



REVISITING CRITIQUES OF ORIENTALISTS ON SELECTED MUSLIM WOMEN FIGURES

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Abstract

The enduring interest of Western orientalists in critiquing Islam, spanning decades and persisting today, manifests through their critical examination of the Quran, Prophetic hadith, and the character of the Prophet. Central to their discourse are inquiries into the portrayal and status of Muslim women figures, particularly those closely associated with the Prophet as his wives, and their potential implications for the authenticity and reliability of Islamic sources. This paper undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the arguments advanced by Western orientalists who contend that these women figures reveal inherent issues within Islam. Additionally, it seeks to refute these criticisms and evaluates the viewpoints of various scholars who champion the pivotal contributions of these women to the Islamic faith. Employing a qualitative approach, this study primarily relies on content analysis to scrutinize the arguments set forth by orientalists and, concurrently, to offer counterarguments substantiated by an extensive array of primary and secondary references. The findings obtained underscore the inconclusiveness and indecisiveness of orientalist criticism concerning Muslim women figures, asserting the prominence of these figures as a cornerstone in opposing the Quran and Hadith as the principal legal sources in Islam. It is argued that safeguarding the honour and dignity of Muslim women figures transcends feminist advocacy; rather, it serves as a fundamental means to debunk baseless contentions and affirm the authenticity of Islamic sources.

Keywords: Critique, Orientalist, Muslim Women, Islamic sources.

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INTRODUCTION

In scholarly discourse, Islam has frequently faced allegations of deliberate promotion of gender bias and a preference for males over females, thereby perpetuating a stereotypical image of women in the religion as emblematic of oppression. This longstanding critique has been the subject of extensive debate among scholars, who have sought to examine whether Islam has subjugated women or elevated their societal status. Notably, this debate has engaged Western scholars, including orientalists, who approach Islam and matters concerning Muslims with a sceptical perspective.

Orientalist perspectives have historically depicted Islam as regressive, anti-civilizational, primitive, and detrimental to the rights of women. Muslim women, in particular, have often been portrayed as a marginalized group in dire need of emancipation, having been confined to the private sphere for numerous generations. As noted by Nicholson (1930) in his work *Literary History of the Arabs*, Islam has been identified as the primary factor responsible for the subjugation of Muslim women, and it is considered a significant impediment to the advancement of their status.

The veil, including the *niqab*, has often been interpreted as a symbol of oppression, serving as a crucial element in the Orientalist portrayal of Muslim women's marginalized identity (Amir-Khan, 2012). Moreover, Muslim women have frequently been depicted either as passive subjects of patriarchal tradition or as individuals unable to fully assimilate into Western culture (Nur Latifah, 2017). This persistently negative image of Muslim women has endured in Western perceptions, perpetuating unfavourable attitudes toward Islam to the present day.

The primary objective of this present research is to critically assess the contentions advanced by Western orientalist who maintain a critical stance toward narratives involving specific women figures in both the Quran and Hadith. Furthermore, this study endeavours to provide a robust counterargument while analysing the diverse scholarly perspectives that emphasize the substantial contributions made by these women to Islam. In pursuit of these objectives, the research is qualitative in nature by referring to primary and secondary sources related to the subject matters. By employing textual analysis, data from sources are gathered and elucidated (McKee, 2003) in order to discover the orientalist's critique through their writings and to analyse the rebuttal accordingly.

The paper is structured as follow. The next section describes the literature related to brief information on orientalism and discussion on the orientalist's work in the portrayal of Muslim women. This is followed by how Muslim women specifically who lives around the Prophet were critically discussed by the orientalist. The last section contains analysis and discussion in achieving the research objectives, then the paper ended by conclusion.

ORIENTALISM AND ITS DISCOURSE ON MUSLIM WOMEN

In defining orientalism, it was debated extensively in Edward Said's book (1978) entitled *Orientalism* that this term refers to "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority." However, Said was not the first to discuss orientalism because there are opinions that it was found in the writings of al-Tibawi in 1963. Some Muslim reformers like al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh also discussed about orientalism in as early as in the end of 19th century and early of the 20th century. Although the orientalism was discussed later, it is believed that the idea of orientalism had emerged earlier in the 12th century mostly after the Quran has been translated into Latin (Ahmad Yumni, Mohd Fairuz & Mardzelah, 2019).

The agenda of orientalism was carried out by the scholar known as orientalist. It refers to "anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient and this applies whether the person is anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist either in its specific or its general aspects" (Said, 2003). It also can be given specific meaning such as "the Western scholars who wrote about Islamic thought and civilization" (Malik Bennabi, 1977), "the scholars who want to search in the language and the sciences of the Orient" (Mohammed Kurd Ali), and "the one who studies the civilization of the Arab and Islam" (al-Ziyadi). The orientalist have desire to go against Islam and make the Muslims away from their belief, and this could be one of the objectives of orientalism (Ahmad Ghorab, 1995).

