Cultural Representation and Stereotypes:
An Analysis of Submission: Part One

Project in the Department of Cultural Encounters
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Module Two

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1. Introduction

The idea for this project spawned from an interest in the current heated debate surrounding the position of Muslim women within Europe. One only needs to follow headlines in the news for a short time, before it becomes apparent that Muslim women are at the heart of a debate pitting Muslim culture against that of historically dominant European powers. In Britain, Germany, and France (just to name a few countries), the presence of veiled women in public spaces has given rise to great controversy. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, even stated recently that he was unsure of whether or not veiled women could contribute to society (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/6058672.stm, 15.11.06). It would be naïve to think this one project capable of adequately dissecting and/or providing an analysis of this complex debate. However, we feel it is an issue of great importance within contemporary European societies; and we feel compelled to further our understandings of the dynamics within the controversy surrounding Muslim women. Therefore, we have decided to focus our inquiries on the notions of the creation and representation of the cultural identity of Muslim women. The controversial film Submission: Part One1 will be the focal point of our project. Written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and directed by Theo van Gogh, the film provocatively depicts the marred lives of four Muslim women, each plagued by a variety of appalling abuses. It is our intention to look specifically at the representation of Muslim women within the film. We assert that Submission stereotypes Muslim women, and in doing so, wrongly represents Muslim women to the intended European audience. In investigating this cultural representation, we will make use of the constructivist notions of Orientalism, Neo-orientalism, and Enlightenment Eurocentrism. These are our key concepts as we seek to answer specifically the following questions:

What are the stereotypes representing the identity of Muslim women in Submission and how are these stereotypes positioned to appeal to the cultures of the dominant powers in Europe?

This project will be comprised of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, providing our problematic, problem formulation, and a brief summary of the project. The second chapter will be a presentation of the theories and methods employed throughout the project. First is a theoretical discussion of Enlightenment Eurocentrism, drawing on the work of Ien Ang. In this segment we will explain our choice of terminology in reference to Europe and European societies. From this discussion, we will move into the theories of Orientalism and ‘othering’, referencing the works of Edward Said and Meyda Yegenoglu. The third segment of our theory chapter, will move

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1In the rest of the project the film Submission: Part One will be referred to as simply Submission.
us from the notions of Orientalism and ‘othering’ as seen in colonialism, to that of modern post-colonial Orientalism and ‘othering’. We refer to these modern day manifestations of the terms as Neo-orientalism. From Neo-orientalism, we move to a theoretical discussion of Stuart Hall’s understandings of cultural representation and identity formation. In the final segment of Chapter One, we also turn to Stuart Hall’s methods of uncovering imposed and simplified cultural identities, a phenomenon he refers to as stereotyping, within film. Here we depict how we will employ this methodology in our analysis of Submission.

Chapter Three will be the contextualizing of Submission: the life and influence of the film’s author, Ayaan Hirsi Ali; and a description of the time and place in which the film was released. Chapter Four marks the beginning of our analysis. Here we will delve into the film, provided first a thorough summary, followed by a detailed analysis of the six stereotypes we manifest throughout the film. Finally, the fifth chapter will be a discussion of the project in its entirety, including also, our further ideas surrounding the established problematic of the controversial positioning of Muslim women within Neo-orientalist ideology.

2. Applied theories and methods

In this chapter, we will detail the theories and methods used in the analysis of Submission. We will look first at the notions of a unified Europe and Eurocentrism, as discussed by Ien Ang. Next, we will look to Edward Said and Meyda Yegenoglu for notions of Orientalism and “othering”. Following will be a brief discussion of the transition of colonial Orientalism to modern Orientalism. We refer to this contemporary Orientalism as Neo-Orientalism. Thereafter we will move to Stuart Hall for a discussion of the theories of cultural identity and representation, as well as for a description of the methods that will be used in our film analysis.

2.1 Defining Europe and Eurocentrism

In order to appropriately analyze Submission within a European context, we must first clarify our choice of terminology. In reference to European society and European culture within this project, we have decided to employ the plural form of the references: I.e. European societies and European cultures. Europe is not a homogeneous society, but rather a geographical continent comprised of individual countries, each with unique (and equally heterogeneous) cultures. We must acknowledge the multiplicity of cultures included within the geographical Europe. At the same time, there is a perceived cultural unity within Europe and Europeans. As discussed in Ian Ang’s²

² Ien Ang studied at the University of Amsterdam where she got her PhD in 1990 in Social and Cultural Sciences, she also holds a BA in Psychology (1977) and her MA (1982) was in the field of Mass Communication. She is Director of
“Eurocentric Reluctance” (1998), there is still the predominant self-view within Europe that claims a unified cultural superiority to the rest of the world. Therefore, we feel the use of 

**societies** and **cultures**, simultaneously acknowledges both the unity and diversity that is implicit within the term Europe.

The European ideology of humanism, rationalism, individual freedom, and progress as emerged during the Enlightenment (first within Europe and then radiating outward towards other countries that now subscribe to similar values: the U.S.A., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.), in conjunction with the arts (and the acceptance of aesthetics from outside of Europe- ancient art, jazz, and world music), allow the image of Europe as the home of “high-culture” to reign throughout the continent (Ang, 1998, pp. 94-95). It is this notion of a cultural hierarchy, in which European culture is located at the top of the hierarchy, leaving cultures outside that of the dominant European powers, ordered along a graduated scale from least developed (those least resembling mainstream Europe) to most developed (those in closest resemblance to mainstream Europe), that shall be referred to as Eurocentrism. The discussion surrounding Eurocentrism is material enough for a project in itself. However, here it stands to define Eurocentrism as the unified mentality prevalent within the varying countries comprising geographical Europe of European cultural superiority.

Ien Ang describes Eurocentrism as not only as a tool for generalizing and constructing those individuals and cultures thought of as outside Europe, but “as a historically sedimented mode of subjectivity: the Eurocentric construction of the world is a defining factor in the European Subject’s sense of self- the paradigmatic European Subject being the bourgeois male.” (Ang, 1998, p. 89) Ang couples this assertion with a historical account of Europe transitioning from a continent of emigration to that of immigration. During the ages of exploration and colonization it was the European bourgeois (which would mean also ‘white’) man traveling out of Europe, exploring and colonizing abroad, engaging in the practice of emigration. These colonizers returned with their experiences, spreading their “knowledge” of lands outside of Europe. Hence the “outside” was brought in, but on the terms of the colonizers. Therefore, Europe had a growing awareness of lands outside Europe, filtering back primarily in the form of “knowledge” (based on the impressions and experiences of those originating in Europe and emigrating elsewhere). Hence, Europe remained more or less homogeneous (a land of “Europeans”) (Ang, 1998, pp. 91-92). Therefore, the European Subject continued to exist as the homogeneous “white” bourgeois male.

With the transition from emigration to immigration, in which individuals from previously colonized countries began to filter into European, the homogeneity of European space began to

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the Institute of Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. She also is among the global leaders in Cultural Studies and her recent works focus among other subjects on media, media audiences, cultural consumption, migration, ethnicity and issues of representation in contemporary cultural institutions.
dwindle. Rather, the once homogeneous space began transforming into one of never before ethnic and cultural diversity (Ang, 1998, p.92). Among other diverse communities, and central to this project, Europe saw the increasing presence of Muslim women. The ‘paradigmatic European Subject’ as white, bourgeois male, witnessed an epochal change in ‘his’ Europe; arguably, one could say, a challenge to the existence of this ‘paradigmatic European Subject’. Therefore, a problem was posed in defining what it meant to be a “European.” Either the previous white bourgeois image had to be abandoned, or the diverse populations immigrating to Europe had to be established as “non-European.”

Therefore, from Ien Ang we gather to access three concepts crucial in our analysis of Submission: 1) a mentality of unified culture within Europe does exist; 2) Eurocentrism is a mentality of cultural hierarchy; 3) post-colonial immigration has challenged the historical image of the European subject as the white, bourgeois male. Having secured these notions, we will now look to a further understanding of the creation of European identity, as it emerges through defining what is not European.

2.2 Orientalism and ‘othering’

We will look to Edward Said and Meyda Yegenoglu for an explanation of the ways in which the dominant power structures use their position as the empowered, to create their own identity through creating divisions and exclusions of people/cultures/communities by labeling them different from European identity. This notion will prove fruitful in our analysis of Submission, as we delve into the image of the European subject that emerges through the depiction of Muslim women in Submission.

In 1979, Edward Said first published his revolutionary book, Orientalism. Within this text, Said introduces the concept of Orientalism as the prevalent European ideology dividing the world into two distinct geographical spheres: the ‘West’ and the ‘East’, also referred to as the Occident and the Orient respectively. Said asserts that this world division is purely imaginary, with no corresponding reality (Said, 1979, p. 50). Rather, this dividing of the world is a tool in which Europe defines itself. By imagining the world in two distinct parts: the ‘us’ and the ‘them’, a binary is created in which the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ become polar opposites. Descriptive categorizations are assigned to the ‘East’ (irrational, superstitious, exotic, etc.). A hierarchical power structure results, as Europe has not only defined the ‘East’, but has also created and recreated the concept of

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Edward William Said was born in 1935 in Jerusalem and died in 2003 in New York. He came from literary theory was a literary critic. He aired the Palestinian views in the US. He spent most of his childhood in Kairo, later he moved to the US, where he studied at Princeton (Bachelor) and Harvard (Master &PhD). He gave lectures in English and comparative literature at the Columbia University and also at Harvard and Yale.
the ‘East’. In positioning itself opposite the “irrational, superstitious, exotic ‘East’”, the ‘West’ emerges as the rational, logical, norm. In other words, the ‘West’/’us’ becomes the standard ‘normal’ and the ‘East’/’them’ becomes outside the normal -the not normal. Therefore, we can understand ‘othering’ to be the creation of self-identity, through the positioning of self as the norm at the top of the hierarchy of power, defining those outside of the self (be that self a culture, gender, country, continent, or any number of created categories) as the exotic ‘other’ (Said, 1979, pp. 5-9).

In Colonial Fantasies; Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism, Meyda Yegenoglu builds upon Said’s notions of Orientalism and ‘othering’, but emphasizes the essentiality of a gendered reading of the terms. Rather than Said’s assertion that gender be relegated to a subdivision of Orientalism, Yegenoglu insists that gender is the center of Orientalist thought. She asserts that it is the white European male who assumes the role of the normative in control of the power structure (i.e. the European Subject), and the female (regardless of race or ethnicity) who becomes the ‘other’. Yegenoglu asserts that the ‘East’ is feminized, and it is around this femininity that Orientalism revolves. Orientalists paint a picture of the Orient as “veiled, seductive, and dangerous”, characteristics also used in ‘othering’ women (Yegenoglu, 1998, pp.39-68).

From these theories we can understand that there is specific need for a European self-identity that is filled by imaging world divisions, and creating a binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this manner the historically dominant European subject (white, male, bourgeois) can enunciate what is not European, by assigning those characteristics to the ‘other’, to ‘them’. Therefore, each static characteristic assigned to Muslim women creates a binary, allowing Europeans to fill the position of the dynamic opposite. Hence, European culture maintains its view of itself at the top of the cultural hierarchy (drawing here upon Ang’s notions of Eurocentrism 1998). In Chapter Four, we will detail the positive European identity that emerges in Submission as specific images of the ‘other’ are assigned to Muslim women.

Notably, Stuart Hall also builds upon the notion of ‘othering’. He points out that one of the dangers of ‘othering’ is not only the external effect in which those outside of the normative group are seen as ‘other’ by the normative group, but that it also has an internal effect on those being ‘othered’. By internal, Hall means that the 'others' are in danger of beginning to see themselves as the ‘other’, while seeing the 'normative' group (the dominant powers) as a position for which the ‘other’ (themselves) should strive to achieve or at least mimic (Hall, 1997, p. 213).

Therefore, considering the current controversies surrounding Muslim women, as mentioned in Chapter One of this project, and Hall’s notions of internalized ‘othering’, it is important to

Meyda Yegenoglu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara. She has also taught in North America and published in Turkish and English on Orientalism in the fields of cultural and women's studies.
acknowledge the risks involved. Through ‘othering’, not only are those outside the Muslim religion encouraged to see veiled women as the 'other’, but also that the veiled women may be at risk of seeing themselves as such. With this point, we need to look further into the changing face of ‘othering’, as it has evolved from its colonial manifestations into contemporary society.

