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Questions and Answers about Hijaab

What is the Hijab? The word itself comes from the arabic word "hajaba" meaning to conceal or hide from view. Hijab is the modest covering of the head and body of muslim women.

Who has to wear it? All muslim adults are supposed to wear the appropriate hijab for their sex. This is one Hadith related by Abu Dawood: *"Ayesha(r) reported that Asmaa bint Abu Bakr(r) came to the Messenger of Allah(swt) while wearing thin clothing. He approached her and said: 'O Asmaa! When a girl reaches the menstrual age, it is not proper that anything should remain exposed except this and this.' He pointed to the face and hands."*

Why do they have to wear it? Muslims must wear the hijab because Allah(swt) ordered it. Muslims have two sources for guidance. The first and most important source is Qur'an, the revealed word of Allah(swt). They may then use Hadith which is the sayings and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad(saw) who was chosen by Allah(swt) to be a role model for mankind.

Here are two passages from the Qur'an that order the hijab.

"O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them (when they go out or are among men). That is better in order that they may be known (to be Muslims) and not annoyed..." (Qur'an 33:59)

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them; and Allah (swt) is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty to their husbands..." (Qur'an 24:30-31)

An Iranian school girl is quoted as saying, "We want to stop men from treating us like sex objects, as they have always done. We want them to ignore our appearance and to be attentive to our personalities. We want them to take us seriously and treat us as equals and not chase us around for our bodies and physical looks."

What do they get out of dressing like that? By covering our beauty, we are evaluated for our intelligence and skills instead of looks and sexuality. Many women who cover are filled with dignity and self-esteem and are happy to be identified as a muslim woman. By wearing hijab the woman is concealing her sexuality but allowing her femininity to shine. Aside from that, it is pleasing to Allah and in return we earn blessings from wearing it.

What is the "dress code"? Islam has no fixed standard as to the style of dress or type of clothing that muslims must wear. There are however, some requirements that must be met. These include:

Body must be covered

- Loose Clothing-The clothing must be loose enough so as not to describe the shape of the body.
- Thick Material-The garments must be thick enough to hide the shape of the body and the color of the skin.
- Modesty-The dress should not be ragged or fancy. It should be clean and dignified looking.
- Suitability-This is another Hadith from Bukhari "Ibn Abbas narrated:

'The Prophet(saw) cursed the men who appeared like women and the women who appeared like men.'"

Clothing is only one facet of hijab. **It is also behavior, manner, and speech.** Women who wear the hijab do not find it inhibiting, impractical, or interfering. We should wear the hijab to show our identity as muslims. More importantly, we should wear it to show our love and respect for Almighty Allah and his instructions.

Dress of Muslim Woman

Firstly the matter of dress. A Muslim woman may wear whatever she pleases in the presence of her husband and family or among women friends. But when she goes out or when men other than her husband or close family are present she is expected to wear a dress which will cover all parts of her body, and which should not reveal the figure. What a contrast with Western fashions which every year concentrate quite intentionally on exposing yet another erogenous zone to the public gaze! In the past few years we have seen the rise and fall of the minidress, the micro-skirt, the wet look, hot pants, the see-thru', the topless and other garments designed to display or emphasize the intimate parts of a woman's body. One may observe a similar tendency of late in men's dress which has become almost skin-tight, although here the men's fashion designers appear to have come to a temporary standstill until men are liberated enough to accept topless or see-thru' trousers, which is fortunately not yet the case.

The intention of Western dress is to reveal the figure, while the intention of Muslim dress is to conceal it, at least in public.

The relevant verse of the Qur'an says: "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw upon them their over-garments. That is more appropriate so that they may be recognised and not molested" (33:59).

Is it therefore required for a Muslim woman when she goes out to wear a dress that covers her from head to foot and does not reveal the figure. According to some scholars only the hands and face should be left uncovered, while according to some others the face should also be covered. There are therefore two opinions on this matter.

The onus of modest behaviour however falls not only on women. The injunctions of the Qur'an are directed to men and women alike. Allah says:

"Tell believers to avert their glances and to guard their private parts; that is purer for them. Allah is Informed about anything they do. Tell believing women to avert their glances and guard their private parts and not to display their charms except what (normally) appears of them. They should draw their coverings over their bosoms and not show their charms except to their husbands" (24:30-31).

The Face Veil

The following text is an edited translation of a summary of ar-Radd al-Mufhim by Shaykh Naasiruddeen al-Albaanee found in pages 5-20 of the introduction of his book Jilbaab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah, 3rd edition, 1996, al-Maktabah al-Islaamiyyah. Translated by Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips

The main errors of those who make the face veil obligatory

1. The interpretation of al-idnaa' in the verse of the Jilbaab to mean "covering the face".

This misinterpretation is contrary to the basic meaning of the word in Arabic which is "to come close", as is mentioned in authoritative dictionaries like al-Mufradaat by the well-known scholar, ar-Raaghib al-Asbahaanee. However, there is sufficient evidence in the interpretation of the leading commentator on the Quran, Ibn 'Abbaas, who explained the verse saying, "She should bring the jilbaab close to her face without covering it." It should be noted that none of the narrations used as evidence to contradict this interpretation are authentic.

2. The interpretation of jilbaab as "a garment which covers the face."

Like the previous misinterpretation, this interpretation has no basis linguistically. It is contrary to the interpretation of the leading scholars, past and present, who define the jilbaab as a garment which women drape over their head scarves (khimaar). Even Shaykh at-Tuwaijree himself narrated this interpretation from Ibn Mas'ood and other Salafee scholars. Al-Baghawee mentioned it as the correct interpretation in his Tafseer (vol. 3, p. 518) saying, "It is the garment which a woman covers herself with worn above the dress (dir ') and the headscarf." Ibn Hazm also said, "The jilbaab in the Arabic language in which the Messenger of Allaah (pbuh) spoke to us is what covers the whole body and not just a part of it." (vol. 3, p. 217). Al-Qurtubee declared this correct in his Tafseer and Ibn Katheer said, "It is the cloak worn above the headscarf." (vol. 3, p. 518)

3. The claim that the khimaar (headscarf) covers the head and the face.

In doing so "the face" has been arbitrarily added to its meaning in order to make the verse: "Let them drape their headscarves over their busoms" appear to be in their favor, when, in fact it is not. The word khimaar linguistically means only a head covering. Whenever it is mentioned in general terms, this is what is intended. For example in the hadeeths on wiping (mas-h) on the khimaar and the prophetic statement, "The salaah of a woman past puberty will not be accepted without a khimaar." This hadeeth confirms the invalidity of their misinterpretation, because not even the extremists themselves – much less the scholars – use it as evidence that the covering of a woman's face in salaah is a condition for its validity. They only use it as proof for covering the head. Furthermore, their interpretation of the verse of the Qawaa'id "... to remove their clothing" to mean "jilbaab" further confirms it. They hold that it is permissible for old women to appear before marriageable males in her headscarf with her face exposed. One of their notable scholars openly stated that. As for Shaykh at-Tuwaijree, he implied it without actually saying it.

After checking the opinions of the early and later scholars in all the specializations, I found that they unanimously hold that the khimaar is a head covering. I have mentioned the names of more than twenty scholars, among them some of the great Imaams and hadeeth scholars. For example,

Abul-Waleed al-Baajee (d. 474 AH) who further added in his explanation, “Nothing should be seen of her besides the circle of her face.”

4. The claim of a consensus (Ijmaa‘) on the face being considered ‘awrah.

Shaykh at-Tuwaijree claimed that scholars unanimously held that the woman’s face was ‘awrah and many who have no knowledge, including some Ph.D. holders, have blindly followed him. In fact, it is a false claim, which no one before him has claimed. The books of Hambalite scholars which he learned from, not to mention those of others, contain sufficient proof of its falsehood. I have mentioned many of their statements in Ar-Radd. For example, Ibn Hubayrah al-Hambalee stated in his book, al-Ifsaah, that the face is not considered ‘awrah in the three main schools of Islaamic law and he added, “It is also a narrated position of Imaam Ahmad.” Many Hambalite scholars preferred this narration in their books, like Ibn Qudaamah and others.

Ibn Qudaamah in al-Mughnee explained the reason for his preference saying, “Because necessity demands that the face be uncovered for buying and selling, and the hands be uncovered for taking and giving.”

Among the Hambalite scholars, is the great Ibn Muflih al-Hambalee about whom Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah said, “There is no one under the dome of the sky more knowledgeable about the school of Imaam Ahmad than Ibn Muflih.” And his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah, once told him, “You aren’t Ibn Muflih, you are Muflih!”

It is incumbent on me to convey Ibn Muflih’s statements for the readers because of the knowledge and many benefits contained in them. Included in them is further confirmation of the falsehood of Shaykh at-Tuwaijree’s claim and support for the correctness of my position on the issue of uncovering the face. Ibn Muflih stated the following in his valuable work al-Aadaab ash-Shar‘iyyah – which is among the references cited by Shaykh at-Tuwaijree (something which indicates that he is aware of it, but has deliberately hidden these crucial facts from his readers while claiming the contrary):

“Is it correct to chastise marriageable women if they uncover their faces in the street?”

The answer depends on whether it is compulsory for women to cover their faces or whether it is compulsory for men to lower their gaze from her. There are two positions on this issue.

Regarding the hadeeth of Jareer in which he said, “I asked Allaah’s Messenger about the sudden inadvertent glance and he instructed me to look away.” Al-Qaadee ‘Iyaad commented, “The scholars, May Allaah Most High have mercy on them, have said that there is proof in this hadeeth that it is not compulsory for a woman to cover her face in the street. Instead, it is a recommended sunnah for her to do so and it is compulsory for the man to lower his gaze from her at all times, except for a legislated purpose. Shaykh Muhyud-deen an-Nawawee mentioned that without further explanation.”

Then al-Muflih mentioned Ibn Taymiyyah’s statement which at-Tuwaijree relies on in his book (page 170), while feigning ignorance of the statements of the majority of scholars. Statements like those of al-Qaadee ‘Iyaad and an-Nawawee’s agreement with it.

Then al-Muflih said, “On the basis of that, is chastisement legal? Chastisement is not allowed in issues in where there is a difference of opinion, and the difference has already been mentioned. As regards our opinion and that of a group of Shaafi‘ite scholars and others, looking at a marriageable woman without desire or in a secluded circumstance is permissible. Therefore, chastisement is not proper.”

This answer is in complete agreement with Imaam Ahmad’s statement, “It is not proper that a jurist oblige people to follow his opinion (math-hab).” And this is if the truth were on his side. What of the case where the jurist proudly, dishonestly misleads people and declares other Muslims to be disbelievers as at-Tuwaijree did on page 249 of his book saying, “... Whoever permits women to expose their faces and uses the proofs of al-Albaanee has flung open the door for women to publicly flaunt their beauty and emboldened them to commit the reprehensible acts done by women who uncover their faces today.” And on page 233 he said, “... and to disbelief in the verses of Allaah.”

Those are his words – May Allaah reform him and guide him. What would he say about Ibn Muflih, an-Nawawee, al-Qaadee ‘Iyaad and other Palestinian scholars, as well as the majority of scholars who preceded them and who are my salaf regarding my opinion on this matter?

5. The agreement of at-Tuwaijree and the extremists with him to explain away the authentic hadeeths which contradict their opinion.

At-Tuwaijree did this with the Khath‘amiyyah hadeeth. They developed a number of comical methods to nullify its implications.

I have refuted them all in ar-Radd and one of them in Jilbaab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah. Some reputable scholars have said that the hadeeth doesn’t contain a clear statement that her face was exposed. This is among the farthest opinions from the truth. For, if her face wasn’t exposed, where did the narrator or the viewer get the idea that she was beautiful? And what was al-Fadl repeatedly looking at? The truth is that this is among the strongest and most clear proofs that a woman’s face is not ‘awrah. In spite of that, there remains a group that insists that she was in ihraam while knowing that her ihraam does not prevent her from draping some of her clothing over her face. At-Tuwaijree does accept sometimes that her face was uncovered but he cancels its implication by saying, “There is no evidence in it that she continuously exposed her face!” He means that the wind must have exposed her face and at that instant al-Fadl ibn ‘Abbaas saw it. Is it possible for an Arab to say that after reading in the hadeeth “al-Fadl began to stare while turning towards her,” and in another narration “... so he began to look at her and her beauty amazed him.” Isn’t this pride with two protruding horns? At other times at-Tuwaijree interprets it as al-Fadl looking at her size and stature.

6. The frequent use of inauthentic hadeeths and unreliable narrations.

For example, the hadeeth of Ibn ‘Abbaas about exposing only one eye is commonly used by those who insist that women are obliged to cover their faces in spite of their knowledge of its inauthenticity. In fact, one among them also declared it inauthentic.

Perhaps the most important of these unreliable hadeeth commonly used as evidence is the one in which the Prophet is reported to have said, “Are you both blind?” They blindly followed at-Tuwaijree and the others in claiming that this inauthentic narration was strengthened by other

supportive narrations and that it was evidence for the prohibition of women from looking at men, even if they are blind. They took this position in spite of the fact that the narration was classified inauthentic by the leading verification experts among the hadeeth scholars like, Imaam Ahmad, al-Bayhaqee and Ibn ‘Abdil-Barr. Al-Qurtubee related that the narration was not considered authentic among the scholars of hadeeth. Consequently, many Palestinian hambalite scholars made their rulings on that basis. Furthermore, that is what the science of hadeeth and its methodology requires as was clearly stated in al-Irwaa. However, in spite of all that evidence to the contrary, Shaykh ‘Abdul-Qaadir as-Sindee had the nerve to go along with Shaykh at-Tuwaijree and others and claim that its chain of narration was authentic. By doing that he exposed himself and his ignorance or feigned ignorance. It is unfortunate that he took this position, because the hadeeth’s chain contains an unknown narrator from whom only one person narrated along with its contradiction to what leading scholars have narrated.

Contrary to the level of scholarship that we are used to from Shaykh as-Sindee, he has brought in support of his claim the most amazing things. He arguments unexpectedly contain deception, misguidance, blind following, hiding knowledge and turning away from his own fundamental principles. Among the amazing positions is Shaykh as-Sindee’s feigned ignorance that the narration contradicts the hadeeth of Faatimah bint Qays which contains the Prophet’s permission for her to stay at the home of the blind companion, Ibn Umm al-Maktoom, whom she would be able see. The Prophet gave the reason for that instruction in his statement to her, “For if you take off your head scarf, he won’t see you.” In at-Tabaraanee’s narration from Faatimah, she said, “He instructed me to be at Ibn Umm Maktoom’s home because he couldn’t see me whenever I took my head scarf off.”

There are also a number of other unreliable hadeeths gathered by at-Tuwaijree in his book. I mentioned ten of them in my response, and among them are some fabricated traditions.

7. The classification of some authentic hadeeths and confirmed narrations from the Companions as inauthentic.

The extremists have declared well-established reliable narrations as unreliable and feigned ignorance of strengthening narrations. They have further declared some narrations extremely inauthentic, like the hadeeth of ‘Aa’ishah concerning the woman who reaches puberty, “Nothing should be seen of her besides her face and hands.” They have persistently declared it inauthentic the ignorant among them blindly following others devoid of knowledge. In so doing, they contradict those among the leading scholars of hadeeth who strengthen it like al-Bayhaqee and ath-Thahabee. Most of them, including some prominent scholars, feign ignorance of its various chains of narration. In fact, at-Tuwaijree openly stated on page 236 of his book that this statement was only narrated in ‘Aa’ishah’s hadeeth. Even though he has seen with his own eyes on pages 57-9 of my book two other chains: one of which is from Asmaa bint ‘Umays and the other from Qataadah in the abbreviated (mursal) format with an authentic chain of narration. Many of the blind followers followed him, including some female authors as in Hijaabuki ukhtee al-muslimah [Your veil, my sister Muslim], page 33.

They also pretend to be ignorant of the leading hadeeth scholars and others who strengthened it, like al-Munthiree, az-Zayla‘ee, al-‘Asqalaanee and ash-Shawkaanee. Some of those who promote themselves as being among the well versed in this noble science – in their forefront Shaykh as-Sindee – claim that some of its narrations are extremely weak and unreliable in order to escape

from the hadeeth science rule that ‘unreliable narrations are strengthened by narrations similar to them’. In doing that, they delude their readers into thinking that no one ruled the weak narrators, like ‘Abdullaah ibn Lahee‘ah, trustworthy and that they cannot be used as supportive evidence. In doing that, they contradict the methodology of the hadeeth scholars in using supportive evidence. Among them is Imaam Ahmad and Ibn Taymiyyah – may Allaah have mercy on them. Likewise, they all feign ignorance that the scholars – among them Imaam ash-Shaafi‘ee –confirm the hadeeth mursal if most scholars use it as evidence, as is the case of ‘Aa’ishah’s hadeeth.

Other strengthening factors may be added to the above.

(a) The hadeeth has been narrated by Qataadah from ‘Aa’ishah.

(b) It has been narrated in another chain from Asmaa.

(c) All three narrators of the hadeeth ruled according to it.

Qataadah stated in his interpretation of the verse on draping, “Allaah has placed on them the requirement to cover the eyebrows,” That is, “and not on their faces” as stated by at-Tabaree.

‘Aa’ishah said, regarding the female in ihraam, “She may drape the garment on her face, if she wishes.” This was narrated by al-Bayhaqee in an authentic chain of narrators. There is clear evidence in ‘Aa’ishah’s giving the female pilgrim a choice in draping that in her opinion the face was not ‘awrah. Otherwise she would have made it obligatory on them as those who contradict it do. Because of their position, most of the extremist authors, with at-Tuwaijree in the forefront, hid this statement of Umm al-Mu’mineen, ‘Aa’ishah from their readers. The author of Faslul-khitaab [The Definitive Statement] deliberately deleted this portion of al-Bayhaqee’s narration in his book. This being only one of a number of similar disreputable acts which I have exposed in my book. The supportive evidence is that this authentic narration from her strengthens her hadeeth from the Prophet. This is among the facts that people are unaware of or they pretend ignorance of, either choice is bitter to swallow.

As for Asmaa, it has been authentically reported from Qays ibn Abee Haazim that he saw her as a woman of white complexion with tatoos on her hands.

(d) The narration of Ibn ‘Abbaas earlier mentioned, “She should pull the jilbaab (cloak) close to her face without putting it on her face.” His interpretation of the verse of adornment “...except what appears from it” as referring to “the face and hands” was similar. There is also a similar narration from Ibn ‘Umar to the same effect.

At this point, a bitter reality must be noted due to the lessons which may be gained from it, the knowledge which it contains and is service as a reminder of the wise saying: “The truth is not know by people, know the truth and you will know people.”

At the same time that Shaykh at-Tuwaijree insists on rejecting the hadeeth of ‘Aa’ishah and its supporting evidences, among them Qaatadah’s mursal narration, he willingly accepts another inauthentic hadeeth from her with mursal support. In that hadeeth it is mentioned “...that she wore a niqaab (face veil)...” and that she was supposed to have described the Prophet’s wife Safiyyah and the Ansaar women as “... a jewess among jewesses...” which is considered by scholars to be a very erroneous statement (munkar jiddan). The Shaykh argues on page 181, “It

has mursal supportive evidence,” and quotes one of the mursal hadeeths of ‘Ataa containing a known liar in its chain of narration.

One should reflect on the great difference between this fabricated supportive evidence and the authentic supportive evidence of Qataadah further supported by other evidences, then ask, “Why did at-Tuwaijree accept the second hadeeth of ‘Aa’ishah and not the first?” The obvious answer is that the accepted one contains reference to wearing the niqaab – even though it does not indicate obligation – while the rejected one denies it. Thus, in this regard, the Shaykh did not base his position on Islaamic legal principles, but on something similar to the Jewish principle: The ends justify the means. May Allaah help us.

8. Placing unreasonable conditions

Among the amazing practices of some latter day blind following hanafite scholars and others is that on one hand they agree with us regarding the permissibility of women exposing their faces, because that was the position of their Imaams, but on the other hand they agree with the extremists in opposition to their Imaams. They make ijtihaad (while claiming taqleed) by adding the condition that the society be safe from fitnah to the position of the Imaams. This refers to the fitnah caused by women to men. Then one of the ignorant contemporary blind followers went to the extreme of actually attributing this “condition” to the Imaams themselves. Among some of those having no knowledge, this resulted in their concluding that there is essentially no difference between the position of the Imaams and the extremists.

It is obvious to jurists that this condition is invalid because it implies that humans know something which the Lord missed knowing. That is, the temptation of women did not exist during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) thus we had to create a special ruling for it which did not exist previously. In fact, the fitnah did exist during the era of divine legislation and the story of al-Fadl ibn ‘Abbaas’ trial with the Khath‘amiyyah woman and his repeated looking at her is not far from the readers’ memories.

It is well known that when Allaah Most High instructed men and women to lower their gazes and instructed women to veil themselves in front of men, He did that to block the road to corruption and prevent temptation. In spite of that, He – Most Great and Glorious – did not command that they cover their faces and hands in front of them. The Prophet (pbuh) further emphasized that in the story of al-Fadl by not commanding the woman to cover her face. And Allaah was truthful when He said, “And your Lord is not forgetful.”

The reality is that the condition of there not being fitnah was only mentioned by scholars regarding the man’s looking at the woman’s face, as in al-Fiqh ‘alaa al-mathaahib al-arba‘ah, page 12. They said, “That [the woman’s face may be uncovered] is permissible on condition that there is safety from temptation,” and that is true, contrary to what the blind followers practice.

They conclude from it that the woman is obliged to cover her face, when in fact it is not a necessary consequence. They know that the condition of safety from temptation also applies to women. For it is not permissible for them to stare at a man’s face except where there is safety from temptation. Is it then a necessary consequence that men also veil their faces from women to prevent temptation as some tribes called the Tawareg do.

They would have a basis in fiqh of the Quraan and Sunnah if they said that a woman veiled in correct jilbaab who fears being harmed by some corrupt individuals due to her face being exposed is obliged to cover her face to prevent harm and temptation.

In fact, it could even be said that it is obligatory on her not to leave her home if she feared that some evil authorities supported by a leader who does not rule by what Allaah revealed, as exists in some Arab countries since a few years ago, would pull her jilbaab from her head. As to making this obligation a compulsory law for all women everywhere and in all eras, even if there did not exist any harm for veiled women, No. Absolutely not. Allaah was truthful when He said, “Do they have partners who legislated for them in the religion what Allaah did not permit?”

These are the most significant of the extremist opposition’s mistakes which I thought needed brief mention due their strong link to the contents of this book. I then closed ar-Radd al-Mufhim with a reminder that extremism in the religion – considering that the Wise Legislator forbade it will not bring any good. And it is not possible for it to produce a generation of young Muslim women carrying Islaamic knowledge and practice moderately balanced, with neither excesses nor deficiencies. Not like what I have heard about some young female adherents in Arab countries when they heard the Prophet’s statement, “The woman in ihraam should neither wear a niqaab nor gloves,” they did not accept it saying instead, “We will wear our niqaabs and gloves!”

No doubt, this was a direct result of the extremist views which they heard regarding the obligation of covering their faces.

I certainly cannot imagine that this type of extremism – and this is only one example from many which I have – can possibly produce for us salafee women able to do everything their religiously guided social life demands of them in a way similar to the righteous women of the Salaf.

Virtues of Hijab

Taken from Al Jumuah Magazine Volume 10, Issue 5, Page 22

Among the virtues of observing the proper hijab for Muslim women, is that first and foremost it is an **act of obedience to Allah (SWT)** and His Messenger (SAW).

