(Un)Veiling the Veiled Muslim Woman

by

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Abstract

The veil is an obstacle to Muslim women and their freedom, becoming an area of debate in regards to "the woman question." Scholars are revealing narrow assumptions of dominant logic that appears attractive to the West. The veil is either oppressive or liberating and/or a political statement. Such binaries were evident in the interviews: the five veiled participants were discriminated against (within their community and outside) as fundamentalist, homebound, submissive, and retrogressive. The five unveiled participants were discriminated against (within their communities) as unreligious, immoral, and "Westernized." The theoretical approach is anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and feminist. Scholars like Talpade Mohanty, Deniz Kandiyoti, Reina Lewis, Edward Said, Lila Abu-Lughod, Fatema Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, Irshad Manji, and Meyda Yegenoglu are incorporated. Critical theory (postcolonial and feminist), textual analysis, and qualitative research are used. Artwork, poetry, film, and literature are also explored. And, there is a focus on life histories and case studies.

To Rasool, Mom, and Dad

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Table of Contents

Approval ii
Abstract iii
Dedication iv
Acknowledgements v
Table of Contents vi

Introduction 1

Chapter One: My Journey: From Veiled to Unveiled 6
Killing Me Softly: Tales of a Veiled Sinner 7

Chapter Two: The Veil before the Rise of Islam and Koranic and Hadith Interpretations on the Veil 13
Pre-Islamic Veil 13
The Islamic Veil 14
Koranic and Hadith Interpretations on the Veil 17
Critiques on Koranic Interpretation 19

Chapter Three: The Muslim Veil Today 23
Representations of Veiled Women in Scholarly Work 23
Representations of Veiled Women in Literature, Film, Photography, and Art 29
Why Such Hatred toward the Veil? 34
Doing Away with the Pitied Muslim Woman Image 36

Chapter Four: Veiled and Unveiled Perceptions 39
Reasons for Veiling 41
Reasons for Unveiling 45
The Heated Debate 47
The Discriminated Women 48

Conclusion 51

Reference List 53

Appendices 55
Appendix A: Glossary 55
Appendix B: Questionnaire 58
Appendix C: Informed Consent 59

Introduction

The Muslim veil is an abstract concept that cannot easily be contained under one meaning. The veil, which is also referred to as "hijab", is both material and conceptual. As a material object, the veil is a fabric which comes in different forms, depending on the person's cultural beliefs and practices. Some of the many different types of veiling (but not limited to) include burqa, niqab, chador, abaya, and headscarf. A burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by women for the purpose of cloaking the entire body. It is worn over the usual daily clothing, covering the wearer's entire face except for a small region about the eyes which is covered by a concealing net. Niqab is a type of veil that covers the face but leaves the eyes exposed. Unlike the burqa, the niqab does not have a concealing net for the eye region. A chador is a full-length semicircle of fabric open down the front, which is thrown over the head and held closed in front. It has no hand openings or closures and is held shut by the hands or by wrapping the ends around the waist. A chador leaves the entire face exposed. An abaya is a robe-like dress which covers the whole body except the face, feet, and hands. It can be worn with the niqab. Also, some women choose to wear long black gloves underneath their abaya so their arms are fully covered. And, a headscarf covers the hair and neck, leaving the entire face exposed. On another level, some Muslims do no translate the veil as an object of clothing that covers a woman's hair and/or body, but rather view the veil as a concept of modesty in regards to dress, behavior, speech, and way of living. According to this interpretation the concept of modesty and the veil is holistic. The headscarf is a signifier as much as words are signifiers; the veil is semiotics. As an internalized act of modesty, the meaning of the veil is in the veil; the internal meaning is what gives meaning to the external, and only when the internalized modesty manifests itself through the external representation, can a Muslim believer truly represent the true meaning of the garment.

On a conceptual level, the veil is an indicator of modesty. In terms of dress, some Muslims[1] argue that they practice veiling by dressing modestly. However, issues such as what consists of "modest dress" and "immodest dress" are raised. And, who determines what is "modest" and what is "immodest" also raises concern. In terms of behavior, speech, and way of living, some Muslims may argue that they practice veiling by acting, speaking, and living

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[1] A Muslim is an individual that practices the Islamic faith and therefore accepts *The Koran* (the Islamic holy book) and *The Hadith* (the teachings of Prophet Mohammad) as their divine source. Furthermore, a Muslim believes in the submission of Allah (an Arabic term meaning God), the oneness of Allah, and accepts Prophet Mohammad as the messenger of Allah.

according to the practices of Islam, such as praying five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadhan, taking a pilgrimage to Mecca, practicing peace and kindness towards animals and human beings, etc. In addition, others argue that a veil is a combination of both. As a Muslim, I find myself struggling with the veil—both in terms of its material and conceptual representation. In the former, I question what the "correct form" of veiling is, or if there is any correct form at all. Even more, I wonder if all "forms" are correct. In the latter, the part that I struggle with the most, I struggle because I question the choices I make and do not make as a Muslim woman living in the West. Nonetheless, in this thesis, I will be focusing on the veil as a material object that covers women's hair and/or their bodies.