2.3 From Colonialism to Neo-orientalism

Said’s concept of Orientalism, as first explained in his book entitled *Orientalism* (1979), is deeply embedded in colonialism. Said delves deeply into the role of Orientalist thought in justifying and intensifying colonial rule. He introduces from the beginning of the first Chapter of his book, a description of Balfour and Lord Cromer asserting that Egypt must be colonized for Egypt’s own good, as well as for the good of Britain. Yegenoglu (1998) focuses her attention on Orientalism as experienced and manifest in colonialism via sexuality and Muslim women. These are just two examples of authors writing about Orientalism through colonialism.

Much of the academic material discussing Orientalism, including also Stuart Hall, is centered on a discussion of colonialism. This is logical, as Orientalism is an expression of the power balance present in colonialism. Colonization is obviously fraught with Orientalists and Orientalism. However, the age of colonization per se is over (not withstanding the post colonial states of nations or the argument that transnational organizations; multinational companies; American, British, and Danish (and so on) occupation of Iraq, etc. may be the new colonization). Said asserts that Orientalism creates an “imaginative geography”, dividing the world into ‘East’ and ‘West’, assigning societal distinctions and worth based upon these imagined divisions. However, due to advanced transportation, and communication technologies, those places, which at one time seemed so distant and invisible, are now easily accessible. The globe is no longer so easy to separate.

What, then, should we make of today’s society? One in which the traditional idea of colonization no longer exists; and geographical divisions (both literal and imagined) are blurred. Where does Orientalism manifest itself in this new “global village”? It is our assertion that Orientalism is emerging now within national boundaries, aimed not at a distant ‘other’, but at one’s own countrymen. Neo-orientalism emerges –no longer an Orientalism relegated to books or fields of study, nor is it an Orientalism of one nation dominating another (not to deny that these manifestations do still exist). Rather, contemporary European culture claims Eurocentric superiority over the people and communities within Europe that are not the white bourgeois. Now the exotic - the Orient - is next door. Hence, we arrive at *Submission* as a not only ‘othering’ the distant Muslim women of the ‘East’, but as contributing to the ‘othering’ of individuals residing within Europe. In
essence, Submission serves to fuel the controversies surrounding Muslim women in contemporary society, as referred to in Chapter One. At this point, we must also consider the dangers of internal ‘othering’, as described by Stuart Hall. With messages of the female Muslim ‘other’ manifest in contemporary European societies, Muslim women in Europe are at risk of internalizing the messages.

Having now arrived at a point in which we understand first that within Europe, there is a prevailing sense of residing at the top of a cultural hierarchy; secondly, that the face of a homogeneous Europe has been challenged, as immigration has resulted in a decidedly heterogeneous European population; historically, European powers have asserted their own identity by creating cultural divisions and defining the ‘other’; and finally, in contemporary society, the ‘other’ not resides among the dominant European powers. Now we need to return to Stuart Hall in order to better understand how and why cultural identities are represented, as well as the dangerous implications in (mis)representing cultural identities.

2.4 Stuart Hall’s Notions of Identity and Representation

This project is centered on notions of the creation and representation of cultural identity. Stuart Hall\(^5\) discusses two ways of conceiving cultural identity in his essay, *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* (1997). It is around Hall’s notions of the formations and representations of these identities that we have begun to understand the cultural representations in and surrounding the film Submission. This segment will be a discussion of and meditation on Hall’s theories.

We will briefly detail the first of Hall’s notions of cultural identity in order to clearly depict the angles from which identity and cultural representation may emerge. Hall refers to this first notion as *imagined rediscovery*. It is the creation of one collective 'self', based on central characteristics of culture, history, and ancestry. This oneness underlies and presupposes the differences and divisions of the people located within the 'one self'. It is the essence of the people, as created by the people, this form of cultural identity formation seeks to capture (Hall, 1997, p. 211).

Hall speaks specifically of the colonized history of the Caribbean. He asserts that the creation of this *imagined* unity functions to empower the communities of people who have hitherto been marginalized by colonial powers. Speaking from his personal experience, having been born to

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\(^5\) **Stuart Hall** was born in 1932 in Kingston, Jamaica. He is a British sociologist and is known as one of the founders of Cultural Studies. Notably, he formulated a new theory of communication, which says that meaning is produced with coding and decoding. He moved to England in 1951 where he in 1968 became headmaster of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. From 1987 to 1997 he was Professor for sociology at the Open University.
a lower-middle-class Jamaican family, and spent his adult life as a member of the black diaspora in England, Hall describes the ways in which the Caribbean people have invested in researching and retelling the past. He asserts that through this imagined coherence of their varied pasts, the people of the Caribbean have been able to regain their identity in spite of the forced transportation, enslavement, and separation. Hall’s first representation of cultural identity is one founded as a static and unifying form of cultural identity created as an assertion of liberation and cultural rehabilitation (ibid, pp.211-212).

We shall look more closely at Hall’s second discussion, focusing on cultural identity as dynamic -in a continual state of evolution, never static, and never depicted accurately in its present form. Hall says that like all meaning, the play of significance makes any attempt at describing reality (be it cultural or another), out dated. The moment words are formed to articulate the essence of culture or cultural identity, they have already become (at best) a representation of what once was. Therefore, in speaking of cultural identity, it is crucial to acknowledge that the culture (and meaning of the words about the culture), is no longer positioned in the same way that it was at the time the ideas were being formed in the mind of the articulator.

Here lies a danger in cultural representation, in the absolute necessity of representing culture as dynamic and changing. Cultural identity is not fixed, but is ever changing. Without such recognition, people and cultures are misrepresented. In understanding representations of cultural identity, one must always consider the position from which the assertion is made. Who is the speaker? From what social class does he or she emerge? What is going on in the speaker’s community at the time the words are spoken? These questions and many more, all aimed at understanding the position of the person who is commenting on the specified cultural identity, are essential in making sense of the enunciations (ibid, pp. 213-215).

In Submission, the “speaker” is the screenwriter, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. By “speaker” we mean that it is her ideas that are being communicated through this film. Therefore, to understand the cultural representation embedded in this film, we must take a closer look at the positioning of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Who is she? What are her experiences? Her motivations? Her agenda? From where and what is she writing? But before we begin contextualizing Hirsi Ali and Submission, we need to look once more to the work of Stuart Hall, as it is his methods that we will use in our contextualization and subsequent analysis of Submission.
2.5 Stuart Hall’s Notions of Stereotyping

In “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” (2003), Stuart Hall again addresses the issue of cultural representation, but this time, in terms of stereotypes. Hall examines a variety of forms of media, looking for the ‘myths’ underlying the messages being communicated to their viewing audiences. By myth, Hall is referring to the silent ideas being expressed through particular media representation, the implied meaning behind the surface image/voice. Hall contends that it is within these myths that stereotypes lie. “Stereotypes get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.” (Hall, 2003, p.258) It is from this notion of stereotypes that we will dissect the imposed cultural representation of Muslim women embedded in Submission. First, we will look at a specific example of Hall’s use of his notion of stereotypes in dissecting cultural representation within film.

Hall instructs us to look at characteristics or commonalities presented within the particular media being examined. Stereotypes emerge as characters within a specific ‘group’ are described in the same or similar, static manner. Among others, Hall looks at the representation of black people within American cinema. He references Donald Bogle’s study Toms, Coons, Mulattos, Mammites, and Bucks (1973) in identifying the prevailing stereotypical images of black people. Bogle asserts that cinema has reduced the black population to five static images:

1) Toms – the Good Negroes, always ‘chased harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved and insulted, they keep the faith, ne’er turn against their whitemasses, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless and oh-so-kind.’

2) Coons – the eye-popping piccanninnines, the slapstick entertainers, the spinners of tall tales, the ‘no-count “niggers”, those unreliable crazy lazy subhuman creatures, good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language.’

3) The Tragic Mulatto – the mixed-race woman, cruelly caught between ‘a divided racial inheritance’, beautiful, sexually attractive and often exotic, the prototype of the smouldering, sexy heroine, whose partly white blood makes her ‘acceptable’, even attractive, to white men, but whose indelible ‘stain’ of black blood condemns her to a tragic conclusion.

4) Mammites – the prototypical house-servants, usually big, fat, bossy, and cantankerous, with their good-for-nothing husbands sleeping it off at home, their utter devotion to the white household and their unquestioned subservience in their workplaces.

5) Bad Bucks – physically big, strong, no-good, violent, renegades, ‘on a rampage and full of black rage’, ‘over-sexed and savage, violent and frenzied as the lust for white flesh. (Bogle in Hall, 2003, p.251)

Hall goes on to say, “There are many traces of this in contemporary images of black youth – for example, the ‘mugger, the ‘drug-baron’, the ‘yardie’, the gangsta-rap singer, the ‘niggas with
attitude’ bands and more generally black urban youth ‘on the rampage’ (Hall, 2003, p. 251).

It is our intention within this project to use similar methods in uncovering the myths underlying Submission; to illustrate how the film reduces Muslim women to a few, stagnated essentials; and to make clear the stereotypes marring the representation of Muslim women in the intended European audience. Whereas Hall and Bogle look at the varying static portrayals of black personalities (the five ‘identities’ quoted above), we assert that Submission depicts little to no variance within the depiction of Muslim women’s identity. Therefore, we will look at the characteristics that are ascribed to Muslim women as one static group. As Hall prescribes, we will look at the ways in which ‘difference’ (or as discussed previously, ‘othering’) is embedded within the film to produce a series of stereotypical traits supposedly common to Muslim women.

Additionally, Hall discusses the notion of ‘authentication’ as a technique for encouraging the acceptance of the stereotypes enunciated within the media representation. The idea is that viewing audiences are readily convinced of the authenticity of a film’s portrayal of any culture/people/group/etc. when practices that are ‘authentic’, are included. Hall mentions specifically films starring Paul Robeson, popular in the 30s in the United States and Britain. Robeson did extensive research into African culture, in an attempt to portray a more realistic and authentic vision of Africa. Viewing audiences readily accepted his films as showing the ‘real Africa’, attributing the authenticity to the presences of traditional African dance, art, video footage, etc., and the fact that he was an actor of African origin. No history or context for the ‘authentic’ pieces of African culture, were provided. Rather, they stood on their own, serving to affirm the myths forged by the film. Forgotten, was the fact that the films were made in essentially American and British spaces, written and performed by American and British actors and actresses. Therefore, the audiences of these films were convinced of the films’ authenticity, when actually the reality (the history, religious significance, underlying meaning, etc.) of the authentic dances/arts/cultural depictions was sorely neglected.

Finally, we will employ Hall’s theories of ‘naturalization’ and ‘fixed difference’. Naturalization refers to the practice of solidifying specific characteristics as innate qualities within a culture/race/religion/etc. Hall works with naturalization in terms of white slave owners in relation to their slaves. If the differences between black and white people were cultural, they would have to be seen as subject to change. However, if the differences were seen as natural, they were permanent and beyond ‘reform’. It is the latter vision of difference that prevailed. Hall specifies that blacks were considered naturally lazy, stubborn, and primitive. White people, on the other hand, were hardworking, rational, and cultured. White people did not question the validity or essentiality of these characteristics. They simply were; these qualities were fixed. The differences between the
races were ‘fixed differences’, attributable to nature.

We assert that Submission fixes the characteristics of Muslim women as such: due to the ‘nature of the religion’, Muslim women can never be more than a few fixed qualities. The only way for Muslim women to escape this reality is to leave the religion. The nature of Islam is fixed as oppressive. Therefore, the differences between Muslim and non-Muslim women are fixed: Muslim women are oppressed, submissive, victims, etc., while non-Muslim women are free of these qualities. We will detail this notion of naturalization and fixed differences with examples from the text in Chapter Four.

But before we arrive at our analysis of the text, we must contextualize the film. As Stuart Hall instruct, in order to understand the underlying messages and stereotypes of a film, it is important to consider the circumstances under which the film emerges. Therefore, we will first look at the voice behind Submission, the screenwriter, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Following this contextualization of the author, we will place the setting from which the film emerged.

3. Contextualization of Submission: Part One

In this chapter, we contextualize, or place, Submission. First, we will look at the life and influences of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the writer and voice of Submission. This will be following by an analysis of the time, place, and atmosphere within which Submission was released. As asserted by Stuart Hall, such a placement is essential in understanding the implications and intentions of a media form.

