MORE THAN HEADSCARVES AND HYMENS:
A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF WESTERN DISCOURSE SURROUNDING MUSLIM WOMEN
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ABSTRACT

THESIS: More than Headscarves and Hymens: A Feminist Analysis of Western Discourse Surrounding Muslim Women

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This thesis analyzes Western discourse surrounding Muslim women by examining Mona Eltahawy’s Foreign Policy article entitled, “Why Do They Hate Us?” as well as its subsequent media responses. Through a feminist analysis of these texts, I examine the emergent themes of hybrid identity and a public discussion of colonialism and tie them to scholarship within critical rhetoric, feminism, postcolonialism, and post-9/11 media narratives. I argue that while there appears to have been some progress in granting agency and validity to these women in public discourses, there is still progress needed, particularly in the construction of feminist critical rhetorical scholarship.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“We are more than our headscarves and our hymens.” Egyptian-American journalist and commentator Mona Eltahawy put forth this evocative statement about Muslim women in a May/June 2012 feature article in Foreign Policy magazine. The article, titled “Why Do They Hate Us?,” boldly argued that Arab men are at “war” against Arab women – framing the “they” as Arab Muslim men, and the “us” as Arab Muslim women. Eltahawy’s article spurred considerable controversy, generating a tremendous presence in the feminist and Muslim blogospheres and a noticeable presence in many mass-media outlets as well. Several prominent publications such as The Guardian and The Atlantic featured responses to Eltahawy’s arguments, and she was interviewed on numerous programs such as the BBC’s HARDtalk and MSNBC’s The Melissa Harris Perry Show. While some praised Eltahawy for her willingness to draw attention to the unfortunate plight of many mistreated women, others denounced her as too highly influenced by Western feminism and for reinforcing monolithic stereotypes about Muslim women.

This thesis proposes to examine Eltahawy’s “Why Do They Hate Us?” article, along with media responses in the form of mainstream mass-media articles. Eltahawy’s article spurred considerable debate over how to discuss the blatantly problematic treatment of some Muslim women in the Middle East – returning to the discussion about Middle Eastern women that was so prevalent after 9/11. However, it also highlighted a divide among Middle Eastern feminists over issues of identity and Western influence. Within this thesis I discuss how the media constructs Eltahawy’s hybrid identity, as well as Arab feminist identity. Additionally, I also analyze the public discussion of colonialism that is present within these assembled texts. Ultimately, by
analyzing the discourse surrounding “Why Do They Hate Us?” as a case study, I seek to answer the following research questions:

   RQ1: What themes does the “Why Do They Hate Us?” case study highlight regarding the discourse between Western feminists and Muslim women?

   RQ2: What types of opportunities does this discourse present in terms of reconceptualizing colonialism?

To answer these research questions, this thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter One provides this introduction as well as a project rationale. Chapter Two reviews pertinent literature regarding Muslim women and the veil, post-9/11 War on Terror rhetoric, as well as feminism and postcolonial scholarship. Chapter Three outlines my theoretical orientation and the methodology used for selecting the textual fragments used for this analysis. Chapter Four contains the analysis of these textual fragments and organizes the findings by theme. Finally, Chapter Five includes a final discussion, draws conclusions from the research, and offers some directions for future scholarship.

**Rationale**

Eltahawy has had an impressive career as a print and multimedia journalist, with articles appearing in prestigious publications such as the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *US News and World Report*. She has also appeared numerous times as a commentator on significant news networks such as *CNN*. Before moving to the United States in 2000, she previously worked as a correspondent for *Reuters* in Cairo and Jerusalem. She was born in Egypt and attended the American University in Cairo, earning her degree at the Egyptian institution that conducts classes predominantly in English. Her personal website explains that she has lived not only in her native Egypt and her current city of New York City,
but in the U.K., Israel, and Saudi Arabia as well. She spent several years as a reporter in the
Middle East, reporting for various media as a Reuters correspondent. During the 2011 Egyptian
revolution, she appeared on most major media outlets, expanding her profile so much that
Jezebel.com described her as “The Woman Explaining Egypt to the West.” Eltahawy made
national news in late November of 2011 when she was detained by Egyptian security forces for a
harrowing twelve hours, during which time she was brutally beaten and sexually assaulted. Her
assault was covered in many major news outlets, including ABC News, NBC News, NPR, The
Guardian, and The Washington Post. Months later, her controversial Why Do They Hate Us?
article appeared in Foreign Policy magazine, casting her controversial statements on the state of
Islam in the Arab world into the public domain. In her article Eltahawy blatantly argues that
Arab men hate women, with strong statements such as, “name me an Arab country, and I'll recite
a litany of abuses [against women] fueled by a toxic mix of culture and religion” and “poor or
rich, we all hate our women.” The article's publication in Foreign Policy is significant, as this is
a popular economic and political outlet, focused on a broader audience than feminist women.
Foreign Policy is bimonthly news magazine with an average circulation of around 100,000.
September 2012, just as the hype surrounding the article had died down, Eltahawy was in the
spotlight once again after being arrested for defacing a New York City advertisement from the
anti-Muslim American Freedom Defense Initiative. Eltahawy publicly spray painted over a
controversial subway advertisement, which read “In any war between the civilized man and the
savage, support the civilized man: Support Israel, Defeat Jihad.” Eltahawy’s status as a notable
controversial figure, coupled with the flood of responses brought on by her 2012 “Why Do They
Hate Us?” article, provide a solid foundation for the examination of both feminism’s goals and
failures as well as a postcolonial discourse.
Given Eltahawy's presence in the West but identification with her Egyptian heritage, her controversial statements became a public battle between Western and Muslim feminists. The rhetorical study of the clash between Western feminism and Muslim feminism is important for both societal and academic reasons. First, Western intervention in the name of feminist causes has often been seen at odds with the desires of Muslim women. Such incidents are particularly notable in the aftermath of September 11, 2011, as xenophobic screens have colored Western thought and intervention in regard to the plight of Muslim women in the Middle East. Second, this project provides an important contribution to the ongoing call from feminist and cultural scholars for increased postcolonial self-reflexivity, specifically in regard to feminist thought.

First, post-9/11, popular and alternative press has been rife with stories focusing on interventionist strategies driven by activists and politicians in the west on “behalf” of Muslim women. Immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the “liberation” of Muslim women was used as a justification for military intervention in the Middle East- a cause that was abandoned soon afterward (Faludi, 2007). Outside of the United States, “burqa bans” seeking to “free” Muslim women from “oppressive” Islamic veils and headscarves forbade wearing any sort of religious face covering in public. The most often discussed ban was widely enacted in France in 2011, but similar debates as to whether to ban the hijab from public spaces have occurred in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany (Winters, 2009). These bans, often rationalized by officials with the intention to promote secularism and to “save” women from an “oppressive” Islamic dress code, are considered by many critics to be culturally oppressive and Islamophobic. More recently, in spring 2013, the Ukrainian-based feminist group Femen launched its “Topless Jihad Day” in support of threatened Tunisian activist Amina Tyler. Protesters painted their topless bodies with anti-Islamic sentiments in response to Tyler’s arrest.
for “immoral gestures” by the conservative Islamic Tunisian government after she posed nude in a series of online photographs. Many Muslim women responded via Twitter and the Muslim blogosphere with Muslimah Pride Day, raising important issues about voice with statements like “I don’t need to be saved from my right and my choice” and “Nudity does not liberate me and I do not need saving.” Femen’s protest, and the resulting backlash from many women in the Muslim community, was featured in stories by outlets such as The Huffington Post, The Guardian, The Atlantic, Fox News, and Al Jazeera. Eltahawy's “Why Do They Hate Us?” article is similarly interventionist in nature, as it attempts to draw attention to and ultimately end atrocities committed against Arab women. At the same time, the article was perceived by many to be overstepping its cultural bounds, and ultimately doing more cultural harm in its colonial attitudes than good.

Second, the examination of the relationship between Western feminism and Muslim women in the Middle East is important to expanding postcolonial research in rhetoric, cultural studies, and women’s studies. This relationship is of particular interest as it continues to evolve as a result of the increasingly complex sociopolitical climate post-9/11. Mohanty (1988, 2003), Shome (1996), Butler (2004), and many others have written about the importance of and need for postcolonial discourse between the West and Muslim culture in the Middle East, which acknowledges and resists the application of a strictly Western worldview. Much of this discourse scholarly discourse has not been updated in the wake of 9/11, nor does it directly address the specific role of feminist interaction.

Mohanty (1988) explains that “Western feminism” is “not intended to imply that it is a monolith” (p. 335). It is essential to recognize the diversity within and between types of feminisms, as the feminist movement is as diverse as the women who belong to it. Rather, using
the term “Western feminist” is an “attempt to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by particular writers that codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western” (p. 334). This strategic essentialism is a sort of necessary evil used to categorize things that do not necessarily fit together neatly, simply for the sake of making scholarly study a possibility.

Shome (1996) argued for the inclusion of postcolonial scholarship in the rhetorical canon, citing important tie-ins to critical rhetoric as well as feminist rhetoric. Shome discussed the problematic nature of a monolithic feminism, emphasizing the notion that “the experience, functions, and goals of rhetoric differ in the different cultural space of women” (p. 53). The goals of white feminists, who often have the loudest voices within the movement, are not always congruent to those of other cultural groups - in this case, Muslim women in the Middle East.

Three years after 9/11, Butler (2004) highlighted the dangers of gauging the “progress of feminism by its success as a colonial project,” arguing instead that with the treatment of Muslim women by the West:

it seems more critical than ever to disengage feminism from its First World presumption and to use the resources of feminist theory, and activism, to rethink the meaning of the tie, the bond, the alliance, the relation, as they are imagined and lived in the horizon of a counterimperialist egalitarianism. (p. 41)

But nearly a decade after Butler’s call, many attempts by feminist activists in the West have fallen short of this disengagement. Instead, they take on a colonial superimposition of Western ideals- and face rejection from the women they are attempting to “help.”

By engaging with a recent case study which highlights Western discourse surrounding Muslim women in the Middle East, this proposed thesis will expand postcolonial feminist theory.
This responds to Shome’s (1996) call for important postcolonial rhetorical research in the realm of feminism, as well as contemporary extension of Mohanty’s (1988) examination of the colonial nature of Western feminism as it approaches Muslim women in the Middle East. As Shome (1996) stated, “It is only when we embrace postcolonialism as a significant critical perspective that rhetorical studies will be able to adequately engage in the present historical and social conditions” (p. 51). A postcolonial analysis of this feminist dynamic is essential for expanding research and gaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between Western and Muslim women.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis deals with Western media discussions about the liberties of Muslim women in the Middle East in a post-9/11 society. Therefore, I review literature regarding each of these issues, as well as how they intersect. First, I examine how scholars have studied the veil as a contested site of meaning. Given the increased visibility of the veil as a signifier post-9/11, I then review literature which focuses specifically on a post-9/11 society. Finally, given that scholars have argued that the framing of Muslim women post-9/11 has become a feminist issue, I review literature regarding feminism and postcolonial feminist scholarship. Ultimately, these bodies of literature work together to further discussion about Middle Eastern women and feminist discourse. Given this literature base, we know that there has been considerable research on the framing of Arab and Middle Eastern women, but that many scholars are looking for feminist analyses that are able to abandon the colonial attitudes that are often present in this work.

