

Rethinking Orientalism of Muslims in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*

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Abstract

Edward Said's Orientalism questions the Western representation of the Eastern 'other', especially the Arab Muslims. A misrepresentation that has always treated the orient with inferiority; as barbaric and backward compared to the refined, reasoning and advanced Occident. This form of representation is what Ayaan Hirsi Ali embarked on in her bestselling memoir *Infidel* (2007). It chronicles her geographical journey from Somalia to Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Netherlands, and her flight from Islam to Atheism. A belief system she finds more appealing to reasoning than Islam which is (according to her) backward and barbaric. Her steadfast criticism of Islam is vividly reflected in her memoir, which ascribes the oppression and tribulations of women to Islam, irrespective

of geographical or cultural influence. Such claims are tantamount to feminist Orientalism of Muslim women, whose claims of liberating Muslim women and rescuing them from the oppressive Islam cannot be overemphasized. This paper argues that the practices of misogyny are rooted in culture and not Islam. Thus, it investigates three main points which are central to the 'Islam oppresses women' debate: Female Genital Mutilation, Early and/or Forced Marriage and Women as sex objects. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* as a continuation of *Orientalism*, propose solutions to the identified problems in Orientalism, which is to unread the misrepresentations by identifying submerged details. Through a contrapuntal reading of *Infidel* (2007), this study counter-narrates the distortion of Islam by drawing upon authentic Islamic sources.

Karya Edward Said *Orientalisme* mempertanyakan representasi Barat dari "yang lain" di Timur, terutama Muslim Arab. Sebuah penyajian yang keliru yang selalu memperlakukan "orient" dengan inferioritas, sebagai biadab dan terbelakang dibandingkan dengan "Occident", penalaran dan kemajuan Barat. Bentuk representasi inilah yang memulai Ayaan Hirsi Ali dalam memoarnya yang terlaris, *iInfidel* (2007). Ini mencatat perjalanan geografisnya dari Somalia ke Arab Saudi, Ethiopia, Kenya, dan Belanda, dan pelariannya dari Islam ke Ateisme. Sebuah sistem kepercayaan yang ia temukan lebih menarik untuk dipertimbangkan daripada Islam yang (menurutnya) terbelakang dan biadab. Kritiknya yang teguh terhadap Islam tercermin dengan jelas dalam memoarnya, yang mengaitkan penindasan dan kesengsaraan wanita dengan Islam, terlepas dari pengaruh geografis atau budaya. Klaim semacam itu sama dengan Orientalisme feminis perempuan Muslim, yang klaimnya membebaskan perempuan Muslim dan menyelamatkan mereka dari Islam yang menindas tidak bisa terlalu ditekankan. Makalah ini berpendapat bahwa praktik misogini berakar pada budaya dan bukan Islam. Oleh karena itu, laporan ini menyelidiki tiga poin utama yang menjadi pusat perdebatan "Islam menindas wanita": Mutilasi Alat Kelamin Wanita, Pernikahan Dini dan/atau Paksa dan Wanita sebagai objek seks. Karya Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism*

sebagai kelanjutan dari Orientalisme, mengusulkan solusi untuk masalah-masalah yang diidentifikasi dalam Orientalisme, yakni untuk membaca kesalahan representasi dengan mengidentifikasi detail yang terendam. Melalui pembacaan kontrapuntal dari *Infidel* (2007), penelitian ini membaut kontra-narasi atas distorsi Islam dengan memanfaatkan sumber-sumber Islam otentik.

Keywords: *Orientalism; Islam; Muslim women; Ayaan Hirsi Ali; Infidel*

Introduction

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel* (2007) is one of those memoirs that caught so much attention in the literary arena. Published shortly after her staunch criticism of Islam in the Dutch parliament and after the unfortunate assassination of Theo van Gogh, her partner with whom she has produced the short film "submission". She has – since then – been living under security guards due to death threats. Hence, this autobiography of hers had been much waited for. Islam, as a religion of oppression, has much been emphasized in the popular academic and political discourses where its women remain the objects of propagative Orientalism.

