CHAPTER 5

Islamic Discourses

I believe that women are more likely than men to read the Qur'ān for liberation.
(Asma Barlas)

Introduction

At a conference held in Beirut at my university a few years ago, the Muslim keynote speaker who happened to be a CEO of a large Lebanese corporation was asked a simple question: "Do you hire veiled women?" He had a simple answer: "Yes we do. We hire them in the back office, but we do not allow them to occupy positions where they have to face customers." He then went on explaining and defending the company's position in regards to that unwritten policy. Nobody in the audience made a rebuttal to his answer and the discussion went another way.

This answer summarizes many of the issues that surround veiled women in the workplace. First, the company operated in Lebanon where Muslims are the majority (about 60–65%). This proves the point that the "veil issue" is not restricted to Western societies where Muslims are the minority. Second, the CEO was a Muslim. So the stance taken by the CEO did not emanate from religious differences. In other words, it was not the case here that a non-Muslim manager was making a conscious decision to discriminate against

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veiled Muslim women. The decision was actually based on pragmatic reasoning that a veiled woman is not fit to occupy certain positions, irrespective of her education, qualifications, or experience.

Thus the veil issue, much debated in Western contexts, has also been an area of controversy, arguments, and counter-arguments across many contexts, including countries where Muslims are the majority and others where they are the minority. The disputes over the headscarf ban in France and other European countries do not represent the only cases where the veil proved to be a divisive issue. In this chapter, I will provide a brief description of the veil within its historic context. I will then continue to explore the various discourses about its role and significance specifically among academic scholars, *ulema'* (religious scholars), and intellectuals—including the growing discourse within Islamic feminism—concerned about this matter and what the veil means for women's status and participation in various Arab and Muslim contexts.

Historical Context

Examining the status of women just before the advent of Islam, one observes a paradox. On the one hand, there are historical indications that suggest that women in the *jahiliya* society were extremely disadvantaged. For example, it is known that infanticide, the burying of female daughters while they were alive, was a common practice. A dim picture also appears in areas concerning marriage customs, divorce rights, inheritance, and other aspects of social and economic lives. On the other hand, there are indications that portray a different picture. The story of Khadija, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, reflects an image of a wealthy woman who was—before Islam—an entrepreneur of sorts. She had a business, employed other men, traded beyond the borders of Mecca, and represented the epitome of economic participation. It is indeed the case that there was an interplay of gender/class/ethnicity factors that were operational during that era which allowed a woman like Khadija to thrive, while at the same time disadvantaged other members of society including poor and slave women.

The example of Khadija in her later interactions with her husband after Islam tells a story of a strong woman whose husband leaned on her for support. Muslim traditions indicate that when the Prophet received the message from God through the archangel Gabriel, he came back to her frightened and shivering. She comforted and consoled him; throughout their lives together, he drew courage out of her. When she later died well before him, he seemed to have buried a piece of his heart with her. Even as he remarried later on, he used to refer to her with affection: "She believed in

me when no one else did; she accepted what I was saying as truth when people rejected me; and she helped me with her money when there was no one else to lend me a helping hand."[1] The Prophet was not hesitant to indicate that, at various points in his life, he was dependent on her emotionally and economically. Khadija's story has been recurrently used in contemporary discourses on the role of women in Muslim societies. Her example is often advanced by Muslim feminists as a role model of a courageous, intelligent, and dependable woman who was instrumental in the life of her husband.

Khadija died a few years after the Prophet declared the message of Islam. That was a tough period for him to the extent that the year in which she died is dubbed the "year of grief." In that year he lost his compassionate wife in addition to his supportive uncle. When he was later driven out of Mecca to another city, Medina, things gradually became better. The deprived and oppressed Muhammad in Mecca became a head of a small, but growing, state. The men and women of Medina welcomed him as he established the first seeds of an Islamic society and government. It was in Medina that the first laws were written down, and it was there where the first signs of a new social order were established. This social order included the prescription of the veil (whatever that has meant for later-day Muslims). The veil was not only a dress code for the believing Muslim women. The veil marked a new social arrangement in which women became differentiated in new ways within the embryonic Medina Muslim society. While Muslims have historically debated the exact implications of the prescription of the veil, this era has been immensely important even for contemporary times. Various perspectives as to what the veil really means have had strong implications on defining women's roles in Muslim society, the degree of their participation in economic and political affairs, and their expected functions in the public versus private spheres.

Many historians argue that the veil was not a new phenomenon created by the new message of Islam at the time.[2] Actually, there were forms of veiling among Jewish, Christian, and pagan societies. Even after the Islamic prescription of the veil, and up to recent times, many European women conformed to a form of veiling during religious services in many churches. Nowadays, a form of veil is found among many disparate communities across the world. Those include the Amish, orthodox Jewish women, Hindu women, and other non-Muslim women in various communities. It even exists among men, though to a lesser extent, such as the *Tuareq* of North Africa and within Sikh communities mainly in India but also within immigrant groups in the West.

Since the time the few verses in *Sura Annur* (chapter of The Light) of the Qur'an were revealed, the veil, and its various forms and symbolisms, have taken different routes. Some, though markedly few, understand the verses and the behaviors of the early Muslim society to direct women to be fully covered, almost totally secluded from the presence of men. Others assert that the dress is not supposed to limit women's participation in the public and economic lives of their societies. Some assert that the headscarf is the invention of patriarchal structures which overpowered the genuine Islamic rulings at the time. Those differences of opinion have had significant impact on female participation in various Arab and Muslim societies. Religious teachings met cultural traditions, and thus various understandings emerged about how believing women should dress. This obviously had an impact on women's levels of economic and political participation across time and place.

Veil as a Face Cover

Some Muslim religious scholars assert that the veil has always meant, not only a headscarf, but also a face veil, and thus a screen distancing men and women. Before delving into what this group confirms regarding male–female relations, it would be important to define one of the schools that advocate such positions in the Arab world, loosely labeled as *Salafism*. Many—though not all—sub-branches within *Salafism* embrace this view, and those have been very vocal with significant outreach within the Arab world.

Salafism represents a philosophy in Islamic thought that emphasizes going back to the early roots. While various forms of *Salafism* are represented in many parts of the Arab world, its strongest presence is—without doubt—in Saudi Arabia. One of the strongest icons within this school was the late grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul Aziz BinBaz[3] (1912–1999). A mufti is the principal religious authority who has excellent command of religious principles. He is certified by virtue of his official position granted by the state to issue *fatwas*, or religious announcements, instructions, and interpretations. His ideas are considered by many to be ultra-conservative, especially in terms of the societal role of females. Although his impact was mostly felt in Saudi Arabia, he was, and still is, widely admired by millions of like-minded *Salafis* (people who adhere to *Salafism*). His role and also the role of his successor have been very influential in impacting social and legal discourses in the Kingdom.

