Chapter III

Representation of Arab Muslim Woman in the White American Novel

This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.

---Honoré de Balzac

3.1 Introduction

Post 9/11 American narrative on Arab Muslim woman prospers in American literature and forms a central part of the modern American Orientalist discourse. This study examines the representation of Arab Muslim women in the post 9/11 American novel with an aim of a better understanding how women are portrayed in relation to religion, society and power. Through the discourse analysis, the study highlights various aspects of Arab Muslim women’s lives between the seventh century and the twenty-first century. With the increasing focus on the Muslims in general, and Muslim women in particular, it is necessary to determine how women are portrayed. Arab women have increasingly been the subject matter of novels and stories since 9/11 and their representations have been influenced by all the events that followed such as the war in Afghanistan and the U.S.-led Iraqi invasion. This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the diverse stereotypes used by American writers to describe Arab Muslim women, their appearance, status, roles, obligations, responsibilities and aspirations.

In fact, the survey of literature reveals that Western representations of Muslim women are far more complex than initially expected. This representation overlays several frames, where Muslim women are represented as oppressed, weak and dependent on the one hand, and fully independent, empowered, intelligent and bold on the other. There are many incidents of misrepresentations of the women and of how they are treated under Islam. In such cases, the Muslim woman’s strong voice is rarely heard in
the novel and instead readers are bombarded with stereotypical and distorted accounts from the writers in an attempt to show how Islam and Muslims view woman. Similarly, there are cases where Muslim women are given ample space in these novels to voice their opinions, beliefs and concerns; they are allowed to discount stereotypes depicting them as weak, helpless and oppressed. In these cases, novels enable readers to draw a comprehensive picture of how Muslim women react, think and live.

One of the theoretical frameworks that helps us understand how Arab women are represented is Postcolonial Theory described by Said as Orientalism in which he notes that anyone who writes on the Orient is an Orientalist and what she/he is doing is Orientalism. Postcolonial discourse is thus more than a mere act of describing facts of colonialism; it is an approach of defining the imperial identity in its contrast with the identity of the Orientals. So far, in the United States, 2001 has been the year of questioning Arab identity and the role of Islam in its formation that the events of the 9/11 seem to have acted as powerful catalysts in this issue and the cultural diversity between Arabs and America as well.

As far as Orientalism is concerned, Muslim woman cannot speak for herself; rather she needs to be represented. In reference to this discourse, Said quotes Marx’s famous statement: “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.”\(^1\) Marx’s statement does also figure prominently in Gayatri Spivack’s famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in which Gayatri refers to oppressed men and women as the subaltern “whose identity is its difference.”\(^2\) Gayatri argues that for the female subaltern, the situation is even worse: “She is even more deeply in shadow.”\(^3\) The study in this chapter is based on the analysis of three novels of Sherry Jones’ The Jewel of Medina (2008), Homa Pourasgari’s The Dawn of Saudi (2009) and Zoe Ferraris’ Finding Nouf (2009).
3.2 Representation of Prophet Muhammad’s Wives

The Jewel of Medina (2008) by Sherry Jones tells the life story of A’isha, the youngest and favorite wife of Prophet Muhammad, and her suffering that starts at the age of six. The Jewel opens when A’isha gets engaged to the Prophet at the age of six when her father decides to cement his friendship and loyalty to the Prophet. Representation of Muslim women’s suffering is the main focus of the novel. When A’isha is betrothed to Muhammad at age six, she is confined to her house until her marriage three years later. She is forced to leave her beloved house in Mecca for Medina when Mecca becomes unsafe for Muhammad and his followers. Through the course of narration, the novel shows how A’isha grows from a self-centered child to a woman who fights for emancipation of woman in this harsh part of the Orient.

The main focus of the novel is A’isha whose suffering becomes the embodiment of the suffering of women in Arabia. The Jewel provides humanizing glimpses into the origin of the Islamic faith and the treatment of woman in Islam through the eyes of this Arab heroine. The life of A’isha is divided into two stages: the early life when she is the only wife of Muhammad and the later life when she lives with multiple wives and concubines in Muhammad’s harem. Most of the characters in the novel are the wives of Muhammad. The novel goes into detail about the personal and sexual relations between the Prophet and his wives. One of the sorest spots is the plot in which A’isha is taken to the brink of adultery with her childhood sweetheart, Safwan.

The Jewel becomes controversial around the Islamic world and is seen as the Satanic Verses of the twenty-first century because the Prophet’s wives are sacred figures. Descriptions of many episodes in the novel are seen by many Muslims as offensive and their content as soft porn. When the book's publisher, The Random House Publishing Group, decided to publish excerpts, outrage soon followed. In an interview with El-Katatney, Jones states “I knew that I expected controversy because I’m writing about sacred figures in Islamic history.” Jones rejects the Muslims’ condemnation:
“Although I’ve been aware from the start that my books might offend some people, I’ve never been afraid of physical harm because of them…It is only my interpretation of history, based on my research, experiences and imagination. I do not fear the consequences of publishing this book.”

Sherry Jones opens her novel *The Jewel of Medina* with an Orientalist description of the Orient and its women of the seventh century: “Join me in a harsh, exotic world of saffron and sword fights, of desert nomads living in camel’s-hair tents...We are in seventh-century Hijaz, in Western Saudi Arabia...where Bedouin raiders fight for survival and women have few rights.” A part of Jones’ antique and exotic Muslim world is the “exotic world,” where women are “regarded as chattel, the property of men, so worthless they might be buried alive” and have few rights. Jones mentions many examples of oppressed women among them the six years old girl, A’isha, who gets married to the sixty years old Prophet and manages to survive troubles that accompany the Prophet’s life. *The Jewel* is a historical novel that tells a fictionalized version of the life of A’isha from age of six till she joins Muhammad’s harem. Though many Muslims feel humiliated after reading the detailed sexual life of the wife of their Prophet and how the Prophet is introduced as an oppressor of woman, Jones argues the novel is not meant to be the definitive version of A’isha’s life or of Muhammad’s character, rather, it is an interpretation of history based on research.

Narration in *The Jewel* constitutes a systematic attack on what Jones believes to be the repressive ideals of femininity enforced by the brutal, barbaric, segregationist and anti-woman legislations of Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. Jones exposes the fragile Muslim woman’s position in Islamic society in which A’isha becomes the embodiment of resistance and feminine struggle for freedom. A’isha comments on such a marriage: “I’d known it would happen someday, but not when I was six. Only very few girls were engaged at birth, as I had been, but they were never confined until they began their monthly bleeding. To begin *purdah* at my age was unheard of.” Jones notes
that if Islam chains the feminine ideal, A’isha is ready to reject the laws and has the spirit to rebuke men who hinder her freedom including Muhammad: “If they try to lock me away forever, I would escape. With the Bedouins, I’d be free to live my life the way I wanted, to run and yell and fight in battles and make my own choices. Because, in the desert, it didn’t matter whether you were a woman or a man. In the desert, there were no walls.”

Although, on the one hand A’isha’s triumph is limited compared to the many defeats she receives from the Muhammad’s strict legislations, the text on the other at various stages acknowledges her demonstration of power as a livewire which cannot be easily defeated.

Jones’ major focus on A’isha with a little reference to other wives of the Prophet does imply that it is unnecessary to expend tremendous narrative energy on all the Prophet’s wives because they are homocentric through A’isha, having a common center. A’isha’s suffering from age of six represents Muhammad’s attitude towards women in general. In the novel, the six years old A’isha is disciplined in a strict manner in preparation to get married to Muhammad. She is forbidden to interact with boys of her age or to look at elder men: “My parents had drummed the dangers into my very bones until I dreaded the gaze of any man not in my family. One illicit glance, it seemed, could pierce the veil of my virginity...I learned every stone in the floor, every crack in every wall of our Meccan home during my years in purdah.”

To reinforce the theme of oppression as an inherent feature of the Prophet, Muslim women are introduced as voiceless humans. Arab Muslim woman is innately oppressed, veiled, secluded, and silenced. A’isha is forced to marry Muhammad though she wishes to marry her childhood friend, Safwan. Nothing she or her mother can do or say will lift her suffering because everything related to them must be decided by men: “Being female meant being helpless. Powerless. They [women] weren’t supposed to plan, but to let others plan for them. They weren’t supposed to live, only to serve.” The novel, further, keeps a very huge gap between Muhammad’s age and A’isha’s who are
sixty and six years old respectively. A’isha narrates her feelings the day Muhammad proposes to marry her: “I slumped onto my bed, feeling as though stones filled my body. Married to Muhammad! It couldn’t be. He was older than my father… why was he allowed to visit me during my purdah, when all other men are forbidden?...‘Safwan,’...‘Come and rescue me. Hurry, before it’s too late.’”

One important issue Jones addresses relates to the confinement of women living in Muhammad’s harem where women’s personal freedom is completely thwarted by their confinement; they have to follow a religion that “suspects every woman”, a religion which teaches its followers that “if a woman glances at the mirror she’s plotting evil.”

The issue of Muslims women’s confinement is related to more than one thing. The first is that Islam orders Muslim woman to be shut off from all public interaction if she is not accompanied by a male guardian. The description of A’isha’s situation is always used for this end. A’isha is the most exposed woman to oppression of Islam because from the age of six she is engaged to Muhammad and she is ordered: “You are to remain indoors, A’isha. It is forbidden for boys or men to see you unless they are relatives”...“You won’t be going to the market anymore, or going anywhere else without me or your father.” The second kind of confinement has to do with Islamic dress: “I wouldn’t be allowed to step outside my parents’ house…I’d be stuck in this cold, dready tomb until the day my blood flow started, six years away or maybe even longer.” In the novel, Islamic dress, contrary to the Islamic view, is a sign of oppression and subjugation of woman.