The interest of the Occidental scholars towards Orient issues varied from different subjects which cover language, religion, culture, as well as on gender. The 'oriental woman' has been a popular subject among the travellers, politicians, novelists, poets, writers as well as scholars, and had reached its peak in the early of nineteenth century (Demirer, 2003). By perceiving Orient as Others, the relationship between gender and orientalism function together to differentiate men and women according to hierarchies that hinge on binaries such as us or them, and masculine or feminine (Khalid, 2014).

In the West, women generally were seen as weak and vulnerable, but the representation of Muslim women is worst because they have typically represented as victim of oppression and functioned as homogenous 'other' among the Western (Mohanty, 1998). The veil has become a central icon in the orientalist discourses that define the experiences of Arab/Muslim women which were debated as early as the exposure of orientalist towards Islam. According to Samuel Marinus Zwemer (1938), the Islamic perspective on women has resulted in the degradation of women to an extent unmatched by any other world religion. Additionally, the Islamic doctrine of divorce has had adverse consequences for the well-being of children. Given that the majority of the global population consists of women and children, Islam is perceived to have disproportionately burdened them with significant hardships.

As articulated by Joseph Schacht (1950), women within the Islamic context experienced various disadvantages: In a specific instance, the Quran had promoted polygamy, transforming it from an exceptional practice into one of the fundamental components of Islamic marital law. This shift resulted

in a discernible decline in the social status of married women in comparison to their pre-Islamic Arabian counterparts. Furthermore, this decline was accentuated by Islam's prohibition of numerous established, culturally accepted sexual relationships that were present in pre-Islamic Arabia.

Furthermore, Ibn Warraq (1995) concurred with the critiques presented by the orientalist, offering a comprehensive set of arguments that highlight Islam's perceived oppression of women. He enumerated various restrictions faced by women due to what is attributed to their actions in the Garden of Eden. These restrictions include: (1) Ineligibility to hold positions as heads of state; (2) Ineligibility to serve as judges; (3) Ineligibility to act as imams; (4) Limited ability to be guardians; (5) Requirement to obtain permission from a guardian or husband to leave their residence; (6) Prohibition of engaging in one-on-one interactions with unrelated men; (7) Prohibition of physical contact, such as handshakes with men; (8) Restriction on using makeup or perfume outside the home; (9) Obligation to conceal their faces to prevent "temptation"; (10) Inability to travel alone; (11) Entitlement to inherit only half the amount that a man does; (12) Reduced value of their testimony in hudud cases, with their testimony being considered half as credible as a man's; (13) Prohibition from performing religious rituals during menstruation; (14) Limited say in choosing their place of residence before they reach an advanced age or appearance; (15) Requirement to seek permission from their guardian for marriage; (16) Restriction from marrying non-Muslims; and (17) Right to divorce their spouse.

Up to the present time, Muslim women continue to be depicted in media and news reports as individuals subjected to victimization, oppression, seclusion, subjugation, exploitation, and mistreatment (Hasan, 2012; Richardson, 2007). As identified by Azka Khan and Wajeeha Auzangreb (2018), orientalist narratives employ specific strategies to present Muslim women as a potential threat. These strategies encompass: firstly, the categorization of Muslim women as 'other' based on factors such as appearance, origin, and other characteristics; secondly, the portrayal of Muslim women in a negative light, perpetuating a stereotypical image of them as violent and antagonistic toward the West; and thirdly, the generalization of Muslim women with adverse traits, leading to empirical biases.

ORIENTALISTS' CRITIQUE ON SELECTED MUSLIM WOMEN FIGURES

These women were not only mentioned in the Prophetic hadith, but they have huge contributions in the narration of the hadith. Some of them have direct connection with the revelation of the Quranic verses as well as did great efforts in the compilation of the Quran. Thus, this study has selected five women companions who were all criticized by the orientalist, they were: Khadijah bint Khuwailid, Aishah bint Abu Bakar, Hafsa bint Umar, Safiyyah bint Huyay and Mariah al-Qibtiyyah.

1. Khadijah bint Khuwailid

The first wife of Prophet Muhammad was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, a prominent and esteemed businesswoman in Mecca who played a pivotal role in supporting and comforting the Prophet during the early years of his prophethood. Although the marriage to the Prophet was not her first, she was honoured to give birth to the Prophet's children. Their marriage lasted up to 25 years where the first ten years was before the prophethood was bestowed upon Muhammad PBUH (Bulandsheri, 2000). Khadijah was excelled in wisdom, intelligence, and humbleness, and due to that, there are many authentic hadiths reported about her virtuous characters. She died three years before the Hijrah, in the month of Ramadan, in the tenth year of the Prophethood of Muhammad at the age of 65 years old (Ibn Sa'd, 1995).

The interest in Khadijah among the Western scholars has started in the Middle Ages short after their interests on the Prophet. According to Sbailat (2022) Khadijah was described as Cadiga, the wealthy lady by Frances Sheridan (1767); Kadiga, the wise woman by Washington Irving (1832); Cadica or Cadiga, the first person to believe in Muhammad's message by Giuseppe Agostino Orsi (1763); and Khadegeh, the Prophet's wife by Edward William Lane (1836); and Chadigah or Chadighe, a woman who believed her husband's hallucinations by Pierre Bayle

(1820). She was also called as “*aym*” means a woman who has no husband because Abulfeda described her as a widow from the nobles of Mecca.

