

# Representation of Muslim Women in the Western Media

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**Abstract:** *This essay attempts to argue about the representation of Muslim women in veil in Western media. This topic is chosen because of general discourse about Muslim women, who wear veil as a threat to secular tradition and value of freedom. Besides, media has power to create affirmation about the general discourse. This paper analyses some researches about Muslim women in media. Based on previous research, it can be assumed that media has power to create women representation as otherness and placed them as threat towards secular tradition and value of freedom.*

**Keywords:** *media, Muslim women, otherness, representation*

**Abstrak:** *Tulisan ini mendeskripsikan representasi media barat atas perempuan Muslim berjilbab. Tema ini dipilih karena adanya wacana umum mengenai perempuan Muslim sebagai ancaman terhadap tradisi sekuler dan nilai kebebasan. Selain itu, media juga memiliki kekuatan untuk melakukan afirmasi terhadap wacana tersebut. Artikel ini mengkaji beberapa riset mengenai teks media yang berbicara tentang perempuan Muslim. Berdasarkan riset yang telah dilakukan, dapat diasumsikan bahwa media memiliki kekuatan untuk membentuk representasi tentang perempuan sebagai 'liyan'.*

**Kata Kunci:** *'liyan', media, perempuan Muslim, representasi*

This paper discusses about how the Western media represent Muslim women in veil by using several researches on some Western texts. This topic is chosen mainly with two reasons: first, there is general discourse about Muslim women as a threat towards secular tradition and freedom value. Second, the power of media in affirming the otherness for Muslim women in that general discourse. Muslim women as a threat towards secular tradition and freedom value is showed from the ban for Muslim women wearing the veil in France (Scott, 2007, p. 90; Hamel, 2002, p. 297); and the feminists movement towards the veil

(which recognized as a threat to freedom) (Nelson, 2013).

This paper tries to give some critiques toward the discourse about Muslim women in the media from post-colonial perspectives which focus on Edward Said's idea about Orientalism, where he argues on how Islam is portrayed in a certain way. Orientalism is used due to its suitability in locating the problem between Muslim societies and the Western societies. The rise of this problem will be explained further in the next section.

Firstly, this article will provide argumentation about discourse and power in media. In this part, this paper will describe

the capability of media in producing discourse with its power. The importance of explaining discourse in this term is that discourse plays an important role in shaping knowledge and truth. Secondly, this paper would like to explain how Islam is being portrayed in the Western's media discourse. This part will provide the debate on media representation of Islam from Orientalism perspective. At last, this article will argue how these representation has put Muslim women into intriguing place, where their existence become the debate between scholars. This essay assumes that the veil and freedom of Muslim women are always being questioned, particularly after 9/11 catastrophe.

#### **METHOD**

Fairclough (1995, p. 47) states that truth is achieved through representation and all representations involve particular points of view, values and goals. Further than that, Fairclough (1995, p. 184) considers media as a place where the political discourse is being produced to perpetuate power. Actors or politicians will never articulate their power in a pure form, as it is always situated.

Therefore, it can be assumed that media can be interpreted as the field of power (Haryatmoko, 2016, p. 60). Media has the power in defining social class and social control. Through language, media have vital position in exercising its power to divide societies. It makes media as the field of power which consists of multiple social field such as economic, education, and art (Thomson, 2008, p. 70).

Related to the power of media, it is interesting to examine the power of discourse. Wodak (2009, p. 48) mentions that discourse has made power eternalized as it conveys knowledge into people's consciousness and then gives an effect to their's perspective in seeing the reality. Therefore, the reality itself is always constructed by those, who have power to make knowledge. Hence, knowledge becomes truth that is being used to figure out something. Mills (2005, p. 74) explains that truth, in discourse perspective, constructed by power which is always distributed in every institution in society. Further, Foucault (Mills, 2005) says that power is no longer oppressive and it is always desired, since it produces things, knowledge and discourse.

Hall (2013, p. 29) mentions that language is one of the means in producing discourse. As the system of representation, discourse defines and produces the object of our knowledge and governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. In addition, Hall (2013, p. 45) also explains that the representation, as the transformation of knowledge, has made discourse which emerges stereotype. By having such knowledge, we may put meaning on something and percieve it as "real" (Hall, 2013, p. 263). Fursich (2010, p. 115) explains further that media creates representations as the points of signifying practices in producing shared meaning, thus representation presents culture, meaning and knowledge about ourselves and our surroundings.

