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**Netzipi Onteta**

**AM: 798310200017**

**Supervisor: Pr. Nikolaos Xypolytas**

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**Νετζίπι, Οντέτα**

**Επιβλέπων: Νικόλαος Ξυπολυτάς**

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# Abstract

In recent decades, there has been a tendency in the Western world for the far right to instrumentalize gender issues within the framework of neo-liberal politics. These instrumentalisation phenomena, among others, have been conceptualized in the international literature as femonationalism; and are mostly linked to the European past of colonialism and the recent past of the instrumentalization of women's liberation for the legitimization of expansionist policies. This essay aims, first of all, to analyze the emergence of these phenomena in Europe and in Greece, interpreting the practices and ways in which the media participate in the framing of women who choose to wear the headscarf, promoting with their rhetoric an Islamophobic climate that not only demonizes the veiled women but also obscures feminist claims concerning the western patriarchy by presenting them as solved. Moreover, the paper tries to shed light on the ways in which the discourse and practices of the contemporary European far-right - in the case of Greece the traditional right - exploits this framing to build a new national identity based on the annihilation of the orient "Other". We suggest that in a context of a reconstruction of Europe's identity and of a reorganization of its political scene, gender discourses and far-right rhetoric tend to be strongly intertwined. The primary material for this paper was drawn from Critical discourse analysis in Greek media material, with the aim of exploring the instrumentalization of gender rhetoric by a far-right media discourse. The aim of the paper is to highlight the media's linguistic means for the grooming of women in headscarves and the implications that this rhetoric has in the public discourse and the practical political and social implications.

**Keywords:** *femonationalism, neocolonialism, Europe, framing, far-right, veiled women*

# I. INTRODUCTION

Seyla Benhabib in her book *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (2002) claims that women and their bodies are the symbolic and cultural place where human societies write their moral system. This claim makes a clear explanation on why intercultural conflicts often focus on practices with strong “moral” dimension, such as veiling, genital cutting (FGM), polygamy, and forced marriages, that involve women: their clothing, their bodies, their legal status.

Historically much attention has been given by politicians, the media, legislators and academia on the gender dimension of intercultural clashes. A multitude of laws have been enacted - particularly in recent years - in European countries concerning the cultural isolation of women who are minorities on the continent, such as that of Muslim women who choose to wear the headscarf.

In a post-9/11 climate, Islam and Muslims are under siege. Islam is understood as a violent and backward religion and culture, Muslim men are perceived as the embodiment of terrorism and extremism, and veiled Muslim women are viewed as the personification of gender oppression.

In this respect, the controversy over the various Islamic veils constitutes a disturbing exception. There certainly exists a right to wear the veil. Moreover, it is true that the countless bills, laws, and cases banning or limiting this right in various European jurisdictions allude to the veil's inherent anti-feminist nature. The veil—or particular types of it— has been judged as difficult to reconcile with gender equality, with women's equal value, with their autonomy, dignity, and freedom.

As El Guindi indicates (1999), the veil has marketable and even “sexy” qualities lacking from more culturally specific terminology. The singularity of the veil also elides a crucial distinction between coercion and freedom of choice in women's adoption of the variety of head- and/or face-coverings so defined.

“The veil” becomes an all-encompassing symbol of repression, and in its dominant association with Islam reinforces the monocular representation of that religion.

As Helen Watson had already indicated, *“the image of a veiled Muslim woman seems to be one of the most popular Western ways of representing the ‘problems of Islam’”* (1994).

The aim of the thesis is to contribute to an increased understanding on how veiled women are being constructed in the West, mainly in the media, in a way that promotes neocolonial rhetoric. It is also to gain a reater understanding of the different kinds of expressions of ‘Western values’ and ‘imperialist feminism” that veiled women are associated with in the West. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is used to answer the research questions of the study.

The theoretical framework used in the thesis consists of the framing theory, femonation-ism, neocolonialism and imperialist feminism. The result shows that ‘Western values’ and especially the idea of “gender equality” is instrumentalized to position the refugee woman as the opposite of the “Western woman”.

### ***1.1 Aim, Problem statement and Research questions***

Based on the above mentioned insights, and the fact that the instrumentalisation of the feminist discourses and issues from far-right policies over the body of Muslim women continues to grow and is gaining more and more ground in the public debate, the aim of this study is to find out how veiled women are instrumentalized in the public discourse of the media in relation to gender equality.

This is to gain a greater understanding of the different kinds of expressions of ‘European gender values’ and ‘othering’ that veiled women are associated with in articles in Greek media.

In addition to this, the thesis will contribute to already existing material on how veiled women are constructed in Greek media.

#### **Problem statement:**



- What are the prevalent discourses through which the media construct veiled women by instrumentalizing feminism discourse?

**Research questions:**

- How far-right has instrumentalized feminism in the refugee/immigration discourse?
- What forms of power relation are produced from the way the media construct the image of the veiled women?

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Framing Theory

Goffman is often attributed to the role of framing theory in various scientific disciplines (Entman, 1993). The concept of framing theory focuses on how media's constructions affect society's problems and how these issues are formulated (Entman, 1993).

The framing theory can be applied in various ways to examine the content of media and what it represents. It can be used to examine how media outlets frame reality in various ways (Entman, 1993). Selection is inevitable in order to obtain what one wants; it is often made by means of news productions, which are often characterized by their news reports (Entman, 1993).

*“To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993).*

Framing theory is the most recognized tool in research about media's effect and power (Schudson, 1989) and it usually focuses on how social issues and/or problems are formulated through the media (Entman, 1993). Specific attention should be drawn to the ways that media construct – mainly through description – various societal problems and how that very construction affects the reality of the media consumer (Entman, 1993).

The framing theory can be applied in multiple ways; as to examine the content of the media and what it represents or to reproduce different power centers and ideologies (Schudson, 1989). Media framing, according to Entman, has an effect on people's perception of the presented topic and on *people's perception of reality as well* (Entman, 1993).

The news text “contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrase(s), stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993).

## **2.2 Constructing the refugee woman**

According to Chouliaraki, there is a specific rhetoric of constructing the refugee identity detected in the media (Chou (Selzer, Constructing a geography of trauma: nation-building and the convergence of feminist and far-right anti-refugee discourses in Germany. , 2021)liaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). In broader studies of the media representation of migration it has been identified that the migrant has been an ambivalent figure (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). There is an emerging duality of the migrant figure as represented in the media; on the one hand represented as the victims of a geo-political conflict in need of protection and on the other hand as a threat to the nation-centered global order who needs to be constrained or even excluded from the hosting community (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). Both frames are characterized as problematic, since they fail to capture the “humanity” of the migrant (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017).

In the first case of the “victimhood” frame the representation is limited in two features; massification and passivization (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). Massification depicts them purely as numbers, statistical references, and mass indiscriminate unfortunates (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). While passivization depicts them as passive bodies-in need without any agency; “*humans as animals in nature without political freedom*”, as stated by Owen (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). Both features contribute to the dehumanization of migrants (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017).

The second frame used by the media to represent migrants and refugees has been, as aforementioned, that of the evil-doing person (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). In this case the migrants' agency is being framed in a malevolent way; migrants are framed as active and hopeful individuals rather than impoverished bodies, who intend to harm their hosting community (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017).

Once again media frames deprive migrants of their humanity (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). This is because they are portrayed as their lives are solely under their own control and not affected by the historical circumstances beyond their control (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). Additionally, the attribution of malevolence reduces migrants to "*faceless strangers*" who are threatening our western safety (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017). As a matter of fact, they are represented from "*speechless emissaries*" to potential terrorists (Chouliaraki, L., Georgiou, M., Zaborowski, R., & Oomen, W. A., 2017).

This muted image of the refugees is used to reinforce a sense of a universal, primordial humanity with the refugees being the "*universal victims*"; a dehistoricization generality that blurs the political and social scene so that makes difficult to see individual politics and histories behind the teeming masses of bodies (Rajaram, 2002).

The depiction of Muslim women especially include the notions of ignorance and submission and with different levels of intensity according to the historical period—sensuality; since the 19<sup>th</sup> century media representations women from other cultures have been represented as exotic and sexually active women (in postcards, labels on alcoholic beverages, etc.), in contrast to the bourgeois model of the *domestic angel* (Navarro, 2010). Later on, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century media women from other cultures were almost absent from politics and were only portrayed as mothers and nice consumable objects, a perception accentuated by nude images of women (Navarro, 2010). In the '90s women were shown as the refuge of the cultural tradition of the country through images in which they wore traditional clothing while men were adjusted to the Western model; this way progress was framed as a masculine characteristic (Navarro, 2010).

What seems rather clear is that the media uses certain ways of framing displaced people both migrants and refugees; with four main frames being dominant in the literature (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). The two negative frames identify them as possible burden or threat while the two positive depict them as victims or in a normalized way (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

However, the predominance of these frames is expected to vary depending on several factors such as the type of media that transmits the information, the demographic and the socio-political characteristics of the reporting countries and, most relevant for this work, the characteristics of the refugees (visually) represented in the news (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

Women traditionally have been less represented in the media even in the context of the western gender equality (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). But even when they are represented in the media, the way they are depicted, mostly in pictures, they generally adopt roles that reinforce the values established by the patriarchal society, and that tend to objectify them and treat them as submissive and defenseless (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). That is glaring especially in the case of Muslim women, who are usually depicted wearing the hijab which directly or indirectly associated them with imposed religious symbols and motifs that usually serve to subjugate them (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

Amores et al (2020) suggest that displaced women's underrepresentation in the media can be understood as a result of structural and political intersectionality that favors the submission of those women in our societies (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). Diverse dimensions such as race, class and gender interact in such a way that subordinate female migrants in an overlapping structural system, leaving them outside of the performances of feminism and anti-racist movements (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

In this regard, female refugees suffer the typical violence of our society on several overlapping levels, both in regard to discrimination based on race or ethnicity, as well as in regard to submission for reasons of gender, and in regard to the subordination for rea-

sons of social class (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). This limitation of the women refugees appearance in the media narratives prevent them of being fully accepted by the society, leading to a “*symbolic annihilation*” that diminishes their power and control over their image and experiences (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

Female refugees are expected to be represented in the western media in the context of two frames; the victimization or normalization (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). The victimization frame is mostly assigned to women refugees since although violence seems to be a predominantly masculine attribute, women experience mostly as victims and especially refugee women coming from the Middle East (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

*“Women are presented as victims of a misogynous religious culture that forces them to be obedient and cover themselves to be respected. The headscarf is presented as either a symbol of subordination or something women can be, directly or indirectly, forced to wear”*, (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020).

Victimization removes political agency from refugee women, this way we deprive them of the capacity to be citizens; rendering them to a condition of political voicelessness (Johnson, 2011).

The use of the normalization frame, on the other hand, does not deal with the refugee women as the “Other” but rather like an assimilated or integrated member of the host society (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). Although, it is considered to be a positive frame normalization in the broader category of the humanitarian frames (which is related with the objectification of the refugee experience where the refugee is represented as a group removed from the historical context reduced to norms and terms relevant to a state-centric perspective (Rajaram, 2002)), puts female refugees in a constant position of a secondary citizen with a passive role in the community (Amores, J. J., Arcila-Calderón, C., & González-de-Garay, B., 2020). The “gender” label is understood as a social construction and a system of meanings that creates social hierarchies based on the associations established with ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits (Santos, R., Roque, S., & Santos, S. J., 2018).

*“The power of gendered labels is such that the process by which the name was selected generally disappears and a series of normative associations, motives and characteristics are attached to the named subject. By naming, the subject becomes known in a manner which may permit certain forms of inquiry and engagement, while forbidding or excluding others”, (Santos, R., Roque, S., & Santos, S. J., 2018).*

In the context of migration and security, these symbolic meanings produced by the label of gender involve certain associations; in the case of the female gender involve associations with vulnerability, civility and innocence (Santos, R., Roque, S., & Santos, S. J., 2018). These symbolic meanings create visible portraits of women as victims of violence, dispossession and displacement and agents for peace (Santos, R., Roque, S., & Santos, S. J., 2018).

Women refugees, along with children, seem to embody in the Western imagination “a special kind of powerlessness; perhaps they don’t tend to look as if they could be “dangerous allies” (Parashar, 2016). Gender plays a crucial role in constructing the vulnerable image of the refugee (Johnson, 2011).

Soguc argues that:

*“Typically, refugee women’s displacement is presented in alarmist terms, intimating a general paralysis, a loss of their agency. This treatment in turn normalizes a general disenfranchisement of refugee women, so much so that women are denied the simplest opportunities to participate in the shaping of their refugee lives. They are even denied opportunities to secure their minimum needs, ranging from food to clothing to basic means of sanitary protection”, (Johnson, 2011).*

This very representation of refugee women as vulnerable individuals in need has depoliticized the issue (Johnson, 2011). As a result, they are assigned in a general category with specific characteristics of inherited vulnerability and dependence (Johnson, 2011).

Helene Moussa argues that depicting women refugees exclusively as victims gives rise to their portrayal as passive subjects, dependent upon their male counterparts for survival and salvation (Johnson, 2011). It has been prevalent that this construction of the

vulnerable refugee women has been instrumentalized and therefore used as a tool for the mobilization of support behind humanitarian intervention (Johnson, 2011).

The depoliticized and victimized figure constructed of the refugee women is a fundamental comment on the political agency of women in general (Johnson, 2011). Her location in the global South and economic circumstances of poverty contain further assumptions within the narratives of ethnicity, race and class (Johnson, 2011).

## **2.2 Femonationalism**

Femonationalism, a concept coined by Sara Farris, is a strategy used by “*three very different political actors - right-wing nationalists, certain feminists and women’s equality agencies, and neoliberals*” (Farris S. S., 2017). The strategy is utilized to promote women's rights, by using a feminist rhetoric for the realization of right-wing populist goals (Farris S. S., 2017).

The new centrality of gender equality, according to Farris, within anti-Islam agendas has been utilized as a means of the mainly the right on the war on terror, that marked the West since 9/11 (Farris S. S., 2017). The rhetoric of Femonationalism has been targeting Muslim women as victims through neoliberal narratives (Farris S. S., 2017).

In her book “*In the name of women’s rights : the rise of femonationalism*” (2017) Farris explores “*the mobilization of women’s rights in anti-Islam and anti-immigration campaigns in the Netherlands, France, and Italy from the early 2000s until 2013*” (Farris S. S., 2017). According to Farris, the countries under research enact laws that criminalize mainly migrants and Muslim women (Farris S. S., 2017). Based upon the idea that women in Islam are oppressed in 2004 France “*approved the ban of ostentatious religious symbols to all of the country’s public schools*” (Farris S. S., 2017). The banning of the headscarf was a step in the government's goal to get Muslim women to adopt the secularist stance adopted by other French women (Farris S. S., 2017). The western rhetoric – in statements, campaigns, the media – has illustrated Muslims and non-western migrant males as a threat to Western societies, to national security, as violent, rapists and oppressors of women (Farris S. S., 2017). At the same time, Muslim women



and non-western women, are portrayed as passive victims of an oppressive culture in need of saving (Farris S. S., 2017).

Femonationalism includes an economic aspect in which neoliberalism has played a significant role, by producing very concrete consequences in the lives of the Muslim and non-western migrant women (Fekete, 2006). Farris detects that there are several policies that promote economic integration and are also promoted as a step towards independence of migrant women, but in fact they contribute to reinforce the image of the private sphere as the woman's sphere (Farris S. S., 2017). Migrant and Muslim women are thus constructed in the public imaginary as in need for special attention, in need or saving - constituting the contemporary form of a well-known Western mythology, or an "old ploy" as Leila Ahmed calls it, namely, that of the "white men [claiming to be] saving brown women from brown men," to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's opposite phrase (Farris S. S., 2017) (Farris S. R., 2012). This "rescue" operation is used as an ideological tool strictly connected "to their key role in the reproduction of the material conditions of social reproduction" (Farris S. S., 2017).

This instrumentalization of women's equality and feminist discourses by xenophobic parties, nationalists and neoliberal governments is constitutes one of the most important characteristics of the current political conjuncture, particularly in Europe; starting from Marine Le Pen in France to the Italian Northern League and the British National Party, they have all adapted a mutual rhetoric about protecting European women (Farris S. S., 2017).

Consistent with Helma Lutz, "*It is through discourses of 'racial,' ethnic and national otherness, rather than through sexual difference, that the antagonism between the 'European' and the 'other' woman is emphasized. In this binary, the European woman serves as the standard against which to measure women from elsewhere*", (Farris S. R., 2012).

*"The image of the migrant woman from non-Western countries as passive subject of the violent patriarchy of her culture thus has a long history; one could argue that, in the*

*present context, Muslim women play the role of a synecdoche for the European stereotype of the female immigrant portrayed as a particular kind of deviation from 'European' femininity—perhaps unconsciously functioning as counter-images or alter-egos of European feminine self-images”, as stated by Farris (Farris S. R., 2012).*

In this new neoliberal context the realigned Right – fluctuating from neo-fascist to neoliberals – integration has been instrumented as a state of power to enforce the notion of the “allies”, concerning the Muslims coming to the West (Fekete, 2006). Part of this right-wing consensus are also feminist and activists of women and gay rights; pushing for immigration controls specifically targeted at immigrants from the Muslim world (Fekete, 2006).

A result the unification of these "progressive" voices seeking protection for women and gay rights (Homonationalism) from the laws and moral order of Islam and its followers who threaten - according to neoliberal rhetoric - western values, strict monocultural policies are seen as a necessary corrective to the multicultural policies of the past; which are held responsible for turning a blind eye to the establishment of patriarchal customs such as polygamy, clitoridectomy, forced marriages and honor killings in the West (Fekete, 2006).

The discrimination against Muslim women, is therefore justified through the media – and parliamentary – rhetoric that construct an image of an “alien culture” (Fekete, 2006). The problems Muslim women may face are justified this way through cultural justifications instead of racial like in the past (Fekete, 2006). Verena Stolcke warned the world in the '90s that the new rhetoric of the Right wing in the West had adopted a repertoire of ideas and a conceptual structure of “cultural fundamentalism”; shifting the anti-immigrant discourse from protecting one's race to protecting one's ‘historically rooted homogenous national culture (Fekete, 2006).

Furthermore, the process of measuring immigrant integration, as noted by Baer (2016), is a neocolonial practice (Baer, 2016). It is a practice that emerged from a race of cultural classification in the context of dominance (Baer, 2016). Under this notion there is

the dichotomy of the good Muslim who is integrated, or rather *assimilated*, who does not show or claim his/her faith in public and above all does not speak out except to distance him/herself from Islamic terrorism (Panighel, 2021).

Cultural fundamentalists monoculturalise the nation; this notion reifies culture as a compact, bounded, localized, and historically rooted set of traditions and values transmitted through the generations (Fekete, 2006). Thus, immigration's cultural diversity is perceived as a political threat to the national identity (Fekete, 2006). Hence, cultural fundamentalism, roots nationality and citizenship in a hereditary cultural heritage (Fekete, 2006).

The misrepresentation of multiculturalism has been incorporated into the repertoire of the mainstream Right, the members of which began to exploit for their own ends issues of domestic violence in immigrant communities (Fekete, 2006). Multiculturalism is these days associated with ghettoization and "parallel societies", where fundamental rights are infringed by illiberal cultural practices (Sauer, 2009).