Orientalism of Muslim women is, to an extent, largely rooted in feminist writings (mostly Western); proclaiming the emancipation of Muslim women to save them from the horrible and oppressive religion of Islam. Muslim women have been projected in mainstream media as troubled by their patriarchal and misogynist societies backed by the Islamic religion, hence, necessitating their freedom from such oppressive clusters as women in the West have done decades of years ago. Whereas, most Muslim women do not perceive their situation in the same manner. Chandra Mohanty brings attention to the discursive colonization of "third world women" in Western feminist writings while questioning the collective conceptualization of

women as universally oppressed who all wish for the same solution.¹

Orientalism of Muslim women continues to thrive with the September 11 event which heightened the discussion about the condition of women in Islamic countries and urges for a political intervention to rescue and liberate the subjugated and oppressed Muslim women especially in Afghanistan. Among the much-discussed issues surrounding oppression of women in Islam are: female genital mutilation, early and/or forced marriage, women as sex objects, hijab, domestic slavery and/or violence, sexual objectification, honor killing, seclusion and anything that involves total submission (to the Islamically motivated patriarchal structures of the society)

Although both Muslims and non-Muslims around the globe are putting efforts at limiting the proliferation of myth spurred by racism or Orientalism, the Orientalists voices are louder, and the stereotype continues to live on. This study will examine some of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's illustration of Muslim women's oppression in her novel *Infidel* (2007) in accordance with the common grunt. To dispel the rampant myth of subjugation of women in Islam, this paper will investigate three main subjects which are central to the 'Islam oppresses women' debate: Female Genital Mutilation, Early and/or Forced Marriage and sexual objectification of Muslim women.

Ayaan Hirsi claims to be a reformer of Islam; she claims to have a good understanding of Islam that qualifies her to dictate which part of the religion needs immediate reformation. Her rude and aggressive approach to solving Islamic extremism earns her the title "radical reformer".² "The New York Times, the Boston Globe, the Los Angeles Times, CNN, Fox News, the

¹Chandra Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30 (1988), 61-88 <<https://doi.org/doi:10.2307/1395054>>.

²Haroon Moghul, "Ayaan Hirsi Ali Is Hurting Islam: Why Her Radical Reformation Is in Desperate Need of Reform", *Salon*, 21 April 2015 https://www.salon.com/2015/04/21/ayaan_hirsi_ali_is_hurting_islam_why_her_radical_reformation_is_in_desperate_need_of_reform_partner/ [accessed 3 July 2019].

BBC, and dozens of other outlets referred to Hirsi Ali as a “critic of Islam.”³ Lean further maintains that Ayaan Hirsi “crosses the line” by attacking and fervently criticizing the faith of the women whom she claims to be speaking for and rescuing from the oppression of their religion (Islam), her works/criticisms are “dangerously close to advocating genocide”.⁴

Ironically, Ayaan Hirsi Ali claims to be fighting against the oppression of women in Islam, but after her film “submission” was released, the focus shifted to Islamic terrorism and fundamentalism, while Muslim women’s issue became primarily ignored and then subjected to marginalization and hate crimes in the Western societies. Lean opines that it is easy to understand Hirsi Ali’s views contribution to the negative perceptions of Islam in both the United States and Europe. It is about the results of which fuel violence towards veiled Muslim women. He argues that this should not become the case that advocates the human rights undermine the rights of any groups with their critics⁵

This highlights the argument of this study that Hirsi Ali’s extreme condemnation of Islam makes the Muslim women who she claims to protect become awfully vulnerable to Islamophobic attacks. In that, her criticisms of Islam substantially contribute to the growing fear and hatred of Islam, which consequentially results in victimizing the Muslims, especially its women. Her works and ideas very perfectly dance to the tunes of Orientalism. Though, a Somali-born American, her thoughts identify her Western nationality and therefore, places her in the Occidental positioning.

Geoffrey Nash (2013) describes the postcolonial theory’s informant

³Nathan Lean, “Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Neither a Critic of Islam, Nor a Champion of Women’s Rights”, *Huffington Post*, 18 April 2014 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/nathan-lean/ayaan-hirsi-ali-neither-a_b_5175604.html [accessed 27 November 2018].

⁴Nathan Lean, “Ayaan Hirsi Ali...”

