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ORIENTAL MIMICRY

Contesting Islamophobia in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*

Sadiya Abubakar Isa¹ & Md Salleh Yaapar²

Abstract

*Most post-9/11 novels are full of Orientalism of the Muslims as terrorists, misogynists or backward and intolerant murderers. Following the uproar after the unfortunate attacks of 9/11, Islam and Muslims have since become the centre of academic discourse, literature, media and even entertainment. The paper contextualises Ayaan Hirsi Ali's exemplification of the Muslims in her enlightenment stance as Colonial Mimicry, her dehumanisation of Muslims as Orientalism. As post-9/11 works have been very much examined under the colonial, oriental, cultural, religious or political lens, this study merges concepts from Orientalism and colonial mimicry into an Oriental mimicry approach. This approach is meant to illustrate Ayaan Hirsi Ali's autobiographical narrative as an exemplification of the desire for a reformed recognisable 'other', as well as the long-established Western 'othering' of the Muslim orient. Thus, Oriental mimicry is the imitation of Western orientalism of the Orient by a supposed reformed 'other'. Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel* (2007) will be examined within two constructs, specifically: 'Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and intolerance'; and 'Islamic misogyny'. In *Infidel*, the Muslim 'other' is illustrated as the enemy of the West; a hatred which is purported by Islam, the religion (as demonstrated in the text) that preaches hatred for non-Muslims and the misogyny of women. Through a new reading lens, namely Oriental mimicry of Ali's memoir, this study situates these misrepresentations and their circumstantial implications within the context of Islamophobia. The study finds that her discourse on Islam's incompatibility with Western democratic values is factually incorrect and ideologically*

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motivated. It also underscores the implication that her misrepresentations are the fierce reinforcement of Islamophobia in the West.

Keywords: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Infidel, Orientalism, Colonial Mimicry, Islam, Muslims

Introduction

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's novel *Infidel* (first published in 2006) has remained an outstanding book since its publication. Receiving so many reviews and being on *New York Times* bestseller list are some of its achievements. It narrates the life story of Ayaan Hirsi Ali from her birth until 2006. Born in Mogadishu, Somalia, her family moved to Ethiopia to escape the dominant military regime there. They then moved to Saudi Arabia under asylum and, after a short stay, moved to Kenya where she spent most of her childhood and coming-of-age. In 1992, she made a dramatic move to the Netherlands and finally to America. Each phase in her life has significant experiences and the most outstanding ones have something to do with Islam. Her life story provides an 'insider status' which elucidates the horrific condition of Muslim women.³ These horrifying stories become the tools for her to illustrate the backwardness of Islam which she sees as incompatible with secularism, democracy and modernisation.⁴ *Infidel* (2007) alongside other works of Ali – *The Caged Virgin* (2010) and *Heretic* (2015) – are tools through which she has problematised Islam and called for its immediate reformation by the Western world. Her short film *Submission* co-directed by Theo Van Gogh depicts a woman professing the oppression of women, with Quranic verses written over her naked body. This movie sparked

³ Evelyn Alsultany, "Arabs and Muslims in the Media after " Posttrace " Era 9/11 : Representational Strategies for a 'Posttrace' Era," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2013): 167.

⁴ Chris Allen, "Islamophobia and the Crises of Europe's Multiculturalism," in *New Multicultural Identities in Europe*, ed. Erkan Toğuşlu, Johan Leman, and İsmail Mesut Sezgin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 213–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qdzxj.13>.

controversy in the Netherlands and caused the life of the Dutch movie director with whom she produced the movie. Her engagements in Dutch politics while working as a parliamentarian for the Dutch Labour party was graciously utilised. She used this as an avenue to propose policies that would suppress the freedom of the Muslim minorities in the Netherlands. These moves, along with her staunch arguments of Islamic backwardness and misogyny would later fetch her death threats, after which she has been living under tight security with bodyguards until now.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali has received numerous awards, recognitions and praises for her bravery and support for freedom of speech. Her fearlessness and concern for Muslim women have attracted academic appraisals as well.⁵ However, she has similarly been fervently criticised by other academics and even the Muslim women for whom she fights. She has been condemned for her exaggerated criticism and victimisation of Muslim women and for the problematising of Islam. Several writers and bloggers have condemned Ayaan Hirsi Ali's overemphasis on Islamic terrorism, fundamentalism and misogyny.⁶ She has been rejected by some ex-Muslims and atheists, and even members of Yale Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics "do not endorse her blanket statements on all Muslims and Islam."⁷ In relation to her ideological inclinations, she has been "particularly

