Humanities and Educational Sciences Journal
ISSN: 2617-5908 (print)

مجلـــــة العلـــــوم التربـــــوية والدراســـــات الإنســـــانيـــة
ISSN: 2709-0302 (online)

Cultural Hegemony, Liberal Conscience, and Understanding Post - 9/11 American Fiction on Arab Woman(*)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55074/hesj.vi33.843

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*) تاريخ تسليم البحث 5/8/2023 تاريخ قبوله للنشر 14/9/2023
*) موقع المجلة: http://hesj.org/ojs/index.php/hesj/index

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Abstract:

This article analyses the impact of Post-9/11 political and cultural agendas on writers' attitudes toward Arab woman as a milestone in contemporary scholarship on neo-orientalism. Inspired by the Discourse Theoretical Approach to hegemony and imperialism, this manuscript offers a significant conceptual contribution to studies on the life of Arab women in post-9/11 narratives, *City of Veils* (2010), as racist, imperial and xenophobic discourse structured around exclusionary visions of the other. With these thoughts in mind, this study focuses on conceptualising the life of Arab woman by Ferraris who has lived in Arabia as a wife of Saudi citizen, as a representative of the climactic epoch in post-9/11 American fiction. It intervenes in debates about the political and cultural value of narratives by showing how post-9/11 narrative project engages specifically with geo-politics and hegemonic agendas. This conceptualisation helps understand how ideologies such as Islamophobia, racism, and populism in post-9/11 narratives all contribute to hegemonic discourse, how hegemonic discourse can be clearly attached with imperialism, and how neo-orientalist authorship can be articulated by writers beyond the neo-orientalist agendas.

Keywords: American Fiction - Liberalism - Arab Woman - Freedom.

الهيمنة الثقافية والحس الليبرالي ووضع المرأة العربية في الرواية الأمريكية بعد 11 سبتمبر

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ملخص

يدرس البحث تأثير الأجندات السياسية والثقافية بعد (11) سبتمبر على مواقف الروائيين الامريكيين تجاه المرأة العربية باعتبارها علامة فارقة في الدراسات المعاصرة عن الاستشراق الجديد، يطرح البحث، المستوحى أفكاره من المقاربة بين نظريات النقد المعاصر وخطاب الهيمنة والإمبريالية، رؤية مهمة عن حياة المرأة العربية في روايات ما بعد (11) سبتمبر، كالنظرة الدونية والمعادية بشكل واضح والإقصائية للمرأة المسلمة كما هو في رواية *City of Veils*, (2010) للكاتبة زيو فيراريس، ومن أهم نتائج البحث هو أن أدب ما بعد لأحداث سبتمبر يساهم بشكل كبير على نشر أيديولوجيات الإسلاموفوبيا، والعنصرية كما هو الحال في الخطاب السياسي، وكذلك وجد الباحث أن الخطاب السياسي الشعبوي يعبر عن توجه غالبية الروائيين يتجاوز أجندات الاستشراق الجديد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرواية الأمريكية – الليبرالية – المرأة العربية – الحرية.

Introduction:

Post - 9/11 cultural hegemony continues to rise even several years after 9/11; the Muslims, already irritated and resentful of the inspection they have been under since 2001, believe that the hegemonic attitude that links one of the major religions in the world with hatred and totalitarianism would continue to be fueled by American politics. Arab backwardness and liberalizing Arab woman as post - 9/11 terms have gained significant currency over the past two decades amongst both scholars and authors to describe the socio -political present. In this process, these terms have also been used as a proxy for various imperial and political ideologies and/or discourses such as neo-orientalism, racism, nationalism, populism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia. Such conflation is due mainly to the fact that many paradigms of hegemonic discourse take an ideational approach that leads to a blurring of conceptual edges and can end up enforcing the racist ideology at the heart of the cultural component which targets the Muslim community inside the United States and the Muslims around the world.

