



# **Muslim women in the media after 9/11**

A content analysis of the American and British digital media between  
2001 and 2002

Aleksandra Milinković

**Lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði**

**Félagsvísindasvið**

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**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this dissertation is on news articles, which report on Muslim women after 9/11 in the American and British digital media. Thus, the basis for my dissertation is my own research on the subject, explored through gender and feminist theory, while addressing the potential consequences on social constructions through epistemology.

News media has had great power over public opinion for many decades. Today, this is even more evident with internet access and individual choice, where one can access information, freely, anywhere in the world. Thus, journalists have great power and great responsibility to spread information while applying ethical principles of integrity, credibility and civility. Journalists hold that privileged position of a mediator between the subjects of their news articles and the public. At times journalists are mediators between the public and politicians. Hence, they are often a tool in the process of justifying political decisions and gaining support for the same. I will attempt to show principal examples, analyze those examples, and approach the subject critically. I rely on academic sources from writers that apply gendered and feminist analysis on the topic of image of Muslim women in the Western media.

## **Forward**

This is a dissertation for my BA degree in Political Science with University of Iceland. This dissertation is valued 12 credits (ECTS) of 180 credits (ECTS) for the degree in political science. My thesis supervisor was Guðný Gústafsdóttir and I want to thank her for her patience, advice, and encouragement. I want to thank Mrs Elva Ellertsdóttir for taking time to find a supervisor for my BA dissertation. I want to thank my mother Vera Stojiljković for her understanding in the moments of crisis. Finally, I want to thank my friend Lilja Kristín Birgisdóttir for giving me advice and helping me deliver the dissertation to the printing office.

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## 1. Introduction

In my dissertation, I refer to ‘the West’ when I address the mainstream majority view expressed in Western media.

For Westerners, Middle East was always a mysterious place. The curiosity comes from myths Westerners nurtured over the course of two centuries. Naturally, these myths are still visible, and the writing that fosters them, is accessible to us now more than ever through digital media.

The focus of my research is on Muslim women, and the image they are assigned in the media after 9/11. The post 9/11 dialectic is important, because Muslim women came into focus more than ever. They were used as tools for justification of the US and UK policies in Middle East, especially in Afghanistan. Thus, most of the articles I have included in my research have a focus on women’s rights in Afghanistan. On the other hand, I have used articles that talk of Muslim women in other Muslim countries in order to balance the subject. Some articles address the discrimination many Muslim women have experienced since 9/11.

This dissertation includes five parts. In the first part, I will address the theoretical approach I will use. In order, to adequately approach to the delicate subject, I have decided to apply gender and feminist analysis in my theoretical part. I will show why the West sees a problem between Islamic values and gender equality in Muslim countries, and how feminists address this topic through gender theory. In the last section of the theoretical framework, I will give a short historical background of Muslims and Muslim women the US and UK.

In the second part, I will explain the methods of my analytical approach and data collection. I will also elaborate on my hypothesis in more detail. Third part of my dissertation is the most important one, where I present in detail articles I selected for the research. I have classified my data according to country of origin, type of digital news journal (conservative or liberal), journals, and the topics they cover. This way, a reader will have a better review of all the articles.

In the fourth part, I analyze social constructions while applying epistemology and ethics to my analysis. I will address the most important examples through epistemology and ethics.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss the hypothesis of my research- *how the events of 9/11 and US military actions in Afghanistan affected western mainstream media’s approach on representing Muslim women.*

## 2. Theoretical framework

I focus on gender and feminist theory of Muslim women and their position in their society, and most importantly how the West sees their position in their societies. I will also give a short historical perspective of Muslim women in the West.

### *Islam and Muslim women*

In his book, “Islam without extremes,” published in 2011, Mustafa Akyol explains how Islam doesn’t necessarily condition dictatorships in Middle Eastern countries, whose majority population is Muslim. He further elaborates that any kind of authoritarianism isn’t, necessarily, derived from the religious beliefs of the majority but it is used as cover for ‘deep-seated political cultures and social structures’. Therefore, he is lead to conclude with the question whether ‘(...) authoritarian Muslims (...) just happened to be authoritarians who are Muslims’ (Akyol 2011, 36)? His question takes our attention of Islam, as a precondition to authoritarian rule in every Muslim country. As a result, one must see Islam, for what it is *not*-an oppressive religion. This approach can be very helpful to explain the prejudice the West has towards Middle East and Islam, and the way West sees the treatment of women in these countries. I demonstrate this later through the examples I found in articles I have included in the analysis for my research. However, it is important for me to mention here, that the most common view West has of Muslim women is, as victims of their own religion. Furthermore, many authors who had addressed this problem in their articles had given a necessary solution. One of the most common subjects is policy-making for gender equality in Afghanistan.

West sees Islam as a religion of oppression against women. Consequently, Muslim women are described as ‘passive, submissive, inactive, and highly dependent on others’ (Jawad and Benn 2003, 9- 10). This description is antonymous to the description of women in the West (Jawad and Benn 2003, 9- 10). On the other hand, religion of women in the West, be it Christian or Jewish, is never taken into account, and addressed in the same way as women whose religion is Islam (Jawad and Benn 2003, 9- 10). Thus, the discrimination against Muslim women is part of not only ‘colour racism’ but of ‘cultural’ and ‘religious racism’ (Mian 1997, 1). What makes these arguments invalid is that most of the oppression against women is, rather, rooted in economic, and political reasoning, then religious (Jawad and Benn 2003, 10). Instead of focusing on religious reasons, Jawad and Benn (2003), point to the



obvious problem of patriarchy in not only Muslim societies but in Christian and Jewish. They claim that the attention isn't directed towards patriarchy in Muslim societies but towards Islam, unlike in societies where Christianity and Judaism are dominant religions (Jawad and Benn 2003, 11). However, they do not deny that many Muslim countries have a very conservative approach to defining women's rights *legally* (Jawad and Benn 2003, 11). Despite this being one of the main problems in many Muslim states, Jawad and Benn believe that this radical focus, which is holding a very conservative approach to the problem, is putting all Muslim women in the same group and victimizing them in a very exploitative way (Jawad and Benn 2003, 11). There is no clear distinction between Islam as religion and Islam as political ideology.

Esposito has addressed this issue from a different angle. He writes about confrontation between Islam and traditional values of Arabic people, and Western values (Esposito 1998, 4). These Western values were often synonymous for many Muslims with Christianity and Judaism. Hence, Muslims were often lead to believe that the traditional-Islamic values, they were taught, were backward and primitive, while those of the West, or Christian and Judean, were the values that Muslims needed to strive for (Esposito 1998, 4). Initially, the effect was to be positive, but in reality it lead to a widening of the gap between the two- *on one side*, Islam and its values coming from the East, *and on the other side*, Judeo-Christian values from the West (Esposito 1998, 4). This split contributed to the development of a more conservative Islamic view on women's rights and their role in society- '(...) modernization in the Arab world has served to sharpen the conflict between traditional expectations of women and their role and real demands of daily life of developing society' (Esposito 1998, 5- 8). Therefore, when addressing the rights of Muslim women, the important distinction, one needs to make, is between religion and politics in Muslim countries.

### ***Hijab and covering/veiling***

We often see in the media how hijab, or any form of covering, is presented as a synonym of Muslim women being forced into seclusion and isolation (Jawad and Benn 2002, 13). For that reason, Iran, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia are examples of countries that require mandatory cover for women, described as the most oppressive Islamic societies (Jawad and Benn 2002, 13). Even though, 'forced veiling' exists, however, media's attention to this specific problem presents one-dimensional focus on possible problems Muslim women

have. Yet, today most women who decide to cover do it because they choose to and not because they are forced (Jawad and Benn 2002, 13). Katherine Bullock (2001) did a research on a 'recovering movement.' Bullock focused her research on the reasons behind 'recovering movement,' and why so many Muslim women decided to veil even though no one ever had pressured them to do so. She cites four main reasons behind this decision: 'political protest, religious, continued access to public sphere, and statement of personal identity' (Bullock 2001, 24). Leila Ahmed (2011) gives an example on the same subject, from El Guindi's observation of re-veiling movement in Egypt that started in the late 1970s. El Guindi discovered the re-veiling movement was part of 'an emergent movement of Islamic religiosity that was at that point essentially confined to student and university life' and, as a result, women who decided to be part of the movement were putting an emphasis on the process of 'internal transformation' (Ahmed 2011, 79). On the other hand, Nadia Hijab (1998) describes the covering movement as versatile paradox and claims that 'some people support it for reasons of cultural authenticity, others for reasons of piety, and still others because it enables them to study and work outside the home without fear or harassment'. At the same time, Ahmed gives another research as an example, which represents the positive outcome of covering movement in Egypt. Alden Williams in his research on the re-veiling movement in Egypt asserted that women chose to wear head-cover, because then they weren't 'harassed' and the choice gave them a sense of 'personal peace' (Ahmed 2011, 87-88). El Guindi and Williams, as Ahmed, based on what Muslim women told them, had concluded that the cause had 'favored and advanced women's interests' (Ahmed 2011, 87). El Guindi claims this, because vast majority of women participants, in his study, were women pursuing higher education in natural sciences (Ahmed 2011, 87). Thus, El Guindi's and William's research disproves the claim, by many, that women who cover are mostly limited to house work and come from Islamic conservative backgrounds. This type of prejudice exists in the West as much as it does in the Middle East. Jawad points out, that in Britain this kind of discrimination is very common against Muslim women who pursue higher education, and end up taking company jobs in higher job positions, but at the same time want to wear a head-cover (Jawad and Benn 2002, 4).