In Islamic tradition, Prophet Muhammad’s wives are ordered to dress in a way that is modest and dignified. Because of the fact that Muhammad’s wives are subject to the assaults of the Pagans and the Jews of the seventh century, a headscarf in addition to a proper unshowy dress, is prescribed as a preventive measure for narrowing the possibility of troubling Prophet Muhammad’s wives. This is the general wisdom behind the Islamic dress as described by Islamic tradition. Little attempt is made to depict the
hostile Jewish environment for Muhammad’s wife in the novel. The scene when Sawdah, one of Muhammad’s wives, is harassed in the market by a Jew who “pinned the back of her skirt up to her belt” to expose her private parts” does not justify the necessity of imposing the veil on Muslim women.16

Instead of describing Islamic dress as a protective measure against such villainies, the novel looks at this dress from a different angle. The erotic allusions are quite clear by repeating the association between Islamic dress on the one hand and sexual freedom on the other, thus forgetting entirely, if not deliberately, about relating the Islamic point of view. Therefore, the veil is a kind of masquerade, which hinders the Muslim women from following their sexual endeavors. A’isha discloses Muhammad and Omar’s discussion on the wisdom behind enforcing the veil: “A woman’s eyes are her most enticing feature,” Omar said. “Even your wives know how to use them for seduction. Covering one eye is the only true way to avoid scandal.”17

A tendency for inclusion of restraining woman’s sensationalism demonstrates that poor treatment of women and outrageous human rights abuses are part of the faith and practised by the most sacred figures in Islam. This is because, in colonial discourses, the colonized people do not speak for themselves; rather, they are objects of representation on which power is exercised. Edward Said emphasizes the dynamicity of this discourse, twenty five years after the publication of his Orientalism in his “Orientalism after 25 Years”, that Orientalism is “very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history.”18 Therefore, it is commonplace to point to Muhammad’s harem as the quintessential mode of American representation of the Muslim woman’s oppression after the 9/11 because “[p]rior to September 11, popular perceptions of Arabs and Muslims had no significant American component.”19 For this purpose, Muhammad’s life is divided into two stages: first is his early life which is marked by less religiosity and more freedom for women, and the second is his later life, a period of Quran revelations which witnesses a rapid increase in his harem and less
freedom given to them. The most oppressive of these Quran revelations are verses that force his wives to hide themselves from all men other than the relatives. The following verses are revelations that provide instructions for Muhammad’s friends:

Do not enter the prophet’s home unless you are invited, and leave as soon as you finish your meal...When you ask his wives for something; ask them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts... It is not for you to cause injury to the Messenger of al-Lah, or ever marry his widows after him. To do that would be something dreadful in the sight of God.\(^{20}\)

Women’s suffering in Muhammad’s harem does not end even after his death; rather, women remain imprisoned even after Muhammad’s death. According to the above mentioned verses of Quran given in the novel, Muhammad’s wives are not allowed to remarry after his death including A’isha who believes she has the right to remarry after the death of Muhammad since she is still in her teens. On many occasions, Muhammad is seen as lecherous, an assumption on the basis of Muslim women’s tragedy. Accordingly, the sexual gratification of Muhammad, almost to the total dismissal of the spiritual purity of a Prophet, becomes more or less mere eroticism. He allows Muslim men to marry only four women at a time while he enjoys more privileges in this respect, more than four wives.

A reader has no way of knowing what source material Jones consulted, but he does rather know that this description involves post 9/11 personal views of the author. The portraits of Muslim women, the characterizations of the Quran and the images of oppressive Islam remain typical: the Prophet is generally displayed as an oppressor of women and the Quran as his fabricated text used to justify his ends. Muhammad is a fanatical leader who has schemed himself into power by claiming to have received revelations and his women are victims of the irreconcilable conflict between his mission as inspired Prophet and his endeavour to possess a large number of women. The
provided Quran revelations in the novel largely focus on issues related to woman’s freedom and A’ishah’s reaction:

You know al-Lah ordered your hijab, A’ishah, he said. “You witnessed His revelations to me in the courtyard.”…How his revelation, in essence confining us all to the harim, had closed in upon me like the dark, cold walls of a tomb…“Yes, I witnessed it,” I said. “I saw everything—including your transformation from a liberator of women into an oppressor of them. Yaa Prophet, was that also the work of al-Lah?”

One very important contention that Edward Said mentions in Orientalism is that Orientalist discourses introduce Muhammad as a disseminator of a false Revelation that aims at fulfilling his sexual desires. The Jewel can be used as a test case to support Said’s contention. Thus, Prophethood (Muhammad’s Prophethood, Muhammad’s Message, Muhammad’s revelation) is that of sexual (but not spiritual) gratification. Muhammad’s attraction toward the child A’ishah proves his abnormal sexuality. A’ishah imagines herself under Prophet Muhammad’s body: “I would lie under Muhammad while he pinned me down with his body, imprisoning me, hurting me. Would he hear my cries of pain? Or would he only pound into me harder and faster…“What would marriage to him be like? Would he forbid me to play with my dolls and toy horse?”

The total picture of the Prophet and the sexual language suggest that Muhammad can do nothing to improve woman’s life but gratify his sexual desire with a six year old girl whom he deprives of enjoying her childhood. In her use of source material, Jones tends to adopt certain events that could best serve the imagination of a historian, but hardly that of a litterateur. For, as an historian, Jones seems to have cared for the situation of woman under Taliban and applied it to a woman in Prophet Muhammad’s era. In an interview with Keskin, Jones notes: “I came across the story of A’ishah for the first time shortly after the World Trade Center attacks in 2001…My goal was to bring these tales, already familiar to Muslims in the rest of the world, to Western audiences.”
Jones does not place much reliance on scholarly research; as Said reminds us in his critical assessment of Orientalist discourse that: “No linguistic knowledge seems to be necessary since what one is dealing with is considered to be a psychological deformation, not a “real” culture or religion.”

Similarly, in Foucauldian tradition, truth and knowledge on subjects are complementary to each other that any writer “has to conform to this in order to communicate, to be understood, to remain ‘in the true’, and thus to be accepted.” In Jones’ case, Taliban in Afghanistan becomes a source of all the necessary knowledge on Islam.

Prophet Muhammad is introduced with certain features of a pedophile. For his own desire, Muhammad does not allow A’isha to get married to Safwan when she shows no interest in him: “Please, Allah, oh please let them say my husband will be Safwan. Don’t let them marry me to Muhammad. I know he’s your messenger, but he’s an old man.” On her wedding day when she is supposed to be with Muhammad who is waiting for her, A’isha is playing with children. She tells her mother: “Can’t you see I’m playing?”

The lesson conveyed by this marriage is the unsuccessful attempt of Muhammad to convey God’s message without becoming a slave to his sexual desires. His first trial of having sex with A’isha indicates a violation of human rights. A’isha narrates Muhammad’s first attempt of consummating this marriage:

“Wait,” I said…I grabbed my doll…My hands trembled, making my doll quiver, also…“This is a solemn occasion, A’isha. The time for children’s games is later.” He kissed the crown of my head. He slid his fingers down my arm. He pulled gently at my robe until it slipped off my shoulders…He slipped his tongue inside my mouth. He moved his hands to my waist, and then slowly up my ribcage, toward my breast…“My Little Red,” he said. “Your body may be ready for me.”

As mentioned in the first chapter, what Westerners say about Islam and Arab societies is always taken at face value and received with little questioning or
examination. On the other hand, what Muslims and Arabs say about Islam and themselves is received with much doubt and skepticism because this area is to be researched by Orientalists. One reason for such a prejudiced outlook including that of Jones’ is that “Orientalists viewed these areas as unchanging and used seventh-century Islam to explain the working of those societies.” Accordingly, Jones argues that Islam is a patriarchal, anti-woman and segregationist religion. Woman in Islam is a helpless agent in this exotic place because it is the father or the husband who decides her future. In order to fulfil Muhammad’s desire in A’isha, her father instructs her “You are a woman now, with no time for childishness.” Like A’isha’s father, her mother holds the same view regarding this marriage: “I only want to make certain Muhammad does not forget which of us is his closest Companion.” Thus, Muhammad manages to create a cruel environment for woman in a very short span of time.

Jones refashions A’isha as a fierce Western modern feminist who confronts Muhammad when he shows interest in marrying all the widows of his own friends who get killed while defending Islam. A’isha is refashioned into Western feminist who fights for emancipation of women and challenges the norms of Muhammad. She denounces the purdah, the practice of polygamy and traditional views of women as disempowered with all the flare of a twenty-first-century feminist: “Does that mean you’re going to marry all the widows from Badr…Where will they all live.” A’isha seems to be disturbed by Muhammad’s way of treatment of all his wives who are already in his harem and thus she furiously confronts him: “First you cage us, and now you want to beat us.” As a Western feminist, A’isha is not satisfied with her own marriage because Muhammad intends to have many more wives. She hates Muhammad and turns to have an affair with her childhood friend, Safwan.

Sexuality of Muslim women of the Orient is central to the post 9/11 fiction. A’isha’s sexuality as an explicit part of her ideal womanhood and feminist struggle is a part of Jones’ focus. This struggle for sexual freedom in practical terms implies that the
more sexual freedom for men in Islamic law should meet the same amount of freedom for women. This ethos is largely A’isha’s response, after all, to the many marriages that Muhammad has in his life. Therefore, the failure to achieve this balance would remove woman a degree from the center of social life and assign her a secondary feminine sphere. Thus, Jones’ portrayal of A’isha’s sexual freedom is not as errant and in need of amendment because she is not a sexual wanton, like Muhammad, but a blushing virgin when she meets her lover, Safwan:

I thought of Muhammad…how he’d let me go at the first sign of fear. Safwan grabbed my breasts and squeezed them hard. He pushed his hand between my legs, making my blood scream…Of course Safwan would expect to make love with me…“My f-flower has not been picked,” I said…My marriage has not been consummated… Safwan paced and glowered. “A virgin”, he muttered. “If I take you now, it will unman the Prophet completely.”

A’isha’s reaction to Muhammad’s treatment reaches its climax when she meets with Safwan, one of the dearest companions to Muhammad. This incident is full of romance and reflects A’isha escapism from harsh reality to romance: “He pulled me into the circle of his arms and held me as…he lowered his lips to my eyes and my cheek and kissed away my tears. “Sweet A’isha,” he said. “Come away with me. Tonight. I have the perfect plan.”…”My only wish is for you, habibati.” A’isha’s meeting with Safwan has really happened, according to Islamic sources, but the portrayal of this meeting is overcome by conspiracy and romance. In Islamic history and as the Quran mentions, A’isha misses the caravan when the Muslim army is returning from a battle with Mustaliq tribe and she is found by Safwan, a scout appointed by the Prophet, who takes her home. As a planned romantic meeting, Safwan instructs A’isha to meet him: “I’ll remain behind, as a scout…Here’s my idea: when the caravan stops at Wadi al-Hamd oasis, you find a way to stay behind. The curtains on your hawdaj will keep anyone from
noticing you’re gone-and when they do, we’ll be far away!” This event in the Prophet’s life casts doubt upon his credentials of Prophethood and the purity of A’isha.

Muhammad’s personality, from the very outset, has nothing to improve the status of woman but carelessness for his wives, falsehood and sexual attraction towards new women he encounters. In addition to the exhausted theme of voluptuousness and the agonizing love intrigue between A’isha and Safwan, the novel shows that A’isha’s sexual affair with Safwan is a result of Muhammad’s negligence of A’isha’s request for sex. Muhammad’s negligence of A’isha’s sexual desire can be held responsible for A’isha’s scandal. Irritated, as the Prophet rejects her request and shows more interest in Juwairriyah, a captive woman, she turned to have sexual relationship with Safwan: “Why don’t you come and watch me, instead?” My smile meant to seduce...“I do not have time for this nonsense, A’isha...Now I must go and make a place for Juwairriyah [captive woman] to sleep.”