Among the first orientalist to represent the true image of Muhammad and his wife, Khadijah was Henri de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722) in his book *Histoire des Arabes avec la Vie de Mahomet* (the original book is in French and was translated to English and re-published in 2004). She was described as the wealthy wife who encouraged her husband (the Prophet) founding the new religion, then she died and left her children and husband heavy-hearted (Sbailhat, 2022). However, in the works of Eulógio of Córdoba (d. 859), the Prophet’s marriage to Khadijah was questioned because it might be intended for financial gain due to her status as the wealthy and businesswoman (Azmi, 2017). Similarly, Worrell (1928) claimed that Muhammad initially benefited from his marriage to Khadija in material terms, and Watt (1961) argued that their marriage was a profitable business deal in order to attract needy people in accepting his religion.

Another orientalist who criticized Khadijah was Henri Lammens in *Fatima et les Filles de Mahomet* (1912) by contending that she was the only wife who gave birth to daughters, yet old and could be the Prophet’s grandmother if they did not get married. In addition, Aloy Sprenger (1813-1893), an Austrian orientalist has provided details about Khadijah. He believed that Khadijah has relation to Shi’a, since she is a mother to Fatima, a wife to Ali ibn Abu Talib.

In addition to that, according to Bowering (2008), he found that Joseph Azzi has analysed that the Prophet’s marriage to Khadijah was considered as the main evidence of the Prophet was being exposed to Ebionite Christian teaching. This teaching was said to have influenced the Prophet’s teaching since both have similarities including the rejection on the concept of trinity and the permission to marry one woman only. Due to the reason that the Prophet get married to Khadijah and stay monogamous until her death might be a part of Ebionite Christianity. Waraqah ibn Naufal who is the cousin of Khadijah was also a follower of the Ebionite Christian and might had influenced to the development of the Quran.

The arguments on foreign influence in the Quran were also include the debate that Khadijah received teaching from Jabr, a Christian slave belongs to Amir al-Hadrami. Gilliot (2001) believed that there was a record that Jabr was the individual who taught the older religion to Khadijah, who later conveyed the teachings to Prophet Muhammad herself. Jabr also was recorded had a frequent meeting with the Prophet, and there was a possibility that Jabr had shared his teachings of Christian and Bible to the Prophet.

2. Aishah bint Abu Bakar

After the demise of Khadijah, the Prophet get married to Saudah, a daughter of Zama’a as the second wife, then gave another marriage proposal to Abu Bakar who agreed that her daughter, Aishah will be the Prophet’s wife. The marriage was performed in the month of Syawwal in Madinah, two years after hijrah (Demireşik, 2012). A subject of considerable debate among Western scholars has been the age of Aishah at the time of her marriage, with some characterizing her as a child bride. While prevailing discourse suggests her age to be six at the time of the marriage, and her relocation to the Prophet’s household transpiring at nine, an alternative perspective posits that she was 16 at the time of marriage, with the consummation occurring at the age of 19 (Saleem, 2012).

Although Aishah was the only virgin that the Prophet married, due to the young age of Aishah, the Prophet has been accused as a paedophile by Dutch Politician Geert Wilders (Mark Steyn, 2012), Martin Forward (1998), and many other scholars in the West. According to Kecia Ali (2014), Aishah’s age has become a tool of polemicists by accusing the Prophet as a paedophilia – not as a diagnostic category but as the highest category of evil – to account for the higher case

of child marriage in Muslim societies. Besides, the Prophet was also labelled as a child-abuser. William E. Phipps (1996: 141-142) mentioned that:

“Muhammad’s own marriages illustrate the inability of husbands to give equal consideration to multiple wives. One wife divulged to another wife what Muhammad intended to be kept secret, and the ensuing squabble is echoed in the Quran. He treated Aisha as his ‘first lady’, giving his only virgin bride more personal attention than any other wife.”

This statement attempts to prove the injustice and inequality conducted by the Prophet in his polygamous marriage by giving his most attention to due to her young age and virgin-status before their marriage. However, David Samuel Margoliouth (2003) views that their marriage had a strong reason, probably because the Prophet sought to strengthen his bonds with key followers, evident in his marriages to the daughters of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. Concurrently, strategic political considerations influenced unions with the daughters of adversaries or erstwhile foes. But interestingly, the criticism found was mostly focused on the Prophet Muhammad himself, and not on the personality of Aishah.

