

**Between *Us* and *Them*:**  
**Deconstructing Ideologies behind the Portrayal of Saudi Women in Canadian Media**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate binary discourses of *self* and *other* constructed by Canadian media in the representation of Saudi women. One of the modest aims of this research is to expound on the status of centralized media coverage in Canada. Drawing on Hegel's model of dialectics, as framed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and David Nikkel's conception of a moderate postmodernism, this research also aims at contributing to the ongoing modern-postmodern discussion by delineating and examining the ways in which dialectical analysis can aid in the deconstruction of metanarratives in Western culture. Utilizing a qualitative research design that employs multidimensional modes of textual analysis, the thesis examined the changes in the portrayal of Saudi Women through a non-probability sampling of 88 Canadian newspaper articles selected from the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and *National post* between 2001-2009. One major finding was that the metanarratives guiding these representations did not change significantly despite changes in narratives as brought about by several major political events. The implications of this thesis revealed what the ideological influences framing these depictions, as well as whether or not the changes that they have undergone, were self-reifying in nature. The research also highlighted the implications resulting from assessing the ontological identities of Saudi women vis-à-vis a Western framework of values.

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### Preface

The depiction of the Orient has been the subject in many Western fields. In Orientalist art, it is framed as an emblem of colonialism in the paintings of Jean Léon Gerome. In political science, the Orient has been examined as a geopolitical *other*<sup>1</sup>—most notably in the progression of imperialism. In Social studies, some scholars have studied the Otherness of the Orient to shed some light on the structures of societies in terms of gender roles, social psychology, cultural dynamics, traditions, and norms.

From a historical vantage, the representation of the Orient has been regarded as constantly changing. In imperialist art, Orientalist artists often used ethnography as a way to deflect criticism from what is primarily seen as an “erotic, exotic, and estranged Orient” (Locke, 1991: 271). Gerome for instance, depicted Oriental women as harems in exotic baths or draped in light translucent veils and garments that emphasize their eyes or figures. These early Orientalist depictions have since come a long way.

With the widespread availability of different media today, and considering the events that once again situated the Orient, and more specifically the Middle East as a subject of interest to the West, hardly anyone can go without recognizing the veil as an Islamic garment, let alone the stereotypical image of Middle Eastern women concealed in their “shapeless...black cloaks” (Abu-Nasr, 2002, October 15). News media systems, in their most basic functional sense, have

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Otherness, Otherhood, Orient, Occident, East, West, as well as Orientalism are capitalized to denote philosophical and political projects. When referenced in lower cases, these terms indicate benign processes that are philosophically and politically vacant, or otherwise not intended in the theoretical confines of this study. The terms *self*, *other/othered*, *us*, *them*, *othering*, are emphasized in italics for similar reasons, indicating philosophical and political entities or processes.

been regarded as channels or agents to power through information dissemination and gathering, and in turn social change.

In *Paris: The Early Internet*, Robert Darnton (2000, June 29) outlines the development of news broadcasting and its capacity to instigate social change by tracing the history of communication systems and political change in France. His account was set in eighteenth-century Paris, where French citizens would gather around the Tree of Cracow illegally to listen to or discuss “*bruits publics*”<sup>2</sup> concerning the affairs of state and the monarchy. He situated news as central to the class division of the time, such that only the privileged class had access to uncensored information. News in France at the time, was censored by a special branch of the police to “repress heresy and sedition... [and protect] privileges” (Ibid). The existing journals then were highly censored; covering only subjects cleared by the bureaucracy. Agents were sent out to infiltrate public gatherings in search of any unauthorized coverage – spoken or written. Though many have been arrested and persecuted as a result, the “Old Regime” began to falter not long after (Darnton, 2000, June 29). The news media “provided a frame for the public’s perception of events... which brought down the Louis-Quatrozean monarchy” (Ibid).

Although the onset of the 2011 Tunisian revolution can be paralleled to the fall of the French monarchy—that is, taking into account the role of alternative and social media and Western interest that “brought the Orient into sharper and more extended focus” (Said, 1994)—faulty depictions of Oriental despotism can no longer bring about the same imperial success that the West once enjoyed in the past. What is in question today is not the truthfulness of universalized representations. Instead it is the consequences of using such totalizing schemes to depict the experiences of an entire geopolitical area, its culture, and its people. Through this

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<sup>2</sup> According to Darnton (2000) there were other places where *bruits publics*, or “public noises” were transmitted including cafes, public gardens, and at private gatherings. This kind of news was carried out in forms of song, stories, and letters, which were coded and then decoded.

approach, the Orient, existing beyond the borders of the West, is reduced to images that exist independently and transcendently of the physical embodiment from which it was inspired. The “truth” in the news is, first and foremost, mediated by the perceptions of reporters involved and then the agency of the tools they use. In her article Sibel Bozdoğan gives an analogy for representation that could illustrate this point profoundly:

Analogous to the way the telescope facilitates the amplification of one sense, i.e., the visual with a concomitant reduction in total experience, representation of the Orient is an overcoming of distance bringing it into view yet devoid of sound, smell, movement and life... [Whereby] the West [is] rational, the East emotional/spiritual; the West as the dynamic world of action, the East, the static world of contemplation; the West representing progress and civilization, the East stagnation and decline...

(Bozdoğan, 1988: 39-42)

Ostensibly, the representation of the Orient has been used to establish the parameters of identity through a subjective understanding of the *other*. The origins of this approach, made famous by Edward Said (1994) in his conception of Orientalism in 1978, can be traced as far back – though with less critical associations– to the Enlightenment era. And as so, depictions of the East today are still important in understanding the West’s lasting interest in it vis-à-vis its media as reflective of its residual historical legacy.

### **Research Problem and Objectives**

According to The Arab Human Development Report “the colonial period impacted the [Arab] women’s movement by dislocating the structure of occupied Islamic countries ... [and] as a result, social development, and the rise of women as a part of it, remained hostage to the drive for national independence, falling much lower on the list of priorities” (UNDP, 2005: 10). Although the Middle East today is facing one of the most difficult time periods in its history, “filled with contradictions, tribulations, and successive, bitter disappointments” (Ibid: 12), it has established independence, for the most part, and has been undergoing social and economic

development and growth. No longer “hostage” to these priorities, the subject of women and their rights in the Middle East has received new attention both nationally and internationally.

Nevertheless, the UNDP Report observes that it is beyond the Middle Eastern women’s movements to affect the “entangled political-social situation by themselves” confirming that “the fight for women’s freedom is the fight of Arab societies as a whole” (UNDP, 2005: 11-12). Notwithstanding its limitations, the report suggests that although the Arab women’s movement began with a strong influence from Western feminist philosophy, it is of crucial importance to recognize that these women’s experiences, influenced by “religious heritage, popular culture and Arab intellectual, artistic and media production” (UNDP, 2005: 13), are developing new and more “authentic” epistemologies that embrace “the language of Islam, not of imported modernity” (Ménoret, 2005: 185).

With this in mind, this research expounds on the binary discourse of *self* and *other* to identify the preponderance of Western vestigial colonialist and phallogocentric ideological legacies manifested in Canadian print media, through its representation of Saudi women. This proposed subject of interest focuses on assessing ideologies that support the representation of Saudi women in Canadian media in terms of relative ideologies and subjectivity. As an illustrating example, consider the following excerpt from an online post by *Macleans* magazine under the title *Saudi women banned from going to the gym. But they might get to vote!*:

Leading Saudi clerics have recently condemned the gyms as places of “shamelessness” and argue they’ll tempt women to leave their homes and neglect their husbands and children... The obvious step of making women’s gyms legal seems unlikely given that the authorities responsible for men’s gyms have “not been allowed or prepared to regulate those for women,” ...The gym shut-down occurs amid discussion that Saudi women might be allowed to vote in municipal elections for the first time, though no one is holding their breath: Prince Nayef, the powerful interior minister, who has said the kingdom had no need of either women MPs or elections, appears on the fast-track to succeed his half-brother the King.

(*Macleans*, 2009)

Two themes can be highlighted in the above passage: First, women can be seen as submissive under an authoritative patriarchal regime in Saudi Arabia. This can be drawn dialectically from the first sentence such that the “clerics” exhibit a dominant authority over “women” implying that they, the clerics, are not categorized, associated, or representative of these women, and therefore can only be acknowledged as their opposites—as men. A person’s primary and secondary knowledge on the dichotomy of Saudi Arabian society as male and female may facilitate such an assumption, while the “authorities for men’s gyms” who are not “prepared to regulate those for women,” and the kingdom’s lack of need for “either women MPs or elections” can confirm them.

Second, as established by the title, the junction between male and female, or clerics and Saudi women, is analogical to that happening between banning gyms and permitting municipal voting. That is, the absurdity insinuated by the relationship between banning women from gyms, yet allowing them to vote, is comparable to Orientalist tropes that place a despotic East opposite to the West—where theocracies are feminine and reactionary, and democracies masculine and progressive respectively (Almond, 2007; Said, 1994). The significance of this theme is relevant to understanding ideologies and binary modes of thought prevalent in the formation of misleading representations. This is not to say that the relationship between media representation and ideology is oversimplified; nor that the audiences’ meaning-making processes are banal and elementary. To say so is to assume that the direct primary perception of reality takes place within the medium’s frame of reference (Adorno, 1954: 228).

It should be highlighted nevertheless; that the information and the way it is presented vis-à-vis this excerpt is contained in the parameters of language, time and space and that the meaning derived or exchanged is established by the overwhelming wealth of material conveyed within these limited parameters. With the media containing messages and depiction of gender and age, race and ethnicity, class and religion, it is evident that – as years of scholarly researches

in the fields of sociology and communication have demonstrated – such messages generate unmistakable impacts on audiences, and therefore on a society as a whole (Gauntlett, 2002). Yet just as these scholars and their studies determined the effects of such disseminated information on viewers and readers, sociologists have also established that these message do not always have a direct influence and are not conclusive to the way people create and determine their identities.

This research is grounded on a humanistic critique of the media in order to induce a longer sequence of thought, revolving around the polemical discourse of *self* and *other*, West and East, Occident and Orient, captured in labels and news headlines over time. It also aims at bringing into view the weakening role of centralized print news media in the face of rapidly spreading decentralized alternative/social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. This research is devoted to assessing the effects and implications of the use of binary modes of representation through a case study on the portrayal of Saudi women in Canadian media. The analysis informs and critiques the idea of centeredness and “centrelessness”—borrowing from the words of Almond (2007)—of the human subject by questioning historical social experiences and their relevance in forming representational “truths” through the process of *othering*. The literature review as such, draws on a postmodern application of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s model of dialectics to deconstruct this process of meaning-making. Since postmodernism “is dominated primarily by the voices of white male intellectuals and/or academic elites who speak to and about one another with coded familiarity” (Hooks, 1990: 1), references to Edward Said’s Orientalism, guided by theories in feminism, identity, and ideology provide a theoretical framework from which this thesis hopes to be positioned outside of the Western discourse looking in.

One of the modest aims of this research is to provide a starting point for future research to build on in studying the development of media in light of unprecedented technological advancement, and more specifically, in light of alternative/social media. It is also aimed at contributing to the ongoing postmodern discussion concerning the relationship between Occident

and Orient, by delineating and examining the development and places in which ideologies have been allotted in Western culture. This examination is both literal and philosophical. One of the main effects of this study will be to culturally relocate and delimit the critique on postmodernity and how, to a large extent, it has inherited in a much subtler way the absolutism that have been prevalent in modernity before it.

The most widespread Western depiction of Eastern cultures takes shape in the form of representing Islam, Muslim and the Middle East, as an alien *other*. These representations, especially of human and women's rights in Islam, renders them as obsolete, reactionary, and contradictory to Western feminism and international human rights. It is within this latter adoption of meaning that the conflict surmounts to a dialectical analysis embodied in the clash between Eastern and Western ideologies, and where, as supported by the literature review, the potential of a postmodern ideological pluralism shall be examined.

It must be noted that the use of a moderate postmodern critical approach to the concept of *other* is neither a progressive unveiling of a series of universal "truths" nor is it a cluster of cultural contingencies. The discourse of *self* and *other*, men and women, black or white, *them* or *us*, is not to be treated as similar binary dichotomies despite the presumption that they are invariably given in the discourse of one another. The concern is not whether or not dialectics and other selected analytical modes can apply to one the same way they do to the rest, but rather how and why, if indeed they do at all.

There are two considerations that should be emphasized in addressing this question. First, the "construction" of each ideology or identity is uniquely situated independently, even if interconnected, to another as will be detailed in the section on self-consciousness in the literature review chapter. Second, no single construction is applicable in that sense, keeping in mind that a bigger scheme of social structure(s), ideology, or perhaps the juncture of ideologies, exist and influence how one subject, dependant or interweaved with another, can work as context or

subtext for another. This is not to say that reading through multiple lenses at once is insignificant or full of errors; on the contrary, it is merely recognizing that this does pose some limitation in the broader understanding of the whole.

As Edward Said contends, “there is nothing especially controversial or reprehensible about such domestications of the exotic; they take place between all culture, certainly, and between all men” (1994: 60). And since the growing trend in media coverage emphasizes the importance of multiculturalism in promoting diversity and cultural understanding, this research offers a view on the polemical issues of authenticity surrounding the relative epistemological meaning of “multiculturalism” in any given society through a hermeneutical and critical examination of the Canadian media. Since “modern anthropology arose when it began to contrast and alienate the cultures which were different from the west” (Sarukkai, 1997: 1406) the news articles analyzed in the findings are, in a sense; ethnographic data reflecting not only on an *other* but also, arguably, on itself.

## **Thesis Overview**

In the following chapter, Literature Review, several pertinent theories will be discussed and examined to inform the theoretical framework for this research. The epistemological roots draw on Hegel’s model of dialectics, on David Nickel’s (2007) conception of a moderate postmodernism, as well as on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1994), to explicate on the concepts of subjectivity, objectivity, and *othering* as means to constructing self-reifying ideologies. Dialectical deconstructions address the dichotomies and binary modes of seeing in a manner that surpasses oscillating discourses of *self* and *other*, object and subject. Additionally, before dabbling into theories of gender identity vis-à-vis this dialectical process, another key epistemological premise will be established using a moderate postmodern feminist discourse, which draws a comparison between radical and liberal feminism, serving later as complementary

to Hegel's dialectical model in deconstructing gender ideologies. The theoretical framework in turn, will be based on the application of these theories in the context of media representations. In this manner, the value of a dialectical approach will be utilized in examining the epistemological ideologies of the Canadian media portrayals of Saudi women as a subjective gendered *other*.

Chapter three, Methodology, will outline the qualitative research design and data collection and analysis methods used to analyze eighty-eight news articles published in three English Canadian newspapers (*The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, and *The Toronto Star*) to answer several research questions, based on the main question: What is the result of dialectical syntheses between Western ideologies and the depictions of Saudi Arabian women in Canadian media? To what degree are these relationships reflective of metanarratives? Which will aid in the conceptualization of key ideas that help frame the changes in Saudi women's representation over time, divided in three Stages, and then followed by a delineation of qualitative content textual and rhetorical coding strategies.

In chapter four, the findings will be summarized, analyzed, and presented based on three timeframes (**Stage 1**: 2001-2002, **Stage 2**: 2003-2006, and **Stage 3**: 2007-2009), whereby the changes in narratives associated with each of these stages, as well as a discussion on the similarities in themes and approaches of each stage, will ensue. Finally, in chapter five, the conclusion will adumbrate the significant finding followed by an explanation of the study's limitations and implication.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

#### **Unthinking Dialectics: A Hegelian Platform for Postmodern Deconstruction**

The literature review is composed of the junctures between varying threads of knowledge to establish the parameters in which the findings for this research can be explained. With this in mind, the epistemological roots draw on Hegelian dialectics coupled with David Nikkel's (2007) conception of a moderate postmodernism to frame theories in feminism, gender identity, Orientalism, and ideology. These ideas will then be examined within the theoretical framework of media representation in the West.

#### ***The Dialectic of Hegel***

Hegel's *Phenomenology*, first published in 1807, focuses on the study of appearances, images and illusions within what he calls the self-consciousness. His book offers a philosophy on the origins of meaning and being vis-à-vis the evolution of consciousness, where Hegel traces it back to 'savage' and 'barbaric' origins. By so doing, he created an abstract table where past and present/future, idealism and realism, can be philosophically comprehended through his system of dialectics. The general consensus, through various readings of Hegelian critics, is that Hegel's dialectical model is both a "way of thinking and an image of the world" that stresses the importance of "processes, relations, dynamics, conflicts, and contradictions" in the creation of subjective and objective meaning making (Ritzer, 1996: 19). The "dialectic is uniquely situated so that it can look into two directions at once and achieve a kind of 'dual' vision" (Rocco, 1994: 72). It is a lens through which Hegel explains the idea of self-consciousness beyond the scope of "subjective idealism" and Kant's transcendental idealism, which, as Mure (1993) points out, leads inevitably to solipsism – "a view that only oneself exists [idealistically and thus] a theory which can scarcely be stated intelligibly" (Ibid: 5).

Following the debate made between Robert Pippin in *Hegel's idealism: the satisfactions of self-consciousness* (1989) and its critique in *The Dissolving Force of the Concept: Hegel's Ontological Logic* (2004) by Karin de Boer, it is important to trace back the development of Hegelian thought as a post-Kantian legacy concerned not only with the ontology of self-consciousness but also with its epistemology, in order to understand the Hegelian dialectic. For Hegel (1977), consciousness is founded on an innate sensory understanding of the physical world. These direct sensory experiences develop the ability to be conscious of and understand one's own being – or self-consciousness.

With this self-knowledge, cognitive and intellectual experiences are thus facilitated, whereby self-consciousness doubles as both object (that sees) and a subject (to be seen) (Hegel, 1977: 15). Hegel furthers this idea in latter parts of his book with the allegory of God and man, and subsequently masters and slaves (Hegel, 1998)—alternatively Lordship and Bondage (Hegel, 1977). This account has been subject to many interpretations. Although it might be a reference to the development of religion or history; following the book's progression to the evolution of the spirit, theology and idealism (Hegel, 1977: 266-453), for the purposes of this study the account is considered as an allegorical delineation of abstract dichotomies and their interactions, on which the rest of the theories in this research will rely.

As a reaction to his predecessor, Hegel's post-Kantian epistemology stems from the duality of self-consciousness (Hegel, 1977). This idea eliminates the idealism held by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). For Kant (1999) only what is visible can be understood, while their reality or truth remains beyond our capacity to apprehend—objective truth, and by extension self-recognition, can never be comprehended outside a subjective understanding. Hegel's dialectical system nevertheless, is based on two premises regarding the duality of self-consciousness as both objective and subjective. That is, as delineated philosophically by Hegel (1998, 1977) in a theistic context, and explained by Geoffrey R. G. Mure (1993):

The universe is the eternal activity of God's self-manifestation not merely *in* but *as* his creation... in this aspect, then, man is an element in God's self-manifestation, his creative self-consciousness. As creator God is distinct from man, but as self-creating God *is* man. Man is conscious of God as distinct [...]. Man does not distinguish himself from God precisely as he distinguishes himself from a natural thing, a mountain or a tree... because God creates man's consciousness as an element in his own (God's) self-consciousness and therefore man's consciousness of God is self-consciousness, consciousness of himself as a constituent element of a self-conscious God.

(Mure, 1993: 2-3)

Hegel (1998, 1977) contends that although these distinctions are not an illusion, they are also *ipso facto*: a fact – distinction that man is not God (a) – cannot cancel another – that man is God (b) – but is part of it—i.e. that man is an element of God's self-consciousness, while God's self-consciousness is not entirely and absolutely man's. These difference, as Hegel (1977: 69-70) explains, occupy a “negative unity” which renders them “exclusive [of other properties]” yet “necessarily” connected. As such, Hegel developed his account of masters and slaves by demonstrating that the *self*, interchangeable with Kant's subject, is not only aware of its being *eo ipso* but also as a distinct entity through the eyes of another *self* – i.e. an *other*, or a Kantian object. The fundamental idea intrinsic in this view of self-consciousness stipulates that different self-consciousnesses are inextricably interwoven by being both object and subject. In other words, one cannot have a coherent concept of *self*, given the existence of an *other* and the opportunity to experience identification with and through it. Unlike Kant, Hegel (1977) concludes that although the exact details of “things as they really are in themselves are unknowable,” the comprehension of their existence is still within conscious reach. This premise therefore, is the foundation of what can be considered the starting point of the dialectical system – the interaction of thesis and antithesis – and is what allows phenomena to fit into universal understandings and classifications as the dialectical process deepens and becomes more complex (Kain, 1998; Hegel, 1977: 69-70).

The Hegelian tradition proclaims that truth is truth only in its dialectical relation to what is good or authentic (Hegel, 1998: 44- 56). This idea constitutes what is subjective, or the notion

of “being.” In other words, whether or not the truth is accurate is not as significant as its authenticity to what is experienced as true, or the reality of its consequences therein. As Hegel explains:

If cognition is the instrument for getting hold of absolute being, it is obvious that the use of an instrument on a thing certainly does not let it be what it is for itself, but rather sets out to reshape and alter it. If, on the other hand, cognition is not an instrument of our activity but a more or less passive medium through which the light of truth reaches us, then again we do not receive the truth as it is in itself, but only as it exists through and in this medium.

(Hegel, 1977: 46)

In other words, the opposite also holds: The authentic is authentic only in its dialectical relation to the idea of truth. This objectivity is exemplified in modern society as the uniformity of lifestyle and shared ideologies in one culture, which can be thought of as expressions of either the values adopted by the individual with respect to the collective society (Rockwell, 2004: 144). The validity of truth in and of itself, regardless of what it may be, is independent of how it is perceived or understood so long as its comprehension, function, and outcome is consistent in the bigger scheme of things. The distinction between both in this respect becomes more and more apparent as the dialectical process deepens; whereby dialectical distinctions in identity becomes apparent the further experiences break down into smaller value-laden elements and systems (religious, ethical, artistic, political, historical, philosophical...etc) (Mure, 1993: 7). Cognition, according to Hegel (1998) is a dialectical process that involves more than one self-consciousness.

Conventionally, consciousness is analyzed dialectically in a three-step process: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (Hegel, 1998: 58; Hegel, 1977). The abstract, or *thesis*, constitutes the first step in this process of meaning making, whereby knowledge is innate or *a priori* self-recognition. Gandelman and Klein elaborate on the process of self-recognition a master self-consciousness undergoes by demonstrating how “a ‘master consciousness’ aims at establishing itself as pure subject by subjugating an ‘object (slave) consciousness’” first (1978: 37). That is,

in order for a thesis-antithesis interaction to occur, self-recognition must first be attained; a thesis must form: the master consciousness must initially become “a historical object” (or slave) as seen by the *other* (Ibid: 38; Hegel, 1998: 211). Once the master consciousness has achieved self-recognition, the reverse must also occur. The slave must recognize the master consciousness as its master in order to reach self-recognition (Hegel, 1998: 111-112), whereby it is the master who is for the slave and not the slave for the master (Hegel, 1977: 105, 111-119). When both consciousnesses have achieved self-recognition, the dialectical process begins. The thesis is the establishment of subject as object (to see): a slave through its understanding of itself independently and vis-à-vis a master, or a master through its understanding of itself independently and vis-à-vis a slave.

The next step, or the development of the antithesis, requires knowledge that is *a posteriori* or obtained from extrinsic experiences or interactions with the environment. It is knowledge that is learned or gained. The antithesis is the opposite or reverse transformation of the thesis: the object as subject (to be seen)—or “Notion” according to Hegel (1977: 104; 1998: 53). The no-longer-just master consciousness becomes *for* the slave but rather it becomes or consumes it (Hegel, 1998: 109; Gandelman & Klein, 1978: 39). The slave, in this discourse, must also assume its master status in order to gain an extended sense of selfhood by defining what surrounds it, not only what defines itself.

In the third stage, once subjective-objective duality of self-consciousness is attained, a resolution or confrontation is drawn between thesis (to see) and antithesis (to be seen) to form what is called the synthesis. It is a stage of mutual recognition between two consciousnesses<sup>3</sup>. The synthesis in this regard, leads to an array of new theses<sup>4</sup>. The Hegelian dialectic, or the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model in this sense is a cyclical process, ergo its product is infinitely

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<sup>3</sup> In the dialectics of an individual identity, the thesis constitutes the notion of “I am”, whereas the antithesis constitutes *I was*, *I am not/no longer am*, or another *I*, and the synthesis of both is simply *I* or multiple *I*.

<sup>4</sup> As for example *I am Canadian*, and an antithesis *I am Saudi*, and a new synthesis *I have both* or *I am neither*.

and complexly ongoing. In summary, for a master/slave consciousness synthesis to be possible, both must achieve their sense of duality (Hegel, 1977: 119-122). It is only through being confronted by difference “in the actual shape of another being” (Gandelman & Klein, 1978: 39), that consciousness can achieve self-recognition through dual or mutual recognition (Hegel, 1998: 112).

However, this process is far from being fluid, involving uncertainty. That is, the dialectics of identity is not limited to a negation of a single *other* (Hegel, 1977: 119-138). As Russon (1991) points out, a thesis can take form as “I” while the antithesis can be “we”. Only when “I” is interchangeable with “we” (not necessarily the other way around), can a synthesis occur. This is because objects exist in a flexible spectrum of variations and do not readily conform to distinct universal dichotomies and meanings that lead to a straightforward conflict between thesis and antithesis (Hegel, 1998: 185-87). In other words, there exist multiple shades of gray between black and white<sup>5</sup>.

Yet, as previously discussed, the existence of a limit does not deter from knowing of the existence of an unknowable beyond that limit (Mure, 1993: 3), postulating, through the examination of this dimension, that multiple individual self-consciousnesses (subjects) simultaneously exist as the same and distinct from one another within this single collective self-consciousness, despite the tendency to think otherwise (Hegel, 1998: 214). That is, that knowledge is gained from sensory interactions with the physical world, which is in turn, interpreted through the mind, and emanated outwards again. Collective self-consciousness is the universal locus of identities existing as an abstraction of a whole and within a single individual. This collective consciousness is the *synthesis* resulting from the dialectic interaction between

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<sup>5</sup> With respect to the first example of individual identity, it is unquestionable that anyone can say “I”. This results in an awareness of multi-standards essential to how phenomena correspond to such classifications. These standards belong outside of the sensory and physical realm as Hegel notes, to an unattainable third dimension in the “reality of an ethical order” (Hegel, 1998: 214).

theses and antitheses, and is what Hegel has dubbed the “universal” or absolute *Spirit* (Hegel, 1998: 214).