Before I begin to discuss my research interests, research questions, objectives, goals, and my position on the veil, I would like to begin with a memorable verse from k-os's[2] "Man I Used to Be" (2005), which reads as the following: "Rappers are acting like Mantan/ Can I be candid, I can't stand it/ Rap bandit, got heaven acting frantic/ I wanna swing my sword decapitate." The following verse has not only affected me emotionally, but also spiritually. It has given me the opportunity to revisit certain thoughts and feelings I once had towards the veil, and in particular, towards Muslim women. I too had experienced what I believed to be the confined aspects of the veil, leading me to willingly remove the headscarf. Thereafter, I struggled with my faith, particularly in matters regarding women's issues and rights. At first, I became one of "[the] rappers [that were] acting like Mantan"[3]: I retold and reinforced dominant stereotypes that are assigned to veiled women, and I became very controversial for doing so. I was "the Irshad Manji" and the "Ayaan Hirsi Ali", individuals who stand against everything Islam "stands for" such as violence, oppression, and unreasonableness. Later, after many years of researching, studying, and critiquing Islam and Islamic women, I have accepted that I no longer want to act like Mantan. I want to critique other scholar's (both Muslim and non-Muslim[4]) attempts in "unveiling" the veiled Muslim woman as subjects of sexual gratification, icons of subjugation, and tools of Prophet Mohammad.[5] Thus, I wish to "be candid" since "I can't stand it" (k-os, 2005). My change in identity as a Muslim—from a believer that Islam degrades women to a believer that Islam liberates women—should allow me to contribute significantly to this field of study. Moreover, the construction of Muslim women's identity, particularly concepts pertaining to veiling and unveiling, is crucial to Women's Studies scholarship because it serves a great

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[2] k-os is a Canadian rapper, singer, songwriter, and record producer.

[3] Mantan is a character from Spike Lee's (American film director, producer, writer, and actor) film called *Bamboozled* (2000). The film which relived the minstrel show had Black actors wearing even blacker faces rather than having White actors in Blackface. Mantan was one of the minstrel performers who sold certain stereotypes of "Blackness" in order to move ahead in society.

[4] An individual that practices (or does not practice) certain beliefs that are in opposition to Islamic beliefs.

[5] Prophet Mohammad is the founder of the religion of Islam and is believed to be the messenger and prophet of Allah.

contribution to feminist studies: The veiled Muslim woman has come to represent the ultimate symbol of backwardness and oppression, and furthermore, a visual cue to bolster claims of the rise in Islamic militancy. The veil serves as an obstacle to Muslim women and their freedom, becoming an important area of debate in regard to "the woman question."

The Muslim veil in the West[6] to many Muslims and non-Muslims, including myself, is a way of dress that represents agency and freedom. Here, I define agency as the state of being in which one is in action or exerting power. Hence, a veiled woman has agency because of her actions and power in redefining herself by not allowing herself to be the silenced, oppressed, and backward Muslim woman. And, I define freedom as the state of freely practicing veiling rather than in confinement or under physical restraint. Thus to me, the veil is only a demonstration of freedom if worn by choice. Agency and freedom are discussed more in detail in chapters three and four. However, one might question exactly how free of a choice a Muslim woman can make if she exists within a culture, a time, a situation, and a religion. Hence, would Muslim women veil (or veil constantly) if the notion of veiling had not been introduced by religious text or cultural practice? Exactly how free of a choice does a Muslim woman have?