'Myths work by naturalizing culturally contingent codes into unchangeable commonsense' (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 5). Myth of oppressed Muslim women, because they wear a veil, has become an image of common sense. Strong *cultural contingent codes*, as defined by Barker and Galasinski, are naturalized in the West, and have contributed to building of this image of common sense. Western media uses the veil in their method of

denotation in order to create mythical connotations about all Muslim women. Media had created an image of brutal treatment of women by the Taliban. With that being said US military presence in Afghanistan is justified as necessary, since they are bringing Western values with them. Part of those values is the utmost respect for Muslim women and their freedom to choose how to dress. Laura Bush and Cherie Blair in their speech from 2001, describe Muslim women, in Afghanistan, as victims, and American and British soldiers as their saviors. Connotations can lead to development of multiple meanings (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 6). Social, gender and cultural background have effect on public's reception of media's messages. Therefore, different target audience can derive different meaning. For example, presentation of Muslim women as victims to the public in the West does not advance their position and solve problems they face in their countries.

Another very important digression is, that messages we find in written media have a different effect if used on TV or radio. Thus, the language used in written or broadcast media would not necessarily bring forth the same effect (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 8). Written media is solely reliant on the words journalists use to send the message, while on TV, the combination of images and words is used to send, potentially, more powerful and more effective message, and on the radio, a tone of a voice is used to put more emphasis on segments new speaker deems important. Different editing techniques news media uses, the message can be more, or less powerful, and have a very different effect on targeted audience.

### ***Colonialism, Western feminism and the image of Muslim women***

The effect of colonialism has had on the way the West sees Muslim women is still visible (Jawad and Benn 2003, 11). This is ascertainable in adjectives journalists use when describing the untamed and uneducated East. The cultural image of superiority of West over East is the main guide for the degradation of Muslim women and their religious beliefs (Jawad and Benn 2003, 12). We hear a condescending tone in news articles when describing the 'horrid' life in Afghanistan during the Taliban. This tone is present in the speech Laura Bush and Cherie Blair gave, showing their support for US and UK's military action in Afghanistan. Jawad points out, by quoting al-Hibri that this superiority complex is as propagated by some 'Western feminists' as much as by the media (Jawad and Benn 2003, 13). For Hijab (1998), Islamic framework has had a very important effect on identity shaping for many Muslim countries after the colonial years. Further, Hijab (1998) points out the

importance Islam has in identity identification, in Muslim countries with colonial history. ‘Cultural colonialism,’ ‘political colonialism’ and in postcolonial years ‘economic colonialism’ have affected Muslim search for cultural identity (Hijab 1998, 48). This identity crisis in Muslim countries has been due to the choice between two extremes- Western model of democracy, which includes secularization, and legislative development with Islamic values, as a main guidance (Hijab 1998, 48). Secular feminism, not knowing how to distinguish ‘between lived Islam, the intellectual legacy of the Muslims, and Islam as a reflection of the primary sources’ has turned it’s advocacy for equal gender rights into a campaign against tradition (Wadud 2000, 8). A very common approach in their analysis of Muslim women’s rights in Islam is a process of applying ‘standards of measurement that are alien both to the Islamic cultural ethos as well as its primary sources’ (Jawad and Benn 2003, 13). That is why Muslim women are seen as a property, which is constantly changing hands, first from their fathers then to their husbands. Through this process of passive and silent attribution Muslim women are victimize. Consequently, those who believe that they know best are trying to make the decisions for them. Muslim women’s voice is taken away from them- first, by the patriarchal society they live in, then, by those who believe that all Muslim women live in equally oppressive societies under extremely abusive conditions. Sonbol gives a very precise description of how the West sees Muslim women:

*‘They see the lives of Muslim women as dictated by medieval laws that have no place in a dynamic modern world that they identify with the West, where women have gained significant economic and political rights. They compare favorable life of women in the West to the “servitude” of women in Third World countries in general, and Islamic countries in particular’ (Sonbol 2001, 109).*

### ***Muslim women’s rights in Muslim countries***

Nadia Haggag Youssef (1978) talks about difference between ‘rights and respect’ Muslim women have/get in their society. For Youssef, there is an ‘inverse correlation’ between rights and respect Muslim women get in their societies. However, rights and respect are most of the time given a synonymous meaning. She further explains her argument- ‘(...) women receive great respect in certain societies that give them few rights; they receive equality of rights in societies in which they compete with men but have relatively low respect’ (Youssef 1978, 76). Nadia Hijab (1998) explains this phenomenon as a conflict of interest

between women and men for the institutional protection of their rights. The lack of equality between the rights of women and the rights of men is rooted in the foundation of debate itself, which has been set into the 'Islamic framework'.

It is important to know that in the Arab countries there are 'equal political rights' that apply to all women (Hijab 1998, 46). However, as Nadia Hijab (1998) points out this equality is not present in all legal aspects of the everyday life. Legality between men and women is not equal in the matters of 'marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance' as part of 'family laws'. There is a significant variation between Muslim countries when equalizing rights of women with the rights of men. This variation is present due to different application of 'Islamic framework' in the legislature. For example, in Tunisia they have '(...) almost achieved equality between men and women within the Islamic framework', while in Egypt '(...) law provides for 'equivalence' rather than equality', and in Bahrain '(...) the disposition of legal opinion has been delegated to the judges to interpret the sharia directly as they see fit' (Hijab 1998, 46). At the same time, the difference exists between countries on a higher scale. This difference is focused on the application of ratified United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Countries that have ratified CEDAW are Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. The difference is again very visible in the case of Egypt and Tunisia. The application of the ratified UN convention is questionable in the case of Egypt (Hijab 1998, 46-47). However, in Tunisia "(...) it has evolved its family law within an Islamic framework, but has interpreted sharia law in such a way that it provides for equality between men and women" (Hijab 1998, 47). This choice between either/or has created a dialogue of compromise for those who argue in favor for women's rights, and placed women's role in the state as part of conformity to Islam and Islamic values (Hijab 1998, 48).

With Egypt and Tunisia as opposite examples, one is able to see that despite holding many things in common, above all their state religion, these countries have a very different social and legal approach to equalizing women's rights with those of men. In order to make women's rights equal, there must be political and legal will to do so.

## ***Muslim women in the UK and US***

My focus here is on the main historical reasons behind the migration of Muslims into the UK and the USA. Political and economic conditions in the second half of the twentieth century drastically defined migration policies of host countries towards potential immigrants from Muslim countries. Understanding the background leads us to understanding of struggles they faced in their new country of residence. Unlike Great Britain, the USA, historically, has been a country of immigrants. However, this has not affected the settling of Muslim immigrants any easier. In fact, the challenges Muslims immigrants faced in both countries from the early years of immigration were very much similar in their nature (Yazbeck et al. 2006, 5).

Mass migration from British Commonwealth countries has marked the second half the twentieth century. The reasons for migration were mostly political and economic. The change of political climate in the countries of origin has been the cause of the heavy influx of immigrants in Britain. In order to accommodate economic migrants and their families Britain had passed a law on family reunion in 1962. This law had made it possible for Muslim women to accompany their husbands to Britain. Muslims who were part of the economic immigration in 1950s and 1960s were mostly coming from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, and later on, migrants who are ethnically Arabic, Turkish and Somali (Jawad and Benn 2003, xxi- xxiii).

In USA, on the other hand, migration had started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Just like in Britain, these first Muslim migrants were part of the economic migration (Yazbeck et al 2006, 5). Unlike in the UK, where immigrants were coming from Asia, in USA migrants were coming from different Arab countries set in, what we call today, the Near East- ‘Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, then part of the Ottoman Empire’ (Yazbeck et al 2006, 5).

In 1921 and 1924, the US passed immigration laws that instituted quotas for migrants coming from Muslim countries (Yazbeck et al 2006, 5).

Immigration of Muslims during the second half of the twentieth century was marked by, mainly, political and educational reasons. After the Second World War, the immigrants who were coming to the US were mostly coming for educational purposes from Iran, India, and Pakistan (Yazbeck et al 2006, 5). Those who could afford to seek education in America were largely part of middle and upper class in their country of origin (Yazbeck et al 2006, 6). In 1960s and 1970s most of Muslim immigrants to the US and the UK were ‘highly educated

professionals' because of the change in political climate in their home countries like Iran, Afghanistan, and Lebanon (Yazbeck et al 2006, 13).

Today, in America those who identify as Muslims come from different geographical regions, and thus, equally different cultural and social background, which makes them the most versatile group of population (Yazbeck et al 2006, 4). It is important to keep in mind even though they are categorically Muslim, they do not belong to the same Islamic sects.

Another important fact regarding Muslim immigrants is that the first Muslim migrants were men, who were followed, later, by their wives and their families (Jawad and Benn 2002, xxiii). This specific pattern is visible in both host countries. Muslim women were not independent migrants, but rather part of the family unification program that government of each host country has passed as a legal right for them and their family members (Jawad and Benn 2002, xxiii).

There are significant similarities in the history of migration and migration policies in the USA and the UK. We see that the first Muslim immigrants were mostly men and women almost never migrated on their own, the first immigrants were part of the work migration and they were all coming from very specific countries. Immigration law and its implementation was changed, in order to limit the number of immigrants from Muslim countries. At the same time a new law for family unification was passed (Yazbeck et al 2006, 5-7). Thus, the conditions of immigration had changed the societal groups that were migrating in different decades of the twentieth century.

