The Western mass media tend to construct an image of Muslim women using a discourse dominated by the notions of:

- passiveness
- victimization
- and the veil
Since the first mass media institutions appeared in the late 19th century, women of other cultures have been represented as exotic, sensual and sexually passive.
The Collective Imagination

- In the colonial period, 19th century and early 20th century, the condition of colonized women was that Muslim women were submissive and weak and that Muslim men were authoritarian and aggressive.
Fanatics of Tangiers
Veil, Niqab, Burqa…

Leila Ahmed, a scholar at Harvard Divinity School wrote “Veiling, to western eyes, has become the symbol of both the oppression of women and the backwardness of Islam.”
Muslim Women in Media

- What are the myths?

- What are the realities?
Powerful images…and laws

- The persistence of negative language used to describe Muslim women, the homogenization of all Muslim women
- Niqab laws in Belgium, France,
- The Netherlands and Austria, Canada
When Feminism is a useful pretext for Non Otherwise Feminists

““The position of women in Egypt, and Mohammedan countries generally, is, therefore a fatal obstacle to the attainment of that elevation of thought and character which should accompany the introduction of Western civilisation”

Lord Cromer was an active member and one-time president of the UK “Men’s League for Opposing the Suffrage of Women” campaigning AGAINST giving British women the vote (remember Georges W. Bush and Stephen Harper)
Gayatri Spivak, Indian Scholar famously said:

“White men are saving brown women from brown men”
Pop Culture Books
The Fantastic World the Main Stream Narrative about Muslim Women

- The reader are plunged into “dystopic” worlds of violent abuse
- Usually the Muslim girls have suffered and escaped
- Those literary productions are believed by the readers to be “ethnographies of actual people and places”
Hidden from the readers

- These memoirs are most of the times written by a ghostwriter (anonymous in the case of Hirsi Ali)

- Or told through translators (Lost in translation)
Oversimplification and Generalization

- Most of the time the differences or nuances are erased and we fall into generalization

- Abu-Lughod speaks of “IslamLand”

- “The bad men who abuse the heroines are Muslims, even if Moroccan, Pakistani, Jordanian or Yemeni”
Is there a bad and good culture?

- “These memoires can’t give readers any indication that such abuses ( incest, rape, beating or other cruelties) might be exceptional or might be considered as horrifying in those communities as they would be elsewhere”

- Leti Volpp said “blaming culture for bad behaviour”
Wedge Issues and Polarization
“Anonymous”
“Victims”
“Terrorist”
Muslim women in the news
“Married to a terrorist and helping producing terrorists”
Raising terrorist (from the Sydney Morning Herald)
“Islamic Time Bomb” cartoon
"Oppressed women are easily overlooked. Please support us in the fight for their rights.” By German NGO (IGFM)
New Muslims in the media

- With social media: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, the representation is changing in both directions
One side of the story

- Muslim women are still represented as victims of their husbands, of their societies, or simply victims of an oppressive religion...
But on the other side

More and more Muslim women are choosing to represent themselves as…
These self-identified Muslim women are

- Stylish
- Creative
- Edgy
Meet the Mipsters

Muslim+ Hispters= Mipsters
Diversified, happy, cool
Muslim Women want to be in charge of their image representation

I felt that to others, being devoted to my faith and adopting interests such as music, art, and fashion were in conflict.” Yasmine Chebbi, Mipster
The reaction to this new representation

- Some Muslim women were totally against it:
  - “plumped, fluffed and frivolous”

- Is this “swag” the way to show the empowerment of Muslim women?

  Fatimah Waseem, a Muslim blogger
How about these pictures? (Australian Muslim women playing soccer)
And this one? Fashion Week in New York, September 2016
Spark a discussion

- An important conversation: Muslims are not monolithic!
- Humanize the Muslim women
- Give them life, colour, diversity
Today Muslim women are more and more

- Vocal
- Agent of Power
- Diverse
The Secret Life of Muslims

- http://www.secretlifeofmuslims.com/
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7fttKMnDFg
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmEflHrIm-s
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeBuWVkUL4A
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUKp5p77Ev4
And the story continues...