The concept of veiling cannot escape extreme interpretations of modesty or oppression; thus, the use of binaries and dichotomies are significant to this thesis. Moreover, one of the most significant binaries that need to be studied in this area is that of the East[7] and the West as two opposing extremes: One does not have a sense of hierarchy until one has a sense of difference—an acknowledgement that the world is dichotomized between the East and the West, the "progressive" and the "backward." Hence, Muslim women only make sense when juxtaposed with Christian women, the East only makes sense when adjacent with the West, and Oriental women only make sense when put next to Occidental women. As disputed areas of debate, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars are effortlessly "unveiling" the veiled woman by revealing further narrow assumptions of certain dominant logic that appears attractive to the West. Certain layers of connotations about veiled and unveiled women are expressed. The West knows what is best for the "oppressed" Muslim, sending messages that consist of relying heavily on the use of rhetoric, the new grammar and the effective way of communicating, leading one to ask the following: Is it possible for the West to express truth without using rhetoric? Or, if rhetoric is being used, then how does one reach truth? For as long as the veiled identity is always expressed

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[6] The term "the West" does not apply to any specific geographical location; instead, it is a concept borrowed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1987) to mean a society which is depicted as forward-thinking, liberal, and progressive. Furthermore, class, ethnicity, and gender also come to play in regards to determining what constitutes as "the West."

[7] The term "the East" does not apply to any specific geographical location; instead, it is a concept borrowed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1987) to mean certain societies (especially Islamic) which are represented as barbaric, savage, backward-thinking, and retrogressive. Furthermore, class, ethnicity, and gender also come to play in regards to determining what constitutes as "the East."

within dichotomous interpretations, the believers[8] and the non-believers[9] of the veil will always be confronted with a dialogue of struggle, a verbal argument—the believers will demonstrate the veil is an act of freedom and agency while the non-believers will demonstrate the veil is an act of oppression and retrogression.

However, such various acts of "uncovering" does not allow one to straightforwardly "liberate" any oppressed individual, nor do they allow one to reach any transparent truth about that person, the veiled, or unveiled Muslim woman. As a result, I wish to "veil"—or in other words, deem her garment as an act of personal, and sometimes communal, form of expression and belonging that cannot be categorized under one category of meaning—the Muslim woman that has been unveiled, and therefore falsely revealed. However, I do not wish to "unveil" the "correct" answer behind why the veiled woman chooses to veil, but rather argue that no unveiling of the veiled woman can lead to one answer. Furthermore, I do not wish to position the veiled Muslim woman in the margins of society; instead, I intend to disrupt established notions of what constitutes sociality's sacred centre. In addition, as a researcher, one of my objectives is to be able to insert my position in a short, chronological story. Also, the research questions I am interested in are the following:

1. Why is the oppressed and silenced veiled Muslim woman an important image for the West?

2. Does wearing the veil send as a strong message as not wearing the veil?

3. Which veiled and unveiled Muslim women are represented in popular culture, and why?

4. Why the need to dichotomize the veiled Muslim woman? For example: the veiled modest woman versus the unveiled immodest woman; the attractive unveiled woman versus the unattractive veiled woman; and, the veiled woman who is labelled as "a believer" versus the unveiled woman who is labelled as a "non-believer."

5. Why are Muslims who sell certain stereotypes of the veil considered "good Muslims" whereas those who are critical of the stereotypes considered "bad Muslims"?

In addition, my theoretical approach will draw on anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and feminist frameworks. I will incorporate a wide range of scholars like Deniz Kandiyoti (1994), Reina Lewis (1996, 2003, 2007), Edward Said (1998), Lila Abu-Lughod (2006), Fatema Mernissi (1991, 2001, 2003), Leila Ahmed (1992), Irshad Manji (2003), and Meyda Yegenoglu (1998). In my research, I will use critical theory (mainly postcolonial and feminist), textual analysis (on

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[8] "Believer" means one who is a believer of the veil. One must not necessarily have to wear the veil, but one must believe that the veil is instructed in *The Koran*.

[9] A "non-believer" means one who is not a believer of the veil. One must not necessarily have to be unveiled, but one must believe that the veil is not instructed in *The Koran*.

videos, diaries, newspaper clippings, etc...), and rely on qualitative research methods due to its emphasis on face-to-face interactions (through one-on-one interviews) and intensive relationships. My research will also delve into other forms of visuals such as artwork (Justine Reyes's "Masks"), film (*Submission*, *Faith Without Fear*, and *Fitna*), photography (Malek Alloula), and literature (Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis I* & *II* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs From the Women's Prison*). Also, I will focus of life histories on veiled and unveiled Muslim women.

Interviewing ten women (five veiled Muslim women and five unveiled Muslim women), my data consists of notes documenting my experiences and struggles, limitations, description of settings and observations, and descriptions of comfort and discomfort in regards to my research topic; ten participant profiles; ten transcribed transcripts; ten audio recordings; a questionnaire consisting of ten questions; and, several public and private documents/encounters from both my participants and myself. I maintained an organized research process by following the KFP (keep, file, and protect) system and the "Overall Analytical Schema", as presented by Kirby et al (2006). In the KFP process, I created a "Sample Identity File" for each participant, and for the latter schema, I first collected the data and then recorded the process. Then, I organized the data by making observations, reflections, and documents. Finally, I tried to understand the data.