Muslim Women and the Veil

The Muslim veil has been studied in depth by a plethora of cultural scholars, and is often a point of discussion in discourse surrounding Muslim women in the Middle East. The following literature indicates that the veil is a highly contested site of meaning, with a number of relevant issues and interpretations. The case study utilized within this thesis does not directly revolve around the veil. However, because this is such a well-researched aspect of Islamic culture, and frequently highlights colonial attitudes toward Muslim women from the Western world, the veil serves as a symbolic representation of the discourse between Muslim women and Western cultures. I begin this section by looking at how Muslim women and the veil have been studied by scholars in a variety of fields. I then move toward a discussion of the more problematic aspects
of scholarship regarding Muslim women and the veil. In particular, I examine that which is limiting or offensive in regard to scholarship on Muslim women and the veil.

Scholars and the Veil

The Muslim veil has proven to be a rich subject of study for scholars in a variety of fields, ranging from but not limited to communication studies, history, sociology, and media studies (Droogsma, 2007; Scott, 2007; Macdonald, 2006; Butler, 2004). Eltantawy (2007) asserts that American media has a “continued fascination” with Muslim women—particularly Muslim women and the veil (p. 3). Droogsma (2007) explains that the “single clothing item identified as 'the veil' obscures diversity in body-covering practices and brings both the loose head-scarf and the all-encompassing burqa into a single discursive frame” (p. 8). As there is no single Arabic term into which the English word “veil” can be translated, “the veil” has come to stand in for a variety of Muslim garments which are associated with a conservative notion of modesty. Droogsma (2007) explains that “to Americans, the veil often represents a tangible marker of difference, in terms of religion and often ethnicity as well” (p. 295). Because the veil is such a conspicuous visual marker, its presence and associated meanings remain a notable presence to the public and scholars alike. This visual marker is often a contentious one, largely because it functions as a highly polysemous symbol. Droogsma (2007) states that while “dominant conceptions of veiling assume that hijab functions to oppress women,” the women who are under these veils—as well as the scholars who study these women—often possess highly differentiated understandings as to how and what these garments mean (p. 295).

Because the veil is a highly contested site of meaning and flux, it leads to and is representative of the ongoing confusion among both academics and the public about how to talk about Muslim women and activism. Macdonald (2006) argues that “the capacity of the veiled
Muslim female body to provoke intense reactions, and to eclipse Muslim women's own diversity of voice and self-definition, raises significant issues for feminist debate” (p. 7). Because of its links to modesty, female bodies, and piousness, there has been significant scholarship and public fascination with veiled Muslim women. Scholars have argued that while the concept of physical modesty is an important one to many Muslim women, it is something that is widely misunderstood by the Western world. Scott (2007), a gender scholar and American scholar of French history, points out that most Western feminists would be quick to agree that “uncovered bodies are no more a guarantee of equality than covered ones” (p. 156). In fact, many feminists past and present associate bodies that are too exposed with objectification – regardless of religious and cultural practices. Either “extreme” is faced with judgment in the Western eye. Many Western observers find conspicuous expressions of Muslim modesty such as the headscarf to be “sexually aberrant,” an in-your-face expression of their Islamic faith (Scott, 2007, p. 153). In the Western world, the veil is a mark of otherness that is not accepted by many in the public sphere.

Scholars have focused on the perceptions of Muslim women not only by the Western world in general, but specific regions of that world as well. Scott (2007) details the long history of laïcité, or French secularism, and the country's “burqa ban” which criminalized the wearing of religious paraphernalia in the public sphere. Scott (2007) explains that those in support of the ban- the majority of the French people- “conceived of it as a valiant action by the modern French state to rescue girls from the obscurity and oppression of traditional communities, thus opening their lives to knowledge and freedom” (p. 125). This uniquely Muslim symbol was associated with patriarchy by the Western public and their leaders and deemed in direct opposition to a free and progressive society. Putting such a visible symbol of the Muslim faith at odds with core
Western values—progressivism, freedom, and a united and civilized people—sets up a dichotomy between East and West, archaic and modern, private and public. Here, blatantly colonial attitudes from the Western world come into play, as the more “progressive” West attempts to rescue “oppressed” Muslim women by means of a cultural mandate.

Ironically, in personal interviews, many of the girls in public schools whose headscarves were banned defined their actions as a personal choice closely tied to their identity, oftentimes separated from parental (read: male) influence (p. 126). Personal accounts of Muslim women’s desire to wear the veil for personal reasons are abundant in popular press articles and blogs about the veil. For example, Muslim woman and blogger Halim Ahmed writes for Ayiba Magazine, “My hijab is not oppressive – but your stereotypes are.” What France publicized as an attempt to save Muslim women from perceived oppression was found by many of these same women to be an infringement on their rights and self-expression.

Journalist and human rights activist Manji (2003) explains that “Islam forms a pillar of identity for millions of women,” and points out that “taking religion out of the public sphere might be more than unrealistic; it might be unproductive as well” (p. 170). A push for a secularized abandonment of Muslim values eats away at the rich cultural identities forged by millions of Muslim women and men. Scott (2007) discusses the strong identification many French Muslim girls experience in relationship to wearing the hijab, which some of them characterized as “part of themselves” (p. 125). This strong sense of identification builds the veil into the identity of many of these women and girls. The veil is part of their faith, their faith is part of them, and thus the veil syllogistically becomes part of them. However, critics of the headscarves viewed these girls as ridiculous, delusional, or brainwashed. From the literature, it seems as though a lack of understanding from Westerners regarding this important symbol, and
the Muslim conceptualization of modesty as a whole, is problematic for relations between the groups. As scholars have pointed out, there is no agreed upon meaning as to what the veil truly represents, which opens the door for a Western interpretation to craft an overbearing meaning of its own which is not truly representative of the identities of the Muslim women it seeks to define.

Limitations and Problems Talking About The Veil

Scholars have identified several problems in both academic and public discourse surrounding the Islamic faith, Muslim women, and the veil. Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008) focus on political cartoons as one medium through which Muslims are characterized by American media. They focused on several pervasive stereotypes: Muslims as Arabs, Muslims as duplicitous, Muslims as medieval and against progress, and Muslims as evil. These massively unfavorable stereotypes portrayed through this unique medium offer a harrowing perspective of how Muslims are viewed by the American public.

Negative portrayals of Eastern Muslims are in no way limited to political cartoons, but can be found throughout Western media. For example, Nance (2009) explains that Westerners often utilize representations “heavily loaded with sexual preoccupations” which sought to gender the East as “feminized” and the West as “masculinized” (p. 3). Fitzpatrick (2009) argues that the West takes a characteristic Orientalist slant when characterizing Muslim individuals, and represents them as “despotic, highly sexual, lazy, unchanging, and incapable of logical thought or self-criticism (especially when it came to culture and religion)” (p. 244). Traditionally, these characteristics are offset by comparing them to the “Western” qualities of civilization and rationality. Oftentimes, women are a focus of these stereotypes, as the representation of the “Muslim wife as a slave” is often part of the discourse that surrounds women (Andrea, 2009). Eltantawy (2007) explains that through a lens of Orientalism, Muslim women are depicted as
“either exotic and mysterious or oppressed and backward” (p. 5). Ahmed (2008) explains that Islam is “often viewed as a patriarchal monolith,” and that Muslim women's use of Islam as a positive force and a tool for greater mobility is often disregarded (p. 542). Her ethnographic findings indicate that the use of a feminist Muslim spirituality by village women in rural Bangladesh “enhances the ethical nature of village society while it raises the material standards of their low-income household” (p. 559). A misinformed, monolithic interpretation of the Muslim faith is limiting to Muslim women and Muslim feminists.

These stereotypes are often used, then, to rationalize the need for intervention on behalf of Muslim women. Butler (2004) writes on the precarious nature of the movement to liberate Muslim women. She explains that Western media outlets such the New York Times often publicize young women baring their unveiled faces as “an act of liberation, an act of gratitude to the US military, and an expression of a pleasure that had become suddenly and ecstatically permissible.” Other activists relay the importance of the veil as a symbol of belongingness, modesty and pride, a rich cultural heritage, and perhaps most importantly, “a veil behind which, and through which, feminine agency can and does work” (p. 142). This is part of the larger narrative surrounding Muslim women and their countries as a whole. Cloud (2004) writes that in regard to Western considerations of predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East, “the idea of the ‘white man’s burden' is a core element in the belief in a clash between white, Western societies and inferior Others requiring policing and rescue” (p. 286). The construction of the Western world as a savior of helpless Muslim women by Western scholars, journalists, and activists is dominant and problematic.

There are clearly a number of contentious positions held by scholars and activists on what the veil truly represents. Droogsma (2007) laments that “scholars tend to ascribe meaning rather
than *describe* the meaning that the veil has for women,” and in doing so fail to recognize the fact that the veil, as a cultural artifact, “does not have one universal meaning for all Muslim women in the world” (p. 295). Similarly, Muslim feminist Arzu Merali (2006) states that “the veil, burqa, chador, and headscarf are blurred into one symbolic entity; all Muslim women-their motivations, their beliefs and their aspirations- are generalized, despised, or simply denied legitimacy,” (p. 176). Projecting meaning onto the actions and motivations of Muslim women who choose to wear the veil can lead to a dangerous and monolithic reading of this important cultural symbol. This is particularly dangerous if this meaning is projected by the West, as this only perpetuates an established colonial worldview. Therefore, a case study about public discourse about the veil and Middle Eastern, female bodies in the 21st century allows an investigation of a well-intentioned but perhaps ethnocentric confusion surrounding the portrayal of Muslim women in the Middle East.

Cultural and gender scholars alike have focused on the issue of feminism in regard to the discussion of Muslim women. Mohanty (2003) echoes a call she has been making since the late 1980's- to investigate the cyclically reproduced Anglo-Americanized femininities produced through discourses of globalization (p. 247). Butler (2004) pushes feminists to think critically about the way Muslim women in the Middle East are discussed, particularly in a post-9/11 society. She explains:

While we may want to champion the suddenly bared faces of the young Afghan women as the celebration of the human, we have to ask in what narrative function these images are mobilized, whether the incursion into Afghanistan was really in the name of feminism, and in what form of feminism did it belatedly clothe itself. (p. 143)
Mohanty and Butler explicate the goals of this thesis project when they propose critique of the ethnocentric nature of much of the feminist discourse on a global scale. These critical inquiries regarding the role of feminism in discourses surrounding Western perceptions of Muslim women in the Middle East are important for dissecting how scholars should go forward with future discussions. These discussions reveal that Muslim women are often used as pawns in nationalist discourses, perhaps both intentionally and unintentionally. The Western-centric way in which women's rights are discussed demonstrates that even feminist scholars are mistakenly struggling to find a stable meaning of Muslim culture.