### ***The Fragmentation of Truth***

Keeping in mind that Hegel’s dialectic is a modern philosophy, it must be said that the idea of drawing on both modern and postmodern thinking is not a new concept. Traditionally, many sociologists, philosophers, writers, cultural and literary critics have attempted to examine and reconcile the problem between modernity and postmodernity, and modern culture and modern society (Gluck, 1993). Postmodern supporters have blamed modernity for everything from engendering “narcissism” (Lowney, 2009), to causing the holocaust (Long, 2003). In some cases some critics, such as Klaus Lichtblau, renounce the entire problem between modernity and postmodernity as a paradox of reflexivity ending in “nihilistic chaos” (1995: 40). Lyotard as another example, argues that “post-modernism does not mean the end of modernism, but rather the situation of its birth” (quoted in Lichtblau, 1995: 43). Philip Kain (1998) supports his claim against postmodernity by drawing on Hegel’s philosophy to critique what he calls a “postmodern subterfuge.” He claims that:

The [Hegelian] world of the other was particular, local, accidental, inessential. But just as the modern other is about to subvert the absolute of the master, just as the slave is about to construct a new absolute with itself at the center, just as the black, the Latino, just as women, are about to arrive, the master declares the postmodern era. The master sheds his cloak of universality to show that underneath he is just as local, just as particular, as anyone else. All are invited to sit at the table of particularity.

(Kain, 1998: 124)

On this premise, Kain (1998) concludes by dismissing postmodernity in favor of the directness and perhaps, ethical manifestation of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic as clear in its outcome—namely, an inevitable death. Nevertheless, characterizing society today as postmodern in this manner is akin to suggesting that there is a fragmentation in social history and a discontinuity in time itself. In the context of this research, this idea is dismissed on the premise that, like Lyotard

(1984), postmodernity is an ongoing social transition that is not separated from modernity in history. The developed philosophies of postmodernism are the products of its modern legacy. However, unlike Lyotard (1984), they are—analogue to a looking spectacle or eyeglasses—essentially the same in function, such that they provide a historical lens through which the world can be seen, but different in their “prescriptions” or *how* the world is seen (Nikkel: 2007).

Western modern tradition placed emphasis on the idea that what was “natural and inevitable to human beings was to pursue happiness and truth” (Armour, 2008: 642), creating as Edward Said argues an “impulse to classify nature and man into types” in order to grasp a presupposed absolute and universal truth through these generalization (1994: 119). Nevertheless, although the idea of an absolute truth renders itself obsolete, postmodernism is not so distinct from modernity in so far as truth is still connected with “happiness” (Armour, 2008). That is, according to David Nikkel, central to postmodernism “is [the assumption] that every individual and culture has basic assumptions, models, images, pictures that control the way one views the world” (2007: 10); and “that all of even one’s own thinking is always incarnate and conditioned is the decisive point for entering postmodernity” (Ibid: 8). To put it simply, postmodernism is *a* truth about *the* truth; a deconstruction of modern construction. Unlike modernity it offers the option of having different or many “lens prescriptions” to view the world, so to speak. However to further address Kain’s (1998) concerns regarding the “subterfuge” of postmodernism, Russell Rockwell suggests that the “solution is to derive meaning from within the system not outside of it” (2004: 158), i.e. to draw on what modern and postmodern philosophy can offer rather than to focus on their shortcomings.

The problem with modernism as Charles Taylor (1992) points out, is that “a context of historical ignorance, helps to accredit the oversimple and almost caricatural readings of one or another strand of modernity” creating in this way a susceptibility to repudiation (Ibid: 503). What this means, reflecting on Hegel’s God-man allegory, is that modernity can be explained as

the transition from a religious world created by God to a secular world created by man (Said 1994; Armour, 2008; Mure; 1993), while postmodernity is the transition from a secular world created by *man*, to one created by *men*—i.e. everyone. Together they form a transition “from intellectuals as legislators (of universal truth, values and rationality) to intellectuals as interpreters (of cultural meanings political and historical events, social change...)” (Kellner, 1998: 74). This stance offers greater insight into the prevalence of Saudi women’s representation in established media, such that these portrayals are subjectified as an object to better suit the status quo, rather than objectified as a subject to fit a utopian universal model of postmodernism, as rendered possible through the expansive potential of the Internet.

Postmodernism holds the potential to go either way as a reconciliation between, or an assimilation of, *self* and *other*. This solution is based on the idea that since truth is considered relative from both a postmodern and modern perspective—as established by Hegel in the previous section—there are several ways in which it can be treated. On one hand, “prereflectivity” as characterized by David Nikkel (2007) is a radical attribute of postmodernism in which “perceiving, knowing, and acting play a significant role in creating the world” which leads to the impossibility of a knowable ultimate truth. “Reflectivity” on the other hand, implies a kind of inevitability of a dominant truth, regardless of its accuracy or adoption by the other, since “the vast array of languages, cultures, worldviews, and religions across the globe and through the ages suggests humanity’s vital role in creating the worlds of meaning in which we dwell” (Nikkel, 2007: 11), and thus, as Chris Rocco points out, the potential of being an ideological “system [that] tolerates nothing outside of itself” (Rocco, 1994, 83). With this in mind, the adopted approach in the context of this study is supported by David Nikkel’s (2007) idea of an in between, or a “moderate” postmodernism.

According to David Nikkel, moderate postmodernism extricates the concept of truth “from the modern burden of explicating and justifying all basic assumptions and all meanings” (2007: 20). In other words, this approach balances between a radical assumption that argues for

the nonexistence of truth<sup>6</sup> and a conservative view that supports the irreconcilability between autonomously coexisting truths<sup>7</sup>. In short, moderate postmodernism stays clear of both “impossibility” and “undecidability” (Nikkel, 2007). Because humans are ostensibly encultured in values, through language, geography, temporality, and culture, as will be delineated in the following sections in more details, moderate postmodernism assumes that there is no correct and pure one way of knowing about the “abstract” or truth(s) of our world. Postmodernism can be regarded as the progress of modernism in so far as it recognizes the importance of reason but also its limitations (Nikkel, 2007: 10). In this respect, dialectics, although a modern tradition derived from Hegel’s philosophy, can be utilized as a postmodern deconstructive analytical tool. Hegel’s dialectical model, in its realist attempt to bring idealism and relativism together, allows for even more fluidity and flexibility if utilized from a postmodern approach—deconstruction—rather than sufficing with “death” (Hegel, 1977; 1998).

Deconstruction, for the two extremes of postmodernism (radical and conservative), is concerned with dissolving the notion of the absolute from modern truth. This mechanism however, poses a paradox since deconstructing the construction of an absolute truth results in another absolute: that no truth can or will exist, or coexist. Nikkel explains the shortcoming of radical deconstruction as the “reliance on linguistic metaphors, [where] some have falsely accused deconstruction of denying non-linguistic elements of experience” (2007: 15).

Moderate deconstruction in this manner “emphasizes the relativity of meaning to context, the connectedness of the elements within a context, and the openness of a context to further and future interconnections. This openness implies the inexhaustibility of reality” (Nikkel, 2007: 16). Deconstruction then is useful only when a breakdown of meaning is necessary due to irreconcilability between dialectical subjects or truths, which as a result ceases or hinders the

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<sup>6</sup> Which is no different from modern absolutism in the sense that an absolute truth holds the same universality as the idea of an absolute *truths* or absolute *no* truth(s).

<sup>7</sup> Which also fails from separating itself from modern thinking in that many truths will eventually lead to trouble, or mastery of a truth over other truths.

development of progress. In short, this approach stipulates that although the truth is unobtainable, it does not prohibit one from reaching out or striving to understand it in any given specific epistemological manner. This method of deconstruction can then be utilized in the analysis of dialectical static metanarratives within the context of media representation. The following table, *Table I.*; sums up David Nikkel’s ontological and epistemological differences of the three strands of postmodernism.

**Table I.** Ontology and epistemology of three postmodern views

	ONTOLOGY (What is truth)	EPISTEMOLOGY (How truth is obtained)
RADICAL	Totalizing	The truth is that there is no truth.
CONSERVATIVE	Totalizing	No one truth exists, or the truth is truths.
MODERATE	Duality	Duality: Exist and does not exist simultaneously.

***The Parameters of Postmodernism***

The use of the concept of identity towards a discourse of ideologies, as briefly touched upon in the previous sections, refers to the epistemological utilization of ipseity and alterity, or *self* and *other*, as a means of self-recognition. These principles are used to explain how identity is affected by space, time, language, gender, and ideology. It is also worth noting, keeping in mind the earlier discussion on postmodernism, that the conditions of a postmodern society and the persistence of history under it in the context of this research refers to the sense given to it by Wei (2009):

- (1) Every culture has to be forced from being a small isolated local community into a more integrated largescale society [the effects of globalization];
- (2) the economic element dominates the whole society, and the new order is regulated by economic standards, which also become a force for control over the society [the spread of capitalism and cross-national economies];
- (3) instrumental rationality – people pursue short-term and

short-sighted interests under the control of the moral principle of utilitarianism [rapid growth of consumerism]; (4) people travel too much with the flow of labor and capital [mobility; technological advancements and the deterritorialization of time and space; the growing number of “world-class cities” (Lowes: 2002)]; (5) people lose their traditional identity and selfhood, and have to resort to an individualist self rather than a communitarian self under the conditions of the market economy [the obscurity between public and private spheres].

(Wei, 2009: 122)

What follows is a discussion on ideology, language, and gender. This section is divided into three subsections. In the first, the politics of ideology as it relates to differences and the construction of identity are examined. In subsection two, the premise of language is identified as it relates to ideology. Finally, in subsection three, the principles of feminism as it relates to postmodernism are discussed. These ideas, coupled with a moderate postmodern deconstruction of media dialectics, offers a window into understanding why Western media representations concerning Saudi women has maintained its, as Said (1994) has dubbed, “latent metanarrative”.

### *Ideology*

In her book *Visible Identities* (2006), Linda Alcoff suggests that dominant and subjugating ideologies are created and projected by majority groups on minorities within a given society. She argues, via Leibnizian theory; that identity philosophically refers to the intrinsic essence that differentiates two things at a time. If two things are discernable from each other then they cannot be individuated, since in the very least they occupy different spaces at a specific given time (2006: 47- 48). As such, an entity can be defined or identified against another entity’s being or self vis-à-vis differences. This occurs in so far as one exists separately of the other. The resulting negation of an identity relationship between two things, which postulates that *I am not you, and you are not I, then we are different*, is at the heart of the idea of Otherness. Nevertheless, in a social context, this definition of identity is far too simple. In the case of national identity par example, similarities not differences work at delimiting a given group, be it through a shared language, geographical location, or belief system. These delimiting factors can transpire either as

inherent/natural/biological or socially constructed and context-relevant involving experiences, languages, and shared beliefs (Alcoff, 2006: 48).

On this note, Gates (1986) deconstructs existing discourse on racial differences and categorization. His book, *Race: Writings and Differences* (1986), focuses on the *othering* of minor ethnic groups within a given society such as African-Americans and Latinos in the U.S, and even indigenous peoples in Canada. He contends that assumptions categorizing different racial groups are based on generalizations predetermined by a set of broad and abstract causes and effects, which are then attached to physically and “metaphysically” defined groups (Ibid: 403-404). In this manner, the idea of categorization similarity or sameness becomes critical to the understanding of identity in so far as it results in the maximization of differences and contrasts of a perceived *other*. In other words, borrowing from Nikkel, it is a “preflectivity” that occurs from “reflectivity” (2007: 11), or the preservation of identity through ideology.

In *The feminist concept of self and modernity*, Xiao Wei considers two concepts of identity-formation in terms of rights and politics: individualism and “communitarianism” (Wei, 2009: 118). She adopts a feminist view that disregards the latter on the basis that society is always changing, and that some people will always be excluded by a dominant group (Ibid: 119-120). However, in his book review of *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, Andrew Gamble (1982) takes up a debate on the nature of dominant ideology across several political traditions. He begins by dismissing the notion of individualism and suggests that it is the central problem in liberal thought. He contends that only chaos and not social order can arise from the conceived ideal of a “multitude of individuals pursuing their own ends,” and that even so these individual pursuits do construct a discriminating ideology in so far as individuals can form a community based on their shared interest of self-gratification and rights (Ibid: 90). As Gamble (1982) indicates, there are two alternatives to this chaos: Capitalism, which situates the market at the heart of social order and value; or socialization, which places the notion of society or shared

culture as the core value in every individual. For both Wei (2009) and Gamble (1982), the existence of a dominant ideology, regardless of its coherence or prevalence in society, is never questioned.

Larrain (1991) asserts that ideologies are produced by and reflected in material things as well as economic conditions, leading a ruling class to generate ruling ideas. In this manner, ideologies exist in the articulation of different “truths” into an idiosyncratic set of values. Individuals make the statements or ideas in this set of meanings, yet its entirety is not the product of self-consciousness or individual intention. As described earlier, the cyclical process of meaning-making (dialectics) is a cause-and-effect paradox considering the irreconcilable duality of master and slave consciousness, subject and object, and prereflectivity and reflectivity in radical postmodern ontology (Hegel, 1998; Mure, 1993; Nikkel, 2007). From a postmodern perspective, the ability to reach any truth not relative to a certain experience is doubted, such that any absolute understanding of social interaction is always questioned. There is no totalizing theory and there is no universal emancipation. Negative ideologies stem from such totalizing values at the expense of over-simplifying differences (Larrain, 1991: 19). In retrospect, a ‘neutral’ conception of ideology adopts pluralism of truths, emphasizing that the interests of different classes are represented by different ideologies (Larrian, 1991: 18).

However, congruent to Nikkel’s (2007) arguments regarding conservative postmodernism, both negative and neutral ideologies are paradoxical since they contradict the very argument they intend to avoid whereby one ideology is still dominating over another: that the “truth” is, there is *no* truth or *many* truths respectively. In other words, the separation and recognition of different truths is an ideology in and of itself (Larrain, 1991: 20). Dominant conservative ideologies therefore, stems from the idea that individuals and social groups are instruments in “a historical process whose meaning is hidden from them and over which they have no significant control” (Palmer, 1994: 711). To make it simpler, just because the fish do not

know much about water, it does not stop them from swimming. In this sense, what is of significant concern according to Fredric Jameson is the “problem of the legitimation of a whole [new] social order” resulting from the cultural switch of a society of “affects” to a society of “effects,” or what Lyotard has called “the crisis of narratives” or “representation” (Jameson, 1984: vii; Jameson, 2006; Lyotard, 1984: xxiii).

With this in mind, the definition of ideology employed in the context of this research is derived from Mark Lowes’ (2002) conception of the term. It refers to ways in which meanings are “pressed into serving the interests of dominant” groups in communities, tackling persuasion and the cultivation of widespread support for a given agenda (2002: 112). These meanings serve a purpose of universalizing a narrow range of exclusive values and interests, through rationalizing – or legitimation to borrow from Lyotard (1984) – given interests as logically consistent.

### *Language*

The preceding section outlined the principles of ideology. In this section, the values influencing ideology as language are discussed in further details. Language in this section has two separate functions as recognized by Robert Dunn in *Self, Identity, and Difference: Mead and the Poststructuralists* (Dunn, 1997: 703). First as a holistic tool of analysis in which metanarratives are delineated. Second, as a politically-charged instrument or medium in which language is used as ideologies (or narratives). For the sake of clarity, discourse will refer to language in its second sense carrying ideological purposes from here on.

To give pretext to these two functions before tackling its elements, consider Plato’s allegory of the cave in Book VII of his *Republic* (1892). Plato was able to circumscribe the idea of *essence*, or truth as used in this study, qua language. That is, he was able to delineate an abstract idea without narrowing down its meaning through the use of words. For example, the

essence of a tree can be conveyed through language without limiting its definition to say, an orange tree or a pine tree; such that the latter two are parts within the whole. This use of language as a means to describe the abstract whole, or the *essence* of things, comprises the first function of language—as a holistic tool of analysis. The other function refers to language’s capacity to appropriate actual representations (of orange or pine trees) from their abstract ideas (the essence of a tree) relative to who represents them.

Drawing on these premises, people acquire meaning through speaking and communicating, whereby meaning can only be altered on the basis of discourse. In this sense, discourse –language in its second sense – is a fundamental part in the knowledge-acquisition process. This line of reasoning creates a cause-or-consequence paradox: How can people understand language if *all* the knowledge needed to understand it is inaccessible prior to the utilization of language? How is ineffable knowledge acquired? Do the concepts people have necessarily depend on the words they use? As explained by the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, everything knowable outside of nature (including as discussed earlier, the notion of selfhood and being) is determined by language (The Debate, 1995). As the hypothesis stipulates, language has an “indefinite number of varieties” both simple and complex or advanced in its usage throughout cultures. Language is regarded as the cultural reality of a given society (Kay and Kempton, 1984: 65). As such, one function of language is that it facilitates for people the ability to ascribe meaning to the world around them (Ibid: 66). People can also acquire meaning or “truth” about their world through speaking and communicating. In this sense, discourse is a fundamental part in the knowledge-acquisition process in any given culture, and therefore also as the ideology or narrative of that culture.

Discourse, or “myths” according to Roland Barthes (1972), have historical limits and conditions of use relevant to each society but separate from any idea or object from which it was inspired or originated (Ibid: 109). Objects therefore, are appropriated by a subject—namely

individuals who use discourse—and transformed from their “silent existence to an oral state” (Ibid: 109-110). Myths furthermore, can take form as any material “endowed with meaning”; that is, any medium including oral, written, illustrated, film, photography, song, or book, or manuscript, news.... Etc. Language’s capacity as narrative therefore, comes from the idea that people can conceptualize outside the confines of “natural language” (The Debate, 1995: 147)—or language in its first sense, as described earlier. As such, meaning is not reducible to individual interpretive processes, nor does it exist independently in an absolute social world. Instead, it is constituted through the communicative interactions of humans in a semiotic setting – *a posteriori* (Mumby, 1989). This edifice of meaning is the product of intricate interplay of power relationships that characterize all forms of socialization (Mumby, 1989; Friedman, 2003: 749).

A dominant group within a society is therefore best able to ideologically structure language to further their own interests. To borrow from Edward Said, “historical laws were in reality historians’ laws” (1994: 114). Yet in the same respect, colonial and imperial narratives also enable visible minorities within a community to achieve an understanding of their own identity against these dominant narratives (Palmer, 1994; Kain, 1998; Mumby, 1989). Ideological distortion from this perspective comes from inherent confines on the understanding of the linguistic process, and from the fact that its users construct spoken language as “purposive” activity in the social sphere (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Andrus, 2009). With these points to consider, “Metanarrative,” defined by Lyotard as the “philosophy of history” (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv), is critiqued to question the validity of a social system. Thus, in the context of this study, Metanarratives are the changes and transformations influencing narratives, or its praxis as ideology—the “systematic scheme of ideas, relating to politics or society”, or “the conduct of a class or group” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 1989). Metanarratives therefore, uses language in its second sense to trace the changes in narratives, or language in its first sense.

## *Gender*

Before drawing into the analysis of the representation of Saudi women and the varying factors filtering into it in Canadian media, it is necessary to introduce the notion of gender in the context of identity construction. Identity, as discussed previously, is an intricate complex product of ideology and the process of meaning-making operating off of *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. In *The History of sexuality* (1998), Michel Foucault provides an analysis of the *self* in the context of gender sexuality as products of power interplay in society (Foucault, 1998). Xiao Wei (2009) takes this Foucauldian approach to criticize democratic societies as oppressive regardless of the fragmentation of identities in the private sphere. She asserts that “democratic politics still puts women on the margins just as traditional society did” (Ibid: 122). She argues that when a “local culture is invaded and lost because of the increased mobility of cultural elements” the women in these cultures begin to look for new roles and identities in the new cultures (Ibid: 122-123). These cultural elements in a “fragmented” world, according to Wei (2009), are associated with gender difference that “create more spaces and areas than it usually did in the past – difference makes new difference” (Ibid: 123).

In chapter 1 and 2 of *Feminism Without Borders* (2003), Chandra Talpade Mohanty deconstructs the epistemological themes surrounding the “Western” construction of knowledge and representation; drawing on the relationships between “Third World Women,” colonialism, and feminism. She critiques analytic strategies and methodologies in the creation of “ethnocentric universalities” (Ibid: 19) and dominant models of power, which to her, become “the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others” (Ibid: 21). It seems that Mohanty is not critiquing whether or not Eurocentric feminist can represent “Third World Women” but rather, her concerns revolve around the effects produced by these models of representations. Her argument therefore, suggests that attention should be paid to the ahistorical

universal theories as well as the agency and positionality of a subject when understanding an object *Other*.

With this in mind, Western media over the past two decades has witnessed dramatic change in terms of representational content of race, gender, class and so on. Extending into the first part of the twentieth century, the “traditional” (Wei, 2009) view of men and women and their corresponding roles in Western society were not as fragmented and unrestrained as they are today (Guantlett, 2002; Robinson, 2005; Freeman, 2001). In addition, since established media industries are generally thought of as highly capitalized and centralized, both in content and in the way they are run<sup>8</sup>, Edward Bernays’ theory<sup>9</sup> of propaganda can be applied to news content, in so far as news reflects the interests and values of a society depending on how people can be affected as consumers rather than as citizens (Hackett, 1996: 43-45). What matters here is the subjectivity of representations. The standardization through set ideological frames of references in Canadian media<sup>10</sup> automatically produces a number of typecasts. As pointed out by Adorno “mass media are not simply the sum total of actions they portray or of the messages that radiate from these actions. Mass media ...consists of various layers of meaning superimposed on one another, all of which contribute to the effect” (1954: 221).

Evidently, the larger socio-cultural trend has been reshaped to accommodate a more “individuated” (Wei, 2009) and technologically advanced world where the common theme for identity, in Foucauldian terms, is sexuality and “to know one’s self” (1998). These processes of

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<sup>8</sup> According to Mary Vipond, in *The Mass Media In Canada* (2000), most media institutions are controlled by monopolies in capitalist systems, leaving no room for journalist and reporter autonomy; “media’s messages consistently convey assumption, attitudes and interpretive frameworks that support, or at least do not challenge, the interests of the dominant class” by working to maintain society in time (Vipond, 2000: 92).

<sup>9</sup> That the manipulation of public opinion was a necessary part of democracy. Bernays’ ideas encouraged the importance of individualism in support of a free laissez-faire economy in order to promote the shift from a society based on *need* (to be part of a collective) to one driven by individual need, or *desire* (to be different or unique)— borrowing from the words of Hegel (1977) .

<sup>10</sup> According to Vipond “Canada has been the single nation in the world most vulnerable to the effects of penetration by American cultural industries, and it has adopted various protectionist measures in response.” She takes up the global debate surrounding the preservation of nationalism and the free flow of media, and contends that Canada’s dependency and closeness to the U.S, which stems from their technological and scientific developments, is harsher than “the act of colonialism” (Vipond, 2000: 104).

change in trends and practices, though significant in the context of history, are not as crucial to the theoretical bounds of this research as the actual transformations in underlying epistemological metanarrative(s) grounding Western culture. Gender roles in the West no longer adhere to the romanticized feminine traditions of the past associated with passivity, patriarchy, and chauvinism. As such, what follows is a discussion of several strands of feminism, which tackle the notion of gender in the context of postmodernity.

Barbara Johnson (1992) explains that postmodern feminism concerns the role of language in the construction of sexual difference and similarities. Postmodern feminism in this respect, offers a means to deconstruct both radical and conservative feminist viewpoints in order to assess and understand the relativity of experiences in favor of a shared rather than a universal understanding of women's experience. As Gila Hayim (1990) describes, using a postmodern rendition of Hegel's dialectic, that "in her struggle as a slave, woman attained independence. In her new struggle as practical consciousness she must gain her freedom. The passage from independence to freedom is the essential task ahead" (Hayim, 1990: 17).

Drawing on Johnson's ideas (1992); if gender distinctions are assigned by "nature", as predominantly held by conservative and liberal feminist thought, then ideas of human rights are narrowed down to a dominant ideology. However, if radical and socialist patriarchal discourse proves vital to the social construction of these differences that seem most absolute, then the scope of human rights reform is broadened to encompass cross-cultural ideologies. That is because unlike liberal feminism, radicals are concerned with exposing (rather than just acknowledging) the cultural meanings attributed to biological differences that assign women to subordinate roles separating them from men (Minow, 1992). One such epistemological approach falling into this latter branch of feminism is based on the feminist Standpoint theory.

Sandra Harding (1993) explains Standpoint feminism in terms of oppression as the "objectivity" that results from recognizing social situations that define the entire social order.

She contends that if and once these social situations are recognized, a less distorted account of “reality” can be attained (Ibid: 52). Her interpretation of the Standpoint theory is very much rooted in Hegel’s masters and slaves discourse such “that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other such politics shaping the very structure of a society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them” (Harding, 1993: 54).

The problem here is that the real relationship between “those at the top” and those dominated by them and their policies may not be as clear, especially when these relationships are produced vis-à-vis the perspective of those groups at the top of the social hierarchy. In contrast, Harding argues that “the activities of those at the bottom of ... social hierarchies can provide [appropriate] starting points for thought ... from which humans' relations with each other and the natural world can become visible” (1993: 54). In this way, Standpoint epistemology views Hegel’s dialectic as restricting rather than un-limiting, and hence is very much socially situated on an absolute objectivity and idealism that is advantageous to “marginalized people [and those who can know what marginalized experiences are] rather than for the use only of dominant groups in their projects of administering and managing the lives of marginalized people” (Harding, 1993: 54-5).

However, reading into these defined social constructions as profound, postulates that there is a common universality shared by all women, which in turn makes it almost impossible to speak of women, or a woman, on an individual basis, with unique and eclectic interests and differences. In this sense, Standpoint theory adopts a totalizing approach in addressing the issues of gender broadly, and women more specifically. As Changfoot (2004) concludes, to assert femininity as a consciousness for all women as Standpoint theory suggests, is to eliminate anyone who may not relate or see oneself as “a mother ... naturally relational or especially endowed with caregiving capacities,” or as a man “naturally hostile or having a natural tendency

to dominate either women or men” or even “as oppressed” and thus “occupying a myriad of contradictory positions of oppression and agency” (2004: 496). In addition, multiple notions of womanhood amongst feminist “threaten a different kind of political paralysis: the classic technique of ‘divide and conquer’ [which] splinters the group that is trying to challenge common oppression” (Minow, 1992: 1099).