⁵ Halleh Ghorashi, "Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Daring or Dogmatic? Debates on Multiculturalism and Emancipation in the Netherlands," *Focaal: Tijdschrift Voor Antropologie*, no. 42 (2003): 163–69; http://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/download/pdf/amr/Halleh_Gorashi_Forum_Focaal_Final.pdf; Mohammad Rashidi Pakri and Renukha Devi Anandan, "A Feminist-Postcolonial Analysis of Power and Ideology in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 208 (2015): 197–202; Neely Tucker, "The Treacherous World of a Public Infidel; Depending on Who's Talking, the Complex Author Who Called Mohammed a 'pervert' Is a Hero or a Self-Promoting Traitor," *Proquest Central*, no. March (2007): A13.

⁶ Max Rodenbeck, "How She Wants to Modify Muslims," *The New York Review of Books*, 2015, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/12/03/ayaan-hirsi-ali-wants-modify-muslims/>; Carla Power, "What Ayaan Hirsi Ali Doesn't Get About Islam," *Time*, 2015, <http://time.com/3825345/what-ayaan-hirsi-ali-doesnt-get-about-islam/>.

⁷ Kimberly Winston, "Ayaan Hirsi Ali Draws Criticism from Fellow Atheists at Yale," *Religion News Service*, 2014, para. 3, <https://religionnews.com/2014/09/15/ayaan-hirsi-ali-draws-criticism-fellow-atheists-yale/>.

condemned by non-Muslim Westerners as a fundamental mouthpiece for the neo-conservative agenda”.⁸

Ali has been criticised as Islam’s ‘native informant’⁹ for critically mediating between Islam and the West. This term ‘native informant’ is, however, considered derogatory after Edward Said used it to condemn Fouad Ajami and his role in necessitating war on the Muslim Arabs. Thus, the debate on whether the term ‘native informant’ fits the usage or not is pertinent to the related discourse.¹⁰ The intensification of Islamophobic literature, on the other hand, remains a relevant problem that demands constant academic scrutiny. Considering the ongoing struggle of countering the accusation of being ‘native informants’ by ethnic writers, this study chooses to examine Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims from the Oriental mimicry perspective, despite her many similarities with Ajami. Using Homi Bhabha’s explication of the ‘mimic man’ in his theory of Colonial Mimicry, and Said’s Orientalism, this study will propose a theoretical model of (un)reading Orientalism in such ethnic writings by ex-Muslims or native informants. This category of writers subscribed to the Orientalism of Muslims in their works to profit from the booming Islamophobic industry through the selling of horrifying stories about Islam from an insider perspective¹¹. They

⁸ Hager Ben Driss, “Memoirs of Violence/Violent Memoirs: Autobiographical Acts in Azar Nafisi’s and Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Works,” *Nabokov Studies* 8, no. 1 (2004): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nab.2004.0017>.

⁹ Nesrine Malik, “Islam’s New ‘Native Informants,’” *NYR Daily*, The New York Review of Books, 2018, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/06/07/islams-new-native-informants/>; Geoffery Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2011); Silke Schmidt, “The Framed Arab/Muslim: Mediated Orientalism,” in *(Re-Framing the Arab/Muslim: Mediating Orientalism in Contemporary Arab American Life Writing)* (Transcript Verlag, 2014), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1xxs1s.6%0AJSTOR>.

¹⁰ Tasnim Qutait, “The Native Informant Speaks,” *Arab Hyphen*, January 1, 2013, <https://arabhyphen.wordpress.com/2013/01/01/the-native-informant-speaks/>; Shahnaz Khan, “Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age,” *Signs*, June 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1086/428423>.

¹¹ Carl W. Ernst, *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, ed. Carl W. Ernst, *Islamophobia in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137290076>.

always write in a “biased Western, liberal-humanist perspective”¹².

In most post-9/11 literary works, Muslims are continuously represented as warmongers, terrorists, backward, misogynist or oppressed (for women) by both Muslim and non-Muslim writers. This endeavour gives credence to the development of Islamophobia in some parts of the world, especially in America. These representations do not reflect the reality of the nearly 2 billion Muslims around the globe¹³. Much of these portrayals rest upon the misdeeds of less than one per cent of the total number of Muslims in the world and the flawed cultural practices ascribed to Islam. Thus, these post-9/11 writers display Islamophobic mannerism in their treatment of Islamic themes, namely Islamic fundamentalism, fanaticism and/or terrorism - a phenomenon which has been considered by many scholars as Neo-Orientalists.¹⁴ The overgeneralised representation of Muslims in such negative ways have been identified to be synonymous with earlier forms of Orientalism which now breeds Islamophobia instead of the racism of the colonial period.