Meanwhile, as recorded by Arthur Jeffery (1938) in *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, one of the women who memorized the Quran and had her own *mushaf* to write the Quranic verses was Aishah. According to him,

“From all we know of ‘A’isha in tradition there is the gravest doubt as to her having had at the Prophet’s death any considerable knowledge of the Qur’an. All the stories, therefore, about her having learned the Qur’an at the Prophet’s dictation and being one of the little group who had memorized the Qur’an in the Prophet’s lifetime, are to be put aside as the inventions of later piety. That she had learned by heart some portions that were used liturgically by the community is likely. It is also likely that the Prophet himself may have taught her little portions. Also, it is possible that the variants ascribed to her are derived from the way in which she was known to recite certain portions before the promulgation of the ‘Uthmanic text, though on the other hand they may merely be variants to which her name was attached to give them authority.” (Arthur Jeffery, 1938: 232)

Jeffery also observes that there are 13 verses in *Mushaf* Aishah that exhibit variations compared to *Mushaf* Ubai, *Mushaf* Ibn Mas'ud, and various other *mushafs* transcribed by the companions of that era. One noteworthy discrepancy in *Mushaf* Aishah has sparked debates, particularly addressed by Gilchrist (1989), who asserts a contention regarding the authenticity of the Qur'anic text. For instance, in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 238, which has been standardized in *Mushaf 'Uthmani* and remains consistent with the current reading, orientalists highlight a discrepancy. They point to Aishah's objection to the content of *Mushaf 'Uthmani*, citing her claim that the Prophet had specifically added the phrase “*Solat 'Asr*” to the verse. Furthermore, some orientalists have cast doubt on the reliability of Aishah's memory and questioned her motivations for transmitting certain hadiths, raising concerns about the authenticity of the narrations attributed to her.

3. Hafsa bint Umar

Hafsa is the daughter of Umar ibn al-Khattab and Zaynab bint Madh'uwn. She was known as an intelligent woman who could read and write, a talented scholar and a tough lady. Hafsa was first married to Khunais ibn Hazafa Sahmi who was among the early Muslims and participated in battle of Badr and Uhud. However, he was fatally wounded in Uhud and died in Madinah. At that time, Hafsa was only eighteen years old when she became a widow at such a young age and made her father worried. Umar did his best to get her remarried, and he was very grateful after he found that the Prophet intended to marry Hafsa (Ibn Sa'd, 1995).

The Prophet valued Hafsa as the knowledgeable, cultured and devoted wife. But, because she is a daughter of an influential man in Mecca and a former wife of a deceased faithful follower, the marriage of the Prophet and Hafsa might be due to political reason (Worrell, 1928). Their marriage serves as strategic alliances, regardless of the personal feelings or desires of the individuals involved. The duration of their marriage also lasted for less than 10 years as they married in the third year of Hijrah, and the Prophet passed away in the 11th year of Hijrah.

Interestingly, criticism towards Hafsa emerged when her father, 'Umar, entrusted her with the responsibility of preserving the *mushaf* compiled under Abu Bakr's leadership before his death, which she eventually safeguarded and assembled into a single document (Demireşik, 2012). According to Jeffery (1937), Hafsa exercised authority in this process by helping the editing process of her copy of the 'Uthmanic codex. Jeffery inadvertently shores up her female agency: a codex that Hafsa edited that was a hybrid of the materials she had in her possession (pre-'Uthmanic) and the eventual canonized 'Uthmanic text. Donner (2011) also believed that Hafsa has connection with the codification of the Quran.

The debate around the role of Hafsa as the protector of the 'Uthmanic codex after her father passed away was also argued by Daniel Madigan (2001). He believed that various elements within the traditions effectively illuminate the perceived status of written Quranic material. Notably, the absence of significant censure is associated with what may appear as negligence. This includes the treatment of the Prophet's *mushaf* as his private inherited possession rather than a communal treasure, its storage beneath a bed accessible to animals, and its entrustment to a woman. The latter aspect is particularly noteworthy, considering the customary laws of evidence that would have limited her ability to independently attest to its authenticity.

Furthermore, the role of Hafsa became a question among the orientalist that she might be the first editor of the Quran in addition to many other arguments that debated on the modification of the Quran. John Burton (1977) questioned the originality of the Quran for there were many possibilities could happen during that time in writing, editing or modifying the Quran. He said:

"This is the role played by the ṣuḥuf of Hafsa, who besides being the daughter of 'Umar, was also the widow of the prophet. The solution was not always consistently applied, for we found versions of the report on 'Uthman's Quran initiative which portrayed that too as collection ab initio. Modern European writers have greatly exaggerated the part played in the story by the ṣuḥuf of Hafsa."

4. Safiyya bint Huyay

Safiyya bint Huyay ibn Akhtab was the daughter of a leader of the Banī Nadhīr, a Jewish tribe. Her father was beheaded for opposing Prophet Muhammad in the Battle of the Trench, and Safiyya became a captive of war chosen by the Prophet for her liberation and marriage. Anas RA stated that Prophet Muhammad emancipated Safiyyah and made her freedom her dowry (*Sahih Muslim*). The marriage between the Prophet and Safiyya stirred some controversy, particularly regarding her Jewish lineage, which was often mentioned.

According to Worrell (1928), the matrimonial union between the Prophet and Safiyya bint Huyay was due to revenge and humiliation of the vanquished with the intention of disparaging and debasing the Jews in Khaybar. Esposito (1998) suggests that the marriage could have possessed political motives or aimed to solidify alliances. In a similar vein, Haykal (1976) views that Muhammad's liberation of Safiyya and subsequent marriage to her served a dual purpose: to mitigate her plight and to uphold their honor. This act is likened to historical instances where conquerors wedded the daughters or spouses of vanquished kings.