When the businessman Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, his foreign policy agendas towards the Islam were, in retrospect, quite cruel where he describes the religion as “a malignant cancer” and “a toxic ideology” (Zurcher 2017). On 27 January (2017), he signed the executive order to ban the entry of nationals of six Muslim countries, including people who have a “bona fide” relationship with American citizens. On 1 February (2017), he tweeted: “Everybody is arguing whether or not it is a BAN. Call it what you want, it is about keeping bad people (with bad intentions) out of country!” (CBS 19). This includes green card holders and visa applicants from the six Muslim countries. A hallmark of the first few months in his presidency showed the rise of hegemonic racial culture conceptualized within the discipline of both human and geography “by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings” (Omi and Winant 1994, 61). As Altwaiji (2014) argued, the Muslim world has served as a racial and hegemonic ground to the United States since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001, contributing to Arabs and Muslims being ideal fodder for American hegemony and spectacular imperialism (315). Because of this history of

cultural hegemony, pejorative terminology is pervasive and well established and therefore, one need not establish connections - one can simply draw on the cultural hegemonic ideology and imperial attitude.

Post - 9/11 writers reposition Arab woman in post-9/11 narrative on a critical landscape that highlights her rights in society in relation to man and shares her concerns and obsessions with readers in order to provide a cultural understanding of the unilateral doctrine and its socio-economic reverberation. In Ferraris' *City of Veils* (2010), Islam and Arab culture are handed a guilty verdict, a fact that explains the western concept of 'oppressed Arab woman' as an encompassing term for stereotypical representations of Arab women as 'oppressed' and 'backward'. The novel identified as characteristic of post - 9/11 literature are set in a disenchanted modern city inhabited by middle class and the bourgeois Saudi families in Jeddah - a world that has not seen progress in terms of women rights, social equality, and personal lifestyle. Women living in that city struggle with Islamic instructions, Bedouin norms, and financial need, and modern compounds in city that beyond immediate family and friends sustain the minimal sense of civil association and personal openness.

Theoretical Frame:

In the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, imperialism and cultural hegemony have been co-opted to legitimize the fragmentation of society in the Middle East. Whilst political novels have emerged to critique the emotive status of woman in Islamic society that underpin such American military agendas and cultural hegemony in the Middle East, they fall short of providing a scholarly representation/critique of this so-called 'Islamic radicalism'. This study addresses the aforementioned lacuna by exploring possibilities for counter -sociopolitical attitude that spatialize the Arab world in backward ways. Critical discourse analysis of woman status in Arab culture introduced by Ferraris as a primarily Western tradition draws on Van Dijk's ideological approach that focuses on the way cultural - power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and legitimated by text and talk in the social and political context. As such, Ferraris' post -9/11 novels serve to ignite further reflections of the geo-political relationships, avenues that nourish the political premises of imperialist initiatives against the aggressor other.

Van Dijk's sociocognitive informs us that the polarization of in-group versus out-group makes it possible for members of a dominant culture to

emphasize its positive qualities as in-group members and negative aspects of others as out - group members. Dijk's sociocognitive approach will be used to investigate the discursivity of texts and to examine how dominant ideologies oppress the less powerful in order to show how dominant ideologies produce hegemony, power, and presuppositions. According to him, dominance is "the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial, and gender inequality" (Dijk, 1993, 250). Dijk explains dominance as:

> This reproduction process may involve such different 'modes' of discourse-power relations as the more or less direct or overt support, enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance, among others. More specifically, critical discourse analysts want to know what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events play a role in these modes of reproduction (260).

Van Dijk's ideological square as a critical discourse analysis framework explores post - 9/11 notions of 'Self' versus 'Other' and 'Us' versus 'Them' as we read in Ferraris'. Dijk's approach consists of society, cognition, and discourse where discourse refers to various structures of representations and language usage in the production of ideologies: "dominance may be enacted and reproduced by subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear 'natural' and quite 'acceptable'…Such control may pertain to *action and cognition*: that is, a powerful group may limit the freedom of action of others" (254). Therefore, the cognitive property of discourse's readers, as part of the contextual understanding of post - 9/11 novel, is crucial for understanding the relationship between text and hegemony and dominance.