**Post-9/11 War on Terror Rhetoric**

Given the intense focus placed on Muslim culture and the Middle East following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is important to turn to a discussion of post-9/11 War on Terror rhetoric. Much of the scholarship on Muslim women, particularly the relationship between the West and Muslim women in the Middle East, was born from the conflict left in the cultural aftermath of 9/11. As many of the textual fragments in the analysis portion of this thesis reference 9/11, it is important to include a section which sets up a foundation for understanding how post-9/11 media and cultural narratives function. It is particularly essential to check for progress, and to determine whether or not these narratives have shifted as time passes and we become more distant from the trauma of the events on 9/11. I begin this section by examining the generalized way in which the Western media set up a stark dichotomy between itself and the Middle East, a dichotomy which emphasized strong, villanizing ties between terrorism and Islam. Next, I examine the discussions of women's bodies and women's rights present in this rhetoric. Finally, I turn to literature which supports the importance of visual images in post-9/11 War on Terror rhetoric.

Powell (2011) argues that media coverage of Muslims after 9/11 focused almost solely on
ties between Islam and oil, war, and terrorism. This allows for only a “minimal knowledge of Islam, except for in terms of need, control, and fear, leading to Western reactions to Islam being largely Orientalist” (p. 92). Said (1978) defined Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'” (p. 2). Said's Orient and Occident are what would now be more likely referred to as the Other and the Western world, respectively. Powell points out that when reporting on terrorist acts, news and other media outlets were quick to label terrorist agents as Muslim, which further solidified the link between Islam and terrorist acts (p. 96). This creates a strong negative association which links Islam with evil actions. Powell boldly argues that by enhancing fear of Muslims, the U.S. government can “use 'terrorism' to justify otherwise unjustifiable acts of war to 'protect our freedom'” (p. 108). This protectionist slant promoted by American media in favor of the U.S. government comes at the cost the Muslim individuals who are constantly being portrayed in a negative manner. Ivie (2004) echoes these sentiments of a rigidly framed dichotomy in portrayals of the United States and the Middle East. Specifically, he references post-9/11 remarks to Citadel Cadets from George W. Bush that discuss the “moral and ideological divide” based on the terrorists' hatred of “progress, and freedom, and choice, and culture, and music, and laughter, and women,” (p. 156). By contrast, Bush stated that America would always “stand firm” for the “non-negotiable demands for human dignity,” among which he explicitly included “respect for women” (Ivie, 2004, p. 157). The treatment of women as valued and respected in the United States was framed in direct opposition to the treatment of women by terrorists in the Middle East.

For a brief moment, women’s rights played an important role in the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror. President George Bush, Laura Bush, Colin Powell, and other top officials
seemed to adopt feminist messages when pushing for the rights of Afghani women. And Faludi (2007) explains, “the governmental glasnost had a counterpart in the media,” where images of women covered by the burqa, accompanied messages about the importance of women’s liberation in the Middle East (p. 40). Cloud (2004) echoes these observations, noting that the images of Muslim women shown during media coverage of US military intervention in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks “construct the viewer as a paternalistic savior of women” from the backward and pre-modern sociopolitical culture of Afghanistan (p. 286). But not coincidentally, “as soon as the bombs began dropping over Afghanistan in early October 2001”- the U.S. government’s promises to restore women’s rights stopped (p. 41). As soon it was no longer a necessary, believable, or compelling narrative to fuel positive favor for the war, the cause was abandoned- both in U.S. foreign policy as well as mainstream media narratives. Both American and Middle Eastern women were used as pawns in the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror. For example, the story of captured American soldier Jessica Lynch was used as a “symbol of the West's 'enlightened' attitude towards women” to justify the United States' “liberation” of Iraq (Kumar, 2004, p. 297). In War on Terror rhetoric, women's bodies were frequently used to justify and further the military agenda of the United States.

Dutta-Bergman (2005) argues that in coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom, U.S. media outlets served “more as the public relations agents of the U.S. government and actively engaged in demonization of the enemy” to justify U.S. foreign policy, rather than utilizing their role as a free press to promote a civil global society (p. 220). The images and stereotypes perpetuated by the media post-9/11 are worthy of study because of their potential ramifications on US interventionist strategies (Fitzpatrick, 2009; Cloud, 2004). Butler (2004) argues that visual aesthetic is a crucial component surrounding the rhetoric of the War on Terror. The “shock and
awe” strategy employed by the U.S. government as well as popular media outlets “suggests that they were producing a visual spectacle to numb the senses” and “put out of play the very capacity to think” (p. 148). Bombarding audiences with overwhelming and devastating images functions to both desensitize the audience, but conversely, can also be used to incite feelings of outrage. Ivie (2004) explains that visual metaphors are hugely symbolic when discussing the rhetoric surrounding 9/11- starting with the iconic image of collapse of the twin towers, which was seared into the minds of “millions of bewildered viewers” (p. 150). Cloud (2004) argues that visual ideographs are an important factor in War on Terror rhetoric, and are particularly worthy of study when coupled with verbal ideographic slogans. specifically, images of Afghan women (who are often depicted under the veil) serve to “establish the barbarity of a society in which women are profoundly oppressed” (p. 287). The images and visual symbols present in post-9/11 rhetoric, particularly those surrounding Muslim women, are important indicators of cultural attitudes and are worthy of scholarly evaluation.

**Feminist/Postcolonial Scholarship**

Because of the strong ties that scholars such as Faludi, Kumar, and Cloud draw between War on Terror rhetoric and representations of “saving” Muslim women under the guise of feminism, it is important that I now turn to a discussion of feminist and postcolonial scholarship, both outside of and within the rhetorical canon. I first examine the discussion of feminism and postcolonialism within scholarship as a whole, mostly focusing on the writings of feminist cultural scholars. Then, I turn to literature regarding these same topics specifically nested in the discipline of communication studies and the rhetorical canon.

Within interdisciplinary scholarship

Feminist and cultural scholars have argued that many well-intentioned feminists are
missing the mark when it comes to globally situated discussions of women and activism. While advocating for a decolonized, globalized feminism, Mohanty (2003) identifies three specific problems with U.S.-based feminisms. First, classist and academic feminism focuses on individual benefit rather than practical, large-scale application. Second, feminism is too focused on tackling issues related to capitalism, and bases equality on corporate mobility and wages. Finally, a radical postmodernist critique of essentialist identity politics has rendered the notion of identity inherently unstable, and therefore irrelevant (p. 6). At the heart of these grievances lies the Western focus on the individual and individual gain. This perspective, lacks a more pragmatic and more socially conscious brand of feminism. Diaz (2003) discusses how this focus on individualism holds the potential to function in line with the rejection of universalism which serves as a cornerstone of postcolonial theory. But ultimately, the individualism inherent in many third wave Western feminisms strives for one primary ideal- as Diaz states, “the European colonizer is the quintessential human being” (p. 11). Instead of exclusively setting feminist goals to align with a singular Western ideal of feminism, I join Diaz in arguing that it is important for activists and scholars to value the perspectives of non-Western women.

Mahmood (2005) argues that feminist scholarship emphasizes the type of politically subversive agency that reshapes hegemonic norms, at the cost of ignoring “other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse” (p. 153). Feminist scholarship must consider other modalities, and willingly embrace diverse ways to promote positive change. Mohanty (1988) argues that “Western feminisms appropriate and 'colonize' the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes” in “third world” countries (p 335). Once again, the focus of the dominant feminist
discourse holds a Western slant, and disregards the potential that other, often ignored conceptualizations of feminisms may have to benefit the movement as a whole.

Gender exceptionalism, or the belief that gender relations in one area or culture are inherently different from and superior to that of another, has been placed at the heart of the discussion surrounding colonial feminist ideologies. Puar (2007) argues that American exceptionalism is now requisite common sense for many feminisms with U.S. popular cultures. The developing interest Westerners, particularly Western feminists, hold in Muslim women in the Middle East is deeply colored by issues of U.S. gender exceptionalism. This is highly problematic, because as Puar explains, “these discourses of exceptionalism allude to the unsalvageable nature of Muslim women by even their own feminists, positioning the American feminist as the feminist subject par excellence” (p. 5). In line with this, Andrea (2009) argues that the “liberal feminist tradition, since its formulation at the end of the century, that has presumed [Western] women to be the “freest” in the world with specific reference to Muslim women, [who are] assumed to be inherently oppressed” (p. 273). The lack of agency given to Muslim feminists, coupled with the perceived superiority of American feminists, casts Western feminists as the saviors of- and martyrs for- the lost cause of the Muslim feminist.

Within Communication Studies

Shome (1996) laid much of the groundwork for postcolonial study in the rhetorical canon, asserting that such research should ask two underlying questions: 1) How do Western discursive practices legitimize contemporary global power structures through their representations of the world and themselves?, and 2) To what extent do the cultural texts of nations such as the United States and England (the infamous colonizers) reinforce their own neo-imperial power practices? These questions remain at the heart of most postcolonial scholarship
within communication studies.

Postcolonial scholarship is of particular relevance to many feminist scholars within the discipline. While many feminist scholars' well-intentioned research may focus on the rights and unity of women, they are often guilty of grouping “women” together as one universal group—a type of universalism that postcolonial scholarship fights against in order to recognize the different experiences of women of different ethnicities and backgrounds. This “discursive colonization” privileges the white experience by ignoring other issues and perspectives (Shome, 1996). Alley-Young (2008) asserts that postcolonial studies and whiteness studies are both important forces within communication studies, and should be further investigated in order to examine “how white privilege and power operates in non-white cultures and contexts” (p. 319).

Dow (2003) brings discussion of feminist agency directly into the rhetorical canon, with a critique on the nature of feminism as a whole and a call to focus more on the smaller picture. She explains that while feminism is about agency and individual choice, feminism is also “a collective politics” (p. 145). Her perspective echoes feminist scholars from other disciplines, thereby recognizing of these phenomena both inside and outside of the rhetorical sphere (Mohanty, 2003; Mahmood, 2005).

Dutta-Bergman (2005) argues that through media framing of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the media “systematically case the United States as the liberator of an uncivilized people” (p. 238). The attempt to silence Western dissidents by emphasizing the importance of patriotism and unity on behalf of not only the United States, but of the uncivilized people of the Middle East as well, is a colonial justification of actions based on the need to be civilized. Cloud (2004) argues that post-9/11, the United States took a paternalistic stance toward the women of Afghanistan, painting a picture of a superior parent helping a struggling and unwise child. A Western post-
9/11 political agenda, when coupled with the issues of Western feminism, often function to frame images of Muslim women in the Middle East as victims who need our salvation—a dangerously narrow and biased lens through which to view this group.