Chapter One:
My Journey: From Veiled to Unveiled

"My heart in the faith I don't practice
I still pray. Allah forgive me for my actions
cause I spit gangsta, think Muslim, and act kafir.
(I can't go on this way)"
-"I Can't Go On This Way" by Beanie Sigel

My name is Rahela Nayebzadah and I am a Muslim Canadian of Afghani descent. My mother is from Herat, Afghanistan and my father is from Kabul, Afghanistan. Because of the war in Afghanistan, both of my parents fled to Iran where they met and got married. At the age of two, my family and I left Mashhad, Iran and moved to Islamabad, Pakistan where we lived for three months. Thereafter, we moved to New Delhi, India where we lived for eighteen months. Afterwards, we moved to Canada as refugees. In Canada, we lived in Red Deer, Alberta for a year, Edmonton, Alberta for three years, and then moved to British Columbia. Growing up in Canada, my experiences as a Muslim and my knowledge of Islam is much different than if I were raised in Iran or in any other Islamic country. My one year experience of being a veiled woman in the West and my area of interest in veiled and unveiled Muslim women led me to pursue this project.

As a researcher, I do not want to be portrayed as a defender of Islam or the Muslim veil. Nor do I wish to be rendered as the complete opposite: the hater of Islam or the veil. Moreover, I do not want to be the reason to why Muslim women unveil. Even more, I do not yearn to speak for Islam, as if the religion, or any religion for this matter, needs defence. Instead, I fight to represent myself *as a* Muslim struggling to insert my identity within an ethnocentric society. To me, Islam does not equal the veil, but the veil is Islamic. In the former, one does not have to wear a veil to "wear" the values of Islam. In the latter, the veil is semiotics; the veil is a signifier as much as words are signifiers. Women donning the veil are equated with the Islamic religion. Furthermore, in this personal chapter, I will explain, evaluate, and critique my experiences with the veil through a short story. I will draw upon journal entries and certain memories that reflect the decision I made upon veiling and unveiling.

Killing Me Softly: Tales of a Veiled Sinner

It was the year 2001 and a sheik[10] was staying at my home. I was in grade eleven and in my second semester. My parents were in Iran at that time. I remember spending a lot of time with this sheik, having endless conversations with him in my bedroom. His visit changed my life dramatically, along with the lives of many other individuals within my immediate family: he built relationships and he broke them. He drilled marriage into our brains at a young age, insisting that it was the "Islamic thing" to do, and that it would prevent sin and create unity within families. Marrying within the extended family was important to him. At every attempt that he tried with me, he failed; I will never forget his efforts in trying to arrange for me to marry my cousin who disgusted me.

One night, I got in an argument with him. He ended up in tears and I felt pressured to feel guilty. Forcing myself to apologize, I opened his bedroom door and made my way in. I asked for mercy. He forgave. Thereafter, lectures on hell and heaven proceeded. He scared the life out of me that day; he took advantage of my youth and my frailty. He had power over me and he certainly knew how to use it to his own advantage. That night I was told that I should have been veiled years ago, immediately after my body developed and my menstruation cycle began, because those were the factors that transformed a girl into a woman. As a woman, I was to cover and be shameful of my developing body. If this was the case, then I wondered why he was spending nights with me in my bedroom, especially since my body was not covered. Finally, he presented his strongest argument, arguing that if I refused to cover my hair, my parents would burn in the eternal fires of hell. He manipulated me for hours until I was finally convinced that I could control my family's destiny. I felt trapped. That night, after leaving the bedroom, believing that Allah[11] was vengeful, I felt that I had to veil myself—from the world of men and the world of sin—immediately.

I left the bedroom feeling subliminal: I felt that I had elevated to a different level of spirituality. First, I neglected music after I was led to believe that music was the pathway to hell. Growing up, I was convinced that music was sinful because when listening to music, one forgets the existence of Allah and is taken so aback by the music that they almost become drunk-like. Hence, I advanced to a greater level: I was willing to cover my hair in order to protect my family. My entire family's afterlife depended on one piece of fabric. I was a completely different person; I was securing my reputation, my shame, and my honour as a Muslim woman. I announced to my siblings that same night that I would veil the following morning. My older sister, who is veiled, was proud of me. I asked my younger sister to participate with me, and she refused, saying that she would be rushing into something too quickly. On the contrary, I felt that because I made my

[10] A religious Muslim official.