3.1 Placing Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born on the 13th November 1969 in Mogadishu, Somalia. Her father, a very religious man, opposed and fought against the Somalia regime of Mohamed Siad Barre in the Somali Salvation Democratic Front. After a period of imprisonment for her father, the family (consisting of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, her father, four women (all wives of the father), four sisters and one brother) fled first to Saudi Arabia, later to Ethiopia and finally to Kenya. In Kenya, Hirsi Ali went to a girl's school where she received an orthodox-Islamic education (de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2005, p.326, The Guardian). During that time she wore the hijab as a symbol of her sympathy for Iran (for a picture and description of the hijab, see Appendix A), which was at that time occupied by the secular Iraq. During her childhood, Hirsi Ali, suffered two traumatic episodes of violence, e.g. at the age of five she was subjected to female circumcision without any anesthesia (The Guardian).
(Her father was an opponent of circumcision, but her grandmother thought that it was part of their culture and without letting the father know, arranged the circumcision. She believed that Hirsi Ali otherwise would not be able to get married.) She also suffered a broken skull at the hand of her Koran teacher (The Guardian). At the age of 22, her family arranged for her to marry a distant cousin from Canada, whom she did not know. However, on her way to meet her future husband, she escaped to the Netherlands via Germany, where she was granted political asylum. Nevertheless she was married to her cousin by clan members, who gathered during her absence and signed the necessary papers (The Guardian). In 1997, she was allotted Dutch citizenship. After her graduation in Political Science at the University of Leiden, she started working as an interpreter in asylum houses, abortion clinics and women's crisis centers. She also became a fellow of the Wiardi Beckman Foundation, which is a scientific institute linked to the social democratic party Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) of which she also became a member (de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2005, p.326).

Since 2002 she became more prominent in the media for her quite often very polemic critique of Islam. She changed her political party to the right-liberal Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), for which she worked as a member of parliament from January 2003 to June 2006, and where she was assigned the portfolio for the integration of non-western migrants, emancipation issues and development aid. She later changed political party affiliations, as she thought that she was not sufficiently backed within the PvdA concerning her critique on negative consequences deriving from certain socio-cultural aspects of immigrants. She also admitted that the prospect she was given from the VVD to realize her ideas in parliament were a driving force for her change in political stance. At that time she also began regarding herself as an atheist (The Guardian). After criticizing Islam in her books and in many interviews, she received threats on her life. Below is an except from one interview resulting in death treats.

*Measured by our western standards, Muhammad is a perverted man. A Tyrant. He is against freedom of expression. If you don't do as he says, you will be punished. It makes me think of all those megalomaniacs in the middle-east: Bin Laden, Khomeini, Saddam. Do you think it strange that there is a Saddam Hussein? Muhammad is his example. Muhammad is an example for all Muslim men. Do you think it strange that so many Muslim men are violent?* (Hirsi Ali In Trouw (Translation), 25.01.03)

In her new party she claims that the integration policy concerning immigrants to the Netherlands have completely failed and that instead of integration happening, ghettos have originated. She demands that immigrants, who do not want to integrate themselves, should leave the county. In her opinion integration equals assimilation, i.e. immigrants should leave their cultural roots and traditions behind. She defines integration with a list of things that immigrants should not
be given the rights to do (The Guardian). She emphatically asserts that Muslim women should not be allowed to veil. Additionally, she thinks that in school Muslim girls should not be allowed to avoid going to physical education (and there being forced to change clothes and to unveil) out of religious reasons (Hirsi Ali, 2005 (b)). In this context she criticises multiculturalism. In her opinion there is a Clash of Civilisations going on not only in the large scale Samuel Huntington has described it in his book with the same name (1996). According to that book the future national and international conflicts will be based on cultural differences. Huntington also particularly predicted violent conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims. Hirsi Ali shares this opinion and expands it also into the scale of individual families meaning that there will be conflicts in families in which the members have different cultural backgrounds. With that she makes an allusion to her own circumcision during childhood. This procedure was performed without her father, -who, as mentioned, had studied in ‘western’ countries,- condoning it. So in her own family the African tradition of circumcision clashed with her father's ‘western’ attitude (The Guardian). Hirsi Ali views circumcision as a product of specific tribal practice combined with a broader cult of virginity, which she sees the Koran responsible for (The Guardian). She wants to introduce some kind of monitoring system concerning physical inviolability of young women in countries with a tradition of circumcision (Hirsi Ali, 2005 (a), p.162).

Besides criticising Islam as a backward religion that does not respect women equally to men, the stance that brought about her extreme popularity with some and vehement rejection of by others, she advocates the freedom of speech vehemently. In a lecture in Berlin in February 2006 she said, “I am here to defend the right to offend”. On this particular occasion, she was commenting on the Cartoon Crisis, a situation in which the right to freedom of speech was pitted against religious respect, which erupted after the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten printed caricatures of Mohammed that were considered offensive by some within the Muslim community (Broder, 2006).

The film Submission, for which she wrote the script, can also be seen in the context of her demand for the right to free speech. In the eyes of Mohammed Bouyeri, a so called “radical Islamic” young Moroccan-Dutch man, the film was one provocation too many. On November 2, 2004, he murdered the director of the film, Theo van Gogh, in Amsterdam. A letter pinned to van Gough's body with a knife provided a motivation for the murder, as well as a lengthy threat to Hirsi Ali. As a result, media hype surrounding Hirsi Ali and Submission reached an unprecedented peak (The Guardian).

Since the release of Submission she has been awarded different prizes throughout Europe and North America. Among others she has received the Freedom Prize from Denmark’s Venstre party in November 2004; in March 2005, she was awarded the Tolerance Prize from the Comunidad
of Madrid; Time Magazine included her in the list of the 100 most influential persons in the world in April 2005; in August 2005, she was awarded the Democracy Prize from the Folkepartiet Liberalerna, i.e. the Sweden liberal party; she was voted as the European of the Year 2006 from the editors of Reader's Digest magazine; the American Jewish Committee gave her the Moral Courage Award; and quite recently the Norwegian member of parliament, Christian Tybring-Gjedde, nominated her as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize of 2006. It is quite obvious from this very distinguished list of awards and recognition, that throughout the dominant powers within Europe and North America, Hirsi Ali is placed in high regards.

However, she has been under close scrutiny from the Dutch government. In May 2006 she again landed on center-stage in the media, but this time due to controversy surrounding her Dutch citizenship. It is not known why and on what grounds she received political asylum in the Netherlands. As before she arrived in Holland, she was in Germany, and according to common practice, she should have applied for asylum there. Also she had already been residing, with refugee status, in Kenya for eleven years, though she claimed to have come directly from Somalia. At the time she applied for asylum, Somalia was in the midst of a serious famine and civil war. Somali refugees were routinely grated political asylum (Polke-Majewski, 2006). Therefore, it was assumed by some that she manipulated her way into her Dutch citizenship. Additionally, it also became known that she applied for asylum using the name of her mother, rather than her own, and also lied about her age (Simons, 2006). She did this in an attempt to protect her family, she said. On top of these controversies, some people also began doubting that she was going to be forced into a marriage: "She wasn't forced into a marriage. She had an amicable relationship with her husband, as well as with the rest of her family. It was not true that she had to hide from her family for years" (Klausen, 2005). Therefore, in the spring of 2006, the legality of her Dutch citizenship was formally questioned. Despite the evidence against her, on June 27, 2006, she was granted the right to retain her Dutch citizenship.

She decided, however, to give up her job as an MP and to leave the Netherlands. Instead she wanted to move to the U.S. where she is expected to work on her new book *Shortcut to Enlightenment* while working for the centre-right think tank, American Enterprise Institute. Currently Hirsi Ali is also working on the sequel to *Submission: Part One*, which is said to deal with homosexuals in Islam, and to be titled *Submission: Part Two* (Broder, 2006).
3.2 Placing Submission: Part One

In addition to understanding the positioning of the author, it is also important to understand from where and from what circumstances the film has emerged. *Submission* first aired in 2004 on Dutch television. This was three years after the 9/11 World Trade Center, and thus, three years into the War on Terror. The United States, Britain, and Denmark, among other Europe powers, had successfully overthrown the Iraqi government in an unsuccessful attempt to locate weapons of mass destruction, a preemptive strategy aimed to thwart would be terrorist attacks. The hunt for Osama Bin Laden and his ever-plotting terrorist comrades continued in Afghanistan, locating more European and American troops throughout the rugged Afghan terrain. The Madrid train station bombing was a fresh wound. Airport security was heightened; soon to be travelers waited in long lines to be screened alongside side fellow fliers, in hopes of not becoming victim to subsequent terrorist attacks. In essence, a prevailing fear of additional terror attacks loomed largely in people’s minds. Fear of the fanatical Muslim reigned.

At the time of the film’s release in Holland, a neo-liberal political movement had emerged, encouraging people to abandon previously embraced “political correctness”, and say what they “really feel”. Marc de Leeuw and Sonja Van Wichelenson describe the atmosphere:

> It [also] created a space for people to vent their fear and anxiety of the cultural ‘other’ in a public domain that would now, not accuse them of racism or xenophobia. At last they were given the space to openly express the view that integration had failed and that “our” tolerance towards immigrants had reached an irreparable damage to Dutch economic and social life. (2005, p. 334)

In essence, *Submission* emerged at a time when people were ready to see Islam as the definitive enemy. Born in this time of fear and suspicion of all things Muslim, *Submission* was situated for success in mainstream European thought.

Having looked at the notions surrounding ‘othering’ and the pursuit of securing the historically white male bourgeois European culture and identity as the height of civility; as we now understand that Orientalist thought has moved into the realm of Neo-orientalism, as dominant European powers, ‘other’ fellow European countrymen; with Stuart Hall’s notions of cultural identity, representation, and stereotypes instructing us on how and what to look for in understanding underlying myths; and knowing the “places” from which *Submission* has emerged; we are ready to move into our analysis of the film. We will begin with a detailed summary.
4. Analysis of Submission: Part One

In this segment we detail the results of our analysis. First, we provide a summary of the film, including the narrative plot, as well as the visual images and sound effects. We then move into a discussion of the subtleties that target an audience other than Muslim women. Finally, we arrive at a description of the six stereotypes dominating the cultural representation within Submission. In our descriptions, we also connect the images with the corresponding theories, as detailed in Chapter Two.

4.1 Submission: Part One Summary

The film opens with a distant view into a shadowy room. The outline of a woman dressed in a niqab (for a picture and description of the niqab, see Appendix A) blends in with her dark surroundings. The walls and floors are black, creating a nearly seamless transition from wall to woman to floor. The woman is only made visible by a colorful backdrop distinguishing her person from the dark, uniformity of the rest of the room. Red, yellow, and pale blue, the pattern is one common to tapestries originating in Iran. Arabic calligraphy appears in the center of the wall design. Also disturbing the blackness of the room, is a floor rug of muted reds and yellows, boasting the design of rugs emerging from Iran, and commonly known as Persian rugs. Coupling these visual elements with hollow flute music reminiscent of a muezzin call to prayer, the open scene establishes a solid placing as an Islamic space.

The camera holds steady on the opening scene, then jumps to a close up of the Arabic calligraphy in the center of the wall design, panning first along the calligraphy, then slowly drawing down to scan the veiled woman. The first glimpse of a human presence beneath the veil comes as the camera arrives at the veiled woman’s feet. This is also the point in which the first movement takes place. The feet are shown moving forward towards the rug; at this point the woman places a sajada, the traditional Muslim prayer rug, in the center of the Persian rug lying across the blackness of the floor. The camera pans back to show the image of the kneeling woman, only her hands distinguishable from the black of her veil.

At this point the woman ceremoniously stands, raising both hands to either side of her head, exposing her bare body beneath the veil that for the first time, appears translucent. She lowers her hands and begins chanting in Arabic. The words of her prayer are subtitled in Dutch (in the original version. Subsequent showings across Europe have translated the prayer into languages suitable for the intended viewing audience.). The camera zooms in for a close-up, showing only the triangular slit in the niqab, revealing only the woman’s eyes. This is set against a blurry backdrop of the
Arabic calligraphy in the wall design. As the chant continues, the camera scans down the length of the woman’s veil, at some points allowing the blackness of the veil to completely engulf the visual screen. As the camera begins moving back up the woman’s body, it becomes apparent once again that the niqab is actually translucent, revealing the woman’s naked body under the veil. The woman’s hands are folded formally in front of her stomach, and the image of a second veiled woman appears in the shadows to the left of the chanting woman. The camera does not focus in on this second woman, but quickly returns to the first woman, zooming in for an abdominal close-up, showing the woman’s torso has been tattooed with Arabic calligraphy. There is no translation provided for the tattooed words.

