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**The Veil and 9/11:
The Orientalist Discourse Revisited**

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Abstract

The Veil and 9/11: The Orientalist Discourse Revisited is an attempt to excavate the prevailing discourses on the veil, notably after the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. This emanates from the fact that the veil after 9/11 becomes one of the burning issues that occupied most of the debates and discussions especially in Western context. More importantly, this article tries to argue that the Orientalist discourse has been revisited in most of the Western debates on the veil. For instance, the veil after 9/11 was connected with a lot of stereotypes and prejudices such as the veil as a sign of oppression, gender inequality, terrorism, patriarchal ideologies, lack of voice and more significantly a refusal to adopt Western values and ways of life. Thus, *The Veil and 9/11: The Orientalist Discourse Revisited* will endeavor to give a very thorough analysis of the perception of the veil after 9/11. Furthermore, this article will try to come across four items: Orientalism and the question of difference; the perception of the veil in colonial era; the veil and 9/11; and the veil and New American Orientalism.

Introduction

It is widely known that the veil remains one of the major problems facing those who are interested in the field of Media Studies and more importantly, Women's Studies. However, the dispute about the issue of the veil is still unresolved and has gone through many misconceptions and stereotypical ideologies that were manifestly seen since the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York; which many think that it has led to the rebirth of a New Orientalist Discourse. Hence, Lila Abu-Lughod in her article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?" put it bluntly when she states that "We need to work against the reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women's unfreedom, even if we object to state imposition of this form, as in Iran or with the Taliban," and "take care not to reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing". (2002, p. 6)⁽¹⁾

(1) Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others", *American Anthropologist* (2002): 6.

As a result, many people are still curious to learn about the veil especially after the bombing of the World Trade Center, because some argued that the issue of veiling cannot be detached from that significant event. This does not mean that the veil has never been seen by the West as a problem before this event—of course it was—but, the idea is that the event of 9/11 has made the veil a very sophisticated issue to be dealt with. For this reason, this article will start with the veil in Colonial Era in order to show the Western obsession with the veil as well as its importance in the past. Additionally, the article ends with the interpretation of this concept in relation to the idea of New American Orientalism, which is a product of the American foreign policies in some Muslim countries.

However, and before delving into the veil in the Orientalist discourse, it is essential to remember the fact that the veil has multiple facets or meanings. For instance, in feminist theory and theatre as Fatima Amrani (2001) argued, the veil gives “women ample of opportunities to go beyond the spoken to the unspoken”. (p. 144)⁽²⁾ While, in cultural studies veiling has been observed as a sign of identity and resistance in front of outsiders. Moreover, in Western media the veil is peculiar to Islam and a sign that meant Muslim women’s oppression. It has completely ignored the fact that the veil was evidently rooted in Christian and Jewish traditions.

Now, it is an Islamic dress; however, those who wear it are allegedly connected with a lot of stereotypes that will be explored later in this paper. This idea has been explained by Akbar Ahmed in his book *Journey into Islam the Crisis of Globalization* (2007)⁽³⁾. In addition, and precisely in the Colonial Era, the veil has always been an issue to be explored. Some preferred to fuse it with the idea of the colonial harem and symbol of men’s oppression of women in patriarchal societies. This issue has been extended and transformed to new ways of thinking about veiled women such as extremism and more importantly Islamophobia which some believe that the veil is a part of.

(2) Fatima Amrani, *Stripping off the Veil: Women’s Performances of the Veil from Street to Stage* (UK: University of Surrey, School of Performing Arts, 2001): 144.

(3) Akbar Ahmed, *Journey into Islam: The Crisis of Globalization* (Massachusetts: Brookings Institutions Press, 2007).

Moreover, after the events of 9/11, the veil has gained tremendous concern notably in the Western context. This was obviously seen through what is called liberating mission in Iraq and Afghanistan which was the beginning of what is now called New American Orientalism⁽⁴⁾. (Davis, 2003) This issue, on the other hand, has been explained by Inge Boer in his book *After Orientalism: Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks*. Boer (2003) stated:

The framework within which the Western public was made to understand the war of retaliation fought in Afghanistan: we were there to liberate the Afghani's from the Taliban regime with the added advantage of liberating the Afghan women, oppressed and miserable in their *burqas* as they were. This is not to say that the women of Afghanistan may not have been miserable, but to clarify the dichotomizing trend implemented by the Western politicians to motivate and justify acts of violence. (p. 10)⁽⁵⁾

This statement shows the process of the liberating mission that took place nowadays especially in Afghanistan and Iraq. This idea might be a corollary of the fact that these missions resemble the missionaries in the Colonial Era. In this case, Boer in this statement argues about the fact that the liberating mission has another function. It tries to justify the tremendous acts of violence done by those who claimed that they want to liberate women. Additionally, this mission aimed at what Said calls "cultural imperialism". (Said, 1993)⁽⁶⁾

Many commentators argued that the ongoing process must be viewed as part of the project of colonial ideologies. These ideologies started with the events of 9/11

(4) New American Orientalism is a term that usually describes the idea of making others different and more importantly in need for others to save them. This concept starts precisely after the event of 9/11 and it is best explained by the idea of the liberating mission in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003 which claims that people in these two countries are oppressed and they need to be liberated. This idea has already been explained by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* where he talked about the question of difference by those people who are in power, the West.

(5) Joyce Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East* (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 10.

(6) Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

that gave birth to this misconception that misled many people, notably Europeans and Americans. This can be seen in the situation of the world nowadays which is characterized by hatred and hostility. (Levine, 2005)⁽⁷⁾.

This idea can be clearly seen in the works of Edward Said especially his 1978 book *Orientalism*. Said was trying to show the fact that knowledge that is produced via Western thinkers and scholars in their exploration of the Orient was not innocent or objective, rather it is a process that is highly motivated. Said tries to show how the East has been produced as an ideal “other” by Westerns. Furthermore, Said in his discussion of the orient argued that the West tried hard to give a solid picture of the East that would always refer to its backwardness. Thus, in his book *Covering Islam* he stated that media has vilified the East in the best way it could be. This stems from the fact that media portrayal of Islam and Muslims in general is through a lens that distorts the actual reality of those people and those places. As a result, I will rigorously try to discuss the Western imaginations of the Orient.

Candidly, when it comes to Orientalism and how certain knowledge has been produced, the works of Edward Said must be taken as very influential since he dealt with this issue in most of his books. Said believes that Orientalism is not more than a discourse framed by some people to achieve certain goals and purposes. Moreover, it is vital to bear in mind that for Said there is no Orient; rather it was Western creation via some discursive representations that gave flesh to the term Orientalism. Hence, Said argued that the representation of the Orient in Western discourse was not innocent or objective; rather he believed that it was a discourse done to bring some notions into existence such as the Orient. He added:

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire. If this definition of Orientalism seems more political than not,

(7) Mark Levine, *Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil* (England: Oneworld Publications, 2005).

that is simply because I think Orientalism was itself a product of certain political forces and activities. Orientalism is a school of interpretation whose material happens to be the Orient, its civilizations, peoples, and localities. (pp. 202–3)⁽⁸⁾.