[11] An Arabic word meaning God.

decision quickly, I was immediately healed and rescued from my heathen self, whereas my younger sister needed more time to "recover."

The next morning, I hastened to veil. Every morning for school, I would carpool with my friends. When my friend's mom's car approached my driveway, my friends looked at me in amazement. They did not comment. They just stared at me, further alienating me. Her mother, however, mentioned that I looked beautiful.

Arriving at Burnaby Central Secondary School, I was frightened. I felt my heart sink in my chest. Walking down the hallways as the only veiled Muslim woman in that school was extremely frightening. I immediately began to wonder if whether I did act too quickly. Perhaps I did don the veil out of fear. I took a deep breath and tried to ignore the voices in my head; instead, I walked down the corridors with my head held high. Students did not hesitate to make me feel different. They gazed at me with unaccepting eyes. Approaching my best friend's locker, she waited for me patiently, with the most disgusted look on her face that I had ever seen. I knew exactly what she was thinking. She was thinking that what the hell is Rahela doing? The veil is certainly not for her! She was not the only one who felt I was acting out of character; when my father was informed that I was veiled, he was surprised. He was not proud, he was surprised. I felt disappointed. I felt that people were refusing to see me in a different and more positive perspective. Why was it so hard for people to accept that I had changed for the best *this time*? That I had voluntarily agreed to become a better person?

Surprisingly, none of my friends dared to ask me why I veiled. It seemed my strong personality would not allow them to do so. Wearing the veil did serve some purposes for me: it served as a test, a test which proved to me who my true friends were. Also, the veil presented itself as an irony. Thinking back, I remember my non-Muslim friends were much more willing to accept me in my veil than my Muslim friends. To the latter, I was still the same: I wore a veil, but I did not "wear" the qualities a veiled woman was supposed to wear: I was still disrespectful to my elders; I still had an irritating loud laugh; and, I still mingled with my male cousins. Inside the doors of Burnaby Central, I did not receive any extra discrimination, but I did receive nonsensical questions and remarks from strangers the minute I exited school. I realized how simpleminded people were when they approached me in the summertime to ask me if I was hot underneath my veil, but I was never once bothered to be asked if I was cold in the wintertime for wearing short skirts when I was unveiled. Furthermore, I was stupefied when my hairdresser told me my hair is in an atrocious situation because I was veiled, which according to her understanding, meant that air was not flowing to my head and brain. Was I to assume that every veiled woman had damaged hair? I was even more benumbed when strangers would approach me, asking me if I had any hair at all underneath my veil. My veil remained a mystery, to both myself and the people around me. Moving onwards, I did not lose any of my female friends; however, I certainly did lose my male friends; they were no longer interested in talking to me.

They only wanted to be seen talking to attractive people, and me with a veil on my head was certainly not attractive. My ego was affected. My confidence and self-esteem dropped significantly, leading to depression, to which my family doctor responded by prescribing me depression pills, pills which turned me emotionless.

A few weeks later, the sheik left, heading back to his hometown to reunite with his wife and children. Shortly thereafter, I discovered that he spread a rumour about me: he wanted to set me up in a marriage with a relative and he told my suitor that I veiled for him, in the hopes that I would impress him. My suitor's existence felt significant—thinking he was so desirable that a woman was willing to cover her hair for him—while I was left embarrassed.

From an unveiled woman to a veiled woman, I had changed dramatically overnight. Before, I would attend high school every day with ounces of makeup. I would wake up extra early just so that I could dress myself in the fanciest garments. Walking down the hallways, I would appreciate the attention I received from the easily sexually aroused teenage boys. I enjoyed being popular amongst the boys and envied by the girls. In juxtaposition, as a veiled identity, things had changed. Being veiled, I no longer kept care of myself. I lost excessive weight. I had a sunken face, my ribs and collarbone were recognizable, my fingers resembled twigs, and my wrists looked like they would snap any minute. I had dark circles under my eyes and my skin looked unhealthy. I neglected my hair; I never put my hair down anymore. I hid in dark clothing, and I only wore black headscarves. I became quiet and so I secluded myself from the world; I constantly locked myself indoors because I did not want to be seen outdoors with a veil on because then I would easily be identified with Islam, an identity that I was ashamed of exposing.

My veiled image continued. Going into grade twelve, my family and I had moved, and so I was content because I was given the opportunity to graduate from my previous high school, Burnaby South Secondary, the school where I did not have trouble fitting in. However, as a veiled woman, things were no longer the same. The timing just was not right. The 2001 September 11th terrorist attacks had occurred and I felt responsible. I would walk down the hallways and students would yell "terrorist" to me. That same year, my family and I went on a family vacation to Disneyland. Security was strictly enforced, particularly in the United States of America. At the airport, the individuals that were pulled aside were me, my mother (who is also veiled), and a group of Black men. The security guards forced my mother to remove her shoes in order for them to search her socks and shoes.