### 3. Research methodology

When defining methodology, the first step is to devise a research question- *hypothesis*, decide which method to use- *qualitative* or *quantitative*, choose sampling methods- more concretely, *methods for sampling*, consider the general implication for the purpose and the effect my research could have.

Here, I will present my research methods and theoretical approach I used to analyze the text of articles I had carefully selected.

#### *Hypothesis and selection of articles*

The focus of my research is how 9/11 has affected image construction of Muslim women in the media. My hypothesis is- *the events of 9/11 and US military actions in Afghanistan affected western mainstream media's approach on representing Muslim women*. Based on my hypothesis my research questions are: what is the effect media representation of Muslim women has on the population of USA and UK; what are the images the readers receive, and how these images construct their social reality? These questions are causally interlinked. Despite the large number of audience, digital news can reach outside the borders of the country of its origin. However, my focus will not be as wide. Thus, the questions I will try to answer will focus strictly on the population of readers in USA and UK.

I have selected to frame the research in the period of one year after 9/11, specifically from October 1, 2001 to October 1, 2002. In the early stages of my research, I have had many difficulties, thus, I had to alter the course of research few times. The specific problems arose while searching for the research material due to poor abilities of some online search engines and mandatory subscription in order to be able to access more than ten articles. Taking into account these unpredicted circumstances I had to expand the number of news portals, especially in the case of liberal news in UK. The total number of articles is forty. I have divided the number of articles between the news in approximate equal measure. The conservative news portals from US include the New York Post and Pittsburgh Review, and from UK the Telegraph. News portals of a more liberal character include The Guardian and BBC from UK and from US the New York Times. My reference to the left/right category of the news is appropriate to the political definition of the left/right division. Norberto Bobbio defines 'left' and 'right' in politics as 'the contrast between the ideologies and movements



which divide the world of political thought and action' (Bobbio 1997, 23). In the case of media, we can see this ideological division clearly in the way they approach the same topics when reporting. However, the line is frequently blurred between political definition of the 'left' and the 'right', despite the sense of clarity we all believe it has, when referring to this distinction.

Today, we can find more similarities than difference in the way most newspapers report on important political issues. The differences are often present not in the news themselves, but the way the news articles are constructed- *language they use and deliberate selection of more or less extreme terms to describe particular groups or individuals*. The focus of this particularity is on groups' or individual's ethnicity, religion, or gender, but it can include all three at the same time. Therefore, in my own classification of the online news sources, I will give an extensive analysis of the language and what approach they have used in reporting.

### ***Analytical methods***

My intention is to present a detailed analysis of media messages that are not visible to a common eye. These images are carefully constructed and molded through the process of "othering" of the subjects presented in the news articles. These constructions affect our perceptions of the topics we read, especially in the case where we are not able to experience them personally. Thus, the media has been able to provide us with global news coverage while at the same time we are able to distance ourselves enough from those events in order to function in our daily routines.

Stuart Hall has identified 'encoding/decoding' construct in media, which refers to encoded text message by the journalist, which a reader can decode, and get a completely different meaning from the one intended (Gauntlett 2008, 30). The difference between the intended and received meaning of the text is conditioned by readers' 'social context' (Gauntlett 2008, 30).

Another very important aspect of my study is the *ethics* of such news reports. I am not only going to break down the ethics of the news, but the ethics of my research. Hence, I will use, as defined by Uwe Flick, 'constructivist sociology' which '(...) seeks to establish how social historical, local pragmatic and other factors influence scientific discovery in such a way that scientific facts may be regarded as social constructs' (Flick 2007, 12). I map out my

research perspective on historical perspective of Muslim women in United Kingdom and United States of America, historical presence of these two countries in the Middle East, gender analysis of Muslim women and the role they were given during the war in Afghanistan. This way, I will be able to link *content analysis* to epistemological clarification of the social constructivism- ‘(...) examine the relationship to reality by dealing with constructive processes in approaching it’ (Flick 2007, 12).

My aim is to deconstruct the primary message media is sending a reader in order to get to the second- hidden message and a true meaning of the carefully selected words (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 10). These words form linguistic phrases, which we intend to use in our daily communication, to define communities that we do not identify with. Thus, Derrida’s approach on analyzing word meaning is suitable. For Derrida, as explained by Barker and Galasinski, meaning that words have, is never strictly locked, and bounded, to a singular meaning, but that their meaning is changing depending on the time, space and context (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 10). Consequently, same words can have different meaning depending on the time and context they were used in, and what kind of meaning was appropriated to them. Baker and Galasinski explain that Derrida’s intended meaning is consecutively ‘differed and supplemented’ (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 10). In those cases ‘supplementation’ is synonymous with ‘substitution’- ‘the meaning of signifiers can never be identical with a fixed entity to which a word refers because a supplement adds and substitutes meaning’ (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 10). For that reason, I will add Derrida’s ‘textual deconstruction’ to the social constructivism with the epistemological focus (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 10).

The application of epistemology, social constructivism, and textual deconstruction in the case of representation of Muslim women in the media, post 9/11, will include deconstruction of identity concepts. These identity concepts are gender, race, and religion, historical and political discourses. Most importantly, it is necessary to keep in mind that these identity attributes have changed through history. Media’s deconstruction of Muslim women and their identities is rooted in historical context. Pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods carry symbolism that is not inherently different. Today, many of the identity attribute symbols, that used to be discarded in shame, are embraced with pride- *veil*.

In my historical analysis of social constructions, I will use Foucault’s approach. Barker and Galisinski define Foucault’s approach as ‘regulated by power which governs not only what can be said under determined social and cultural conditions but who can speak, when and where’ (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 12). When applying this approach to the

subject of my thesis, I will be giving the historical account of fixed terms that have been socially acceptable for defining Muslim women in the media. The process of ‘normalization’ is essential to development of every discourse in construction of every social reality (Barker and Galasinski 2001, 12).

In the next section I will provide qualitative content analysis of the articles applying the theory and methods of analysis already mentioned.

## **4. Article analysis**

### **US online journals**

There are two categories for every group of articles- conservative and liberal. For category of liberal journals, I have selected New York Time and for category of conservative journals I've selected New York Post and The Pittsburgh Review.

### **Liberal**

New York Times satisfied all the requirements for my research, thus, it was sufficient to include it as the only online journals from USA as part of the liberal category.

### **The New York Times**

The selection of articles in New York Times covers various topics on Muslim women their social and political position in the Middle East and the West. Main topics include history, education, and the politics of gender.

In this part, I will give a short summary of each article and analyze their content, as well as, give a short comparison of their subjects.

### ***History***

Barabara Crossete's article 'The World: Afghanistan's Women; Hope for the Future, Blunted by a Hard Past', published in New York Times, December 2, 2001, the reader is introduced to short history of political regimes that have changed in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her aim is to show us how different political regimes in Afghanistan have affected the quality and liberty of life for many Afghan women.

Her choice of words in describing the celebration of Afghanistan's independence is, specifically focused on the appearance women had in 1959- their faces were uncovered. This sends a message that veiling is inherently negative as perceived by the West. The passive

image that Afghan women are, assigned resonates the image of patriarchal society, in which religious leaders dictate political decisions. She talks of inner political struggles and ‘constitutional reform’ for political and public rights of women, by King Amanullah, which had cost him, his throne. King Amanullah stood for women’s rights in ‘public and private sphere’ and gave women their right to vote (Crossette 2001). Under the mujahedin and later Taliban women in Afghanistan were socially marginalized and were unable to participate in politics (Crossette 2001).

Crossette reports that Afghan women beyond borders are advocating for Afghan women in Afghanistan. The optimism for constitutional change is high, however the change is slow, and it might take years before it has any effect. The problem for Afghan women’s political activism is not only present in overwhelming historical evidence of continuous political struggle for their rights but it is evidently present in ‘rural-urban divide’ (Crossette 2001). In 1964 there were four women elected for the lower house of parliament, Wolesi Jigra (Crossette 2001). In 1977, there was a brief presence of women in Loya Jigra, the highest decision-making body (Crossette 2001).

Crossette concludes by giving a voice to Ms Rina Amiri who is advocating for gender equality in Afghanistan:

*‘There is a recognition now that Afghans have to develop a common identity, and that the gender issue does have to be factored into that equation’ (Crossette 2001).*

Aleya El Bindari Hammad is the author of the article ‘Muslim Women are the First Victims of Islamic Extremists,’ published December 15, 2001. As a Muslim, she believes that it is her responsibility to give voice to Muslim women and explain how extremism has affected their lives and the image people have of Islam and Muslim women in Islamic countries. Hammad’s topic is, perhaps, the most unorthodox of all subjects covered in articles of my research. She represents Islam and women’s rights in countries, where Islam is the state religion, as liberal religion through which women have been able to exercise their will in a way that is very familiar to everyone who has lived in free, liberal, and democratic society.

Further, she explains how extreme interpretations of Qur’an have defined women and their role in society in a negative way and how women were obliged to follow certain rules while men were not. Women were limited to Qur’an-ic education and their movement was limited to the inner family circle where men held the right to make decisions for them. The indoctrination of women had a purpose to be taken as a norm and passed on to their children. This way unacceptable oppression became a norm. Hammad does not only define but

questions the extremist right to claim and justify with Qur'an something that was never written in the Holy book. She supports her argument by giving an example from Qur'an-education and the right every individual holds to it. In the end, she calls on Muslim women to 'read and write the Koran for themselves' (Hammad 2001).