Furthermore, it is argued by some that The Prophet's marriage to Safiyya was a strategic move intended to quell the animosity and antagonism between Jewish and Islamic factions (Fathi Musad, 2001). The orientalist also argued that Safiyya felt compelled to accept Islam due to the loss of her entire family, including her husband and father. With no viable alternatives, the prospect of living with the Prophet seemed no different from joining her deceased relatives, suggesting a fate shared with them (Kamruzzaman & Obeid, 2023).

The Jewish community residing in Medina at that time, including Safiyyah's father and paternal uncle, were among those who harboured animosity towards Prophet Muhammad. They questioned his prophethood, being chosen from the Qurayshi Arab tribe, whereas previous prophets were from their own people, the Jewish community (Tarikuddin, 2009). It was recorded that the Prophet's other wives also disapproved of Safiyyah's presence due to her Jewish heritage. This included Aishah binti Abu Bakr, Hafsa bint 'Umar al-Khattab, Zaynab bint Jahsh, and Juwayriyah al-Harith, as documented in the *sirah* literature during various incidents (Yusri et.al, 2012).

For instance, it is mentioned in *Musnad Ahmad* that once Zaynab bint Jahsh and Safiyyah travelled with Prophet Muhammad on a journey, and Safiyyah's camel fell ill. The Prophet said to Zaynab, "Safiyya's camel is sick; how about giving her one of your camels?" She replied, 'Never should I give it to such a Jewish woman.' The Prophet became angry with her, and he did not approach Zaynab for two months (*Musnad Ahmad*, cited in Mus'ad, 2001). The issue of Safiyya's Jewish lineage is often raised by those around her because her father and paternal uncle harboured dislike towards the Prophet PBUH (Tarikuddin, 2009).

The Jewish community often takes pride in their lineage as the chosen descendants. As mentioned in the Quran, "The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of Allah and His beloved ones'" (Surah al-Maidah: 18). Some orientalist have discussed the influence of the Jewish community on the content of the Quran, as seen in Abraham Geiger's work *Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume Ausgenommen* (translated as 'What Muhammad Took from Judaism?'). Geiger argued that the Quran was influenced by Judaism not only in the matter of language but also in three aspects: first, beliefs and doctrines; second, the sovereignty of law and ethics; and third, worldview (Armas, 2003).

C. C. Torrey also supports Geiger's perspective and extends his ideas in the work titled *The Jewish Foundations of Islam*. He asserts that the Quran's reliance on Jewish tradition is significant. Other orientalist such as Crone and Cook emphasize Muhammad's movement starting as 'Judeo-Hagarism,' a pact between Jews and Arabs. Consequently, orientalist suggest that Prophet Muhammad may have had other strategies when liberating Safiyyah and marrying her as a Jewish woman. Moreover, Safiyyah's role could potentially have influenced the revelation of the Quran, similar to other Jewish individuals said to have acted as informants to Prophet Muhammad, such as Abu Fukaihah, a fluent Greek (Aramaic) speaker who interacted with him and taught foreign languages (Gilliot, 2001).

5. Maria al-Qibtiyya

Maria al-Qibtiyya was a daughter of a Coptic father and a Greek mother, who did not originate from the Arabian Peninsula. The family resided in Egypt and later relocated to the court of Muqawqis when Maria was still very young. During the Treaty of Hudaibiya, the Egyptian ruler Muqawqis bestowed Maria as a gift to be presented to Prophet Muhammad, who had come to convey the message of Islam. As mentioned in *al-Isti'ab fi Ma'rifah al-Ashab*: "Maria, the daughter of Sham'un, was a slave presented by the ruler of Alexandria and Egypt, al-Muqawqis, to the Messenger of Allah. The ruler also presented with her another slave, her sister, Sirin, and Khasi, who was called Makbur. Subsequently, the Prophet gifted Sirin to Hassan bin Thabit, who is the mother of 'Abd al-Rahman bin Hassan."

The background of Maria al-Qibtiyya invites various controversies in Islamic history (Omar Khalid, 2017). Not only that, but there is also a debate questioning Mariah's status as either a wife or simply a female slave to the Prophet (Cheema, 2018). This is because in the Prophetic biography of *Sirah Ibn Hisham* and *Sirah Ibn Ishaq*, Mariah's name is not placed under the category of the Prophet's wives. However, apart from Khadijah, Maria is the woman who bore the Prophet's child, giving birth to a son named Ibrahim. Nevertheless, the son fell ill and passed away.

From the orientalist perspective, the originality of Maria might be one of the reasons that foreign influences existed in the Quran and the Prophet's teaching. It is claimed that the story of Maryam who shook a date tree so that the date fruits could rain upon her can be found in both the Quran (Surah Maryam, 19: 25) and the *Gospel of Infancy*. The similarity of this story in different sources raised question in identifying which one is the original, but Tisdall (1905) believes that the appearance of Mariah in the life of the Prophet could be an influential factor in the development and narrations of the Quran. Maria was known to has knowledge on the Bible and was Christian before she embraced Islam. This argument came from the orientalis in searching the sources of the Quran since they are aware that the Prophet is illiterate man who neither can read nor write.

