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## **Analysis of the Status of Muslim Women in Islam in the Two Decades from the Western Lens and Media**

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### **Abstract**

Following sound knowledge and a better understanding of women's issues from the grassroots level could be a great source of policy-making, particularly on women empowerment. In addition, women's studies could be a potential means of effecting a positive change toward building a better society. Women's studies play a pivotal role in the attainment of societal progress and human development. Media can be used to navigate the impact of the negative portrayal of Muslim women in societies across the globe. Thus, under the lens of print and non-print media, numerous Oriental researchers had been examining the plight of Muslim women to unveil their status and the active role they play in societies. This research explores the previous research on issues and experiences of Muslim women geared towards creating a positive attitude and better perspective on Muslim women. Since the year 2000, there had been a great development of research and studies which focused on Muslim women from different perspectives. Hence, there is a need to review the related literature on Muslim women due to its important role in presenting the various identities, and the role of Muslim women in societies across the world.

**Keywords:** Muslim women, Western media, women empowerment, women's plight

### **Introduction**

Muslim women are carelessly portrayed negatively in media as submissive, ignorant, uneducated, and oppressed by men. For the West,

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according to Salma Yaqoob<sup>1</sup>, there is nothing more symbolic of the claimed Islamic oppression than the so-called “plight of Muslim women”. Aysel Morin<sup>2</sup> reports that the reason behind the stereotypes against Muslim women might be because of some disreputable incidents such as the banning of girls from going to school by the Taliban, and the execution of an Afghani woman because of an accusation of committing adultery.

According to Nahleh Gharavi Naeeni<sup>3</sup> the identity crisis of women is considered one of the intolerable events that have sharply destroyed modern communities since the status of women in many societies is the most essential matter for every human society. Studies focusing on Muslim women unveil the status of Muslim women in the social and political arena. Thus, being familiar with Muslim women’s issues culturally, socially, and politically is essential in advancing the cause of women empowerment.

Why Muslim women’s studies are important? Western media oftentimes painted Muslim women negatively as being oppressed, locked up, backward, less respected, not valued, uneducated, and abused by men, primarily because of the Islamic teachings relating to wearing of the veil, women’s rights, and the notion of inequality between men and women in Islam. Thus, it is important to study the plight of women because they play a crucial role in developing societies and in nation-building.

Unfortunately, the widening contributions of women to social, economic, political, academic, and peace development in many societies are oftentimes forgotten and unrecognized, hence, unnoticed. Essentially, from the grassroots level, women are not just homemakers as they raise their children and nurture their families who later become active members of society. Women mold the mind of their children which shapes their behavior, which then has a great impact on the well-being of the society they live. If every woman mould well their children, then probably every society will prosper and flourish, hence, the realization of social development.

Meanwhile, parents should educate themselves on the relevant issues confronting women, and then educate their children on such issues to

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<sup>1</sup> Salma Yaqoob, “Muslim Women and War on Terror,” *Feminist Review*, no. 88 (2008): 150–61. DOI: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30140883>.

<sup>2</sup> Aysel Morin, “Victimization of Muslim Women in Submission,” *Women's Studies in Communication* 32, no. 3 (2009): 380-408. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2009.10162395>.

<sup>3</sup> Naeeni Nahleh Gharavi, “Islamic women studies is important and necessary,” *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 9 (2010): 1238–1243. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.12.313>.

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establish a healthy environment that is free from biases, prejudices, misconceptions, and discrimination towards women.

Contrary to the popular opinion in many non-Muslim societies resonating that Muslim women are oppressed, the truth of the matter is, that Muslim women had been emancipated since the 7th century when Prophet Muhammad (SAW) established Islam in Arabia. Women enjoyed their rights, and were honored, and treated with immense respect, thus, at that period, the *jahiliya* (dark period) in Arabia had ended.

Before the coming of Islam, women were rampantly oppressed, exploited, and abused in many nations across the world. In Arabia, women were treated like commodities, which they can be sold and traded as goods. Infanticide was practiced rampantly where female infants were buried alive due to fear of poverty, meanwhile, men thought that women will only bring shame to their family, and they were not allowed to own assets and property, and they cannot contribute to the well-being of the society. When Islam came in the 7th century, women were liberated. Allāh (SWT) was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) more than 1400 years ago to protect the rights of women and honor them and raise their status in society.