Hegemony, Stuart Hall wrote of his time, is the "dominance and subordination in the field of relations structured by power" (Hall, 1985). Drawing from Hall's notion, the questions for researchers are what exactly is US Arab relationship? How do dominance and subordination function? The premise of the theory of hegemony in Marxism is that individuals are not controlled by force alone, but also by thoughts and ideas. Karl Marx believed that "the ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class" (1959, 26). However, according to Marx and Engels (2010) it is not the economic factor alone that determines class differences. The

growth of industry at the end of the nineteenth century in the west made social domination and class subordination much more critical and complex than before. Individual and class ideological affiliations began to exercise a crucial role in social power in the west in general. Marx and Engels referred to a fact that individual always addresses the conditions of human existence outside ideological outline:

> The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way (42).

This American cultural hegemony over the Middle East is defined by Khalil as the "dominance over the historical crossroads of commerce, culture, continents, and religion" that ensures "dominance, directly or indirectly, over the population of the region, which was reflected in part in representations of the Middle East and its inhabitants" (2011, 54). According to Edward Said (1978), the position of a Muslim woman in the Arab world does not provide her with any opportunity to be an agent of change and development in her family and, by extension, the society: "women are usually the creatures of a male-power fantasy" (207). This cultural paradigm sets up a problematic position for educated and liberal males who are informed that looking at woman is "as dangerous as staring at the sun" (Ferraris, 2010, 126). Therefore, Arab women should not claim any intellectual or educational space in which they can operate as males' partners and should not aspire to empower themselves or facilitate their social integration into society. Further, as far as the geopolitics is concerned, relationship between 9/11 terrorist attacks and hegemony is concerned, Lena Petrovic (2002) argues that the relationship between events and hegemonic discourse expresses the concerns of postmodern theories and contributes to them:

> [W]hen … as counterstrategy to the terror of the political logic of the same, the postmodern theorists prescribe a universal multiplicity - of language games, of free interpretations, of subject positions, none of which lay claim to superior truth or justice - they end up as champions of compulsory epistemological and ethical relativism that is fatal … to one of the strategies of self-defense against the power of dominant culture (287).

Neoliberalism and Narratives:

The rise of the neoliberal, often imperial, literature in early twenty-first century has increasingly become a subject of debate among critics of post - 9/11 American literature. Referring to authors such as Zoe Ferraris and Sherry Jones, along with numerous others, cultural studies scholars frequently connect this trend of 'neoliberal literature' to an ascending hegemonic neoliberalism, going so far as to call the literature of this period 'neoliberal literature'. Writing on the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11, critics read narratives that take "neoliberalism from idea of the contemporary and with a strong focus on 9/11 as a temporal reference point" and noted a turn to neoliberalizing the society through representing the barbarity of Islamic culture, brutality of social norms and cruelty of the patriarchal structure (Niblett, 2019, 49). Michel Foucault (2004) referred to such influence as a newly emergent form of imperial exercise that enables writers "to become entrepreneurs of themselves" (232). Therefore, the majority of contemporary American narratives is entirely in the grasp of American politics, and it thus comes as no surprise that readers witness the proliferation of historical and detective novels.

More clearly, the fact that contemporary narratives are a hegemonic neoliberal project indicates that the hierarchy which places Christian America above the Muslim Middle East is manufactured by neoliberal ideology. Islamic culture is, hence, "forcibly made to occupy the role of the ideological other that neoliberalism contrasts itself against in order to perpetuate the claim that it (neoliberalism) is indeed a liberating ideology" (Waikar, 2018, 9). This focus on the constitutive relationship of immediacy between neoliberalism and its geopolitical influence allows us to observe and understand the congruencies between hegemonic narratives and related paradigms that represent the same phenomena. By fusing this approach of criticism, readers can develop a model that highlights the strong relation between the cultural dimension of the neoliberal agendas and contemporary narratives. From this perspective readers can reckon the relationship between neoliberal ideology and narratives, and they can also examine the ways that historicize both the narrative work and neoliberalism through their political and cultural mobility.