The gender equality frame is used to demonstrate the huge gap between minority and majority culture and as a symbol for cultural difference (Sauer, 2009). The dichotomy between "us" and the "Other" - in detail, the pre-modern, sexist and patriarchal 'Other' where women have no choice – takes a cultural form connected to self-determination and women's rights (Sauer, 2009).

The gender equality argument is on the one hand used against 'the Other,' to show the huge difference and incompatibility of Muslim and European culture and on the other hand to argue that women from the majority society are already equal and do not need affirmative action; which leads to an ambivalent and twofold argumentation (Sauer, 2009).

In that sense, the ban of the veil in the name of individual autonomy ends up being ironic since it relies upon on essentialist arguments about Islam that deny any personal autonomy to Muslim women and girls (Sauer, 2009). Because veiled women are not, in the

eyes of the western “liberators” enough autonomous beings, on the contrary they are either seen as the representatives or the victims of a fundamentalist culture, they are thus denied political agency altogether (Sauer, 2009).

It is that part of neoliberal feminism that has justified coercive state action and control over the lives of immigrant women; according to Femonationalism arguments Muslim women are too passive or enslaved to resist the power of Muslim men who control their bodies by enforcing them the hijab (Sauer, 2009). Accordingly the state has to act as the liberator of Muslim women; by stepping in and forcing them to unveil, for example in Germany and France, state bans on the hijab are seen as necessary both for the liberation of Muslim women and the protection of women’s rights generally (Sauer, 2009).

Muslim women’s bodies converted to a battlefield over values and identity politics; state neutrality and gender equality are not only challenged, but also re-negotiated and reassured in these debates (Sauer, 2009). This debate on the headscarf is part of the general identity politics where the Muslim communities are trying to build a common “us” while the dominant society is marking the “other” by questioning the presence of Islamic symbols in the public sphere (Sauer, 2009). Motives among Muslim women for wearing a headscarf diverse; although in the feminist debate the headscarf is either seen as a freely chosen expression of women’s religious identity and a shield from the lustful gaze of men (Moghadam, V. M., & Kaftan, G., 2019) or as an emblem of female oppression denying women full access to the public sphere (Sauer, 2009).

Body covering is now interpreted as a visible sign of disrespect to democratic values and the unwillingness to integrate into majority society (Sauer, 2009). Body coverings used by Muslim women has set religion on the public agenda in a context that is threatening the secular liberal democracies of the West; the debate about body coverings shifted the attention to migrant women discursively denying them the necessity for equal opportunity policies (Sauer, 2009).

Three different approaches have emerged across Europe concerning the Muslim headscarf; the prohibitive approach, that ban the use of headscarves in public as in France and Switzerland, the soft or selective approach which only bans specific kinds of body coverings as it happens in Finland and Sweden and finally the non-restrictive, tolerant model where body coverings are not banned at all as in Austria and Denmark (Sauer, 2009). This debate over headscarves has been accompanied by “a retreat from multiculturalism” (Sauer, 2009).

Under capitalism the female body has to exposed in to order to circulate “according to the market paradigm” (Eisenstein, 2015); but what is the Muslim girl going to sell in the capitalistic context since she will remain covered (Farris S. R., 2012)? The unveiling of the Muslim women in the West embodies the dual nature of the western man's overwhelming desire to uncover the enemy's woman, or of the colonized, and the demand to end the incongruence of hidden female bodies as exceptions to the general law according to which they should circulate like “sound currency” (Farris S. R., 2012).



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(Γεωργιάδης, 2017)

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<sup>1</sup> In this tweet, the current Development minister and vice-president of the ruling right-wing New Democracy party quotes an article in which the Austrian police unveils Muslim women

As Sara Farris proposed, we need to understand the rise of Femonationalism as a as symptomatic of the distinctive position of Western and non-Western women in the economic, political, and *lato sensu* in the material chain of production and reproduction (Farris S. R., 2012). Precisely Farris argues that, “*The possibility that nationalist-xenophobic discourses could appropriate the central feminist ideals of equality and freedom emerges from the very specific reconfiguration of the labor markets, and migration, produced by neoliberal globalization in the last thirty year; confronting femonationalism thus requires not only ideological refutation but also a concrete analysis of its political-economic foundations*”, (Farris S. R., 2012).

This mobilization of gender as an ideological and instrumental cover up for neo-imperialist and even fundamentalist projects is strongly attached to neocolonialist and assimilationist projects; behind the deception of the new missionary expeditions that are presented as philanthropic—or rather in this case, as “philogynist” and feminist, according to several researchers and academics (Farris S. R., 2012).

### **2.3 Neocolonialism**

Colonialism ascended in the wake of the Enlightenment; a historical moment in Europe when the faculty of reason was increasingly elevated over religion (Bjoernaas, 2015). Undeniably, nineteenth and twentieth century intellectuals declared religion and the consequent beliefs to be unreasonable; by way of illustration Karl Marx believed that religion was the opiate of the people. Sigmund Freud argued that religion was for the irrational mind while Friedrich Nietzsche claimed, “God is dead” (Bjoernaas, 2015). With the birth of European imperialism, the West saw itself as appropriate to bring the Enlightenment virtues of reason and rationality to its colonies (Bjoernaas, 2015).

Racism is the basis of the constitution of the world order and the division of the world’s population; within this system of racial classification – the “*coloniality of power*” – social

categories in ethnicity, indigeneity, race, and religion emerged, classifying the population by administrative, legal, scientific, and aesthetic categories (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). The system of colonial racial differentiation stipulated our Eurocentric modern hierarchical system through which historical identities were created in association with social roles and geographical places (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). By and large, the modes of production and social reproduction of global capitalism continue to be organized by the racial matrix sustaining the coloniality of power, which represents the cultural predicament of racial capitalism (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). The link between racial capitalism and coloniality is significant for migration policies in Western Europe. Though Europe imagines itself as “raceless,” it is the cradle of the invention of racial capitalism (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018).

A central dichotomy of colonial modernity has been the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the nonhuman; the western, bourgeois, colonial, modern man became a subject/agent, fit for rule, for public life and ruling, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason (Lugones, 2010). On the other side the Western bourgeois woman was not understood as his complement, but as someone who reproduced race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, and being homebound in the service of the white, Western, bourgeois man (Lugones, 2010). The imposition of these dichotomous hierarchies became woven into the historicity of relations, including intimate relations (Lugones, 2010).

The racial differentiation system is intersected with a patriarchal system, which was exported to the European colonies, constituting the coloniality of gender (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). In the context of coloniality of gender there is a cisgender dichotomy producing positions of masculine superiority and feminine inferiority (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). In the framework of colonialism there is an intersection with racism; along these lines when masculinity is racialized as black and brown, it is considered “animalistic” and, as such, violent and inferior. At the same time, femininity coupled with black or brown masculinity can be considered inferior and an object of sexualized exploitation and violence; therefore gender constitutes the matrix of coloniality of power (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018).

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1985 in her groundbreaking essay laid claim to the phrase “White men saving brown women from brown men”, in order to describe the war the British declared to South Asia, using the saving of brown women (Cooke M. , 2002). The headscarf debate recalls the four-stage gendered logic of empire: (1) women have inalienable rights within universal civilization, (2) civilized men recognize and respect these rights, (3) uncivilized men systematically abrogate these rights, and (4) such men (the Taliban) thus belong to an alien (Islamic) system (Cooke M. , 2002). This kind of division, subjected to imperial logic, divides people into genders solely, where men are the Other and women are the civilizable (Cooke M. , 2002).

In order to save their universal civilization white men need to save those civilizable women, the imperial logic suggests that they must attack those men who incorporate the Other (Cooke M. , 2002). During the process of rescuing “their” women, will become “ours”; when politics get under that very imperial logic disappear and the only visible thing is the veil of women’s victimization (Cooke M. , 2002). The aforementioned saving does not imply that only men are the heroes, but suggests that through Western feminism Brown women can be saved by “white” women this time (Crosby, 2014).

The multiple ways the rhetoric of “saving women” has come to mark the public debate and restructure feminism are profoundly related to reconfigurations in the realm of geopolitics (Bracke, 2012). During the period of “the clash of civilizations” during the ‘90s the issues of gender and sexual politics began taking a central position in the public debate; a role that has been severely expanded in relation to the war on terror after 9/11 (Bracke, 2012) (Cooke M. , 2002) (Hirschkind, C., & Mahmood, S.,, 2002).

The so-called civilizing mission – which included the religious aspect with conversion to Christianity – has been present in the ideological conception of conquest and colonization (Lugones, 2010). Judging the colonized for their deficiencies from the point of view of the civilizing mission provided the West with the right justifications for enormous cruelty (Lugones, 2010). The justification of civilizing mission was the euphemistic mask of brutal access to people’s bodies through unimaginable exploitation, violent sexual viola-



tion, control of reproduction, and systematic terror (feeding people alive to dogs or making pouches and hats from the vaginas of brutally killed indigenous females, for example) (Lugones, 2010). The hierarchical gender dichotomy was used as a judgment, though the attainment of dichotomous gendering for the colonized was not the point of the normative judgment (Lugones, 2010).

In the case of French colonialism in Algeria the use of the woman question in colonial policies where intervention into sati (the practice of widows immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres), child marriage, and other practices was used to justify rule (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The unveiling of the local women was not only driven by the men's desire to take advantage of their beauty but was also about "*baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure*", as noted by Fanon (1965); since the colonizer experienced the hiding of the face with a veil as mystery they had to solve, whereat by unveiling her she was rendered as a "possible object of possession" (Bhandar, 2009). In the colonial context there is an urge from the colonizer to obtain anything was in the ownership of the colonized bound up with the desire to objectify, possess and control the ways in which the colonized population moved and inhabited space; related to each other, and existed as legal-political subjects (Bhandar, 2009).

One of the most consistent themes in the war on terror, has been the contention that this war is waged in order to protect women's rights and in particular to liberate Muslim and Arab women from the yoke of their misogynist cultural backgrounds and religious traditions (Bracke, 2012). The war on terror has been construed, waged and legitimized on gendered and indeed sexualized terrain (Bracke, 2012)

The juxtaposition of "barbarity" and the "Enlightenment"—is nothing but another callous assertion of the incommensurability of Occident and Orient, the reference to the child-delivery incident casts light on a less evident strategy pursued by populist-feminist anti-veil rhetoric. Susanna Mancini\*

### ***2.3a The Afghanistan invasion case***

9/11 was the moment when the age of multiculturalism ended and the long period of “war on terror” began, with the first warnings that a new era of racism and neocolonialism was dawning, enlightened by the sign of women’s rights (Ayotte, K. J., & Husain, M. E., 2005) (Haritaworn, 2012) (Hirschkind, C., & Mahmood, S., 2002) (Crosby, 2014). After the terrorist attacks in the World Trade Centre in the USA veiled women were used as a rhetorical tool to build public support for the invasions both in Iraq and Afghanistan (Crosby, 2014).

The ‘war on terror’ – as articulated from USA and launched by that country- with its ambitions to transform Middle Eastern countries into peace-loving democracies, resembles in many ways a much earlier imperial venture (Anghie, 2006). The rhetoric employed by President Bush to justify the invasion of Iraq for instance resembles the rhetoric used by Vitoria to justify the Spanish conquest of the Indians; blaming the colonized as the barbaric, the uncivilized (Anghie, 2006). This has resulted in the formulation of a new form of imperialism that asserts itself in the name of ‘national security’, as self-defense (Anghie, 2006).

Laura Bush, first lady of America at the time, addressed the nation saying:

*“Civilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror-not only because our hearts break for the women and children of Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan, we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us”*, (Hirschkind, C., & Mahmood, S., 2002).

After that the First Lady in another speech addressing the Taliban, terrorism and brutality against women stated that because of the military invasion in the country Afghan women are no longer imprisoned in their home and linked permanently the fight against terrorism with a fight for women’s rights (Haritaworn, 2012). It does not come as a surprise that the military invasion of the United States in Afghanistan was celebrated first and foremost as the liberation of Afghan women from Taliban control (Hirschkind, C., & Mahmood, S., 2002). A few days later another “first lady”, this time Cherie Blair, wife of

then British Prime Minister Tony Blair, issued a similar statement (Ahmed L. , 2011). Passing the baton to the media, this rhetoric legitimized the depiction of the war in Afghanistan as a righteous war by virtue of our concern to save the women (Ahmed L. , 2011).

This way the burka became the "battle flag" and "shorthand moral justification" for the war in Afghanistan (Ahmed L. , 2011) . During that time the media filled with images of burka, images embedded in narratives that were about women's oppression in Afghanistan, but narratives too that often also carried an implicit message as to Islam's ageless oppression of women (Ahmed L. , 2011).

In her article "*This isn't 'feminism'. It's Islamophobia*" in the Guardian, Penny Laurie argues that it is a hypocritical claim from men that they stand for women's rights while appropriating their language of liberation to serve their own small-minded agenda (Laurie, 2013). She sets as an example far right groups like the English Defence League and the British National party who rush to condemn crimes against women committed by Muslim men, while at the same time are fielding candidates who make claims like "*women are like gongs – they need to be struck regularly*" (Laurie, 2013). At the same time when western women disagree with the "feminist" ideas of these groups they "deserve to be shipped to Afghanistan and stoned to death", as she explains (Laurie, 2013).

The stories of Muslim misogyny have been for long used by the western patriarchy in order to justify imperialism abroad and sexism at home (Laurie, 2013). This rhetoric of "saving the women" in the name of "civilization" is an old ploy used many times in the past in particular by British and French imperialists (Ahmed L. , 2011). This was rhetoric they used with regard to women in whatever regions their empires took them to – in relation to Muslims or Hindus or others – to justify imperial domination (Ahmed L. , 2011).

Colonial patriarchy has been instrumentalizing the feminist rhetoric since the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Viner, 2002). With the most prominent example being that of Lord Cromer, British consul general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907, who was convinced of the inferiority of Is-

lamic religion and society, and had many critical things to say on the "mind of the Oriental" (Viner, 2002). According to his point of view, it was the way Islam treated women that constructed the "fatal obstacle" to the Egyptian's attainment of that elevation of thought and character; and the only possible solution was the Egyptians to be "persuaded or forced" to become "civilized" by disposing of the veil (Laurie, 2013) (Viner, 2002). At the same time Cromer was the same man who founded the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, which tried, by any means possible, to stop women getting the vote in Britain (Viner, 2002). Concomitantly, in Egypt, he actively ensured that women's status was not improved as he raised school fees- preventing girls' education that way – and discouraged the training of women doctors (Viner, 2002).

What colonial patriarchs like Cromer sought was to replace eastern misogyny with western misogyny (Laurie, 2013). More than a century later the same logic applied to George Bush's administration in the White Office (Laurie, 2013) (Viner, 2002). During his presidency Bush was anything but a feminist; he was the one who cut off funding to any international family-planning organization which offered abortion services or counseling (Viner, 2002).

It is then obvious that misogyny only matters when it isn't being done by white men (Laurie, 2013). Laurie explains that, "for decades, western men have hijacked the language of women's liberation to justify their Islamophobia" (Laurie, 2013).

In consonance with Ahmed, feminism hence served as a "*handmaid to colonialism*"; specifically she writes: "*Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of comprehensive superiority of Europe*", (Viner, 2002). Moreover Ahmed argues that, "*Colonialism's use of feminism to promote the culture of the colonizers and undermine native culture has imparted to feminism in non-western societies the taint of having served as an instrument of colonial domination, rendering it suspect in Arab eyes and vulnerable to the charge of being an ally of colonial interests*" (Viner, 2002).

Justification of political actions like the above mentioned offer not only deeply held bigotries, but also the ethnocentric and gendered assumptions on which all racisms rely (Nelson, 2005). The requisite to recreate Islamic femininity within a liberal framework reveals the perceived threat of the unsaved Muslim woman to Western masculine sensibilities (Nelson, 2005). The possible inability to rescue Muslim women, renders the savior country culturally, politically, and militaristically impotent (Nelson, 2005).

This assertion of a supposed military success of the US in securing Afghan women has been especially malevolent; according to reports at the time in some cases conditions for women in the territory deteriorated at the same time that suicide BY Afghan women was much more frequent than under the Taliban's rule (Ayotte, K. J., & Husain, M. E., 2005). As Ratna Kapur points out, these words have haunting resonances for anyone who has studied colonial history; since according to researchers of colonialism the use of "the woman" to rationalize colonial policies has been a classic instrument in colonial rhetoric (Haritaworn, 2012) (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

Many observers were therefore surprised that the downfall of the Taliban did not lead to Afghan women's mass abandonment of the burqa (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Its persistence was quite rightly judged, however, to reflect the persistence of traditional patriarchal values and norms that the Taliban had merely enforced in an extreme form, norms and values that most Afghan women and men continue to associate with Islam and that few of them are yet ready to abandon in the absence of any credible or palatable alternative set of values (Mir-Hosseini, 2006).

Even though this Western practice of appropriation and construction of the third-world Muslim woman is not a new phenomenon, in the aftermath of 9/11 the circulation of images of veiled females reached epic proportions (Crosby, 2014). American media capitalized on the veil in every possible way as a visual and linguistic signifier of Afghan women's oppression; so much that burqa-clad figures were converted into the political symbols of evil (Crosby, 2014).

Mohanty (1991) has noted that, "[t]o assume that the mere practice of veiling women in a number of Muslim countries indicates the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation not only is analytically reductive, but also proves quite useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy" (Ayotte, K. J., & Husain, M. E., 2005). The homogenization of Muslim covering practices partakes in exactly the paternalistic logic that underlies the neocolonial politics of U.S. efforts to "liberate" Afghan women according to an explicitly Western model of liberal feminism (Ayotte, K. J., & Husain, M. E., 2005).

The expression of Islamic fundamentalism on the helpless female victim popularized the view that the hardship and sacrifice Afghanistan had to undertake was inevitable and for their own good; post 9/11 the covered body of the Afghan women became the visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens "us" and our Western civilization (Hirschkind, C., & Mahmood, S., 2002). This image was seized on by the Bush administration and the mainstream media and served as a key element in the construction of the Taliban as an enemy particularly deserving of our wrath because of their harsh treatment of women (Hirschkind, C., & Mahmood, S., 2002).

This construction of the Afghan women as victims in need of saving has been severely problematic for the reason that through this notion of saving, a Western superiority is implied (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Abu-Lughod in her article "*Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?*" trying to explain the patronizing quality of this rhetoric invites us to use the "saving women" context today for African-American or working-class women; what becomes clear through the example according to Abu-Lughod is that we have become politicized about race and class but not culture (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

France's "well-intentioned" veil ban is a salient example of the outcomes of the construction of the Muslim women as victims; women who would otherwise move freely in public wearing a veil, are relegated to the private sphere (unwilling to leave unveiled), creating what Angelique Chrisafis calls "*house arrest*" (Crosby, 2014).

The use of face coverings and headscarves as generalized symbols of female oppression perform a colonizing function; under those notions women are seen as objects since they are denied agency to speak for themselves (Ayotte, K. J., & Husain, M. E., 2005). As pointed out by Ayotte (2005) *"[t]he domesticated, subjugated, unenlightened Other as opposed to the liberated, independent and enlightened Western self was used as a moral prop to legitimize colonial power relations"* (Ayotte, K. J., & Husain, M. E., 2005).