Islamically, more than 1000 years ago, Muslim women enjoyed the right to freedom of belief, and freedom to choose their religion the Qur'ān says: ‘...there is no compulsion in religion...’ (Qur'ān: al-Baqara, verse 256). Muslim women enjoyed the right to equal justice, and the right to education and seek knowledge as Islam enjoins seeking knowledge from the cradle to the graveyard.

Muslim women have the right to financial independence and security, and the right to trade, earn money, own property, enter into legal contracts and manage all of their assets, business, and financial affairs. Women are entitled to inheritance and can spend and invest their wealth wisely. Muslim women have the right to choose a spouse as Islam gave them the right to decide and express their opinion regarding their marriage, and thus, they can accept or reject marriage proposals. Islamically, they cannot be forced into marriage.

Muslim women have the right to be honored and to be treated justly, gently, and kindly with the utmost respect. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) highly recommended and ordered men to “*Be gentle with glass, the women*” where he metaphorically compared women to “a fragile glass”. Islam honors women in any role they play in society as traders, mothers, scholars, wives, workers, daughters, and as a leader. Both the Qur'ān and prophetic traditions placed great emphasis on the importance of respecting women, and the great reward involved in showing them the honor and respect that they deserve.

## **Research Method**

The method of this research is by investigating the major themes confronting the wide-ranging issues on Muslim women that previous researchers have researched. This study reviews only the most relevant research selected that was carried out on Muslim women across the world from the year 2000 until the year 2020 it covers two decades.

## **Research Objective**

The main objective of this study is to identify the major themes, the overall findings, and the results of previously published articles from the year 2000 until the year 2020 that were carried out on Muslim women.

## **Finding and Discussion**

In this research analysis, five major themes appeared to be the most studied topics on Muslim women from the year 2000 until the year 2020, these themes are 1. Representation of Muslim women in Western media; 2. Muslim women experience on veil through their voice; 3. Muslim women's active role; 4. Changes and Muslim women; and 5. "Muslim women do not need saving".

### **1. Representation of Muslim women in Western media**

Many studies have been carried out on the representation of Muslim women in the media as manifested in Bushra H. Rahman; Katherine H. Bullock and Gul Joya Jafri; Bandar Al-Hejin; Nur Latifah Umi Satiti; Muhammad Asraf Khan and Zahra Sadaf; Azra Khan and Aurangzeb Wajeעה.<sup>4</sup> These previous media studies on Muslim women reveal that Muslim women are represented as 'oppressed', 'passive', and 'victims'.

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<sup>4</sup> Bushra H. Rahman, "Framing of Pakistani Muslim Women in International Media: Muslim Feminist's Perspective," *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 2, no. 1 (2012): 106-113. Katherine H. Bullock, and Gul Joya Jafri, "Media (Mis) Representations Muslim Women in the Canadian Nation," *Canadian Woman Studies* 20, no. 2 (2000): 36-40. Bandar Al-Hejin, "Covering Muslim Women: Semantic Macrostructures in BBC News," *Discourse & Communication* 9, no. 1 (2015): 19-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481314555262>. Nur Latifah Umi Satiti, "Representation of Muslim Women in the Western Media," *Journal ILMU Komunikasi* 14, no. 2 (2017): 189-202. Muhammad Ashraf Khan, and Zahra Sadaf, "Portrayal of Muslim Women by Western Print Media: A Textual Analysis in Feministic & Orientalist Perspective," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* 17 (2016): 41-57. Azka Khan, and Aurangzeb Wajeעה, "Need to Counter Gendered Orientalism: The Case of Muslim Women Caricatures on E-Media," *Research Journal Al Başīrah* 7, no. 2 (2018): 23-39.