### ***Education***

Carlotta Gall in article "Threats and Responses: Education; Long in Dark, Afghan Women Say to Read is Finally to See," published on September 22, 2002, gives a voice to Afghan women. She quotes Mariya:

*'The women most often complain of not being able to decipher street signs, even for the bathroom, and not being able to understand medical prescriptions' (Gall 2002).*

However, some women saw the opportunity to learn to read and write as a possible solution for finding a better job and thus gaining some independence. She gives us an image of family unity for these women and their insistence and encouragement to dedicate their time to education in order to help other family members (Gall 2002).

### ***Politics of gender***

In Rina Amiri's article 'Muslim Women as Symbols- and Pawns,' published November 27, 2001 and in Maureen Dowd's article 'Cleopatra and Osama,' published November 18, 2001 one reads about the problem of gender politics in Afghanistan encouraged by the Bush administration.

Dowd's critical focus is on Laura Bush's campaign 'liberation of Afghan women' and she sees it as a pure US stage- act. Her criticism clearly reveals selective campaigning of US politics for women's rights in countries where it suits their foreign policies best:

*'Bush senior went to war to liberate Kuwait, yet America has not made a fuss over the fact that Kuwaiti women still can't vote or initiate divorce proceedings. We also turn a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's treating women like chattel.*

*(...) Besides having to put up with polygamy, Saudi women cannot marry outside Islam, while men can. Or divorce without cause, as men can. Women also have to use*

*separate banks and schools and obtain written permission from a male relative before traveling alone or going to a hospital. They must sit in the back seats of the cars they are not allowed to drive' (Amiri 2001).*

The focus of Amiri's criticism is on the synonym given to gender equality and West-meaning, if you are pro gender equality you are pro West. This way struggle for equal rights of women in East, and West, has become the most famous allegory of *us vs. them*. This allegory takes away the legitimacy of the struggle for gender equality for all women. Amiri does not only criticize this problem but she gives a potential solution:

*'To help Afghan and Muslim women create new spaces in which to negotiate their positions, we must move beyond the premise that Islam is anti-woman. Distinctions should be made between countries that pursue a more moderate form of Islam, allowing for women's civic and professional participation, as in present-day Iran, and those like Afghanistan under the Taliban that practice a distorted and politicized Islam' (Amiri 2001).*

Susan Sachs explores the problem of the generalization of all Muslim women in her article 'Where Muslim Traditions Meet Modernity,' published December 17, 2001. She addressed the problem of cultural and legal nature in Muslim countries. Her example of Morocco confirms Amiri's point- 'those Muslim women who advocate for gender equality in their home countries are seen as Western pawns' (Sachs 2001, 1).

Sachs presents a short history of Islam's influence on legal systems of Islamic states. She explains that many countries apply tribal customs, which they justify as Islamic. Moroccan sociologist, Fatema Mernissi, claims that access to internet and education has helped many Moroccan women with their independence on the interpretations of the Qur'an (Sachs 2001, 2).

Sachs concludes by giving a voice to religious women through Suaad Salih's words that women's testimony in court is valuable when woman is the only witness to the crime of adultery or murder. However, despite Salih's optimism it is very important to keep in mind that court cases where women's testimony is considered of value are rare if almost non-existent (Sachs 2001, 2).

Neil MacFarquhar's article 'In Bahrain, Women Run, Women Vote, Women Lose,' published May 22, 2002 describes the first Bahrain municipal election where women could vote but as well participate as candidates.

In the second paragraph, he sets the tone to the whole article by quoting a woman who believes that ‘men use their brains better’ while describing her appearance as ‘draped from head to toe in black so that only her eyes showed behind gold-rimmed glasses’ (MacFarquhar 2002). MacFarquhar identifies oppression of Muslim women because they are covered.

Despite the positive constitutional change, which has allowed women to vote and participate as candidates, MacFarquhar explains that the social part of the process shows that Bahrain is not ready for such change. According to MacFarquhar, men in Bahrain judge women equally, with head-cover or without it.

Neil MacFarquhar shows women in Bahrain as oppressed, and even though they are given certain legal rights, they in fact have no rights, whatsoever. I will turn here to an argument made by May Seikaly who did her research on political activism of Bahraini women. Seikaly (1998) explains that women in Bahrain, both Sunni and Shiis, who are politically active as part of the Islamic movement consider veiling important as a representation of Islamic values. Seikaly stresses the importance of belonging to Sunni or Shiis- although both sides push ‘for the education of women as a means for mobility and economic independence, they differed on the final result’ (Seikaly 1998, 183). Therefore, the sectarian difference is very important and even emancipated women, who put emphasis on social and political issues in their society, choose to veil.

Joel Greenberg describes a personal journey of a Palestinian woman, a suicide bomber, Darin Abu Eisheh in his article ‘Portrait of an Angry Young Arab Woman,’ published March 1, 2002. He describes Ms Abu Eisheh as ‘radicalized by the 17 month conflict with Israel’ (Greenberg 2002). He continues on explaining all the reasons behind Ms Abu Eisheh’s decision as part of her paranoia and fear and feeling of responsibility to do something against Israel’s occupation. Darin Abu Eisheh thought that woman’s military activism is equally important to man’s (Greenberg 2002). He presents the recollection of her political activism and thoughts through the words of the people who were closest to her. This makes us question his intent and validation of the story. This is evident in her father and brother’s statements, who disagree with her politically (Greenberg 2002). His article reinforces the stereotype of an ‘angry Arab woman’ who is nothing but a fanatic, as he has presented it in the title of the article.



## ***Conclusion***

Crossette and Hammad give us a short historical introduction of Afghanistan with the focus on women and their social and political position. The historical evolution of women's rights they describe is very important, however, their focus on history excludes important social relations and behaviors in Afghan society. They are defining the Taliban period as oppressive while the pre-Taliban period very liberal. Misguidance on very general information is very often present in articles such as these two. Their failure is to recognize that the situation in Afghanistan was very different depending whether women lived in rural or urban areas next to the importance of the historical period.

Authors of articles, with subject politics of gender, have approached the theme differently. Some articles (see Amiri, Sach, and Dowd) have addressed the problem of politicized gender and use of liberal/democratic ideology to 'free' Muslim women of their oppressive societies and religion. While, other articles (MacFarquhar and Greenberg) represent an image of Muslim women as oppressed or as angry women who resort to suicide bombing.

## **Conservative**

For conservative journals from US, I had problems finding enough articles. This is the main reason why I had to include two online journals- The New York Post and The Pittsburgh Review.

## **The New York Post**

Article for New York Post cover stories from Laura Bush's activism for Afghan women, Afghan women used as messengers between different terrorist cells and as part of the sex traffic chains, and Palestinian woman- suicide bomber. Main topics include politics of gender, and Muslim women- weapon of war.

As in the previous analysis, I will give a short summary of each article and analyze their content, as well as, give a short comparison of their subjects.

## ***Politics of gender***

In Deborah Orin's article 'First Lady: It's a War for Women's Rights,' published November 18, 2001 we read Laura Bush's quotes that describe former president Bush's anti-terrorist policy:

*'Only the terrorists and Taliban forbid education to women. Only the terrorists and the Taliban threaten the pull out women's fingernails for wearing nailpolish.*

*The terrorists who helped rule [Afghanistan] now plot and plan in many countries. And they must be stopped. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women' (Orin 2001).*

Orin tries to prove her point with statistical facts, which clearly describe the life that women in Afghanistan have lead before Taliban came to power- 'women represented 70 percent of teachers, 40 percent of doctors and 70 percent of government workers in Kabul.'

She concludes:

*'But now, it says 16 out of 100 Afghan women die in childbirth; a woman can be shot for the "crime" of taking a child to a doctor; and 50,000 widows barred from working must beg, "or worse"- meaning prostitution' (Orin 2001).*

Marilyn Rauber's article 'Laura's Going on the Air for a Little Tali-Bashing,' published November 17, 2001 has the same Laura Bush's speech as a subject. However, the title has a satirical twist, thus those who are reading it might not take it as serious. The author has a mocking tone calling Laura Bush "first feminist", taking a critical stand on her effort as being false, which is used as a form of justification for the military action in Afghanistan. Rauber confirms that 'British First Lady Chaire Blair' will be making same efforts as Laura Bush.

She further points out that this kind of political engagement from a First Lady has not existed before thus Laura Bush's efforts are even more important.

## ***Muslim women- weapon of war***

Neils Lathem's article 'Desperate Al Qaeda Seeking Women,' published September 1, 2002, talks of Afghan women being included in drafted as 'to help with al Qaeda logistics'. It

is assumed that their main role is being ‘couriers’ and ‘pass messages and carry money from al Qaeda leaders to various terror cells around the rest of the world’ (Lethem 2002). Lethem explains that al Qaeda and the Taliban have treated women in the same repressive ways. Proof was found in ‘al Qaeda training manuals’ in Afghanistan (Lethem 2002). However, the role women are playing is bigger than the ‘intelligence sources’ had predicted at first. Lethem concludes that two women have been arrested in Britain as part of al Qaeda operation for ‘manufacturing passports and forged documents for traveling terrorists’ (Lethem 2002).

Megan Turner has written three articles that explore the alleged sex-slave trade by the Taliban. Two articles ‘Sex-Slave Fear for Women’ and ‘Sex-Slave Fear for Prisoners’ were published on November 19, 2001, while a third article ‘Taliban Sexually Enslaved Women,’ was published February 11, 2002. The first two articles cover the same story- about Afghan women from a prison Pol-i-Charki, abducted by the Taliban. Both articles use the same introductory text. However, the second article includes statements from provisional governor Mohammed Ibrahim Sekander, and by a member of foreign affairs committee of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), Sahar Saba (Turner 2001).