In this respect, the bone of contention of both radical and conservative feminist definitions lies “in the assumption that the term *women* denotes a common identity” (Butler, 1999: 3). Frug (1992) suggests that these threats are not absolute and can be challenged and overcome. In exploring anti-pornography ordinance, she reveals that “the fractures and contrasts among images of women and femaleness” expose the fluidity of culture, language, and meanings (Ibid: 1102). In *Gender Trouble* (1999)—despite rejecting Hegelian dialectics as *phallogocentric* and accommodating to masculine constructions of meaning (Stoetzler, 2005: 343)—Judith Butler also argues that identity implicit in such non-exhaustive terms as *woman* or *women* “transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender ... because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (1999: 3).

Butler (1999) also highlights a critical distinction between gender and sex, such that if gender were to be considered a cultural construct assumed by the “sexed body” then its universality is diminished in so far as it cannot “follow from a sex in any one way.” Sex in this sense is subject; with out challenge, to a binary male/female biological morphology, while gender in contrast, depends on a multitude of cultural and ideological interpretations. That is, issues of radical and conservative feminism regarding identity and representation are grounded on the understanding of sex as binary, which postulates a presumption of gender that is reflective and confined by and to it (Ibid: 45).

Johnson (1992) furthers this argument by raising indispensable questions: “if we cannot define the word ‘woman,’ how can we speak of ‘women's oppression’? How can women be liberated or empowered if there is uncertainty about what the word ‘woman’ means? Is the problem with particular definitions of ‘woman’ or with the very attempt to define ‘woman’ at all? Is there any definition that fits all women?” (Johnson, 1992: 1080). The answer to these questions is not a multi-valence of the notion of “woman” as banal presumptions might imply. Rather, these questions present a moderate postmodern opportunity towards further imperative examination.

As Frug (1992) urges at the beginning of her manifesto, the interconnectedness of the medium and the message in postmodernism does not implore tossing out both the message along with the medium, nor does it imply a critical separation of one from the other. The essence of postmodernism in relation to dialectics posits that the invariability of constructed binaries in any given discipline (such as gender and the dichotomy of male and female, masculine and feminine, woman and man), and even between interdisciplinary fields of study (for instance, shared emancipatory narratives in both racial and gender politics), should not constrict the expansion of meaning through an interdependent relationship between parts of a constructed whole. As Frug (1992) points out, what is considered masculine in some societies can be interpreted as feminine or sex-neutral in others. This is not to say that gender differences are nonexistent, but rather that it is manifested differently in different cultural contexts, and that these manifestations are ever changing. This postmodern analysis of the competing strands of feminism offers a sensible scope for resisting any imposed culturally-relative meanings from one society over another. Building on particular as well as universal deconstructions of women's experiences highlights the shared commonalities between Eastern and Western women, as well as challenges the ideologies that generate discourses of oppression, subordination, and *othering*.

## Situating the *Self* and *Other*

To give pretext to the significance of identity and language in understanding the dichotomy between *self* (Occident) and *other* (Orient), Sundar Sarukkai (1997) illustrates how the aporia of language lends to meaning its temporal disposition. In his example, Sarukkai demonstrates how the linguistic equivalents to the English notion of “*other*” in all Indian languages translate closely to “one more” (1997: 1408). Sarukkai, reveals that the word itself not only implies differently than its English parallel—as in augmenting the similarities rather than the differences—but also “quantifies the notion of otherness” as a collective of selves (Ibid). This idea of the *other* as an extension of the *self* is the basis of Sarukkai’s “*self-in-the-other*” and “*other-in-the-self*” concepts. Sarukkai contends that the polemical idea of objectivity attributed to an outsider studying a group of people revolves around “the belief that there is some true knowledge outside [of] us waiting to be discovered” (1997: 1408). Supporting the moderate postmodern premise established earlier, Sarukkai, like Descola (2006), also contests this idea by asserting the inevitability of a subjective *self* contrasting with an *other*, and that this subjectivity can perhaps reveal potential benefit in providing a more accurate or “authentic” account of the *self*.

With these arguments in mind and in his reading of Levinas, Sarukkai (1994) establishes the following: First, in the *self-in-the-other*, the *self* studies an *other* in space where time is “not manifested in its [spatial] immediacy” such that a person belonging to a specific cultural or social group –an “insider” so to speak – can provide insight in studying his or her community (1997: 1409). This process defies the conventional notions of objective anthropologists examining their subjects as “outsiders.” Nevertheless, the process entails that the observer as an “insider” must be able to recognize and bracket his or her values when documenting observations about his or her own culture—a method that is left unsettled by Sarukkai. Second, in the process of *other-in-the-self*—or “auto-ethnography” (1997: 1409)—the *self* studies or documents itself in its present state, such that once the present becomes past, a future *self* can understand its past as

*other*. In these two manners, the study of *self* and *other* is split in time and space, whereby the latter requires the agency of a documentation tool or method (photography, film, written word...etc.).

The media therefore, can be considered in several ways, occupying interlinked roles as a *self-in-the-other* (a spatial *self* reflecting back on the political, economic, cultural values adopted by the state, society, system, and/or institution to which it belongs), an *other-in-the-self* (a temporal *self* documenting itself through the development and changes in social values, ethics and ideologies in the form of media content and news over time), and as a *self as other* (a *self* that examines a spatial/temporal *other* that is seen through the representations of political, economic, cultural values adopted by a state, society, system, and/or institution to which it does not belong). The first is spatially self-referential, the second temporally self-reflective, while the last places the *self* in a fixed position by dislocating the *other* in time and space.

Setting the framework for Hegel's idea of truth and the dialectics of *self* and *other* as redeveloped by Sarukkai (1997) within the representation of Saudi women in Canadian media, the *and* between *self/other* justifies that the issue lies not within the existence of differences in ideologies, identities, beliefs, social structures and regulating social institutions. As Philippe Descola explains, "anthropology's methodological relativism is in no way a moral relativism" (2006: 2), rather it does not condone "ethical pluralism" in its effort to stress that an anthropologist, first and foremost, belongs to an institutions that maintains beliefs, values, and systems, which are "constantly bugged by misunderstanding" (Ibid: 8). The issue is very much dependant on the processes of temporal and spatial allocation by which these differences are conceived, interpreted, preserved, represented and reinterpreted through language, ideology, and identity.

The first possibility, where differences are emphasized; implies changes in the underlying structure of Western society that posits a new relational dynamic, whereby the West recognizes

and acknowledges the East and its different metanarratives as located on unequal historical standpoints, instead of giving it an “epistemological status equal to that of [its own] historical chronology or geographical location” (Said, 1994: 205). If this were the case, then the media, reflective of the social ideologies resulting from these changes would only prompt urgency towards understanding the “new” or temporal and/or spatial *self* through *othering*. However, this kind of metanarrative development, as highlighted by Sarukkai (1997) and tackled extensively in the previous section, is dismissed on the premise that the objectivity of the *self* (West) is paradoxically impossible if it assumes that the *other* (Saudi women) is fixed in time and space (or at least space), and since it considers itself as objective in its observations. To put it simply, hegemony, power shifts, and interests would not exist at all if in defining the Saudi woman, or any *other* for that matter; the West only produces an understanding of itself.

The second possibility, the allocation of space and time, considers the changes on a superficial nature, manifesting only as changes in social trends (narratives/ideologies), the split between private and public spheres, the fragmentation within the private sphere, and to the consistency of underlying epistemological metanarratives. The relationship between the West and its representation of Saudi women in terms of space, time, and language in the context of gender identities are maintained within their inherited tropes. And the issue is thus centered on reshaping or redeveloping power and self-asserting ideologies to accommodate new times and situations. The relationship therefore is not the pursuit of meaning in order to be different, but instead, as Gudrof (1998: 301) contends, differences in order to be meaningful—or powerful (Foucault, 1998).

It is due to this very act, that a conflict of identities and ideologies arises. In the context of Western and Eastern gender politics, “Western feminism is dismissed for being ... [an] instrument of colonialism which concerns itself with white affluent middle-class women and for having developed an analysis which is all but irrelevant to the lives of the majority of women

around the world” (Almond, 2007: 133, Lorde, 1984), while Western feminists critique Edward Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism “as a discursive regime ... on the grounds that it does not address the issue of sexuality adequately, and that it tends to be a totalizing discourse devoid of any spaces of resistance or counter discourses” (Jiwani, 2004: 266-67).

As such the fluidity of a postmodern dialectic that accepts the *other* rather than alienates it proves an interesting potential to the way in which ideologies can be formed, shaped, and reconciled. In his conclusion to *The New Orientalists* (2007), Ian Almond suggests that Western attempts to delineate and demonstrate the “epistemological finitude” of the subject of *other*, frequently lures theorist into the trap of writing about themselves instead (Ibid: 203). The issue therefore, is in the relationship of time, which places the Orient *not* in postmodernity. In this sense, the Orient is still adjusting to its “modern” transition. As Said maintains, “Orientalism [has been] fully formalized into a repeatedly produced copy of itself” (1994: 197) through the fragmentation of power:

Power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).

(Said, 1994: 12)

With this in mind, the paradox of postmodernism (or dare I say postmodernisms) is not a matter of the nature of truth, but rather what truth it should adopt. For one thing this fragmentation has split the West, arguably, into the three, and everything-in-between, branches of postmodernism. This split in time, in its attempt to reconcile “modern culture and modern society” (Gluck, 1993), has lead to even deeper fragmentations not only on the scale of the private and public, or state and individual, but also in fracturing the *ideologies* of the state and the individuals<sup>11</sup>. For as stated earlier in this chapter, many sociological, political, anthropological, philosophical disciplines

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<sup>11</sup> See Gluck (2003) for the various debates on the nature of this fragmentation.

lean towards different ideologies in this regard. The problem is that, in its effort to resolve the issue of the binary, the fragmentation of modernism has elevated it into a problem of pluralism.

For most of the critics that deny we are in a postmodern era, the argument stems from the persistence of myth in time. Adorno and Horkheimer (2005), Lyotard (1984) and Barthes (1972) all pinpointed the persistence of the myth of modernism and its preponderance in the West. Congruent to this assertion, the previous sections outlined why there is no break between the “premodern” (Graulund, 2009: 98), modern, and postmodern. History therefore in the context of *self* and *other*, cannot separate the temporal existence of one from the other; it merely provides a dimension in which an opportunity to reexamine and build on the differences between these experiences can manifest (Graulund, 2009).

With hindsight furthermore, language or discourse as explained earlier, allows us to create meaning from our environment in a dialectical manner of thinking. But as this dialectical stream of thought continues, and as meanings are made and classified, we begin to draw from these meanings again to expand our objective existence into a subjective one. That is, we begin to understand that we not only *see* but are also *seen*. The relationship is paradoxical, the *self* defines the world; then from that world the idea of *self* expands, and with its expansion or redefinition, it gains the ability to make new meanings based on its new interactions with the world that it defined. When we employ this ability once more, the world is again redefined. But if it is redefined or expanded then the foundation on which the basis of its redefinition lies (i.e. our ability to extract meaning from it the first time, to develop and then define it) becomes problematic since the world from which we extracted meaning is not a stable or coherent thing anymore; it is an endless cycle that might lead to complex definitions (and hence, polemically points to Hegel’s solution of an inevitable “death”).

With this in mind, is not the process but the limitations associated with it. The limitation of our reasoning is twofold, in so far as not everyone reasons the same way leading to a

paradoxical chicken-and-egg dilemma where the universality of meaning begins to deplete and regenerate again. And second that an ultimate truth is not attainable within the scope of time and space dictating our ability to reason beyond these limitations. This posits a concern on what constitutes the lesser evil: Should a Hegelian death occur, whereby one *self* overtakes another? A new or modern “stylized barbarity” as suggested by Adorno and Horkheimer? (Adorno et al., 2005: 58). In the context of social studies, this is unconceivable, for without problems and continuous change and development, progress is unattainable. Therefore, it is more constructive to find a temporal solution, similar to Descola’s “relative universalism” (2006: 11), that does not override spatial differences, by adapting to the changes in a given period to maintain the coexistence of both *self* and *other*, state and individual, Occident and Orient, public and private... etc.

### **Speaking of *Self***

In an article entitled *Saudi Women* (1984) published more than two decades ago, Judith Caesar questions the purpose of news entries concerning Saudi women by addressing whether or not they were presented “for our elucidation,” contending that such representations are not meant to “increase our knowledge of a complicated foreign society” (Ibid: 619). Although Caesar’s article does touch on the “silent” suffering and “rebellion” of Saudi women “against [state] restrictions,” showing them as “intelligent, sensitive women,” to challenge the dominant conception at the time, her article is just one example of how the West insists on romanticizing the image of Saudi women according to its relative epistemic shifts at any one given time. Miriam Cooke (1994) illustrates that “the way we talk about an event affects the way we will experience or perceive our experience of a later analogous event” (Ibid: 6). She asserts that in times of war, literature, including news, builds on certain inherited or imagined values that

effects its readers' experiences and expressions, and in turn shapes new ideologies and counter-ideologies (Ibid: 7).

According to Mary Vipond, newspapers in Canada present information to its readers that, if not fully endorsing; do not contradict the dominant ideology. She asserts that despite the fragmentation of individualism, the media in Canada is still founded on collective society and "the power-relationships within it" (2000: 94). Caesar's assertions moreover, are outdated, and anything but close to accurate. Today, the diversity of reporting in Canada, despite its high dependency on dominant foreign sources—including the Associated Press, United Press, Reuters, and Havas which posits a problem on its own (Vipond, 2000: 65)—is as high as it has ever been in the past<sup>12</sup>. As the findings will later reveal, both men and women of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds are involved in the dissemination and gathering of news.

There are two important issues to consider, keeping in mind Vipond's analysis of the media. First, since Canada relies on international reporting for its coverage, an Arab "insider" in Saudi Arabia, to borrow from Sarukkai (1997), does not guarantee that the authenticity of representation is secured, given that power interests are in play, and that, as established earlier, not all Arabs or Muslims share the same experiences, let alone a Muslim-Westerner (which, though beyond the bounds of this study, may prove potentially helpful in the context of representing Islam). Second, the situation of Saudi women does not necessarily reflect Saudi Arabia's role as a political player in the international field, nor is it a summary of the general condition of citizens and the public in the kingdom<sup>13</sup>. The situation in Saudi Arabia, and thus the representation of Saudi women, according to Ménoret (2005) in his book *The Saudi Enigma*, is

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<sup>12</sup> Vipond furthermore, reveals that the Canadian press also economizes by buying almost all its foreign news from American and European sources before re-writing it for Canadian consumption (2000: 69).

<sup>13</sup> According to Nimrod Raphaeli in *Demands for Reforms in Saudi Arabia* (2005), the 9/11 attacks, international criticism, economic decline, growing population, scarcity of opportunities, as well as the growing insurgency inside the Saudi Kingdom created the urgency for the government to seek change. However, despite this "growing recognition about the need for reform, the political commitment to carry them through is either absent or overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks to be tackled" (Ibid: 517). The article details several complex multilayered political, economic and social aspects hindering the reform movement in the country, including issues on the status of women.

not a problem of a state being “modern or Islamic, favorable or hostile to women, socially emancipatory or oppressive,” rather it is a problem with the impotence of a political class and order “that agrees to speak any language and to parade any sign, so long as it appears to serve its ends” (Ibid: 175). Ménoret (2005) furthers his argument by questioning the “yardstick” used to measure the modernity or backwardness of Saudi society adopted by the West. He describes the fixation with the “status of Saudi women” as the “Trojan horse of Westernization” (Ibid: 175). Such that, as Baudrillard (2002) argues in contrasting with the Eastern *other*, this incessant fixation on reifying the reality of the abstract is not only within the boundaries of its identity, but also outside of it.

Nevertheless, many Saudi natives, including a considerable number of women, have written about the status of women in their country. In *Women and words in Saudi Arabia: The politics of literary discourse* (1994), Saddeka Arebi for example, examines the work of several Saudi Arabian women writers whose work contributes and challenges the religious and cultural constraints, by interpreting and reinterpreting secular and religious heritage, as well as the Western imaginary that represents the Arab woman as docile and subjugated. Altorki (1986; 1977) and Almunajjed (1997) as another example, offer in their respective fields of study, several books and articles on the lives and experiences of Saudi women.

In *Family organization and women's power in urban Saudi Arabian society* (1977), Altorki, delineates the dynamics of gender and class in the kingdom based on the author’s conducted ethnographic fieldwork. In it, she relates the findings of her data, which reveal how “women have always exercised significant control over the decisions of their male agnates relating to the arrangement of marriages” (Ibid: 277), focusing more on presenting an accurate depiction of women in contrast to circulating dominant ideas of submissiveness. In retrospect, Almunajjed (1997) offered a similar account by conducting one hundred interviews with women of different classes and backgrounds in one city. Her interpretation of these interviews

nevertheless, as well as a substantial part of her bibliography, relies heavily on Western sources. What makes Almunajjed's publication credible nevertheless, is her insight *as* a Saudi woman.

In *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The limits of postmodern analysis*, Moghissi (1999) voices her concerns about such concentration on asserting the *self* against an *other*. She explains that this can lead to the preservation of Islamic fundamentalism (Ibid: 62), which was initially the very reason that invoked such defensiveness towards an *other*—namely towards the West's totalizing criticism of Muslim or Arab women's oppression.

Livingstone (1998) describes this binary argument of *self* and *other* as the “being-true-to-myself syndrome” (Ibid: 15). He concedes that social and individual identity is a subjective dialectic of differences and alienation. Differences however, are not enough to acknowledge let alone accept equality, or the subjectivism of equal values (Ibid: 16). What is important is not the “truth” about the *other*, but rather *authenticity*. Livingstone recognizes that subjectivity is unavoidable, but he also argues that although society creates subjective representations it does not implicate hegemonic stereotypes and reactions from these representations (Ibid: 17). If authenticity is to be true to yourself, then values are relative: Objective in the context of their own society based on their experiences in it; subjective outside of their context, in the relative experiences of another. This however does not eliminate the capacity of these values to inform ideologies that govern the actions of the state, government, or people towards a perceived *other* (Lowney, 2009).

Livingstone emphasizes the importance of moral ethics in developing authenticity in representing an *other*, suggesting that without it, society is pressed into a state of “undecidability of meaning, of worth, of value” (1998: 17), whereby identity is forever caught in an irreconcilable dialectic based on differences and hence a distortion of history (Ibid: 18). Moreover, Benjamin Walter (1938) elaborates on the idea of authenticity. He adduces that representations in the media are framed so that they become independent in reality from “the

original itself” (Ibid: 3). As Ghareeb (1983) suggests in *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in The American Media*, the nature of established media itself is a problem considering journalistic trends such as competition, pack journalism, common or shared personal or individual ideologies, not to mention the feeling of patriotism in times of crises. Authenticity therefore, is “the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced” (Benjamin, 1938: 3). Thus, if authenticity of a thing is jeopardized due to representation, since “substantive duration ceases to matter,” then so too will its history, and in turn its authority and autonomy (Ibid).

Considering that the aim of this research is to examine the ideologies guiding media representations, Karim H. Karim suggests that “multiculturalism as a post-modernist project offers the prospect in which varying perspectives can share discursive space, and in which public discourses can be polyvalent. However, the realization of this ideal is dependent upon the socio-political elites, who presently control dominant discourses, making room for minority voices” (1993: 15). Livingstone proposes an act of “cortesia- the courtesy of listening to the other, to the text” as a solution (1998: 17). Ghareeb (1983) stresses that to the very least, the media should resume its watchdog duty in keeping the state and power in check. Sarukkai furthermore (1997), deems that the solution in a way that it is not negatively subjectified is “to re-understand the other and perhaps integrate into its epistemology an ethical responsibility towards the other.” This solution furthermore, perhaps sheds some light on how a “truthful” image of the *self* can be gained in the same manner. If a myth of the *other* is eliminated, then so too shall the myth about the *self*, and more so a modern or postmodern *self* with all the paradoxical and polemical meanings that these terms may carry. What he emphasizes is the “ethical domain” in which the *other’s* own subjectivity is acknowledged in its representation.

Sarukkai (1997) furthermore, like Benjamin (1938), suggests that when a *self* tries to subsume an *other* “then there is violence” (Sarukkai, 1997: 1407) or “war” (Benjamin, 1938: 14)

inflicted on the latter. As Lyotard (1984: 5) delineates, the war which Benjamin attributes to the loss of authenticity, is a war over power. Sarukkai (1997) goes further in his argument by claiming “there is an ethical responsibility not to violate the other by reducing it to one's own system of thought. The violence arises in ignoring this a priori ethical call.” To Sarukkai, the entire process of representation is unethical and void of responsibility if it does not recognize that the *other* is more than just an ontological subject, or “knowable entity.”

Buterin (2009) defines the notion of will in his reading of Hegel as “the way we imbue our experiences with meaning through the purposes we assign ourselves” (Buterin, 2009: 27). Not only does this suggest that meaning drawn from relative experience is subjective, but also that the “purposes” we give ourselves determine how such meaning is made, and to what effect. A Hegelian description of freedom is “being at home with oneself in another” (Baynes, 2002: 1); this freedom cannot occur if the will, or purpose to which we ascribe to ourselves, cannot or do not coincide with one another. Such responsibility can be distinguished in two ways: *externally* and *internally* whereby the difference is in intention (Alznauer, 2008). One can be held internally accountable or “morally responsible for what [he or] she intended to do, foresaw, or should have foreseen” (Alznauer, 2008: 367). External responsibility is the social response to the effects caused by one’s actions regardless of intent—for example, legal or religious codes. Dialectically speaking, Hegel applies the same system of God and man to external and internal responsibility. Just as man can be both God (in his ability to create) and distinct from God (as a creation of God), so is external to internal responsibility; external responsibility is always determined by internal responsibility. However, as suggested earlier, external (social) responsibility is not on the same plane as moral (personal) responsibility, whereby one can be morally guilty without being legally at fault (Alznauer, 2008: 381).

This raises a presumable paradox such that if intentions were all that mattered then accountability as we know it is completely dependant on a person’s sense of moral

responsibility. In other words, if intentions determined punishment then all “unintended” misrepresentations are inculpable, just as accidental murderers are without blame. Nevertheless, Alzanuer (2008) points out that Hegel’s dialectic does not exonerate the murderer of his/her actions on the premise that “we always intend much more than we intended” (Ibid: 382). That is, the mere fact that a reporter succumbed to generalization in his or her article supposes the intent to which he or she should be held accountable. Moral accountability, or internal responsibility, is not determined by one’s intentions with respect to a situation; rather, it is one’s consciousness of the act that lead to this misfortune. (Ibid: 382-2)

Rita Shelton Deverell furthers this debate between responsibility, subjectivity, and objectivity by describing the ethical duties of journalist as part of the problem (1996: 59). In order to achieve a utopian state of media representation ethically, a journalist must address ethical, personal and subjective questions about events. She contends that stories have several sides to be covered and challenges the linear view of perspectives that limits media to objectivity and subjectivity, or *goodness* or *badness*, respectively, and the effect they have on reality. Journalism, she argues involves a diversity of voices that shape reports as opposed to the misconception of objectivity brought about by the ideals of liberal democracy representation (Deverell, 1996: 60). Deverell, suggests that subjectivity should not be the issue (1996: 59). Reality is not shaped by the lack of personal views or reports as the criticism on subjectivity suggests. On the contrary, authentic representation must involve the subjectivity of the reporter, subject, and spectator. She warns that by denying subjectivity completely, or substituting it with the façade of objectivity, media content will fall into the pitfall of misinformation, inaccuracy, and thus lack validity in representation (1996: 48). She states that only by recognizing the existence of subjectivity and addressing it or stating it clearly can we surpass these dangers, and begin to change.

## Speaking of *Other*

The common assumption about knowledge is that it improves with time, but as supported by the arguments in the previous sections, Edward Said demonstrates (1994: 202) that this assumption is only partly true given that only discourse is subject to visible changes. In *Orientalism* (1994), Said reveals how “a major part of the spiritual and intellectual project of the late eighteenth century was a reconstituted theology” (Ibid: 114), where Europe aimed at reestablishing its identity through “a detailed study” of what was perceived as a threatening *other*—namely “Indian” or Asian cultures (Ibid: 115). He illustrates that although discourse can and did change since then, this change is not necessarily associated with a change in underlying metanarratives (“Latent Orientalism<sup>14</sup>” (Ibid: 206)). That is, the lasting interest in self-reification (in Hegelian terms), the pursuit of power and self-preservation (in Foucauldian terms), and the construction of legitimation narratives (in Lyotard’s terms) are still prevalent despite the changes that dynamics of language and representation involve.

At one level, Orientalism examines “the literary conditions by which a static and regressive Orient was constantly reproduced in Western literature” (Turner, 2004: 173-174); by provoking differences and similarities, both Western and Eastern cultures can be defined accordingly. However in the context of this research, following in Said’s footsteps, the idea of identity is utilized to examine the possibility of transcending Otherness resulting from the dichotomy of Occident and Orient. This is not to say that differences and similarities are constructed based on imagination, nor that the rhetoric of “blame”, as often associated with Orientalism, will be adopted or ignored in analyzing the material later in this contribution – far from it. It is almost inevitable to extract the element of blame associated with the process of

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<sup>14</sup> Metanarratives, in the dialectical context of Occident and Orient, have two important roles pertinent to the analysis of the findings in this research: First, to understand the readjustment of *self* as object—or in other words, to identify the changes in epistemological thought occurring over time. This can be thought of as “latent Orientalism” (Said, 1994: 206)—the homogenizing epistemological framework underlying Western society (Ibid). Second, to outline how the changed *self* asserts itself through a redefinition of an *other*—a “manifest Orientalism” (Ibid) or the legitimization of new epistemological thought through the construction of narratives.