From this literature base, we can conclude that there has been considerable controversy in the public sphere as well as within academia in regard to reading the veil as a symbol, and that this contested site of meaning is representative of the larger discussions surrounding Muslim women. While there has been considerable “intervention” on behalf of Muslim women in the Middle East by the West, the motives behind this intervention seem to be colonial in nature. Even within feminist discussions, which should seemingly promote equality, Muslim women are held to an unfair standard of Western feminist ideology, which functions under a West is best paradigm. As a result, postcolonial scholars are calling for decolonized feminist scholarship which rejects universalist, essentializing concepts of identity to promote a more holistic understanding of other cultures.
CHAPTER THREE:
CRITICAL ORIENTATION

In this chapter, I explain the theoretical approach I will employ in this project, and define the key terms that are important to understanding this orientation. First, I give an overview of critical rhetoric, as this is the type of analysis I will employ. Next, I discuss feminist critical rhetoric to examine how feminist scholars have actually used this approach in their scholarship. Finally, I specify which texts have been chosen as my case study and how these media fragments were assembled. This approach will allow me to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What themes does the Why Do They Hate Us? case study highlight regarding the discourse between Western feminists and Muslim women?

RQ2: What types of opportunities does this discourse present in terms of reconceptualizing colonialism?

Critical Rhetoric

Within the rhetorical canon, there has traditionally been a focus on the analysis and critique of singular texts. These singular texts, often public addresses, are the cornerstone of the long-standing house that Aristotle built. More recently, however, a focus on the study of power dynamics in communicative relationships (largely based on the work of Michel Foucault) coupled with the prevalence of postmodernist and poststructuralist ideology, has prompted many scholars to engage in a critical rhetoric, which allows for the analysis of these power relationships (McKerrow, 1989; McKerrow, 1991; Sloop, 2004). McKerrow (1991), one of the original critical rhetorical theorists, states that the critic is “positioned to deal with a postmodern world wherein fragmentation is the rule and unity is the exception” (p. 77). Use of a poststructuralist lens, which focuses on the fragmented and antiessentialist nature of being,
means that this analysis often occurs through a number of interrelated conversations that are combined into a single text or case study for analysis. McKerrow (1989) explains that “a critical rhetoric examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world” (p. 91). Similarly, Sloop (2004) explains that “critical rhetoric is concerned with the materiality of discourse, viewing the discourse of power itself as material and working within public debate” (p. 18). These power structures lie at the heart of a critical rhetorical analysis. As McKerrow goes on to explain, “in practice, a critical rhetoric seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse of power. The aim is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society – what possibilities for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change.” (p. 91).

McKerrow (1989) states that the principles of a critical rhetoric “recast the nature of rhetoric from one grounded on Platonic, universalist conceptions of reason to one that recaptures the sense of rhetoric as doxastic” (p. 92). McKerrow (1991), in a later article, furthers this justification of doxastic rhetoric and explains that “a critical rhetoric participates in a postmodern world without providing certitude with respect to an outcome” (p. 77). Sloop (2004) elaborates on this notion of critical rhetoric as doxastic, as he explains that “rather than being concerned with knowledge of the essence of objects (e.g., the “truth” about sex) or philosophical discussions about meanings, critical rhetoric is concerned with public argument and public understandings about these objects (p. 18).

The value placed on public understanding of a rhetorical event by this doxastic nature has lead critical rhetoricians to focus less on a single text and more on a number of texts, which highlights the fragmented nature of larger discourses. As McGee (1990) states, Critical rhetoric does not begin with a finished text in need of interpretation;
rather, texts are understood to be larger than the apparently finished discourse that presents itself as transparent. The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourse from which it was made. It was fashioned from what we call ‘fragments.’ (p. 279)

These fragments are pieces of interrelated texts, parts of the larger public discourse, pieced together for the purpose of examining a larger cultural discourse on a subject, rather than just a singular text. McGee explains that a critic can get a more developed understanding of a “text” by considering the relationships between an apparently finished discourse and its sources, between an apparently finished discourse and culture, and between an apparently finished discourse and its influence. Each of these relationships are important for a holistic understanding of a public discourse. It is a responsibility of the critical rhetorician to piece together the necessary fragments to invent a text for study. A holistic, doxastic understanding of rhetoric helps to get at a true understanding of how power and ideology function. For example, a traditional approach to rhetoric may study a speech from one politician about women’s rights in the Middle East. However, this project, influenced by critical rhetoric, will piece together a number of mass media fragments in order to gain a more nuanced and complete understanding of how women’s rights in the Middle East are discussed.

**Feminist Critical Rhetoric**

Given the complicated relationship that postmodernity and critical theory has with agency, it is no surprise that feminist critics have dedicated much page space to understanding how to practice feminist critical rhetoric. Dow (2006) explains that postmodernist and poststructuralist theories, with their recognition of the materiality of discourse and belief that discursive activities reflect our understanding of the world around us, hold that “discourse, in its
various forms, makes gender *real*” (p. xvi). As a result, a poststructuralist lens often lends itself well to the study of gendered discourses – making this a fitting lens through which to view the “Why Do They Hate Us?” case study. This materiality of discourse, vividly present within the view of a critical rhetoric, creates strong ties between poststructuralist theory, critical rhetoric, and feminist rhetorical analysis.

Many feminist scholars piece together media fragments to construct a holistic, context-driven text fit for analysis. For example, in a juxtaposition of feminist discourse surrounding second-wave protests and mainstream public discourse of the Miss America pageant, Dow (2003) utilizes a variety of fragments to construct texts for analysis that get at the zeitgeist of the movement during this time, and the resulting discourses over the next several decades. In a post-9/11-focused example of this, Cloud (2004) utilizes media fragments of visual texts to examine narratives of Afghan women by piecing together widely circulated images taken from national news magazines and news websites. Although Cloud's study is visual in nature, this same can be done for textual fragments- or in the instance of the “Why Do They Hate Us?” case study, a mix of a variety of media. Fragmented texts are often used in order to get at the complicated nature of the societal narratives which are essential in feminist study.

Couched in an article on feminine style, Dow and Tonn (1993) explain that “while a primary goal of critical rhetoric is to understand the discursive operations of power and domination, a complete agenda for critical rhetoric would also include investigation of positive alternatives to the discourses of power” (p. 300). This recognition of the dangers and downsides of power structures is a major part of crafting a critical rhetoric. Their assertion that positive alternatives to this is especially important in the context of the study of oppressed minorities. This is particularly relevant to the colonial discourses and discussion of women present within
the “Why Do They Hate Us?” case study, given that part of my goal is to uncover how power and ideology function to tell a story about Muslim women.

My method is modeled after the work of John Sloop, and is also informed by Raka Shome’s theoretical approach to critical rhetorical theory. Like Sloop (2004), I engage in a critical rhetorical analysis by piecing together a number of mass-media fragments. This choice is guided by Sloop’s (2004) assertion that “the meanings presented in mass mediated texts are ones that place ‘governing’ interests at the center, making visible the meanings that most clearly fit the interests of those in the strongest positions of power” (p. 22). In line with this belief and Sloop’s work, this project seeks to examine the dimensions of power at play within the context of a specific case study through an analysis of mass media discourse. Additionally, my project is also in line with Shome’s call for more critical (rhetorical) theorizing of issues on a transnational scale. Shome (2013) calls for rhetorical scholars to rethink “issues of agency, translation, symbolicity, affect, the public, the modern, the ‘human’, and so on” (p. 517). In this thesis, I engage in the type of “solid rhetorical rethinking” that Shome calls for in regard to many of these issues. In selecting a case study and compiling textual fragments, I have continuously invested in finding a case study that allowed a diverse group of voices to be heard. With the words of Shome and other critics in mind, I attempt to conduct an analysis of media fragments that is sensitive to colonial critiques of traditional approaches to feminist scholarship. I return to my process in greater depth within Chapter Five, as I draw conclusions about the impact of my ideology and methodology throughout this research project.

**Justification of Texts**

In her article entitled “Why Do They Hate Us?” published in the May/June 2012 issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine, Egyptian-American journalist Mona Eltahawy discusses the
problematic relationship between men and women in the Middle East, boldly stating, “Yes: They hate us. It must be said.” Eltahawy’s controversial article spurred considerable conversation about agency, sexism, and the complicate nature of women’s rights in differing cultural contexts. A number of articles and interviews emerged in response, both in solidarity with and strongly against Eltahawy’s article, culminating in a complicated public discourse regarding how Muslim women in the Middle East should be viewed and discussed. Thus, the best way to analyze the “Why Do They Hate Us?” case study to adopt Sloop, McKerrow, and McGee’s notions of fragmented culture and critical rhetoric.

In this project, I examine Mona Eltahawy’s “Why Do They Hate Us?,” as well as the resulting discourse surrounding the mass media discussion of this original singular text. McRobbie (2000) argues that the complex and fragmented nature of postmodernism reflects the nature of popular culture, making this an accurate framework from which to work. In line with this notion of fragmentation and the nature of critical rhetoric, it is fitting that I examine not only the original article, but a variety of reactionary sources that contribute to the discourse surrounding this article. I include articles by authors who disagree with Eltahawy, others who are on her side, as well as those who are on the fence. Additionally, I also include interviews with Eltahawy, including one from The Village Voice that asks her directly about her controversial Foreign Policy article. As McGee (1990) puts it, “discourse anticipates its utility in the world, inviting its own critique – the interpretation and the appropriation of its meaning” (p. 279).

Piecing together a case study text for analysis leads to an analysis about the framing and surrounding discourse on Muslim women by Western feminists. I pieced together these fragments by gathering the top results in a Google search in order to get at the doxastic nature of this debate. In order to compile relevant fragments, I used the search term “Eltahawy Why Do
They Hate Us” and limit the dates of relevant articles from April 2012 (when the primary article was first released) to August 2013 (when another Eltahawy controversy took center stage in most Eltahawy-related press). Searching “Eltahawy Why Do They Hate Us” yielded over 24,000 results, and limiting the dates reduced this number to 500. In order to select the most relevant articles, I limited those used to analysis to specific media publications, and chose these selections from the first ten pages of Google results, as these would be the most publicly prevalent. The publications I selected were all from journalistic media outlets, with some structured as news articles and others as editorials. This brought me to a final selection of 21 media fragments to use for my analysis. The vast majority of the fragments utilized within this thesis are text-based articles from popular press publications, all of which were studied in their web-page form, though many are available in print text as well. As they are all available virtually, they fit in with the doxastic goal of rhetoric which will be discussed again in the next chapter.

In the following analysis chapter, I examine the emergent themes which I found to be most prevalent in the set of compiled fragments. Given my critical approach, I was open to seeing what themes emerged, both implicitly and explicitly stated by the media fragments. I read through the various fragments I had compiled, and took note of recurring trends I found to be regularly emergent. I also categorized these fragments based on their overall tone regarding Eltahawy's original article, based on whether they seemed to agree with her, disagree with her, or chose to remain more neutral. After taking note of these factors, I organized these trends into more global themes that spoke to my intentions as a feminist postcolonial scholar. Through an analysis of these themes, I investigated on the following research questions:

RQ1: What themes does the Why Do They Hate Us? case study highlight regarding the discourse between Western feminists and Muslim women?
RQ2: What types of opportunities does this discourse present in terms of reconceptualizing colonialism?
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

With her “Why Do They Hate Us?” article, Eltahawy spurred considerable discourse on topics relating to female identity, feminism, coloniality, and cultural relativism. This chapter examines the assembled media fragments and their emergent themes to explore the discussion of these complex cultural phenomena in the public sphere. Two prominent themes emerged from this analysis: a discussion of hybrid identity, and a discussion on colonial influence. These findings are notable, given that they result in a more nuanced discussion of Arab Muslim women's issues than was indicated by the literature.