The use of gender to appropriate political discourses in spite of having many contemporary manifestations, its historiography is best grounded in a colonial and post-colonial context (Nelson, 2005). McIntock noted vis-à-vis the age of Empire:

*"Women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge"*, (Nelson, 2005).

The modern Western orientation takes on the identity of liberating feminists, their power and knowledge justified through both essentialist assumptions of Islam juxtaposed with exceptionalist views of Western liberalism (Nelson, 2005). Muslim women are encouraged to support this hegemonic agenda, a type of false acculturation in which acceptance of Islam relies entirely on adoption of Western sensibilities, and the abandonment of perceived backwards practices and extremism (Nelson, 2005).

Women throughout history have been assigned the role as transmitters of cultural values and tradition in the process of ethnic or national construction; the female is fabricated as the cultural and biological reproducer of the collectivity (Olivius E. , 2014). This very contraction of the women's roles has been central to the making of difference between colonizers and colonized, and to the legitimation of colonialism.

As quoted by Olivius (201): *"Many of these "cultural" conflicts between Western colonizing cultures and colonized indigenous cultures involved issues pertaining to women's roles and female sexuality, rendering the figure of the colonized woman and important site of struggle between "Western Culture" and the "Culture" of the colony...In these conflicts, Western colonial powers often depicted indigenous practices as symptoms of*

*the “backwardness and barbarity” of Third-World cultures in contrast to the “progressiveness of Western culture”. The figure of the colonized woman became a representation of the oppressiveness of the entire “cultural tradition” of the colony”* (Olivius E. , 2014); thereby reaffirming what above mentioned about the legitimization of colonialism.

The construction of the “Other” culture has been severely used in colonial discourses to create an image of superiority of the Western civilization; bound to the notion of “white men saving brown women, from brown men”, colonial projects have been underpinned and legitimized for centuries (Olivius E. , 2014). Furthermore, this tactic can be used so as to make a population more governable, as we can detect in the colonization of Algeria; the colonial authorities sought to undermine resistance to their rule through the “liberation” of Algerian women:

*“If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight”,* (Olivius E. , 2014).

It was this very situation of the women in the Algerian society that provided the colonizers with the theme of action; these women who were pictured as humiliated and sequestered, were turned by the Algerian men – who were firmly denounced medieval and barbaric – into a dehumanized object (Olivius E. , 2014). The representation of Algerian women were thus instrumentalized in order to demonize Algerian culture and legitimize colonial rule (Olivius E. , 2014);

*“Converting the woman, winning her over to foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture”,* as stated by Fanon (1970) (Olivius E. , 2014).



It can be detected here that this dipole between “backward” and “modern” cultures has been tooled throughout the history of men in order to serve colonial and imperialist incarnations (Olivius E. , 2014). As already mentioned in the case of Afghanistan violence and discrimination against women were used as a Trojan Horse for imperialistic and neocolonial goals of the West (Olivius E. , 2014). The US intervention was morally legitimate and even necessary; a dichotomy between tradition and modernity, the western “freedom” and democratic choice” counterpoint the darkness and oppression representing other parts of the world while other parts of the world (Olivius E. , 2014).

Positional superiority has been used as a method of control between and within civilizations in different forms and mechanisms (Nader, 1989). The West's position of superiority has been the notion of development – economic, technological – which becomes a strategy which can help it spread its point of view around the world (Nader, 1989).

The division established between the countries producing refugees and the countries accepting refugees can be portrayed in the dipole “Us” and the “Other” (Freedman J. , 2010). The “Other”, the countries producing the refugees, are those who do not respect human rights, at least not the same way as western countries do (Freedman J. , 2010). This is prominent in the case of woman rights, for example in the cases of domestic violence (Freedman J. , 2010). Domestic and gendered violence “there” is attributed to immutable social and cultural characteristics and the real dynamics of gender inequality underlying all types of gender-related violence, whether ‘here’ or ‘there’, are not analyzed (Freedman J. , 2010).

According to Macklin, *“Recent feminist scholarship from the United States on gender persecution and refugee status evinces a distressing degree of cultural hyperopia regarding local conditions for women. It seems that when some North American feminists want to make a pitch for granting asylum to victims of gender persecution elsewhere, they become tactically blind to the compelling evidence gathered by other North American feminists documenting local practices that might constitute gender persecution. At the very moment North American feminists turn to condemn misogyny in the ‘third*

*world', they lose sight of the fact that our own culture hardly presents a model of gender equality" (Freedman J. , 2010).*

McKinnon (2016) argues that U.S. state energy around eradicating gender violence around the world must be seen as another state project to service neocolonial aspirations for power consolidation in political theaters around the world (McKinnon S. L., 2016).

*"What this means in the refugee context is that we suppress the commonality of gender oppression across cultures to ensure that what is done to Other women looks too utterly different from (or unspeakably worse than) what is done to women here, that no one would notice a contradiction in admitting them as refugees. The logic of the dichotomy of refugee-acceptor/refugee-producer compels a parallel classification of Western woman/Other woman that serves to facilitate the admission of at least some women fleeing gender persecution, but only by adopting a method that is politically and empirically problematic", as noted by McKinnon (1995) (Freedman J. , 2010).*

The "refugee crisis" has revealed several paradoxes regarding migration; the modern form of migration from former European colonies illustrates the divide created between the insiders and outsiders of the nation (Navarro, 2010). This notion evokes the logic of coloniality by creating a racial dichotomy between the insiders – members of the nation-state – and outsiders – the migrants (Navarro, 2010). Hence the irreconcilable difference between citizens and migrants is embedded in a racializing logic shaped within social relations formed by the persistent effects of colonial epistemic power (Navarro, 2010).

### **2.3b The Veiled Women**

The colonial narrative is therefore the condition of modernity, produced through the epistemic lens of the colonial condition and resurfaces under the contemporary label of

Islamophobia (Brayson, 2019). That very colonial condition is the frame where debates and restrictions concerning Islamic dress arise; with the hostility over the issue impacting the lives of Muslim communities and individuals, resulting in social and political exclusion (Brayson, 2019). The Enlightenment values that still reign supreme in the veil debate in Europe is intrinsically linked to the ongoing Enlightenment project, because those who advocate banning the veil invoke the virtues of secularism (Bjoernaas, 2015).

In the last decades there is a growing movement to limit women wearing headscarves and Muslim veils, such as the burqa and niqab, in Europe (Weaver, 2018). The European court of justice, the EU's highest court, has ruled that employers can ban staff from wearing headscarves, its first decision on the issue of employees wearing visible religious symbols at work (Weaver, 2018).

Here is a timeline of the European ban in headscarves (Weaver, 2018):

**24 September 2003:** Germany's federal constitutional court rules that states can change their laws locally if they want to. Half of Germany's regions go on to ban teachers from wearing headscarves (Weaver, 2018).

**3 February 2004:** France starts the debate to ban religious symbols, including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses, from schools (Weaver, 2018).

**31 March 2010:** A key committee in Belgium votes to implement the first European ban against wearing the burqa and niqab in public (Weaver, 2018).

**11 April 2011:** François Fillon votes that women are banned from wearing the niqab in any public place. Under the first ban of its kind in Europe, face veils are outlawed virtually anywhere outside women's homes, except when worshipping in a religious place or travelling as a passenger in a car (Weaver, 2018).

**1 July 2014:** The European court of human rights upholds France's burqa ban. The judges say preservation of a certain idea of "living together" is the "legitimate aim" of the French authorities (Weaver, 2018).

**22 May 2015:** The Dutch cabinet approves a partial ban on face-covering Islamic veils on public transport and in public areas. The ban does not apply to wearing the burqa or the niqab on the street, except when there are specific security reasons (Weaver, 2018).

**18 January 2016:** David Cameron says he will back institutions with "sensible rules" over Muslims wearing full-face veils, but rules out a full public ban (Weaver, 2018).

**18 August 2016:** France's Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, defends municipal bans on body covering burkini swimwear designed for Muslim women after mayors impose burkini bans in several seaside towns including Cannes, Villeneuve-Loubet, and Sisc on the island of Corsica (Weaver, 2018).

**6 December 2016:** The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, endorses a partial ban on the burqa and the niqab (Weaver, 2018).

**30 January 2017:** Austria's ruling coalition agrees to prohibit full-face veils such as the burqa and niqab in courts and schools. It also pledges to investigate banning headscarves for women employed in public services (Weaver, 2018).

**14 March 2017:** In its first decision on the headscarf issue the European court of justice rules that employers can bar staff from wearing visible religious symbols (Weaver, 2018).

**31 May 2018:** The Danish parliament votes to ban garments that cover the face, including Islamic veils such as the niqab or burqa (Weaver, 2018).  
(Ahmed L. , 2011)

The controversial debate on headscarves – niqab or the veil – has been utilized by many politicians around Europe with the intent to criminalize its use (Gohir, 2015). In many Muslim countries around the world face and body coverings are enforced on women to make them invisible in the social scene and to “protect” men from being tempted by them; nonetheless the wearing of the veil can be both limiting for women’s mobility and liberating (Gohir, 2015).

What is notable is that the leading voices in most European campaigns against face veils are to a slim majority male politicians of the right; namely, Nicolas Sarkozy of the right wing Union for a Popular Movement (France), Denis Ducarme of the center- right Reformist Movement (Belgium) , Geert Wilders of the far right Freedom Party (Holland), Heinz- Christian Strache of the far right Freedom Party (Austria), Oskar Freysinger of the far right Swiss People's Party (Switzerland), and Mazyar Keshvari of the right wing Progress Party (Norway) (Gohir, 2015).

France was the first European country to prohibit the wearing of religious symbols including the headscarves in public (Gohir, 2015); the general defensiveness that France demonstrated later on is indicative of the criminalization of Islamic dress, heavily connected to the colonial past to the present and future; it is a manifestation of the failure of the historical project of French colonialism (Brayson, 2019). Thus, France was the first country to criminalize visibly Muslim women; in fact this act of “unveiling” has been heavily linked with the attitudes and narratives used by the French during the colonization of Algeria under the exclaiming “*Vive l’Algerie française!*”, while forcefully unveiling Muslim women (Brayson, 2019). Like it happened in Algeria, the act of unveiling women is linked with the control of the population and exert power remains the strategy in contemporary France resulting in neocolonialism (Brayson, 2019).

Frantz Fanon (1965) described the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962) as a French struggle aimed at ‘unveiling Algeria’. In detail, Fanon notes that:

*“It was the colonist’s frenzy to unveil the Algerian woman, it was his gamble on winning the battle of the veil, because unveiling would imply bringing this [Algerian] woman within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession” (Andreassen, 2013).*

The demonization of Islamic dress as oppression has been heavily criticized since it paints women as victims with no agency, implying that Muslim communities and Muslim men are characterized by a barbarism (Brayson, 2019). Islam is thus painted as ‘a barbaric source of women’s inequality’, whereby Islamic dress is the tool of this inequality (Brayson, 2019). This narrative imposes a meaning on Islamic dress that disregards the complexity and nuance of the practice and the meaning given to it by those women who wear it; besides, this narrative obfuscates and perpetuates a French neocolonialism (Brayson, 2019).

Further, this widely used narrative of the oppressed Muslim women who needs to remove their clothing and be forced bodily integration onto the unveiled society debates, are illustrative of a ‘blame the victim’ rhetoric; the women are blamed for their own oppression (Andreassen, 2013) (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Veiled women are held responsible for their religious community’s supposed female oppression which implies a perception of women as the bodily reproducers of the community (Andreassen, 2013). The bodies of the veiled women seem to mark the imagined separation between the liberated female of Western society and an imagined oppressed female of the Muslim community (Andreassen, 2013).

Islamic dress has come to signify a threat to public safety embedded in a narrative of terrorism; since the 9/11 attack until the Charlie Hebdo and the Bataclan theatre attack the narrative of a state at war with Islamic terror elements that threaten national security has been fueled in the West (Brayson, 2019). This extended logic of security against the Islamic dress and everything that resembles it is used as a diversion to obscure neo-colonial agendas that are implemented without question or critique (Brayson, 2019).

The politicization of the Islamic dress and as a matter of fact of the bodies that wear it has been instrumentalized by various far-right politicians around Europe, with the most prominent example being that of Marine Le Pen in France (Brayson, 2019). The narrative built on the notions of fundamentalist Islam and its personification on Muslim women is conflation of terrorism and gender equality betrays a reasoned, robust account of Islamic dress as a signifier of either of these logics but is successful at entrenching a powerful terror/security/public order narrative as determinative of the public-political discourse around Islamic dress (Brayson, 2019).

Strategic recourse to the shifting logics of gender oppression and national security obfuscates and enacts the colonial substratum upon which this discourse is founded and suppresses the colonial condition from public consciousness; resurfacing under the contemporary label of Islamophobia (Brayson, 2019). Through the years many educated, working women living in the West have started wearing veils voluntarily; this is not an easy case for the West not only because of religious or cultural reasons but mostly because it undermines the traditional interpretation that it clings to so acrimoniously (Navarro, 2010), the interpretation of the brown women in danger needing saving from white, Western men.

Neocolonial sexism is the best recourse to fuel Islamophobia; based on colonial feminism which thrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and promotes the idea of the victimized women by the brutal colonized men (Navarro, 2010). Similarly, today Islamophobia is based on the very idea of brown, veiled women's salvation (Navarro, 2010). On the other hand, in Muslim countries, pornography, prostitution and lack of respect for women in the mass media are used by the heads of Muslim States to systematically criticize Western countries and their citizens (Nader, 1989) (Navarro, 2010).

Therefore, the assessment of the women's position in both the West and the East is based on the patriarchal notion of the way in which "other men" treat "their women" (Navarro, 2010). In both cases, the real concern does not lie on the condition of women every time but on the will to defend a geopolitical space; in the case of the headscarves the West seeks to maintain a position of superiority (Freedman J. , 2010) (Nader, 1989) while the Orient is trying to challenge that position (Navarro, 2010). Correspondingly,

this strategy of addressing sexism in the “Other” apart from the Islamophobic implications that it has manages to conceal masculine domination in “our” home, as well as elements present in the entire patriarchal system (Navarro, 2010).

The orientalist principle of Othering has prepared the way for the use of feminist language to justify Islamophobia (Bjoernaas, 2015). In like manner that veiling proved Muslim inferiority and justified Western colonial expansion, contemporary politicians approach the issue of unveiling from the perspective of a savior narrative: women must be saved from patriarchal and totalitarian Islamic culture (Bjoernaas, 2015). The veil operates as a marker of female subjugation, and unveiling is both justified and mandated as a feminist initiative against gender oppression (Bjoernaas, 2015).

According to Sarah Ahmed, a “Us vs Them” narrative had been created through the movement of emotions within what she calls the “affective economy” – their associations and connections with and between signs, figures and objects (Ahmed S. , 2004). Emotions move and affect subjects and figures externally, becoming temporarily attached to them in constant movement, as she explains (Ahmed S. , 2004).

This is what makes emotions crucial in defining the “delineation of the bodies of individual subjects and the body of the nation” which can through associations be attached to certain objects, creating an associative network of emotions that define imagined “others” (Ahmed S. , 2004). In her own words: “[...] what makes them alike may be their ‘unlikeness’ from ‘us’” (Ahmed S. , 2004).

The “metonymic slide” – as explained by Ahmed – is used to illustrate how the affective economy can shape language and create the “other” ; for instance, “immigration becomes

readable as (like) forms of rape or molestation: an invasion of the body of the nation” (Ahmed S. , 2004).

Ahmed uses the concept of “bogus asylum seeker” to advocate that refugees can become interchangeable and representative of a haunting or lingering threat to the nation (Ahmed S. , 2004). With the majority of refugee representations as frauds or criminals, it becomes practically impossible to detect “wanted” from “unwanted” refugees (Ahmed S.



, 2004). “Hate is economic; it circulates between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement” (Ahmed S. , 2004).

In his emblematic work, “Imagined Community”, Anderson argues that modern nations imagine themselves as utopian communities that exist based on a limiting horizontal fraternity that is sovereign (Anderson, 1997). In these “imagined communities” people are bound to each other even if they have never seen one another; these communities can either expand or decrease based on the distinctive idea of who belongs to it; ready to die in the name of the community fraternity (Anderson, 1997).

Gender has been pigeonholed as “a constitutive element of social relationship based on perceived differences between the sexes, and ... [as] a primary way of signifying power” (Andreassen, 2013). Concerning the debates on veiling gender seems to play a big part in the construction of power not only between men and women but mainly between the white majority population and the minority population of color (Andreassen, 2013). Intersecting with race, ethnicity and religion, as a primary field in which power is articulated, veiling produces a binary between the veiled, oppressed minority women and the non-veiled, liberated, white, majority ethnic women (Andreassen, 2013).

Resembling colonial times, feminist language is used to justify banning the veil in order to save Muslim women from an oppressive dress code that reflects a patriarchal social order (Bjoernaas, 2015). Western feminism, with its imperialistic concern for Muslim women’s oppression, construes Islam as inferior and therefore reinforces the colonial narrative (Bjoernaas, 2015).

In support of what has already been said Bullock and Jafri (2002) highlight three ‘personas’ that Muslim women are thought to occupy in the popular imagination: *Sexualized and assailable bodies*, *Women in need of salvation* and *Muslim women as terrorists*. In the emblematic work of Edward Said (1978) on orientalism, the notion of the exoticization and colonization of the Other, though popularly held imagery, has a central role.

### 2.3c *The three personas of veiled women*

Early male travelers to the Middle East went with erotic fantasies in mind, having been fed images of the exotic beauty 'behind the veil', and thus sexualized expectations of women found there. Postcards often carried images of scantily clad – but veiled – women in tempting poses. The fantasy lingers today, albeit in a different form.

Agathangelou and Ling (2004) claim:

*“(...) the female Other remains a silent, inscrutable object of desire ... Indeed, contemporary media outlets like National Geographic have popularized an image of the Muslim woman as a half-veiled, muted waif, eyeing the white-male world beseechingly and remotely. This motif reflects a long-standing, Orientalist tradition of treating the female Other as young (under-developed), appreciative (subordinate), and tantalizingly mysterious (unknowable)”.*

Muslim women are sexualized, such that they are reduced to their bodies. And the body is, according to Eisenstein (2006), ‘*a horribly powerful resource for those who wish to conquer, violate, humiliate, and shame.*’ While men are typically described as barbaric and dirty, women are often described in breathless terms as beautiful, striking, exotic. Their motives and activities seem less important than their physical appearance.

Muslim women’s bodies become assailable because of their exotic allure, but also because of the threat that such attraction represents to white culture. The veil enhances the allure; what is hidden becomes desired. While a male Muslim’s ideology is not necessarily obvious from the dress, a female wearing a headscarf becomes an easy target for those fearing Islamic fundamentalists. Therefore, while individuals who are actually dangerous may remain potentially invisible, their pacifist, veiled sisters may be heavily scrutinized and potentially victimized.

For white women, there is the duality of the Madonna/whore that characterizes their roles and identities. For black women, there is the Jezebel and Mammy distinction. So too there is a second contradictory piece to Muslim women’s imposed identity. Juxta-

posed to the wholly sexual 'belly dancer' is the wholly pure 'oppressed' woman in need of salvation.

The 'weak' victim has become part of the controlling image of Muslim women, and thus a trigger and key rationale not only for public violence against Muslims, but also for the 'war on terror.' The 'justness' of military action in Afghanistan in particular was certainly expressed as an attempt to root out terrorism. But especially after the WMD 'hoax' was revealed, supporters of the war turned to the narrative of saving Muslim women from their oppressors.