Indeed, Allah (SWT) orders the wearing of hijab in the Quran when He (SWT) says,

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like palms of hands or one eye or both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, etc., and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks, and bosoms, etc.) and not to reveal their adornment ..." (An-Nur 24:31)

The same order was given by **His Prophet (SAW)** when he said, *"The woman is awrah, (that which must be covered)." (Tirmidi)*

The modest appearance of the Muslim woman, dressed in correct hijab, is a sign of **purity and dignity**. It tells the world that she is a **chaste** woman, and sets her apart from the immoral behavior associated with women who go out in clothing that leave nothing to the imagination. As a chaste, **modest** woman, the hijab shows that **she does not want her sexuality to enter into her interactions with men** in the smallest degree.

The hijab also serves as a **screen** for the Muslim woman and the evil that exists in the society around her. When a woman wears the hijab she is **less likely to be sexually harassed** by men with sinful motives. She is also **less likely to be exploited for her beauty and femininity**.

Her **intelligence and skills**, instead of her looks and sexuality, are more likely to be the basis for judging her. An Iranian schoolgirl was quoted to have said,

"We want to stop men from treating us like sex objects, as they have always done. We want them to ignore our appearance and to be attentive to our personalities and minds. We want them to take us seriously and treat us as equals and not just chase us around for our bodies and physical looks."

By wearing the hijab, when she is outside the confines of her home, the Muslim woman is free to concentrate on the tasks she has set out to do. She is **not trying to impress anyone** with dazzling displays. She is not worried about whether her **hair and make-up** are in place, and could care less if men find her attractive, or whether her clothes are the latest "thing."

The hijab frees her from the need of constantly **seeking approval from others**, and frees her to only seek the approval of her Guardian Lord.

Another virtue of the hijab is that it prevents **unnecessary rivalry and competition** between women. Due to this sense of competition, the "liberated" woman **wastes her wealth and sacrifices her health** and well-being, through plastic surgery, in a desperate attempt to keep up with society's fleeting and everchanging image of beauty.

In Islam, through the hijab, women learn to appreciate each other based on **knowledge, piety and societal contributions**. The hijab gives women the right to reclaim their own bodies as private property and not something for all to speculate about and to scrutinize.

The Question of Hijab and Choice **From Soundvision at <http://www.soundvision.com>**

The discussion at the Islam Awareness Week exhibition started out nicely enough. We talked about women's rights, domestic violence, sexual abuse, heavy, heavy issues. It was interesting, she was a feminist, and I, a Muslim woman. But we connected.

Then, as always, the topic turned to Hijab. She started out politely enough, complimenting me on mine and the way I wore it. She asked why I wore it. Faith and personal choice, I replied, the words practically a mantra now after speaking to several women about it in the past. But I began to feel that familiar knot in my stomach. I knew what the next question would be.

“As a feminist, I support your right to wear Hijab because it's a choice. But if you really believe in choice, don't you support the right of women NOT to wear Hijab in Iran, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, where Hijab is forced on women?”

I gulped. What could I say? I looked at my feet, and then looked up. She had me cornered.

“I just find it incredibly difficult to negotiate this question,” says Kathy Bullock, a Hijabi who completed a PhD. thesis on The Politics of the Veil from the University of Toronto's Political Science Department in January.

Muslims and Liberals, especially those who are feminists, occasionally butt heads over this issue. For liberals, Bullock explains, their views on Hijab are clear. “For them, even the mere fact that it's a thorny question for us it's a problem because for them the issue is clear: the individual has the right to dress as they choose.”

She notes that Muslims, on the other hand, do favor kind of state enforcement of Shariah, and by extension, Hijab. The three countries most usually cited for Hijab enforcement are Afghanistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Hijab, more specifically the Burqa, has been enforced in Afghanistan since the Taliban took over major parts of the country in 1996 following years of civil war. The Burqa covers the entire body, head and face.

In Iran, Bullock says Hijab has been enforced since 1981, two years after the Islamic Revolution took over the country's leadership, with the support of most Iranians.

In Saudi Arabia, Bullock says she knows of no exact law making Hijab mandatory in the state, but it seems custom, social and family pressure play a role in ensuring Hijab, as well as the Niqab or face covering, is worn.

In all three cases, some form of violence has been associated with not complying to Hijab in these countries, including beating and whipping.

The perception of many liberals is that Islam is violent, misogynist, and anti-personal choice, with an Islamic state ideally interfering in every aspect of its citizens' lives.

A RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION-SOME POINTS

Jamal Badawi is part of the North American Fiqh Council. He notes that there is no precedent in Islamic teaching for state enforcement of Hijab. However, there is evidence of positive pressure and encouragement to wearing Islamic dress.

Badawi offers a few ways the “liberal” question can be answered:

1. WE DO NOT SUPPORT WHAT CONTRADICTS ISLAM

This point has to be mentioned at the outset, in order to set the guidelines for the response to this question.

“One cannot say I support the ‘right’ to disregard the teaching of Islam,” says Badawi in an interview with Sound Vision from his home in Halifax, Nova Scotia. “That’s the trick in this question.”

This is also important to remember because liberals do not view not wearing Hijab as a wrong.

2. WE SUPPORT THE RIGHT METHOD THOUGH

“What one can say safely is that we support the Prophetic approach in bringing about change as it was done in the matter of Hijab without resort to compulsion or force,” explains Badawi.”

Bullock agrees that it’s important to separate the obligation of Hijab from the violence that is often associated with its enforcement in some Muslim societies. She notes a Muslim should condemn violence, for example, but that it can be separated from the issue of Hijab enforcement by the state.

3. NO SOCIETY HAS ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

In response to the enforcement of Hijab in some Muslim countries, Badawi says:

”When we say choice, there is no even liberal democracy in our century that allows free choice in the absolute sense. For instance, even in the Western world if a woman or man wants to make a ‘choice’ of walking naked in a public place, we know that this is not regarded as an acceptable ‘choice’.”

“That shows that societies have the right to set reasonable limits on choices so as not to harm society at large or its ‘moral values’. It is in the same vain that it would not be inappropriate for an Islamic state to set those reasonable limits.”

Bullock suggests making parallels between dress cods in Muslim countries and Western countries. For instance, in most of the West, women cannot go topless on the streets (although it is legal in the Canadian province of Ontario).

4. IN AN ISLAMIC STATE THERE SHOULD BE CHOICE IN TYPE OF HIJAB

Badawi points out that Muslim states should allow for differences in interpretation of the Hijab, most notably, whether the face of a Muslim woman can remain uncovered or not.

“I must say that the reasonableness of those limits [on dress] should imply that no one particular interpretation should be forced on all so long as there is another legitimate interpretation,” he says.

“If there are these two Fiqh positions, nobody has the right to enforce stricter limits if there is another legitimate interpretation which excludes the covering of the face.”

5. NO VIGILANTE GROUPS TO ENFORCE HIJAB

“It must be emphasized that the concept of vigilante is unacceptable in certain kinds of enforcement of the law,” says Badawi. “So long as there is a state in place, an Islamic state, it would be the duty of the state to enforce it on other levels.”

“It is not the right of individuals or groups to enforce criminal law, for example, otherwise it would be a total chaos, because these are matters that require due process of law in front of competent judges”

“One cannot refer to the broad Quranic injunction to enjoin the good and forbid the evil to justify enforcement of criminal law. Organizations however, may within the boundaries of the law advise and encourage the enjoining the good and forbidding the evil just as individuals do.”

6. HIJAB: GET OVER IT

The “over obsession” with Hijab also needs to be addressed when such a question is brought up, says Badawi.

“Given the nature of what’s happening in Muslim societies today there are lots of other wrongs on a more basic level that need to be corrected,” he notes.

“Like the issue of Iman [Faith] and only after that is attained, detailed issues like this [Hijab] would fall in place without much pressure.”

10 Tips for Muslim Activists to Deal with Hijab From Soundvision

While Hijab is an obligation clearly ordained in the Quran and Sunnah, it is only one of many Islamic obligations.

Yet, some Muslim organizations have heated debates about it, and sometimes practice unacceptable behavior towards those Muslim women who do not wear Hijab, to the point of excluding them or making them feel uncomfortable.

How can Muslim activists make their organizations and communities places where the laws of Islam are upheld, but Muslims, men and women, are not excluded? Where Hijab does not become a flash point? Below are some tips.

1. DO NOT JUDGE

This is key for activists. While some Muslims in a given setting may judge non-Hijabis, activists and key figures in organizations and communities must never fall into this kind of behavior.

Remember that we don't know a person's background: maybe the sister doesn't know Hijab is an obligation; maybe she's from a culture where it is not practiced; maybe she is from a family that has forced her to take it off; or from a non-practicing family, or even a family that is hostile to Islam.

Harshness will lead non-Hijabi women to turn away from other Muslims, and in many cases turn to non-Muslims.

“If they look around and they see Muslim activist women who are very negative and exclusionary and overly critical then they are not going to make them their friend,” says Sharifa Alkhateeb, vice-president of the North American Council of Muslim Women. “If they [activist Muslim women] want to influence the behavior of young women, they have to, before anything else, become their friend.”

Which is the next tip.

2. IF YOU'RE A MUSLIM SISTER BE A FRIEND

“What young Muslim women need more than anything else is friendship,” says Alkhateeb.

She explains that most of the time, they feel alienated and cannot befriend their parents, who may reject their views or cannot relate to them. This leads to young women searching for solace in friends outside the family.

This is why it is crucial that activist Muslim women extend a warm, friendly hand to young Muslim women, whether in organizations or in the Muslim community in general.

Alkhateeb also stresses that being a friend is not just speaking the words of friendship.

“They think it’s enough to say I love you, and I care about you,” she says. But real friendship and caring “comes through living with the person, being around the person.”

3. IF YOU’RE A BROTHER, BE POLITE, TREAT HER WITH RESPECT

That essentially means practicing a brother’s Islamic duty to lower his gaze and guard his modesty. It also means not making the sister feel uncomfortable.

This includes not looking down at her, making rude gestures or comments about her lack of Hijab.

4. ENCOURAGE HER TO PARTICIPATE IN ISLAMIC ACTIVITIES

“It’s only by mixing in the right company that someone who is contemplating Hijab will have the strength and courage to make the final act,” says Kathy Bullock, who began wearing Hijab two weeks after her conversion to Islam.

This means that the open and welcoming attitude can’t be reserved to just a one-shot activity, like a dinner or an orientation session. It means regular contact with other Muslims.

One method is a Halaqa. Most MSAs and Muslim communities offer a variety of these, from mixed brother sister Halaqas, to gender-specific ones.

A sisters only Halaqa can allow for more comfortable and open discussion and relations, and better bonding time, which can strengthen friendship and sisterhood.

5. HAVE HER RESEARCH THE QUESTION FOR A PRESENTATION

This was an approach Abdalla Idris Ali, Director of the Center for Islamic Education in Kansas City, Missouri and a former Muslim high school principal, used for a student who did not wear Hijab. He asked her to do a presentation on the topic.

This method could be effective because it provides the basic information, without any judgment or harshness. It is something the individual does on her own.

This method can also be used for other topics, to encourage Muslims-i.e. if a brother has missed Salat ul Juma a few times, a presentation on its importance could serve as a reminder.

6. PROTECT HER FROM THOSE WHO WILL CAUSE HER HARM

This is tricky but will be necessary. In many Islamic organizations and Muslim communities, you will find those who wish to implement Islam using what Alkhateeb describes as the “baseball bat” approach: with harshness.

This must be resisted. If such a situation arises, fellow brothers and sisters should stand by the non-Hijabi sister.

It will not only serve to be a “buffer” for the harsh comments, but it will indicate her importance as part of the Muslim community/organization, and in the long run, will be conducive to giving her advice.

7. GENTLY AND KINDLY EXPLAIN TO OTHER MUSLIMS NOT TO JUDGE HER

Just as it is important for Muslims to remind each other of their obligations to Allah, it is also important that activist Muslims gently explain to others not to use the “baseball bat” approach. Talk to them with proof from the Quran and Sunnah-that Islam calls for inviting people to the good with wisdom; that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was not harsh and intolerant in the face of others’ weaknesses. Also stress the gradual approach. Use many examples, as it seems the Muslims who want to use the harsh approach often feel this is the Islamic way.

By providing solid examples from the Sunnah, they may become convinced to change their way.

If this does not work, get a trusted scholar or knowledgeable Muslim or Muslima to address them who both sides listen to and trust.

8. EMPHASIZE BUILDING IMAN (FAITH) FIRST

Islam was sent to the Prophet gradually, and Muslims today must also implement Islam in this manner.

That means that before anyone speaks to a sister about Hijab, more important aspects of the faith have to be emphasized: the basic beliefs, pillars, the importance of praying five times a day, fasting in Ramadan, etc.

This gradual approach builds Iman and conviction, and in fact was the method used by the Prophet.

“We fail to see any Ayah (verse of the Quran) pertaining to Hijab in the entire Makkan revelation that was given to the Prophet, that’s almost 13 years. The injunctions about more detailed aspects relating to the righteous Muslim community were revealed during the Medinan period. Some in the middle, and later part of that period,” says Jamal Badawi, a member of the North American Fiqh Council.

“This is a revealing lesson for us because it shows that Allah (s.w.t.) knew in advance what injunctions He wanted

to reveal,” he adds. “Yet He delayed the revelation of those matters until many years or many, many years of preparation on the level of Iman, submission to Allah, love of Allah and the sincere desire to voluntarily obey Allah and His Messenger. Once that base was established it wasn’t difficult at all for the believing women to willingly abide by the injunctions of Allah.

“This is similar to what happened also with the prohibition of intoxicants where the same process of preparation took place to the point that when the final prohibition of intoxicants was revealed it wasn’t difficult either for men to abide by that willingly and immediately.”

9. DON’T BE APOLOGETIC

What should not be forgotten though is that while the approach must be gentle and kind, there must be no apologies for or hiding of Islamic teachings. Once again, wisdom is necessary, but a sister must not be told that not wearing Hijab is acceptable from an Islamic perspective.

“Muslim organizations have a duty to say what is right and to invite in the best of manner women to cover and to support them when they do so but that doesn’t mean individuals should be judgmental when women are not covering,” says Bullock.

10. WHEN SHE TAKES THE STEP, SUPPORT HER!

”There needs to be a lot more support for the women who decide to cover,” says Bullock.

When a sister does adopt Hijab, she often needs all the help she can get, in the face of angry parents, discriminatory employers and professors or feminist friends or acquaintances.

This is where the friendship and openness come in. We must never think our job is done once someone adopts any Islamic practice they were previously not engaging in. This is a common mistake Muslims also make when dealing with new Muslims.

We often spend a lot of time convincing an individual to accept Islam. But once s/he does, we become cold and distant, with no desire to help these brothers and sisters with the struggles being a new Muslim entail.

The hardest step is often AFTER the fact, not before it. Support, friendship, and most importantly brother and sisterhood is crucial if, in many cases, the practice is to be maintained.

The Hijab as Daw'aa

by Dr. Aisha Hamdan, AlJumuah Magazine, Volume 10, Issue 5, Jumaada-A- Ulaa, 1419h.

Most Muslims are familiar with the various reasons that Allah has required women to wear hijab: The hijab reflects modesty, purity and respect; it lessens temptation so that more serious sins will be avoided; it protects women from the harm and molestation of evil men; a woman who wears hijab will be evaluated for her intelligence and skills rather than her appearance.

One important aspect that is often overlooked, however, is that the hijab is a symbol of Muslim identity. A woman who covers her head is making a statement that she is a member of the Muslim community and that she follows a particular code of moral conduct.

Allah says: "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women to draw their outer garments around them. That is more suitable that they will be known (as Muslims and chaste believing women) and not be abused." [Qur'an, 33:59]

"...that they will be known..." In America, where Islam is the fastest growing religion (alhumdullilah), many people are coming to know what this head covering really signifies and to understand the religion that mandates it. The hijab, in effect, is an amazingly powerful tool for dawah; one that Muslims themselves are probably not even aware of. As with any tool, the key for effectiveness is appropriate and knowledgeable use.

The most obvious first step would be for Muslim women to actually wear the hijab. It is a tragic and upsetting phenomenon to see so many Muslims dressing in the manner of the disbelievers (blue jeans, T-shirts, short skirts, even shorts). The Prophet, sallallahu allahe wa salam, said; "Whoever resembles a people is one of them." (Abu Dawood). This is not only happening in America and other Western countries as people attempt to assimilate and adopt the practices of the prevailing culture, but it is also occurring in Muslim countries at an alarming rate.

A woman who refuses to wear the hijab is disobeying Allah and committing a serious sin, putting worldly pleasures above spiritual attainment, and neglecting her duty to the religion of Islam. Many scholars agree that the only reason a Muslim may live in a non-Muslim country is to conduct dawah and bring people to the true religion. How can a woman perform dawah for Islam when she is not even practicing it herself? To do this would be a form of hypocrisy and it will not be successful.

Once a woman begins to wear hijab she completes a large portion of her responsibility for dawah with very little effort. Each time that she goes to the grocery store, the library, to work, to school, or to any other public place, she is spreading the magnificent message of Islam. This is not only because of the outer hijab that she wears, but more importantly, the modesty of her behavior that accompanies it. When a woman refrains from flirting with men, limits physical contact, and is reserved and respectful, people may become curious and want to learn more about this intriguing faith. It may just sow the seeds of something wonderful.

At the University where I teach (which happens to be a private, Catholic school), women are often interested in my manner of dress and demeanor. Each semester I have at least one student who requests my involvement in a project for another class, usually comparative religions. They are surprised when they learn the rationale for this injunction and the fact that it was part of their

religious heritage as well. If I chose not to wear hijab, I would miss these wonderful opportunities to share the beauty, peace and universality of my faith.

When there is the possibility for further discussion with those who are interested, knowledge and understanding of the topic are imperative. A very effective technique is to relate the concept to something that is familiar to the other person. Some examples of questions that could be posed include:

- "Did you every wonder why Mary, the mother Jesus (alayhes salam) wore clothing very similar to that of Muslims?"
- "Why do Catholic nuns dress the way they do?"
- "Did you know that in the Canon laws of the Catholic church today there is a law that requires women to cover their heads in church?"
- "Have you read in I Corinthians (Bible, 11:3-10) the verses that Paul wrote: 'Every man who prays of prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And evey woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head - it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman doesn't cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or shaved off, she should cover her head.'"
- "Did you know that there are some Christian denominations, namely the Amish and the Mennonites, who still require women to wear the head covering?"
- "Were you aware that is was the custom of Jewish women to go out in public with a head covering and that some denominations still practice this today?"

These discussion points demonstrate the obvious fact that the **head cover was not introduced by Islam**, but rather that this requirement has been in place for thousands of years. This can also be a cogent segue to more crucial topics such as the fact that Moses, alayhes salam, Jesus, alayhes salam and Muhammad, sallallahu allahe wa salam, were all prophets of the same God and that they each carried the same basic message. Islam corrected the errors that had been introduced into previous revelations by humans and completed the process that was planned by Allah.

We should be proud to be Muslim. We should also be grateful for the gift that Allah has given to each one of us: The perfect truth of Islam that is our key to paradise. All others are being deluded by Satan and following paths to destruction. With our gift comes the responsibility to share the truth with those who are less fortunate. We are all responsible to carry the light of Islam. The hijab is an outward manifestation of this light that burns within, and it can be an effective tool for fulfillment of our obligation. We choose whether to develop this light into a bright, radiant star or let it be extinguished by foolish and selfish desires. May Allah guide each of us to the true path.

Hijab Activism: Every Public Moment Becomes Dawah by Shaema Imam

Abu Hurairah narrated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said, “I will not be a witness for two types of people who are destined for the Fire: people with whips, like the tails of cows, who beat the people (i.e., tyrannical rulers who are enemies of their own people), and women who, although clothed, are yet naked, seducing and being seduced, their hair styled like the tilted humps of camels. These will not enter the Garden nor will its fragrance even reach them, although its fragrance reaches a very great distance” (Reported by Muslim).

POLITICAL OPPRESSION AND MORAL LAXITY

Commenting on this Hadith, Yusuf al-Qaradawi states, “The astonishing thing about this Hadith is the connection of political oppression with moral laxity. This connection is borne out by facts, since it is the way of rulers to keep people preoccupied with their personal desires and lusts so that they have no time to think about public affairs.” (al-Qaradawi, 1960)

I feel that this Hadith, and brother Yusuf’s commentary of it, is a fitting explanation of why I view Hijab as a dignified dress AND as a potent tool inextricably tied to social activism.

WITH HIJAB, EVERY PUBLIC MOMENT BECOMES DAWAH

Alhamdulillah, I began wearing Hijab four years ago. Since then, I feel that my Hijab has permitted me to be a Muslim youth activist at many different levels. In fact, every moment in public becomes a sort of Dawah.

In this society especially, people use their clothes to send a message, to label who they are as individuals, and to demonstrate what groups they belong to.

Only a few years ago, a furtively whispered comment, “um, excuse me, your tag [that shows the name of the company] is showing!” would have been appreciated. Now, it seems that many clothes are BUILT around the tag itself! The reality is that every group has its uniform. Thus, I think that Hijab is especially suited (pun intended) as a medium of nonverbal communication of Muslim identity in this very appearance-based society.

HIJAB: A PICTURE OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN

Indeed, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Often the most minimal of words or images can have a definite impact. A huge picture of a black swoosh on a billboard will immediately bring to mind the Nike company.

Hijab is increasingly being identified not as an odd, unexplainable method of dressing by a woman, but an odd, unexplainable method of dressing by a MUSLIM woman. Once this

connection has been made, whatever that woman does will be registered as something Muslim women do.

HIJAB SHATTERS STEREOTYPES

In this society it seems that - women especially- wear clothes not to cover, but to strategically expose, their bodies. By being seen by others in loose, opaque clothing covering all but the hands and face, Muslim women are sending out a very strong message that they choose not to participate in the game of show-and-see.

When these same women in Hijab are seen laughing [what, how dare they be happy, isn't someone forcing them to dress that way?] or reading and writing [educated and literate too!] important stereotypes are shattered without a word being spoken.

When people hear me speak, regardless of what I say, they note that I have a North American accent when I speak English, and a distinctly Quebecois accent when I speak French.

So automatically, they realize that a woman who wears Hijab is not necessarily from a foreign country. That even a woman born and raised on pure Canadian milk and cookies can be motivated to choose to cover herself with Hijab. So already, regardless of what I actually do or say, this information is transmitted.

THE UMMAH MUST CULTIVATE A DISTINCT IDENTITY

The key to our success as an Ummah in this Western society, I feel, is the cultivation of a distinct and positive identity among the Muslim brothers and the sisters.

One noted speaker once said that a tool can be used either for you or against you. I feel that my Hijab works to foster a positive image of Islam if I speak for the rights of women in society, for the advantages of sustainable natural resource management, and for the political rights of oppressed persons everywhere.

However, if I am seen behaving rudely, doing badly in school, or encouraging injustice, a mental note is made not just against me, but against Islam.

“Hijab activism” is a challenging and honorable way for sisters to encourage themselves towards increasing their own submission to Allah while also inviting others to learn more about what it truly means to be a Muslim in society.

The War of the Women

By Yahiya Emerick & Reshma Baig

A popular English saying says that "*Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.*" The meaning being that if a woman feels like something unfair happened to her, her anger will be limitless. I'm not going to say that that is necessarily true or not, but I have seen shades of it in the world-wide war between women who wear the Hijab (head-scarf) and those who want to oppose it.