This possibility of using women as sex-slaves Turner links to their infamous treatment of women and detention for ‘fornication, adultery, begging, or marrying without the consent of their family’ (Turner 2001). She points to Saba’s theory that this act was meant to represent the strength of the Taliban.

She explains that RAWA is a feminist organization that has faced many difficulties during the Taliban years but these difficulties won’t be going away with the presence of Northern Alliance.

In her third article she emphasizes that the Taliban practice of trading women as sex-slaves has been present for years during their rule in Afghanistan. However, the women they were abducting were from ethnic minorities of Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara as stated by the government officials for an article published in Time magazine (Turner 2001). Rape has been made legal, and many of these women were forced into marriages to Taliban soldiers. She reports that ‘more than 600 women vanished during a 1999 Taliban offensive on the Shomali Plain, north of Kabul’ (Turner 2001).

Uri Dan wrote a short article about one Palestinian women’s path to martyrdom called ‘The Angel Paramedic Who Turned Herself into a Suicide Bomber,’ published January 31, 2002 in New York Post. He has described what seems to have been a very simple, day-to-day

life Wafa Idris has had before she decided to become a suicide bomber. He compares the reactions between Israeli officials and leaders of different Arab countries, among them Iraq's former president Saddam Hussein. The accent of his story is put on the short family history and her brother's involvement with Fatah's Tanzim parliament, who at the same time is on 'Israel's most-wanted terrorist' list (Dan 2002). However, as Dan points out, because Wafa was not particularly religious her discontent grew from her daily job of having to take care of wounded Palestinians when standing up to Israeli soldiers. He delivers the story with the quotes from her family members and the most significant part of the article is the concluding quote by her mother:

- *'She is a hero,' her mother said. 'My daughter is a martyr.'*

- *'I wish other women will follow her path, with God's help.'*

Haddad points out that this kind of representation of Palestinian women is very common in the Western media- angry Arab women who fall victim to the terrorist acts against civilians or mothers and sisters who support their fallen children as martyrs. In media Palestinian suicide-bombers who are women are given a role of an angry Arab, as Joel Greenberg as expressed in his article as well. Unfortunately, this image 'fosters and strengthens stereotypes of Muslim women as fanatics and willing participants in violent struggle' (Haddad et al. 2006, 31). This way all Muslim women are indirectly asked 'to explain and somehow take responsibility for the actions of their sisters overseas, while the press continues to fail to fully represent the political and emotional reasons why a few women believe such violence is their last desperate resort' (Haddad et al. 2006, 31).

## **The Pittsburgh Review**

Pittsburgh review has covered women's rights in Saudi Arabia and struggle for political participation of Afghan women.

I give a short summary of each article and analyze their content, as well as, give a short comparison of their subjects. Subjects are women's rights in Saudi Arabia and politics of gender.

## ***Women's rights in Saudi Arabia***

New ID card issued for women in Saudi Arabia is the subject of Betsy Hiel's article 'First Assault in the Long Battle,' published December 16, 2001 in Pittsburgh Review. Heil points out the restricted lives women lead in Saudi Arabia- 'unable to drive cars, to travel, to obtain higher education or take jobs without the approval of male family member or guardian'- but they have 'control of their money,' '(...) inherit property, and keep their own money separate from their husbands' (Heil 2001). These individual ID cards just for women are very important because their previous ID-es were issued '(...) on family ID cards as dependent of their father or husbands' (Heil 2001). Heil additionally explain how women in are used for political battles between opponents of certain political decisions in Saudi Arabia. I need to discuss further legal rights of women from Haddad's book.

John Whitehead in his article 'Saudi Arabia: Where women suffer,' published April 16, 2002 reports about an incident where '14 school girls died after the mutaween- the Saudi religious police- herded them back into a burning building because they were not wearing Islamic headscarves and black robes and their male relatives were not present to retrieve them' (Whitehead 2002).

John Whitehead continues to explain the brutality of the religious police in Saudi Arabia where the primary targets for their brutality are women- '(...) riding in a taxi with a man who is not their relative, appearing with their heads uncovered in shopping malls, and eating in restaurants with males who are not their relatives' (Whitehead 2002). However, as Whitehead reports, the discrimination does not stop there but it has legislative backing- '(...) daughters receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers'; '(...) in court, the testimony of one man equals that of two women'; furthermore, women need a male relative to speak for them in court if their testimony is to be valid, 'women must demonstrate legally specified grounds for divorce', and etc. (Whitehead 2002). Additionally, in all public places there is complete gender segregation. Whitehead further points out that international community has not been very critical of Saudi Arabia's violation of human rights, because of oil. He calls for social action of American peoples to US government and Congress to show their support for human rights and criticism of US behavior for 'turning a blind eye' on these violations (Whitehead 2002).

## *Politics of gender*

Keith B. Richburg in article 'Afghan Women Want say in Country's Future,' published November 25, 2001, tells a story of Afghan radio broadcaster Jamila Mujahed. Mujahed has been reporting about the turbulent Afghan history since 1992. She was going to participate in the UN conference, in Germany, where the topic was Afghanistan's political future.

Richburg believes that the conference is going to be 'a first step toward ending decades of Afghan's warring faction from truly representative and broad-based government' (Richburg 2001). However, Said Amin Mujahed, who believes that those who are attending the conference are not presenting Afghanistan's diverse educated community, expressed critical opinion. UN representative Eric Falt emphasized that participation of Afghan women is essential for the first official meeting.

Richburg further explains how women in Afghanistan have never enjoyed that many rights but while they did have some before Taliban came to power; they lost even the essential rights they had with the Taliban in power.

Other problem, women in Afghanistan face, is explicit division between women who stayed in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule and those who left.

## *Conclusion*

The New York Post has a different approach to reporting on Muslim women when compared to articles of The New York Times. It's topic focus is on the Muslim women's rights in Afghanistan through the lens of First Lady Laura Bush, although, the first two articles have a very different approach to the same topic. The second category of New York Post articles presents Afghan women as victims of sex trade and last article is a story of a Palestinian suicide bomber. These articles present stereotypical image of Muslim women- either as a victim of Islamic extremists, who need to be liberated, by the white men and educated by a white woman, or terrorists who have become martyrs themselves.

Articles in Pittsburgh Review do not have a very conservative stand on the presentation of Muslim women, even though it is classified as conservative. Its focus is on women's rights in Saudi Arabia and the importance of women political participation in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Heil talks of the progress Saudi Arabia has made in women's rights with

the new, independent ID for women. Despite her praise for new ID system, she takes her time to give us an account of wider social and legal problem for women in Saudi Arabia. John Whitehead analyzes the state of human rights violations in Saudi Arabia from a liberal perspective. On the other hand, Richburg addressed the problem Afghan society has and how important women political participation is for the country's new political period.

## **UK online journals**

I have used the same principle to categorize online journals from the UK. Two categories are included- liberal- The Guardian and BBC, and conservative- The Telegraph.

### **Liberal**

In this category I have included two news portals, that of the Guardian and the BBC. The challenge I had due to bad search engines with liberal news websites, I had to include BBC instead of more article from The Guardian or some other daily news, even though the BBC does not fall under the category of a daily journal.

### **The Guardian**

News, from The Guardian, has a different focus from the rest of the news. The subjects they covered are- Muslim women in Britain, detailed article on the subject of re-veiling movement in Egypt and one article on politics of gender where the subject is Cherie Blair's activism for Afghan women soon after the 9/11, which is parallel to activism of Laura Bush.

## ***Muslim women in Britain***

Madeleine Bunting's article 'Can Islam Liberate Women?' published in the Guardian, December 8, 2001 tells a story of six highly educated Muslim women living in London who have decided to start wearing hijab few years back. These women believe that Islam has brought them greater freedom than Western feminism ever could. Bunting continues to tell the Shagufta's story, a British born Pakistani woman who explains:

*'But I found liberation in Islam. It gave me the confidence to insist on a good education and reject the arranged marriage. Islam made sense to me, and I could understand it, as opposed to what I had grown up with. Plus, it was compatible with being British - being a British Muslim, rather than Pakistani' (Bunting 2001).*

Shagufta's best friend Soraya who comes from a slightly different background- 'French Catholic/Muslim liberal background'- tells a similar story:

*- 'The Koran says that men and women are equal in the eyes of God, and that we are like a garment for each other to protect one another' (Bunting 2001).*

However, Bunting points out, that Muslim women who decide to cover are perceived as oppressed, while many Muslim women feel that their Islamic dress and veil give them an opportunity to put an emphasis on something more than their sexuality (Bunting 2001). She points out few controversial facts from Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's life: polygamy, marriage to Aisha who was nine at the time while Muhammad was fifty. These facts pose problems for many believing women but their faith is stronger than Western rational approach to analyzing Islam. Bunting explains that her conversations with women and men have led to defining gender in stereotypes which many feminists disapprove (Bunting 2001). The center conflict between the two cultures- East and West- is on their vision of equal society. She further gives us an argument made by Dr Winter who talks of gender segregation in both cultures and how this has given positive results, especially in Iran, where they have gender quotas for university employees, but at the same time this gender segregation is not something that was envisioned early on in Islam (Bunting 2001). Women, which Bunting interviewed, disagree with the restrictions many women face in Islamic countries while they emphasize that education is woman's power in struggle against oppressive regimes (Bunting 2001).