Hybrid Identity and Media Discourse

Eltahawy's “Why Do They Hate Us?” article opened up a community of people interested in discussing hybrid identity. Bhabha (1994) explains that bearers of hybrid identity are “caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation... they are now free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference” (p. 55). An identifier associated with a postcolonial context, Bhabha's notion of hybrid identity rejects the notion of a central locus of culture and asserts that those who search for a “true national culture” will be “disappointed.” Although not identified by name in any of the popular press texts examined, Bhabha's conceptualization of hybrid identity is present in many of them. Eltahawy's article set for the opportunity for her as well as her respondents to discuss a belongingness to multiple groups, and to explain how their blended cultural identities influence their perception of the issues in the article. Many, if not most, of the mass media fragments included discussions of hybrid identity in some capacity. For example, as he enters the difficult discussion of navigating issues of culture, gender, and equality, Max Fisher's response
article at *The Atlantic* explains that “the intersection of race and gender is tough to discuss candidly.” Whether or not he agrees with Eltahawy's stance in her controversial article (and for the most part, he does not), he does acknowledge that what she is doing is difficult. In discussing the precarious situation of women's rights in a historically colonized Arab world, Eltahawy engages in a discussion about this difficult type of intersection. These women have a complex hybrid identity that has historically and contemporarily been misunderstood and judged. Eltahawy explains to *NPR* that women are “vectors” of culture and religion, and through better understanding their role we can be better clued in to the culture as a whole. Through an analysis of the responses to Eltahawy's article, it becomes apparent that this notion of hybrid identity becomes an important focal point in many of these texts. Eltahawy's article set for an opportunity to discuss not only the complex identities of Arab women, but also the fascinating hybrid identity of Eltahawy herself, as well as the hybrid identities of many of the authors and activists these response fragments include. In this section I will first discuss how the assembled fragments construct Eltahawy,'s hybrid identity, then I will turn to the construction of the hybrid identities of others, before finally examining the construction of Arab feminist identity.

Eltahawy and Hybrid Identity

Many of the reactionary media fragments point out Eltahawy's national heritage when discussing her controversial article. These articles are careful to assert her hybrid identity in the form of dual citizenship. Katie J.M. Baker's *Jezebel* article introduces Eltahawy as an “Egyptian-born, U.S.-based journalist,” *PolicyMic* identifies her as an “Egyptian-American journalist,” and Eyder Peralta's *NPR* article bills her similarly. From the start, consumers of these media are aware of her nationalities, as they function to explain her credibility in speaking on Arab women's issues as well as her crafting the message to a Western audience. In some articles, this
is the only explanation of her fascinatingly complex background, and serves as a concise way in
which to sum her up hybrid identity. By framing her with a foot in Egypt and a foot in the United
States, Eltahawy is a part of both worlds – but not a full member of either one.

This notion of being straddling worlds is expressed in several other ways as well – which
is perceived as both a positive and a negative (and sometimes both within the same article). Nick
Pinto's article in The Village Voice frames this cultural hybridity in a positive light, as her
belongingness to both worlds allows her to function credibly in both worlds. Pinto explains that by
“holding dual citizenship in Egypt and the United States, she has carved a niche for herself as
one of the most influential and popular commentators explaining the Arab world for Western
audiences.” In some ways, her dual citizenship grants her greater opportunity to have her voice
heard in the media, as her ethos is accepted on Islam and women's issues by the West. In fact,
The Village Voice refers to a Jezebel article that identified Eltahawy as “the woman who's
explaining Egypt to the West,” due to her large media presence during the Egyptian uprising.

Eltahawy's success in the West relies on her Egyptian heritage as an important factor, as it grants
her considerable credibility and insight. She is on the inside, a less guilty media consumption
choice by those aware of Western media bias and a good feature for outlets looking for accurate
and diverse commentary from experienced sources.

At the same time, while Eltahawy's hybrid identity functions to grant her credibility and
is a likely factor in her professional success, this same identity is seen by others as a negative
factor. Many responses to her “Why Do They Hate Us?” article accuse Eltahawy of playing the
role of a “native informer.” A borrowed term originating from studies of ethnography, the native
informer is an individual who is from a colonized or oppressed nation but speaks out against it
because of their alignment with Western ideology. The native informer is viewed as a turncoat,
someone who has been indoctrinated with a dangerous Western narrative that contradicts the true best interests of the people in their native country and concedes to a Western conceptualization of culture. Jelodar, Yusof, Hashim, and Raihanah (2013) explain that in a globalized society, the native informer is viewed as someone who is “manufacturing consent for the public that a military intervention would do good to save the country from barbarism” and that “they are employed to show that the conquer of the world by imperialism is a human project and a liberation” (p. 217). Native informants may at first seem like they are contributing new or insightful contributions from their country of origin, but in actuality they only perpetuate harmful Western ideologies.

Accusations of Eltahawy's serving as a native informant plague her throughout the dissenting opinions present in reactionary fragments. Vicky Allan's article in the Herald Scotland relates this concept to Eltahawy as she explains:

Eltahawy has been accused of being a 'native informant,' someone who comes from a culture and is used by us, in the West, to validate our views of that culture. In support of this notion, it's worth noting that the piece was not published in an Arabic magazine, but in the American publication, Foreign Policy, in English.

While Allan herself is more in agreement with Eltahawy's article, she still includes the accusations against her to provide perspective and the notion of impartiality. This impartiality, present in almost all the media fragments, shows the inherent conflict related to this precarious subject. In discussing both sides, most all fragments have to incorporate a discussion of Eltahawy's identity in some way, as this continuously lies as the heart of the discussion. Most of the adversarial discourse in these fragments revolves around Eltahawy's identity as a
Westernized woman. Pinto's profile of Eltahawy in *The Village Voice* explains that many in the Arab world view her in this negative light, and find these Western notions of inherent Arab misogyny to be particularly alarming coming from someone inside their culture. He explains:

*Ikhras*, a website edited by two Arab-American men devoted to calling out what they see as Arab collaborationists in the American war machine, has gone so far as to call Eltahawy a “House Muslim.” Writing in *Ikhras*, Sarah Hawas called her a “native informer,” trotted out by Western media outlets to confirm and reinforce their audience's preexisting views.

Here, it becomes apparent that the same hybridity that makes Eltahawy appealing to the Western media reads differently to a non-Western audience. The strong emphasis on hybrid identity present here causes many non-Western audiences to read Eltahawy as an ideological traitor. Although she is also Egyptian, Eltahawy's message is perceived as distinctly Western, which is met with suspicion and hostility from a crowd who is well aware of the ideological influence of imperialistic discourse.

Eltahawy's identity as a Westerner is a prevalent topic within dissenting views of her “Why Do They Hate Us?” article. Sarah Mousa's *Al Jazeera* editorial does not have a direct discussion of Eltahawy's identity or background, but points out that her article was clearly “addressed to a western audience by virtue of its language.” Mousa identifies Eltahawy's target audience as the Western world, a conclusion that she finds to be problematic given the content of the article. Max Fisher's response in *The Atlantic* analyzes the Western target of Eltahawy's message as it relates to the construction of her identity, stating:

Eltahawy's personal background, unfortunately, might play a role in how some of her critics are responding. She lives mostly in the West, writes mostly for
Western publications, and speaks American-accented English, all of which complicates her position and risks making her ideas seem as Westernized as she is. That's neither fair or a reflection of the merit of her ideas, but it might inform the backlash, and it might tell us something about why the conversation she's trying to start has been stalled for so long.

Whether she is seen in a television interview, heard on the radio, or even read in a magazine, it seems Eltahawy's identity is often read primarily as American, and then as Egyptian. Even when she is invisible, her body is presumed – the Muslim culture is embedded even when the visual signifiers are not there. There is no conspicuous visual symbol, such as the Muslim veil, to tie her to her Muslim heritage. Her Western influence seems to supersede her Egyptian heritage (and citizenship) for many. Here, Fisher seems to paint this as an unfortunate circumstance where Eltahawy's views are delegitimized by her critics because of her affiliation with the Western world. Toward the end of this passage, he asserts that the admittedly difficult subject of the subjugation of Arab women may be inherently stalled by the resistance against Western ideology. But for those who accuse Eltahawy of functioning as a native informer, this is inherently part of the issue – creating a seemingly circular pattern of blame.

Although many may start to view her as deeply (and perhaps irredeemably) ideologically intertwined with the West, it is clear that Eltahawy herself still identifies strongly with her Egyptian roots. Most of Eltahawy's work, whether it is personal activism or a highly public opinion piece, deals with issues surrounding the Arab Spring. In her “Why Do They Hate Us?” article, she boldly mirrors Nicholas Kristoff's 2002 editorial by the same name – but replaces his “us” comprised of American citizens with her “us” of women in the Middle East. She inherently lumps herself into this category, calling on her personal victimage in Egypt along with that of
many other women in her home country. Although she is projecting the message through a Western publication in a Western language, she is rhetorically aligning herself with women in the Middle East. She consistently uses words like “us,” “we,” and “our” to describe actions already taken and those that she believes need to occur in the future. The very title of the article itself – “Why Do They Hate Us?” – utilizes this type of inclusive language. It is clear that she identifies with this group – but what is less clear is why she is putting forth this message to her “we” group in the Middle East, yet publishing this message in a Western magazine. By carrying this “we” appealing to a Western audience but inherently linking herself with Middle Eastern women from the title of the article on, she exists in a sort of liminal space between the two worlds.

Eltahawy is consistently presented as somewhat of a paradox, with parts of her identity in direct conflict with others. Nick Pinto's article in The Village Voice discusses the dynamic extremes of her identity in a profile feature which discusses several of her controversies, from her award-winning “Why Do They Hate Us?” article to her arrest for spray painting graffiti over an anti-Muslim subway advertisement. Pinto states, “If theatrical acts of vandalism don't obviously seem to go hand in hand with the summits of journalistic recognition, they do for Mona Eltahawy.” Eltahawy is a spray can-toting criminal and a nationally recognized journalist all at once. Like the framing of many other aspects of her identity, this is is a divided construction which is oftentimes at odds with itself.