As it can be seen in the entire book, Said argued that the concept of Orientalism can be labeled as a well-organized science. Said based his arguments on the fact that those Westerners who studied the Orient were, in most cases, misrepresenting it and framing it in a way that pleases them and severs their interests. Said argued that Orientalism is a school of interpretations. This emanates from the fact that Said believes that the Orient is a human made for particular interests in specific geographies. Said also stated that the Orient is material that feeds the concept of Orientalism. He stated:

As a discipline, as a profession, as specialized language or discourse, Orientalism is staked upon the permanence of the whole Orient, for without “the Orient” there can be no consistent, intelligible, and articulated knowledge called “Orientalism”. Thus the Orient belongs to Orientalism, just as it is assumed that there is pertinent information belonging to (or about) the Orient. (p. 239)⁽⁹⁾

The idea that Said has tried to disseminate is that the Orient is the material of Orientalism; this means that without the discourse of Orientalism one may not have what is called the Orient. This was an upshot of the fact that in order to make the world intelligible one needs to have a discourse, since nothing meaningful can exist outside discourse. He puts this when he says, in the quote above, that without the Orient one will not have a discourse called Orientalism. Interestingly, this latter is what makes Said’s theory applicable in this paper in general and in this subtitle in particular. This emerges from the fact that when it comes to the issue of the veil one can say that the same discourse was revisited and practiced, since veiled women have been stigmatized especially in Western contexts.

(8) Said, *Culture and Imperialism*: 202–203.

(9) *Ibid*: 239.

Revealingly, the idea of the veil and the Orientalist discourse is very pervasive in scholarly works. As a consequence, some feminists see this discourse as a way for campaigning against women and using women's oppression as a substantial factor by which this discourse can be normalized and justified in a rhetorical way and the idea of women's liberation figured at the heart of that rhetoric. The most quintessential example of the rhetoric of liberation can be overtly seen in the case of Afghan women.

Abu-Lughod made a similar point in her article and asks the following question: "What are the ethics of the current War on Terrorism, a war that justifies itself by purporting to liberate, or save, Afghan women? Does anthropology have anything to offer in our search for a viable position to take regarding this rationale for war"? (p. 1)⁽¹⁰⁾ As the quote entails, the war on terror took some factors to gain international consent such as to liberate and save Afghan women. Abu-Lughod in order to extend the issue further uses an anthropological approach to show her discomfort with the issue of the war on terror and the idea of saving Afghan women. Clearly, through her last question one can argue that she is advancing the idea of cultural relativism through the enhancement of the notion of difference. For her and according to her anthropological approach, this war cannot be justified by the plight of Afghan women and the rhetoric of liberation advanced by Bush's speeches.

Abu-Lughod tries to unravel the fact that Afghan women were used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan which directly echoes the theory of the white man's burden which is part and parcel of the imperial ideology. This latter can be clearly seen through Laura Bush's speech. She added: "Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes, they can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment, the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (Linda S. Heard, 2003)⁽¹¹⁾. As it can be seen, the rhetoric of liberation is very

(10) Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?": 1.

(11) Linda S. Heard, "Apathy of Afghan Women After Taliban", *Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)*, <http://www.rawa.org/apathy.htm>

clear. Abu-Lughod immediately after these mischievous words by Laura Bush gave her comments and argued that they can be taken as reminiscent of the colonial ideology. She stated:

These words have haunting resonances for anyone who has studied colonial history, many who have worked on British colonialism in South Asia have noted the use of the woman question in colonial policies where intervention into *sati* (the practice of widows immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres), child marriage, and other practices was used to justify rule, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) has cynically put it: white men saving brown women from brown men. (p. 2)⁽¹²⁾

Openly, the rhetoric of the white man's burden was pervasive in Laura Bush's statement; and Abu-Lughod on the other hand gave a plausible judgment. This emanated from the fact that this notion of freeing the native and liberating them from their oppressive culture was prevalent in colonial discourses and the case of Algeria is one of them. The rhetoric or hypothesis is that these women are always in need for someone to rescue them from the oppression employed by their male counterparts. Abu-Lughod gave a wonderful example about this issue when she cites Gayatri Spivak and her idea of white men who were indenting to save brown women from their male counterparts.

According to Abu-Lughod, this legacy of making people appear different has been the focus of many people and Spivak is one of them. Abu-Lughod endeavored to have a peer analysis for the issue of Afghan women. This was a result of the fact that for her the claim that Afghan women were oppressed and need someone to liberate them was more likely to be a myth. She stated:

It is common popular knowledge that the ultimate sign of the oppression of Afghan women under the Taliban-and-the-terrorists is that they were forced to wear the burqa. Liberals sometimes confess their surprise that even though Afghanistan has been liberated from

(12) Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?": 2.

the Taliban, women do not seem to be throwing off their burqas. Someone who has worked in Muslim regions must ask why this is so surprising, did we expect that once “free” from the Taliban they would go “back” to belly shirts and blue jeans, or dust off their Channel suits? We need to be more sensible about the clothing of women of cover, and so there is perhaps a need to make some basic points about veiling. (p.3)⁽¹³⁾

Abu-Lughod in this passage started with the idea of oppression of Afghan women by Taliban which she believed was a myth since it argued that women were forced by Taliban to wear the veil. More importantly, Abu-Lughod moved on to challenge the fact that even after Taliban regime has ended women still wear their burqa which shakes the notion of Afghan women being liberated by American Government. Interestingly, this questions the idea that we should analyze this issue through the parameters of culture and traditional clothing and the specificities of each culture.

Furthermore, Abu-Lughod moved on to excavate the rhetoric of Laura Bush’s notion of saving Afghan women from Taliban. She challenged the very notion of women’s liberation in Afghanistan. In addition, she argued that the idea of saving these women was not more than a strategy that created by America to fulfill its political agenda and its interests:

The discussion of culture, veiling, and how one can navigate the shoals of cultural difference should put Laura Bush’s self-congratulation about the rejoicing of Afghan women liberated by American troops in a different light. It is deeply problematic to construct the Afghan woman as someone in need of saving. When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her to something. What violences are entailed in this transformation, and what presumptions are

(13) *Ibid.*: 3.

being made about the superiority of that to which you are saving her? (p. 6)⁽¹⁴⁾

Visibly, through the quote above, one can clearly see the notion of self-interests that America was pursuing in the Middle East which has nothing to do with the liberation of women as Abu-Lughod has argued. More importantly, Abu-Lughod has spoken about another issue which is the notion of American arrogance which was clear in the case of Afghanistan. Abu-Lughod argued:

Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority by Westerners, a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged. All one needs to do to appreciate the patronizing quality of the rhetoric of saving women is to imagine using it today in the United States about disadvantaged groups such as African American women or working-class women. We now understand them as suffering from structural violence. We have become politicized about race and class, but not culture. (Abu-Lughod, 2002, pp. 6-7)

For her, women, and notably their bodies, have been used to serve the American empire. Abu-Lughod tackled the issue of America and its arrogance as the main reason behind the idea of liberation which hinted at the rebirth of the white man's burden which put America as the mantle, the savior and the altruistic nation. Abu-Lughod argued that the claim that Afghan women were in need to be liberated gave America and the Bush Administration a sort of superiority characterized by a kind of arrogance which she believed must be challenged. The concluding sentence of the above quote is critique of the notion of liberation. Abu-Lughod inveighed against this issue, and rather claimed that America has many issues to be solved before saving Afghan women. According to the quote above, one can conclude that Abu-Lughod gives no legitimacy for this war and from her point of view, this war cannot be justified neither by Laura Bush nor by Bush's rhetoric which is the emblematic of American arrogance as she stated.

(14) *Ibid.*: 6.