Salafism generally asserts that female participation in the "domains of men" is in contradiction with their true nature. Such an encroachment will inevitably have severe negative societal implications. A woman's house is her kingdom. This is where she can be most productive as she takes care of the affairs of her house and her family. According to this school, the West has devalued the importance of taking care of the home and the family. This has eventually led to significant societal problems and disintegration within the family. Uncontrolled participation of women in the public space is considered a crime against the young as they lose the opportunity to be properly raised by dedicated mothers. Eventually children fail to get the right values from their mothers.[4]

This school of thought recognizes that women indeed participated in various roles in the early Muslim community as nurses or even as warriors. Yet they note that it would be false to draw generalized conclusions from those historical incidents about the permissibility of women participating in the public sphere alongside men. Their reading about Islamic history, especially the last few years before the Prophet's death, reflects an understanding that such occurrences happened within a strict separation between males and females. During such interactions, they assert, women observed the full veil including the face cover.

Advocates of such positions do not resist, and actually encourage, women to seek out better education and even get involved in the world of work. They do believe, however, that such initiatives have to be done within the two above-mentioned conditions: separation from men and observing the full cover including the face veil in case there is any presence of adult men. That's why women are encouraged to seek more education in girls-only schools and universities. They are also encouraged to take on work roles that do not compromise the above conditions through working in all-female education, health, and similar gender-segregated institutions.

Within the Kingdom, however, there are various dissenting voices that often challenge, softly in most cases, the official position of the religious establishment. Actions by the political arms of the Kingdom, represented by the various kings and crown-princes, reflect how the rulers have been trying to negotiate a positive transition into a relatively less conservative thinking and practice. This is evidenced, for example, by efforts made by the late King Abdullah to further facilitate female university education, and even create a prototype of a coed college in 2009, the *King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST)*, near Jeddah by the Red Sea.[5]

Strict traditions within Saudi Arabia still bar women from access to many job opportunities, and their political participation, despite recent improvements, is still very modest. While female labor force participation rate has improved, it still remains at 20% which is less than half of the neighboring Kuwait or UAE.[6] This is still up from the 10% rate of 2002.[7] All in all, the situation has improved, but changes have been slow, definitely slower than the pace desired by many Saudi and Arab feminists.

To explain further some of the discourses that have been going on among conservative circles, I am going to illustrate by drawing from a little-known text by a Saudi Arabian author named Ahmad Abdul Ghafoor Attar. In his 172-page book titled *the veil and the uncovering*, he dedicates long sections to defend a certain understanding of the veil that reflects the above-mentioned dominant discourse in Saudi Arabia which is markedly less dominant in other parts of the Islamic world. The book is a good representation of the positions of many Saudi religious scholars impacting daily practices and shaping male–female interactions.

In his introduction to the book, Attar notes that improvements in schooling in Saudi Arabia prove that the veil does not obstruct women from earning their education. He describes the positive role of the monarchy in advancing education for girls back in the 1960s. He does not, however, elaborate on the stern resistance that the late King Faisal[8] (1906–1975) faced when he introduced female education. He, instead, notes that Saudi women have been able to make significant educational accomplishments without compromising their veils.

As the veil is an important term to define, Attar asserts that the veil cannot be complete unless it includes the face. Although the term *niqab* is the term usually used to mean face-cover, Attar prefers to use the word *hijab*. He dedicates a long section explaining how both the male and female were created from one soul, quoting from the Qur'an: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women." (The Qur'an—chapter 4—verse 1). There are, however, natural urges and instincts among males and females which need to be properly regulated. Among the regulations are the restrictions put on Muslim women. A Muslim woman should have no relationship with an *ajnabi* (a person whom she is not allowed to interact with as he is not a father, brother, husband, or son). The divine law, continues Attar, has put levels of protection for Muslim women. The first of those protections is a *hijab* that "covers all her body and her limbs where

nothing becomes visible" (p. 38). Except under an extreme need, such as the need to be treated by a male doctor, no part of her body should be exposed to the eyes of an *ajnabi*.

In a later section titled "the uncovering of the face is not permissible," Attar notes the reasoning behind covering the face:

> In our Islamic law, it is not allowed [for women] to show their face and hands. . .the face summarizes all the beauty of a woman. . .evidence is clear that the *fitnah* [sedition or temptation] of the face is overpowering. Instincts and lusts when put on fire cannot be resisted or overcome, especially if there are a young man and a young woman. (p. 50)

Attar then brings forward further rationalization to this position. The face needs to be covered to protect women, because in guarding women lies the well-being of the whole society. The face veil, he asserts, was the practice in early Islam, and this is the practice that needs to be kept. Attar further criticizes other contemporary scholars who argue that the veil only represents a head cover that reveals the face and hands. He indicates that those scholars have been mistakenly impacted by the contexts in which they live where women do not cover their faces. Those scholars had to adapt to their environments and thus had to accommodate an understanding of the veil that is simply not correct. He makes a distinction between the *almuhajjabah* (the completely veiled woman) and the *alsaferah* (the woman who exposes her face). The *alsaferah* is more likely to get harassed and fall into unwanted approaches of men:

> The general moral decline would not have come if women kept their faces covered. What we see and what we hear about such erosion of values and sexual chaos in Muslim societies is only because it all started by uncovering of the face which eventually led to women exposing other parts of their bodies wearing seductive and provocative clothes (p. 141–142).

Based on this, Attar considers that the only real Muslim society in contemporary times is the Saudi society where the divine laws are applied. Because of this, Attar contends, only two rape cases have been reported in 50 years in Saudi Arabia. This is because of the face veil that has built a fortified barrier between men and women: "our society gives severe punishment to anybody who harasses a woman."

The work of Attar is representative of a school of thought echoed by many popular scholars in the Kingdom. The main issue here is that despite the

fact that more than 98% of Muslims live outside Saudi Arabia with a variety of understandings about the veil, this context takes special significance. First, Saudi Arabia represents the home of Islam where Mecca and Medina are situated. It was in those two cities that the mission of the Prophet first started, and it is to those places where Muslim pilgrims, from all over the world, visit and give special reverence. In addition, Saudi Arabia has what are probably the largest reserves of natural resources (oil). Thus it takes special geopolitical importance. There are various practices of face-covering in other parts of the Muslim world, and those only get attention when there is a political or economic reason for doing that. For example, very few people knew about the *burqa* in Afghanistan before 2001. It was only after the terrorist events of September 2001 that the Afghan female *burqa* got any serious media attention.

