ANALYSING THE POSITION OF FEMALE MUSLIMS IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY AND THEIR CHOICE OF DONNING HIJAB AMIDST SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT[1]

ANALISANDO A POSIÇÃO DE MULHERES MUÇULMANAS EM SOCIEDADES PATRIARCAIS E SUA ESCOLHA EM USAR O HIJAB EM MEIO AO CONTEXTO SOCIOPOLÍTICO

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Abstract: The discussions on Muslim women's oppression in the context of Muslim and non-Muslim countries are heavily focused on their position in Islamic society, their interpretation within feminism, and broader debates on donning the hijab. Primarily, the adaptation of hijab as a garment most of the time refers from religious to social pressure under the patriarchal influence and relates to political ideologies. This paper explores the stories and facts beyond those narratives finding there are identities which are entirely personal when it comes to the hijab. This paper also incorporates the theories such as 'Orientalism', 'Male gaze' and discussions base on books such as Mohanty's Under Western Eyes, Islam vs Islamism by Peter R Demant, The Headscarf Controversies by Hilal Elver, Beyond the Veil by Fatema Mernissi. Furthermore, the primary discussion with students from different Muslim countries living in the UK light on the factors such as one's cultural context or geographical location has impact on those decisions. Besides, tradition and ethnicity appear as having a significant influence on religious practices. Through comparative studies on the adaptation of hijab in different Islamic countries explains Muslim women's subjectivity towards hijab is not away from political connotations.

Resumo: As discussões sobre a opressão de mulheres muçulmanas no contexto de países muçulmanos e não muçulmanos concentram-se fortemente em sua posição na sociedade islâmica, em sua interpretação dentro do feminismo e em debates mais amplos sobre o uso do hijab. Principalmente, a adaptação do hijab como peça de vestuário, na maioria das vezes, se refere da pressão religiosa à social sob a influência patriarcal e se relaciona com ideologias políticas. Este artigo explora as histórias e fatos para além dessas narrativas, e descobre identidades inteiramente pessoais no que diz respeito ao hijab. Este artigo também incorpora teorias como 'Orientalismo', 'Olhar masculino' e discussões baseadas em livros como: *Under Western Eyes*, de Mohanty; Islam vs Islamism, por Peter R. Demant; The Headscarf Controversies, de Hilal Elver; e Beyond the Veil, de Fatema Mernissi. Além disso, a discussão principal com estudantes de diferentes países muçulmanos que vivem no Reino Unido esclarece que fatores como o contexto cultural ou a localização geográfica de alguém tem impacto nessas decisões. Além disso, tradição e etnia parecem ter uma influência significativa nas práticas religiosas. Através de estudos comparativos sobre a adaptação do hijab em diferentes países islâmicos, explica-se que a subjetividade das mulheres muçulmanas em relação ao hijab não está longe de conotações políticas.

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Introduction

As a subject Muslim women's fundamental position in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies reveals ample scope of arguments and explanations. In the complex multiplicity of discourses there are always incidents to look into and add value to it. Here I employ my case from my own experience and understanding of Islam, Islamic social structure, the interpretation of Quranic verses, and the female Muslim's identity and '*male-female dynamics*' (Mernissi, Fatema 2011: 42) in Muslim society. And finally, Hijab as the gesture of power. Through this article, I am trying to explore the enormous influence ethnic culture, geographical position of Muslim countries and tribal tradition has on Muslim identities, and how those construct Islamic religious implementations. To me, Islam is merely not a simple religion for its invasive nature; it is very political indeed. Islam and Muslim as community '*ummah'*, and Muslim women's position in it always throws questions at me- for the contradictions and confusions it creates through various interpretations and school of thoughts, which are more political; hence naturally biased.

Female Muslim's position in religious transcript is far away from the interpretation of Qur'anic verses. The reflection of masculinity, and the patriarchal societal view, influence Arab tribal culture are prominent in religious laws and customs. Traditionally, women are treated '*less-than-equal*' compare to men (Demant, Peter 2006: 77). The conservative thinkers like popular Egyptian preacher Muhammad Mutawalli al- Sha'rawi advocates that '*the house'* is the celebrated '*God given space*' for Muslim women, where she can '*pursue the noblest of all professions on earth*' the role of mother by raising '*the next generation*' (Stowasser, 1994: 129). Muslim female has no role to play outside her home as the conservative thinkers believe straightway indicates the patriarchal view. The '*sexual dynamics*' (Mernissi, 2011: 61) of genders, oppressed '*subgroup*' (Kirmani, 2009: 48), women's role in public spaces and how much freedom she has in her movement and '*control of the female body*' always remains debatable (Ramírez, 2014: 671). Over time, much incisive criticism has been shown; even Muslim believers have a misconception regarding the position of woman in Islamic society, '*ever since they came under the impact of the Western Civilization*' (Afza and Ahmad, 1993: 3).

Veiling Muslim woman's face is not the primal issue relates with her respect and honor, but it is the concept of modesty. Different school of thoughts implies different rule

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on the Hijab, but it remains arguable, whether is it necessary or not? Whether it is free of choice or obligatory for Muslim *Ummah*? Covering up is social etiquette than a religious obligation in many parts of the Muslim world, like Pakistan, Bangladesh.