Additionally, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad in her 2007 article “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon” believed that this Orientalist discourse was very clear in the rhetoric launched by the American Government in the Middle East and notably Afghanistan. This claim, the rhetoric of the Orientalist discourse, was very clear in Haddad’s article. She stated:

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Bush Administration launched an all out propaganda campaign to win the hearts and minds of the American public in support of its military campaign in Afghanistan against al Qaida and the Taliban. The war propaganda cast American efforts to bring about regime change in Arab and Muslim nations as guided by noble and altruistic motives, aimed at bringing civilization to uncivilized Muslims and democracy to those living under autocratic regimes. It was also projected as defending American values deemed valid for all time and place, beginning with the empowerment of Muslim women. The campaign stressed the need to mobilize American armed forces to liberate the Muslim women of Afghanistan, in particular, from their degrading condition. (p.3)⁽¹⁵⁾

In this quote Haddad has clearly shown that immediately after the event of 9/11 the US started its rhetoric in the Arab and Muslim world as the real saviors of Muslim women from the oppression that was exercised on them by Muslim men. As Haddad argued, to achieve this goal and to win the public consent they needed to construct propaganda that will enable them pursue their Orientalist discourse. Interestingly, in this quote one can clearly see the idea of American arrogance and superiority which gives it the legitimacy of being in the center and makes its values valid for all times, as Haddad vehemently condemned the idea of liberating women from these denigrating and degrading regimes in the Muslim world, and in Afghanistan in particular, and argued that it was a strategic plan done by Americans, and the Bush Administration particularly.

(15) Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon”, *Sociology of Religion* (2007): 3, <http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/>

Significantly, from Haddad's prism, the idea of saving Muslim women has been backed up and supported by Americans and media in particular. For her, this has been achieved not only by the altruistic views by the US Government, but also through the generalization of the media and American public which see the veil with all its types as a symbol of extremism. She adds: "Increasingly the American public has identified 'the veil', whether a hijab (a covering of the hair) or burqa (a covering of the head including the face), with Islamic militancy, extremism, Jihadism, and oppression of women". (p.3)⁽¹⁶⁾ This entails the idea of stigmatization of Muslim women and Islam in general. More importantly, Haddad has rigorously stated that immediately after 9/11 Western media has given a tremendous concern to the veil and Muslim women. She said:

Muslims have questioned why it took 9/11 to alert the American press and the Bush administration to the misdeeds of the Taliban and their mistreatment of women. They noted that on March 20, 2001, when a delegation of Taliban officials visited Washington, Afghan women and some American feminists picketed the government building where they met and called on the government to save the women of Afghanistan. Their efforts were totally ignored by the press and the U.S. administration. The media obsession with the veil after 9/11 was most evident in its coverage of the response of Afghan women to the liberation of Kabul. (p.3)⁽¹⁷⁾

Here one can clearly see that Haddad was questioning this moment of transition that has accrued immediately after 9/11 which has placed Afghan women in a need for liberation. Additionally, Haddad argued that this massive importance that was given to the veil after 9/11 was not innocent; rather she believed that this coverage was very subjective since it ignored many voices of Afghan women, meaning Western media's coverage of Afghan women was very selective. More

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) *Ibid.*

significantly, Haddad argued that those women who did not strip off their veils puzzled Western media. She said:

The press could not fathom why Afghan women would not cast off their burqas and celebrate. Later coverage of the hijab and the burqa in the American press became more balanced as reporters began to search for answers as to why after 9/11 young Muslim women in the West increasingly began to wear the hijab. (p.3)⁽¹⁸⁾

Haddad indirectly wants to reveal the fact that the veil sometimes should not be disassociated from the idea of personal choice. This can be seen through her arguments concerning the shift in the coverage in Western media when they moved to question the reasons that led many young Muslim women after 9/11 to wear the veil. Furthermore, Haddad believed that shift must inaugurate new perception, since it attempted to listen to voices of those who wear the veil.

This subtitle gave a brief summary about the veil and the discourse of Orientalism. The aim of the previous discussion is to shed light on the veil within the Orientalist discourse in order to know about the process through which the question of difference has undergone through. The next item will illustrate the issue of difference that is the cause of the negative interpretations of the veil.

1. Orientalism and the Question of Differences

General basis of Orientalist thought is an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, “different” one called the Orient, the other, also known as “our” world, called the occident or the West. (p. 4)⁽¹⁹⁾

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978

As it can be bluntly seen through the quote above, Said has vehemently argued that the idea of dividing the world into unequal parts be it in a geographical term or historical was at the heart of the Orientalist thought and ideologies. Importantly,

(18) *Ibid.*

(19) Said, *Culture and Imperialism*: 4.

Said's statement did not only tell about these unequal parts of the world, but he also went deeper to divulge the fact that this division produced a kind of tension, superiority, inferiority and borders between these two different worlds. According to Said's *Orientalism*, the notion of making others appear different was not only an intellectual doctrine, but it was also a political one. Said stated:

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... [A]s a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge... Consequently, this establishes a distinct divide between the active West and passive East". (p. 10)⁽²⁰⁾

Consequently, this political doctrine did not only create the kind of difference that is one of Said's major interests, but what was tremendously preposterous for him was the fact that the Orient has been rendered weaker and unable to change which has created one part of the world very active and the other part passive. Additionally, Said believed that the structural framework adopted by Orientalists has aimed to inaugurate and feed the notion of difference, which he believed was the main reason if not the catalyst or the prototype that created all these problems of differences. For Said, Orientalism was not only a way of describing one part of the world, but a vision of reality and knowledge. He stated: "For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). This vision in a sense created and then served". (pp. 43-44)⁽²¹⁾

Additionally, Said surmised that this division has created unequal parts of the world, one is civilized and familiar, that is the West, and the other part is the strange, the Orient, the East which has been viewed as inferior in comparison with the West which is always in a high status. More importantly, Said argued that this

(20) *Ibid*: 10.

(21) *Ibid*: 43-44.

unequal division of the world must be analyzed in connection to those who foster the notion of the Orient as a result of their imagination. Said affirmed:

Those experiences were part of a much wider European or Western relationship with the Orient, but what seems to have influenced Orientalism most was a fairly constant sense of confrontation felt by Westerners dealing with the East. The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees of projected inferiority and strength, the range of work done, the kinds of characteristic features ascribed to the Orient: all these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West, and lived through during many centuries. (p. 201)⁽²²⁾

As it has been stated in this quote, the Orient and its difference is a product of Westerners through their encounter with the Orient. However, Said emphasized the idea that what has really created these differences was the identification of oneself with the Orient which gave the legitimacy to the inferiority and strength through rage of connotations and characteristics assigned to the Orient. This latter inaugurated a sort of imaginative geographical division that contributed to the notion of making particular place or geography less civilized and different. Said strongly believed that the Orient is a discursive term produced by the Orientalists: “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”. (p. 177)⁽²³⁾

Hence, according to Said, the Orient was a production of different things as he argued. Said stated that the Orient was a knowledge, an idea or imagination that have gone through a process of transformation from one generation to the other or what Said thought to be a citation from someone else’s works by another. This idea of passing the information to different generations can be repeatedly seen in

(22) *Ibid.*: 201.

(23) *Ibid.*: 177.

the Orientalists' discourse that Said has thoroughly explained in the best possible manner; and one can see the fact that those Orientalists like Gerard de Nerval, Gustave Flaubert, R. Gibb, and Silvestre de Sacy and many others have cited one another. Additionally, the notion of Orientalists citing one another can be seen in Orientalism today, when France banned the veil some other Western tried to inaugurate the some motions banning the same garment in the public spaces.