*othering* from the concept of Orientalism, since its foundations are constituted on language, and language can recognize but cannot transcend its ideological capacity as discourse. It is nevertheless, necessary to recognize the inevitability of presumptions and the prevalence of ideology when theorizing about the implications of identity-reification through *self/other*. As Turner contends “the critical intellectual” therefore, “must go beyond the suffering of particular nations and cultures to explore the universal aspects of human suffering and oppression” (2004: 174). Instead of approaching the idea of ideology as myth, Said stressed that Orientalism is “something more formidable than a mere collection of lies” (1994: 6). As Sarukkai (1997: 1407) explains, the relationship between *self* and *other* is asymmetrical. The Occident, or “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient” (Said, 1994: 2), draws on ontological and epistemological assumptions of the Orient and its occupants, where the *self* “attempts to subsume the other into the ‘same’” (Sarukkai, 1997: 1407). Not surprisingly, Said (1994) received much criticism for his approach.

Mark F. Proudman (2005), for instance, accused him of designating the term Orientalism to “an ideologue and propagandist of empire, so that it is now almost impossible to use the term in its former sense” (Ibid: 548). Proudman insists that Said has adopted the very same “essentialist generalizations” that he attempted to critique through what can be seen as, at least to Proudman, “little more than a collection of extraneous and context-free quotations that [suited] his polemical purposes” (Ibid: 549). Herman Schmid furthermore, argues that ideology and “society in general” do not have their genesis in human subjectivity (1981: 62). In his readings of Durkheim and Althusser, he insists that the notion of subjectivity is a “social *effect*” whereby humans draw from something objective in reality (“internalization”) and then interpret it to form ideologies (“externalization”) (Ibid).

However, in response to this argument, Sarukkai (1997) provides an account of the impossibility of studying *self* and *other* without it being rooted in the concept of subjectivity.

Additionally, he asserts that language too “cannot transcend this; rather, it reflects [a] responsibility in its full entirety” – that is, its manifestation as discourse (Ibid: 1408). To state the obvious, if there was such a way in which the *self* can understand the *other* objectively then there would not be a problem to begin with. On this idea, Said elaborates that Orientalism is not merely “a basic geographical distinction” between Orient and Occident, “but also of a whole set of ‘interests’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction ... it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand” (1994: 12). In so doing, the rationale behind his approach was not an attempt to analyze “what lies hidden in the Orientalist text, ... [but rather to analyze] the text’s surface, its exteriority to what it describes” (Ibid: 20).

Linda Alcoff argued that few could contest the relationship between identity formation and power structures (2006: 25). She asserts that identity differences and similarities work mutually to augment oppression and solidify power and authority respectively (Ibid: 25-26). If, as within the social context of national or ethnic identity; similarities were all that matters, then social hierarchies, ideologies, and oppression would not exist at all. Sarukkai, in studying concepts of ipesity and alterity, illustrated the relevance of subjective differences in the construction of identity. He points out that focusing on the differences alone sets no limitation for studying the Otherness of “a rose plant or a zebra and that of a person,” thus “the study of humans” (1997: 1406), is very much established on the subjectivity of people. In Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1994), this idea has been elucidated in the way the West perceived a foreign Orient.

In Jack Shaheen's *The TV Arab* (1984), the stereotypes in popular American media concentrates on the depiction of Arab men as extremely wealthy, barbaric, sexualized, or as terrorist. Arab women on the other hand, are portrayed as submissive, oppressed, restricted to the veil, suppressed by gender separation, and subjugated by polygamous marriages. In *Covering Islam* (1981), Edward Said highlights the importance of “dialogue and less sensationalism”

(Jafri, 1998: 9) in media coverage of the *other*. Although these insights were made almost three decades ago, the issues are still as pressing today.

Over the past years, there has been an established scholarly consensus by researchers<sup>15</sup> that the West tends to portray Muslim women in weak roles. In one study, Mishra (2007a) compared the representations of Saudi women in *The Washington Post* with those of American women in the Arab news after September 11, 2001. Her findings revealed that American news tend to portray Saudi women as “oppressed victims in need of Western liberation”, while “the Arab News represented most freedoms enjoyed by American women as shallow”. Another quantitative research by Kaufer and Al-Malki (2009), ascertained that the majority of “Western media representations of [Arab] women, [are] more pictorial than verbal” (2009: 113-114). As Mishra reveals, the defining characteristics of both representations had the common goal of “disciplining the female body” (2007a: 259); such that the Orientalized body essentializes Otherness by becoming a constant projection of everything strange and abhorrent to the West, while simultaneously ever exotic and alluring (Jiwani, 2004: 267).

Congruent to the arguments in Edward Said’s *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), Gema Martín-Muñoz explains in the beginning of her article (2002) that “the media not only constitutes almost the sole source of information for the images and attitudes that they create[,] they also perpetuate historically inherited stereotypes and cultural imaginaries that form part of the national collective memory bank” (Ibid). The Muslim woman is ostensibly contrasted against a Western grid of gender norms and rights. The notions of Arab and Middle East have often served as shorthand for Muslim in mainstream media (Said, 1981), placing women even more deeply within a bigger caldron of generalized representations. Asma Barlas criticizes such totalizing practices by

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<sup>15</sup> For more researches on the representation of other, Arabs, Muslims, and Arab women see: Baderoon, G. (2003), Ghareeb, Edmund (1983), Hafez, Kai (2000), Ibrahim, D. A. (2003), Narayanamurthy, B. (2007), Kamalipour, Yahya R. (1995), Jiwani (2004), and Wilkins, Karin Gwinn (1997). Also see <http://www.caircan.ca/>.

demonstrating how “women in Muslim societies lead dramatically different lives depending on a range of factors, especially social class, that determine the opportunities they will have throughout their lives” and how “difficult [it is] to generalize about women's experiences [in] a single state, much less all Muslim societies” (Barlas, 2005: 96).

In Islamic countries, and more specifically in Saudi Arabia, where Islamic Sharia's laws derived from the Quran govern both public and private lives, gender identity adheres to a set of different rules that are strictly outlined by the regulations of state and society. Mai Yamani, a social anthropologist studying the effects of globalization in Saudi Arabia, reveals that the “kingdom's totalizing adaptation of tradition, honor, and religion” is not as solid as the media seems to portray (2005: 80-81). She outlines two important factors in the fragmentation of the country's nationalism pertinent to this study:

[First] *Deterritorialization of political identity*, owing to the rapid development over the past decade of new trans-Arabian media-including 108 Arab satellite television channels and thousands of Internet sites-has eroded the national unity that is a key political resource for any regime. [Second] *The encroachment of the West*, in terms of politics, ideology, and force, owing to the emergence of the United States as the world's sole superpower.

(Yamani, 2005: 81)

Unlike the dominant misunderstanding, the political turbulence in Saudi Arabia is not restricted to international criticism regarding its laws against women or its problem as a breeding ground for Islamic fundamentalists. Yamani (2005) reveals that the history of the country as well as its resistance to change in a rapidly globalizing world has hindered its progress as well as shattered its inner national stability. The social changes and advancement over time, in which the West experienced a shift in thought from agrarian, to industrial, to postmodern thought of the individualistic ideology within a culture, where a sense of community forms on the shared agreement to agree to disagree, may not apply on a macroscopic level across spaces.

With this in mind, one can speculate on the colonizer/colonized history that defines the Middle East today. In one aspect, it is residual of the changes in Western modern epistemology:

The issues in the Middle East surrounding WMDs, women's rights, Islamic fundamentalism...etc., or even so (in a more "mythical" context) as communal, stasis, primitive constituting the "old world" (Graulund, 2009) are all inherited in part from its Western colonizer. I argue that it is *in part* because though the colonialist and imperialist influences did have a solely responsible influence on the course of Middle Eastern history, it does not, despite using it as means of achieving its goals, dismiss the fragmentation in Islamic thought resulting during its rule. That is, waves of change not only came from the outside but from the inside of the Islamic empire as well. Thinkers and scholars and their differences in *ijtihad* (Hourani, 1991: 68)—or interpretations and justifications—aided in the fragmentation of what Hourani suggests was a united world under Islam. The world that existed before World War II and the fall of the Ottoman dynasty was the last of a "united" Islamic empire. At its prime, according to Hourani (1991) the faith of Islam created for people regardless of language, space, and time,

[A] common sense of belonging to an enduring and unshaken world created by the final revelation of God through the Prophet Muhammad, and expressing itself through different forms of thought and social activity; the Qur'an, the Traditions of the Prophet, the system of law or ideal social behaviour, the Sufi orders oriented towards the tombs of their founders, the schools, the travels of scholars in search of learning, the circulation of books, the fast of Ramadan, observed at the same time and the same way by Muslims everywhere, and the pilgrimage which brought many thousands from all over the Muslim world to Mecca at the same moment of the year.

(Hourani, 1991: 257)

With the rise of separate Islamist movements under the weakening Ottoman Empire, the political relationship between European leaders and some Arab and Islamic leaders, seeking to break loose from the Turkish dynasty, began to change (Hourani, 1991: 259-260). What followed consecutively were the European influences that encouraged the "idea of those who spoke the same language and shared the same collective memories should live together in an independent political society," giving birth to "the spirit of nationalism" (Ibid: 269).

Relative to the history of Saudi Arabia, the Arabian peninsula, within the wider Ottoman empire, remained divided into separate dynasties that were either against or in support of outer

intervention. The Sharifs of Mecca maintained control under the rule of the Ottoman Empire over the western and southern regions of Hejaz<sup>16</sup> and Yamen. The Ibn Rashid rulers in central Arabia also supported by the Turkish state, were able to shield these regions from the growing expansion of the Saudi state aided by the new Wahhabi movement and its imams for some time. However, by 1914, Abdul Aziz and his army, supported by the founder of Wahhabism; Muhamad Ibnu Abdul Wahhab, the British government, and its allies in the Eastern Gulf known now as Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait, succeeded in defeating the Rashid dynasty and began to take over the other regions in the area (Hourani, 1991: 280).

Although Saudi Arabia was established as an internationally recognized state in 1932, its rulers have since faced constant threats to the stability of the monarchy due to the latent vestigial tribalism that still exists today (Yamani, 2005). The issue nevertheless, extends beyond state borders and within the Arab world. Many Islamic countries voiced their issues with Saudi Arabia's adoption of a Wahhabi doctrine, which embraces narrow and literal interpretations of Quranic scripts.

In her article, *Women's Human Rights in the Koran: An Interpretive Approach* (2006), Shah discusses the potential of Quranic verses as subject to "context interpretation" in order to ultimately consider and foster the equal rights of women in Islam. She points out that the most widespread interpretation of religious texts renders women's rights in Islam as obsolete, reactionary, and contradictory to Western feminism and international human rights<sup>17</sup>. The problem however, is not restricted to how the West sees the East. Barlas argues that it is the general ideology in Muslim countries, which situates males as ontologically superior to their gender counterparts that facilitates such perceptions (2005: 93). Nevertheless, she also points out

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<sup>16</sup> For further context on the relevance of Hejaz's separate history, vernacular, culture and traditions in relation to the rest of the other regions in Saudi Arabia, and relevant to the minor distinctions made in some of the articles in the findings that highlight the distinction between the western city of Jeddah and the central city of Riyadh see: Baker, Randall (1979).

<sup>17</sup> See Doumato, Eleanor Abdella. (1995), Kelsay, John (2007), Oh, Irene (2008), and Hatem, M. F. (2006) for more on Islamic Shari'a laws in the eye of globalization. Also, Golley, Nawar Al-Hassan (2004), and Hopkins, Nicholas and Ibrahim, Saad E. (1997) for more on Arab society.

that the West, in the way that it “works as a silent referent in historical knowledge,’ is not very helpful for understanding postcolonial societies” if it does not question the “realities and virtualities” that media and new technology offer (Ibid). She concedes that it is crucial to adopt “models that can accommodate the specificities of Muslim societies” (Barlas, 2005: 93); that is because “secularization” as she maintains, does not “guarantee against dogmatic beliefs” (Barlas, 2005: 105)

On one hand, Canada’s conception of national gender identity, based on political and economic globalization, can be placed on one end of the spectrum. While on the other hand, Saudi Arabia, governed by its statutory religious laws, can be placed on the opposing side (Shah, 2006: 869). This situates both ideologies at different vantage points. From a Canadian outlook, there exists a “democracy of everyday life” that dictates the homogenization of gender roles (Giddens, quoted in Gauntlett, 2002: 3); such that, in the context of postmodernism, Canada is more socio-culturally adoptive of social constructions (Gauntlett, 2002:16), while Saudi Arabia fosters the tendency to adhere to biological determinism (Yamani, 2005: 83). The issue is not as Gudrof suggests, “socially structured sexual confusion” (1998: 229), but in the construction of these two ideologies and the repressive oppositions that build on them.

Structuration, a theory first developed by sociologist Anthony Giddnes, suggests that Micro and Macro levels of society, governed respectively by human agency and social structure, are in a direct relationship with one another, and that “the repetition of the acts of individuals” are forces that create these structures (Gauntlett, 2002: 93). This dialectical relationship is much more complex than a causational rationale would invoke, whereby the simplicity of A affecting B and equaling C, is not adequate in this sense to explain the intricate influences of people and society on each other (Ibid). Therefore, contingent with postmodern and feminist theories, it goes without saying that gender, universally and in and of itself, cannot be reduced to a mere constituent factor in formulating a social or individual identity. It exists, in the epistemological

conception of identity, within a dialectical model of subjective understanding. In this respect, the fundamental problem lies in “the nature and extent of the sexual implications of the unconscious site of Orientalism” (Abu-Lughod, 2001: 103), challenging in this way how Said (1994) relegated gender as part of his broader colonial discourse. As Lila Abu-Lughod points out,

First, we have to ask what Western liberal values we may be unreflectively validating in proving that "Eastern" women have agency, too. Second, and more importantly, we have to remind ourselves that although negative images of women or gender relations in the region are certainly to be deplored, offering positive images or "nondistorted" images will not solve the basic problem posed by Said's analysis of Orientalism.

(Abu-Lughod, 2001: 105)

In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that the process of dialectics is not employed for its modernist purposes, but instead, reiterating from the introduction of this research, to deconstruct and critique how the binary of *self* and *other*, men and women, black or white, *them* or *us*, is not to be treated as similar dichotomies despite the presumption that they are invariably given in the discourse of one another. The concern is not whether or not dialectics and other selected analytical modes can apply to one the same way they do to the rest, but rather how and why, if indeed they do at all.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

To reiterate from the opening chapter, this research expounds on the binary discourse of *self* and *other* to identify the preponderance of Western vestigial colonialist and phallogentric legacies manifested in Canadian media over time through representation. This research is based on a qualitative non-probability sampling of the portrayal of Saudi Arabian women in three Canadian newspapers. The analyses of the findings explore the multidimensional aspects of alterity and ipseity in Canadian media to shed some light on the nature and consistency of epistemological metanarratives within a wider ontological Western mediascape. Utilizing Bruce. L. Berg's (2007a) explanation of Content Analysis, this research aims at systemically analyzing and interpreting data collected from three Ontario-based newspapers. The analysis of the data to be examined is not limited to the "physical data" available, but also extends to an interpretive understanding of thematic and conceptual symbolism available in it (Ibid: 252).

#### Research Design

The axiology, or values, attributed to this methodology is a combination based on *critical* and *hermeneutic* approaches whereby the media, as an extension of society, is seen as "heavily and aggressively value-laden," such that only "by recognizing society" and "interpreting action and text" within it "can [we] give priority to the most important human values" (Baran & Davis, 2009: 12-13). The research design furthermore, adopts a "normative" ontology of the media such that it "operates in order to conform to, or realize, a set of ideal social values" (Baran & Davis, 2009:15). Epistemologically speaking, these ideal standards, on which the findings in this research will be judged, draw on the ideas of dialectics, subjectivity, Orientalism, and gender dynamic as explained in the literature review chapter. That is, "what is known is situational or

local, what is real and knowable about media system is only real or knowable for specific social systems in which that system exists” (Baran & Davis, 2009: 15).

As established in the section on postmodernism and metanarrative changes, issues of cultural imaginary and inherited historical notions of colonialism and imperialism still linger on today. The methodological goals of this research is to examine the *selective perception*, or “the idea that people will alter the meaning of messages so they become consistent with preexisting attitude and beliefs” (Baran & Davis, 2009: 146), through the evaluation of *cognitive consistency*, or “the idea that people consciously and unconsciously work to preserve their existing views” (Ibid). The methodology is designed to examine the possible relationships between the underlying ideologies of Western gender identity and the portrayal of Saudi Arabian women in the Canadian media and its implications. Reasoning in this research is *inductive*, moving from specific observations in data to form broader generalizations and theories, whereby the conclusion is based on premises (Berg, 2007a: 255). Hence, The *purposive sampling* strategy of data (Neuman, 2007: 247), will be analyzed *inductively* vis-à-vis a combination of rhetorical and textual analysis.

A methodology based on such content analysis establishes a regulatory framework that extrapolates from, and assesses existent knowledge for the purpose of arriving at, and validating, new knowledge (Berg, 2007: 304). Utilizing Bruce. L. Berg’s explanation of Content Analysis, this research aims at systemically analyzing and interpreting data collected from three Ontario-based newspapers. The analysis of the data to be examined is not limited to the “physical data” available, but rather extended to an interpretive understanding of thematic and conceptual symbolism available in it (Berg, 2007a: 252). To study the authors individually and microscopically is not as effective as studying the message that they convey and its impact on its audiences. Therefore, discussion pertaining to the role of policy makers in the media industry will not be covered in the premise of this examination except in broad theoretical terms. As

Theodore Adorno (1954: 226) suggests, the significance of studying the authors and communicator of these articles and images, in this situation at least, is no different than studying the sea in terms of the psychology of the fish. Hence, this research is framed by theoretical triangulation supported by the literature review at hand and drawing on the links between macro and microscopic levels of interpretation in newspaper articles.

### **Conceptualization**

Qualitative research falls under Blumer's umbrella concept of "*Symbolic Interaction*" (Berg, 2007: 9). The concept of *Symbolic Interaction* derives from two ideas concerning the extraction of meaning. The first view indicates that meaning is intrinsic to an object, event, or phenomenon. The second account suggests that people impose meaning to these objects, events, or phenomena. Meaning in its second sense, allows people to produce various realities that constitute the sensory world and therefore, reality becomes an interpretation of various definitional options. Whether or not this reality is accurate is not as significant as its authenticity or the reality of its consequences.

According to Lawrence Neuman, *conceptualization* refers to "the process of taking a construct and refining it by giving it a conceptual or theoretical definition" (2007a: 208). Therefore, following the instructions for critical analysis outlined by Berg (2007: 36), it is necessary to "concretize the intended meaning" of the following concepts and how they are examined within this study: *Ideology, values, rights, othering, the West, Saudi women, subjectivity and objectivity, media representation, text, and dialectics*.

The term *ideology* is defined as the praxis of Lyotard's (1984) conception of "narrative". As delineated in the literature review chapter, a narrative is a "story or representation used to give an explanatory or justificatory account of a society" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 1989), such that in practice, they form a "systematic scheme of ideas, relating to politics or

society”, or “the conduct of a class or group” (Ibid). These ideas, or *values*, are defined as the underlying beliefs gained through social and historical experiences, reified by language or discourse. Ideologies therefore refer to ways in which meanings are “pressed into serving the interests of dominant” views of a group tackling persuasion and the cultivation of widespread support for a given agenda (Lowes, 2002: 112). Social ideologies are determined by the culture-specific values underlying norms, or the political terms of “cultural intelligibility” (Butler, 1999: 148), “which make for communal solidarity” (Aune, 2008: 403), and therefore enable the perception of collective or individual identity and rights.

These values according to Barthes (1972: 123), are “myths” which have no guarantee for “truth” whereby “meaning is always there to *present* the form” and “the form is always there to *outdistance* the meaning.” Ideological changes and differences therefore, are determined by the “metanarratives,” or historical social transitions and experiences influencing narratives (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). Metanarratives can be identified by evaluating *text* or the “product [or discourse] of social interaction that serves as a source of understanding” (Baran & Davis, 2009: 13). *Text* or *discourse* in this manner, involves the subjectivity of images, institutions, language, society and related cultural codes. *Identity* as it follows, is a subjective compilation of the discourse of being that supplants the notion of an absolute conception of the *self*. Judith Butler (1991) highlights interconnectedness of identity and subjectivity such that the process of becoming a *subject*, involves the appropriation and reiteration of cultural *norms* while *identity* is the characteristics or *values* (gender, race, ethnicity, rights...etc.) that define or individuate a particular subject. Together they foster the similarities and differences of a group of people within communities or larger groups who share the same values. In this way, identity in the context of this research, refers to the subjective political or cultural agitation of social groups, including ethnic or racial nationalism, women's rights, gay and lesbian liberation and so on, which can prompt ideological

binaries of *self/other*, male/female, West/non-West, civilized/primitive, biological/cultural to create stereotypes.

*Stereotypes* are preconceived and clichéd notions (biases or cognitive structures based on norms and values) that help individuals process information through associations between reality and perceptions. Stereotyping in this research takes place in the social categories of rights and gender. Since people are the products of both their biology and their environment (nature and nurture), stereotypes can act as positive reinforcers of *cognitive consistency* through *selective perceptions* (Baran & Davis, 2009: 146). The media in this way can be viewed as one way in which such perceptions can be gained or/and reflected. *Media*, plural of medium, is the type of channel through which messages and values can be transmitted and exchanged. *Media content*, in the context of this study, denotes subjects, or “news,” that are presented in newspaper articles. *Media representation* is the practical method of representing these contents, which involve the reification of ideologies, qua discourse, signs, and images. The deconstruction of newspapers content includes an examination of the use of terminology, vernacular, or “slang”, and literary devices, as well as the various representations conveyed. Keeping in mind the postmodern approach delineated in the literature review, the deconstruction of content involves examining whether the representation of an alienated or *othered* subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject(s).

With this consideration in mind, it is important to first outline the definition of *gender* and *gender rights*, *Saudi women*, the *West* (or Western values), as well as to highlight the thematic concepts operationalized in coding the findings. Gender is one element factoring in the formation of identity, be it on an individual or social basis. In the context of this research, the relationship between the ideologies of gender and identity, employed in Canadian media and the respective depictions of Saudi Arabian women, is reflective of a broader underlying metanarrative that permeates the idea of rights and what it is to be a woman in the West. As

proposed in the literature review, the epistemological fragmentation of truth in the West is a reaction to the premodern and modern metanarratives of absolutism. As such, Western feminism is concerned with what it is to be a woman, or the relative experience of womanhood beyond its phallogocentric legacy. Different feminist ideologies place different emphasis on how a person's gender (as opposed to sex which is determined by biology) can be determined by biological and cultural definitions or a combination of both.

The conceptualization of Saudi women therefore, is selectively framed and limited to females identified as Saudi Arabian citizens residing within the Saudi kingdom. The key terms *othering*, *the other*, *the alien other*, *them*, are important interchangeable theoretical terms that subjectifies them against Western ideals to be able to determine the stereotypes guided by the dominant perception of women and their rights. In methodological terms, they are used when individuals, theories, terms, institutions, channels, or media of a non-dominant society and its ideologies are addressed or represented by another powerful counterpart. In this case, Western ideology assumes the dominant role, while Saudi Arabian subjects are subservient to these ideals, *only* in their represented reality in Canadian news. The definition of Canadian media and ideology more specifically, are redeveloped based on Rune Graulund (2009) and Edward Said's (1994) conceptions of the terms West and Western. According to Graulund:

'The West' no longer denotes a precise geographical position in the shape of Europe, but now includes geographically diverse locations all over the globe. It is, in other words, no longer unequivocally 'west' of any one location. That is not to say that the distinction between West and 'the rest' has disappeared, only that this distinction has become increasingly hard to define. (Graulund, 2009: 81)

Edward Said proposes, that although power has shifted from Europe, namely France and Britain, they both constitute "the West" in different historical timeframes. And therefore, the geographical and cultural closeness of America and Canada and their shared histories in this regards, gives pretext to the use of Orientalism in the context of this research (Said, 1994: 4). These shared experiences can be outlined as: 1) Common epistemological values in history

(Enlightenment, Industrialization...etc). 2) Shared European origins. 3) Close geographic proximity. 4) Shared use of a language. 5) Interrelated Media systems. In this manner, the case-specific analysis of the subject of Saudi women in contrast to these ideas sheds light on the trends, nature and implications of Canadian media representation, while the macroscopic synthesis of the process of representation helps identify ideological imperatives in Western media systems.

To outline the gender ideals on which these representations are contrasted, the following themes set the criterion for the concepts to be identified in the analysis and coding process: *Private/public sphere* (i.e. lifestyle, domestic or non-domestic roles, family, work, religion), *Social experience* (i.e. guardianship, chaperons, careers, independence), *Rights* (i.e. social or political opportunities, education, justice), and *Subjugation* (i.e. oppression, segregation, abuse, submissiveness). These ideas are operationalized, or linked to “specific sets of measurement techniques or procedures” (Neuman, 2007a: 210), through the process of dialectics. *Dialectics*, unless indicated otherwise, refers to Hegel’s model as utilized by moderate postmodern deconstruction as explained in the literature review. That is, as inquiry into metaphysical contradictions and their solutions in understanding the action of opposing social forces, values, and ideals. In compliance with the moderate postmodernism approach taken in this study, Rocco (1994) situates the dialectical "between modernity and postmodernity" as "mediating text" such that it is a vantage point that "offers perhaps a third way that helps illuminate the limitations of the other two" (Ibid: 72).

In this respect, the interpretation of *othering* as a dialectical appropriation is twofold: First, it can be understood as a theoretical model of meaning-making in and of itself founded on modern thoughts. This provides a means in which a subjective identity of Saudi women can be defined from the *other’s* point of view. Second, it can assume a self-referential role for the media, where insight on “the sender of the communication” can be gained (Berg, 2007a: 252).

Nevertheless, taking into consideration Ian Almond's (2007) precautionary observations, the dialectical can be problematic insofar as most writers or theorist attempting to tackle it are not able to escape its theoretical interpretive manifestation. Hence, the interaction of concepts is just as important as the terminology being described. Since there are several different values underlying the concepts outlined, it is important to know *how* concepts are related and how they operate in the scope of this analysis. This understanding of process will help better identify and recognize significant patterns and themes as they appear in the data. The relationship between the terms must be simultaneous such that each can be used as thesis or antithesis in the dialectical model.

