<sup>288</sup>, which means they are pictorial fabrics that shape people’s awareness and perception of things. Accordingly, documentary photographs are employed to teach viewers how to think about things, how to see them and how to perform in accordance with them.

The documentaries, which are under study, do not serve as straight, innocent films that people might enjoy watching them, but they are perceived as strong and influential tools of directing and guiding our awareness of people, things and the world around us. In fact, these documentaries are produced and filtered through political colonial discourse in order to maintain the expansion of a global European culture. They are used as means to present the East as an ‘Orient’ other that lives in a permanent state of oppression, darkness and

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<sup>288</sup> -Terry Barrett, “A Theoretical Construct for Interpreting Photographs”, in *Studies in Art Education*, (Vol. 27, No. 2, 1986), p. 55.

terrorism and that it will be always seen as the opposite of civilization, enlightenment and humanity.

The East or the “Orient” is seen to be constructed as a negative version of European culture. This is why, the European representation about the East is not authentic and real but it is "severally governed by cultural motivations and acutely forwarded by political incentives"<sup>289</sup> as Edward Said states. Therefore, it becomes obvious that any examination, study or analysis of any European or Western textual or visual production should essentially be related to the cultural and political biases and prejudices that they might be used to pass colonial tropes and stereotypes through. In other words, there are constellations of fake assumptions and misconceptions that motivate, stimulate and shape the European understanding as well as the Western attitudes towards the East. In this context, Edward Said clearly points out that

My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a *political* doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s *difference* with its weakness<sup>290</sup>. (emphasis mine).

Accordingly, the East was depicted and presented as an irrational, underdeveloped, and violent “Other”, contrasted with the rational, developed and peaceful Europe. A contrast, Said suggests, derives from the need to create “difference” between the two worlds West and East. It is within this structure that these two documentaries *Europe Vs Islam: Decide now before it is too late* and *The Violent Oppression of Muslim Women* are to be analyzed and examined.

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<sup>289</sup> - Said Edward. *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 12.

<sup>290</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 204.

The documentary film *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before it is Too Late* consists only of a series of photographs that are put together to form a text and they are supported by music. It is a short film but a powerful one. The filmmaker here wants to construct meaning through the grammar of the technique of still and moving images and through the expressiveness of the sound or the music. The title itself is expressive and more meaningful “*Europe Vs Islam*”; it sums up the whole documentary film. This is to say, the filmmaker produces this documentary so as to support and explain the idea represented by this title. In fact, we have two complete different worlds Europe and Islam, West and East. The idea here is that Islam is represented as the opposite, as the enemy of everything that is civilized and developed. They will never be combined, never live together and more importantly they will be in a permanent clash and conflict.

This documentary revolves around issues and ideas that are raised and discussed by Samuel Huntington in his book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order (1996)*. In this book, Huntington argues that there is an enormous menace and danger coming from the Islamic world. He said that

We are seriously threatened by an ideological war within Islam. It is a civil war in which a radical Islamist faction is striking out at the West and at moderate Muslims.<sup>291</sup>

He even predicts that the relationship between the West and East will always be characterized by hatred and hostility. In this context, he calls upon the West to be cautious when dealing with Muslims. He also urges the West to invent or come up with policies that aim at protecting them from a ferocious Islamic enemy that is lurking behind.

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<sup>291</sup> - Huntington, P. Samuel, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p, 58.

This documentary relies on Huntington's ideas and works mainly within the framework of binary opposition, an idea Edward Said prominently called orientalism. Following this discourse, Islam and Europe are seen as two worlds that are unable to coexist because Islam is meant to be completely inferior, violent and submissive while Europe is meant to be progressive, peaceful and free. To support these notions, the following photograph suggests that Islam does represent a threat to Europe through opposing freedom which is seen as the supreme value in Europe. See the following figure,



Figure 1.1: Freedom enemies

According to this photograph, which is among others in the documentary<sup>292</sup>, the filmmaker wants to tell Europeans that Muslims do not enjoy and share the European Western values such as freedom and democracy. Muslims reject to conform to the new principles of living which those European nations are offering them. Muslims are ungrateful and evil creatures who refuse completely to adopt the very important value in Europe which is freedom.

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<sup>292</sup> - It should be noted that all the photographs, starting from Figure 1.1 until Figure 1.6, are taken from the documentary film *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before it is Too Late*.

This photograph is not genuine and real but it is clearly manipulated. If we look closely at the picture, we will see that the hands of the protester are invisible and that only fingers are seen to hold that sign. Their faces have been covered and hidden so as to imply that Muslims do represent a great threat to the European values and life. This is also revealed through the notice or the sign in which we see “freedom go to hell”. This is a sign that clearly suggests that Muslims are in fact in oppositional terms with the West. Instead of calling for liberty and emancipation, they are calling for rebellion against the European norms and values. This picture in fact works as a reminder or as a confirmation to what former president of the United States of America said in one of his speeches. Bush said that, referring to the Muslim world,

They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.<sup>293</sup>

The filmmaker is aware of this manipulation as he aims at deceiving Europeans and making them afraid of Muslims and Islam. Therefore, Muslims must not be accepted as part of the European society and that they cannot be integrated as they strongly refuse to conform to the Western standards. To put it differently, this representation serves essentially to strengthen the threat and the danger that a Muslim man is claimed to pose against Europe.

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<sup>293</sup> - Shahid Alam, “The Clash Thesis: A Failing Ideology?” in *Global Policy Forum*, (2004), p. 1.

Europe endeavors to justify and to rationalize the procedures that aim at governing and controlling the so-called “violent behavior of Muslims” through surveillance in order to discipline Muslim men and women.<sup>294</sup> Such discipline means surveying and controlling Muslim communities that are established in Europe, and in their own homelands in the form of invasion. This is also confirmed by Huntington when he said that the clash of civilizations

between East and West—is the phenomenon with which we must grapple, we can begin to develop a strategy and tactics for doing so.<sup>295</sup>

This is a clear affirmation of the importance of having a strategy and a decisive policy that can limit the threat of the East not as a geographical place, but as a culture that is doomed to be atrocious and aggressive. The same manipulation and construction occurs with the following image. See figure 1.2,



Figure 1.2: Islam and Violence

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<sup>294</sup> - Aquil Rajaa, “Change and Muslim Women”, in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, (Vol. 1 No. 21, USA, 2011), p. 21.

<sup>295</sup> - Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (New York: Touchstone, 1996), p. 58.

As the picture above reveals, the Quran is added and put next to a rifle so as to mislead the European audience into thinking that violence is inherently part of Islam. The fact of putting the Quran next to a gun or a rifle is very significant. The image itself turns into a thought and this is exactly the objective of this documentary film. This is to say, the filmmaker already knows that Quran is the holy book of Muslims and that it represents the heart of Islam. For this reason, the filmmaker, by manipulating and making changes on the picture, suggests that Islam is in fact the source that ignites violence, encourages killing and terrorism. It is of paramount importance to note that this photo has been modified, changed and colored through the use of the technique of Photoshop so as to serve as a stereotype. Accordingly, Quran is represented as the book that teaches Muslims how to use violence and inflict terror on others. The message becomes clear Islam is synonymous with violence, terrorism and fundamentalism.

This documentary is produced to remind European viewers that Islam is in fact a religion of violence and that its followers are “terrorists” and “evil”. Therefore, Europe as the source of civilization and knowledge should fight those “terrorists” and take the lead in eradicating the existence of Islam in Europe otherwise Europe will turn into a nest of “terrorism” and violence. Terrorism has become the most important issue in Europe. Such behavior has spread among European nations especially after the 9/11 attacks as well as the Madrid, London, and Paris attacks of 2015 and the list goes on. As a matter of a fact, since 2015 Europe witnessed an increase of the number of terrorist attacks and the deaths caused by these attacks. However, the representation of media seems to cultivate a culture of fear and islamophobia. To put it differently, European media take these attacks as an excuse to tarnish the picture of Muslims and their religion Islam.

The European discourse about the other or the orient does not limit itself to representing Islam as a violent religion that threatens European values but also to construct many of misleading images about Muslim women. In other words, the colonial discourse does perpetuate many of the constructed stereotypes and prejudices about Muslim women. These stereotypes are meant to shape and reframe viewers' attitudes toward the aggressive vision of Islam.

The documentary film *Islam Vs Europe* demonstrates images of large numbers of Muslim women in different situations from different countries and encourages European spectators to perceive these images as examples for a “fundamentalist” menace.

The East is represented as a society and culture that adopts systematic practices of oppression and discrimination against women. Muslim women not only have to obey their fathers and brothers, but also have to endure the rules and the restrictions imposed on them by the patriarchal religious order. To clarify more this point, the following picture suggests that Muslim women suffer from patriarchy and extreme rule of males. See figure 1.3,



Figure 1.3: Muslim Women Killed in a Stadium

The previous Figure 1.3 clearly suggests that women are treated with extreme force and power by males. They are imprisoned and not permitted to either express themselves or defend themselves. What is worse is that Muslim women are being punished and killed as they are women. In this case, the European viewers might believe that Muslim women in these authoritarian Islamic countries are submitted to an absolute male power and domination. Women are treated as if they were slaves of dictatorial families and society.

The whole Eastern political and social systems seem to be absolutist and extremist in dealing with women. The idea here is that if Muslim women rebel against this patriarchal and unfair system, they will be ruthlessly punished. In other words, they will be killed and executed in front of people, and this will take place in the stadium as the picture reveals. The stadium itself becomes a symbol of oppression, death and a space where severe punishments are being executed unlike in European countries where stadiums are filled with women to enjoy their times and to joyfully watch football games. Consider the following picture,



Figure 1.4: Happy European Women

It becomes obvious, as the picture above shows, that happiness, cheerfulness and life are exclusively attributed to European women while their counterpart Muslim women are completely deprived of any humane aspect. In other words, Muslim women are destined to live in a permanent status of oppression, sadness and more importantly to be ruled by “Islamic extremists”. As a matter of a fact, viewers are deliberately exposed to see these Islamic atrocities in order to generate a generalized message that Muslim men are extremists, fundamentalists and terrorists. The spectator is being led to comprehend the fact that terrorism, oppression and fanaticism equal Islam.

In this picture Figure (1.5), Dutch women seem to be completely different from Muslim ones. They seem to be confident, liberated, enjoying their times and happy with their lives. Muslim women, on the contrary, are thrown into a life of utter darkness and absolute misery.



Figure 1.5: Cheerful Dutch Ladies

In fact, it could be said that this documentary does homogenize European women and represent them as one category of people. Through displaying such illustrations the filmmaker attempts to convince the European viewers that this

documentary “tells reality”. In fact, it does represent and more specifically deform reality. Most of the images were taken out of their original context so as to serve a certain ideology and more importantly to cultivate a feeling of hatred and fear towards Islam and the East. Furthermore, these images went through processes of manipulation, arrangement, selection and construction to delude the European audience into thinking that the images of the documentary are genuine and real. The following picture supports this idea, see figure (1.6),



Figure 1.6: Muslim women buried alive

This picture shows us clearly that a Muslim woman is being buried alive. It implies that Muslim women are victims of a completely discriminating social system, enduring and suffering from a severe patriarchy and complete subjugation. The idea here is that Muslim women are not only punished in their countries by killing or executing them but also by torturing them and brutally burying them alive. As a matter of a fact, the colonial discourse has always changed and distorted the reality of the people and cultures of the East. In addition, it has stripped them of their humanity, represented them as primitive,

uncivilized and even as savage. In this case, the European viewer seems to believe that Muslim women live in an everlasting state of sadness, sorrowfulness and deep grief.

Another look on the picture suggests that her facial expressions intensify this calamity; a poor, innocent and helpless victim is being buried alive because she was born a woman. Such stereotypes are in fact intrinsically connected to a larger world of political strategies, policies and implications. This in fact explains the situation of Muslim communities in Europe that are presented in media as inherently uncivilized. Muslim communities are also exposed to deliberate and to unusual procedures of control, surveillance, and stigmatization. For this reason, Europe resorts to its supposed right and obligation to defend and protect itself, even if by coercion, from what they call barbaric Islamic values.

Documentary films and the selection of photographs that are shown to the European audience are ideologically framed, and loaded with an Islamophobic culture that tends to make a permanent clash with Muslims. Muslim males are represented as “fanatics”, “inhuman”, and “terrorists” whose mission is only to observe, control and put women under their surveillance while Muslim women are represented as “oppressed”, “inferior” “victims”, and sometimes as “terrorists”. Therefore, the East or the Other becomes a place where a world of disfigurations, images, stereotypes and prejudices are produced and circulated. As Homi Bhabha suggests in his book *Location of Culture*, the Orient or Otherness is in fact

constructed within an apparatus of power which contains, in both sense of the world as another knowledge- a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourses as the limited form of otherness, that

fixed form of difference, that I have called stereotypes.<sup>296</sup>

It becomes clear that this documentary film in dealing with Otherness does not aim at giving a true picture of the real world. It aims mainly at “disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture”<sup>297</sup> which is the Islamic culture. At the same time, promoting the European civilization and calling for the adoption of Western life and values. The underlying assumption here is that this documentary explicitly proposes, through its clear and flagrant contrast between Europe as the source of civilization and Islam as the source of violence, that both worlds are incompatible as the latter is racially, culturally, politically and socially different.

The exaggerated negative perspectives about Islam and Muslim women are essentially derived from Orientalist writings and images that are predominantly deceptive, misleading and not accurately depicting the lives of ordinary Muslim women. This is why, Mohja Kahf says that the tradition of victimizing Muslim women becomes the core narrative of media, she says of course

There are variations on the narrative: the woman may be a willing accomplice, or she may be escaping her victimization. But “the Muslim woman is being victimized” is the common axis undergirding a wide variety of Western representations.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> - Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 70.

<sup>297</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 109.

<sup>298</sup> - Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman From Termagant to Odalisque*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 1.

Accordingly, it could be said that the mainstream media in Europe has largely contributed to the spreading out of distorted images about Muslim women for different political and ideological reasons. In other words, the established images of Arab and Muslim women in European scholarship as well as their imagination revolve around either fantasized, sexualized or eroticized representations of Muslim women, or around powerlessly dominated creatures in need of a rescuer as it is the case with veiled women.

This is in fact the perspective of what the documentary film *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* tries to convey. It is a documentary film that reinforces many of the orientalist thoughts and strengthens some of the cliché notions about Muslim women. This is achieved mainly by displaying various images of “victimized” Muslim women supported by narration along with sad music. These three major constituents are used so as to construct meaning and to communicate specific ideological notions about Muslim women.

*The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* is pregnant with meanings and images of Muslim women who are traditionally oppressed and cracked down by male figures. The title does suggest that women are relegated to a lower position and that they are poor and helpless victims of a completely discriminating order. Muslim women here are not only depicted as having a Muslim culture and background but whose faith is a backward and oppressive one. This indicates that there is indeed a close relationship between Islam as a religion and the condition of the victimized Muslim woman. This fact is intended mainly to tarnish the picture of Islam and more precisely to introduce it as

“fundamentalist”, “extremist” and “terrorist” religion. Such stereotypes are embedded in the European perception as they help frame their attitudes and continue to influence their major policy-decisions towards the East.

The documentary film *The Violent Oppression of Muslim Women* begins with a loud and noisy mixture of voices. We hear people screaming, shouting and yelling without any sort of self-control or order. This loud and noisy mixture of voices is heard and accompanied by the narrator throughout the documentary film. The documentary includes varied types of images of veiled, unveiled women, caricatures of violence and short shots from world events. The documentary starts with displaying a moving photograph of the flag of Saudi Arabia in which we have a picture of a Muslim woman veiled in Black and accompanied by a statement or a caption that justifies the war on terrorism and suggests that priority is given to saving women from oppression. See Figure (2.1)



Figure 2.1: “Oppressed” Women

In the light of this image, it could be deduced that this statement made by Robert Spencer reminds us of the period of time that witnessed the war in Afghanistan

as well as the war in Iraq after the 9/11 attacks on New York. In both of these wars, saving supposed victimized, oppressed Muslim women and combating militant Muslim men, as they claimed, serve as essential pretexts and justifications for waging war against these Muslim countries. These wars in fact have negatively impacted Europeans and contributed to an increase in adopting a false and a fake image of Islam that is threatening and aggressive by nature. The implication here is that “this global war” is not only about fighting terrorism but also about saving Muslim women from their demeaning and degrading situations of living under despotic regimes that deny their freedoms. Islam then is represented as posing a menace against European and Western civilization in general.

Another example that fits perfectly within Robert Spencer’s statement is that of Laura Bush’s speech about Muslim women in Afghanistan. She claims clearly that “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”<sup>299</sup> Such portrayal of Muslim women as subjugated and oppressed victims requiring a Western intervention and calling for a Western salvage is reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak’s famous declaration about the fact that “white men” must come to “save brown women from brown men”<sup>300</sup>. This means that the global war on terror is perceived as also a war against Islamic or Muslim misogynists who tend to imprison, oppress and entrap women. It is for this

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<sup>299</sup> - James Gerstenzang, and Lisa Getter, “Laura Bush Addresses State of Afghan Women”, Los Angeles Times, (2013), retrieved from: <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/nov/18/news/mn-5602>.

<sup>300</sup> - Gyatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993), p. 92.

reason that the writer Jasmin Zine in her article entitled “Muslim Women and The Politics of Representation” confirms vehemently that

Muslim women are particularly marked, as media images of *burqah*-clad women have become the trademark of Islam’s repression. These images serve to justify all forms of military action under the trope of “liberation,” as was the earlier formula for colonial intervention and control in the Muslim world.<sup>301</sup> (original emphasis).

In accordance with this, the war on terrorism has, subsequently, been transformed into a liberation operation that aims at regaining the violated rights of Muslim women and more significantly liberate them from the shackles of their Muslim societies.

The fact that a black veiled woman being pictured there is intended to suggest that women’s rights and freedom are in complete denial and hostility and that they are unattainable as long as these women keep wearing this repressive dress which is the veil. In this context, Huntington suggests that Islamic societies would be more affluent, more progressive if they were to adopt and to espouse “our way of life.” This description offers a momentous justificatory account for the war against terrorism in many places in the world.

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<sup>301</sup> - Jasmin Zin, “Muslim Women and The Politics of Representation”, in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, (Vol.19. No.4), p. 2.

For this reason, he portrays Islam and the East as the West's Other. For him, the primary conflict is

between two different versions of what is right and what is wrong, as a consequence, who is right and who is wrong. So long as Islam remains Islam (which it will) and the West remains the West (which is more dubious), this fundamental conflict between two great civilizations and ways of life will continue to define their relations in the future even as it has defined them for the past fourteen centuries.<sup>302</sup>

The European orientalist discourse about the other or the orient, in particular Muslim women perpetuates many of the constructed stereotypes and biases. The documentary films under study tends to represent and construct these women as oppressed and exploited badly by males, be them husbands, brothers or even fathers. In other words, women are exposed to be poor, helpless victims and more importantly deprived of their essential rights. They are forbidden from going out, they are forced to submit to the will of their husbands and fulfill their desires and needs. If they refuse to do so, they will be punished or beaten to death. Figure (2.2) in the following page shows us how a young veiled woman being executed in front of the public,

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<sup>302</sup> - Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, p. 212.



Figure 2.2: A Wife Being Persecuted

The narrator while explaining this figure, she says that “over 90% of Muslim wives in Pakistan have been choked, beaten or abused sexually for reasons like cooking and unsatisfactory meals or for failing to give birth to a male child”<sup>303</sup>. The language she uses becomes deeply discursive and more notably loaded with ideologies and misconceptions. This Western discursive mode of representation on Muslim women prevents Eastern women from any potential promises for self-emancipation, freedom and liberation. Like the picture in *Europe Vs Islam* in which women are executed in the stadium, women in *The Violent Oppression* are being flogged and beaten in front of people.

The general assumption is that Muslim women are victims of an utterly discriminating social system and their only alternative is to endure and to suffer from patriarchal despotism and extreme subjugation. Not only this but also men of these Muslim societies tend to confine and to imprison their daughters and their wives inside the house and exploit them badly. As a result, women are prohibited from going outside and prevented from enjoying their freedoms. The following figure (2.3) in the following page supports this idea,

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<sup>303</sup> - David Horowitz, *The Oppression of Muslim Women in Islam*.



Figure 2.3: A Close up Image of Confined Muslim Women

Figure (2.3) evidently suggests that Muslim women, even if they are young, are imprisoned and not permitted to express themselves freely. It shows us a Muslim woman who is confined and put behind bars perhaps by an absent husband. Though being absent, her husband might be seen as an authoritarian figure in the family, whose horrifying symbolic presence seems to affect her even more badly. In this case, the European and Western viewer seems to believe that this woman has been hunted, captured and held captive in a cage, a prison or in a harem from which her only escape is through her thinking.

It is an escape from the sadness and grief they face from the Muslim patriarchal society that turns her into a poor, innocent and helpless victim. Her facial expressions and looks as well intensify this calamity, and confirm that they live in an unfortunate and miserable life. Additionally, her pleading eyes suggest that she is deeply worried and that she has to face the abject humiliation of living a life that is built on worries, pressures and troubles. To put it differently, there is a hidden world which is full of unfair, unmerited, and inequitable practices that Muslim women are doomed to live in.