The neoliberal values of democracy, freedom, women's rights, dignity, and international peace in post 9/11 American novel - already are at the core of American political agendas - are defined against Islamic cultural values

of totalitarianism (anti-freedom) and Islamic aggressive teachings (anti-peaceful ideology). In this context, neoliberal narratives conceptualize Islam, Islamic culture and the Muslim society as irrevocably antithetical to neoliberalism and the American way of life. In their *Introduction: How Do Novels Think about Neoliberalism?* presented at the fourth biennial conference of the Society for Novel Studies that was held at the University of Pittsburgh in May (2016), John Marx and Nancy Armstrong (2018) examined the relationship between the novel and neoliberalism and referred to how major contemporary novelists have caused the novel's "partition of the sensible" which allows "an expression of the generic obligation of the novel to violate the established novel form" (157). Marx and Nancy question contemporary novel genre in the light of its relationship with the neoliberal agendas: "[s]hould we consider the variations that encourage us to identify certain novels with "neoliberalism" as variations of the novel as a genre - or do they amount to a different order of difference that in turn amounts to a different set of generic requirements?" (157). They put it straightforward that the dominance of neoliberal ideology made novel unable to deal with its conceptual fundaments and logical commitments and to locate itself in relation to literary and aesthetic structures.

Neoliberal narrative writers clearly intend to offer a productive provocation and a counter-terrorist experiment of sorts that enable readers to foreground the fundamental concepts that are involved in situating Islam, Islamic culture and the Muslims in relation to the United States and to the western culture in general. But what is really provocative about this narrative? After all, many critics examined the pressures of politics and imperial agendas on writers and the contemporary geopolitical 'post - 9/11' as a period, imperial or not, emphasize that narratives have been subsumed under political agendas and neoliberal capitalism:

'Neoliberal novel' conceives of the relation between its constitutive terms in such a way as to allow us to locate the periodization of the novel not simply in an external, material determination but in the complex interplay of the formal relations between the market, social, and political structures, and culture…It is also a way of articulating a set of contradictions inasmuch as the novel, as we shall see, remains constitutively incongruous with neoliberalism. To be sure, we know that there are novels that simply replicate the logic of neoliberalism (Nilges, 2015, 257).

On (22) December (2001), Don DeLillo published *In the ruins of the future: Reflections on terror and loss in the shadow of September* in

Harper's Magazine in which he referred to "the surge of capital markets" that has "dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness" (2001). DeLillo has seen the neoliberal agendas in the literary context as the "the defining moment" that will haunt narrative themes for decades:

"Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments" (2001). This reference to DeLillo's neoliberal factor is intended to conduct us to the major aim of this essay: to demonstrate the extent that American narrative writers are bound by 'neoliberal ideologies.' It's this understanding of how neoliberal narratives evolve and adapt to different geopolitical factors and contexts that is the premise on which DeLillo has proposed an understanding of the clash between the cultures of the Middle East and the United States: "We are rich, privileged and strong, but they are willing to die. This is the edge they have; the fire of aggrieved belief" (2001). Despite a huge number of narratives published in the ten years following the 9/11 attacks, surveying the neoliberal agendas in narratives presents an opportunity to critique the neo-orientalist, hegemonic, and imperial approach to the production of knowledge on Islam and the Muslims. Notwithstanding the big focus of the American policy on 'countering terrorism' in approaching many issues in the Middle East, the relevance of the need for neoliberalization, fighting terrorism, and liberating Muslim woman have been much more the dominant issues in the neoliberal narratives. Because of this relevance, and the renewed urgency given to these issues, the essay analyzes neoliberal ideology through a historicized and geopoliticised methodological framework.

Who is Zoe Ferraris and what is her background on Arabia?

Zoe Ferraris is an American mystery writer born in Oklahoma in (1972), to a U.S. army officer and Ukrainian mother. In (1991), Ferraris married a Saudi Palestinian man whom she met in San Francisco and moved with him to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, after she became a mother of a baby girl. In Jeddah, Ferraris lived with her husband's extended family, a group of Saudi-Palestinian Bedouins who had never welcomed a stranger into their lives before. Her knowledge of women rights in Saudi Arabia came from her nine-month stay in Jeddah, one of the most prominent cities in Saudi Arabia and the gateway to the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina:

That was definitely my impression of Saudi men going over there, that women are oppressed and men are the oppressors and men have the run of the place while women are restricted to their homes…I sympathized with their situation enormously. I think that is definitely something most Americans don't think about. Another aspect of that is how difficult it was for married Saudi men to have a wife, because it's a little bit like having a child: She can't drive herself, she can't go out by herself. If she needs to go to the doctor you have to come home and take her. If she wants to go to the store, you have to take her. You have to take her everywhere (Kehe, 2010).