Consider **Table III.**, which lists some significant concepts in the dialectical analysis of Canadian media and its representation of Saudi women. The common attribute in all these terms, besides being identified dialectically, is that the terms under the thesis-antithesis columns have an assumed binary and, for the most part, antonymic relationship with one another. The corresponding terms under the synthesis column represent the nature of these relationships between theses and antitheses. In **Table II.**, the theses and antitheses interaction in the (de)construction or synthesis of identity is demonstrated. This linear interaction is the most basic form of dialectical meaning-making, as it draws on *a priori* experience of the *self* and then contrast that knowledge of the *self* with *a posteriori* experience of something else (an *other*). Now in considering the elements in **Table III.** again, one may notice that the relationship becomes more complex as the syntheses of theses and antitheses become more non-linear as a result of interactions between two *a posteriori* experiences.

In **Table IV.**, the dialectical deconstruction of gender identities demonstrates such a relationship. This non-linear interaction is explained vis-à-vis the construction and deconstruction of epistemological experiences (Metanarratives). The build-up of Metanarratives begins with establishing a relationship between two independent elements. Primary elements in

*Table IV.* are either biological (sex: male/female) or culturally determined (gender: masculine/feminine) and are dialectically synthesized based on their own variations. In the given example, the metanarratives behind gender dynamics and ideologies are examined vis-à-vis the relationship between two epistemologies relating to sexuality (sex and gender) as a value of identity. Sex is the biological variants between men and women, while gender is the cultural meanings ascribed to them. When sexuality is synthesized, a cross-match is created between sex and gender, producing four variations: Masculine/Male, Masculine/Female, Feminine/Female, and Feminine/Male. Assuming that masculinity are the traits associated with the biological state of being male, and likewise femininity and female, then it holds that identity, as determined by sexuality, is biologically-related. The result therefore is an ideology that is based on biological-determinism. Just the same, if masculinity is independent of biology, and determined by culture, then it holds that identity, with respect to sexuality, is socially determined.

From this point, the two ideologies, in the context of their independent epistemological interactions with other values (say for example, rights or sexism...etc), can exist autonomously in a process of ongoing syntheses that is suggestive of the nature of its progression (its implications). However, the existing binary relationship between the ideologies can also cease in light of their shared and interconnected epistemological roots, from which a reexamination of its parts can be done (its history). It follows then that the process of dialectical construction and deconstruction of ideologies is both perennial and iterative. It is continuous considering the infinite multi-levels of new elements involved (for example the synthesis of language as primary, and vernacular as secondary, into gender ideology). Accordingly, it is iterative or cyclical in so far as it determines and is determined by the relationship of, or the-everything-in-between, the values and metanarratives. In other words, the dialectical relationship between two ideologies is parallel to the relationship between their respective metanarratives. That is, ideology is reflective of metanarratives, and as such a lens into its own history.

Philosophically speaking, a Hegelian dialectical relationship can only exist between two or more things. The higher the number, the more complex and multidimensional the equation and outcome becomes. Considering the concept of *self/other*, one can conceive about his or her existence without a need for exterior understanding, or an antithesis to that existence. However, she or he will not be able to synthesize vis-à-vis *self* without first, conceiving of itself as an *other*, and second, creating a binary between the subjective *self* as an objective *other*. In this respect, the demonstrated method of construction-deconstruction is pivotal to this research in so far as it offers holistic view of representations in the findings as both self-referential and self-reflective.

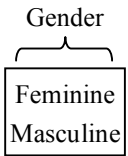
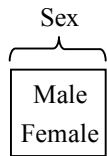
**Table II.** Primary dialectical relationship.

<b>Thesis</b>	Subject as Object I see	Experience (a priori)	I
<b>Antithesis</b>	Object as Subject I am seen	Experience (a posteriori)	Not I, he, she, it...etc.
<b>Synthesis</b>	Abstract Concept I see and can be seen	Reification of Experience Value	Identity

**Table III.** Secondary dialectical relationships

<b>Thesis</b>		<b>Antithesis</b>		<b>Synthesis</b>	
<b>Concept</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Metanarrative</b>	<b>Narrative</b>
Male/female	Sex	Masculine/Feminine	Gender	Sexuality	Biological/Cultural
West/Occident	Contemporary	East/Orient	Primitive/developing	Geography	Histories
Secular	Progressive	Religious	Reactionary	Beliefs	Doctrines
Democracy	Majority	Theocracy	Minority	State	Government
English	Assertive	Arabic	Submissive	Language	Voice
Individual	Private	Collective	Public	Activity	Sphere
<i>Self/us</i>	Ipeity	<i>Other/them</i>	Alterity	Perspective	Identity/Othering
Man	Patriarchy	Woman	Matriarchy	Sexism	Authority
Family	Micro	Bureaucracy	Macro	Interactions	Structure
Market	Capitalism	Planned	Communism	Economy	System

*Table IV.* Dialectical deconstruction of gender identity

Thesis		Antithesis		Synthesis	
Identity	Value	Identity	Value	Ideology	Determinants
Woman	Feminine/Female	Man	Masculine /Male	Sex	Nature
	Masculine/Feminine, either or both		Masculine/Feminine, either or both	Gender	Nurture
Gender 	Social Relativism (Nurture)	Sex 	Biological Determinism (Nature)	Social Value (Narrative)	Epistemological Experience (Metanarratives)
Metanarratives	Narrative	Metanarratives	Narrative	Identity	
Identity				New or Dominant Ideology	

## **Research Questions**

Since the aim of this research is to synthesize the preponderance of Western vestigial colonialist and phallogocentric ideological legacies manifested in Canadian media through its representation of Saudi women; the main research question is as follows: What is the result of dialectical syntheses between Western ideologies and the depictions of Saudi Arabian women in Canadian media? To what degree are these relationships reflective of metanarratives? To answer this concern, the following sub-questions are considered in no particular order:

1. How are women in Saudi Arabia portrayed in the Canadian media? On what basis and to what effect?
2. What are the ideological influences framing these depictions? Do they change over time? Can these changes be self-serving?
3. Was the reference to Saudi women the main subject or a minor point in the background towards something else?
4. What implications result from assessing the ontological identities of Saudi women vis-à-vis a Western framework for gender roles?

These questions can be answered through the analysis of findings to reveal the ideologies and narratives shaping representations in established Canadian media. The results give insight on whether or not changes in representation narratives can invoke cultural relativism as a feasible option through “moral responsibility” (Alznauer, 2008: 367).

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

According to the 2008 NADbank<sup>18</sup> report, Canada has ninety-seven daily circulating newspapers across the nation. The readership study reveals that “weekly readership has remained stable, indicating that daily newspapers continue to be a relevant source of news and information for Canadians. Almost three quarters of Canadians (73%), 13.7 million adults 18+, read a printed

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<sup>18</sup> NADbank is “the principal research arm for the Canadian Daily Newspaper industry and a tripartite organization whose membership is comprised of daily newspapers, advertising agencies and media companies and advertisers” (Nadbank 2008 readership study, 2010).

edition of a daily newspaper each week,” in contrast to only 4% of adults who read online editions. “The total reach of Canadian adults through printed and online editions of daily newspapers is 77% each week” (Nadbank 2008 readership study, 2010).

Keeping in mind Canada’s active readership and involvement in the news, data was gleaned from three wide-circulating Canadian English-print newspapers: CTVGlobalMedia’s *The Globe and Mail*, Canwest’s *The National Post*, and Star Media Group’s *The Toronto Star*. Of the three, the *Toronto Star* is the largest, with a “circulation of about 335,680 paid copies each weekday, about 477,683 on Saturdays and about 331,504 on Sundays,” the *Globe and Mail* follows closely at second (Nadbank 2008 readership study, 2010).

Because the sampling method in this project is a non-probability purposive sampling, only materials that mention, discuss, or depict Saudi women and their experiences as outlined were selected. Additionally, since the corpus of this research is country-specific and gender related, the research discourse scheme of precedent-setting is based on a discourse of “Saudi Arabia” and “women.” This includes word variations for both in content title and body such as *Saudi*, *Saudi Arabia*, *KSA*, *the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, *The Kingdom*, *Arabia*, *girl(s)*, *woman*, *women*, *female*. Therefore when combined, phrasal variations include, but are not limited to: *Saudi Arabian woman/women*, *Saudi woman/women*, *Saudi Arabian girl(s)*, *Saudi girl(s)*, *Women/girls of Saudi Arabia*, and *the women of the Kingdom*. However considering that these sequences are not sufficient in narrowing down search results to better fit the parameters of this research, a complimenting precedent-setting criterion was applied. Terms and sentences that denote public opportunity, accomplishments, rights, privileges, oppression, subjugation, or injustice, and cultural, religious, traditional, and societal norms were put into consideration in the selection process of articles. These factors are categorized under the four content-matching concepts defined in the conceptualization and data collection themes: *Private/public sphere* (i.e.

lifestyle, domestic or non-domestic roles, family, work, religion), *Social experience* (i.e. guardianship, chaperons, careers, independence), *Rights* (i.e. social or political opportunities, education, justice), and *Subjugation* (i.e. oppression, segregation, abuse, submissiveness), and *religion* (its social and spiritual influences). These concepts help maintain reliability based on their consistency in determining the cultural precedent-settings applied in the analysis of thematic and literary devices use in the articles.

Furthermore, reflecting on news coverage surrounding the Middle East over the past decade, temporal considerations were crucial in collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. It assists in the detection of patterns and relationships within and across the collected material. The reviews of newspaper articles offer an opportunity to examine the progression or buildup of a case over long but defined periods of time. It also suggests some clues on the attitude and habits of news coverage in the press, at any given time, event, situation, or season. The material therefore, is categorized and then analyzed within the timeframe of three major political events associated with the region: **Stage 1** The attacks on September Eleven (2001- 2002), **Stage 2** The War on Terrorism (2003- 2006), and finally, **Stage 3** Recent Coverage (2007- 2009). Any occurring changes in the binary representation of *self/other* and *West/East* in each period are thus cross-examined to determine whether there has been any significant thought in the epistemology that guides ideological representations.

In practice, a general search was conducted using “Saudi” first, and then “Saudi Women” as keywords through the ProQuest search engine. The search was then narrowed by setting the filters to define three time spans starting from the specific date of 11/9/2001 to 30/12/2002, and annually thereafter from 2003 to 2006, and 2007 to 2009. The results from the keyword search “Saudi” indicated broadly the material relating to Saudi Arabia that received Canadian media attention at a given time. In the first timeframe for example, these themes involved views on the

Attacks of 9/11, the Bush administration, and the involvement of Saudi Arabia. As such the filter settings were once again readjusted to narrow down the search by adding the variations of keywords geared towards researching Saudi women during the time that followed the attacks. This process was conducted in the same way nine additional times to compile data from each of the three newspapers over three time spans: September 11 attacks, The Iraq War/War on Terror, and finally a general search in consideration of the aftermath of these events. Data is then coded in terms of themes, semantics, and concepts defined in the conceptualization and research design sections of this chapter.

This non-probability purposive sampling scheme, covering several articles from different newspapers, does not confine or limit potential inferences in terms of content, providing instead, a sustainable and reliable method for reexamining different material in other newspapers or media in the same way (Neuman, 2007a: 220). The coding process of data is developed on grounded themes, followed by the identification of analytic themes, and then a consideration of relevant theoretical explanations for each (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2007). The data is then presented in the next chapter as an organized body of compressed information under various thematic subheadings. Following the collection and coding of data, a combination of two qualitative modes of analyses were employed: *Rhetorical* and *textual*. By so doing, patterns in the data are distinguished to determine what additional analysis or actions must be taken. As Neuman (2007a: 223) points out, validity is closely related to the reliability of the findings, therefore conclusions drawn are discussed to retrace the various analytic steps used to ensure accuracy and validity.

Since qualitative research falls under Blumer's concept of Symbolic Interaction (Berg, 2007: 9), validity in this research is based not on *what* is real but on the significance of what *is* real relative to a given context (Neuman, 2007a: 222). That is, it does not matter how a color-

blind person sees red, as long as the car stops at a red light. Rhetorical analysis of media content – i.e. newspapers – involves breaking down phrases and sentences to produce and understand meaning. By understanding meanings underlying representations, the narratives or ideologies of any given message or article can be understood. As Berger explains, this model of communication can be summarized in Harold Lasswell’s statement “who? Says what? In which channel? To whom? And to what effect?” (Berger, 2000: 58). In other words, rhetorical analysis examines the message, its senders and receivers, the medium and the context in which it is conveyed.

Rhetoric, as it applies to the analysis of articles in this research, refers to the “social values and effects of symbolic forms found in texts (whether intentionally placed in them or not)” (Berger, 2000: 57). The purpose of rhetoric is to “persuade” (Ibid) or to help create a consensus on a certain subject, perspective, belief, or ideology. In Aristotelian tradition, the effectiveness of message-persuasion manifests in five ways: *Ethos*, based on the credibility or character of the sender, *pathos*; an appeal to the receiver’s emotions, *logos*; proof based on reason or logical arguments, the *aim*, value or purpose of the message, and finally the *mode*, or the channel by which a message is conveyed (Berger, 2000: 60). For this research, as explained in the conceptualization section above, the sender denotes the Canadian media as archetypal in a broader Western media. The receiver more specifically, consists of the Canadian population, or those with access to said newspapers, as representative samples of the wider Western culture. Printed publications (newspapers) are the mediums through which the message (Saudi Arabian women’s rights and experiences) is conveyed. The case-relative “effect” (Berger 2000: 58) outlined for this case study is situated within the dialectical understanding of both the sender and his/her message in relation to one another. Based on these terms, Berger (2000) defines eight literary devices that are employed in the analysis of concepts and themes in effect. They are as

follows: *Alliteration, comparison, definitions, exemplification, irony, metaphor, metonymy, and Allegory*<sup>19</sup>. Based on these rhetorical analytical methods, and complemented by the conceptualization delineated earlier in this chapter, a comparison between thematic and conceptual constituents in the portrayal of Saudi Women across several circulating Canadian newspapers can be drawn. The portrayal of the *other* thus demands interrogation at various levels, in terms of strategic uses to define the boundaries of an imagined collective, and also in terms of the antithetical differences of *them* as they appear to *us*. The themes (subjects and predicates) at play are as follows:

A. *Themes (Private/public sphere, Social experience, Rights, and Subjugation):*

- i. Saudi patriarchal laws predicating oppression, discrimination, gender segregation, submission, subordination, and repression of women.
- ii. The representation of Islam in association with fundamentalist fringe groups perpetuating violence and human rights violation in its name.
- iii. Questioning traditions and norms to justify the struggle for freedom, resistance, equality, emancipation, and liberation at work and at home.

B. *Thematic binaries:*

- i. Epistemology of Otherness: attributes of collective culture, norms, expression, language, ambition and incentive for change.
- ii. Ontology of victimization: clothing, class, status, expectations, freedom of choice, and submission.

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<sup>19</sup> For an explanation of these methods, refer to Berger, 2000, pp. 62-64.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

#### The Canadian Mediascape

The three timeframes analyzed are centered on major events affecting the dynamics between West and East over the past ten years. **Stage 1**, covering the time between the terrorists attacks bringing down the twin towers in 2001, the response war on Afghanistan a month later and the preliminary events leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, is marked as the beginning of one of the most politically-charged periods since the Gulf war. **Stage 2** begins in the year 2006, noted mostly for the hanging of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein for his “crimes against humanity.” The cell phone video of his execution circulated across the globe within a matter of hours, and is still readily available even today. Additionally, only a few months prior to his death, the Israeli-Lebanese thirty-four day war had also ended. The following period between 2007 and 2009, **Stage 3**, defines an erratic and unstable aftermath of the foregoing stages. Aside from the increased rates of terrorist attacks and suicide bombings in this period—reaching its highest since the beginning of the twenty-first century<sup>20</sup>—the year 2007 witnessed the beginning of an economic recession where the world succumbed to the most devastating global financial crises since the Great depression in the 1930s. The insolvent banking system in the United States, as a result of the Bush administration enterprise, had caused the collapse of several international financial institutions, banks, and corporations.

Keeping in mind that there has been extensive and significant research on the difference between news before and after September 11, this analysis aims at identifying underlying values

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<sup>20</sup> Global Terrorism Database (GTD), National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). Retrieved from [http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?expanded=no&casualties\\_type=b&casualties\\_max=&start\\_year=2000&start\\_month=1&start\\_day=1&end\\_year=2008&end\\_month=12&end\\_day=31&dtp2=all&success=yes&ob=GTDID&od=desc&page=1&count=100#results-table](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?expanded=no&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_year=2000&start_month=1&start_day=1&end_year=2008&end_month=12&end_day=31&dtp2=all&success=yes&ob=GTDID&od=desc&page=1&count=100#results-table).

and ideologies in the Canadian mediascape through the development and progression of change in the portrayal of Saudi women over time. What follows therefore, is an analysis of these developments framed within these three stages and according to the concepts and thematic subjects and predicates outlined in the methodology chapter.

### **Saudi Women in the Context of Three Timeframes**

The general observation regarding all three time frames, (Stage 1: 2001-2002, Stage 2: 2003-2006, Stage 3: 2007-2009), reveals that the representations of Saudi women did not vary much from the existing cache of sensationalized images discussed in the literature review. However, there were some significant changes in terms of context, or *why* Saudi women were being referenced, leading to a noticeable vacillated difference in *how* they were depicted.

Baring in mind that Canada's role in Afghanistan in Stage 1 was merely part of the symbiotic military exchange program with the U.S. (National Defense and the Canadian Forces, 2004) and later (Stage 2 & 3), part of the International Security Assistance Force<sup>21</sup> (ISAF), and considering Canada's military reluctance to join forces with the Bush army's invasion of Iraq (Delvole, 2003), most articles in Canadian newspapers since the 9/11 attacks and up to the 2003 war—withstanding that the majority of Stage 1 articles credited American sources—espoused Western and U.S. involvement in the Middle East. The overall findings revealed partial similarities to the findings in Mishra (2007), which covered the representations of Saudi women in American media. The results in Stages 1, 2, and 3 revealed consistency in reoccurring themes (*Private/public sphere, Social experience, Rights, and Subjugation*) in the Canadian media's propensity to focus on how "Saudi women were not allowed to drive, travel, or have surgery without permission from a male relative; they could not divorce without a cause as men could;

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<sup>21</sup> For more on ISAF-NATO mission, efforts, and accomplishments see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/>.

they suffered segregation in public places and had to wear *abayas* or black cloaks that cover Muslim women from head to toe” (Mishra, 2007: 267).

The conclusive analysis of the three Stages however, by expanding on the metanarratives embedded in Western media, implies the fluidity of narratives shaping the representation of Saudi women. Canada’s adamant stance regarding the invasion of Iraq (marking the end of Stage 1) can be associated with the apparent decreased proclivity of Canadian news to convey uncritical opinions and views regarding Saudi women and their agency in promoting action (Stage 1 & 2). In one aspect, it can be said that the suspension of the representation of Saudi women in Stage 1 as docile and submissive, and in need of saving, affinitive to the findings in Mishra (2007), is maintained within the relative political framework at the time, as well as on the shallow pool of topics detailing the anti-democratic laws limiting Saudi women in the public sphere.

In another aspect however, the progression of passive-active representations, conceived under a growing scatter of public opinion on national and international policy, reveals how changes in the image of Saudi women are adjusted to the frequency of examination and reexamination of self-consciousness. That is, the consistency of feminist, liberation, and democracy rhetoric in the media over time is reflective of the metanarratives affecting ideology changes. For Mishra (2007), Western “*liberation* [is] defined as being able to exercise individual choice in purchase of consumer goods, such as women putting on high heels and men buying pin-ups of beautiful women” (Ibid: 267). The majority of the eighty-eight articles adopt relative narrative renditions based on this superficial definition, highlighting individualism in varying contexts and discourse. The following subsections expound on variations of trends and contexts.

### **Saudi Women and the Legitimization of War**

In the first stage, yielding nine articles, Saudi women were invoked to *legitimize* the necessity of American intervention in the Middle East. In the aftermath of September 11, the American media laid the groundwork for its invasions of Afghanistan (in Oct, 2001) and Iraq (in March, 2003) as a preemptive measure against future terrorist attacks. The news articles produced between 2001-2002 were, though less abundant than in succeeding years, more rigorous in voicing this position in comparison to the subtlety of latter articles. Mariam Fam (2001, Oct 20) wrote an article under the headline “*how war reveals life beyond the veil*” which openly endorsed “wars and economic woes” as a “gate to freedom” by likening the effects of the War on Terrorism to the rights and liberties American women gained after World War II. She does so by concentrating on the “conservative interpretation of Islam” as the cause behind the empowerment of men and the subjugation of women in the Middle East. Capitalism moreover, is framed as a favorable alternative for women in war-stricken countries, where the author quotes several Arab/Middle Eastern women who “admit” that “making money gives [them] a sense of freedom” (Ibid). To further support this argument, women not in favor of these changes were depicted in impoverished conditions “sitting on the floor on a rug” and draped in veils, *abayas* or *hijabs*.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia was compared to Iraq prior to the Iran-Iraq war, Gulf War and the UN economic sanctions that pursued. The author draws on the differences between Saudi women, Iraqi women, and Bahraini women, and even Iranian women. Unlike the rest, women in Saudi Arabia cannot hold high ranks in the public domain compared to their Middle Eastern sisters. The author also attributes these phenomena to the decreasing numbers of men dying in wars; almost blatantly implying that with the men out of the picture, the women may get the chance to experience liberty in the form of work, fashion, and managing their own lives among other things.

Fam (2001, Oct 20) contends that war “gave women confidence in themselves... and convinced [Arab] men of women’s potential.” In all the articles in Stage 1, Middle Eastern governments and men are portrayed as chauvinistic, patriarchal and hypocritical in their claims of gender equality laws. Fam (2001, Oct 20) further attributes absurdity to the “increasing number of females...donning veils” claimed by patriarchal governments. Similar to the other articles, this one succeeded in muting the voice of Saudi, Muslim, and Middle Eastern women interchangeably as one, by talking *for* them.

Furthermore, another article situates Islam as the cause of women’s suppression in Saudi Arabia. It reported on the religious state’s banning and shutting down of several stores that sold the “black head-to-toe gowns” for “violat[ing] Islamic law” (Breif, 2002, May 7). The problem with this assumption is that it generalizes about Islam in such a way that, arguably, facilitates an even broader legitimization of war, let alone *othering* of Islamic countries. As Edward Said explained “Islam is a world of many histories, many peoples, many languages, traditions, schools of interpretation, proliferating developments, disputations, cultures, and countries” that cannot be simplified into a single unmitigated derogatory rendition (Said, 2002, July: 70).

Another interesting news trend, developed further in the latter two Stages, relayed the controversial topic of salesmen working in women’s lingerie shops in Saudi Arabia. In Stage 1, the topic was covered twice within the same week in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* by the same author. In the *Globe and Mail* article, “*Saudi women find treatment ‘humiliating’*” (Abu-Nasr, 2002, Oct 15), Donna Abu-Nasr criticized the logic of Saudi Arabian rules as paradoxical since it very much embraces segregation in favor of patriarchal privileges, whilst allowing men to conduct businesses that are otherwise considered “intimate” to women (Ibid). She moves on to describe the “shapeless forms” that are Saudi women quoting several of them, as well as journalist and activists to frame the issue as an “insider’s” problem, and thus rendering

the Western gazer—be it journalist, reader, intervening government...etc.—as an objective or neutral outlook. One example, involves quoting a Saudi journalist, Jehayeir Al-Mussaid, adopting an opinion compliant with Western interpretation of the situation. However, in Pascal Ménoret's *Saudi Enigma* (2005), Al-Mussaid specifically expressed otherwise saying that though the situation is the same the context and interpretation is worlds apart. Al-Mussaid argues that oppression and other forms of liberation/segregation Western rhetoric relating to Saudi women is “a part of [Saudi] parlance that [has been] imported, among other things, from foreigners” but which may not necessarily convey “what the [Saudi] woman wants from liberation” (Ibid: 185). Nevertheless, Abu-Nasr asserts that Saudi Arabia's inability to cope with its fast development as an “oil made” kingdom has resulted in its resistance to adopt Western “social awareness to changes” (2002, Oct 15).

To elaborate on this point, Abu-Nasr gives pretext to the segregation in contemporary Saudi Arabia by considering malls and new developments in contrast to the history of the old days, “preserved” in old “souqs, or markets” (Ibid). She argues that in those days women were much more free to conduct business and go about their everyday lives<sup>22</sup>; the economic growth leading to mass consumerism has only been adopted to sedate citizens in order to maintain religious authority and state power—a view nevertheless, that is also supported by Al-Mussaid in Ménoret (1997) and Abu-Nasr (2002, Oct 15) and also by other Saudi reformers and Saudi experts<sup>23</sup>.

Abu-Nasr, with several articles spanning over the three timeframes, retains to a larger extent a cynical and sardonic tone in her representation of Saudi Arabia. This characteristic however, is also very prevalent in most of the articles in Stage 1, where Saudi Arabian women were conveyed as voiceless emblems of indifference to (if not pro) Western ideals, while *all* men

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<sup>22</sup> A historical point which cannot be contested.

<sup>23</sup> See Raphaeli (2005), Yamani (2003; 2005), Ménoret (1997), Altorki (1986)

were seen as opposing oppressors and hence, *others*. In comparison nonetheless, later articles (Stage 2 & 3) tackling the same lingerie sales subject and conforming to such representations of muted and docile Saudi women (with different motives), conveyed men as more humane, reserving criticism to the Saudi state and Islamic system.

Moreover, several articles in Stage 1 tackling spinsterhood and the associated stigma amongst Saudi woman, emphasized the social segregation of the sexes, where women are “not allowed to meet [their husbands] before their wedding night” (Will, 2002, Aug 16) let alone interact with unrelated males. This separation is conveyed as detrimental to the social standing of women, in so far as this, at least in the context of Western ideology, is associated with ‘traditional’ gender roles that separate the private and public domains of society (Gauntlett, 2002). One article, reporting on a Saudi author and her new book, reveals how she opted for a career instead of a domestic life (Goddard, 2002, Oct 26). In another article the religious clerics of the state are criticized for endorsing polygamy for men, such that a Saudi woman’s “life isn’t considered validated until she is married and raising children,” and how some women support this by finding wives for their husbands (Saudis struggle with the stigma..., 2002, Oct 5). In Goddard (2002, Oct, 26) author Raja Alem is praised for doing the precise “unheard of for Saudi women,” pointing out “what life might be like for a woman confined by tradition to virtual house arrest” (Goddard, 2002, Oct 26).