Back at Burnaby South, my friends did not particularly discriminate against me; I just willingly chose to neglect my friends. As a veiled woman, I felt that my choice of friends were no longer appropriate to my image: I prayed five times a day and covered my body and sexuality in shame while they partied, did drugs, drank excessively, and experimented in sexual activities. During lunch hours, I would hide in a stairwell, and if anyone caught me, I would make it seem

that I was doing my homework. Towards the end of my grade twelve year I would share my lunch hours with a friend, a Muslim female friend. We would meet and share our problems. She introduced suicide to me; we would come up with inventive ideas to end our lives. I would write suicidal notes. One day, the topic of my veil approached. She was the only friend that I had discussed my veil with. She gave me the courage and the strength to take my veil off, and I took her very seriously because she had an authoritative voice, that of a native Muslim speaker. As a Muslim and as a woman, I felt that only she understood what I was going through.

Furthermore, in English twelve, one of the class readings was George Orwell's *1984***.** I remember a particular passage from the book, a passage that gave me the boldness to unveil. In this passage, Julia, the protagonist, rips off her scarlet sash of the Junior Anti-Sex League. She is about to perform sexual intercourse with Winston, her boyfriend:

> Quickly, with an occasional crackle of twigs, they threaded their way back to the clearing. When they were once inside the ring of sapling she turned and faced him. They were both breathing fast, but the smile had reappeared round the corners of her mouth. She stood looking at him for an instant, then felt at the zipper of her overalls. And, yes! It was almost as in his dream. Almost as swiftly as he had imagined it, she had torn her clothes off, and when she flung them aside it was with that same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilization seemed to be annihilated. Her body gleamed white in the sun. But for a moment he did not look at her body; his eyes were anchored by the freckled face with its faint, bold smile. He knelt down before her and took her hands in his. (126)

I craved the feeling that Julia encountered, my body hungered for it. I too felt annihilated and wanted to tear the suffocating veil off of me. I too wanted my body to gleam in the sun. I slowly gained my confidence back and I suddenly had the strength to take it off. I came home and I told my parents. I began to weep uncontrollably because I was scared that I would be judged as a coward. I was completely wrong: they were very supportive. Gaining my parent's consent, I felt freedom run down my body, and so I ditched the veil immediately**.** I began to wear skirts again and reveal my bare arms. This was a very uncomfortable moment for me; I was starting anew. However, I felt guilty and sinful at the same time. Several times, my father's friends tried to persuade me into reveiling, telling me that for every day that I showed a strand of hair, I would be more susceptible to evildoings. I refused.

Months after I abandoned the veil, a family member who was a few years younger than me and manipulated by the same sheik, gave into temptation and decided to give up the veil. I immediately blamed myself, thinking I influenced her. Now, I felt twice the burden and sin on my shoulders. However, she also had the help of her relatives from Edmonton to help her remove her veil: It was their eldest son's wedding and she was specifically told that if she wanted to dance in his wedding, she would have to remove her veil. She did. Her father approved because she had the approval of her eldest uncle. In my upbringing, the approval of an elderly relative is important.

Time passed and I was back to my old self again. After high school graduation, I registered into a film writing course in Douglas College and I was not afraid to seek vengeance. I wrote a play called "Beneath Her Veil," a play which I presented to the class as lived experiences which many Muslim women are faced with. I did not hesitate to inform the class that this play did not reflect my experience in a Muslim family, distinguishing myself from the "bad Muslims."[12] The play was based on a young Muslim woman, Mariam, who had recently immigrated to Canada from her home country, Iran. Every day, Mariam would visit the pond and write poems. One day, she met a Caucasian man, Austin, who took interest in her veiling and her writing. They became friends, which eventually led to an intimate relationship, leaving Mariam to run away from home and stay with Austin. Meanwhile, her younger sister, Zeinab, was also experiencing the "Canadian sexual life": she would leave her house with her veil on and then upon arriving to school, she would remove her veil. Thereafter, Zeinab began to experiment with makeup and revealing clothing. She also socialized with the wrong crowd in school. One day, she went to a house party and had sexual intercourse with one of the most popular guys in school. Weeks later, she discovered she was pregnant. She informs Mariam and Mariam immediately returns home, where she discovers that her old-fashioned father is in bed sick because of the torments that she and her sister have put their family through. Mariam becomes remorseful, asking her father what she can do to fix things. He replies by asking her to marry Ali, a religious man with a respectable family. She agrees. The play ends with Zeinab having an abortion in order to protect her family's honour and Mariam getting married to a man she does not love. Her father recovers and their family becomes functional again. The class reacted positively; I was told by a classmate that I should pitch my play to CBC. I was so proud of my work that I asked my eldest sister to read it. She was extremely offended and told me that I contributed to the false stereotypes which surround Muslims**.** I was becoming the Irshad Manji and the Ayaan Hirsi Ali: I was depending on false stereotypes in order to create a name for myself.