The selection of Ferraris' novels for this study is based on the author's motivation for writing about Saudi Arabia and on her background as an author "with an insider knowledge of Saudi Arabia" (Ferraris, September 17, 2010). In an interview in *Haaretz* with Ferraris, David Green says "Ferraris writes about the Saudi theocracy with the critical eye of a liberated Western woman" (2010). *City of Veils* (2010), Ferraris' first novel on women's rights in Saudi Arabia, has been translated into many languages except Arabic, the main language of Saudi Arabia. It is important to know that although it has been more than a decade since *City of Veils* was published; neither the novel nor the follow-up novel, *Kingdom of Strangers* (2012), have been translated into Arabic despite having be translated into many languages such as German, French, Italian, Dutch, Czech, Polish, Romanian, Danish, Portuguese, Turkish Lithuanian, and Hebrew. Except for Hebrew and Turkish, all these languages are all western and central European languages. In the interview with Green, Ferraris said "I would love to see an Arabic version, but I couldn't possibly do it myself…And I know my sisters-in-law would love to read them, but they don't speak English well enough to read it in English" (Green, 2010). The impact of these translations sheds light on the importance of the western recognition of the status of woman in Islam as a primary account that examines the evolving and changing perception of Muslim women in relation to religion and politics.

In most of post-9/11 American novels, Saudi Arabia is taken as a birthplace of Islam and a place from which Islam spread east and west; thus, as a subject matter, Saudi Arabia has become a lens to approach and investigate the position of Muslim woman in the entire Islamic world. Therefore, all post - 9/11 inquiries on woman's rights in Islam take Saudi Arabia as a typical model for these investigations because in contemporary

scholarship on Muslim woman's rights, *Sharia* or Islamic law and women have never been in good terms. Zoe Ferraris' *City of Veils* (2010), taken as an example of contemporary novel on Arab woman, is a documentation of the suffering of Muslim women who are presented as victims of their patriarchal families and *sharia* laws, whether she is rich or poor, royal or ordinary. Ferraris was married to a Saudi and lived with him in Jeddah for a couple of years. In *City of Veils,* Ferraris tells us her own experiences as an American wife, and informs us what gender oppression means for her. Ferraris considers her experience in Saudi Arabia is a departure from a ground that offers universalistic and realistic understandings of Islamic way of life, *Sharia* laws, Islamic culture, and subjugation. This provides insights into the complex and at times even controversial, meanings of gendered identities shaped by Islamic and social conditions.

Neoliberalizing the Middle East:

Post - 9/11 neoliberal strategy allows hegemonic relationship over the entire Middle East, its society, and culture through assigning combating terrorism an active role in the transition into the fate of neoliberalization. Therefore, neoliberalism is not a monad or a unified prescription; instead, it is a geopolitical application process whose mobility can always be bound up with cultural and political agendas, which are, of course and at every point tied up to the realm of cultural hegemony and imperialism. One final feature about the process of neoliberalization offered by Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Smith, which invites a huge criticism that many wish to reject, is the lack of clarity in how a cluster of (American) narrative writers align their projects with the political agendas and employ them for the historical moment's features. The two critics Huehls and Smith emphasize a major role in which 'culture,' 'the political-ideology,' and 'economy' become equally dominant (2017, 3). Huehls and Smith's emphasis on the dominance of imperialism strengthens our understanding of the contested approach, in which the hegemonic attitudes are seen in the "structure of feeling" which has been hitherto understood in the critical work of Gramsci, Raymond Williams and the literary criticism of the Birmingham School. As Stuart Hall implores us to understand neoliberalism in its multiple instantiations in his work on the 'revolution' of neoliberalism:

No project achieves 'hegemony' as a completed project. It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are permanent or final. Hegemony has

constantly to be 'worked on,' maintained, renewed, and revised. Excluded social forces, whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions … and the struggle over a hegemonic system starts anew. They constitute what Raymond Williams called 'the emergent'—and are the reason why history is never closed but maintains an open horizon towards the future. (727, 28)