Most importantly, connecting Said's views with the issue of the veil and the Orientalist discourses one may argue that these views are convenient to the scope of this paper. This emanates from the fact that when one looks at the campaigning against the veil especially in Western contexts one will see that veiled women have been orientalized since they were described in most cases as different and more importantly oppressed victims that need saviors to free them from the demise they are witnessing in their homelands.

More broadly, the question of difference remains one of the major issues facing researchers in the twenty-first century. However, one might argue that one of the most important reasons that heighten this dilemma is the notion of Orientalism. This idea has been divulged by Said and many others as the paramount reason that created the question of difference that caused all the tension nowadays. This can be seen in Said's book *Orientalism* in which he stated that the East was described as different in Western imagination as it is the case of the veiled women. In this item I will be explaining this idea of difference through Said's *Orientalism*.

In the Orientalist discourse, one may argue that Western knowledge on the Orient was used to differentiate and devaluate Muslims as others in comparison with their European counterparts. Said argued that the West has created an ideal picture of the East that remained unable to be changed. This can be seen in his book *Orientalism* where he tried to trace the history of this concept and its contribution to the creation of the question of difference.

Said's notion of Orientalism gives us the opportunity to understand the relationship between the West and the East, or what Said calls the Orient and the Occident. Orientalism as a discourse allows us to see how Western knowledge on the East was created in a dominant way. It classified the East as different and inferior. This can be clearly seen through this statement by Rubina Ramji: "Simple reflections of a true anterior reality, but composite images which came to define the nature of the Orient as irredeemably different and always inferior to the West".(p. 111)⁽²⁴⁾

Another example of this kind of representation was given by Frantz Fanon (1965). Fanon argued that French colonizers in Algeria have worked to destroy Algerian identity in order to create a hybrid identity which will lead to the idea of differences: "The officials of the French Administration in Algeria, committed to destroying the people's originality, and under instructions to bring about the disintegration, at whatever cost, of forms of existence likely to evoke national reality directly or indirectly, were to concentrate their efforts on the wearing of the veil, which was looked upon at this juncture as a symbol of the status of Algeria" (p. 37)⁽²⁵⁾

This quote reveals the fact that the colonial discourse was an attempt to destruct and create a hybrid identity. The way that these women dress was conceived by the colonizers as a way of oppression relegating women to the lower status.

The question of hybrid identities and differences was explained by Homi Bhabha in his book *Location of Culture*. Bhabha claimed that colonial subject was: "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." (p. 70)⁽²⁶⁾

(24) Rubina Rajmi, *The Centrality of the Veiling and Invisibility: The Construction of the Muslim Identity in Contemporary Discourses and Media* (n.p.: University of Ottawa, Department of Classics and Religious Studies, 2003): 111.

(25) Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965): 37.

(26) Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 70.

Bhabha (1994) stated that colonial discourse is the source of the creation of these differences and superiority. This can be seen clearly through the following statement:

The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of denigrate types on the basis of the racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction... Colonial discourse produces the colonized a social reality which is at once 'another' and yet entirely knowable and visible. It resembles a form of narratives whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth that is structurally similar to realism. (pp. 70–1)⁽²⁷⁾

In this quote, one can see the fact that the colonial discourse had created the unbalanced power. Meaning the colonizers were always the powerful group and others were just born to be denigrated and colonized. Evidently, this claim was clearly seen in the case of Algerians and their confrontation with the French colonization. Moreover, Said stated that Orientalism was not only a well-organized science, but a philosophy:

Philosophy, then the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling Orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing Orientalism, which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities, and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what 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. (p. 72)⁽²⁸⁾

(27) *Ibid*: 70-71.

(28) Said, *Culture and Imperialism*: 72.

All these things were fused to create these differences. However, the issue of the veil has been only one example of this process of difference. This can be seen through many documentaries and films in which veiled women have been looked at as different and inferior in comparison with other Western women. This idea of inventing difference can be seen in the work of Jack Shaheen who tried to trace the history of the creation of the Orient in and through the Western imagination. (Shaheen, 2005)⁽²⁹⁾

The previous part dealt with the issue of the question of difference that is one of the concerns of this paper. The next part is concerned with the perception of the veil in colonial era which will be compared later on with the way it is portrayed nowadays.

2. Perception of Veil in Colonial Era

“Colonial discourse, despite its rather constant function in serving the forces of order, actually assumes a number of widely divergent rhetoric forms, like a series of fragments made by stress fractures under the burden of colonial authority.” (p. 7)⁽³⁰⁾
David Spur, *The Rhetoric of the Empire*, 1993

“Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is bringing her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure.” (p. 43)⁽³¹⁾
Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 1965

The perception of the veil in colonial era has been imbued with many connotations that were associated and ascribed to this issue. Some saw it as a real distinction between the sexes, others believed it to be one of the most important assets to be destroyed in order to bifurcate and divide this society and destroy its ways of life. This emanated from the fact that the veil for them meant something

(29) Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. A film based on a book with the same name (2005).

(30) David Spur, *The Rhetoric of the Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 7.

(31) Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*: 7.

more than an issue; it represented a form of resistance that was substantial to Algerian society. This can be seen through the following quote:

The veil came to signify, in the French and Western colonial psyche, resistance. On the other hand, Algerian women also utilized unveiling as a form of resistance against colonialism. Some uncovered their bodies, took the appearance of dominated women by wearing Western styles of clothing and makeup, only to disguise their terrorist activities in France. Veiling has also been used, more recently, as a tool of resistance against patriarchal regimes of power. Afghan women have carried books, supplies, and cameras beneath the burqas to document Taliban abuses (p. 112)⁽³²⁾

According to Kenza Oumlil (2010)⁽³³⁾, the veil has been understood by French Administrators in colonial era as a form of resistance. Oumlil is right in this regard since Algerian women have used the veil in different phases for different purposes. For instance, Algerian women wore the veil as a societal issue in the beginning, but when they realized that the course of liberating the nation needs their bodies they strip their veils off.

Moreover, the most important thing to fathom when it comes to the perception of the veil in colonial era is the fact that it is always associated with women's oppression. This latter gives colonizers the legitimacy to enter under the rubric of the saviors for women's rights; this idea of liberation can be seen in the works of Ania Loomba (1998). She stated:

In the colonial situation women were used as crucial markers of this cultural difference. Colonisers regarded their position within the family and within religious practices, in India, in Algeria, in South Africa, and in countless other colonised countries, as indicative of a

(32) Kevin J. Ayotte and Husain Mary E. "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil", *NWSA Journal* 17.3 (2005): 112. Appeared in Kenza Oumlil, "Discourses of the Veil in Al-Jazeera English", *Reconstruction* 10, no. 1 (2010).

(33) *Ibid.*

degenerate culture. Reform of a woman's position thus became central to colonial rule. Nationalists regarded this as colonial intrusion, and responded by initiating reforms of their own, claiming that only they had the right to intervene in these matters. Such tactics resulted in partial reform but also recast, and sometimes strengthened, indigenous patriarchal practices (Loomba, 1998, p. 192)⁽³⁴⁾.

According to Loomba, a woman's body was viewed by the colonizers as a very important factor of cultural differences that colonizers should destroy in order to achieve their goals. Loomba argued that colonizers were passionately eager to reform women's dress, notably the veil, as a very significant step toward unveiling colonized societies and obliging them to adopt their styles and codes of dress. However, Loomba argued that these strategies did not achieve much success; they rather helped colonized societies to empower women's bodies through their own participation in war. For instance, in the case of Algerian society the veil has been used in two different ways in which the female body was also used in different ways.