Through the discourse analysis and qualitative interviews, I collect data to clear to investigate Muslim young women's opinion on the practice of donning headscarf in diffident Islamic countries. I do this by contrasting these opinions with the general European/Western view of the hijab as a symbol of female oppression and backwardness. These Muslim young women have strong view on 'male gaze', 'hijab as suppression not free choice', 'societal oppression', 'political influence', 'islamophobia', and 'Muslim feminism' from their personal narratives.

In 2016, armed French police confronts a woman resting on the shore at the town's *Promenade des Anglais* and makes her to remove some of her clothing (French Police Make Woman, 2016). Burkini ban beside headscarf regulation flares controversy. Lately, in 2018 UK Boris Johnson criticises Muslim women by saying wearing burkas "look like letter boxes" and compare them to "bank robbers". This offensive notions of verbal abuse and bodily action demonstrate the discrimination towards Muslim woman on gender context paving for gendering islamophobia.

With the growing political mobilisation in Europe after the end of colonization aggravates the '*Headscarf problem*' (Ramírez, 2014: 676). In 2009, a woman named Asma Bougnaoui, lost her job at IT consultancy Micopole SA as she refuses to remove her hijab at workplace (Davies, 2017). Control over female's body by regulating their dress code is a vital concern. Her obligation to wear hijab in Muslim world makes her a 'good' citizen, where in non-Muslim countries wearing it classifies her as 'bad' citizen (Bi, 2017). Hijab becomes the parameter to judge Muslim woman's moral principles.

This article will analysis how patriarchal Muslim society objectively implements laws to degrade women to otherness in socio-political context. And how Muslim woman's emancipation is seen as a threat to their well-established patriarchal society. Emancipation plays a great deal to construct Muslim women's social position. In my second part of this article, I attempt to explain to don hijab should be Muslim women's right and free choice, but how social and political institute has manipulated it. The subject area is enormous, but my purpose is to reveal this discourse through history, religious explanation, social contribution, and its cultural identity.

Muslim Male-Female Sexual Dynamics in Patriarchal Society

It is quintessential to fathom the male-female dynamics (Mernissi, 2011: 42) in Muslim world, hence my interest lies in how Muslim women's identity is shaped up by patriarchal society. Muslim men's inertia not to allow female Muslims to work outside the house, assuming that they will bring disgrace to the family, actually reflection of their male ego.

Patriarchal society devours on hierarchy, ignorance, and competition, which transform as control over female gender by command and power. I concentrate on the patriarchal role of the society, which finally narrates the position of women in Islamic community and the construction their identity. For this discourse, I have been engaging with female Muslim students from various setting reflecting family backgrounds, ethnic origins, and religious traditions to understand their personal narrative on sexual segregation? Or how they comprehend man's dominance on female?

Aliyah, British born-Pakistani origin, 19 years old from Birmingham is currently studying Engineering at Coventry University. She grew up in a very traditional-religious Muslim family, where wearing hijab is customary, with her two sisters and one brother. The traditional Pakistani cultural impact is very vivid in their upbringing. A sense of discrimination is always there amongst her siblings. At a younger age, preaching at Mosque where she went to learn Qur'an, highly influences her. She starts wearing Hijab at that point. But for last 2 years, she has stopped donning hijab, since she is going through an identity crisis- she doesn't know who she is? What she wants from her life? Aliyah respects her religious values, her culture and family teaching. Our context is obligatory dress code for men and female. Aliyah narrates once her family went for a holiday. Her bother could go swimming wearing swim truck, but as a girl she and her sisters weren't allowed to. Her brother has more freedom then them. Though in Islam men are not allowed to show their body either.

> **Syeda**: If something is obligatory for men, they don't follow it. But its obligatory for women, they have to follow it. Why? Do you think this is one kind of dominance on women?
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> **Aliyah**: Yeah, I feel there is definitely a difference between man and woman. Islam doesn't preach that. Within Qur'an it talks about- even the household work as Sunnah, even Muhammad (PBUH) did it. But what happen people get confuse between culture and religion. The culture from Pakistan slowly integrated into it and that becomes such a big difference, like a hierarchy and patriarchy.

Aliya's conversation points to the social dynamics of gender identity (Chapman, 2015 : 238) of a Muslim girl living in UK. She confirms her knowledge of the core message of Islam through her previous engagement with Islamic studies at the Mosque. Qur'an advocates the gender equality; no hierarchy is there. Religion is completely an individual entity; its approach is universal. But when it comes to the contact of social norms, interpretation changes. That's why the preaching in the book alters as it entire into the real-life practice. This discrepancy on sartorial norms has deep impact on Aliyah's identity construction. Religious practice becomes cultural identity in Pakistani society, though they live in UK, she can sense the profound influence tradition has in her religious duties. This duality pricks her conscience. The embedded psychological and material conditions of inequality in both the societies create challenges for Aliyah to accept herself as she is- within Pakistani traditional Islamic culture or her British-Muslim identity.

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Nissa, Algerian Muslim, 27 years old, currently doing her PhD in English Literature and Linguistic at Coventry university. She grew up in Algeria, wearing hijab from the age of 14 against her family's wish. Extremely aware of her national political affairs and concern about her community. Our conversation flows in the same way, regarding dress code of Muslim woman.

Syeda: Why Islam asked woman to wear hijab? What do you think about it?

Nissa: I think, if we also consider the fact that men are also by Qur'an, by book, by Islam they are also obliged to, asked to dress up in other different way. That would be, your question wouldn't be that why only women?

Syeda: Exactly. But we don't talk about it?