Ironically, the patriarchal model of Islam was to be defeated by an alternative patriarchy: 'women are characterized primarily as victims in need of saving by the paternalistic masculinity of patriarchal social or governmental institutions. This formula extends to the realm of international relations, where "the heroic, just warrior is sometimes contrasted with a malignant, often racialized, masculinity attributed to the enemy"'.

Identifiable Muslim women are also seen as the threatening other in some contexts; not someone who needs saving, but from whom the nation needs saving. Another paradox arises. While the veil is often taken as a sign of submissiveness, it is also taken as a sign of Islamic aggression. So, if women are not characterized as exotic, or as oppressed, especially when they are veiled, they are represented as mysterious, dangerous and threatening. This, too, is fuelled by the controlling image of 'Muslim-as-terrorist.' Thus, covered women are represented as 'agents' of terrorism or, as in France in recent years, 'as the tools of Islamic organizations aiming to infiltrate France' (Freedman, 2007). One right wing politician was quite explicit in his association of the hijab with security threats, claiming that 'there has been so much evidence that we can no longer afford to ignore the real meaning of the headscarf for fundamentalists'. Another claimed, in parallel fashion, that wearing a headscarf constituted a '*militant act which is supported by real fundamentalist propaganda*'. Covering is thus seen as at least tacit support for fundamentalism and terrorism.

The spectre of the Muslim woman as 'warrior' or terrorist seems to be really popular. Alongside her male counterpart, the militant female warrior is also ready to wage war in

the west. So strong is the notion of 'veiling as danger' that there have been moves across the west to ban the hijab, burqa, etc., especially in public schools.

The 'war on terror' provides another entrée into an understanding of violence against Muslim women if we consider the lessons from the scholarship on violence against women in the context of war. In this context, women's bodies become a medium on which to inscribe hostility and enmity. Women, in this context, are fair game, and in fact, powerfully appealing as targets.

## ***2.4 Imperial Feminism***

It is almost impossible to define the relationship between West and East without talking extensively about imperialism (Liddle, 1998). The importance of imperialism is not only

to be understood in an economic and political context, but also to apprehend the imbalance of power that has determined the relations between the two sides (Liddle, 1998). Perchance the strongest example of the imbalance of power between west and east is how the narrative of one is given legitimacy over the narrative of the other; the possession of greater power generally invests the knowledges of the more powerful with a greater authority than those of the powerless, and this authority facilitates the creation of universalized images of both the powerful and the powerless (Liddle, 1998).

In conformity with Said's work (Said, 1985) the context of imperialism as orientalism enabled the West to come to terms with the East, and at the same time to construct the West's identity in contrast or opposition to that of the East (Crosby, 2014) (Liddle, 1998). Said reasoned that the 'political doctrine' of orientalism has resulted in a powerful consensus and created a universal imagination concerning the Orient that has spanned many generations in the West (Said, 1985) (Liddle, 1998).

In her landmark essay "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Mohanty theorizes colonization as a diffuse discourse that creates a "relation of structural domination, and a discursive or political suppression (Mohanty, 1984)", (McKinnon S. L., 2016).

Commensurate with Mohanty, colonization, has been used as an analytic to "characterize everything, from the most evident economic and political hierarchies to the production of a particular cultural discourse about what is called the "Third World" (Mohanty, 1984)", (McKinnon S. L., 2016). In the context of Western feminism the production of a monolithic "Third World Woman" subject, are in line with the feminist practices that are complicit in global political and economic dynamics of domination and suppression (McKinnon S. L., 2016).

Imperialist feminism adopts the idea that non-Western women need to be liberated through a variety of imperialist tactics, while simultaneously misconstruing certain contemporary conditions of "Western" women as liberated (Salaymeh L. , 2019). It is a common ground in the West that non-Western societies are limited by their "problematic" cultures while Western cultures do not have adverse effects on Westerners; this pre-

sumption is a form of cultural racism (Salaymeh L. , 2019). A specific manifestation of Western cultural racism is the supposition that Western cultures promote economic development and that this economic “progress” liberates women (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

The imperialist feminist can be best understood apropos of the imaginary Other – the colonized female subject, habitually the Muslimwoman (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Muslimwoman is an imperialist construction that operates as a synecdoche for the relationship between the West and the non-West (Salaymeh L. , 2019). In the same framework, as we have already mentioned above the US government repeatedly justified its imperial interventions and occupations of Muslim-majority states as necessary to secure the rights of women (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

In consequence, the West claims that Muslimwoman needs to be liberated from her “patriarchal” culture, and only Western men can achieve this objective (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Imperialist feminists consistently attribute “the plight” of the Muslimwoman to Islam and its laws rather than to dimensions of patriarchy that are widespread, including in imperialist societies of the West (Salaymeh L. , 2019). This Muslimwoman stereotype reflects the presumption that “Muslim societies” are inherently more patriarchal, both historically and currently; even if the vast majority of premodern societies were patriarchal, and premodern

Muslim societies were not more patriarchal than contemporaneous premodern societies (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Patriarchy manifests itself differently in the West and non-West, but it cannot be quantified as being less or more so in any given society; thus, the notion that one society is more patriarchal than another is an ideological claim (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

To sum up, “Imperialist feminist” is a shorthand for a particular collection of ideological positions that promote Western imperialism and prejudice against non-Western women in the name of feminism (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Moreover, because imperialist feminism often uses the discourse of international law, particularly human rights and humanitarian intervention, it is important to recognize that modern international law is aligned with

Western imperialism; as noted by Nina Power, *“Imperialist feminism uses the language of liberal feminism (extending human rights, extending the vote) but the techniques of war. It is invariably counter-productive, and in its current phase primarily anti-Islamic”*, (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

According to imperialist feminist perspective, the key characteristic of Muslimwoman is their modest dress, particularly her headscarf (Salaymeh L. , 2019). This oversimplification ignores the fact that a big number of Muslim women do not dress modestly or wear headscarves, as well as the non-Muslim women who dress modestly for a variety of personal reasons (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

This notion fail to understand that modest dress is a cultural practice that includes both men and women, since social expectations of modest dress for Muslim women correspond to expectations for Muslim men as well (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Comparing men and women in Muslim societies, modest dress is the norm; conventional discussions do not consider that a “typical” Western woman exposes much more of her body than a “typical” Western man while a “typical” Muslim woman covers relatively little more of her body than a “typical” Muslim man (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

The aforesaid comparison highlights the fact that dress is a socially constructed practice and that women’s clothing involves not merely women’s “choice,” but rather social norms, market pressures, political identity, and men (Salaymeh L. , 2019). The social construction of the dress is gendered in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, however in different ways (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Notably, wearing a headscarf can be a fashion choice for Muslim women, just as hairstyles or wearing hats is a fashion choice for all women (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

In fact, women's hair in the west functions as its own sort of veil (Arwa, 2014). The time and money spent on hair isn't just the free exercise of personal preferences, its part of a broader cultural performance of what it means to be a woman; one that has largely been directed by men (Arwa, 2014). In spite of fixating on what the veil means for Mus-

lim women, we should take some time to think about our own homegrown veils, as suggested by Arwa Mahdawi on the Guardian (Arwa, 2014).

Whether it's covered by a veil or colored, hair is a feminist issue; taking a look at the semiotics of female sexuality, long hair is (hetero)sexual, short hair is non-sexual or homosexual, and no hair means you're either a victim or a freak (Arwa, 2014). When famous actress shaved her hair for a film role she observed all the stereotypes around the constructed image of woman and the role hair play in it; "*Some people will think I'm a neo-Nazi or that I have cancer or I'm a lesbian. It's quite liberating to have no hair*", according to Portman (Arwa, 2014). What imperialist feminism fails to incorporate is that not only the wearing of a headscarf is a political statement but rather all fashion has political implications (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

Once we acknowledge that the male gaze influences women's clothing options, we must reconsider what pressures are placed on women to dress non-modestly; both men and pop culture determine what women wear (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

Thus, when imperialist feminists allege that modest dress is a sign of oppression, they fail to recognize the oppressiveness of non-modest dress and thereby reinforce the male gaze (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

Imperialist feminist perspective concentrates on women, their bodies, and their autonomy, as if these issues can be isolated from men, their sexual desires, and their power (Salaymeh L. , 2019). How a woman decides to un/cover her body may be one signifier of women's (relative) autonomy; however, the male gaze contributes to constituting that autonomy (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

The combination of the heteronormative male gaze and the liberal myth of autonomy miscomprehends women in the West as autonomous agents, who are always empowered to consent, and the *Muslimwoman* as a hapless victim, without the choice to consent (Salaymeh L. , 2019). Imperialist feminism's reliance on the male gaze and on a



false notion of full autonomy has significant implications for women in the imperial center (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

An assemblage of imperialism and misogyny are to blame for the invention of the concept of Muslimwoman as a means to justify Western interventions, occupations, and neo-imperial policies (Salaymeh L. , 2019). The image of the Muslimwoman is constructed by imperialist feminism by inconsistent comparisons, the adoption of a heteronormative male gaze, and the imposition of a liberal myth of autonomy (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

Imperialist feminists effectively advocate that the Muslimwoman's body should be uncovered for heteronormative male pleasure and that her genitalia should invite imperialist penetration (Salaymeh L. , 2019). The clichés of headscarves render the Muslimwoman little more than the sexualized object of imperialist violation, as the genre of "hijabi porn" implies (Salaymeh L. , 2019).

Feminist human rights discourse of the last few decades, in has been used to spatialize particular forms of gender violence onto particular geographies and women's bodies, as argued by Sara McKinnon (McKinnon S. L., 2016). This spatializing essentializes these places and these nations as volatile to women; which is commonly related to political projects, geopolitical strategies of defense, diplomacy, and development consolidate around maintaining global moral authority in matters of human rights (McKinnon S. L., 2016).

A lot of attention has been brought to the imperialism feminist logic within Muslim women are presented as having no agency and being in need of rescue ( (Abu-Lughod, 2002) (Bjoernaas, 2015) (Cooke M. , 2002). The "Rescue" narratives of Muslim women have been mobilized dangerously in the past by feminist and liberal human rights groups to justify imperial political projects such as the invasion of Afghanistan and to support other efforts of military imperialism, fostering a necessary degree of skepticism around imperialist interventions in the name of "feminism" (Colpean, 2020) (Farris S. S., 2017).

A shining example of the aforementioned can be found in the case of FEMEN and the way the feminist group has decided to demonize Islam falling in line with a logic of gendered leftist Islamophobia wherein “Western feminism” has been “complicit in the Orientalist construction of the non-Western woman as inherently victimized” (Colpean, 2020). FEMEN reflect a deeper tradition of imperialist feminism that rejects the agency of Muslim women and promotes an agenda in opposition to Islam (Colpean, 2020). The activist group has illustrated an image of feminism being incompatible with feminism; their attempt to secularize Muslim women in the name of “liberation” upholds a false dichotomy between Islam and women’s rights (Colpean, 2020).

It’s the extent of the above-said mentality and practice of neocolonial practices that made many Muslim women suspicious of western-style feminism; the growing Islamization of Arab societies and the neo-colonial impact of the war on terror has meant that, according to academic Sherin Saadallah, “secular feminism and feminism which mimics that of the west is in trouble in the Arab world” (Viner, 2002).

The fact that Arab women may reject western-style feminism, does not mean they are embracing the subjugation of their sex; on the contrary Muslim women deplore misogyny just as western women do, and they know that Islamic societies also oppress them (Viner, 2002). Liberation according to Muslim women’s point of view does not encompass destroying their identity, religion or culture, and many of them choose to retain the veil (Viner, 2002).

In this framework, a particular brand of Muslim feminism has developed in recent years which is neither westernized nor secular nor Islamist and ultra-traditional, but instead is trying to dismantle the things which enforce women's subjugation within the Islamic framework (Viner, 2002). Conversely, western feminists are left with the fact that their own beliefs are being trotted out by world leaders in the name of a cause which does nothing for the women it pretends to protect (Viner, 2002). This instrumentalization and abuse of feminism has discredited the cause of western feminism in the Arab world, as well as in the West (Viner, 2002).

What is interesting in the veil discourse is that to attack her, commentators who complain about the subjugation of a woman simply because she wears a veil, do not talk about her but about her father and her husband (Panighel, 2021). Multiple articles explaining “who she is” repeatedly by describing her as the “wife of”, the “daughter of”, obliterating her self-determination (Panighel, 2021).

In an era when plenty of Western leaders are banning the headscarves and as a matter of fact restricting the liberties of the majority of Muslim women feminists should work towards the dismantling anti-Muslim stereotypes instead of reifying them (Colpean, 2020). An integral part is to recognize the agency of Muslim women because feminist audiences who recognize different manifestations of agency and are able to listen to and speak with marginalized women, instead of speaking for them (Colpean, 2020).

The new rhetoric of exclusion seems to emerge as a strategy to substantiate the anti-immigration measures that the right-wing factions of post-colonial Europe incorporate in their political agenda (Αστριδου, 2013). Although this rhetoric often includes anti-racist and progressive positions, such as notions of deconstructing the concept of 'race', rejecting an inherent superiority of 'whites' and viewing cultures in egalitarian terms in essence, emanates from a conviction of the superiority of 'Western civilization', a superiority interwoven with the modern construction of the Weberian rational subject of the Enlightenment (Αστριδου, 2013). The perception of Western civilization as advanced began to slowly constructed, in contrast to an equally a-historical conception of civilization of the East as "backward", and with both of these static conceptions of each civilization corresponding to different geographical regions, and at the same time justifying colonial practices (Αστριδου, 2013).

In the context of the Islamophobic approach of the Other, these perceptions of the superiority of Western civilization exist (Αστριδου, 2013). A transnational conceptualization of

the Islam, with a common agenda that 'threatens' all the states of the West culturally and demographically (Αστρίδου, 2013). Islamophobia is defined as the perception of Islam, not just as a religion, but as a monolithic, static and entrenched political ideology, violent and aggressive, which supports terrorism, which does not share common values with other cultures, nor interacts with them, whereby on the one hand Muslims are represented as 'barbarians, irrational, primitive and sexist' and on the other hand justifies as 'normal' the manifestation of hostility and the application of discrimination and exclusion against them (Αστρίδου, 2013). Islamophobic rhetoric often incorporates nationalist concerns about the Islamisation of Europe (Αστρίδου, 2013).



(constantinosbogdanos, 2021)

The cornerstone of the radical cultural difference that Islamophobia underpins has been the oppression of Muslim women (Αστρίδου, 2013). Although the definition of Islamophobia is recent, the ideological concept it describes has deep roots in the European narrative about Islam (Αστρίδου, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> "It's not a poster but a whole common chamber of the EU and the Council of Europe. It is now clear: the progressive elites have taken over the institutional imposition of islam in our societies. The attitude towards this issue will in future determine the political field", writes the right-wing politician, Konstantinos Bogdanos, commenting on the campaign of the Council of Europe

The 'position of the Muslim woman' emerges as a critical aspect of this narrative during the colonial imposition of European Muslim countries in the 19th century (Αστρίδου, 2013). Colonial rhetoric then appropriated the rhetoric of feminism, which was gaining ground in Europe at the time; the feminist criticism denounced the Enlightenment's conception of the rational subject, which repressed and excluded as irrational both female subjects and the subordinate masculinities of ethnocultural Others (Αστρίδου, 2013).

But the selective appropriation of feminist rhetoric by colonialists, on the one hand, reinforced the existing normative standard of citizenship, and on the other hand succeeded in the 'status of women' into a criterion for separating the valid from the imperfect cultures (Delphy 2004:64) and into a moral alibi for colonialism as a campaign for "liberation of oppressed women", while at the same time providing "pretextual cover" for the oppression and exclusion of women in Western metropolises (Αστρίδου, 2013).

With a similar mechanism, the "war on terror" in which the the Western civilization's carrier states, led by the United States, joined forces, abused feminist rhetoric, and overlapped the military interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003 under the pretext of 'saving the women of Islam' (Αστρίδου, 2013). After 9/11 the demonization of Muslims in the context of dominant political discourses and a plethora of negative media reports, brought about an upsurge in Islamophobia worldwide and especially in America, Europe, and Oceania (Αστρίδου, 2013).

a sudden interest in the women's rights in Muslim countries was expressed by people and by conservative factions that had never before expressed feminist concerns, a fact which has been describes as the "seduction of feminism by the ruling power" (Eisenstein, 2015). Once again, the oppression of women was presented as an inherent element of Islam, and silenced the contribution of other social determinants such as poverty but also political factors, such as the earlier strengthening of extremist Islamic organizations by the US itself in the context of the Cold War (Αστρίδου, 2013).

The rhetoric of imperialist feminism, contributes in practice to the deterioration of the living conditions of women and men (Αστρίδου, 2013). , as long as it insists on women's oppression as an inherent element of Islam, the more fundamentalists perceive this rhetoric as an attack on Islam and react against women's rights (Αστρίδου, 2013). Violence against women has multiplied in war zones, compared to their previous rates under Taliban rule, for instance (Αστρίδου, 2013). The killing of the campaigner for women's rights, Sitara Achakzai in 2009, and the attempted assassination of 15-year-old schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai in 2012 are typical examples of this transformation of the "women's issue" into a field of conflict and warfare (Αστρίδου, 2013).

In the context of this soteriological discourse, which constructs as the only salvation for Muslim women is Western intervention, the collective actions of Muslim women themselves are disregarded and silenced, further, they are presented as passive victims, incapable of proactive action (Αστρίδου, 2013). their own conceptualizations of what constitutes a 'problem', and respectively of what constitutes 'liberation' are overlooked; while, for example, evidence reports that Afghan women assess the impact of US airstrikes as a major problem as well as rape, hunger and the difficulties they face as refugees, but from the western point of view imperialist feminism focuses on symbolic issues such as the burqa and the hijab, which are perceived as the epitome of female oppression (Αστρίδου, 2013).

In the performance of the covering of the head (Hasham) the "insurmountable cultural difference" between the "civilized West" and the "backward" East are sited; also it symbolizes Muslim otherness in Western societies (Αστρίδου, 2013). Hence women who practice it often suffer institutional or extra-institutional reaction from Western societies (Αστρίδου, 2013)

#### ***2.4a Femonationalism in European Politics***

Populist parties are the expression of protest and resentment: against a traditional type of politics accused of being an enemy of the will of the people; against a globalized

economic system; and against the multiculturalism and pluralism that undermine perceptions of pure identity and membership in a national community (Donà, 2020, #).

Right-wing populism is a ‘thin-centered ideology which puts a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous “Others” who are together depicted as depriving the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice’ (Donà, 2020, #). With the worsening of the two European crises of migrants and refugees and demography issues, such as immigration, nationalism and the notion of ‘Others’ – topics always on the agendas of populist radical right parties – have become core issues in the public and political debate (Donà, 2020, #).

During the last decades in Europe plenty are the examples of the PRR parties closely linked to elements of nativism, authoritarianism and EU-skepticism: examples of such parties include the French Front National/National Rally, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Italian Lega, Alternative for Germany, the Danish People Party, the Finns, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Hungarian Fidesz and the Polish Law and Justice (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020) (Donà, 2020, #).