The point of discourse is about how differences is being acknowledged. In Foucault's perspective, human is a non-value free subject (Mills, 2004, p. 30) and discourse has challenged the notion of individual's freedom that refers to Cartesian's concept of subject. In Cartesian's concept, subject is notified as a free-value and independent human regardless their social background. Whilst, Foucault sees subjectivity as the result of power relations amongst humans.

Foucault realizes that human do not exist in empty space, where there is a total freedom. He says that power is always distributed in every institutions of societies and religion is one of the institutions that power works effectively. Meanwhile, the expression of religion is the space where each person may act differently. Wearing the veil for Muslim women is one of religion expression that we may take to see how subjectivity works.

## FINDING

It can be problematic if veil is considered as a sign of women submission towards patriarchal culture. Considering that all Muslim women in veil are having the same experience is something that is debatable amongst scholars, since it ignores women's subjectivity. In Indonesian context, the veil is not a compulsory for Muslim women, except in Aceh region. Meanwhile, there are many Muslim women are wearing it.

Even in Indonesia, the experience of wearing veil is different from time to time. In Suharto's era, veil is prohibited in

formal school because it is considered as a sign of fundamentalism. After his regime ends, veil is commonly used by Muslim women, even in more fashionable style. It shows how women with different context are struggling with power in a different mode. It shows how subjectivity works, the way women negotiate with power. The recognition of women's subjectivity is the point of discourse.

Therefore, in the case of women in veil, whether it is jilbab, niqab or burqa, they considered having the same experience and situation that needs to be criticized. The situation of Muslim women in Indonesia and in Afghanistan, will not be the same. Women from both countries are having different political, economic context or even historical context that affluent them in wearing veil.

Many scholars concerns on how colonial legacy has changed the political discourses about colonized areas, whether its culture, people or religion. Based on Discourse Theory, post-colonial theories has challenged the colonial legacy that put colonized people into one group as the other (Mills, 2004, p. 104). It breaks otherness and the social consequences that it may take, such as generalizing people into single group and assuming that they have single experience.

Said in Mills (2004) argues that the process of make people as 'otherness' and generalizing the colonized people are needed to produce the differentiation between the West and the Orient. Further, the discourse about the Orient permeates

in the production of knowledge through language. The differentiation between the West and the Orient will make the definition of the Orient easier in the production of knowledge by the West.

The generalization of colonized people are documented in the colonial texts and are considered as the truth depiction of colonized people:

The fact that sweeping generalizations were made about particular cultures made them less communities of individuals than an indistinguishable mass, about whom one could be a mass 'knowledge' or which could be stereotype the inscrutable Chinese, the untrustworthy Arab, the docile Hindu, and so on (as cited in Mills, 2004, p. 97).

It reflects that the differences of individuals are never recognized in the colonial texts. Edward Said (2003, p. 90-91) has defined Orientalism as a political position between the Orient and the West that determine domination. In addition, Said explain that the distinction between the Orient and the West is not merely about the distinction of location. It brings the issue about political power that results the unequal position in producing knowledge. In his writing, Said mentions that the West as the representation of European countries and America. Therefore, in this article, the example would be refereed to the text produced in those countries.

This paper is pointing at the discussion of the Muslim women in veil in the Western context. Wearing veil is never considered as the part of the Western culture. In France, it is recognized as the contradiction towards the concept of freedom in terms of sexuality. Women in veil is considered as submissive

and never recognize their own sexuality. Therefore, it is interesting to discuss Muslim women in the Western text from Orientalism perspective while discussing about how colonial legacy gives power to the Western countries in creating discourse about Muslim women in their texts.

### **Islam in Media**

After the momentum of 9/11, Islam is clearly portrayed as terrorist. The portrayal of Islam as terrorist was emphasized by the Bush's politics that promoted the "War on Terror". Bush used the slogan to uphold democracy in Muslim societies as a mask of invasion to Muslim countries. Bush had imposed a universal value in Muslim countries, which he noted that these countries had no freedom at all. At one point, Bush was masquerading his very action under the idea that freedom is a universal need and exercising the positive practice of power as the important point in democracy by eliminating the "roadblock to freedom" in Muslim countries (Wimberly, 2008, p. 13).