Narratives on Islam that portray Muslim women as oppressed, their men as misogynists, and Islam as the religion which advocates

¹² Christine Grogan, “Lolita Revisited: Reading Azar Nafisi’s Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books,” *Women’s Studies* 43, no. 1 (January 2014): 52–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2014.852422>.

¹³ Jeff Diamant, “The Countries with the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations,” Pew Research Centre. Fact Tank, 2019, para. 9, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/>.

¹⁴ Riyad Abdurahman Manqoush, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, and Noraini Md Yusof, “Islamophobic Irony in American Fiction: A Critical Analysis of Lorraine Adams’ Harbor and John Updike’s Terrorist Department of English,” Faculty of Education School of Language Studies and Linguistics School of Language Studies and Linguistics,” *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 4, no. 3 (2014): 73–80; M. Iqbal M. Alosman, Raihanah M Mydin, and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, “Architectures of Enmity in Andre Dubus III’s the Garden of Last Days,” *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies* 18, no. 4 (2018): 251–64, <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2018-1804-16>; Hossein Pirnajmuddin and Abbasali Borhan, “‘Writing Back’ to Don DeLillo’s Falling Man,” *The Journal of International Social Research* 4, no. 18 (2011): 119–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2011.569130>.

for terrorism “draw heavily on earlier tropes of Orientalism.”¹⁵ In his discussion of post-colonialism and Islamism, Nash describes the post-colonial theory’s informant as a native (colonised) who severely criticises his/her culture or religion in favour of the normatively superior West. These informants sometimes become alien to their own culture or criticise it while still being rooted in its history and traditions. Ayaan Hirsi Ali fits nicely into Nash’s description of a post-colonial informant for her staunch criticism of Islam and of Somalian culture in her works. A similar argument lies in an article by Nasrine Malik, who identifies Ayaan Hirsi Ali as one of “Islam’s New Native Informants”¹⁶ who sells out negative stories about Islam for socio-political benefits.¹⁷ Speaking of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Majed Nawaz, Nasrine affirms their label “anti-Muslim extremists” as first designated by the Southern Poverty Law Centre, to be the result of their outright use of hate language against Muslims and Islam. In a similar argument, Geoffrey Nash maintains in his book *Writing Muslim Identity* that Ayaan Hirsi Ali, an anti-Islamic writer/speaker is one of three migrant writers¹⁸ whose anti-Islamism brought them fame.¹⁹ Their flight from Islam has bought them the sympathy of the Western audience.

Professor Ian Buruma, a Dutch historian and writer, is one of the fiercest voices against her radical views and representations of Islam. Buruma’s review of *Infidel* sees her narrative (of liberation) as a scheme to win the West while highlighting the viciousness of the Muslims. He also rejects her call for a forceful reformation of Islam by the “perfectly enlightened West”, which she sees as the solution to all the bad experiences she encountered with Islam as recounted in her book.²⁰ While Pakri and Anandan’s analysis of Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s

¹⁵ Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, 50.

¹⁶ Others are: Wafa Sultan, Irshad Manji and Majed Nawaz.

¹⁷ Malik, “Islam’s New ‘Native Informants.’”

¹⁸ Irshad Manji, Taslima Nasrin and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

¹⁹ Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, 66.

²⁰ Ian. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6KeWAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=murder+in+amsterdam&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwibz9Hwxq_XAhXMDewKHSEfBEUQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=murder in amsterdam&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=6KeWAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=murder+in+amsterdam&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwibz9Hwxq_XAhXMDewKHSEfBEUQ6AEIKDAA#v=onepage&q=murder%20in%20amsterdam&f=false).

Infidel emphasises the issues of power and ideology in her novel,²¹ scholars like Oudenampsen, Grewal, and Bosch among others have criticised her novel for displaying the principal features of Orientalism in which the identification of Islam with subordination and oppression of its women is ultimate.²²

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's biographical narrative is instantly infused with an authority due to her Islamic background. She entices both intellectuals and ordinary readers into believing that her narratives of Islam are factual because of her personal experiences. To this end, Adam Yaghi attributes academia's approval of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's work to her appeal to legitimacy. This caused her "serial autobiographies [to be] treated as honest and reliable testimonies".²³ Ayaan Hirsi Ali's uncritical fame and approval, her neo-Oriental style of portrayal and her appeal to authenticity have been criticised by Saba Mahmood who sees her reception in some American academic institutes as reproachful.²⁴

Pertaining to Ayaan Hirsi Ali's subscription to Orientalism, Merijn Oudenampsen holds that Ali's perspective on Islam largely relies on the Western tradition of Orientalism, in that her life story recounted in *Infidel*, enormously contradicts her later views of Islam. Her radical criticism of Islam and her association of Islam with backwardness and terrorism leads Oudenampsen to see her novel "as a biographical variant of Huntington's clash of civilizations

²¹ Pakri and Anandan, "A Feminist-Postcolonial Analysis of Power and Ideology in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*."