Several motifs pertaining to early Muslim woman emerge in the American discourse of the post 9/11. Firstly, her struggle for freedom emerges simultaneously with the coming of Islam. That is the basic premise for her portrayal that is transformed into one of helplessness and increasingly subdued speech; her sexual right seems to shrink because of legislations that allow polygamy. Secondly, she becomes oppressed. The harem that Muhammad builds has already begun to be an oppressive place since the seventh century. Thirdly, sexuality is an important part of the Muslim woman’s portrayal from the very early Orientalist discourse with certain emphasis that she has been actively seducing rather than seductive. Thus, she becomes, definitively, the erotic object of male visual pleasure.

The sensual element that the dialogue contains implies that Prophet Muhammad supersedes Allah in His function. According to the Prophet, it is Allah who commands him to marry those attractive captive women for the sake of his religion. He tells A’isha about his new marriage to the captive women: “Think about it!...When she becomes my
wife, the Mustaliq will be our allies...This is the work of Allah! First He handed us an easy victory, then He awarded me the chief’s daughter. This marriage will be good for the umma [nation], and for Islam.”³⁸ It is Muhammad who carries out Allah’s will and he who should be gratified. All this makes it abundantly clear to contemporary readers that a man who behaves in this way, especially with women, cannot possibly be a prophet.

Presumably the need to defend A’isha’s sexual affair with Safwan leads Jones to accept uncritically many of the points in A’isha’s personality including her treachery of Muhammad. Muhammad is assumed to be unfair to A’isha, an assumption that leads A’isha to a critical scandal. It is not uneasy to go on to hold that Muhammad is a man who perceives women as machine for sexual gratification and A’isha is a victim of his interest in women. Soon after the victory he embraces a new marriage with one of the captives: “The prophet is eager to take his new princess back to Medina to marry her.”³⁹ In such a situation, A’isha’s adultery happens and is justified because A’isha believes she will not be able catch Muhammad for he intends to enlarge his harem.

9/11 terrorist attacks have inaugurated a sharply heightened interest in Islam and Muslims among American feminists who feel it to be their duty to defend Muslim women against Islamic oppression and marginalization. Gargi Bhattacharyya writes: “One aspect of the War on Terror has been this battle over the meaning and ownership of the idea of women’s rights.”⁴⁰ This Orientalist engagement with Islam and Muslims echoes the American political attitude that emerges immediately after the attacks. Jan Pettman notes that the 9/11 introduces the chance to George Bush to play the role of the champion of Muslim women’s rights in the conservative Muslim societies and wonders why this interest grows rapidly after 9/11 and “Why not before?”⁴¹ Interestingly, violation of woman’s rights inside the United States shows contradictions in this American struggle to enhance Arab woman’s rights. Internationally, the United States continues to refuse to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of
Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), effectively blocking its implementation, and under Bush there has been a withdrawal of US aid to sexual health and family planning programmes that provide information about abortion.

Harem as a discursive concept is a part of the American narrative on Islam and forms the basic tenet of the cultural strength of the American discourse. This term could be used as a negative foreign counterpart to the Western ideals of feminism. Before looking at Sherry Jones’s portrayal of Muhammad’s harem, examining some pre 9/11 examples will provide some key features of such an image. Beginning with a pre 9/11 column “How to Start a Harem” which appears in Maxim magazine in January 2001 by Mike Dojc, the columnist gives certain steps to start a harem, first of which is “you’ll have to head for the Middle East. Almost any nation there will do.”

The term harem in this article is a concept that refers to the lives of the wives of a man who keeps more than a wife living in a separate part of the house. As Dojc’s column indicates, harem carries many images such as sexuality, oppression of female, male dominancy and veiling.

In addition, to be an icon of patriarchy and gender division, the term harem is used as an epitome of matriarch hegemony where one powerful wife controls all other sister-wives. Therefore, a woman becomes both exploited and exploitative of the underclasses. Women in the harem are divided into a hatun who is the “Great Lady,” or “first-wife” who controls all the sister-wives and durras who are the other sister-wives. A’isha has feelings of fear from this matriarchal system and before she goes to Muhammad’s harem she is advised: “When you marry, daughter, make certain you are the first-wife in your household. Make certain you control your destiny, or it will control you.”

The possibility that the harem is another kind of household where women also govern families, raise babies and attend to the details of domestic production does not come up because it is incompatible with what the harem has come to mean. In the Orientalist view, the harem is, rather, a place where none of those good domestic things
can be properly achieved. The Muslim harem is endowed with irreducible nature to Western feminist ideals with the exception of A’isha who refuses to be exploited by other women of the harem:

I couldn’t be his hatun, since he already had a first-wife in Sawdah; I’d be the durra, the parrot, serving her every whim. Would Sawdah make me her slave, giving me the baset of chores?...I would never, ever live the way my mother did. If Sawdah tried to order me around in Muhammad’s harim, I ’d show her with one sharp sentence who was quicker of the tongue. If she hit me, I’d either kill her or make her wish for death.\(^4^4\)

The harem becomes a place of unnatural and degrading female life where women are devoid of the values of equality, self-reliance, health and independent minds. A’isha describes the situation in Muhammad’s harem: “We were hungry, we were threadbare, and, worst of all we were bored…In Muhammad’s harim, there were no babies, only children from previous marriages-and most of them older. We sister-wives spent our days in idleness, magnifying our few problems and grumbling at one another.”\(^4^5\) The explicit association of Islam with the oppression in harem indicates that the Muslim woman turns into a slave, a quintessential victim of absolute despotism and debased to a dumb, animal existence.

Characterization of Muhammad and the sword he uses to conquer the women shows that Muhammad’s sympathy to captive women is not humane. He is a man who can never think of religion without involving in sex. This nature of the Prophet is manifested through many of his marriages that take place in disgusting and inhumane situations. For example, his marriage to the captive princess Juwairriyah, the daughter of Mustaliq chief, immediately after the battle reflects his cruelty to the captive woman. A’isha narrates the situation of this captive woman: “I beg you, Prophet of al-Lah, do not send me into slavery,”…“See how soft my hands are? Look at my skin. It has never been touched by the sun”…“I am at your mercy”…“I will do whatever you desire.”
Desire? Muhammad was having so many of them at that moment.” Sexual aggressiveness is a relatively thick part of Muhammad’s overall aggressiveness. A reader would be easy put to find textual support for calling Prophet Muhammad “transgressive voluptuous”: “‘There is a way’ he said. ‘I can save you from slavery and avoiding offending my men if you will do this one thing…’ Marry me,’” he said.”

The Prophet is neither able to offer mercy nor freedom to innocent women. He is only evidently capable of being sexually attracted to them. His sensuality and subjugation of woman are stressed further when Jones allows him to marry another captive, Raihana, the daughter of Jewish Qurayzah chief, whose father, husband, children and brothers are killed in a battle with Muhammad: “Raihana’s laugh scraped like sand over a fresh wound. “I will never do that, even to get my sons back.” “What kind of man is Muhammad?”…“A true pretender. Claiming to be the Prophet our Jewish Book foretold. Would God anoint an Arab over one of His chosen people?”

In the novel Muhammad’s marriages in these difficult situations constitute a systematic attack on the basic ideals of femininity enforced by religions before Islam including Christianity and Judaism. The point here is that relationships should be governed by the consent of the individuals involved and therefore any system or religion tries to alienate individuals from their natural selves is unsound. Sexuality is a primary form of expression for this natural authenticity. Sexual life in The Jewel is important both in itself and as a pattern for political life. Therefore, Muhammad judges the loyalty of women on the basis of their submission to his desires. This relative sexual hedonism of the Prophet is not at all a paradise for women as it is for Muhammad. A’isha narrates the ongoing dialogue between Muhammad and Raihana, the captive woman Muhammad desires to marry:

“You murdered my father, my husband, and my brothers,” the woman snarled. “I’d rather die, too, than become your whore-like this one.” She flung her hand toward me without a glance. “If you plan to send me into
slavery, kill me now,” she said. “Death by beheading would be more merciful than rapes and beatings. I’m an unskilled princess with soft hands and a sharp tongue, neither of which is valued in a slave.”

Muhammad is neither a true prophet nor a genuine humanist but a slave of his own sexual passions, whose harem includes twelve women: “The prophet of God must have special powers in the bedroom.” Prophet Muhammad and Muslim women are associated with lowliness and lechery. Lowliness and sensuality of the Muslims are stressed further when the Prophet falls in love with the physical charms of his adopted son’s wife, Zaynab and marries her. This marriage proves that Muhammad is not God’s Prophet but a sensualist who could easily fall for the machinations of women. The description of Muhammad and Zaynab, almost to the total dismissal of purity and chastity of sacred figures, becomes more or less a matter of mere eroticism. This story is introduced on the notions that Zaynab is a dirty woman who exposes her nakedness to tempt Muhammad; and Muhammad is a lecherous and incestuous man who is tempted and forces his adopted son to divorce Zaynab in order to marry her:

“But why she opened the door to him?” “She says she thought it was Zayd.” The first woman snorted. “As if she would not know her own husband’s voice at the door.” “She exposed herself to the Prophet on purpose?...Since the Prophet saw her naked, all she does is preen before the mirror.”... “When she opened the door in her nightclothes, he told her he would wait outside for her to get dressed. But then a gust of wind blew past and lifted her bedroom curtain. ‘The breath of God’ she calls it. As if al-Lah willed it to happen. The Prophet saw everything, she said. Everything!”

The story at the very outset certainly has a basis in fact. The relevant facts, which no Muslim, Muhammad himself included, has attempted to suppress or cast doubt upon, are simply as follows, visiting Zayd’s house, Muhammad was met at the door by Zayd’s...
wife, Zaynab, who was indeed wearing a light garment, which the Arab women used to wear in the privacy of the house at that time. Her husband was not at home, so Muhammad immediately withdrew muttering praise to Allah. Zaynab was an attractive woman who was brought up under Muhammad’s care. Further, it was Muhammad who got her married to Zayd, who later divorced her. Having been divorced, there was a crucial problem for Muhammad to marry her. Zayd, we realize, was the Prophet’s adopted son, and it was the custom among the Arabs at the time to treat adopted sons like one’s own sons. And according to that tradition Muhammad would not be able to marry her. It was revealed to him at this critical point that he should follow the Quran and marry her. Therefore, in Islamic tradition, this marriage was to set a precedent to the Muslims that to marry a divorced adopted son’s wife is neither sinful, nor socially unacceptable.