The chant ends, the camera zooms to the eyes of the first woman, providing a moment of seeming eye contact between the audience and the woman, a racy percussion rhythm joins the hollow flute, and the woman begins narrating in English, the first of a series of four monologues. She opens the monologue describing the violent sentence mandated by Allah for all who are guilty of fornication. The camera jumps rapidly from the eyes of the narrator, to a wider view of her nakedness beneath the veil, to the figure of a third woman laying limply on the floor, covered in angry whip wounds and Arabic calligraphy, and draped with a wrinkled, stained sheet. The sound of a cracking whip joins the hollow flute and rapid percussion.

Suddenly, the percussion and the whip go silent, the camera stops the rapid jumping from scene to scene, and a narration of a young woman falling in love begins. She tells of a romance blooming in secret at the “souk”, the local market, and of the happiness that could not be contained. The community notices and begins to talk disparagingly, condemning the romance. Rather than forego the relationship, the young couple decides to be together and “trust in Allah’s mercy.” The narrator describes a love of affection, respect, and trust. The narrator laughs self consciously as she questions how Allah could disapprove of such a love, and the first monologue comes to an abrupt end, leaving the audience with the impression that Allah did, in fact, disapprove of the young couple’s love.

The percussion then returns, and the camera jumps to a blurry image of a woman clad in a wedding dress, her bare back tattooed with Arabic calligraphy similar to that seen on the narrator’s body beneath the translucent veil, as well as on the mangled flesh of the woman lying on the floor. This third figure is shrouded in darkness so she is visible only from her shoulders to her lower back. The second monologue details a young woman forced by her father into marriage at the age of 16. Her father comes to her one day in the kitchen and informs her of her fate. The camera returns to the triangular gap revealing the narrators eyes, with a blurry image of the second woman, standing still, silent, and veiled in the background. As the narrator begins to tell of unwanted sex forced upon
her by her new husband, the image of the second woman comes into crisp focus. Like the narrator, there is only a small slit in this woman’s niqab, but unlike the narrator, this woman is positioned so that her eyes remain shadowed beyond visibility. The only visible aspects of this woman are her niqab and a small portion of her forehead and nose. She is standing completely still, and in the absence of any sign of life, she resembles an object more than a human being. The narrator continues in describing her repulsion with her husband, right down to being repulsed by the smell of even his freshly cleaned body as he approaches her “in her marital home”. The camera jumps to a close-up of the intricate beading on the white wedding dress. The monologue returns to the issue of forced sex, enunciating the woman’s subservience to her husband as an effort to please Allah. She talks about her “uncleanliness” in Allah’s eyes during her periods of menstruation, detailing how once women are “clean” Allah condones men approaching them in “any manner, time, or place” (The implication here is that this ‘approach’ is of a sexual nature). The camera begins a rapid succession of angles, moving between the eyes of the narrator and the trembling back of the tattooed bride. The music then slows, and the camera moves to the beaten woman lying on the floor, panning slowly up her body, revealing more tattooed Arabic calligraphy and holding steady on her bruised and battered face. The lighting illuminates her swollen lips and cheeks, but creates shadows that conceal her eyes. The second monologue ends here.

The third monologue commences with the narrator again praying to Allah, detailing the strength of her jealous husband as he beats her repeatedly. The rapid cracking of a whip and percussion rhythm returns and the camera jumps from one angle to another, viewing the beaten woman lying on the floor. She is seen in a variety of limp and motionless positions, her only movement being an almost dying twitch, all the while surrounded by shadowy darkness. As the camera scans her gruesome bruises, the narrator speaks of submitting to Allah. She tells of her gratitude and obedience to her husband, due to his support of her “by his means”, and describes him as her maintainer and protector. Muezzin cries echo in the background, and the third monologue comes to an end.

The final monologue is of a young woman detailing how she devoutly follows Allah’s will: she looks downward, guards her modesty, keeps herself covered, and does not leave the house unless absolutely necessary and condoned by her father. She admits to “sinning” sometimes, which she describes as fantasizing about feeling the wind and the sun and daydreaming of traveling the world. She then goes on to say that of course she will never do these things, as she understands the importance of “guarding her modesty” to please Allah. Her story of guarded modesty turns as she reveals that her uncle is raping her repeatedly, in her home. The camera scans down the second woman, from her shadowed eyes, down her body, stopping at her gloved hands crossed in front of
her stomach. She unclasps and drops them to her side, revealing white Arabic calligraphy on her black niqab, and a slightly protruding abdomen. The narrator continues telling the story of rape and her attempts at avoiding it, all the while giggling an a small, self-conscious manner. She tells of asking her mother for help. Her mother defers to the father for help, but he accuses the two women of “question his brother’s honor” and orders them not to speak of such things again. The narrator details feelings of pain, guilt, loneliness, incapacity, abandonment, and shame. The self-conscious laugh turns to a near cry, as she reveals that she is pregnant, and that her uncle has left as a result. The muezzin cry returns, accompanied by the slashing of a whip. The monologue of the young devout woman ends with her enunciating her confusion. Having always been faithful and submissive to Allah, she is left with no help. Rather, she longs for death. An overhead camera looks down on the narrator, who looks up, once again establishing eye contact with the audience. The room is all dark and shadowed, save the narrator’s eyes, her breasts beneath her veil, a small ruffle from the wedding dress, and the Persian rug.

4.2 Establishing an Audience; Excluding Muslim Women

Having now supplemented our theories and methodology with a detailing of the text at hand, we are now positioned to employ our theories and methods. We will first look at aspects of the film that point towards it’s positioning to cater to an audience that does not include Muslim women. In doing so, we will establish that Submission is an imposed cultural representation, rather than an imagined rediscovery.

In this segment, we will establish that Submission is not a film designed about Muslim women’s identity for Muslim women; but rather, it is designed to appeal to an audience other than Muslim women, namely the dominant powers within European societies. By considering the portrayal of Muslim women’s cultural identity within the film, using Stuart Hall’s notion of imagined recovery; coupled with the languages employed within the film and the use of “authentic” symbols taken out of Islam, we assert that Submission is an imposed representation of Muslim women, rather than a representation of self by Muslim women. Hirsi Ali has embraced a Eurocentric mentality, and is speaking from a position that depicts Muslim women as ‘other’. While this does put Muslim women in jeopardy of seeing themselves as the ‘other’ (as Stuart Hall points out in his discussion of internal ‘othering’), the primary target/purpose is to further a stereotypical view of Muslim women within dominant European societies.

In our discussion of Stuart Hall’s first notion of cultural identity, we establish that imagined rediscovery is a type of representation that creates one collective 'self'. Within this form of representation, members imagine a unity and sameness based on shared culture, history, and
ancestry, despite diversity among the members. Hall asserts that this is a form of liberation and empowerment created by ‘a people’ for them selves. While Submission does portray Muslim women as one collective self (as we will depict in a subsequent portion of this text), the portrayal is not a liberating one, but rather one of victimization (a point which will also be discussed at length in a the stereotyping segment of this text). Therefore, our first point in establishing Submission as targeting an audience excluding Muslim women, is that it depicts Muslim women as uniform and static, without empowering or liberating them. Therefore, it is not seeking a female Muslim audience, as it is a static reduction of Muslim women’s individuality, rather than an imagined rediscovery. Hence, it stands to reason that his film is targeting an audience that excludes Muslim women.

Submission is a cultural representation of Muslim women, aimed at instilling a specific, static image of Muslim women within the minds of individuals who do not self identify with Muslim women. By considering the stagnant and oppressed images portrayed of Muslim women, in conjunction with English being the primary language of the film, it is apparent that Hirsi Ali did not write this film as a liberating imagined rediscovery, but rather as an indictment of Islam and the position of women within the religion. In doing so, she has created a film that reduces the women within an entire major world religion to one static (mis)representation.

Our second point in establishing Submission’s target audience, centers around the use (and omission) of Arabic and English language within the film. Arabic is the original language of the Koran, and is widely spoken among devout Muslim communities throughout the world. The author of the film, Hirsi Ali, is fluent in written and spoken Arabic, as she was educated in an orthodox Islamic school as a child. Therefore, it is logical that if Ali intended to make a film for Muslim women, she would do so in the language most common to herself and the greatest number of Muslim women. This language would, of course, be Arabic. Why then, is it written predominantly in English?

Granted, the opening prayer is in Arabic. However, subtitles are provided. The film was first released in the Netherlands, therefore, the original version provides Dutch subtitles for this opening recitation. As it was released in other countries, the subtitles were adjusted to fit the needs of the predominant viewing audience, i.e. in Denmark it was released with Danish subtitles. However, except for this prayer (heard again briefly in the last seconds of the film), the narrator speaks exclusively in English. Granted, many Muslim women do speak English, but if communicating about the oppressive qualities of a religion for people within that religion, it is most logical to communicate in the primary language used in the religious practice, and therefore reaching the largest number of individuals engaged in this particular religion. However, the text of this film is
primarily in English. This language factor is indicative of Ali’s disregard for communicating with the majority of Muslim women around the world through this film. Rather, she is aiming at an audience outside of the Arabic speaking population.

One might point out that Arabic calligraphy plays a large role in the film, for which no subtitles or translations are provided. However, it is clear that understanding the actual, literal meaning of these words is insignificant in the greater intentions of the film. Rather it is the settings in which these words appear, that we must consider. The calligraphy appears on the body of the battered, lifeless woman lying in the floor; across the shoulder blades and back of the silently sobbing bride; upon the niqab of the stoic woman consumed by shadows; and upon the exposed body of the narrator. The audience requires no language to see the pain and torment experienced by these women in this film, each of whom bare this Arabic writing upon their person. Each time the narration details pain, violence, or victimization, the camera angles in to show the Arabic calligraphy marring the flesh and attire of these women. Therefore, the Arabic calligraphy is used for dramatic symbolic effect, connecting pain and torment with the language of the Koran. It is not used for communication with or to a wider Arabic-speaking population, but rather about this population.

Obviously, in order for a film, or any form of media for that matter, to establish and influence an audience, there has to be some elements that make the film seem ‘trustworthy’. By trustworthy, we mean that the audience believes that the film is communicating a true representation. How is it that Submission goes about establishing a trustworthy rapport with its non-Muslim audience? What makes the film appear to be an adequate description of the cultural identity of Muslim women?

In beginning to answer this question, we look to Stuart Hall’s notion of ‘authenticity’ (Hall, 2003, pp.254-256). As described in a previous discussion of Stuart Hall’s theories and methods, one technique used by filmmakers to establish an air of authenticity and secure stereotypes, is to include glimpses of authentic cultural aspects. This technique is readily employed in the creation of Submission.

The opening scene of Submission immediately conjures up notions of authenticity, as the stage is set depicting a woman dressed in a niqab. She is standing in front of a wall decoration, which bares a striking resemblance to designs used in tapestries originating in Iran, a nation traditionally and historically associated with the Muslim faith. She is standing upon a rug, which is also one of a design common to ‘Persian rugs,’ a commodity also closely associated with Muslim countries (specifically Iran), and places an additional small Muslim prayer rug in the center of the larger Persian rug. Accompanying the visual elements, a hollow flute plays a continuous melody

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that is reminiscent of the muezzin call to prayer, a sound used in beckoning Muslims to commence their time of prayer.

As the film continues, the audience is witness to numerous samplings of seemingly ‘authentic’ aspects of Muslim culture. Notably, the first words enunciated are in Arabic, as the narrator chants a ritual prayer. The words are translated at the bottom of the screen, affording the audience a window into the words of an ‘authentic’ Muslim prayer. Additionally, Arabic calligraphy is shown throughout the film’s running time, on the wall and on the bodies and clothes of the actresses. Though often shrouded in shadows, what can be seen of the four actresses reveals them all to be of a relatively dark complexion, i.e. darker in coloring than the historical vision of the white European bourgeois vision of self as discussed in a previous section of this project. They easily can be typed as ‘not European’, and therefore, authentically as the ‘other’, a position in which Muslim women are often relegated to in European societies (Yegenoglu, 1998). Hence, Submission establishes an air of authenticity, seducing the audience into accepting its underlying myth—a stereotypical representation of Muslim women.