²² Merijn Oudenampsen, "The Double Life of Ayaan Hirsi Ali on Neoconservatism, Islamic Fundamentalism and the Clash of Civilizations" (Tilburg University, 2016); Kiran Grewal, "Reclaiming the Voice of the Third World Woman," *Interventions* 14, no. 4 (2012): 569–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2012.730861>; Mineke Bosch, "Telling Stories, Creating (and Saving) Her Life: An Analysis of the Autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali," *Women's Studies International Forum* 31, no. 2 (2008): 138–47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2008.03.006>.

²³ Adam Yaghi, "Popular Testimonial Literature by American Cultural Conservatives of Arab or Muslim Descent: Narrating the Self, Translating (an) Other," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 83–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1107996>.

²⁴ Saba Mahmood, "Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War on Terror," in *Gendering Religion and Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 193–215, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230623378_9.

theory”.²⁵ Isa, Yapaar and Muhammad dismiss Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s views on the Islamic positions of women, rather they see it as culturally influenced practices that have little to do with Islam. They appropriate the Islamic misogyny narrative as an appalling neo-Orientalism of Muslim women.²⁶ Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s work has been criticised for strengthening the dominant Orientalism of liberating Muslim women. Kiran Grewal for instance, sees Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s work as an utter fabrication of the emancipation narrative which is often appropriated by autobiographical writers; that it offers “a reinforcement of the dominant order through the “authentic” voice of the victim”.²⁷ Ali’s work has been similarly criticised under the lens of Orientalism for the victimisation of Muslim women, validation of the ‘War on Terror’ or the marginalisation of the Muslims at large.²⁸

Since this novel has been very much examined under the ideological, oriental, cultural, religious or political lens, this study marries concepts from Orientalism and Colonial Mimicry into an oriental mimicry approach to explore Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s demonisation of Islam and Muslims in relation to Islamic misogyny, Islamic terrorism and intolerance. Additionally, this study will be a follow up on the recommendations for a more critical and scholarly

²⁵ Merijn Oudenampsen, “Deconstructing Ayaan Hirsi Ali: On Islamism, Neoconservatism, and the Clash of Civilizations,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 17, no. 2–3 (July 2, 2016): 247, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2016.1232195>.

²⁶ Sadiya Abubakar Isa, Md Salleh Yaapar, and Suzana Haji Muhammad, “Rethinking Orientalism of Muslims in Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Infidel,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 2 (2019): 241–65, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v9i2.241-265>.

²⁷ Kiran Grewal, “Reclaiming the Voice of the Third World Woman,” *Interventions*, December 1, 2012, 582, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2012.730861>.

²⁸ Haroon Moghul, “Ayaan Hirsi Ali Is Hurting Islam: Why Her Radical Reformation Is in Desperate Need of Reform,” Salon, 2015, https://www.salon.com/2015/04/21/ayaan_hirsi_ali_is_hurting_islam_why_her_radical_reformation_is_in_desperate_need_of_reform_partner/; Daniel O’Gorman, “Speaking for the Muslim World: Popular Memoir and the ‘War on Terror,’” *European Journal of English Studies* 22, no. 2 (May 4, 2018): 142–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2018.1478257>; Aysel Morin, “Victimization of Muslim Women in Submission,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 32, no. 3 (October 2009): 380–408, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2009.10162395>.

engagement with Ayaan Hirsi Ali's work by authors such as Oudenampsen, Grewal, and Yaghi.