Two years passed and I enrolled into a Postcolonial Studies class at Simon Fraser University. I was introduced to the works of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. I was taken aback by the concept of Orientalism. In this class, I was reserved; I refrained from expressing my thoughts and feelings within classroom discussions. One day, a classmate got up before the class and presented on Muslim husbands beating their Muslim wives. I immediately thought to myself: How can a class on postcolonial theory motivate a student to present on such a topic? I scanned through the class and realized that there was a veiled girl in the class. Immediately, I felt that she was being both victimized and antagonized. I was outraged and I waited patiently for her

[12] In "Islam Through Western Eyes," Edward Said argues that bad Muslims are equated with extremists, terrorists, and fundamentalists—as manifested by leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini, a leader that is most favorably recognized for his "irrational violence combined with extreme licentiousness." Thus, these individuals are looked down on as atrocious and fallacious individuals who are a threat to the world order and peace. (*The Nation*, January 1, 1998)

to complete her presentation. When she concluded, my hand flung up in the air. The class was surprised that it was my hand raised in the air. I was infuriated; I remember my blood boiling and the blood rushing immediately to me head, leaving me red-faced. I said the following: "I usually don't talk in class unless I am angry. Right now, I am really angry. Your presentation was so racist and did not hold any truth. Where is your research? Where in *The Koran*[13] or in *The Hadith*[14] does it tell Muslim men to hit their wives?" The look on the presenter's face was blank; she did not comment. Later, she passed me a note saying, "I'm sorry." During break, the professor approached, praising me for my courage. This very moment transformed me. I was no longer tolerant of these demeaning conventions; I was ready to address these injustices.

A few more years passed again and I found myself in a Women's Studies Feminist Theory graduate course. Presentation topics were distributed and I noticed that one section was on veiled women. I went home and I immediately emailed the professor, telling her that I wanted to present on the topic. I was assured that only I could do justice to the veil; leaving it to the hands of other classmates would be distorted. The class was four hours long and halfway through the class, I presented. After my presentation, one student raised his hand and asked about the purpose of Prophet Mohammad. I was amazed by his question: I did not understand why Prophet Mohammad's existence would come up during a presentation on the veil. Maybe if the question was altered so that Prophet Mohammad's existence was relevant to the topic of the veil, then the question would have seemed more appropriate. Even more, I was intrigued as to why the professor, as a facilitator, did not intervene, especially when the discussion was going off topic. I guess she felt it was controversial. The topic of Prophet Mohammad then became a heated topic. A few Iranian Muslim students with anti-Islamic attitudes began to criticize the Prophet, insisting that he was a misogynist with numerous wives, wives who were too young to be married. Thus, the second half of the class consisted of either defending or attacking the Prophet based on his actions; the focus of the veil had drifted. It turned into a debate that only consisted of Muslims: Muslims who were against the Prophet, and Muslims who were for the Prophet. The remainder of the class did not dare to interfere; their responses were not invited. The irony of it all was that this time it was *the Muslims* who were attacking Islam, not the non-Muslims. Throughout the presentation, the professor kept asking if there is room for feminist thought in religion. I, however, was convinced that my position was feminist. I felt attacked. I came home and I took to the class blog. I responded angrily to my presentation. My post evoked a lot of comments, both positive and negative. I even had a post specifically addressed to me, saying "For Rahela." I was unstoppable. I felt a stronger urge to fight against the discriminations put forward toward veiled women.

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[13] The Islamic holy text (written in Arabic) which is believed was revealed to Prophet Mohammad.

[14] *The Hadith* is a text which is based on the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad.