Additionally, Hirsi Ali is herself an element of authenticity. As discussed previously, she was once a “veiled Muslim woman”. She was born and raised in a Muslim home. She experienced some very traumatic events in her childhood and young adult life, which she attributes to a strict Muslim environment and which she describes vividly for audiences of interested and appalled Europeans. She speaks out in condemnation of the Muslim religion, saying women are forced into submission and physical abuse. Hirsi Ali’s voice is powerful as she is depicted as ‘authentic’. She knows Islam and knows Muslim women because of her personal history. Her painful history is portrayed as one common to all Muslim women.

There are other factors assisting Hirsi Ali’s in positioning her voice for a successful delivery within the European communities. As discussed in ““Go Wake Up!” Submission, Hirsi Ali, and the “War on Terror””, Marc de Leeuw and Sonja van Wichelson (2005) assert that Hirsi Ali emerged as a popular political figure, at a time when the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ were pitted against each other. Multiple high profile attacks were attributed to Muslim terrorists, purportedly attacking the “west” in the name of their deity, Allah. Additionally, the “west” saw its value for Freedom of Speech being vehemently protested as communities of Muslim believers challenged the right of the “west” to exercise freedom of speech at the expense of the sacred religious beliefs of others. Hirsi Ali’s message was heard at a time when Europeans were looking for validation of and permission to voice their distain for Islam. Hirsi Ali provided that permission. The fact that she was essentially a Muslim woman (she had a history of being a Muslim woman, though by this point she had rejected the religion and claimed her position as an atheist), denouncing the practices of Islam as abhorrent
and despicable, gave permission for Europeans to voice similar sentiments. Without Hirsi Ali paving the way for these assertions, such comments would have been seen as bigotry. However, embracing and uplifting Hirsi Ali gave permission to openly echo her criticisms. Hence, she was readily accepted as an authentic voice adequately representing Islam, and in doing so, Muslim women. Her acceptance is echoed in the extensive list of awards she has received as detailed in Chapter Three. With such a warm reception within Europe (and also North America, as her awards list details), her words were positioned to fall on a willing audience.

From our reflection on Submission’s intended audience, we will now move to the stereotypes manifest in the film. We will detail images from the film that support six different static characteristics imposed upon Muslim women. We will also illustrate how each individual stereotype plays into a number of the theories of cultural representation and identity formation, as described in Chapter Three. Many of the images within the film serve to support a number of stereotypes simultaneously. Rather than analyzing the stereotypes implicit in each image, we have chosen to organize our analysis by stereotype, and support the stereotypes with a variety of images. Therefore, across the six stereotypes, there will be a repetition of image descriptions. As the film is only 11 minutes long, each image is packed with stereotypical implications.

### 4.3 Muslim Women as Submissive, Obedient, and Silent

One of the stereotypes in all four stories told in Submission is that Muslim women are submissive to men, to Allah and, accompanying that, to the rules in their Islamic cultures. They are also represented as obedient and silent. Within that representation they always do what they are told to do and never violate the rules men, society or tradition give them. In doing so, often against their own will, they are portrayed as never rebelling and always being silent. In this segment, we will look at the images used in the creation this static view of Muslim women. Additionally, we will illustrate how the use of these images embodies the notions of the naturalization of fixed differences, ‘othering’ through binary opposition, Orientalism, and Eurocentrism.

In the first story about the young girl, who fell in love with a man she meets in the market, she gets accused of fornication and therefore sentenced to flogging. As “proof” that this is “natural” in Islam a verse from the Koran, which is also written on the woman is quoted in the film: “The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication flog each of them with a hundred stripes; let no compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe In Allah and the Last Day; and let a party of the believers witness their punishment.” That is what Stuart Hall refers to as naturalization as a “representational strategy designed to fix difference” and to “secure it forever” (Hall, 2003, p.245). In Submission Muslim women are represented as quite naturally
submitting to the verdict so that it does not need any comment, although only the young woman and not the man has to undergo the punishment. Hall mentions popular representations of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in which fugitive slaves knelt to receive their punishment. That was seen as completely natural at that time and the situation of Muslim women is represented similar to that in the film Submission.

In the second story a young woman is forced into a marriage. This scene is narrated as if the bride's father just casually drops in and tells her that she will have to marry a man –one he has chosen, and whom she does not love. She very naturally obeys her father, although, as the story tells, the wedding day is not a celebration for her but only for her family. That means that a Muslim woman is again represented as submitting herself, this time to the will of her father and her family. In her marital home her husband forces her to have sex with him, although she is “repulsed by his smell, even if he has just had a bath”. As she however tries to circumvent that, her husband quotes the following passage from the Koran:

“But when they [wives] have purified themselves [i.e. when they do not have their menstruation], you [husband] may approach them in any manner, time or place ordained for you by Allah, for Allah loves those who turn to him constantly and he loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.”

So here again the film says that it lays in the very nature of Islam that Muslim women have to obey their husbands. As she does not want to obey her husband's will, she in the end does so and again submits, this time to rules from the Koran that are taken as literally true: “Yet, O Allah I obey his command, sanctioned by your words I let him take me”. Here again a difference between Muslim women and women from European societies is naturalized. While the latter would presumably never submit themselves to any misogynist verse from the Bible, Muslim women are represented to follow every rule from the Koran even if the laws are completely opposing their own will and their self-determination.

Although in the third narration the woman tells that life with her husband is “hard to bear” she stays with him. As she tells, she is “devoutly obedient” to him, and in his absence she also follows every rules that are set to her. Still her husband never trusts her and constantly beats her, after wielding threats and warnings at her. In that narration the Muslim woman is very clearly represented as not having the same rights as a man. The man is in the position to threaten and beat the woman without any reasons and, even so, the woman, like a servant or even like a slave, obeys every of his commands.

In that example Muslim women are again shown as the binary opposite of European women.
In this binary, the European women become the empowered who, if in a marriage with a husband like the one described in this scene, would not submit to him, but rather file for a divorce. The oppressed, submissive and obedient Muslim woman as the ‘other’ is shown as a clear contrast to the free, self-determining European woman, an ideal image for targeting the film’s intended European audience.

The last narration shows another time a woman, who follows and obeys every rule her Islamic surrounding gives her. The woman says in a testimonial style directed to Allah:

"Just as you demand of the believing woman I lower my gaze, and guard my modesty. I never display my beauty and ornaments; not even my face or hands. I never strike with my feet in order to draw attention to my hidden ornaments, not even at parties. I never go out of the house unless it is absolutely necessary; and then only with my father's permission. When I do go out I draw my veil over my bosom as you wish."

The way the narrating woman tells this leaves again the impression that covering her whole body and never going out of the house without her father's permission is the most natural thing for her. That is especially explicitly expressed in the first sentence of the quote. She does veil just as Allah demands it from every believing woman.

In doing so, she submits herself again, although, as she remarks, she sometimes dreams of a completely different life, in which she does not have to veil and in which she can meet many different people. The dream she has is essentially portrayed as having the life of a European woman, but she names her dreams as sins. Here the opposition of the two ways of life becomes most obvious. With on the one hand the daydreaming Muslim woman, who always submits herself to the will and rules of others, and on the other hand the life European women can easily lead and of which the Muslim woman dreams. That picture is decidedly Orientalist in thought, as it emerges from a Eurocentric perspective, claiming European women have lives richer than those of the Muslim ‘other’. The Orientalist, in this case Hirsi Ali, claims to know from her ‘western’ perspective what is best for Muslim women and what dreams they should have, not acknowledging that there are different reasons for veiling and not only submitting to ‘oppressive Islamic culture’. The woman in that scene, however, does not veil out of her own will but because she wants to obey the rules mandated for her.

Later in that narration, the uncle repeatedly rapes repeatedly this woman. When she turns to her mother, the mother promised to take it up with the father. The raped woman obviously feels not in the position to talk to her father herself but needs her mother's help. The father, however, orders both of them not to question his brother's honour. Represented as silenced and helpless, the women once more obey and submit.
In the end of the film the narrator for the first time makes Islam and Allah responsible for the sufferings. Although she says that faith in Allah and submission to him feels like self-betrayal, she still directs her speech to Allah and the film ends with a prayer in Arabic. From that, one can see that the cultural identity of Muslim women in the film is depicted as static and never changing. Although in the end the narrator has detected her submission to Islam as the reason for her affliction, she does not change her behaviour and continues praying to Allah. This change, i.e. stepping out of the Islamic society and becoming an atheist, would then be Hirsi Ali's proposed solution. Drawing that static picture of Muslim women, however, according to Stuart Hall cannot be a correct representation of their cultural identity, as he claims that cultural identity is always changing and therefore every representation of it is already outdated at the time it is made.

This is a notion shared by Edward Said who claims that every representation of other is a misrepresentation because the one creating the representation always does this out of his personal language, cultural realm and with his personal ambitions. Hirsi Ali might know the culture she tries to represent quite well, but she still has her personal political aims furthering the causes she wants to pursue. With her not acknowledging the possibility of cultural change and demanding from Muslim women, as she did, to leave their cultural identity i.e. their religion behind them, she 'others' and stereotypes. That means that the differences between Muslim women and European women are fixed and reduced to some essentials. While European women are seen as free to pursue their way of life as they want that to do, Muslim women in the film Submission are represented as always submissive and devoutly obedient.

4.4 Stereotyping Muslim Women as Victims

A predominant stereotype visible in Submission, is that of Muslim women as victims. Throughout the monologues we hear stories of physical and psychological abuse inflicted upon the women by Allah, men, and their community. We will look first at images depicting women as victims of the violent wrath of Allah; secondly, we will look at the images portraying women as the passive victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as perpetrated by the men in their lives; and finally, we will look at the victimization of women emerging from the their wider community. In compiling all these images, we will clearly see the stereotypical depiction of Muslim women as helpless, powerless, victims of all manners of abuse. Furthermore, we will detail how European identity reaffirms the Eurocentric notion of its cultural superiority, through the portrayal of Muslim women as the ‘other’, and through naturalizing Islam as an innately violent religion.

The first sentence of the first monologue, comes as an appeal to Allah: “Oh Allah, as I lie here wounded, my spirit broken [...]” The narration goes on to detail the violent punishment
mandated by Allah for those guilty of fornication, a sin to which the narrator admits being guilty. In this case, fornication is implied to be the passion of a romantic first love with a young man met in a local market. The woman does not contest her guilt, but is resigned to being flogged one hundred times as punishment for her sin of fornication. It is Allah’s will, and she is resigned to suffering through her due punishment.

The second monologue is also one of victimization as sanctioned by Allah. Having been forced into marriage, the woman feels great disdain for her new husband. However, as mandated by Allah, she allows her husband to “take” her as he pleases. She is subjected to unwanted sex, as condoned by Allah in the words of the Koran. The camera focuses on the silent woman standing silently in the shadows. She does not speak. She does not attempt to escape the abuse. Again, she is the victim of the will of her deity.

The third monologue is one detailing extreme physical abuse inflicted upon the woman by her husband, and enabled by Allah. First, the woman says that Allah has created men stronger than women, a fact that leaves her incapable of defending herself against the violent attacks of her husband. She says that life with her husband is “hard to bear”, but she accepts the burden, as it is the will of Allah. The camera focuses in on the woman lying beaten, bruised, and helpless on the floor. In this story of the third woman, we again see a figure helpless and unwilling to defend herself from abuse and injustice inflicted upon her by her most high deity.

The final monologue depicts a young devout woman. While she details daydreams of feeling the wind and the sun and traveling the world, she is resigned to the fact that Allah does not allow her to do these things. She does not challenge these restrictions mandated by Allah, rather she details extensively her abiding by Allah’s rules. She fixed her gaze toward the ground, covers herself, hides her beauty, and only leaves her home with the permission of her father. Finally, we see the closest thing to anger and self-support coming from a woman in the film, as she tells Allah that her commitment to him has left her feeling helpless, hopeless, abandoned, and longing for death. Though she is moved to anger and enunciates her distaste for the situation Allah has left her in, she still does attempt to empower herself. Rather, she wishes for death. Here again, she is simply the victim of Allah’s laws.

Through the repetition of images depicting Muslim women as the perpetual victims of a wrathful and violent spirituality, provides a binary opposition in which the European identity emerges as the rational body. The Muslim women are shown to embrace the spiritual world, i.e. world of superstition, even at their personal expense. They are depicted as helpless against the powers of the intangible. Therefore, the European subjects becomes ones which employ rational thinking above all other, never allowing any superstitions or spiritual beliefs to undermine their well
being. In essence, in ‘othering’ the Muslim woman by depicting her as a victim of her spirituality, European identity is seen as empowered by rationality.

