

Religious Marginalization/ *Othering* of Pakistani Women in *Islamabad Blues* by Ladurner

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative research is to investigate the religious marginalization/*othering* of Pakistani women in the memoir *Islamabad Blues* (2004) by Ladurner. This research introspects Pakistani women's oppression and marginalization as *others* by Eastern patriarchal system and Western imperialistic perspective in the selected text. The epistemology for this research is postcolonial feminism. The selected theoretical framework is Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* (1984) and Said's notion of *othering* from *Orientalism* (1978). Textual analysis is selected as a method of analysis with a focus on the most likely interpretations of the text. According to McKee's *Textual Analysis* (2003), every text should focus on 'contextualization'. Without taking into account the exact socio-cultural context, one cannot assert one's own *self* as right/superior and the *other* as wrong/inferior in a text. McKee's contextualization works as a lens to highlight that the Eastern context of culture and religious teachings are not taken into account while constructing Eastern women's identity in the selected text ultimately marginalizing them on the basis of religion.

Keywords: Religious marginalization, Othering, Postcolonial Feminism, Double – colonization, Identity Construction.

Introduction

The present qualitative research is based on postcolonial feminist investigation of the memoir *Islamabad Blues* (2004) by Ladurner. It examines how Pakistani women are misrepresented in Western discourse as oppressed and silenced by Islamic values. This research is conducted in light of Mohanty's (1984) theoretical perspective of *Under Western Eyes* and Said's perspective of *marginalization/othering* from *Orientalism* (1978). *Under Western Eyes* focuses on Eastern women's oppression by Oriental patriarchal system as well as their subjugation by Western imperialistic perception. While, *Orientalism* sheds light on Western idea of portraying the Westerner as *self* and the Eastern people, particularly the women as *others*. The selected method for this research is *Textual analysis*.¹ The analysis aims to explore the double – colonization of Pakistani women to investigate their oppression in

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oriental patriarchal system and furthermore their marginalization as *others* from Western perspective and also how their identity is constructed in the Western texts as oppressed and isolated women. Postcolonialism deals with the multifarious themes like oppression, violence and resistance of the postcolonial nations. “The term ‘Postcolonialism’ once referred exclusively to the discursive practices produced the historical fact of prior colonization in certain geographically specific segments of the world that is now more of an abstraction available for figurative deployment in any strategic re-define of marginality”.² The abstract division of geography is self – ascribed construct that highlights the criterion of dividing the humanity in *self* and *other*. “It is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the center.”³ This construct serves as a survival-kit for portraying the orient as inferior and *other* by presenting the occident as superior, center and *self*. *Other* portrays a complete contrast with the *self* of the Occident, carrying the darker traits of humanity, and furthermore, dehumanized and silenced. It is the very soul of all the forms of dominance whether it is epistemic, cultural, economic, political, and military and it is so integral to colonized countries that literature cannot ignore it. The division that is based on geography among orient and occident is obvious. According to Said, the orient is represented as the negative *other* so that the occident can be presented as positive *self*. Occident has its own mindset observing the orient as Said asserts in *Orientalism* (1978) as “Orientals are people with hysteria, seduction and desire”.⁴ This inequality among orient and occident is observed in furthermore gender discrimination in oriental patriarchal system where “personal traits and pattern of behavior (including responsibilities, opportunities and privileges) that a culture attaches to “being female or male”.⁵ In this way, females’ identity is constructed as *others*. Males present themselves as dominant over women and their identity is constructed as *self*. In division of orient and occident, male and females, it is the females who are subjugated and their social/religious marginalization is created by ‘double – colonization.’

Islamabad Blues (2004) is written by German male writer Ulrich Ladurner. Ladurner came to Pakistan as a journalist after the war and terror in Afghanistan to collect information about war as Pakistan and Afghanistan are Muslim countries. Ladurner stayed for two months in

Pakistan. He wrote about different aspects of Pakistan and Pakistani's ways of living in his memoir. In particular, he observed Pakistani women's suppression by Eastern patriarchal system and majorly focuses on Islam as the source of their marginalization in society.