Neoliberalism both as a term - which basically means free markets, free trade and less governmental interference in the economy and the social issues - and as a socio-cultural response to the communist/nationalist policies of 1980s, was increasingly shaped by several geo - political and imperial forces like the events of 9/11, the American retaliation in the Middle East, and the Arab Spring. The Bush's administration set it clear that neoliberalizing the Middle East means all of life, or, put clearly, neoliberalizing describes the situation in which the region's social, political, economic and cultural life has been elevated to the standard model for all relations. In fact, George W. Bush made it very clear and simple for us to understand that neoliberalism for the Middle East means both political hegemony and sociopolitical dominance. He emphasized six American principles to the Middle Eastern societies as "essential principles common to every successful society, in every culture":

- "Successful societies limit the power of the state and the power of the military -- so that governments respond to the will of the people, and not the will of an elite.
- Successful societies protect freedom with the consistent and impartial rule of law, instead of selecting applying the law to punish political opponents.
- Successful societies allow room for healthy civic institutions -- for political parties and labor unions and independent newspapers and broadcast media.
- Successful societies guarantee religious liberty -- the right to serve and honor God without fear of persecution.
- Successful societies privatize their economies, and secure the rights of property. They prohibit and punish official corruption, and invest in the health and education of their people. They recognize the rights of women.
- And instead of directing hatred and resentment against others, successful societies appeal to the hopes of their own people." (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2003).

The need for liberalizing Muslim women:

Zoe Ferraris' *City of Veils* (2010) emphasizes the construction of the neoliberal apparatus of life for Muslim woman through which a woman gets more rights, significance, and freedom. The main theme in *City of Veils* is not who 'Arab women' are, but more fundamentally and critically how Arab women ought to react against their oppressors and build their independent identity. Ferraris state in an interview with David Green in *Haaretz* that "wearing a burka is annoying, it's not natural…let's get rid of it…I wouldn't wear it in America, but I do wear one when I'm in the Middle East. I'm glad that it's become an issue of debate" (Green, 2010). Further, the proposed identity which is suggested to act and transform, providing, for example, its own freedom and neoliberal way of thinking, is always identified with the western identity because the 'West' in general and the United States in particular is a clearly liberal designation of better identity, and one which can be a model for identity. Ferraris has been associated with Arab culture and lived in the Middle East for a year. She believes that the status of woman in Islam is reducible to sub-human individual that risks the personal-affective form of her life: "That I as a woman have to cover up because you as a man have no control over yourself. Why is the woman the first thing to be covered up? Why should men not have to govern themselves?" (2010). According to Ferraris, the construction of Arab woman's identity against the 'West' includes elements of what she considers part of religion and culture: "women are oppressed and men are the oppressors…women are restricted to their homes. That was my big revelation going over there…I sympathized with their situation enormously…How incredibly boring life must be for the women who must stay home all day" (Kehe, 2010). This range of neoliberal examinations of women's life in the Middle East today, in particular the emerging out of post - 9/11 narratives, focuses on gender injustices, irrespective of whether one such examination is social or religious.

City of Veils is on the limitations of Arab women and their struggle to have recognition in society. To speak of neoliberalizing Arab women in contemporary American novel is to speak of the paralysing limits of the Arab women by locating their suffering and by locating the seeds of resistance inside a harsh religious culture built by contradictions of the historically changing interpretations of the Quran. Katya's life provides us with a broad frame that allows us to understand the oppressive religious conduct her father follows, he believes that a female is virtuous and should

not be seen or heard by males: "Close the door, lower the veil, shut the mouth" (Ferraris, 2010, 27). He is a devout Arab who is "praying five times a day and following all of the niggling Wahhabi rules that seemed, to Katya's mother at least, nothing more than an outward show of religiosity" (65). He always identifies himself as a "Muslim" and insists that "Katya and her mother wear burqas when his friends came to the house" (65). Ferraris' logic of neoliberalism focuses on gender-based discrimination that continues to be manifest in workplace and results in dramatic repercussions of the inner emotional lives of females: "They don't trust us to do our jobs…. that's the problem. One little mistake on my part justifies all their biases against me. The good news is that the pressure has turned me into the best examiner in the building" (37). *City of Veils*' themes, characters, diction, and setting are all specific, and therefore they perfectly suit a neoliberal voice and can develop a narrative consciousness as a particular medium that has much to do with the particularities of the society.