Not only are women depicted as victims of Allah’s will, but they are also shown to be passive victims of violent men. We see them as victims of violent physical and sexual abuse. The film depicts a sixteen-year-old girl, forced into marriage, and subsequently forced into sexual performance. Though the narrator makes clear in the monologue that she is completely repulsed by her husband, and has tried to push him away, he forces the sex anyway. She does not follow through in defending herself and warding off the rape, as he begins quoting Allah. She becomes the victim of her husband’s violent sexual advances.

There is further depiction of sexual violence and victimization in the final monologue. The story is about a young girl falling prey to an incestuous uncle. She tells first of being forced to fondle him, then of being disrobed and raped. She is unable to find help and eventually ends up pregnant and abandoned. Again, she is the helpless victim.

The second monologue is not a story of sexual violence, but of several physical beatings. The narrator details her husband’s jealous rages, and the extreme state of physical injury he inflicts upon her nearly once a week. The camera repeatedly shows the image of a broken and battered woman lying limp on the floor. She is unable to defend herself due to her inferior strength, and her dependence upon him for financial support. In essence, she is resigned to being the victim of his violence, as being with him is her only way of being supported financially.

Through the repetition of images of Muslim women as helpless against the physical and sexual violence inflicted by the men in her life, a binary in which European culture becomes one in which women do not fall prey to violent men. Whether it is European society that is not violent or if it is European women who are unwilling to acquiesce to male violence, Europe identity emerges as refusing to accept violence against women. Here we see not only the process of ‘othering’ creating a positive identity for Europe, but also we see the Eurocentric hierarchy of cultures reaffirmed. As it is depicted as a culture intolerant of violence against women, Europe reassures itself of its position at the highest level of the cultural hierarchy.

Finally, Submission depicts images of abuse inflicted upon these women by the wider community of Muslim believers. The monologues begin with the narrator telling of 100 floggings that are to be imposed upon anyone guilty of fornication, and to be administered and witnessed by “a party of the believers”. The story goes on describing the situation in which the woman warrants receiving the violent punishment. She cannot deny her guilt, as she is pregnant. While men can claim innocence, as their guilt cannot be traced (unless caught in the act of fornicating), women are the ultimate victims. If impregnated, there is no denying their sexual involvement. Therefore, the
woman is the one who will be subjected to physical beating as inflicted and observed by community members.

With this scene being the only image of Muslim community within the film, there are no messages showing diversity of women’s power within Muslim communities. Hence, the image of Muslim women as victim to their community stands alone, to create the final category of forces victimizing Muslim women. With the film depicting Muslim women as powerless victims of their community, European communities emerge as empowering women. Here again, the static portray of Muslim women as victims, creates a positive niche in which European culture can claim superiority.

As did Hall and Bogle (Hall, 2003, p. 251) in regards to depictions of black characters within a genre of film, we have sought to identify static characteristics applied to the female Muslim characters within Submission. Each of the four women is portrayed as the helpless victim of a number of physical abuses. While in several instances the narrator voices an attempt at taking control of the situation, i.e. pushing away her husband’s sexual advances, or voicing her displeasure in a prayer to Allah, never do the women succeed in taking control, nor do they show any adamant attempts to do so. They remain the static victims. Therefore, it becomes clear that one stereotype asserted in the film is that Muslim women are powerless victims.

As discussed in our description of Said and Yegenoglu’s Orientalism and ‘othering’, stereotyping Muslim women allows European culture to see itself as the binary opposite. As we have detailed above, Muslim women are the powerless victims, yielding European women as the empowered group, refusing to be subjected to abuse. Additionally, this leaves the European bourgeois male as being culturally above subjecting women to such victimization, and European communities as intolerant of such victimization of women. As implied by Hirsi Ali’s accusations of Islam, in order for Muslim women to gain the empowerment ‘already had by ‘western’ women’, they must cease to be Muslim women, as she herself did. They must abandon the religion, as the nature of Islam is to make women victims. Islam has been fixed, or naturalized, as an abusive religion; Muslim women have been fixed as helpless victims.

4.5 Stereotyping Muslim Women as Deprived of Dreams and Desires

A theme running throughout Submission is that of Muslim women unable to control their situations (victims, as we established before), but also as not being able to follow their dreams and aspirations. Essentially, they are portrayed as never being able to realize themselves outside of their oppressed positioning within their religion. Three of the four monologues hold central the notion that Muslim women have dreams that prove impossible due to the mandates within Islam. The
images supporting this stereotype serve to ‘other’ the Muslim women, creating a Europe in which people can realize their dreams regardless of gender. Further, the nature of Islam is fixed as restricting women, and once again, the Eurocentric notion of European cultural superiority is reaffirmed.

The first monologue tells the story of a young woman in love. She has met a man at the local market, and begun developing a relationship with him. She was unable to meet with him openly, so they snuck and met in secret. Their relationship is depicted as one of love, affection, trust, and respect—all positive attributes that are desirable in a relationship. She cannot understand how Allah could look disdainfully upon these things. However, other followers of Allah’s word, begin to notice and look down on the romance. The woman becomes pregnant, and can therefore, be proved to have been party to fornication, and is sentenced to 100 floggings. She is unable to live and love freely. Rather, she is forced to endure great physical pain as a result at her attempt to live as she desired.

The second monologue is about a sixteen year old girl forced into marriage. Her father chose for her a husband based on the fact that he came from a ‘virtuous family’. Not only is the woman here unable to choose her own husband, she is forced to marry him because of his origins, with no consideration for love. The narrator says that her wedding day is not a day for celebrating her (implying that she wishes it were a day of her own celebration), but a day of celebration for her family, instead. The camera focuses in on the image of the wedding dress clad woman, quivering, making clear for the audience that the bride is clearly unwilling to be the bride. To make matters worse, she has no choice in whether she would like to engage in sexual relations with her new husband or not. She is denied her sexual desires (or lack there of), in addition to her freedom to choose a husband and marry out of love.

The fourth monologue also tells of unrealized aspirations. The woman in this story dreams of being free to enjoy the outdoors and nature. She yearns to be free from her veil and experience the sensations of wind blowing through her hair and the sun shining warm upon her skin. She talks of walking on the beach, of traveling the world, seeing famous places, and meeting a variety of new people. Even as she wistfully details all that she dreams of doing, she acknowledges that the experiences will never be possible for her. She emphasizes the importance of her refraining from these dreams, even acknowledging them to be sinful, as attempting to realize them would require her letting down the guard of her modesty. She must ignore and repress these dreams in order to please Allah and preserve her modesty.

Her cheerful tone changes dramatically, as she begins telling of her further desires—to be in control of her own body. She has been subjected to repeated raping and forced sexual acts by an
uncle staying at her family’s home. She talks of wearing her veil in an attempt to discourage, or at least not encourage, the sexual advances of her uncle. These attempts prove unsuccessful, leading her to her final dream – death. She details how her life has left her feeling pain, shame, guilt, abandonment, and self-betrayal. The dreams she began the monologue detailing, have shifted, as she leaves the audience with her final words: “[…] under my veil, you remain silent, like the grave I long for.” Therefore, we see her fantasies move from those of freedom to experience the world, to longing for the freedom to die, and therefore leave behind the pains of this world. The series of monologues ends here, leaving the audience with the final image of Muslim women as unable to embrace their dreams.

As in the other stereotypes communicated throughout this film, representation of Muslim women as being restrained in all forms of freedom to experience and realize their dreams, creates a positive binary opposite to be filled by the white European subject. We should note that the situations besetting the Muslim women in this scene are so extremely negative, the binary leaves the opposite sitting in a position of an equally extreme, yet decidedly positive light. European women are once again depicted as having the freedom not only to have great ambitions, but to realize them. Europe becomes a place in which women do have the capacity to reach their highest dreams without interference or disadvantages attributable to gender.

At this point we must revisit Stuart Hall’s notions of naturalization. Through the static representation of Muslim women being unable to achieve their dreams, Islam becomes fixed as a religion that represses women. There is no possibility for change or evolution. Rather Islam is what it is by nature, and therefore, Muslim women are naturally deprived of their rights to reach for and/or realize their dreams. In order for Muslim women to be able to accomplish and achieve that which they long for, they must cease to be Muslim women. Possibility for difference within the religion, and therefore possibility for change in the position of women, is impossible. As did Ayaan Hirsi Ali, in order to chase dreams and become anything more than that which men subject them to, women must abandon their belief in Islam. Both Islam and Muslim women become fixed in their identities. Europe emerges as the dynamic, changing culture, superior to the static and oppressive nature of Islam.

### 4.6 Muslim Women as Dependent Housewives

When one looks in the text of Submission at the places where Muslim women are depicted, it is striking that those are always connected to activities housewives have to do. One other myth of Submission regarding Muslim women is therefore that they cannot carry out other professions than that of being a housewife. Through ‘othering’ we can understand that European culture emerges as
the binary opposite, in which all professions are equally accessible to men and women; and the differences between the dependant Muslim housewife and the independent European career woman are fixed and naturalized.

In the first narration of the young girl, there are three words mentioned, which are all related to doing the shopping. They are “souk”, “marketplace” and “bazaar”. These places are shown to be acceptable, as the girl, however, wanted to meet her boyfriend, that had to be at a place where they could hide from the gaze of society or, as the film simply says, “in secret”.

The second narration mentions two places. Those are the “kitchen”, where the news that the woman had to marry a man she did not know was brought to her, and the “marital home”. That an announcement, which is so important and brings such serious consequences with it for the woman, is brought to her in the kitchen, leads the audience to drawing the conclusion that the woman is in the kitchen most of the time. The other place, the “marital home”, is again, as the kitchen, inside of a house. It is not her real home, but only her marital home, as she calls it. She is not there because she wants to be, but rather to fulfil her duties. Those duties, in the case of this particular monologue, mean having unwanted sex with her husband.

The third story does not explicitly tell anything about places. The narrator just says that the woman, in her husband's absence, guards what Allah would have her guard. From this sentence on can interpret that the husband can freely chose to leave the house but not the woman, who has to stay at home and guard herself.

The woman in the fourth story tells that she never leaves the house unless it is “absolutely necessary”, and even then only with her father's permission. In her home she feels “caged, like an animal waiting for slaughter”, when she is “alone at home” (i.e. all the men of the household have the right to leave the house whenever they want) and her uncle approaches her in order to rape her.

So in at least three of the four narrations it is very clearly communicated that Muslim women have to stay in the house or take the duties of a housewife when they go out. They are represented as not being able to select a profession of their choice. This representation of the stereotyped housewife creates a binary opposite in which European women are completely liberated. Although in most European countries there might not be a complete equality of rights for men and women, most of all on the labour market, and it is mainly the women, who do the household there, they still have the right to chose. According to the law they have the same rights as men, can freely chose a profession, visit universities and chose where they want to go. With the dream of the woman in the fourth story, it is again shown that Muslim women wish to be able to have those rights.

Along with the stereotype of Muslim women as housewives comes the idea that they are
uneducated. When they are not allowed to leave the house, they also cannot learn very much or even study. Having no profession or education, they are represented in *Submission* as being completely dependent on a man, who cares little for them.

As the father in the second story tells his daughter that she will have to marry, he describes the intended groom as being from a “virtuous family,” and therefore, able to “take good care” of her. That is the only reason mentioned for the father’s decision in choosing that specific bridegroom. He does not allow his daughter to chose for herself, implying that she may not have the capacity to chose someone that meets this standards—namely, coming from a family that can afford to take care of her. According to this logic, it is not possible for Muslim women to marry out of love, as they are not seen as smart enough to choose a man that can adequately care for them. With the father choosing the groom, the woman is again shown as dependent, this time on her father, who decides her future for her. She is relinquished from the control of one man, to that of another.

In the third narration this dependence of Muslim women to their husbands is naturalized by a quote from the Koran. It says in the film: “O Allah, most high! You say that ‘men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because, you have given the one more strength than the other’.” With that quote *Submission* again says that it is, according to the Koran, quite natural to see Muslim women as dependent on their “protectors and maintainers”, i.e. men. This not only fixes the difference between Muslim men (strong and financially capable) and Muslim women (weak and dependent on their husbands), but also that between Muslim and European women. In this binary, European societies emerge as a culture in which women function, or at least have the opportunities to function, without male interference.