Historical evidences show that women’s status in the seventh century Arabia was generally poor, particularly in issues related to marriage, divorce, inheritance and worship. Women were more or less the property of men, as under any other world religion especially Christianity and Judaism. Prophet Muhammad was a tribal man living in a society where polygamous marriages were common. His practice of polygamy was not something strange because Arabs of the seventh century had many wives and concubines. In this era, women served two main functions: those of children bearers and manual laborer. Muhammad’s marriages helped him improve his economic, social and religious status through wives who worked for him and facilitated alliance with their tribes. The Prophet married Khadijah, his first wife, the wealthy businesswoman to improve his economic status. Khadijah is pointed out as the Prophet’s greatest financial supporter. His marriage to Sawdah who worked as a tanner contributed to improve his economic status. His other marriages are meant for gaining wealth, friendships and loyalties.
The status of woman in the medieval European society was no better than the position of woman in Arabian society. Polygamy was popular in the medieval European society. There were multiple wives and concubines even in ancient Rome. In the Middle Ages, European women were valued as an economic commodity. Because women represented a large source of cheap labor, they quickly became the mainstay of the medieval economy. Wife beating was common and even socially accepted. The Church supported this barbaric practice. In a theological dictionary of the time Nicholas Byard states: “A man may chastise his wife and beat her for her own correction; for she is of his household, and therefore the lord may chastise his own.”

Therefore judging the practices of medieval Arabs in the light of modern Western norms and values may not be appropriate because many of those practices are not relevant today in modern Islamic society. Similarly, these practices including the subjugation of women were practiced in medieval European society too. Therefore taking the present-day Western values as a model for judging Arab women may be biased because the East and the West share common cultural similarities in issues related to sexism and economic oppression of woman.

The representation of Muhammad’s marriages in this novel renders Muhammad as an irrational man; torn between his mission as a Prophet and his worldly interests and passions. He uses his Quran revelations to achieve his own desires. In the context of his marriage to his adopted son’s divorcee, he introduces a Quran revelation to avoid his people’s criticism: “al-Lah’s intentions are perfectly clear...By commanding this marriage, He has left no room for doubt: Adopted sons are not the same as sons by birth.” This marriage results in a state of disapproval and condemnation among closest people to Muhammad such as his companions and wives. His wife, Umm Ayman comments: “Poor Zayd...it breaks his heart to hear it. It breaks mine, too.” Among his companions is Umar who: “folded his arms and scowled at Ali. Unfortunately, interpreting the Prophet’s revelation to fit our own needs has become a popular pastime
in the umma,” he said. “Some accuse Muhammad of doing the same in this instance.”

A’isha’s father, the closest man to Muhammad finds “this union may appear unwise”. Similarly, other Muslims find it to be unfair that Muhammad limits four wives to them while he increases his harem as he wishes: “Five women in his harem, while he limits us to four. Is that fair?” “The prophet of God must have special powers in the bedroom.” “Here is one of his wives. Let us ask her. Yaa, A’isha, how will your husband satisfy five women?” I laughed, scorning them to hide my panic, for I’d wondered the same thing.”

Out of much romance and less care for the historical facts perhaps, Jones builds her story on Zaynab and Prophet Muhammad. It may be assumed that Jones has heavily relied on a number of Orientalist sources without even bothering herself to read this issue from an Islamic source. Though she makes no explicit reference to it, Jones probably has read Washington Irving’s *Mahomet and His Successors* because the story of Zaynab had been a favourite topic for Orientalists like Irving. Jones may not have a prior knowledge that Zaynab is Muhammad’s cousin and it is Muhammad who forces her to marry Zayd. As a romancer Jones is somewhat constrained by facts and challenged by them to unleash her imaginative skills with exotic and romantic details which would appeal more to her as a story teller, and to the reader’s feelings and imagination than to the historian’s precision. For a Muslim reader, *The Jewel* is a polemical discourse meant to belittle and dehumanize Muslim women and the Prophet. Ahmad Hawfy in his book *Why the Prophet Muhammad Married More Than One* argues that this marriage happened without any fabrication as Jones claims:

Did not the Prophet know Zainab his cousin and how beautiful she was?

Was not he the one that gave her in marriage to Zaid, and even compelled her to do so? Why did he wed Zainab to Zaid and did not marry her himself, considering that had he wanted, it would have been easy for
him? Would it not be more becoming his social position to marry his cousin first, than to marry her as the divorcee of his freed slave?\textsuperscript{57}

Generally, the Muslim woman after the 9/11 is transformed in the American novel into an object for sexual gratification, a model of the marginalized, disabled, oppressed creature and the definitive victim of a tyranny of Muhammad’s legislations. She is the emblem of the frustrating Islamic world that starts in the seventh century. Beginning with Muhammad’s harem as a perfect didactic tool for the ideology of improper male conduct, American fiction releases a whole series of soothing rationalizations from the point of view of patriarchal authority whose message is at least our women are free; at least our women are autonomous individuals with souls, and not animals; at least we have a single sexual standard; at least we Christians do not treat women as mere sexual playthings.

3.3 Representation of the Modern Arab Muslim Woman

_The Dawn of Saudi_ (2009) is a fictional novel about the oppression of women and human rights abuse in modern Saudi Arabia. The novel explores the hardships many Saudi women endure in this conservative society. The novel provides many aspects of Saudi women’s life such as marriage, male guardianship, dress and employment. _The Dawn_ highlights the lives of two different women, Sahar Al-Hijazi, a Saudi woman raised in an oppressive society and Dawn Parnell, an American woman raised in a society that offers equal rights to man and woman. The two women, who have formed a bond while attending college in Spain, are the central characters of the novel. Their suffering starts later when they arrive in Saudi and reach to different ends.

Homa Pourasgari was born in Iran and moved to the United States to learn English at the age of twelve. In the Preface to _The Dawn_, she informs the reader that she has chosen to write about Saudi Arabia rather than of Iran “because in order to comprehend what constitutes today’s Iranian government, you first must understand
Islam. Consequently, in order to understand Islam, it is necessary to travel to the source of where it all started—Saudi Arabia where Saudis believe they are the unifiers of Islamic practice.”

Set in Saudi Arabia and United States, The Dawn takes the reader from a conservative country with no freedom to a country that strives to provide equality for everyone. Sahar represents the suffering of women living in Saudi Arabian society. The opening chapters of the novel focus on Sahar Al-Hijazi who is forced to marry an old businessman, Husam. The purpose behind this marriage is to save her billionaire grandfather, Kadar, from bankruptcy. According to the deal, Kadar’s business will merge with that of Husam and if this merger takes place, their Crawford Company will be one of the largest in the world. When Sahar comes to know about her grandfather’s intention, she fakes her death and is admitted in hospital. With the help of her uncle, she manages to escape to the United States and the scene changes to America. A couple of months later, Sahar starts working and becomes an independent woman who fights for the rights of Saudi women.

The America girl, Dawn, who falls in love with a Saudi man she meets at a night club in Barcelona, decides to drop out of college and converts from Mormon to Muslim. She goes against the advice of Sahar who strictly warns her that her life in Saudi will be in danger. As a result her parents disown her. Ironically, Dawn feels that her parents hold rigid beliefs and little does she know what is in store for her after she marries her Saudi husband. After their marriage, she discovers that her Saudi husband has lied to her. He has two other wives and she is forced to live in the normal ways of Saudi culture. Dawn has applied many times for divorce but as a woman she has no right to get it. Their relationship has deteriorated as he starts beating her. It is only at the end that she realizes that her love has blinded her to the harsh realities to leave the US to KSA. She kills him and is herself killed by her brother in-law.
In the US, Sahar takes the name Dawn Parnell, her American friend who is killed in Saudi Arabia. Through Sahar’s eyes, the reader can see the gross injustices inflicted upon Saudi women, who as described by Sahar’s grandfather, are merely “precious commodities who bore sons and could be traded to make deals. If they failed to carry out these two obligations, they were worthless.”

In her critique of Muslim Arab society, Pourasgari notes that Islam deprives woman of the basic rights as a means for controlling and suppressing her sexuality. Woman’s dress is a part of this means: “a woman who shows her hair or skin is nothing but a whore.” A wide range of rights is violated for this purpose and anything believed to lead to woman’s provocation and exposure to males is strictly prohibited to be practiced by woman: “Bicycles were forbidden for women because the orthodox Muslims thought that the movement of the legs and hips were provocative…Women were allowed to own cars but not drive them. The only time they were permitted to sit in the front was when their mahram was driving. Women without means whose husbands were at work were trapped at home.” Similarly, “music and dancing were forbidden in the Muslim religion because Islam forbade anything that might lead to lust and fornication. It was believed that music and dancing were used to stimulate thoughts of eroticism and filthy love.”

Historically, Saudi Arabia is a place of birth of the Prophet of Islam and from there Islam spreads towards East and West. Therefore, all Orientalist inquiries pertaining to human rights in Islam take Saudi Arabia as a typical model for these inquiries because in the Orientalist point of view, Islamic law and women have never been friends since the time of the Prophet. So, representations of women in this society are believed to be applicable in all Islamic societies. In *The Dawn of Saudi*, all women in Saudi society, whether they are rich or poor, royal or ordinary share the same treatment under Islamic law:
The fate of all women, royalty or otherwise, was the same. The only difference between the rich and the poor was that the former lived in a golden cage and the latter in a metal one...A woman was always considered the property of her husband or male guardian, and that male was allowed to treat her any way he wanted, even kill her without being prosecuted.  

Within this highly controlled patriarchal enclosure, a good woman ought to become a submissive individual and an erotic object for her husband’s gratification. In The Dawn of Saudi, Pourasgari seems to have read Jones’ The Jewel and provides a similar erotic understanding of how Muhammad suppresses woman’s eroticism: “Oppression of Saudi women is based on the belief that women’s voice, looks and shape lure or entice men on purpose to get them do things against their willpower and beliefs.” Sahar Al-Hijazi is a victim of Prophet Muhammad’s tradition. Like A’isha, Sahar is a victim of man’s sexuality and has to live to please him regardless the difference in the age of the two:  

Like all Saudi women, such was Sahar’s fate as her situation worsened when she turned 22. According to the Saudi tradition, she was too old to get married. Men preferred their women as young as one year old. There were no laws in Saudi Arabia defining the legal age for marriage. The Prophet Muhammad was the model they followed. A’isha became his wife when she was six years of age, and the marriage was when she was nine. The younger a woman married the better. She would be more subservient.

Despite the gloomy environment and all the cruel factors, with Islam at the front, modern Muslim woman fights hard for her independence in order to control her life and decision. In the family of Al-Hijazi, Sahar is forced by her millionaire grandfather, Kadar, to marry a man who is old enough to be her grandfather who aged 68. The
purpose behind this marriage is to save Kadar’s business from bankruptcy: “Husam, was also a well-recognized multibillionaire….Husam’s company was supposed to merge with Kadar’s. If the companies didn’t merge, then Kadar would have to file for bankruptcy and sell his businesses and share in Crawford Enterprise to cover his debts.” The implication is that one can buy a wife; women in Muslim Arab society are for sale. Sahar narrates: “I was part of the deal, you see. I was given to him as a bonus in order to merge with Husam’s company.” But Sahar, who has lived in the West and knows its ideals, rejects such a marriage. The dialogue between her and Husam’s sister represents a division between a Westernized Muslim woman and the traditional submissive Muslim woman:

“I will not marry your brother,” Sahar replied with conviction. “Oh, yes you will. Your grandfather has already drawn up a business contract with him. And after your marriage to my brother, the paper will be signed. So, you see, it’s a done deal. Husam’s company will merge with your grandfather’s, so you have no choice but to marry him.” “I will make his life hell. Why would you want your brother to marry someone as obstinate as me?”