The face veil has led to a great controversy in Western countries where, out of millions of minority Muslims living there, very few Muslim women adopt it. It is evident that the face veil is not the preferred choice of dress even among religious Muslim women. According to a survey[9] by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research Center in seven Muslim-majority countries, the full face veil was the preferred style of dress for a minority of respondents except for Saudi Arabia where a face veil which kept the eyes exposed was favored by 63% of respondents. Despite the geopolitical and religious importance of Saudi Arabia, female dress practices in the Kingdom only have a marginal impact on women's dress in other contexts. While the face veil exists in many countries, the percentage of Muslim women who cover their faces is very low. In Tunisia, for example, according to some reports,[10] veiled women who cover their faces represent only about 3% of women. In Egypt, percentages possibly range between 5% to 7%.[11] The percentages in other Arab contexts are not expected to be much higher (except for some countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council).

The impact of the face veil on female participation in the Arab world did not get much scholarly attention. Over the last decade, most discussions about face veils have centered on the practice within countries where Muslims are the minority including the much publicized *burqa* ban in France. This got lots of media attention although reportedly only a small fraction of French Muslim women wore it. According to the interior ministry just 2000 women wore the face veil out of a 7.5 million Muslims in France (0.027%).[12] Interestingly, the stern resistance against the *burqa* has actually led to an increase in its incidence.[13] In addition, in a

country like Egypt, proposals to ban the face veil cast some doubts about the potential harms on the same women who were supposed to be helped by such a ban. "Because of the decision (to ban the face veil), now I will have to stay at home," reported a fully veiled practicing nurse.[14]

Without doubt, wearing the face veil puts limitations on women's participation in some sectors due to the unwillingness of some employers to hire those women. Some employers, such as those in the hospitality industry in Egypt, consider that the face veil is not fit for their type of work.[15] This prompts some activists to mobilize against such establishments through social media claiming discrimination, insensitivity, and lack of tolerance to alternative understandings of the religion.

Veil as a Headscarf

At the other side of the debate, there are Muslim scholars who do not embrace the view that Muslim women are required to cover their faces. Those include renowned—and sometimes controversial—figures such as Muhammad al-Ghazali and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. I am going to represent this view, however, through a less-known, though more controversial, figure, Gamal el-Banna.[16]

In a book simply called *Al-hijab*,[17] el-Banna notes that the past few decades have witnessed a surge of veiled women in Egypt. Very early on in his analysis, he makes a distinction between the *hijab* and the *niqab*. A *hijab* has commonly been used to mean the headscarf that keeps a woman's face and hands exposed, while a *niqab* is the full body cover that hides the face except occasionally for a small hole in front of one of the eyes.

El-Banna notes that the rights of the females in Muslim societies have been oscillating between two contrasting and harmful positions. On the one hand, there are those who approach women and their roles in society only from the perspective that she is a female, a sexual being, not from the perspective that she is after all a human being (p. 12). From that standpoint, her sexuality is what determines her:

> The idea of the female as a "human being" is very blurry to some... Just by giving her right as a human being gives her a right concerning her dress ... The opposing party has to value her "will" and respect it and not try to weaken it or overpower it...A woman has on her end to draw the proper balance between her existence as a human being and her nature as a female. (p. 21)

The other perspective is the one that looks at women only as human beings negating their feminine sides. This is the perspective that adopts the notion that—as el-Banna quotes—"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"[18]:

> The path that the modern European woman has pursued proves that both perspectives are wrong. One is an old [Muslim] jurist understanding which forced a face veil and prohibited *ikhtilat* [intermingling between males and females] because they only saw the "female" in a woman, and the other [European] perspective which only saw the "human" in a woman thus ignoring the categorical biological differences which make a woman "biologically speaking" a female. (p. 23)

El-Banna then moves on to describe how the head cover was the most practical solution between those two perspectives. In covering her hair, a Muslim woman is acknowledging her femininity; she is different from a male. At the same time, as she is free to expose her face and hands, her personality and individuality are not eroded. The Muslim woman, by putting on a headscarf, is able to strike a delicate balance between her "femininity" and her "humanity."

El-Banna acknowledges that for the most part of Islamic history, Muslim women have been subjected to a very strict form of seclusion. At one point in time, women were prohibited from going out of their homes, and they were not given the opportunity to learn how to read and write. Moreover, women were required to cover their faces which he considers to be "an unforgivable crime against society and against women which should never be allowed" (p. 34). This understanding—in practice—did not allow women to participate in any sort of meaningful work outside their homes. Thus they became more dependent on men. This gave the latter extreme power over women which was often misused. In addition, the inability of women to get proper education had detrimental impact on the whole family. Mothers could not educate their children beyond what they already know. Such practices "kept half of the society in the darkness of ignorance and illiteracy." The society became a masculine society where women were totally separated, not only from men but also from public life. Those baseless prohibitions, he contends, were among the prime causes of "the decline in Muslim society."

El-Banna goes even further in putting his standpoint about *hijab* in a broader perspective indicating that Islam as practiced nowadays is different from the real Islam:

> The “Islam” that Muslims practice nowadays is not the “Islam” of God and his messenger, but it is the one that has been molded by interpretations of *fuqaha* (jurists) over more than one thousand years ago... This revealed an understanding that was impacted by the closed-minded nature of the era in which they lived... Such an understanding reflected the opinions of men who, irrespective of their good intentions, were fallible as their opinions were impacted by fallible sources. (p. 133)

El-Banna then moves on to describe the Qur’anic meaning of *hijab*. He asserts that the word *hijab* has been mentioned several times in the Qur’an and does not refer to a dress code. Actually the word *hijab* comes to mean various things, including a physical barrier or a screen. He explains that the famous verse of the *hijab* refers in fact to written manners (not a dress code) that could be included in a book of etiquette, not a stipulation governing how women should dress.

El-Banna asserts that the basic message of Islam is one that is based on justice and gender equity with rights and duties, while respecting decency and disciplining sexual relations through the institution of marriage. The holy texts in Islam forbid indecency and enjoin things that are right and forbid things that are wrong. A review of the practices in early Islam, el-Banna notes, provides strong evidence that women played an active role in their societies, including participation in group prayers and performing pilgrimage. He notes that—as a consequence—there were lots of women who had very active public roles. This comes in contrast to the stereotypes portraying them as subjugated females who kept to their homes with no voice regarding what goes on around them. Women acted as soldiers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and nurses, and there is no evidence that they used to do all of this while their faces were covered.