⁵Nathan Lean, “Ayaan Hirsi Ali...”

as a native (colonized) who criticizes (severely) his/her culture or religion in favour of the normatively superior West. These informants sometimes become alien to their cultures or do the criticism while still being rooted in their history and culture. Ayaan Hirsi fits well into Nash's description of a postcolonial informant for her staunch criticism of Islam and defiance of Somalian culture in her works. Similar argument lies in the work of Nesrine Malik who identifies Ayaan Hirsi Ali as one of "Islam's New Native Informants"⁶ who sell out negative stories about Islam for socio-political benefits. Few others in this category are: Wafa Sultan, Irshad Manji and Majed Nawaz. Speaking of Ayaan Hirsi and Majed Nawaz, Nesrine affirms their label as "anti-Muslim extremists" as first designated by the Southern Poverty Law Centre, to be the result of their outright hate language used with respect to Muslims and Islam. In a similar argument, Geoffrey Nash maintains that Ayaan Hirsi Ali, formerly a Somalian Muslim, now a staunch American atheist and an anti-Islamic writer/speaker is one of the three migrant writers (Irshad Manji, Taslima Nasrin and Ayaan Hirsi Ali) whose anti-Islamism brought them fame, (66) their flight from Islam has bought them the sympathy of the Western audience.

This highlights the role of Hirsi Ali in propagating the marginalization, fear and hatred of Islam and Muslims in America. This study agrees with the arguments of Geoffrey Nash and Nesrine Malik that: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, through her books and speeches presents herself as nothing of an African or a Muslim but a Western liberal thinker who's civilized thoughts strikes against the barbarism of Islam.

Previous literatures have deconstructed her Islamism, neo-conservatism and double standards⁷, as well as analyzed her method of victimization

⁶Nesrine Malik, "Islam's New "Native Informants", *NYR Daily, The New York Review of Books*, 2018 <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/06/07/islams-new-native-informants/> [accessed 27 November 2018].

⁷Merijn Oudenampsen, "Deconstructing Ayaan Hirsi Ali: On Islamism, Neoconservatism,

of Muslims through Orientalism which propagates and justifies 'War on Terror'⁸. Her work has much been discussed in the spirit of Orientalism⁹, and American multiculturalism, it has been applauded for heroism from

and the Clash of Civilizations", *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Volume 17, Issue 2-3 (2016), 227-248 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2016.1232195>; Merijn Oudenampsen, "The Double Life of Ayaan Hirsi Ali on Neoconservatism, Islamic Fundamentalism and the Clash of Civilizations", Tilburg University, 2016; Max Rodenbeck, "How She Wants to Modify Muslims", *The New York Review of Books*, 2015 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/12/03/ayaan-hirsi-ali-wants-modify-muslims/> [accessed 27 November 2018].

⁸Aysel Morin, "Victimization of Muslim Women in Submission", *Women's Studies in Communication*, Volume 32, Issue 3 (2009), 380-408 <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2009.10162395>; Daniel O'Gorman, "Speaking for the Muslim World: Popular Memoir and the "War on Terror"", *European Journal of English Studies*, Volume 22, Issue 2 (2018), 142-153 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2018.1478257>; Kiran Grewal, "Reclaiming the Voice of the Third World Woman", *Interventions*, Volume 14, Issue 4 (2012), 569-590 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2012.730861>; Moghul; Abhilasha Singh, "Marginalized Silence under the Observations of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Salman Rushdie", *IRJMSH*, Volume 7, Issue 12 (2016), 22-32. a film critiquing the treatment of Muslim women, aired on Dutch television, a Muslim fundamentalist murdered the film's producer, Theo van Gogh. While the murder brought Islamic extremism worldwide attention, the film itself escaped critical scrutiny. Analyzing the depictions of Muslim women in *Submission*, this essay discusses the intricacies of Muslim women's struggle. Surrounded by the oppressive discourses of Islam and patriarchy on one hand, and of the "global sisterhood" and Orientalism on the other. Muslim women today labor to achieve equality both with Muslim men and Western women. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]; Copyright of *Women's Studies in Communication* is the property of Organization for Research on Women & Communication and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use. This abstract may be abridged. No warranty is given about the accuracy of the copy. Users should refer to the original published version of the material for the full abstract. (Copyright applies to all Abstracts.)