Why do I describe it as a war? If you have to ask then you haven't been paying much attention to what women talk about in public meetings, articles, lectures, and even among themselves. The battle consists, quite interestingly, of four distinct war-fronts.

There are

1) the women who wear Hijab out of conviction that it is the Islamic thing to do.

Then there are

2) the women who wear it only because their mothers and grandmothers wore it; unaware of its true Islamic significance.

The third group,

3) the non-Muslim feminists, rally against anything that covers up even one inch of the female form, but we already expected this from them.

And finally,

4) there are the secular "Muslim" women, who almost never practice Islam anyway, but who have Muslim names and roots, who make it a point to appear at all Muslim gatherings with hair fashionably styled in full public glory.

For the sake of this article, one issue must be clear from the outset (so as not to ruffle the feathers of too many readers): An operative definition of the Hijab-wearing woman must be constructed. Albeit, as described above, not all Hijab wearers are alike. Women wear the Hijab for varying reasons. In reality, there also exists those noble and true Muslim sisters who wear Hijab because it is Islamically correct. They perceive it as intrinsically empowering. In addition, the Hijab is not a facade (the "*I'll wear Hijab then do whatever I like*" attitude).

The operative definition of a true Hijab wearing Muslim woman is one who correctly follows the guidelines of Qur'an and Sunnah and whose only motivation is to please Allah. (Qur'an 33:59) This type of Hijab wearing woman is intelligent, Allah-fearing, overcoming the temporal trappings of the life of this world, and ultimately very happy with her decision. She is not out to please anyone except her Creator.

Now as stated previously, there are the four groups in this **Battle of the Scarf**. But it's not a fair war. Although it would seem that there are two factions on each side, in fact, the culturally-based Hijab wearing women are no help to their Islamically-oriented sisters. The cultural Hijab-

wearers don't look at their Hijab as an Islamic duty, but rather as an affiliation with some old-country culture. And in fact, they wear it only out of habit.

Obviously, then, the daughters of such women, feeling more "American" than Arab, Indian, Nigerian (or any culture transmitted by family origin), never wear the Hijab themselves because it's just "culture" and thus, the cultural women are no help in the Islamic struggle. Their own offspring become some other "culture" just as they are only motivated by what they grew up with themselves.

Have you ever seen the women, walking in "full" Hijab, but then their two or three daughters, even if they're teenagers, are dressed completely like non- Muslims? It's incredibly common. I feel like asking those mothers. Why are you even wearing Hijab if it wasn't important enough for you to pass on to your daughters?

So the Islamically-oriented Hijab-wearers are quite alone in the face of the assault by the feminists/secular "Muslimahs". The relationship between those two erstwhile allies is strange. The agenda of the Western feminists has always been puzzling. They cry about equality and respect but then push for things that dehumanize women and put them at the mercy of merciless men. They'll say women should be respected for their minds rather than for their bodies, but then they'll say that women should go around in mini-skirts and g- strings. It's funny how some ultra-Feminists argue with pride that the only professions in which women earn more money than men are prostitution and fashion modeling--then, while complaining against violence towards women, they try to encourage more women to be "empowered" by disrobing (utilizing work- place fashions that place more emphasis on the female figure rather than intelligence and qualifications).

Men are an aggressive lot. If you take away clothes from a woman, the man is not suddenly going to start respecting her. Rather he's going to take it as a green light to chase after her. It's interesting how so many male fashion designers are worshipped by Western, European, and now even "Muslim" women. (Armani, De La Renta, Gucci, Mizrahi, Lauren, etc...)

It doesn't take an analyst from Fashion Avenue to figure out that a man will design clothes for women that fits one main criteria: **That the outfit be pleasing and attractive to the eyes of a man.** From this arises the catch- phrase: "powerful and sexy". Some cultural "Muslims" with more of an interest in fashion (rather than their love for Allah) heed the call of Vogue, Glamour, and Cosmopolitan rather than the guidelines for dress in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Unfortunately, both "Muslim" men and women have fallen prey to the paradigms of worldly dressing. (Is it really dress for success or dress for sex?). Some brothers are ashamed of their wives and daughters wearing the Hijab in public (the "you look too dowdy with that thing on your head" syndrome.) Some women discourage their own Muslim sisters from wearing the Hijab saying that they'll "never succeed" or "just look old-fashioned and oppressed", or as I've overheard time and time again, "you only need to wear Hijab on Eid or at Jumu'ah prayer".

It must be added here that Muslim women are not being encouraged to dress dowdy, sloppy, or out of the "mode". It is merely being asserted that what is touted as fashionable is not necessarily empowering--or flattering-- in the real sense of the word. Islam arrived on the scene more than 1400 years ago to fortify a woman's dignity; introducing the concept of "covering the parts that

elicit desire". Time and time again it is implored that "Allah is beautiful and loves beauty." Our Creator made us beautiful and the dictates of "modern" fashion morph that beauty into something exploitative and ugly.

The feminists say that women should be free and independent, never relying on any man. So the message men extract from this is that now they can have as many lovers as they want and never have to be tied down to one woman ever again. Consequently, a woman who dates can expect to go from man to man for twenty years or more before she can succeed in tying one down in marriage. And now women have to dress even more alluring to attract men, and have to work harder to keep them around lest the "roving eye" spots another, younger, prettier catch. Women, as polls have shown, are more harried, stressed and suffering from acute eating and other disorders than ever before.

Feminists say that all spiritual traditions are male-oriented and have worked to keep women down. While this may be true in the case of Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism, these feminists have no knowledge of Islam. All they see is the stupid, chauvinistic cultural traditions of backward X, Y or Z Muslim country and they equate that with the teachings of Islam. Then pseudo-scholars from the West quote ayat and Hadith out of context and paint a picture of a barbaric religion which seeks death for all.

On the same level, there are also ethnic "Muslim" women out there who do more to disparage Islam and present apologetic misinformation than their non-Muslim associates. Case in point: In a recent New York Times article about the growing number of Hijab wearing women in America, a "Muslimah" doctor from Chicago is quoted as saying that "Hijab has nothing to do with Islam." Her justification was that she was from Pakistan and it's not important over there. This makes one wonder: Which version of Islam is that? Oh, the abridged version. (Qur'an 33:64-68)

At the same time there is the wave of Muslimahs in America who assert their identities as Muslims and are cognizant that the Hijab is a requirement. These are the sisters on the frontlines who you see in various workplace settings with their Hijabs. The Hijab, as many sisters have commented, changes everything. Peoples are compelled to see you as a Muslim and therefore must assess their own feelings about Islam and Muslims. Ill feelings and sincere understanding of the faith are put through the sieve that is the Hijab.

You can imagine the outrage feminists feel when they hear that women are leaving "liberated" Western-secular culture and accepting Islam. I once overheard one feminist say, "Why are they entering a religion that will oppress them." It is so wired. If a woman walks down the street in a french-style head-wrap, nobody blinks an eye. If an old woman has a scarf or net wrapped around her head, nobody even looks. But the minute a woman walks in public with a scarf worn in typical Muslim style, people, women mostly, absolutely freak out. Otherwise nice women will start muttering insults or even yelling.

Of course, no one says anything bad when they see a statue of Mary wearing a veil- and she always has a veil on. And no one yells at nuns, many of whom dress more Islamically than most Muslim women. So why the anger at the Hijab? You know, there's an interesting experiment you can try, and it may also save you from committing sins. Whenever a pretty girl walks by, almost every man looks at her, right? In Islam this is discouraged, for obvious reasons. But the next time

you see a pretty woman walking by a stationary group of people, don't look at the pretty woman, (save yourself from a sin,) instead, look at the faces of the other women as the pretty woman passes by them. You'll be amazed to see that it's the women who are most blatantly and closely watching the young debutante prance by. And the glances of the women will follow long after the men have lost interest.

It's amazing! Women judge each other by their looks and appearances more than you would imagine. Especially non-Muslim women, who see the new female as a potential rival for male attention. When a Muslim woman, dressed according to her conscience, walks by, you see these same women grimace and make ugly faces. Why are they so threatened by a covered woman even more so than a half-naked one?

Because the half-naked woman is only a rival for a man. The covered woman is a direct challenge to any woman's whole being, sense of self and way of life. A modestly dressed, covered woman is a walking, talking challenge to the women (and men) who are sacrificing their Akhira for success on the terms of Dunya. A woman in Hijab who is a functioning member of society is a clarion call to everyone around her. She symbolizes a woman who is empowered by Allah (swt) rather than by the shabby, eclectic, pop-cultural, spiritually bankrupt throngs who pass as the icons of contemporary society.

The average non-Muslim woman sees nothing wrong with unmarried sexual relations, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, dancing with men, walking around half-naked, maybe taking drugs, gossiping, lying, using foul language, etc... (Who are all those immigrant Muslim men who race to marry such women and ignore their noble Muslim sisters?)

While the Muslim woman, in Hijab, radiates the exact opposite! She doesn't engage in those things and rather tries to be humble, self-controlled, full of nobility and goodness and spiritually motivated. Non-Muslim women freak out because they feel so much shame deep down that they are so rotten and unclean! (Culturally-oriented Hijab-wearers don't threaten them much because they usually are rude, loud and without inner-purity, as well. There is a style of Hijab and a look of inner-purity which distinguishes the conscientious Muslimahs from all others. You can see Taqwa in a person's face!)

A Muslim woman, whose inner-purity is reflected in her behavior, is more beautiful than even the most sensually dressed non-Muslim. So many men I know have said this, both Muslim and non-Muslim! Men love to run after the easy women for "conquests" but they want to marry someone who is pure more than anything else in the world! Non-Muslim women are filled with their shame/rage and it makes them attack Islam and things Islamic with a venom more deadly than any Orientalist ever had.

So many Western women, despairing of the lifestyle in which women have been reduced to mere sex-objects for men, are leaving the immoral lifestyle for the Islamic one in huge numbers. It doesn't matter if they find good husbands or not. They're accepting Islam because it's real, because it speaks to them as women.

But still the non-Muslim women twist their hands in rage. Now, because there is a whole class of Muslim immigrants who grew up worshipping America and the West, associating its technological advancements with its values, the non-Muslim feminists have a useful new tool in

their fight against the one thing that shows them how wrong they are. These allies are the women with Muslim names who don't practice Islam, or who at the very most consider Islam to be a praying and fasting "religion" and little else.

These "Muslim" women, who may be victims of backward cultural traditions, think that the "Muslim" culture they came from is what Islam is about. Well, if that was true, I wouldn't like Islam either. I'm sure you'll agree that Muslims are sometimes the worst examples of what Islam categorizes as bad. But most of us are intelligent enough to realize that just because I have to pay a bribe to the policeman or if a woman has to abort her daughter in favor of a male child in the future-- it doesn't mean that Islam teaches that.

But there are a whole class of "Muslims" who can't seem to make such distinctions. They can't seem to understand where culture ends and Islam begins; they can't seem to let go of cultural values and adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an; they can't seem to wash away the taint of culture to expose the illumination of Islam. That would require a sacrifice on their part. (Oh my god! If they followed true Islam they might have to allow their daughters to marry people of a different ethnic group. Can't have that now!)

Already the feminists have destroyed Christianity and Judaism. Read that sentence over one time. Those two religions are now in the dust-bin of history, despite a cough from them every now and then, because they're effectively marginalized. The feminists, without even understanding that Islam is best for them, have brought secular "Muslim" women into their ranks to show the world that Islam should become as quaint and marginalized in society as Christianity is now.

Just on a side note, you know how Christian missionaries are roving all over the world and making thousands of new converts every day? They brag about it and Muslims complain about it because countries like Indonesia and Nigeria are in danger of becoming "Christian" countries in a few decades. But wait a minute! Who are the Christians converting and who is becoming Muslim?

The Christians are converting ignorant villagers, uneducated natives and people with Muslim names who don't know anything about Islam. While those who are accepting Islam are Jews and Christians- Westerners who are highly educated and have lived the secular way of life all their lives! The dumb become Christian while the educated become Muslim! There's some food for thought!

Back to the war of the women: How have the feminists used these "secular Muslim" women? They have convinced some "Muslim" women that the path to money and power in this country is through bastardizing your own soul. By conforming to the heathen wishes of the majority, you can achieve loads of worldly success. That if you're a working professional (in any field), that success can only be attained by ripping off the "oppressive weight" of your Hijab and donning a "powerful and sexy" power suit.

As many Hijab wearing, practicing Muslim sisters have commented, the Western feminist ideology only hurts those who are ready to sacrifice their Next Life for the success of the world. Our practicing, Hijab wearing sisters have proved time and time again that they can wear their Hijab and become teachers, doctors, nurses, accountants, principals, economists, professors, etc...

On the same level, without sacrificing their identity as Muslims; they are accepting the challenge of success while not simultaneously sacrificing their Islam.

But the feminists have their ready slaves: there are "Muslim" women who are brought by the feminists to their seminars and meetings to give the "Muslim" voice (read: token "Muslim" woman who will lash out against Islam and emerge as the Renaissance Woman Who Emerged From Behind The Veil.) Because these women had no real belief anyway, they almost always parrot, quite shamelessly, the views of the feminists. Then these "Muslim" women become filled with the idea of a crusade against "oppression" in their ethnic communities. An Arab secular "Muslimah" will work her agenda in the Arab community; an Indo-Pak in that community, etc...

It's easy for them to do this given that most of the Muslims who immigrated to this country are as of yet, unorganized and unaffiliated with any Masjid or organization. What's more, we shoot ourselves in the foot because some of our centers are run by people who are also secular in their outlook and just want to be important in the eyes of their associates. (Qur'an 9:107-108)

The feminist "Muslimahs" set up clinics with free counseling (toward non-Muslim values), abortion facilities, women's shelters and the like. (They get grants from universities, local governments and feminist organizations.) They say they're helping, but by promoting values in the minds of the women they serve which are unIslamic, they really cause harm in the long run.

They literally make it seem as if all you have to do is remove the Hijab, wear a mini-skirt and give up Islamic teachings then all your problems will be solved. When the root of the problem to begin with is almost always someone in their lives, maybe themselves or their husbands, were not following Islam to begin with! The cure can never be the poison.

The culturally-based Muslim Hijab wearers are the most vulnerable. They are usually, and you know this is true, uneducated village-style women who will listen to anything that sounds "sophisticated". Their Islam is usually a mixture of folklore, cultural traditions, superstitions and the like. They are the majority of women in the Muslim world. They're not bad or evil or anything, they're just completely unaware of real Islam. The feminists and the secular "Muslimahs" want to "liberate" them into the great world of today's used, worn-out, vulgar, "modern" Western woman.

The women who have either accepted Islam or who rediscovered it after living in a Muslim family are often quite alone. Those who love Allah by their own conviction and who seek to follow Islam truly are the enemies of the feminists, and by extension, of the Shaitan. The Shaitan calls people to forget Allah, to forget that they're responsible for their actions and to forget that this life is a short time of testing. He lures people with their animalistic desires and their cravings for the best in life. He whispers that there are no moral standards and that you can do as you please. Those who accept this call, whether with Muslim names or non-Muslim ones, descend to the level of intelligent beasts. (See Qur'an 7:16-17)

I have personally witnessed confrontations between those who wear Hijab by conviction and those secular "Muslimahs" who say it's not required. Every single time, the secular "Muslimahs" have utilized an insulting and nasty tone. Arguing with their worst faces. Of course, one of the signs of a hypocrite is that they'll get nasty in a disagreement, but then again, they don't accept the Hadith usually anyway, unless it seems to agree with their positions. (Qur'an 33:36)

The Muslim women who don't yet wear Hijab, but who desperately want to, sometimes may become afraid of the mean-spirit of the secular "Muslimahs." Nobody wants to be pointed out and nobody wants to be yelled at. I feel bad for these women. Their hearts and minds are tugging them towards true Islam but the nastiness of mean, shame/rage filled people make them afraid to wear Hijab. And sometimes the conscientious Hijab wearers don't always know when to be gentle and don't always encourage their sisters in a thoughtful, sisterly way. This as a result of always having to be on the defensive.

This war will go on for as long as there are women who believe in and love Allah. Many a Muslim man, whose own faith was weak, has fallen to it and pressured his wife or daughters not to wear Hijab. But in the end, the purity is the proof. A Muslimah in Hijab always looks purer than a woman in a mini- skirt. And a Muslimah in Hijab who practices Islam, will always be happier and free of shame, while a "liberated" woman has nothing but the empty standards of fashion magazines, western-style therapy, and empty and temporary "love" affairs to look forward to.

There is one incident that we'll never forget. We were once at a Muslim youth rally on the east coast. There were hundreds of Muslim college students in attendance. As we were moving through the crowd we came upon a group of Hijab wearing sisters. One of the sisters, a young woman of about 18 or 20 was stating, "One thing that scares the heck out of everyone is an articulate, well dressed, intelligent, and professional Muslim sister wearing Hijab". It's true. Because they present the alternative that every woman can attain. That is the real equality and the real standard of respect. (See Qur'an 33:35) The trouble is, so many people are so trapped in the sinful, immoral lifestyle of lies, substance abuse, irresponsibility and chaos, that their shame drives them merely further into rage.

We know of one mother, a Muslim woman, who sent her daughter to an Islamic school in Michigan. The daughter opened her eyes to Islam and wanted to wear her Hijab outside of school, in public, also. But her mother, who was a secular "Muslimah" forbade her to wear Hijab saying, "I won't have my daughter being better than me." May Allah help us and the Muslim women who strive to please their Maker and ultimate judge. Amin.

*** The authors would like to state that this article is not intended to disparage those Muslim sisters who do not take Hijab for whatever personal reason. It is understood that a sister will take Hijab when she is ready since there is no compulsion in Islam. At the same time, according to the Qur'an, Hijab is a fard and this fact cannot be overlooked. (Qur'an 33:59) Allah (swt) is the final judge. May he give us all courage.

The woman who can get by without her looks

It is late in the afternoon at the University of British Columbia and I have been cooped up in this library for hours, trying to compose a thesis for my American Literature term paper. Deciding that a break would help clear my thoughts, I leave the confines of the library to sit outside, only to hear a female voice come up from behind me to ask:

"Just how is it that you can live with yourself from day to day wearing that THING on your head and letting THEM control your life?"

Granted, it is an original line, a creative way to break the ice, yet why the code words? Only because I've been yelled at in public before for reasons connected to my appearance do I know what this woman means.

Code word # 1: "head thing"= 30inch X 30inch yellow and maroon flower patterned polyester blend, a piece of cloth I happen to be wearing to cover my head and neck;

Code word #2: "them"= all Muslim men who, sinister-like with their dark beards, heavy accents, and hidden Uzi's get a rush out of making women their life-long slaves.

Having deciphered all this quickly, I turn to face the stranger- a cross looking thing - I smile politely and signal to the empty chair beside me:

"Would you like to have a seat?"

HIJAB, the head to ankle covering that leaves only the face, hands and feet visible in public, has made me a very patient Muslim woman. The brave individuals who have mustered the courage to verbally express their opinions about my scarf haven't been the most trying. There are many who can't formulate words coherent enough to communicate their disapproval, and so, rely on simple gestures and sign language. Walking through downtown Vancouver, I've been fingered, spat on, scowled and cursed at.

Stepping into an elevator, I once traumatized a man who could do nothing but shuffle into the corner of the empty lift and mutter "What the ----? WHAT THE ----?!?!?!?" I have to take the agitation, the horror, and even the hatred in a stride.

But never will I be silent about it.

I can ignore the flagrant distortions no more than I can deny the fact that I am a Muslim living in Canada. Who I am and what popular culture thinks I am, has become a tug-of-war-competition of who can explain the status of the Muslim hijab-wearer convincingly. The media tells the public that I am a weak freak of nature who has been forced to subject herself to the tyranny of Muslim fundamentalists. Catherine Meckes assesses that wearing hijab is "some kind of twisted logic" because it entraps women like animals in a cage.

The Muslim dress code, she argues, is a form of hiding from society so that I don't have to deal with the realities of my "natural habitat." Ms. Meckes seems to be familiar enough with the Western culture to know that women are constantly objectified, used as commodities, tools to sell beer and boost sales for the next football season.

Sadly enough, though, she views women who wish to distance themselves from this commercial degradation with fear.

She finds women who cover "disturbing" and wished that she didn't have to confront them on their "home turf."

Pardon my feeble-mindedness, I've pinned my scarf on too tight and squeezed reason out of my brain....just WHO is running away from the truth? I have chosen to set myself apart from millions of Canadians, placed myself in the way of ridicule by a society that demands women to conform to certain ideals, I have refused to hide in the crowded university hallways and malls by looking the way Cindy, Cosmo, or Calvin Klein think I should - all because I'm a spineless caged rodent?!?!

I have rejected the hip-hugging jeans, the breast-enhancing halter tops, the poofy hair and made-up face, and accepted hijab so that I can be appreciated for my intellect and personality rather than my figure or fashion sense. When I face a classmate or colleague I can be confident that my body is not being scrutinized, my bra-strap or pantyline visible. I have repudiated the perverted values of our society by choosing to assert myself only through my mind. I understand my "natural habitat" ! very well thank you.

I fully comprehend the distorted image of the "ideal woman," but the difference between me and the Catherine Meckes's of the world is that I am NOT afraid to defy those standards. Islam liberated me from THAT prison.

Perhaps hijab is so misunderstood because it is prescribed by a religion that makes a bold and shocking statement: Women are precious creatures who have the right to be valued for who they are, and not what they can juggle.

When I decided to start wearing hijab, my mother pulled me aside and posed this question: "If you found a diamond that was exquisite in every way, would you show it to all your friends, let them gawk at its dazzle, caress it, or would you covet the stone and protect it by preserving its natural splendor?"

Once you bear something for all to see, the second you display something for its beauty, you objectify it and diminish its value. Because its worth is built on its ability to attract, when it no longer elicits awe from onlookers it becomes worthless. Is it a wonder that neck lines keep plunging every year?- more cleavage means women won't bore oglers, the commercial industries, and the rest of society for awhile. But when will those skirts quit shortening?? For how long will women remain sex objects??

Islam tells us that every woman is a jewel and when she respects herself enough to preserve her beauty for herself and her loved ones, she rejects being objectified by a society which does NOT value her.

Only the dearest people in my life know me without hijab because they love me enough to value ALL of me. John and Jane Doe don't love me or care for me, so why must I meet their notions of an "ideal woman" if they are meaningless to me?

It is the desire to please popular culture that makes 15 year old girls want to fit into Kate Moss's jeans by sticking their fingers down their throats and wretching (throwing up) three times a day. It is the unattainable Perfect-Body society has conjured, that make "fat", "ugly" girls splatter themselves on sidewalks because they just are "not thin and pretty enough". AND THEY TELL ME ISLAM OPPRESSES WOMEN??

I am thankful that I am not suicidal or psychologically unbalanced because I can't meet the demands of my culture. I am fortunate that my concerns and goals in life lie on a higher plane than the dictates of a pretty fashion industry. I am quite content with my religion, for it values my power to achieve great things through my mind, not through my body.

Whether I am physically beautiful or not, you have no clue. Perhaps this fact is disturbing for Catherine Meckes and the library stranger because they are not ready to meet a woman who can get by without her looks. Then again, perhaps it is because they are just ignorant of the (WHAT IS IT?) facts. Either way, I don't need anyone's sympathy, I am not really that scary, and your anger does me no harm.