Smeeta Mishra, 2007a, 2007b<sup>5</sup>; Bushra H. Rahman<sup>6</sup>; Eli Lester Roushanzamir<sup>7</sup>; Katherine H. Bullock and Gul Joya Jafri<sup>8</sup>, for example, examine how Muslim women are represented in the Canadian media. They found out that they are predominantly framed as members of Islam which promote anti-Canadian values including gender oppression and indiscriminate violence. They are also framed as outsiders: threatening others, oppressed, and exotic. In addition, the media considers Muslim women as veiled which is seen as a symbol of violence and oppression, and disregards the sociological complexity behind the decision to cover by using a veil. The researchers add that such misrepresentation often makes Canadians hostile to Muslim women who are veiled.

Bushra H. Rahman<sup>9</sup>, on the other hand, investigates the way Muslim Pakistani women are portrayed in the international magazines *Newsweek* and *Time*. The findings reveal that they were always portrayed as ‘*oppressed victims of the ‘repressive’ laws of Islam*’. On the other hand, the findings show that little coverage was given to women as the ones who are working for their autonomy within the context of Islam. For example, the media hardly refer to Benazir Bhutto in the context of Islam who became the first ever Muslim woman Prime Minister of Pakistan. In the same context, Khan and Zahra<sup>10</sup> find that Muslim women who put on veils and maintained their Islamic values with pride never appeared nor were regarded as a positive subject by the Western media.

Moreover, Nur Latifah Umi Satiti<sup>11</sup> explores the way veiled Muslim women are represented in Western media. She found that the media’s portrayal of veiled women was portrayed as a threat to the value of freedom and secular tradition. She adds that media is powerful in creating women’s

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<sup>5</sup>Smeeta Mishra, “‘Saving’ Muslim Women and Fighting Muslim Men: Analysis of Representations in The New York Times”. *Global Media Journal* 6, no. 11 (2007a): 1–20. Smeeta Mishra, “‘Liberation’ vs. ‘purity’: Representations of Saudi Women in the American Press and American Women in the Saudi Press,” *The Howard Journal of Communications* 18, no. 3 (2007b): 259-276.

<sup>6</sup> Rahman, “Framing of Pakistani Muslim Women...” 106-113.

<sup>7</sup> Eli Lester Roushanzamir, “Chimera Veil of ‘Iranian Woman’ and Processes of U.S. Textual Commodification: How U.S. Print Media Represent Iran,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2004): 9-28.

<sup>8</sup> Bullock and Jafri, “Media (Mis) Representations Muslim...”36-40.

<sup>9</sup> Rahman, op. cit., 106-113.

<sup>10</sup> Khan and Zahra, op. cit., 41-57.

<sup>11</sup> Nur Latifah Umi Satiti, “Representation of Muslim Women in the Western Media,” *Journal ILMU Komunikasi* 14, no. 2 (2017): 189-202.

representation as “*otherness*.” Rochelle Terman<sup>12</sup> also explores the representation of Muslim women in the US media. The findings reveal that US media always promote the idea that Muslims are sexist. This accordingly has an impact on policies that involve Muslims in the US and globally. In addition, this may reinforce Islamophobia and form public opinions toward Muslims across the divide.

It was found that most of the previous media representation studies have a great focus on the veil or *hijab*. These studies show how *hijab* tends to be linked to “oppression”, “backwardness” and recently “terrorism” as noted by Gholam Khiabany and Milly Williamson in their studies in 2011<sup>13</sup>, and in 2008<sup>14</sup>, and Michelle Byng in 2010<sup>15</sup>; and Louise Ryan in 2011<sup>16</sup>; and Katherine Bullock and Gul Joya Jafri in 2000<sup>17</sup>; and Binoy Kampmark in 2003<sup>18</sup>; and Katherine Bullock in 2002<sup>19</sup>; and Azka Khan, and Wajeeha Aurangzeb in 2018<sup>20</sup>. Socially, in the most ideal sense, veiling is not only an Islamic dress code but veiling protects the dignity of women and empowers them suggesting respect, self-preservation, protection, modesty, and in harmony with the Islamic faith.

## 2. Muslim women experience on veil through their voice

In other articles, we found out that some studies report on the veil from a Muslim woman's perspective. Such studies have helped to understand the meanings associated with *hijab* or veil practice. Darnell Cole and

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<sup>12</sup> Rochelle Terman, “Islamophobia and Media Portrayals of Muslim Women: A Computational Text Analysis of US News Coverage,” *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2017): 489-502. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx051>.