For the sake of monolithic construction of Arab society, The Dawn establishes dichotomous opposition between women’s life in Arabia and her life in America in order to show the effect of Western culture on Arab woman’s life. The novel offers an opportunity to see the “bad” and “good” elements of the Muslim women fully externalized into two separate characters Westernized and non-Westernized. Sahar who gets her education in Barcelona tries to live a Western life-style and rejects her native one. Contrasted to her mother, a submissive woman, Sahar refuses the submissive life in Arab society: “I’m still young. Women in America don’t get married until they’re into their 30s. I cannot, and I will not be treated like an object. Didn’t you even hear what he said? Obey him. As if I would. I would die before I obey anyone…Doesn’t anybody care
about how I feel?...men have been coming here and staring at me as though they were purchasing meat.”

Her mother, Asima, despite her knowledge of the oppressive life, shows no reaction: “I don’t like it either, but we have no choice. We live in a culture where women don’t have rights”. She advises her daughter to accept the marriage to a sixty eight year-old man: “The sooner you accept this [marriage], the sooner you will get on with your life.”

Feminist discourse on race revolves around the us/other dichotomy which includes specific victims and victimizers. In Post 9/11 literature, cultural dichotomies between Islamic and American societies hold the view that Islam is a backward, anti-woman and anti-West religion. This dichotomy is explained further in The Dawn where Pourasgari shows an attitude towards Islam by establishing the American point of view as a basis for judgment and as the ground against Islamic treatment of woman: “A Jew or Christian’s life is worth 50 percent of a Muslim man’s life, all others including Hindus are worth 1/16. An atheist’s life is worth 0 percent and a woman’s life is worth 50 percent of the males in each of these categories. That’s how the judges base their decisions.”

Similarly, women living under Islamic rule receive the same injustice. The Dawn establishes a dichotomy between the two girls; Sahar, an Arab Muslim, and her friend, Dawn, an American Mormon married to a Saudi man, in order to provide a strong basis for judgment. Dawn who marries her Saudi boyfriend in Barcelona is fascinated by her husband’s description of Saudi life. She goes with him after he promises her a Western life style in Saudi society:

There were apartment buildings where Westerners lived and men and women were allowed to mix and dress the way they wanted…They had grocery store, swimming pool, a large yard where the tenants could play sports…Women and men were even allowed to sit around in their bathing suits, make homemade alcohol from smuggled yeast, and watch films in a movie theatre, which was all haram-forbidden on the outside.
Authenticity of narration in the text is determined by gender where female’s voice is usually strong and authentic because a male’s voice is inauthentic and rarely does the male speak about his views. The description of life in Saudi Arabia given by the Saudi male does not carry the truth. Dawn’s knowledge about life in Arab society comes from her husband who shows more freedom and open-mindedness in Barcelona. In fact, life is not as Dawn is told by her husband. Though Sahar tries to convince her not to go to Saudi, Dawn believes in love rather than rationality “Can’t you be happy for me? I am marrying someone I love…My boyfriend loves me. He said we would live in a Western compound and travel all the time.”

Once in Saudi, Dawn finds life is completely different from what she was previously told. Soon she realizes the result of her trust in this man: “After her marriage, she moved to Riyadh but not in a Western compound, which her boyfriend had promised, but in a house located in an Arab neighborhood. The man she had married lied to her about his liberal ways in order to manipulate her into marriage.” There is direct evidence that the Oriental is being represented. This occurs when the male’s voice is not speaking in the discourse of the culture portrayed.

Authentic knowledge about life in Islamic society comes only from female characters. The message that Islam is patriarch religion is conveyed by Sahar who has the most authentic voice in the novel. She believes that her suffering has a basis in her religion: “She often wondered which god supported such cruelty toward women. Which god created such inequality among men and women? After all, weren’t all humans supposed to be equal? How much of this inequality was religion and how much was it the interpretation of men of her culture? She hadn’t an answer but could no longer accept the life she was born into.” Had Dawn listened to Sahar’s knowledge of her own society and religion she would not have been trapped in Saudi:

In America, you are free to do as you wish even when your religion dictates otherwise but in Riyadh all your freedoms will be taken away. You will not be able to drink sangrias. You will not be allowed to leave
the house without a *mahram*-a Guardian...You will not even be allowed to drive or ride a bicycle. Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world where women were not allowed to drive cars."³⁶

The binarism that American society is advanced and the Islamic is not is reinforced by introducing Arab characters who lived in the West and returned home with ambitions to Westernize their own society. This binarism of human/subhuman appears as the theme of sub-humanity. Pourasgari provides examples of young Arab men and women who live in the West and return to their native places as enlightened and civilized people. For instance, uncle Nadim, who received his education in the United States, represents the model of civilized Arab Muslim man: “He often wished that the laws of his country were based on civil laws instead of Sharia- a code of law derived from the Koran and teachings of Mohammad.”³⁷ Uncle Nadim is the only male who believes in equal rights for men and women and prefers the Western way of life. He is a symbol of an Americanized Arab man who has certain features that make him a model for Sahar.

Sahar’s rejection of marriage is based on her knowledge of the American life that “women in America don’t get married until they’re into their 30s.”³⁸ She has a preference for the American way of life because living in Arab society will bring more confinement to her. She comments on her arranged marriage: “I can’t, and I will not be treated like an object. Didn’t you even hear what he said? Obey him. As if I would. I would die before I obey anyone.”³⁹ In other words, she believes that her society is a better place for males and not for females: “If the child is a boy, he can leave after age of 18, but if it’s a girl, she may never be allowed to leave by the father, can be forced into marriage and be oppressed like a Saudi woman for the rest of her life.”⁴⁰

Sahar and Dawn reach opposite ends. Sahar fakes her death by drinking chemical solution and, with the help of uncle Nadim, she goes the United States. Dawn is trapped in Riyadh and lives a miserable life with her husband. The evil of Arab patriarchy serves
as the climax of the novel when Dawn’s freedom is taken in Saudi after she converts to Islam. Dawn has to live as submissive as Arab women where “woman is obliged to satisfy her husband whenever he asks.” She has been subject to this aggression by all around her including her husband: “He had an insatiable hunger for intercourse…He hurt her by biting, punching and whipping her…She had tried several times to go to the Saudi courts to complain to officials, only to be sent back to her husband, telling her that she didn’t have any proof. The officials requested that she obey him.”

The invention of imagery of female heroism which manages to be very feminine and at the same time independent, tough, and consciously resisting traditional male authority, is a remarkable focus of *The Dawn*. All heroism in the novel is not of the American girl, Dawn but of the Arab Sahar’s. Sahar pays a high cost for her freedom. When she arrives in America she suffers a lot before getting the American freedom. She works as a servant at Crowford Enterprise and is subjected to various assaults. The fact that she belongs to a very rich family is no more relevant during her search for freedom:

She was exhausted from cleaning all the toilets-nine downstairs, five upstairs, three at the guesthouses, four at the cottages, his and hers by the indoor and outdoor pools, the tennis courts and the stables. Once done, she mopped the floors, washed the sinks, cleaned the counters and restocked the bathrooms with toilet paper, fresh towels, liquid soap and hand lotion.

Sahar represents the rebellious Saudi woman who rejects religion and tradition and escapes to USA on her wedding day to live her own life, including a life of sexual freedom. She never thinks it is too late to start a new life in America; rather she insists: “My past is my past, and I have to now focus on the present.” The qualms she has regarding the American society do not frighten her: “Will she find a home in a country where people were too busy with their own lives to worry about their neighbors? Will she be able to make a family of her own in a place where the roles of women and men
were no longer black and white but a shade of gray?” are overcome at the end.\textsuperscript{85} There is direct evidence that her fear is overcome in American society: “America, the country that supported her independence, expected her to make decisions, find work, make money, get lodging, pay for her own medical bills, look for a mate and figure out right from wrong. No longer were there laws that dictated her path. She was a caged bird who had been fed and protected all its life and now had been set free.”\textsuperscript{86}

One cannot help but observe that the gender limitations on woman’s existence are reducible to the simple observation that oppression of woman is essentially Islamic. All women, Arabs or non-Arabs, share the same treatment in Islamic society. In Saudi Islamic laws: “if a woman gets raped, nine out of ten times she gets blamed for luring the man into raping her” and therefore “[m]any women don’t report being raped because they’re afraid they’ll get punished for it.”\textsuperscript{87} Asian female workers living in Saudi Arabia are oppressed too: “Often young Filipinos with work permits in Saudi Arabia were treated like slaves and had their passports taken away by their employers so that they could never leave the country. They were beaten by owner of the house or raped by male family members while the Saudi courts ignored it.”\textsuperscript{88}

Mistreatment of women, rather than being a serious problem, becomes an inevitability and thus a stereotype allowing the reader to accept the whole religion as an aggressive one. Sahar is fed up with all the practices of her society including her dress: “I needed my freedom. I needed to be able to walk out without being covered from head to toe. I felt suffocated under my \textit{abaya}.”\textsuperscript{89} It is for these reasons Sahar escapes to America where she finds freedom: “From the day a girl is born, she’s taught that her role in life is to get married and bear sons to carry out the husband’s name.”\textsuperscript{90}

In America, life is changed for the better. Sahar is no longer oppressed; instead, she is free, independent, working a male-dominated job and refuses to wear the veil. The central change in her personality is indicated by the fact that Muslim woman is rescued by superior American values. Her personality is marked by features of a liberal
Westernized woman. In America she is transformed into a sharp critic of the American policy towards violation of human rights in Arab societies: “The U.S. government has strong ties with the Saudi government and they look the other way when there is any kind of human rights violations.” Sahar’s American friend Alex feels the same: “That’s terrible,” Alex pondered the injustice of it all. “What’s interesting is, I have never seen our president point to the Saudi Arabia for violation of human rights and yet he has no problem pointing fingers at China, Russia, Cuba and Iran.” Sahar begins to work on many fronts against oppression of woman in Saudi Arabia. She writes to journals and contact American politicians for the same purpose: “Sahar set up shop outside Pavilions to collect signatures asking California senators to speak up against the violation of human rights in Saudi Arabia and to support a bill to put sanctions against that country.” Not only is Sahar’s life changed, but also her way of thinking is transformed in the American society. She begins to search for women who suffer in other parts of the world including women in Latin America. She establishes a Women and Children’s Center which cares for abused women and children. She believes that she may not be able to save the world or have the power to change her country but she could at least reach out to the community around her.