⁹Adam Yaghi, "Popular Testimonial Literature by American Cultural Conservatives of Arab or Muslim Descent: Narrating the Self, Translating (an) Other", *Middle East Critique*, Volume 25, Issue 1 (2016), 83-98 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1107996>; Lean; Dobrota Pucherova, "Islam, Tradition and Modernity in the Work of Two Somali Writers: Nuruddin Farah and Ayaan Hirsi Ali", *English Studies in Africa*, Volume 59, Issue 2 (2016), 27-40 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2016.1239416>; Mineke Bosch, "Telling Stories, Creating (and Saving) Her Life. An Analysis of the Autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali", *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 31, Issue 2 (2008), 138-147 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2008.03.006>; Hager Ben Driss, "Memoirs of Violence/Violent Memoirs: Autobiographical Acts in Azar Nafisi's and Ayaan Hirsi Ali's Works", *Nabokov Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 1 (2004), 209-211 <https://doi.org/10.1353/nab.2004.0017>; Rodenbeck, "How She Wants to Modify Muslims"...

the feminist point of view¹⁰. Thus, having it that previous studies have looked at the text from an oriental point of view, to authenticate the repudiation, this study intends to refute the misrepresentation of Islam by drawing upon Islamic sources through a contrapuntal reading.

Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) proposes a reread of Western canonical texts (which are full of Orientalism) to identify a hidden detail “not unequivocally, but contrapuntally”. Contrapuntal reading, therefore, could be marked as Said’s focal point of resistance of representation in Postcolonial theory, he urges the colonized to unread the misrepresentations and write-back. While Said’s Orientalism asserts that the European misrepresentation of the East is assertively constructed, in that, it transforms from imaginative representations (fantasies) to “actual administrative manifestations”¹¹ which the natives are forced to believe of themselves. Here, contrapuntal reading suggests that the native should read the imperial (now canonical) novels with an intention to bring to light what is silenced or deliberately ignored about the native, to debunk the single story always brought to the mainstream. This approach of study would be used in this research to debunk the misrepresentations in Ali’s *Infidel* (2007) by providing accurate responses from Islamic sources. Instances of Islam promoting oppression of women such as: female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage or sexual objectivism will be reexamined from a religious point of view. This is achieved by referring to authentic religious sources on the same matter.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is one of the myths faultily perpetuated in the name of religion (especially Islam). Even though it has been in practice

¹⁰Mohammad Rashidi Pakri and Renukha Devi Anandan, “A Feminist-Postcolonial Analysis of Power and Ideology in Ayaan Hirisi Ali’s *Infidel*”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 208 (2015), 197–202.

¹¹Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, 78.

in many parts of the world before the prophethood of Muhammad Peace be upon him – Hereafter written as (PBUH) – (which marks the birth of new-age Islam), Islam is still used to justify the barbaric practice by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Although the practice is more common in the third-world and Islamic countries, it is well practiced by migrants in North America, Europe and the UK¹². Ironically, a similar process of genital cutting is done professionally to women without inviting the same attention given to FGM. Ball 2018 sees a double standard in the Western way of addressing FGM, which he attributes to the persistence of Orientalist misrepresentation as a justification for intervention. He argues that:

FGM/C is any alteration to the female genitals to meet a desired image or identity. FGM/C as practiced in Western states, such as female genital cosmetic surgeries, plastic surgeries, and body art/modifications, are linguistically framed to be excluded from the UN efforts, although procedures are nearly identical.¹³

For the prosperity of Orientalism, the practice of FGM has been dehumanized and vilified in a differing manner, such that barbarism prevails in the whole process, whereas, the Western surgeons are heroic for a similar task. Ayaan Hirsi Ali particularly blames the backwardness of the religion for its constant oppression of women, part of which is suppressing their right to enjoy anything to do with sexuality and accordingly, the circumcision of the female genitals. In her memoir, she recounts that in Somalia, which is an Islamic country almost all girls are excised. Hirsi, like most Somalis, believes that FGM is done to prevent women from adultery or fornication by restraining the female sexual desire and preserving the

¹²Patel Reyhana, “Islam Must Never Be Used to Justify Female Genital Mutilation”, *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 2019 <http://news.trust.org/item/20190205180900-4sb36/> [accessed 20 June 2019].

¹³Casey L Ball, “Orientalism and the UN: Deconstructing the Double Standard in Policies of FGM/C”, *Symposium*, 23, 2018 <https://dc.ewu.edu/scrw_2018> [accessed 25 June 2019].

virginity which is traditionally ‘an honour’ to the clan, if that is the case, the goal has not been achieved on Ayaan and her sister Haweya who both had series of premarital intercourse. In the process of which Haweya got pregnant twice and underwent abortions.