The headline of another article, “*Regimen change beats screwdrivers,*” in its use of metonymy and metaphor, implicitly supports the necessity of Western intervention for women’s rights. As pointed out by Mishra (2007a), Western intervention is not condemned when it concerns human rights. Considering that these articles were published after the invasion of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia was represented as the “worlds most rigorous theocracy” (Will, 2002, Aug 16) after the annihilation of the Taliban. The references to Saudi women is used to bolster

this perspective, with the idea that Saudi Arabia “sooner or later, and probably sooner ... will meet its match in modernity. [And therefore] America's reluctant semi-allies in Europe and elsewhere should support American actions that hasten that day” (Will, 2002, Aug 16).

### **Saudi Women and the Pursuit of Reform**

In the second stage, yielding forty-two articles, Saudi women were invoked to justify the effects of American intervention, which was to an extent portrayed under a tense critical political climate; perhaps directly or indirectly related to the reelection campaign of George W. Bush. With the increasing number of casualties, scandals, and doubt that revolved around the war on Iraq, the crux of non-contextual coverage began to shift once more. The feeling of patriotism arising during times of crises, falsely rooting the War on Terrorism to the events of 911, began to unearth different political views and deeper interests in details concerning Saudi women—that is, aside from legitimizing preemptive protection measures, Western involvement was also justified as a means of protecting the vulnerable *other* from the immanent threat of dictatorship and oppressive regimes.

On one hand, the media can be criticized for revealing the negative aspects of the *other*; in another, it can be said that it has adopted resources and a less ethnocentric nature of coverage. Through these factors, the “problem” of the Saudi state is extenuated, creating more binaries, more political and social, more ideological exchanges of different opinions surrounding the Saudi woman. Although a development from the previous stage, the depictions in Stage 2 are still voiced ethnographically, speaking *for* the women not *of* them.

In this regard, Saudi women were subject to more complicated representation since reporting no longer delineated surface or shallow conditions touching on vague public roles. In an article called “*Land of shopaholics and shut-ins; women who rock boat risk wrath of both*

*Saudi sexes strict codes aren't the only reason for gender inequality*" (Cohn, 2003, April 20) metonymically highlighting the wearing of the veil, the author suggests that although patriarchal "muttawa," the religious police, are always present to ensure that women are covered in public places, "women are harsher on themselves." Some women, especially ones hinted as having local or no education at all, appear to prefer traditional conservative lifestyles. The article furthers this claim by highlighting the opinions of Saudi women educated abroad. In one instance, a reporter visiting a local girl's college meets with the dean of the college and two empowered women, one who was almost denied her American education in the 1970s when "tribal fighters" chased her to the airport (Cohn, 2003, April 20). According to the article, the dean explains how "self-imposed barriers and a patriarchal society with conservative interpretation of religious and cultural tradition makes this desert kingdom an obstacle course for aspiring women" (Ibid). Illiteracy moreover, is reported to be higher in females than in males, and that twenty-seven percent of women refused employment in order to avoid interaction with their gender counterparts. The point is further emphasized with an anecdote of a female professor at a local university protesting for the right to drive during the Gulf War, and as a result, was severely beaten by her own female students.

Women in this article are ontologically described according to the epistemological criticism directed onto state policy as seen in Stage 1, where Saudi Arabia's adoption of some aspects of modernity and capitalism within the scope of its own ideology is problematic and contradictory to the ideals of capitalism and democracy. Due to this partial 'assimilation', Women are described as incapable of dealing with their "hard battle" in so far as they are "asking not fighting" for their rights. This foreseen passivity is attributed to the sedating "shopaholic" nature of their "comfortable lives," where "drivers [wait] on [them] every where." This stresses the wide class division, such that Saudis either live "lives of leisure or scrub floors

at home” as “shopaholics or shut-ins.” With this idea, the status quo in Saudi Arabia is regarded as an “Islamic injunction, [that] if lost can lead to sexual tumult.” Those in favor of maintaining it, have “low ambitions” and prefer holding onto “tribal codes, dress codes, and driving codes.” Women “who rock the boat or take the wheel” on the other hand, “risk the wrath of both sexes,” as well as authorities. (Cohn, 2003, April 20).

Saudi Arabia, according to Fulford for the National Post, ranks last in contrast to other nations in terms of civil liberties. It is described as a “rich theocratic monarchy” where women’s rights do not exist (Fulford, 2003, July 12). The report indicates that “dancing, Freud, gay sex, Marx, the Bible, criticizing the monarch, women driving cars -- all remain illegal” and that “their own [Islamic] human rights system” reduces any efforts taken by women towards reform as merely trivial complaining. Fulford further expands the differences between the U.S. and the kingdom, criticizing how Saudi Arabia paid a large sum of money in the production of a series of TV commercials that show individuals in situations that “emphasize the shared values’ of Americans and Saudis”; an initiative, in Fulford’s opinion, that is hypocritical, or at the very least only successful in accentuating the opposite (Ibid). The article details the inhuman system in Saudi Arabia alluding to the brutal actions of religious police prosecuting for “crimes of vice,” and the imprisonment of persons without notifying families. It endorses these perceptions by soliciting the Mecca school fire earlier in 2003, where girls were “beaten” back inside for the lack of proper “black cloaks” (Ibid). In this article, women are only described to emphasize the troubling “conservative outrageous” and “anti-Semitic” nature of the country rooted in Islam, dismissing any initiatives as hypocritical, on the basis that democracy cannot exist in a non-secular setting.

An ongoing theme from Stage 1, one article under the title “*New Veil, Old Face*” (Freeman, 2003, Oct 31) implicitly endorsed the idea that war liberates women, revealing how

pressure from the U.S. post-911 is forcing Saudi to loosen its conservative laws. Freeman ascertains that some “Saudis were so disillusioned with their own government that they were looking to the United States for Salvation and actually would welcome a U.S invasion” (Ibid). This view however, is limited only to “educated” women in Saudi Arabia who spent “several years living in the United States” (Ibid). Others by contrast, are still oblivious to this framing of the truth and are conveyed as scared and voiceless, and even to a degree, with no capacity for reason or insight. The author also references sociologist Mai Yamani on several occasions, neglecting the deeper arguments she ascribes to the “deteriorating” state of the country (Yamani, 1996; 2003; 2005). The article demonstrated how American influences over the Aramco oil company compound located in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia had benefited Saudis and more importantly women, because of its American administration. The compound, as the reporter argues, is the only place where women can drive legally with no dress code and no gender segregation. One woman living in the compound was interviewed and described as “loosely” wearing a headscarf, as a “fashion statement” rather than a mandatory garb (Freeman, 2003, Oct 31).

The separation of the sexes furthermore, is attributed as the main cause of oppression, effecting both men and women alike. However, Freeman confuses the rights of men and women to marry whomever they choose, by claiming that both must gain consent from their families equally (Freeman, 2003, Jul 9). Following this superficial understanding (as supported by Altorki, 1977), the report nevertheless conveyed some liberal connotations in the “patriarchal” kingdom. It portrays a Saudi girl who is aware of her “living situation,” successful in finding love through the Internet. An interview with her husband, moreover, emphasized his “American-accented English,” revealing that he fell in love with “her brain first” (Freeman, 2003, Jul 9). The emphasis on his ability to speak English, as well as “her brain,” renders both individuals less of

an *other* associated with primitive depictions of patriarchal Saudi men and submissive unfortunate women forced into “arranged marriages, often with cousins.” The marriages, as the article implies, often end up with men having ultimate control over their “covered from head-to-toe” wives. “Some modern Saudi women” nevertheless, are said to avoid or delay marriage until they are older. The alternative to marriage, as the article depicts, is unpleasant whereby women are often found working in the “ghetto of health, education and a limited number of banks” (Freeman, 2003, Jul 9).

The norm accordingly, is for girls to marry in their “early 20s and bare children right after ... anything beyond that is virtual heresy in society” (Freeman, 2003, Jul 9). Women who “studied” abroad are seen as more restless and eager for change. They are getting more involved in business and persisting on continuing to work outside the home after marriage. This attitude dislocates these individuals from their contextual setting, dismissing their experiences as Saudi in favor of their commonalities with the West. In so doing, not only are women ontologically non-Saudi, they are polemically portrayed as “authentic” or “objective” (Sarukkai, 1997) images whose narration of their own experiences is considered “morally responsible” (Alznauer, 2008).

A book review chronicling the spiritual journey of an author venturing between Islam and Christianity highlights the problematic issues that Islam subjects onto women. The article is the first in this Stage to begin highlighting the sect differences in Islam. In “*A Muslim despite herself*” Schwartz (2003, September 20) revealed some insight on the different denominations of Islam, comparing Sunni and Shi’aa, whereby the first is considered the worst of the two. The author neglects the historical developments of each as well as the diversity of branches and teachings within them. The long old division between the two denominations had rendered each with separate fissures in Islamic thoughts, which evolved into more fragments that are more and

more autonomous despite their origin<sup>24</sup> (Kermani, 2002, February 21). Saudi Wahabism additionally, is viewed as a Sunni sect with a reactionary ideology and a strong influence over Muslims everywhere for being the State rulers of the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Its followers moreover, are described as the “progenitors of Al Qaeda” (Schwartz, 2003, September 20).

Nevertheless, the reporter criticizes the book’s author by drawing on the similarities of ultra-orthodox Jewish communities and Muslim societies. Jewish women in some cases, according to the reporter, are “forbidden to drive and otherwise function outside their homes.” As such, Schwartz accuses the author of unrealistically demanding that all religions “operate without rules.” He nevertheless, an author of two books discussing the “two faces of Islam” and “Saudi fundamentalism,” also fails to avoid the problem of generalizing Saudi women as part of the wider Muslim umbrella, paradoxically representing their subjectively-viewed shared oppression within a Western discourse of rights. Saudi women, he claims, are “yearning to rip off the coverings that oppress [them]” (Schwartz, 2003, September 20).

Such trends in the early part of Stage 2 presented the more detailed information about Islam in Saudi Arabia, depicting the hardship of women mostly to further emphasize a need for change or interference. These interventions were given premise based on framed details of the women in the kingdom, which revealed reinterpreted accounts of split attitudes on the state of their being. The year 2004 nevertheless, witnessed the highest number of articles in this timeframe, introducing new trends that are split into two dominant perspectives. Some articles attributed the roots of manifesting problems in Saudi Arabia to a vague political system. Others

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth considering the representation of Shi’aism at the time this article was published as a justification, attributed to the American rendition of the plight of Shi’aas in Iraq, that verifies the attack on Sunni dictator Saddam Hussain. Additionally, historically speaking, some Shi’aa sects under the Ismaili denomination are said to have adopted values and thought from other cultures and religions including Zoroastrian, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and other Eastern and Western influences, rendering them more favorable than their conservative Sunni counterparts.

however, drew on more distinctions between Islam as a faith and its interpretive political practice in the desert kingdom. The articles that focused more on the dysfunctional aspects of Saudi society, concentrated on the lack of rights and the rules that oppose democracy; women in most of these articles were either subject to an Orientalist representation or silenced completely.

In one article of a five-part series called *Troubled Kingdom* published in the *National Post*, Isabel Vincent (2004, March 29) reviewed a memoir authored by Osama Bin Laden's sister-in-law. She described the political corruption of the ruling family. The House of Saud, as the article explains, adopts a strict interpretation of Islamic law in fear of losing control and power to the religious clerics. This pervasive corruption "has inspired support for an ultra-fundamentalist Islamic backlash that upholds staggering discrimination against women and other minorities, making everyday life for most of the country's 24.2 million inhabitants incredibly difficult" (Ibid). The article supports this claim by sourcing Carmen Bin Ladin's book, former CIA operative Robert Baer's *Sleeping with the devil*, as well as referencing a prominent Islamic reformist, Saad Al-Fagih, broadcasting from London against the Saudi royalty, who claims that they (the Saudis) provide "no accountability and no transparency." Nevertheless, several more articles do not recognize the type of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, alluding to one generic conservative rendition, which is viewed as responsible for strict government rules. In yet another Carmen Bin Ladin concerned article, most Saudis were said to be supportive of Osama Bin Laden and his actions, perceiving the Western values as "godless [and] individualistic ... and [with] shameless freedoms" (Wente, 2004, July 22). Women in this article are depicted as "empty" rich women with no purpose but to live a life of "luxury" as nihilistic domesticated "pet-like" wives who are being "neglected" and "depressed", and eventually divorced and deprived of seeing their children. Another one on the same subject of Bin Ladin's book, as the first of its kind regarding the reality of women's life in Saudi society, used such notions as

“luxurious Taliban” or harboring “extreme hatred towards [the] West” in sensationalizing Saudi society (Vincent, 2004, March 29). The article reveals that the true power and control in the country lies in the hands of fundamentalist religious police, who with their interpreted practice of Islam, maintain “Saudi as primitive [as it was] 30 years ago” and supporting the ideas that women are sinful. The news entry also highlights the comparison made by Ms. Bin Ladin between California and Jeddah, pinpointing that in the latter “Sudanese slaves” were kept in private homes.

Unlike the articles in Stage 1, reporting in this phase subtly incorporate the distinctions between the political and the societal realms of the country, while maintaining a pessimistic tone as to how “little has changed” and that the future may not be so bright. A different article adopts the same attitude, describing the monarchy’s political system as a strict interpretation of Islam, while yet another condemns the “muttawa’as” as self-appointed religious policemen, who are stifling women and society. One news entry delineates the experiences of an expatriate on the difference between the public lives in Emirates and Saudi Arabia as contrasting Islamic Gulf countries with polar opposite interpretation of the religion (Moss, 2004, June 19). Several articles from Stage 2 similarly, describe the religious authorities as “ultra conservative” (Saudi clerics condemn..., 2005, April 13); elaborating that it is a sexually phobic country “dominated by Wahabism – a puritanical brand of Sunni Islam” (The Eye of the beholder, 2004, August 9).

However, the articles that maintained a vague delineation of the country’s policy made no clear indication of the structure of Saudi society. Three articles generally describe it as the birthplace of Islam, ruled by an alliance of the House of Saud and powerful Wahhabi religious authorities. Others simply state that it is in a continuous struggle between reformist and religious conservatives towards the issue of women’s rights, focusing more on the latter’s exhausting efforts in pursuit of change. Some emphasized that the problem is purely due to Islam in general

where religious authorities are trying to limit political reform and that violating gender separation rules or driving codes are against Islamic teachings. In a rebuttal to the previous Bin Ladin article, the Saudi Ambassador of Canada at the time published an article that affirms a different portrayal of Saudi Arabia as having a role “in the stability of prices in the world oil markets and ... in seeking a just and lasting peace in the Middle East” (Al-Sharif, 2004, April 22). The editorial, varying only slightly in the second, was republished in the *Toronto Star* within the same week (The other side of the Saudi story, 2004, Apr 23). Both emphasized that Saudi is a welfare state to many countries around the world; that it values women and their rights and treats them equally, and also that it too, has been a targeted victim of terrorism from both Saudis and non-Saudis.

The Saudi Ambassador’s account on the history of the kingdom furthermore, neglects to address any complaints by international bodies such as the UN or Amnesty regarding human rights violation, proclaiming instead that “all laws and regulations apply to both sexes without distinction or exception, since Islamic law does not discriminate between men and women with regard to their duties and obligations, regulations prohibit all forms of discriminatory practices” (The other side of the Saudi story, 2004, April 23). Furthering his position, Al-Hussaini portrays women in the monarchy as very involved, referencing executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Thoraya Obaid, a Saudi citizen, as an example. Women are also said to have the rights to own property, sign contracts, engage in trade, run their own businesses, have the right to vote, and most importantly the right to learn—all rights, which without a man as the article fails to note, cannot be claimed. The article also fails to mention the segregation of the sexes as commonly known about Saudi. There are however, seventy-eight women’s colleges, and the rate of literacy between male and female students is “equal”, while more than 20 percent of businesses in the country are woman-owned. The author also dates the inception of Saudi

Arabia to more than a hundred years ago although the modern day state was officially recognized in 1932 (Hourani, 1991; Yamani, 2005).

In an opinion entry, written by a political science professor from the University of Toronto (Kielburger, 2006, April 13), the western region of Saudi is labeled as more liberal than other parts of the country. Where the Saudi ambassador tried to facelift the image of Saudi women (Al-Sharif, 2004, April 22), the author of this article tried to exoticize them. He begins by hinting at the subjugating law that govern the kingdom, pointing out the 2003 Mecca school incident, where fifteen girls with no abayas died in a school fire as a result of religious police locking them in. The author focuses on mystifying the image of the Saudi woman or girl (arguably, also to reflect his own image as so), by alluding to their lives as mysterious and their personalities as willful, strong, and resisting. He portrays them as having internal struggles dealing with the hardship of societal norms and their confrontation with him, a foreign but “friendly” man, in “an out of the ordinary” situation. The author also draws on his personal preconceived perceptions, expecting to see veils inside the girls’ school he visited, only to see a number of girls with “jet black hair.” He furthers their “feminist” personas, by describing them as curious girls, who are “quiet activists” in need of encouragement to “speak freely”, and reiterating, rather pedantically, how they live in a society where women cannot travel without a related male, and “must seek the consent from the highest court in the land [of] the king” when marrying a non-Saudi. Finally, he compares the “Feminist” girls of Saudi Arabia to the females in his class on the subject of women’s right, and then highlights some similarities and potentials for the first batch to five Canadian historical feminist figures that changed the British North America act to include women.

Another journalist tackled the complexity of the kingdom at length, by exposing the political structure as well as the intricate domestic politics that run it. In it, the interdependent

symbiotic relationship between the royal family and “puritanical Islamic” Wahhabi clerics centered in the capital are examined, such that one cannot survive without the other, both depending on the highly restricted rules to maintain their authority (Potter, 2005, Aug 7). The article also notes the difference between the regions of Saudi Arabia, whereby Riyadh and the central region make up stricter districts, while the Eastern and Western provinces are more liberal. It reveals how the culture is “conservative by choice” being first and foremost, a Muslim society “far less insular than that holding sway in the center of the country” (Ibid). The situation is contrary to the “Western misconception about the appetite for reform in Saudi Arabia [such that] change automatically implies a move toward democracy” (Ibid). The reporter interviews various Saudi individuals including women, revealing that Saudis are in fact only demanding change in things such as state accountability, publishing an actual government budget, and stopping corruption through transparency. Potter concludes that the resulting oppression due to this complex make-up is not concerned with whether or not women should wear the hijab or drive a car, instead should center on issues influencing these privileges through citizen rights, male or female, through freedom of speech and expression, whilst still adhering to its relative ideals of Shari’aa as essential reforms. His humane depiction of women in the theocratic state is based on his encounter with a Saudi activist’s wife, who was jailed for petitioning the government, and as such, on the account of her husband’s absence, gained leadership of *Human Rights First*, an organization with no legal standing by the Saudi governments. The reporter nevertheless, does not neglect the fact that women are generally not allowed to interact with men “let alone foreigners” (Potter, 2005, Aug 7). Similarly, journalist writing on the first female pilot story portrayed Al-Hindi as independent and “ready to face an angry society” with the blessing of both the prince and her father (Mattar, 2005, Jun 17).

In a *Toronto Star* article, Salah Nasrawi begins by saying that Saudi is a conservative Islamic country that is forced to reform under international pressure in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks, and highlights the patriarchal society's determination to maintain the "essential job" of women as mothers and wives. The female doctors attending a medical forum as the article suggests, are "to be heard but not seen," and the separation of the sexes enforces men to sit "in one room, women in another," sharing views only through video conferencing where the men must stare at blank screens. The women no less, are depicted as strong and determined, voicing out their opinions and dissatisfactions with the situation, as personified through Nawal al Rashid, head of the new National Press Union in Saudi Arabia. (Nasrawi, 2004, June 17) One reporter addressing France' sanction against wearing the hijab draws an analogy between France and Saudi Arabia as two opposite extremes in tackling the issues of Muslim women, the first promoting "racism and islamophobia" (Fatah, 2004, Jan 21) while the latter encouraging "fundamentalism and sexism" (Ibid).

In the *Globe and Mail*, two news feeds distinguish between Islam as a faith and one of its denominations as practiced in Saudi Arabia, which are endorsed by some traditions and norms. The first article is a review of two books that cover Islam as a subject. In this feature, "the Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia" is described as "a stripped-down, puritanical and supremacist interpretation of Islam, which its followers call Salafism." This denomination of Islam, forces its followers to comply only to its "own literalist interpretation, while all other practices are to be shunned as unlawful 'innovations'" (Qureshi, 2005, July 16). It is described as pure radicalism, rejecting "1,000 years of Islamic thought and customs (such as speculative theology, or traditional celebrations of the Prophet's birthday) as heretical innovations." Qureshi ascertains that those who do not follow their beliefs are considered "apostates whose blood can be shed with impunity." In this manner, the article clears Islam as accountable for the Saudi oppression

of women, and instead pinned to “Bedouin tribal customs.” The review supports this view by describing how the wives of Islam’s Prophet are the right “models for the right treatment” in contrast to modern day Saudi sexism, indicating that no segregation existed during the classical Islamic times. The veil, according to this account, is not required for those beside the wives of the Prophet, and that driving is not sanctioned due to Bedouin customs.

The other report, referring to the kingdom as having an austere interpretation of Islam, describes a society empowered by “male domination” where women cannot drive, and can only travel when accompanied by male relatives. This in turn, as the article conveys, forced five women “tiered of conservative Saudi Arabia” (Five Saudi women undergo sex change, 2006, Apr 4), to take “desperate measures” to fix their lives by undergoing sex-change surgeries. A reporter of yet another book review, covering *Girls of Riyadh* before its release in English, described the fictional characters as “hardly sex and the city” but no less bombshells (Abu-Nasr, 2005, Dec 17). The article conveys the split opinions the book’s reception in Saudi, revealing that a prominent female author voiced her concerns against the book as “hurtful to the girls in our country.” A contrasting, but surprising opinion, coming from the Saudi Minister of Labor, reveals that the book has been praised as a step towards welcomed reform. The reporter moreover, illustrates that though this has been a “bold” move by the young author, Al Sanie is cut off and rejected by the conservative society, despite her family’s support. Al Sanie is seen as a reformist that highlights “issues society denies,” and whose general fan base and strong support is comprised of those received from males. The reporter also highlights the veil; the young author wearing her “Islamic headscarf ... like virtually all Saudi women.”

Moreover, two articles also reported on the Canadian deputy prime minister’s visit to Saudi Arabia, emphasizing that, after checking with protocol, she was required to put on an abaya before meeting with the newly crowned king (Whybrow, 2005, Aug 5; MacKinnon, 2005,

Aug 4). One article however, highlighted that although a headscarf was mandatory for all Saudi women, the deputy minister did not put one on. The article also points out that women in Saudi Arabia cannot vote or travel alone, and mingling of the sexes as well as driving is strictly banned. In the other entry, a letter to the editor, abayas were described as clearly a reinforcement of “oppression by Saudi regimen” (Whybrow, 2005, Aug 5) voicing discontent that deputy McLellan, representing Canada, was obligated to put one on.

Possibly the most unique piece of news amongst all the publication in this section is an article reporting on a research that revealed the hit-status of the Oprah show amongst Saudi women. The study; according to the article, claims that these women are “commonly perceived as sheltered and conservative,” and that it is surprising to find that a large number of the female demographic identifies with “the same issues as women around the world” (El-Rashidi, 2005, Dec 3). Further references to Saudi women indicated that they are “sensitive” such that ads depicting women must adhere “to conservative dress codes but with a modern touch.” The article however, recognizes “stereotype of being timid and oppressed” as “outdated,” noting that although satellite television is illegal in the country, it is readily available to Saudi women, and as such they are much more connected to the outer world than is generally recognized.

Covering a relatively recent decree by Saudi clerics condemning “arranged marriages,” one *Globe and Mail* piece quotes the country’s “mufti” voicing condemning the coercion of “women [as] highly un-Islamic and a major injustice to women” (Saudi clerics condemn ..., 2005, April 13). The article describes the situation of “arranged marriages” as forced by family patriarchs, as well as tied to the increased rate of divorce in the kingdom. The report also endorses the country’s action towards the unprecedented position legalizing imprisonment of “fathers... until they change their minds.” Nevertheless, as a legacy of Stage 1, one article conveys the “irony” of men selling lingerie to women, portraying them as having to endure an

“awkward anomaly in an ultra-conservative Islamic state” (Saudi women to oust men ..., 2006, May 10).

As such, when it comes to how women are generally portrayed in Stage 2, the findings reveal three interesting patterns: About a quarter of the articles follow a stylistic approach that personifies all women as seeking change through documented success stories, such that a given woman, or a number of women, are quoted or depicted in active roles improving their society and rights. A second theme less prevalent, conveys mixed portrayals, most of which emphasize that the changes occurring are due to Western encouragement, influence, or pressure directly or indirectly. In these articles, some women are said to be against changes, preferring instead the conservative lifestyle they are in, while “U.S-educated” women push forward for reform. Finally, a number of articles depict women as submissive, passive, and conforming to patriarchal forces, against their wills, concerned only with their domestic roles. In some of these articles, Saudi women are only mentioned in passing to stress the fundamentalism in Saudi Arabia or the pervasiveness of the Islamic religion and the need for a more secular and globalized rendition of it, while other articles in this category picture the entire lifestyle of women as hopeless with no room for reform.

In the articles that represent active women, one reported that a new Saudi channel, Al-Ikhbariya, “is trying to change false western perceptions” on the role of women, allowing Saudi’s first female news anchor to report on the day’s news and, as the article described, dressed “modestly in a black head scarf and white jacket” (Evans, 2004, Jan 13). The articles in Stage 2 have a high concentration of presenting “firsts” for Saudi women, which defy the patriarchal norm, including the first Saudi film, starring a first “silver-screen” Saudi actress (Hooray for Saudiwood, 2006, Mar 24), another on the first “risque” fashion designer (Vallis, 2004, April 29), the first women-exclusive auto showroom (All-female showroom launches ...,

2006, Dec 9), the first Saudi beauty pageant (The Eye of the beholder, 2004, Aug 9); two on the first Saudi female pilot, hired by a company owned by a reformist prince (Mattar, 2005, Jun 17; National Post, 2004, Nov 24); one on seven women who ran in the elections for the board of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Saudi women to be allowed ..., 2005, Sept 15)—to list a few.