Many of the above mentioned European political parties (most of them characterized by their anti-immigrant and islamophobic views) have mobilized on a rhetoric of progressive gender values; the ideas about masculinity and femininity— with special reference to the protection of women (and children)—fuels particular forms of male empowerment, but also particular forms of gendered violence (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020).

Even though, most of these political formations and organization rarely discuss gender equality, their anti-Islam agenda is strongly based on conceptions of Islam as inherently unequal and oppressive to women (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020). This rhetoric situates them as different from the perceived imminent Islamic threat linked to immigration; this way the far right espouses Western liberal “values”, including gender equality and (white) women’s émanicipation (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020).

Far right political parties - such as the French National Rally and American alt-right celebrity Milo Yiannopoulos - identify themselves as LGBTQ-friendly and gender equality supporters (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020). This very mobilization along progressive gender policies serves an anti-immigration and anti-Islam purpose and is often described as femonationalism or homonationalism. Despite these developments, traditional gender roles largely dominate dynamics among far right movements and actors (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020).

Since the early 2000s a number of Western European countries introduced measures to simultaneously criminalize migrants and especially Muslim women (Soltani, 2016). Namely, Italy in 2002 passed Law No. 177, which required migrants to be fingerprinted and imposed severe sanctions on undocumented migrants; while a few years later, in 2004, France started the banning of the headscarf in public schools, a decision culminated in the government's wanting Muslim women to embrace France's principle of *laïcité* (secularism) (Soltani, 2016).

These legal structures are some of the many iterations of how an ideological formation built on an anti-migrant and anti-Muslim foundation has become more dominant in European politics (Soltani, 2016). Femonationalism is also a quiver for white nationalism with figures such as the feminist Susan Moller Okin who claimed that non-Western cultures are more oppressive to women (Soltani, 2016).

This type of rhetoric reveals what Joan Wallach Scott describes as Western liberal democracies' perspective through a "*racist lens that had justified imperial conquest... [and viewing] mostly Muslim people...not only as different but as inferior*" (ibid).

The rise of far-right parties has generated a litany of self-described feminists who propose nationalist cordoning from Scandinavia to Southern Europe (ibid). Adhering to national conservatism, parties such as the Sweden Democrats, Swiss People's Party,



and AfD jettison themselves from centrist parties by championing their burgeoning female members. European nationalist parties have developed women's caucuses (ibid).

Case in point, the German AfD<sup>3</sup> has tried to appeal to women under the leadership of Alice Weidel and Beatrix von Storch with the inauguration of the *Frauen in der Alternativ*, a working group that aims to increase female voters in their party structure (Soltani, 2016) (Bonhomme, 2019). In fact, some of the AfD members even instrumentalized the language of the Me Too movement to prove their support for women's rights (Bonhomme, 2019). Yet, their position is entrenched in anti-Islamic rhetoric that then reproduces anti-feminist policies—tied both to productive and social reproductive forces (Bonhomme, 2019).

Since the federal elections of 2017 both in Germany and France it seems that the issues of gender equality - as well as the LGBTQI\* rights - rose to prominence. It is observed that in both countries there was a resurgence of right-wing parties, such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany (hereinafter AfD), and Marine Le Pen's *Front National* or FN in France (Soltani, 2016).

In the case of AfD, according to Open Democracy, the party is characterized as “the most explicitly anti-feminist party” since it wants to uphold (or rather: reinstate) “the traditional nuclear heteronormative family [as it] is the only model that can reverse the country's declining birth rate, and having children is hence more of an act for the ‘fatherland’ than the result of a personal decision” (Soltani, 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) is a right-wing populist party founded in 2013 with the original aim to oppose Germany's membership of the EU. When the number of new refugees in Germany increased in 2014 and 2015, AFD changed focus to instead make resistance to the flow of refugees their core issue. AFD is now represented in nine of Germany's 16 state legislatures, and aims to win their first national seats in the upcoming federal elections (24 September). The party program can be read in its entirety here: (in German), and here (in English).

On the other side, the Front National<sup>4</sup> seems to strongly appeal for feministic issues only in opposition to “Islamisation” (Soltani, 2016). Thus, the ‘feminism’ of Marine LePen, her party, and her followers boils down to anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Further, Marie Le Pen seems that is only a feminist when it comes to “white, French, Catholic-raised upper middle class women” (Soltani, 2016). Marine LePen and the Front National are only concerned with women’s rights when they are endangered by ‘foreigners’, they do not attempt to challenge the status quo in terms of gender equality (Soltani, 2016).

While appealing to fear of social transformation, Le Pen’s statement encompasses the gender equality paradox, as it is her illiberal policies that roll back women’s rights by dictating a French ‘secular’ uniform that removes any markers of a religious or cultural identity (Soltani, 2016). In this sense, the perceived oppression of Islam is replaced with a narrow definition of secularism, both of which reduce individual autonomy (Soltani, 2016). Assimilation of religious symbols conveys that there are “normal” and accepted symbols while others are “conspicuous” and too visible for public consumption (Soltani, 2016). By using state secularism as a source of exclusion and a method of delineating the boundaries of the nation – identifying who does and does not belong – the FN undermines the intent of secularism as a national value that promotes acceptance and tolerance (Skjelsbæk I., Leidig E., Beau Segers I., and Thorleifsson C., 2020).

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<sup>4</sup> Front National (FN) is a right-wing populist and nationalist political party in France. Its main policies include opposition to France's membership of the EU, economic protectionism, law and order, as well as resistance to immigration. The party was founded in 1972 and Jean-Marie Le Pen was the party's leader from its inception until his retirement in 2011. He has been convicted of racism or inciting racial hatred at least six times, and charged for anti-semitic remarks. His daughter, Marine Le Pen, was elected as his successor and she has pursued a policy to mitigate the party's image. In the second round of the parliamentary elections, Marine Le Pen gained 35 % of the votes. The electoral program can be read in its entirety here.

# Marine Le Pen : « Un référendum pour sortir de la crise migratoire »

Par Marine Le Pen  
13 janvier 2016 à 16h28



La présidente du Front national s'exprime après les événements de la nuit de la Saint-Sylvestre, à Cologne en Allemagne

<sup>5</sup> (Le Pen, 2016)

But these practices are nothing new for the European far right; specifically, under fascist rule in Germany, “the government attempted to increase births to Aryan women by restricting abortion and providing financial incentives for childbearing while subjecting numerous minority women to forced sterilization” (Lieback H., 2017). On that notion, the Front National’s branch of ‘feminism’ shares some widely criticized traits with White Feminism; a type of feminism criticized for prioritizing the experiences and voices of cisgender, straight, white women over women of color, queer women and those who fall outside this narrow identity (Lieback H., 2017).

In the nationalistic parties we can detect that right-wing populist feminism emerges as a propaganda tool that does not seek internal change and true amelioration of women’s and LGBTQI\* people’s rights, but exploits allegedly feminist rhetoric to establish a notion of a well-functioning (and inherently European) status quo that needs to be defended against ‘intruders’, ‘outsiders’, and ‘others’; constituting the hijacking of feminism and the Western gender equality values (Lieback H., 2017).

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<sup>5</sup> An article written by Le Pen suggesting a referendum to stop immigration crisis, with reference to the Cologne case



(Le Pen, 2)

In this right-wind rhetoric far right European parties have identified the Muslim women's dress as a boundary of belonging (Soltani, 2016). What happens with the far-right's obsessive preoccupation with the dress of Muslim women - and especially the use of the veil - in Europe is described by academics as the epitome of political paradoxology. The practical manifestation of the gender equality paradox is rooted in the practice of using gender equality rhetoric to justify policies that reduce women's agency and autonomy (Soltani, 2016).

The Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ), Front National (FN) in France, Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD), and Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV) in the Netherlands differ substantially in their platforms and rhetoric, but they hold similar stances on Muslim women's dress.

In all of the above mentioned European countries have enacted some level of restrictions on what women can wear. The political discourse on Muslim women's dresses started with the affaire des foulards, headscarves affair, in France in 1989; after the securitization of immigration discourse, and, more recently, the migrant crisis, Muslim

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<sup>6</sup> "This European communication in favor of the Islamist veil is scandalous and indecent while millions of women are courageously fighting against this enslavement, including in France. It is when women remove the veil that they become free, not the other way around!", wrote Le Pen in 2021 commenting on the Council of Europe campaign.

women's dress – perceived as a symbol of extremism – has attracted political discussion not only in France but throughout Western Europe.

Arguments to publicly ban clothing items such as the hijab, niqab, and burqa are based on overlapping – and equally contradictory – claims of victimization, religious neutrality and state secularism, and, ultimately, cultural visibility. According to right-wing populist parties, wearing “religious symbols” undermines a nation's secular values (Soltani, 2016). This is just a manifestation of the concerns regarding the maintenance and strength of the dominant religious culture.

Under these notions, the anti-veil legislation in France, for example, is based on the concept of secularism and the need for the absence of “conspicuous religious symbols” in the public. With reference, to Muslim women's dress as a threat AfD and the FPÖ argue that it weakens German and Austrian identities respectively, since the presence of Islamic practices and traditions are against “the religious traditions of Christianity”.

More specifically, the German AfD views multiculturalism as a direct threat to its “dominant national culture” (Leitkultur) and seeks to regulate the practice of minority religions. In this rhetoric the AfD promotes an assimilationist policy in which displays of a Muslim identity such as a woman's decision to cover herself is a threat to the “survival of the nation-state as a cultural unit”. While, the FPÖ, objects to all forms of “fanaticism and extremism” that threaten the dominant Christian culture, an overture directed at the perceived growing visibility of Islam in Austria (Soltani, 2016).

Next to the aforementioned countries, the Dutch PVV<sup>7</sup> attempted to impose a tax on the headscarf as a means of punishment for “polluting Dutch culture”. During the parliamentary debate for the imposing of the tax, Geert Wilders stated,

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<sup>7</sup> Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) is a Dutch nationalist and right-wing populist party founded in 2006 by Geert Wilders. Wilders is still leading the party and has been convicted for inciting discrimination. The PVV has proposed to ban the Koran, and to close all mosques in the Netherlands. The party is eurosceptic. In parliamentary elections in 2017 the PVV won 13 % of the vote and became the second largest party in the House of Representatives. The one-page-long (!) electoral program can be read in its entirety here.

*“Let’s ensure that the Netherlands will look like the Netherlands again. Those headscarves are really a sign of oppression of the woman, a sign of submission, a sign of conquest” (Korteweg, 2013: 764).*

PVV appears obsessed with Islamisation. From their one-page election program, 1/3 of the page is dedicated to de-Islamifying the Netherlands. The party has also produced a report on violence against women in Islam. The report focuses on forced marriage, isolation of women, honor based violence and female genital mutilation – forms of violence which of course must all be addressed. The problem is that the party sees violence against women as merely an Islamist issue. As a matter of fact, the Dutch party claiming to be fighters of women’s rights does not actually lift a finger for women’s rights. Indicative of that behavior is the fact that they voted against the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, an international convention to combat violence against women, and against a bill to combat female genital mutilation. [opendemocracy](#)

We observe that the policies and rhetoric ultimately come down to the supremacy of national identity and the visibility of Islam. The FPÖ, FN, AfD, and PVV all view Islam as a threat to their culture and national identity, and, thus, seek to regulate women’s dress as a method to remove the visibility of the “Other” (Kane-Hartnett, 2018 ). There is a notion in all those parties that the wearing of a headscarf (hijab, niqab, burqa) operates as a denial of their national cultures and a sign of the inherent difference of Muslims (Kane-Hartnett, 2018 ).

The contradiction in promoting the concept of gender equality and individual freedom while prohibiting women to control their bodies is obvious, yet the value-driven rhetoric is generally well received by the public and provides cover for overtly nativist policies (Kane-Hartnett, 2018 ).

Ultimately, Islam is depicted by the far-right as the number one enemy of gender equality – ironic, especially considering the AfD’s great resistance to gender mainstreaming, and the PVV’s poor track record on defending women’s rights.

*The AFD states: "Islam does not belong to Germany". It is "a danger to our state, our Society, and our values".*

*The FN claims: "To defend the rights of women: Fight against Islamism that wants to roll back women's fundamental freedoms; establish a national plan for equal pay between men and women and the fight against professional and social insecurity."*

The above statements are indicative of the way in which the converging parties treat women and feminist discourse by instrumentalizing feminist arguments to present an Islamophobic agenda.

European political leaders often make scapegoats of migrant and Muslim women without interrogating the ways that sexism gestures in their own society (Bonhomme, 2019). Elisa Banfi notes that countries such as Switzerland have historically instituted burqa bans "in the name of women's rights," even though gender parity in electoral politics has not been fully achieved (Bonhomme, 2019). While Switzerland operates as a direct democracy today, women make up only 30 percent of its house of representatives and 15 percent of the senate (Bonhomme, 2019).

### **2.4b The Greek case**

The case of Greece seems to be a lot different from the above mentioned European states; its heterochronous and peculiar phenomenon (Vougiouka et al., 2021,). While in the rest of European countries the instrumentalization of women's and LGBTQ rights in the name of re-nationalizing identity, is mobilized from the far-right in Greece the protagonist is the traditional right (Vougiouka et al., 2021). This happens due to three main reasons: the hegemony of the Left within the women's and LGBTI movements, the role of the Church and the commitment of the feminist movement to the second wave. (Vougiouka et al., 2021)

In the first place, comes the role of the Greek Orthodox Church, which is fundamental in the formation of the right ideology since the secularization is something that has been never fully achieved in the country (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #). The Greek Church retains its ability to exert pressure and have a say in official state policies, while at the

same time being a hub of immense ideological and institutional influence; which makes the Church an important ideological pole of attraction for Greeks (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #).

The conservative neo-liberal right - mostly seen in the face of New Democracy, the currently ruling party - is the one adopting a new identity politics (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #). The far-right as illustrated in the face of Golden Dawn, did not shift its ideas and did not hide its opposition to reproductive rights and, in general, to feminist and LGBTI claims (Sakellariou, 2017).

The European scheme, then, is embodied in terms of the Right and not the far right in Greek current affairs, especially with the #metoo movement,

where members of the New Democracy government have utilitarianly expressed an essentialist pro-women discourse (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #). Vis a vis, on 8 March 2021 Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis spoke about invisible heroines referring to victims of sexual harassment in sports (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #). Nonetheless, at the same time the government of New Democracy proceeded with a bill on compulsory co-parenting, without introducing any provision for cases of domestic violence and gender abuse, ignoring so far the concerns and criticism from many feminist organisations (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #).

Despite the differences between the Greek case and the European paradigm, there is a point of political and ideological convergence; the issue of the headscarf (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #). In the political discourse the headscarf has been highlighted as a symbol of oppression by right-wing party MPs (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #). Expressly, the headscarf issue has been presented as an instrument of oppression and a means of undermining women's freedoms, a symbol that takes away the autonomy of Muslim women and places them outside the public sphere, while emphasising male domination (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #).

In the following excerpt the former New Democracy MP Konstantinos Bogdanos as he positions himself on the issue of the veil:



*“... However, the burqa and the niqab are both a security problem, as they can make anyone invisible to citizens and authorities, and a violation of women's rights, when they wear them compulsively, being intimidated and oppressed, something unacceptable for the dominant culture of our country, as well as for its legal culture (...)”*

This particular position of Bogdanos raises two central issues, firstly, a conception of Muslim women as subjects without implicit agency, without any room for personal choice is reproduced, and Muslim 'culture' is contrasted with the a priori free 'culture' of 'western' Greece; secondly, we observe the adoption of a manipulative discourse by a politician who has expressed sexist views in the past, culminating in the targeting of academics in the field of Gender Studies<sup>8</sup>, but also in his homophobic statements during a TV interview<sup>9</sup>. This specific politician expresses his concerns for women's issues and freedoms as expressed through feminist positions, only when these concerns are related to Islam and the threat posed by the “Other”, and the need to liberate muslim women (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #).

His views are also indicative as expressed in the following tweet where he refers to the issue of femicide, adopting the rhetoric of the unnecessary existence of the term, even considering that it degrades women, disregarding the structural elements of patriarchy that constitute it and threaten the females.

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<sup>8</sup> 'The far-right front "worries" about Gender Studies and targets female teachers - and not only', The Press Project, 2021, <https://thepressproject.gr/to-akrodexio-metopo-anisychei-gia-tis-spoudes-fylou-kai-stochopoiei-didaskouses-kai-ochi-mono/>

<sup>9</sup> "Bogdanos's new rant about 'vegan lesbians' and 'bachalosatanistries'" tvxs, 2019, <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/neo-paralirima-mpogdanoy-gia-bigkan-lesbies-kai-mpaxalosatanistries-binteo>



<sup>10</sup> (constantinosbogdanos, 2019)

To review, femonationalism has not developed in the Greek context the same way it has in other European countries; in Greece the conservative neoliberal right has taken the front to redefine its image by introducing a rights-based discourse and attempting to express feminist concerns (Vougiouka et al., 2021, #).

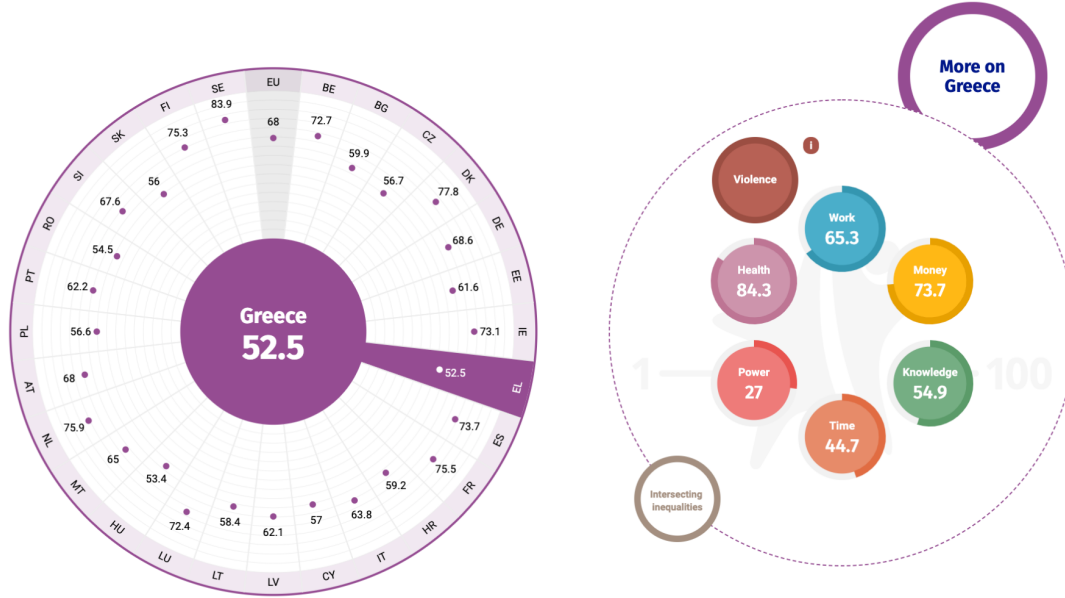
The Church-state relations that remain closely linked and the attachment of the traditional right-wing voter in the country to the triptych of homeland-religion-family leaves the Right a small but fertile ground to exploit the feminist discourse in such a way as to satisfy the need for safety and protection of the homeland - from the foreigner, Muslim dynast and the culture of the headscarf they bring - while at the same time using a neoliberal identity to defend the issues that affect feminism. With the above mentioned, happening at a time when in Greece in 2021 alone there were 17 femicides (Αγγιμανάκη, 2022). While the country ranks 27th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index, 15.5 points below the EU's score (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

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<sup>10</sup> "Femicide." However, the word from which the neologism deviates is not "andricide", but "homicide". Thus, from the much-vaunted political correctness and neo-Marxist/feminist lingo we end up with the linguistic dehumanization of women. Enlightenment.