The Orientalist notion that women are usually the creatures of a male-power fantasy is challenged by the American girl, Dawn. She is a product of the American values, who, despite the inevitability of her destruction, manages to leave behind a striking picture of the American superiority over the Arab Muslim. The forces she faces in the Arab society are both her husband and the whole judicial system. When she eventually finds out that “it was nearly impossible for a wife to get a divorce from a husband, but incredibly easy for a husband to divorce a wife, all he had to say was “I divorce you” three times”, Dawn does not submit to these forces. She rather has to endure gender discrimination too: “Dawn tried divorcing Youssef but she wasn’t allowed to go in front of a judge. She needed a mahram[male guardian] to speak for her
but she had no one. Even if she had a male guardian, the court would never allow a woman to divorce her husband. The police just sent her home and told her to work it out with her husband.” At the end Dawn is victorious. She stabs her husband fifteen times while he is sleeping. She gets killed by the same knife she uses to kill her husband. Dawn is dead but her soul is not. The soul is alive to enlighten and guide the oppressed Arab woman for freedom as her letter to Sahar indicates:

You are the voice in my head. You are the sister I never had. You are my best friend, my family and the only person I have in this dark, lonely world… I want you to live for both of us and be free. Do all the things I took for granted. Run on the beach, go out in the street without a mahram, vote, drive, work and have sex with a man who respects and cares about you… Don’t be scared. I may be dead, but my spirit lives on and will protect you. Take my strength and use it to escape.

The theme of Arab women’s sexuality is integrated with the theme of Oriental submissiveness. The episode when Sahar is making love with her American boyfriend is related to gender submissiveness within Middle Eastern society. This episode indicates two things: first is the sexual submission of Arab Muslims before a Westerner: “Jason picked her up and carried her to the bedroom… His mouth caressed her breasts and shifted toward her navel and then to between her thighs but when he heard the sound of pleasure in her voice he lost control and pushed her legs open with his as he entered her in one sharp move.” Secondly, it suggests the ease with which Arabs fall before the Western righteous force. After her sexual intercourse with the American boy, Sahar asserts: “I have violated everything I have always been taught, and yet I feel no remorse. I’m glad that it was you who made love to me instead of a husband I could never love. I wouldn’t trade this night for anything.” These two indications reinforce the idea that there is an essential connection between Arabness and submissiveness to the American force.
Sahar feels violation of women’s rights in Islamic society of Saudi reflects the backwardness of her society. In America, she “felt ashamed that her country, which was supposed to be a model for Islamic states, was the biggest human rights violator in the world. If they couldn’t get it right, how could their followers?” 99 The message is that if there is any divine spirit, it is manifest in the women’s ambition to embrace the American values. Sahar is preoccupied with American conceptions of individual autonomy and freedom of choice: “That’s why she loved the U.S. she may have been more conservative than others but she had choices. The choice to drive even if she couldn’t afford to have a car, the choice to dress sexy, even if she preferred to dress modestly, the choice to vote even when she didn’t have time to make it to polls.”100

When the Orient is first Orientalized at the end of the nineteenth century, a vast and complex discourse on Islam and Muslim women developed simultaneously. In those colonial discourses, imperial culture is always introduced as a hospitable one for the Arab oppressed woman. Lazreg introduces the best example of the French freedom offered to Algerian women and how the French try to Westernize those women who lived under the oppressive rule of Islam and Arab culture. Lazreg describes a skit written by a French lady at an awards ceremony in a Muslim Girls’ school in Algeria held on October 24, 1851 that is attended by French colonial Officials:

Oh! Protective France: Oh! Hospitable France!

Noble land, where I felt free
Under Christian skies to pray to our God:
We believe that God
Loves a prayer said by a good child.
Oh! But we will strive to do good
So that He will fulfill your wishes…
God bless you for the happiness you bring us!
And you, adoptive mother, who taught us
That we have a share of this world,  
We will cherish you forever! 101

The struggle for freedom is the principal focus in post 9/11 American discourse on Muslim women. This discourse presents the Muslim woman to the reader as a slave in Arab Muslim society while in America she has complete freedom. In America, the Arab Muslim woman is not subordinate to the authority of her male guardian or any other man. When Sahar receives “Welcome to America”, she could not believe her eyes and ears: “Does that mean…does that mean…” she burst into tears. It had taken her tremendous effort to hold back her fear: “Am I free to go?” 102 America becomes a land of her freedom, hope and a space for raising families.

It is commonplace to point to Arab woman’s dress as the quintessential sign of Islamic oppression of woman in the post 9/11 American texts. This dress code is perceived as a means of controlling woman’s sexuality. This becomes a general view where both literary writers and politicians engage in wide and anxious discussion regarding this issue. For instance, the then First Lady Laura Bush in a radio address on November 17, 2001 states: “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.” 103 These words have an insightful resonance for a reader who has knowledge of colonial discourse that uses women’s right to justify imperial domination as Gayatri Spivak puts it, “white men are saving brown women from brown men.” 104 The real mystery why coverage of Islamic dress becomes so dominant is answered by the Australian Brownyn Bishop: “It has become the icon, the symbol of the clash of cultures, and it runs much deeper than a piece of cloth.” 105 This anxiety spreads to Europe especially France, the oldest liberal country in the world, where Muslims constitute more than six million of the total population.

In America, the Puritans of the 19th century thought the Muslim woman needed a relief from overindulgence in sex. Interestingly, today’s liberation of Arab women is perceived from an opposite direction. Today, the Americans believe that Arab women
need a liberation that will enhance her sexual freedom. Thus, empowerment of Muslim women in American literature asserts liberation of woman from Islamic dress as a first step. This significant contradiction is seen in the post 9/11 novel. In *The Dawn*, Arab Muslim code of dress is the most convincing sign of oppression against Arab woman and therefore, Arab woman is encouraged to get rid of this tradition: “She thought it was unjust that she wasn’t allowed to breathe the same fresh air that men did, that she was forced to look at the beautiful blue sky through the blackness of her veil, and that while men fornicated before marriage.”

The Muslim woman’s dress signifies that Islamic law suppresses woman’s sexuality. This dress, in Islamic point view, provides the Muslim woman the resistance against the possibility of her vulnerability to the Western culture. Sahar compares her society with the Western one: “When you travel through Europe or America, they have so much freedom that no one cares if you walk out in your underwear. People just go on about living their lives.” Accordingly Islamic law is incompatible with modernity because in Western society women are being granted certain freedoms that are not given by Islamic law: “Many Saudis and fundamentalists found the Western culture a threat to their Islamic values. This intensive fear applied not only to Saudi Arabia but also to all countries that governed according to the laws of Sharia. The more the Western countries meddled in their affairs, the more religious and conservative they become.” Ideology has much to do in this issue. Arab Muslims hold the opposite view. They regard the Western dress as showy and perceive these women as prostitutes.

Binarism between East and West including contrasting descriptions as human/subhuman, advanced/backward, secular/fanatic implies that East remains East as inferior and West remains West as superior. This stereotype approaches the subhuman; she is a woman who can work in very limited fields but not in the vicinity of man: “Some have jobs in women’s banks and women’s shopping malls, but this is all new.” This kind of discrimination does exist in Islamic society but, according to Islamic
sources, is related to traditions rather than Islamic teachings. Therefore, it would be misleading to assume that this discrimination is exclusive to Muslim Arab society because Muslim societies are diverse in their class base and levels of education and employment, both for men and women, because traditional and cultural values do play a role in this issue. Discrimination against women is largely observed inside the United States too: “In the United States, occupational sex segregation is related to the fact that women hold, on average, jobs with less desirable characteristics than men’s occupations.”

Further, this tradition does not have basis in Islam because Prophet Muhammad didn’t object to women working rather he married, Khadija, the woman he was working for.

The evil of Islamic law serves as the climax of the post 9/11 novel when it allows men to kill women in the name of honor. In The Dawn, the judicial laws extracted from Islam permit killing of women who violate the family honor. Sahar is followed by her husband to America not just because she escaped to America, but because she spoiled his name: “His goal was to kill Sahar one day and save his honor.” Husam is not violating the law here because what he is doing is a work granted by Sharia: “Why should he kill her when the Saudi courts would gladly do it for him? All he had to do was to surrender her to Riyadh police and explain how she had violated their marriage contract. The courts would then throw her in prison, torture her…and then give her the death sentence.” This motif activates a whole new scene which includes, for the first time, the aggressive nature of Islamic law, Sharia, in issue related to women and thus becomes the most powerful evil force in the novel, more powerful even than the conservative tribal tradition of the Arabs.

It is easy here to see the role of the CIA at Los Angeles airport in saving Sahar from honour killing when she becomes in the grip of her husband and his personal pilot. The CIA agent warns them: “I’m asking you nicely to disappear and am warning you for the last time: If as much as a hair is missing on that girl’s head, I will personally destroy
yours lives. For your own interest I suggest that you move on and forget about her.”

Her captivity at the airport becomes the springboard for transformation. With a cool deliberation, she preserves the life and status she wants for herself: “My duty to be a good wife was burdened on my forehead from the day my mother gave birth to me. But you see, my fate is no different than the fate of many girls who are often as young as 11 years old.”

Sahar manages to defeat men who mistreat her and create from Islam a misogynistic religion that establishes honor killing as a symptom of masculinity.

In addition to being an unjust system, Islamic law is marked by contradictions. In Islamic laws of Saudi Arabia, a woman who marries a non-Muslim is “condemned to death by her family and the courts even if she lived outside the country.” On the other hand, men who marry foreign women “were permitted to marry non-Muslims.”

In Dawn’s case, the murder is justified by the claim of restoring her husband’s name while in reality her murder is revenge because: “[w]hen a male relative kills a woman in order to resort family honor, it is tolerated.”

Though, her brother-in-law is avenging his brother whom she has killed: “he claimed that Dawn has been cheating on her husband and that he had gone home to confront her and she killed him to hide the truth.” The only possible conclusion here is that killing for restoring honour is more tolerated by Sharia laws than any other form of killing.

Arab woman as an object of male’s desire recurs over and again in post 9/11 American fiction. In Ferraris’ Finding Nouf, modern Arab men resemble their Prophet who perceives woman as an object to satisfy man’s desire. Muhammad’s attitude towards women is summarized in the following words: “The best of women, the Prophet said, is the one who is pleasing to look at, who carries out your instructions when you ask her.” Therefore, suffering of modern Muslim woman is part of a tradition that Muhammad started centuries ago. Based on A’isha’s suffering, Ferraris builds her story of Nouf’s loveless marriage that results in her death largely because “she was nervous about her wedding…She didn’t know Qazi [her groom] that well.” Ferraris is an
American writer who has lived in Saudi Arabia and was married to a Bedouin. She conveys both male and female perspectives in a country where religious police crackdown on mixed company.