I am not under duress, or a male-worshipping female captive from the barbarous Arabian deserts.

I'VE BEEN LIBERATED!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Agonies Of Muslims In Veils, Nigeria

By Kayode Ogunbumi, THE GUARDIAN, Nigeria, Sunday, 03 October 1999

CLOTHED in a flowing robe, with her head demurely covered with a scarf, Miss Hajarat Usman thought she was an epitome of what a lady should dress like. So she went in to meet the panel of interviewers. But there she sensed *"some undercurrents of discomfort with the way I dressed, and open hostility from one or two"*.

She recalled steeling her nerves to reply to the questions, put to her, as best as she could, following which she was rewarded with glances of admiration from the panelists. *"I could see they were impressed by my performance. This was later confirmed when the leader of the panel told me after the interview that I was the best candidate they had interviewed that day and that I would be best for the job. He however wanted to know if I intended to dress the way I was to the bank if employed"*.

Miss Usman replied in the affirmative. She was told to go and await the bank's reply. She knew she had somehow missed the job, which was true, for the bank never got in touch with her.

Two years after, she was still waiting for the letter she knew will never come. She traces the missing of the job to her *"resolve to dress in a way compatible to my Islamic faith"*.

Miss Usman holds a **Bachelor of Science degree in Banking and Finance** from the University of Jos, Jos, and was **the best graduating student of her class**. She is from Osogbo in Osun State.

Minutes before the interview was to take off, an official of the Bank had walked up to her to inquire if she was to be interviewed by the panel.

"I said yes, happy in the belief that a friendship with the man could help eventually," she recalled. *"I was therefore stunned when he told me I would not be interviewed because of the way I dressed. And where I was interviewed I should not expect to be employed."*

Miss usman said, in a tone of bitter resignation, that she had learnt the society has little regard for upright people, *"those employers would rather I come to work exposing half my body to them"*.

She also made another observation. Hers was just another in a rising number of Moslem women discriminated against in the work place because of the way they dress. *"Maybe, we should actually form an association to fight our case,"* she joked.

Investigations by The Guardian On Sunday revealed that some companies are averse to employing women dressed up in hijab, - the flowing robe which covers the whole of the body and the head, leaving only the face and the hands.

Mr. Aina Olukolun, the personnel manager of an insurance company in Lagos, told The Guardian On Sunday that because Insurance Salespeople have to go out to meet people, he *"would not want to include a covered-up woman in my team"*.

How about office duties, like in administration and accounts. He said there might be little problem there, *"Though I don't think we would employ such women."*

An employment consultant in Lagos, said appropriate dressing is a major requirement for getting employed. But he was quick to add that the definition of what constitutes appropriate dressing is flexible. *"A lady in mini-skirts might fail an interview. Then she might not, depending on the organisation. But I think most companies are likely to frown at women who covered themselves in clothes. I think the odds against such women are huge"*.

Perception is indeed a major reason for the troubles of hijab-wearing ladies. Mr. Bade Ologun, a senior executive in an advertising agency in Lagos said a number of otherwise brilliant applicants had failed to get their career started because of their Islamic mode of dressing. *"You see, advertising thrives on dynamism and the readiness to be creative. Such women might be seen as being old-fashioned and are incapable of being creative"*.

Most Muslim women say they feel they are required to satisfy more conditions than the rest of people - renounce their belief and their being, as Miss Mujidat Oni, another "victim", puts it. A **graduate of Business Administration** from the polytechnic, Ibadan, she had been in job seeking for the past four years. *"I had high hopes of getting a good job after I finished my National Service, Now, I am almost resigned the matter to fate"*

Miss Oni had somehow lowered her expectation, all she wants now is *"a job, even a teaching job, so I can start applying myself. All my friends have ended up as teachers, so I might as well join them;"* she said.

Though teaching is usually seen as the 'last option', due to low wages associated with it, getting a teaching job could also be demanding, as another lady, Munirat Yusu testified. A **graduate of English Language from University of Ibadan**, she had been directed to the headmaster of a private Secondary school at Ojodu, a suburb of Lagos. *"Immediately I met her, the woman could not hide her displeasure with the way I dressed. After reading the recommendation I brought with me from her friend, she was sorry that the students would not like the way I dressed. She said this will affect them academically, as I would not be an effective teacher. I walked away"*.

As it happened, it is not always so easy to walk away from the troubles associated with the dressing.

President of the Malaria Care Association of Nigeria (MCAN) and Islamic Study Group of Nigeria (ISGON), Professor Abdulkereem Hussein, told The Guardian On Sunday that he was recently approached by **two ladies who told him they have been asked to change their mode of dressing or risk being sacked** by the Bank they work for. *"One of them had resigned while the other is still fighting it out"*, he said.

Hussein said it is unfortunate that most organisations have taken to persecution in the name of enforcing corporate dressing culture. *"God has directed us on how to live in a community. Should people dress to satisfy owners of business or their God?"*, he asked. *"If a Muslim woman opens her legs or hair for public admiration, she has gone against the wishes of God. The same way, if a well-brought up Christian girl should dress with her hair uncovered, she has gone against the teaching of Jesus and God"*. (Hussein cited 1 Corinthians, Chapter 11, Vs. 6) in the Holy Bible

and Chapter 24, Vs. 31 in the Holy Koran to back up his argument that both Islam and Christianity support women covering up their hair.

Beyond this, he said, it is **undemocratic to insist on a certain dressing code for people**. *"Are we more corporate or advanced than Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia?"*, he queried, wondering why covering one's head should be frowned on. *"Under military rule, people can be forced to do things. Now, under democracy, people should be free to do what will create harmony for the individual and the society. Certainly, to force a woman to expose her hair is against her fundamental rights and should not be allowed."*

He called on Christian and Muslim organisations to come together *"to protect the interest of those who want to follow the rules of God so that they are not persecuted by the society."*

Tug of War: Decisions By A Muslim Hijabi Woman

By Rasha El-Haggan, English Major at University of Maryland Baltimore County (Copyrighted 1997) Visit Rasha's beautiful website at <http://www.gl.umbc.edu/~relhag1>

I felt a chill on my neck. A chill I had not felt for a long time. It made my stomach flip. My hands involuntarily went to the back of my neck. I started to panic as my hands touched my hair. In the background, I could hear Brett's laughter and boyish giggle. Turning around, I saw my whole class, sitting, a sea of faces looking at me. My eyes sought out Brett sitting right behind me. He was supposedly engaged in a conversation with Seth, his friend. I knew he was pretending, trying to make me think it was not he who pushed my scarf over my head, showing my hair and neck. Hot tears invaded my face, freely running down my cheeks. It was the one moment where I felt the true violation upon my body by a stranger. I slowly put my scarf in place, feeling violated and raped of my dignity.

I felt anger rise within me, coloring my cheeks to a bright red. My heart beat ten times faster and my right hand slowly formed a fist. Palms wet with frustration, I slammed it into his face.

I cared for nothing.

I simply did not care if school policy forbade physical retaliation. I did not think of the consequences of perhaps Brett retaliating back and hitting me, or of what my eighth grade Health teacher, who was lecturing at the time, would do. I only felt threatened and a natural, almost animal instinct, arose in me.

My head scarf was, by no means, a little thing. It was my livelihood, what I stood for. My mom had always instilled in my sister and I the importance of the Hijab, the head covering. "A woman," she said, "was a precious entity in herself that must be protected." We grew up accepting and liking the fact that once we reach puberty, we must adopt the Hijab. We were taught that a woman's beauty is for no one but herself, and later on, her husband. Any man who was not my Mihrim, my protector (Mihrim is Arabic for the men whom I can't marry, such as my father, my brother, my uncle, my father in law, and later on my husband), could never see my hair or my body, save my face and hands. He can neither touch me, shake my hands, nor approach me in a way that would violate my private space. That was a right for only my family. In fact, the thought that some day a man, my husband, who was not of my immediate family, would see me without my scarf was a very uncomfortable thought. It was, and still is hard for me to think that I would have to get used to the idea of taking my Hijab off in front of my future husband after wearing it for close to 11 years. Imagine now how I felt when Brett stripped away the right for me to chose.

I was under the illusion of being safe with my Hijab, of feeling protected from curious looks. I thought I was free from ugly sexual looks or degrading stares. Little did I know that the Hijab itself attracted unwanted stares and vicious curiosities, stares of a different kind. Indeed I was as free as a bird in the vast blue sky is from a hunter.

Brett had caught me in a cage enamored with the bars of caution.

In a way, my freedom and sense of safety were brutally taken away from me. Now, six years later, I always make a point of tightening my Hijab around my face. I put pins everywhere in my scarf, ensuring its safe position.

Everyday, from that day forth, whenever I go home, after a long day at school, my neck feels the bruise made by the tightening of the pin holding the Hijab together. I started to get safety pins instead of regular ones since they were less likely to give in to a tug or a pull. I started wearing cotton scarves because they were less slippery.

Instead of letting my hair free and loose under my scarf, I put it in a tight bun at the nape of my neck to prevent anyone a full view of my hair if they decided to pull it off my head. But why? Why should I have to do this?

That year, eighth grade, was perhaps the worst year of my life. We had just moved to Gaithersburg. My dad had liked the area and the schools were supposed to be good, especially Montgomery Intermediate School. It was my first time to go to school here in the US. In the beginning, most of the curious kids would come up to me and ask me why I wore that "thing," as they called it, on my head. I did not mind their questions. In fact, I took pride in answering them. I felt proud of what I stood for and what I believed in. Most of them understood my religion and my reasons for wearing the Hijab.

There were some, however, that did not understand. They'd ask degrading questions such as, "Are you bald under there?" pointing to my scarf. Or they would spread rumors about how I had spiders in my hair-my favorite rumor as it happened to be. Their questions hurt me. They tore at my self confidence, however, I did not know how to respond back. Fortunately, no one dared touch my scarf. They somehow knew that my Hijab was sacred ground. They only verbally, but never physically abused me. They knew, deep inside them, that touching my Hijab was a huge mishap. You just did not go around pulling people's pants down.

When Brett pulled my scarf, I must admit, I felt it was a joint effort by the whole class. To me it was not just Brett who violated my private space, it was the class as well because they looked at my revealed hair. Therefore, when I punched Brett, it was as if I punched them all, urging them to look away. Their stares of disbelief only added salt to the bloody wound. However, later, when the teacher asked Brett and I to stay after class, every one of my classmates, as they left the room, scorned Brett's actions. "You shouldn't have done that," "How could you Brett?" "For God's sake, you didn't have to be such a child!" It made me feel guilty because I had thought they would laugh and scorn me, instead, I felt their support like a soft pillow, cushioning the blow.

Thinking back now, many questions arise within me. Was my response justified? Was Brett's actions deserving of my violent reaction? My sophomore English High School teacher once wrote to me in a side margin comment on a previous paper that I wrote, "Did your violence solve the problem?" In a simple answer, Yes. It solved the problem delightfully. No one bothered me ever again. In fact, all the rumors and degrading comments ceased. I was free of harassment the whole year through. My punching him somehow gave me the satisfaction of knowing I can fight back for myself.

However, does the ends justify the means? By punching Brett, did I accomplish what I want? Did I regain my freedom? No, I did not. I still feel nervous whenever a guy comes too close. I still use safety pins, cotton scarves, and tight knots whenever I go out. My punch did not, under any circumstances, return to me the feeling of safety.

The honor which the Hijab provided me with was taken away the moment Brett touched my scarf. I had lost it and could never regain it back. When I cried then, my tears were full of shame. Now they are full of loss.

For what it was worth, my violence did not give me back my cradle of safety. Therefore, can I really say I was justified? Is the rape victim justified if she kills her rapist? Is the mother justified if she takes revenge on her daughter's killer? Is the rule of an eye for an eye justifiable or is it a sign of anarchy? After all, was I any better than he? He violated me physically and I retaliated by doing the same. I have no answers to these questions, only a passing remorse and a never ending confusion.

I remember that day, when I got back from school, my face was stained with tears. My dad had gotten a phone call from my teacher about the incident. He was angry for many reasons. He was angry about the transgression upon my religious honor. Religiously, in Islam, a woman wearing the scarf was untouchable, almost sacred. People looked upon her with high respect and a sense of honor. He understood how the sense of being "untouchable" was taken away from me. Yet, he was also angry at me as well. "Do you know what he could have done to you??" he said, waving his angry finger in my face. "For God's sake, he could have really hurt you." Yes, he could have given me a bloody nose. He could have damaged my face or even pulled my scarf off again. But what was I to do? Were we supposed to just kiss and make up? I had to fight for my rights, it's what my beliefs teach me. Yet it also teaches me to be patient. My dad had always said "Patience is part of our Iman, faith." Yet wasn't I patient enough with their year-long treatment of me? I couldn't take it much longer. It seemed that Brett cut the line when he touched my Hijab.

On a more moralistic view, I wonder now if I could have handled things differently. Perhaps if I'd talked to him instead of hitting him, I would have gotten the same results without the violence. However, that somehow seems artificial to me. Had he initially come to me and asked me why I wore the scarf, I would have gladly answered him, but the way in which he acted towards me, by pulling my scarf off, needed an immediate, quick response. Even then, would talking to him instead of punching him mean that others could do the same thing, thinking I can't fight for my rights? In that aspect, my punch served its purpose. If I had acted "civil," then I'd be sitting and talking to every student in the eighth grade every time one of them decided to pull off my scarf. And why should I have to? Why should I have to explain my dress to anyone? I did not feel at the time that I needed to explain anything to him. He over stepped his bounds first, I seconded that. Sometimes, I still feel that way. I feel that had he come to me in peace, I would have went to him in peace. But he did not.

In all fairness, my thoughts drift off, trying to explain the reasons behind this boy's actions. After all, he was a boy, a mere 13 year old child who knew little, if anything, about normal girls, much less Hijabi ones. I sometimes think perhaps he was curious about my hair. What color it was. If it was soft, curly, straight, or ragged. Or maybe he wanted to know if I indeed did have spider nests growing underneath my scarf.

I lean towards that line of reasoning day by day because it's never happened again after that. The kids grew out of junior high, into high school, and then into college. Their mentality evolved as well as their maturity. Their curiosities were tamed to deal with society's diversity. At last I felt the childhood fascination that would push the "Brett"-like people into demeaning others, equate itself with maturity. I also matured, knowing fully well to be careful with my reactions, yet still a big portion of me does not regret my response.

It saddens me now to know that I solved the clash between the maturity of religious obligations and the immaturity of childhood curiosity with immediate violence. It was a tug of war between actions and reactions and, in my case, Brett and I were the rope. He was curiosity and I was early maturity. However, neither of us won because our acts of violence, on both our sides, cut the rope right in the middle.

You Don't Have to Wear That in Canada - The Hijab Experience of Canadian Muslim Women

by Katherine Bullock, March-April 1998 issue of Islamic Horizons magazine, a publication of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Katherine Bullock, a revert to Islam since 1994, was a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto when this article was published.

The furor over the expulsion in 1995 of Quebec high school students who refused to remove their head scarves, with some people declaring the Hijab might not be considered proper “Canadian” dress, demonstrates that the West has not yet transcended the negative stereotype of the oppressed, veiled Muslim woman which has generated during the period of Western colonization of the Middle East.

Indeed Muslim women in the West are still discriminated against based upon these myths. The aim of this paper is to bring the perspective of some Muslim women who cover willingly into the debate over Hijab.

THEY SAY, ‘YOU DON'T HAVE TO WEAR THAT IN CANADA’

Muslim women in Hijab are regularly told by Canadians “This is Canada. You're free here. You don't have to wear that thing on you head.”

Nur, a university student, discovered one day that this view of Hijab can lead people to be quite hostile. At university one day, a woman angrily approached her, asking why Nur was dressed like that, bringing herself so much attention, and bringing “backwardness” to Canada, when feminists had worked so hard for the cause of women for the last twenty years.

THE HIJAB IS A COMMANDMENT FROM ALLAH

When asked to explain why they covered, the women I interviewed said they believed that in the Quran Allah commanded women to cover their hair, and that Prophetic statements backed that up. For them, Hijab symbolizes, not oppression or terrorism, as it does in mainstream Western discourse, but “purity,” “modesty,” a “woman's Islamic identity,” and “obedience, or submission to God and a testament that you're Muslim.” Halima, a convert to Islam, adds that Hijab symbolizes “the woman's power to take back her own dignity and her own sexuality.”

HIJAB: NOT THE RESULT OF AN ‘ANTI-WOMAN’ INTERPRETATION

The women I interviewed are aware of feminist arguments that they are being duped by an anti-woman interpretation of the Quran. However, they reject this suggestion, and in so doing demonstrate they do not follow Quranic verses blindly.

They have considered various interpretations of the Quran, and chosen that which made most sense to them. They are not, as conventional wisdom in the West suggests, duped women following the dictates of men.

They all believed that the Quranic verse asking women to cover their hair is straightforward.

Nadia captures the women's position well: "I have to say that when I read the Ayah (verse) that says take your headdress and put it over your bosom (Quran 4:30-31), it's pretty clear to me that there is an assumption that you're wearing a head dress, and that's part of the Islamic dress.

I mean why didn't He [Allah] just say 'wear a high neck collar?' {laughs} You know, if it was your bosom that was the important thing then why wasn't there more stress on, um, you know put a button in the top of your shirt, or something, I dunno. Or make sure your bosom is covered, or um, that kind of thing."

Raneem, a convert to Islam, added even if Hijab was just a cultural thing, "it's a good thing to do."

WHY DO MUSLIM WOMEN WEAR HIJAB AND NOT THE MEN?

Westerners are often puzzled to see Muslim women covering their bodies more than Muslim men do, and see that as a proof of the woman's inferior status.

Islam lays out a dress code for both male and female believers, but the requirements for covering are different: a man is to cover from navel to knee, and wear opaque, loose clothing (tight jeans are out of the question); women cover more, everything but face and hands.

All of the women I interviewed believe that these differences are due to inherent differences between men and women.

They say that men are more easily turned on sexually than are women. The point to covering is not that sexual attraction is bad, only that it should be expressed between a husband and wife inside the privacy of the home.

A public space free of sexual tensions is seen as a more harmonious and peaceful place for human beings, men and women, to interact, do business, and build a healthy civilization.

EVEN MANY NON-MUSLIM MEN SEEM TO RESPECT HIJAB

These women see Hijab as a benefit to society, as a protection for women, and as a source of inner peace.

Several women, especially converts who started covering in their twenties, felt men, even non-Muslim men, approached them more respectfully, did not try to flirt with them or make "leering" comments, and treated them as 'persons' not 'sex-objects.'

Halima also pointed out that male-female interactions were based on more than just the clothes: Hijab is a mode of decorous behavior as well, “when you're covered, you're not going to be a flirtatious person.”

WOMEN SHOULD CARE HOW THEIR DRESS AFFECTS MEN

My interviewees reject the feminist argument that women should not care how their dress affects men.

They reply that Muslim women and men are brothers and sisters in faith, and find nothing wrong in helping men practice their faith better.

As Zainab, a convert to Islam, said: “women have been exploited so much, and men make such silly fools of themselves over women, that I really think it's a good thing for the men, that women wear Hijab. Why encourage jealousy or envy or anything like that? Why encourage the negative emotions?”

MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES NOT A SIGN OF INEQUALITY

Many feminists argue that to believe in male-female differences is to accede to women's oppression, because it is these differences which have been used to stop women from realizing their potentials.

The Muslim women in the survey do not agree that believing in male-female differences is to believe women and men are unequal.

They all believed that men and women are different, and that women and men are equal in Islam. For these women, the principal definition of equality is how human beings are in relation to Allah.

The Quran unequivocally states that men and women are equal in the eyes of Allah. Men and women were created from a single soul, and are both the trustees of Allah on earth (Quran 2:30), individually responsible and accountable for their actions.

However, these women do not believe that male-female differences include traditional western notions of men being more rational or intelligent than women.

In addition, the women were not of the opinion that a woman's childbearing nature meant she could not be in the work force, and nor did they believe that a man's duty to support his family financially meant that he should not do household chores.

The women referred back to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), who used to mend his clothes, sweep his house, and perform other chores.

The view that men and women have inherent differences is a source of the conflicting understanding of women's position in Islam between the West and my interviewees.

EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IS NOT SAMENESS

They argue that equality does not have to mean sameness, and criticize western presumptions that if men and women are not doing something in an identical manner they must be unequal.

Nor do the women believe that Hijab hinders their freedom, rather Hijab is seen as a device to facilitate Muslim women's movements outside the home.

Nadia expresses the sentiment well: "I kinda see [Hijab] the opposite way [from being a sign of constraint]. I kinda think that if you've covered yourself Islamically, then there wouldn't be a reason for you to stay home, I mean that was the whole point, that you've removed the attention to yourself, so now you're out there to do your business, based on who you are, I mean what you have to say and what you're going to contribute and not what you look like, and that kind of thing."

The women argue that the idea that Hijab means women should not go outside is contradicted by the Sunnah of the Prophet: during his lifetime women were very actively involved in the community, in business, in fighting wars, in scholarship and so on.

HIJAB GIVES WOMEN SELF-ESTEEM

An aspect of Hijab that came through strongly in the interviews was how wearing Hijab gives these women sources of inner strength and a high level of confidence and self-esteem.

For example, men and women learn from an early age that women (all of them) are beautiful, and this is the reason they cover. That message is good for women's self-esteem, as well as for the way men think about women.

The message compares favorable to that of the West where we see anorexia and bulimia on the increase as young women attempt to reach an unattainable ideal of female beauty.

HIJAB GIVES WOMEN INNER PEACE

Many women stressed how comfortable they felt wearing Hijab, how it made them feel good about themselves, and brought them a feeling of inner "peace".

Ellen, a convert to Islam, stresses that in Hijab she feels "like I am doing something to please Allah, you know....it makes you feel good about yourself. You feel different in a good way, because you're not exposing yourself and you know, you're not exposed to many things like you would be if you're not covering."

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN WHO WEAR HIJAB

Muslim women in the West who cover suffer daily indignities from the people around them because of the way they dress.

The Western image that they are oppressed, or represent a terrorist religion makes it difficult for them to be accepted easily by the Canadian community.

Because Islam is not well understood in the West, some converts also have problems with their families, friends and colleagues about becoming Muslim and about wearing Hijab.

Other women face opposition from their own (Muslim) families as well, in their decision to cover. This is because in many Muslim countries, the West has been seen as the model to imitate in order to 'progress,' and they tried to shed Islam and all that was associated with it.

Hijab is associated with something 'backward,' 'low-class' people do, or as something only old women do. Many see Hijab as ugly and as reducing the chances for a young woman to get married. Muslims who grow up in Canada often object to Hijab, taking on the Western perception of the meaning of Hijab. Several of the women (born Muslim) in this study had battled families in order to cover.

SOME POSITIVE REACTIONS TO HIJAB

And yet, many of the women I interviewed stressed that overall they do not get too many hostile reactions and some of them also experience positive reactions from non-Muslims.

They think that Toronto (Canada) is so multicultural that people are used to seeing all different kinds of dress.

BRINGING UP THE HIJAB QUESTION WHEN IT'S NOT RELEVANT

Sometimes Muslim women have problems with people in situations where their identity is really irrelevant to the situation at hand. Zainab has been a patient in a hospital and had her doctor tell her she should not have embraced Islam because she became a "second class citizen."

He asked her "don't you know how badly the women are treated in Islam?"