What is common in these articles is the way liberty and rights are framed. All articles begin by listing repressive regulations that Saudi women must adhere to under the Saudi state (whether described as religious/theocratic or just politically conservative). They include a list of several broad conditions including how: Women cannot travel alone, vote or run for public office, “that the strict segregation of the sexes permeates every aspect of [their] daily life” (Hooray for Saudiwood, 2006, March 24), they are not allowed to drive, and finally that “women in Saudi Arabia cover from head-to-toe.” Other articles are more focused on specific subjects including the ban of sports and restrictions limiting them to certain jobs.

In an article, British prime minister’s wife, Cherie Blair was quoted voicing her advice to Saudi women in an economic forum that took place in the city of Jeddah (Saudi women told: Be patient, 2006, Feb 16). The remark though seemingly encouraging, implied that Saudi women were being rash and impetuous and that they should maintain patience because “nothing can transform overnight” (Ibid). The article provokes the contrast between wisdom, handed down by Blair, and Saudi women’s projected ‘youngness’ as feminist players in the field of women’s rights. Yet in another publication, this insinuation was implored through the prosecution Saudi women receive from religious authorities for “immoral attachments to Western values” and for “opposing society’s teachings that a woman is weak and dishonorable and must never speak up” (Hooray for Saudiwood, 2006, March 24).

Additionally, Stage 2 had the most frequent depiction of abaya-clad Saudis. More than half of the editorials had direct references to the Saudi black garment. Some articles refer to it as the “stiffening black abaya”, “head-to-toe” covering, a “hijab ordered by god,” “a jail on your back,” and even a symbol of “inequality” in the Western eye. Many of these references also toyed with metaphors of the veil to allude to one idea or another. In the Carmen Bin Ladin stories (Vincent, 2004, Aug 14; Vincent, 2004, March 29; Wente, 2004, July 22), the reporters emphasized Bin Ladin’s account of her pre-terrorist brother-in-law being “shocked to see her uncovered” (Vincent, 2004, March 29) to demonstrate the developing fundamentalism associated with today’s Osama Bin Laden. Another article mocked a supposed Saudi beauty pageant, which was a supposed means of reformation towards equal gender law. The article focused on one of the entry conditions where all contestants must be “covered head-to-toe in black garments” (The Eye of the beholder, 2004, Aug 9).

One article, narrating the account of an expatriate living in the American oil compound (Moss, 2004, Jun 19), explained how sporting “traditional Islamic female dress, a black, cloak-like affair called the abaya,” is perfect for concealing a “bad hair day”, or a “full-blown pregnancy”; while in another article one woman contends that by wearing them, women are “programmed [...] to accept such humiliation” (All-female showroom launches ..., 2006, Dec 9). This response was provoked after a speaker at a medical conference refused to address women in the audience prompting them to leave. The article despite portraying active and strong Saudi women advocating for change, conveyed a pessimistic tone implying that for every step forward one step is taken back (Freeman, 2006, Dec 9).

Considering the various city backgrounds and locations in Stage two, many articles that choose to highlight how liberal the city of Jeddah or the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia are, do so to bring out even more the conservative atmosphere of the capital and center area, as well as

the rest of the country. Most articles do so by contemplating any new achievements in favor of Saudi women, as for example the first women-exclusive auto showroom opening in the capital, and listing several issues that dismisses these actions as pointless—in case of the showroom, that not all woman supported such a change, let alone men and state authority. One woman was quoted saying that “society is not prepared for such a step.” The article furthermore, reveals that to some, cars as symbols of emancipation, as well as a threat to femininity, and that owning a car, a right granted for decades, such that half the cars in the country belong to women, is sufficient enough (All-female showroom launches ..., 2006, Dec 9).

Ostensibly, Stage 2 reveals that women’s representation functions as a backdrop to the erratic state of coverage, which in an attempt to reveal something new, consisted of recycled preconceived notion on which comparisons and contrasts were made. The Saudi ambassador’s denial of any underlying social issues can hardly be considered an authentic voice on behalf of Saudi, let alone its women. First and foremost, his opinion is representative of a certain class, gender, region...etc. framed by his title and position, in favor of the status quo. Perhaps, publishing his articles emphasized the “hypocritical” accusation projected towards the state. But yet even so, how can any article in this Stage not be considered in this way since none actually allow “the Saudi woman” to write her own story? Or at least attempt to write about them without the curtain of subjectivity being masked as their objective voices? Many of the articles, as mentioned earlier, are improvements on those in Stage 1 only on the basis of details (longer word counts), more distinctions (state and religion, region traditions and dynamics, comparison between West and East), and in their involvement with characters through quotes and examples. In “*Love and the single Saudi girl*” (Abu-Nasr, 2005, Dec 17) the author compared a book published by a Saudi female author called *Girls of Riyadh* to American drama series *Sex and the City*, suggesting that it is not quite as open, but a noteworthy attempt anyway. The problem with

this association is that the author assumes an immediate connection between the two. However, on what basis can this be apprehensible? On the basis that women are the same everywhere? Or on the basis that these reports cater to Western audiences? Is it encouraging the idea that women's experiences should be the same everywhere? Or that the author is essentially a pioneering reformist through her "exposure" of the "truth" of women's lives in Saudi? Salah Nasrawi (2004, June 17) points out that if the press mediates the voice of the people, then women are the voice of freedom in Saudi Arabia. His idea, though directed at Saudi Arabia's unrestrained media censorship, is applicable to Canadian media and the fact that no Saudi woman is linked authoritatively to any of the articles.

Unless the media can clearly recognize its role in decontextualizing Saudi women by distinguishing Canadian values as independent of Women's concerns and accounts "over there," it cannot be the "vessel" of freedom through which a real and authentic Saudi woman's "voice" can be heard. For one thing, decontextualization often occurs in the comparisons between Western and Saudi values (hyphenated sometimes with "Islamic", "reactionary", "oppressive", "extremist" and "Wahhabi" among other things), the condition of people's lives if cultures were reversed, as well as through the framework of credibility given to "insiders." That is, as genuine as her experiences maybe, Carmen Bind Ladin's part Iranian background merely insinuates "Middle Eastern" if at all, and she is not representative of Saudi women, let alone women in a given class or situation (as foreign women married to Saudi men) in that context. At best, her situation represents the general lifestyle of any woman in the desert country, not how these conditions are apprehended but Saudis themselves. This does not assume that many Saudi Arabian women deny or are happy with their conditions; on the contrary, it just stipulates that their opinions cannot be equated to Western values.

One article that managed to escape this trap, and perhaps is the most effective *self-as-another* (Sarukkai, 1997) coverage in this phase, is an Emran Qureshi article called “*Triumph of the Fundamentalist*” (Qureshi, 2005, July 16). It touched on the issues facing Saudi women under Islamic rules by critiquing the Wahhabi state doctrine. Qureshi does not go into details about what these issues are, but rather suffices by mentioning that they are part of the Bedouin customs inherited by its rulers, rather than by Islam. In this way Qureshi avoided using Saudi women as a face for a cause, directly analyzing the subject of interest instead.

Furthermore, though pointing to some differences in regions and class, media representation eliminates individual dynamics within the social structure, by creating a totalized whole. In articles pointing to the city of Jeddah for instance, despite its fame as Saudi’s most liberal city, women are considered the same as those in Riyadh—or Qatif, or Damam. The truth is, though the rules are almost the same across the nation, there are vast deviations in cultures and traditions across Saudi<sup>25</sup>. Each region has its relative ideas on freedom, traditions, norms, interactions with the outside world...etc. To this point, the erratic nature of reporting in Stage 2 can be attributed. Saudi Arabia is more complex than a set of system doctrines, labels of norms, and national and traditional costumes and outwears.

Additionally, the only “morally responsible” *Self as Other* report is given by an expatriate, highlighting and then “bracketing” her values towards her subjective experience (Moss, 2004, June 19). Fiona moss reveals how life is for foreigners in the kingdom. In her story, she recognizes the relativity of her experiences based on her background, the region she lived in, the subjective comparison of that to neighboring countries she visited, the social and security issues faced in Saudi (terrorist attacks, driving, abaya... etc.). Her references to Saudi women,

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<sup>25</sup> As Hourani (1991) points out, the inception of Saudi Arabia involved the unification of several regions and their own separate histories.

public segregation of females, driving, and the abaya among other things, were in a sense, a justification of Saudi Arabia, rather than a critique. She revealed that although these rules apply to everyone in public, expatriates like her and her family were free to do what they liked within designated private compounds or in certain time and places in public. She points out that terrorists and religious police, and other forms of religious extremist, do not represent the general public view. Though her account still draws on personal preconceived disposition, Moss maintains that her account is about her experiences as a woman and as a mother in Saudi Arabia.

### **Saudi Women and the beginning of the End of Partisanship**

In the third stage, yielding thirty-seven articles, Saudi women were invoked to reveal the varying perspectives in a changing political climate as the world's superpower prepared to trade its Republican government for the Democratic Party's Barack Obama. The period between 2007-2009 contained articles with more interest in Islam and traditions and social character. In a sense, though not quite the watchdog against state interest, the media has once more assumed its role as a critical body that keeps governments in check, as well as conveys the public opinion. Of the thirty-seven articles in Stage 3, the number of articles crediting Canadian sources increased dramatically, almost reaching the same number of articles crediting foreign sources.

Although several articles maintained some aspects of previous trends—owing mostly, as explained in the postmodern discussion in the literature review, to the fact that time cannot be discontinued and thus events and ideas cannot be removed from their histories—a significant amount of the reporting voiced opinions and commentaries bracketing subjective values. Additionally, coverage also revolved around social issues or 'news' headlines that did not necessarily criticize or support a specific interest. One article for example, and the only of its kind in the three Stages, reported on a successful surgery to eliminate a "giant tumor" from a

patient. The reference to the Saudi woman was made only as means of identifying the subject's identity as a patient that took part in a scientific-first to extract an eighteen-kilo tumor (Giant tumour removed ..., 2009, April 25).

Nevertheless, the remnant trends from the previous stages included more extreme and critical articles towards the religion of Islam, often blurring the line between tradition and religion. One article describes the religion as a "barbaric" regime with a "morally primitive society" whose practiced faith suffers from flawed "internal logic" (Unreformed barbarism, 2007, November 29); another similar article claims that Sharia condones punishing children, let alone women for blasphemy (Alter, 2007, December 29); yet one more criticizes Islam by confusing traditional social costumes, vaguely mixing Durzi practices, a denomination of Shia'aa Islam with Sunni Wahabism, describing an uncommon hijab that requires covering everything but one eye (Todras-Whitehill, 2008, March 5). In one, the emphasis is put on the oppressing unjust legal system, which is believed to be endorsed by society and resulting in the augmentation of Qatif girl's punishment (Wente, 2007, Nov 27). Another, following on the previous coverage of lingerie sales in the kingdom, describes the country as "tradition-bound" but also revealing that women have finally gained the right to work there instead of men (Ghazal, 2007, Sept 21).

Most of the articles in Stage 3, directly and indirectly, addressed the oppression of women in Saudi Arabia, either as the main subject or in passing. Some generalize women's oppression as part of "all" Muslim oppression under a public form of Islam; others blame the patriarchal dominance in the Saudi society, which is supported by clerical groups that condone honor killings and the prosecution of women who make their own decisions against family wishes; and finally a few criticize what is seen as self-proclaimed laws in the kingdom with internationally approved human rights.

In the articles that maintained a biased proclivity towards victimizing Saudi women, coverage conveyed that women are still oppressed by Islam in general, either by disregarding provided information that reveals otherwise, or by eliminating sufficient evidence to support misguided ‘facts’. One article for example, despite ample quotations referenced by a women’s right advocating group about the difference in Saudi tradition and Islamic rules, alludes to Saudi Arabia’s strict conservatism as due to Islam as a whole (Two Saudi sisters shot ..., 2009, July 11). The women’s rights group argued that oppression “has nothing to do with the religion of Islam or Saudi tradition” yet the article concludes by saying that “Saudi Arabia, the only country in the world that does not allow women to drive, has a powerful clerical establishment that runs the judicial system” (Two Saudi sisters shot ..., 2009, July 11). Another article, called “*UN selective about protecting women: Islamist extremism at root of discrimination*,” (Edwards, 2007, March 10), alludes to misleading facts about Islamic practice<sup>26</sup> such that genital mutation, along with the segregation rules on driving and voting, are considered common in Islam. However, some articles are more careful in tackling these issues; either noting the difference between Islam as a religion and how it is practiced within Saudi Arabia, where one clearly states that the religion does not prohibit women to drive (Time has come to give ..., 2007, September 24), while a few suffice not to mention anything at all with regards to state or religious doctrines.

Two other articles emphasize the conservative and cleric rulers of the country, referencing some authors and “mufti’s” decisions pertaining to women’s sports in the country with the reasoning that the West’s “plan is to lure Muslim women out of their homes and subsequently out of their headscarf too” (Eltahawy, 2008, Aug 14). One article in *the Globe and Mail*, the only newspaper that reported on the “hit” Saudi book that “caused some horrified

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<sup>26</sup> The openness of Islam to interpretation, or *Fatwa*, “an authoritative, advisory legal opinion issued by a specialist (*mufti*) on a point of law but which in itself had no binding force” (Waines, 2003: 314), renders some cultural practices as permissible or preferred as *Sunna*, “the authoritative example of the way a Muslim should live” (Waines, 2003: 321).

reactions in her homeland” (Adams, 2007, Sep 3), highlights the structure of government by referencing the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue to imply that although traditions vary across the country, the “Sunni fundamentalists” sect of Islam followed by the state is gaining power, as opposed to the prominent trend in other articles that suggest that the women are gaining more rights, while the state is succumbing to international pressure (Adams, 2007, Sep 3). In the same interview that discussed *Girls of Riyadh*, the reporter also quoted author Alsanea on the increasing resistance against Valentine’s Day after it was introduced in the early 1990s. The author is portrayed as an accomplished young dentist, in an efforts to humanize Saudi women by drawing on the similarities of her values to North American girls, or “chicks”, and also by endorsing her book as an authentic account of the lives of young Saudi Girls, paralleled to the HBO series “Sex and the City” (Adams, 2007, Sep 30). Alsanea’s is pictured proud of wearing the veil, treating it not as a symbol of oppression or force. However, the reporter still described it as a tolerable head and body garment so long as women are kept occupied with “Prada” (Adams, 2007, Sep 3).

Nevertheless, a critical article reported on the absence of female Saudis in the Shanghai 08 Olympics game (Eltahawy, 2008, Aug 14). Although the reporter does refer to Saudi women as passive, “[having] no chance to qualify,” under strict Saudi clerics who believe that women wearing “tight leotards and tops” are “all-too-tempting [even to] women themselves”, she also mentions that women in the kingdom are trying to invoke change through the use of alternative/social new media technologies such as Youtube, and by forming underground teams that risk state anger. The same article however subjects the Saudi woman to an ideological interpretation of Islam, such that the women who identify as Saudi *and* Muslim are challenged by the reporter’s own belief and practice of Islam as one before the other. The non-Saudi females

from neighboring Muslim Gulf countries in contrast, are described as strong athletes that sport the hijab but are still active in various social realms.

Another indirect depiction of Saudi women as submissive is made in an article voicing Canadian dismay at the mistreatment of some female Canadian university representatives by the religious police during a Saudi education fair in the city of Jeddah. Although it presents Canada's stance on multiethnic cohesion and its respect for cultural differences—seen in the quote of a Canadian official that explained his shock since he had inquired about the protocols regarding the female representatives—the article concentrated on the restricted image of women in “shapeless abayas”; where one statement implied that *only* women are not allowed to work in “mixed environments” (Alphonso, 2007, May 8). This however, brings into question the contradictory nature of this portrayal since it follows that men too, cannot work in “mixed” conditions without the presence of women.

In a variety of different articles, some reporters conveyed somewhat of a deep understanding of the political structure and religious practices within it, claiming as a result, that the state is using Islam as a mask for “Islamic Clerics” to hide behind it to preserve power. The references made about Saudi women were only made broadly to reflect on these ideas, rather than to argue for women's rights in the Kingdom. In “*Saudi women shed veils to play*” (2008, May 9), the judicial system in Saudi Arabia is compared to the American system to highlight how the first suppress women more than men. Another two articles criticize Islam for being public, suggesting that religion should remain a private privilege. In one article, the author criticizes president Obama's speech in Cairo in 2009, implying that Islam is being treated as an ethnicity as opposed to a religion, and urges that Islamic societies should move towards a more just and democratic system by undergoing the same changes that the “Christian world” has undergone over the last few centuries (Frum, 2009, May 16) – a transformation from public to

private. The other article by the same author, specifically pinpoints that the problem with Saudi Arabia is not in the form of Islam (Wahabism) it adheres to, but rather that it does not place the religion as an individual private privilege; such that being a Muslim does not constitute as an ethnicity, but instead is a personal choice subject to personal interpretation (Frum, 2009, June 5). Additionally, one article reasserts that Saudi Arabia is still refusing to see or pursue change; pretending to advocate change only in fear of “Westerners coming in to have a look” (Todras-Whitehill, 2008, March 5).

A different set of articles moreover, differs from the rest in asserting that women have equal, if not more privileges than men. One opinion entry goes as far as saying that there is no indicator revealing that women are feeling oppressed in Saudi, and that it is an image of a highly eroticized society concocted by the West. This article by Stephen Roney (2007, December 28), problematic as it may be, dated before any municipal elections were allowed in Saudi, points out that although women cannot vote, men are not able to do so either and that the rift between males and females in Saudi Arabia should not be compared to racial Segregation in Western history. One of the two letter submissions published in the *Toronto Star*, and among the articles that do not highlight gender separation in Saudi Arabia, distinguishes between the values in Canada and those that exists in the kingdom. This article addresses the submissive image of women as a concoction of Western ideals, depicting Saudi women living a high society life with very leisurely roles in society and no desire to drive (9/11 prism unfair to Saudis, 2008, Aug 19). Yet the letter entry, as a response to the first, indicates that the focus should not be on whether they want change or not, but rather that the choice itself should be available as a given right (Freedom of choice is key, 2008, Aug 22). The article based on Roney’s own experiences however, does highlight the questionable extremity of laws and family traditions that are said to ensure “Safety measures” (Roney, 2007, December 28). Nevertheless, the article still humanizes women in so

far as it suggest that these women should be included in the discussion of their own rights as opposed to being addressed as a faceless entity in vague totalized terms.

Another article in this set, one out of a number of articles that covered or touched on the story of “Qatif girl” – a rape victim who was sentenced to 200 lashes and a few months in jail due to her predicament – realistically touched on the difference between state and society, and the form of oppression that is prevalent in Saudi Arabia. Although it pinpoints that women do indeed suffer many degrees more than men, it still recognizes that men too are, to some extent, oppressed by the state – at least by its unstable and interpretive judicial laws. This is evident in the portrayal of the victim’s husband addressing big news stations internationally, and by the emphasis on his support towards his wife. The article also alludes, though very subtly, to the domestic and religious strains in the kingdom by pointing out that the victim and her family were Shia’it – a denomination of Islam concentrated in the oil-rich Eastern region, which has been continuously repressed and coerced by Wahhabi rule in Saudi Arabia (Ward, 2007, Dec 18).

Furthermore, two articles voiced discontent against the West’s involvement in the Middle East, such that it is not entitled to act as an intervening force in favor of Saudi women, let alone representing them, as seen in the “Burka Barbie” doll article (Kay, 2009, Dec 2). In this article, Barbara Kay criticizes how the West, in its attempt to encourage multiculturalism, has framed Muslim women in a demeaning manner through its rendition of what is “traditional.” She asserts that “traditional burkas... were invented quite recently by fanatically misogynistic fundamentalists” taking advantage of Islam. Similarly, Elliot Skierszkan (2008, May 9), in a response to a letter by Ezra Levant (2008, May 5) in the *National Post*, also promotes the idea that Canada should not define itself by comparing with other “less” well-off countries. In his letter, Levant suggest promoting Canadian oil to “liberate Saudi women” (Levant, 2008, May 5), as a response to the news outcry for the five hundred ducks killed near an oil site in Ft.

McMurray, Alberta in 2008. Both articles however, refer to Saudi women very broadly, the first adding however, a depiction as autonomously capable of working towards their own reform.

However, an additional number of articles indicate that although Saudi women are active and not submissive towards their situation, they are still in need of Western intervention to help advocate their rights. In one of the articles, international intervention is urged in a call for “liberalizing the backward” (Wente, 2007, Nov 27). One article quotes Hilary Clinton’s stance during the 2008 elections, urging president Bush to take action towards the Qatif Girl case (Wordsworth, 2007, Nov 22). Although the report was suggestive of her interest to promote her own campaign, it did not criticize her opinion about intervention. Another article, also covering the Qatif rape victim’s story, depicts her as a fighter who appealed and lost, receiving an increased sentence for her resistance, and as such calling for Canadian and international attention (Wente, 2007, Nov 27). Two articles however, reveal the stance of Saudi women at a UN conference for women’s right, defending against the claims of oppression directed at their country. The articles allude to the severity of these women’s oppression as unable to recognize their own situation, and emphasized the point by contrasting the original Qatif girl’s case to a hypothetical case in Western courts (Alter, 2007, Dec 29).

Several reporters however focus on how Saudi women are actively resisting the law by driving “in villages and remote rural areas” (Time has come to give ..., 2007, Sep 24) or by “gathering signature or circulating petitions” (Ambah, 2007, Sep 25) to promote one cause or another. In “*Two Saudi sisters shot in ‘honour killing; brother forgiven*” (2009, July 11), the reporter quotes a Saudi women’s group promoting women’s rights in the country but highlights their presumed confusion about the source of oppression. The group, as the article explains, blames the Saudi Commission for the Promotion of Virtue & Prevention of Vice, or the religious police, as an institution responsible for all the problems occurring. However, the report

undermines this distinction by pointing at what it has called an “extreme version of Sharia law” in general.

Most of the articles nonetheless, referred to Saudi women without urging the need for external or Western intervention. In an article that reports on the private practice of sports, where women hold private matches and are quoted on enthusiastic outlooks about the progress of their privileges, the women are described as “quietly” resisting the government’s ban on sport classes and events (Saudi women shed veils to play ..., 2008, May 9). In another story, the collaborated efforts of surveyed women were reported to have contributed to help open the first hotel for women in the country—after a time when many were not allowed to check-in with out a male guardian (A new hotel for the hijab set, 2008, March 22).

A significant number of articles in Stage 3 fall into the trap of what Edward Said outlined as an Orientalized and highly exotic and eroticized view of Eastern woman. In an article that followed up on the lingerie edict from Stage 1, the female subject interviewed, Mariam Bin Laden, was portrayed and quoted as a submissive figure with no interest in knowing if she is “related to the infamous Osama Bin Laden, but whose main concern this day was to get the best fitted undergarment for herself.” This elicits a highly patriarchal society that limits women to the private sphere; such that Mariam’s role is reduced to simply “please her husband” submissively (Ghazal, 2007, Sept 21). The same article further paints a picture of Saudi women, comparable to the painting of Orientalist painter Jean Léon Gérôme, *The Harem Bathing*, where they are coming into a newly all-female staffed lingerie store “to lay down their abaya, hang out with their girlfriends, sisters, mothers as they discuss and try on the undergarments” (Ibid).

## **Discussion**

Representing Saudi women under Islam simplifies their identity as one unit under bigger totalizing schemes. They are fragmented into several pieces as Saudi women, or Muslim women,

or Middle Eastern, with the most vague rendition as women under Islam. To insinuate the notion of Saudi, situates women in Saudi as a single entity sharing experiences as one; to put them under a Muslim umbrella, generalizes them as individuals with exact practices and beliefs; if they are classified as Middle Eastern, they are defined under broad geopolitical, geographic and ethnic backgrounds; but to put them under Islam is to generalize about them in an ambiguous and indefinite manner by disregarding the differences in beliefs, location, ethnicity, experience, community, and personal association. Many articles in all three stages do not define the differences between each, let alone the intended purposes behind adopted classifications within the articles.

In the course of the three timeframes, the majority of reporters attempt to delineate the sources of Saudi women's oppression. Islam and its multicolored nature is often pinpointed as the cause, framed in a manner that caters to Western audiences. These interpretations however, regardless of how detailed, still present Islam as a dichotomy: as either a strict, woman-repressing, fundamentalist system, or as a peaceful and just religion that has been tainted by barbaric and primitive reinterpretation, as manifested in Saudi Arabia. This dichotomy juxtaposes the difference between religion in the West and in the East. For one thing, the different descriptions of Islam (or Islams) in the articles seem to imply independent and isolated versions of the religion, in contrast to an umbrella rendition under which the many denominations and sects fall. On the other hand, as overtly discussed on several occasions, a number of articles critique Islam from a socio-structural point of view, demarcating the issues of religion in the private and public spheres.

Because it is generally understood the Islam operates in the public realm in the Middle East, Muslims, congruent to the racial analysis given by Almond (2007) and Hall (1994), especially authoritative clerics or fundamentalists and terrorists, are portrayed as "backward,"

“reactionary” and “barbaric” in their utilization of Islam to endorse their tribal madness. The repeated emphasis to switch Islam in Saudi culture from public to private insinuates the myths explained by Lyotard earlier (1984): “that of the liberation of humanity” and the advantages of “speculative unity of all knowledge” (Jameson, 1984: viii). This is most notable in the comparison of values. The transition of gender roles for instance, as discussed in Gauntlett (2002), illustrates a frequently reoccurring radical and conservative postmodern trend over the three Stages. Both draw on fashion as a measure of Western value of rights. The radical approach suggests that even if Saudi women do not want to wear “tight pants or short skirts” (Fam, 2001, Oct 20) they should have the choice; while the conservatives suggests that the hijab should be abolished entirely. Nevertheless, the moderate alternative proposed in this research would be to reflect on how these views affect one's own identity or how one sees another without hegemonic interests for change.