Figure 2.4: a married couple



Figure 2.5: Young women behind bars

In figure (2.4) we see a selected picture of a man who has total authority and control over women. The woman there perhaps is his wife, concubine or his maid. He is in a position in which he is standing powerfully, and giving orders. On the contrary, his wife has nothing to do except to obey his orders, to dance for him, to please and satisfy his sexual desires. In case of rejection, the woman should be responsible for her choice and bears the harsh consequences.

Figure (2.5) also is seen as warning to European viewers and to the world that in Muslim societies early marriages are something blessed and acceptable by the family. Muslim families marry off their daughters as early as possible because finding a husband is the ultimate objective in this culture.

It is certain that the aim behind using such photographs is not to protect young girls from their male counterparts but more importantly to exploit the

phenomenon of early marriages to quarrel against the primitiveness and crudeness of Islamic societies and, hence, to authorize and justify colonial intervention. These figures are employed to convey an important message which is that Muslim women are put into the service of men and if they refuse to obey, they will be put in prison as the figure (2.5) suggests. Such a practice would void women of their agency, negate their intellectual side and more importantly reduced them to mere commodities.

The representation of veiled Muslim women as oppressed, secluded and imprisoned in a harem suggests, as Homa Hoodfar, says that “the veil and the Muslim harem, as the world of women, emerged as a source of fascination, fantasy and frustration for Western writers.”<sup>304</sup> Harems here are introduced as closed spaces where Muslim men incarcerate their Muslim wives. Accordingly, Muslim women are portrayed as “prisoners, frequently-naked and unveiled and at time sitting at windows with bars, with little hope of ever being free.”<sup>305</sup> The employment of barred window along with a woman fixed to it seems to be highly charged with symbols of confinement. The prison-house is a theme that is not new to Europeans but it is frequently used as it emerges from orientalist paintings and literature. Being in a concealed and private space that is solely limited to women, the harem is typically conceived as an impenetrable space with no linkage to the outside world.

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<sup>304</sup> - Homa Hoodfar, “The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women”, in *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, eds. Elizabeth Casteli and Rosamond Rodman, (Palgrave, 2001) , p. 426

<sup>305</sup> - Ibid.

Such depiction of Muslim women could only suggest that Europe tries to give itself the right to intervene under the pretext of civilizing and saving Muslim women from the darkness of imprisonment. The idea here is that even if a Muslim woman wants divorce, the narrator Noonie Darwish in the documentary tells the audience that she will be “left alone without support and without her children and she is usually taken by her father”<sup>306</sup> to be incarcerated and oppressed again.

The European and Western orientalist tropes systematically characterize the East as the prison-house of women, and therefore, as a moribund culture incapable of making civilized changes. This documentary film is “awash with demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism, or Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny.”<sup>307</sup> It becomes clear that victimization and terrorization that is caused by the Islamic patriarchal culture and early marriage become one of the major aspects that characterize the Islamic society; a society that has been thrown into a world of absolute darkness and incomprehensible weirdness.

Stereotypes or what the filmmaker calls “facts” show that “the global war we are fighting against the *Islamic Jihad* is not about bombs and hijacked airliners but also about the oppression of women. The Islamic law *Sharia* that terrorists are fighting to impose upon the world is a law that would create a global state of gender apartheid”<sup>308</sup> as Darwish confirms. This in fact suggests

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<sup>306</sup> - David Horowitz, *The Oppression of Muslim Women in Islam*.

<sup>307</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 347.

<sup>308</sup> - David Horowitz, *The Oppression of Muslim Women in Islam*.

that the filmmaker wants to convince European spectators with the idea that Sharia as a law authorizes an institutionalization of discriminatory practices against women rendering them vehicles of subordination and obedience. This is clearly and strongly endorsed by Robert Spencer in his book *Islam Unveiled* when he claims that

Women in Islam are victimized by the Sharia, or Islamic law, which privileges men in numerous social and legal instances, and in some countries they are further victimized by customs such as polygamy and female circumcision. As for slavery, it still survives in a few Arab countries including Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Mauritania.<sup>309</sup>

In the light of this quote, one could deduce that the narrator of this documentary confirms Spencer's beliefs on Muslims and supposedly claims that all Muslim women are subjected to the increase of violence incited by Islam. She even gives examples of Muslim women from Indonesia, Afghanistan, and many other countries where Muslim women are maltreated and severely abused by their husbands and by the culture they belong to. To put it differently, the East or Muslim societies are represented as societies and cultures that adopt systematic practices of oppression and discrimination against women. Therefore, the East or the other becomes a place where a world of disfigurements, images, stereotypes and prejudices are produced and circulated.

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<sup>309</sup> - Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled Disturbing Questions About The World's Fastest-Growing Faith*, (San Francisco: Encounter Book, 2002), p. xi.

The idea of Jihad is of extreme importance in this text in the sense that throughout the documentary film the word Jihad is repeated systematically and principally linked to death, killing and violence. The narrator says that “we are fighting against the Islamic Jihad”<sup>310</sup> associating Jihad mainly to violence and terrorism. This is done deliberately and in an attempt to conduct the viewer’s perception towards conceiving of Jihad as an act of terrorism.

European and Western mainstream media often misuses the meaning of jihad by referring to it as the holy war in which Muslims unjustly and irrationally murder non-Muslims. It has become synonymous with the political, the cultural and the ideological stereotypes produced about Muslims. In this respect, it should be said that the notion of Jihad has in fact gone through a series of distortions to maintain fixed and conventional views about Muslims.

Such distortions connect Muslims and particularly Muslim men to bloodthirsty, murderous and vicious people and more importantly turns them into nations that love and worship violence. This is revealed and confirmed clearly when Darwish states that “oppression of women is an incidental feature of a society that fosters terrorism”<sup>311</sup> (my emphasis). In the same vein, it could be said that the efforts made behind these distortions is to strip and to devoid the concept of Jihad from its spiritual and religious meanings. To put it differently, this documentary shrinks Jihad to a sole physical performance of violence and to a mere act of terrorism.

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<sup>310</sup> - David Horowitz, *The Oppression of Muslim Women in Islam*.

<sup>311</sup> - Ibid.

In the Islamic religion, Jihad means “to strive” or “to struggle”; it does not automatically mean a military action but most often connotes a continuous struggling for self-enhancement, self-empowerment and to make things look better in Muslim societies. As Clinton Bennete says,

Texts contain much discussion about the meaning of the word *jihad*. It is often and rightly argued that the word does not mean 'war' but 'striving', and includes many types of striving to establish Islam, including the inner struggle against temptation.<sup>312</sup>(original emphasis)

It is not incarcerated in aggressive acts and war as it is theorized and identified in the European world; it is open to different acts and performances that a Muslim in general can do. Jihad can signify a number of things that a Muslim does for the sake of God. However, it is rarely that European media use this kind of definition in their narration and reports.

As we will see in the following documentary, European media often takes the word "jihad" out of context to proliferate and promulgate negative views on Islam. In fact, such stereotypes can only serve the Western policies and military campaigns on what is called “War on Terror”. This campaign has been expressed clearly at the beginning of this documentary when the audience came to believe that the war on the so called “terror” is a war of liberating Muslim women from the shackles of Muslim patriarchal despotism.

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<sup>312</sup> - Clinton Bennete, *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates*, (Library of Congress, London, 2005), p. 232.

In the following section, Muslim women are no longer seen as victims who need to be saved but they are perceived as the victimizers. Muslim women turn into Jihadists and fanatics who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of “jihad”. Therefore, the colonial discourse moves its representation of Muslim women from oppressed to being oppressors.

## **B-Representing Muslim Women as Fanatics and Oppressed in *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria! And Submission***

Over the last decade, the documentary film has become the most influential instrument of the worldwide media. Its power is mainly derived from its ability to represent cultures and people according to a certain ideology and a certain perspective. In fact, the topic of Muslim women has become the focal point or the main concern of public attention in European media. This is why Muslim women are often stereotyped and given negative images that do not reflect reality but to represent them in a way that responds to the European ideology. In this section, I will try to unravel another aspect of the orientalist discourse that does not only portray the Muslim woman as a victim but rather as a victimizer and a terrorist.

Years after September 11 events, the European public, academic, and policy makers around the world have become preoccupied with the phenomenon of terrorism. Europeans want to understand what sort of person would do something so horrible as martyring herself or himself? They want to comprehend what kind of fanatic group would nurture and exert such a maniacal weapon? And, most of all, want to grasp what the European governments as well as counterterrorism centers around the world can do about it? As one might expect, this has resulted in the publication of countless works including the production of films and documentary films on the subject of Jihad and terrorism.

The documentary entitled *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!* is an example of a European representation of Muslim women. Through the use of narrative, images and techniques of interviews and the close up to focus on characters, the filmmaker aims at deforming and distorting the image of Muslim women. In fact, they are represented as killers and terrorists whose main purpose

is to spread terror, to terrify civilians and to make them live in a permanent state of fear.

This documentary is about British women who converted to Islam and are involved in a bloody war in Syria under the pretext of Jihad. These women are in fact presented as a threat and pose a menace to the international security especially to the European one. The language used by the narrator Kylie Morris becomes discursive and more significantly loaded with ideologies, prejudices and misconceptions.

If we take the title as an example *British Women Joining Jihad!* The word Jihad is employed to suggest violence, terrorism and killings. Therefore, European viewers might believe that Islam is being linked to terrorism and that European women who convert and adopt Islam as their religion are longing for death and jihad.

Like in the documentary film *Islam Vs Europe: Decide Before It is Too Late*, jihad becomes the essential objective of this documentary *British Women Joining Jihad* in the sense that the concept has been stripped of its spiritual meanings and ideologically becomes synonymous with terrorism and violence. This had in fact resulted in the spread of Islamophobia around Europe. Europeans have become fearful of anything that has to do with either Islam or Muslims. In other words, the fear of Islam and Muslims has hugely been intensified especially after the break out of the Syrian revolution and the emergence of ISIS<sup>313</sup>. This revolution which has turned into a war later has attracted many people around the world especially Muslim women from Europe.

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<sup>313</sup>- ISIS or sometimes called ISIL is an abbreviation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. It is an armed group that claims to represent Islam and its objective to establish a Caliphate in the region.

Rik Coolsaet in his book entitled *Jihadi Terrorism and Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences*, states that

Young Muslims, from diverse ethnic origins, fall under the spell of radical Islam by what they hear, see, and read thanks to television, satellite dishes and the internet.<sup>314</sup>

This means that European Muslims have been influenced by images of war and calls for jihad which internet plays an imperative role in its dissemination. The documentary starts by displaying a picture of a Muslim bearded man with a veiled woman carrying a rifle along with a title that seems to be written in Arabic, see this figure



Figure 3.1: Arabic Title

This title is not written in Arabic but it is a sentence or a phrase that consists of jumbled letters with no meaning. The insertion of the title as such might be done on purpose in order to create difference. The message behind this suggests that the

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<sup>314</sup> - Rik Coolsaet, *Jihadi Terrorism and Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 44.

language of these jihadists is an eccentric language that belongs to strange and different people.

It is at the beginning of the documentary that the European viewer is exposed to a scene of a woman training in an Islamic uniform which is the full veil. The technique used is the close-up which is intended to make these women the central characters of the film. The image of the “terrorist” comes quickly to the mind of European viewers to shape their ideas and their perceptions.

The filmmaker aims at directing and guiding the viewer’s awareness towards adopting a certain point of a view which is to believe in the notion that Muslim women are also “fanatics”. In fact, such labels can only enforce the European racist policies and military operations on what is called “War on Terror”. The documentary opens with a scene of a fully covered Muslim woman firing shots from a Klachinkof, see the following figure,



Figure 3.2: Muslim woman with a Klachinkof

The narrator Kylie Morris comments on this scene (3.2) and says

This young British woman has traded life in London for a supporting role in the war in Syria. She is a fighter by marriage, newly-wed to a Jihadi from Sweden.<sup>315</sup>

In the light of this, it could be said that the narrator seems to be surprised and shocked to see a Muslim British woman being able to leave everything in London, abandon a prosperous life full of opportunities, to join a war and another life that is completely different and filled with atrocities.

The former president George Bush said clearly after the 9/11 events that “Our 'war on terror' begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.”<sup>316</sup> Accordingly, the production of this documentary becomes a part of a military campaign against anything that is Islamic. Therefore, the United States as well as the European Union took the lead in this war and found it a moral duty to take action against all Islamic organizations including Taliban, Al-Qaida, ISIS, Hamas and other Islamic organizations in Syria such as Nosra and Al Muhajirin.

In this documentary, the concept of jihad is not defined as “a radical revolutionary energy, an agent for peaceful social change, an inner struggle for peace and reconciliation”<sup>317</sup> but it is presented and represented as “a barbarian destructive

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<sup>315</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

<sup>316</sup> - Gary L. Gregg, “George W. Bush: Foreign Affairs”, in *Miller Center*, (University of Virginia, 2018), p. 4.

<sup>317</sup> - Jacqueline O'Rourke, “*Representing Jihad: The Appearing and Disappearing Radical*”, (London: Zed Books, 2012), p. 2.

instinct that opposes civilization.”<sup>318</sup> This is why, most European political reporters and commentators perceive Islam as an aggressive and violent religion which is inherently filled with hate for others. In other words, Islam and Muslim women in this documentary film are routinely denigrated and stereotyped as enemies of European freedom and civilization. They are victimized as potential holders of threatening ideologies as O’Rourke believes.

The narrator Morris goes on describing the situation of this Muslim woman fighter as she relies on the technique of interview. The idea here is that the technique of interview is employed in this documentary so as to reinforce the filmmaker’s argument and to explain his point of view. More importantly, she resorts to the interview so as to give the impression that these women say “the truth” by themselves and that the filmmaker does not intervene in imposing his or her answers, beliefs and his own assumptions on the interviewees.

Meryem is the name of this British Muslim woman fighter who travelled from UK to Syria to join her husband Abu Bakr. The name “Meryam” has been given to her to conceal her real identity. The narrator introduces her as

A tall young woman, dressed in a hijab, complete with face veil, firing a gun. She speaks with a London accent, and calls herself “Meryam”. It’s not her real name, but her commitment to the jihad is real enough.<sup>319</sup>

From a European point of view, the women who travel and join different organizations in Syria and Iraq are in fact often seem to be instrumentalized in

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<sup>318</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

order to put into effect misogynistic ideologies. Accordingly, they are still performing within a powerfully patriarchal system. However, the liberation process appears to be real for a large number of women who do take the journey and conceive the confinements of such a system not as restricting. Meryam does not feel incarcerated in this system as she strongly believes that Islam has made her feel free. See figure (3.3),



Figure 3.3: A Jihadi Woman

The message becomes clear freedom that Islam offers is that of spreading terror. It is a religion that offers opportunities of military training to use rifles, weapons and be immersed in violence. Muslim women are no longer docile and sexualized bodies but they are fanatics armed and perilous soldiers of God prepared for martyrdom in the name of jihad.

Since the start of the conflict in Syria in 2011 between regime forces and opposition, many European women have traveled to join the fight in Syria. The phenomenon of female jihadists joining rebel forces is not new but has received an unusually high amount of attention in the European media. For many Europeans, Muslim women perceive the fight as an obligation they have to fulfill due to the call for Jihad. Many of them travel not only to join male

fighters in their fight but also to marry them. As a matter of fact, the victimizing discourse that has long been associated with Muslim women seems to be unviable in this documentary. See figure (3.4),



Figure 3.4: A Veiled woman with a revolver

Muslim women are no longer represented as those innocent, oppressed and vulnerable humans who need European salvage. On the contrary, this documentary presents them as warriors, ferocious jihadists who are ready to inflict terror and panic on others. The narrator Kylie Morris confirms this notion and says that “Maryam shoots a Kalashnikov for the camera, and then fires off a revolver. She’d like to fight, to become what she calls a martyr.”<sup>320</sup> In this context, Cragin and Daly argue that

There is something disturbing about the concept of women as terrorists. Perhaps it has to do with the feminine identity as nurturer- women are mothers, sisters, and wives, but not killers.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>320</sup>- Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

<sup>321</sup>- Cragin, R. K. & Daly, S. A, *Women as Terrorists: Mothers, Recruiters, and Martyrs*, (California: Praeger Security International, Santa Barbara, 2009), p. 1.

Maryam while having a conversation with the filmmaker, she states that in UK “I used to wear the face veil, it was fine, but when I started to cover my face; people started to say “go back to your country”. I used to reply, ‘I was born round the corner’”.<sup>322</sup> This in fact might suggest that she was not living comfortably in UK as she was exposed to racism and fear inside her home. She felt alone among her people who were supposed to protect her and support her. This might be explained as one of the reasons that made her flee her country and join her husband in Syria. When she was in UK, she felt restricted and her freedom was limited. Her speech indicates that women are more likely to be insulted, assaulted and abused if they wear Islamic clothing. Maryam continues saying that

These are our brothers and sisters and they need our help. So, instead of sitting down focusing on your families or focusing on your studies, you need to stop being selfish.<sup>323</sup>

After living in the UK and being left alone in her struggle in life, she eventually found shelter, and support from the jihadists. Jihadists have been able to attract her, cater for her needs and to be there for her. Currently, she feels home living among her brothers and sisters. This in fact indicates that she wants to assert herself as an independent woman being able to take charge of her life and be among those who can assist her and protect her. To put it differently, Maryam has found the community that could accept her and embrace her; a true bond of brothers and sisters which is completely different from the “fake relationships” she had back home, Maryam further claims.

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<sup>322</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

<sup>323</sup> - Ibid.

The documentary film conveys a message that Muslim women who join jihad, attract also others to come. This is exemplified in Maryam's call for other Muslim women to stop being selfish and join their brothers and sisters in jihad. The idea here is that Jihadists have been able to recruit and to attract other young Europeans, be them women or men, by means of religious indoctrination.

The documentary suggests that Jihad principally bases its terror strategy on the willingness and readiness of these young European Muslim women to lay down their lives for what they see as a divine command, the war against the infidels. The narrator comments on this and says that "the sound of the fight doesn't bother her. Instead, she says it makes her feel like "victory is near."<sup>324</sup>

The documentary film goes on visualizing Muslim women and showing all signs of horrors, dreads and panics making a connection between Islam and terrorism. The depiction of such war which takes place in Syria is enhanced by the camera's centralization on weapons, sounds of bombings and the veil. The narrator confirms this when she says "But this is Syria. There are not only victories but defeats, and serious atrocities."<sup>325</sup> In this context, the orient is deemed to be a place of war and jihad.

The narrator even justifies this war and seems to adopt the ideology of Assad's regime in fighting these terrorist groups without covering and shedding light on the factors that motivate these groups to fight. In other words, the documentary film deliberately neglects the atrocities and war crimes committed by the Assad regime and turns what happened into a war on terror. The champion of course according to this documentary film is the Assad regime that

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<sup>324</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

<sup>325</sup> - Ibid.

takes responsibility of eradicating terrorism and fighting extremism on the behalf of Europeans. In this respect, the narrator says

President Assad's forces are fighting here to take back rebel-held territory from groups they regard as terrorists. By night, from the building where the family live, they can hear the government forces' heavy weapons and see the flash of firing on the horizon.<sup>326</sup>

In this light of this, it becomes clear that the documentary serves to justify the policies of the regime, to uphold its ideology and to embolden its military campaign against what it is called "terrorist groups".

Trevor Mostyn, who is a prominent journalist and expert on European media coverage, noticed that "television loves the image of the ugly, ferocious blood curdling Muslims."<sup>327</sup> This is what European spectators see in this documentary film and in many other similar ones such as *Europe Vs Islam*, and *The Violent Oppression of Women*. Mostyn goes on to use the Palestinian example to suggest that Muslims are perceived as potential terrorists. He states that

there has been this perception created by television that you have soldiers with guns and tanks on one side and children with stones on the other side.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

<sup>327</sup> - Chris Yalonis, *Western Perception of Islam and Muslims*, (California: Communique Partners, LLC, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>328</sup> - Ibid.

This European documentary film conveys a similar image between jihadists who are, on the one hand, prepared to fight and use violence and in the other hand, Muslim women who also are ready to be equipped with guns, rifles, revolvers, bombs and prepared to spread terror. Interestingly enough, women fundamentalists not only fight in battles but also go shopping with their rifles on their shoulders. See figure (3.5),



Figure 3.5: Muslim women go shopping

Morris comments on the scene (3.5) and says that “while their men fight, the two women and their children go shopping and they take their Klachinkof just in case.<sup>329</sup> It could be said that Muslim women do not live and have a normal life but they have a very freighting life that is full of violence and fear. To see women bearing arms, rifles while going to shop, this is extremely shocking to European viewers. This means that the documentary film does accentuate the strange nature of the orient. It presents the oriental community as completely different, unable to join or keep up with European civilization. In other words, the documentary suggests as Edward Said said that “Orientals lived in their

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<sup>329</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

world, "we" lived in ours."<sup>330</sup> When Maryem and her friend Aicha were shopping and buying some food, the filmmaker asked them

What do you miss from the UK? Immediately Maryam answered "food", what kind of food? junk food, the cakes and stuff from the supermarket, my mum's food.<sup>331</sup>

As a matter of fact, food represents a strong constituent in defining the British identity of these women. Her talk about food and the act of buying food from the store are used as important and meaningful emblems. See figure (3.6),



Figure 3.6: terrorists buying food

Food in fact serves as a bridge that connects and relate their place of origin UK with the new setting. In this context, The French sociologist Claude Fischler attempts to discuss the significance of food to identity and how it helps form the

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<sup>330</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*, p. 44.