Rania, who is a doctor, finds sometimes patients will interrupt their visit to her to ask her "Where is she from?" Or why is she "dressed like that?" Rania said that she finds that "there's the time to explain and then there's the time to just give a brief answer and go on to other things...I mean you may look like a Muslim, but you have a job to do, and let's talk about why you're here, and I'm the doctor and you're the patient okay?"

THE PRESSURE TO 'LOOK CANADIAN'

Given these kinds of negative reactions to Hijab, it is not surprising that many Muslims try to hide their Islamic identity. The pressure for Muslims to assimilate to the ways of the West is great.

Safiyah is under such pressure from her husband to “look Canadian”. He did not seem to mind that she wore Hijab in Algeria, but in their first six months in Canada, so many people stared at them, that he felt uncomfortable with her in Hijab.

Although the staring didn't bother Safiyah, her husband has successfully pressured her to stop covering.

The women I interviewed referred to Canada as a multicultural and multi faith society in a positive way, and appreciate the liberty and protection Canadian law gave them to practice their religion as any other group can.

They thought as does Halima: “if Canada boasts you can practice your religious freedom of thought and beliefs, if a woman believes she should wear her Hijab why shouldn't she? She's not hurting anybody, I mean if people can go down Yonge street [a popular Toronto haunt] almost naked, why should her putting a scarf on her head bother people, even for that matter wearing a veil on face, why should that upset somebody?”

HIJAB IS A RESPECTABLE THING

Muslim women want non-Muslims to think that Hijab is a respectable thing, not degrading or “oppressive.”

They like to be seen just as an ordinary person who deserves to be respected. Raneem said, “Just take me as I am you know, like they should accept me for who I am, not for the way I look and that goes for everybody.”

Halima was clear in her views. She said, “I would like them to respect our choice and not exclude women who wear Hijab from certain things [like] in Quebec [...] I mean this is truly oppression, they say the woman is oppressed because she's wearing the Hijab, but the true oppression is preventing somebody from going to school because they have a scarf on their head, the larger issue is we'd like everybody to know about Islam so more people would accept it.”

Sadia said her Hijab should tell others, “That I'm a Muslim, so I want them to know that, I'm doing this because I'm obeying Allah, and it's a free country and I can do what I want. And that I don't care if I'm accepted by them or not, I'm going to do it anyway.”

Object of Despair

by Fahim Firfiray (Abu Omar)

**Emma is a lawyer
And so is Aisha too
Colleagues going into court
At circa half past two**

**Its 1 O'clock right now
They grab a bite before the trial
They chat about this and that
Conversing with a smile**

**Aisha is in full hijab
With a loose all over suit
Emma's in her business wear
With accessories taboot**

**Emma's really quite bemused
At Aisha's godly ways
She looks Aisha in the eyes
And very firmly says**

**You're a smart girl Aisha
Why do you wear that across your hair?
Subjugated by "man"-kind
An object of despair**

**Take it off my sister
Let your banner be unfurled
Don't blindly follow all around
DECLARE YOUR FREEDOM TO THE WORLD**

**Aisha is amazed
But not the least bit shy
She bravely puts her milk shake down
And gives Emma the reply**

**My dear sister Emma,
Why do you dress the way you do?
The skirt you're wearing round your waist,
Is it really you?**

**Now that we've sat down,
I see you tug it across your thighs,
Do you feel ashamed?
Aware of prying eyes?**

I see the way you're sitting,
Both legs joined at the knees,
Who forces you to sit like that?
Do you feel at ease?

I'll tell you who obliges you,
To dress the way you do,
Gucci, Klein and St. Laurent,
All have designs on you!

In the main, it's men my friend,
Who dictate the whims of fashion,
Generating all the garb,
To incite the basest passion

"Sex Sells" there is no doubt,
But who buys with such great haste,
The answer is the likes of you,
Because they want to be embraced.....

They want to be accepted,
On a level playing field
Sure, with brain and intellect
But with body parts revealed

Intelligence and reason
Are useful by and by
But if you want to make a mark
Stay appealing to the eye

You claim your skirt is office like
A business dress of sorts
Would we not laugh at Tony Blair
If he turned up in shorts?

His could be the poshest pants
Pinstripe from Saville Rowe
But walking round like that my friend
He'd really have to go

Why do you douse yourself with creams
To make your skin so milky?
Why do rip off all your hair
To keep your body silky?

A simple shower's all you need
To stay respectable and clean
The time and money that you spend
Is really quite obscene

**Why do you wake up at dawn,
To apply a firm foundation,
Topped with make up and the like,
In one chaotic combination?**

**And if you should have to leave the house
Devoid of this routine
Why do you feel so insecure
That you should not be seen?**

**Be free my sister Emma
Escape from your deep mire
Don hijab today my friend
And all Islam's attire**

**Avoid all those sickly stares
Or whistles from afar
Walk down the street with dignity
Take pride in who you are**

**Strength lies in anonymity
Be a shadow in the crowd
Until you speak and interact
When your voice will carry loud**

**You're a smart girl Emma
Wear this across your hair
Don't be subjugated by "man"-kind
An object of despair**

**To use your very words my friend
Let your banner be unfurled
Don't blindly follow all around
DECLARE YOUR FREEDOM TO THE WORLD**

The Freedom to Wear A Veil

by four Danish women, *Tania Brogaard, Gry Helene Herbener, Anne Kristine Jakobsen, Lene Wittrup Jensen, Uta Kreie Larsen*. Published in the Danish Magazine, "The Torch" or "Faklen" <http://www.faklen.dk>

That the veiled Muslim woman by all means should be regarded as oppressed is a **myth that ought to be killed**. Many people are scandalized by the veil, but only few seek an explanation from the Muslim woman herself; her voice is often overheard in this matter. If she is asked, on the other hand, **the veil represents freedom and dignity**.

O Prophet! say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they let down upon them their over-garments; this will be more proper, that they may be known, and thus they will not be given trouble; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (Sura 33, 59)

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons...(Sura 24, 30-31)

In the Koran, the term **hijab** is used of the attire of the Muslim woman as a whole, but also includes **the way she lives and acts**. In everyday language it often only refers to the veil or scarf itself which must cover the head and chest.

This is, so to speak, the exterior sign of the way of life of the Muslim woman, but you also speak of having *hijab* in **ears, tongue and heart**. Here there is no reference to a specific veil, but to a **suitable behaviour** in accordance with the precepts of Islam.

This prevents her from **hearing, speaking or feeling negative things** of other people.

Hijab is derived from the Arabic word *hajaba*, which means to **conceal or to prevent from being seen**. The garb must be loose and opaque and must be worn, whenever the women either leaves the house, or whenever male visitors not belonging to the family are received. Only the hands and face may, according to the prophet Mohammed, be visible, but this point is rather controversial. Some also choose to cover these parts of the body, but more often than not this is the result of the **personal choice** of the individual woman.

THE VEIL IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A BURDEN

We know the veil from the antique Hellas, for instance, where the established women of society had the right to wear one, while the prostitute and the female slave had to go about bare-headed and thus unprotected against being accosted. Throughout History, **noblewomen** have worn veils when walking about among the lower classes, or they have hidden their faces behind fans.

The **bridal veil and the nun's habit** had a similar purpose. In the New Testament, in his first letter to the Corinthians Paul states that during prayer, women should cover their head (11, 5-6).

Nowadays, some people are astonished daily by seeing women wearing veils. Most have an idea that the veil is oppressive, and many protest loudly and publicly on behalf of these women.

One thing that these officious persons have in common is usually that they have never found it necessary to **ask the women themselves**, not to speak of making themselves acquainted with the religious and cultural background of the veil. Even so, they are busy imposing on others their personal opinions as to what is oppressive.

If one asks the women behind the veils, the story is quite different.

The **orthodox Muslim woman** does not perceive the veil as inhibiting or oppressive. Quite the contrary - the veil guarantees her the **full respect** of the surroundings, and thus must be considered a **privilege** rather than a burden.

The dignity of the wife or the daughters, or the **dignity** of any Muslim woman, for that matter, must be respected and protected, writes Momina Abdullah on the Internet.

Many Danes entertain the erroneous notion that the veil represents a compulsion from the husband and the religion. But women wearing veils, on the other hand, normally **radiate devotion** towards their religion. **They have chosen the veil** as a clear demonstration of their Muslim identity.

Forcing anyone to do something against their own will is against Islam. This point is stressed by all the women we have spoken to. **There is no demand of compulsion in the Koran.** On the other hand, every human being should see it as a religious duty to act out of a clean heart.

Of course there may be families where the **woman is forced**, for instance to stay at home. But that **does not imply that doing so is Islam**, the sisters Batool, of 21 years, and Ayisha, of 19, concord. **There are oppressed women in all cultures, Danish or Muslim.** And as in all other situations it is important to consider each particular case for itself instead of generalizing. For a woman is not oppressed unless *she* feels it that way.

THE VEIL GIVES CONFIDENCE AND FREEDOM

The scarf contributes to creating equality between man and woman. He does not see her only as a **sex symbol**, says Batool. When a man looks at a woman wearing a scarf it is because he is interested in her **personality** and the way she thinks instead of her appearance, her sister complements. A woman who covers herself is hiding her sexual charm, and yet allows her womanliness to remain visible, writes Mominah Abdullah.

Islam does not attempt, as some people erroneously think, to exclude sexuality. It is canalized in its full strength into the marital relationship, and is not »flaunted« in other contexts. *Hijab* therefore guarantees the integrity of the Muslim woman.

The clothes must not be tight so that the forms show. In this way, we avoid problems like **sexual harassment and rape**. When we wear these clothes, we feel secure. We are more protected, Ayisha thinks.

And then a man does not stare at other women than his wife, emphasizes Batool. She elaborates on the relationship between a man and a veiled woman: When a woman covers her beauty, the

man does not look at her as a woman, but as a fellow human being. Instead, he concentrates upon her intellect. Bergliot Emina, a Norwegian convert, also emphasizes: **You cover your head and chest, but not your brains.**

For Ayisha, the notion of the oppressed Muslim housewife is a myth. In Islam, the **husband has a duty to maintain his family.** It is therefore a matter of course that he must work. But, of course, the woman may also work. It is not so that she cannot go out and get an education or a job. But she is allowed to sit at home, it is not her duty to maintain the family.

Emina adds examples of professional women in Muslim countries: About 60% are illiterate in Egypt, but **I have met more female professors in Egypt and Jordan than in Denmark.**

Batool adds: Islam encourages everybody, both the man and the woman, to go out and **read and study.** Bergliot Emina even characterizes it as a Muslim duty to seek knowledge.

She continues: In many ways, Muslim women have more freedom than women in the West. First of all, the veil has meant that I can walk around **without being judged by my appearance.** Secondly, the women are **equally respected and appreciated** whether they choose to be housewives or professional women.

For the Muslim woman, the **veil therefore represents freedom.** Only this freedom has another character and expresses itself in another way than that of the West. **But must the women of the West be the only ones to define freedom? Are they the only ones who know what the right to choose for oneself and to decide over one's own body means?** We wonder if not the many millions of Muslim women would claim otherwise!

Of course, every woman must have the right to wear a veil as well as the right not to wear one.

My BODY is MY Own Business
By Naheed Mustafa

MULTICULTURAL VOICES: A Canadian-born Muslim woman has taken to wearing the traditional hijab scarf. It tends to make people see her as either a terrorist or a symbol of oppressed womanhood, but she finds the experience LIBERATING. The Globe and Mail Tuesday, June 29, 1993 Facts and Arguments Page (A26)

I OFTEN wonder whether people see me as a radical, fundamentalist Muslim terrorist packing an AK-47 assault rifle inside my jean jacket. Or may be they see me as the poster girl for oppressed womanhood everywhere. I'm not sure which it is.

I get the whole gamut of strange looks, stares, and covert glances. You see, I wear the hijab, a scarf that covers my head, neck, and throat. I do this because I am a Muslim woman who believes her body is her own private concern.

Young Muslim women are reclaiming the hijab, reinterpreting it in light of its original purpose to give back to women ultimate control of their own bodies.

The Qur'an teaches us that men and women are equal, that individuals should not be judged according to gender, beauty, wealth, or privilege. The only thing that makes one person better than another is her or his character.

Nonetheless, people have a difficult time relating to me. After all, I'm young, Canadian born and raised, university educated why would I do this to myself, they ask.

Strangers speak to me in loud, slow English and often appear to be playing charades. They politely inquire how I like living in Canada and whether or not the cold bothers me. If I'm in the right mood, it can be very amusing.

But, why would I, a woman with all the advantages of a North American upbringing, suddenly, at 21, want to cover myself so that with the hijab and the other clothes I choose to wear, only my face and hands show?

Because it gives me freedom.

WOMEN are taught from early childhood that their worth is proportional to their attractiveness. We feel compelled to pursue abstract notions of beauty, half realizing that such a pursuit is futile.

When women reject this form of oppression, they face ridicule and contempt. Whether it's women who refuse to wear makeup or to shave their legs, or to expose their bodies, society, both men and women, have trouble dealing with them.

In the Western world, the hijab has come to symbolize either forced silence or radical, unconscionable militancy. Actually, it's neither. It is simply a woman's assertion that judgment of her physical person is to play no role whatsoever in social interaction.

Wearing the hijab has given me freedom from constant attention to my physical self. Because my appearance is not subjected to public scrutiny, my beauty, or perhaps lack of it, has been removed from the realm of what can legitimately be discussed.

No one knows whether my hair looks as if I just stepped out of a salon, whether or not I can pinch an inch, or even if I have unsightly stretch marks. And because no one knows, no one cares.

Feeling that one has to meet the impossible male standards of beauty is tiring and often humiliating. I should know, I spent my entire teenage years trying to do it. I was a borderline bulimic and spent a lot of money I didn't have on potions and lotions in hopes of becoming the next Cindy Crawford.

The definition of beauty is ever-changing; waifish is good, waifish is bad, athletic is good -- sorry, athletic is bad. Narrow hips? Great. Narrow hips? Too bad.

Women are not going to achieve equality with the right to bear their breasts in public, as some people would like to have you believe. That would only make us party to our own objectification. True equality will be had only when women don't need to display themselves to get attention and won't need to defend their decision to keep their bodies to themselves.

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When I Covered My Head, I Opened My Mind

By Sharrifa Carlo

As a non-Muslim living in Western society, the idea of modesty was not exactly foremost in my mind. Like all other women of my generation and mind-set, I thought such ideas were antiquated and excessive. I felt pity for the poor Muslim woman who had to "wear all that junk," or "walk around in bed - sheets" as I used to call it

I was a modern woman, educated and liberated. Little did I know the awful truth. I was more oppressed than any Muslim woman in the most culturally oppressive village in the Muslim world. I was oppressed not by an inability to choose my clothing or to choose my life-style, I was oppressed by an inability to see my society for what it really was. I was oppressed by the idea that a woman's beauty was public, and that lustful admiration was equal to respect.

It was when Allah guided me to Islam, and I put on the hijab, that I was finally able to step out of the society in which I lived and see it for what it really is. I could see how the highest paid women were those who exposed themselves to public display, like actresses, models and even strip-tease dancers. I was able to see that the relationship between men and women was unfairly stacked in the man's direction. I knew I used to dress to attract men. I tried to fool myself by saying I did it to please myself, but the painful reality was that what pleased me was when I was admired by a man I considered attractive.

I now know that there is no way for a person to know that he is dirty if he has never been clean. Similarly, I was not able to see that I was oppressed until I stepped out of the darkness of this oppressive society into the light of Islam. With that light shined on the truth, I was finally able to see the shadows that had been so obscured by my Western philosophies. It is not oppression to protect yourself and society; it is oppression to voluntarily throw yourself into the quagmire while denying it is dirty.

I am grateful to Allah that He allowed me to recognize that when I covered my head, I was taking away from people any means for judging me other than my mind, my soul and my heart. When I covered my head, I took away the incentive for exploitation based on beauty. When I covered my head, I made people respect me because they saw that I respected myself, and when I covered my head, I finally opened my mind to the truth.

Teach, Don't Preach

One of the factors which attracted me to this great deen of ours was the fact that so much of it can be understood based on logic and reason. that is why I feel that many Muslims parents do themselves a great disservice by not explaining more to their children. The old, "Because I say so..." or because you are an Arab, Pakistani, Somali, (fill in your cultural preference)..." never has worked and never will work. Human beings have a natural desire to understand what they do and why they do it, that is why Islam is such a great religion, because it satisfies all of our basic intellectual and emotional needs; it does this simply because it is the truth, and the truth is always easy to understand and defend.

When we teach our children, we should use the same sound reasoning and logic that we use to convince ourselves that a particular deed is beneficial. Thus, as we accept it, so, inshallah, will they because it will be understandable. Of course we preface every instruction with the

understanding that we do what we do to please Allah and Allah only, even if we can not understand it, but alhamdulillah we have a means to understand the majority of what we do and avoid as Muslims.

For instance, we know that we don't eat pork because Allah commands us in the Glorious Quraan to avoid it. Then, we know that our beloved Prophet (Sal Allahu alayhi wa salam) commanded us to avoid it. We need to tell this to our kids, and as they grow and increase in their understanding we need to show it to them. This teaches them some important lessons. It shows them Allah's commands; it shows them the importance of the Prophet's (Sal Allahu alayhi wa salam) commands, and it shows them the basics of researching into the deen. Then, once we set this as our base, we need to explain to them the wisdom of this command. Talk about the diseases associated with eating pork. Discuss the unsanitary living/eating habits of this animal. Essentially, teach them those things which help you to avoid this sin. Teach them to use their faith and their mind in unison as tools towards achieving the ultimate goal of reaching Jannah.

Hijaab is an Attitude, not a Fashion

By Fawzia Malik

Wearing the Hijaab isn't just a matter of simply putting a piece of cloth on your head, it is an attitude, a way of thinking and behaving, and accepting yourself for who and what you are. Basically it constitutes an Islamic way of life, it is a statement which indeed should portray a certain attitude.

A woman may indeed wear a long skirt and a scarf, but if she flirts constantly, then she can't be really described as wearing the Hijaab (Indeed clothes should be long, loose and not see through, after which any style of clothing is applicable). The whole idea involves conducting oneself with dignity at all times (that means running for the bus and boisterous behaviour in public is not a good idea!!). As previously mentioned, the Hijaab depicts a statement, and that is something one should be continually aware of. It identifies you as a Muslim, and ultimately people will judge Islam by you, and that is a heavy responsibility!! Yet sisters, we must also be thankful that by wearing the Hijaab, we go a long way in fulfilling our duties of Dawah. Curiosity prompts people to question us, giving us the opportunity to show the non-muslims the beauty of our religion. O.k., so we may get the stares at times (to which one rapidly becomes immune), but it is amazing how many are sincerely interested, oh and not to forget the redoubtable old British ladies on the Tube ("Oh I do like your headdress, my dear!!!").

Hijaab isn't meant to restrict you from doing the kind of things you want to do, it is a blessing because it makes us check our behaviour continuously, preventing us from doing the things that muslims shouldn't be doing anyway. Anything (with the blessings of the Almighty, is possible) - studying, working etc. etc. -provided it is within the bounds of Islam (Halal).

Sometimes, however the decision to wear the Hijaab can become extra complicated through external pressures, notably family and friends. Unfortunately, even some muslims nowadays look upon the Hijaab as being too "extreme", and the like and when these attitudes come from members of your family then the decision becomes all the more difficult. Speaking from experience, things do change, because ultimately, you are doing this for Allah (s.w.t), and he will make it easy for you, by "softening" the hearts of those that may not be all that encouraging. Eventually they themselves will want to follow you because deep down they know that it is the right thing to do. If that doesn't help, then this should convince you:

On the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said that the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said : Allah the Almighty says: "I am as my servant thinks I am...If he draws near to Me a hand's span, I draw near to him an arms length; and if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length. And if he comes walking, I go to him at speed."

On the other side, it is important to ascertain the motive for wearing the Hijaab. If you are thinking of wearing it to please your husband, to impress people at the mosque, or just as a change, then please think again. Hijaab (as with everything else) is to please Allah (s.w.t) only, any other motive will not sustain that conviction.

A word also to our brothers; Hijaab may seem to be merely a woman's issue, but that is not so. Muslim men have to follow a dress code too, no matter if it isn't as extensive as for women it still exists! The men, like women, should also wear loose clothes -so no tight fitting jeans please!! Their attitude to all women should also always remain respectful and business like, as the women's attitude to men should be.

Finally, all of the above pales in significance to the words of our Creator (s.w.t):

Say to the believing men
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that will make
For greater purity for them:
And Allah is well acquainted
With all that they do.
And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that they
Should not display their
Beauty and ornaments except
What (ordinarily) appear
Thereof; that they should
Draw their veils over
Their bosoms and not display
Their beauty except
To their husbands, their fathers,
Their Husband's fathers, their sons,
Their brothers or their brothers' sons,
Or their sisters' sons,
Or their women, or their slaves
Whom their right hands
Possess, or male attendants
Free of sexual desires.
Or small children who
Have no carnal knowledge of women;
And that they
Should not strike their feet
In order to draw attention
To their hidden ornaments.
And O ye Believers!
Turn ye all together
Towards Allaah in repentance that ye may be successful.
(Al -Quran, ch.24:30-31)

Sumayyah's Road to Hijab

I remember that when my sister Ruqayyah first started to invite me to Islam, that the main obstacle on my path to light was not the sacrifices that I would have to make in my eating, drinking, and conduct. The fact that I would have to learn a completely new and sometimes confusing language to even say my prayers did not cause me to lose any sleep either. The one felled-tree in my path to guidance and righteousness, was the fact that I would have to go around looking like her.

My sister, you see, wears full hijab, with her face and hands covered. Even though she assured me that the khimar and jilbab was all that would be required of me, the thought of my friends seeing me dressed like that kept me from declaring my faith openly for a long time, even though I believed it in my heart. The fact that I also had to cover up my hair, which I used to spend a great deal of time and money on, was then, also too much for me to bear.

Now because of this, many of you may think that I was a shallow and vain person, but my thoughts and actions should come as no surprise. As women raised in the West, from birth, we are taught that our self-worth is directly proportionate to our attractiveness. The society upholds unattainable and unrealistic images of beauty that the women in the society must constantly pursue. We spend of our time, energy and wealth, in this constant and illusive chase. We become slaves to Revlon, Vidal Sassoon, the fashion gurus in Paris and ultimately our own sense of vanity.

It will be three years ago, this December 25, that I stood before two Muslim sisters and declared openly my belief in Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW), and thus freeing and liberating myself from my former self-imposed bondage. Stepping out of the darkness of kufr (disbelief) into the light of Islam, it's funny that I found such freedom in the very thing that was keeping me from Islam in the first place; the hijab. Even though I get the wide gamut of strange stares, points and comments, this covering makes me feel honored, safe and cherished.

The word hijab comes from the Arabic word "hajabah" meaning to hide from view or conceal. Women, who conceal their beauty in this society and do not give into its oppressive system, are looked upon as invisible, without sexuality, and backward. Because I'm often mistaken for a nun, and Islamic fundamentalist terrorist, who maybe hiding god-knows what up under all that stuff, or the poster-child for oppressed womanhood everywhere, I feel the hijab, for many women, is the truest test of being a Muslim. In instructing us to wear the hijab, Allah (SWT) has given Muslim women what they can bear of injunctions and obligations. For Allah (SWT) says,

"And We tax not any person except according to his capacity, and with Us is a Record which speaks the truth, and they will not be wronged." (Al-Mu'minun 23:62)

Unfortunately, Satan and his cohorts are calling the Muslim woman to enslave herself to the creation, and to forget about her servitude to her Creator. Chastity, modesty and piety are deceptively marketed as shackles on personal freedom. Allah (SWT) warns the believers they should not let Satan deceive them, as he deceived their parents, Adam (AS) and Eve (AS). Under the guises of fashion, culture and modernism however, Satan has, and is succeeding to lead the Muslim woman into immodesty.