Nissa: Yes. We always talk about why women are obliged to dress up in certain ways, but actually men also have to dress up in certain ways which definitely not like women, but they have certain dress code according to Islam. Yeah, that's Islam.

Nissa makes her point conciesly, that Islam is equal for both men and women, but its 'WE' people who only concern about women's righteousness forgetting men's religious obligation. Dress code is certainly relating with modesty, but its measure and standard vary when applied men versus women (Mahmood, 2005: 156). She did not mention patriarchal society here, but the reference clearly shows that how gender preferences work over religious practices.

Sairah Pakistani Muslim, 22 years old, is studying Business Management at Coventry University. She is here to complete her final year, tells her upbringing and education is from Pakistan, she has seen the society closely. She is extremely curious and critical about Hijab. She says, hijab seems oppression to her. She mentions a story of her cousin who is 10 years now. That little girl, according to Sairah, is highly influenced by her mother and wants to wear hijab, without even knowing why she is supposed to do that. For Sairah, this is becoming more of a cultural practice than religious obligation.

Syeda: Does it ever occur to your mind that maybe this is her religious preference?

Sairah: It could be, yes, I feel like the reason people do this scarf because you are supposed to dress modestly, so you don't attract opposite sex, that's the understanding of it. So, you are doing it, you sort of giving man more power over yourself.

Syeda: Do you feel like it's a sexual segregation, dominance?

Sairah: Yes, definitely and that's where it acted as oppression. Even if it's done by choice, I think subconsciously you do it because of that. It's their problem not on us, to cover ourselves completely, so they don't see us in a certain way, it speaks a lot of their character not ours. Why are we taught, constantly that you have to be in certain way, you need to cover yourself, you cannot walk out of your house alone? Why?

Syeda: For you it's a religious thing? It's a sexual dominance.

> **Sairah**: Yes! Even if it not just religious, even culturally from where I come from, I come from a patriarchal society, so even if you put religious aside culturally even, socially even I just feel it's like a sign of oppression.

Sairah sceptic nature towards hijab comes from here rational attitude towards Pakistani traditional culture. There is a strong element of expectation and influence to wear the hijab prevails in her cultural. Girls grow up seeing it all around them, leaving them with no other choice than embracing it. Even individual's personal choice to don hijab, not always a personally motivated decision, but is open to subtle expectations and parental influence (Siraj, 2011: 724). The Pakistani patriarchal society's construction allows man's dominance over woman. The formulation of female's identity is based on social point of view, no free will is there, for woman '*an identity is first a social location, a space made available within the representational structures of the social world*' (Attride-Stirling, 2001: 268). Sairah sees it's as a vicious circle for woman, even her free choice is influenced by society's expectations. Sariah's statement doesn't imply the action of donning hijab is right or wrong, but how the whole thing has been manipulated that is questionable. Her argument is basically why a woman would surrender to a man, why she would give others privilege over her body and mind. There should be some '*act of resistance*'. (Bilge, 2010: 9). In feminist discourses the veil comes as a symbol of both submission and resistance to cultural forces of oppression, though there is a suggestion of dress code in Qur'an. (Bilge, 2010: 14)

Sarah 24 years old Muslim student from Casablanca, Morocco, is studying Journalism at Coventry University. She comes from a mixed tribal family- her mother is Berber, and her father is Arab. Her father is an open-minded person who is extremely cautious about what others will talk about his girls, since they don't wear hijab. Sarah shares how her father asks her and her sisters to wear *Abaya*[3] and cover their head while getting out from home after *iftaar*[4], in *Ramadan*[5]. Luckily, Sarah has a car, it is not that difficult for her to change inside it, otherwise Sarah would look like a prostitute who does it to all the time to keep their identity secret. Sarah keeps on thinking about this fact that her father turning his eyes to the social problem where dress code acts as the site of identity (Chapman, 2015: 243). He is more concern about his reputation- what people will think him as a father, who has no control over her daughters.

> **Sarah**: … just my father doesn't want to hear about other people talking about his girls that they are going out in Ramadan which is a holy month, they shouldn't go out. They shouldn't go to café. Like between him and himself he doesn't mind, then he doesn't want to face others, the society.

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[3] Abaya is sometimes also called an aba, is a simple, loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by some women in parts of the Muslim world including in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.
[4] Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset. Muslims break their fast at the time of the call to prayer for the evening prayer.
[5] Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting (Sawm) to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad according to Islamic belief.

Moroccan society is gradually becoming conservative. According to Sarah, her father had no problem with his girls not wearing hijab, however now Sarah says he feels pressure from the society and he is judging himself on societal scale. Even the community's expectations challenge his fatherhood. In patriarchal society men take the lead, they exercise their right on female members of their family. Sarah's father' failure to force his daughters to wear headscarf, shows his lack of ability as a man. Control and power dynamics are the basic of patriarchal society, '*power is always born of something other than itself, and it is interwoven with social relations*' (Deacon, 1998: 114). As Foucault always viewed power as the plain oppression of the powerless by the powerful (Bãlan, 2010: 55).

Sarah's father personifies 'powerless' insignificance to the 'powerful' societal demands. At one-point Sarah tells me woman needs to wear hijab so that they don't allure men, but funnily prostitutes are covering themselves to hide their identity, and from a distance they look so 'dignified lady'. This Prostitute comparison might look a bit disturbing or confusing to my Western readers but from the Muslim society's context its relevant. In my next analysis, I am going to talk about how colonization de-constructed and re-constructed the outlet to see Eastern world and orients. An item of dress, in Muslim world that expresses social identification the desire to show '*who they are*' (Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli and Howarth, 2012: 535) and serves as a visual cue for other's representations but for West this relevance is difficult to engage with.