Significantly, the perception of the veil in colonial era was very much related to the idea of the harem. This notion has been pinpointed by many writers, such as Fanon, and more importantly Malek Alloula in his book *The Colonial Harem*. Alloula's argument explained the fact that the colonizers aimed to unveil these women as a kind of liberation in front of the natives. He believed that by showing the hidden part of these women to the public or Western gaze is a way of freeing them from their harem as well as a victory over the indigenous culture. This emanated from the colonizers' belief that unveiling these women will free them from the inner oppression that they faced in their homeland. (Alloula, 1986)

Furthermore, the attention of colonizers in the context of Algeria is to unveil these women and make them accessible to the public gaze. He states: "The photographer will respond to quiet and almost natural challenges by means of a double violation: he will unveil and give figural representation to the forbidden.

(34) Ania Loomba, *Colonialism-Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998): 192.



Algeria. Moorish woman in city attire.

Figure 2: An Algerian Moorish woman walking in the city, from Alloula's

The Colonial Harem, (1986) p. 13.

The way this woman covers her body is one of the strategies that prevent the colonizers from having access to the Algerian women. This woman was conceived by the colonizers as mysterious woman that has the capacity to resist the colonial gaze and a threat in front of their eyes. The veil here was perceived as an obstacle in front of the colonizers' gaze. The same analysis can be applied on this picture. Arguably, this woman might be regarded as a symbol of the Algerian society and her veil reveals the fact that it belongs to a culture that has its own rituals and customs.

Obviously, one may argue that this picture can be seen as the embodiment of Algerian culture and customs. These pictures, and especially those with the full veil, have caused a lot of anxiety for the colonizers. However, the perception of the

veil, in that time remained very much related to the idea of colonial Harem. Hence, these pictures were viewed by the colonizers as the real Harem and backwardness.

Moreover, this is one of the projects that have been launched by the colonialist regime in Algeria. This can be seen through the images of veiled women in photographs by French colonizers. This idea has been explained by Alloula who claimed that the Orient has been unveiled and exposed to the world as exotic in comparison with Western women. Though, the aim was to liberate these women from the Algerian men which reminded us of Chandra Mohanty's idea of the white men who are trying to liberate brown women from brown men (Mohanty, 1984)⁽³⁶⁾. This can be compared with the same idea of French colonizers in Algeria. However, the native did not welcome the colonizers and their idea of unveiling women.

This item has explained the perception of the veil in colonial era and how it was perceived by the colonizers. The next subtitle will try to disseminate some ideas on the mechanism that the veil has undergone immediately after the event of 9/11 which the next item discusses.

3. Post 9/11 and the Veil

To many Western onlookers a veiled woman epitomizes Islam. Used as a representation of women's oppression, freedom, faith, and social status, the veil has become one of the most controversial issues among not only Islamic scholars, but followers of Islam as well. "Standing as a beacon of tradition or an emblem of progressive modernity, the veiled or unveiled, de-veiled or re-veiled woman has been a feature of divergent struggles over decolonization, nationalism, revolution, westernization and anti-westernization (p.10)⁽³⁷⁾.

(36) Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse". Appeared in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

(37) Reina Lewis, *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, edited by David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003): 18.

It is clear that after the bombing of the World Trade Center, the veil and veiled women had occupied most of Western media. Thus, some still ask the question: Why is this fear and anxiety from the veil and those who wear it? This is one of the major questions that will always need some peer analysis and investigations. However, some are still embarking on the claim that the veil as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression, and therefore women must be freed from these practices that are hostile to women's rights. On the other hand, some believe that it is not more than a way of stigmatizing Muslim women.

Additionally, Western media has given too much of its news and columns to this issue of veiling especially after 9/11. However, their coverage of the issue was very problematic since it did not give the chance to those women in most of their coverage. The following quote tells about this issue: "Post-9/11 media reproduces the imagery of veiled Muslim "Others". Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist acts, the circulation of images of veiled Muslim women considerably increased, signifying women's oppression". (p.6)⁽³⁸⁾ As the quote above explains the fact that the veil has gained a major concern after 9/11 and the images of veiled women have been rampant in Western media. Additionally, a similar point has been made by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad in her 2007 article "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon." She argued:

Since 9/11, the American media has vastly expanded its coverage of Muslim and Arab women throughout the world. Western audiences have been simultaneously riveted and horrified by the reported treatment of Muslim women. The highly publicized atrocities of the Taliban have left Americans outraged at what Muslim men do to their women. They have also assured the American public of the virtues of American society and provided an outlet for the energies of some American feminists seeking the "empowerment" of Muslim women. (p.3)⁽³⁹⁾

(38) Oumlil, "Discourses of the Veil in Al-Jazeera English": 6.

(39) Haddad, "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon": 3.

Apparently, after 9/11 veiled women have become on the forefront of TV channels, newspapers, journals and magazines. Additionally, as it has been stated before, one of the arguments that some are still holding to when it comes to the veil is the fact that women are suffering under Taliban's regime. This worldview asserts the fact that Taliban have treated women harshly. Here one may argue that the events of September 11 have been manipulated for some other purposes. For instance, the idea that Afghan women are oppressed and therefore need some other party to free them is not more than a myth which has been created by the Bush Administration to enable them to pursue their ideologies in the Middle East in the name of women's liberation.

In the case of Afghanistan and the liberation of Afghan women, Stabile and Kumar argued that this idea of liberation from the oppressive culture imposed by Taliban is still very problematic since the status of women is still the same. They question the idea of liberation of the Afghan women inaugurated by the Bush Administration as an attempt to shake this Orientalist discourse about Afghanistan, and Afghan women in particular. They claim: "When we look at the condition of women today in Afghanistan, it becomes clear that the US never really had their liberation in mind. While some things have changed since the collapse of Taliban for women, much remains the same. So, for instance, women may now venture out in certain regions without a male escort, but they still do not enjoy basic human rights". (p. 11)⁽⁴⁰⁾

What Stabile and Kumar wanted to unveil concerning the case of Afghan women is the fact that American invasion of Afghanistan in the name of saving women has brought nothing for these women who are still in miserable situations. This emanated from the fact that Stabile and Kumar assert that these women have not gained any considerable status since that arrival or advent of American forces to liberate Afghan women, and their rights are still violated. Stabile and Kumar,

(40) Carol Stabile and Deepa Kumar, "Unveiling Imperialism: Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan", *Media Culture Society* (2005): 12-13, <http://www.sagepublications.com>

moreover, argued that US media has been the platform and the real celebrator of this Orientalist discourse launched by the Bush Administration. They lamented:

In retrospect, the coverage of Afghan women that followed from 11 September 2001 can only be understood as a cynical and opportunistic use of women. Few journalists and reporters could have believed that the sudden interest in Afghan women was anything other than a cover for the Bush administration's dreams of empire, particularly given the absence of coverage of issues involving women and violence in the US media in general. Additionally, had journalists had some memory of the 1980s media coverage of the Afghan–Soviet war and the mujahideen, out of which the Taliban emerged, they would have remembered that it was positively glowing. (pp. 12-13)⁽⁴¹⁾

This quote can be considered to be the emblematic of the strategies adopted by US to wage war against Afghanistan in the name of women's liberation. According to Stabile and Kumar, there was a clear use of women's bodies to justify the invasion of Afghanistan. Importantly, Stabile and Kumar disseminate the fact that Western media had been manipulated since it has been brainwashed by the Bush Administration since it did not fathom that this war has nothing to do with the freedom of Afghan women and their status. Interestingly, the veil and notably the Burqa has been the focus of Bush and his rhetoric to gain the public support. In a statement by his wife as it has been stated previously she asserted many times that the war on Afghanistan was to save Afghan women from Taliban and their oppression regime. According to Stabile and Kumar women's bodies were used to substantiate some other issues such as war on Afghanistan which many saw as unjustifiable as far as human rights are concerned.