In the same story the narrator tells that the husband supports her “from his means”. Therefore she is expected to be grateful, loyal and obedient to him. The man, however, does not have to be grateful or loyal to her though she does all the housework. Here the Muslim women are again ‘othered’ and stereotyped as not at all equal to men, but more like their servants. Considering the binary depicted here, European cultures become ones in which women are not dependant on men, nor are they required to be responsible for household chores. In the event that the European female subject does take responsibility for doing the work around the house, or being a full time housewife, the European male is appreciative.

Another myth in *Submission*, which is connected to the stereotype that Muslim women are uneducated and therefore dependent, is that they do not know anything about birth control. This makes them even more dependent on men. In the first narration the woman gets accused of adultery, and is sentenced to flogging. She cannot deny her guilt because she is pregnant. Otherwise there would have been no proof for any sexual relationship, and therefore she would not have been
judged guilty. Because her relationship was one of “affection, trust and a deep respect for each other” one can see that, in opposition to the woman in the fourth monologue, this woman was not forced into having sexual relations. While it is possible that she did not know the punishment for fornication (being pregnant and unmarried), it seems more likely that she just did not know how, or was not afforded the opportunity, to prevent herself from getting pregnant. Muslim women are again represented as not educated and as not knowing anything about birth control. In this situation they become even more dependent on the men, with whom they have sexual relationships. If the men do not use condoms, the women are at a high risk of becoming pregnant because they are unable to take control of their own reproduction. Therefore, it is the men who are in control of reproduction. Women have no reproductive rights.

That logic applied to the last story would mean that in addition to the repeated raping the described woman has suffered, she is to be accused of adultery. With the proof for that (her being pregnant) she will also be sentenced to flogging because, as developed in the opening monologue of the film, those guilty of fornication are to be flogged 100 times. This woman is in a completely losing situation. She was raped, not allowed to stick up for herself (as it implied questioning her uncle’s honour), and will now be found guilty of fornication. Hence this woman has been subjected from one form of violence to another. Such representations help to fix or naturalize the view of Islam as violent towards women.

In the depiction of the cultural identity of Muslim women in reference to their positioning in society, there again is no place for change. They are assigned to a static position, incapable of evolving or adjusting. Submission does not acknowledge the possibility for any kind of change in the position of women in Islam. The naturalization of the above-described mandates from the Koran for Islamic societies, it fixes the difference between the ‘othered’ Muslim women and the normalized European women.

4.7 Muslim women as forced into marriage/sexual relationship

Although the myth that Muslim women are forced into marriage is only prevalent in one of the narrations, Submission also communicates that Muslim women are not allowed to choose their partner on their own in another of the stories. It also says that they are not happy in their relationships and that they get abused and beaten without the possibility to divorce. Once again, through these images European culture emerges as the dynamic ‘other’, in which individuals are in complete control of their entrance into and exit from relationships. The images of Muslim women as mandated by Allah to acquiesce to relationships against their will, fix the nature of Islam, and thus, fix the differences between the freedom of individuals within European society and the
repression within Islamic society.

In the first narration the woman has a secret relationship, which is described as affectionate, with trust and deep respect between the partners. That happy affair, however, is not condoned by the surrounding society. It is forcefully brought to a termination as the woman is accused and convicted of adultery, meaning that she gets flogged with a hundred stripes in public.

The logical consequences out of myth in the first narration that Muslim women cannot chose their partner, are shown in the second story. There a 16 year old woman gets the news that she will have to marry a man, whom she does not love. Her father, who made the decision, does not ask about her opinion. He incidentally tells her: “You are going to marry Azziz; he is from a virtuous family and he will take good care of you.” He talks about her future as if it were his own one. Using the expression “you are going to marry Azziz” he talks about a future he has already decided about and also about something that is definitely going to happen.

In that marriage her husband forces her to have sex with him quoting a verse from the Koran which condones that (“[husbands] may approach them [their wives] in any manner, time or place”), although he disgusts her (“repulsed by his smell”). She completely submits him and his sexual desires because she wants to please Allah, or as she says: “Sanctioned by your [Allah's] words I let him take me.” For her there is obviously not the choice to get divorced. Otherwise she would have chosen that way out of her desperate situation. In European societies there is that choice for women and the numbers of divorced marriages are continually growing.

It is again a static picture, which is described here in Submission for the situation of Muslim women with no solution given to get out of that but to get rid of the believe in Allah because as the film implies one has to submit to Islamic rules, which are also given as verses from the Koran, as long as one is a Muslim. That serious problem for Muslim women is once more naturalized and the difference between Muslim and European women is reduced to their stand in society, which is represented as abused housewives for Muslim women and as free and liberated for women from European societies.

In the last story the dilemma Muslim women are shown to be in (i.e. as long as they keep their cultural identity as a Muslim woman they are subject to male disposal) becomes most apparent. The woman in that narration does everything in order to follow her rules. She even veils inside the house because she does not want to attract her uncle's attention. That does not disrupt him, however, in his plans to repeatedly rape her.

In European societies things like that of course happen as well, but there they are seen as a serious felony and the incestuous uncle would have been punished. In the situation as it is shown in Submission on the other hand, not the uncle is punished but her niece. Additionally to being raped
and becoming pregnant from that, which might be the worst nightmare for any woman, she can be accused of adultery and therefore flogged, as depicted in previous stereotype segments. As a consequence of this desperate situation she is longing for her death.

In Submission her longing for death is in the end not only a consequence of the rape she was a victim of, but more fundamentally of her religion and her Islamic culture. With the naturalization of the issue that Muslim women have submit to men and are not equal to them, the film argues that all the described things happen to women in the name of Islam.

### 4.8 Stereotyping Muslim Women as Veiled

The film also stereotypes Muslim women as always veiled, except as instructed, forced, or ‘allowed’ otherwise by a male figure. As in the previous five stereotypes, through this stagnated depiction of Muslim women as uniform, European society becomes the dynamic opposition. In this case, the image of Muslim women as always dressed in the veil, except when mandated or allowed otherwise by men; asserts that European society embraces women’s complete control of their self presentation, without male influence.

The narrator is a veiled woman, telling the story of each of the other women in first person. She becomes all of the women as she depicts details of their lives. In essence, then, each of the women is veiled. Even the two women shown without the veil, are veiled as their story is being told. The presence of the unveiled women serves as imagery and flashbacks, dramatizing their stories, rather than depict Muslim women who have chosen to be without their veils.

One ‘unveiled’ woman is on the floor, barely robed, and covered in wounds that have been inflicted by her husband. As the story details the woman being beaten, the message is clear that her current state of undress and injury are at the hand of her husband. Hence, she is without a veil as a result of her husband, not of her own will.

Additionally without a veil, is the young bride being forced into marriage at the age of sixteen. Her father, without her knowledge, arranged the marriage for her. Therefore, she is robed in clothing other than her veil, but not by choice. Furthermore, within the wedding dress her body is quivering as if she is crying, leading the viewing audience be even further convinced that her current state, dressed as a bride is not her choice. She is only out of her veil due to the demands of her father.

The woman in the fourth monologue gives voice to the necessity for Muslim women to veil. She is a young devout woman detailing her obedience to Allah. Twice in the first stanza of her story she reiterates that she wears the veil, as demanded by Allah: she never ‘displays’ her beauty or ‘ornaments’, asserting that she even covers her face and hands; and that if she ever leaves the home,
she covers herself from head to toe with her veil. Hence, the message, in order to please Allah, Muslim women must be veiled.

She goes on to admit to ‘sinning’ occasionally, by fantasizing about feeling the wind blowing through her hair and the sun shining on her skin. Implied in this sin, is the removal of her veil. In order for the wind to move her hair, or the sun to touch her skin, the veil must not be present. If this absence of the veil is a sin, the veil must then be seen as an essential component for all religious Muslim women. Therefore, practicing Muslim women must wear the veil if they want to abide by the laws of Allah.

Furthermore, the narrator speaks of Allah’s allowance for her to be unveiled within her home, but only if she is solely among family members. However, she reveals that she does wear her veil inside to ward off unwanted sexual advances from her uncle. She is unable to remain under her veil, though, as the uncle forcefully removes it, as well as her undergarments, as he rapes her. Therefore, even the choice to wear the veil is taken from her. Her uncle, a male figure, is in control of her unveiling.

Through these depictions of when and where women are allowed to be veiled, the film stereotypes Muslim women as always veiled, except when mandated otherwise by men. It is communicated that Muslim women do not own the right to decide for themselves about what they wear, in other words, how they present themselves. If we consider this stereotype in terms of ‘othering’, the binary opposite is one in which women are free to choose their clothing, i.e. self-presentation, without male influence. The European female subject is then seen as having complete autonomy in terms of the clothes she chooses to wear, i.e. her self-presentation. In other words, in the binary juxtaposition placing Muslim women as the exotic ‘other’, if the Muslim women are without right to decide for themselves, European women emerge as being in complete control of their choices. Further, if Muslim men demand specific attire of Muslim women, the European men become the liberators, allowing ‘their’ women the right to choose for themselves.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this project we assert that the film Submission reduces Muslim women’s identities to a few static, essentialized traits. We use Stuart Hall’s notions of cultural identity and representation (1998), as well as his ideas on stereotyping (2003) to assist us in proving this hypothesis. We also maintain that a very specific ideology based on Eurocentric Orientalist thought is employed in an attempt to secure the film a prominent position in mainstream Europe. We have
sought to answer the question: What are the stereotypes representing the identity of Muslim women in Submission, and how are they positioned to appeal to the cultures of the dominant powers in Europe?

We first establish the theories necessary for understanding the ideology positioning Submission to establish and appeal to an audience of dominant European powers. In order to place Submission in a European context, and as catering to Eurocentric ideas, we justify the premises upon which we refer to one unified Europe. We assert that it is Eurocentric ideology that unites the varying cultures within Europe. Eurocentricity is defined as the notion that geographical Europe is the home of high culture; or more specifically, the culture of the historically white European bourgeois male is superior to the cultures of all individuals not defined within this vision of the European subject (Ang, 1998, pp. 94-95). Submission goes to great lengths to portray the positions of Muslim women as helpless under the powers of their Islamic culture. This categorizing of Islam as oppressive to women, reaffirms the Eurocentric notion of Europe as the home to high culture.

We explore the concepts of Orientalism and ‘othering’. Orientalism is the Eurocentric philosophy that divides the world geographically into ‘West’ and ‘East’. The ‘West’ is defined as countries that have invested in the philosophies of the Enlightenment, and the ‘East’ as those cultures which have not. Hence, the ‘West’ becomes the norm, and the ‘East’ becomes the exotic ‘other’. This creation of the European self through depicting the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ as polar opposites, is Orientalism. The ‘West’ is ascribed the high culture of Europe –the ‘us’, relegating the ‘East’ to occupy a lower positioning within the cultural hierarchy –the ‘them’, or the ‘other’.

Additionally, we introduce the idea of Neo-orientalism as a continuation of this Orientalist thought, but as seen in a post-colonial context. Now the notion of the substandard ‘East’ is applied within European society, ‘othering’ Muslims living within Europe. Submission appeals to the Neo-Orientalist thought in contemporary society, because it depicts Islam as denying its female believers the opportunity to achieve any dreams or desire. Such a portrayal is specifically offensive, and seen to be opposed to, the widely held beliefs within Europe that women should be afforded the same opportunities as men. Hence, Muslim women and Islam become the ‘other’ in a modern European context.

The ‘othering’ of Muslim women within Submission through depicting them in stereotypical ways, provides a way for Europe to define elements that are not included within its own identity. The negative stereotypes ascribed to Muslim women, leave European culture to fill the binary position of the positive opposite. We identify six prominent stereotypes of Muslim women in Submission. Each one is depicted in a number of visual and auditory images. We detail the images that comprise each stereotype, as well as illustrate how such images define European culture in a
positive light. We discuss the elements of ‘authenticity’ used to convince audience members of the cultural accuracy being portrayed within the film, specifically Hirsi Ali herself, as well as a number of cultural artifacts: prayer rugs, Arabic inscription, etc.