Patriarchal society, Libido and Male Gaze in Religious context

In every single situation, the problem is same- Patriarchal society. Long practice of a set of customs for a group of people become their culture. For Aliyah and Sairah Pakistani culture and tradition plays a vital role on their religious practices. The injunction of Islamic law is different in those societies for patriarchal oppression. Multi ethnic Algerian society holds close root with Islam. Since Nissa is wearing hijab on her own choice so it is not an oppression, force, or burden on her. She has accepted this life with her full virtue, it is not domination for her, and still her words evoke the thought that 'yes' there is discrepancies prevails in her society when it comes to man's dressing code. This is the paradox of the patriarchal society.

This section largely focuses on the themes of gender's sexual identities, and religious interpretation of that. Highlights of the multiple terms as male gaze (Mulvey, 1988: 62), patriarchy, and subconscious emerge with the topic's like '*libido*', '*psychoanalysis*' creates a narrative that helps to construct male-female sexual dynamics in religious context and laws around it. While speaking of dressing up, the instruction is simple-dress up modestly. Islam particularly advised men to move away his gaze after seeing a woman, second look is forbidden (Al-Kaysi, 1986: 41). The societal pressure keeps on reminding Muslim woman that her body is not hers only, it is an object for others to look at, to gratify their sexual

pleasure. Mulvey's concept of male gaze is based on woman's presence is an indispensable element of spectacle. '*Male gaze*' projects its fantasy on to the female figure as sexual objectification (Mulvey, 1988 : 62). Muslim female's choices are limited, either cover herself or be the subject of '*male gaze*' — sensual lust, pleasure to look at. That's why when a Muslim young girl reaches to her puberty, donning hijab immediately becomes obligatory for her, her choice doesn't matter there. Aliyah's version, at 7th grade her mother asked her to wear hijab, because she was becoming a woman- the object of '*male gaze*' (Mulvey, 1988 : 62). Islamist ideologist even put restriction on her movement and voice, anything about female sexuality distract them form God's path.

Why female Muslims are subject to oppression in her Muslim society where Islamic rules are equal for everyone. The physical mechanism of these two genders act differently in sexual context. Biologically, man is more visual-centric- visual stimulation drives his libido, whereas, female sexuality is a little more complex, says psychiatry Madeleine M. Castellanos (What Is The Difference, n.d).

Their sexual difference is more based on *emotional connection*[6], sensitivity plays a great role here. Islam acknowledges sexual desire as energy. Islam does not eradicate the urges of '*raw instinct*' (Mernissi, 2011: 52) with good or bad connotation, unlike Christianity which has polarized sex- good and evil, flesh and spirit, and instinct and reason (Mernissi, 2011: 52). But to keep social stability Islam imposes guidance on sexual activities. Rampage of immoral sex is not advised in any society, by law Islam prohibits it.

Freud while explaining '*libido*' the energy of instinct away from good or bad, finds young girls face more resistance than young boys regarding sexual identity (Freud, et al. 2001: 219). From a very early age, society teaches young girls that she needs to control her desires, cannot express it, that's the right thing to do. Woman who expresses their sexual need label as-bad, indecent, corrupt. Needless to say, women eventually gain more control over their physical desires and needs, because they associate it with shame, disgust, guilt. That's why Muslim women are in the veil so that men can walk freely without being sexually vulnerable to woman. This is not only in religious practices, even in Western world women play the '*passive form*' (Freud et al. 2001: 219) when it comes to sexual term. Western psychologist confirms that woman's sexual repression is constructed by the social stigma attach to it, whereas Muslim society in general consider woman as the object to instigate sexual desire. In both cases its female sexual subjectivity leads to her social oppression.

Muslim system implicates its law on the basis of male-female social and sexual dynamics. Gender segregation is an obvious result how Arab patriarchal culture discriminates women from men. In Islamic society the gender segregation is very obvious the way they have separated man and woman in social sphere. Muslim women's social positioning remains

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[6] Madeleine M. Castellanos says, in fact, one of the main differences between male and female sexuality is that man don't need to feel emotionally connected to the person they're having sex with in order to want to have sex. There's actually scientific research to support the observation that women tend to feel sexual desire towards those men for whom they feel an emotional connection.

as the oppressed '*victimised*' and '*voiceless*' in the context of well established '*stereotype*' societies in spite of time and geographical setting (Kirmani, 2009: 48). In the name of religion's law, it is easier to control her, because it is a general rule for everyone in respect of class, age, or ethnicity. All Muslim women fall under the same category- oppression in the concept of saving her from modern world, since modern world consumes women as the object of sexual desire, lust, and reason for infidelity. The dominance of man over female sexuality is related with physiological and psychological needs where patriarchal societies influence is prominent. Thus, women always perceive as the subgroup in Muslim world, are essentially a separate entity who needs to be studied in a proper manner with theoretical impact.