The story of the Prophet's wives being jealous of Maria also adds to the prejudice against Maria who has a different background. Al-Hakim al-Naysaburi in his book *al-Mustadrak* narrated from Aishah that she said that "I felt jealous of Maria when she got a son from the Prophet SAW and I told the Prophet SAW that this son is not like you (Him)" (Vol. 4, p. 42). The story of Aisha's jealousy and her accusations against Maria about the child of the Prophet SAW can also be found in *Sahih Muslim*, *Musnad al-Bazzar*, *Musannaf Abi Asim* and others.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of previously emphasized orientalist discourses, it is apparent that the scrutiny of women in the Prophet's life within oriental studies has been characterized by academic rigor, systematic analysis, and a historical lens (Sbailat, 2022). These women, each contributing significantly to the evolution of Islam, have led remarkable lives. They faced accusations of being the primary source of the Quran, its editors, and language instructors, among other designations, underscoring their unique significance in the Prophet's life.

The female companions of the Prophet, especially his wives, are often seen as embodying the ideal womanhood in Islam (Stowasser, 1992). They excelled in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in both private and public spheres, largely attributed to the Prophet's presence. His exemplary attitude and character consistently guided and protected his wives with love and kindness. Each of the Prophet's chosen wives exhibited virtuous characteristics, and there is no recorded instance of them speaking ill or behaving adversely towards one another, as the pursuit of peace remained the ultimate goal in their marriages.

Therefore, based on the critiques raised by the orientalis, the following discussion will focus on the selected Muslim women figures and the concerns raised in each of them. This study aims to refute the discussed criticisms through textual analysis of historical and *sirah* sources. The counterarguments are as follows:

1. Different motives of marriage

The only monogamous marriage of the Prophet was with Khadijah as his first marriage. She was recorded in the history as a highly successful businesswomen before she met the Prophet (Muhammad, 2021). Regardless of their age differences, Khadijah's proposal of marriage was accepted neither because of her wealth, financial gain nor noble status, but it was due to her honesty, steadfastness and loyalty in her personality and companionship. Their marriage lasted

30 years until Khadija passed away, and most of the wives after Khadija were widows except Aisyah. Six of his wives were from the tribe of Quraysh, five were from different Arabian tribes, and one was from the Coptic Christian in Egypt (Ibn Sa'd, 1997).

After Khadijah passed away, the Prophet got married to Sawda in Mecca, three years prior to the Hijra, in the tenth year of his prophetic journey (Ibn Sa'd, 1997). Sawda had been the sole wife of the Prophet for three years until he married A'isha. As mentioned before, Aisha was the only virgin wife of the Prophet and was criticised a lot due to her young age during the marriage. Many scholars view that there is nothing bizarre in Arab culture that bride's age is between nine to twelve. Aisha mentioned in a hadith that the Prophet did the marriage contract when she was six years old and consummated the marriage when she was nine years old (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). It is a norm the Arabian Peninsula that a girl reach puberty at the early age, and able to give birth after their marriage. Al-Bayhaqi reported that Imam al-Shafii said: "In San'a', I saw a grandmother who was twenty-one years old; she reached puberty at the age of nine and gave birth at the age of ten, and her daughter reached puberty at the age of nine and gave birth at the age of ten."

Therefore, marrying a young age bride in Arab culture is not considered as the act of paedophile as claimed by the West. It was the age that a perfectly acceptable at that time (Al-Andalusi & Brown, 2018). Moreover, Aishah was chosen because of Allah's guidance which was shown in the Prophet's dream. It was narrated by Aishah herself that the Prophet said to her: "I was shown you twice in my sleep. I saw you wrapped in silk, and I was told, 'this is your wife'. I lifted the cover and I saw you. I thought, 'If this is from God, He will accomplish it'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari & Muslim*). Their marriage is not because of sexual desire, but the intuition to marry Aisha came from Allah. The Prophet also acknowledged the immaturity of Aishah and showed the love and compassion towards her, which a paedophile would lack (Spellberg, 1994). In addition, the young age of Aishah came with her inquisitive character and passionate to learn since the day she married to the Prophet. Her intellectual capacity was never questioned, and she was respected by both men and women regardless of her young age (Harpci, 2015). However, there are also views believe that Aisha's age was actually around nineteen during the marriage based on some historical accounts (Kamruzzaman & Obeid, 2023).

In the third year of Hijra, the Prophet gave the marriage proposal to Umar al-Khattab for Hafsa after her husband passed away. This marriage was far from any sexual reason but might be a way to strengthen the social relationship with Umar. The Prophet became son-in-law to Abu Bakr and Umar, and a father-in-law to Uthman and Ali for they were both married to daughters of the Prophet. Regarding Hafsa, she was a highly intelligent woman, but there was one occasion that made the Prophet divorced her. However, they reconciled after Jibril told the Prophet that, "Hafsa is a woman who fasts and prays a lot, and she is your wife in Paradise" (Ibn Sa'd, 1997). This evidence demonstrates that their marriage had neither political influence nor hidden motives, as Hafsa was divinely acknowledged and was dedicated to being the Prophet's wife.