El-Banna contends that the Prophet had a very strong relationship with the other sex, first with her as a mother, then as a babysitter, then as a wife, and as a faithful companion:

> He was touched by what a woman holds in terms of love, compassion and sacrifice which left deep impressions on his behaviors and life direction. He stood as a supporter of her rights against any injustice or oppression. (p. 193)

El-Banna provides his own theory as to why a basic rule to cover the hair and the bosom was transformed in later thinking to a requirement to cover the whole body including the face. Islam came with a new message, and its

rulings—particularly those relating to women—were revolutionary. Those new rulings were not met with proper understanding, and were not unconditionally welcomed. Women were closely linked before Islam to the concept of *'ird,* or honor, and thus they were closely guarded. The saying of one of the closest companions to the prophet provides evidence to this: "By God we did not see anything (of real value) in women till God revealed his rulings about them." They hated—against the message of Islam—to consult with their daughters as to whom the latter would marry. They hated—against the message of Islam—that a person looks at his future wife before he marries her. They also hated that women join them in prayers, or that they would be given anything in inheritance.

In sum, the liberating ideas of Islam barely lasted for 50 years. After the Prophet died, his compassionate message in regards to women was lost. The Muslim society changed in a fundamental manner back into understandings that reiterated earlier practices. The early equitable message of Islam was lost as new masses of people started embracing the new religion in the Levant area and in Persia, and they brought their heritage and ancient customs. Among those practices were those which kept women at home and deprived them from their civil rights. Those practices included the institution of *harem* which was, and always is, an alien intrusion into the world of Islam. A wave of political events, changes in dynasties, and a series of cultural influences—including Byzantine, Persian, Ottoman, and Mamluk—gave a severe blow to the cause of women.

El-Banna then advances an understanding about the veil that would differentiate him from other scholars who also criticize the face veil, such as Muhammad al-Ghazali and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. He notes that while he accepts the veil that only keeps the face and hands uncovered, his analysis of the religious text does not lead him to conclude that this specific dress code is a clear injunction of Islam. The Qur'an offers general guidelines and it does not dwell on the details. Those general guidelines would prohibit any dress that reflects vulgarity and exaltation, the dress being too short, or too tight, or it being transparent showing the skin. These are all forbidden by Islam and are far from the decency sought by the faith. Beyond that, a modest dress code is acceptable even if it shows part of a woman's hair or part of the legs. When understood from this perspective, el-Banna asserts, the veil would not be an impediment to women's public involvement in social and economic affairs of their communities.

Islamic Feminism

El-Banna represents a school of thought that argues for women's right from within Islam itself. This growing type of discourse, labeled Islamic feminism, revolves around the need to address women's issues through rereading of the Muslim holy texts. Contrary to what some secular Arab feminists assert in terms of the responsibility of religion—even beyond Islam itself[19]—in producing the problems targeting women, this approach argues that Islam has been misused and misinterpreted. While this might be understood as an apologetic response to criticisms involving Islam,[20] the proponents emphasize that this approach is not only valid in theory, but is also effective in practical terms. Islamic feminism becomes a movement where intellectual and academic efforts meet activist initiatives seeking to empower women, taking Islam as a reference point. This type of feminism uses concepts, methodologies, and approaches that include both those that have traditionally been advanced by Islamic understandings, and those that exist outside of Islam.[21] What this means is that an Islamic feminist would use, for example, the tools of exegesis usually used by Muslim jurists, but would not mind the use of the philosophical underpinnings of mainstream feminism.

Islamic feminists acknowledge the existence of deep problems impacting women in Arab and Islamic societies. Women have long been excluded from participation in the public sphere in Muslim societies, and much of the rationale that has misguidedly been used relates to arguments that such exclusion is sanctioned by Islam itself. Part of the problem lies in the fact that some people who consider themselves "guardians of the truth," almost exclusively male, have often monopolized a monolithic understanding about the recommended position of women in the public sphere including how they should behave in the presence of males. Islamic feminists do not take everything interpreted on behalf of Muslim women at face value, as "Muslim women are demanding equal access to scriptural truth."[22] Women have been mostly deprived, as many Islamic feminists argue, from such access, and this has had devastating effects on their well-being including their ability to be present in the public space that is mostly occupied by males. Male interpretations have led in many cases to practices that had left women behind.

Many Islamic feminists acknowledge that the situation of Arab and Muslim women is a multi-faceted problem, but part of the puzzle can be explained by how the holy texts have been understood. Interestingly, more women are getting involved in the reinterpretation of the Qur'an including

cases in Saudi Arabia itself.[23] Such attempts would move the interpretation into becoming a more gender-balanced one or a "gender-sensitive reading of Qur'anic Exegesis."[24]

In tackling the issue of monopolizing interpretations, Nazira Zainuldin (1908–1976), a Lebanese author and activist, emerges as a key figure who challenged monolithic interpretations of the religious texts. She criticizes the historical framing done by men: "women are more worthy of interpreting verses that have to do with women's duties and rights than men, for they are the ones that are directly addressed."[25] Other Islamic feminists refer to readings of the Qur'an that engender female repression,[26] ones that have been erroneously used to propagate perspectives not cognizant of the plights and rights of women. In sum, Islamic feminists assert that there is a need "to offer a reading that confirms that Muslim women can struggle for equality from within the framework of the Qur'ān's teachings… To identify Islam inseparably with oppression is to ignore the reality of misreadings of the sacred text."[27]

From the above discussions, one finds a lively and dynamic analysis that argues for women's rights, but does so from within the holy text itself. The over-riding common factor among most such discourses is that the text is believed to offer no implications that should lead to discrimination against women.

Qiwamah

As an example of the problems facing women that are based on textual understandings or misunderstandings, is the one related to *qiwamah* which was discussed earlier. This is an issue that has been raised multitudes of times by secular feminists as an example of how a religious ruling has been putting obstacles in front of women's participation. When a religious understanding puts a man above the woman, at a higher degree, then this would inevitably lead to lack of equitable participation.

Islamic feminists argue that the concept of *qiwamah* has been grossly misinterpreted and falsely applied. The concept of *qiwamah* is not related to a higher regard for males over females.[28] This is more related to the varying roles assumed by each gender. As males in most cases are the economic custodians of the family, this responsibility rests on their shoulders. This is definitely not related, Islamic feminists argue, to an inherent preference for men over women. *Qiwamah* is not patriarchal from this perspective.[29] It is rather an acknowledgement that from an economic perspective, the man is

the person who takes care of, serves, and protects the woman, and not the one who controls, leads, or manages.[30]

Saleh[31] criticizes how the *qiwamah* has been interpreted by one of the key interpreters of the Qur'an, Ibn Katheer. This early interpreter indicated that men are "better" than women and thus it is only appropriate that men become women's guardians. Such understandings have overwhelmed many of the interpretations of the Qur'an including some contemporary ones, and thus the religious text (the text of the Qur'an) has to be "saved" from such prejudgments.[32] If the text is approached from a new perspective, Saleh asserts, totally different interpretations would be reached.