<sup>331</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

way an individual feels about himself or herself. In his article, he states clearly that

Food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy and organisation, but also, at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently. Food is also central to individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the foods he/she chooses to incorporate.<sup>332</sup>

This passage proves that food plays an essential part in shaping the identity of humans. The first thing Maryam misses from home is food, cakes and her mother's food. The narrator Kelly Morris wants to convey a message that food is a key component in the construction of identity and selfhood. These Muslim women still identify themselves with British identity through food and therefore are yearning to go back home. They are regretting to join their husbands in Syria and this might be taken as an indication that these Muslim British women have been misled, brainwashed and forced to travel to Syria.

Maryam's neighbor Aicha , which is not her real name, is also a British Muslim women who took the decision to join and accompany her husband in his fight in Syria. She in fact expresses her dissatisfaction and disappointment of being in Syria in the first days. However, later on she adapted herself to the new

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<sup>332</sup> - Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity", in *Social Science Information*, (1988), p. 27.

situation and become familiar with the new place. In this respect, Aicha says that

when my husband did come here (Syria) he basically decided to stay here, so, yeah, I was a bit, a little bit unhappy about that but hamdulillah, it's okey.<sup>333</sup>

In this conjuncture, it could be assumed that the objective of the filmmaker is to present the argument that these Muslim women are being exposed to a process of brainwashing and that they have been coerced and forced to travel to Syria. See figure (3.7),



Figure 3.7: Aicha, Maryam's neighbor

As the documentary approaches its end, it closes in a very suggestive scene in which we have both jihadists Abu Bakr the husband and his wife Maryam. Abu Bakr expresses his wish to have more children to carry on what

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<sup>333</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*

he left in case he is martyred. He even has plans for his children to prepare them to become good fighters and jihadists. In this context, Abu Bakr says that

My wife is Hamdulilah pregnant now, five weeks now, so, Inchaelah I will get to see the baby before I get Shahada (laughing) that's what I really want to see...but Hamdulilah I am very happy that she is pregnant, Inchaelah it will be a boy.<sup>334</sup>

It becomes obvious that the documentary film reveals that the project of Jihad is on a continuous process and will never end as it always passes from one generation to another. The message here is that Abu Bakr is planning to transmit all his skills and fight capacities to his next child that he eagerly waiting to see. This means that the next generation of Muslims will be taught and instructed to eulogize armed conflicts and terrorism. Instead of thinking about the future of his child in terms of providing him with good education and cater for his needs to help him secure his future, Abu Bakr has already prepared for his child an atmosphere of war and weapons in which the child will be required to learn how to fight in order to survive. See figure (3.8) in the following page,

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<sup>334</sup> - Kylie Morris, *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!*



Figure 3.8: Married jihadi couple

In the light of this, the documentary sends a clear message to European people that this is the type of life Muslims aspire to have and this is how Muslims think. In addition, the filmmaker assures the Western viewer that even Arab and Muslim children are brought up within violence and terrorism. This racial attitude towards Muslim children aims at deepening the European imagination that Islam is so dangerous and that it shelters all evil and deceitful Muslims, be them young or old.

Another documentary film that fits within this stereotypical framework is that of *Submission* (2004), made by Ayaan Hirsi Ali who was originally born in Somalia but lives and holds a Dutch nationality. The script of the film was written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali who escaped Somalia and sought asylum in the Netherlands. The film was produced by Theo Van Gogh who is a well-known Dutch filmmaker and descendent of the famous Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh. The producer was murdered while riding his bike to work.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> - He was killed and stabbed to death by Mohamed Bouyeri, a Moroccan immigrant who in fact was enraged by the film *Submission* that represents Muslim women as inferior and victims of Islam.

This short film depicts and narrates the experiences of Muslim women living and having to endure patriarchy and violence. It was aired on the Dutch national television and became popular among people and intellectuals. As a matter of fact, the documentary caused controversy and debates on the situation of Muslim women in the Netherlands as well as the veil and the place of Islam in Europe.

Ayyan Hirsi Ali depicts and narrates the stories of five young Muslim women Amina, Aisha, Safiya, Zainab and Fatima.<sup>336</sup> These stories tend to question and debate the rules that guide gender relation in Islamic societies. Amina who is the main character in the film narrates the stories on behalf of her friends. The first story is a critique of the Islamic rules against the premarital sex which is seen as forbidden by Islam. The second deals with the issue of arranged marriage which is believed to be widespread in the Muslim world. The third story sheds light on family violence and shows how women are maltreated by family members if caught in “indecent” situations. The fourth discusses the issue of incest.

All these stories take place in Islamistan which is “an imaginary country where the majority of the population is Muslim and where the legal system is the Shari’a”.<sup>337</sup> These women are presented as victims who suffer from an unjust and a complete repressive religious system that intends to oppress women and limit their freedoms.

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<sup>336</sup>- Muslim women in the documentary film remain anonymous and only one character speaks for them and represents them. They are given names in the original script of the film which is to be found in Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s book *A Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, (2004), p. 153.

<sup>337</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *A Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, (Uitgeverij Augustus, 2004), p. 152.

The documentary film *Submission* opens with a scene of a Muslim woman called Amina. She is young, alone, dressed in a black hijab and completely covered from head to toe in a big and dark room. European viewers could only see a small opening for her eyes. As the woman prepares herself to pray, she picks up the carpet from the floor, unrolls it and then stands in a room with a colorful backdrop and an Arabian looking rug on the floor constructing an Islamic setting. The rug is pointed in the direction of Mecca. Amina stands and faces Mecca as she raises her arms up into the air, with her palms exposed, ready to address Allah, and yells “Allahu Akbar.” See the following figure,



Figure 4.1: Muslim women

The space where she stands appears to be a place of prayer and with Arabic music in the background. Amina is getting ready to start her prayer. When the light is placed on her body, it becomes obvious that the woman is wearing a sort of naked Niqab that looks so visible and transparent. In the same context, we see a camera moves up and down her body and through its lens we see her nude flesh under her outfit, from her belly to her chest, along with Quranic verses written on her skin. She starts praying and reading Surat Al Fatiha but once she

finishes, viewers are automatically exposed to hear sounds of whiplashes in the backdrop.

Amina delivers a speech in which she tells the destiny of a Muslim woman named Aisha. In the meantime, the camera slowly moves from Amina to focus on Aisha who is lying on the floor in a very weak position. What we see here is wounds and scars on her body, caused by the strokes of the cane. Written across them is a text from the Quran ,chapter 24, verse 2 (Al-Nur, or The Light).<sup>338</sup> See figure (4.2),



Figure 4.2: Muslim Woman Beaten

The woman says “O Allah, as I lie here wounded, my spirit broken I hear in my head the judge's voice as he pronounces me guilty. The sentence I've to serve is in your words.”<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *A Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, p. 154.

<sup>339</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Submission*.

She then goes on explaining that two years ago she fell in love with a man called Rahman. She used to exchange admiring looks with him before she began to meet him at the Souq<sup>340</sup> in secret. She says

As the months went by our relationship deepened. What is more, out of our love a new life started to grow. Our happiness did not go unnoticed and before long, envious eyes gave way to malicious tongues.<sup>341</sup>

The result was that her family found out about her relationship with Rahman and decided to punish her in compliance with the Islamic traditions. This punishment, as Ayaan Hirsi Ali described in her script, is written across her back and thighs. Verses were taken from the Quran and were inscribed on her body as a justification of the use of violence and beatings. As the camera spans over her body, the narrator reads the verses from Surat Al Noor and says

The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication flog each of them with a hundred stripes; let no compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day; and let a party of the believers witness their punishment.<sup>342</sup>

The woman is lamenting and addressing Allah for her suffering. Her body is injured as it is lashed many times by a cane as the picture reveals. The message

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<sup>340</sup> - Souq is a word in Arabic that means a traditional market where women and men go shopping and buy food.

<sup>341</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Submission*, (2004).

<sup>342</sup> - Ibid.

here is that Muslim women live in horrible conditions and are badly treated and beaten by men who everytime quote Allah for their bad actions and beatings. This woman wants to convey a message that if Muslim women protest against the maltreatment and the violence inflicted on them, they, instead of men are exposed to severe punishment and vengeance. Therefore, they need to obey and be subservient as this is done in the name of Allah.

The notion that is being promoted is that Quran is the main source of violence. It is this holy book that incites men to beat and strike their wives whenever they try to refuse their orders or resist their control. The fact that a Quranic text is being inscribed on the body of the woman suggests that in the words of Allah women in Islam are being punished and that men are always innocent. Ayaan Hirsi Ali comments on the way these women are presented and says that

There is the woman who is flogged for committing adultery; another who is given in marriage to a man she loathes; another who is beaten by her husband on a regular basis; and another who is shunned by her father when he learns that his brother raped her. Each abuse is justified by the perpetrators in the name of God, citing the Quran verses now written on the bodies of the women. These women stand for hundreds of thousands of Muslim women around the world.<sup>343</sup>

In the light of this quote, it can be said that it is difficult to avoid reading *Submission* as a documentary film whose major message is that Islam is bad for

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<sup>343</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, (Free Press, 2006), p. 3.

women. In other words, the documentary film has all the characteristics and the aspects of Orientalism. The spoken and the written texts in the documentary refer to a more academic form of orientalism that envisages the lives of people as framed, shaped and determined by Islam. This is conveyed through establishing a connection between specific verses from the Quran and the behavior of Muslim men who beat and maltreat women. See figure (4.3),



Figure 4.3: Wounded body

The fact that the filmmaker wants to convey a message that there is a close relationship between violence against women and Quran suggests that Ayaan Ali gives one interpretation and one meaning to the Quran. This reduction of a world religion with various different local disparities and centuries of interpretation to these five verses, renders the literal statement obsolete and meaningless. To put it differently, Hirsi Ali only opted for one dimensional and one interpretation of the Quran which is the most detrimental to the cause of

women. She also suggests that men's violence against women is mainly motivated by Quran and that their violence find legitimate grounds in Islam.

The documentary film does taint and distort the picture of Islam and its teachings. This is due to her way of presenting violence against women, relating it to Islam, and her use of a language that homogenizes the experiences of women rendering them all first and foremost as victims and weak in their own religion.

As narrated and described by the actresses in the documentary, the Muslim women in the stories are represented as powerless young women who submit themselves to Allah. They are seen to lack agency in dealing with their problems. These narratives tend to classify women by their vulnerability where women are always subordinated.

The documentary *Submission* not only generates the European Oriental image of Muslims and Islam, but also structures and principally frames this depiction within "a Western misogynist image in which women's bodies are depersonalized as objects of desire and lust."<sup>344</sup> In the same context, Muslim women are not treated as independent individuals with agency and dignity; rather they are treated as objects, sexual and erotic creatures that are there to fulfill and satisfy European man's desires. As Leeuw and Wichelen confirm,

The sensual female voice, the explicit use of American English, and her nakedness under a transparent veil, evoke an association with quasi soft-porn images.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> - Marc de Leeuw and Sonja van Wichelen, "Submission, Hirsi Ali, and the "War on Terror" in the Netherlands", in *Feminist Media Studies*, (Vol. 5, No. 3, 2005), p. 328

Indeed, the practice of eroticization is dominant in the documentary and only serves the male European gaze. The fact of covering and revealing the female body suggests that the filmmaker is aware of the power of imagery and the power of the naked body. See figure (4.4),



Figure 4.4: Naked Veil

The use of nakedness is essentially meant to attract Western European attention and bring to the fore the male gaze. As a matter of fact, the employment of translucent forms of outfit and veiling has not only been a trope of Orientalist painting but also of representations of the erotic and the exotic in popular visual imagery. This has enabled the European male gaze to pore over Muslim women's bodies while concurrently covering their faces. It is this male gaze that serves patriarchy and enforces male domination and control over women. In accordance with this, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is aware of the influence that naked images of the veil could have on the audience particularly male European

viewers. In his article entitled “Debates on Islam in Europe”, Annelies Moors admits that

In making *Submission* Hirsi Ali and Van Gogh were well-aware of the power of the visual. Although some have referred to the film as a work of art, it is first and foremost striking in its unimaginative resonance with the visual imagery of Orientalism.<sup>346</sup>

The male gaze<sup>347</sup> is intended to bring into play the sexual politics of the gaze and indicates a sexualized and erotized way of looking which gives power to men and objectify women. In the documentary *Submission*, Muslim women are positioned as objects of male lust and desire. Laura Mulvey in this respect argues that traditional Hollywood films were produced in order to serve and respond to an essential male need or drive known as “scopophilia”. In this context, Mulvey says that “the cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia.”<sup>348</sup> It is a sexual enjoyment, an ecstatic feeling of pleasure that is involved in the act of gazing or looking at the body of women. Accordingly, European viewers tend to be scopophilic in their way of gazing and watching the naked body of Muslim women.

Mulvey states that most popular movies are filmed in ways that gratify and satiate masculine scopophilia. To clarify more, in traditional movies men are always presented as active agents, controlling subjects and women are treated as passive objects of desire and lust. This is to be noticed in both the

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<sup>346</sup> - Annelies Moors, “Debates on Islam in Europe”, ISIM Review, (2005), p. 8.

<sup>347</sup> - The concept of the male gaze was introduced by the scholar and the filmmaker Laura Mulvey in her famous essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975).

<sup>348</sup> - Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Eds. L. Braudy and M. Cohen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 2.

story and in the audience. Therefore, women are not allowed to be desiring sexual subjects in their own right. According to Mulvey,

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.<sup>349</sup>

In the light of this statement, the documentary film *Submission* is essentially meant to respond to the masculine voyeurism which intends to sexualize and eroticize women for male viewers. More importantly, it also tends to objectify Muslim women in relation to the controlling and to the curious European male gaze, presenting woman as image or spectacle and man as the bearer of the look.<sup>350</sup> In other words, European men do the looking; Muslim women are there to be looked at as they are mainly characterized by their “to-be-looked-at-ness” as Mulvey suggests.

There are important inconsistencies between the original script of the documentary film and its broadcast version. Despite the fact that Ayaan Hirs Ali tells repressive stories of Muslim women, she reduces these four Muslim women into a single character, denies them a name and introduces the male gaze. In fact, these stories bear the distinguishing marks of the colonial discourse which is to orientalize the orient. Hirs Ali in this respect adopts a homogenous oppressive Islamic culture while producing *submission*. She portrays a homogenous collective of Muslim women rendering them one and denying them agency and autonomy. In other words, Muslim women in the documentary film

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<sup>349</sup> - Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>350</sup> - Ibid.

are represented as powerless, defenseless, oppressed by their religion, abused and sexually assaulted by men, and incarcerated in a harem.

The notion of harem is embodied in the way Muslim women are presented and filmed. The stories they narrate are supposed to be secretive, between them and Allah and no third party is involved. However, Ali intervened and exposed their conversations to the European audience allowing them to listen and to take part in the dialogue these women have with Allah during their prayers. In doing so, Ali in fact hints to the European and Western audience that

they are about to hear the most intimate secrets, unspoken truths, and untold stories of Muslim women, and they, the audience, are being given a glimpse of the forbidden world of the harem.<sup>351</sup>

The notion of harem in *Submission* means that place or enclosed space which is replete with oriental slaves, erotic women, sexual concubines and where women are incarcerated in order to fulfill and gratify man's sexual desires. Muslim women in Ali Hirsi's harem are caught, as Marsha Hamilton says, in a "forbidden realm of women complete with tales of sexual orgies, lesbian affairs, violence, greed, lust, and unimaginable wealth."<sup>352</sup> In fact, Ali employs the mechanisms of orientalism through introducing the Europeans to the world of harem and at the same time inviting them to live the sensation of exoticism and eroticism that is usually linked with this world.

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<sup>351</sup> - Aysel Morin, "Victimization of Muslim Women in *Submission*", in *Women's Studies in Communication*, (Routledge: 2009), p. 390.

<sup>352</sup> - Marsha J. Hamilton, "The Arab Woman in U. S. Popular Culture", In Joanna Kadi, *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, (South End Press, USA, 1994), p. 176.

The female body in *Submission* is displayed through a voyeuristic perception. The European and Western audiences are offered an intimate erotic image or “quasi-porn” image as Moors says, which, through the representation of victims, serves to uncover the brutality, inequality and unfairness of Islam. Accordingly, Hirsi Ali has allowed European men to enter the forbidden world of harem and have access to the hidden secrets that are exemplified in the suffering, violence, abuse, lust, incest, greed, and rape which are concealed in this exotic world. Hence, *Submission* implies to visually open up the private space of Muslim women and the world of harem by unraveling and bearing witness to the internal violence of Muslim societies. In this context, it is assumed that Hirsi Ali has made abundant use of the analytical techniques of European Orientalism turning into, what Edward Said has named, the figure of the native informant. Edward said argues that

Such a system of reproduction makes it inevitable that the Oriental scholar will use his American training to feel superior to his own people because he is able to "manage" the Orientalist system; in his relations with his superiors, the European or American Orientalists.<sup>353</sup>

On this basis, Hirsi Ali is in fact perceived as a scholar and researcher from the orient who comes and sits at the feet of European and American Orientalists, and who employs her European education and training to obtain and feel superior in comparison to her own people. This is of course due to her potential and her ability to manage the orientalist system as Edward Said says.

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<sup>353</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*, (1979), p. 324.

Ali's critique to Islam is mainly based on a fundamentalist perspective that sees and defines Hadith and Quran as incompatible with European life and values. She also stresses on the idea that Islam is intrinsically antagonistic to modernity, to Europe and to the West in general. Even her representation of Muslim women does not take into account their differences, their individuality and their experiences which vary from one another. Such generalizations and biased views on Islam and on the oppression of women has turned her into an unwelcoming figure in the Muslim world and brought her in conflict with the very Muslim women she claims to defend.

The system of Orientalism, according to Said, has a theatrical quality. He depicts this system of viewing the orient as "stage on which the whole East is confined", he continues,

On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.<sup>354</sup>

Hirsi Ali turned into an actor on this theatrical stage, attempting to represent the Orient to a European audience so that the orient becomes visible to them. Ali brings light to the orient through the display of women's body and the stories they narrate. All the four Muslim women in *Submission* are silent and none of them is able to speak. They are frustrated, disappointed, angry, have sad and terrible stories to tell, however, a third party, the narrator speaks on behalf of them.

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<sup>354</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*, p. 63.

The language the narrator uses to describe the atrocities and the sufferings of Muslim women may not be known to the Dutch people in the Netherlands. Despite the fact that Hirsi Ali claims that she wants to address the cause of Muslim women in Holland, she sarcastically did not write the script in Dutch, Arabic or even Turkish so that Muslim minorities in the Netherlands could comprehend. Hirsi Ali elaborates more on this idea and says

The calligraphy, for instance, is very beautiful, but complex at the same time. Sometimes, behind that beauty lays cruelty, not so much for the viewer, but for the Muslim woman. I want to show this in Iran and Saudi Arabia, I want to show it to women who live under the sharia and also to other women, smart women . . . That's why I did it in English.<sup>355</sup>

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's point of view is clear and that her intention was that the film was mainly for smart women. Nevertheless, the media outlet Hirsi Ali chooses to broadcast the film could not reach the target audience she wants. To put it differently, the target audience that Ali wants to address the issue of Muslim women is principally a Western European Dutch audience. Since this audience is incapable of deciphering and understanding the Arabic calligraphy, and generally unfamiliar with Islam, this documentary emboldens and reinforces the voyeuristic gaze and asserts the European fear from the Muslim other.

This documentary film does not portray the stories and the lives of female Muslims living in the Netherlands. It does not locate the situation of Muslim

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<sup>355</sup> - Marc de Leeuw and Sonja Van Wichelen, "Submission, Hirsi Ali, and the "War on Terror" in the Netherlands", p. 328.

women and deals with it in a Dutch social setting. In addition, Muslim women in the film do not speak in Dutch and do not address problems that could happen to them in the Netherlands. This can only indicate that the documentary film is consciously produced and made within an invented orientalist setting to respond and satisfy European expectations.

Ayaan Ali breaks women's solidarity and divided women on ideological grounds. Instead of cooperating with other feminist Muslim women who struggle for the right of women, Ayaan Ali disrupts this unity and chooses to be a "Western orientalist" that represents the European interests. According to her, there are women who live under Sharia and other women who are smart and have potential. This categorization unveils her elitist perception and suggests that women who live under sharia are unintelligent, stupid and do not speak English while those who are smart, they speak English and for them the film was made. This undoubtedly means that her objective resides in the fact that these smart women should take the lead and play the role of the heroine that could save Muslim women from oppression, extremism and patriarchy.

In November 2001, Ayaan Hirsi Ali was invited to a conference and attended a debate entitled "The West or Islam: Who Needs a Voltaire?" During the debate, Ali says the following,

Look at how many Voltaires the West has. Don't deny us the right to have our Voltaire, too. Look at our women, and look at our countries. Look at how we are all fleeing and asking for refuge here, and how people are now flying planes into buildings in their madness. Allow us a Voltaire, because we are truly living in the Dark Ages.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, (Free Press, 2006), p. 282.