Meanwhile, at the same time, Bush was being silent about what kind of freedom that the people of Muslim countries wanted (Wimberly, 2008, p. 12). From the discourse, Bush politics has under represented Islam in the global discourse. Islam was represented as the subject that must be ordered or disciplined under Bush's power. Moreover, in supporting Bush's global discourse, Islam is depicted as backward, passive and live in conservative era (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2011, p. 25). This paper discusses that there is no single or general problem

between the societies, in this case, Muslim women in veil. Imposing one value by silencing the voice of the people in Muslim societies only result another colonialism.

It can be clearly seen on how the West has dominated Islam from how Neo-Conservative divides Muslim into two: “bad” Muslim and “good” Muslim (Kassimeris & Jackson, 2011, p. 27-29). Kassimeris and Jackson argue good Muslim are not allies for America, since they are recognized as the people that need to be helped and need to be trained to become an ally of the US.

Islam, which is depicted as primitive and backward, is created as the opposite of the West, where the modernization began (Said, 2007, p. 184). This statement did not come without historical background. The history that emerges the concept of Orientalism was started around 1469-1527. At that time, Asia and Ottoman was very interesting for European’s scholars to study. From that moment on, they call Asian as “Orient” that most of European called “the Levant” which means “land where the sun rises” (Lockman, 2010, p. 44-45). Later on, the Orient become the Orientalism, that points the system of representations framed by a whole of forces that made the Orient as an object of Western knowledge, Western consciousness and later, Western’s world of order (Said, 2003, p. 203). It is no longer about the positive doctrine about the existence of the orient in the West. Based on Said (2003), Orientalism provides information about the Orient that is being essentialized by the Western.

The dichotomy between the East and the West then was generated from time to time (Lockman, 2010). Moreover, by understanding Orientalism, we can see how Western world has dominated, restructured and ordered the Orient (Said, 2003, p. 8).

Mortimer (2007, p. 361) says, the perception of national interest will give implication to the way foreigners are being captured in the media. This relation between media and the society has influenced the way an event is reported and as an effect, it will affect the society (Thomson, 2008, p. 71). This relationship enable media to provide the justification any violation that is used by the West in fighting “oriental” people (Mortimer, 2007, p. 361).

Said (2007, p. 343) mentions that few number of American expert who concern to the Islamic world become one factor of misinterpretation about Islam. It happened when the Gerome’s painting which illustrated a bearded muezzin standing in a minaret, calmly summoning the faithful to prayer with “the militant revival” as its caption, published by Time on April 12, 1979.

The similar case happened in 2005 in Denmark, when a newspaper published the cartoon of Muhammad and angered Muslim community. The cartoon draws an image that the West are always an opposition with Islamic world (Müller & Özcan, 2007, p. 290). The case was sharpen when the media report that the feedback of Muslim community toward Danish newspaper are recognized as radical (Abbas, 2011). Media report those feedbacks negatively,

regardless the purpose of the community (Abbas, 2011). From this case, the media has very wide access into knowledge which gives them bigger opportunity in shaping the definition of political and social meaning about Islam between audiences (Fursich, 2010, p. 115). The shared meaning, created by the media, has made the image of Muslim in perils.

In terms of image Muslim in Western world, Europe and United States, Muslims are severely suffered from Islamophobia, particularly after the attack of 9/11. Many leaders in the Western countries are reported that they feel threatened by symbols associated with Islam, including the veil that worn by Muslim women (Carland, 2011, p. 470). In the States, media represents Muslim in their texts as the other in American public life, which makes harder for Muslim community to use their identity to live their life (Byng, 2010, p. 114). Another exclusion process is by using the term “exotic” or even worse, as queer and even abnormal in pointing Muslims (Fursich, 2010; Dedeas, 2014). Most of the time, media essentialize non-white, non-elite groups and any kind of minority parties by excluding these groups from the contents or by providing few range of representation (Fursich, 2010, p. 116). Further, in line with Said’s thinking, many media coverages show how the Orientalists talk about the orientalisised as full of violent; irrational and backward (Amir-Khan, 2012, p. 1603).