<sup>13</sup> Gholam Khiabany, and Milly Williamson, “Muslim Women and Veiled Threats: From ‘Civilising Mission’ to ‘Clash of Civilisations’,” In *Pointing the Finger: Islam and Muslims in the British Media*, edited by Petley J and Richardson R, 173-200. London: One World, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Gholam Khiabany, and Milly Williamson, “Veiled Bodies – Naked Racism: Culture, Politics and Race,” in *the Sun. Race & Class* 50, no. 2 (2008): 69-88.

<sup>15</sup> Michelle D. Byng, “Symbolically Muslim: Media, Hijab, and the West,” *Critical Sociology*, 36, no. 1 (2010): 109-129. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920509347143>.

<sup>16</sup> Louise Ryan, “Muslim Women Negotiating Collective Stigmatization: ‘We’re Just Normal People’,” *Sociology* 45, no. 6 (2011): 1045-1060. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038511416170>.

<sup>17</sup> Bullock and Jafri, op. cit., 36-40.

<sup>18</sup> Binoy Kampmark, “Islam, Women and Australia’s Cultural Discourse of Terror,” *Hecate: an interdisciplinary journal of women's liberation* 29, no. 1 (2003): 86-105.

<sup>19</sup> Katherine Bullock, “Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes,” Richmond: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Azka Khan, and Wajeeha Aurangzeb, op. cit., 23-39.

Shafiqa Ahmadi<sup>21</sup> investigate 2003 the experiences of seven US Muslim women about veil on college campuses. The participants agree that veiling is a practice that “good Muslims” practice and such practice is an extremely valued form of modest behavior, as well as a sign of Muslim identity. However, the study shows that non-Muslims on college campuses have a potential influence on the decision of veiling. Some women declared that they stopped wearing a veil because people are either had little knowledge or misinformed about wearing a veil and accordingly, they have a feeling of isolation and discrimination.

Jasmin Zine<sup>22</sup>, on the other hand, investigates 2006 the experiences of veiling among young Muslim women in a Canadian Islamic school through narratives. She finds that women’s narratives establish their different articulations of Islamic womanhood in senses that challenge and emphasize religious ideas. They are also simultaneously subject to Orientalist portrayals of veiled women that perceive them as backward. Jasmin Zine concludes that “*By centering the voices and struggle of these young Muslim women, we can begin to see them as actors who at times reinforce traditional norms and at other times act in ways that begin to redefine the terrain of gender, faith, and identity*” (p.250).

In another ethnographic study, Sandra Hoche<sup>23</sup> explores 2013 the meanings Muslim Malaysian women attribute to *the hijab* by exploring the reasons behind their decisions of wearing a *hijab*. Some of these women are veiled, while others are either unveiled or sometimes veiled. Findings demonstrate that meanings assign to head covering are individually, culturally, and contextually attributed. The researcher believes that having different opinions on veils is a reminder that there are many Islamic views and versions of veiling.

Moreover, Danielle Dunand Zimmerman<sup>24</sup> explores in 2015 the experience of 16 French and American Muslim women who attend school in France and the US. These women convey strong opinions against

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<sup>21</sup> Darnell Cole & Shafiqa Ahmadi, “Perspectives and Experiences of Muslim Women who Veil on College Campuses,” *Journal of College Student Development* 44, no.1 (2003): 47-66.

<sup>22</sup> Jasmin Zine, “Unveiled Sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and Experiences of Veiling among Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39 (2006): 239–252. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600788503>.

<sup>23</sup> Sandra Hochell, “To Veil or Not to Veil: Voices of Malaysian Muslim Women,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* XXII, no. 2 (2013): 40-57.

<sup>24</sup> Danielle Dunand Zimmerman, “Young Arab Muslim Women’s Agency Challenging Western Feminism,” *Journal of Women and Social Work* 30, no. 2 (2015): 145-157. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109914546126>.

stereotypes of submission and backwardness. They assert personal choice and power regarding their veils, in contrast to what Western feminism is promoting.