In this study, the methodology used is qualitative and analytical. Using available materials on Ayaan Hirsi Ali's exaggerated problematisation of Islam, the study examines the factuality of some of her anti-Islamic proclamations in the novel *Infidel*. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the Oriental mimicry. It starts with an analysis of the author within the structures of Colonial Mimicry. This part of the study examines her as a 'reformed recognisable other', a term explicated by Homi K. Bhabha in his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' in his book *The Location of Culture*.²⁹ The second section proceeds to analyse her subscription to the earlier tropes of Western Orientalism of Islam, which constructs the Muslim as a paradoxical 'other'. This analysis is based on Edward Said's theory of Orientalism propounded in his book with the same name in 1978.³⁰

The second part of the discussion explores the novel focusing on the two paradigms which are: 'Islamic misogyny' and 'Islamic fundamentalism, intolerance and terrorism'. Thus, through the lens of Oriental mimicry, this study highlights the circumstantial implications they carry within them. This study does not look at Bhabha's assertion of mimicry as subversive, that it is a mockery of colonialism, but as the dire desire of the colonised to look just as the coloniser. Ayaan Hirsi Ali's obsession with reforming Islam is examined as a pattern that has always been associated with the discourse of Englishness.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali: The Reformed Recognisable 'Other'

In the essay 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' in his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha analyses mimicry based on the Lacanian vision of it as camouflage resulting in colonial ambivalence. Bhabha refers to mimicry as the act of imitating the coloniser by the colonised 'other', to attain a

²⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

³⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 5th ed. (London: Penguin, 2003).

perceptible position and to fit into the power structure, that is for the native to be well accepted by the European/ coloniser. For Bhabha, “The mimic man is...the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English”.³¹ This implies that the colonised ‘other’ extremely desires to be identified as a good coloniser (Westerner). The eagerness is to the extent that the native/colonised man imitates the European ways of dressing, speaking, eating, walking and all other behaviours that would make him as good as the coloniser, and presumably better than other colonised people.

“By our Western standards, Muhammad is a perverse man, and a tyrant.”³² Ayaan Hirsi Ali who is considered a product of Colonial Mimicry, can fit into Bhabha’s description of a “mimic-man”. Having lived much of her adolescence and part of her adulthood in Kenya, she was entirely exposed to a certain level of development in Kenya which was not at that time achieved in her home country, Somalia. This is evident in her description of Kenyan culture, society, school system, female liberty, dressing, hospital and refugee welfare. She derides Kenya for being an African country but becomes wholly fascinated by a similar development she sees in Europe.

“The women were bare—they seemed naked—their legs, their whole arms, their faces and hair and shoulders were all completely uncovered. Kenyan women were often more uncovered than we Somalis, but somehow the whiteness of these women’s skin drew my eye more.”³³

Nevertheless, she does not consider the Kenyan way of dressing as egalitarian enough to emulate while she is still in Kenya, as the sense of liberation only comes to her when she steps into Europe. By ignoring the little growing empowerment of women around her back in Africa, she trades her African and Muslim values for Western ones. She chooses to be blind to the same advantages available in

³¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 87.

³² Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2007), 303.

³³ Ali, 185.

Kenya; she could only see that the Dutch “men and women were sitting together, not at bars but with easy familiarity, as if they were equal,”³⁴ whereas this same free mixing existing in Kenya is underappreciated. “I would get to England. There I could speak the language and understand the culture, with the meadows and cows, and the Queen, and Mayfair and Whitechapel—I knew it all.”³⁵ The fascinating English life and culture, which Ayaan Hirsi Ali wants to be part of, speaks more of her desperate desire to be Anglicised. Berating her own cultural experiences and distinctive practices for the ultimate Western ones, she eagerly wishes for the White way, which is, of course, the better.

“I knew that another kind of life was possible. I had read about it, and now I could see it, smell it in the air around me: the kind of life I had always wanted, with a real education, a real job, a real marriage. I wanted to make my own decisions. I wanted to become a person, an individual, with a life of my own.”³⁶

Ayaan Hirsi Ali reveres the Western standards so much that she ignores the different examples of female power and abilities around her, from which she could learn. Looking at her mother's strength and ability to make decisions, her aunt's success in entrepreneurship, or her sister's liberty and audacity, the women around her lived a life of their own. In addition, the Kenyans' civilisation as compared to the Somalis was much more advanced and liberal. However, Ali was not merely fascinated, rather she was carried away by the Western ideas she had gathered from the books she had read. Her level of attraction to Englishness proves the mimic-man that she is.

Bhabha sees a mimic-man as an “authorized version of otherness” in that they (mimic men) become objects of colonial desire; they are preferred to the colonial empire compared to non/fewer mimicking natives despite their efforts at unification with the Whites, the native is given a partial recognition/ they are

³⁴ Ali, 185.

³⁵ Ali, 187.