Furthermore, the events of 9/11 had a great impact on the world in general and the Muslim world in particular. These events have put the world in an opaque situation that seemed to be very complicated in all aspects. Some people thought that the tension has come with the Oklahoma bombing that many argued that it was carried out by Arabs especially people from Middle East as I have mentioned before.

(41) *Ibid.*

This idea was explained by Carine Bourget (2008) in an essay entitled “9/11 and the Affair of the Muslim Headscarf” in *Essays* by Tahar Ben Jelloun and Abdelwahab Meddeb. Bourget states: “The events of 9/11 have further exacerbated the association made in the Western media between Islam and terrorism. As a defining moment marking the turn of the century.” (p.7)⁽⁴²⁾ This reveals the fact that 9/11 was the backbone of the negative portrayal of Muslims in most of the Western media. As result, veiled women were portrayed as victims and have been looked at with a lot of stereotypes and prejudices in mind, such as oppression and many other connotations. This idea has been explained by Amira Jarmakani (2008) in her book *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* where she claimed that the events of 9/11 have a great effect on the perception of images of veiled women:

Moreover, the popular story of oppressed Kuwaiti women whose prohibitions were extended to female U.S. soldiers during the 1991 Gulf War, coupled with the less than subtle connections made between the Taliban, al-Qaida, and Iraq immediately following the events of September 11, 2001, have had the effect of mapping the images of veiled, oppressed Kuwaiti women and of Afghan women wearing the burqa onto the perceived realities of Iraqi women. Such sweeping, sloppy conflation demonstrate two important points. The first is the way in which women from varied regions of the Middle East and Central Asia are perceived as a monolithic mass, and the second is irresistibility of the veil as metaphor. (pp. 18-19)⁽⁴³⁾

This quote provides an extensive explanation of the events of 9/11 and their contribution to the way veiled women were perceived by Europeans and Americans. Since then, the attention was given to those who wear the veil as the case of women in Iraq and Afghanistan as the quote explained. These events have resulted in

(42) Carine Bourget, “9/11 and the Affair of the Muslim Headscarf in *Essays* by Tahar Ben Jelloun and Abdelwahab Meddeb”, *French Cultural Studies* 19, no. 1 (Feb 2008): 71, <http://www.sagepublications.com>

(43) Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood the Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 18-19.

what was called the liberating mission. Additionally, many people argued that the negative perception of the images of veiled women must be attached to the events of 9/11. Since that bombing, veil was regarded as the source of fear and anxiety for the West. Furthermore, this perception built on what might be called value judgment and prejudices.

This idea of fear of the veil can be backed up by the fact that since that time women who wear the veil faced a lot of problems including discrimination. This issue can be seen in a documentary broadcasted on Fox News entitled *Discrimination Claim* in which a young veiled woman was deprived from having a job just because of her veil being a Muslim, so she may cause fear and anxiety.

Recently, the veil in Western media was given great concern in comparison with the past when the veil was not more than colonial harem. However, and precisely after 9/11 this concept has completely changed and imbued with new negative understandings and perceptions of both the people who wear it as well as the religion to which the veil is connected: Islam. After these events, the veil was connected with a lot of stereotypes, such as oppression and terrorism.

Moreover, after the events of 9/11, most of the heated debates revolved around the veil as an issue that needs to be excavated. In Britain and France, the veil was given too much attention more than any place in Europe. This emanated from the fact that the public perception of the veil has completely changed after 9/11 and more precisely in 2006⁽⁴⁴⁾. This has been revealed by the leaders of the parliament in England. One of the most important and very telling statements that will be discussed in the second part of this paper is the idea of the veil as a sign of separation. This idea was loudly vowed by the Prime Minister Tony Blair when he argued that the veil is a symbol of separation. This goes hand in hand with the issue of the veil and the new American Orientalism.

(44) The issue of the veil has gained much of the debates and discussions in the Western contexts in general and in England and France in particular. This can be seen through some comments by British politicians such as the Representative of Blackburn, Jack Straw and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. These are two politicians whose comments were the source of the disputes and misunderstandings in England.

4. The Veil and the New American Orientalism

Take up the White Man's burden—

In patience to abide,

To veil the threat of terror

And check the show of pride;

By open speech and simple,

An hundred times made plain.

To seek another's profit,

And work another's gain. (p. 322)⁽⁴⁵⁾

Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*, 1989

The events of 9/11 have given birth to an aura and a quest for the New World Order. However, some believed that the quest for this Order has started since the announcement of Samuel Huntington's phrase the clash of civilizations. One must assert that the events of 9/11 were the backbone and spoon-feed of the emergence of the notion of New American Orientalism, notably to save some parts of the world as it has been repeatedly seen in the rhetoric of Bush and his wife, Laura Bush. This can be clearly seen in Sahar Momand's article: "Wartime Agendas: The Portrayal of Afghan Women by the United States". Momand states:

On November 17, 2001, a little over a month after the United States started its war in Afghanistan, First Lady Laura Bush gave a radio speech specifically addressing the women of Afghanistan. In this speech Bush rejoiced over the retreat of the Taliban and the new "freedom" that had become available to women. As she put it, due to "[the United States] recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment" (Bush,

(45) Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden", in *Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, by David Spurr, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1933).

2001). Bush's speech epitomizes the dominate rhetoric in the United States that is employed when portraying Afghan women. (p.1)⁽⁴⁶⁾

Through the quote above one can see the fact that the events of 9/11 were one of the paramount reasons that drive the Bush Administration to adopt the ruses of the New World Order; He stated: "The United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe" (President George W. Bush, 2002). Additionally, the events of 9/11 can be viewed as the new Pearl Harbor through which America put itself in the position of the world savior. Laura Bush's speech was a reminiscent of what some will call the rhetoric of the Empire, and David Spurr is one of them. Her rhetoric has been characterized by the idea of liberation, the point that can be taken as one of the ingredients of the notion of New American Orientalism. Laura Bush had strongly spoken about the freedom that Afghan women have rejoiced after Taliban's regime has ended. She asserted many times that women are no longer imprisoned under their Burqas, which Laura Bush has compared with herself as a liberated woman. Clearly, the notion of liberation was not more than a way to justify the war on Afghanistan. Momand's article touches on this issue. she said:

This rhetoric involves comparing the previously oppressed Afghan woman under the Taliban to a "liberated" woman with access to education and freedom as a result of the presence of the U.S. By juxtaposing this image of Afghan women as victims to "liberated" American women who can enjoy democracy and freedom, the U.S. is better able to reinforce and justify its values and actions. Constructing the image of Afghan women as oppressed victims in need of saving by the U.S. gives more legitimacy to the war on Afghanistan. However, this "oppressed victim" image ignores the actual history of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan that led to her oppression. (p.1)⁽⁴⁷⁾

(46) Sahar Momand, "Wartime Agendas: The Portrayal of Afghan Women by the United States", *Mills Academic Research Journal* (17 Nov 2001), www.themarj.com

(47) *Ibid*: 1.

In this quote, the idea of the white man's burden was very clear when Laura Bush argued that women's status in Afghanistan have ameliorated since the advent of US Military Forces. This rhetoric has been done to justify the war as Momand already stated. Here one can argue that the images of Afghan women have been used to construct certain prejudices about Afghan women and their status. Interestingly, Momand argued that the victimization of women in Afghanistan has put on the periphery the actual destruction done by America and its policies in the Middle East and in Afghanistan in particular.