Index score for  Greece ▼ for the 2021 ▼ edition

 The data for 2021 Index is mostly from 2019. The UK is not included.



(European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021)

## ***2.5 Discourse Analysis and Social Constructivism***

Critical Discourse Analysis is the meeting ground between the critical tradition in social analysis and linguistics and explores the ideological character of discourse (Van Dijk, 2001). It constitutes a set of critical approaches that focus on the social analysis of discourse, which, although differing in terms of theoretical foundations, methodology, and objects of study, share the common goal of tracing the strategies applied to discourse that contribute to the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of dominant ideologies and asymmetrical relations of power and authority (Van Dijk, 2001).

They are interpretive approaches: they do not simply describe an existing reality but evaluate and attempt to interpret it (Fairclough, 2005). The Critical Discourse Analysis approaches are interdisciplinary, because in studying social phenomena, they necessarily draw from many disciplines, while they are also characterized as eclectic, as one can selectively draw from the set of assumptions and methodological tools for the construction of a research position (Wodak, R. & Meyer, M., 2009).

Norman Fairclough (Fairclough, 2005) debates that CDA method seeks the systematic investigation of often opaque relations of causality and determination between discourse practices, events and texts, and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; in order to explore how the opacity of these relations between discourse and society is a factor in securing power and hegemony.

Discourse analysis should be handled as a package, where theory and method are interlinked (Van Dijk, 2001). The package contains philosophical premises regarding the role of language in the social construction of the world, theoretical models, methodological guidelines for approaching a research area and specific techniques for language (Van Dijk, 2001).

Discourse analysis is based on a social constructivist point of view, where language is important; language does not depict reality in a direct, uncomplicated or neutral way, but rather contributes to shaping reality, social relationships and identities (Van Gorp, 2007). Discourse analysis is a useful method when studying debates and in studies of power

schemes such as hegemonies or gender (Wodak, R. & Meyer, M., 2009). But also to identify and map identity constructions (ibid), which means that a discourse analysis is suitable for this thesis and suitable to accomplish the aim of this thesis.

## **2.6 Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis**

The chosen method is a critical discourse analysis by Norman Fairclough. It aims to expose hidden power structures (Van Dijk, 2001), which is helpful in achieving the aim of this study. According to Fairclough, *the only way of gaining access to the truth is through representation of it, and all representations involve particular points of view, values, and goals* (Fairclough, 2005).

Moreover, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis emphasizes that discourses are not only constitutive, but also constituent meaning that discourses are not raised above the activities of other social practitioners and social processors, but are constructed by as well as constructing the world (Fairclough, 2005).

Discourses, according to Fairclough, have three functions, they shape and reshape social identities, social relations and knowledge and meaning systems (Fairclough, 2005). The analysis is mainly centered around the communicative event and the order of discourse (Fairclough, 2005) .

In this particular study the communicative event is a number of articles and the order of discourse is the media discourse. The order of discourses entails several specific discursive practices, which compete with each other to create and establish meaning. Here the concept of hegemony is central, and helpful when connecting discourses with power.

### **2.6a Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis**

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis was chosen in this case because of the fact that the method is described as the most developed of the critical discourse analysis methods when wanting to do research about communication, culture and society (Van Dijk, 2001). Supplementary, CDA aims to map out the role of discursive practice in sustaining

the social world that implies unequal power relations, which is closely linked to the purpose of this thesis. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is a three dimensional model which entails **text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice** (Fairclough, 2005). According to Fairclough, every case of language use is a communicative event, and a critical discourse analysis of a communicative event is an analysis of the relationship between three dimensions; text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 2005).

### **2.6b The Three Dimensional Model**

In this case the text consists of speeches, written texts, images or a mixture of the linguistic and the visual. The analysis of texts has a focus on the formal features of the text, including vocabulary, grammar, and connection between sentences that construct discourses and genres linguistically (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002).

Although multiple tools are suitable for analyzing text, this study uses modality and transitivity. The use of modality in order to analyze in CDA means focusing on the speaker's or author's degree of affinity in a statement.

What kind of modality is used has consequences for the discourse's construction of both social relations and on knowledge- and meaning systems (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002). Mass media often incorporate objective modalities in their text when presenting interpretations as if they were facts or the truth. When the media use modalities their language reflects their authority in society – the power of the dominant speech (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002). Transitivity, on the other hand, is analyzing how different processes and events are connected, or not connected, to objects and subjects (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002).

The purpose behind this analysis is to map the ideological consequences that diverse representations may contribute to (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002). This is done by examining how sentences are constructed; for instance the journalistic texts, use active voice for members of the out-group ("the others", "the bad guys", minority groups, the migrants, refugees) presenting them as subjects (perpetrators).

It is a negative self-presentation (Van Dijk, 2001). As van Dijk argues, the choice of grammatical person in racist texts of journalistic discourse is not accidental (Van Dijk, 2001). Rather, it defines the identity of the community and the group, and is often projected as inequality between 'we' and 'the others' and a distinction is made between the in-group and out-group, respectively (Van Dijk, 2001). This in-group and out-group polarization is based on the projection of our good and their negative or the mitigation of our own bad and their positive aspects (Van Dijk, 2001).

In many cases, the recurring views on a topic can be generalized and result in more complex social attitudes (Van Dijk, 2001). Analysis of discourse practice includes processes of text production, distribution and consumption (Fairclough, 2005). Analyzing the discourse practice is relevant when one is interested in analyzing how the text is produced and how it is consumed (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002). To do this kind of analysis one needs to find out what stages a text is required to go through before being printed and produced, and what changes the text has gone through during the different stages (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002).

Another discourse practice of analysis can also be conducted through looking at the intertextuality of a text, which means that the text builds upon other text. Manifest intertextuality is a clearer form of intertextuality, where the text you analyze is not only in an obvious way based on another text, but the author is openly referring to another text or statements to support his or her own statement (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002). Sociocultural practice, is a third dimension which aims to map out which sociocultural practice the communicative event is part of, and to do that it is necessary to include other relevant theories, like sociological theories (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J., 2002).

In the present study theoretical concepts and framing theory have been used. The final conclusions of the study are to be found between discursive practice and the broader sociocultural practice.

As already mentioned there are no clear guidelines on how to analyze the sociocultural practices; although there are a set of questions as they are suggested by Winther Jørgensen and Phillips that the researcher can ask the text, such as ; Does the discursive

practice reproduce the discourse order?, Is the discourse order reshaped so it creates social change? What are the ideological, political and social consequences of the discursive practice?, Does the discursive practice reinforce or conceal certain unequal power relations in society?

### ***III.Method and Material***

This section starts with a discussion of reflexivity, the position of the author. Then Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis with the chosen tools is introduced. Finally, the empirical material and ethical considerations are discussed.



### **3.1 Reflexivity**

The constructive perspective in combination with the feminist tradition set as an important issue reflexivity and the position of the author. It is of a vital importance to underline that the researcher is always involved, contributing and partly responsible in their research, but also that research always takes on a subjective dimension (Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. , 2002).

At this point theory gives us the right to make a very important assumption; the research can never be conducted from a neutral position. I am aware of that my background, as a woman and a feminist, may direct or indirect affect some choices made in this study. Concerning this very research my focus on Muslim, immigrant and refugee women in Europe comes from my personal interest to learn more which is highly connected with the fact that immigration is part of my family's background.

Furthermore, my choice of media reflection is influenced by my former education in media studies. Also, institutional and cultural factors affect how we understand and perceive the world around us, and therefore affect how we analyze texts (Wodak, R. & Meyer, M.,, 2009).

In line with a social constructivist standpoint, I argue that the research and the text produced through the study is influenced by the researcher's pre-understandings. It is highly possible that other researchers with a different background, might see and react to other things in the texts, and therefore come up with a different result than in this thesis. Despite the aforementioned standpoint – that we all are subjective even as researchers – the aim is to be as objective as possible.

### **3.2 Reliability and Validity**

As with many other qualitative methods in social science, discourse analysis involves a criticism concerning the level of reliability in the study. A study with a high reliability means that the study can be conducted in the same way, by another researcher and still come up with the same result (Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O., 2000). Discourse analysis typically includes interpretations of the chosen empirical material, thus there is a risk that the researcher's own values and opinions might influence the results of the study,

that the interpretations of the material are perceived as subjective (Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O., 2000).

In order to reduce the problem of reliability, it is important to employ transparency. Transparency means that the discourse analyst describes exactly how an interpretation has been made, for instance by using quotes from the text to justify their interpretations in the study (Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O., 2000). The validity of a study is perhaps the most difficult, and at the same time the most central problem for empirical social science (Wood, L. A., & Kroger, R. O., 2000). As in the problem of reliability, transparency is important in increasing the validity of a study. In order to enhance the validity, it is crucial that the measurement tools, employed to assist the analysis and the researcher, are clear; further, an accurate and detailed explanation of how the survey was conducted.

### ***3.3 Material***

The material to be analyzed in the present research consists of editorial articles in Greek newspapers regarding the use of headscarves from Muslim immigrant/refugee women produced between 2015-2021.

The chosen material has been searched in the online archives provided by the newspapers' websites. The time frame is set from January 2015 to December 2021, due to the fact that during these years more Muslim women (both refugees and immigrants) came to Greece apropos of the refugee crisis.

In the search for relevant editorial articles, keywords such as immigrant, refugee, veiled, Europe, and bans on headscarves were used.

A first search resulted in 72 editorial articles. To further narrow it down I read all the articles and excluded articles that were not in line with my research. These steps resulted in 25 relevant editorial articles.

### ***3.4 Ethical Considerations***

During the study ethical considerations have been regarded. As the study's empirical material consists of articles that have been published in newspapers, consent is not required when using public information provided via mass media. The study does not share any sensitive information about private or professional persons. Therefore, no

consent is required from individuals who have expressed themselves in interviews, other articles for the purpose of being published publicly.

## ***IV. Analysis***

This is the chapter where the analysis of the research data is presented.

From the analysis of the journalistic texts we observed that three central models dominate in the journalistic narrative. Important is also the manifestation of a sense of separation between Them and Us. Where they in the texts are understood as the culturally others and we is a response to a culturally homogenized, morally and value-laden European group distinguished by its inherited superiority over the 'primitive' others.

During the thorough readings of the empirical material three central subdiscourses emerged, which entailed descriptions of the veiled woman as a threat, the veiled woman as a victim and the veiled woman in need for salvation.

The three subdiscourses, named *the Threat*, *the Victim* and *Saving brown women* are analyzed and divided according to Fairclough's analytic model; text, discursive practice and sociocultural practice.

Further we can detect a general focus on the notion of "European gender equality"; Europeans seem to be characterized by values such as equality, democracy, and human rights.

## 4.1 The Three Sub-discourses

### 4.1a THE THREAT

The first sub discourse that emerged during the readings of the empirical material is a discourse of the veiled, Muslim, immigrant or refugee, woman portrayed as a Threat. Women are instrumentalized in the journalistic discourse and pictured as a Trojan horse coming to conquer the West. Prevalent is the danger Muslim women pose for European and Greek Christianity.

#### 1. TEXT

In the above article - written by Thanos Tzimeros a radical alt-right politician and journalist, founder of the right-wing political party Dimioutgia Ksana (Δημιουργία ξανά) - makes a clear division between "Us" and the "Other".

In this case referring to "... *one of "ours"*", he refers to one of the most important aspects of the Greek identity, that of religion and specifically Christianity by contrasting the image of an excessively religious Christian woman with that of a Muslim woman, where in both cases the woman body has refused to follow the contemporary rules of fashion and chooses to dress in the religious way either with black, modest clothes or with a headscarf.

In this confrontation, as a supporter of the harsh neoliberal model, Tzimeros states, both linguistically and conceptually, that he does not agree with either of the two images

of the excessive imprinting of faith on a woman's body. He concludes that while both live their secular lives within a grid of religious appearance norms the Christian woman is not dangerous; since as he explains, Christians don't plant bombs, Muslims do.

*"So just as you see one of "ours" with the braid, sideburns, dark clothes, thick socks and black moccasins and you realize she is "divine", so the Muslim woman wearing a headscarf defines herself. "Are you going to ban the christians from dressing too?" the classic idiot will ask. No, idiot. Because neither "Life" nor "The Savior" puts bombs. Allah's fighters do." (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)*

*[“Έτσι, όπως βλέπεις μια "δική μας" με την πλεξούδα, τις φαβορίτες, τα σκούρα ρούχα, τις χοντρές κάλτσες και τα μαύρα μοκασίνια και συνειδητοποιείς ότι είναι "θεική", έτσι και η μουσουλμάνα που φοράει μαντήλα ορίζει τον εαυτό της. "Θα απαγορεύσετε και στους χριστιανούς να ντύνονται;" θα ρωτήσει ο κλασικός ηλίθιος. Όχι, ηλίθιε. Γιατί ούτε η "Ζωή" ούτε ο "Σωτήρας" βάζει βόμβες. Το κάνουν οι μαχητές του Αλλάχ".]*

In a second excerpt from a text written by Tzimeros we see the lucid positioning of a moral panic that stigmatizes the “Other”. The journalist states clearly that we (we, Europeans) are at an unbelievable and unprecedented war since we are even forced to feed our enemy in our own "home". Thus, creating a clearly aggressive division between the homogenized us - a social us of an imaginary community according to Andersen where we are connected by an ideal since we never met in reality - versus the dangerous and different attacking “Others”. In the last quote, the author links women wearing the headscarf to a cancerous tumour that must be removed if it is not to kill us socially and politically as Christian Europeans; he specifically describes women wearing the headscarf as the protective tissue around the jihadists that needs to be removed, effectively stripping away the danger.

*"Today we have a war. Different from the ones we have known, but a war! With the historical novelty of the recipient of the attack maintaining and feeding the army of the invader!" (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)*

*[“Σήμερα έχουμε πόλεμο. Διαφορετικό από αυτούς που γνωρίσαμε, αλλά πόλεμο! Με την ιστορική καινοτομία ότι ο αποδέκτης της επίθεσης συντηρεί και τροφοδοτεί τον στρατό του εισβολέα!” (Τζήμερος, 2016)*

*"So the key is the headscarf! Just as when a cancerous tumour is operated on, healthy tissue is removed around it, the same must be done here: around the jihadists' perimeter are those who strictly follow the dress code (and not only) of Islam in their daily lives." (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)*

*["Το κλειδί λοιπόν είναι η μαντήλα! Όπως όταν χειρουργείται ένας καρκινικός όγκος, αφαιρείται ο υγιής ιστός γύρω του, το ίδιο πρέπει να γίνει και εδώ: γύρω από την περίμετρο των τζιχαντιστών βρίσκονται όσοι ακολουθούν αυστηρά τον ενδυματολογικό κώδικα (και όχι μόνο) του Ισλάμ στην καθημερινή τους ζωή".  
(Τζήμερος, 2016)]*

Stereotypes are used to distinguish the racialized "Other" from white subjects; these stereotypes help to distance white from not-white. Here 'white' is a metaphor for western or non-'Third-World-looking', rather than a matter of skin pigmentation or other such phenotypes (Perry, 2014).

These interpretations allow dominant group members to recreate whiteness as superiority, while punishing the Other for their presumed traits and behaviors (Perry, 2014).

These negative constructions of Islam provide motivation for the victimization; as it has been suggested from many academics through the years Muslims may represent the last 'legitimate' subjects of slanderous imagery and stereotypes (Perry, 2014).

The emphasis given on phrases, "*Because neither "Life" nor "The Savior"<sup>11</sup> puts bombs. Allah's fighters do*" "(...) and around the jihadists' perimeter are those who strictly follow the dress code (and not only) of Islam in their daily lives.", creates a pervasive sense of threat from Muslim women with any kind of headscarf emerging as the instrument of threat, according to most of the analysed media. This very practice is an example of high objective modality; meaning that the media present interpretations as if they were facts or the truth, making no clear indication that what is being stated is an opinion or just a version of a situation among many others.

According to Entman (1993) "*media often select one version to mediate, which gives no room for a nuanced image or other aspects of the version. When the media portrays something in society in a certain way, it has an effect on people's perception of the presented topic and on the perception of reality as well*" (Entman, 1993).

Moreover, the aforementioned quotes portray Muslim women as a homogenous group of villains and extremists that work along with the jihadists who are in fact on a mission to colonize the West, either through births or jihad.

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<sup>11</sup> Christian magazines sold in Greece for religious, propaganda purposes

The juxtaposition of the western women bound to Christianity and its dress codes to the covered Muslim women “*So just as you see one of "ours" with the braid, sideburns, dark clothes, thick socks and black moccasins and you realize she is "churchwoman", so the Muslim woman wearing a headscarf defines herself*”, is instrumentalized in order to assert the incompatibility between the fully veiled women - or even of the churchwomen in this rhetoric - the status as wives and mothers interacting in the public sphere and hiding themselves from the public eye. This would have not been a problem in the case of a covered nun, since she is justified to hide her looks from the public sphere since they are asexual. The contrast is with the sexually active women, who must interact in the public sphere in accordance to the western system of gender relations.

Consequently, we understand that women are reduced to “sexual beings”.

Veiled women refusing to follow the rules of the western system pose a threat since they produce a new form of empowerment in which women exercise their power outside of a system of accepted rules and experience non-conformist (“perverse”) forms of pleasure as a result. However, these “perverse” forms of pleasure seem nothing but the other side of the same coin; the exhibition of the female body, its reduction to a sexual object and the trivialization of explicit sexuality are “normal” features of Western societies (Mancini S. , 2016).

## **2. Discursive practice**

Most of the articles regarding the Muslim woman wearing a headscarf build their arguments on statements or debate articles written by either far-right politicians such as the case of Thanos Tzimeros who was quoted above, or public intellectuals from the liberal (i.e. Soti Triantafyllou) and conservative (i.e. Takis Theodoropoulos) pool.

Statements such as “*Today we have a war*” as used by Tzimeros in 2016 are utilized to argue against other politicians or political parties. It is common for political opponents to use articles to call out what they consider to be mistakes by the state, in order to counter their own proposals that will promote their political agenda. The same happens

in the texts of Tzimeros that aim at a general change of attitude socially and politically concerning the presence of the headscarf and Muslim woman who wears it.

The aim here is to promote an even harsher neoliberal agenda which, under the pretext of sweeping secularisation, seeks to marginalise the image of the muslim woman by eradicating from society all the cultural elements of her community, as can be seen at the quotes from two different articles, proposing a change of perception concerning Muslim communities.