Regarding the Prophet's marriage to Safiyya, she was not sought as plunder by the companions of the Prophet during a battle, recognizing her noble lineage as a lady of Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza, the daughter of their leader, and a worthy one for the Prophet. Consequently, the Prophet liberated Safiyya and offered her the choice to embrace Islam or return to her tribe. According to Martin Lings (1983), the Prophet had offered Safiyya the choice to return to her tribe, or embrace Islam and marry him, and Safiyya opted for the latter choice. She embraced Islam by her freewill and the Prophet marrying her to foster peace with the Jewish community (Fathi Mus'ad, 2001).

Similarly, the Prophet's marriage to Maria al-Qibtiyya was questionable due to her different background. Although there are arguments whether she was a part of his wives or to be considered as his female slave, Ibn Kathir (2000) said: "Maria al-Qibtiyya (may Allah be

pleased with her) is said to have married the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, and surely everyone accorded her the same honourable title as the Prophet's wives, *Umm al Mu'minin*." She was also given the title *Umm al-Walad* (mother of the son). Although the status of her child was envied and doubted, all questions were answered when the angel Gabriel greeted the Prophet with the words: "Peace be upon you, O father of Ibrahim." Unfortunately, baby Ibrahim passed away at the age of 19 months and was buried in Baqi' cemetery during a solar eclipse (Miftah, 2020). There are claims linking Ibrahim's death to the eclipse, but the Prophet PBUH said: "The sun and the moon are two signs amongst the signs of Allah. They do not eclipse because of someone's death or life. So, when you see them, invoke Allah and pray till the eclipse is clear" (*Sahih al-Bukhari & Muslim*). Maria spent three years with the Prophet Muhammad, and she passed away five years after his demise, in the year 16 AH (Fariati, 2015).

2. The Revelation of the Quran

The first person witnessed to what happened to the Prophet after he received revelation was a woman. The first person who believed in him was also a woman. This woman is known as Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet. A hadith related by Ahmad quotes the Prophet as saying of Khadijah: "...She believed in me when others rejected me; she accepted the truth of what I said when others thought me lying; and she supported me financially when others would not."

Another wife who witnessed the revelation was sent down upon the Prophet was Aisha. The Prophet once said: "Do not cause me grief regarding Aisha, for revelation does not descend upon me when I am under the same sheet with any woman except Aishah" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*). She spent most of her time with the Prophet which made her a knowledgeable and experts in both the Quran and Hadith. Aisha and her expertise were acknowledged by many scholars, as Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri recorded, "If the knowledge of Aishah was put on the right scale, and the knowledge of all the women, even including the Prophet's other wives was put on the left scale, Aishah's knowledge would be heavier" (al-Naysaburi, 1990).

In addition to that, the revelation of the Quran was revealed gradually to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of approximately 23 years. The Quranic verses sometimes were revealed in response to specific events or questions, while at other times, they were revealed spontaneously. It was really difficult to believe that there was someone helping or teaching or inspiring the Prophet during the process of revelation as claimed by many orientalists. In fact, The Quran issues a challenge asserting that neither the Prophet nor his community were previously acquainted with the information being disclosed to him. Allah said: "We reveal to you these accounts of matters that are beyond the reach of human perception. Neither you nor your people knew about them before this. Be, then, patient. Surely, the good end is for the God-fearing" (Surah Hud, 11: 49).

This verse, along with several others conveying a similar message, constitutes compelling Quranic evidence indicating that the Prophet had no prior knowledge of the revelations being bestowed upon him. It is imperative to emphasize that the notion of the Prophet receiving information from any human source is entirely baseless and incorrect. Furthermore, it holds true that neither the Prophet nor his community possessed prior knowledge of the truths conveyed through divine revelation (Ali, M. Mohar, 2004).

3. Foreign Influence in the Quran

In addressing the potential attribution of shared narratives between the Bible and the Quran solely to the presence of Maria, Professor Jabal Muhammad Buaben posits a critical inquiry: "If the narratives in both sacred texts, the Bible and the Quran, originated from a singular source, what would have precluded God from imparting similar revelations to Muhammad?" (Azmi, 2017). While acknowledging the existence of parallel narratives in both scriptures, it remains undeniable that Allah transmitted all stories directly to the Prophet without

intermediary or external influence. Gabriel, as the angel of revelation, merely facilitated the transmission process, serving solely as a conduit, with the Prophet promptly disseminating these revelations to his Companions following their reception.

It is similar rebuttal to the claim that the Prophet has number of informants from different backgrounds proficient in different languages and well-versed in the scriptures of Christianity and Judaism. While it is conceivable that Safiyya possessed linguistic proficiency, her character was distinguished by virtuous qualities. Ibn Kathir attested to her excellence, stating that she excelled in worship, piety, asceticism, devoutness, and charitable acts (Fathi Mas'ud, 2001). In instances where her Jewish lineage was disparaged, the Prophet intervened, emphasizing Safiyya's esteemed lineage by pointing out that her "husband is Muhammad, father is Aaron, and uncle is Moses" (*Jami' Tirmidhi*), a reference to figures held in high regard among believers.