Although, Ayaan herself acknowledges that FGM exists before Islam. A few people who practiced this female genital mutilation are not Islamic and not all Muslim practice this. But at the end she clinched that “Imams never discourage the practice: it keeps girls pure”¹⁴ This insinuates that the Imams (Islamic preachers) who are considered as the guides for Islamic practices gave tacit approval of the barbaric act by not condemning it. Thus, this leads to putting the blame on Islam for the continuance of FGM in Somalia. Whereas the state government is left undisturbed, Somalia being under the military rule would have actively refrained from the practice if ordered by the government. But Ayaan chooses to call on the Imams rather than the State Government. FGM is easily ascribed to Islam because the reasons behind it look Islamic, whereas, there is no such a reference in the Holy Quran stating girls must be circumcised. Similarly, there isn’t any accurate reference about FGM in the Sunnah, the sayings or traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) After all, the prophet PBUH himself said: “Do not harm yourself or others.”¹⁵

Everything about this procedure inflicts severe pain on the victim; it causes infection and likely to cause problems at childbirth. It is therefore ruled out by various Islamic scholars around the world that FGM is not Islamic and strongly discouraged.¹⁶ Any act that leads to altering Allah’s

¹⁴Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, New York: Atria Paperback, 2007, 31.

¹⁵Sunan Ibn Majah 2340.

¹⁶Al-Amin Dawood, ‘Islamic Ruling on Male and Female Circumcision’, 2005 http://www.just.edu.jo/~mafika/733_Reproductive%20Endocrinology/Islam%20and%20Circumscision.htm. Abubakar Sadiq Idris Wakwa and Abubakar Abdul Muhsin Wakawa, ‘Islamic Solutions to Social Problems’ https://www.academia.edu/15446493/ISLAMIC_SOLUTIONS_TO_SOCIAL_PROBLEMS

creation is considered satanic, according to the Quran. Since FGM includes cutting off healthy functional organs, and/or changing the appearance of the female genitals without any religious basis, it is contrary to the rule of Allah. Allah says in the Quran: "Verily we created man of the best stature"¹⁷ this demands that the human body should be left as created.

FGM is a long rooted cultural practice in Somalia that would difficulty discontinue, a study on FGM/C by Frontiers confirms that "FGM/C is a deeply rooted and widely supported practice that is sustained through many cultural justifications that reinforce its continuation."¹⁸ This answers the question of why they still practice it even though it is not encouraged by religion. according to this report, the Somalian interviewees mostly acknowledge preserving the Somali traditions when reminded that it violates the rule of Islam. To this end, the researchers quote Allah's saying in the Qur'an: "And when it is said to them, 'follow what Allah has revealed' they say rather we will follow that which we found our fathers doing..."¹⁹ to describe the Somalian's adamancy.

Hirsi Ali finds a way to make Islam look responsible for the prosperity of FGM in Somalia because the practice is believed to "keep [women] pure" which is the same reason why women are absolutely oppressed in the utterly backward religion. There is no doubt that Islam encourages chasteness in both men and women which ought to be derived from moral uprightness and nothing to do with the cutting off any part of the body. Lethome & Sheikh's research reveals that the three main reasons cited by interviewees about FGM/C are: that "[it] is a Somali tradition, it is an Islamic requirement, and that it enforces the cultural value of sexual purity

¹⁷The Quran: 96:4

¹⁸Asmani Ibrahim Lethome and Abdi Maryam Sheikh, *De-Linking Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting from Islam*, 2008 https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/De-linking_FGM_from_Islam_final_report.pdf [accessed 20 June 2019].

¹⁹The Quran: 2: 170.

in females by controlling female sexual desires, thereby ensuring virginity before marriage and fidelity throughout a woman's life."²⁰ This tells that not only Ayaan Hirsi Ali has the misunderstanding that FGM is an Islamic requirement. Although, she acknowledges its pre-Islamic existence at the same time linking imputing the blame to Islam with the remark "Imams never discourage the practice: it keeps girls pure" (p. 31), this signifies that the purity which Islam propels in the women it oppresses, is the same goal as the FGM thus the Imam's passive approval. The question here is, non-Muslims in other parts of the world practising FGM would they also blame Islam by waiting for Imams to discourage it? Why not blame the state government or ministry of health or even the body of elders serving as community leaders in Somalia? The clear-cut intention of Orientalizing the Muslims is deduced from these remarks of Hirsi Ali which successfully drives her audience into believing that Islam is so terrible with anything to do with women and therefore validated the need to save them. Mazin E. Khalil maintains:

The concept of FGM as an inherently Islamic tradition was in fact a form of Islamophobic rhetoric linked back to medieval tropes. Furthermore, I was able to conclude that the rhetoric of saving women from the grips of Islam which is portrayed as violent and abusive towards them by Western media was also a tactic of Islamophobic rhetoric used to gain political and social support in the post 9/11 era.²¹

Early and forced marriage

Early and forced marriage which will hereafter be referred to as EFM is commonly associated with Islam due to its prevalence among (but not limited to) many Muslims from different cultural background, which

²⁰Asmani Ibrahim Lethome and Abdi Maryam Sheikh, *De-Linking Female...*, 22.

²¹Mazin E. Khalil, "Female Genital Mutilation: Islamic Roots or Culture Conflated?" Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT, 2015 <http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/523> [accessed 25 June 2019].

according to a report on forced marriages, feeds into the widespread Islamophobia in the UK, specifically in the upshot of the 9/11 and 7/7 events.²² EFM has as well been conceptualized as a development issue, generally linked to poverty.²³

In *Infidel* (2007), Ayaan recounts her experience of forced marriage alongside the early marriage of her childhood Muslim friends in Kenya. All of which Islam takes credit for.

For Ayaan, her forced marriage happened (according to her) because Islam demands total submission from its adherents, and the female followers must submit not just to Allah but to the males in charge of them. Her father's decision to marry her off to Othman Moussa is to elevate the family (clan's) honour, but she didn't spare Islam as the perpetrator of such practices.

She describes her wedding day as an ordinary day in her life, it may be true that she is defiant, but it is difficult to accept that a bride would do house chores on her wedding day when her family and relatives are around. The difference between her wedding and Jawahir's is strikingly obvious

While Jawahir's wedding had a series of events, Ayaan's doesn't. In order to show her defiance to the marriage, she refuses to partake in the marriage activities. To further subscribe to the Orientalist representation of Islam, she describes the noteworthy issue of the insignificance of a woman in her marriage, through her claims of being absent at her wedding. It is a popular myth that Islam forces women into entire submission, which includes accepting a forced marriage. However, the stance of Islam on this matter contradicts what has been

²²Geetanjali Gangoli, Amina Razak, and Melanie Mccarry, *Forced Marriage and Domestic Violence among South Asian Communities in North East England Northern Rock Foundation*, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol and Northern Rock Foundation June 2006 https://www.nr-foundation.org.uk/downloads/ForcedMarriage_report.pdf [accessed 24 June 2019].

²³Khatidja Chantler, Geetanjali Gangoli, and Marianne Hester, "Forced Marriage in the UK: Religious, Cultural, Economic or State Violence?", *Critical Social Policy*, Volume 29, Issue 4 (2009), 587-612 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018309341905>.

projected by mass media. Ayaan, on many occasions, has repeated the orientalist mantra by equating a baari, to be a “pious slave.” (p. 12) This, according to her, is because the baari, is expected to protect her husband’s family honour, she should not ever complain regardless of the intensity of the situation, in fact, “[s]he is a devoted, welcoming, well-trained work animal.”(p. 12) Ayaan narrates that most of the times being a baari comes with feeling grief, humiliation and a sense of exploitation and even in these times, she (a baari) must pray to Allah for comfort.

In contrast, the Quran says: “And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage. Then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property, and do not consume it extravagantly and hastily against their growing up.” (4:6) Here the age of marriage is identified with the age of maturity of intellect and that of the age of growing up, which marks both physical and mental development. Ayaan Hirsi’s friends who were forced into early marriage are rather the victims of cultural decadence.

In a narration of the Prophet, a woman companion of the Prophet came to him and said: “My father has married me away to one of his relatives without asking my opinion. I do not wish to stay with this man as his wife. The Prophet (PBUH) said: “A previously-married woman has more right concerning herself than her guardian, and the permission of a virgin should be sought (regarding marriage), and her permission is her silence.”²⁴

Similarly, Ibn Abbas spoke to the Prophet (PBUH) about a lady who testified that her father had forced her into marrying someone without her consent. The Prophet (PBUH) gave her a choice of accepting or invalidating the marriage.