Hijab A Gesture of Power at the Nexus of the Political and the Personal

I always see hijab as the tip of the iceberg, way deeper and complicated topic. A single piece of cloth narrates the discourse of history, culture, heritage, religion, social stability or chaos, political ideologies, and personal spatial freedom or confined oppression. Islam is not the first religion or Muslims are not the first community who talks about modesty, purity, and spiritual salvation. But, yes, Islam being the last religion on the monotheistic revolution and Muhammad (PBUH) being the last of the lineage of prophets of the books starting with Adam (Demant, 2006: 6), gives this community an extra attention. Every word, every line, every rule, or *fatwa* [7] or action goes through unspeakable scrutinises and arguments from both end- Western and eastern media.

In this discourse, my method challenges the idea of Hijab as a fixed category by looking at it in multiple ways through the narratives of my participants. While engaging with them, as I can comprehend the narrative on this context changes with their own personal experience and understanding of this discourse. Our conversations vary from what their understanding of Hijab is, their thoughts on the controversies related with hijab in Europe, and the opinions they held regarding the hijab as representing Muslim feminism? Needless to say, hijab or covering up comes with other interesting viewpoints and concepts, which are obviously intertwined in multiple ways. The concepts extracted from those conversations are- emancipation, colonization, imperialism, misrepresentation of orients, political agenda, islamophobia, feminism and more.

I questioned myself while writing, reading, and researching for this analysis- is Hijab out of political context? Is it solely my personal choice, or right? Is this how I want to portray myself, or embracing it as my identity- without feeling religiously obligated? In this essay, specially, I want to engage with my idea how hijab gradually becomes a political notion

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[7] A fatwa is any religious decision made by mufti (Islamic scholar who is an interpreter or expounder of Islamic law). The most infamous fatwa is the one by Ruhollah Khomeini sentencing Salman Rushdie (Muslim essayist) to death - that's why most Western people see fatwa just as a death sentence, although it's more than that.

through emancipation. This concept captivates me. A woman with or without headscarf or hijab is always the object to subjugation, sexual disparity, and gender dominance. On both occasions- women need to be emancipated.

Emancipation, where Everything gets Complicated

Talking about women's emancipation within the context of religion can get us into a rabbit hole, an entire world is awaiting there. This emancipation becomes fright within the Muslim world. Islamists take it as a compromise to their well-established Muslim customs and traditions, modernization will crush their Islamic ideologies and values, in short it is a threat to Islam. Alluring Muslim women to join labour force brings '*disastrous cost' in the terms of damaging Islamic family order*' (Stowasser, 1994: 129). In Islam women always relate with family honour and respect, they are the guardian of protecting family values. Women are the weakest spot in the Muslim traditional patriarchal fort. But urbanization dismisses the '*protective and oppressive cocoon*' (Demant, 2006: 83) in which Muslim women belong for ages. This '*progression*' or '*civilization' can be added up in 'unprincipled behaviour*' besets by '*bankrupcy of reason and the lack of moral courage*' (Stowasser, 1994: 128). Muslim world does not want to embrace those undignified morals. Not only Western concept of emancipation '*undermines*' man's divine role as '*family provider and his guardianship over her*', it also challenges '*his manhood, his dignity, his substance and his willpower*' (Stowasser, 1994: 129). Women's emancipation straight way connects with religious problem, failing to see that it is an economic liberation for both the genders.

Colonization is the first time, when Western world gets a chance to have a close contact with Muslim females. From their self-glorifying '*perfectible*' societies (Lazreg, 1988: 81), Western feminists assume that they need to save Muslim women from the patriarchal oppression, liberate female Muslim from confinement, and providing Muslim women opportunities to express herself. But for Western men hijab or veil becomes the partition and barrier between the veiled body and observer's male gaze, all-encompassing veil seems to place her body out of the reach of Western gaze and desire (Yeğenoğlu, 2005: 39). In this perplex situation, where the Western world gets frustrated with the inaccessibility and invisibility of Muslim women, and veiled Muslim women denounce to show herself in any context. The amount of interest occupies in this veiling of orients in Western culture, never could surpasses any other objectives. Woman's emancipation is the only way to solve this riddle- unveiling of an enigma, makes visible what is hidden (Yeğenoğlu, 2005: 39).

Impact of Colonialism on Orients

In this analysis, I find an underlying connection between emancipation, moral values, and misrepresentation of orients. It's entirely in the outlook. As Said explains '*a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European*

Western experience' (Said, 1995: 1). In simple words how West perceives east becomes the representation of orients. West's interpretation of East is more stereotype, full of the rhetorical figures- women being over sexualized, or with mysterious veil, *Haram*[8] — a sexual place, erotic and exotic belly dancers; and men are thieves, snake —charmer, barbaric, uneducated. There is a constant encounter of generalizing notions in their descriptions of "the mysterious East," as well as the stereotypes about "the African [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind" (Said, 1994: xi). Soon this becomes 'us and they' (Said, 1995: 45), *'self and other*[9]*'* (Macfie, 2002: 150). In this constant debate of who is more civilized than whom and the "third world woman" caught between tradition and modernization (Spivak, 1988: 90).

My discussion with Aliyah hovers around how Europe is getting harder on Muslim community and how this burka-ban is really affecting everyone with buzzing animosities. Aliyah tells, to her burka ban is really ridiculous. If wearing scanty cloths or no cloths is allowed in many European countries, then the regulation of clothing worn by Muslim women (Ramírez, 2014: 671) violets their human right. Aliyah associates this action with fear of unknown, wearing headscarf separates Muslim woman from the crowd. Liberal Western society connects it with '*submission and subordination combined with ignorance*', or accomplices in the fundamentalist threat in other word '*gendered Islamophobia*' (Ramírez, 2014: 680). Apart from tagging it with anti-Muslimism approach, there is another explanation of it according to Aliyah.