From another perspective, Esra Aytar and Peter Bodor<sup>25</sup> explore 2019 the discourses of being a Muslim immigrant woman in Hungary through interviews and observations. Their study presents narrations about wearing and not wearing the veil. The findings reveal many challenges of wearing the veil, described by authors as the “*hijab paradox*”. The *hijab paradox* refers to the paradoxical situation when the *hijab* is required according to Islamic culture to avoid uninvited attention, while at the same time it completely provokes unwanted attention from people of the host country. The researchers, accordingly, recommended that Muslim women need to be supported by NGOs to be more active in dealing with different kinds of unwanted attention.

### **3. Muslim women’s active role**

Other studies have been carried out on the active role of women in their society by calling for their rights from an Islamic perspective. In his book, entitled: “Women & Politics from the Perspective of Islamic Movements in Jordan”. Hassan Abu Hanieh<sup>26</sup> examines 2008 women’s positions and roles in Jordanian Islamic movements. His study looks at their struggle to maintain women’s rights through promoting an Islamic feminist perspective that may support the improvement of women’s status in society. Through involvement in various Islamic movements, Muslim women have begun to free themselves from the societal, cultural, and historic chains that have restricted their behaviors and activities. In other words, women have adopted an active part in the decision-making process.

The Islamic women activists assert that women are equal to men in instinct and responsibility, however, they believe that the home is the core place of women. Hassan Abu Hanieh opines that the most important lesson to be learned from the experience of the Islamic women’s activism in Jordan is to cancel singular interpretations that depend on “*fundamentalist visions of Islam and women in Islam*”.

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<sup>25</sup> Esra Aytar & Peter Bodor, “Discourses of being a Muslim Woman in Contemporary Hungary and the Hijab Paradox,” *Quaderni di Sociologia* (2019): 33-50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/qds.2609>.

<sup>26</sup> Hassan Abu Hanieh, “Women and Politics: From the Perspective of Islamic Movements in Jordan,” Amman, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2008.

Moreover, Julie Elisabeth and Pruzan-Jørgensen<sup>27</sup> assert in 2012 that it is important to get a better understanding of Islamic women's activism since they have always been active and empowered calling for their rights within an Islamic perspective since the early 1990s. In their report, they provide some categories of Islamic women's activists including global activists, state activists, political activists, religious activists, social welfare activists, and scholar-activists. These activists shape possibly significant future partners for external 'actors' and players such as women's organizations, working actively to contribute to women's authority, autonomy, and participation and representation of women in various aspects of society.

Susan Carland<sup>28</sup> addresses in 2012 the experiences of Muslim women commentators, who regularly feature in the Australian media. She also investigates their motivations for appearing in this media as Muslim women. The findings demonstrate that all the participants were completely aware of the negative stereotypes towards them in Australian communities. However, these women are keen to use their positions in media to challenge such stereotypes.

#### **4. Changes and Muslim women**

Several studies call for pointing out changing views of Muslim women globally instead of classifying them as one passive group. Nadia Abgrab Noormohamed studies in 2008<sup>29</sup>, for example, point out that Muslim women in the US adapt culture to the modern Western World which is important for their success and stability. Since they reveal as talented and educated individuals, they are starting to construct new identities and images for themselves in the developing global marketplace. Their autonomy, hence, wins the hearts of the general public through the understanding of cultural patterns. In another study, Rajaa Aquil addresses 2011<sup>30</sup> the stereotypical image of Muslim women in the eyes of the West. She suggests that changes should take place in the way Western media represent Muslim women. She also examines the developments that happened in women's rights with the arrival of Islam, in addition to the improvement that is

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<sup>27</sup> Julie Elisabeth & Pruzan-Jørgensen, "Islamic Women's Activism in the Arab World: Potentials and Challenges for External Actors," 2012, DIIS (Danish Institute for International Studies) Report 02, Copenhagen.

<sup>28</sup> Susan Carland, "Silenced: Muslim Women Commentators in the Australian Media," *The La Trobe Journal* 89, no.1 (2012):140-150.