4. Process of Collection and Codification of the Quran

It is noteworthy to emphasize that certain wives of the Prophet were directly engaged in preserving the Quran during his lifetime and continued to do so after his passing. For example, Aishah and Umm Salamah were reported to have their own *suhuf*. It proves that they were writing the Quran and memorizing it and later became references when the compilation process of the Quran started. Hafsa, another wife of the Prophet, had also memorized the Quran. She was entrusted with the role of 'keeper' of the Quran, yet her position was deemed questionable due to the potential implication that she could have served as the 'editor' of the Quran (Ruqayya Y. Khan, 2014).

The argument was analysed from the feminist perspective and supported by the orientalist's critiques on the process of compilation and codification of the Quran. However, Aisha Geissinger (2017) and Anthony & Bronson (2016) had rejected the assumption that Hafsa edited the Quran. Hafsa was chosen in those process dominated by male companions was not merely due to her position as the wife of the Prophet and the daughter of the third caliph, but she has the credibility and integrity to carry the huge responsibility.

Hafsa was among the first females who memorized the Quran, and she also narrated many hadiths from the Prophet. She is highly intelligent and literate that made her able to read the compiled *suhuf* and was referred to regarding the Quran. She listened to the Prophet delivered the Quran and witnessed the Quran's compilation after the Prophet's death. Her father was the one who suggested to Abu Bakr to compile the Quran in fear that many reciters of the Quran died in the Battle of Yamamah. The *suhuf* remained with Abu Bakr until he died, and then with Umar, until the end of his life, and then with Hafsa (*Sahih al-Bukhari*).

After her father passed away in 644, Hafsa lived in Madinah for about twenty years. She was responsible in the safekeeping of the *mushaf* before she handed over to Uthman ibn 'Affan. The process of collection of the Quran was mentioned in a hadith narrated by Anas ibn Malik, that Uthman sent a message to Hafsa saying, "Send us manuscripts of the Quran so that we may compile the Quranic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you." Hafsa sent it to Uthman, then he ordered Zaid bin Thabit, Abdullah bin al-Zubair, Sa'id bin al-'As and Abd al-Rahman bin Harith bin Hisham to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. After many copies were completed, Uthman returned the original manuscripts to Hafsa. Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Quranic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt (*Sahih al-Bukhari*).

There are many reports emphasized that Hafsa did not involve in the copying process of the Quran for the selection of the 'writers' was carefully appointed at the time of Abu Bakr and Uthman. Thus, there is no valid reason to justify that she has edited the Quran. Any effort that

associated the early female Muslim scholars with written Quranic materials shed some lights on few aspects of the formative and medieval reception histories of the Quran (Geissinger, 2017). It was due to the existence of other *suhuf* that was not only written by Hafsa, but also Aishah and Umm Salamah. Aside of the debates around Hafsa, Asma Asfaruddin (2008) highlighted the positive impact on her contribution as the keeper of the Quran, she said: “The accounts concerning the collection of the Quran emphasize the role of a woman. Hafsa, the daughter of Umar ibn al-Khattab and the wife of the Prophet, in preserving an early form of the text committed to her safekeeping by her father. This manuscript is said to have formed the basis for the Uthmanic recension.”

In its entirety, the consolidation of the Quran into a single compilation was achieved under the supervision and with the active involvement and collaboration of the prominent Companions of the Prophet. This process involved meticulous scrutiny of written documents alongside oral recitations, ensuring comprehensive inclusion without any omission (Ali, M. Mohar, 2004). Whatever happened during the time of Uthman ibn Affan was the formal standardization of the Quran without making any alterations to its content, and those involved in every step of this process were individuals who were genuinely trusted and knowledgeable in the field of the Quran. Any criticism raised was merely a perception aimed at rejecting the Quran by selecting minor issues as a pretext to seek faults and conceal the real truth.

CONCLUSION

As the subject of orientalism is too vast, this study focuses on a specific debate of orientalist towards the Muslim female figures in Islam. It also specifically chosen five important female figures who have been criticized based on their roles, contributions, and influence in the development of Islam since the Prophet's time. However, this study believes that there are other debates against many other female figures which can be discovered in further research.

In summary, the criticism directed towards prominent female figures serves the primary purpose of rejecting Prophet Muhammad as the final Messenger and the Quran as the ultimate scripture for humanity. The ongoing debate regarding the legitimacy and evolution of these two legal foundations within Islam persists among scholars with diverse ideological orientations, including orientalist, neo-orientalist, modernist, liberalist, and individuals with various academic objectives or potentially dubious motives. Simultaneously, women in Islam have consistently been portrayed as oriental figures labelled as ‘the Other’, ‘victims of oppression’, ‘sexual objects’, ‘Islamic time bombs’, and other negative depictions found in orientalist writings and those influenced by orientalism.

The findings suggest that the criticisms expressed by orientalist in this research lack conclusive evidence to support their portrayal of Muslim women. Instead of providing solid evidence, these critiques seem to reinforce the orientalist's position in challenging the Quran and Hadith as primary legal sources in Islam. Protecting the dignity of Muslim women figures, rather than being a focal point on feminist agendas, becomes essential in validating unsupported claims.

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