From the dawn of civilization, flowing dresses and headscarves have always been associated with "godliness" or "god consciousness." Even the Christian pictorial representation of the earlier prophets and their women folks bear a familiar likeness to the dress ordained for Muslim men and women. This tradition of modesty is reflected in the Quran, wherein Allah (SWT) says

"O Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover yourselves (screen your private parts, etc.) and as an adornment, and the raiment of righteousness, that is better..." (Al-A'raf 7:26)

But since the hey-days of the feminist movement, there has been an increasing amount of scrutiny placed on the dress and status of Muslim women. According to these "liberated" women, the hijab not only covers the head, but also covers the mind, will and intellect. They say that our dress code is outdated and oppressive, and that it stops us from being productive human beings.

They speak out of ignorance when they say that our hijab does not belong in these modern times, when due to the constant decrease in moral values in the world today, circumstances make the hijab even more necessary. More than ever before, sex crimes are rampant and "liberated" women in the larger society now face increasingly higher chances of being raped or sexually harassed. The Federal Government conducted a research in which they found that in America, **a rape-crime is committed every six minutes.**

The women, who uncover their beauty and show off their bodies and made-up faces for all to enjoy, expose themselves to be harmed by these wolves in human clothing. Allah (SWT) enjoined the hijab on the Muslim woman to protect her from harm. He (SWT) knows His creation, and knows that when women make dazzling displays of themselves, with immodest clothes, perfumed bodies and made-up faces, that it serves to increase the sexual deviance of the overall society. Many of those who are misguided would have us think though that the hijab is a portable prison that restricts our minds, lives and hearts. It is none of these things, and in order not to fall victim to their plots, we must begin to understand what the hijab truly is

For Muslim women, the clothing requirements are not meant to be restriction but rather a way in which society can function in a moral and Islamic fashion. As Muslims, we are the torchbearers for the rest of humanity; therefore we must set the example and set ourselves apart for the rest of society. A wise person once said,

"If you want to judge the religiousness or morality of a people, look to the dress of its women."

Apart from the benefit it holds for the ummah and the larger society, the hijab has many virtues for the Muslim woman herself.

It's been almost three years now since Allah (SWT) guided me to the light of Islam, and took me away from the darkness of disbelief. Even though strangers tend to speak to me in loud, slow English, and always ask, "aren't you hot in all that,"

I have found the hijab to be the most liberating part of my conversion.

I adjure my Muslim sisters to reclaim the hijab. It is your right and an intrinsic part of your Islamic identity. Do not allow the Satan, Jinns and humans, to enslave you to your desires, egos and vanity, when Allah (SWT) in His Mercy, has given you the keys to freedom. As Muslims, we must lovingly submit to the will of our Creator, and let the whispers, taunts and ill intentions of the creation be of no consequence to us.

And what greater act of submission can there be for a true Muslim woman than the saying of the faithful believers when they are called to Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW) to judge between them, is only that they say, "*We hear and we obey.*" By doing this, Allah (SWT) will increase us in faith and make our way easy for us (Insha-Allah). As true servants of the Lord of the worlds, we have no choice but to follow whatever orders He (SWT) has given us. As we are slaves, when our Lord says go there, we should go, and when He (SWT) says come here, we should come, with no hesitation whatsoever.

Let us strive then to be true servants of Allah (SWT) by doing our best to carry out His injunctions to the best of our abilities (Insha-Allah). Let us commit ourselves to not falling prey to the beckoning of the larger society to be among the "liberated women," but let us work to be among the "believing women," Insha-Allah!

OBSERVATIONS ON HIJAB

Author: Unknown

It has been my personal observation that some Muslim girls and women do not realize the significance of hijab. Hijab is arabic for protection and cover. Some people put a lot effort into their hijab, yet it serves no purpose. I am referring to the pointless hijab that some girls wear.

The first pointless hijab is referred to as the headband hijab. It is a band of fabric approximately 4 inches wide. It covers the back of the head and allows all the hair to be exposed. It doesn't serve much in terms of modesty, but at least it comes in handy in case of an unexpected tennis match.

The second pointless hijab is the dupetta, also known as the Saran wrap hijab. It covers all the hair, but it is totally transparent. Again it doesn't serve much in terms of modesty, but it keeps the hair nice and fresh.

The third type of hijab is known as the Mickey Mouse Hijab. It is when a girl wears a black scarf and tucks it behind her ear, so that her ears stick out.

We now move to my favorites:

The yo-yo hijabs. The first yo-yo hijab, also known as the Benazir Bhutto hijab, is the scarf that keeps falling down and needs to be constantly pulled back up....up, down, up, down, just like a yo-yo.

The second yo-yo hijab is also referred to as the convertible hijab. This type of hijab is predominant at any type of social event, i.e. an Aqeeqah, Bismillah party, Ameen party, wedding, etc. This is when an Imam or Qari comes up to the microphone and starts to recite Qur'an. At this point, all the convertible hijabs come up...until he says "Sadaqallahul atheem". I'm not sure, but apparently in some cultures that translates to "ok sisters, you may now take off your scarves".

I'm sure this may seem odd, but what's even funnier is when people do not anticipate the recitation of Qur'an at a social event, and are forced to be creative and use accessories such as a purse to cover one's hair. I was surprised to see a women hold her purse over her head as "hijab"..as if the multitudes of men surrounding her are not a good enough reason to wear hijab, but some guy reciting du'a compels her to hold a purse over her head. Her friends were more creative...one friend used her dinner napkin. I was also laughing when I saw the communal hijab -- two or more girls draped under one dinner napkin during the recitation of Qur'ann. Her other friend was still more creative. She used her coffee saucer on the back of her head. I wasn't sure if it was hijab or a Yamaka.

I didn't know if she was a Muslim or a Jew. I felt like going up to her and saying "Shalom alaikum, sister".

And, people should remember that hijab is not just a protection from guys, but from a girl's nafs (ego) as well. It should prevent girls from having to spend hours in front of the mirror doing her hair. But, unfortunately, you see girls in front of the mirror for hours doing their hijab as they

would do their hair, with all sorts of elaborate braids and the like. I wanted to go up to a sister and say "Is your hijab naturally curly?". I also felt compelled to go up to another girl and say "pardon me, but is your hijab naturally that color, or did you dye it?".

Well, the point to remember is that some people make an effort to wear hijab, but it is futile, because it is not fulfilling its purpose. It's like using an umbrella with holes in it. Hijab is used for protection from guys as well as from the girl herself, and should not be used as an accessory or for beautifying one's self.

Anyway, that's it. If anyone disagrees with me or is offended, then you are disagreeing with the teachings of Allah subhanahu wa Ta'ala.

In Search of the BODY BEAUTIFUL by 'Itrat Azad

There seems no limit nowadays to the extent that women (and men!) are prepared to go to in order to achieve that 'perfect look'. Forget false eyelashes and wigs, we are now talking scalpels, implants and liposuction!!

Cosmetic surgery amongst film actresses has been commonplace for quite some time now, but these days, we wouldn't be too hard pressed to find ordinary women on the street who are more plastic than real! Indeed, in some circles, having multiple facelifts has become a status symbol: the more you have, the higher you are in the status rankings.

If questioned whether cosmetic surgery was Islamically correct or not, then without doubt, most Muslims would instinctively respond by saying that it isn't, for the simple reason that it would be interfering with Allaah's creation. And certainly, this would be the correct response.

The Companion, Ibn Mas'ood, *radiAllaahu 'anhu*, once said (quoting what he had heard the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, say): "*Allaah has cursed the tattooers and those who have themselves tattooed, and those women who have their teeth filed for beauty and those who have their [facial] hair plucked and thus alter Allaah's creation.*" A woman remarked, "*What's all this?*" So Ibn Mas'ood - *radiAllaahu 'anhu* - said: "*Should I not curse one whom Allaah's Messenger cursed? And it is in the Book of Allaah!*" She said: "*I have read the Qur'aan from cover to cover, but I did not find that in it.*" He replied: "*If you had read it thoroughly you would have found it. Allaah says, 'Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it and whatever he has forbidden, refrain from it'*" [Sooratul-Hashr (59):7].¹

So the Prophet Muhammad, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, forbade women from performing these three practices which the women commonly did for the sake of beauty in those days - seemingly '*insignificant*' practices for which they would incur the CURSE of Allaah. And this forbiddance isn't just restricted to the procedures mentioned in the *hadeeth*.

Because Allaah says in more general terms in His Book: "***So set your face truly to the faith, Allaah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind, [Let there be] no change in the creation of Allaah.***"² [Soorah ar-Room (30):30].

Therefore, it is obligatory for us to accept the creation of Allaah as it is, not making any alterations to it.³ More importantly though, it is also obligatory for us to believe that all of Allaah's creation is beautiful, because Allaah, the *Khaaliq* (Creator) does not create anything except with beauty and perfection, which is why He says to mankind: "***You can see no fault in the creation of ar-Rahmaan [the Most Merciful]. Then look again: can you see any rifts? Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you in a state of humiliation and worn out.***" [Soorah al-Mulk (67):3].

This may all sound quite strange when we consider how often we hear women complaining about their appearance. In fact, it is estimated that over half of the Western women today actually perceive themselves to be ugly. In addition, surveys show that nearly all women feel under pressure to "*look good*".

As a result, the quest for beauty has become a serious preoccupation for many women. Open up any women's magazine and you will not fail to find a single one which doesn't contain tips on how to "look good", or which don't contain huge adverts promoting new creams that halt the aging process or concealers to hide wrinkles, etc.

Beauty today is big business. Beauty contests are very profitable and - contrary to popular belief - more are spawned every year. The cosmetics market is a multi-billion dollar industry; the demand for cosmetic surgery is growing at a tremendous rate. All three industries promote the same notions of beauty that women everywhere are expected to meet: mainly a white, European, "Barbie-doll" like standard. The pressures on women to conform to these standards are enormous and few are able to withstand them.⁴

The fact is that Western women today may complain that they are not treated with equality and respect, but it is they themselves who have made it acceptable for society worldwide to see women merely as beauty-objects who are there to be ogled by the men who in turn are the (im)polite voyeurs. When viewed in this light, we find that beauty contests are not too dissimilar to reality itself: just as the tallest, slimmest blonde girl gets the title in the beauty contest, in the real world it's the tallest, slimmest blonde girl who gets the man!

In Islaam, beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder, beauty is in the whole of creation, because Allaah - the One free of all imperfections - is the one responsible for it. And as Allaah says: ***"Your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses: no choice have they. SubhaanAllaah! And far removed is He from the partners they ascribe [to Him]."*** [Soorah al-Qasas (28):68].

So it is from the wisdom of Allaah that He has chosen to create some of us short, others tall, some fat, some thin, some dark-coloured, some light - all are beautiful and perfect in their own right. That is why we are taught from the *Sunnah*, the beautiful *du'aa* (supplication) that the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, would say: *"O Allaah, as You have made my appearance beautiful, likewise make my character beautiful."* (*Allaahumma kamaa hassanta khalaqee fa hassin khuluqee*).⁵

As Muslims, we must believe that evil and imperfection cannot be attributed to Allaah.⁶ The desire to change any aspect of ourselves means, in effect, that we are dissatisfied with Allaah's choice and His handiwork, and that there is imperfection in what He has created. Thus to say about ourselves or anyone else that we or they are ugly is a great sin. This point was reinforced by the Prophet, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, when he once saw the Companion, 'Amr ibn Fulaan al-Ansaaree, *radiAllaahu 'anhu*, whose *izaar* (lower garment) was hanging low (to the ground), so he, *sallallaahu 'alaihi wa sallam*, ordered that he raise it. 'Amr made an excuse saying that he had skinny shins (i.e. he was embarrassed to show them), so the Prophet responded by saying: *"O 'Amr! Verily Allaah - the Mighty and the Majestic - has created everything in the best form."*⁷

All this is certainly not intended to discourage women to look after themselves and adorn themselves in lawful ways (e.g. wearing nice clothes, having nicely done hair, etc.). Indeed, adorning oneself is something that the wives are obliged to do for their husbands and Allaah rewards the woman who pleases the husband when he looks at her.⁸ But with these tremendous pressures on women to conform to the ideals set by the marketing media, it may be hard for Muslim women to resist feeling insecure or uncomfortable about their appearance.

Consequently, many Muslim women have shed their *hijaabs* for the sake of following fashion; Muslim women too develop inferiority complexes about themselves.

We must bear in mind that this search for the '**body beautiful**' is, in reality, a deception from Shaitaan. Shaitaan has vowed that he will create such false desires in mankind.

He has said (as stated in the Qur'aan): "***Surely I will arouse in them [mankind] false desires; and certainly I will order them to slit the ears of cattle, and indeed I will order them to change the nature created by Allaah.***" [Soorah an-Nisaa' (4):119].

May Allaah always keep us safe from the false promises of *Shaitaan*, for Verily He is the One who guides to the Truth.

Notes

1. Reported by Ibn Mas'ood and collected in *Saheeh Muslim* (English trans, vol. 3, p.1166, no.5301). This incident is a good illustration of the status which the *Sunnah* held in front of the Companions.
2. Note that this forbiddence applies to the whole of creation, not just human beings. Therefore, defacing any part of Allaah's creation is *haraam*. By extension, this ruling also applies to all forms of genetic engineering, which are carried out on farm animals, for example, in order to procure more profitable meat from them.
3. This is with the exception of those things which have been prescribed in the *Sharee'ah*, e.g. clipping the nails, shaving the underarms and around the private parts, etc.
4. In fact, some women go to such extremes that it results in them developing health problems - anorexia nervosa - for instance. The carcinogenic nature of breast implants are also well documented now. No doubt, the future will reveal more harmful effects of these artificial means of changing creation.
5. One *hadeeth* which contains this supplication mentions that this *du'aa* should be recited on looking in the mirror. However, the chain (isnaad) of this hadeeth is **not** authentic. But it is authentically reported as a supplication to be recited at any time. (See Ibn Taimiyyah's *al-Kalimat-Tayyib* with al-Albaanee's footnotes.)
6. For an explanation of this important aspect of belief, please refer to *The Prophet's Prayer Described* (p.15).
7. *Saheeh* - collected in the *Musnad* of Imaam Ahmad (vo1.4, p.200).
8. See *Musnad* Ahmad, an-Nasaa'ee and others. Also, it is forbidden for the husband to invoke ugliness upon the wife - as was a common practice amongst the pre-Islamic Arabs.

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How To Lower Our Gaze **by Sabeel Ahmed**

A big curtain is not my intention, but a big iman and befitting Islamic manners is

"If I were not a Muslim, I would have contracted AIDS" proclaimed my friend. "The ayats in Sura Nur about lowering our gazes doesn't affect me anymore," expressed another youth, talking about the intense temptations felt by today's young. Difficulty in lowering the gaze by both the young and old is readily perceived on the street, weddings, parties and even in the mosques.

What has gone wrong? How can Muslims, called by Allah, our Creator the model community, the custodians of Truth and the upholders of morality behave this way? Why are we adopting the attitudes and routes of the kuffar? How can we rectify ourselves? What follows is a series of practical, though graphic advises which can work for us and set us free from Satan's stronghold, Insha`Allah.

Prophet Muhamad (pbuh), by way of warning and as a reminder said, *"There is nothing left after I go more dangerous to men than the temptations of women."* Being optimistic, a ray of hope was also wisely provided during the prophet's Last Sermon *"If the Ummah holds on to the Qur`an and Sunnah, it will never go astray."*

When Allah created humans with all our desires and urges, he also revealed to us sufficient and complete guidance to properly channel these desires, both in the midst of Dar-ul-Kufr or Dar-ul-Islam. All we need to do is seek it, contemplate on it and pursue it. *"This day I have perfected your deen for you, completed my favors upon you and chosen Islam as your deen."* (Maida 4)

We should realize that the fact the great sahabas were human beings also. Biologically there were no different from us. They had desires and temptations but yet, they controlled themselves in the best of ways. We can do the same, Insha`Allah. To possess sensual passions is human, to control them is Muslim.

When confronted with an alluring situation like passing by a non-mahram on the street, office or school, Satan is constantly tempting us to glare at her/him with evil thoughts. Satan is probably excitingly saying, with a big smile, 'yes, yes, yes,' when we steer into the bait he is setting. During these situations, immediately and consciously realize that when we give a second or following glances, we are obeying Satan. *"O you who believe, follow not the footsteps of the devil "* (24:21). By immediately averting our gazes and disobeying Satan, we are giving him a one-two punch in the face and leaving him frustrated and accursed.

Satan rebelled and was expelled by Allah, so let's all rebel against Satan and expel him from our hearts. Satan intends to fight a war against Muslims, so let's gather our forces behind the Qur`an and the Sunnah and defeat him. Remember that even if no human eye is watching us, the Ever-Watchful Allah is constantly monitoring the innermost regions of our hearts. Our eyes, limbs, tongue and private parts will be witnesses on the Judgment Day and not an atom's worth of deed will remain unexamined.

Our minds are conditioned to associate thoughts of stealing clothes from a store to being in handcuffs and hauled into a police van. Likewise we should condition our minds to bring the

verses of Surah Nur in front of our eyes during any tempting situations and imagine that Allah is speaking to us directly *"Say to the believing, men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty .O you believers! Turn you all together towards Allah that you may attain success"* (24:30-31) If the Qur`an contained only these two ayats, it would be enough to convince me that it is the book of Allah.

With practice, these associations and the remembrance of Allah during tempting situations will prevent us from getting stuck by devilish arrows. Successfully controlling our gazes also deadens our avoidance of sinful situations. An Islamic idiom says, **"Anything that leads to haram is haram in itself."** To do a pious deed is a reward; to avoid a sin is a reward too.

One of the biggest culprits in this class is movies. In the name of entertainment, to please our peers and children and an excuse to do something together as a family, we astonishingly allow un-Islamic pictures and dialogues in front of our eyes and ears. Can we ever imagine (aouzubillah) any sahaba renting the latest hit from Blockbuster Videos, or listening to music with alluring lyrics at high volume?

Likewise we watch news on TV and stare at the anchor women, adorned in heavy make-up, scanty clothing and seductive smile. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), was once approached by a woman with a proposal for marriage. He took a single glance at her face and turned his face away. Jabir bin Abdullah reported: *"I asked Allah's messenger about the sudden glance on the face of a non-mahram. He commanded me that I should turn away my eyes."* (Muslim) Thus, we are not supposed to stare at faces of non-mahrams, be they are our fellow students, our elders, saleswomen or someone on TV.

Pious ladies of the prophet's household were ordered to observe purdah (separation) in front of a blind sahabah. Asking the curious questions as to why cover/separate when the blind sahabah could not see them, the prophet (pbuh) wisely answered, *"But you could see him."*

In our wedding ceremonies and parties and even in many Islamic fundraising dinners, there is heavy free-mixing between brothers and sisters. Often the chairs of males and females are arranged facing each other, knowing that about 90 percent of our sisters do not wear hijab. It is often noticeable to see males and females peeking glances at each other from the opposite ends of the hall. **A big curtain is not my intention, but a big iman and befitting Islamic manners is.**

"A woman who applies perfumes and goes to a gathering is like an adulteress" the prophet said Muhammad. Compare this with our sisters who clad themselves with expensive perfume, one kilogram of makeup, and then come to mixed gatherings. Will this not attract the attention of males? Let's be real. We have lowered our moral guards so low that a humble word of truth often seems so awfully strange.

Let us contemplate the above humble advices and constantly make the supplication, "O Allah help us control our sensual desires until we get married, and even after we marry, let our desires be only towards our spouses."

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The Veil as a Political Metaphor Colonialist Period & Post Colonialist Period & the Struggle over Hijab Taken from HIRU

During the colonialist occupation of much of the Muslim world, Islam began to be attacked by those wishing to crush the spirit of the occupied people. There are many personal and government documents of this time that clearly equate Islam with the veil & recognize that the spirit of the people could not be completely controlled without controlling the obvious symbol of Islam---the veil.

"it (the veil) lies at the root of all the most important features that differentiate progress from stagnation. In Arabia before the advent of Islam it was customary to bury female infants alive. Muhammad improved on the barbaric method and discovered a way by which all females could be buried alive and yet live on----namely the veil." Our Moslem Sisters, A Cry of Need from Lands of Darkness, by A Van Sommer and S. Zwemer.

"In general, the woman of Arabia in the early Muslim era was in subjection either to her nearest male kinsman...or to her husband, whose right over her was regarded in the same way as his right over any other property." p. 94, Stated by Ruben Levy.

The colonialist government officials, utilized the influx of Christian Missionaries and orientalist who came to "teach" the Muslim masses. Of course at first it was only the upper class families that these "scholars" had access to or interest in. Through their observations of these elite families, it was determined that Muslim women all over the world were suppressed.

It is ironic, actually, that Victorian Orientalists, in their tightly laced & disfiguring corsets would label the flowing veils of Islam to be oppressive. And that their male counter-parts would claim that the Muslim male was oppressing their women folk. For back in the Victorian world of Europe and America, their own women folk were closed behind the doors of the home, with no political voice, right to divorce or right to inheritance. Often, it was the greed of colonialists to increase productivity that it encouraged that Muslim women leave their homes and become "liberated" and take outside employment. This tactic has been used & continues to be used by corporations today, to control the economic market & superimpose it's own agenda.

By removing women from their homes and displacing men, who by nature are more aggressive and confrontational with a more docile work force, colonialists of all time periods have found they can become wealthier with little overhead or worker demands.

Colonialists encouraged political leaders to adopt "civilized" behavior prescribed by the dominating Christian European social structure. Those greedy leaders desiring to emulate Europe, quickly adopted the trappings of Europeans, at the cost of their fellow countrymen & Muslims.

French colonialists, in the 1950's, in Algeria used the issue of the veil to win the support of Muslim women & thereby defeat the Algerian Nationalists. Their tactics however included turning younger people against their own culture by "liberating" them from the traditions & their cultural dignity.

The veil was abolished, by the government, in 1920 in Afghanistan. Then was reinstated in 1929 by the government. Yet, again in 1959, the issue of the veil turned again when the wife and sisters, of Afghanistan's Prime Minister appeared in public unveiled and set a new precedent & once again women began to go out of their homes uncovered, in an effort to illustrate their "modern" & "progressive" fashion. Then, in 1992, the new interim government of Afghanistan decreed that women must immediately adopt "Islamic Dress".

In Iran, the veil was formally abolished in 1936 by Reza Shah. Yet though it was outlawed by the Shah, women still chose to wear it. In many of the rural areas, outside the immediate influence of the Western influenced aristocrats, Muslim women still chose to cover themselves in a modest manner. Even in the urban centers, some women continued to veil, despite laws against it. Yet in 1978, Iranian women demonstrated in the streets against the Shah wearing the traditional chador. With the end of the Shah's rule, Iranian women returned to wearing the chador not only for religious reasons, but as a sign of solidarity of their cultural identity.