In the current research, the selected text is explored on account of religious marginalization and the resultant identity construction of Pakistani women as treated in oriental patriarchal system through the lens of the occident. The cultural norms, religious practices, ways of living of the orient are investigated by the occident and perceived through their occidental lens while observing the orient as *other*. "It is the reflection of relationship of imperial and intellectual domination of the West which feels it is superior to an inferior/other East"⁶. One holds a particular position as the powerful occident asserts himself, his nation, country, society or group as *self* and the orient is tagged as *other*. "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences"⁷. Hence, this research explores how the Western lens constructs Pakistani women's identity as *others* through religion in the selected text.

Thesis Statement

The current research aims to investigate the religious marginalization of Pakistani women as oppressed *others* by Western discourse in *Islamabad Blues* (2004) by Ladurner. Although the colonial era has ended, still Eastern women face oppression by not just the Eastern cultural practices but also by their identity constructed as marginalized by Western discourse. The Westerners envision Islam as only a source of oppression for women and totally fail to understand the oriental perspective of Islam as actually a source of liberation for Pakistani women. This research raises the issue of double – colonization of Pakistani women in the selected text to highlight the misinterpretation of women rights in Islam in Western discourse.

Western *Othering*/Marginalization of the Orient

Othering from Said's perspective highlight the Western invention of 'orient' as: "The Orient was almost a European invention"⁸. The West brought the term of "orient" on surface that is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the

Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (P. 2).⁹ Orient and oriental people are portrayed by the Occident through their own perception. Orientalism is a system that is created for gaining and producing knowledge for the orient. The true knowledge is based on scientific facts and the other knowledge is embedded in purpose in Said's (1978) words. In this purpose, the differences are created for constructing the identity of East and West: "There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated"¹⁰. The oriental's image is created as weak and to be dominated by the West. "Thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, normal"¹¹. While, the non – European and Eastern people are portrayed as irrational, immature and other than normal. The differences were created for positive *self*-image of the West so that the Eastern image should be portrayed as the *other*.

The notion of double – colonization explains women's double – oppression and dual sufferings as a woman in oriental patriarchal system and as a postcolonial inhabitant from occident's perspective. "Double – colonization refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy"¹². Al though the colonial era is over however, even in the present times, Eastern women are doubly marginalized in the world. Given the global context of Postcolonialism, Eastern women are marginalized as *others* by the oriental patriarchal society and also by the Western construction of Eastern females' identity as weak, oppressed, and uncivilized. In oriental patriarchal system, women are considered inferior and *others* to males. "In this way, violence, marginalization and *othering* are the core common concerns of postcolonial feminism, which is a sub – section of postcolonial theoretical approach that seeks to explore patriarchal subjugation and females' marginalization in colonial and postcolonial context".¹³

Postcolonial feminism asserts the Eastern women's maltreatment in Eastern patriarchal system as well as their oppression through the perception from Western understanding as: "In other words, only in so far as Woman/Women and the East are defined as *others*, or as peripheral, that (Western) Man/Humanism can represent him/itself as the center."¹⁴. She sheds light on women's *othering* in patriarchal context on account of gender discrimination which leads to the oppression of most of the women in many countries. With regards to this

suppression, oriental women are doubly marginalized due to societal male dominant and Western imperialism prevailing in many postcolonial countries even after their independence from the colonial powers. In *Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories*, Eastern women's oppression is described as: "She suffers from double – colonization as she simultaneously experiences the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy"¹⁵. It underscores the double oppression faced by oriental women by patriarchal and the Western colonization that Eastern women are double oppressed by patriarchal system and colonialism in McLeod's (2010) stance. Eastern women are oppressed by patriarchy, but the West relates it with the religion Islam. Western feminists write that Muslim females are affected by the patriarchal system since the time of the Prophet Mohammad as it is narrated by Mohanty (1984). She addresses this biased concern of the Western feminists as under