The first stereotype is that Muslim women are submissive, silent, and obedient; a representation which leaves its binary opposite (which refers to the European woman) as empowered, voiced, and independent. The second stereotype is that Muslim women are victims; as such, the binary opposition is once again portrayed as the empowered subject. The third stereotype is Muslim women as deprived of access to reaching dreams and aspirations; leaving the opposing subject to be free to reach ultimate achievements. The fourth stereotype represents Muslim women as dependent housewives; the binary opposite here being the independent minded career woman. The fifth stereotypical representation is that Muslim women have no free will to choose either their marriage partner, or their sexual endeavors. Such a portrayal of forced marriage and sex leaves the binary opposite in total control of all marriage agreements and sexual encounters. The sixth and final stereotype represented within Submission is that Muslim women are veiled, and without control of their own attire or personal presentation; such representation portrays the binary opposite as in total control of personal attire. Hence, in the stereotypical portrayal of Muslim women, the viewing audience not only gains ‘knowledge’ about Muslim women, but receives reassurance of their own identity.

It is at this point where our discussion can be brought back to the original motivating problematic for this project -the controversies surrounding Muslim women within European society. We set out to analyze Submission in an attempt to begin to understand the heated nature and prevalence of these ongoing controversies. From this analysis we can begin to understand the complexity in the debate, in that there is more at stake than accurate verses inaccurate knowledge (i.e. how much truth lies in the words of Hirsi Ali). The debate is more a matter of defining the European self.

Since our project has focused on the analysis of Submission, rather than the audience of Submission, we have not delved deeply into any psychoanalysis or surveys of the European mind. However, through our understanding of ‘othering’, it becomes apparent that in raising questions surrounding the freedom of Muslim women “to contribute to society” (in the words of Tony Blair), “society” is actually attempting to secure a self identity which places great importance on freedom and contribution to society. Therefore, while domestic violence centers exist across Europe, and do have white European women residing in attempt to escape the control of their abusive white European men, depicting Muslim women as victims of violence (as is done in Submission), and in speaking out against this violence, allows dominant European society to define its self identity as
one without violence or freedom impediments. In other words, rather than acknowledging and
dealing with the violence and issues of limited freedoms present in dominant European society;
advocating against the violence and control in Muslim homes, portrays an ideal representation of
European society.

This same logic can be applied to each of the six aforementioned stereotypes. For a further
eexample, we can look at the stereotypical representation of Muslim women as unable to reach for
their desires. In modern European society there have been an abundance of studies looking at the
inconsistencies in salaries and promotions across gender lines. Across the board, men receive higher
salaries and more opportunities for promotions than do women. This is inconsistent with the desired
European image of embracing gender equality. Thus, in focusing on the gender inequality outside
dominant European society, a binary position is created in which Europe can exist as a society
embracing gender equality. Hence, placing Muslim women and Islam in the center of controversy
and media headlines, Europe appears to live up to its image of an ideal society. Hence, we can
understand Submission as lending itself well to the European desire to live up to its ideal image.

It can be pointed out that Ayaan Hirsi Ali is an immigrant and did grow up in a Muslim
home, and she is the voice behind the film. She experienced pains, which she attributes to being
raised in an Islamic culture. However, before her experiences of pain are allowed to represent an
entire body of religious believers, it is important to point out that her experiences are but one story.
Although white European women do find themselves in horrible situations with abusive husbands
and demeaning work, a European audience would not accept the story of her life as the collective
experience of all European women. Rather, her story would be heard, and hopefully she would
receive assistance insuring her future is brighter than her past. In this same way, it is important to
acknowledge the pain that Hirsi Ali experienced, but not to allow it to impose a similar reality on all
Muslim women. Doing so reduces the diversity of Muslim women’s experiences, in the same way
that labeling all European women as having lived the life of a battered woman would reduce the
experiences of European women.

As is evident in a quote used previously in this project, Ayaan Hirsi Ali does not consider
herself as part of the Muslim community. She identifies herself as a member of the ‘West’.
“Measured by our western standards, Muhammad is a perverted man.” (Hirsi Ali In Trouw
(Translation), 25.01.03) (Author’s emphasis added.) Hirsi Ali explicitly states here, that her
standards are “western standards”. In this way, through Submission she is no longer representing
something of which she is a part. As Hirsi Ali considers herself ‘Western’, she can no longer speak
with a voice that is authentically that of a Muslim woman.

This brings us back to Stuart Hall’s ideas of cultural representation in which any
representation that does not acknowledge the continuing evolution of culture is a misrepresentation (Hall, 1997, pp. 213-215). Using this logic, even if this stereotypical depiction of Muslim women was true at the time in which Hirsi Ali considered herself a Muslim, she is now misrepresenting the religion in her omission of the possibility for evolution. The portrayal of Muslim women and Islam in the film is stagnant. According to Stuart Hall, such representation is misrepresentation.

In conclusion, as we set out to do, we have begun to analyze one small aspect of the controversies plaguing modern Europe and Muslim women. Our endeavor to analyze Submission has revealed to us, that the film is indicative of a larger desire, not simply to stereotype and misrepresent Muslim women, but to claim an identity of which Europeans can be proud. Hirsi Ali’s voice, as a prior Muslim woman, provides a negative portrayal of Islam and therefore, grounds for the European ideals to emerge when placed in binary opposition. The stereotypes within Submission give permission for dominant European powers to criticize Islam, and in doing so, to represent the European self as the ideal culture.

6. Zusammenfassung

Wir verfassten dieses vorliegende Projekt, weil wir zu verstehen lernen wollten, wie das Bild ‘fremder’ Kulturen, in diesem Fall der Islamischen Kultur, in Europa geprägt wird. In diesem sehr breiten Feld entschieden wir uns dazu, uns auf das Bild Muslimischer Frauen zu konzentrieren, wie es von Ayaan Hirsi Alis Film Submission: Part One präsentiert wird.


In Kapitel Drei stellen wir den Film Submission in den Kontext, in dem er produziert wurde. Dafür erschien es uns wichtig auch den Hintergrund der Drehbuchautorin zu erleuchten. Sie ist gebürtige Somalierin, die eine orthodoxe Muslimische Erziehung genoss, dann in die Niederlande auswanderte und dort als Parlamentsmitglied besonders durch ihre heftige Kritik am Islam internationale Bekanntheit erlangte.

In Kapitel Vier erfolgt zuerst eine wertungsfreie Zusammenfassung von Submission. Daraufhin zeigen wir auf, dass sich der Film weniger an Muslimische Frauen richtet, als vielmehr

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Appendix

A) Illustrations and interpretations on different veils

The burka comes in many variations, but in its most conservative form, it thoroughly covers the face of the person wearing it, leaving only a mesh-like screen to see through. This refugee is wearing the conservative burka that the Taliban regime requires women in Afghanistan to don outdoors. The burka is thought to have originated in the Arabian peninsula and can still be found there today. They are not always as conservative in form as the one shown here and often allow parts of a woman's face to show through.

The word hijab refers to the variety of styles in which Muslim women use scarves and large pieces of cloth to cover their hair, neck and sometimes shoulders. As shown on this Seattle-area Muslim woman, the hijab often leaves the entire face open. In the United States, the hijab is the most common form of headcovering for Muslim women.
The chador is the full-body cloak Muslim women in Iran are expected to wear outdoors. Depending on how it is designed and on how the woman holds it, the chador may or may not cover the face. The chador was forbidden in Iran under the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, who was brought to power with help from the United States and sought to modernize the country. After the shah was exiled during the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the chador became required wear for all Iranian women. Many Iranians today subvert their dress-code by wearing Western-style clothing beneath the chador.

Hindu women also wear a veil, a practice that highlights the fact that veiling is not exclusively Muslim. Traditional and orthodox Hindu women, such as this one, will cover their heads and at least partly obscure their faces in the company of unrelated adult males. Sometimes veiling is accomplished with a loose end of the woman's sari, and sometimes it is done with a scarf-like fabric known as the dupatta.
Many Pakistani Muslims, such as this one, wear some form of veil. This woman is wearing the nikab along with a bandana that reads, "God is great!" The veil existed before Islam existed, but it has been embraced and spread by the religion. Not all Muslim women wear a veil, but among those who do, styles vary wildly, from simple kerchiefs and elaborate head scarves to full face-and-body coverings.

The nikab is the form of Muslim veiling that comes closest to what is actually meant by the English word "veil." English speakers tend to use the word veil as a catch-all term that covers all types of Muslim head and body coverings. The nikab, worn in black by this Moroccan woman, is a veil in the true sense of the word. It covers everything below the bridge of the nose and the upper cheeks, and sometimes also covers the forehead.

B) Text of the film Submission: Part One

O Allah, as I lie here wounded, my spirit broken
I hear in my head the judge’s voice as he pronounces me guilty.
The sentence I’ve to serve is in your words:
“The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication flog each of them with a hundred stripes;
let no compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe In Allah and
the Last Day; and let a party of the believers witness their punishment”

Two years ago, on a sunny day, while on the souk my eyes were caught by those of Rahman, the
most handsome man I have ever met.
After that day, I couldn’t help but notice his presence whenever I went to the marketplace.
I was thrilled when I learned that his appearance on the bazaar was not a coincidence. One day he
suggested we meet in secret, and I said, ‘Yes’.

As the months went by our relationship deepened.
What is more, out of our love a new life started to grow.
Our happiness did not go unnoticed and before long, envious eyes gave way to malicious tongues;
‘Let’s ignore these people’, Rahman and I said to each other, ‘and trust in Allah’s mercy’.

Naive, young and in love perhaps, but we thought that your holiness was on our side.
Rahman and I shared affection, trust and a deep respect for each other, how could Allah
disapprove? Why would he?

When I was sixteen my father broke the news to me in the kitchen.
“You are going to marry Azziz; he is from a virtuous family and he will take good care of you”.

My wedding day was more of a celebration of my families than of mine
Once in my marital home my husband approached me,
Ever since then I recoil from his touch,
I am repulsed by his smell, even if he has just had a bath.

Yet, O Allah I obey his command
Sanctioned by your words I let him take me
Each time I push him away he quotes you.
“They ask thee concerning women’s courses
Say: They are a hurt and a pollution
So keep away from women
in their courses, and do not Approach them until They are clean
But when they have Purified themselves, Ye may approach them in any manner, time or place
Ordained for you by Allah
For Allah loves those Who turn to him constantly
And he loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.”

O Allah, most high
You say that ‘men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because, you have given the one
more (strength) than the other’.
I feel, at least once a week the strength of my husband’s fist on my face.
O Allah most high
Life with my husband is hard to bear,
But I submit my will to you
My husband supports me from his means,
Therefore I am devoutly obedient, and I guard in my husband’s absence what you would have me guard;

But my husband, maintainer and protector, fears disloyalty and ill conduct on my part; he accuses me of being ungrateful to him;
He always finds a reason to doubt my loyalty to him
And after a series of threats and warnings he starts to beat me.

O Allah, most gracious, most merciful.
Just as you demand of the believing woman I lower my gaze, and guard my modesty. I never display my beauty and ornaments; not even my face or hands.
I never strike with my feet in order to draw attention to my hidden ornaments, not even at parties.
I never go out of the house unless it is absolutely necessary; and then only with my father’s permission. When I do go out I draw my veil over my bosom as you wish.

Once in a while I sin. I fantasize about feeling the wind through my hair or the sun on my skin, perhaps on the beach. I day-dream about an extended journey through the world, imagining all the places and people’s out there. Of course, I shall never see these places or meet many people because it is so important to guard my modesty in order to please you, O Allah. So I cheerfully do as you say and cover my body from head to toe except while I am in the house and with family members only. In general I am happy with my life.

However, things have changed since my father’s brother, Hakim is staying with us.
He waits till I am alone at home and comes to my room. Then he orders me to do things to him, touch him in places most intimate.
Since he is with us I took to the habit of wearing the veil inside in order to deter him. That doesn’t stop him though.
Twice now he unveiled me, ripped my inner garments and raped me. When I told my mother she said she would take it up with my father. But my father ordered her - and me - not to question his brother’s honour.

I experience pain each time my uncle comes to see me.
I feel caged, like an animal waiting for slaughter.
I am Filled with guilt and shame;
and I feel abandoned, yet I am surrounded by family and friends.
O Allah, Hakim is gone, now that he knows that I am pregnant.

The verdict that killed my faith in love is in your holy book.
Faith in you…, submission to you... feels like… is self betrayal.

O Allah, giver and taker of life.
You admonish all who believe to turn towards you in order to attain bliss.”
I have done nothing my whole life but turn to you.
And now that I pray for salvation, under my veil, you remain silent like the grave I long for.