> **Aliyah**: Because at this point of time everyone believes that we are going forward. The fact that, especially in Western society they used to wear heavy clothing, they used to cover up a lot, and now they don't. Doing that they feel like other countries to move forward, they need to do that too. They don't realize that some people don't. They are trying to eradicate it all, in the hope of being better, but they don't realize it's not better for some people.

Aliyah points out the fundamental difference between Eastern and Western outlook towards covering up. In early. In early 19th century, Western women used to wear heavy cloths, with their progression, Western world feels obligation towards these *subaltern*[10] oppressed women's '*sensational cultural practices*' (Abu-Lughod, 2015: 41) of covering up, which indicates to them that these '*muted subjects of subaltern*' (Spivak, 1988: 91) Muslim women have no voice. This image of segregation becomes '*a mission to rescue them from their culture*' (Abu-Lughod, 2015: 6-7). In this persistence of emancipation Western world

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[8] In a Muslim household, a harem is a part of a house set apart for women and from which non family males are excluded. Harems existed in the pre-Islamic civilizations of the Middle East and in the courts of pre-Islamic Assyria, Persia, and Egypt. The harem was also found in the courts of China and Japan as well as in India and southeast Asia.

[9] The creation of a series of stereotypical images, according to which Europe (the West, the 'self') is seen as being essentially rational, developed, humane, superior, virtuous, normal and masculine, while the Orient (the East, the 'other') (a sort of surrogate version of the West or the 'self') is seen as being irrational, backward, despotic, inferior, depraved, aberrant and feminine sexually.

[10] The subaltern is a technical term for a certain kind of dispossessed person. It is a person who fits within the model of the Oppressor/Oppressed as the being so marginalized as to not even have the 'voice' of the oppressed.

fails to see the core family value system of Eastern societies. What West is recognising as backwardness, in Eastern culture that is honourable' etiquette. Aliyah's Pakistani traditional culture teaches her to cover her shoulders or wrap scarf around her neck as a sign of decency, nobility, and modesty. I can relate with Aliyah because that's how I have seen my mother while growing up. That is our culture in this sense a source of identity (Said, 1994: 13); our values. In south-east Asia and most Muslim countries have their own tradition attire, someone wearing Western cloths considers as 'too modern' in south Asian context, which itself a derogatory comment. In a conservative patriarchal society, it is recommended and wise to cover yourself while going out, if you are wearing something not up to social standard. That cover up will save you from social harassment and unpleasant comments, its acts as a defence mechanism. In eastern part of the world covering up is being respectful, dignified; not ignorant or disrespectful. It has nothing to do with religious practices or oppression, which Western world fails to perceive.

Hijab, under the Political umbrella

A major part of my dissertation explores Islam. It is essential to associate the religious ideologies Islam holds with current discussion. A religion starts in middle east with less known cultural habitat Arab, which spreads like wild fire, conquering and conjuring- non-Muslim Arab, non-Arab Muslim- emerging with multiple history, culture, ethnicity, and language bringing them under one authority, Islam. After talking to 5 distinctive individuals for my research who share nothing common as Nationalities, but their uniformities reflect in- tribal ethnic values, cultural embodiment, and religious implications-Islam. To an extent, some of us share colonialism, Ottoman empire's rule, and orientalism. And all these have a deep impact on our growing sense of nationalism, fighting for it and establishing our own political identity. That's why I cannot separate Islam from political connotation.

In 2010, in Madrid, a teenaged school girl was expelled from her school for wearing hijab. At the same time, away from Madrid, in Iran, a group of religious leaders started advocating for stiffening dress code law (Ramírez, 2014: 671). Geographically or socially these countries have nothing in common but on political sphere their interest matches-how a Muslim woman should dress up. The liberation of Muslim women has become the fundamental part of these arguments (Ramírez, 2014: 674). Clothing restriction is one of the many elements imposed on women in Muslim countries, the imposition of laws on Muslim clothing always requires women-almost never men. with '*gender politics*' and legislation on women's clothing immediately gives visibility to law enforcements '*control in all places*' (Ramírez, 2014: 674). Then how can I separate Hijab from Politics?

Turkey a secular peripheral country, who shares its border both with Asia and Europe. This country has gone through many challenges in the context of social, political, and religious identity from Byzantine rule to Islamic expansion and finally the Nationalist Movement

with Atatürk in 1923. Turkey's geo-socio-political presence is different from the religious ideologies. In the 20th century, to achieve homogeneity Turkey has gone through '*mascaras and enforced population exchanges*' (Demant, 2006: 12). Hijab is always a controversial topic for them. I exchange my views with, one of my participants from Turkey, Esma regarding donning Hijab.

> **Syeda**: So, they follow all those religious things, when they are wearing hijab?
>
> **Esma**: Not all of them. I don't think so. I don't have many friends who wear hijab. Sometimes you know for example- if their family is close to Government, our Government is kind a conservative Government. If their family have a business or that kind of thing with Government. like to support   them, they also wear hijab. But actually, they don't feel that religion inside them.
>
> **Syeda**: So it's a more like a political thing for them, if they are trying to be related with Government.
>
> **Esma**: But I cannot say its entirely political, but kind of political, there's a part of the society who do it…. for political purposes.