<sup>29</sup> Nadia Abgrab Noormohamed, "Muslim Women - Adapting Culture to the Modern Western World," *Journal of Diversity Management* 3, no. 1 (2008): 67-74.

<sup>30</sup> Rajaa Aquil, "Change and Muslim Women," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 21 (2011): 21-30.

currently happening in the various fields of women's work and education in Saudi Arabia, the strictest Muslim country. The researcher recommends technology as an aid to change to help solve some prolonged issues that globally affect Muslim women. Today, Saudi women could travel alone without their *mahram*, and they are actively engaging in various socio-political and economic spheres in Saudi Arabia. All these were not allowed in Saudi Arabia since time immemorial.

### **5. "Muslim women do not need saving"**

A few studies argue that 'Muslim women do not need saving', but rather stereotypes and *Gendered Islamophobia* against them need to be broken. In her study in 2002, Lila Abu Lughod<sup>31</sup> raised the question: "Do Muslim Women Need Saving?" She asserts that veiling itself must not be confused with submission or lack of agency. There is a need to stop interpreting the veil as a fundamental sign of women's imprisonment even if we protest imposing veils such as with the Taliban or in Iran. The diverse attitudes of millions of Muslim women must not be reduced to a single item of clothing. Projects of saving Muslim women only support a sense of superiority by Westerners, who need to stop the obsession with the veil and instead have to consider serious problems. In the same context, Nawal Mustafa reports in 2020<sup>32</sup> that "Muslim Women don't need saving". She points out the stereotype Muslim women faced in Europe and the Western perception that Muslim women need liberation. She highlights other restrictions such as the ban on the veil in countries such as Belgium and France. Such restrictions limit women's personal and religious expression. Few studies confront Muslim women. Barbara Perry points out in 2014<sup>33</sup> The scarcity of studies on the hate crime practiced against Muslim women. He recommends researchers pay attention to Islamophobic violence against Muslim women rather than just focusing on women's oppression in their patriarchal societies.

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<sup>31</sup> Lila Abu Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-790.

<sup>32</sup> Nawal Mustafa, "Muslim Women don't Need Saving: Gendered Islamophobia in Europe," 2020 Report, Transnational Institute - [www.tni.org](http://www.tni.org), Amsterdam.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Perry, "Gendered Islamophobia: Hate Crime against Muslim Women," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 20, no. 1 (2014): 74-89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.864467>.

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## The Muslim Women's Contributions in the First World Countries and Asia Today

There is a wide research gap on women which the researchers have yet to explore. Hence, this paper suggests that there is a need to highlight the other aspects of Muslim women's issues, particularly their active participation in politics, academia, security, health, and natural sciences. For instance, as a case study, the phenomenality of Muslim women's active participation in politics in the US and other countries.

In politics, in the US, Ilhan Abdullahi Omar, a Muslim American woman, a politician works as the US Representative for Minnesota's 5th congressional district since 2019. She is a member of the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party. She also serves in Minnesota's House of Representatives from 2017 to 2019, representing part of the US Minneapolis. Her congressional district includes all of Minneapolis and some of its suburbs.<sup>34</sup>

Another American Muslim woman, Rashida Harbi Tlaib, works as a politician and a lawyer and serves as the US Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district since 2019.<sup>35</sup>

In Australia, Mehreen Faruqi works as a senator for New South Wales.<sup>36</sup> She is serving the Australians actively and has been contributing to making a better life for Aussies through her office as a senator.

In other countries, Muslim women play a crucial role in nation-building where Muslim women serve as state leaders and state actors, for instance, the current president of Singapore is a Muslim woman, named Halima Yacob.<sup>37</sup> She was chosen to serve the nation of Singapore. It is the most diverse community and ethnicities in Asia which has Chinese, Malays, Indians, migrant Europeans, Africans, Arabs, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, etc.

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<sup>34</sup> Nune Grigoryan & Wolfgang Suetzl, "Hybridized political participation". In Atkinson, Joshua D.; Kenix, Linda (eds.). *Alternative Media Meets Mainstream Politics: Activist Nation Rising*. Rowman & Littlefield (2019), p. 191. ISBN 978-1-4985-8435-7.