³⁶ Ali, 187.

preferred by the coloniser to the fewer non-mimicking natives who, despite their efforts at unification with the Whites, were only given partial recognition. He continues his argument that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable ‘other’, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite.”³⁷ In other words, no matter how well the native imitates the coloniser, they (the colonisers) would only appreciate him at a certain level which is better than the other natives, but would never see him as an equal or the same as themselves.³⁸

Mimicry is simply “the disciplined imitation of the white man by the native.”³⁹ It is both good and bad; it disrupts the native’s culture, history and religion and leaves him in a state of ambivalence, at the same time it breaks colonial authority⁴⁰ and triggers a sense of resistance in the mimic man. “The mimicry of the post-colonial subject is therefore always potentially destabilizing to colonial discourse and locates an area of considerable political and cultural uncertainty in the structure of imperial dominance.”⁴¹

This study underscores Ayaan Hirsi Ali as a ‘mimic man’ who has turned into the perceptible position of the Westerner in her thoughts and actions. Bhabha opines that by adopting the European language and systems, the colonised presents a distorted image of their world to the colonisers which is now disconcerting to their authority. Bhabha’s theory of mimicry is not just about copying or imitating the colonial cultures, but also about the displacement of the colonised in history and reality, which is seen in Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s fractured history and entangled reality. Bhabha’s concept of mimicry

³⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

³⁸ Sanjiv Kumar, “Bhabha’s Notion of ‘Mimicry’ and ‘Ambivalence’ in VS Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*,” *Researchers World* 2, no. 4 (2011).

³⁹ Pramod K. Nayar, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism* (New Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2010), 150.

⁴⁰ The art of mimicry exposes the native man to the knowledge of liberty, which the coloniser would try to alienate and conceal, to prevent the native/mimic man from enjoying such knowledge. For Bhabha: “The menace of mimicry is its double vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse, also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I’ve described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object” (1994, 115).

⁴¹ Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Hove: Psychology Press, 2000), 116.

enables the placement of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the non-Western author, in the position of the coloniser and hence, the Orientalist. This is apparent in how she thinks in the Western way, assumes herself to be White in thought and action and sees herself as the most appropriate to speak on Islam. Her monolithic image of Islam as an oppressive and backward religion is propounded with a self-proclaimed Whiteness, the typified goal of a mimic-man – to be as White.

The Muslim ‘Other’: Hirsi Ali’s Orientalist Engagements

According to Mineke Bosch, some of the principal features of Orientalism is the “identification of Islam with subordination or oppression” of women.⁴² He argues that Ayaan Hirsi Ali uses this to get into the Western spotlight. Through her circumventive narrative, she achieved her goal of showing Islam as an oppressive religion in order to make her book highly marketable.

Edward Said sees Orientalism as a means of expressing socio-cultural identity among other facets. He criticises Western representation of the Orient and how this has structurally created an identity which remains relevant until today. As a way of viewing the world, Orientalism acquires a global significance by identifying and representing the cultures in ways that promote and foster an economic and political superiority of the West over the rest of the world. In this, the West must demonstrate the inferiority of the Orient in order to justify their superiority and colonial presence. Said observes here that racism is a product of Orientalism, and among the characteristics of Orientalist writings is a vivid socio-cultural divide. Chua argues in correspondence with the above that:

“Since the 1990s, the term Orientalism [has been commonly used] to refer to ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, prejudicial stereotyping, and cultural misrepresentations of non-‘western’ societies, particularly those influenced by Islamic knowledge and practices.”⁴³

⁴² Bosch, “Telling Stories, Creating (and Saving) Her Life. An Analysis of the Autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali,” 144.

⁴³ Peter Chua, “Orientalism as Cultural Practices and the Production of Sociological

This study imbibes the use of Orientalism – as a means of creating socio-cultural difference or distinctiveness – to analyse the identity projected of Islam and Muslims in Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s text *Infidel* (2007). It justifies the argument of this study that Islamophobia is a consequence of Orientalist stereotyping, in this case spread through socio-cultural differences, with the result that Islamophobia is the subset of racism in the West especially in the United States.⁴⁴

“My central motivating concern is that women in Islam are oppressed. That oppression of women causes Muslim women and Muslim men, too, to lag behind the West. It creates a culture that generates more backwardness with every generation. It would be better for everyone—for Muslims, above all—if this situation could change.”⁴⁵

Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s predecessor, Salman Rushdie, also tried to make a bold exit from the fetters of Islam; in proclaiming his Orientalist position his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) hurt Muslim sentiments. Ziauddin Sardar likens Salman Rushdie – for his publication of *The Satanic Verses* – to a “brown sahib”, which corresponds with Homi Bhabha’s description of a mimic-man who desperately and willingly forfeits his native culture in exchange for Western acceptance and assimilation. Sardar holds that:

“In his desperate attempt to obliterate his indigenous identity and submerge it into the European self, the brown sahib seeks to present his original culture and civilization as a pre-modern extension of the culture and civilization of the mother country . . . The literary

Knowledge,” *Sociology Compass* 2 (2008): 1179, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00129.x>.