Thus, all women, regardless of class and cultural differences, are affected by this system. Not only are all Arab and Muslim women seen to constitute a homogeneous oppressed group, but there is no discussion of the specific practices within the family which constitute women as mothers, wives, sisters, etc. Arabs and Muslims it appear, don't change at all. Their patriarchal family is carried over from the times of the prophet Mohammed. They exist, as it were, out- side history.¹⁶

Western discourse gives the impression that Muslim women are marginalized by religion in patriarchy. While, *most* if not *all* women, across borders and cultures are defeated by tyrant patriarchy as females are exploited by males all over the world as it Mohanty (1984) illustrates it. "This exploitation results in an assumption of women as an always-already constituted group, one which has been labeled "powerless," "exploited," "sexually harassed," etc., by Western feminist scientific, economic, legal and sociological discourses. The exploitation needs to be noticed that is quite similar to sexist discourse labeling women weak, emotional, having math anxiety, etc" (P. 338).³ She persuades *all* women to unite under the umbrella of sisterhood without dividing Eastern women from Western superiority.

Methodology

The current research is qualitative in nature. *Textual Analysis* (2003) as presented by McKee is applied to meet the needs of the research. The conceptual framework for this research is Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* (1984), to raise the concerns of double – colonization, along with Said's notion of *othering* from *Orientalism* (1978). Double – colonization deals with the oppression of Eastern women by the patriarchal system and furthermore, their marginalization as *others* from Western perspective in the Western text *Islamabad Blues* (2004). The proposed model of *Textual analysis* focuses on the contextualization of every text from McKee's (2003) perspective. According to him, contextualization refers to multiple interpretations of any text. On the basis of context, cultural meanings may be interpreted differently by different people based on their experiences/understandings. According to this model, on the basis of personalized meanings, the *other* cannot be represented as wrong or right through an assertion of positive self – portrayal. Anything that may be acceptable in one context, may not be appreciated in another culture or context. Without concentrating the *others* context, one's image cannot be created as wrong, rather context of that image presentation should be taken into account. The selected model focuses on the contextualization of every text while creating/constructing the image/identity of women as *others*. In this way, textual analysis of the selected text aims at the postcolonial feminist concerns in the context of developed theoretical framework

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Based on misinterpretation of religion, Pakistani women's identity is constructed as oppressed in Eastern patriarchal system and they are further marginalized as silenced/weak in Western discourse. The third world women/colonized women by imperial power are positioned at periphery as the first world feminists position themselves at center according to Mohanty's (1984) stance. The colonized/third world women's image is created as they are bound between needs and desires so that their own image should be created as enlightened, educated center, having free will. Linking it with the analysis of *Islamabad Blues* (2004), the colonized Pakistani women's oppression is investigated by the cultural practices of religion, social role/status of women in society,

Western perception of veil, voiceless of Eastern women. In the light of Quranic references, the analysis highlights how in the above mentioned spheres of life, the colonized women are perceived by the Western imperial power and how their identity is constructed in the selected text.

1. Cultural Practices of Religion

Pakistani women are oppressed by the Eastern patriarchal system due to gender discrimination. Males marginalize them through the cultural practices of religion. Ladurner came to Pakistan as a reporter to investigate people's views on 9/11, and religious extremism. He met with a salesman to know his views about it. Ladurner in his memoir *Islamabad Blues* (2004) mentions about his meeting with a salesman from which came to know how Pakistani women are treated by the males. Ladurner asks him about the marginalization of females in the following excerpt:

Journalist: "This regime oppresses women."