When the debate ended, a professor of law named Afshin came up to her and said, “You're a little Voltaire yourself (...) I just *know* our Muslim civilization will be saved by a woman.”<sup>357</sup> Hirsi Ali in this respect seems to be the inappropriate candidate for this mission as she has announced her condemnation to the religion of Islam and embraces the superiority of European liberal values. As a result, Hirsi Ali plays the role of the rescuer and embarks on the chore of saving mission which reminds us of the famous statement made by Gyatri Spivack “white men are saving brown women from brown men.”<sup>358</sup>

By deploying the rhetoric of orientalism, a connection can be made to her mission with the civilizing discourse that Western and European feminists use. Moreover, her saving task creates a linkage with a more modern version of that civilizing discourse. A similar example of this would be of Laura Bush’s position on Muslim women in Afghanistan. Laura Bush declared that her country will definitely help women of Afghanistan and rescue them from the tyranny, the oppression and the despotism of Taliban. Lila Abu Lughod reacted to this and says in clear terms that

her speech reinforced chasmic divides, primarily between the "civilized people throughout the world" whose hearts break for the women and children of Afghanistan and the Taliban-and-the-terrorists, the cultural monsters who want to, as she put it, "impose their world on the rest of us.”<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> - Gyatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory: A Reader*, p. 92.

<sup>359</sup> - Lila Abu Lughod, “Do Women Need Saving? Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others”, in *American Anthropology*, (2002), p. 784.

However, what makes the European or Dutch quandary even more complicated is that Hirsi Ali is neither a white man nor a white woman but a brown woman who adopts a superior position vis a vis her people in order to present herself as the heroin who is going to rescue Muslim women. Leeuw and Wichelen argue that

rather than “white men saving brown women from brown men” (colonialism), or “white women saving brown women from brown men” (Barbara Bush), a “brown” woman (Hirsi Ali) wants to save other “brown women” from “brown” men.<sup>360</sup>

The embodiment of Hirsi Ali as the cultural and the Muslim female “other,” and not the masculinist white European man, makes the politics of saving even more effective by dismissing denunciations of speaking from a white masculinist position.<sup>361</sup> Hirsi Ali is doing exactly the opposite of what Gyatri Spivack believes. According to Spivack, the subaltern women cannot speak within hegemonic Western or European discourses. Hirsi Ali in this context adopts an orientalist and superior position, at the same time, presents herself as the legitimate representative of all Muslim women. Ali admits in her book *The Caged Virgin* that

The third reason I am determined to make my voice heard is that Muslim women are scarcely listened to, and they need a woman to speak out on their behalf.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> - Marc de Leeuw and Sonja van Wichelen, “Submission, Hirsi Ali, and the “War on Terror” in the Netherlands”, p. 333.

<sup>361</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> - Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *A Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*, p. 23.

In the light of her statement, it can be assumed that Hirsi Ali is determined to present herself as a rebel, or as she calls herself as an infidel who embodies the Western European discourse and claims a voice from within.

*Submission* is an orientalist film that does not at all question the colonial and European discourse which tends to homogenize Muslims. The representation in the film reinforces and emboldens stereotypical images of Muslim women.

In the following section, we are introduced to another type of stereotypes which has to do with honor killings. This documentary *Honor Violence Rising In The West* aims at cultivating a culture of fear, hatred and abhorrence of Muslims and presents them as despots, inhumane and barbarians. More importantly, it represents Islam as a misogynist religion in which women's rights are utterly denied. Such construction of the rise of honor violence in the West is mainly meant to represent Islam and its followers as hostile and enemies to European values.

## **C- Honor Killings as a Politicized and Orientalist Islamic Practice in *Honor Violence Rising In The West***

It is clear that societies and cultures of the “other” become a good target of the European’s camera. For this reason, documentary photography is used to depict and construct negative ideas and images about others and create a kind of a fake “reality” which serves or responds to the European’s desire for control and domination. This is done by producing and reproducing a specific language accompanied by photographs that construct and promote the colonial discourse in the Western world in general and in Europe in particular.

The documentary film entitled *Honor Violence Rising in the West* is an example of a Western ideological representation of Muslim women. Through the use of narrative, supporting images and techniques of interviews and the close up to focus on characters, the filmmaker aims at deforming and distorting the image of Muslim women. In fact, they are represented as extremely oppressed, weak while men, be them fathers, brothers, or husbands are represented as killers and murderers whose main objective is to spread terror, to terrify women and to make them live in a permanent state of fear.

This documentary is about Muslim women who live in Europe and who are targeted for their ways of clothing, behaving and living by their counterpart men under the name of honor. It is produced by CBN News, a channel that perpetuates many of the stereotypical views about Islam and Muslim women.

Orientalist tropes like the previous ones come to the surface to cover other images of Muslim women and to take other forms that represent them either as oppressed, imprisoned or being subjected to the male surveillance. This means that the patriarchal social order does not only limit itself to confining females but also to enforcing them to comply with the rules and the norms that are set by males to protect their honor as this documentary claims.

If we take the title *Honor Violence Rising in The West*, the audience will come up with an idea that this type of violence is widely spread among European nations and that it cannot be ceased. It is taken in fact to warn Europeans of the increase of honor violence in Europe as there are large numbers of Muslim immigrants coming to Europe. According to BBC, there are approximately 3000 honor attacks in the U.K every year<sup>363</sup>, and in another research conducted by Chesler shows that

for 172 incidents with 230 honor killing victims, 96% of the killings committed in Europe and 84% of cases occur in North America.<sup>364</sup>

This means that in Europe 96% percent of the honor killing have been carried out by Muslims and occurred exclusively in Muslim communities.

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<sup>363</sup> - BBC report entitled "Honour Attack Numbers Revealed by UK Police Forces", (2011), retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16014368>

<sup>364</sup> - Phyllis Chesler, "Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings", in *Middle East Quarterly* (Volume 17, March 01, 2010), p. 9.

Since the perpetrators of such crimes are Muslims, the documentary film presents the issue of honor killings as one the main features that characterize the Islamic culture and that is promoted by the Islamic religion. This means that European and American media deal with honor killings as an Islamic barbaric practice that has been brought from backward Muslim societies to the enlightened world. In this context,

In Western countries, there used to be a tendency to believe that so-called “honour crimes” occurred exclusively in certain Asian countries, such as Pakistan , Afghanistan and Bangladesh, some African countries and the Middle East. However, over the last twenty years, there is no denying that so-called “honour crimes” have become increasingly common in Europe, particularly in France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Turkey.<sup>365</sup>

In the light of this, it could be said that honor killings have turned into a dangerous phenomenon that the whole European nations suffer from. Europe seems to be traumatized to see such a barbaric practice being imported from remote and isolated places such as Afghanistan to its land.

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<sup>365</sup> - John Austin, “The Urgent Need to Combat so-called “Honour Crimes”, Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, (United Kingdom: Council of Europe, 2009), p. 7.

The T.V broadcaster, who presents this documentary, starts warning the audience by quoting the BBC report “three thousand killings in Great Britain, three thousand, what are these honor killings? Honor of what?”<sup>366</sup> He continues saying “we warn you of what you are about to see is not suitable for children, it may not even be suitable for adults”<sup>367</sup>. As a matter of fact, honor violence or what this documentary calls “honor killing” is presented in this documentary to signify mainly

the premeditated murder of preadolescent, adolescent, or adult women by one or more male members of the immediate or extended family. These killings are often undertaken when a family council decides on the time and form of execution due to an allegation, suspicion, or proof of sexual impropriety by the victim.<sup>368</sup>

According to this statement, one could deduce that male-female relationship in Muslim societies is only based on subordination, segregation and complete oppression. In other terms, the colonial discourse does emphasize the fact that Muslim women are dominated and ruled by males, and they have to be obedient, submissive and available at the service of the patriarchal power that protects them. This suggests that honor crimes might be carried out by the husband,

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<sup>366</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in The West*.

<sup>367</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> - Aysan Sever Yurdakul, “Culture of Honor, Culture of Change A Feminist Analysis of Honor Killings in Rural Turkey”, in *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 7. No. 9, (University of Toronto: Sage Publications, September, 2001), p. 964-65.

sometimes the father or the brother of the woman who often proclaim themselves to be the guardians and the preservers of the family's honor.

The idea here is that if these Muslim women try to adopt “Western cultures or defy the wishes of their parents or adopt Western ways or even trying to leave Islam”, the reporter Dale Hurd tells the audience that “their families will kill them after they tortured them first”<sup>369</sup>. To support this notion, see the following figure,



Figure 5.1: A Westernized Muslim woman

This is a picture of a Muslim woman who has adopted a Western life and chose to live in a different style of life. As a consequence, Hurd tells the audience evidently that this woman “was run over by her father in his Jeep Cherokee” rendering her a dead body. This is not only her case but also the case of another “Canadian woman who was strangled by her father because she refused to wear

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<sup>369</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in The West*.

a headscarf”<sup>370</sup> as the reporter said. This means that honor killing is taken as a procedure to punish all those women who have taken on their own decisions to trespass the rules and to adopt European Western ways of life. Such justifications do not stop here but also includes any woman who dares to commit or to seek

A divorce, adultery, premarital sexual relations, pregnancy out of wedlock, refusing to consent to sexual relations (including forced prostitution), not fulfilling the demands of husbands, fathers, brothers, or other male relatives, or even interrupting man-to-man conversations.<sup>371</sup>

The motivation behind committing such crimes is mainly attributed to a social order claimed to require procedures of enforcement against women. Accordingly, honor crimes, as the quote suggests, are executed for instances of divorce, rape, refusing forced or arranged marriages, rejecting man’s orders, or any other example conceived as smearing and sullyng the family's honor.

This documentary film implies that many Muslim women are murdered based on suspicions of a family member and are not given the chance to speak for themselves. The accusation alone is sufficient to tarnish what is called a

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<sup>370</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> - Shira T. Shapiro, “She Can Do No Wrong: Recent Failures in America’s Immigration Courts to Provide Women Asylum From “Honor Crimes” Abroad”, in *Journal of Gender, Social Policy & The Law*, (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2009), p. 298.

man's or family's honor and is thus enough to rationalize the killing of the women. Muslim women are always held accountable and responsible for shame because their role is to resist seduction. Honor killings could have detrimental effects on the lives of Muslim women if they are caught or seen

alone with a boy, dating, smoking, seeking employment without permission, or refusing to agree to an arranged marriage. Even failing to serve a meal on time, receiving a dedication of a love song over the radio, stealing a glance at a boy, or wanting to go to the movies.<sup>372</sup>

All these happen in a moment women are supposed to abide by their family, traditional laws and principles. Many of these justifications provided above are dealt with in the documentary. The idea here is that if these women transgress those norms, then they will expose themselves to a severe punishment from the whole community and not only from their abusive partners.

Honor violence in this documentary film is taken as a procedure to punish Muslim women whether they are in real or supposed relationships. The aim behind such representation is essentially to foster xenophobic and racist portrayals of “backward” and “uncivilized” Muslims. This in fact helps to fuel the mistaken belief that this abhorrent act could only be committed by an “uncivilized Other”.

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<sup>372</sup> - Ibid., p. 298.

This tendency to portray the East as lacking the principles of development and the basics of civilization has clearly been presented in European photography, and literature. They all share one common belief, which is the orient. This orient that has always been and “should be” the opposite of civilization and progress. Edward Said in this respect explains this by saying that

These Western representations were anything but innocent value-free conceptions. Rather, they have always had political implications. Their wholesale production was severally governed by cultural motivations and acutely forwarded by political incentives.<sup>373</sup>

In fact, there have always been political reasons, ideological motivations behind employing the issue of honor crimes. On the one hand, honor crimes cases are used as a bait to gather support for anti-Muslim and xenophobic policies. On the other hand, they are employed as evidences to show the European and the Western world the barbarity of Muslims and the violence of Islam. In this conjuncture, one of the most prominent examples would be of the President of the United States of America Donald J. Trump when he cited the murder of a Muslim Pakistani celebrity named Qandeel Baloch<sup>374</sup> by her brother. This

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<sup>373</sup> - Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 12.

<sup>374</sup>- Qandeel Baloch, 26 years old, was allegedly strangled to death by her brother, Muhammad Waseem, in a suspected honor killing, after she posted racy pictures online. Read her story at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/qandeel-baloch-murder-latest-news-muslim-cleric-pakistan-mufti-abdul-qavi-killing-a8009451.html>.

incident was chiefly taken to justify his ban against Muslims entering the country. For Sara Mahmoud, this is an abnormal reference to the so-called “honor killings,” totally unrelated to its supposed national security reasons. In this context, she argues that

while honor killings are not an Islamic crime, the U.S. media and society associates the term almost exclusively with Muslims.<sup>375</sup>

Instead of approaching the issue of honor crimes as part of a wider pattern of global gender-based violence, the European, American media and society exclusively attribute this practice to Muslims. The idea here is that rather than forming an authentic effort to address violence against women, the travel ban’s reference to honor killings is seen as a transparent strategy politically put in order to single out Muslims and make use of stereotypes of Muslim misogyny. In a similar fashion, European governments also take the issue of honor crimes as a pretext to justify their refusal and rejection of immigrants.

This documentary transmits a message that honor killings are horrible crimes and barbaric practices committed only by Muslim men to punish their female relatives, be them wives, daughters, mothers or sisters, for bringing shame on the family. Muslim men even believe that it is a religious duty to take

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<sup>375</sup> - Sara Mahmoud, “Honor Killings and the Travel Bans”, in *Take Care*, (2017), p. 01, retrieved on 06/08/2018 from <https://takecareblog.com/blog/honor-killings-and-the-travel-bans>.

an action against women who violate Islamic teachings. On this basis, the European society perceives honor crimes as the “workings of a primordial, unchanging and ahistorical Muslim patriarchy.”<sup>376</sup> This clearly means that the East or the “Orient” is seen to be constructed as a negative inversion of European culture. The European view has always changed and distorted the reality of the people and cultures of the East which has stripped them of their humanity, presented them as primitive and uncivilized.

The narrator Dale Hurd goes on describing this type of violence and says that it could also be committed against those Muslim females who refuse arranged marriages. In this case, he gave an example of “a Norwegian girl who was forced to marry her cousin from Pakistan”<sup>377</sup>. In the meanwhile, the filmmaker introduces a picture that is supposed to be of the Wedding or marriage of this girl. See figure (5.2) in the following page

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<sup>376</sup> - Suvendrini Perera and Sherene H. Razack , *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour on Terror*, (University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 173.

<sup>377</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in The West*.



Figure 5.2: Muslim forced marriage.

This picture shows us clearly that a Muslim woman is being forced to accept marriage that she has no idea of. It implies that Muslim women are victims of a fully discriminating social structure, enduring and suffering from a brutal patriarchy and total subjugation. The impression here is that Muslim women are oppressed from earlier ages and that they are thrown into the darkness and oblivion of marriage.

Muslim societies seem to adopt a traditional systematic oppression, enforcing girls to get married without taken their consent into account. Therefore, their childhood is being raped and their rights are censored. This confirms the idea of Sherene Razack when she unmistakably states that Europeans approach “the problem of forced marriage as a problem of controlling fundamentally unassimilable and culturally inferior Muslims.”<sup>378</sup> This “unassimilability of Muslims”, Sherene Razack continues, “grounds much of the

<sup>378</sup> - Sherene H. Razack, “Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilized Europeans: Legal and Social Responses To Forced Marriages”, in *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 12. Issue. 129–174, (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 132.

discussion of forced marriages (...) producing not only the barbaric foreigner but also his or her counterpart: the civilized European.”<sup>379</sup>

Europe endeavors to substantiate and to rationalize measures and actions that aim at governing and controlling the “vicious practices” of Muslims and more considerably to put them under surveillance in order to discipline Muslim men. In other words, Muslim women are ordained to live in a history of continuing oppression and suffering practice at the hands of men. As Razack again says

Unassimilable, duplicitous, tribal, and prepared to sell their daughters into marriage and a life of continual rape, Muslim communities require the force of law to bring them into modernity.<sup>380</sup>

This means that Muslim patriarchal communities in Europe often seek to set up their own autonomy, their own laws, away from the laws, the norms and the rules of the wider society of which they are a part of. In other words, they want to establish Islamistan inside Europe, a term that was used by Ayaan Hirsi Ali in her documentary *Submission*. Islamistan is an imagined country where Muslims could apply Sharia Laws and live in accordance with Islamic teachings.

After introducing this image, the filmmaker immediately resorts to the use of the technique of interviews so as to explain the content of these supporting images. The idea here is that the filmmaker does not only narrate the stories of

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<sup>379</sup> - Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>380</sup> - Ibid., p. 138

Muslim women but also resorts to making interviews with other experts in order to strengthen and endorse his point of view. To clarify more, immediately after showing the above image, an expert called Hege Storhaug is given the floor to talk and to defend the stereotype that Muslim women are forced to marry and that they do not have any right to choose who could fits them. See figure (5.3),



Figure 5.3: A Norwegian Expert

This expert in figure (5.3) clearly supports the stereotype and while talking about that Muslim Norwegian girl who was forced to marry, she says sadly that “I was also shocked when she said for example my parents were willing to kill me if I did not enter this marriage, to protect their own honor”<sup>381</sup>. As a matter of fact, such talk is politically framed, governed and that it is filled and loaded with the anxieties and more specifically with the fear towards Muslims. Such stereotypes are in fact intrinsically connected to a larger world of political

<sup>381</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in the West*.

strategies, policies and implications. This portrayal has to do with Islam as well in the sense that it is depicted as the source of this violence.

In Europe, the discourse surrounding honor killings has been utilized to provoke an anti-immigrant rhetoric against Muslim communities. According to Sarah Mahmoud, whenever honor killings occurred in the West, media outlets immediately refer to the perpetrator's race, religion, and ethnic background. Therefore, media coverage of honor killings is used mainly "as a means to justify the exclusion of the migrant group from the nation."<sup>382</sup> Such employment of the term honor crimes is meant to bring into play prejudice, bigotry and stereotypes of Muslims as aggressive misogynists incapable of assimilating and integrating into European culture.

One of the most important values in the West and in Europe in particular is individualism. This value is perceived as a specific element that characterizes the Norwegian and European culture. European superiority lies in believing that individual freedom must come first before culture and community. This is in contrast with Muslim communities where the family and culture of collectiveness play a significant role in the life of the individual. This means that Eastern culture is characterized by an important component which is the family that represents the core and the essential unit in the Muslim individual. Individualism then is celebrated in Europe and taken against the collective culture that Islam upholds. Accordingly, the notion of "Europeaness" generates

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<sup>382</sup> - Sara Mahmoud, "Honor Killings and the Travel Bans", p. 4.

a dichotomous relationship between the East and West as it relies essentially upon the same binary of the civilized citizen and the savage other, the European self and the orient other. To clarify more, Thomas Eriksen speaks about Islamic marriage and argues that

The practice of arranged marriages in particular has aroused the ire of many Norwegians as it so clearly conflicts with ideals of individuality and equality that the Norwegians hold so dear. Arranged marriages are not forbidden in Norway although forced marriages are. But obviously the Norwegians are unlikely to understand an ideology which puts the interests of the family before those of the individual in a society where many parents, if not most, breathe a sigh of relief when sons and daughters finally leave the nest at the age of 19–20.<sup>383</sup>

On this basis, it can be assumed that individualism is seen as the marker of European supremacy. It works to designate Europe as a place with principles and values, thereby locating Europeans unfalteringly within modernity against the Other whose culture and religion are void of values and committed to patriarchy, inequality and hierarchy.

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<sup>383</sup> - Thomas Eriksen, “Norway a Multiethnic Country”, in *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*, (2008), p. 104.

Honor crimes or killings are not in fact carried out by isolated individuals; rather a whole collective of people is in control. In this situation, Muslim women have no choice except to abide by the specific instructions imposed on them. This sort of instructions is profoundly

(...) incorporated within a patriarchal hierarchy where male figures (such as the woman or girl's father or uncle) are at the top of the hierarchy and the females are at the lowest and weakest position, especially unmarried daughters.<sup>384</sup>

In this context, if the girl or woman do not follow the specific instructions her life becomes at stake. She might jeopardize her life by being locked and imprisoned into a room, be transferred willingly or unwillingly to another nation. She might also be forced to get married to an anonymous man and in worse she could end up being killed by her own family or relatives.

The narrator Hurd states clearly that “honor violence is sometimes committed by Hindus and Sikhs, but it is *usually a Muslim crime*, a study found that 91% of killings were committed by *Muslims*. Women who break with traditional *Islam* often face grief danger”<sup>385</sup>, (my emphasis). In this respect, it

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<sup>384</sup> - Linda Edvardsson, “Crimes of Honour: Females Right for Support in the Multicultural Society”, Department of International Migration and Ethnic Relations, (Malmö University, 2008), p. 7-8.

<sup>385</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in The West*.

becomes clear that the documentary film's objective is to defame and taint the picture of Islam and Muslims. This is done principally through presenting honor killings as a religious punishment that Islam promotes when a girl disobeys the orders. In fact, this documentary failed to recognize the universality of violence against women. Women could suffer and be exposed to different forms of violence anywhere and everywhere in the world, as Erturk argues

It is important to underline the universality of violence against women and its causes, because we are increasingly observing a worrying trend towards singling out certain types of violence and essentialising certain cultures as the source of the problem.<sup>386</sup>

In the light of this, the issue of honor crimes should not be exclusively and specifically perceived as a Muslim thing rather it is to be seen as a cultural or a social practice that could happen in every culture. This documentary tends essentially to diminish the crimes of honor with indistinguishable implications that are attached to notions and instructions of Islam.

Surprisingly, the study that this narrator talks about refers to a book written by Phyllis Chesler and Robert Spencer who produced or sponsored the first documentary analyzed in the first section entitled *The Violent Oppression of*

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<sup>386</sup> - Yakin Ertürk, "Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women", United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, (New York, 2007), p. 2.