*“Universal ban on all Islamic schools and informal religious courts. (Informal courts in all countries except Greece, which have a legal status!!!!) In Europe Education is secular. And when you live there, you are obliged to have this education -end of story. If you like it. If you don't like it, back to the homeland of your ancestors and even if you are a French, Belgian, British or Greek citizen.”* (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)

*“Καθολική απαγόρευση όλων των ισλαμικών σχολείων και των άτυπων θρησκευτικών δικαστηρίων. (Άτυπα δικαστήρια σε όλες τις χώρες εκτός από την Ελλάδα, τα οποία έχουν νομικό καθεστώς!!!!) Στην Ευρώπη η εκπαίδευση είναι κοσμική. Και όταν ζεις εκεί, είσαι υποχρεωμένος να έχεις αυτή την εκπαίδευση -τέλος της ιστορίας. Αν σας αρέσει. Αν δεν σου αρέσει, πίσω στην πατρίδα των προγόνων σου και ας είσαι Γάλλος, Βέλγος, Βρετανός ή Έλληνας πολίτης”.* (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)

*“The building of mosques, the "warehouse" countries (see Greece), the familiarization with the hijab and the burqa, the application of sharia, the "Islamic police", the religious processions in the centers of the capitals. All part of an organized demise of European identity. And the cultural character of each nation-state, separately.”* (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)

*“Η οικοδόμηση τζαμιών, οι χώρες "αποθήκες" (βλέπε Ελλάδα), η εξοικείωση με το χιτζάμπ και την μπούρκα, η εφαρμογή της σαρία, η "ισλαμική αστυνομία", οι θρησκευτικές πομπές στα κέντρα των πρωτευουσών. Όλα αυτά αποτελούν μέρος μιας οργανωμένης διάλυσης της ευρωπαϊκής ταυτότητας. Και του πολιτιστικού χαρακτήρα του κάθε έθνους-κράτους, ξεχωριστά”.*

The majority of the articles under research convey the same or similar message, which is in line with the framing theory and how media select and salience aspects (Entman 1993). Repeating the same messages over and over again - *“Today we have a war”, All part of an organized demise of European identity* - and thereby exerting the power of a communicating text, media shape the perception of people (Entman 1993).

### **3. Sociocultural practices**

In the empirical material the majority of the articles produce an image of the veiled women as a threat that opens up for various social, political and economic conse-



quences. In one of the articles it is argued that the headscarf worn by Muslim women is practically the depiction of the jihadists:

*“So the key is the headscarf! Just as when a cancerous tumour is operated on, healthy tissue is removed around it, the same must be done here: around the jihadists' perimeter are those who strictly follow the dress code (and not only) of Islam in their daily lives.” (Tzimeros, 2016)*

“Το κλειδί λοιπόν είναι η μαντήλα! Όπως όταν χειρουργείται ένας καρκινικός όγκος, αφαιρείται ο υγιής ιστός γύρω του, το ίδιο πρέπει να γίνει και εδώ: γύρω από την περίμετρο των τζιχαντιστών βρίσκονται όσοι ακολουθούν αυστηρά τον ενδυματολογικό κώδικα (και όχι μόνο) του Ισλάμ στην καθημερινή τους ζωή”. (Τζήμερος, 2016)

Women identified - from the various headscarves - as Muslims are seen as a threat; not someone who needs saving, but from whom the nation needs saving. This case poses a paradox; while the veil is usually taken as a sign of submission, in this case it is taken as a sign of aggression. Hence, the image of the covered women in the case of the article under research is represented as an “agent” of terrorism; instrumentalized and portrayed through the media as the tools of Islamic organizations aiming to infiltrate the West. The dress code is illustrated here as a militant act as at least tacit support for fundamentalism and terrorism; establishing an equation between the oppression of women, fanaticism and terrorism. It is this paradox between emancipatory and non-emancipatory forces which scholars have identified as femonationalism’s greatest strength and weakness.

Others, like the article writer Theodoropoulos, see in the Muslim headscarf a cultural imperialism coming from the East, acting on the opportunity to make historical correlations with the end of the Roman Empire:

*“Many compare the current invasions of Third World populations to the barbarian invasions that led to the collapse of the Roman Empire. An unrealistic comparison, even if you get around the obvious differences in historical context. Alaric and his Goths did not challenge the civilization of an exhausted Rome. It had been Christianized and demanded that they recognize its military value. Nothing to do with the cultural imperialism of today's Islam that demands that Europe submit to the law of the headscarf.”*  
(Θεοδωρόπουλος Τ. , 2021)

*[“Πολλοί συγκρίνουν τις σημερινές εισβολές των πληθυσμών του Τρίτου Κόσμου με τις βαρβαρικές εισβολές που οδήγησαν στην κατάρρευση της Ρωμαϊκής Αυτοκρατορίας. Μια μη ρεαλιστική σύγκριση, ακόμη και αν παρακάμψετε τις προφανείς διαφορές στο ιστορικό πλαίσιο. Ο Αλάριχος και οι Γότθοι του δεν αμφισβήτησαν τον πολιτισμό μιας εξαντλημένης Ρώμης. Είχαν εκχριστιανιστεί και απαιτούσαν να*

*αναγνωρίζουν τη στρατιωτική τους αξία. Καμία σχέση με τον πολιτισμικό ιμπεριαλισμό του σημερινού Ισλάμ που απαιτεί από την Ευρώπη να υποταχθεί στον νόμο της μαντίλας".]*

The different treatment that the veil has in the West in respect to women's clothing choices is heavily linked to the socio-cultural role of women in the western societies; where clothes are an integral part of the possibilities and the limitations set to the women's body. The veiled women come in contrast with the unveiled, modern women, mainly because the Muslim women's choices violate the socially valued image of the western women. Coverage is being perceived by the western society as the refusal to engage to what is constructed as normal for the western societies; protocols of interaction with members of the opposite sex and thus, as a violation of the notions of gender hierarchies established within Western social structure.

As Benhabib explains "*the bans and limitations placed on the right to wear the veil, can be regarded as an attempt to inscribe on Muslim women the receiving society's moral system*" (Mancini S. , 2016).

In the passage in question we can identify the practice of false projection; the writer referring to the "*invasions of Third World populations*" and *their sociocultural status, which according to him "demands that Europe submit to the law of the headscarf"* projects *visions of the Islam as the dangerous, threading, patriarchal threat in an attempt to hide the unresolved conflict concerning the gender issues in the western civilization.*

I argue that the image of the Muslim women, produced by the media in the majority of articles, causes the construction of a negative even evil image for women wearing a headscarf in the West. It can be detected that the media contribute with their rhetoric to the creation, maintenance and continuous strengthening of the gendered islamophobia that can be even dangerous for Muslim women in their everyday life.

Opinions laid out by the media in the empirical texts, has an effect on the public and in the extension it may also influence their attitude towards a person or group of people. As Moore (1995) has underlined the Muslim caricatures that appear in the popular culture are presented to us within a framework of symbols, concepts, and images through which we mediate our understanding about reality; constructing in fact out ideas about

Muslim – and especially women – through stereotyped images (Perry, 2014). The widespread perpetuation of such caricatures – by the media and by public figures – fuels sentiments of suspicion and mistrust by shaping public perceptions in less than favorable ways (Perry, 2014)

*“Europe continues to commit cultural suicide, having gone so far as to advertise the Muslim headscarf as “freedom!” (Ανδρώνης, 2021)*

*[“Η Ευρώπη συνεχίζει να διαπράττει πολιτιστική αυτοκτονία, αφού έφτασε στο σημείο να διαφημίζει τη μουσουλμανική μαντήλα ως “ελευθερία!”]”*

Aziz (2012) explains, that Muslim women wearing a headscarf undergo the same brunt of entrenched stereotypes as Muslim males, profiled as the main threat for America - in this case for Europe as well - but unlike men, women are caught in the intersection of discrimination against religion, race and against the fact that they are women.

Discourses like these aim to reinforce the power relations and maintain the hegemonic discourse order (Fairclough 1993). I argue that there is an implicit statement that the issue of gender equality in Europe would have been further developed if it weren't for the Muslim women, since they are being perceived and only portrayed as subordinate, which means dragging the European society back in the issues of gender equality.

This imminent cultural threat coming from the east seems, based on the articles under consideration, to be using as a vehicle the woman, the Muslim woman in disguise, who is once again, in the words of the scribe with no agency, a mere passive agent. We can detect the ideas expressed by Huntington's Clash of Civilizations being perpetuated once again here by the journalist. The article is based on the notion that the influx of Muslim diaspora will gradually erode the fabric of western societies.

## 4.1b THE VICTIM

The next sub discourse is that is repeatedly used in the material under research is that of the Muslim covered women as victims of patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles.

### 1. TEXT

In the media, the illustration of Muslim women who choose the headscarf is limited to portraying them as passive victims of a barbaric patriarchal structure that has nothing to do with the secularised states of gender equality in Europe. Author and journalist Soti Triantafyllou explains in the following excerpt that the use of the headscarf by Muslim women is something that disturbs and offends Western citizens as much as the sight of the exposed female body offends the inhabitants of Muslim countries.

*“Muslim veils offend the sensibility of Westerners, just as uncovered faces or bodies offend the sensibility of Muslims. In Muslim countries this sensibility is dominant and defines the behaviour of Westerners; but it cannot define it in Western, Christian or secularised countries.”* (Τριανταφύλλου Σ. , 2021)

*[“Τα μουσουλμανικά πέπλα προσβάλλουν την ευαισθησία των Δυτικών, όπως ακριβώς τα ακάλυπτα πρόσωπα ή σώματα προσβάλλουν την ευαισθησία των μουσουλμάνων. Στις μουσουλμανικές χώρες αυτή η ευαισθησία είναι κυρίαρχη και καθορίζει τη συμπεριφορά των Δυτικών- δεν μπορεί όμως να την καθορίσει στις δυτικές, χριστιανικές ή εκκοσμικευμένες χώρες”.]*

She identifies the difference in the fact that in Muslim countries oppose the covering of women in their countries, whereas in Western Christian societies this does not happen in relation to the headscarf. In this line of text women are illustrated as observers rather than as active participants in their community. Women themselves are merely the apple of the eye in the description between the secularized west and the muslim east. It is not them who act and are annoyed by the possible nakedness of western women, for example, but a faceless community that supposedly includes them; absent from the lan-

guage used, they fall into passively instrumentalized bodies that either satisfy one group or aesthetically displease another.

*"Todorov considers the burka a "right"; but what is the limit of the "right"? The burqa is not a sartorial peculiarity, much less a "fashion"; it is an imprisonment that is accompanied by polygamy, honour crimes, social isolation and, above all, a rejection of non-burka culture. "We deprive these women of a freedom so elementary that we don't even notice it: that of being able to choose their own clothes...", writes Todorov."*  
(Τριανταφύλλου Σ. , 2015)

*["Ο Τοντόροφ θεωρεί την μπούρκα "δικαίωμα"- αλλά ποιο είναι το όριο του "δικαιώματος"; Η μπούρκα δεν είναι μια ενδυματολογική ιδιαιτερότητα, πόσο μάλλον μια "μόδα"- είναι μια φυλάκιση που συνοδεύεται από πολυγαμία, εγκλήματα τιμής, κοινωνική απομόνωση και, πάνω απ' όλα, απόρριψη της κουλτούρας που δεν έχει μπούρκα. "Στερούμε από αυτές τις γυναίκες μια ελευθερία τόσο στοιχειώδη που δεν την αντιλαμβανόμαστε καν: τη δυνατότητα να επιλέγουν οι ίδιες τα ρούχα τους...", γράφει ο Todorov".]*

In the same mentality seems to be the text of Tzimeros where he muddles the use of the headscarf with the dangers that he describes as lurking behind it, such as clitoridectomy. In his piece, an alleged neighbor, under the name Ahmed, who dresses his wife in a veil is given as a schematic example; this is what he is obviously doing in plain sight but no one can know what Ahmed is doing to his wife in their own house. After all, as stated by Tzimeros in the UK the rates of clitoridectomy are approximately 170.000 girls every year. As the writer concludes the headscarf is the only part visible to us, so according to him the only one that we can and should control.

*"At this point, let's pick up the thread of the vague threat and put it in the hands of the neighbor, Ahmed, who dresses his wife in a headscarf and a djellaba. He does other things possibly in his house, but you can't know them. (500 - 2000 girls are estimated to undergo clitoridectomy every year in Great Britain in which the number of women subjected to this barbaric practice is 170,000!!!!) The headscarf, however, you can see." TZIMEROS*

*"Σε αυτό το σημείο, ας πιάσουμε το νήμα της αόριστης απειλής και ας το βάλουμε στα χέρια του γείτονα, του Ahmed, ο οποίος ντύνει τη γυναίκα του με μαντήλα και djellaba. Κάνει και άλλα πράγματα ενδεχομένως στο σπίτι του, αλλά δεν μπορείτε να τα γνωρίζετε. (500 - 2000 κορίτσια εκτιμάται ότι υποβάλλονται σε κλειτοριδεκτομή κάθε χρόνο στη Μεγάλη Βρετανία στην οποία ο αριθμός των γυναικών που υποβάλλονται σε αυτή τη βάρβαρη πρακτική ανέρχεται σε 170.000!!!!) Τη μαντήλα, όμως, μπορείς να τη δεις". TZ-IMEROS*

The language used by the writer gives once again the image of the gagged woman trapped in the brutal patriarchy of Islam, presented through the eyes and writing of the secularized West as a passive person who is dressed, positioned and controlled by the males in charge of her.

## 2. Discursive practice

There are various articles where the use of statistical data is mobilized, but without providing any research impact as the articles do not provide the way in which the figures presented by the author were collected. For example, Tzimeros writes, "*500 - 2000 girls are estimated to undergo clitoridectomy every year in Great Britain in which the number of women subjected to this barbaric practice is 170,000!!!!*" presenting those numbers without citing his source in order for the reader to be able to cross check the statistical data or learn more about the issue. Statistics are selected to prove the point of the articles, to enhance the credibility of the articles (Fairclough 1993). Many of the articles convey the same or similar message, which is in line with the framing theory and how media select and salience aspects (Entman, 1993). Repeating the same messages over and over again, and thereby exerting the power of a communicating text, media shape the perception of people (Entman, 1993).

The reference about an unknown person called Ahmed is something the author of the article presents as his own knowledge and experience; there is no specific reference in the text. This is, I argue, a way for the author to make a text more salient (Entman, 1993). By referring to an unknown man and raising points about what he might do and impose on his wife other than the headscarf, which is given that it is obligatory, the text is made more noticeable, meaningful or memorable (Entman, 1993).

In a handful of articles we detect the use of intertextuality. In particular Trintafyllou uses Todorov's text in an attempt to deconstruct it and produce its own arguments refuting what Todorov has written;

*"Todorov considers the burka a "right"; but what is the limit of the "right"? The burqa is not a sartorial peculiarity, much less a "fashion"; it is an imprisonment that is accompanied by polygamy, honour crimes, social isolation and, above all, a rejection of non-burka culture. "We deprive these women of a freedom so*

*elementary that we don't even notice it: that of being able to choose their own clothes...", writes Todorov."*

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In this above stated article piece she uses the element of intertextuality in her attempt to demonstrate the absurdity of treating the headscarf as a fashion trend or rather as a right. She even seeks the limits of the human right of self-determination of the female body, possibly proposing a process of limiting female self-determination in order to preserve and save them from the stranglehold of muslim patriarchy. While associating the headscarf with honour killings, polygamy and social isolation, considering them all parts of the burqa culture as he describes it.

Further, manifest intertextuality is used in the article to convince the readers that their position and view is the one that shows what reality actually looks like. Repeating the same arguments over and over again, or in this case, repeating by referring to others that express the same opinions affect people's cognitive schemas (Strömbäck 2014). The cognitive schemas help us organize knowledge and memories, and control how we interpret new information.

Repeated and monotonous information might shape people's understandings of reality, and people are less open to new information that contradicts their cognitive schemes than to information that confirms them (Strömbäck 2014). This means that the media's monotonous and repetitive discourses in the articles will shape people's understanding of the veiled women, and perhaps eventually also the veiled women's perception of themselves.

### 3. Sociocultural practices

Media's image of the veiled women as a victim of the oppressive patriarchy and of oppressive cultures, are in the articles constructed as something that is not a part of the western society, and therefore not a part of the "European values".

The representation of veiled women tends to be a monolithic interpretation; it is illustrated as a sign of the mystery of an Orientalist historical interpretation, of submission and oppression. In the majority of articles veiled women are lacking individual or personal attributes and as a matter of fact any form of agency

*;"it is an imprisonment that is accompanied by polygamy, honour crimes, social isolation and, above all, a rejection of non-burka culture", "(...) Ahmed, who dresses his wife in a headscarf and a calabash".*

The veil is represented in the majority of articles as the ultimate symbol of exclusion for women but never refers to its multidimensional character. Different types of veil - ranging from veils to body covers - are used for different reasons; "(...) dresses his wife in a headscarf and a djellaba", "The headscarf, however, you can see it". Also an important aspect of the headscarf issue that is never stated is the fact that different forms of covering mean different things for each women and are imposed for different reasons (national law, family, faith).

This differentiation is also the most important if we want to argue that the central issue of the debate on the headscarf is the defense of women and their rights and not the instrumentalization of the female body and its choices for a cultural war between west and east. The practice of erasing the multiplicity and variety of Muslim women's experiences and thereby choices help the writer to construct the "Other". The image of the oppressed veiled woman is contrasted to the image of the emancipated western, Christian woman who is constructed as in charge of her life, body and choices.

This failure to acknowledge even the possibility of the agency in veiled women ensures the representation of the muslim women as "voiceless victims". Ahmad (2010) argues that the practice of silencing and victimizing veiled women contributes to the separation



between “us” and “them”. In the articles the veil is treated as the symbol of gender oppression; although the veil debate revolves around the right of women to speak up for themselves, the views of veiled women are absent in this case. Western women and men talk for them and speak up for their freedom to whether or not they wear a headscarf. In the debate of the veil as illustrated in the articles under research, the central role is not given to the understanding of the ways which veiled women experiences are mediated through gender, age, race, ethnicity, education socioeconomic status or space but rather to a mutation of the veil as a symbol of “otherness”. The ideas proposed of prohibiting the veil in West, the only outcome can have would have been the marginalisation of muslim women.

Even in the liberal concept of the West, women are still defined in certain ways; objectified by the male gaze. Within this framework, the Muslim woman who veils becomes the object of the gaze in a non-Muslim milieu so, the praxis of veiling has the ‘unintended consequence’ of attracting the non-Muslim gaze. According to Foucault, the concept of the ‘object of the gaze’ operates upon the assumption of an ‘ideal’ spectator. Foucault’s theoretical framework ascribes control over the gaze to the ‘ideal spectator’ to critique the images created through that gaze. In Foucault’s terms the veil represents the visibility of desire; a desire to remove the veil and view the unseen, the women under the veil, the exact same desire the colonial ancestors had, to unveil the women of the enemy in the context of liberating them. It is the desire to penetrate behind the veil that provides a feeling of control to the western men and society. So, the veil is imagined as the obstacle to desire to see the hidden body; the symbol of the unveiled female Muslim body becomes a sign of ‘victory’.

## **4.1c Saving brown women**

The third and last sub discourse that is consistently in the texts regards the white western male syndrome to save eastern women from patriarchal Islam and the Muslim male oppressor; as posited by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak “*White men saving brown women*

*from brown men*". This phenomenon is consistent to what Leila Ahmed calls "Colonial Feminism".

## 1. Text

In the articles the veiled women - refugee or migrant - is described as a wandering member of an oppressive community that never takes her into account (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016) (Σιδέρης, 2021) but instead imposes and oppresses her; who needs to be saved by Western social rules that will come to liberate her by imposing new legislations on her body and choice as a canon of equality and human rights (Σιδέρης, 2021).