{Later however, it must be noted that extremist behavior overshadowed the Islamic laws governing public behavior}

In Turkey, the practice of veiling also was under attack. Ataturk abolished the veil in the 1920's. In 1997 a university woman was expelled from architectural school for wearing hijab to class. In today's educational system in Turkey, Muslim women are DENIED an education if they wear even a simple headscarf, which is ordered by Allah! Yet NO Feminist organization fights for the freedom of Muslim women to choose their own form of dress, nor their right to an education. What has happened to these champions of women's rights? Why have they gone so silent? Do the Capitalists have their tongue?

In Egypt too, the veil is being attacked. Women wearing traditional face veils are threatened with arrest and even rape by government officials who claim that wearing the garment is a symbol of terrorist activity.

Now, Muslim girls and women are being forced to choose between Islam and their educations, yet none of the Women's organizations, who's voices have been previously claiming to be concerned with Muslim women's rights seems to demand the rights of these religiously conscience women. While Political conscienceness is applauded in the West, religious conscienceness appears to be an alien concept!

Yet constantly we here Western media & political leaders talking about morality and family values. Doesn't it seem like they are being a little bit two faced?

Though there is no concise detailing of the similarities and differences between Muslim clothing styles around the world, this has not stopped feminists from making sweeping assumptions about the suppressive nature of Islamic dress code.

Veiling has long been described by feminists as a means for men to control women. In Gender Roles, by L.L. Lindsey, it states:

"Islamic law is nurtured by a code of ethics which sees woman's role as providing legitimate male heirs. This role may be compromised if women are not restricted in their activities

especially during childbearing years...Therefore, Islam assumes that woman is both potentially powerful and dangerous." (p 222)

Such broad strokes, this author makes!!! Shame on her for suggesting such ironious claims. Quran clearly states that daughters and sons are to be equally welcomed. So I must ask you, where is this "scholar" getting her infomration?

Islamic law comes from Quran and hadith, not the practices of ignorant people. To suggest that the actions viewed amongst the masses IS the religious law, is no different from suggest that murder & warfar is promoted in Chistian Laws. However, as a consciencious writer, one has to acknowledge that the acts of some Christians is not necessarily the religous Laws that their religion dictates.

This practice known as veiling has long been left unchallenged in Western sociological or anthropological journals. Those in the Muslim world who do attempt to challenge it are often brushed off by fellow academic professionals as "ignorant" or "biased".

It should be acknowledged that much of what has been written has been heavily clouded by cultural, political and religious biases which are rarely addressed by the authors, book reviewers or publishers.

As with the previous citation, the typical interpretation of veiling has been that of a form of victimization of women or the political manipulation of them.

"The effect of these garments is the same, though, for the woman is rendered anonymous,a non-person, unapproachable, just a silent being sulking along, looking neither to the right or left. To those who do not know her personally, she is nameless and faceless." (Jeffery, 1979)

Frank Viviano stated in his article, "The scarf that split a nation" in the Nov./Dec '94 issue of Weekend, "...a head scarf worn by Muslim women to demonstrate allegiance to fundamentalist Islam. "

Viviano goes on to say, "...nearly two dozen high school students here Paris)...have been expelled for wearing the hijab to classes." and that "...feminists and leftists from North Africa itself...want the scarf banned from public schools. The issue is not liberty, they say, but equality-----the flaunting of an item of dress that symbolizes sexual oppression."

January 1999: French Teachers Strike Over Muslim Headscarves, RENNES, France (Reuters) - Tensions between Muslim fundamentalists and France's lay school system bubbled to the surface Wednesday as teachers at a junior high school in Normandy refused to teach Muslim students wearing headscarves. Teachers at other schools in and around the northwestern town of Flers announced plans for a mass demonstration and strike Friday in support of the teachers who have refused to report for work at the College Jean-Monnet since Monday. The majority of the school's teachers walked off the job after education authorities ordered the school to take in a 12-year-old student of Turkish origin whose family insisted that she wear an Islamic headscarf to class. Tuesday a second Muslim student sought to be enrolled after presenting a letter from her parents saying she too planned to cover her head with an Islamic-style scarf in school. Segolene Royale, junior minister for secondary education, sent a government mediator to Flers Wednesday morning. The current controversy has divided Flers, with a minority of teachers favoring the

Muslim girls' enrollment and the town's association of Turkish residents criticizing the girls as isolated cases. Islam is France's second largest religion after Catholicism, estimated at four to five million people, most of them from former French colonies in North Africa. Controversy has simmered in France for years over the extent to which the school system had to accommodate Muslim students. But the dispute in Normandy marked the first time the issue had flared up since the current leftist government took power in mid-1997. In 1994, the conservative government then in power issued rules banning "ostentatious religious symbols" from secular state schools. It said the ban applied only to Islamic-style headscarves, however, and not to similar religious symbols like crosses worn on necklaces or Hebrew skull caps. Over a hundred girls were subsequently expelled from their schools while several hundred others defied the ban. The girls and their families said they were merely observing the Muslim religion but the French government and many teachers argued the scarves, as symbols of Islamic fundamentalism and the repression of women, were preventing their wearers from becoming integrated into French society.

If this is truly an issue of equality, as the opponents of hijab claim, then why is it that the Muslim girls have the right only to wear what the opponents feel is appropriate?

Schoolgirls in France have been expelled and harassed since Feb 1989 for donning the hijab. The French hijab issue reached a crisis point in September of 1989, when French Minister of Culture, Francois Bayrou issued a decree calling for the scarf to be forbidden as "an ostentatious religious symbol". The issue of hijab in France is nothing more than a remnant of the colonialist mentality that dictated the lives of Muslims, when France controlled its neighbors to the south.

Though many of the opponents of hijab are of Arab Muslim origin, their ideology is no different than their Christian colonialist counter-parts----to subjugate Islam and Muslims to the secular ideology of the day. Today this is done through negative labeling of those who adhere to their religious values and who choose to openly practice their chosen faith.

Yet there are some voices beginning to be heard over the clamor of leftists and Euro-centric feminists.

One such example is found in "Behind the Veil Debate" in which it states:

"For many Algerian women the hijab represents a rejection of Western influence, liberation from unwanted male advances, and the right to promote their own social status through education and self-appointed professions."

A Chinese American Non Muslim Woman Experiments with Hijaab
by Kathy Chin, originally published in *Al-Talib*, the newsmagazine of the Muslim Students' Association of the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) in October 1994. At the time of its publication, Kathy Chin was a senior at UCLA majoring in Psychobiology and Women's Studies.

I walked down the street in my long white dress and inch-long, black hair one afternoon, and truck drivers whistled and shouted obscenities at me. I felt defeated. I had just stepped out of a hair salon. I had cut my hair short, telling the hairdresser to trim it as she would a guy's. I sat numbly as my hairdresser skillfully sheared into my shoulder-length hair with her scissors, asking me with every inch she cut off if I was freaking out yet. I wasn't freaking out, but I felt self-mutilated.

I WAS OBLITERATING MY FEMININITY

It wasn't just another haircut. It meant so much more. I was trying to appear androgynous by cutting my hair. I wanted to obliterate my femininity. Yet that did not prevent some men from treating me as a sex object. I was mistaken. It was not my femininity that was problematic, but my sexuality, or rather the sexuality that some men had ascribed to me based on my biological sex. They reacted to me as they saw me and not as I truly am. Why should it even matter how they see me, as long as I know who I am? But it does.

I believe that men who see women as only sexual beings often commit violence against them, such as rape and battery. Sexual abuse and assault are not only my fears, but my reality. I was molested and raped. My experiences with men who violated me have made me angry and frustrated. How do I stop the violence? How do I prevent men from seeing me as an object rather than a female? How do I stop them from equating the two? How do I proceed with life after experiencing what others only dread?

The experiences have left me with questions about my identity. Am I just another Chinese-American female? I used to think that I have to arrive at a conclusion about who I am, but now I realize that my identity is constantly evolving.

MY EXPERIENCE OF BEING "HIJABED"

One experience that was particularly educational was when I "dressed up" as a Muslim woman for a drive along Crenshaw Boulevard with three Muslim men as part of a news magazine project. I wore a white, long-sleeved cotton shirt, jeans, tennis shoes, and a flowery silk scarf that covered my head, which I borrowed from a Muslim woman. Not only did I look the part, I believed I felt the part. Of course, I wouldn't really know what it feels like to be Hijabed - I coined this word for the lack of a better term everyday, because I was not raised with Islamic teachings.

However, people perceived me as a Muslim woman and did not treat me as a sexual being by making cruel remarks.

I noticed that men's eyes did not glide over my body as has happened when I wasn't Hijabed. I was fully clothed, exposing only my face. I remembered walking into an Islamic center and an African-American gentleman inside addressed me as "sister" and asked where I came from. I told him I was originally from China. That didn't seem to matter. There was a sense of closeness between us because he assumed I was Muslim. I didn't know how to break the news to him because I wasn't sure if I was or not. I walked into the store that sold African jewelry and furniture and another gentleman asked me as I was walking out if I was Muslim. I looked at him and smiled, not knowing how to respond. I chose not to answer.

BEING HIJABED CHANGED OTHERS' PERCEPTION OF ME

Outside the store, I asked one of the Muslim men I was with, "Am I Muslim?" He explained that everything that breathes and submits is. I have concluded that I may be and just don't know it. I haven't labeled myself as such yet. I don't know enough about Islam to assert that I am Muslim. Though I don't pray five times a day, go to a mosque, fast, nor cover my head with a scarf daily, this does not mean that I am not Muslim. These seem to be the natural manifestations of what is within. How I am inside does not directly change whether I am Hijabed or not. It is others' perception of me that was changed. Repeated experiences with others in turn creates a self-image.

HIJAB AS OPPRESSION: A SUPERFICIAL AND MISGUIDED VIEW

I consciously chose to be Hijabed because I was searching for respect from men. Initially, as both a Women's Studies major and a thinking female, I bought into the Western view that the wearing of a scarf is oppressive.

After this experience and much reflection, I have arrived at the conclusion that such a view is superficial and misguided: It is not if the act is motivated by conviction and understanding.

THE MOST LIBERATING EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE

I covered up that day out of choice, and it was the most liberating experience of my life. I now see alternatives to being a woman. I discovered that the way I dress dictated others' reaction towards me. It saddens me that this is a reality. It is a reality that I have accepted, and chose to conquer rather than be conquered by it. It was my sexuality that I covered, not my femininity. The covering of the former allowed the liberation of the latter.

Hijab Battles Around the World

by Pamela Taylor, Nov-Dec 1994 edition of Islamic Horizons Magazine, a publication of The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Pamela Taylor has a Masters from the Harvard Divinity School. She is an active Muslim, mother of three and a freelance writer.

Tayyibah, St. Paul Minnesota. Fatima, Creil, France. Samira, Algiers, Algeria. What do these women have in common? They are all Muslim, and they've all had a run-in with the law.

Their crimes, you ask? Wearing Hijab, or the Islamic head scarf. Worldwide there seems to be a growing consensus that a few yards of cloth on a woman's head, especially if it covers part or all of her face, is a threat to education, women's rights, public security and even to freedom of religion itself.

MUSLIM COUNTRIES NOT IMMUNE TO THE TREND

Amazingly, countries whose populations are predominantly Muslim are not immune to this trend. Indeed, it seems they have led the charge.

For many years, Turkey, followed more recently by Algeria and Tunisia, has had a prohibition on wearing Hijab. Egypt, up until a few weeks ago, also forbade women students to wear scarves. Morocco forbade its citizens living in France to join protests against Hijab strictures there.

Women who defy the bans may be arrested, denied jobs and education, fined or even thrown in prison. More recently, moves against the Hijab have been made in European and American countries.

THE CASE OF HIJAB DISCRIMINATION IN FRANCE

This September in France, the national minister of education issued a directive that effectively banned head scarves from the classroom. On October 3, police were called in to prevent 22 Muslim girls from entering their school wearing the Hijab.

Since then polls have shown that 86 percent of the French populace supports the education minister's decree.

The general perception is that Hijab is a threat to secularism and the separation of religion and state. In particular, there was concern that Hijab is responsible for dividing Muslim and non-Muslim students.

Some even claim that it is an Islamist plot to "demolish the secular public system" (Le Point Magazine).

Others worry that head scarves introduce religious influences into the public school and places undue strain on other students to conform to Islam's dress or moral code.

HIJAB: A VIOLATION OF A WOMAN'S RIGHTS?

Another claim is that Hijab constitutes a violation of the female's human rights because it is a form of discrimination.

Yet, it is common in France for students to wear crosses or yarmulkes (the Jewish skullcap) and for Jewish students to be exempted from Saturday classes. Defending his discriminatory decision, [French education minister Francois] Bayrou declared, "My instructions to school heads will be very clear. We will continue to accept discrete religious signs, as has always been the case. But we cannot accept ostentatious signs that divide our youth."

BENAZIR BHUTTO ON THE HIJAB

Visiting Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto added insult to injury, when addressing the French Diplomatic Press Association on November 3.

[She] said that Muslim girls who want to wear head scarves perhaps "want to make an identity of their own and to observe what they consider to be their traditions," and declared "luckily my father did not ask me to wear a veil, otherwise I might not be here before you today."

HIJAB DISCRIMINATION IN AUSTRALIA

Sociology professor Gary Bouma, of Melbourne's Monash University, who authored [the] Australian Bureau of Immigration and Population Research's report, says wearing the Hijab "clearly sets a woman aside as different and as a serious Muslim," adding "that wearing the Hijab made it difficult for them to get jobs."

The report, which said that many of Australia's 150,000 Muslims have experienced harassment and bigotry, was released by Immigration Minister Nick Bollock on November 4, just days after his government announced new laws carrying jail sentences for inciting racial hatred.

IT STARTED IN FRANCE

These are the latest episodes in an ongoing debate which started in 1989 when three French girls wore head scarves to their school. The principal would not let them in and so started a national controversy.

At that time, education minister Lionel Jospin refused to set a policy on head scarves and asked the Council of State to make a ruling.

They declined, saying that it was up to the individual schools to decide whether or not to allow scarves. But in 1992, the Council of State seemed to reverse itself, and required that the three girls be reinstated.

The current minister of education, Francois Bayrou, feared that schools, “have the impression that we do not give them the means to deal realistically with this type of incident,” and so instituted the ban.

HIJAB IS PROTECTED BY THE LAW IN FRANCE

French Muslims say that the Gaullist government’s decree is absurd because the nation’s estimated 700 Hijab-wearing students could hardly be considered a threat. Muslim leaders are pondering about asking their people to pull-out up to one million school children from state schools and educate them at home unless this directive is withdrawn.

They point out that the wearing of Hijab is protected in the French constitution under the Freedom of Religion and Rights of Individuals Act as amended in 1992.

The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe which had another explanation for the French fury, said: “The French government is using the presence of Muslims as a political slogan to win votes. The French nation boasts about its revolution of liberty, fraternity and equality. They should follow other Europeans who accept Muslims as a nation and respect their faith and practice.”

DISCRIMINATION IN BRITAIN

Echoes of this debate have been felt in Britain where in 1990 two Muslim girls were sent home for wearing head scarves.

More troublesome is anti-Muslim violence on the streets, discrimination in the workplace, and the lack of public funding for Islamic schools while Catholic, Jewish, and other religious schools receive state support.

HIJAB DISCRIMINATION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

On the other side of the Atlantic, we see a similar patten. In Trinidad and Tobago, two Caribbean islands that have large Muslim populations, the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist and Hindu boards of education issued a joint statement prohibiting Muslim girls-who are assigned to their state-supported schools-from wearing Hijab to class.

In the statement, the board justified the ban by explaining that, “our boards of managements feel very strongly that there should be no exceptions to the rule of uniform. In fact the very term ‘uniform’ indicates that we are unwilling to allow any deviation from this.”

The Muslims have gone to court to fight the ban.

HIJAB DISCRIMINATION IN THE U.S.: VIRGINIA

And in the United States there have been several cases in the past few years. Islamic Horizons has reported on the case of a Virginia teacher who was removed from her post in 1989 when she started wearing a scarf. The courts first said she should be given back pay, but later this decision was reversed. At last notice the case was still being appealed.

HIJAB DISCRIMINATION IN ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Just this fall, Tayyibah Amatullah was arrested in St. Paul during a shopping trip because she violated a law which prohibits people from concealing their identity with “a robe, mask or other disguise unless it is for entertainment purposes.”

Admittedly, there appears to have been confusion on the part of the police officers.

“They didn’t know whether it was a man, a woman or a bank robber behind the clothing,” stated police spokesman, Paul Adelman. “They have seen other Muslim women whose faces were half-covered...but they described this person as bizarre. It did not look at all Muslim.”

Amatullah follows the strictest interpretation, completely covering her face while in public. The confusion appears to have been further complicated by Amatullah’s refusal to speak to the officers.

“I cannot intermingle with men in public,” explains Amatullah. “I cannot look at men or talk to men or allow them to touch me.”

When the officers told her to uncover her face or to leave the mall, Amatullah got angry and the police took her to a small room where they ticketed her. Amatullah and the Minneapolis community were outraged.

“If we’re supposed to be in a free country, why can’t I freely practice my religion as long as I’m not infringing on anyone else? Who am I hurting by covering my face?” Amatullah asked.

The police department felt the arrest was not about religion, Adelman says, but rather controlling crime.

Youths wearing ski masks or bandanas over their faces have been arrested recently in the mall, where crime is a problem. However, the community rallied to the cause and the case against Amatullah was dropped.

It seems that this incident could have been avoided. While Muslims disagree as to covering the face, the Quran is clear with regards to speech.

In Surah Ahzab (33:32) it says, "...If you fear God, then do not be too complaisant in your speech, lest one whose heart is diseased should be moved with desire, but speak in a straightforward way."

And there is ample evidence that women spoke in public during and after the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

For instance, Omar Al Khattab, when he was Khalifah, limited the amount of dowry a woman could receive. One woman stood up in the Masjid and told him he could not do this since the Quran commanded men to give women their dowries even though it be a treasure, so no one could limit the amount. Khalifah Omar agreed with the woman and reversed his decree.

The point is, of course, that while there are limits on the type of speech men and women should engage in, it is not totally forbidden.

Even if an error in judgment may have been made by Amatullah, the arrest is ominous, and could set a dangerous precedent, especially when viewed in light of international trends and general anti-Muslim sentiment here in the United States.

DISCRIMINATION OF MUSLIMS IN U.S. PRISONS

Also of concern, are several rulings regarding Muslim prison inmates made by the Supreme Court over the past year-and-a-half which indicate that even Justices, who are to uphold the constitutional right to freedom of religion, do not understand the requirements of Islam, or perhaps do not value their practice to the extent that they value Judeo-Christian practice.

For instance, they decreed that prisons were not required to allow Muslims to gather for congregational prayers on Friday, even though those institutions had no problems providing services for a variety of Christian and Jewish groups.

Muslims say that they can only surmise that the justices did not understand that Jumu'ah prayer is not optional for Muslim men. They hope that if the issue of Hijab comes before the court it does understand that it is not an option for Muslim women either.

RELIGIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ARE IGNORED

Optimism, however, is not called for, according to John Witte, director of the law and religion program at Emory University in Atlanta, and co-organizer of a recent international conference on religious human rights.

"The human-rights revolution is passing religion by," says Witte.

He cites several reasons. For many, religion is private and so discussion of religious rights and laws seems to violate some basic premise.

As well, people from different faiths often cannot agree on what rights should be protected.

For instance, proselytizing is an important practice for Christians and Muslims, but for people of other faiths, it is unimportant.

As a result, joint effort is difficult.

Religious groups, “are interested in protecting their own people,” says Witte, “but the notion that we have to develop golden rules of religious liberty-treating everyone in a manner in which we would like to have ourselves treated as religious people-is something that has only recently caught on.”

The idea that others have the right to their own religion, is an anathema to many religions.

What then, should Muslims in America do to prevent further problems, especially with regards to the right to wear what Islam required them to wear?

EDUCATION IS KEY TO GAINING RIGHTS

Muslims agree that first, they must educate their fellow Americans about Islam in ways that are relevant and meaningful.

Today, Muslims are becoming more accessible in general and less removed from the public eye.

Islamic centers and Muslim organizations across North America are increasingly getting involved in interfaith dialogues and public forums, and are inviting local clergy and school groups to come to the Masjids for Jumu’ah or Eid prayers.

MUSLIMS MORE DETERMINED TO CONTRIBUTE

Some Muslim communities have initiated outreach projects, such as programs for the poor, the abused, or the homeless, hospital and nursing home visitation programs, and even knitting groups who donate hats and scarves to shelters around the community.

The Muslims are more determined to make a positive contribution to society. Muslim organizations are calling upon parents to become more involved in local government and school functions, such as PTA’s, textbook committees, or school boards, in order to make their good presence felt.

Muslims’ leaders are educating their people that by being involved with the school system and local government, they can develop credibility and good will in their communities.

Indeed, results are already visible in many areas.

GOOD NEWS FROM NEW JERSEY AND VIRGINIA

One school district in New Jersey closed for Eid holiday.

The principal argued that it wasn't fair to close for Christian and Jewish holidays and then ignore those of the Muslim students in the school.

A school in Reston, Virginia invited Muslim parents to display Ramadan and Eid posters on the school library wall where other religious holidays are highlighted. And various states have instituted Islam days.

A FAR-REACHING SOLUTION TO RIGHTS

Muslim legal experts are suggesting a more far-reaching solution. They are asking for the institution of Islamic courts in the U.S. replicating the experience of the American Indian Tribal Court System.

In a landmark decision in 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an Indian tribe may not assert criminal jurisdiction over a nonmember, reasoning that nonmembers should not be subject to discriminatory tribunals.

Similarly, they feel that the Indian Child Welfare Act passed by U.S. Congress in 1978 which gives tribal courts powers in family matters.

Muslim legal experts believe that Muslims need to start by establishing an organization dealing with Muslim family law and professional legal association.

Banning Hijab in Canada: It can Happen Anywhere
by Sheema Khan, a member of the Ottawa, Canada branch of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and was one of the few Muslim activists at the forefront in defending the right of Muslim girls to wear Hijab during the 1994-95 controversy in Quebec, Canada.

During the late 1980's and early 1990's, I remember the stories emanating from France of young Muslim schoolgirls expelled for wearing the Hijab. While many of the young sisters were permitted to return to school wearing the Hijab, wider questions had been raised.

How does a purely secular public school system accommodate religious beliefs? What about the issues of freedom and oppression of women? Were these girls influenced by the "integristes" of Algeria, who were aspiring to implement an Islamic government in the former French colony?

Was this another example of "immigrants" failing to integrate into French society (a favorite theme of le Front National, a national anti-immigrant party)? Was this the beginning of the end of the strict separation between church and state?

At the time, I thought the problem was peculiar to France. Impossible for such an event to happen in Quebec, Canada. Then on September 10th, 1994, the Muslim community of Quebec (and Canada) received a strong wake-up call.

THE CASE OF EMILIE OUMET

Emilie Ouimet, a 13-year-old high school student, was sent home from school for wearing the Hijab. The primary reason given by the principal was that the school had a strict code that forbade the use of caps or attire that would distinguish students from their peers – part of a dress code for disciplinary reasons.

Soon after, a debate raged for months through Quebec society.

Incredibly, the issues raised were similar to those raised in France: religious belief in a secular system; the fear of religious fundamentalism; Hijab as a symbol of oppression versus liberation; and integration of "immigrants" into Quebec society (the failure of which was exploited by La Societe St-Jean Baptiste, a Quebec organization).

NO EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE ISSUE

A few more incidents of young Hijabis expelled from school emerged. In some cases, parents of girls were interrogated by school administrators on whether they forced their daughters against their will to wear the Hijab.