*Women in Islam*. Both of these men are known for distorting and deforming the image of Islam and Muslims, representing them as a danger and a threat to the stability and security of Western nations. To support this, this documentary *Honor Violence Rising in The West* provides the following photograph in which we have the supposed study of Phyllis Chesler, see figure (5.4),



Figure 5.4: Phyllis Chesler Study

The target here is in fact Islam that is represented as an oppressive, unjust and cruel to women. In this context, Islam is depicted as cultivating a barbaric tradition which males use to subdue and subjugate women to the advantage of their interests. This is affirmed by Aysan Sever who states clearly in his article about honor violence that

Although these reports are written with sensitivity toward religious differences, they nevertheless leave the impression that there may be something wrong with Islam or its practice. Especially in the televised reports, a sobering

discussion about honor killings is frequently juxtaposed over a silhouette of a mosque or a soundtrack of a Moslem call for prayer. The outcome of these visual and auditory cues is to inseparably tie the crime with the already negatively stereotyped Moslem world.<sup>387</sup>

As the narrator Dale Hurd goes on describing the situation of these victimized women, he starts interviewing some of these women. The idea here is that the technique of interview is employed in this documentary so as to reinforce his argument and to explain his point of view. More importantly, he resorts to the interview so as to give the impression that these women say “reality” by themselves.

It is worth mentioning that all interviewees who appear in this documentary are not shown to the public as their faces remain hidden from the camera. Such technique is done on purpose so as to conceal the identity of the speakers. See figure (5.5) in the following page,

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<sup>387</sup> - Aysan Sever Yurdakul, “Culture of Honor, Culture of Change: A Feminist Analysis of Honor Killings in Rural Turkey”, in *Violence Against Women*, Volume: 7, Issue: 9, (September 2001), p. 966.

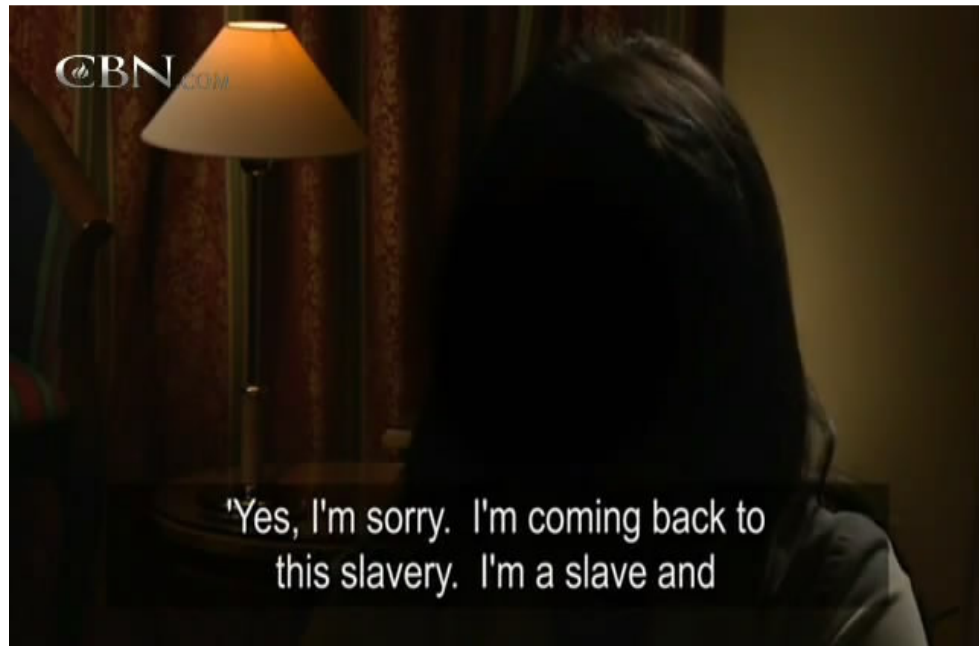


Figure 5.5: An Anonymous Muslim woman

This interviewee has in fact been chosen to support the perspective of the filmmaker and to help reinforce the stereotype about Muslim women. She is presented in the documentary as someone “who came to study in Paris after growing up in a Muslim nation because she rejects Islam and Islamic rules about women”<sup>388</sup> as Hurd says. This unknown young woman continues saying that the best way to return home safe is to adopt once again the role of a conventional subservient Muslim woman who is ready to obey and carry out man’s orders. In other words, she should be ready to become a slave at the service of the Islamic social order. This is clearly expressed when she claims that

it will be safe if I will play the game. There’s game, so if you want to go back, you have to apologize for living, you have to apologize for being yourself. You have to apologize for

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<sup>388</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in The West*.

wanting freedom, you have to apologize for everything and say ‘yes, I’m sorry. I’m coming back to this slavery. I’m a slave and happy to be slave.’ That’s how it works.<sup>389</sup>

This representation clearly suggests that Muslim women are treated with extreme force and violence by males. They are imprisoned and not permitted to either express themselves or defend themselves. In this case, the European viewers or audience might believe from such discursive speech that Muslim women in authoritarian Muslim countries are submitted to an absolute male power and domination. Women are treated not as free human beings but as slaves of despotic families and societies.

The whole Eastern political and social systems seem to be absolutist and extremist in dealing with women. If Muslim women rebel against this patriarchal and unfair system they will be ruthlessly punished and eventually killed. This in fact confirms the idea of the writer Sherene Razack when she declares that

The body of the Muslim woman, a body fixed in the Western imaginary as confined, mutilated, and sometimes murdered in the name of culture, serves to reinforce the threat that the Muslim man is said to pose to the West and is used to justify the extraordinary measures of violence

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<sup>389</sup> - Dale Hurd, *Honor Violence Rising in The West*.

and surveillance required to discipline him and Muslim communities.<sup>390</sup>

As a matter of fact, this documentary is ideologically framed, shaped and is replete with anxieties and more distinctively with the hatred towards Muslims. On the one hand, Muslim males are represented as “extremists”, “inhuman”, and “murderers” whose job is only to monitor, to control and to put women under their surveillance. On the other hand, Muslim women are represented as “subjugated”, “inferior” and “victims” who need to be saved from this Islamic bondage.

It becomes clear that this documentary film in dealing with Otherness does not aim at giving a true picture of the real Muslim world. It aims mainly at “disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture”<sup>391</sup> which is the Islamic culture. More precisely, these documentaries are served and made to focus mainly on depicting and portraying the inferiority of the Muslim other, the primitive nature of Muslim races and the barbaric depravity of Muslim societies.

The following chapter offers an analysis of documentaries that do not adopt orientalism in their depiction of Muslim women. It proposes a different argument and offers a different perspective that essentially challenges and shakes up the orientalist colonial discourse. To put it differently, *Truth Behind The Veil*, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* and *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim* are documentary films that shed light on the active participation as well

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<sup>390</sup> - Sherene H. Razack, “Imperilled Muslim Women, Dangerous Muslim Men and Civilized Europeans: Legal and Social Responses To Forced Marriages”, p. 130.

<sup>391</sup> - Said Edward, *Orientalism*, (1979), p. 109.

as the struggle of Muslim women in life and society. In this context, Muslim women are represented as strong and independent females who seek to subvert the European colonial stereotypes and propose a counter discourse that disrupts the European and Western understanding of Muslim women.

## **Chapter II:**

**Deconstructing Three Documentary Films *Truth Behind  
The Veil, Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam and She's a  
Thoroughly Modern Muslim***

## **A- Unsettling and Contesting the European Image of the Veil and Muslim Women in *Truth Behind The Veil***

The most visual symbol of “Islamic oppression” of women, almost taken for granted by Europeans is the veil. This traditional dress has always been represented as the main target of religion. As I have argued in the previous sections, the idea of representing Muslim women as victims and other times as fundamentalists has led to the construction of the “other”. This latter is being presented as uncivilized and completely different from the Europeans. As a matter of a fact, the image of a veiled Oriental woman has a particular place in these documentary texts,

not only as signifying Oriental woman as mysterious and exotic but also as signifying the Orient as feminine, always veiled, seductive, and dangerous.<sup>392</sup>

The presence of Muslim communities and veiled women in particular in European countries are perceived to be a menace to the European civilization and its values. This notion can be proven through the ongoing biased and racist policies against Muslim populations in European communities, such as France, England, Germany, and the Netherlands. Some of these countries even offered to ban the veil as a procedure to protect the security of Europe. The purpose behind this is essentially to signify injustice and brutality towards Islam. In this

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<sup>392</sup> - Meyda Yegenoglu, “Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism”, (Cambridge, University Press, 1998), p. 11.

respect, Neil Macmaster argues that the veil plays a critical role in shaping and framing the Western European discourse about the other. Accordingly, he clearly claims that

The central importance of the veil in European representations of Oriental society derives not only from its role as the most public and visible signifier of radical sexual segregation, but also as the key marker of the essential inferiority of Islamic societies.<sup>393</sup>

In the light of this quotation, one could deduce that the veil is in fact appropriated to serve and to reinforce an everlasting binary relationship between a civilized, superior Europe and a backward, inferior East.

Such distorted conclusions are revealed, unveiled and resisted by the narrator and the filmmaker Charles Annenberg Weingarten who, at the start of the documentary *Truth Behind The Veil*, evidently acknowledges that “In the Western world, one of the biggest issues of Islam is the covering of women”<sup>394</sup>. The idea here is that many of European people conceive of “the use of Hijab as a symbol of oppression but few people understand that the Quran actually preaches modesty.”<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> - Neil Macmaster and Toni Lewis, “Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling”, in *The Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 28, Issue: 1-2, (England: University of East Anglia, 1998), p. 121

<sup>394</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind the Veil*.

<sup>395</sup> - Ibid.

Unlike Ayaan Hirsi Ali who suggested that the Quran promotes oppression, segregation and violence against women, Charles says that the Quran does promote modesty and fosters humility. Indeed, the practice of covering the head with a Hijab or a veil is not intended to show oppression and brutality, rather it intends to reveal modesty. Muslim women wear the veil to connote “privacy, humility, piety and moderation that are cornerstones of the Islamic belief system.”<sup>396</sup>

The documentary films *Submission, Islam Vs Europe, Honor Violence Rising in The West, and The Violent Oppression of Women* do reinforce the colonial European discourse that refers to the veil as an oppressive and backward garment worn by Muslim women. The statement made by Charles completely refutes and utterly disturbs the colonial orientalist discourse. In other words, his statement in fact proves that the message of the filmmaker is being conveyed and proposed from the beginning of the documentary as it basically “represents the perspective or the argument of the film.”<sup>397</sup> This is why, it could be concluded that this perspective is mainly meant to direct and to guide the European spectators towards adopting a specific perception of the veil or Hijab. Here, Hijab is not seen as a symbol of oppression and compulsion but as a dress that connotes and “preaches modesty” as he said.

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<sup>396</sup> - Fadwa El Guindi, “Veiling Resistance”, in *Fashion Theory*, Volume 3, Issue 1, (United Kingdom, 1999), p. 55.

<sup>397</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary: What Types of Documentary Are There?* Chapter 6, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 107.

The assumption is that the narrator or the filmmaker does not aim at reinforcing and asserting the European Western stereotypical view of Muslim women as victims and subservient. Their depictions as vulnerable and weak are to be found in documentaries such as *Submission, The Violent Oppression of Muslim Women, Honor Violence Rising in The West*. However, in this section Charles's<sup>398</sup> objective behind this cultural production *Truth Behind The Veil* is primarily intended to contest those biased images and more significantly to reconstruct another image of women as dignified individuals and free subjects.

An essential point about this cultural production is its serious engagement with the religious experiences of Muslim women. To put it differently, there is a shift of focus in the portrayals of the lives of Muslim women in this documentary film from the typical representations of their experiences in European discourses. This documentary film helps deconstruct and more importantly dismantle and unsettle Western, European hegemonic and ideological discourses about Muslim women.

Charles's search for the truth, as he converted to Islam, enabled him to embark and start this journey to the Middle East and exactly to Saudi Arabia. This documentary records his journey and documents his continuous effort to portray the situation of Muslim women, to investigate the truth behind the veil as well as the religion of Islam. This is to be noticed in the documentary film

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<sup>398</sup> - It should be noted that the narrator Charles Annenberg Weingarten was a Jewish, but later on he converted to Islam. Now, he is the director and the founder of a multi-media organization called "explore" which is the entity that produced this documentary.

where the audience is introduced to the objective of the film produced. See, figure (6.1),



Figure 6.1: A Philanthropic Mission to Saudi Arabia

In this documentary film, Charles is making great efforts in trying to find out and to learn about how culture determines and influences women's views of the veil. This means that the narrator does not adopt a panoptic and superior position in dealing with or in talking about Muslim women like Ayaan Hirsi Ali did in her documentary *Submission*. Rather, Charles here adopts a participatory or interactive method in which Muslim women are given a voice to express themselves, talk, interact and communicate with the filmmaker.

Charles is trying to find answers to his questions concerning the condition of Muslim women mainly through the implementation of methods such as interviews, interaction, dialogues and communication with them. Accordingly, Charles chooses a varied group of Muslim women and asks them about their

opinions and their points of view on the veil and on Muslim women. As a matter of a fact, his journey or travel to Saudi Arabia was motivated by a curiosity to know about whether the veil epitomizes stiffness and rigidity, and consequently, impeding Muslim women from education and going forward or as a repressive garment that hinders women's development.

To answer these questions, Saba Arafat, one of the Muslim women interviewed in this documentary, see figure (6.2),



Figure 6.2: Educated Muslim Woman

Unlike in *Honor Violence Rising in The West* where we have interviewees speaking with another voice and their faces are hidden, Arafat in *Truth Behind The Veil* speaks with her own voice, with confidence and more importantly her face is shown to the public. This means that the European audience is being exposed to hear and to listen directly to Muslim women without any manipulation by the filmmaker. The fact that these Muslim women show their

faces and speak is fundamentally meant to disrupt and disturb the orientalist prejudices that presume all Muslim women cover their faces and unable to have an opinion.

Arafat in this interview clearly states that there is a common misconception in the West and particularly Western media that always presents “women with a cloth-clad, a Hijab or Abaya or whatever she wears” as someone who “does not have a mind, she cannot think for herself and cannot express herself”<sup>399</sup>. She continues saying that “a lot of these women are quite powerful in their own way. Majority of them are highly articulate, very educated and they have a lot of passion in them, they have a lot of creativity in them”<sup>400</sup>. Arafat’s speech in fact is supported by documentary images that help strengthen her position and at the same time to back up the fact that that these women are highly articulate and very qualified persons see figures (6.3), and (6.4) in the following page



Figure 6.3: Qualified Muslim women

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<sup>399</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind the Veil*.

<sup>400</sup> - Ibid.



Figure 6.4: Muslim women at The Center of Art

Arafat's statements along with these images strongly refute and contest the European claim that Islam or wearing the veil actually hampers the advancement and progress of Muslim women. What these images try to show is that the veil is the key marker of women's freedom and emancipation. Their language and dress epitomize liberty and development. This will optimistically lead to a better appreciation of the fact that many Arab Muslim women live their lives resourcefully and inventively as the documentary reveals.

The image of Muslim women in this documentary offers an alternative depiction that in fact can dislodge and perturb the stereotyped orientalist version of the victimized Muslim women. As Mohja Kahf argues, "the deconstruction or demystifying of the irreducible difference attached (in Western discourse) to women in the Arab-Islamic world" must be approached as well as their texts "with as much nuance, rigor and openness of paradigm as is applied to the study

of European and American women's literature and literary history.”<sup>401</sup> As a matter of a fact, this rigor, nuance and openness of paradigm, as Kahf says should be applied to the study of all cinematic productions about Muslim women including documentary films so as to unravel what they embody and to circumvent reaching simplistic conclusions.

The message the documentary film attempts to transmit is that Islam does not prohibit women from seeking education or from pursuing work. On the contrary, Islam encourages women to be educated, to work and even to own property and engage in business. This is confirmed by the filmmaker when he provides the following subtitle saying that “In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, an Islamic woman had the right to divorce, own property and inherit.”<sup>402</sup>



Figure 6.5: Muslim student

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<sup>401</sup> - Mohja Kahf, *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, Eds Amal Amire and Lisa Majaj, (Routledge, New York, 2000), p. 151.

<sup>402</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind The Veil*.

Another Muslim veiled student in Dar Al Fikr high school says that “people outside think that woman has no say or no rights in Islam. Well, actually she has the most of the rights than man and this is the most thing we want people to know”<sup>403</sup>. This means that Islam came to promote the value and the merit of women to take a higher position in society. The fact that these women are given the voice to express themselves freely enable them to situate themselves as autonomous from the ideological and hegemonic European discourse that positions Muslim women in a stationary and rigid category. In doing so, the narrator Charles in fact challenges and unsettles the constructed image of Muslim women as a motionless and singular group.

Another area of investigation is that of the veil. In here, the narrator’s emphasis was on the idea that the veil or hijab is seen as a “cultural choice that is put in the Quran (...) or under Islam”<sup>404</sup>. This point of view is supported by his conviction that there is no verse in the Quran that tells how should woman put the veil or cover her body. The Quranic text, which is the most important reference for the Muslim belief system, mentions the veil in three separate sections, which have subsequently been used to justify the different veiling and segregation practices in Muslim countries and communities. In chapter 24, Surat Al Noor “the Light” the prophet is commanded as follows,

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty....and say to the Believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, that they

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<sup>403</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind The Veil*.

<sup>404</sup> - Ibid.

should not display their beauty and ornaments except what appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms(...).”<sup>405</sup>

In accordance with this verse, which is also being provided by this documentary film, it can be deduced that men are the first to be asked to lower their gaze, to remain modest while dealing with women they do not know and to cover their private parts. In this context, Al Gundi says that

men are first mentioned as having to abide by these two prescriptions, to control their gaze at women and suppress their passion and forwardness when interacting with “strange” women.<sup>406</sup>

In the light of this, it could be assumed that Islam places the primary responsibility of remaining modest and observing hijab not on women but on men. It is clear that the Quran calls upon men not to gaze at women and not to be licentious. The same is applied to women who also should guard their modesty by first controlling their gaze and covering their private parts. In Surat Al Ahzab, verse 53, the prophet commanded his followers not to enter his home freely and asked strangers who wish to speak to any of his wives to do so from behind a Hijab, a curtain. This is confirmed in the following verse,

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<sup>405</sup> - Quran, Surat El Noor chapter 24, verse 31.

<sup>406</sup> - Fadwa El Guindi, “Veiling Resistance”, p. 56.

O believers, enter not the dwellings of the prophet, unless invited... And when you ask of his wives anything, ask from behind a hijab. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts.<sup>407</sup>

The veil is mentioned here twice and in both instances, it is called hijab. In the first instance, followers of the prophet Mohammad are instructed to be heedful of the prophet and his wives' privacy, and to not enter into his residence or house without taken the permission from him. If followers wish to speak to the Prophet's wives, they must do so from behind a hijab which is explained as a curtain. This curtain separates the wives of the prophet from the strangers who come to speak with them. (33: 53). In the verse 59 of the same Sura, the wives of the Prophet are instructed to draw their Jellabas around them when they go abroad. Quran says,

O Prophet tell your wives, daughters and believing women to put on their veils so that they are recognized and thus not harmed.<sup>408</sup>

The veil here is used to replace the word Jalabib or Jilbab which refers to a long loose dress. On the basis of these three verses from the Quran, the meaning of the veil varies depending on the context and to whom the speech is directed. These verses in fact indicate that the veil or Hijab is seen as a form of modesty. Accordingly, Islam has powerfully highlighted the concept of decency and

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<sup>407</sup> - Quran, Surat Al Ahzab chapter 33, verse 53.

<sup>408</sup> - Ibid, verse 59.

modesty in the interaction between members of opposite sex. This perspective tends to completely disrupt and challenge the European feminist's thoughts on the veil and on Islam. These feminists adopt a superior position towards third world women especially Muslim women who wear the veil. Instead of understanding the complex nature of the veil and its intricate politics, they automatically tend to vociferously decry the veil, which they glibly and discursively construe as a concrete demonstration of patriarchal and religious oppression. As El Guindi suggests, "They are not examining the *Qur'an* for fundamentals about Muslim life. When they do, they will find a kinder model."<sup>409</sup>

Fadwa El-Guindi, in her examination of the veil, does not adopt the colonial discourse of an oppressed, victimized, and passive Muslim woman. On the contrary, El Guindi vehemently retorts against simplistic and ethnocentric interpretations about Muslim women's veiling as well as the cultural codes embedded in it. In her book *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, El Guindi clearly says that

neither in the *Qu'ran* nor in a reliable *Hadith* can be found any explicit ordinance promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad ordering either Muslim women in general or his own wives to veil themselves.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>409</sup> - Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, (New York: Berg, 1999), p. xvii.

<sup>410</sup> - *Ibid.*, p. 152.

In this respect, it should be noted that the references to curtains and cloaks in the verses quoted above from the Quran have been used to justify and even cement practices of veiling, segregation and seclusion in Muslim cultural and religious behavior. These verses in fact reprimand forced laws on women that claim “women must cover or else men are distracted”. They obliterate rape and honor culture because the Quran instructs men to reform themselves first.