Sadly, this rhetoric has been seen in Western media, and notably in US media, which helped to dispatch these images that have nothing to do with the actual reality of Afghan women. This idea that images of victimized Afghan women have spread all over the world can be seen in Momand's article. She argued:

In the case of the wartime portrayal of Afghanistan, images of women consist of those who are faceless and void of identity because they are forced to wear the burqa or women who joyfully are liberated by the U.S. and are able to rip their veils off for the first time since their repressive regime took power. On December 3, 2001, *Time* Magazine issued a "special report" entitled "Lifting of the Veil" which is emblematic of this discourse (Time, 2001). The woman on the cover of the magazine wears a head scarf but her face is exposed and smiling. This image is of a relatively young woman with a serene expression on her face, as if she is at peace now. The image along with its title implies that the veil itself is the oppressor of women. (p.2)⁽⁴⁸⁾

Clearly, in this quote one can see the fact that Western media has played a major role to mobilize the war and make US involvement justifiable. One of the widely spread images of Afghan women was the image under the rubric: "Lifting the Veil" which as Momand argued is the symbol of the discourse some called New American Orientalism which is a war in the name of saving people—usually women—from their repressive regimes in the Islamic world. Momand argued

(48) *Ibid.*: 2.

that claiming that Taliban regime was oppressive for women, and notably veiled women, can be taken as one way of making Western dress a standard to follow. Momand claimed: “Though Taliban was a regime that was extremely oppressive to women and making veiling a requirement was one of the ways they restricted women’s agency, the media’s tying of the veil to oppression is problematic and idealizes “Western” standards of dress above all others”. (p.2)⁽⁴⁹⁾ Importantly, this idea that women have been rejoicing the freedom after US invasion of Afghanistan can be easily deconstructed. This emanated from the fact that the notion of saving Afghan women has been contracted by the fact that the Burqa is still worn by Afghan women; the reason why it is still present is one of the concerns of this paper.

This discourse of New American Orientalism can be clearly seen in another article by Dana Cloud entitled “To Veil the Threat of Terror: Afghan Women and the “Clash of Civilizations” in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism” where she argued that the notion of saving others by intruders was omnipresent since the moment of the events of 9/11. Furthermore, from her prism, the idea of the white man’s burden was given new shapes via what is allegedly called war on terror. She divulged the fact that this war was built on some false claims that serve American interests. This can be bluntly seen through the following quote: “The picture that emerges [from rhetoric about war in Afghanistan] is a land teeming with wild-eyed warlords, malnourished children, abused women, mud huts and treacherous mountain terrain whose caverns and underground caves are home to minions of malevolence—basically, a scene out of *Lord of the Rings*”. (2004, p. 2)⁽⁵⁰⁾ This shows the idea of waging war in the name of saving other, or what it can be called New American Orientalism.

Moreover, the rhetoric of New American Orientalism has also been shown in an article written by Carol Stabile and Deepa Kumar entitled *Unveiling Imperialism:*

(49) *Ibid.*

(50) Dana Cloud “To Veil the Threat of Terror: Afghan Women and the “Clash of Civilizations” in the Imagery of the U.S. War on Terrorism”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90, no. 3 (Aug 2004): 2.

Media, Gender and the War on Afghanistan. In this article one can clearly see the idea that New American Orientalism was embedded in the arguments for the war on terror. Stabile and Kumar said:

In political discourses about Afghan women, two narrative traditions and practices converge: that of the protection scenario and that of Orientalism. Both traditions draw much of their rhetorical force from discourses of imperialism. The argument about protecting women, used as a justification for the bombing of Afghanistan, combines elements of both traditions. Orientalist discourses often employ protection scenarios as justification for imperialist aggression, although Orientalism has a specific colonial history. According to the logic of the protection scenario, women, like the penetrable, feminized territory of the nation-state, must be protected from the predatory advances of some real or imaginary enemy. (p. 6)⁽⁵¹⁾

Thus, Stabile and Kumar argued that the rhetoric of this kind of Orientalism is usually based on imperialist views; they argued that the imperialist views were omnipresent in American discourse and more specifically war on terror. Furthermore, they stated that the idea of the white man's burden which was one of the major strategies adopted during the colonial era can be clearly seen in the idea of the war on terror. More importantly, Stabile and Kumar moved on to closely diagnose or look at a very essential issue which is women's bodies. This comes from the fact that the female's body has been regarded as the symbol of the nation; a delicate one that usually needs to be saved from other forces, be it from outside or inside as it is the case of Afghan women.

More importantly, numerous scholarly works have dealt with the issue of arrogance and supremacy exercised by the West, notably America, in the name of what they called the well-being of others. This altruistic view, this notion of saving others has rendered the native in passivity as it is the case of Afghanistan. In addition, this idea of making some cultures and races in an inferior position

(51) Stabile and Kumar, "Unveiling Imperialism": 6.

has been disseminated by Edward Said in his book *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. He stated: “The idea that some races and cultures have a higher aim in life than others... gives the more powerful, more developed, more civilized the right therefore to colonize others, not in the name of brute force or raw plunder, both of which are standard components of the exercise, but in the name of a noble ideal”. (p. 574)⁽⁵²⁾

Importantly, Said’s statement has been written before the War on Terror, and on Afghanistan in particular; but one may argue that Said has forecasted this issue of New American Orientalism. Said argued that the notion that some cultures are less important than others has given some legitimacies to other cultures and make them more powerful and relegate those who believe that they are superior in a high status; the notion that one can see in colonialism and its ideologies. Said’s idea could be seen in *Orientalism* when one looked at the notion of power relations which from his perspective created the polarized world with unequal cultures as a corollary of some of the systems of classifications done by colonizers in order to serve their own interests. This ideology that Said has embarked on can be seen in the notion of New American Orientalism. Sadly, this latter is widely spread in American’s ideologies launched against Arab and Muslims by the Bush Administrations. Said stated:

...The world of Islam—its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding—is still mired in religion, primitivism and backwardness. Orientalism posits the West as modern, greater than the sum of its parts, full of enriching contradictions, and yet always ‘Western’ in its cultural identity. The world of Islam, in stark contrast, is no more than ‘Islam’, reducible to a small number of unchanging characteristics, despite the existence of contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as those of the West. (p. 10)⁽⁵³⁾

(52) Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000): 574.

(53) Said, *Culture and Imperialism*: 10.

Clearly, this quote can be taken as very important when it comes to description of the notion of Orientalism which is still embedded in US policies in the Arab and Muslim world as the case of Afghanistan. According to Said, the East has been created as different from the rest of the world since it was viewed as backward and less civilized in relation to the West. He argued that Orientalism gave the West the legitimacy of being superior and more cultivated than the rest of the world especially Muslim world.

Furthermore, the idea of the veil and the New American Orientalist discourse can also be found in the 2010 article entitled: "Lifting the Veil: Examining the Portrayal of Muslim Men and Women in Western Media." In this article, one can argue that the portrayal of the veil and its negative connotations were prevalent in Western media. This can be seen through the following statement: "Muslims, as portrayed in Western media, illustrate two Orientalist assumptions that arouse concern and fear in Western societies: 1) Muslim women are oppressed and in need of liberation and 2) Muslim men are a violent force that pose a threat to Western society". (Retrieved, 2010)⁽⁵⁴⁾ Hence, this quote and many other quotations in this article pinpoint the idea of Muslim women and sufferance. Thus, the problem of this discourse of Muslim women's oppression is the fact that it necessitates the intervention of others in the name of freeing oppressed women.