Esma explains how in years she is noticing the political and social changes in Turkey, surrounding secular and religious clashes. Dichotomy in political outlook concerning values is always a constant trait in Turkish political culture, there is no middle way according to her. Esma says, we face many limitations being women, but Government is more focused on establishing women's right to wear Headscarf, '*in reality the headscarf controversy is cleverly used*' (Elver, 2012: 31), to divert attention from real problems regarding women's welfare. From 1980 till today Turkish headscarf debate is a constant issue in their national political ground. In '*the power struggle between secular and religious political parties*' (Elver, 2012: 9) headscarf dominates. Turkey is extremely complex country for its secular approach to transform into modern state, whereas there are Islamists who go against this notion of modernization. Headscarf controversy has been politicized from both ends, the legislation around it is more '*political than legal*' (Elver, 2012: 65).

Donning hijab should be woman's personal right away from her social or political subjectivity, but surprisingly in a secular country like Turkey, it is gradually becoming political, in a manipulative manner. Diverting from the core religious principles, hijab transforms into a macro-power dynamic to achieve political favours from Government- a gesture to please and taking advantage from the situation.

With the end of colonialism, a number of '*subaltern*' (Spivak, 1988: 92) populations increased all over the Europe. The hostility between West and East continues with new Muslim immigrant's crisis. Long before that he middle ages Islam's *'destructive invasions and calamities*' (Demant, 2006: 15) first confronted by Christian counterattack: crusades which '*led to Islam's first significant territorial losses*' (Demant, 2006: 16). This rise and fall of both sides left deep scar on the Western and Muslim psyche. In this new socio — political scenario one thing becomes vital — How do we survive without eliminating each other? In

this global crisis when dissatisfaction surpasses hijab becomes the target, a political agenda to control and restricted Muslims.

In 1980's the '*headscarf problem*' (Ramírez, 2014: 676) emerges in Western side. Regulation of *Muslim women's clothing*[11] (Ramírez, 2014: 672) is the direct result of the threat Europe starts feeling from- Naturalised immigrants, refugee crisis, threat of terrorism, and anti-Muslimism sentiments. Muslim shares 4.9% of Europe's total population currently, by 2050 population would be expected to be somewhere between 11.2% and 14% (Europe's Growing Muslim, 2019). These nations feel the threat to be insecure with overlapping cultural identity. Countries like France, Germany, Turkey, Spain, Holland along with other raise concern to secure their '*cultural essence*' — the Western liberal cultural practice (Ramírez, 2014: 676). The discrepancies in thoughts and ideologies are based on factual things- one its due to economic and political problems and Western foreign policies which is always not so favourable towards the Muslim Community, and second their ideological differences.

'*The link between terrorism and islam was firm long before*' (Shryock, 2010: 1). '*Islamophobia as a unifing concept*' (Shryock, 2010: 2) develops from Europe's stereotyping profile of Muslim world which is associated with '*violent extremists, averse to democracy, oppression of women and culturally backward*'. (Shryock, 2010: 2) Anti-Muslimism fundamentally attacks Muslim woman, because a woman with hijab is the physical embodiment of Islam. Over the period, Hijab becomes a problem for '*mainstream society*' in non-Muslim countries says Suriyah Bi (Why Some Muslim Women, 2018). Muslim women donning Hijab is mostly and vividly classification of a female Muslim's presence in public spaces, emphasises her inferiority to Muslim men as well as non-Muslim women. Regulating the headscarf becomes a visible device that underpins the inequality between them and us, west and east, imperialist and orients (Ramírez, 2014: 682). Ramirez explains further the growing aggression is not towards Islam but much with Muslim whose main religion is Islam, and thus women become the symbol of gender *Islamophobia*[12].

When Muslim women donning hijab take part in any anti-terrorism or humanitarian protests; then Hijab becomes the sign of empowerment, enlightenment, and strength and power. Suriyah Bi in 'Holes In My Hijab' (Bi, 2017) criticizes this notion of politicians and media for commercialising Hijab. Her arguments are fair. Why does hijab become the symbol of progression, only then when women wear USA's or Union Jack's flag as Hijab? Why cannot a black hijab be the symbol of empowerment? This is another way to look at Orients, that they are only empowered when West supports them. Bi's comment is harsh but true, '*Don't use us to score goals in the match between the so called 'Western Civilised Masculinity' and 'Eastern Monstrous Savage and Barbaric Masculinity'*' (Bi, 2017). The west

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[11] France was the pioneer, banning the hijab in schools through the enactment of Law 2004–228, the so-called 'Law on Secularity', which regulates the use of any symbols or attire that show religious affiliation in public primary and secondary schools. In 2010, Law 2010–1192 of 11 October 2010 was enacted, banning the niqab in all public French spaces.

[12] Islamophobia is the fear, hatred of, or prejudice against, the Islamic religion or Muslims generally, especially when seen as a geopolitical force or the source of terrorism.

is considered as progressive, civilised, and developed, while the orient is deemed remote, corrupt, primitive, passive, or backward (Hobson, 2013 :7)

Conclusion

> **Syeda**: People think that by wearing hijab woman is being oppressed? What do you think about this?
>
> **Nissa**: No definitely not. I would say, I am oppressed if I am forced not to wear it. I am given the choice in my case to wear it or not? I choose to wear it than how am I oppressed in this way?