“That a virgin came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and mentioned that her father gave her in marriage forcibly, so the Prophet (peace be upon him) gave her choice [to keep marriage or to invalidate it].” she

²⁴Narrated by Muslim, 1421. In Al-Munajjid, 2004.

responded, 'Actually, I accept this marriage, but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right to force a husband on them.'²⁵

In another hadith recorded by Abu Huraira and validated by Muslim, the Prophet (PBUH) stated explicitly that a virgin should not be married out until her consent is obtained. He said: "The widow and the divorced woman shall not be married until the order is obtained, and the virgin shall not be married until her consent is obtained", reported by Abu Huraira. From a translation of Sahih Muslim by ²⁶ Nevertheless, with regards to the ill-treatment of women, Allah states in the Quran that: "It is not lawful for you to inherit women by force. Nor may you treat them harshly so that you can make off with part of what you have given them, unless they commit an act of flagrant indecency. Live together with them correctly and courteously [. . .]" (4:19)

According to Islamic Relief Worldwide, "Forced marriage has no legal validity in Islam. No-one can be forced into marriage against their will, and there is no basis in the Shari'ah for this practice."²⁷ The editor continues that, most of the parents who force their daughters into marriage do it for material benefit and nothing Islamic. This argument resonates with Ayaan's father who refused to acknowledge her refusal and pushed her into marrying a total stranger just to augment his social status. It will be well said that his son-in-law is a well-to-do Somali in Canada, a developed Western country. "But this was a strategic marriage; Osman Moussa could boast that he was married to a Magan, and we would now have relatives in Canada. There were all kinds of reasons for my father to be happy about this match." (p. 171)

²⁵Narrated by Ibn Majah, hadith 1947 In Islamic Relief Worldwide.

²⁶The Book of Marriage (Kitab Al-Nikah), Book 008, Number 3303. In Abdul Hamid Siddiqui, 'Translation of Sahih Muslim', 2005 <http://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/muslim/> [accessed 4 July 2019].

²⁷Islamic Relief Worldwide.

Sexual objectification in Islam

Muslim women have been the subject of a politicized orientalist discourse in the West through media, literature and political discourses or government policies²⁸ Both extremist Muslims and orientalist non-Muslims have successfully defined a Muslim woman as a sex object; who is either an instrument for provoking or satisfying a man's sexual desire.²⁹ That Islam doesn't allow women to feel any sexual desire denounces the role of foreplay and female orgasm in a married couple's sexual relations Through a binary opposition, Ayaan Hirsi compared Western ideal and romantic sex episodes with that of the barbaric, cruel and unromantic Islamic one. In an English romance novel, "when the man and woman kissed, he put his hand on the woman's breast, and then he put his mouth to her nipple. Jawahir was horrified. "These Christians are filthy!" she squeaked. "This is forbidden! For Muslims it's not like that at all!" (p. 112). This leaves the impression that Islam does not condone sexual fantasies or even pre-intercourse foreplay. That Muslim men are misogynic is a commonly reiterated orientalist discourse. Thus, it is believed that they take women only as sex objects who do not deserve to be respected, let alone pleased in bed. Hence, one-sided pleasure is normative. Jawahir's description of Islamically certified sex is that "it was awful" because her husband doesn't do the filthy romance with her, he just "open her legs,

²⁸Sana Sana Tayyen, "From Orientalist Sexual Object to Burkini Terrorist Threat: Muslim Women through Evolving Lens", *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, Volume 4, Issue 1 (2017), 101 <https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.4.1.0101>.

²⁹Azizah Al-Hibri, "Islam, Law and Custom: Redefining Muslim Women's Rights", *American University International Law Review*, Volume 12, no. 1 (1997), 1-44, <http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/auilr> [accessed 26 June 2019]; Asma Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran", *Macalester International*, Volume 10 (Spring 2001), 117-146 <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl><http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol10/iss1/15> [accessed 26 June 2019]; Al-Missriyyah Dar Al-Ifta, 'Muslim Women between Total Concealment and Flagrant Promiscuity', *Fatwas*, 2019 <http://www.dar-alifta.org/Foreign/ViewArticle.aspx?ID=698&CategoryID=5> [accessed 26 June 2019].

took off her underpants and tried to push his penis inside her.” To further normalize the animalistic behaviour against women, Hirsi Ali attributes it to the God of Islam, who according to her, forbids “good women” from “feel[ing] desire” (p. 113)