Eltahawy's identity is often presented in a way that implies that different parts of her identity are continuously at odds. The presentation of her identity seems to be at odds with the typical, one-dimensional, essentialized portraits of Muslim women that the media often presents. With Eltahawy, there seem to be directly conflicting interests among a reputable journalist and a
radical activist looking for sensationalist attention. Perhaps more importantly, many question if her allegiances to the people in her home country of Egypt are compromised by her dedication to Western audiences and ideology. Does her identity as an “Egyptian-American” prevent her from being a whole Egyptian or American? Can these identities exist within the same person? Or does her Western influence represent an ideological colonialism that whitewashes her beliefs and ignores the needs of her Muslim brothers and sisters back in Egypt? Journalists themselves seem to be in conflict regarding these important questions, oftentimes oscillating between their agreement with either side of the fence. Eltahawy's identity functions to establish her motives and intentions, and is therefore an important component of the larger societal narrative surrounding the “Why Do They Hate Us?” article.

Discussants of Eltahawy's identity are quick to point out the numerous roles she fills through her personal and professional work. Melissa Jeltsen's interview with Eltahawy lists several of the labels Eltahawy identifies with, stating that “She juggles many titles: Feminist. Award-winning writer. Media personality. And a new label she's only recently felt comfortable adopting – activist.” Although she is up for a National Magazine Award for her prolific “Why Do They Hate Us?” article, one title this article does not use to describe her is “journalist” – something that is repeated in several other publications as well. Several texts, such as Jeltsen's Huffington Post article and Alex Pearlman's GlobalPost interview both explain Eltahawy's discomfort with continuing to identity as a journalist while holding strong opinions that caused her to cast journalistic objectivity aside in favor or highly opinionated activism. Both outlets report the same story: disenfranchised and outraged at the media coverage following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Eltahawy switched from her role as a reporter to an opinion piece contributor. Ron Rosembaum recounts her remarks on post-9/11 discourse and media presence in his
discuss the identity of Eltahawy, a liberal Muslim and a feminist, in the context of the 9/11 attacks. She says, "When 9/11 happened I thought, 'I'm not hearing from Muslims like ourselves,' she says, meaning liberal and moderate types. 'I'd only hear from old men and conservative women. So I started writing opinion pieces. I wanted to get another voice out there to show that, look, 9/11 doesn't represent all Islam.'"

Here, Eltahawy discusses her identity as a liberal Muslim and contrasts it with what she felt to be the dominant view and media narrative in the West after 9/11. She did not identify with the traditional, conservative Muslim personalities who were present in the public discourse following 9/11. Eltahawy's politics and ethnicity set up what she is (an opinion writer and commentator) and what she isn't (a journalist). This shift in her identity is reactionary to the types of Muslim identities present in the media immediately following 9/11. Rosenbaum's article thoroughly discussed Eltahawy's evolving identity as a liberal Muslim and contrasts it with what she felt to be the dominant view at the time. This indicates a shift in the Muslim identities present in the media immediately after 9/11, as compared to the discussion of Muslim and Arab feminists present in the discourse now.

The “Why Do They Hate Us?” response articles, when examined as a collective whole, reference the opinions of many liberal Muslims and Muslim feminists. Even if the messages in Eltahawy's article itself are deemed by many to be dangerously Westernized, the resulting discourse contains commentary from a number of diverse voices, oftentimes directly hyperlinking to even more content on their blogs. The inclusion of these primary voices, often from Arab and Muslim women identified by the article's author as feminist, offer to serve as a more authentic voice than Eltahawy's Westernized one.

Eltahawy's perception of the lack of diverse Muslim voices in post-9/11 media discourse
MORE THAN HEADSCARVES

is legitimized by a number of cultural and media scholars. The media narratives immediately following 9/11 were so strongly aligned with American political interests, and as such painted Muslim women in need of rescue from their domineering patriarchal society (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Cloud, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 2009; Butler, 2004). This resulted in a flat, one-dimensional construction of the Muslim community in the Middle East, where the only “old men and conservative women” in the Middle East were commonly granted media representation. Eltahawy's reactionary decision to distance herself from “unbiased” journalism in favor of highly opinionated commentary was an attempt to resolve this phenomenon commonly noted by scholars in a variety of fields. The rich discussion of hybrid identity present in these textual fragments suggests that Eltahawy's attempts to provide more nuanced representation and discussion of Muslim women's issues were likely part of a broader movement away from monolithic representation. The thematic presence of hybrid identity throughout the responses to Eltahawy's article seem to be indicative of some progress toward more nuanced representation.

For example, a letter to the editor by Dalia Mogahed in a subsequent issue of Foreign Policy argues that while many find Eltahawy's opinions to be dangerously influenced by the West, her intentions are not to be harmful. She explains, “I trust Eltahawy cares as much as I do about the injustices perpetrated against women in the Middle East. She's not out adversary. Those who beat and rape women, or let those who do get away with it, are the enemy.” She presents Eltahawy not as a complicit corroborator with Western imperialists, but rather as well-intentioned yet misguided.

While respondents to Eltahawy's article may disagree on their feelings toward her motivations and assertions, they all agree that her multifaceted identity plays an important role in the construction and validity of her message. Although Eltahawy herself does not wear the veil,
she is often described as Muslim or at least as belonging to a Muslim community. Further, the artwork contained both within the printed and online versions of the article contains provocative images of a brown-skinned woman in the nude, with her body painted black everywhere but her eyes, clearly symbolizing a niqab. The imagery of the veil is clearly linked to a Muslim identity, and therefore with Eltahawy. Many scholars have lamented that although the Muslim veil does not have one universal meaning for all of its wearers, it is often used to unfairly group all Muslim women into a single monolithic identity of subjugation (Droogsma, 2007; Merali, 2006). This ignores the true, complex identities of the women wearing the veil. However, the more nuanced discussion of hybrid identity occurring in the media reaction surrounding Eltahawy's article suggests that this may be shifting. Eltahawy herself is willing to publicly discuss the diverse components of her identity, even those which may seem to be at odds.

The discourse about Eltahawy constructed by others seems to pick up on these complexities as well. The recognition of hybrid identity by the popular media serves as progress, as it takes into the account the more nuanced “dialectical reorganization” Bhabha discusses in relation to the construction of culture. Bhabha writes that “the changed political and historical site of enunciation transforms the meanings of the colonial inheritance into the liberatory signs of a free people of the future” (1994, p. 55). Recognizing the complex hybrid identity of Eltahawy is perhaps then a step toward liberation – it acknowledges the complexities of her identity, instead of essentializing them into a more digestible stereotype.

Hybrid Identity of Others

The discussion of hybrid identity does not end with an investigation into the many roles played by Eltahawy, but leads into a larger discussion about the roles of others involved in the reactions to her article as well. Several authors discuss aspects of their own personal identities, or
those of the other women featured. Identity becomes an important factor to build credibility and a personal connection. In her *Al Jazeera* article, “Eltahawy's 'Hate' Fuels Real War on 'Us’”, Sarah Mousa opens up by discussing her experiences at Princeton, a well-known Western institution. She provides an anecdote where she complained about a mural at the school that she felt was offensive to Arab and Muslim individuals and was told by administrators that the piece was not intended to be problematic but in fact was “sympathetic to the women of [her] region.” Here, Mousa uses personal experience to demonstrate the perhaps unintended consequences of some Western portrayals of Arab Muslim identity. She is granted credibility by her personal experience balancing between two national identities, but at the same time she demonstrates how this credibility has not been recognized by prestigious Western institutions in the past.

Vicky Allan makes ethnic and religious identity a focal point in her response article in the *Herald Scotland*. Allan brings in a multitude of viewpoints to discuss the varying takes on Eltahawy’s controversial. While the article is brief and she does not go into detail when discussing contributors (most of which are bloggers), she is careful to include information about their nationality. They are identified as a “Moroccan-American writer” or a “Palestinian blogger,” showing the importance of including diverse voices in the conversation. These “authentic” voices give those providing commentary for Westernized media outlets a more legitimate, inside perspective. This is key to minimizing a colonial, Western-centric tone, and demonstrates the agency of these opinionated but often overlooked and underrepresented women. Additionally, when weighing in with her own opinions on Eltahawy’s article, Allan is careful to hedge her commentary with her own identity as a “Western secularist.” Clearly, national identity and belongingness are prevalent within discussion of Eltahawy’s supporters and objectors.
Through both the discussion of Eltahawy as well as the authors of these fragments, it appears that the monolithic essentialism many scholars have lamented may be losing ground in some media outlets. The presentation of hybrid identity is situated as crucial to understanding the complex nature of the “Why Do They Hate Us?” debate, and is used to both legitimize and undermine Eltahawy's stance in the article, as well as those of the individuals responding to her.

Arab Feminist Identity

An important group in the conversation surrounding the discussion of Eltahawy's “Why Do They Hate Us?” article is Arab and Muslim feminists. Though it is not discussed within the content of the article in which they are mentioned, many of these women have self-identified on their personal blogs or through other public channels that they identify as feminist. The labels used by the authors who reference their opinions are used for the purpose of this analysis, with the understanding that this may not be how all of these women choose to identify. Those weighing in on Eltahawy's article seem to include these voices as a way to discredit or embolden Eltahawy's claims, depending on their reaction. Many articles discuss the role of feminism in the Middle East as well as its role in the Islamic belief system. The inclusion of these voices recognizes the “Muslim feminist” not only as a grouped entity, but also on an individual level. Several online articles, including those from Business Insider, The Guardian, and The Atlantic, mention several prolific Muslim feminists and link directly to their blog posts discussing the issue. The visibility they are granted casts them into the midst of a discussion targeted within the West, but their inclusion expands the commentary to a global forum.

This pool of feminists is a diverse one, but they seem to be united in this media narrative in that they are all framed as opponents to Eltahawy's stance within her article. Max Fisher writes in The Atlantic that “a number of Arab Muslim feminists have criticized the article as reinforcing
reductive, Western perceptions of Arabs as particularly and innately barbaric.” This creates the feeling that the dominant reaction within the Arab Muslim feminist community is strongly against Eltahawy, and offended by her thesis. Nesrine Malik's article in The Guardian presents a similar sentiment, mentioning several Arab feminists by name. In a discussion about the problematic nature of Eltahawy's assertions, she states that “reform is already under way when it comes to women's rights thanks to the efforts of several Arab feminists, such as Nawal El Saadawi and Tawakul Karman, who recognize that we need to fight the patriarchy, not men.” This suggests that Eltahawy's intervention, perceived by this group of women to be highly Westernized in its fundamental attributions of inherent misogyny, is not needed. There are already Arab feminists in the region with a more accurate vision of the problem, and Eltahawy's misguided perspective is not helping their plight. This portrayal of Eltahawy as misguided and late to the proverbial Arab Muslim feminist party is reiterated in Fisher's article in The Atlantic:

The Arab Muslim women who criticized Eltahawy have been outspoken proponents of Arab feminism for years. So their backlash isn't about 'Arab brother before Western sister,’ but it does show the extreme sensitivity about anything that could portray Arab misogyny as somehow particular to Arab society or Islam.

Arab Muslim women do have agency when it comes to oppressive treatment, and many Arab feminists are already working toward more culturally sound explanations and solutions. Eltahawy's article is perceived by many as insensitive to deeply-rooted cultural identities.