<sup>35</sup> Erin Golden, (November 7, 2018), "Ilhan Omar makes history, becoming first Somali-American elected to U.S. House," *Star Tribune*. Minneapolis, Minn. Archived from the original on February 2, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Parliament of Australia. Official website. Accessed date: August 5, 2021. See Link: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=250362](https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=250362).

<sup>37</sup> Channel NewsAsia. Archived from the original on August,7 2017. Retrieved 7 August 2017.

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In Indonesia, Dyah Permata Megawati Setiawati Sukarnoputri served as the fifth President of Indonesia in the year 2001 to 2004<sup>38</sup>. Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim-populated nation.

Another Indonesian woman, Susi Pudjiastuti serves as the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister.<sup>39</sup>

In Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto became the first Muslim woman leader of a Muslim nation in modern history. She served two terms as Prime Minister of Pakistan, first from 1988 to 1990, and second from 1993 to 1996.<sup>40</sup>

In Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia, a Muslim woman served as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 1991 to 1996, and then again from 2001 to 2006.

Sheikh Hasina Wazed, another Muslim woman served also as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh since January 2009. She served as Prime Minister of Bangladesh from June 1996 until July 2001. She served for a combined total of over 17 years as Prime minister of Bangladesh.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the great role that Muslim women play in many countries as state leaders, they are oftentimes portrayed as oppressed, uneducated, and ignorant in the Western media. Contrastingly, in reality, Muslim women excelled as academicians.

In the Philippines' case, some of its public universities are headed by Muslim women, for instance, the Mindanao State University, Marawi City, the biggest university in Mindanao, Philippines once had a Muslim female president named Emily Marohombsar.

The Institute of Islamic Studies in the University of the Philippines in Diliman, a state university was once headed by Dean Carmen Abubacar, and then also later, headed by Dean Macrina Adjerol Morados, who are Muslim Tausug women.

The National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) of the Philippines was once headed by a Muslim woman, Yasmin Busran Lao. The Philippines also had a Muslim woman senator named Santanina Tillah Rasul. Numerous Muslim women serve as lawmakers in the Philippines.

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<sup>38</sup> Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/editor/The-Editors-of-Encyclopaedia-Britannica/4419>. Accessed date: August 5, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Sara Schonhardt, (December 4, 2014), "A fish? A plane? What's the tattoo on Susi Pudjiastuti's leg?" The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved 17 December 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Caryn James, "BOOKS OF THE TIMES; From Benazir Bhutto, a Life Story of Drama and Paradox." The New York Times.

<sup>41</sup> The Daily Star, "PM Birthday Today," Retrieved 29 September 2019.

In international relations, Imelda Macapundag Panolong, a Muslim woman serves as a career diplomat, and she is the current Ambassador of the Philippines to Oman.

In the Philippine's local leadership, Tarhata Alonto Lucman, a Muslim woman served as Governor of Lanao del Sur in Mindanao, Philippines from 1971 until 1975.<sup>42</sup>

Countless Muslim women are scientists, and some Muslim women serve in the arm forces such as the navy, air force, military, law enforcer, and police.

In Australia, Mona Shindy, a hijab-wearing Muslim woman serves as a naval officer who runs the Littoral Warfare and Maritime Support Capability Development Group in Russell, Australia. She is the chief of the navy's strategic adviser on Islamic cultural affairs.<sup>43</sup>

Maha Sukkar of the Victoria Police is one of the first pioneering Australian Muslim female officers.<sup>44</sup>

In New Zealand, the majority of its population is non-Muslim, however, New Zealand has several Muslim police officers like Constable Zeena Ali.<sup>45</sup>

In the US, Lt. Saleha Jabeen, an American woman became the first ever female Muslim chaplain in the Department of Defense, Airforce.<sup>46</sup> We also have Katie Amin, a Chesterfield Firefighter who is a Muslim, Arab-American.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Philippines Government Official posts.

<sup>43</sup> Australian Government Department of Defense. Annual Report 2013-14, Feature profiles. See: <https://www.defence.gov.au/annualreports/13-14/profiles/profile-captain-mona-shindy-ran.asp>. Accessed date: September 5, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Natasha Simpson, (November 26, 2004) "Policewoman given uniform variation to wear hijab," PM, ABC Radio. Retrieved 13 November 2018.