### ***Re-veiling movement in Egypt***

In her article 'Language of the Veil,' published December 8, 2001, Ahdaf Soueif puts the veil in historical perspective from early twentieth century. Her country of focus is Egypt. However, she first speaks of the problem she encountered- how to define those women who wear any kind of head-cover? She first resorts to the ethnical, then religious definition, then national and cultural. Still, she finds these definitions very narrow, because the attire is different from country to country even from class to class, or ethnic and religious group in the same country. In the end, she opts to call these women 'urban' (Soueif 2001). She speaks of the West's negative influence politically, socially and culturally on "urban" women. Many Egyptian feminists have tried to develop their approach independent of influence from West. In 1906, Egyptian 'pioneer feminist Malak Hifni Nasif' spoke of the veil as an inquiry for 'women's place in society because the west had made it so' (Soueif 2001). Soueif further points out that Nasif advocated for 'education, health and economic independence' instead (Soueif 2001). Soueif continues with an explanation of how women from Nasif's time dressed:

*'In the Cairo of the time, women covered their hair with a tarha, a thin material in either black or white. For their faces, they had a choice of the white yashmak, which was drawn across the face under the eyes and connoted the aristocracy and their imitators; the bisha, which could be casually thrown over the whole face and was neutral in class terms; and the burqu', a rectangle of the same fabric as fishnet stockings that was hung from under the eyes with a small decorative gold or brass cylinder at its centre over the nose. This last was very much the accessory of the bint al-balad, the "native woman" of the working or lower middle class, who had no desire to imitate the yashmak or bisha-wearing ladies' (Soueif 2001).*

Sadat's policies were more pro-Western, thus became the catalyst for Egyptian women to protest against them and covering seemed the best way to do so. Soueif points out that most women, who wear hijab today in Egypt, do so, because they do not wish to be sexually objectified, by men. For Soueif, women who chose to wear niqab are mostly women of lower middle class, while those who are wealthy dress more Western. Her insinuation is clear, those who have little have no choice but to politically protest with their clothing against those who have so much. This way Sadat's article is complementary to Ahmed's and Bullock's emphasis

on the importance of re-veiling movement as not only a political revolution, but also as an ideal for acceptance of Muslim women and their decision to cover.

### ***Politics of gender***

In her article 'Cherie Blair Pleads for Afghan Women,' published November 20, 2001, Ahdaf Soueif gives a report of Cherie Blair's activism for Afghan women. Cherie Blair's previous work had a charity focus, while, this time she decided that it is important to stand by Afghan women in their struggle for education (Ward 2001). UK government decision has been to focus on encouragement of Afghan women and their rights. Thus, in this particular event Cherie Blair stood by international development secretary Clare Short and education secretary Estelle Morris (Ward 2001). Yvonne Yazbek Haddad in her book 'Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today,' criticized Cherie Blair's speech at the same event which Ward wrote about. For Haddad, Mrs Blair's speech is just an 'echo of Victorian legacy,' which leads to understanding of Afghan women's life struggles through the 'liberating project of Western ideology' (Haddad 2006, 32). She further argues that the opposition to the Taliban is more natural, due to their oppressive treatment towards women (Haddad 2006, 32). Using Haddad's analytical approach Cherie Blair's liberal activism can be a strong reinforcement of the process of 'othering' through cultural, political, and religious patronization.

### **BBC**

Subjects covered by this news are- speech given by Cherie Blair and Laura Bush, political hardship women in Afghanistan face when elected, the question of wearing a burqa in the post-Taliban Afghanistan, challenges Muslim women face in Britain after 9/11, and two articles on legal reformation for the procedure of divorce in Turkey and Jordan.

## *Politics of gender*

BBC's article 'Cherie Blair Attacks Taliban 'Cruelty,' published November 19, 2001, confirms the rhetoric used in Lucy Ward's article 'Cherie Blair Pleads for Afghan Women'. However, the article consists of three parts, first part is dedicated to Cherie Blair's activism and promotion of rights for Afghan women, and second part is addressing Laura Bush's efforts towards the same goals. In the third part, it is reported that MP Joan Ruddock has welcomed the efforts British government is making while promoting 'links between British and Afghan women' (BBC 2001).

The accent is on Barbara Bush's political influence on her husband, USA's now former President Bush. Her language in addressing this matter is similar to Cherie Blair with an emphasis put on, so-called, 'scare tactics' used by the Taliban. However, despite a very similar rhetoric in their speech there have not been any reports whether Cherie Blair and Barbara Bush had discussed their 'campaign' (BBC 2001).

In article 'Laura Bush Decries Taliban 'Brutality,' published November 17, 2001 the author had decided to quote Mrs. Bush from her speech on subject of Taliban brutality against women (BBC 2001). At the same time one reads a short paragraph describing lack of support by NGO Amnesty International, which points out that 'US-aided Northern Alliance has committed 'heinous abuses' against women' (BBC 2001).

Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (2006) sees Laura Bush's speech as a post-9/11 propaganda, which had laid down the ground for emancipation of Muslim women and their salvation from Islam. She further explains her argument:

*'It is true, of course, that the Bush administration was targeting one of the most extreme interpretations of Islam, dominant in Pakistan and Afghanistan and enforced by the Taliban. At the same time the White House was attempting to assuage criticism from Muslim allies by assuring them and the American public that "moderate" Islam is a respectable faith and that the war on terrorists is not a war against Islam' (Haddad 2006, 3).*

In article 'Afghan Woman Minister Hits Back,' published June 18, 2002, reflects on the accusations made against Dr Sima Samar, Afghanistan's Minister for Women's Affairs. The accusation made 'by the newspaper Mujahed' had Minister Samar accused of disbelief 'in Islamic Sharia law' (BBC 2002). BBC reports that this kind of accusation is intentional with a goal of decreasing her part 'in any future administration (BBC 2002). Her statement-

“new Afghanistan, where our children do not play with guns for toys and are kept away from evil and corruption’ - a week later had angered Islamist and mujahideen fighter (BBC 2002). Dr Sima Samar belongs to the ‘minority Hazara ethnic group and has been appointed to the women’s affairs minister’ and ‘(...) also appointed deputy premier’ (BBC 2002). She has been outspoken with her critical stand against burqa.

This article shows us the root of the problem in Afghan society. Women’s activism and criticism of traditional burqa isn’t welcome. Another issue at hand is that ethnical background in political culture in Afghanistan plays an important role next to the gender.

### ***The burqa question- Oppressed or not?***

In his article ‘Afghan Women Enjoy Their Freedom,’ published November 23, 2001, Marcus George describes a post-Taliban Afghanistan where women are still wearing burqas. However, they are allowed to move freely without a ‘guardian’ - male relative or a husband; they are able to seek medical attendance without mullah’s permission and male surgeons can operate without getting appropriate confirmation (George 2001).

Through a testimony of an Afghan woman, he points out, that many women do not see the burqa, as a synonym of oppression, but an Islamic tradition in their country that has been present for centuries (George 2001). The decision to stick with the attire, which has been presented, to the rest of the world, as oppressive and disrespectful to women, is due to ‘political uncertainty’ in the country (George 2001). Despite this, women are more than aware that the life circumstances during the Taliban were very difficult and there were severe restrictions on their freedoms. George had faced difficulties to find a woman to interview points out, being a male journalist. However, women are taking the public space for themselves and strong patriarchal society is becoming more tolerant towards women’s presence outside of house.

### ***Muslim women in Britain***

In his article ‘British Muslims: Pride and Fear,’ published September 10, 2002, Dominic Casciani explores the treatment, before and after 9/11, of young British, Muslim women who wear a hijab. Before 9/11 the sentiment a British-born Najmul Nisa Khan has

experienced ‘respect’, while post/9/11 this ‘respect has been replaced with fear’ (Casciani 2002). During his interview with Najmul people have been very hostile towards her. Casciani explains that Islamophobia has been on the rise in Britain since 9/11 but at the same time public has shown great interest to learn more about Islam and culture of people who practice Islam. The city of Leicester, which is the center of Casciani’s story, has had programs to break assumptions about Islam. What is even more important is the ‘inter-faith’ cooperation with the Church of England (Casciani 2002). There are Muslims who have made it their goal and life’s work to teach people about Islam, such is Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra. British Muslims are aware of the bias British media has when reporting on Islam and Muslims and that British Ministers have additionally contributed to false representation of their way of life.

The second part of the article describes in more detail discrimination of Muslims in Britain, which is not a focus of my research.

### ***Legal rights of women in Muslim countries***

In the article ‘Jordan Woman ‘Wins Right to Divorce,’ published May 13, 2002, one reads in detail about a new law in Jordan, passed in the beginning of 2002. This law has given a legal right to women to file for divorce, which only their male counterparts have had before. The woman in question had to ‘forfeit any right to financial compensation’ which included ‘her husband at the time of their marriage’ (BBC 2002). This law has been ‘based on a proposal by a royal human rights commission’ whose main commissioner is King Abdullah, ‘(...) who pledged to improve the status of Jordanian women when he came to power in 1999’ (BBC 2002). It was reported that 50 women, at the time of the issue of this article, have had filed for divorce.