Aziza El-Hibri, in analyzing the verse (*aya*) related to *qiwamah*, which she calls the "complex verse," notes the following:

> The Complex Phrase was revealed in an authoritarian/patriarchal society that the Prophet was attempting to civilize and democratize. Consequently, it should be viewed for what it really is. It is a *limitation* on men which prevents them from assuming automatically (as many did then) oppressive authoritarian roles with respect to women. At most, the Complex Phrase tells them, that they can guide and advise only these women they support financially and then only when certain conditions obtain. The rest of the *ayah* does not change this analysis if one takes a fresh non-patriarchal look at it.[33] (p. 32)

On a related note, Heba Raouf Ezzat[34] (1965–) asserts that the concept of *shura* should apply within family relations in the same manner that it is applied in the political arena.[35] The concept of *shura*, or consultation, means that decisions are made through a process of mutual discussions and exchange of ideas. The institution of the family, she asserts, should not be different from other societal institutions. Accordingly, husband–wife relations should be based on a system of consultation and participation, and not on the principle of putting an authoritarian leader who behaves the way he wants within his family. Many Islamic feminists contend that there is still a distinction between men and women that pertains to the roles that they assume during certain periods of their lives.

Any differences between men and women, Ezzat affirms, should not be used as grounds for discrimination against women who should be granted the same opportunities and other rights guaranteed by the Qur'an. Those differences related to the nature of women would require them to assume different responsibilities and functions during their lives both in the private and in the public spheres. Each woman should be given the

choice between different roles that she wants to play at different stages of her life. A woman, during the time when she is giving birth, nursing her children, and raising them, needs to have the choice to assume a role different than her husband during that period. Later in life, she can assume a different role where she can participate more in the public sphere. Society should be responsive in both cases. Society should accept the fact that she has chosen to immerse herself more into her private space with her family and children in the first instance. Moreover, when she decides that it is time for her to assume larger roles within the public space, society should not discriminate against her in that regard.

Like their secular feminist counterparts, the issue of the veil has understandably been of keen interest to Islamic feminists. There does not seem to be a unified discourse even within Islamic feminism regarding the veil. Some intellectuals who would be categorized under Islamic feminism consider the veil a making of male readings of the holy texts which engulfs a misreading not only of the text but also of Islamic history. Mernissi is one of those voices. She takes a critical approach as to how the early traditions were read. Others, on the other hand, argue that the veil is indeed a matter of religious injunction, and women have the right to heed what they believe in terms of how they should dress.

Women's Agency and False Consciousness

A question that is often addressed to feminists on either side (secular and Islamic) is where would we draw the line between a woman's agency (which assumes that she has the right, as an autonomous human being, to make her decision and indeed decide to put on the veil or not), and her false consciousness (which assumes that such sense of agency is in fact a reflection of deceitful awareness). Under the later situation, forces of patriarchy, socialization, and powerful institutional arrangements strip women from genuine autonomy. Under a false consciousness context, women are argued to make decisions that are against their own self-interest.

Commenting on such arguments, Charusheela discusses a tension between two values, one of autonomy and the other of equality.[36] Equality between men and women is a desired outcome. Yet what would happen when women choose to make decisions or display behaviors that make them unequal to men?

> What do we do when women, in asserting their right to autonomy of cultural identity and national self-determination, do not attack a social construction of gender we deem patriarchal, nor seek to replace it with notions of human autonomy or choice that we consider marks of female emancipation?[37] (p. 199)

According to certain strands in Western feminism, including some aligned with Arab secular feminism, women are sorted into two groups: those who suffer from "internalized oppression," "false consciousness," or "deceitful awareness," and those who have "genuine autonomy." Under this categorization, there is no real world where women can genuinely make choices that lead to unequal outcomes with men. When women make such choices, they are not being authentically agentic or autonomous. They would be suffering from the effect of outside forces that alter their consciousness about what they need to do as autonomous human beings. Such women end up suffering from "internalized oppression."

Under this perspective, all third-world feminisms (including Islamic feminism for that matter) would have a problem of legitimacy if they do not challenge the status quo of their societies in a manner that aligns with Western conceptions of female emancipation. Under such an understanding "non-Western feminism is an oxymoron... One cannot be both a feminist and a critic of Western ethnocentrism and orientalism."[38]

In invoking the false consciousness argument, as far as Muslim women are concerned, critics may end up enslaving the same women they aim to emancipate. Real freedom becomes the one configured for oriental women by Western feminists. "Those veiled oriental women have no agency of their own, and when they declare they are choosing, they are not in fact choosing," so goes the argument. Women are perceived to be reflecting external imposed powers of patriarchy and male domination.

Many Islamic feminists counter the false consciousness standpoint by arguing that female agency is actually compromised when her decision to put on a specific dress is not respected. A woman's decision to dress in a certain manner—that is not in harmony with external standards—should not be interpreted as her being subjugated and oppressed. By choosing a form of dress, she is in fact sending a message that she wants to be treated as a human being rather than just being a female.

The false consciousness argument has been recently brought to life in the wake of the veil controversy in some European countries. Much of the discourse that occurred over the dress revolved around whether Muslim school girls were brain-washed by their families into wearing the veil.

Accordingly, critics argue, they develop a preference for the headscarf that is based on a false awareness. Analyzing how the French media covered the issue, Michela Ardizzoni reported how various critics of the veil declared how it "positions the young Muslim women as completely subjected to their male family members"[39] and the headscarf thus becomes to those critics a symbol of subjugation irrespective of whether the person wearing it has done it out of her free will or not.

This argument that has been brought forward by several Western feminists, has also been embraced by many Arab feminists. El-Saadawi is the most notable example of an advocate of the position that Arab women have fallen into the false consciousness trap. Either by putting on the veil or by succumbing to Western models of how a woman should look like, the Arab woman has fallen victim to her own thinking:

> ... that's why we see a female university professor.. who is revolting against [male] despotism and harassment, yet she carries within her, the [male] despotism and harassment virus without realizing it. She carries the blind belief in the absolute power of the state, religion, and family... she then gives birth again to this seed or virus through her children, male and female.[40] (p. 245)

This theme is repeated within el-Saadawi's rhetoric, effectively ascribing lack of real consciousness to some women as to what are their priorities, how they need to live their lives, and how best to tackle their problems.