Suffering of Arab woman is the main focus of the neoliberal ideology, so it can appear to signal the growing interest in improving the rights of women in the Middle East. Katya's friend Leila Nawar is a victim of her brother Abdulrahman, a devout Muslim, who believes that vices in society increase by women's exposure to man: "He didn't like her being out of the house, and he thought that filming people was inappropriate." (92). It is as if the male in society measures his success in terms of what one might imagine their fight with crimes and vices by isolating women from the outside world. Abdulrahman does not feel happy when he comes to know that Leila is supported by her cousin Ra'id and her friend Farooha: "He didn't like that she was doing it, and he wanted it to stop" (92). Katya's second friend Donia is a sad image that tells a brief, brutal story of inhuman and degrading treatment: "having been subject to the abuses of seven older brothers, she was shy to the point of obstinacy…She expressed emotion rarely. Most of the time Katya had to strain to hear her voice" (65). The reader can find out what causes the need for liberating Muslim women who are socially oppressed and confined in spaces almost stripped of life.

The need for neoliberalizing Arab society and individuals is justified by the need to liberate the women and include them in social relationships – as long as those relationships do not violate the nature of human equality. Leila represents the aspiration of Arab woman toward improving her economic status which she believes a quick fix in which jobs for women are a

prerequisite for empowerment and pro-strength independence: "She knew that financial independence was the only thing that would make her a happy person, Leila being who she was. Financial independence." (93). Similarly, money is very important for her friend Farooha who is always in need and encouraged by Katya to revolt: "You spend all your time in your room. Your parents want you locked up here, and your brother threatens you if you so much as open your bedroom door. Aren't you longing to get the hell out? (95). The economic status in *City of Veils* questions the social position of Arab woman and reflects her aspiration toward emancipation and independence. When Katya got a job, "she'd been overjoyed – eager for the distraction and the independence" (32). Emancipation – not luxurious life, money, or job – is the need that will make the difference in the life of an Arab woman in *City of Veils*, and its acquisition is possible by a rigorous yet bold struggle against oppression. Katya's dedication to that cause does not weaken in this neoliberal iteration, it further morphs into a much recognizable form of neoliberal feminist struggle against objectification of woman: "You think women should be your sex slaves. That's what Leila was to you, wasn't it? A pretty face. A cute, tight ass. Someone you thought you could fuck if you felt like it" (187). *City of Veils* is regarded as harbouring neoliberal agendas by fuelling anti-Islamic lifestyle and creating havoc to change the social make-up. In this neoliberal ideology, the females' resentment of her life, so much embodiment of 'anti-Islamic' and 'anti-Arab' so much as it will be, in an aggressive world, is an emphasis on the need for change and neoliberal values in the form of freedom, employment, and equality.

Conclusion:

The dominant ideas of neoliberal narratives agree upon protection of women's rights against the religious harassment. Therefore, the first leitmotif of neoliberal narratives is protection. This idealized protection of women from violation demands the state to perform its duty in accordance with the related international agreements. There are several well-documented examples of religious and social violations of women's rights, including example from the seventh century, which prove that women are in a vulnerable position. In neoliberal narrative, Arab woman resists the structural and systemic discrimination and violence through lifestyle and ideas antithetical to dominant social culture and Islamic ideas. If we understand neoliberal narratives as an imperial project rather than in terms

of base and superstructure, and as significantly hegemonic rather than as only scholarly, there are also reasons to look at them in the light of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that sets out a vision of social structure for all as "peoples of the United Nations" with equal rights that range from 'liberty' and 'security,' to the 'free' participation in 'all' activities of the community. In conclusion, neoliberal narratives, along with their ideas of democratic reforms, liberating women and fighting terrorism, represent the main approaches and possibilities for a progressive society.

Acknowledgment:

I would like to thank Andrew Gross, professor of North American Studies at the University of Göttingen in Germany for his editorial remarks which made the arguments of this manuscript more cogent. I also thank Northern Border University for the technical support while writing this article.

Disclosure statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding: The author received no direct funding for this research.

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