The Quran also flattens complaints such as what a woman is dressing is “too seductive or stimulating”, whatever that means, men are advised and commanded not to gawk at women. In other words, modest behavior and veiling of a body are accepted by Muslims as Islamic commands. However, the question of how much of a woman’s body to be covered is principally left to interpretation and more importantly to cultural practices. As Al Guindi argues, notions of concealing and revealing “are very much tied to cultural notions of respectability, sexuality, eroticism and privacy.”<sup>411</sup> The narrator in the documentary *Truth Behind the Veil*, confirms what has been mentioned and says that

It is here when we begin to see how culture shapes the role of religious doctrine in a given society. In Jordan, women do not have to cover themselves completely, in Saudi Arabia they do.<sup>412</sup>

This in effect corroborates the fact that there are different kinds of veils or Hijabs across the Muslim world. Such difference in wearing the veil refers

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<sup>411</sup> - Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>412</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind The Veil*.

essentially to the specificities and characteristics of the culture and not the religion. This means each society and each culture produces a specific interpretation of how the veil or Hijab should be worn. This has resulted in having a variety of terms and practices associated with the act of covering the body. For example,

Usually, women wear a headscarf and cover their bodies, with the exception of their face, hands, and feet. In some cultures, a full veil is used, called the *niqab* or *burqa*, which covers the face. Sometimes, women even cover their hands with gloves and wear socks on their feet, such that none of their skin is visible. It has been highly debated that these variations are not religious, but cultural.<sup>413</sup>(original emphasis).

In the light of this, it could be argued that there are various social and political discussions and on-going debates concerning wearing the veil or Hijab by Muslim women. This shows that the practice of wearing and covering the body has profound meanings and mainly intended to serve spiritual purposes more than what social and cultural traditions try to impose on them. In this context, El Guindi believes that

There is sufficient evidence to indicate that we are dealing with multiple phenomena, layers of

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<sup>413</sup> - Abdulla Galadari, "Behind the Veil: Inner Meanings of Women's Islamic Dress Code", in *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, Vol: 6, Issue: 11, (United Arab Emirates Higher Colleges of Technology, Dubai, 2012), p. 115.

meaning, and diverse contexts. Each cultural region in the different eras used the same or similar elements in a different way and gave veiling a different meaning.<sup>414</sup>

This means that the Muslim societies or countries do not share the same principles, the same mentality and perception of the veil. Each country has its own way of defining and approaching the issue of veiling. For instance there are many Arabic terms that refer to the veil such as

*burqu'*, *'abayah*, *tarhah*, *burnus*, *jilbab*, *jellabah*, *hayik*, *milayah*, *gallabiyyah*, *dishdasha*, *gargush*, *gina'*, *mungub*, *lithma*, *yashmik*, *habarah*, *izar*.<sup>415</sup>(original emphasis).

All this complexity reflected and expressed in the language is referred to by the single convenient European or Western term “veil,” which is indiscriminate, monolithic, and ambiguous. The notion here is that the absence of a single, monolithic term in the language of the people who at present most visibly practice veiling

suggests a significance to this diversity that cannot be captured in one term. By subsuming and transcending such multivocality and complexity we lose the nuanced differences in meaning and associated cultural behaviors.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>414</sup>- Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, p. 4.

<sup>415</sup>- *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>416</sup> - *Ibid.*

It is for this reason that “the women who adopt the new veil do so for a number of reasons, but it should not be a matter of law but one of personal choice.”<sup>417</sup> This is also supported by the statement made by a Jordanian Islamic scholar named Basma Lozi who is interviewed by Charles in this documentary.



Figure 6.6: A Muslim female scholar

She says that “In Islam, you are not forced to believe; it is a matter of personal choice, you see! but like anything else in the world or human nature or what I call it parental society or patriarchal society where the father, the leader or the head decides for the family everything”<sup>418</sup>. However, this is not the case of religion because the beauty of Islam, she says, resides in its principle that there is no enforcement and no violence in making people believe. This automatically is applicable to the case of covering the body and veil. Women could choose for

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<sup>417</sup>- Katherine Bullock, “Challenging Media Representations of the Veil: Contemporary Muslim Women’s Re-veiling Movement”, in *The American journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, (Volume 17, Fall 2000), p. 27.

<sup>418</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind The Veil*.

themselves the type of veil they like. In this conjuncture, she illustrates the fact that the veil is not an exclusive dress of Muslims but

If you look anywhere in the world, they have head covers in Europe and Eastern Europe,(...). So, it is a folkloric dress. In Islam, you don't have to wear Abaya, there is not something that says this is the Islamic traditional cloth. It is your traditional clothes, you can have it in any color, in any design but you have to have you body covered and you can have it as fashionable as you like"<sup>419</sup>.

According to this statement, it could be said that the practice of wearing the veil becomes not only a tool to articulate a sense of self, but more importantly is perceived as a matter of personal choice as it is asserted by Basma Lozi. Such assertion is intended to free Muslim women from the stereotypical discourse that undermines the body of Muslim women. In other words, the veil or hijab is seen as a culturally particular dress and suitable instrument in regaining and obtaining independence.

Another imperative point I would like to underline is that the Muslim women in this documentary are dressed in different outfits. This clearly shows that they are individuals rather than a group being portrayed in one type of veil

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<sup>419</sup> - Charles Annenberg Weingarten, *Truth Behind The Veil*.

suggesting that they all look the same. They are individualized through their powerful presence in a text that describes them not as faithful means to obedience and confinement, but as subversive forces that contest and disturb the European Orientalist thought about Muslim women.

There is even multiplicity among Muslim women who wear the veil or the Hijab. For example, the way female students cover their hair is completely dissimilar to the way Saba Arafat does. As a consequence, the description of Muslim women who wear different dresses does disconcert the stagnant and singular delineation of the veiled women in European mass media. In addition, the Muslim female characters in this documentary film perceive the veil not as an emblem of “Islamic cruelty and inferiority” but as a marker of liberation and a testimonial of their Muslim identities. As Al Guindi states that the veil or

The veiling symbolizes an element of power and autonomy and functions as a vehicle for resistance.<sup>420</sup>

In a nutshell, this documentary suggests that most European observers fail to fathom out that the practice of veiling or covering, which has a long and complicated history, has been adopted and espoused by many Muslim women as both a substantiation of Muslim cultural identity and a vociferous feminist proclamation. The debate on the veil continues in the following section to cover

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<sup>420</sup> - Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, p. xvii.

other areas and countries of the world as the narrator travels to search for the truth.

In the following section, the documentary film *Islam Unveiled* not only presents the veil as capable of de-marginalizing women in society, but it also represents a strong symbol of liberation from colonial legacies. In other words, this documentary, as we will see, predominantly deconstructs the emblematic representation of the Muslim woman as a singular and unified group by displaying differences within the Muslim women. Like Charles who visited Saudi Arabia in *Truth Behind The Veil*, Samira Ahmed also travels to different Muslim countries to find answers to questions that concern the veil, oppression, honor and Islam.

## **B- Writing Back to The European Colonial Discourse in *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam***

Like *Truth Behind The Veil*, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* employs some of the conventional forms of filmmaking. Such forms refer to the adoption of the participatory mode that emphasizes the role of the filmmaker or the narrator with the subjects and people filmed. In other words, what we have in this documentary is a relationship of interaction, communication and dialogue between the narrator Samira Ahmed and other Muslim women. This mode of representation is combined with the expository style to create a kind of consistency, lucidity and coherence in messages transmitted by the documentary.

This documentary film aims essentially at inviting European audiences to take part in a research and investigation set up by the narrator Samira Ahmed in an attempt to undermine the colonial discourse and more importantly to unveil the truth about events and experiences of Muslim women with their own faith. To put it differently, it is a documentary that centers its interest or rather its argument and perspective on the history of Islam and the manner Muslim women struggle and endeavor to achieve equality and liberty within the religion.

At the beginning of this documentary, European spectators are introduced to a close up image of a man named “Mohammed Atta”. This man is presented as a criminal who was responsible of the 9/11 events in which New York were ruthlessly attacked by airline hijackers. See figure (7.1), in the following page,



Figure 7.1: A Misogynist man

The narrator Samira Ahmed while commenting on this photo along with a surveillance video that shows his suspicious movements, she says that this man before committing suicide left a will that states that “he wanted no women at his funeral, no women at his grave, only he said, good Muslims”<sup>421</sup>. In other words, “He was a man who, just like the Taliban, used Islam to justify his fear and hatred of women”.<sup>422</sup> This suggests that Samira Ahmed has dealt with this incident as a separate event that represents only this individual. The idea here is that she does not follow this method of generalization and representing all Muslims as misogynists and belonging to one category of people. On the contrary, she clearly confirms that “men like these” are the ones

who have convinced many in the West that Islam itself is a religion which hates and depresses women.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>422</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> - Ibid.

The objective behind producing this cultural text is essentially intended “to challenge that view (...) to travel across the Islamic world to ask whether a devout Muslim woman can find freedom and equality”<sup>424</sup> as Ahmed states.

What Ahmed tries to convey is that because of these men like the one mentioned above that Europe and the West come to identify the other visually as prehistoric, clannish, misogynist and frozen in time and space, while Muslim women are perceived as powerless victims, completely veiled from head to toe and invisible. In addition, her statement underscores the fact that she is interested in embarking on a journey, like Charles did in *Truth Behind the Veil*, to find out and to learn about the accurate instructions of Islam and whether these instructions have been deformed or not.

She travels to different Islamic societies such as Turkey, Malaysia, Iran, Egypt and Pakistan driven by a desire and strong curiosity to investigate and to ask questions “if men really are allowed to beat their wives, if Islam really promotes the stoning to death of women”<sup>425</sup>. It is this perspective that makes this documentary completely different from *Submission, The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam, British Women Joining Jihad and Honor Violence Rising in the West* in which we have the narrators confirming and reinforcing a Eurocentric discourse that totally denies the individual experience of women, rendering them all passive, weak and in need to be saved.

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<sup>424</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>425</sup> - *Ibid*.

In this documentary *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*, European audiences are invited to witness surprising facts about Muslim women's lives in the Muslim world as the film examines their cultural, political and social roots, beliefs and practices which for many Europeans appear brutal and pre-modern.

In European media, Islam is conceived as a barbaric religion, which represses women and turn men into atrocious and aggressive creatures. Islam is determinedly represented as a brutal religion, which promotes misogynist behaviors and fosters gender differences. This stereotype is in fact being undermined and resisted in this documentary as the narrator Samira Ahmed tells the audience that

Islam is totally without gender (...) both women and men pray exactly in the same way, there is no hierarchy in bishops and priests” as it is in Christianity. Not only this but also she says that “the first convert to Islam was a woman, Mohammed’s first wives.<sup>426</sup>

This confirms that Muslim women are not oppressed, they are free in embracing the religion and they are all seen equal before Allah. In doing so, Ahmed defies the Western colonial discourse produced about Islam by offering an alternative perception that shakes the Western understanding and conception about Muslim women.

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<sup>426</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

Ahmed in fact endeavors in her search to find out the reasons Muslim women wear the veil, an issue which is the heart of her investigation. This is confirmed by her when she says that “at the heart of my investigation is the veil. To some is the uniform of oppression, I want to find out why for many millions of women it is becoming a powerful symbol of political liberation?”<sup>427</sup> In this respect, we see a scene in which a group of young veiled school girls on the street of London wearing black Hijabs, some of them are covered entirely while others show only their faces. In this scene, Ahmed comments by saying “girls much younger than me are taking it (the veil) by choice”<sup>428</sup>. See figure (7.2)



Figure 7.2: Muslim British Girls

When Ahmed approaches these girls and engages in a discussion with them about the veil, the young girls said that they are “proud” and that “it is a good thing to wear it” despite the European male gaze that tends to objectify them and pity them. What is interesting is that Ahmed tells us that “one of them says she feels naked without a Hijab”<sup>429</sup>. This shows that Muslim identity can be so

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<sup>427</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

fundamental to Muslim women's lives and that it could also be seen as a form of strength for them. Their Hijab and commitment to religion in a Western European secular life influences all aspects of their lives and become indispensable for their sense of existence.

In the subsequent scene we see Ahmed the narrator interviewing four Muslim women who study at the Birmingham University. See the following figure (7.3),



Figure 7.3: Muslim women at a café

What we see in this photograph are four Muslim women dressed in different kinds of veils mixed with Western type of clothing. They are sitting with Samira Ahmed who seems to be shocked seeing these women wearing the veil in a secular, democratic society of Britain. Ahmed asks them, “why there seems to be a great number of women are wearing the veil here in London?”<sup>430</sup> To answer this, one of the females

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<sup>430</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

named Khalib, who is a student and who chooses not to cover herself entirely, expressed her point of view and says that

This society has progressed materially yet spiritually they haven't (...) looking around you, everything is so superficial, the Western society, all they lust for is power and it is just greediness.<sup>431</sup>

This statement is followed by another important declaration made by her friend Shaista Hussain on the veil who clearly states that

The hijab is a covering, comes from the word to cover and that is *the beauty of it but it doesn't cover the mind*. It allows the mind to work on its own terms.<sup>432</sup> (my emphasis).

Both statements confirm that religion is seen as an integral part of their daily lives. Having to live in a secular world motivated by materialism and greediness, push these Muslim women to stick to their origins and go back to their roots. Such narrative could be explained as an attempt to naturalize and normalize Islamic lifestyles and experiences of Muslim women in Europe and at the same time to deplore and to de-normalize secular experiences for them.

In showing the rootedness of faith in the experiences of many Muslim women, this documentary fills up a hole in the colonial orientalist European representations of Muslim women. In the statement dealing with the meaning of Hijab, the female student defines her Hijab as an emblem of modesty. The same perspective is shared

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<sup>431</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> - Ibid.

by Charles in *Truth Behind The Veil* in which he states that the veil preaches modesty and symbolizes decency. When women choose to veil themselves, this does not mean that they veil and cover their minds as well. In other words, her portrayal of the Hijab or the veil illustrates that the Hijab is not seen as an apparatus of oppressing and inferiorizing Muslim women. On the contrary, it is perceived as a piece of clothing that makes them look beautiful and free. This is affirmed by her when she says that

If I am an individual doing it by choice, out of conviction and belief nobody should have a problem with it as long as I am not imposing it on others.<sup>433</sup>

In this respect, it could be deduced that the discourse or the type of language Samira Ahmed employs is essentially concentrated on how women perceive the veil and whether they are forced to wear it or not. The idea here is that the veil or Hijab is not seen as a sign of coercion and compulsion, rather as a symbol of free will and conviction. In addition, the language the four Muslim women employed in their speech does suggest a strong sense of empowerment and pride. Accordingly, the veil here becomes not only a way to articulate their Muslim identity but more significantly reflects an individual and independent choice.

The fact that these Muslim women are introduced in the documentary as walking in the mall, going to schools, smiling and sitting in a café, could be interpreted as an expression of modernity and openness. Such depiction of Muslim women could be seen as “a strong statement of their identity”<sup>434</sup> that resists and

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<sup>433</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>434</sup> - Ibid.

writes back to those European representations which imply that the veil and Muslim identity are imposed on women.

Undermining the European vision that Islam intrinsically oppresses and violates women's rights, the narrator Ahmed travels across the Islamic world to inspect the Muslim culture behind the veil and how Muslim women perceive and interpret Islamic teachings. As a matter of fact, her journey aims at showing the European audiences that in Islamic societies there are different interpretations, positions and attitudes towards the veil.

Ahmed travels to Iran as the first destination of her journey where women are forced to cover their hair as they are ruled by an Islamic state that calls upon women to wear the veil at an early age. Accordingly, Ahmed visits two Iranian families that represent two different perspectives. The first one she visits supports the wearing of Hijab and adheres to the teachings of Islam. In this context, Ahmed says that

I have come to meet a 9 year-old Ferzanna. The evening before a very important day in her life as a Muslim girl, tomorrow she will be officially initiated into the wearing of a Hijab and from this day on she will be obliged to cover up in public.<sup>435</sup>

In accordance with the previous statement made by Ahmed, it should be noted that in Iran girls are required to wear the veil at the age of nine. It is at this age that girls are treated like women and here Ferzanna is expected "to say her prayers, she has to fast and observe all religious duties expected from her"<sup>436</sup> as Ferzanna's father says.

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<sup>435</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

The young girl Ferzanna here is depicted as smiling, happy person, passionate about wearing the veil and ready to adopt a new identity. See figure (7.4),



Figure 7.4: Ferzanna, a veiled Iranian child

This in fact challenges the orientalist discourse and subverts the colonial discourse that always reinforces the image of Muslim women as miserable, unhappy and will eternally live a life of sadness and grief. Therefore, the veil here is no longer that sign of misery, oppression and anguish but it is a source of joy and happiness. This notion is endorsed by her mother when she clearly states that

actually we like a hijab, we have chosen to be cover up and no one is forcing us. Women who don't observe the full hijab are influenced by Western cultures.<sup>437</sup>

This suggests that women who wear the Hijab, they do it out of their conviction and their freedom. However, what is interesting in her statement is that she sees those women who do not put the veil as subservient to the West. In other words, their refusal to veil is explained as a sign of compliance with the West and denial of their

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<sup>437</sup> - Ibid.

agency. This is intended to mean that the colonial discourse is being subverted and more importantly inverted by Muslim women.

The idea being conveyed is that submission and obedience are no longer descriptions linked to those who are veiled but essentially associated to the unveiled ones. Accordingly, the veil from the point of view of this family turns into an empowering dress that strengthens their identity and makes them feel home. This perspective is different from the one being proposed by another Iranian family “who questions the state’s imposition of religion on their lives”<sup>438</sup>.

The family is introduced as living a different style of life, a Western one, their nine year-old girl named Pantea is seen playing music without putting Hijab or a headscarf.



Figure 7.5: Pantea, a modern Iranian child

As a matter of a fact, her mother adopts a different position towards the veil and strongly opposes what Ferzzana’s family believes to be true about the issue of covering the hair. In this context, Pantea’s mother says in evident terms that

I personally think a girl of nine is still a child, too young to wear a Hijab. For example, up to the day

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<sup>438</sup> - Ibid.

when they turn nine, girls are allowed to play with their male cousins and relatives. Then, suddenly they realize that they can no longer play with them anymore and that they have to be all covered up in front of them. I don't think it's fair for them to be separated out even though all they do with each other is playing some innocent childish games.<sup>439</sup>

It is clear from this statement that this family seems to be more modern and adopt a position that contrasts completely with what Ferzzana's mother believes when she says that at the age of nine, girls are expected to comply with their religious teachings.

This also suggests that there are women in Iran who refuse the imposition of religion by the state and that they are struggling for their rights to be unveiled. This reminds us of the notion raised by Michel Foucault in his article entitled "Space, Power and Knowledge" in which he clearly elaborates on the fact that power is always disturbed by the oppositional voices that emerge and refuse to comply with its system. In this respect, Michel Faucault says that

no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>440</sup> - Michelle Foucault, "Space, Power and Knowledge", in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, Simon During, (Routledge, 1999), p. 135.

This means that despite the imposition of the law on Iranian Muslim women, they still resist and still perceive their right to be unveiled as an indispensable component of their life. In doing so, this documentary aims at destabilizing the colonial discourse in its attempt to homogenize and totalize Muslim women. In here, we witness diversity in experiences and more importantly giving voice to women themselves to speak their minds and to represent themselves.

The second destination this time is Turkey. Unlike Iran where women are striving not to wear the veil, in Turkey we see another struggle of Muslim women to wear the veil. To support this, Ahmed says that “In Turkey, women are also taken to the streets and the differences these women are fighting for the right to wear the veil not to burn it”<sup>441</sup>. This means that Muslim women in Turkey have been striving for their right to wear the Hijab despite the state’s ban of the veil in public places, in schools and in universities. In this context, Ahmed describes her feelings and explains to the European spectators that she has an admiration and attraction to Turkey, a country that has gone through a difficult process of reforms and transformation towards establishing a secular state. Ahmed explains to viewers that

Istanbul was the heart of the Ottoman Empire, after its defeat in the First World War, Turkey’s leaders decided that Islam was anti-modern and reactionary. In the Muslim world, there was no period comparable to the English Enlightenment two centuries earlier in which church and state were separated. But now,

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<sup>441</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

Turkey alone in Islam took that step under the leadership of Kamal Ataturk who pursued an aggressive policy of separating religion from the government.<sup>442</sup>

In the light of this statement, it could be said that the most important break or fissure between the Ottoman Caliphate and the new republic occurred with the new policies and reforms put or proposed by Kamal Attaturk who is seen as the founder of modern Turkey. These reforms granted Turkish women an officially and constitutionally permitted equality with men in terms of voting, divorce, work, and education. Accordingly, the discourse of the liberation of women by Ataturk becomes prevailing in the Turkish way of governance. This implies that by granting these rights to women, along with the replacement “of Arabic Turkish scripts with Roman alphabets and the ban of Hijab and the Fez”<sup>443</sup>, Ataturk has transformed Turkey into a Westernized and modern state.

In the next scene, we see Ahmed meeting a medical veiled student named Khadija as well as her friends who were “banned from Istanbul University” for putting the veil. See figure (7.6), in the following page,

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<sup>442</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>443</sup> - Ibid.