## DISCUSSION

Women are viewed as vulnerable groups in the politics of representation since they wear visible religion sign on their body. Unlike Muslim male, their signification of religious piety are not as visible as women. Women’s body become the site, where discourses about sexuality take place. It becomes the signification of cultural value, resistance, or even belongings. Therefore, it is interesting to discuss more about how Muslim women are being represented in the media.

Since veil is the most visible sign of Muslim women identity, it becomes the perfect scapegoat for Orientalist in constructing Muslim women in the West (Amir-Khan, 2012). It is very intriguing, when Muslim women are represented in two ways: as the object of the patriarchy tradition or as the resistant community who are fail to integrate with Western Culture. This Orientalists perspective has permeated in the Western’s society. As an effect, the discourse about veiled Muslim women, has provoked the violence and racism toward Muslim women in Western countries (Amir-Khan, 2012).

In this paper, the texts media refer to those, which are written by the Western feminists. Muslim women, who are used to be associated with people from the “Third World”, in some situations, become object of the texts that is produced by mass media or some Western feminists. It is argued that the definition of Muslim women already influences women’s live either in political or sociological areas (Mohanty, 1988).

Further, she took some of Western's feminist in pointing how some feminists texts has generalized Muslim women, such as Juliette Mince (1980) and Patricia Jeffery (1979). Mohanty mentioned Juliette Mince, who wrote *the House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society*, has generalized that all Arabic women and women in Muslim societies share the same notion of familial kinship. In Mince's writing, based on Mohanty, these women are experiencing the same oppression, regardless their class, race and cultural differences. In line with Mince, Mohanty finds the generalization of Muslim women in Jeffery's writing as well. Jeffery has simplified the value of Muslim women in Muslim societies by making the internalization of purdah in Pirzada as the representation of Muslim women.

Mohanty, in line with Said's concept about Orientalism, concerns on how some Western feminist put their gaze towards Muslim women and make them as "The Other". Colonialization has made structural domination and political oppression towards "The Other" perpetuated (Mohanty, 1988). Mohanty (2003) explains that the colonialization emerges in the certain way such as the production of knowledge by some Western feminist texts.

Reflecting the image of women in veil as oppressed and subjected by backwardness (Byng, 2010; Zine, 2002; Bullock, 2000), Mohanty unpacks how knowledge production about these women is being made. Mohanty departs from the point where she argues that the production of knowledge by some feminists can be

considered as the western hegemony scholarship (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). As the result, Mohanty found the generalization by some Western feminists discourse about Muslim women in several characters. First, it is seen that average Third World women are sexually submissive since they live based on their feminine gender. Second, by being part of the Third World, Muslim women in veil, means being poor, uneducated, religious, victimize (Mohanty, 2003, p. 19). On the other hand, the definition has placed Muslim women in veil as an opposition to women from Western countries, that are well educated, independent, modern and having control to their own body and sexuality (Mohanty, 2003, p. 42). Women from the Third World are recognized sharing the same value, while in fact, they do not share nor face the same values and problems. Each woman struggle different fight in different situations based on her historical perspective. Generalizing women is equal with ignoring women's situation and imagining as if they were victimized in the same ways.

In some Western feminists writings, all the women in the Third World live under male repression. When living by using religion attribute in the Third World community is connected with oppression, it is simply assumed that these women live under oppression. Hence, veil as one of the religion attribute worn by Muslim women, becomes the signifier of oppression toward these women live. Further, some feminists consider that the veil is the way how women's body are being controlled and

segregated without their consent (Mohanty, 2003, p. 33-34).

The differentiation between Western women and Third World women also gives implication on how these women are being subject and object of the discourse. The fact that some Western feminists as the subject, gives the privilege to define the Third World women as “oppressed women” becomes “oppressed Third World women” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 39). This interpellation comes from the term “underdeveloped women” as an effect of the dichotomy between Western women and the Third World women. What makes this calling more problematic is that Third World women stay silent and have no place to speak, so their voice cannot be heard.