*Finding Nouf* (2009) is a novel written by Zoe Ferraris. It won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize winner when it was published. Set in contemporary Saudi Arabia, the novel tells the life of women who are separated from men in most situations and explores the tension between men and women in this Islamic country. Many issues related to women are highlighted in the novel such as segregation, wearing burqa that covers their eyes and many other customs that prevent women from interaction with men. One of the primary themes in *Finding Nouf* is the suffering of women in one of the most rigidly gender-segregated and gender-biased countries of the world. On numerous occasions, the novel mentions that women are not allowed to have jobs in places where they may interact with men.

*Finding Nouf* is about the disappearance of a sixteen year-old girl, Nouf ash-Shrawi, the daughter of a wealthy and influential family. Nouf disappears just three days before her wedding. The main characters are Nayir al-Sharqi, a devout Muslim who plays the role of a desert guide and Katya, a girl who works in a coroner's office. Nayir has a difficult time even looking at a woman’s uncovered face and feels his soul may be in jeopardy as he talks to women, especially Katya. The novel begins with Nayir in the desert searching for Nouf, who is rumored to have run away. Nouf was by all accounts surrounded by comforts and led a happy life. Her sudden disappearance leads to much speculation.

Nouf is found dead in the desert after ten days of search. The novel ends with a discussion between Nayir, Katya and the ophthalmologist that Nouf is a victim of honour killing and is not drowned because there are defensive wounds on her wrists. Together they learn that Nouf had meetings with someone in an abandoned zoo and was planning to escape from the confines of Saudi society to New York City. This discussion
reveals that Nouf is killed because she is not happy getting married to Mr. Qazi. The three people are also puzzled by the way Nouf is buried with her belly facing Mecca because only pregnant women are buried that way and Nouf was not even married.

Arab Muslim woman is described in terms of commodities that are at the core of rivalry between Islamic states and America at this period. This commodification is entirely a function of gender differentiation that assumes the equality between Muslim and Western women. In Finding Nouf, Nouf plans to run away to America because America offers her what is stolen in Arab society. Nayir feels dazzled by her determination and sacrifice for freedom: “The fact that she wanted to run away to America set her in a category beyond what he had previously believed…Nouf in his mind was starkly deceptive, plotting a scheme to satisfy her desires and rebuke her family. She was not fearful; she was ambitious.”

What is notable in these novels is that A’isha, Sahar and Nouf are very similar to each other. All of them are persecuted and fight for freedom against the patriarchy of Islamic society that uses the female body for its own pleasure.

Nouf represents rebellion against Islamic tradition in the modern time. Katya, who investigates the death of Nouf, comes to the conclusion that “Nouf would have been upset…the way that family raises their children bothers me…Nouf may have been a victim of her upbringing.”

Though Nouf knows that committing suicide is a sin in Islam, some sources reveal that she kills herself in order to escape honour killing that may result from her refusal of arranged marriage. In her Journal, she writes: “In the name of Allah, all-merciful, all-knowing, I almost killed myself today, but I was too frightened to do it…Allah, please forgive me.”

Despite her confession of committing suicide, the investigators, Nayir and Katya reach to the conclusion that Nouf has not committed suicide rather she is killed for restoring the honour of her family.

Nayir and Katya’s conclusion is based on three observations. First is that during the search for Nouf’s body, the family was not eager to find out the reasons behind her
death. Nayir is directed by the examining doctor: “You’re here to pick up the body,” she said, “so pick up the body and forget about the rest. The case is closed—they’ve decided it was an accidental death.”124 Second is that Nouf was pregnant and buried in the way pregnant women are buried: “Nouf’s back was turned to Mecca. Not her feet, but her back…The image disturbed him. If what he suspected was true, why hadn’t Miss Hijazi told him? A family buries a woman with her back to Mecca only when she carries a baby in her belly, a baby whose face, in death, must be turned in the direction of the Holy Mosque.”125 Therefore, “the family would have to be behind it. They were the only people powerful enough.”126 Third is that Nayir and Katya observe many bruises that look like she has been attacked: “When she turned her attention to a series of bruises on Nouf’s wrists and hands, Nayir allows himself to watch. She stabbed one of the lesions. “Looks like sand,” she said. “There’s something beneath her fingernails too. These look like defensive wounds.””127

Honour killing is a universal phenomenon that is reported in countries such as Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Brazil, Ecuador, Morocco, India, Israel, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, the Balkans, Sweden, Holland, Germany, Italy, Yemen and many more countries. The belief that a male has the prerogative to murder his female relative can be traced back to certain codes of cultures rather than religions. As far as Islam is concerned here, the Quran states: “O you believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness…live with them on a footing of kindness and equity.”128 Thus, the practice of honor killings has a cultural root more than a religious one. It is undeniable that the root of honor killings in Arabia is centuries old and dates back to the Pre-Islamic era in Arabia. Before Islam, men were encouraged to bury their infant daughters alive to avoid the possibility of dishonoring their families in future. With the coming of Islam, Islamic law brought an end to the brutality of this cultural action.
In *The Jewel*, Jones has a contrasting view from that of *The Dawn* and *Finding Nouf*. In *The Jewel*, Prophet Muhammad called for an end to honor killing in the seventh century. Jones refers to this act as one of the cultural practices in Arabia and had ended with the coming of Islam. When A’isha was born, she would have been one the female infants who were buried alive before Islam. But she was lucky enough to be born with the emergence of Prophet Muhammad who saved her from Arab tradition. A’isha narrates: “I’d known Muhammad all my life. He’d held me in his arms just moments after I was born...He’d saved my life, my parents told me, by convincing my father to break the Meccan law. Too few boys were being born that year, so the Qurayshi leaders had decided that all the new born girls should be buried alive.”

Patriarchal discourse in post 9/11 America always contrasts a “good” woman who is a paragon of the female autonomy with a “bad” woman who epitomizes what is considered unfeminine. If American culture begins its encounter with Islam by representing the Muslim woman primarily as a “bad” woman, this “badness” is fading in post 9/11 discourse. Muslim woman becomes more appreciative of her role in changing the patriarchal forces. The increasing American dominant perception of the Islamic society as impotent, unproductive, ineffectual, is reflected in the general feminization of the Islamic Orient in cultural discourse, so that the Muslim woman, the most feminine part of that effeminate world, becomes its exemplary manifestation.

The ideal woman is not the one who accepts the oppressive treatment of Islamic culture, but the one who rebels. Nouf, before death, decides to accept marriage to Qazi and go with him to New York where she would escape from him in a hotel because in Arab society “women were not allowed to leave the country without an exit visa signed by their husbands or fathers.” Once in America, Nouf will embrace the “White Value” by escaping with her American friend, Eric Scarsberry: “She wanted to go to America...She gave him a million riyals. He was going to set her up in New York with...
an apartment…She wanted to leave…On her honeymoon. She was going to New York with Qazi…She was going to leave him in the hotel and meet Eric somewhere.”

No effort is done by the Arab male to uplift the suffering of woman. While the American boy, Eric, is a saviour of Arab woman from the cruel culture of Islamic society. Eric tells the investigators: “I was helping her. She had no one-I was her only link to freedom.” However, to Arabs, Eric represents an evil intruder: “Eric was in some ways the evil American, the greedy man who comes to Saudi and does anything for money, wreaking havoc with society-in this case, with innocent virgins.” The superiority of the American values becomes more definite over the Arabic ones at least in women’s freedom. This superiority, Ferraris notes, fascinates Nouf to escape her family and live in the American society. Her driver, Muhammad, narrates:

She wanted to live in America…She saw this program on television one day, about a woman who studied wild dogs in Africa. She wanted to be just like that woman, even though the woman lived with these dogs-dogs! She was dirty…I think that impressed Nouf more than anything else, that this woman could live like a dog and be so happy. More than Nouf, at least.

The imbalance between the Muslim Arab East and the Christian American West remains obviously a function of changing cultural and historical patterns that Said calls in *Orientalism* the difference between the familiar/strange, superior/inferior. He notes that the presence of this imbalance in the American Orientalist discourse has engendered failure to make accurate predictions. Said traces this attitude through a study by the Middle East Studies Association on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1967 conducted by Morris Berger, an American sociologist. The study comes to the conclusion that the modern Arab states are not areas of great cultural achievement and that the area has no potential to become a political power center.
There is a common ground between the veil as a segregating tool and eroticism that the former prevents the latter as a religious act. *Finding Nouf* has two environments segregated by sex in which even looks are strictly prohibited and considered “as dangerous as staring at the sun.”\(^{136}\) Nayir represents the male segment of the society who never saw a woman in his life: “Everything he knew about women had been gleaned from rumor, the Quran, and an assortment of bootleg television videos... Although his friends laughed, it was sadly true, and Nayir was left with the depressing sense that the world of women was one that he would never be allowed to enter.”\(^{137}\) In the course of investigating the death of Nouf, Nayir is disturbed by existence of women who are not wholly covered: “There were too many ankles showing for his discomfort.”\(^{138}\) His inability to reach to a conclusion regarding the mysterious death of Nouf is largely because he fears Allah’s punishment for speaking and interacting with women: “He tried not to imagine her face or her body, but the more he thought about her, the more vivid she became. In his mind she was walking through the desert, leaning into the wind, back cloak whipping against her sunburned ankles. *Allah forgive me for imagining her ankles*, he thought.”\(^{139}\) Nayir is a typical Arab conservative Muslim who does not accept even looking at a woman’s face.

Ferraris’ creation of a free female character from Katya plays an important role in establishing a good understanding between men and women in Arab society. Nayir, who works with Katya, has been a radical Muslim who never gazes at Katya’s face in the beginning: “Because her face was exposed, he averted his gaze, blushing as he did so. Uncertain where to rest his eyes...she’d noticed Nayir’s discomfort and was disappointed by it.”\(^{140}\) The first thing comes to Nayir’s mind regarding Katya’s freedom is that her parents must be a Westernized couple: “He could imagine her father wearing a business suit, speaking perfect English; her mother was perhaps one of those women who wrote letters to the king and the ministers complaining about the laws against women.”\(^{141}\) This female free association with male can alter radical thoughts of
conservative men in Arab Muslim society. The result of this interaction between male and female can overcome radical beliefs and shape male personality too as Katya recognizes it in Nayir character:

...she marveled at how her opinion of him had undergone a shift. Instead of an imposing, overly righteous ayatollah, he now seemed like one of those men who, aware of their own physical power, develop a kind of masculine grace...He wasn’t overbearing; he was kind, thoughtful, smart, and reliable. And now he is the only person she trusted with information about Nouf’s case.”