Figure 7.6: Khadija, a Turkish medical student

These veiled women explain to Ahmed that they are everyday struggling and protesting against the ban of the veil. They also said that the university administration forbid other veiled women from showing their veil by demanding that they should first take away the scarf before entering the university. In other words, their veil practices are represented as a threat to others and more importantly as a disturbance to other students as Khadija says. Accordingly, the Turkish state becomes as Ahmed says “terrified of the political symbolism of the veil”.<sup>444</sup> Therefore,

The unveiling of women became a convenient instrument for signifying many issues at once, i.e. the construction of modern Turkish identity as opposed to backward Ottoman identity, the civilization and modernization of Turkey and the limitation of Islam to matters of belief and worship.<sup>445</sup>

<sup>444</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>445</sup> - Gul Ceylantok, “The Securitization of the Headscarf issue in Turkey: ‘The Good and Bad Daughters’ of The Republic”, in *The International Studies Association*, Vol. 8, (Ritsumeikan University, 2009), p. 117.

In accordance with this, Islamic covering could be perceived not as purely a religious practice, but a highly disputed political emblem within Muslim communities as well as within the international political debate. It should be noted here that these veiled women here are not represented as passive, weak and obedient but as defying women who “have really struggled, coming to big city to transform their lives, trying to become doctors, nurses or going to university.”<sup>446</sup>

These Muslim women are represented as courageous, audacious and brave in their way of asking about their rights. They also go on protests and demonstrations in an attempt to voice their opinion out and declare openly and decisively their rejection of the veil ban. They know that if they protest against the authority, they would get beaten, end up in jail or get arrested. However, this has not stopped them from claiming their right to wear the veil. This evidently proves that these Muslim women defy and challenge

both the secular construction of the headscarf as a means of Islamic male oppression, as well as the Islamist masculinist construction of the veil as protector of women’s modesty and place in the *mahrem*, or domestic sphere.”<sup>447</sup> (original emphasis).

It is because of their defiance and challenge, a new type of resistance comes into existence. This resistance is intended to target and to fight any discriminatory

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<sup>446</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>447</sup> - Valorie K. Vojdik, “Politics of The Headscarf in Turkey: Masculinities, Feminism, and The Construction of Collective Identities”, in *Harvard Journal of Law & Gender*, (Vol. 33, 2010), p. 664-65.

practices from the state to impose on Muslim women Western and secular style of life. This means that despite the ban of the veil and the imposition of that law on Turkish Muslim women as well as the expulsion from schools, government offices and universities, women still resist and still perceive their veil as a pivotal element of their religious practice and as an integral part that shapes their Islamic identity. By doing this, Muslim women are in fact contesting the patriarchal discourse and resisting it from within.

Muslim women's resistance to patriarchal power extends to take another form in another Muslim society in Malaysia. In this country, we see a continuous struggle of Muslim women to defend their rights and to prove that they have agency and capable of representing themselves. This resistance is represented by a Malay opposition group of Muslim women called "Sisters in Islam". It is in fact a group that defends women's rights and promotes a moderate Malay Islam. Not only this but also this group aims at sensitizing women about their religion and "distributes simple leaflets to ordinary women and what Islam says about polygamy and domestic violence, complete with verses of the Quran"<sup>448</sup> as Ahmed says.

When Ahmed meets the founder of this group named Zaina Anwar, and asked her about the issue of Hijab, Anwar clearly states that

If you look at pictures of Muslim women in party politics in the 1950's and 1960's you just see black hair everywhere, no one was wearing the Hijab."<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>449</sup> - Ibid.

The reason behind this she says is because of “Islamic revivalism that engulfed the country starting from the 70’s. Suddenly, you’re told that as a woman you need to cover up, you’re told that it is dangerous to mix with non Muslims because they’re infidels who might lead you astray”<sup>450</sup>. However, Anwar continues saying that

when we went back to the Koran and read the verses in the Koran, it was very, very clear that the Koran talks about justice, about equality, about compassion in the relationship between men and women<sup>451</sup>.

What Anwar tries to convey here is that there is no separation or discrimination against women as long as Islam is concerned. It is the interpretation of men that has deformed the Islamic teachings and instructions.

Since “Islamic revivalism” emerged, the veil or Hijab becomes a politicized issue that parties and governments start making decisions on it. This in fact confirms the idea presented by Samira Ahmed when she evidently says that “the trouble is that the Hijab is used as a symbol by politicians and revolutionary movements for their own purposes. It can be interpreted as progressive or as reactionary”<sup>452</sup>, depending mainly on the interests and the ideologies adopted by each movement. Despite the fact that the veil is conventionally seen as a symbol of religious identity, the clash or the conflict between those who endorse secularism and those who call for establishing an Islamic state, turns the veil into a mere political symbol.

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<sup>450</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

Samira Ahmed did not only investigate the politics and the dynamics behind the veil or Hijab but also embarks on a new journey and travels to a new destination to examine some Muslim practices that are falsely and stereotypically attributed to Islam. As Ahmed says in her documentary,

If many in the West see Islam as backward, one reason is the practice known as the female circumcision or genital mutilation.<sup>453</sup>

She travels to Egypt in order to examine the practice of female circumcision and searches for the reasons behind this practice. Her statement evidently proves that her role is to challenge and to dismantle the Western European stereotypical view that relate female circumcision to Islam. Indeed, the West does capitalize on this practice and approach it as a barbaric practice in order to taint the picture of Islam and more importantly to justify discriminatory and racist policies against Muslims in Europe. An example of this would be *Honor Violence Rising in The West* and *The Violent Oppression of Muslim Women*, these documentaries supply images of mutilated girls and women with blood on their body in order to suggest that Islam promote uncivilized practices.

Samira Ahmed conducted a series of interviews in which she interacts with different experts so that she could understand and comprehend the politics behind this practice. One of these experts is Dr. Shaheen who is a traditional Muslim scholar who

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<sup>453</sup> - Ibid.

legitimizes the mutilation operation on girls. In this respect, Dr. Shaheen justifies this practice and says that

Circumcision is an act of compassion towards the women. It is a way of honoring her rather than disfiguring her. It is necessary for the woman to have a long clitoris, that is why it is reduced because longer clitoris is a discomfort for her especially when she walks in the street (...) but it should be reduced not removed completely.<sup>454</sup>

At the end of his talk, he reveals that this is done in order to protect the woman because long clitoris will make her all the time sexually excited and aroused. The idea here is that Ahmed believes such justifications come from conservative Shikhs and clerics whose main role is to control the lives of women. They want to have total control over the body of women because they think that women are Fitna, they bring shame to their families. What is worse is that these clerics give religious explanations and interpretation to help them convince people of the importance of controlling female's sexuality.

For Ahmed and the other interviewees, the practice of female genital mutilation is a mere traditional practice that has nothing to do with Islam. This is confirmed by Dr. Mawahib who says that

genital mutilation has nothing to do with religions. It's been there for ages and ages even pre-islamic, even pre-christianity. Our Christians as well as our Muslims do it. In many cases tradition is mistaken for religion

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<sup>454</sup>- Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

(...) unfortunately my religious leaders tend to control women by not revealing the facts about Quran. What is good is that women's attitude towards circumcision is changing.<sup>455</sup>

In the light of this, it could be assumed that the practice of female circumcision is not an Islamic practice but its roots date back to the pre-Islamic and the pre-Christian eras. It is not known precisely how long genital mutilation has been performed. However, according to Serour,

The Practice of this custom in ancient Egypt Was reported by Herodotus (500 B.C.) And Strabo, The Greek geographer. Herodotus Reported 500 Years BC That female circumcision was practiced by Phoenicians, Hittites, Ethiopians As well as the Egyptians.<sup>456</sup>

This means that female circumcision is an old practice that dates back to 500 B.C. It was practiced since the times of Ancient Egypt for social and traditional reasons. In other words, the documentary suggests that the practice of circumcision should be dealt with as a global phenomenon that can be found and performed in other communities and practiced by other sects as well. In this context, Bartels strongly believes that

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<sup>455</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>456</sup> - G.I. Serour, "Medicalization of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, in *African Journal of Urology*, (2013), p. 146.

female circumcision is by no means practised in all Islamic countries or among all Muslims. In Saudi Arabia, the country that is at the heart of Islam, female circumcision is not practised. In the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), Turkey and Pakistan, the countries from which most Muslim immigrants in Western Europe come, the circumcision of females is also not practised.<sup>457</sup>

Therefore, limiting the practice to Muslims and then relating it to Islam is mainly meant to serve the orientalist European discourse. Such prejudice can only generate conflict and produce abhorrence towards Islam.

Dr. Mawahib's statement is so powerful in the sense that it unravels the truth about Muslim clerics and scholars who tend to control the body of women under the pretext of Islam. These religious male scholars are accused of not revealing the whole facts about Quran but they choose some aspects and neglect others. The idea being conveyed here is that these religious leaders are selective and biased when it comes to interpreting Quran or hadith.

Samira Ahmed returns to the original text to verify whether female circumcision is found in the Quran or not. She says that the practice of female mutilation

does not have any source in the Quran, it is all from the hadith(...) but there is one hadith which has a

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<sup>457</sup>- Edien Bartels, "Female Circumcision among Immigrant Muslim Communities: Public Debate in the Netherlands", in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, (Vol. 24, No. 2, October, 2004), p. 395.

reference to a woman who carried out such a practice coming to the prophet and asking him about it and he is supposed to have said ‘if you must cut, then cut gently or cut lightly because it is more pleasing to the man.’<sup>458</sup>

The hadith that the narrator Ahmed included in her speech is the following; Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have passed by a woman carrying out circumcision on a young girl. He instructed the woman by saying,

Trim, but do not cut into it, for this is brighter for the face (of the girl) and more favorable with the husband.<sup>459</sup>

The religious scholars of Islam who argue that circumcision is a commendable, they take the hadith above to permit performing it. From this narration, the clerics and the religious leaders deduce the encouragement of the Prophet to circumcise women. They base their opinion on a woman named Umm Atiya who met the prophet while performing circumcision. Accordingly, they deduce the permissibility of the genital mutilation of females as the prophet for them did not plainly prevent it. They also assume, however, the impermissibility of going to extremes in doing so, based upon his prohibition of “cutting into it”.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>459</sup> - Cited in Abd al-Rahmân b. Hasan al-Nafisah, “Female Circumcision & Islam”, in *Contemporary Jurisprudence Research Journal*, (Riyadh, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>460</sup> - “Female Circumcision in Islam”, an article published by IslamReligion.com, (2006), p. 7, retrieved from <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/438/female-circumcision-in-islam-part-1/>.

When one meticulously examines the statements and the narrators of this hadith, they will find a kind of manipulation, inconsistency and confusion in the narration. This is why, according to Abderahman, many prominent scholars doubted the hadith and said clearly that it is weak and cannot be relied upon.<sup>461</sup> Ibn ul-Mundthir comments on this by saying that

There is no report about circumcision that can be relied upon, and no chain of transmission that can be followed.<sup>462</sup>

It is well-known among scholars of Islam that if a hadith is found to be weak and untrustworthy, it is impermissible to be used as a confirmation or a proof to found a ruling in Islam, as all legal decisions in the religion must be authenticated with genuine and unmistakable proofs.

One of the interviewees, a male filmmaker, states evidently that if the practice of female circumcision was Islamic, the prophet would have ordered or would have made circumcision first to his daughters so that they can be an example to follow. For him, “this is a marvelous proof that it is not Islamic”.<sup>463</sup> In the same context, why would the prophet’s wives remained silent on this issue? Is not it strange for them not to shed light on this female issue? If it was Islamic, prophet’s wives would have elaborated upon issues they were able to witness and assist especially that circumcision is seen as a practice that honor women as some clerics claim. In the light of this framework, one can assume that female genital mutilation is not at all an

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<sup>461</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

Islamic practice and not a religious obligation; rather it is carried out in the name of traditions, customs and a personal choice.

The problem with such hadiths that justify female circumcision resides in the fact that they are weak, unreliable and untrustworthy. Many religious scholars and clerics reiterate and repeat these hadiths so that they could convince people of them. Through the reiteration of these narrations, people automatically tend to believe them as a truth.

The same is applied to the Quran, religious scholars interpret Quran in order to keep the status quo and reinforce patriarchal hegemony. They interpret the verses in a way that suppresses oppositional voices, presenting their explanation as the only reliable, truthful reading of religious texts. Such interpretations tend to be biased, impartial and do not reflect the true interpretation of Quran. More importantly, they do not take into consideration women's specificities while interpreting. In this conjuncture, Amina Wadud believes that

(...) the context of Muslim communities has not yet risen to the level of the text. It was not the text which restricted women, but the interpretations of that text which have come to be held in greater importance than the text itself.<sup>464</sup>

In accordance with this passage, one could assume that interpretation is given more significance and more attention than the text itself. Samira Ahmed in this

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<sup>464</sup> - Amina Wadud, *Quran and Women: Rereading The Sacred Text From Woman's Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. xxi.

documentary is doing exactly the opposite; she does not take for granted the interpretation of scholars as a truth but always authenticate and verify them in the original text. In other words, she always goes back to the Quran to seek the truth, and to search for answers. See figure (7.7),



Figure 7.7: Ahmed reading Quran

On the basis of what it has been discussed , it becomes clear that early Islamic scholars and clerics especially those conservative ones, as Ahmed suggests, become responsible for lowering the position of women in Muslim societies. These scholars tend to deceive people, and manipulate Quran and Hadiths to serve their interests. As Dr. Mawahib says, “they do not reveal the whole facts about Quran” which means that they do hide important information. This is why, it is believed that some of the Hadiths were constructed and that men made use of them as political weapons to preserve what they thought as crucial to them, one of these being the subjugation of women. In this respect, Amina Wadud clearly states that

'traditional' *tafsir* is that they were exclusively written by males. This means that men and men's experiences were included and women and women's experiences were either excluded or interpreted through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs of woman.<sup>465</sup>

In the light of this quote, Wadud seems to deplore and denounce the fact that tafsir was exclusively a male domain. For her, traditional tafsir are written by men and they do not take into account the experiences of women. This exclusion of women from tafsir would create many misconceptions about the relationship between men and women.

Both Ahmed and Wadud strongly believe that Quran does not make any discrimination between men and women but they suggest that the inferior position given to women in some Muslim societies is based on a false and male-dominant interpretation of the Quran. In this respect, Ahmed says

genital female mutilation is slowly on the retreat in Egypt, it is because women are challenging the old traditions using religious texts themselves (...) at the women's faculty, I found young confident Muslims taking an active part in the debate about the future of their religion unlike their mothers who were excluded from religious study.<sup>466</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> - Amina Wadud, *Quran and Women: Rereading The Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective*, p. 2.

<sup>466</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

This is fact indicates that the situation of Muslim women in Egypt is changing. Muslim women who have long been submissive to traditions and to male interpretations of religion are themselves taking the sacred texts and putting them under scrutiny. Though in the past women were secluded from the religious domain, now they are becoming activists, feminists struggling for their rights and striving to disrupt the colonial Western discourse that represents them as highly vulnerable and voiceless.

One of these students at Al Azhar University says that “I think the one thing we should be concerned with, it is correcting the image, the highly disfigured image of women abroad.”<sup>467</sup> This means that Muslim women are aware of the biased and the constructed stereotypes that European media promulgate about them. See the picture of this student in figure (7.8),



Figure 7.8: Blond Muslim women

The European audience might think that this is an American or a European woman. Their expectation has in fact been frustrated as the woman in the picture is an Egyptian Muslim woman. The European audience here is exposed to see a different

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<sup>467</sup> - Ibid.

Muslim woman who does not put the veil, her hair is blond, wearing a red dress and doing make up. This image alone can serve as a disturbing factor that essentially subverts the orientalist European discourse on women. This blond Muslim woman continues saying that

women in Islam are being educated, they got a chance to build highly reputable careers, they earn their own money and they have their own understanding and their own positions on different worldwide problems, we are not less than the other women in the world.<sup>468</sup>

This speech reminds us of student's speech in *Truth Behind The Veil* in which Muslim women assert that they are strong individuals aspiring to build their lives and get a good education. In other words, both documentaries share the same perspective which is that Muslim women are not religiously or islamically oppressed but they are individually powerful in their own ways.

Muslim women do not only fight against the colonial orientalist European discourse that deprives them of their strength, agency and independence, but also they locally combat oppressive forces such as patriarchy, male dominance and religious male fundamentalists. Ahmed again states that

these students at Al Azhar are genuinely committed and they know their holy text in detail, I imagine they have no trouble holding their grounds against male fundemantalists.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>469</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

Going back to the original religious texts play a significant part in shaping and framing the argument of Samira Ahmed in this documentary. She puts forward that the best way to confront male fundamentalists is to return to the sacred texts which they need to be re-read, re-examined and reinterpreted. According to her,

There is a new generation of Islamic scholars who are happy to call themselves feminists because they return to the original texts of the Quran to regain for women the status they enjoyed in earlier Islam.”<sup>470</sup>

This in fact suggests that in order to avoid falling into the trap of patriarchal interpretations that privileges male readings over female’s ones. Women need to study both Quran and hadiths and provide an alternative reading that might do women some justice.

Indeed, what we see in the documentary film are Muslim women, particularly intellectual ones, who take into account the position of women in terms of religion and tradition. These intellectual Muslim women offer a new discourse of women that is not affect by Western feminism. For this reason, Amina Wadud proposes

to make a 'reading' of the Qur'an from within the female experience and without the stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretations.<sup>471</sup>

According to Wadud, a reinterpretation of sacred texts is needed and recommended in order to break up with stereotypes. These stereotypes have dominated male

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<sup>470</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> - Amina Wadud, *Quran and Women: Rereading The Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective*, p. 3.

interpretations and have led to the reinforcement of an inherent distinction between females and males. Such interpretations, Wadud continues,

assume that men represent the norm and are therefore fully human. Women, by implication, are less human than men. They are limited and therefore of less value.<sup>472</sup>

Throughout the documentary film Samira Ahmed puts the emphasis on the significant role of Islam in setting women in the highest position. Ahmed clearly distinguishes between tradition and religion and more importantly shows to European audiences that most of the time traditional practices and customs are erroneously taken for being religious.

Ahmed travels to Pakistan, her homeland, to tell Europeans that marriage in Islam is not something forced on the female. On the contrary, forced marriages or arranged marriages are only traditional practices that have nothing to do with Quran or Islam. She says that

In Pakistan, arranged sometimes forced marriages are still the norm in the poorer rural areas of the country as families try to keep control of women's property rights that are passed on through marriage."<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> - Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>473</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

Ahmed did not stop here but she returns to the Quran in order to find out whether or not these types of marriages exist. The fact that Ahmed returns to Quran to check and verify practices might be perceived as a call for Muslim women to return to sacred texts which have long been reserved only to men. She states that

On this issue the Quran is clear, there is no concept of forced marriage in the Quran, even the arranged marriage, it is always assumed that the women and men are both given full consent, she owns her own property, she has her own rights which have to be respected.<sup>474</sup>

Ahmed's speech evidently offers a counter discourse to what Europeans believe of Muslim marriage. Europeans have always associated the practice of forced marriage to Islam, believing that it is promoted by the Quran. In this context, Ahmed refutes this prejudice and states that the Quran does promote consent, love and compassion in marriage.

Unlike in *Honor Violence Rising in The West* in which we have images of supposedly forced marriages, this documentary *Unveiled Women* suggests that Muslim women could also fall in love and then get married to the man they choose. See figure (7.9) in the following page,

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<sup>474</sup> - Samira Ahmed, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.



Figure 7.9: Happy Muslim Couple

Nadia the bride got to know Husain before marriage. They went out, they talked and then they fell in love. Ahmed comments on their wedding by saying “Nadia has accepted the marriage and now she joins her new husband.”<sup>475</sup> Indeed, her acceptance is so important in Islamic marriages, there is no sign indicting that she was forced into this marriage. Nadia looks happy with a big smile on her face, ready to establish a new family with the one she loves. As Muslims, Ahmed says,

Hussain and Nadia are required by the Quran to live their based on kindness and equity. And they start life together based on the basis on a contract that specifies a woman’s material rights in the marriage, something prescribed by Islam more than a thousand years before it was heard of in Europe.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>475</sup> - Hamid Ruhi, *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*.

<sup>476</sup> - Ibid.

In the light of this, one could deduce that kindness, compassion, and mutual respect are the basics of an Islamic marriage. This marriage does not prevent women from their rights, rather it helps protect and preserve their rights according to a contract signed by both the wife and the husband. In this context, Wadud states that

(...) today couples seek partners for mutual emotional, intellectual, economic, and spiritual enhancement. Their compatibility is based on mutual respect and honour, not on the subservience of the female to the male.<sup>477</sup>

Islam according to Samira Ahmed is not intended to oppress and subjugate the females neither sexually nor socially or economically, rather its objective is to treat women as human beings. It obliges men to treat their wives fairly and never impose on them things they do not like. In this context, her idea is that in Muslim societies often people mix what is traditional with what is religious. Therefore, many practices which are merely traditional become perceived by some as religious. The message of this documentary film is clearly to call upon people and particularly European audiences to differentiate between traditions and religion and that Islam has never been a misogynist doctrine.

The documentary film ends with the return of Ahmed to London where she witnesses how Muslim women live their lives in British societies. Ahmed was taken aback by how successfully these young Muslims have combined their faith with secular principles. Exploring the lives of Muslim women in secular society like

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<sup>477</sup> - Amina Wadud, *Quran and Women*, p. 77.

Britain will be the topic of the following documentary film entitled *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim* directed by Mark Warburton.