In specifically addressing the issue of "choice" in wearing the veil, Ghadeer Ahmad, an Egyptian activist, notes that wearing the veil does not spring from real choice by women due to two reasons. First, the veil is engulfed in an aura of sacredness. Although it is not one of the pillars of the Muslim faith, she affirms, it has always been surrounded with significant societal interest due to an obsession with women's bodies. The second reason, according to Ahmad, is that the society provides reinforcement mechanisms and reward structures associated with wearing the veil. All of this leads the woman to "deceive herself" into thinking that she is making a free choice in putting on the hijab while she is in reality making this choice "consciously and sub-consciously at the same time."[41]

One problem with the above arguments is that they fail to note that a degree of socialization involves all types of dress. People "choose" what to dress to attend a wedding, a funeral, or a church or mosque, or to go the beach. Their decisions reflect a combination of free choice and responsiveness

to societal expectations. Stripping veiled women of all agency because of their choices, becomes the other side of stripping other women, with different socially sanctioned dress choices, of all agency.

The false consciousness argument also disseminates the notion that Muslim women make choices on what they wear based on conditioning by powerful, often male, family members and religious institutions.[42] In such instances, the perspectives, ideologies, and opinions of those women become irrelevant:

> the perspectives of those who wear the burqa are delegitimized in favour of those who are (self) represented as emancipated. .... false consciousness has effectively reintroduced through the back door a way in which Western women can reclaim legitimacy in speaking for women of other cultures and races. Thus, just as under colonialism, Western women claim the ability to speak for those who are so victimized and hapless that they have no voice which is their own.[43] (p. 389)

The false consciousness charge again divides the world of Muslim women into two camps, those with legitimate views who embrace "our" Western modes of liberation, and the other misguided ones who are under an illusion of agency and autonomy.

Reasons for the Veil

For Islamic feminists, the power of the veil in neutralizing women's sexuality is an interesting theme to explore. The veil is one way by which Muslim women are able to free themselves from the "obsession with sexualising women."[44] Some veiled Muslim women look at the veil as the means by which they have control over their bodies, thus not subjugating themselves to the demands of an increasingly consumerist society which uses and abuses their bodies in advertisement and economic profiteering.[45] Accordingly, the veil becomes a symbol by which women are treated as "persons, rather than as sex objects."[46] Practically speaking, as some women assert, veiling gives them better control of their own selves, rather than being a form of externally imposed control over their bodies and behaviors. In such a situation, the argument goes, veiled women can work more freely than their unveiled counterparts, without attracting the gaze of men.[47]

As discussed in an earlier chapter, some secular feminists assert that there is a negative impact of this symbol on a woman's identity.

Yet this reasoning would necessarily entail that women, more or less, put on the veil for a limited number of reasons. The assumption is that a woman puts on the veil because she is forced to do that, either directly through the power of the state or a father or husband figure, or indirectly through the power of institutions which offer sanctions for such behavior. Another assumed reason relates to the false consciousness argument as described above. In both those two general explanations, women's identity will suffer as she is behaving to please others, either towards dominating male figures or towards powerful societal institutions. Such decisions, it is argued, are not taken by a woman's own will, and thus her identity is tarnished. This leads her to make decisions that are not truly hers.

The above line of argumentation fails to note the multitudes of reasons why women put on the veil, a thing that has been extensively explored in prior studies.[48] There are women who put the veil yielding to the power of the law and/or power of strong cultural norms. This explains some veiling cases in countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan under the Taliban (the latter two are not Arab countries). This does not exclude the fact that there are many women in those countries who freely choose to put on the veil for other personal reasons. In all cases, however, those three contexts which are greatly and disproportionately covered in the media, do not explain the mosaic of the female veil in Arab and Muslim countries, and even in countries where Muslims are the minority. Women put on the veil for various reasons, many of which are not captured by observers. Sometimes the same Muslim woman may offer various explanations as to why she wears the veil.

It would be inappropriate to shame the "return to the veil" movement by reducing it to powers of brainwashing or patriarchy. Some women put on the veil because they simply believe that this is a religious requirement. While those women may not necessarily agree with all what religious scholars (ulema') have to say in terms of the exact specifications of the Muslim dress, they embrace a dress style which they believe makes them good Muslims before God. Linked to this reason is the perspective that the veil serves as an expression of Muslim women's modesty and morality.[49] The veil is just a statement, often directed inwards, that they find more personal meaning in this dress code. While the religiosity argument seems intuitively plausible as to why some women put on the veil, it is surprising how this reason is often immediately discounted.

Of course, some who put on the veil are impacted by the dress codes within their own cultures. After all, cultural conditions are part of how

people live their lives and make their choices. This applies to all people, Muslim or non-Muslim, male or female, veiled or unveiled. In the case of veiled women in Arab and Muslim countries, this explains the multitudes of veil fashions that are found.[50]

Other reasons for putting on the veil could be more politically oriented. The veil to some is a symbol of protest against a ruling government or a perceived unjust system. The growth of the veil movement in Egypt in the late seventies and early eighties is often put forward within that context. The headscarf thus becomes to some women a means and a symbol of protest and revolution. The veil could also be used as a means to affirm one's identity and an expression of an "anti-colonial solidarity and resistance."[51] Veiling could also stand to reflect Muslim woman's independence. It could be a vehicle to get better access to the public space, or it may represent a solution to the quandary of choosing to get into paid employment while undergoing a feeling of guilt about such a decision.[52]

In sum, the much celebrated false consciousness argument fails to capture the myriad experiences and motivations of veiled Muslim women. The reasons differ depending on many factors including whether a woman lives in a Muslim majority country versus countries where Muslims are a minority, whether she is politically active, whether she is affiliated with activist groups, the environment in which she lives, her social or economic conditions, or even whether she is religious or not. In sum, there is no one exclusive reason that can be brought forward to explain why women choose to put on the veil.

Who Owns the Public Space?