In the following text excerpt from the article titled PRRR, written by Thanos Tzimeros we see the proposal of the neoliberal far-right politician for the treatment that the headscarf should have in Europe. According to the author, the ban on the headscarf would have a twofold benefit for western European societies; firstly, through the ban, women and girls who suffer from the compulsion of the headscarf and are afraid to come into conflict with their families would be saved, and secondly, the danger of the movement of fanatics to the West would be eliminated from Europe, while the fanatics already in the West will make their presence felt, thus giving Europe the justification to treat it accordingly as a population group. .

*"By banning the headscarf, you kill three birds with one stone: you give a way out to those who, and especially those who, adopt this attire out of fear of rejection by family and environment, you make immigration to Europe forbidden to fanatics and at the same time you push the already extreme "European" Muslims to react and thus to manifest themselves. . " TZIMEROS*

*"Με την απαγόρευση της μαντίλας, σκοτώνεις τρία πουλιά με ένα σμπάρο: δίνεις διέξοδο σε όσους, και κυρίως σε όσους, υιοθετούν αυτή την ενδυμασία από φόβο απόρριψης από την οικογένεια και το περιβάλλον, κάνεις τη μετανάστευση στην Ευρώπη απαγορευτική για τους φανατικούς και ταυτόχρονα ωθείς τους ήδη ακραίους "Ευρωπαίους" μουσουλμάνους να αντιδράσουν και έτσι να εκδηλωθούν. . " TZ-IMEROS*

In the following excerpt the journalist comments on the recent campaign "Freedom is in hijab" produced by the Council of Europe - a campaign for diversity and respect for the

female body which was violently taken down after its launch due to the manifestations mainly in France that it promotes latent, fundamentalist standards. In support of his position on the error of the Council of Europe in associating a woman's freedom with the headscarf and her right to it, the journalist draws a parallel with Europe's - and the world's - past on the status of women.

Voularinos explains in his article that in the past women were not allowed to work and were forced by their social role in the patriarchy to remain confined in the house taking care of the household without being allowed to have dreams and aspirations for career, education and advancement. As he mentions many women were imprisoned by this regime as is also known historically but there were also those who did not feel imprisoned but instead were happy within this reality. At the end he asks the reader a rhetorical question; what would we feel of a campaign showing a career woman on one side and a housewife on the other with the slogan "My job, my choice"?

*"Not so long ago it was very common in androgyny for the worker to be the man and the woman to declare her occupation as "housekeeping". Some women worked and made a career and did so by choice. The former, however, did not do all housewifery because they chose to. Many only did it because it was "the right thing to do". Obviously some would have liked the job, but many would have suffocated. But their social environment did not allow (or at least did not facilitate them in) anything more. In some cases it didn't even allow them to imagine that there was anything more. What would a campaign look like that had a career woman on one side and a housewife on the other and presented both situations as a product of choice with the slogan "My job, my choice"? " VOULARINOS*

*"Πριν από λίγο καιρό ήταν πολύ συνηθισμένο στην ανδροκρατία ο εργαζόμενος να είναι ο άνδρας και η γυναίκα να δηλώνει ως επάγγελμα "οικιακή βοηθός". Κάποιες γυναίκες δούλευαν και έκαναν καριέρα και το έκαναν από επιλογή. Οι πρώτες, ωστόσο, δεν έκαναν όλες τις δουλειές του σπιτιού επειδή το επέλεξαν. Πολλές το έκαναν μόνο και μόνο επειδή ήταν "το σωστό". Προφανώς σε κάποιες θα άρεσε η δουλειά, αλλά πολλές θα ασφυκτιούσαν. Αλλά το κοινωνικό τους περιβάλλον δεν τους επέτρεπε (ή τουλάχιστον δεν τους διευκόλυνε σε κάτι περισσότερο). Σε ορισμένες περιπτώσεις δεν τους επέτρεπε καν να φανταστούν ότι υπάρχει κάτι περισσότερο. Πώς θα έμοιαζε μια καμπάνια που θα είχε από τη μία πλευρά μια γυναίκα καριέρας και από την άλλη μια νοικοκυρά και θα παρουσίαζε και τις δύο καταστάσεις ως προϊόν επιλογής με το σύνθημα "Η δουλειά μου, η επιλογή μου"; " BOYLARINOS*

In his article for the greek news site Liberal, journalist Yannis Sideris, referring to the tolerance of Western society regarding the use of headscarves in Europe, says the following:

*"It is a human right of women to dress as they like. Instead, we see them (like all rights activists<sup>12</sup>) advocating for uniformity of appearance for Muslim women from the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, or Afghanistan. They are still victims of the will of the father, the brother, the husband, their own social environment. Their 'masters' come to Europe but they carry with them and impose the customs of their places of origin." SIDERIS*

*"Είναι ανθρώπινο δικαίωμα των γυναικών να ντύνονται όπως θέλουν. Αντ' αυτού, τους βλέπουμε (όπως όλους τους ακτιβιστές των δικαιωμάτων) να υποστηρίζουν την ομοιόμορφη εμφάνιση των μουσουλμάνων γυναικών από την Αραβική Χερσόνησο, το Πακιστάν ή το Αφγανιστάν. Εξακολουθούν να είναι θύματα της θέλησης του πατέρα, του αδελφού, του συζύγου, του ίδιου του κοινωνικού τους περιβάλλοντος. Οι "αφέντες" τους έρχονται στην Ευρώπη, αλλά κουβαλούν μαζί τους και επιβάλλουν τα έθιμα των τόπων καταγωγής τους". SIDERIS*

According to the journalist, the choice of clothes is a stated right of women, which it is not being respected by those he describes as civil rights warriors<sup>13</sup>. Instead of respecting this human right of women, the civil rights warriors support the uniformity of muslim women, who are described as victims of the males in their families and society in general; ballasts who are "transferred" to Europe by others.

The above mentioned are in line with the previous sub discourse, of the victim, of how the veiled woman is portrayed in some of the articles. Most often she is given no agency as she is made passive, unlike other actors in her surroundings. Which, I argue, is a way for the media in the articles to reinforce their image of the veiled women and make their points more legitimate.

## 2. Discursive practice

As stated by Entman (1993) media makes a selection on the things they want to focus on, involving choosing a position or sides on a current topic.

Many of the articles convey the same or similar message, which is in line with the framing theory and how media select and salience aspects (Entman 1993). Repeating the same messages over and over again, and thereby exerting the power of a communicating text, media shape the perception of people (Entman 1993).

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<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup>An insult, most commonly used between 2016-2018 for anyone espousing socially progressive views. Used almost exclusively by right-wing [chuds](#) who bash so-called "SJWs" based entirely on YouTube compilations of something along the lines of "feminists being owned".

The extensive use of the passive voice is indicative of the nominalization and passivization used in the language, as Fairclough (1992) has shown the choice of the passive voice over the active voice is often ideologically charged.

There are several ideological features associated with nominalization and passivization such as (i) deletion of the act, (ii) redefinition, (iii) positioning redefined concepts as agents, and (iv) maintaining unequal power relations. The use of passive voice in this case is used for deleting any notion of agency.

Through the journalistic texts, we observe that in the active syntax the members of the out-group ("the others", "the bad ones", minority groups, immigrants, refugees) are presented as subjects (perpetrators), they are the subject and their negative qualities are projected even more.

As van Dijk (1991) argues, the choice of grammatical person in racist texts of journalistic discourse is not accidental. Rather, it identifies the identity of the community and the group, and it often projects the inequality between 'us' and 'the others' and distinguishes between the in-group and out-group, respectively. This in-group and out-group polarization is based on the projection of one's own good points and their own negative points or the mitigation of one's own bad points and their own positive points.

### 3. Sociocultural practice

From the articles under examination we can observe that the "veiling" of Muslim women in the West is seen as a sign of Islamisation; in respect to Neo-orientalism there is a separation detected between "veiling" and "unveiling". Veiling on the one hand is portrayed as the place of representation of tradition's archaism, while unveiling as the place of modernity.

*"(...) at the same time you push the already extreme "European" Muslims to react and thus to manifest themselves. . " TZIMEROS*

*"(...) την ίδια στιγμή ωθείτε τους ήδη ακραίους "Ευρωπαίους" μουσουλμάνους να αντιδράσουν και έτσι να εκδηλωθούν. . " TZIMEROS*

Once again at the heart of Western thinking concerning the headscarf lies the widespread perception we have about Muslim women's agency. The popular assumption suggest that women who veil are not doing it in their own volition which creates a fertile ground for the protection of women through legislation. This negative perception of Muslim culture, and even more so of the headscarf, is what justifies any legislative interventions. According to what we observe in the West in general, these legislative interventions are allegedly based on the need for modernization in women's rights, the preservation of cultural norms and public safety.

*"(...) especially those who, adopt this attire out of fear of rejection by family and environment" TZIMEROS*

*"(...) ειδικά εκείνοι που υιοθετούν αυτή την ενδυμασία από φόβο απόρριψης από την οικογένεια και το περιβάλλον" ΤΖΗΜΕΡΟΣ*

*"They are still victims of the will of the father, the brother, the husband, their own social environment. Their 'masters' come to Europe but they carry with them and impose the customs of their places of origin."*

*SIDERIS*

*"Εξακολουθούν να είναι θύματα της θέλησης του πατέρα, του αδελφού, του συζύγου, του ίδιου του κοινωνικού τους περιβάλλοντος. Οι "αφέντες" τους έρχονται στην Ευρώπη, αλλά κουβαλούν μαζί τους και επιβάλλουν τα έθιμα των τόπων καταγωγής τους". SIDERIS*

In reality, these legislative interventions are just as much an attempt to protect Western society from immigrants and especially from Muslims. The debate is not around the protection of women rights and their emancipation but rather an attempt at keeping the influence and visibility of Islam in Europe at bay.

*"(...) you make immigration to Europe forbidden to fanatics and at the same time you push the already extreme "European" Muslims to react and thus to manifest themselves. . ." (Τζήμερος Θ. , 2016)*

*"(...) κάνετε τη μετανάστευση στην Ευρώπη απαγορευτική για τους φανατικούς και ταυτόχρονα ωθείτε τους ήδη ακραίους "Ευρωπαίους" μουσουλμάνους να αντιδράσουν και έτσι να εκδηλωθούν. . ."*

Hijab ban legislation also neatly fits the Western trope of the oppressed Muslim woman in need of saving. In this case the "salvation" of women is again subject to a patriarchal system, this time of Western origin. The liberatory imposition of the West treats the

headscarf as a condition in isolation and refuses to look at it as a symptom of oppression in which women are indeed subjugated, not only by patriarchal Islam but often by Western patriarchy as well. The proposal here in this case is to free women from their shackles by imposing new rules on how to live with their bodies and their self-determination.

The use of feminism as a means to justify the West's assumed superior model of democracy and freedom; as Abu-Lughod (2002) described the justification for imperialism and military occupation of Muslim countries through the exploitation of Western feminist imagery.

After all, the female body - regardless of color, nation or race - always within the patriarchal system is subject to an authoritarian duality. For white women, there is the duality of the Madonna/whore that characterizes their roles and identities; for black women, there is the Jezebel and Mammy distinction. In the same notion the duality for muslim women is the juxtaposition of the sexual 'belly dancer' with the wholly pure 'oppressed' woman in need of salvation.

The central thought on which the majority of the articles studied were based is the idea of the overthrow of the Muslim patriarchy by another.

Ironically, the patriarchal model of Islam was to be defeated by an alternative. Women are characterized primarily as victims in need of saving by the paternalistic masculinity of patriarchal social or governmental institutions. This formula extends to the realm of international relations, where the heroic, just warrior is sometimes contrasted with a malignant, often racialized, masculinity attributed to the enemy.

And once more, in the inevitable media hysteria surrounding the ongoing regional chaos, Muslim women have become trapped in the middle of a discourse that purports to work for their "salvation", yet only serves to further marginalize them. Muslim women in the West as well as abroad, particularly those who choose to veil, are placed in an impossible position; if they defend their faith or claim to have chosen it from a position of

autonomy and independent choice, they are accused of apologetics, or are paternalistically charged as victims of “false consciousness” or of their “repressive culture.” In the twisted, bizarrely simplistic rhetoric currently surrounding Islam in Western media, it has been deemed impossible to both identify as a Muslim and as a proponent of peace and equality.

Further, we can observe a false dichotomy that operates on many levels, wherein we not only assume absolute difference from our enemies, but also absolute difference from the “oppressed women” we purport to be saving. We are feminists, therefore anything they do must be antithetical to feminism. As Shabana Mir writes, *“feminism is local, and has many colors, and isn’t always called ‘feminism’ because ‘feminism’ is owned and run by White women who bring White men in fighter planes”*.



## V. Conclusions

The aim of this study is to find out how the feminist discourse is instrumentalized in the media discourse in order to serve anti-immigration/anti-refugee and neo-colonial policies. It is also to gain a greater understanding of the different kinds of expressions of the European gender equality values and 'othering' that veiled women are customarily associated with in Greek public discourse. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis was used to answer the research questions of the study. 26 journalistic articles, published between 2015 - 2021, regarding veiled women in Europe were analyzed.

During the readings of the articles, one overall discourse and three sub discourses emerged. The overall discourse, the "European gender equality" was intertwined with the three sub discourses *The Threat*, *The Victim* and *Saving brown women*.

In the emerging sub-discourses we observe how the central artery of thinking connected to the European values of gender equality institutionalized a dichotomy between "us" and "others".

In this dichotomy, the European 'Us' - homogenized and completely free of patriarchal structures and influences - is presented as the right and healthy way that a veiled woman should strive for; on the other hand, the 'Other' is described as an oppressive, also homogenized social mass that almost hedonistically desires female oppression and the constant and non-negotiable devaluation of women and their rights.

In this condition, women must, if not fight for their westernization, which is synonymous with freedom and emancipation, at least seek and accept the salvation offered to them by western society in the form of orders, impositions and cultural influences. The three different sub discourses raised by the research support what argues in that the veiled woman is presented in three central forms which aim to demonize both the headscarf and the body that wears it.

The first sub discourse noticed is the framing of veiled women as a *Threat*. Within the discourse of *the Threat*, the veiled woman is constructed as a danger inextricably linked to terror. Underneath the headscarf lurks a terrorist threat that takes various forms; it is a direct terrorist threat of a woman as a bomber or an indirect one as a cultural phenomenon that comes to colonise Europe through the generations and thus to establish the culture of Islam. Thus making a clear appeal to Huntington's theory of clash of civilisations. In this so-called Clash of Civilisations, the woman is the enemy's Trojan horse; the woman is instrumentalized from both sides as a weapon of war.

The second sub discourse is *the Victim*, which stresses the subordinated position of veiled women. Media most often describes her in the articles as coming from countries where women have no rights and are isolated from the rest of the society and European values. Patriarchal structures and traditional gender roles are the reason why she is isolated, which is located outside European society and the Greek values concerning gender equality. Media's image reinforces a conviction that patriarchal structures and the subordinated hierarchy position of women, is not a part of the western society, which in turn reinforces the success story of the western gender equality.

This victimization of the headscarf-wearing woman in the West morally legitimizes interventionism first in the self-determination of the female body and then extends to institutional issues such as legislation. European legislation comes as the protagonist that must stand as a protective cordon on women's choice

The effort to make women who wear headscarves aware of the European way of life and follow it is presented as a one-way street to their salvation. The ban on the headscarf and the cultural 'conversion' of women is presented as the epitome of feminist demands; the crowning glory of European feminism according to the rhetoric of the articles is presented as the unveiling of muslim women.

In the last subdiscours, *Saving brown women*, the majority of the articles describe the veiled women as a passive observer in need of saving. The masquerade of the salvation of eastern women from the patriarchy of Islam and the headscarf has its roots in

colonialism and the way the European conquerors used the enemy's wife as a symbol of conquest and enslavement.

We see the same thing happening in modern Europe; from George Bush using the liberation of women in Afghanistan as a vehicle to invade the country to the colonialist rhetoric of Islamophobia in Europe in the midst of the refugee crisis, the instrumentalization of feminist rhetoric has been widely used. The veil offers a visible, public marker that can be mobilized to emphasize various political and social agendas.

Under colonial rule, the veil became a sign that demarcated those who did not belong to the European system of thought. It continues to do so, and has become mobilized within political debates at times of crisis – for example in Germany by Merkel facing the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany party.

It is obvious from the articles under investigation that in Greece in particular but also in the rest of the European Union - derives from the articles under research that the headscarf does not pose a threat locally, but European-wide as a collective danger - a neo-colonial discourse takes center stage. Women wearing headscarves pose an obvious manifest danger that must be legally and morally stamped out; both in a legislative framework and in the moral consciousness of the European citizen, it is necessary to eradicate the image that the headscarf is a democratic choice, a right of every citizen.

This neo-colonial rhetoric that suggests women to find salvation through western patriarchy and to embrace a neo-colonial neo-liberal feminism, is also based on the European value of secularization; a secularization that is not integrated in the Greek reality, specifically, as the mixing of church and state is more than a given. In fact, the rhetoric used by the country's officials often follows the dictates of the Greek orthodox faith. In a state where the ministry of education, is officially called the ministry of Education and Religion, the colonial rhetoric is based on the argument of secularism to deprive the muslim woman of her right to wear the headscarf.

In effect, it attempts to create a neo-colonial cultural contact with the female body, which can only be free if it follows the dictates of Western patriarchy and therefore satisfies the Western patriarchal gaze. As shown, the European gender equality rhetoric is central

when the media creates the image of the veiled women. While women in the West are presented as independent and equal to men with the only problem being the economic gap, veiled women are constructed as a danger to both Western society and themselves.

Europeans have a history of portraying the veil as foreign to the continent's mentality – and this shows no sign of abating. Yet, considering the way Muslim women have used the veil as a way of resistance in the past, they are likely to do it again in the future. A central argument for the prohibition of Muslim women's dress by right-wing populist parties – and mainstream parties that have appropriated their rhetoric – is that “Islamic garbs” are a visible symbol of victimization and oppression, and thus undermine the Europe-wide public value of gender equality.

Many parties use this framing to promote restrictive policies, in which they argue that “de-veiling” Muslim women is akin to liberation and serves to protect Europe from falling victim to Islamic fundamentalism. Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National and 2017 presidential runner-up, has affirmed that the acceptance of an ‘Islamist uniform’ for women would mean unequal rights. For her, the battle over dress is simply a battle against Islamic fundamentalism. The FPÖ believes the so-called burqa-bans do not go far enough, arguing that the burqa, niqab, chador, and even hijab are representations of women's oppression. Similarly, the AfD views the headscarf as a “political-religious symbol of Muslim women's submission to men” that curtails “equal rights for women and girls”.

Yet, the notion of victimhood restricts women's agency as well as denies the agency of Muslim women to negotiate their identities and dress how they please. When construed as a symbol of oppression, Muslim women's dress represents Islam's backward, repressive culture, and in turn is in need of regulation. This rhetoric reinforces a white savior complex of the populist right, in which to “de-veil” Muslim women in the name of gender equality reverberates the narrative of “white men saving brown women from brown men” as well as the ‘protection’ against the invasion of Islam.

Therefore, the populist right casts aside modern notions of multiculturalism, tolerance, and, in particular, personal freedom in defense of “their” modern culture, thus weakening the legitimacy of European liberalism. Because Europe is often viewed as a bastion of modernity, leader in gender equality, and home of tolerance, "the irony of the anti-veil claims" is inescapable.

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