## **C-Individualized Muslim Women in *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim***

Like Samira Ahmed's film *Islam Unveiled*, the documentary *She is a Thoroughly Modern Muslim* directed by Mark Warburton offers another example that sheds light on the lives of Muslim women in Britain. This documentary does not reiterate the European colonial stereotypes on Muslim women; rather it tries to subvert these clichés and suggests that Muslim women in Britain live in harmony and peace with the rest of the secular British society.

This documentary film presents to the European audiences four Muslim women from different backgrounds living in Britain. These women demonstrate strength in their faith and in their Muslim identity. They seem to be successfully integrated in the British society, conforming to the British customs and norms and more importantly living a modern life. They do not see themselves as alienated and being forced to assimilate in the British culture, rather they see themselves as free individuals proud of embracing the European values.

The documentary film opens with scenes of the British countryside in the middle of England. Then, we hear the voices of the four Muslim women expressing their love and admiration of Britain. One of them said that "what I love about Britain is the people"<sup>478</sup>, the other said "I really do respect the women who cover their heads", while the other said "I love Britain, I absolutely adore it."<sup>479</sup> From these statements, one could deduce that the argument of the documentary film is being presented to the European audiences right from the beginning. An argument that suggests Muslim women are not seen as enemies or terrorists, but they are women

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<sup>478</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

<sup>479</sup> - Ibid.

who love their country Britain. This in fact refutes completely the perspective of the documentary *British Women Joining Jihad* that stereotypically and ideologically endorses the discursive image of the terrorist Muslim woman.

The narrator Mina Anwar introduces these Muslim women and says “meet four women came to show us they are thoroughly modern Muslim and they like you to see Britain and Islam through their eyes.”<sup>480</sup> See figure (8.1),



Figure 8.1: Four British Muslim women

In the light of this, it could be said that the role of these Muslim women is to show Europeans another image and perspective of them. They want Europeans to have a close look on their lives and to understand their perspectives. In other words, Muslim women in this documentary represent themselves and they speak for themselves. They are no longer represented, as the orientalist discourse implies, but they are capable of speaking for themselves and reaffirm their existence.

The fact that we have two veiled and two unveiled Muslim women is intended to offer different perspectives. The documentary suggests that not all Muslim women wear the veil but there are numbers of Muslim women who do not prefer to put the

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<sup>480</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

veil. The colonial European discourse has always been biased in the way Muslim women are represented. It implies that all Muslim women are the same and all of them are forced to wear the headscarf or the veil. The documentary film goes against this ideological background by presenting Muslim women as having potential to resist racism and islamophobia. Mina Anwar, the narrator, says that

These professionals say that they are dedicated followers of Islam. They are also passionate about Britain. Haleh is a firm feminist; she is a professor of politics at the university of York. In the heart of Bermingham, you find Assia, a cartoonist. Farhat aims to bring up her children as Muslims; she is a qualified general practitioner. And finally Maria who divides her time between university her office and her home.<sup>481</sup>

According to this passage, Muslim women are not seen as confined and imprisoned in their homes, cooking and doing the dishes. They are not forbidden to go out, or not permitted to pursue their studies and build their future. These Muslim women possess the ability to succeed in life and improve their level of education. These are the stories of Muslim women who have emigrated from different countries and have integrated successfully in the British society.

Haleh is a university professor of politics originally from Iran, Maria is a council member and university student from Pakistan. Assia is a cartoonist who loves drawing and art came from Libya. Farahat who is a fulltime mother and a general practitioner came from Kenya. In this context, the documentary film celebrates this multiplicity and diversity in British society. It does highlight the significance of the

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<sup>481</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

different experiences Muslim women have. Despite the fact that Muslim women have different ethnic backgrounds, belonging to different countries, practicing different traditions, they share the same religion which is Islam. In other words, as the narrator suggests, though they are Muslims and “were born in distinctly different countries, they are modern British and proud of it.”<sup>482</sup>

The fact that these Muslim women are given names mean clearly that they are individualized and more importantly being treated as human beings. This is in contrast to the women represented in *Submission* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali who denied them a name and a voice in the film. She appointed a completely veiled woman in black to narrate and speak on behalf the other women who remain unknown to the audience. The documentary *She is Thoroughly Modern Muslim* challenges many orientalist conceptions on women and offers a space where stereotypes are being subverted and principally contested.

This film tackles many important issues that concern the lives of Muslims. Such issues include the practice of putting the veil, the pillars of Islam, the notion of terrorism and many other prejudices. European audiences are invited to learn from these Muslim women without any intervention from the documentary filmmaker. His or her presence remains very limited and their intervention is totally if partially absent.

Despite living in a European country Britain, a society that is profoundly secular and modern, these four Muslim women seem to stick to their religion. On the one hand, they accept the norms and the laws of the British society but at the same time they remain loyal and faithful to their religion which is Islam. This is noticed in the language they use to express their allegiances to Islam and in their way of approaching the subject.

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<sup>482</sup>- Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

The university professor Haleh said that “I actually see myself as needing God”<sup>483</sup>, Mariam too, she states clearly that “I don’t think I can imagine my life now not believing in God and not being a Muslim”<sup>484</sup>, Farahat as well said “God is amazing”<sup>485</sup>. All these statements made by the four Muslim women confirm that they have not abandoned Islam for the sake of melting in secularism. They in fact show a strong commitment to Islam perceiving it as a liberating force.

Religion seems to play an important part in the lives of Muslim women in Europe. This is exemplified in their adoption of Islam as a way of life. These women tend to abide by the Islamic teachings that concern practicing the five pillars of Islam. They speak enthusiastically about charity and the role this pillar plays in helping the poor and purifying the self. As Assia says “if I just spend the money on myself, that’s it, ok, it’s gone but if I spend it for charity it’s something that I have in my afterlife bank account.”<sup>486</sup>

The documentary also displays images of pilgrimages to show that Muslims are required to go to the holy city of Mecca to pray. See figures (8.2), and (8.3) in the following page,



Figure 8.2: Women in Hajj

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<sup>483</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She’s a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

<sup>485</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> - Ibid.



Figure 8.3: Hajj

Mina Anwar the narrator comments on these photographs and says that “Muslims are also required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.”<sup>487</sup> Figure 8.2 demonstrates that Farhat along with the women with her are happy and delighted to make pilgrimage. In this context, Assia reacts to this

you see rich people, you see poor people, and they all are wearing the exact same clothes or the exact same materials. Millions of them, standing next each other praying together as one body.<sup>488</sup>

In accordance with these statements, it could be assumed that Islamic sacraments are not represented in the documentary as backward and degenerate practices; rather they are religious rituals that should be respected and praised. Pilgrimage in Islam as the documentary suggests, is a place where women and men pray together and where the rich and the poor meet without any attempt to discriminate against people. To put it differently, pilgrimage is taken as an example to promote justice, equality and to embolden righteousness and rectitude. These thoughts tend to decolonize the orientalist discourse which always portrays Islam as the source of cruelty, violence and barbarism.

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<sup>487</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

<sup>488</sup> - Ibid.

The documentary film tackles another pillar of Islam which is praying. Muslims are required to pray five times a day, accordingly, the European audience is invited to live this experience and have a close look on how Muslims women approach this religious rite. As a matter of fact, each of these women performs praying depending on her own situation and circumstances. The Muslim British-Iranian woman Haleh used to struggle to find time to pray when she was living in a boarding school. The same thing for Mariam who says that

sometimes you could have some restrictions due to work or life generally. I can't always pray them on time but if I miss some prayers, I go home and pray them in the evening together.<sup>489</sup>

Though Maryam began her prayers at the age of twenties, she cannot pray on time due to life responsibilities. Therefore, the best way for her to do it is to come back home and then pray them all together. The camera moves to show the audience multiple shots of different positions of praying such as kneeling and bowing. See the following figures (8.4), (8.5)



Figure 8.4: Maryam Praying

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<sup>489</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.



Figure 8.5: Assia praying

According to Assia, praying is so essential in her life especially that she wants to live a life of a devout Muslim woman. She believes that prayers are like “checkpoints through the day.”<sup>490</sup> As for Farhat, she also prays but in the documentary film she is depicted as praying in the car. See figure (8.6),



Figure 8.6: Praying in a car

The European audiences might be surprised to see Farhat praying in the car while delivering her children to schools. The fact that she is praying in the car might help Westerners to understand that in Islam one can pray at any place and there is no harm in doing so in the car. It is a kind of solution to the busy life that these women have in secular and modern nations. This is revealed by the narrator when she says that “Farahat applied a modern Western solution to her busy life, she prays in the car.”<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

<sup>491</sup> - Ibid.

It becomes clear that praying is not only a ritual that is limited and necessarily should be performed at home. On the contrary, praying could be performed anywhere and at anytime. The narrator Mina Anwar suggests through the documentary film that in order to make a balance between religious duties and life activities, Muslims can pray in cars, in offices and in different places. This clearly implies that there is no obstruction that could hinder Muslims from living a secular and modern life. Being a Muslim and modern can only reinforce and help in the integration of Muslims in European countries.

Praying for these Muslim women not only is a religious duty but also is seen as a source of joy and calm. Maryam says that praying

(...) gives me a feeling of calm and if things came bad in my life or having a particularly bad day or having problems, then for me if I take just a few minutes and pray and clear my mind, they help put things in perspective and things seem have no bother anymore.<sup>492</sup>

Religion in the eyes of these Muslim women brings them serenity and peacefulness. If they confront any problem in life, they return to religion to find comfort and peace of mind. This is completely different from the perspective being proposed in the documentary *Submission* in which the practice of praying is portrayed as forcefully imposed on Muslim women. Muslim women in *Submission* pray in order to reprimand God for their problems and assume praying as an act of total submissiveness and oppression. Also, in *British women Joining Jihad*, praying is equated as a call for violence and terrorism. A man carrying a rifle on his shoulders while praying can only insinuate that there is a close relationship between terrorism and Islam.

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<sup>492</sup> - Ibid.

On the basis of what it has been discussed, this documentary *She is a Thoroughly Modern Muslim* conveys an important message that religion represents a great part in the lives of Muslim women in the West. As Amin Malak argues in his book *Muslim Narratives in the Discourse of English*,

Religion-based identity may not be exclusive to Islam qua religion, for one might argue likewise about Judaism or Tibetan Buddhism. However, given the fact that Islam is the second largest religion on earth, this tenacious, voluntary attachment demonstrated so pronouncedly by its adherents from diverse cultures and from different corners of the world is both solid and striking.<sup>493</sup>

The development of identity of these Muslim women is being framed and shaped by their understanding of religion and its association to the secular modern society where they live. They have not entirely opted for a Western European style of life and not forgotten about their roots. On the contrary, these women seem to be fully committed to their Islamic identity as it is reflected in their religious practices.

The documentary puts the emphasis on the important role of Muslim women in British society. Their integration is depicted as smooth, successful and not encountering any societal or cultural impediments. This is to be seen in the way the four Muslim women perform their daily activities, live their lives in Britain and how they commute with others. See figure (8.8) in the following page,

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<sup>493</sup> - Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and The Discourse of English*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 5.



Figure 8.5: Assia commuting

Assia along with the other Muslim women Haleh, Farhat and Maryam are portrayed as sociable, open-minded and extrovert people. They socialize, speak with British native people and visit different places such as cafes, schools, and restaurants. Though Assia does not go to the pubs and does not drink wine, this does not restrict her movement. In the documentary, she is seen talking, smiling, laughing, curious about knowing the other and ready to make new friends.

The issue of the veil is also being debated in this documentary and represents a controversial issue in the U.K. In this context, Haleh says that

The idea of Hijab is that women cover their hair. The idea of Niqab is that they cover everything except their eyes. The whole point is people interpret what kind of covering they have to have differently.<sup>494</sup>

This statement resonates with the perspectives being adopted in the documentaries *Truth behind The Veil* and *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam*. Both of them illustrate that the practice of veil or covering is attributed to interpretations and that it is not a

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<sup>494</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She's a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

sign of repression. The narrator, in this respect, says “far from being a sign of oppression, covering up can be a statement of strength.”<sup>495</sup>

In the words of Farahat, “wearing the hijab, for me it was a personal issue, my sisters and my mom don’t wear it. So, it was something that I chose.”<sup>496</sup> The same thing for Maryam, she pays respect to those who put the veil but she has not decided yet to cover her hair. For Assia and Farahat, they also conceive the veil as a powerful practice that gives them strength. The veil has not forcefully been imposed on them but they chose it out of their love and will. The narrator states that

These four Muslim women are among the privileged few, they have freedom to make their own choices, yet they have each chosen her own path which takes them accountable for their decisions and it is a choice that seems to liberate them.<sup>497</sup>

This documentary film does not advocate sameness and homogenization for those who are identified as Muslims. It does highlight the different experiences of these Muslim women and the different paths each one of them chooses to follow.

Indeed, the documentary does not reinforce a dichotomous relationship between the West and East that is based on conflict and war. The four Muslim women are aware of this relationship and fully conscious of the stereotypes that surround them. Many Europeans believe that Muslim women are oppressed and that they lack potential to be successful in life. Challenging these prejudices and preconceived notions become a necessity and an obligation to these women. This is articulated in the speech made by the cartoonist Assia when she says that through her work of art she wants “to bridge gaps between these two societies.”<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>495</sup> - Mark Warburton, *She’s a Thoroughly Modern Muslim*.

<sup>496</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> - Ibid.

Maryam, according to the narrator, also “decided to challenge stereotypes by standing in Manchester’s local elections. When Maryam won, she was U.K’s youngest female Muslim councilor.”<sup>499</sup> See figure (8.6),



Figure 8.6: Maryam Manchester’s councilor

Maryam in fact turns into an example that defies the colonial stereotype which denies women their agency. Maryam has been able to shutter the Western Orientalist discourse on women and proves herself as a hard-working, strong and courageous woman.

For Farhat, challenging and contesting stereotypes requires Muslims to stand firm against those who attempt to defame and disfigure the picture of Islam. At the same time, one should embody the true Islamic values that should be reflected in their behavior towards themselves, their community and towards the society in general. In this respect, Farhat plainly declares that

God has said that you need to treat people justly, kindly, and fairly, be friendly and smile; being a Muslim I hope would affect people around me.<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> - Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> - Ibid.

The message of Farhat is clear; Muslims should be an example of kindness, politeness and fairness. They should not treat people especially those who are different from us with harshness and stiffness. For these Muslim women, Islam is a religion of peace and their role in British and in European societies is to spread peace, cultivate a culture of tolerance and live in harmony with the rest of the society.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has fundamentally underscored the portrayal of Muslim women in images found in eight documentary films *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before It is Too Late* (2010), *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* (2012), *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!* (2013), *Submission* (2004), *Honor Violence Rising in the West* (2011), *Truth Behind the Veil* (2010), *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* (2011), and *She's a Thoroughly a Modern Muslim* (2007).

This study focuses principally on the ideological allusions and influences of documentary photography. It also corroborates the fact that documentary filmmaking reiterates and remains loyal to the European stereotypical representations about Non-European societies, particularly about Muslim women. As a matter of a fact, documentaries that center their attention on portraying Muslim women as traditional, oppressed and victimized are embedded with ideological underpinnings. They are not simple acts that replicate visual facts of reality and present it authentically. On the contrary, they are powerful means that are replete with misleading depictions and essentially loaded with political and cultural implications. To support this, Martin Evans argues clearly that

The truth value of photography is established in its ability to 'fix' an image (stereotype) and to reproduce it, disseminating that image to a mass audience (...)

photographic representations are like recruiting agents, offering a spectator a position – which is always already ideological – from which to ‘see’ and in which to imagine (fantasize) their relation to the things and peoples represented in the pictures through the very geometrical relations depicted by the scene.<sup>501</sup>

It becomes clear that documentaries hold the same methods and techniques of power and ideology. Since the documentary involves the use of techniques of framing, cropping and positioning of subjects along with manipulations of scale and perspective, the documentary here is not a genuine representation of people and objects and it is not a loyal reproduction of reality or the world out there. This practice of representing Muslim men as atrocious, brutal and violent, while women as subservient and incarcerated in a horrendous life is not an innocent act and not free from ideology.

An imperative point about the documentaries examined in this thesis is that some of them tend to fix the stereotype of Muslim women as the victimized other and sometimes as the fanatic other. These are the perspectives being implemented and transmitted to European spectators. This means that the objective behind the production of a documentary film is mainly to convey a message and persuade audiences with what they see. Filmmakers through their visual products want to enhance the authenticity of the orientalist discourse that

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<sup>501</sup> - Martin Evans, *Empire and Culture The French Experience, 1830–1940*, (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd 2004), p. 60-61.

is displayed in images and employed in the film. Nichols Bill in this respect states clearly that

Documentaries seek to persuade or convince us: by the strength of their argument or point of view and the appeal, or power, of their voice. The voice of documentary is the specific way in which an argument or perspective is expressed.<sup>502</sup>

Orientalism has been helpful and useful in the analysis of the documentary films as it is considered as the most influential work in the field of postcolonialism. Its importance stems from the fact that orientalism helps and attempts to define the way Muslim women are represented in European media including documentary films. The theories of postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism have provided the author of this thesis with the analytical tools which helped deconstruct and contest the orientalist hegemonic European discourses. As Robert Young says

Postcolonial feminism has never operated as a separate entity from postcolonialism; rather it has directly inspired the forms and the force of postcolonial politics. Where its feminist focus is foregrounded, it comprises non-western feminisms which negotiate the political demands

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<sup>502</sup> - Nichols Bill, *Introduction to Documentary*, (Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 43.

of nationalism, socialist-feminism, liberalism, and ecofeminism, alongside the social challenge of everyday patriarchy, typically supported by its institutional and legal discrimination: of domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, honour killings, dowry deaths, female foeticide, child abuse.<sup>503</sup>

On the basis of what Young says, these theories have been employed in an attempt to refute and counter Euro-centrism. They are seen as a critique to European power and hegemony. More importantly, their adoption has been useful in subverting stereotypical views on the Other and has offered a voice to the marginalized people particularly Muslim women. The theory of postcolonial feminism as Young suggests puts the emphasis on the different realities of Muslim women, it takes into account the specificities of race, identity, nationalism, political, economic and social factors that contribute to the shaping of the lives of Muslim women.

Documentary films that are analyzed in this dissertation could be divided into two categories: the first category tackled the issue of the victimized Muslim woman as they are represented in *Europe Vs Islam: Decide Now Before It is Too Late* (2010), *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* (2012), *British Women Joining Jihad in Syria!* (2013), *Submission* (2004), and *Honor Violence Rising in the West* (2011). This chapter pointed out that the “oppressed victim”

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<sup>503</sup> - Robert J. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 116.

discourse is a constructed one. This discourse is mainly intended to reinforce and strengthen the binary relationship that governs the West and the East. In other words, I have elucidated how European political and economic power permitted Europe to bring into being a scope of knowledge about the Orient specifically about Muslim women. This in fact has led the European world to define itself as “civilized”, “democratic” and “rational” in contrast with the East that has always been represented as the anathema of civilization, using Edward Said’s word.

This notion gets its essence from the fact that these documentaries are perceived as ideological acts used to pass on hidden notions and stereotypical views of both people and culture. For this reason, I have positioned these visual productions within the field of postcolonialism and colonial discourse. This type of discourse as Sara Mills suggests is perceived and detected

(through various strategies, such as making generalisations about the other nation, making valorised statements, fixing these people in an unchanging past or present tense and making them very much a textual entity) limits them to an object position and does not confer full human status on them.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> - Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women’s Travel Writing and Colonialism*, (Routledge, 1991), p. 48

It is this objectifying and dehumanizing component in documentary films which construct the Orient and Muslim women as the Other for European nations. In this context, I have found that this discourse never dies or fades, it is always reinforced and reproduced to maintain the same European prejudices about Muslim women and to describe the other as always oppressed and permanently victimized. Edward Said affirms again that this is the outcome of an unbalanced power relationship between the West and the East. For this reason, I have laid emphasis on the imperative and the major role that these documentaries play in the creation of and in the insistence on difference as well as the perpetuation of the political devices or instruments that are employed in Orientalism.

The second category examined three documentary films *Truth Behind The Veil* (2010), *Islam Unveiled: Women and Islam* (2011), and *She's a Thoroughly a Modern Muslim* (2007). This chapter in fact differs completely from the previous one. The idea here is that the traditional image of Muslim women as victimized, oppressed and helpless is being strongly contested and essentially subverted in these cultural products.

I have demonstrated in this chapter that the colonial European portrayal of veiled Muslim women in mainstream media suggests the feeling that all Muslim women are the same. This portrayal essentializes Muslim woman's identity and highlights that Muslim identity is being enforced on Muslim women, rendering them vulnerable and always victims. However, the representations of Muslim women in these three cultural products reveal multiplicity and differences among Muslim women. This chapter disputes and vehemently refutes the

stereotype of a victimized and a weak Muslim woman. Muslim women here narrate their stories by themselves; speak for themselves without any feeling of fear or pressure imposed on them. In other words, it is noticed that the female characters in these visual products are given a voice and a space where they strongly assert their ethnic and religious identities. They are not escapees of Islam, but they are depicted as committed to their faith Islam despite living in secular societies.

These documentaries offer successful examples of Muslim women who are capable of overcoming European biased judgments, balancing their religious duties with the requirements of the secular modern life and more importantly confronting patriarchy in all its forms. In this context, it could be argued that these documentaries defy and write back to the homogeneous and unchanging European representation of the Muslim woman. In short, the selected documentary films could be seen as models or cases of study that stand for alternative representations of Muslim women.

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