In the article ‘Turkish Women get Equal rights,’ published January 1, 2002, historic ‘legally enshrined inequality between the sexes are brought to an end’ (BBC 2002). The new law passed protects woman’s rights to work and live freely without asking her husband’s permission, but most importantly any woman that is divorcing her husband is legally allowed ‘(...) to an equal share of joint assets’ (BBC 2002). Divorce lawyer Janin Arin has pointed out that legislative part allows women to receive equal amount of shared assets, especially in cases where women have spent decades married without employment (BBC 2002). However, the law does not ‘apply retrospectively’ (BBC 2002).

Turkey has remained a country of extreme social contradictions- high number of educated women are not part of the working market. At the same time, women are treated differently in rural and urban parts of the country. Thus, leaving many women to feel pessimistic about change in patriarchal traditions, entrenched in social and cultural customs.

These two articles are complementary and they both stress the importance of this type of law in Turkey and Jordan.

## ***Conclusions***

Readers of the Guardian and BBC expect of them to cover news on women's rights with diversity and depth their readers are used to. Therefore, in these news articles we hear the voice of Muslim women not only in Muslim countries but in Europe as well. Writers of these articles write without a burden of 'white supremacy' and neo-colonialism in articles published in liberal and conservative US articles. Perhaps the two articles that stand out the most are Ahdaf Soueif's 'Language of the veil,' where her analysis of the re-veiling movement in Egypt has a lot of similarities to Leila Ahmed's book 'A Quiet Revolution,' and Marcus George's article 'Afghan women enjoy their freedom,' where women in a post-Taliban Afghanistan are still wearing a burqa. He shows us that some women in Afghanistan do not see a synonymous connection between a burqa and oppression.

## **Conservative**

When searching conservative daily news from UK I did not encounter problem with the search engine or with the lowest number of articles I needed to include in my research.

## **The Telegraph**

Articles of the Telegraph proved to be the most challenging for my analysis because of the length of the articles and depth of the topics they were covering. The Telegraph proved to be less conservative than I originally expected, especially when compared to its counterparts

in USA. There are three categories- Islamophobia in Europe, politics of gender and political activism of Afghan Royal family. The second category is the most diverse.

### ***Islamophobia in Europe***

In his article 'British Media Promotes Islamophobia, says EU,' published May 24, 2002, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard explores a report by European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia. He provides us with some basic conclusions of their report which point to the alarming upraise in violence against Muslims, since 9/11, in Britain, Holland, Sweden and especially Denmark. Evans-Pritchard emphasizes the type of physical violence Muslim women who wore hijab have experienced- spitting, beating and even rape (Evans-Pritchard 2002). However, the report is also concerned with the media's approach to analyzing Islam and events of 9/11. Sunday Times, The Telegraph, even BBC have had a slip of using racial and their journalists have made generalizations of all Muslims and all Islam. Evans-Pritchard reports that 'Bob Pirkis, center's chairman,' has categorized 9/11 as "detonator" for Islamophobia that has been present for years and has not been addressed as a social problem in European countries. The events of 9/11 have been used, by the right-wing political organizations, to spread fear among European citizens. However, Islamophobia is not the only problem in Britain and surrounding countries, anti-Semitism is another problem on the rise, which has lead to burning of synagogues.

This article is very important for the subject of Islamophobia because it does not provide a personal experience of Muslims, but it presents a research and concern EU institutions have shared and thus emphasized as relevant. It is clear that Islamophobia has become a real social and political problem for many European countries in the aftermath of 9/11.

### ***Politics of gender***

In Telegraph's article 'The Veil Gives Sex Appeal New Meaning,' published December 5, 2001 we read a story of Britain's prominent feminist and ex-MP Jackie Ballard, and her decision to move to Teheran and pursue further education.

The title and the subject of the article set a superiority complex West has over East, which is further emphasized in the fourth paragraph:

*'From liberal democracy to Islamic theocracy seems an extraordinary journey for any British politician to make, but in Ballard's case it is even more so: a Left-wing, divorced single mother, she willingly submitted herself to the strict rules of dress and social deportment that are the law in Iran' (Telegraph 2001).*

Ballard's decided to move to Teheran after the elections which had led to loss of her job as an MP. The main topic of the article is Ballard's view of mandatory headscarf women have to wear in Iran. She explains the difference between chador, or 'a long shapeless coat' and that her sentiment towards the very specific dressing code has changed from negative attitude to positive. She explains that there are women that object to it but that this revolt has existed before the revolution as well- there are women who like it and do not complain and there are those who despise it. Despite the mandatory cover, women have a choice what kind of cover they want to wear. Ballard compares the Islamic dress to uniform of women 'on the Labour backbenches' (Telegraph 2001). She explains that next to the change of style she has experienced since arriving in Iran, she has experienced a change of her defining 'sex appeal'. However, the main reason behind her decision to move to Iran is, as she called it, 'the affair of the heart'.

The second part of the article is focused on her Phd subject- effect of internet- and her political views on censorship in Iran and her lack of interest in British politics since she moved out of Britain.

Barbara Amiel's article 'We Are Not Risking World War So Women Can show Their Ankles,' published December 3, 2001 addressed the contradictions Bush and Blair administrations have had in their justification of war in Afghanistan. This contradiction is especially present in the campaigns of both leaders' wives. Amiel's argument is rooted in a point she makes very clearly:

*'It seems we must fight to liberate women from the tyranny of the burqa under the fundamentalists of the Third World, but be vigilant in protecting a woman's right to wear it safely on Fifth Avenue' (Amiel 2001).*

She believes that the stand against war and terrorism at the same time is only possible as oxymoron. Her further criticism is focused on fellow journalists Moreen Dowd's and Polly



Toynbee's and their support of George Bush's military policy towards Afghanistan in the name of liberating women. She therefore focuses on cultural imperialism:

*'I don't like the single-child policy in China or female circumcision in Africa, but I don't expect Mr Bush or Tony Blair to put Western soldiers at risk to change this' (Amiel 2001).*

Amiel's criticism of liberal left is focused on their, as she refers to it, 'obsession with 'gender roles.' With this she continues to broaden the subject by giving different examples of American military intervention, which is not the focus of my research, therefore, I will not be focusing on it.

Oliver Poole's article 'Cherie Blair in Campaign to Liberate Afghan Women,' published November 17, 2001 reports on the upcoming speech of Tony Blair's wife. He points out to the statistics of the conditions under which women lived before the Taliban came to power and after the prominence to power. The authors does not hesitate to make the connection between the similarities in both British and American policy towards Afghanistan and their inclusion of both leader's wives in order to gain wider public approval.

Ahmed Rashid in article 'Women Will Have Strong Voice in Building the New Nation,' published March 25, 2002 reports on the election of members for Loya Jirga in Afghanistan. The significance of this election lays in the expectation for number of women that will be members of the new Afghan government for the oldest government body- Loya Jirga. This come back of Loya Jirga as a government institution since 1964 signifies a return of king Zahir Shah, who has been in exile since 1973. However, despite the enthusiasm there is a social stigma against women expressing their opinions and participating in political debates in many provincial parts of Afghanistan. Despite this problem, Ms Parlika, who was interviewed for the article, states her optimism on importance women will play in rebuilding Afghanistan politically and socially. However, before the elections go through the commission for Loya Jirga will publish rules for "the procedures for holding indirect elections among the tribes, clans, communities, and cities" (Rashid 2002).

Ismal Qasimyar's hope is that the legitimacy of Loya Jirga will be determined with the diversity of its members. His main goal is to include members not only of the conventional Loya Jirga, which included "tribal and clan chiefs from all ethnic groups across the country," but include "representatives from the millions of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, the vast number of exiles spread around the world, women, technocrats and businessmen from

inside and outside Afghanistan” (Rashid 2002). Finally, he points that members have to have a past clear of any war crimes (Rashid 2002).

In Ahmed Rashid’s second article ‘Afghan Women Find a Voice on Tribal Council,’ published January 8, 2002 we read of Afghan women’s courage to stand up to inequality in number representation in Loya Jirga. Women in Ghaurian confronted 800 men in a mosque who met to select their representatives. Rashid reports of Afghan women’s activism for equal rights of access to education and political participation. He further points out that the predicted 10 per cent of seats in the assembly that were reserved for women might go up. Rashid shows us a realistic image of women and their societal role and their struggle to break the overwhelming patriarchally structured society. This includes women’s active opposition to their husband’s disapproval of their active role in education and political revolution.

In the article ‘Women Named in New Afghan Government,’ published December 5, 2001 members of ‘the post-Taliban government’ which will include ‘two women as cabinet members,’ Sima Samar and Suhaila Sidiq, and chairman Hamid Karzai. For the first six months ‘30-member executive cabinet will rule Afghanistan’ where ‘three key posts were being retained by the Northern Alliance’ (Telegraph 2001). However, the main challenges for building the new government exists in the multi-ethnic population of Afghanistan that still keep very strict, patriarchal gender roles.