In 2019, December, Sitting in Lanchester Library in my University campus, on a lazy winter afternoon I am having this conversation with Nissa. To her oppression would be not to wear hijab, backlash would be flaunting her hair in the air. She chooses this path, knowingly, willingly. For her this is her religious obligation, her unshakable faith to Almighty and human right. In the 1960s, a young woman named Hatice Babacan, studying at Ankara University's Faculty of Theology, has been expelled from her department for donning headscarf. Babacan's fault is that her headscarf holds firmly her religious faith and traditional values. To the university Authority it looks as a hindrance, since she stands out in her classroom. They ask her to uncover or leave. Babacan chooses to leave the classroom, failing to pursue the authority that it's important for her faith. This incident sparks a process of arbitration among the students and that ends in Babacan being thrown out of the faculty (Rogers, 2014: 19). This is how Dayla Rogers in *A House of Mirrors: Representations of Veiling in Modern Turkey* describes one of the most talked about Headscarf controversies of 1960's.

Sounds surreal! A girl is being punished in a Muslim country for donning headscarf? Or a girl being forced to take it off in a secular country? In this context both are right. These are not isolated events or incidents. There are innumerable times when Muslim women actively joined in violent social reforming movements or directly engages in battles. When the National Liberation War raged in Algeria, women joined ranks to fight for their country (Cooke, 1989: 2), though it may be vouched as FLN (Front de Libération Nationale, National Liberation Front) propaganda (MacMaster, 2007: 93). However, what remains undeniable that forced to unveil publicly symbolized as Public Rape which was resented both by Algerian men and women. (Aimée; Lucas, 2004: 108). In 1978's women's participation in Iranian revolution or Lebanese Hezbollah women to Hamas sisters (Demant, 2006: 85), this list can go longer. These are the instances when woman's personal choice becomes their political right and their Hijab or Veil transforms into *'semantic fusion... especially in the context of martyrdom'* (Shirazi, 2011: 109).

In Western Feminist discourse on women of the third world, does not merely assume them "as an always-already constituted group, one which has been labelled '*powerless*', '*exploited*', (Mohanty, 1988: 338) but certainly comprises objective knowledge about that

certain subject. While representing their identities Muslim women always reveal themselves as a category with limited and differing resonance (Kirmani, 2009: 47) or as a subject of oppression in '*Western Feminist's writing*' (Mohanty, 1988: 334). Even in Said's Orientalism (Said, 1995: 1) the presence of '*subaltern woman*' (Spivak, 1988: 91) remains limited. Valerie Kennedy profoundly asserts in her '*Edward Said: A critical Indroduction*' (Kennedy, 2013) that neither Said's Palestine society, elite British or American educational system constantly remains far away from recognising the gender equality. As a direct result Said himself fails to comprehend that matter. Nobody ever talks about *The Greater Jihad* [13]'*struggle in the path of god*' Muslim women take in their everyday life (Demant, 2006: 8). Apart from resisting their worldly temptations, Muslim women tolerate all hostilities imposed on them by the society, face socio-political discrimination.

Muslim women who came forward to protest for their religious rights participating in political movements, marching beside men donning Hijab fails to obtain acknowledgement as Feminist. In those events donning headscarf is more of their personal choice, personal stand based on their unmoving faith in Islam. It seems like a more open and generous choice to me- because being submissive to something unseen against the odds takes a lot of courage and determination. For them wearing hijab is their feminist identity- away from political or social manipulations. This assertiveness towards standing up against Islamophobia is a conscious gesture of faith-based belief of Muslim females. My participants share their horror stories they face while living in UK. Sometimes, they have been pushed in Primark's clothing section, sometimes their headscarf been pulled off by classmates in school, while walking on the street people stare at them in weird way — "*I felt like I crawl into my boyfriend, I couldn't stand, I felt I am going crazy*" — said Aliyah, 2019 or if god forbids there is any terror attack — "*when that attack happened in London, for days I didn't get out from my room, what if?*" said Nissa, 2019 Still they are choosing to wear hijab. Their faith is way deeper than my limited knowledge.

The hijab debate is crushing Muslim women in between the liberal modernity and traditional religious values. Amidst those arguments, take a pause and think- there is something extra-ordinarily admiring and courageous that how many women choose to wear hijab, niqab or veil by their own choice. It is their individual right, their feminist movement. They are choosing it wholeheartedly, and some are trying to reach at that point of devotion. It takes a lot of bravery, willpower, and endurance to don Headscarf amongst all the threats, rebukes, offensive remarks, embarrassments, and temptations.

As a researcher the challenge remains to narrow down the issues around Muslim female- the subject area is vast. Islam as a religion faces criticism for its discriminatory outlook towards women what is condemnable that the patriarchal society forbids Muslim women even to liberate them in the context of religious equality. The limitation lies in

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[13] The greater Jihad refers to the efforts of a believer to live their Muslim faith as well as possible. Muslims make a great effort to live as Allah has instructed them; following the rules of the faith, being devoted to Allah, doing everything they can to help other people.

the socio-political situation where it difficult to talk about religious aspects from a 'faith-positive prospective' (*If You Want To Know,* 2017). The lack of investigation carries in the name of religious purposes are another way to subjugate female Muslims to understand the true essence of Islamic views on gender issues. Muslim women are not only struggling for their rights but also fighting against the authorities who exercise their privilege on Muslim female, with or without donning Hijab.

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