Another question that has been recurrently addressed by Islamic feminists is related to the public sphere and "who owns it?" There is a traditional discourse, as discussed earlier, that restricts women's access to public spaces, or only permits it under strict conditions. This is based on a premise of male ownership of this realm. Islamic feminists are unanimous at challenging male-purported ownership of this common space. Some Islamic feminists assert that it is a pillar in Islamic feminism to refuse the division of spaces into two, a "public" owned by men and a "private" owned by women.[53] A female, first and foremost, as a human being enjoys the same value of equality, as advocated by the Qur'an: "[Islamic feminism] rejects the notion of a public/private dichotomy (by the way, absent in early Islamic

jurisprudence or *fiqh*) conceptualising a holistic *umma* in which Qur'anic ideals are operative in all space."[54]

Badran laments the situation of Muslim women in many contexts where their access to the public sphere is greatly constrained. This has even extended to the common religious public space, as limitations are sometimes put on women's access to some mosques.[55] Shutting women out of the public space has been responsible for a culture of gender inequality and gender segregation. Eventually women have become isolated and their access to educational, economic, political, and even religious participation has been greatly constrained.

Islamic feminists also refuse the notion advanced by some Muslim religious scholars as to the priority that women should give to the private sphere all the time. There are connections between the two domains and women's impact should extend to both: "Breaking the dichotomy would give housewives more social esteem and would encourage working women to fulfil their psychological need to be good mothers and wives."[56]

Conflicting Feminisms

In the Arab world, there are many initiatives aiming to improve the situation of women, eradicate injustices imposed on them, and cultivate environments conducive to their empowerment and participation. The work of feminists for over a century in this region has met some successes, but those achievements pale compared to what needs to be done. Feminists have different starting points, and they adopt various approaches to sort out women's issues. This often puts them at odds with each other. As they sometimes differ as to the real reasons behind women's disempowerment and lack of participation, they disagree on how best to approach those roadblocks and problems.

Among many Islamic feminists, there is a sense of disenchantment with Western-style feminism and its counterparts in the Arab world. Western-style feminism tries to impose a specific form of universal feminism that transcends cultures and countries. There is an over-emphasis on the "external" role of women that marginalizes the "internal" role of women.[57] The external role of women, her role in the public space is given primary, often sole, attention at the expense of the internal role within her family and the domestic sphere. It has become almost shameful to talk about a role for women in the private sphere, and the discourse about their role in the public sphere has dominated all feminist talk.

It could be argued back that such feminist discourse is just a reflection of where scarcity exists. Women do not exist at par with men in the public space, not even close. This necessitates an emphasis on the societal loss from such absence in economic and political participation. Yet, the over-dominance of the external role of women undermines the whole private sphere as if such a role does not contribute to societal progress. Feminism becomes overly concerned with the role of women in economic production.[58] This zealous emphasis on women's economic contribution at the expense of her contribution within the domestic sphere (which is not usually assessed in a quantifiable manner) raises a concern over what all of this means to common values, including social and family values.[59]

Moreover, working along a Western agenda, there is fear that Western-inspired feminism reflects the neo-colonial priorities rather than genuine indigenous areas of concern. Some scholars argue that feminism, nationalism, and colonialism are interconnected in the Arab world although an indigenous feminist movement has existed in this context for a long time.[60] Some view the unveiling campaigns that have been conducted in some Arab countries as a conspiracy perpetrated by colonizers to erode Muslim society.[61] In a balanced analysis of the role of Western-inspired feminism, Abu-Lughod notes that "condemning 'feminism' as an inauthentic Western import is just as inaccurate as celebrating it as a local or indigenous project. The first position assumes such a thing as cultural purity; the second underestimates the formative power of colonialism in the development of the region."[62]

Western-inspired feminism is perceived as driving for the total independence of women, not in terms of them being autonomous beings, but in terms of putting forward an agenda that is centered around the female. Abdel Wahab el-Messiri[63] (1938–2008) provides a sharp criticism of such female-centered feminism.[64] This brand of feminism centered around the female, el-Messiri contends, actually argues that a woman, as a self-sufficient being, needs to "discover" herself, and thus she should self-actualize outside any social framework. The underlying assumption is that she is in a state of timeless conflict with the self-centered male. There is a fear that a movement that sought to liberate the women, has turned into a movement that is concerned about the identity of the woman, which is separate of the man. Under this understanding, according to el-Messiri, Western-inspired feminism offers an alien understanding of the history of civilization, framing it as a history of male–female conflict. This flawed perspective assumes that because males became dominant over females at a certain point in history, the time has come for the latter to fight back and liberate themselves from this domination.

Both Ezzat and al-Messiri criticize such perspectives of Western-inspired feminism or "radical feminism." This reflects a disappointment in Arab feminist organizations as they have departed from their nationalistic concerns and have continuously embraced "fundamental feminism" in terms of conceptualization and agendas. Western-inspired agendas have replaced other indigenous issues of prime importance.[65] It becomes worrying that by adopting such extreme feminist agendas, some Arab feminists may be hurting the same women they are trying to help.

Notes

1. Musnad Ahmad. Reported from Aisha, Hadith #24302, http://library.islamweb.net/hadith/display_hbook.php?bk_no=121&hid=24302&pid=62379
2. Kahf, Mohja. (2008), "From her royal body the robe was removed." *The veil: Women writers on its history, lore, and politics*, 27. edited by Jennifer Heath, Univ of California Press.
3. Abdel Aziz Bin Baz (1910–1999) was a Saudi jurist and scholar. He was the Grand Mufti from 1992 to 1999. He was a very influential figure in Saudi Arabia having occupied many official positions in the Kingdom. He is considered one of the major figures in the *salafi* understanding of Islam. He is also considered to be a prolific writer although he lost his eyesight at an early age.
4. BinBaz, A. (1985), "Judgement about women's work", available at: http://www.binbaz.org.sa/fatawa/91; BinBaz, A. (1988), *Islamic Fatwas*, Darul-Qalam, Beirut.
5. Drury, S. (July 30, 2015). Education: The Key to Women's Empowerment in Saudi Arabia? *Middle East Institute*, http://www.mei.edu/content/article/education-key-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-saudi-arabia
6. Ibid.
7. Arab Human Development Report (2002), *Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*, UNDP, New York, NY.
8. King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud was King of Saudi Arabia from 1964 to 1975. He implemented lots of reforms in the kingdom including increased education for girls despite the strenuous resistance from ultra-conservative circles.
9. Moaddel, M. (2013). *The birthplace of the Arab spring: values and perceptions of Tunisians and a comparative assessment of Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Pakistani, Saudi, Tunisian, and Turkish publics*. Department of Sociology, and Research, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism, University of Maryland, http://mevs.org/files/tmp/Tunisia_FinalReport.pdf