Twenty five years has passed, and Mohanty’s concept is still relevant. The concept of “oppressed third world” not only is used by some of the Western feminists, but also by the broader groups. In their sociological live, women in veil receive racial treatment that blocks them in accessing various public spheres.

From this paper it can be seen that wearing a square cloth called veil is not merely a practice in religion that has long been understood and devalued (Lughod, 2001, p. 108). It is contradictory with the construction about the West as superior. There is an irony where some feminist speak for women’s liberty and state that the personal is political, while on the other side, they exclude Muslim women by assuming them as an apolitical by wearing the veil. The veil (that is considered as backward

and conceal women’s sexuality), then, is contradicted with the Western concept of gender (that is considered as modern and aware of women’s sexuality) (Amir-Khan, 2012). If the personal is really political, it should be considered how Muslim women use the veil as their political movement to count.

Some women wear veils because of their piety, and the other as a way to resist the social norm. In some research, it is found that some Muslim women wear niqab/hijab to express their freedom (Abbas, 2011). Further, Saba Mahmood found that Muslim women are not passive individuals since many of them are involved in political movement. The involvement of pious veiled women in Egypt during Islamic movement shows Women in veil are an active subject and not victimized (Mahmood, 2005). Their involvement in the mosque proves that the veil does not block their role in public space. They challenge the society that may prohibit them to be involved to, by wearing the veil. Analysts often explain the motivations of veiled women are such as social protest, economic necessity, anomie, or utilitarian strategy. Those two cases present how Muslim women are empowered. It also challenges the discourse that homogenizes the meaning of wearing the veil as the oppressed, militant and unconscious. It also problematizes media representation of veiled women that excludes women in veil from the public debate (Ryan, 2011) since it gives evidence that there is no one dimensional culture or religion practice (Rana, 2007, p. 172).



Those two examples make the debate about Islam and the West become more interesting, since it makes some women should face multilevel problem in practicing their piety. At one side, they are the victim of every issue that come up in the conflict, on the other side, they are voiceless when public are mentioning their problems. Through media, this vulnerable position is being used to strengthen those who hold the power.

First example how veiled women is being used to enhance power through media is the case of Afghanistan invasion by America. American media reported how women were gaining freedom from Taliban authority (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). Many news mentioned that fundamentalism in Islam has raised the oppression toward women. Regarding women's oppression in Afghanistan, the US media spotted an issue about radicalism in Islam as the only cause (Stabile & Kumar, 2005).

It can be assumed that, based on the American media, the problem of women in veil in Afghanistan is because of Islam itself and the dark history of Taliban. This case becomes the entrapment for Muslim women and Islam. From this discourse, it seems that American, as the West representation, come to Afghanistan to rescue them. While, there is another fact where those radicalism was supported by US to win power over Afghanistan in the Afghanistan-Uni Soviet conflict (Stabile & Kumar, 2005). The media was displaying one truth, while hindering another.

In line with Stabile and Kumar, Byng (2010) has done research on 72 articles

of New York Times and Washington Post which published between January 2014 and December 2016. In 2004-2006, these two newspapers were considered as having high rank in circulation in America. From the research, Byng found that some media in the States represent veil as a sign of violence and radicalism of Islam.

The celebration of freedom expression was also presented in New York Times. At that time, the newspaper displayed the photographs of Afghanistan young women with no burqa and the veil showing an act of gratitude toward US military and the expression freedom (Butler, 2004). After few moments, Butler found that for Muslim women in Afghanistan, veil means more than an adornment. It also means their kin relation, pride, and sense of belonging to a community (Butler, 2004).

In writing women in veil who live in the Western countries, some media present women in veil as an outsider who reject to integrate with the society where they live in (Ryan, 2011). It makes an image that as if those women who come from Muslim community or countries are those who should be blame for any racial abuse towards them.