In David Rennie’s article ‘Women Doctors Pray for Freedom,’ published November 19, 2001 reports about challenging conditions medical staff and their patience had faced during the Taliban. The challenge during that period included treatment of female patience and few female doctors that were allowed to work had to do under strict rules. Even after the arrival of Northern Alliance troops the rule on wearing burqa, for female doctors, when accessing the male part of the hospital, has stayed. Rennie concludes with a pessimistic statement of Dr Aziza Azizi:

*‘When we have peace and security, we will be able to take off our burqas and work freely. Afghan’s women are waiting for peace’ (Rennie 2001).*

### ***Afghan Royal family’s political activism***

In Christina Lamb's article 'Return of the Royal Rebel,' published March 24, 2002, Afghan Princess Homaira Wali tells a story of coup d'état and her family's journey in exile. Homaira showed enthusiasm to return to her home country and show Afghan women that they can be free again, as they were before, when her grandfather was a king. Here The author used an opportunity to describe the terrible conditions women have been living under since the Taliban came to power. In the second paragraph he writes Princess Homaira's words:

*'Now what I want to do is show women they can do these things again. I will not wear a burqa and I plan to ride into the villages, finding out what kind of help people need and using my contacts both with the tribes and the outside world to make sure it gets to them' (Lamb 2002).*

Military attack on royal family home happened in the late hours of Princess Homaira's wedding night. She describes the fear her family had endured and their decision to kill each other as the better choice than being capture and tortured. She spoke of her struggle while living in Italy, her family cutting ties with her, taking her daughter away, because she asked for a divorce.

The author finishes the article with Princess Homaira's words:

*'I'd seen the pictures but I was still shocked by all the destruction - and angry. But the birds were singing and the smiles on people's faces made me think there is hope' (Lamb 2002).*

In his article 'Afghan king returns to the big tent,' published March 24, 2002, Ahmed Rashid writes about participation of former Afghanistan King Zahir Shah in opening of Loya Jirga and supporting Hamid Karzai as a leader. The author shows enthusiasm for the progress Afghanistan has made since the Taliban were forced out of Kabul.

The author explains the conflict between different segments of the country's leadership for- 'Mr Karzai, the warlords and the powerful group of Tajiks who control the three most powerful ministries in the present government, for failing to end their rivalries and bring stability to the country.'

## ***Conclusions***

Articles in Telegraph cover diverse topics which include problem of Islamophobia in Europe, to British MP Jackie Ballard who decides to move to Tehran, to criticism of Western

politics towards Afghanistan and inclusion of Afghan women in politics, and finally the importance Royal Afghan family plaid in encouraging the new political reforms. One reads from simple practical problems Afghanistan faces to more complex social problems. The report on Islamophobia has been presented to the readers as the problem on the rise that many European governments need to take seriously. However, the story about the British MP Jackie Ballard has a tone of stereotype Westerns often have of women in countries where there is a strict dressing code, in this case, Iran. On the other hand, Barbara Amiel's article presents a typical conservative stand on gender and human rights of women in Muslim countries and countries in the West. Her discontent with American military intervention is evident throughout the whole article.

## 5. Epistemology, ethics, and social constructions

In this chapter, I am using epistemology, ethics, and social constructivism to explain the effect news articles have on the public.

The word epistemology comes from two Greek words: ἐπιστήμη (epistimi) meaning knowledge and λόγος (logos) meaning reasoning. Thus, epistemology is a branch of philosophy that is trying to reason the knowledge of certain subject an individual believes to understand. In this manner, I have decided to use epistemology, in my research, as a tool to explain social constructions media creates for the public by choosing how to report on certain subject. The epistemological analysis includes the analysis of language used by the media when representing Muslim women. I have expected to find different use of language for different categories of articles- liberal and conservative- for both countries. Patterns appeared that were pointing to common use of terms but at the same time pointing to differences in the language most of the journalists used. Moreover, through detailed analysis I had noticed that the initial differences have become commonalities. Journalists who were covering the same subject often had the same approach in presenting it. For example, articles that covered news on Laura Bush and Cherie Blair's speech, conservative or liberal, has a critical approach to the subject. On the other hand, article published by BBC on November 19, 2001, gives basic information about the speech Cherie Blair and Laura Bush gave with emphasis on influence Mrs. Bush has on her husband, former US president George W. Bush. Therefore, next to prejudice towards Muslim women there is prejudice against Laura Bush. This leaves us with assumption that the post-colonial syndrome for liberation of Afghan women is a woman's idea. Nonetheless, many feminists from Middle East have pointed out the wrong approach liberal feminists have when addressing gender equality in Middle Eastern countries. Articles that covered stories about formation of new Loya Jirga in Afghanistan had similar approach to explaining Afghanistan's strict patriarchal society and the importance of women actively participating in Afghanistan's highest political institutions. When addressing the issues of women's strict dress code in Afghanistan, I have found that most of the articles use *pre* and *post-Taliban* timeframe, thus framing the social conditions of the country in black-and-white allegory. However, there were exceptions to this rule and one article worth mentioning is 'Afghan Women Enjoy Their Freedom.' Marcus George explains that despite a drastic change in political situation in the country, most women in provincial areas of Afghanistan still wear

a burqa and they do not see it as a form of oppression. This helps us understand better Afghan society and gender dynamics in society. His story sheds light on our social construction of all women in Afghanistan and all Muslim women in other countries who decide to veil as oppressed and that they are seeking a way to end oppression symbolized by the veil.

Articles often had titles that were not consistent with journalist's approach when reporting on subject of Muslim women. Article titled 'Portrait of an Angry Young Arab Woman' is a clear example of misrepresentation of Muslim women in the news. When reading the article one understands that extremism is inevitable for all Palestinian women.

Taking each article apart- *brick-by-brick*- sheds even more light on journalist's intentions with the message is trying to communicate with the potential audience. Hence, my intention when using epistemology was to reason Western knowledge of Muslim women. The most common message one gets from articles I included in my analysis is that Muslim women have no rights, they are all oppressed, they are all forced to cover and even when legally women's rights are ensured, those rights in practice do not exist. Consequently, both sides judge Muslim women equally. In their home countries, they are judged if they choose to be critical of their social, political, and legal position, and the liberal West that defines them as oppressed, judges them, if they choose to cover. Social, cultural, and political problems many Muslim women face in their home countries have many layers, thus, the problematic of such matter isn't one-dimensionally. Media often resorts to present the subject in such manner. The problem caused by one-dimensional approach to the subjects affects not only the image a reader will have of Muslim women but it undermines reader's capacity to understand a complex and multi-layered topic.

Another very important analytical concept I've used is Derrida's diversion of word meaning depending on the time, space and context it is sent in. Today, when we read articles that covered gender issues in Afghanistan dating back to 2001 and 2002, we are not equally perceptive to the message as we were at the time of their publishing. Our knowledge of the subject is broader that is why today we access it critically. The basis of our critical thinking is accumulated knowledge over the course of more than a decade. Derrida's diversion was successfully used in MacFaruhar's article 'In Bahrain, Women Run, Women Vote, Women Lose' where he directs our attention from the main topic- elections in Bahrain where women were allowed to vote and participate as candidates for the first time, to their dress code- covered from head to toe. When applying, Foucault's historical approach to social constructions, the image of Muslim women presented in the articles, I have analyzed, is conditioned by the weight of colonialism. This has led both sides in conflict, the US and UK

on one side, and the Taliban on the other, to use women in Afghanistan as a justification for military action.

Finally, in the results of my research I am trying to ask and answer the question of ethics. Every journalist is making many ethical decisions when writing an article on a controversial topic, where he might be creating a stereotypical identification of ethnic or racial group of people, and in this case a gendered stereotype. Every journalist has an ethical obligation to present the subject rightfully. However, the reality of the West is not the reality of people living elsewhere. This concept of believing certain ethical standards creates a field for possible ethical misguidance, which leads to creation of certain stereotypes- *my 'reality' as a white woman, will not match a 'reality' of a woman who comes from a different cultural, religious, ethnical and national background.* Social constructions become realities through our knowledge reasoning of the world. Ethics is a measure of guidance in this process. Consequently, when considering ethics in journalism there are three ethical standards that should be kept in mind: integrity, credibility and civility (Day 2005, 28-30). Voltaire said, 'With great power comes great responsibility' and journalists have great responsibility to report ethically because their stories have great power to change and affect social constructs.

## Conclusion

This dissertation consists of four main parts. However, the core of the dissertation is my content analysis of news articles published in digital mainstream media in the US and UK, in the year after 9/11. Before I started the analysis, I had to make my own hypothesis, define the time frame for the research, and decide what theoretical approach I will use in analyzing the collected material.

My hypothesis was *the events of 9/11 and US military actions in Afghanistan affected western mainstream media's approach on representing Muslim women*. Based on the collected data I asked a question- Have the events of 9/11 and US military actions in Afghanistan affected mainstream media's approach on representing Muslim women? Yes, 9/11 and US military actions have affected media's approach to representing Muslim women. Equal gender rights in Muslim countries have become a hot topic after 9/11. Content analysis shows that Muslim women were used as part of the campaign to justify US military presence in Afghanistan. Some journalists were more critical in their approach when reporting on the subject while others used their articles to send a positive message of war in Afghanistan- saving Afghan women from the Taliban cruelty. At the same time, other articles explored Europe's new problem- Islamophobia. Some articles presented Muslim women in a fair light and tried to expose hypocrisy of the West.

Language, especially adjectives, journalists use was essential for my epistemological analysis of social constructs. When analyzing articles I had pointed to the importance of message a journalist is sending. Women were often described as passive, without any education, and power to change their social and political position. When important constitutional and legislative decisions were passed, the journalist would sway the focus on the way women dress or how men feel about their political activism.

Media has had a great impact on public opinion with their approach when reporting on gender politics in Middle Eastern countries. However, their approach to the subject is conditioned by the history of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial myth of the Middle East and Muslim women. The war in Afghanistan was not only fought militarily but it was fought with information and western mainstream digital media was used as medium for publication. The battleground was slowly moved into the digital world where the power of information



holds the highest bidding. That is why digital media has been the greatest weapon West has, in the war for gender equality in Afghanistan and other Muslim countries.

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