⁴⁴ Enzo Traverso, “Islamophobia: The New Western Racism - Pluto Press,” accessed October 19, 2018, <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/islamophobia-the-new-western-racism/>; Larry Portis, “Otherness, Orientalism and Objectivity in the United States,” *Divergences*, 2009, <http://divergences.be/spip.php?article1486>; Craig Considine, “The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and ‘Flying While Brown,’” *Religions* 8, no. 9 (2017): 165, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090165>.

⁴⁵ Ali, *Infidel*, 349.

endeavours of the brown sahib are the product of this grand Western project. His brown colour ensures the eagerness of many Europeans to listen to his authentic voice and thus have their own prejudices confirmed.⁴⁶

Similarly, Ali Mazrui contemplates in a lecture delivered at Cornell University on 1 March 1989: “is Salman Rushdie simply continuing his basic contempt for his own roots?”⁴⁷ Mazrui considers Rushdie to have committed cultural treason for disrespecting and denouncing his culture and religion for the sake of his Western readers. This behaviour is what this study considers as the extent to which Ayaan Hirsi Ali goes in order to gain a Western audience and a lucrative income.

As post-colonial critics have done for Salman Rushdie after his publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), this study will analyse the transformation of Ayaan Hirsi Ali from a colonised individual to the colonising crew; her flight from being an African Muslim to an American Atheist, from the Orientalised to the Orientalist. Her contestation of Islam in *Infidel* (2007) subscribes to the earliest Orientalist clichés. Her novel is therefore considered an Orientalist one in the same way that Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* “remained largely unchallenged” to those who see it as an Orientalist attack on Islam.⁴⁸

As with most post-9/11 novels, Muslim rejection of America’s invasion of the Middle East gets little or no literary attention; all emphasis rests on seeing the terrorist acts as religiously motivated.⁴⁹ Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism have been the desired subject of post-9/11 narratives that accentuate Muslim deep-rooted antagonism and hatred for non-Muslims. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, like most

⁴⁶ Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons From the Rushdie Affair* (London: Grey Seal, 1990), 86.

⁴⁷ Ali Mazrui, “Is The Satanic Verses a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair,” in *The Kiss of Judas: Affairs of a Brown Sahib*, ed. Munawar A. Anees (Kuala Lumpur: Quill Publishers, 1989), 85.

⁴⁸ Zafar Sobhan, “The Satanic Verses and the Occidentalism of Salman Rushdie” (Pomona College, 1992).

⁴⁹ Alosman, Mydin, and Hashim, “Architectures of Enmity in Andre Dubus III’s the Garden of Last Days.”

other post-9/11 writers, ascribes intolerance of other religions and cultures as the principal teaching of Islam manifested through various Islamic practices. In her view,

“[Islam] teaches hatred to children, promises a grotesque version of the afterlife, elevates the cult of “martyrdom”, flirts with the mad idea of forced conversion of the non-Islamic world, and deprives societies of the talents and energies of 50 percent of their members: the female half.”⁵⁰

Studies show that post-9/11 novels draw a connection between religiosity and intolerance. Alosman, Mydin and Hashim (2018) find that Andrea Dubus in his novel *The Garden of Last Days* (2009) represents Muslim characters as intolerant and antagonistic “towards non-Muslims” under the influence of Islam.⁵¹ Similarly, in their criticism of Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), they observed that the Muslim characters perceive death as a pathway to heaven and, therefore, do not hesitate to die while eliminating or destroying the enemy. Through the cliches of “devastation” and “revenge”, DeLillo fabricates the non-Muslim enemy and emphasises the difference. In this regard, his illustration “create[s] the hateful enemy who aims to devastate Americans’ lives to attain heaven and take revenge on non-Muslims.”⁵² Just like these authors, Ayaan Hirsi Ali presents Muslims as intolerant and violent – “We are taught that as Muslims, we should oppose the West”⁵³ – and that Muslims are inherently antagonistic towards the West due to Islamic teachings. All three authors describe the 9/11 hijackers as motivated by sincere religiosity and extreme hatred for non-Muslim Americans.