In Canada, veiled women are constructed as 'The Other' in the society and as a result, they're not easily considered as Canadian (Bullock & Jafri, 2000). The way media constructing women in veil as 'The Other' is by contrasting them with Canadian women who are free, modern and well educated (while veiled women are oppressed, uneducated and militant)

(Bullock & Jafri, 2000). In line with Bullock and Jafri's view about media, Elfriede Fursich says that media shapes a mediated national identity by determining the boundaries of a community, which is part of the nation and excluding the minority as 'others' (Fursich, 2010, p. 116). In terms of doing so, Fursich (2010) says media works in two ways. First, minority is called 'others' based on the ethnicity, language, race, religious or sexual minorities. Second, media construct international relations; conflict and culture in their texts by reporting them unequally.

For some politicians in the Western countries, women in veil are considered as groups who reject to integrate and may cause any problems in the country (Ryan, 2011). One kind of the veil that cover women's body and face, called niqab, is also critiqued as the symbol of women's separation. Moreover, in many respects, the sentiment towards niqab is enforced by government and media rhetoric as the "war on terror" while emphasizing the presumed unassimilability of Muslim (Abbas, 2011, p. 73). In France, media consider women in veil and live in France, as a threat and disrupting the liberal value. It is because the veil is considered as the inferiority and irrationality, which is contradictory with what France value (Hamel, 2002, p. 299). In the broader sense, the term "secure the way of life" or "our values", that is usually used by the Orientalists, is a perfect way to frame Muslim women as the inferior (Amir-Khan, 2012).

The statement that supports the idea that the veil is a contradictory to certain

society's value is written on an article in *Le Monde* that mentions: "banning the veil in public area is the effort of government in combating radicalism which are fighting secularism" (Based on Hamel, 2002, p. 299). The way this statement blames the victim is an example of discourse strategy in showing racism (Renkema, 2004). Racisms also appears in other way such as: generalize the other's characters; present minority groups as a threat for dominant group existence; place the minority group as outlawed (Renkema, 2004).

The generalization created by Western feminist or activist has become source the oppression toward Muslim women. This context triggers Muslim women experience racism in all areas of their public lives and with the wider society, including with the feminist and feminist institutions (Hoodfar, 1993, p. 13). It proves that the dominant culture have opportunity in labelling non-dominant culture as subversive to preserve the dominant's power (Hamel, 2002, p. 300). This condition drags Muslim women to face, at least three different repressive practices. First, racial abuse; second, how to adjust their own culture with the dominant culture; third, how to resist and challenge while they struggle against racism (Hoodfar, 1993, p. 13).

There is nothing wrong with the celebration of freedom, particularly women's freedom. What makes this celebration problematic is that it becomes the new discourse and put women in veil as the people who are not free. Hence, the celebration of freedom has put women

in difficult position since they have to choose between fighting racism or sexism (Hoodfar, 1993).

This paper is not saying that the discourse of the Muslim veil in media has made massive Islamophobia, but to explain that media can be the best place for some opinion leaders to establish discourse towards Muslim women in veil. A broadcaster, Harley-Brewer, wrote in *The Daily Express* that Muslim women's veil was an intruder for Western values (Carland, 2011, p. 470). In the same tone of writing about Muslim women's veil, Britain's *The Sun* published an article that highlighted the veil as a threat for British values (Carland, 2011, p. 470). Popular media have challenged Muslim women who live in the West to prove that wearing the veil does not violate any Western value (Bullock, 2000, p. 48).

Besides being the culprit of the Western value's disruptions, the veil also becomes the one to blame the socialization of patriarchal traditions. Some feminists consider that the veil is the sign of patriarchy in Islam. The gender depiction of Muslim women gives image that these women are those who need to be helped from their selves and their community (Amir-Khan, 2012, p. 1596). Furthermore, the assumption of veil as the oppression toward women perpetuates the racist stereotype, which is ultimately in the service patriarchy in the western and Muslim society (Hoodfar, 1993, p. 16).

Meanwhile, in an ethnographic report written by Emma Tarlo (2005) shows that the press keeps reporting the veiled women to rise

otherness and create an image that they are an extremist. The veil is known as a symbol of resistance and rejection towards British values (Ryan, 2011, p. 1046). From the interview, Tarlo also found an interesting idea from a woman with niqab. In the interview, she wants others see her action in the society, not what she wears (Tarlo, 2005, p. 16). While media and politician call them as the minorities who resist integrating, this woman gives the opposite fact. Her struggle to integrate better in Britain, she learns English and help other women like her to learn English as well, so they can integrate better there (Tarlo, 2005, p. 17). Yet, her voice is hidden from the crowd and that is how discourse works. Hence, these women are struggling to integrate into British value to be the 'nomal' ones.