Salesman: "We don't oppress women. Islam teaches us: if a woman, for example says black, as a man you must say white".¹⁷

In the above-mentioned quotation, according to the journalist's perspective, it is Pakistani regime that is oppressing women, while from the salesman's perspective, this oppression stems from the teachings of religion i.e. Islam. But it is neither religion nor regime that is oppressing women, rather it is the patriarchal system that gives more importance to the male's stance and allows males to contradict a female's verdict. In this way, women are subjugated by cultural practices of religion as males mold religious references according to their needs and desires. Males do so to maintain their superiority: "In particular, several verses from the Qur'an have frequently been used to support the claims of the inherent superiority of males over females".¹⁸ Due to the patriarchal system's influence, male presents religious references out of context that are beneficial for their own needs and desires. The salesman further supports his claim of opposing a woman's verdict by giving the following reason:

Salesman: "We have another rule which says that the testimony given by a woman in a court of law is worth only half as much as that of a man. You need two women to offset the testimony of one man".¹⁹

The salesman further asserts that according to religion, a female

needs to be accompanied by another woman or a male in order to give her testimony in a court of law. In the eye of religious law, she being a female is considered only half a witness. The text asserts that it is perceived by Pakistani males that females are less intelligent, or they are deficient in intelligence and lack commonsense. They link it with the teachings of Islam by their cultural practices of religion for placing restrictions on women in testimony and in intellectual matters. Unfortunately, this misconception regarding Quran is propagated as its reference is given out of context. Quran in Surah al-Baqrah (2: 282) narrates about bringing two women as:

If there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witness, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.²⁰

The purpose of bringing two women is to focus that two women will support each other's memory. It does not assert that they are less intelligent than men, rather it focuses on women's forgetfulness as there can be more chances of forgetfulness so they are asked to bring two women. If one of them forgets something the other can remind her. The scientific reason behind this forgetfulness is that levels of estrogen during menopausal transitions brings forgetfulness in women that helps them to forget premenopausal pain. This forgetfulness due to changing menopause is recognized by different researches as: "The menopausal transition is a time of increased vulnerability to cognitive declines. A majority of women report forgetfulness and concentration difficulties during the menopausal transition".²¹ The period of premenopause creates forgetfulness as it releases estrogen. According to an international foundation of *What to Expect When we are Expecting* (2018) investigated that women tend to forget why they walked in to the street for, where did they left their purse etc., as forgetfulness is a common and normal characteristic of estrogen imbalance, pregnancy and premenopause.

Memory issues are a normal occurrence during premenopause. If you are in premenopause, you may be worried about lapses in your memory. But mild memory forgetfulness is very common. They happen because your body is making less estrogen. And for women, the effect is temporary. This doesn't happen immediately. During premenopause, your estrogen level goes up and down a lot. This is when many women experience symptoms associated with the transition to menopause.¹⁴

Women usually forget things during the transition to menopause as their estrogen levels fluctuate. This forgetfulness serves as a blessing for women as it allows them to forget painful experiences. But in the Eastern patriarchal system, males give religious references out of context where there is matter of recording testimonies of witnesses. The Eastern male considers women less intelligent without focusing on the background of bringing witnesses with her and he gives impression that she is half intelligent than male. He does not bother to focus on her forgetfulness rather perceives her as less intelligent. Forgetfulness does not suggest that women are less intelligent.

The Quranic references about bringing witness with the woman refers to women's forgetfulness. It does not denote that they are less intelligent or unwise. Rather it highlights women's tendency towards forgetfulness that if one forgets then the other can remind her. But the patriarchal system presents this reference out of context because women's portrayal as less intelligent and unwise can exhibit males' wisdom and intelligence. In this way, Eastern women's identity is constructed as less intelligent or less wise by male's perception of intelligence.

2. Women's Rights to Education

Pakistani women are devoid from the rights of education. Due to dominance of patriarchal system, women do not have equal rights of getting education like males and they are marginalized by constitution of education. Women's right of education is asked by Ladurner (2004) as:

Journalist: "women are not allowed to work, and they are not allowed to attend school."