This view of Islam as public, perceived to be without central authority and open to many renditions, is what many reporters have criticized as the “illogical” and flawed characteristic of Islam leading to fanaticism and violation of human rights. That is to say, its status as public, based on communal orientation that permits a collective ethos, situates it as the antithesis to everything that is perceived Western: Contemporary capitalism, with its centralization of power and its hierarchal structures, democracy, individualism, and the privatization of religion. In Stage 2 and 3, more criticism was directed to Islam as the root of flawed state-structure in Saudi Arabia. One article highlighted an important theme between faith in the Arab world and in the Western world, which was also prevalent in the underlying groundwork of other articles. The article demonstrated that the problem in the Middle East is due to the pervasive prevalence of religion in the social, political and economic public sphere (Frum, 2009, May 16). It compared

and contrasted its effects to the early Catholic Church and contemporary practices of Christianity, respectively. The proclivity of representing Islam generally in all three phases resulted in blurring the distinction between religion and culture. The findings also reveal a surplus of “recycled” stories in different times. That is, many of the stories covered, including Qatif girl, *Girls of Riyadh*, and the lingerie sales edict, were either followed, or literally rewritten and published on different days. Yet despite this recycling craze, and despite highlighting the few cases where women were against change, most articles maintained a separation between the logocentrism of *us/them* subtexts due to the portrayal of women as eager for change and in some cases seemingly still hopeful about the prospects of reform.

Additionally, the Stage 2 publications contained the only articles that published what can be considered “vindicating” editorials by the Saudi ambassador as a response to some news entries criticizing the Kingdom. This of course from a feminist standpoint or otherwise, is not equitable to the voices of women and their views on their own experiences, nor is it informative to the groundwork on which Canada regards itself. This period also revealed a dramatic increase in reporting, covering stories with a number of “firsts” for Saudi women, including voting and obtaining identification cards. The trend however, was concentrated on describing Saudi cultural and political regulations that dictate the rules in the kingdom as oppositional to any perceived betterment to the condition of women’s lives, which are, directly or indirectly, correlated to a presumed Western exegesis.

The generalized and collective references made about Saudi women imply, virtually, the same theoretical incentive that Baudrillard had ascribed to the “Arab masses” (Baudrillard, 2002; Almond, 2007: 168). The difference however, is that unlike the Arab Masses who are docile, controlled, and ignorant, Saudi women are submissive, subjugated, and desperate for change. From a Western vantage point, their position in Saudi Arabia, wearing the veil and dictated by

men, is a static and regressive subjection that encapsulates them in time, and changed only through changes in the gaze. This issue of temporality is a prevalent theme in the process of *othering* (Turner, 2004: 173-4), which in this case results in a fragmentation of Islam, as the demarcating force running Saudi Arabia, and as the antonym of progress and modernity. What is worth noting about the articles' accounts on Islam, is that despite their length and details, none of the articles offered Quranic sources to assert claims. The majority sufficed by mentioning that there are cultural traditions that permeate into shaping the conditions of women in the country. What becomes an issue here is that the line between tradition and religion is blurred or lost, forcing the blame on both.

The separation of the sexes is another common theme that has been addressed repeatedly, and that exemplifies the blur between tradition and religion. Although Islam does dictate the preservation of formal boundaries between men and women, there is also a clear Quranic "recognition of women's legal and economic independence as existing and remaining separate from that of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons" (Almond, 2007: 138). The prevalent misogyny and ingrained conservatism of Saudi Arabia cannot be denied, nor can the struggles of women in the Middle East due to abhorrent excess in patriarchal traditional practices, discriminatory legal norms, and Islamic fundamentalism reflective of its interpreters (Shah, 2006). However, it is very important to maintain the truth as not to erect a whole new ideology based on the flaws of both these misinterpretations and misconceptions, as can be argued about the narrative changes in all three stages.

As discussed earlier, social transitions always maintain subtle, or latent, inherited ideals from their past; in this way, the postmodern era of today, as some thinkers would like to believe, cannot be separated from its history. It is very crucial therefore, to recognize and direct these inaccuracies in an effort to develop better narratives and ideologies through moral responsibility.

In one example, Barbara Kay (2009, Dec 2) criticizes what is arguably an Orientalized version of the Barbie doll sporting a Burka in a collectors auction. Although Kay makes some valid points in her description of the Burka as a symbol of oppression (that it is not Islamic but traditional, that it is used mostly in patriarchal states...etc), her defense, framed within a modern-postmodern criticism of Barbie history, reifies the Orient in the doll as caught in the middle of the dialectic between men and women, Postmodern and Modern, East and West, *us* and *them* and the continuously complicated renditions of what and how Western ideologies are defined.

Moreover, the Saudi women often hyphenated as Muslim among other things, has been represented obsessively with the symbolism of the veil and Islam by extension. And though this is a critical and important part of the Saudi woman's identity, the symbolism of the veil reduces her to a mere generality that includes the *other* veiled Kuwaiti-Muslims, Lebanese-Muslims, Egyptian-Muslims, Moroccan-Muslims collectively and independently. Applicable to all the articles in the three timeframes, the majority of the stories had a constant reference to the veil as a symbol of oppression, the illegality of driving, and the segregation of the sexes in favor of men. On several occasions however, some articles interviewing Saudi women on the conditions of their lives, made no references to the veil, emphasized its absence, or else described it as a kind of "fashion statement."

Moreover, the veil – interchangeable with cloak, black, covering, abaya, Niqab, burka, hijab, walking tents, all-encompassing, head to foot, head-to-toe, traditional garments, body concealing, eye revealing, shapeless, or any combination of these – is used as a descriptive and metaphoric device that succeeds in feminizing the *other*. In more than one occasion, stated in the title and/or echoed in the body of the text (for instance, one story was presented by the title *Life of Saudi women unveiled*, while another *How war reveals life beyond the veil*), the word *veil* is embedded in the text and used to describe the act of uncovering the concealed. The implication is

that the *veil* needs to be removed regardless of who or why it was placed over Muslim and Arab societies. Since the veil is conventionally a woman's attire, the act of *unveiling* feminizes Saudi Arabia as secretive and docile beneath the repressive conservative exterior.

One example that uses the veil as well as gender segregation; among other things, to create an overall image of the *other*, describes women as "confined by tradition and virtual house arrest." These women are described as forced to make a choice between careers or marriage in a highly patriarchal society, whereby both options coexisting is "unheard of." Another describes the "luxury" prison-like lifestyle of women in Saudi Arabia, such that men essentially can do anything in contrast to their wives. And yet another describes an extreme patriarchy where polygamy is preached and promoted in public by the religious police. All of these images, portrayals and representations delineate what Baudrillard (2002) has ascribed to a Western fixation on images. The veil in the context of Baudrillard's (2006) *simulacra*<sup>27</sup> no longer assumes a materialistic garb covering Muslim women. It is removed from the context of its creation and placed in a new nonrepresentational space altogether. The abstract relocation of the veil, which is "turned into information, ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war, [that is] in some way symptomatic" of the postmodern problems in its effort to disconnect from modernity (Alomond, 2007: 163). The "war" with Saudi Arabia is a visual phenomenon, reflected by media events rather than a military conflict, "a proliferation of signs rather than a physical assault" (Ibid), a war of ideologies that are framed according to changing interests as the three stages indicate. In the final analysis of these findings, it can be said that these news stories reinforce a seemingly never-ending ideology of *us* and *them*, whereby contemporary forms of racism in the media are shaped and adapted to fit current political and social climates. The postmodern dialectical lens reveals that the portrayal of women as oppressed is supportive of the idea that

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<sup>27</sup> Baudrillard (2006) describes the loss of reality as Simulacra: the irrelevance of signifier to the signified.

dominant ideologies manifest as “phallogocentric” (Stoetzler, 2005: 343), representational, power tools. It is phallogocentric in so far as Western ideologies are blatantly strong and patriarchal or masculine, preserving the rights of their women and willing to protect it for others, while Saudi Arabia is Orientalized as weak and feminine, segregating and repressing its citizens in exchange for secular power and authority masked under a theocratic regime.

This idea is synthetic of the role of media in a moderate postmodern dialectic. Identity of *self* and *other* manifested in two ways where “being occurs as itself and, at the same time, different from itself” (Pada, 2007: 50)—or in other words, identity gained externally, and internally as self-reflective and self-reifying, through logocentric constructs. External identity is very evident and patent, where as with internal identity the product is much more complex and subject to relativity. The image of an oppressed Saudi woman holds true in comparison to the rights privileged to Western women, and in that sense authentic. However the ipseitic *reality* of the Saudi woman’s personal understanding of self-consciousness might not be interpreted as oppression, proving that the concept of gender is impossible to extract out of its political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced. In Hegelian terms, the reconciliation between the two separate ontological conditions of Saudi woman amounts to *death* – of either *master* or *slave*, or both – such that the seesaw relationship between ideologies will continue until one subdues to the other. Interestingly enough, though the articles on Carmen Bin Ladin highlighted that she is not of Saudi origins, or one of *them* – the *other* women – her experiences as an ex-wife of a Saudi, and more so the sister-in-law of Osama Bin Laden, somehow validated her credibility. After revealing that she has once lived in California, now residing in Geneva, with a new last name spelling, the article begins to portray her as comparable to a Western *us*.

In some articles this is done by stressing on the American education or influence obtained by some Saudi women who seem to voice their discontentment as well as their continuous efforts

for reform. In other articles, this is achieved by depicting the women as *being* or *existing* in a masculine-controlled Saudi Arabia, and as such only Saudi, or *them*, by extension and *not* necessarily by choice or participation. This leads to a removal of *othering* that deems these women, part of a holistic definition of *us*. Their adoption under the scope of *us* arguably, still situates them at a second rate standing, in a dominated position, even if on a conceptual or abstract scale. This is because, congruent to Foucault's (1998) conception of power as a product of social interaction, and at the risk of employing a discourse of victimization, their lack of participation and muted voices, either completely or partially, reveals their vulnerability towards a more dominant ideological force.

Canada has attempted to solve the issue of Hegelian ethical responsibility outlined by Sarukkai (1997) to cater to its multicultural society, by encouraging multicultural representation through ethnic diversity in the media. However, the problem with Sarukkai's *self-in-the-other* approach, where the Arab reporter is given credibility as a presumed insider, is that it raises into question the potential stereotyping that the "insider" can produce. Additionally, Saudi-Canadians, or Arab-Canadians more broadly, representing "Saudi" or "Arab" news due to their heritage does not dismiss their enculturation in Canada by virtue of their 'Arab-ness' or 'Saudi-ness.' After all, drawing on the premise that language has the capacity to serve as ideology, the language of news reporting, at least in the range of articles examined in this research, is not native to the *other* being represented. Additionally publishing Saudi people from Saudi Arabia in the newspaper (Al-Sharif, 2004, April 22; The other side of the Saudi story, 2004, April 23) is also a problematic solution. As Abu-Lughod (2001) states "as long as we are writing for the West about 'the other' we are implicated in projects that establish Western authority and cultural difference" (Ibid: 105). As mentioned earlier, the Saudi ambassador's response is not representative of women's opinion since the issue revolves around gender equality. Additionally,

his response to a Canadian article, in a Canadian media, is not an authentic account on what is Saudi, let alone Saudi woman. The ambassador in his role as ambassador is problematic by virtue of his knowledge of Canada and his special temporal and spatial location there. The response in the newspaper was to a series on Saudi Arabia published in the National Post by a variety of journalists including one on Saudi women by Isabel Vincent (2004, March 29) and therefore following the already established epistemological “rules-of-the-game” so to speak. In other words, Canada represented Saudi, Saudi is representing itself counter to the representation given by Canada and therefore is founded on a representation of itself rather than on the “essence” of itself.

Another issue regarding the totalizing notion of Saudi women as Arabs, or Muslim puts the onus of ethical responsibility on the reporter. A Lebanese reporter with his or her own personal experience, relative to his or her life in Lebanon, does not validate his or her reporting on Saudi Arabia by virtue of his or her status as “Arab,” on the simple basis of a relative history, a common language, let alone a reporter with no shared experience or understandings of the given context. There are two problems here: First, the experiences of a given reporter culturally varies than those of a Saudi woman, from those of a Saudi woman living outside of Saudi Arabia, and similarly from those not from Saudi Arabia but living there. The presumption that there is a common universal human capacity for empathy does not exhume the content from bias. Second, the ideological values belonging to the reporter vary than those of Canadians, and since a degree of interpretation and subjectivity as established cannot be removed, as part of the human element and as part of language as a meaning-making process, the representations are further mediated by the reporter and then by the Canadian recipient of the news.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusion

#### Significant Findings

Since the main research question is concerned with the result of a dialectical syntheses between Western ideologies and the depictions of Saudi Arabian women in Canadian media, in order to establish how representations are reflective of constant latent metanarratives, there are three general observations that can be noted from the discussion of the findings: First, in compliance with Vipond (2000), a significant number of the news articles were dependent on external sources, crediting the Associated Press, the New York Times, Agence-France, Bloomberg News, and Reuters among others. The majority of articles that did credit Canadian sources, were published by the *National Post*, proving that between the other two newspapers, it was the most self-reifying. The remaining articles, which constitute a little less than half of the total number, did not credit any sources or authors and were, in a sense, ‘raw’ in their descriptions. Although the implication of quantitative data is beyond the scope of this research, it can still be said that any immediate desired change on the broader scope of Canadian news reporting might be hindered by these trends.

Second, there are several constant trends surrounding the general conditions of the articles. Although the majority of reporters come from Anglo and Francophone origins, a small, but nevertheless important number of articles with “non-western” or “Arabic”<sup>28</sup> reporters prompted a reconsideration of Sarukkai’s (1997) *self-in-the-other* and *other-in-the-self* discussion. In the context of the first, it is worth mentioning that the only “Saudi-written” story was by the Saudi ambassador in Canada in 2004. In context of the second, no subjective account

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<sup>28</sup> The names of some authors, as well as their popularity in the news media and press sector, makes their Arabic background recognizable.

by Saudi women was given without the mediation of a third party.

The third observation reveals that, in examining the portrayal of Saudi woman as *others* over time, there is a multilayered change that forces the conception of the Saudi woman as complementary to the development of a cause or point. The majority of articles were written as news exposés, or firsthand experiences (travel or visit...etc), or as commentaries. The prevalent use of metonymy (drawing on Western pop culture, books, history... etc) metaphors (reifying individualism as shopping, Islam and oppression as the veil, war as process for the first two...etc) and other forms of literary devices in describing Saudi women, amplified by the totalizing lack of clear distinctions between social and political Saudi Arabia, ostracizes Saudi women to accommodate another subject.

These dominant themes are in congruence with Almond's criticism of "Western hegemonic agendas [which] appropriate feminist humanitarian concerns to justify their 'interventions'" (2007: 133). Almond contends that the West employs ethnocentric criticism that is unilateral and "overtly secular" by concentrating on what is not Western or "contemporary" in Islamic cultures (2007: 134). Supported by Said's premise in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1994), Almond's criticism can be taken a step farther in so far as delineating the issues with postmodern metanarrative. This is because the Western inclination to "save" the oppressed Saudi woman implies superficial change in the course of historical social development, as opposed to the nihilistic metanarrative shift, that Gauntlett (2002) has described. The remnant overt patriarchal and postcolonial underpinnings that dictated Western ideologies in the past are still reflected in the discourse of *other*. Perhaps, in defense of Gauntlett's perceived transition, the phenomenon of change is located within the scope of its ipseity, and the need to intervene is only reflective of the West's outreach to assert its identity by ascribing values to new situations.

In several cases, some Saudi females, often voiced as active reformist, were generally identified as Saudi expatriates or alumni and students at American or European universities. In

rare other occasions nonetheless, some women who live in Saudi Arabia are portrayed as less credible but with potential, “passion,” will, and “curiosity” to grow. The subtext of these representations suggests that the more similarities they share with the reader, especially as educated or successful women, the more believable they look compared to *us*. In reference to the title of this thesis, the *and* signifies the dialectical process of dialectical deconstruction between *us/them*. In one article par example, a 2005 study revealed that Saudi women were able to relate to social issues aired on Oprah. The unique tone was highly distinctive from others, such that Saudi women were adopted as part of *us*, as opposed to the strangeness of *them*.

Nevertheless, some articles, although still adoptive of these trends, remained neutral covering stories that entailed no depictions of Saudi women or the Saudi state as oppressed. Others opposed any Western intervention by arguing that these women, referenced as a collective entity, do not desire change. And finally, some reports renounced the former position in favor of giving Saudi women the option to choose, regardless of what they will choose, and therefore necessitating and urging Western involvement. The majority of these articles covered events including the Olympics and the controversial absence of Saudi women, a number of social achievements in their favor, and crimes of injustices against them including rape, forcible divorce, and honor killings. But despite the intensified concentration on subjugation, the loudest, strongest, and most active voice given to Saudi women belonged to articles in Stage 3, in 2007-2009.

However, what is even more interesting is that the sensationalized depictions of women in various articles (and in one case, the recycling of such a story over the span of the three timeframes) did not vary much within the years. Saudi women essentially received media attention mostly depicted as being docile under a phallogentric “interpretive form” of Islam. They are seen as unable or incapable of freeing themselves without international interference. The difference nevertheless, is that these portrayals are reproduced in a manner that reflects

contemporary circumstances—such as the 08 elections in the United States, the recession, the Olympics, and of course the War on Terror. The strategy manifests by presenting impartial journalistic articles to report new, fresh, and neutral stories while maintaining a continuity of construal metanarrative of Orientalism, that allude to the constant mitigation of imbricated binary oppositions, which; dialectically, advances hegemonic identity discourses between West and East, *self* and *other*, as well as *here* and *there*.

What is striking about the Western gaze in these articles, is the empty semantics used to described Saudi Arabia, Saudi religion and politics, and most importantly Saudi women as the *other*. This gaze, amounts at times into paradoxical reflections on the, arguably, premature Western “transition” from modern to postmodern, or, tantamount to Almond’s (2007) observation in his conclusion, to nothing more than the “moral and ontological emptiness of the West itself.”

Considering the unprecedented rate of globalization vis-à-vis mobility, technological advancements, and media coverage, Hegel’s “death,” or in the context of this case study, maintaining or discontinuing the coverage of Saudi women altogether in Canadian media is not realistic as an option that can induce the effective change necessary to alter or harmonize the metanarratives between each culture. This is supported by the claim that universality is nonexistent in terms of authenticity (Descola, 2006: 1). Thus, although the bringing together of metanarratives is a slow, gradual, and time-consuming process when compared, new research must focus on finding new ways to allow them to coexist instead of concentrating on improving one to subdue the other, or even by abandoning them altogether.

Moreover, it can be surmised that postmodernity in this respect faces a polemical question as an extension of modernity if it is taken into account that metanarratives do in fact exist and cannot be removed. Although pluralism, a characteristic of postmodernity, offers a great way of understanding the origins of “truths” and metanarratives, it does nothing for the

development of ideologies, social structures, and systems that are founded on them. Concern therefore, should be on how to redevelop metanarratives instead of on the authenticity of the history of knowledge and even on any single issue as the solution for all problems. These changes, as revealed in this research, encompass and explain the narratives within a totalizing scheme. They are solutions for a given time not for permanent set futures to be based, for without problems – conceptual or practical – there cannot be progress and development.

On a different note, my own response to the term Ideology is that it eradicates neo-Marxist ideas. It is a blanket dismissive terminology where power is seen as either prime or primordial. Perhaps, a kind of inexorable motive force rather than a compilation of the sum of its parts, which would be distinctive in different cultures. It reminds me of the problems with earlier French ideologies revolving around language and myths in which the belief in the ability of ideology through language to initiate or create change blinds the believers to reality, thereby exhuming the blame from ideology, instead of recognizing the faultiness in it. I also tend to consider ideology in the media as something that fails to look at the components or elements of the ideological system, instead treating them as an undifferentiated whole. I do not deny that many of these behaviors and elements are hard to study objectively but I also think that at least an attempt should be made to delineate the elements of the semiotic and journalistic culture. Simply tossing off "ideology" as an explanation for various things is no explanation whatsoever. Ideology is clearly a social construct, but the theory that it is responsible for certain kinds of identities, beliefs, or behavior towards content in the media is also constructed.

### **Limitations and Implications**

The purpose of this thesis is not to debate about what or who is right or wrong. For just as the West through its representation of a foreign *other* shows little of who the Saudi woman is, Arabs too have “slipped into an easy anti-Americanism” (Said, 1994: xxvii); rather, the aim here

is to examine Canadian media in an effort to lay the groundwork for future researches to improve the understanding of *self* and *other*, and let go of criticizing the binary through construction and reconstruction of epistemological history. This study is an initial point of reference for further studies to develop and improve current strategies and ideologies prevalent in media industries macroscopically and microscopically, through a real and genuine partnership between Orientalist and Oriental, modern and postmodern thought.

The delimitations and limitations of this research focus on the identity, or the construction of identity, of the *self* in relation to the *other*. Attention is paid to the representation of Saudi women within the Canadian media, and Middle Eastern women and Western media by extension. Although the representation of Canada within the Saudi media may have provided useful insight into understanding how persistent metanarratives are readapted in media narratives, it is beyond the scope of the present study; and since this study is also concerned with the self-reification of ideologies and discourses, so too are the representations of Saudi women by Saudi media<sup>29</sup>, since the latter may not guarantee that they, the Saudi women as a defined entity, will ascertain authenticity to their respective experiences, and as such would be useless in advancing this discussion on Canadian media.

In addition, only newspaper articles were tackled for reasons of consistency and because some broadcasted (Radio and television) material were difficult to secure in their original format. Topics regarding women in Saudi Arabia often do not make it on television news as frequently as they appear in print, especially considering how a large number of the findings revealed that the conditions of Saudi women were used to frame other issues. Seeing that a large part of this research is dependant on the role of language in formulating ideology, printed publications and

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<sup>29</sup> Consult Sakr, 2008, for an example of Saudi women's involvement in the media, and their representation in Saudi media.

journals also provide a rich source for highlighting ways in which this can be employed and thus analyzed.

The methodology is structured on a variety of submerged theories tackling the specific case of Saudi women in Canadian media, leaving the door open for future researches to approach different subject matters and case studies similarly. It must be taken into account that English content in Canadian media is favored over French. This is because unlike other popular areas of media studies in the Middle East such as Morocco or Lebanon, the political relationship between Saudi Arabia and English-speaking Canada is stronger than with its Francophone counterpart, suggesting that any possible change between the two can be extended to other parts respectively. Nevertheless, considering the practical aims of this research, future researches can be conducted in French or in Arabic or other languages for which specific sampling, not within the scope of this research, may be necessary.

By highlighting, analyzing, and assessing the themes in the depiction of Saudi women and their rights, this research also provides insight on the ways in which media representation can be improved in Canada. Additional research on the “little stories” that constitute the embedded socio-metanarratives shaping any given media can better shed some light on how syntheses of metanarratives can take place between two social and ideological dichotomies as an alternative to Hegel’s proposed “death.” Future research may in this sense be conducted in an effort to compare the implication of established media, such as newspapers and televised news, to the potential of new media and/or alternative news, to explore new scopes.

Finally, as Bruce L. Berg (2007) suggests, it should be emphasized that the role of the researcher is important in qualitative research. Therefore, to conclude this research without addressing the author’s ‘identities’ may be interpreted by some in the same way Proudman (2005) interpreted Said’s (1994) intention in *Orientalism* as “an ideologue and propagandist of

empire;” the very thing he set out to critique. The researcher has spent much of her childhood life in Saudi Arabia, then Lebanon, and now Canada, and is also well versed in a diverse range of Arabic and English literature and culture.

### **Thesis Summary**

To achieve the overall aim for this thesis, the literature review began with a delineation of Hegelian philosophy revolving around dialectics (Hegel, 1977; 1998) and framed by a feminist interpretation of postmodernism, David Nikkel’s (2007) idea of a moderate postmodernity, and Edward Said’s (1994) work on *Orientalism*. Hegel’s ideas of self-consciousness and master-slave narrative were also critiqued based on several examinations outlined by contemporary Hegelian critics. Nikkel’s ideas revolving around the modern society and postmodern culture were complemented by theories of other postmodern thinkers including, Barthes (1972), Hall (1994), Lyotard (1984), Taylor (1992) and feminists such as Butler (1999), Frug (1992), and Johnson (1992). Together they are framed within the discourse of Orientalism as outlined by Edward Said (1994), and discussed within the parameters of ethical responsibility as explained by Alznauer (2008), Descola (2006), Sarukkai (1997), Hackett (1996), and Livingstone (1998).

Based on this theoretical framework, a methodology was designed to determine how Western identities and values interact to create ideologies serving in the process of *othering* the Saudi woman in the media. These depictions were examined using a qualitative research design that drew on non-probability sampling from the *Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and *Toronto Star*. Using inductive reasoning, through data analysis methods that involved a content rhetorical and textual analysis of themes and concepts relating to representation changes during different political events over time, the nature of metanarratives in the broad spectrum of Western media were investigated. The resulting findings were then presented according to the three timeframes

in which they were analyzed: Stage 1 (2001-2002), Stage 2 (2003-2006), and Stage 3 (2007-2009).

These findings examined the ethical responsibility and the authenticity of media representation. The truth is truth only in its relationship to what is good, and what is good in one culture or context may not necessarily be so in another (Hegel, 1977; 1998). To focus on whether or not Canadian media is presenting differences to purposely promote a Western ideology is not as significant as understanding the implications of these representations, as ethnocentric interpretations of what constitutes being a woman in the Middle East – regardless of intent.

The main purpose of this study as such, was to investigate how latent metanarratives are consistent despite the changes in manifest narratives conveyed in established news. More specifically, this research was conducted to reveal how the latent narratives of Saudi women is still prevalent despite these changes; i.e. that they were portrayed to bolster any interest directed at the Saudi Arabian kingdom. This analysis was done through a case study of the changing ideologies that shaped the representation of Saudi women in Canadian media over the span of three important events relating to the Middle East: The terrorist attacks of September 11, The War on Iraq, and the instability that perused as an aftermath of these events. The implications of this thesis revealed what the ideological influences framing these depictions, as well as whether or not the changes that they have undergone, were self-reifying in nature. The research also highlighted the implications resulting from assessing the ontological identities of Saudi women vis-à-vis a Western framework of values.

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