Inferiority calls into question of the basic rights of the Muslim woman as compared to their Western counterparts. Most of Muslim Arab women The Dawn and Finding Nouf are educated women who are prevented from entering the work field. A common tendency in representing educated women in the two novels is their reliance on educated unemployed Muslim women. This creates an impression that veiled Muslim woman is a well educated woman with career aspirations but hindered by male patriarchy: “Women didn’t have birth certificates until recently. They were included on their father’s birth certificate, which made them the property of a man...And what’s most unfair is that a 12-year-old brother of a 30-year-old single woman, for example, is allowed to make decisions for her and can forbid her to leave the house.”

Katya Hijazi, who has received a PhD in molecular biology, is not allowed to apply for a job that suits her area of study because “[t]here were few jobs for women, especially educated women. Women were allowed to work only in places where they wouldn’t interact with men...the country’s scientific jobs were filled by men first.”

This paradigm set up a special role for women in Orientalist discourse that “women are usually the creatures of a male-power fantasy.” Ferraris makes no effort to distinguish between Arab women who work and others who do not. The more conducive way of representation, which introduces the reader to women from all walks
of life; this would include the educated, uneducated, employed, unemployed, rich, the poor, the courageous, the submissive, the stay-at-home mom and so on, is not relevant in Ferraris’ tradition of approaching Muslim woman. Similarly, this will include many examples of Muslim women who wear Islamic dress codes by choice and those who are forced to wear them.

Most of the women who live with Katya are fully controlled females who advise her: “You’d better start having children before you get too old. You may be too old already! What is a job compared to the value of children?” In such society women do not even argue to get their rights: “When she [Katya] told her father about the job, he jerked upright and narrowed his eyes. “Come on, we’re not that poor,” he said. It had stung her so deeply that she’d wanted to cry. Letting a woman work was a desperate thing to do. They had sunk in the world. Her face must have showed her disappointment, because Abu backpedaled.” Accordingly, Katya gives up her ambitions and starts giving tuitions for girls, who are treated the same way by their male guardians: “All of her students were from the school for girls just down the street. They came in pairs with their escorts- usually brothers or cousins- who waited while Katya helped the girls with their homework…She’d hear their escorts tease them: “Why are you studying chemistry? Can you use it for cooking?”

Violation of women’s rights is attributed to Islamist thought, the most conservative school of Islamic thought. In Islamist belief, woman’s duty is to remain at home; she is not allowed to practice activities that may involve interaction with men such as driving which is “a lot dangerous than stealing. It’s illegal, too.” This school is represented by Shaikhs like Al Obeikan who issues the most controversial fatwa in which he advises women to breastfeed their foreign drivers so that they form a familial relationship with their drivers and get mixed with them: “Women could give their milk to men to establish a degree of maternal relations.” Sumner and Philip note that religion cannot be taken in isolation while dealing with Arab woman because the
conservative tribal nature of Arab culture and the male interpretation of the sacred text have a major role. They refer to women’s rights in Christianity: “If the church fathers were prejudiced against women, and we know it, then we should be careful not to absorb their bias” because “Traditional Christian thinking is not the same thing as biblical thinking about women.” Therefore, Ferraris’ Orientalist view on Islam is an ethnocentric one because veiling has roots in Judeo-Christian tradition before Islam. In the Old Testament, for instance, one reads: “When Re-bek’ah raised her eyes, she caught sight of Isaac and she swung herself down from off the camel. Then she said to the servant “Who is that walking in the field to meet us?” and the servant said “It is my master.” And she proceeded to take a head cloth and to cover herself.

Post 9/11 American fiction on Muslim women is a part of the whole modern American Orientalist academia, a part whose basic tenet is that Islam is innately and immutably oppressive to women. Islamic marriage, the veil and gender segregation epitomize Islamic oppression of woman and these customs are the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies. Further, judging Arab woman in the light of her beliefs to find out how civilized she is a common trend in the post 9/11 novel. Accordingly, If a Muslim woman holds certain beliefs that are uncommon in Western culture, she is described as backward, no matter how highly assertive, educated or independent she is. In other words, women are not judged on how they fit within their culture as much as they would fit in a Western culture.

Post 9/11 American narratives, especially the polemical ones, in their diffuse and polymorphous disseminations are part of the American illiteracy about Islam among both public and writers and based on traditional Orientalist discourse. In a questionnaire conducted by CAIR in 2005, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, finds that only two percent of Americans say that they are “very knowledgeable” about Islam, thirty-nine percent felt “somewhat knowledgeable” while nearly sixty percent said they are
“not knowledgeable” about the faith. Hence, 9/11 narrative on Muslim woman is a reproduction of the old Orientalist texts.

Jones does not seem to own a personal outlook of Muslim woman, but tries to establish it as coming from the traditions of the Afghani society whose religion is based on fanatic and radical clergymen. Therefore, it may be assumed that Jones has heavily relied on a number of contemporary sources that are inaccurate, unauthentic and shallow as Jones herself states in the *Afterward* of her novel that her knowledge of Islam is new and the majority of her sources on Islam and Muslim women are books written on women living under Taliban: “[w]hen the U.S. sent troops into Afghanistan, I began hearing news about the reversals for women there under the Taliban, how girls were no longer allowed to go to school and women were required to wear *burqas*…I was disturbed by these reports and…I knew very little about Middle Eastern culture or Islam at the time.”

A striking feature exists in all post 9/11 American texts pertaining to Muslim woman is Prophet Muhammad’s sexual treatment of woman. Arab Muslim women depicted in these texts have often been represented as either exotic and mysterious or as oppressed and backward persons who have been suffering the male dominance since the coming of the Prophet of Islam. This is the most obvious binary that emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century and continues to emerge in the post 9/11 American discourse devoted to Arab women. Flaubert, for instance, comments “the Oriental woman is no more than a machine” referring to her sexuality. This conception of Arab women in relation to Prophet Muhammad in contemporary American writings remains practically unchanged from Flaubert’s conception of the nineteenth century. Muhammad is still anti-woman, a false Prophet and the author of a religion based on subjugation of women. Further, the provided religious elements suggest that Muslim woman in post 9/11 texts is represented not only as a function of American supremacy over all others, but also as a
function of Christian resentment of Islamic power over woman; she is differentiated as the powerless female factor of an intimidating and powerful male world.

In *Orientalism*, Said draws a distinction between “unconscious positivity” which he calls “latent Orientalism,” and “the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology,” which he calls “manifest Orientalism.” He explains: “Whatever change occurs in knowledge of the Orient is found almost exclusively in manifest Orientalism; the unanimity, stability, and durability of latent Orientalism are more or less constant.”

Said further notes that it does not matter how Orientalists differ in their treatment of the Orient because such differences are only the “manifest” face of Orientalism while the only thing that unifies their effort is the “latent” side which is the deeper level of Orientalism that introduces the Orient as inferior. Ferraris’ and Pourasgari’s treatments of Muslim woman are kind of truths on the manifest level of Orientalism because what they are doing confirm earlier prejudices because of the fact that “Oriental material could not really be violated by anyone’s discoveries.”

A well-noted tendency, which has a good presence in these novels, is the overgeneralization of certain cultural practices and mixing them with religious ones; in some cases this leads to distortion and in others leaves one confused about cultural and religious practices that seem inferior, peculiar and alien. Generally, post 9/11 novelists take a single practice; sometimes this practice is very extreme such as honor killing or other kinds of abuse, and introduce it to the audience as an Islamic norm regardless of the different cultural and traditional groupings of the Islamic world. Another feature identified in the post 9/11 representation of Muslim woman is the American standard against which Muslim Arab woman is judged as civilized or traditional. This standard is based on how Western a Muslim woman looks, what clothes she wears and how Western her ideas are, which is not very realistic since many liberal Muslims still hold conservative religious opinions that fit their culture and lifestyle. Thus, American
discourse about the world of Islam in the post 9/11 period, strictly speaking, is an imperialist project. If not imperialist energies, what, then, are the energies that go into the production of a discourse about Islam and specifically the Muslim woman beginning with the wives of Prophet Muhammad?
Notes


3 Spivak 287.


5 Jones 1.


7 Jones VII.

8 Jones 20.

9 Jones 20.

10 Jones 21.

11 Jones 29.


13 Jones 157.

14 Jones 18.

15 Jones 18.

16 Jones 68.

17 Jones 163.


21 Jones 290.

22 Jones 36-37.


26 Jones, The Jewel of Medina 35.

27 Jones 39.

28 Jones 59-60.


30 Jones, The Jewel of Medina 37.

31 Jones 36.

32 Jones 74.

33 Jones 290.

34 Jones 179-180.

35 Jones 170.

36 Jones 170.

37 Jones 166.

38 Jones 175.

39 Jones 170.


44 Jones 37.

45 Jones 143.

46 Jones 169.

47 Jones 169.


49 Jones 225.

50 Jones 153.

51 Jones 143-44.


53 Jones, *The Jewel of Medina* 152.

54 Jones 144.

55 Jones 152.

56 Jones 153.


59 Pourasgari 8.

60 Pourasgari 18.

61 Pourasgari 30.
62 Pourasgari 41.
63 Pourasgari 5.
64 Pourasgari 206.
65 Pourasgari 5.
66 Pourasgari 3.
67 Pourasgari 210.
68 Pourasgari 21.
70 Pourasgari 14.
71 Pourasgari 212.
72 Pourasgari 19.
73 Pourasgari 19.
74 Pourasgari 20.
75 Pourasgari 6.
76 Pourasgari 9.
77 Pourasgari 30.
78 Pourasgari 13.
79 Pourasgari 13.
80 Pourasgari 165.
81 Pourasgari 188.
82 Pourasgari 20.
83 Pourasgari 67.
84 Pourasgari 133.
85 Pourasgari 238.
86 Pourasgari 238.
87 Pourasgari 207.


Pourasgari 314.

Pourasgari 279.

Pourasgari 313.

Pourasgari 317.

Pourasgari 26.

Pourasgari 43.

Pourasgari 213.

Pourasgari 213.


Ferraris 182.

Ferraris 105.

Ferraris 123.

Ferraris 240.

Ferraris 19.

Ferraris 27.

Ferraris 19.

Ferraris 16.


Ferraris 101.

Ferraris 101.
132 Ferraris 158.
133 Ferraris 160.
134 Ferraris 102.
135 Said, Orientalism 288.
136 Ferraris 126.
137 Ferraris 75.
138 Ferraris 125.
139 Ferraris 2.
140 Ferraris 13.
141 Ferraris 135.
142 Ferraris 223.
143 Pourasgari 187.
144 Ferraris 118.
145 Said, Orientalism 207.
146 Ferraris 177.
147 Ferraris 119.
148 Ferraris 117-118.
149 Ferraris 101.


152 Bible (King James), “Genesis, from The holy Bible, King James version,” (University of Virginia Library: Electronic Text Center 1995) 24:64-65.


156 Said 206.

157 Said 205.