Salesman: "This is only because at the moment there are not enough school buildings. First, they have to build. Then, women can also go to school again. But man comes first, he's more important".²²

Apart from other due rights, women are even devoid from the right of education. From Eastern patriarchal perspective, it is not as important for women to get education as it is for male. The patriarchal system divides the roles from the very start of the birth of daughter and son. As son is perceived the bread – earner of the family so he is preferred to get

education and daughter is supposed to take care of home so her education is not considered important like the son. Even the gender 'woman' is not born rather it is constructed from the birth by society by saying them to: "perform the role of a good mother and housewife within the four walls of the house rather than to become an educationist, manager, or community leader in the active life of a society."²³ But in Eastern patriarchal society roles for both genders are divided for them as staying at home, being uneducated, taking caring of children is associated with women's duties, while man's job is to earn livelihood and educated. Even the Eastern patriarchal society forgets that Hazrat Khadija's (R.A) profession of business and there are many other examples as well. Quranic teachings for the emphasis on reading, reciting and rehearsing" in Surah Al Alaq or Iqra (96: 1-5) addresses as:

Proclaim! (or Read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher -
Who created – created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed
blood. Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful, He taught (the
use of) the pen, Taught man which he knew not.²⁴

There is emphasis in Quran to read and rehearse. There is no limitation/discrimination of gender in it as the saying of Holy Prophet (PBUH) is evident in this regard as: Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination). There is no discrimination of gender to get education as Muslim women have left the marks in the education field. Among hundreds of splendid educated women, some needs to mention here:

For example, Ayesha (R.A), the wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was a lady of profound erudition. Many Sahaba (companions of the Prophet) and Tabeeeyen (direct followers of the sahaba) used to come to her for learning Islamic law, theology and Hadit. Zainab (R.A), the daughter of Hazrat Ali (R.A), was a great Islamic scholar of theology. Fatima Binte Abas and Sikha Sayeeda, the two Islamic scholars, used to come to the mosque regularly to deliver lectures on Islamic theology.²⁵

In Islam, there is equal emphasis of education for both genders as the above mentioned examples regarding education from Quran and other Muslim women in the time of prophet (P.B.U.H) are evident. The most important of all is that religious emphasis through Quranic interpretations, Hadith and other examples of the female sahaba is not taken into account for Eastern patriarchal system. In a nutshell, it is

Eastern patriarchal system that disallows women from the right of education by dividing roles. Males are supposed to get education to earn livelihood and female are perceived to look after the home and her right of education is not considered as important for Eastern patriarchal society as it is perceived important for males.

4. Purdah and Social Participation of Women

As Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and Pakistani people's ways of thinking and living are based on religious grounds and enriched with its own culture as well. While for the West, the scenario is totally opposite. The blessing for one culture/context is a curse for the other culture/context. Pakistani women's seldom coming out of their homes is considered an oppression from Western imperialism prevailing in once colonized countries even from the post-colonial era observes Pakistani women through the colonizer's mindset. As Ladurner writes in his memoir *Islamabad Blues* (2003) that women are least visible in Pakistan, and it reflects their oppression. You see women on the streets of Islamabad veiled and in small numbers. But all the same, they are least visible. And yet, when I enter a shop, they disappeared immediately. Women are eliminated from the public view as this regime oppresses women.²⁶ According to Ladurner, in Pakistan, women are least visible in public view. They are either in veil or they are in very small numbers in streets of Islamabad and he perceives from his Western understanding that they are oppressed by the state and that is the reason behind their less public appearance or seldom coming out of their homes and in veil. While, in Pakistan due to different codes of conduct/context purdah has its cultural importance that is not oppression for Pakistani women as the West perceives it. Pakistani regime is male omnipotence that is so suffocating as it is oppressing women from Ladurner's stance:

I only see a lot of male faces. But after almost four weeks of stay, I am getting the barracks mentality. In the morning, I am greeted by a man at a reception desk, a man cooks my scrambled eggs, a man cleans my room – it's this male omnipotence that is so suffocating.²⁷

Pakistani regime's image is created as a suffocating and male dominant place, where women are eliminated from public view

according to Ladurner, there are males everywhere at duties, at reception, scrambling eggs, cleaning rooms. Pakistani women's identity is constructed as suppressed at homes from Western imperialistic perspective. They seldom come out of their homes. The oppression of staying at home from the Western perception is a blessing from the Eastern context for Pakistani women. There are differences of cultures and values between Pakistan and the West. The Western writer creates Pakistani women's image as suppressed because of less public view as others, to construct Western women's identity as enjoying liberty and freedom and self. The differences of both cultures are not taken in to account, rather they are presented to show Pakistani women's oppression, dependence and Western women's liberty and freedom.

5. Western Perception of Veil

Eastern countries, their religious values such as purdah and veil are considered oppressive in the Western context. Pakistani women's identity is constructed as conservative and primitive because of their veils. A woman in veil is observed and associated with the conservativeness of the area from Ladurner's Western perception: She lowered her veil to cover the face. Now only her eyes were visible. Apparently, her neighborhood was more conservative than the inner city".²⁸ A female was observed fully covered in veil, only her eyes were visible through the veil and covering herself denoted her residence in conservative area from Ladurer's Western perception. The imperial colonizer writer does not consider the cultural context of the veil for Pakistani women, rather it is depicted for the politics of comparison between Pakistani and Western women. By constructing Eastern women's identity as conservative as others because of their veils, the Western female's identity is constructed as modern and self. In this regard that veil's context and situatedness must be considered and on the basis of different cultural and religious backgrounds/context, one cannot assert the other as conservative to present one's own self as modern from Mohanty's perception

To wrap up the above discussion of Pakistani women's marginalization through the Western perspective, in social life, Western perception of veil, voicelessness of Eastern women, honor based gender discrimination, it is obvious that colonizer's perception about Pakistani women's identity is constructed through colonizer's mindset as others. The colonizer's mindset constructs Pakistani women's identity at

periphery due to colonizer's superiority of centeredness. This Western imperialistic mindset regarding his perception about Eastern women is based on abstract oppression that does not have any obviousness. The obvious oppression of patriarchal discrimination that subjugates not if not all but most the women of the world, across cultures and beyond race suffer. While, Pakistani women's identity as others is constructed from Western imperialistic perspective that is based on geographical division that the West wants to maintain the relationship of colonizer and colonized, master and slave, superior and inferior, civilized and uncivilized even after the post-colonial era. Now they are colonized by imperial enslavement. Pakistani women's identity is constructed voiceless in social discrimination, oppressed and conservative through Western perception of veil and the matter of honor as crazy. The Eastern women are perceived as voiceless, and others, while Western women's image is created as voiced, enjoying freedom, modern and positive self. The West should consider the religious and cultural contexts of honor and veil, and focus on the suppression that all women of the world face under patriarchy.

Conclusion

The current research aimed to investigate Pakistani women's religious/social marginalization based on misinterpretation of religion in the selected occidental text. In light of provided Quranic references, it gets clear that Eastern females are suffering not by religion but by the patriarchal system in Pakistan. While on the other hand, Western oppression for Eastern women is baseless because it depicts Western imperial mindset for judging Pakistani women as well. Western marginalization of Pakistani women is not based on social obviousness, rather it clearly reflects occident's tendency to create another contrastive entity to be placed at margin so that Western identity could be constructed at center and the relationship of master, slave and colonizer and colonized could be maintained as it was observed in colonialism. Pakistani women's oppression by patriarchal system is evident as *most* if not *all* of the women suffer under patriarchy. Moreover women in the West are as subjugated by men as women in the East.

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