10. *Middle East Online*, (March 26, 2016). Banning *niqab* in public spaces protects Tunisians. http://middle-east-online.com/?id=221126
11. *FRANCE 24 Arabic*, The face veil that hides the Egyptian women, YouTube Video, uploaded on Jun 27, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgAfV8TRHpY
12. *The Independent*. (25 August 2016). 7 facts about France's burkini ban that make outsiders very uncomfortable http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/burkini-ban-ruling-france-sarkozy-nice-beach-pictures-muslim-islam-a7208476.html
13. Ibid.
14. *FRANCE 24 Arabic*, The face veil that hides the Egyptian women, YouTube Video, (uploaded on Jun 27, 2008). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgAfV8TRHpY
15. *The Economist*, (Aug 27, 2015). Muslim dress in Egypt Haughty about the hijab. http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21662561-women-campaign-against-places-ban-veil-haughty-about-hijab
16. Gamal el-Banna (1920–2013) was an Egyptian scholar and writer. He is best known as being the youngest brother of Hasan el-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. He is also known to have had extremely progressive propositions regarding issues of secularism, justice, and family issues. Noha El-Hennawy writing for the Egypt Independent notes that he was "a feminist at heart," as he advocated for a greater role for women in Muslim societies.
17. El-Banna, J. (2010). *Hijab*, Dar Shurook, Cairo, Egypt.
18. de Beauvoir, S. (1973). *The second sex*, New York; Vintage Books.
19. For example, this is the view adopted by Nawal el-Saadawi where in many of her writings she indicates that religion, including all monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have been responsible for the disempowerment of women and they were major contributors in strengthening patriarchal structures.
20. On the issue of apologetic responses, see Barlas, A. (2002). *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. University of Texas Press.
21. Saleh, A. (2013). Epistemological dimension of Islamic feminism. In Omamima Abu Bakr. *Feminism and the Islamic perspective*. Women and Memory Foundation, Egypt.
22. Cooke, M. (2004). *Women claim Islam: Creating Islamic feminism through literature*. Routledge. p. xiv.
23. Ibid.
24. Abou-Bakr, O. M. (2011). A Gender-sensitive Reading of Qur'anic Exegesis'. in Qudsia Mirza (ed.) *Islamic Feminism and the Law. London: Routledge/Cavendish.*

25. Zayn al-Din 1998 as quoted by Cooke (p. xiv). Nazira Zainuldin (1908–1976) was a Druze Lebanese writer and activist who argued against the seclusion of Muslim women. She is known for her revolutionary ideas outlined in two books "Unveiling and veiling" and "The young woman and the sheikhs".
26. Barlas (2002).
27. Barlas (2002), p. xi.
28. Ezzat, H. In El-Saadawy, N. & Ezzat, Heba Raouf (2000). *Women, religion, and morals*. Darul-Fikr Al-Mu'aser. Damascus, Syria.
29. Ibid.
30. Banani, F. (1993). *Taqseem al-'amal baina al-Rajul wa al-Mar'ah (Division of labor between men and women)*. Marrakesh: Manshurat Kulliyat al-'Ulum al-Qanuniyya. As quoted by Bahlul, R. (2000). On the idea of Islamic feminism. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 20, 34–63.
31. Saleh (2013).
32. Ibid.
33. Al-Hibri, A. (1997). Islam, law and custom: Redefining Muslim women's rights. *American University Journal of International Law and Policy*, 12: 1–44.
34. Heba Raouf Ezzat (1965–) is a Professor of Political Theory at Cairo University. She is the Co-founder, and consultant (1999–2005) on strategic planning and editorial policy evaluation, for the popular online service www.islamonline.net. Her research interests include globalization, women, empowerment, and social change.
35. Ezzat (2000).
36. Charusheela, S. (2001). Women's choices and the ethnocentrism/relativism dilemma. *Postmodernism, economics and knowledge*, 15, 197.
37. Charusheela (2001), p. 199.
38. Charusheela (2001), p. 206.
39. Ardizzoni, M. (2004). Unveiling the veil: Gendered discourses and the (in) visibility of the female body in France. *Women's Studies*, *33*(5), 629–649.
40. El-Saadawy, N. & Ezzat, Heba Raouf (2000).
41. Ahmad, Ghadeer. (October 22, 2016). Veil or no-veil: an endless duality. *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=617520
42. Amina Haleem (2015) Covernance: Feminist Theory, the Islamic Veil, and the Strasbourg Court's Jurisprudence on Religious Dress-Appearance Restrictions, 5 *DePaul J. Women, Gender & L.*, Available at: http://via.library.depaul.edu/jwgl/vol5/iss1/1
43. Down, S. (2011). Debating the Burqa: How the Burqa Debate Can Reveal More than It Hides. *Canterbury L. Rev.*, *17*, 375.
44. Down (2011), p. 390.
45. Bullock, K. (2002). *Rethinking Muslim women and the veil: Challenging historical & modern stereotypes*. IIIT, Henndon, Virginia.
46. Bullock (2002), p. 24.

47. Ikran, Eum. (2000) Discourses on (Un)Veiling in Egypt, *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 6:4, 102–124
48. See Bullock (2002); Haddad, Y. Y., & Esposito, J. L. (Eds.). (1997). *Islam, gender, and social change*. Oxford University Press; Haddad, Y. Y. (2007). The post-9/11 hijab as icon. *Sociology of Religion*, *68*(3), 253–267.
49. Of course, this is not to say that such women claim that unveiled women lack modesty or morality.
50. Ikran (2000).
51. Haddad (2007).
52. Ikran (2000).
53. Badran, M. (2006). Islamic feminism revisited. *Al-Ahram Weekly On-Line*, 781, 9–15.
54. Ibid.
55. In Islamic jurisprudence there should be separation between men and women during prayers—within the same space—preferably with different access points. Many mosques in the Arab world are architecturally built in a way where such separation is not easy. This ends up denying women from any access. In the past few decades, however, women have increasingly been able to access newly built mosques which accommodate all Muslims, male or female.
56. El-Gawhary, K. (1994), "It is time to launch a new women's liberation movement – an Islamic one (an interview with Heba Ra'uf)", *Middle East Report*, November–December, pp. 26–7.
57. Ezzat (2000).
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid
60. Golley, N. A. H. (2004). Is feminism relevant to Arab women?. *Third World Quarterly*, *25*(3), 521–536.
61. Ikran (2000).
62. Abu-Lughod, L. (2001). "Orientalism" and Middle East. *Feminist Studies.* 27(1): 101–113.
63. Abdel Wahab el-Messiri (1938–2008) was an Egyptian scholar, historian, and author who wrote a lot about Western culture, secularism, Arab-Israeli conflicts, and comparative literature.
64. Al-Messiri, A. (2010). *The woman issue between emancipation and female-centered discourse*. Nadaht Masr, Cairo, Egypt.
65. Ezzat (2000).