Consequently, Western media gave tremendous concerns to the way Muslim women dress. Importantly, Momand argued that Western media usually glosses over the fact that there are some Muslim women in Afghanistan who are comfortable with this dress. However, Momand believed that the idea of making Afghan dress oppressive was aimed at adopting Western dress and style of life. Momand said: "The media's tying of the veil to oppression is problematic and idealizes 'Western' standards of dress above all others," (p. 2)⁽⁵⁵⁾. Thus, the claim that women will throw away their veils after Taliban regime might be analyzed as a very simplistic view since it has completely ignored the cultural commonality of the indigenous.

(54) "Lifting the Veil: Examining the Portrayal of Muslim Men and Women in Western Media", www.samcrowe.posterous.com

(55) Momand, "Wartime Agendas": 2.

Additionally, this idea of leaving one's culture and embracing someone else's culture and its ways of life contradicts the very meaning of a society, since culture is the space and place where the society narrates its stories, the indigenous culture must be respected. Abu-Lughod negotiated this issue and said: "veiling reflects a systematic code of dress particular to a specific society... As anthropologists know perfectly well," she states, "people wear the appropriate form of dress for their social communities and are guided by socially shared standards, religious beliefs, and moral ideals, unless they deliberately transgress to make a point or are unable to afford proper cover." This shows the fact that the veil reflects a way of dress which also reflects other individuals' ways of life in a particular geographical place. As Abu-Lughod argued and is known from an anthropological perspective, people wear the dress that was known and shared by the majority of the population according to certain standards with certain appreciations by the whole community.

Interestingly, the veil nowadays has gained too much attention which led some to view this issue as an extension of what was known by the term New American Orientalism. This idea might be plausible when one looked at the way Western media portrayed the veil and veiled women in general.

One of the most important ideas now is the mission of liberation by United States of America. This idea began as a way of liberating women from men especially the Afghan women from Taliban's regime. This idea can be clearly grasped in Jarmakani book when she stated that:

Images of Arab womanhood in U.S. Popular imagination are implicitly connected to the notions of civilization that undergrid the narrative of the ransacked museum. For example, contemporary representations of the veil in U.S. popular culture have been deployed to emphasize the civilized superiority of U.S. culture in relation to supposedly barbaric practices of female oppression. In fact, shifting U.S. interpretations of and engagements with the notion of civilization

have largely determined the popularity of varied representations of Arab womanhood in particular historical moments. (p. 15)⁽⁵⁶⁾

Obviously, this quote tries to shed light on the idea of the liberating mission in Afghanistan or what they have called the civilizing mission. This emanated from the fact that many people claimed that Afghan women were oppressed by Taliban and that the aim of the Bush Administration was to free them. This idea has been explained by Kumar and Stabile in their 2005 essay “Unveiling Imperialism”:

Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity—a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent. Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. Yet the terrorists who helped rule that country now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women. (p. 1)⁽⁵⁷⁾

(56) Amira Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (n.p., 2008): 15.

(57) Stabile and Kumar, “Unveiling Imperialism”: 1.



Figure 3: This picture tells about the idea of liberating mission in Afghanistan where Laura Bush on the left with Afghani woman on the right. It is taken from *The Sun* Newspaper.

This quote summarized Bush's project which was part of what it was called New American Orientalism. In this quote it was apparent that women have been used to serve political agendas as it has been claimed by Bush administration that women in Afghanistan were oppressed and they need to be liberated. This idea can be seen through the following picture where Laura Bush and a woman from 'Afghanistan' were juxtaposed as an example of the project of United States of America.

This picture is the best reflection of the idea of the civilizing mission that took place in Afghanistan. The woman on the right is still oppressed and Laura's role here is to liberate her from the oppression that she is facing in her nativelyland, Afghanistan. More importantly, the cross that appears on the veiled woman is very much important in a sense that it refers to the sick, contaminated and diseased Afghan society. Significantly, this picture and hundreds of other pictures are the real explanation of what is called the New American Orientalism that was apparently seen in Afghanistan.

In addition, one of the most well known people whose commitments on the issue of veiling are unforgettable is Jack Straw who claimed that the veil should be taken off since it is a mark of separation. This can be clearly seen through the article he has written in one of the British newspapers *Telegram*. He asserted that the veil can make the conversation more difficult and it does not contribute to the community relations (Straw, 2006). This claim has been regarded by some as the beginning of racial intolerance of Muslims in England.

This hostility in most cases was a result of the media effect on people's perceptions. The idea of media effect on the way people think was the main alibi that heightens the veil in stereotypical way. This idea has been explained by Edward Said who argues that media causes a kind of brainstorming which replaced the way people think properly. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, he stated:

It is not difficult to imagine that a Muslim might be made uncomfortable by the relentless insistence—even if it is put in terms of a debate—that her or his faith, culture, and people are seen as a source of threat, and that she or he has been deterministically associated with terrorism, violence, and 'fundamentalism'. (p. xxi)⁽⁵⁸⁾

This statement explains one of the most important issues of the New American Orientalism which is discursively created through the idea of the liberating mission by United States of America. In the quote above, Said sheds light on how media, and Western media in particular, made those veiled women as different and more importantly in need for someone to intervene as a result of their faith and culture. He argued that Muslim be it women or men, are more likely to be connected with violence, terrorism and fundamentalism.

However, Meyda Yegenoglu in *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* has tried to unravel some of the issues that have been overlooked

(58) Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981): 21.

by many intellectuals. Yegenoglu argued that one should not put the blame all on those Orientalists, rather there are some in Muslim and Arab countries that should be blamed or criticized since they have adopted the same methods of divisions in their homelands. More significantly, Yegenoglu moved on to pillory some of the projects that have been done by nationalists to maintain the same schematic division seen in the Orientalist discourses.

In her section on the “Battle of the Veil: Women between Orientalism and Nationalism”, Yegenoglu was very much critical of the nationalists especially in Algeria and Turkey. Yegenoglu believed that the nationalists were the apes of the Orientalists, because she argued that the nationalists “are in fact the very product of Orientalist hegemony”, (p. 122)⁽⁵⁹⁾ Of course, after the colonial phase, many questions have been asked if there was really a difference between the Orientalists and the nationalists. Some argued that the same strategies that one can see in the Orientalist discourse have been adopted by the nationalists. This idea has been dealt with in a very interesting book entitled *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* by Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee argued that after the colonial phase the natives have maintained some of the characteristics depicted in Orientalism, such as the case of women who had been seen as other, and she gave the example of Turkey.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Conclusion

This article attempted to shed light on some of the discourses surrounding the veil both in the past and in the present. Specifically, the article has tried to look at the perception of the veil after the events of 9/11. Additionally, the article has tried to disseminate some of the Western imagination about women who wear the veil both in the past and after the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York. Significantly, the article put some of the emphasis that the Orientalist discourse

(59) Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 122.

(60) Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (UK: Oxford University Press, n.d.)

which as known in the 7th and 8th centuries have been re-born notably after the events of 9/11.

For instance, the idea of saving the world proclaimed by the Bush Administration or what was called by many scholars to be the New American Orientalism is an example of the fact that the old colonial and Orientalist discourses have been manifestly revisited, which can be seen in the Bush Government comments on the lives and status of Afghan women and Taliban regime. Importantly, what this article tries to pinpoint is the fact that after 9/11 veiled women have been stereotyped in most of Western discourse on the Muslim female identity, and notably the veil women who occupied most of that discussions and debates.

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