A few school principals questioned the right of Muslim students to fast during the month of Ramadan. The Muslim community found itself at the center of a debate for which it had no unifying voice. Divisions within prevented any meaningful coalition of resources to address the pressing needs.

However, that did not stop individuals from taking action, including the parents of Dania Bali, a straight-A student who was asked to remove her Hijab. They filed a complaint with the Quebec Human Rights Commission.

A RULING THAT TURNED THE TIDE

As Ramadan arrived, the Commission made a landmark ruling that turned the tide: Quebec schools did not have the right to prohibit any student from wearing religious attire (be it a Sikh turban, a Jewish yarmulke, a Christian cross, or Islamic Hijab).

More importantly, Quebec society was asked to consider the issues of religious pluralism in the emerging “global village”.

The Quebec Charter of Rights guaranteed religious freedom, and no school administrator or employer could take that right away.

OTHER GROUPS ALSO SUPPORTED RIGHT TO WEAR HIJAB

In addition, the Quebec Council for the Status of Women and the Canadian Jewish Congress came out in favor of the Hijab – for different reasons.

For the Council, it was an issue of freedom of choice and access to education. If the Hijab were banned, the Council argued, many of these young Muslim girls would simply not attend school, and thus be penalized for their choice of belief.

For the Congress, it was an issue of religious rights for minorities.

COMMISSION ALSO RULED AGAINST A MUSLIM SCHOOL

It should be also noted that the Commission ruled against a Muslim school in Quebec that required non-Muslim teachers to wear the Hijab while teaching. One cannot force one's beliefs on others – be it for or against the Hijab.

Since that time, there have been fewer incidents of Hijab discrimination in the schools.

COMMUNITY HAS TO BE MORE PROACTIVE

However, the Muslim community must become more proactive in educating Quebec society about its beliefs and practices. It must also put aside differences for the common good of the community.

It must be ready to defend its rights by using the appropriate channels readily available.

In Defence of Non-Hijaabi Sisters
From Soundvision at <http://www.soundvision.com>

It had been ten years since she had set foot in a mosque. Being at university had broadened her mind in many ways, one of them being her reconnecting with Islam.

She had begun praying five times a day a month ago, and now felt ready to pray in public, at the university's Juma prayer.

She paused and stood a few feet away from the women's entrance. Taking a deep breath, she pulled the silk scarf out of her purse and tied it carefully on her head. Her ponytail stuck out a bit. She smoothed the creases on her long-sleeved beige shirt and tugged at the bottom of it to make it longer over her pants.

The prayer was great. She had never felt this sense of inner peace.

Afterwards, she tried mingling with the sisters, but nobody even looked her way. A few of them even pretended not to hear her greeting. The only sister who did talk to her said in a huff: "You know your prayer is not accepted in those pants and that tiny thing you pass for a Hijab. I suggest you get more Islamic knowledge and dress properly before coming back here."

The words stung her like a million bumble bees. Too numb to respond or speak, she charged out of the hall. Never again would she associate with these people, she told herself.

And never again would she return to Juma.

Are you shocked reading about this incident? Don't be. It has been a reality in almost every Muslim community in North America.

This harsh judgment and intolerance shown towards Muslim women who do not wear Hijab can lead to at least some Muslim women to become alienated from the Muslim community, and could lead to a loss of Islamic practice.

While Hijab is an obligation clearly ordained in the Quran and Sunnah, the above-mentioned method of its enforcement and encouragement is not Islamic, according to Muslim scholars, researchers and activists. Muslims have to start seeing the issue from a different perspective, they say.

SOME ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF NON-HIJABI SISTERS

"I would say that the overwhelming majority of Muslim women I have met who don't cover and who believe in God, believe they should cover, but believe they're not ready yet," says Sharifa Alkhateeb, vice-president of the North American Council of Muslim Women, in an interview with Sound Vision.

This reality indicates there is a seed of faith that needs to be nurtured and encouraged. As well, it means these women need all the support they can get.

Abdalla Idris Ali is a member of the Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) Majlis Shura, which debates Islamic issues and establishes policy for the organization. He says what also has to be remembered is that many Muslim women are coming from cultures where the Hijab is not practiced, for whatever reason. These sisters should not be condemned. Rather, Islamic concepts like Hijab, should be explained to them.

Another possibility is that Muslim women who do not wear Hijab are coming from families which are either not practicing Islam, or are downright hostile to it.

In this situation, "it's actually a celebration that a young Muslim woman wants to pray Juma," says Kathy Bullock, who started wearing Hijab two weeks after she converted to Islam.

"I think that's where the tolerance comes in."

Another reason some Muslim women may find Hijab difficult is because of the often negative ideas surrounding Hijab. For instance, that wearing Hijab kills marriage and job prospects. Muslim activists must seek to dispel such myths.

"There needs to be a lot more support for the women who decide to cover," says Bullock, who completed a PhD. about The Politics of the Veil from the University of Toronto in January.

Bullock also gives a chilling warning to those who condemn non-Hijabi Muslim women: "We might be wearing Hijab but we might be doing something incredibly wrong which cancels out the reward [for wearing it]." One of these things she mentions is arrogance.

WHY ARE SOME MUSLIMS SO SENSITIVE ABOUT THE HIJAB?

Some Muslims seek to condemn non-Hijabis out of their understanding of the Quranic injunction of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. Yet, they fail to take the right approach in doing it, in accordance with the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), which was one of kindness, gentleness and patience.

Interestingly, some Muslim men and women who criticize non-Hijabi Muslim women seem to have different reasons for doing it and varying ways of approaching a sister who does not wear Hijab.

"Unfortunately on the brothers' side there is a push to make Hijab the marker of Islamic identity," says Bullock. She also emphasizes the hypocrisy of many Muslim men criticizing Muslim women who do not wear the Hijab, while they themselves wear tight jeans or pants, or short shorts. These forms of dress are strictly prohibited for men in Islam.

Yet, go to any Juma or Jamaah prayer, and these forms of unIslamic dress can be easily seen.

"I think some of the men put too much emphasis on the women instead of looking at their own selves," she says.

However, Alkhateeb thinks most of the men are less vigilant than the women about Hijab, partly because they figure the women are going to take care of it.

She argues that the majority of the Muslim men who are over concerned about with the issue of Hijab because they don't trust themselves sexually, and fear their own reaction to a woman who is not covered Islamically.

For women, weak self-identity and faith could explain the harshness shown towards non-Hijabi Muslimas.

“It is so difficult to maintain the practice of covering, emotionally, psychologically on the job and in everyday life, you get so much negativity from other people that the reaction of most of the practicing women and activists is to develop a cocoon, a protective cocoon, and part of that protective cocoon is in continually, verbally and in other ways rejecting what is unlike yourself,” explains Alkhateeb.

“And that is to shore up your own self-identity. I think that part of the reason they are so negative is because this is part of shoring up their own self-identity and because there is a hidden fear that if they let down their guard that they'll stop covering. And if they allow any space in their mind to alternative ways of thinking that their thinking will fall apart. And that means that the underlying precepts and concepts are not strong.”

WHERE DOES HIJAB FIT ON THE ISLAMIC LADDER?

“While it is correct to say that Hijab is correct in the teaching of Islam we tend to forget that there are many other basic issues, why the over obsession?” asks Jamal Badawi, a member of the North American Fiqh Council.

Part of the reason some Muslims treat non-Hijabis so harshly is because of their lack of understanding about where the obligation of Hijab ranks on the Islamic ladder.

A more correct approach would be gradual and would mean implementing more important aspects of Islam, like Iman (faith), and praying five times a day before moving on to requirements like Hijab.

“We fail to see any Ayah (verse of the Quran) pertaining to Hijab in the entire Makkan revelation that was given to the Prophet, that's almost 13 years. The injunctions about more detailed aspects relating to the righteous Muslim community were revealed during the Medinan period. Some in the middle, and later part of that period,” explains Badawi,

“This is a revealing lesson for us because it shows that Allah knew in advance what injunctions He wanted to reveal,” he adds. “Yet He delayed the revelation of those matters until many, many years of preparation on the level of Iman, submission to Allah, love of Allah and the sincere desire to voluntarily obey Allah and His Messenger. Once that base was established it wasn't difficult at all for the believing women to willingly abide by the injunctions of Allah. “

Badawi says this is similar to how the Islamic commandment forbidding intoxicants was introduced.

“The same process of preparation took place to the point that when the final prohibition of intoxicants was revealed it wasn't difficult for men to abide by that willingly and immediately.”

He explains this was especially difficult for Muslim men, who were the ones reported more likely to consume alcohol than women at that time.

“Some well-intentioned Muslims seem to miss these lessons from the gradual revelation and become too legalistic to the point of doing more harm than benefit, notwithstanding their good intentions,” adds Badawi.

WRONGLY USING THE “BASEBALL BAT” APPROACH TO THE HIJAB

“Muslims gain a little bit of knowledge and they want to run around with a baseball bat and beat people over the head with religion. That’s exactly what [has] made many young people leave the mosque,” says Alkhateeb.

Using the right method to tell Muslim women about Hijab is crucial, just as it is in advising Muslims to implement any other requirement of the faith.

“In the Prophet’s whole life he led by encouragement not pressure,” she says. “The way he behaved is the opposite of how most Muslims who are practicing Muslims behave towards each other in terms of giving advice. His way was not carrying around a religious baseball bat.”

The thinker and writer, who has also been an activist for the last 35 years points out the “baseball bat” methodology is in full swing when many Muslims encounter non-Hijabis.

“Instead of inviting her and embracing her, they’re immediately trying to think about what they can criticize her about,” says Alkhateeb.

The Prophet also did not use “vigilantes” to impose a religious requirement like Hijab.

“When we deal with the Sunnah, we find that he never appointed vigilantes to go around to reinforce something that believing Muslim women were encouraged to do, or use any harsh words or actions to arrive at that desired situation or desired setting,” says Badawi. “The approach that he followed which we should follow as our example was not to focus on issues like Hijab before Iman and psychological and spiritual preparation was in place.”

Badawi stresses inviting to Hijab and other Islamic requirements should be done in a way “that would motivate people to respect the moral values of society rather than simply forcing them to do so. In fact that goes back to the definition of Islam which is willing trusting and loving submission to Allah and obedience to His Messenger.”

As an example, he cited an incident from the lifetime of the Prophet when a Bedouin man urinated in the mosque. When other Muslims saw this, they became very angry and wanted to rebuke him harshly. The Prophet on the other hand, stopped them and told the man gently what he was doing was incorrect.

“That story is a classic example of the contrast between the attitudes of some well-intentioned Muslims who want to correct the wrong immediately and by any means and the approach of the Prophet of kindness, gentleness, persuasion and wisdom,” he explains.

TEMPORARILY TOLERATING THE WRONG: A RULE OF USUL AL-FIQH

“The other aspect which is frequently missed is another rule of ordaining the good and forbidding the evil which was addressed by many scholars especially by the famous Shaykh ul Islam Ibn Taymiyyah,” says Badawi. “The rule basically is that if in a given situation, attempting or trying to forbid the wrong may result in greater harm than benefit, then it is better to tolerate the wrong on a temporary basis.”

“I think the classic example that Ibn Taymiyyah is referred to is when the Tatars invaded Muslim lands,” explains Badawi. “He was told that some of these soldiers were drinking and that they should be stopped because this is part of forbidding the wrong yet, he advised that they should be left alone. His reasoning was that if those soldiers become sober, they might go on killing more people which is a greater harm than drinking”.

“This is not a new rule,” he emphasizes. “It is a basic rule in Usul al-Fiqh, the roots of Islamic law, that if some harm is inevitable then it is better to tolerate the lesser harm in order to prevent great harm.”

Badawi demonstrates how this rule could apply to a situation where a Muslim sister who does not wear Hijab attends Juma prayer.

“For example, if that sister is approached in a harsh way she may not come again which could hurt her and hurt the community at large. But if she’s welcomed first and there’s demonstration of brotherhood and friendship, then in a gentle and wise way that is suitable for her, she can be encouraged, then of course it would be a far better result than the confrontational, harsh approach.”

INVOLVING NON-HIJABI SISTERS IN ACTIVITIES

“It’s only by mixing in the right company that someone who is contemplating Hijab will have the strength and courage to make the final act,” says Bullock.

This means women offering friendship, as well as involving the sisters in Islamic activities through organizations like Muslim Students’ Associations. Bullock notes that if a Muslim woman wants to do something for Islam she should be applauded “because she could be out there doing something else.”

“Muslim organizations have a duty to say what is right and to invite in the best of manner women to cover and to support them when they do so but that doesn’t mean individuals should be judgmental when women are not covering,” she adds.

INVOLVEMENT, BUT NOT LEADERSHIP

However, Ali and Badawi draw the line of involvement of non-Hijabi Muslim women in Muslim organizations at the leadership level.

They both say that any Islamically-oriented organization will select a person to be their leader who reflects their goals and aspirations. That means a Muslim woman who does not wear Hijab would not be selected because she is not fully following the precepts of Islam. Similarly, a Muslim man who is not fulfilling Islamic obligations like prayer, chaste behavior, etc. would also not be selected for a leadership position in such a milieu.

Badawi says this is not exclusion. Rather, it is the natural outcome in any milieu which aims to be Islamically-oriented. Its leadership will represent the precepts of Islam as much as possible.

“I’m against the term exclusion because if we apply the Islamic Shura (consultative) method then the leadership would emanate from the people, will be chosen by the people. And if the community or Islamic organization in a given setting are truly Islamically oriented, one would expect that the person chosen to be the spokesperson and symbol of that organization should reflect their conviction and values in the best possible way.”

A POSITIVE APPROACH

Badawi gives an example of how he, “with my weaknesses” approached an aggressive non-Hijabi sister and the result.

Many years back, during a visit to Australia, one sister, during one of his lectures, a non-Hijabi Muslim woman asked questions about Hijab, in a disapproving manner. He talked to her kindly and give information without harshness.

Two years later, he returned to Australia, and a sister in full Hijab approached him, asking if he recognized her. He did not.

“I am the one who was arguing with you about Hijab two years ago,” she told him. “But it is the approach and information that you gave me that helped me to study more, to educate myself and to make up my own decision and I am happy with what I decided.”

Anti-Hijab Discrimination: Some Legal Advice

Cases of Hijab discrimination against Muslim girls and women in Canada and the United States are not uncommon. However, there are measures sisters can take in both countries to fight against such intolerance.

Below are some suggestions based on interviews with a member of the Washington, D.C.-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Toronto, Canada-based Canadian Muslim Civil Liberties Association (CMCLA):

TIPS FOR DISCRIMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES

There are three main areas where discrimination tends to take place against sisters who wear Hijab: in employment, public facilities and education. Br. Salahudin Shakir is CAIR's Civil Rights Coordinator. He has offered the following advice about dealing with Hijab discrimination in these three areas:

IN EMPLOYMENT

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act guarantees the right of employees to wear Hijab in the workplace.

Br. Salahudin pointed out that it is very important for sisters to remember that the employee has to inform the employer either at the beginning of the job, during the job interview or once they've been questioned about the Hijab that they wear the Hijab for religious reasons.

It is preferable that this be done in writing. If your employer is not allowing you to wear Hijab:

- Inform your employer in writing that you wear Hijab for religious reasons.
- If s/he still denies you the right to wear your Hijab, write a letter to him/her explaining that this is a violation of your civil rights.
- If this has no affect on the employer, see if there is a body within the company that can handle this complaint. Most larger companies have an Employment Opportunities Office (EEO) or a Human Resources department where a complaint can be filed.
- If nothing happens in this regard, file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in writing. They will conduct an interview with you about your complaint.

NOTE: in most cases you have the legal right to wear Hijab on the job. The only exception would be if the Hijab becomes a health or safety issue.

IN PUBLIC FACILITIES

- If you are called names by strangers at a public facility like in the mall or on the street, there is not very much you can do.
- If you go to a restaurant and you are treated differently by an employee, or you are thrown out of a store because of your Hijab, this is religious discrimination.
- If you are kicked out of a store, verbally approach the manager of the store.
- If this does not resolve the issue, write a letter to the store's corporate or legal office. You can complain and ask for an apology.
- This can even reach the level of a lawsuit if you suffered injury. This is covered under Title II of the Civil Rights Act which covers discrimination in public places.

PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

If someone pulls off your Hijab or threatens to physically harm you because of your Hijab anywhere, you can file a criminal assault charge with local police. However, you would have to be able to identify, by appearance, the perpetrator. In many states, you can go into small claims court by filing a civil assault charge if this happens. In some states, this would be considered a hate crime, for which there are more severe punishments.

IN SCHOOL

If a professor makes offensive or derogatory statements about your Hijab, you can:

- File a complaint with the principal.
- If that doesn't work, file a complaint with the local school board.
- You can file a lawsuit.

TIPS FOR DISCRIMINATION IN CANADA

Br. Faisal Kutty, a Muslim lawyer based in Toronto, Ontario is general counsel of the CMCLA. He has given the following advice about Hijab discrimination in Canada.

In general, under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as under various human rights protections at provincial levels, Muslim women and men have been guaranteed full religious freedom.

If you have been discriminated against, the first step is to deal with the perpetrator directly, whether this person is an employer, store employee, etc. However, this is not necessary if you feel that the perpetrator is a danger to your safety.

If the discrimination has been at the hands of an employer, most workplaces have an internal body dealing with complaints of discrimination. You should approach this body.

As well, at this stage, you can approach a Muslim organization like the CMCLA to help you deal with this incident of discrimination.

“I would say the vast majority of cases can be resolved by approaching either the perpetrator or someone who’s their senior and involving some Muslim organization,” Br.. Faisal said.

However, if this is not the case, then the case can be taken to the human rights commission at the provincial or federal level.

To determine which level you must go to, you have to first find out under which jurisdiction the area you are dealing with falls under. For example, in Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction, therefore, you would have to approach your province’s human rights commission, not its federal equivalent. However, if you had a complaint about something regarding the Canadian military, this falls under federal jurisdiction, therefore, you would have to approach the federal human rights commission.

Br.. Faisal did warn, however, that going forward with a complaint with the commissions is a “long, protracted process” with minimal compensation. The purpose really is to receive punitive damages. As well, if the discrimination has been at the hands of an employer who fired you because of your Hijab, the commission will not generally force the employer to allow you back into that job.

If you are not satisfied with the commission’s ruling, you can appeal to a provincial level court.

For further information, CAIR can be reached at (202) 659-2254. Those interested in contacting the CMCLA should call Br. Anwar Syed at (416) 289-9666.

The Fear of Hijab

Nothing strikes fear in the Western psyche like a piece of cloth on a woman's head by Naheed Mustafa

In September 1994, 13-year-old Emilie Ouimet was sent home from Montreal (Quebec, Canada)'s Louis Riel High School because her Hijab did not conform to the school's dress code.

Two months later, a second Quebec girl, 15-year-old Dania Baali, was told she would have to transfer to another school from College Regina Assumpta if she wanted to observe Hijab.

It is incredible to know nothing strikes fear in the hearts of Western man like a piece of cloth on a woman's head.

The Hijab is Perceived As A Radical Statement

To some, she is making a radical statement about her violent political ideas. To others, she is the symbol of absolute subjugation and is in dire need of rescue. For them, having such women as part of the North American landscape is frightening. She is "the veiled woman," belonging in a foreign place, an actor on an exotic stage.

We are seen as poisoning this "free and democratic" culture with our "weak and submissive ways." Thus, various school boards in Quebec have decided that rooting out the unwanted influence at the earliest point possible is the best way to avoid contaminating their haute culture.

The Fear of Hijab is Legitimate

I have often wondered why a woman in Hijab participating freely in this society is perceived as so threatening. I have always thought that fear of such women was unfounded. After all, her wearing Hijab has nothing to do with anyone else-it only has to do with her commitment to Allah. But now I realize the fear is legitimate.

"Muslim women are a threat."

Hijab Sends a Message of Acceptance and Rejection

A woman who covers herself out of the love of Allah is not just stating something about what she accepts but she is also saying something about what she rejects. Any woman who refuses to play the gender games that are so basic to all societies is going to be pushed out.

Women have always been expected to play some kind of role in every society. In North America, a great part of this role revolves around sex and the aura of sexuality. Any relationship involving men and women has some kind of sexual undertone.

When a woman covers herself she is rejecting that role, she is saying sex will have nothing to do with her public life. It is the fact that she has taken out of the discussion her physical self that people find so upsetting.

A Woman in Hijab : More than "Just a Woman"

A female doctor, writer, electrician or plumber may be appreciated in the work environment for her skill, but is still basically seen as "just a woman." But put her in Hijab so that what makes her a woman cannot be appraised and all of a sudden you are dealing with a person.

It is a radical idea not liked by many.

She is Rejecting The Politics of Gender

This person is not only rejecting preset gender roles but also the associated politics of gender. She is therefore rejecting the basic social structure which also means she is seen to be rejecting the political system and its tied economic setup.

So educators in Quebec should feel threatened. Emilie and Dania are more than just two girls whose headgear does not conform to school dress code. They are representatives of something bigger, of a different way of life and of living. It took me some time to come to this conclusion.

Hijab : An Act of Faith

I had always seen Hijab as a private matter between myself and Allah. I chose to wear Hijab because I felt my Iman (faith) had to be translated into action and if Allah asks me to cover, then I should. If I could not act out my faith then what was the point of saying I had any faith? But, unfortunately, those around me did not see my wearing Hijab as a personal act of worship. Rather, they saw it as a personal attack on them. I wore Hijab and that automatically meant I disapproved of everything they did. I found the hostility difficult to understand. Just because my head was covered, people were unable to relate to me. I had a newfound freedom and a greater sense of confidence in myself as a Muslim but most others saw me as a throwback.

Women's Progress Still Tied To Appearance

Progressiveness for women is unfortunately still defined by how much they are willing to reveal. The more power women seem to gain, the more compelled they are to take off their clothes. This paradox is at the root of the confusion faced by North American women.

They are supposed to be strong, independent and assertive yet, at the same time, they are made slaves to an ideal physical image which cannot be achieved by the vast majority of women. This duality is a marketable commodity.

Take the fashion industry for example; the latest from Paris says “glamor” is the hottest look of the season with its glossy lipsticks, slip dresses, and spiked heels.

Women object saying that fashion designers are expecting them to dress like prostitutes at the office. They loathe the fact that the female body is used for selling everything from cosmetics to clothing to cars. Yet when Muslim women cover themselves up and protest the very same thing, they are conversely regarded as being oppressed.

Terminal Confusion About Women's Freedom

The confusion is terminal. While some fight against what they see as objectifying women, others feel the ideal way to ultimate freedom for women is the right to go bare chested in public. The rationale seems to be that once our bodies are desexualized then it will be safer for us to go out on the streets. We just have to give up our dignity, our modesty and our privacy. And it is in the midst of all this confusion that women in Hijab have arrived. Their unwillingness to play into the hands of either side has earned them scorn.

Hijab has become a Political Statement

Hijab is fundamentally part of worship but, right or wrong, it has become a political statement as well. We may only be expressing our commitment to our Deen (religion) but Hijab is seen to symbolize a rejection of the West.

The Mistake of the Secularists

This perceived rejection has affected liberal secularists so profoundly that they are willing to push aside their own basic principle of individual freedom to stave off the “oppressive” influences of Islam. It would be a wise person indeed who would realize that it is the very culture secularists are trying to preserve that has led people to search for something else.

And for those who are truthful to themselves, they will see that Emilie and Dania have it figured out.