In a Business Insider article, Sanya Khetani frames it as surprisingly that Muslim and Arab feminists are often not in agreement with Eltahawy's article. She writes, “While the problems [Eltahawy] describes are very real, she has been criticized by many of the very people
you would've thought would be on her side: feminist Muslim and Arab women.” This paints an
expectation of a monolithic feminism, where feminists are in agreement on major rights issues.
But instead, these feminists are shown to have more diverse and divergent interests, with more
nuance than we “would've thought.” This presents a Westernized feminism, which Eltahawy is
accused by her opposition as perpetuating, as the dominant norm, and ignores the cultural
nuances of its Arab inceptions.

As many explain the negative backlash of many Arab feminists towards Eltahawy's
article, it is important to note that this response could play into a dangerous stereotype.
Fitzpatrick (2009) explains that the West often characterizes the Muslim world as “incapable of
logical thought or self-criticism,” especially when it comes to culture and religion (p. 2004). It is
possible that including voices of Arab Muslim feminists and their criticisms of Eltahawy could
be used to further the argument that the Muslim world is resistant to any outside criticism. The
reactions of Arab feminists sampled for the sake of these articles seems to be overwhelmingly
negative – almost every time an “insider view” from an Arab or Muslim feminist is shared, it is
in opposition to Eltahawy. One thing that may prevent this type of negative effect is that these
responses are often couched in a micro-lesson on the colonial past (and present) of the region. By
showing depth in the reasons these women are opposed to Eltahawy's ideas, it seems less likely
(thought still possible) that the inclusion of these oppositional viewpoints will be chalked up to a
stereotypical resistance to change, and instead legitimized as culturally significant.

Not only are the identities of specific Arab feminists and the movement as a whole given
consideration, but Eltahawy's involvement and identification with this movement is discussed as
well. Eltahawy's identity as both a Muslim and a feminist is contextually relevant to how her
article is received. In his article in *The Village Voice*, Pinto quotes one of Eltahawy's prior
explanations of the difficulties of navigating her complex identity. She wrote for *The Jerusalem Post* in 2010 that “to be a Muslim and a feminist is to stand in the crossfire and yell “Shut the f**k up!” to everyone around you because you know that anything you say can and will be used against you by everyone.” When prompted about this comment in the more recent article for *The Village Voice*, she reports to Pinto, “I still feel that way, absolutely.” Western stereotypes of Muslim women and Arab men, and the normalization of Western feminist models as the default feminism, work together to make an Arab Muslim feminist seem to be somewhat of a contradiction. Eltahawy's description to these publications shows her caught between her identification with Islam and the feminist movement, attempting to belong to both simultaneously but condemned by either side for her involvement with the other.

Eltahawy's experience of being caught between two seemingly opposing ideologies is reflected in the literature base. Feminism is often interpreted to mean only Westernized feminism, which is then placed at odds with the positioning of Arab Muslim women. Puar explains that the prevalence of Western feminism as the ideal feminism “alludes to the unsalvagable nature of Muslim women by even their own feminists, positioning the American feminist as the feminist subject par excellence” (p. 5). These two identities, Muslim and feminist, are often framed as not only oppositional, but a (Western) feminist identity is constructed to be preferential. However, the reaction to Eltahawy's article begins to paint a different picture. The inclusion and legitimization of Arab feminist voices is important to granting agency to Muslim women and their brand of feminism. Acknowledging these voices as an authority forms a space for an alternative type of feminism that many postcolonial feminist scholars have been calling for. Many openly call Eltahawy out for projecting Western ideology onto these women, and interpreting the causality of their treatment the wrong way. These Arab Muslim feminists clearly
defy stereotypes that many scholars found to be present in media discourses immediately following 9/11 (Faludi, 2007; Cloud, 2004), and show that they are active in their own inception of feminist activism and thought. This grants them a degree of agency that is often missing in academic discussions of Muslim women and feminist ideology. Mohanty (2005) argues that the consideration of alternative modalities of agency is a crucial step in decolonizing feminist discourses. Granting legitimacy to their views by quoting them in mass media may be a small step toward considering other feminist modalities, other than constantly privileging a Western orientation.

**Postcolonial Discourse in the Public Sphere**

Much of the discussion surrounding Eltahawy's “Why Do They Hate Us?” article, particularly those who were in overall disagreement with her stance, involved a direct discussion of colonialism and imperialist force. Whether historical in nature or given a more contemporary focus, there was considerable discussion of colonial intervention within many of the media fragments analyzed. This segment of this chapter discusses how Eltahawy's article allowed for a public discussion of colonial discourses, and demonstrates how these fragments support the notion that there may finally be some progress in public discourse surrounding the construction of agency of Middle Eastern Muslim women.

Many of the analyzed media fragments featured explicit discussions of colonial histories and their lingering effects. These explanations were used to provide context to discussions of Arab Muslim culture, and were used by their authors to displace blame solely from this community to their Western colonizers. When arguing that Eltahawy's assertions are stereotypical, Westernized, and generally misguided, the common argument of her opposition accuses her of pointing to Islam as inherently flawed. Rather, many argue that a dark history of
Western imperialism is the root of these egregious rights violations. Melissa Jeltsen references Moroccan-American writer Samia Errazzouki's Al-monitor.com post as she explains the conflict in *The Huffington Post*:

> Some critics worried that Eltahawy minimized a complex issue by writing in such broad strokes. Eltahawy entirely neglects the socioeconomic roots of gender inequality, the rise of authoritarian regimes in a postcolonial context, the remnants of dehumanization and oppression from colonialism, the systematic exclusion of women from the political system or those who are used as convenient tools for the regime.

She explains that many are angry with Eltahawy for misplacing the blame, and ignoring the damage done by an extensive history of Western imperialism. Alexandra Zimmerman writes a similar explanation of these complaints for *PolicyMic*, sharing the popular opposing belief that “the sources of misogyny are not from Islam, but from imperialism and colonialism that reigned over the Arab word for centuries.” Eltahawy is accused of using Islam as a convenient and sensationalist scapegoat, rather than focusing on the more complex underlying factors at play.

Max Fisher's piece in *The Atlantic* further criticizes Eltantawy's article for placing the blame on Muslim men rather than a Western imperialist past. He frames Radical Islam as a reactionary force against colonization, stating that “when the West later promoted secular rulers, anti-colonialists adopted extreme religious interpretations as a way to oppose them.” These problematic belief systems are not inherently the fault of an evil race of Arab Muslim men, but rather have a more complex historical inception. This narrative is often silenced by the Western world, a strategy that is commonly employed in favor of promoting negative stereotypes that justify Western interventionist strategies. Fisher further explains the silencing of colonial
discourses in the conversation surrounding treatment of women in the Middle East, stating that “you don't hear these [explanations based on colonialism], or any of the other evolutionary theories, cited much. What you do hear cited is religion.” Religion functions as a frequent and effective scapegoat for a much more complex explanation, one that is significantly less palatable to those in the Western world. Indicting this explanation as a search for an easy answer that ignores a more complex colonial past is reminiscent of feminist scholars who critique the misinformed search to find stable meaning in Muslim culture that is congruous with Western ideologies (Mohanty, 2003; Butler, 2004). In line with the suggestions of these scholars, Fisher's article seeks to find a deeper, more culturally-embedded meaning in the misogyny Eltahawy discusses, rather than going for the more popularized route of blaming Islam.

The conversation on the colonial discourses at play involve a surprisingly deep discussion on the history of Western imperialism. Mousa's Al Jazeera article discusses the “centuries of colonisation” the people of the region have historically suffered and explains that “the authoritarian governments that arose in the postcolonial era... seemed undefeatable, and the policies they executed are the real root of current suffering.” Here Mousa touches on and explicitly blames colonial intervention for many of the current issues with the rampant misogyny in the area. The Atlantic provides a more developed historical perspective on the damages done by colonialism:

Some of the most important architects of institutionalized Arab misogyny weren't actually Arab. They were Turkish – or as they called themselves at the time, Ottoman – British, and French. These foreigners ruled Arabs for centuries, twisting the cultures to accommodate their dominance. One of their favorite tricks was to buy the submission of men by offering them absolute power of
women... Colonial powers employed it in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and in South Asia, promoting misogynist ideas and misogynist men who might have otherwise stayed on the margins, slowly but surely ingraining these ideas into the societies.

This detailed review grants significant attention to explaining current problematic cultural institutions in the Middle East through Western colonial intervention. These writers assert that these complex, historically pervasive colonial interventions are to blame, rather than an inherent hatred of a victimized “us” from a villianized “they.”

Eltahawy's article lead to the development of an extensive public discussion of the devastating and lasting effects of colonial intervention in the region. Carried out by referenced bloggers, opinion contributors, and reporters piecing the arguments together, the conversation of colonialism present was significant. Fisher's article in *The Atlantic* includes a discussion of colonialism through the voices of Arab Muslim feminist bloggers and infuses their voices within his discussion of Eltahawy's misdirection. He references Edward Said's terms of Orientalization, and states that blogger “Nahed Eltantawy accused the piece of representing Arab women 'as the oriental other, weak, helpless, and submissive, oppressed by Islam and the Muslim Male, this ugly, barbaric monster.'” This postcolonial discussion of Eltahawy's article implements diverse voices and prominent academic texts, showing a developed conversation occurring in a popular media space.

Many scholars have implicated the media in contributing to problematic portrayals of the Middle Eastern Muslim world immediately following 9/11, where Muslim women were often used as pawns to justify American military intervention (Dutta-Bergman, 2005; Faludi, 2007; Cloud, 2004; Kumar, 2004). However, the rich discussion of colonial pasts and its strong
ideological effects that is consistently present in the media reaction to Eltahawy's article is evident of some progress. This type of discussion mirrors calls by postcolonial and feminist scholars to be more aware of the Western-centric bias of mainstream feminism (Mahmood, 2005; Diaz, 2003; Mohanty, 2003; Puar, 2007). Mohanty (1998) argues that Western feminisms colonize the complexities of women of non-Western cultures, classes, races, and religions. The media response to Eltahawy's article seems to hold an important awareness of this phenomenon. Eltahawy's essentializing stance is frequently read to be an unfair, Westernized interpretation of a diverse body of people whose issues stem not from inherent misogyny, but are instead more culturally complex. This Westernized read functions not as an asset for Eltahawy, but a hindrance – perhaps suggesting that the public view is not sympathetic toward the Western perspective here.
Through the analysis of the media fragments surrounding Eltahawy's article, it is important to draw conclusions about public discourse on Arab Muslim women as well as the reconceptualization of colonialism. First, it is important to address both of the research questions guiding the investigation of these texts:

RQ1: What themes does the Why Do They Hate Us? case study highlight regarding the discourse between Western feminists and Muslim women?

RQ2: What types of opportunities does this discourse present in terms of reconceptualizing colonialism?