There are some non-Islamophobic, non-fictional authors such as Vincent Cornell who contend that overgeneralising spreads the idea that Islam advocates terrorism and intolerance. For him, “[t]he

⁵⁰ Ali, *Infidel*, xvi.

⁵¹ Alosman, Mydin, and Hashim, “Architectures of Enmity in Andre Dubus III’s the Garden of Last Days,” 256.

⁵² M. Iqbal M. Alosman, Raihanah M. Mydin, and Ruzy Suliza Hashim, “Architected Enemies in Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*,” *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 9, no. 1 (2019): 30.

⁵³ Ali, *Infidel*, 109.

modalities of Muslim intolerance inhabit theological, cultural, and ideological discourses whose roots penetrate deeply into the pre-modern Islamic past.” He debunks the myth of Islam preaching intolerance by adding that, “one should not make the mistake of essentialising the Muslim attitudes by assuming that the roots of Islamic intolerance are mainly scriptural.”⁵⁴ Reflecting on the Muslim tolerance of Jewish presence in Aqsa and the overwhelming tolerance of non-Muslims during the Umayyad Dynasty, Cornell posits that the intolerant conduct of Muslims in modern times could be the result of ideological, socio-political and religious challenges they have been subjected to over time from evangelical Christianity, secularism and Western Imperialism. However, from the Muslims’ angle, Islamic fundamentalism is mainly responsible for perpetuating extreme intolerance.

Western discernments of Islam have been mostly critical from the earliest contacts between the two worlds until recent times. The stereotype of Muslim women as oppressed is rooted in Western Orientalism with an origin dating back to the eighteenth century, evident in pre-colonial European travel writings.⁵⁵ The generalisation of Muslim women as being disempowered and needing an American or Western benefactor to rescue them has also been the dominant narrative since September 11.⁵⁶ Ayaan Hirsi Ali intensifies this common ground in her memoir by drawing references from the Quran to validate her proclamations of Islam oppressing women. She says, “[t]he Quran said “Men rule over women.” In the eyes of the law and in every detail of daily life, we were clearly worth less than men.” The notion of Islam subordinating women is

⁵⁴ Vincent J. Cornell, “Theologies of Difference and Ideologies of Intolerance in Islam,” in *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2008), 278.

⁵⁵ H. Katherine Bullock, “The Politics of the Veil” (University of Toronto, Toronto, 1999),

http://www.collectionscanada.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape10/PQDD_0006/NQ41116.pdf.

⁵⁶ Anniqua Rana, “On Being a Muslim Woman,” *Intercultural Education* 18, no. 2 (May 2007): 169–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980701327304>; Layla Saleh, “(Muslim) Woman in Need of Empowerment,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 80–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1105589>.

well portrayed here. In her foreword, she describes Islam as a cult which objectifies women. This, however, accentuates the image of Islam as one which subjugates the womenfolk. She goes on to say:

“This cult makes the lives of women a misery, either by depriving them of a sex life altogether or by forcing them into expedients (painful anal penetration, the resealing of the hymen) that are dangerous as well as unpleasant and degrading.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

The Oriental representation of Muslims in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's novel highlights her quest for reforming Islam. As a mimic-man, her self-proclaimed Western-ness is evident in her dissociation with Islam and Somalia – and her alliance with the West. Similarly, Ali opines that Islam is directly or indirectly responsible for all the unjust treatment of Muslim women irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. In contrasting her claims with Islamic literature, this study finds that her discourse on Islam's incompatibility with Western democratic values is factually incorrect. The novelty here is that, through the means of differentiation, Ayaan Hirsi Ali renders Muslims as rather intolerant and less than humane. Through this, her readers will view Islam as an operational tool encouraging Muslims' antagonism against non-Muslims, and in the oppression of women. Islam is thus made accountable for the 9/11 attacks which is illuminated within the clash of civilisations framework. Through the accentuation of existing Muslim stereotypes, she is threatening the peaceful multiculturalism in the West and even globally. This study, therefore, recommends that future studies in this area should deconstruct Ayaan Hirsi Ali's accentuation of Islamophobia from within, that is as a native informant.

⁵⁷ Ali, *Infidel*, xiv.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ب	پ	پ	ز	ز	ز	ز	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	ب	ب	ب	ژ	—	—	ř	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	پ	پ	پ	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	ت	ت	ت	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ﺖ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	đ	ž	ž	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ﺖ	ﺖ	ﺖ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a ²
ح	h	h	h	ظ	ž	ž	ž	ال	al ³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	ğh	gh	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

¹ – when not final

² – at in construct state

³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)
	و	uww (final form ū) uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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