Contrary to Ayaan Hirsi's opinion on sexual relation in Islam, is a body of scholarly works in Islam that have detailed the sexual life of the Prophet (PBUH) and have explicitly described human sexual pleasure in accordance with the principles of Islam. The sexual pleasure and satisfaction of a woman have been emphasized by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali in his work, *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Ihya Ulum al-Din), written in the eleventh century where he quoted the Prophet (PBUH) as saying:

One of the deficiencies of a man is that “he should approach his wife and have sexual contact with her before exchanging words and caresses. Consequently, he sleeps with her and fulfills his needs (i.e. orgasm) before she fulfills hers.” Al-Ghazali further elaborates on the importance of a woman achieving orgasm by stating, “Congruence in attaining a climax is more gratifying to her because the man is not preoccupied with his own pleasure, but rather with hers...”³⁰

Correspondingly, the Prophet (PBUH) says in a hadith: “When a man has sexual intercourse with his wife, he should be at the same pace as her. If he satisfies his desires before her, he should not withdraw until she has also satisfied herself...”³¹

The above sources are religious bases for the satisfaction of a woman in sexual intercourse, religious scholars have classified this issue as a woman's legal right in a marriage, in that, a woman who is not sexually satisfied can demand a divorce.³² In the same vein, the significance of

³⁰Muslim Women's League, “Sex and Sexuality in Islam”, 1995 <https://www.mwlnusa.org/topics/sexuality/sexuality.html> [accessed 26 June 2019].

³¹Hadith of Anas Ibnu Malik in Sayyid Sabiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, Vol. 2, 142-143.

³²Muslim Women's League, “Sex and Sexuality in Islam”...

foreplay has been stressed by the Prophet (PBUH) and prominent Muslim scholars. Imam al-Daylami (Allah have mercy on him) records a narration on the authority of Anas ibn Malik (Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) is reported to have said: "One of you should not fulfil one's (sexual) need from one's wife like an animal, rather there should be between them foreplay of kissing and sweet words."³³ In another narration, Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (Allah have mercy on him) reports in his famous "Tibb al-Nabawi"³⁴ that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) forbade from engaging in sexual intercourse before foreplay. (p. 183) Islamically, the methods of foreplay are unrestricted. The only rules are the agreement reached by both partners through mutual consent and often unspoken understanding.³⁵

The above analysis gives the implication that, sexual satisfaction is a right for a Muslim woman and not a privilege. Therefore, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's projection of otherwise could be seen as an under-representation of the status of women in Islam. This proves the hypothesis of this study, that her narration has so much of oriental inclinations.

Conclusion

The work of a critic, according to Edward Said is to "speak truth to honour," the long-lasting effects of Orientalism still exist in present-day racial or ethnoreligious stereotypes that have infested humanity. It should be taken into consideration that Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel* (2007) is a recollection of her life experiences, which are mostly horrible. Therefore, it should not be considered as a seminal depiction of Muslim women's oppression. Her novel

³³Musnad al-Firdaws of al-Daylami, 2/55 in Muhammad Adam al-Kawthari, 'Kissing and Foreplay', *Central-Mosque*, 2003 <https://www.central-mosque.com/fiqh/kissf.htm> [accessed 4 July 2019].

³⁴Al Jawziyya Ibn Qayyim, *Al Tibb Al Nabawi*, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dar Al Feeha, 2003.

³⁵Muhammad Rizvi, *Marriage and Morals in Islam*, 2nd ed., Tehran: Islamic Education & Information Center, 1994 <<https://www.al-islam.org>> [accessed 4 July 2019].

just offers a repetition of orientalist views of Muslim women but proposes no tangible solution. The study identified these as underlying factors for the misrepresentation of Islam: poverty of knowledge which is manifested in the vivid ignorance of the absolute rights of women under Islamic law, where such knowledge is not lacking, poverty could restrain the granting of these rights. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs and practices are also a hindrance to the proper utilization of Women's right in Islam. Additionally, the excessive male domination of the knowledge sphere within the Muslim society has directly or indirectly engrained male interpretation of women's rights and responsibilities within marriage and in other aspects of life. This is an attempt to restrict the effect of Orientalism in Ayaan's novel. Further studies should focus on other aspects of Orientalism like feminist orientalism which is yet to be explored.

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