In regard to RQ1, after conducting my analysis, I believe that the question is inherently flawed. The media fragments studied were not exclusively composed by Western feminists, which does not allow for much speculation about this specific group. While many of them seemed to be in line with feminist ideology, placing that title on them for the purpose of this analysis seems unproductive. However, this analysis does allow for a discussion on the discourse between different identity groups – an important idea that this research question lead to. By examining the Western media responses to Eltahawy's article, we begin to gain insight into how the West frames the discussion of Muslim women, particularly Arab Muslim women. The nuanced discussions of identity, and the awareness of cultural difference present in both Eltahawy's original article as well as many of the response articles, are important markers of some progress in this type of discourse. Further, as a Western feminist analyzing this case study, my involvement and scholarly methodology are important considerations as well. With the conscious choice of a diverse case study and an awareness of colonial ideologies frequently present in these
discourses, I was actively looking to avoid many of the criticisms frequently lodged at Western feminist scholarship. As a white Western feminist, I was consciously looking for a less colonial approach to these types of texts – something which I hope influenced my analysis for the better.

In regard to RQ2, it seems that this discourse provides several important opportunities in terms of reconceptualizing colonialism. Among the most significant findings within the analysis is the presence of self-aware discourse on the influence of colonialism. Such a rich discussion of colonial influence and its effects was refreshing to find in these fragments. I am cautiously optimistic that this public discussion of colonialism is a step in the right direction toward a more public recognition of the damage of colonial discourses. This shifts the blame from a certain group of people and approaches the setting with more cultural awareness. Although this complicates the discussion of women's rights, it does so in a productive way, which will hopefully lead to even more cultural awareness and critical self-assessment.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The analysis of Eltahawy's “Why Do They Hate Us?” article and the subsequent media responses highlights important similarities and differences between what is happening in within scholarship and what is happening within contemporary media responses to public discussions of Muslim women. Eltahawy's article boldly calls outs many important human rights violations faced by women in the Arab world. However, she chooses to place the blame within Arab culture – specifically, on Arab men. Further, rather than addressing this message to the Arab world, she publishes her article in *Foreign Policy*, a political magazine with a Western audience. This directs her calls to action, to “call out the hate for what it is”, to “resist cultural relativism”, and “to listen to those of us fighting”, to a Western audience. As many of her critics have noted, this harsh placement of blame is constructed as a phenomenon which is unique to Arab men. This
seems to be consistent with critiques of mainstream and scholarly ideologies that Islam is “often viewed as a patriarchal monolith” (Ahmed, 2008, p. 542). By addressing this message of Arab men as the oppressor to the Western world, it seems that Eltahawy is putting the ball in the Western court. Many scholars have argued that mass media and scholarly ideologies alike have lead to the image of Muslim women as a people in need of rescue by the morally superior West (Cloud, 2004; Butler, 2004). This argument could be similarly gleaned from Eltahawy's article, something that has not gone unnoticed by her numerous critics. But despite her critics, there must still be something salient about this type of message, as Eltahawy remains a popular commentator, and her controversial article was nominated for a National Magazine Award.

While Eltahawy's article can be seen as engaging in many of the colonial themes that have previously been identified by scholars as problematic, many of the response articles seem to work in opposition to these themes. A nuanced discussion of the historical systems that have lead to these practices, coupled with a rich public discussion of colonialism, function as a progressive response to many of the indicts that have been waged against scholarly constructions of Muslim women in the Middle East. Droogsma (2007) laments that when talking about the veil, “scholars tend to ascribe meaning rather than describe the meaning” (p. 295). This sentiment has been extrapolated to critique the ways scholars discuss the images and realities of Muslim women in the Middle East as a whole. However, much of the discourse in the responses to Eltahawy's “Why Do They Hate Us?” article seems to remedy many of these problematic assertions by engaging in a more productive (and less offensive) type of discourse that highlights the realistic, multifaceted nature of Arab Muslim women, instead of representing them as one-dimensional pawns in need of rescue. Although Eltahawy's original article is subject to many of the same critiques found in the scholarly literature, many of the public responses to her article seem to be
more progressive. This refreshing turn demonstrates that finally, over a decade following 9/11, we may be rethinking the way the media frames Muslim women in the Middle East in a way that grants them the agency and identity they deserve. That being said, it is also important to consider that many of the publications featuring these response articles, such as *The Guardian* and *The Atlantic*, are often considered to be more liberal or progressive, and may be unrepresentative of media discourse as a whole.

Additionally, the rich discussion of hybrid identity within the texts addresses criticisms waged against colonial feminisms. Mohanty (2003) argues that “a feminist critique of essentialist identity politics has rendered the notion of identity inherently unstable, and therefore irrelevant” (p. 6). However, the focus on identity, in regard to the people writing the response articles, the framing of Arab Muslim feminists, and Eltahawy herself, demonstrates that the construction and management of identity is highly relevant in this context. These articles seem to take a turn for the personal, where the construction if identity seems to lie at the heart of the message. Many of these articles are explicitly feminist in their responses, and implicitly argue for a decolonized feminism. A response article in *The Guardian* encourages readers expresses the writer's inner conflict as she recognizes the offenses in Eltahawy's article as egregious but is turned off by the cultural absolutism present. As such, she encourages readers to turn to the efforts of Arab feminists who are already furthering women's rights in these Arab nations. These public discourses are feminist in nature yet seem to avoid framing identity as “irrelevant”, as Mohanty laments. These assembled fragments seem to be in line with what Mohanty has been calling for, and are perhaps indicative of progress in public discourse.

This analysis is not only important for scholarship because of its findings, but because of its methodological process as well. For the purpose of this thesis, I purposefully selected a
diverse case study and constructed a web of media fragments that represented multiple voices. This is important in terms of both what the literature predicted as well as a statement of deviance away from previous studies. The findings within my analysis may differ from others because of the selection and assembly of the textual fragments present, and the case study that was analyzed. Public discourse may be getting better, but a certain type of scholarship, conscious of colonial influence, is required to tap into that. While I don't claim any kind of perfection, I consciously made choices to make diversity a focus of this project and actively sought to avoid the pitfalls that critics have highlight in other forms of feminist scholarship. It is important for scholars to approach their work with a certain level of conscientiousness toward colonial criticisms – and critical rhetoric affords an opportunity to do so. McGee (1990) explains that that fragments used in critical rhetorical scholarship are “part of an arrangement that includes all facts, events, texts, and stylized expression deemed useful in explaining its influence and exposing its meaning” (p. 279). Critical rhetoricians have the power and obligation to construct a bigger picture through textual fragments in their analysis. This means they have considerable power in regard to the inclusion or exclusion of voices by selecting which fragments will be present within their analysis. A conscious inclusion of diverse voices whenever possible is an important obligation for critical rhetoricians as they develop their work. Shome (2013) has recently pushed for greater transnational awareness within rhetorical theorizing, something with which I have attempted to follow through in this analysis.

Further, a common thread running through many of the response articles is a constant comparison of Arab and Middle Eastern countries to the Wester world. Eltahawy's article criticizes those who compare the offenses suffered by many women in the Arab world to the equality issues in the West, stating, “Yes, women all over the world have problems; yes, the
United States has yet to elect a female president; and yes, women continue to be objectified in many “Western” countries (I live in one of them).” A response article in *The Herald Scotland* engages in a comparison to the West by posing the question, “We might equally ask, when pondering European or American rape and domestic abuse statistics: who do so many men hate women?” *The Atlantic* also constructs a frame of reference in regard to the Western world, by comparing governmental representation in Tunisia to that of the United States: “Why did Egypt's hateful 'they' elect only 2 percent women to its post-revolutionary legislature, while Tunisia's hateful 'they' elected 27 percent, far short of half but still significantly more than America's 17 percent?”

Andrea (2009) argues that it's often presumed that Western women are the “freest” in the world, specifically in relation to “inherently oppressed” Islamic women. Using the West as a frame of reference to which Middle Eastern or Arab countries are constantly compared could be extremely problematic, if the West is situated as a yardstick to which the rest of the world needs to measure up to. McEwan (2001) explains, “postcolonial approaches invoke an explicit critique of spatial metaphors and temporality employed in western discourses” that insist that “the 'other' world is 'in here'” (p. 95). Using the West as a frame of reference could easily create the type of distancing between the West and the Middle East that postcolonial scholars try to avoid. At the same time, it is also possible that this type of comparison could be employed beneficially to create less distance. If the Middle Eastern or Arab world is compared to the West in a certain way, might this rhetorically construct less distance? Is a comparison to the West always negative, or is it employed on these popular press articles as a non-harmful, practical means of conveying a message?

As with any study, there are strengths and limitations to the construction and analysis of
this thesis project. A major strength of this project is the distinctly feminist approach to the research as a whole. In this research I not only looked to critiques of contemporary feminist scholarship in the literature review to apply it to the public discourse within the case study, but also used these critiques in my approach to selecting the texts as well as conducting my analysis. This approach strengthens the study as a whole as it methodologically embodies past suggestions to decolonize feminist study. Using this approach to this specific case study, it fills a void in the research by constructing a colonially-aware feminist critique of Western discourses surrounding Muslim women. A limitation of this study lies in the fact that the number of articles selected for study was relatively small. Although this was done purposely to examine a specific cross section of the media buzz, a larger number of articles from different publications could likely yield different findings.

**Directions for Future Scholarship**

Scholars interested in postcolonial issues should perhaps turn toward an investigation of online discourses. Pinto points out in *The Village Voice* that “it's easier to find online critiques than people willing be to quoted criticizing [Eltahawy],” which he follows with a discussion of the dissenting views present on Arab blogs. This trend seems to hold true, as much of the criticism discussed in many of these articles is not pulled from interviews or commentary from prolific public figures, but rather is taken from online discourses such as blog posts. These blogs, most often written by Muslim, Middle Eastern, and Arab contributors, are the primary way dissenting opinions from the “inside” group are included in the discourse. The authors that choose to include excerpts or even hyperlinks to blog content from Arab women commenting on Eltahawy's article are able to include the important voices of these women. While featuring them in this minor role may not be ideal (as the inclusion of a more diverse writing staff and first-hand
voices is preferential), including them in this capacity is an important step in the right direction. Franking (2001) states, “whether all forms of online sharing and inter-exchange are always unproblematic is beside the point in that all these daily internet uses are adding a new dimension to 'everyday life' and its concomitant practices” (p. 388). Cyberspace opens up a door in which the personal and political meld and provides an important platform for marginalized groups. As Franklin goes on to explain, “As both postcolonial and feminist critiques... contend, these online interactions articulate the public-private-personal in ways that do not 'confer unproblematically a uniform set of meanings which are common to all” (p. 389). Even a cursory glance at the cross section of media fragments present demonstrates a tremendous depth in the analysis of colonial discourse and feminist implications that Eltahawy's article, and viewpoints similar to hers, bring to light. While oftentimes absent in academic literature, particularly within the rhetorical canon in communication studies, these discussions are alive an well in the blogosphere. This highlights a disparity between practice and scholarship, and highlights that it is important to bring these online discourses into the academic sphere.
References