<sup>45</sup> DNA News. See Link: <https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-new-zealand-police-hijab-uniform-constable-zeena-ali-muslim-women-2857290>. Accessed date: September 5, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> NDTV, Indians Abroad, Press Trust of India, "US Military's First India-Born Female Muslim Chaplain Graduates," See Link: <https://www.ndtv.com/indians-abroad/us-militarys-first-india-born-female-muslim-chaplain-graduates-from-chaplain-college-2373277>. Accessed date: September 5, 2021. Updated: February 18, 2021 3:17 pm IST.

<sup>47</sup> YOUTUBE, Finding Yourself Through Community Service | Katie Amin | TEDxGraceStreetWomen. See Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGc4823uWeg>. Accessed date: September 5, 2021.

## Analysis of the Status of Muslim Women in Islam in the Two Decades from the Western Lens and Media

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In the UK, there are Muslim female officers, like Usma Amireddy; who worked as a police officer for 10 years in North Yorkshire.<sup>48</sup> Muslim women enjoy their profession as engineers, and health and medical providers as physicians, midwives, and nurses.

In medicine, Dr. Hina Chaudhry works as the Director of Cardiovascular Regenerative Medicine at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. Dr. Hina Chaudhry is a cardiologist and associate professor of medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai.<sup>49</sup> Muslim women are also empowered in the space race as in the case of Nora Al Matroosi, who is the first-ever Muslim woman astronaut from the United Arab Emirates.

Tahani Amer, the Senior Technologist at NASA in Washington, DC, US. And we have Mona Diab, a computer science researcher who specializes in natural language processing, automatic text analytics, applied machine learning, data science, and artificial intelligence.<sup>50</sup> In a nutshell, numerous Muslim women contributed to social, economic, political, cultural, and academic development in many Muslim and non-Muslim societies across the world and beyond.

### Conclusion

Previous works on Muslim women were not defensive enough to address the wide-ranging issues affecting Muslim women. Previous research on Muslim women did not give justice in mainstreaming the Muslim women's plight for equal recognition as catalysts for social, political, and scientific innovation. And that Muslim women's contributions to their respective society should be recognized on a wider spectrum under scholastic interests. Muslim women, no matter where they are, have huge contributions to nation-building.

Muslim women empowerment is not yet well studied, hence, there is limited knowledge on Muslim women empowerment. It is recommended that researchers may focus on Muslim women's empowerment, and also their contributions to nation-building. In addition, there is a need to examine the

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<sup>48</sup> YORKSHIRE POST. See Link: <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/crime/meet-north-yorkshire-police-officers-who-designed-countrys-first-hijab-female-muslim-officers-3052386>. Accessed date: September 5, 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Mount Sinai. See Link: <https://www.mountsinai.org/profiles/hina-chaudhry>. Accessed date: September 5, 2021.

<sup>50</sup> See TeenVogue, *3 Muslim Women in STEM You Should Know About, They're making a difference.* By Mona Khalifeh. March 27, 2017. Link: <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/muslim-women-in-stem-to-know>.

ongoing debates on the difference between Islam as a religion and the cultural practices of Muslim communities, where traditions, customs, and social values are more prevalent than Islamic religion. Lack of understanding between Islam as a religion and the cultural practices of Muslim communities has led to criticism of Islam as a religion negatively and many non-Muslim societies ignored the realities of Muslim societies' cultural practices which are not Islamic. For example, the book entitled: *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam* by Spencer and Chesler highlights the oppression of women in Islam by reviewing some cultural norms and traditions and claiming that such norms are recognized by the teachings of Islam and by the holy Qur'an. These practices or norms include female genital mutilation, the beating of a daughter, sister, and wife, easy divorce, sexualizing women, domestic slavery, child marriage, honor killing due to rape, etc. It is clear then that those scholars mixed up the social practices and religious teachings due to ignorance which may mislead the people. New research, therefore, must be carried out to distinguish between social problems and religion.



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