As the one who has power, The Orient attempts to rescue Muslim women in veil by constructing reality as if they are in the zone of imaginative geography, where they are an object of desire and repressed maiden in need of rescue (Zine, 2002). Media images represent that burqa-clad is the mark of Islam repression (Zine, 2002, p. 2).

Some Western feminists come out to be intellectual vanguard to save Muslim women who lack of political awareness to fight for emancipation (Zine, 2002, p. 16). This image is shown in the pictures that already mentioned by Butler in critiquing the photo by New York Time that snap women take off their burqa to celebrate freedom. The way the Occident celebrates the freedom in the Orient world seems showing no grief, no sense of the precariousness of life (Butler, 2004, p. 38-39), since behind the celebration, there are veiled

women need to be understood. The way media constructs veiled women proves how the media become insensitive about racism (Amir-Khan, 2012).

Another construction about veiled women is that it is interpreted as the revival of Islam that relate to militancy, repression and violence. This construction is mentioned in the research by Bullock and Jafri (2000) that found many photographs on newspapers portray women in veil holding weapons that represent violence. The way media do the representation has affected audience in constructing reality in their mind. This will highlights what Said (1978) says about truth: "... I believe it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not "truth" but representation" (p. 21).

The binary thinking about veiled and unveiled, oppressed and freed, has victimized the women in veil itself since it assumes that women have no awareness to her own body and ideas. Instead placing this women in the better areas, the fallacy of women in veil has put women in another racial treatment by society, including politician, military, press, and their neighbourhood (Amir-Khan, 2012). Their voice is hindered from popular media and texts; their real problem is never heard, while on the other hand, they should face people gaze on the street (as if they are abnormal) (Amir-Khan, 2012).

In addition, Bullock found that in the last few years, media has changed in covering Muslim women (Bullock, 2000, p. 48). They begin reporting about the veil from women in veil perspective. Bullock mentions that

more than five articles already report women positively.

## CONCLUSION

This paper is not trying to confront the Western societies but to explain how some texts in the Western societies has created a certain discourse about Muslim women. Homogenizing the meaning of the veil as the oppressed, militant and unconsciousness is the concept that should be revisited. In reflecting this homogenization, this article finds that discourse, that works through the representation has constructed stereotype toward minority. This stereotype becomes the set of knowledge which make some Muslim women as "The Other". Issues around women's sexuality and freedom makes the veil is easier to politicize. Further, they are the minority in the Western community that make them no access towards any powerful institutions. Another issue that is being highlighted in this paper is that wearing the veil by Muslim women will be viewed as the sign of resistance towards Western culture.

This article explains that the main problem of media representation of veiled women is the absenteeism of women in veil from the public debate (Ryan, 2011). The representation of Muslim women in media blurs the fact that Muslim women either in Western countries or in other countries are struggling in different battle.

Meanwhile the critique doesn't stop to the media as only culprit, since there is no clear limitation which one comes first: the logic of political decision-making or media logic. As Wodak (2009, p. 3) says, media

communication and political processes exist in the circle. At one moment, media communication comes after the rationality of political decision-making and leadership, and at another moment, it turns the way around.

### Recommendation

Further, in representing Muslim women, especially those who wear the veil, from the perspective Orientalism, media have constructed women as ‘The Other’, who live under repressive society and come from the backward world. Texts produced by media already put as if Muslim women are “helpless” object and need The West to save them. This concept results the idea that the Occident is the benchmark of the development of the Orientals (Afshar, 2008). Either some of Western feminists or politicians take side in media as the subject in defining Muslim women and put women in the “object” position.

Therefore, this structure of domination gives implication in Muslim women’s live. The Occident perspective in the media limits Muslim women’s space in the public sphere. Media constructs Muslim women who wear veil as a threat to the secular tradition, and a threat for freedom value, thus it excludes them from the country where they live. Furthermore, politically, they receive the racial treatment from the government such the restriction for them to wear veil in public institution.

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