Chapter Two:
The Veil before the Rise of Islam and Koranic and Hadith Interpretations on the Veil

Focusing mainly on Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) and Homa Hoodfar's "More Than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy" (2003), this chapter will consist mainly on the history of the veil before the pre-Islamic era. It will also look closely into the root meaning of the word "hijab"—an Arabic word used in *The Koran* which has led many Muslim women to veil. Thereafter, the chapter will look into *The Koran* and *The Hadith* because to study the Muslim veil without these two texts would be incomplete. Both texts are of great importance to Muslims; thus, both texts are crucial. Hence, authentic sources and multiple sources[15] on this concept will be explored. Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah's critical view on al-Tabari's (a well known interpretator of *The Koran*) Koranic interpretations will also be interrogated.

Pre-Islamic Veil

The veil, which is mainly recognized as an item of clothing that signals the Islamic faith, had been present before the rise of Islam: "Indeed, prior to the nineteenth century, the veil was never viewed as a symbol of Muslim culture; the practice of the veiling and seclusions of women is in fact pre-Islamic and originates in non-Arab Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.6). Homa Hoodfar dates the veil back to Assyrian law. In the thirteenth century BC, veiling was restricted to "respectable" women only; thus, prostitutes and slaves were forbidden to veil (2003, p.6). Hence, the rules on veiling, according to Assyrian law, are arguably clearer than the "rules" on veiling specified in *The Koran*. In *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Leila Ahmed provides a detailed account on Assyrian law. The law specified that wives and daughters of rulers had to veil, concubines accompanying their mistress had to veil, and former prostitutes who were later married (also known as "sacred prostitutes") had to veil (1992, p.14-5). These rules were strictly enforced so that those who did not abide by them were heavily punished: there were penalties of flogging, having water poured over their heads, and having their ears cut off (Ahmed, 1992, p.14-5). Nonetheless, the main

[15] Because I do not read Arabic, I will be relying on versions translated in English. Furthermore, I will also refer to scholarly work that has been written on *The Koran* and *The Hadith* such as work done by Soraya Hajjaj-Jarrah (2003), Homa Hoodfar (2003), Leila Ahmed (1992), Sajida S. Alvi (2003), Fatema Mernissi (1991), and L. Clarke (2003). In regards to *The Koran*, I will be using the English translation done by Saheeh International (1997).

premise of the pre-Islamic veil was to differentiate women into two categories: respectable and unrespectable, as argued by Ahmed:

> That is, use of the veil classified women according to their sexual activity and signaled to men which women were under male protection and which were fair game. [...] [This division] was fundamental to the patriarchal system and, second, that women took their place in the class hierarchy on the basis of their relationship (or absence of such) to the men who protected them and on the basis of their sexual activity—and not, as with men, on the basis of their occupations and their relation to production. (1992, p.14-5)

Misogynistic practices were also evident in Byzantine and Syrian practices. In the Byzantine, "women were always supposed to be veiled, the veil or its absence marking the distinction between the 'honest' woman and the prostitute" (Ahmed, 1992, p.26). The shamefulness of sex was only targeted on the female body: "the Syrian reliefs showing a woman so heavily swathed that no part of her, not even her hands or face, is uncovered date from the early Christian era" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 35). In addition, Jews also practiced veiling to some degree (Ahmed, 1992, p.55). How the veil has turned to an oppressive Islamic uniform is worth examining, especially since the history of the veil predates misogyny.

As an Islamic phenomenon, the veil is usually interpreted as an act of modesty and the practice of seclusion. However, if the veil is a sign of modesty, this dates back to "a wide variety of communities, including most Mediterranean peoples, regardless of religion" (Hoodfar, 2003, p. 6). And, if the veil is an indication of segregation, this was "a sign of status and was practiced by the elite in the ancient Greco-Roman, pre-Islamic Iranian and Byzantine empires" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.6). According to Ahmed, segregation and the veil were even evident in the Christian Middle East and Mediterranean regions at the time of Islam (1992, p.5).

The Islamic Veil

Firstly, in order to investigate the Islamic veil, one must gain a good understanding of the term "hijab." Fatema Mernissi's "The Hijab, *the Veil*" describes the concept of the word as three-dimensional:

> The concept of the word *hijab* is three-dimensional, and the three dimensions often blend into one another. The first dimension is a visual one: to hide something from sight. The root of the verb *hajaba* means "to hide." The second dimension is spatial: to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold. And finally, the third dimension is ethical: it belongs to the realm of the forbidden. So we have not just tangible categories that exists in the reality of the senses—the visual, the spatial—but also an abstract reality in the realm of ideas. A space hidden by a *hijab* is a forbidden space. The *Lisan al'-Arab* dictionary (*Language of the Arabs)* does not help us much. It tells us that *hajaba* means "hide with a *sitr*." And *sitr* in Arabic means literally "curtain." So we have an act that divides space into two parts and hides one part from view. The dictionary adds that

> some synonyms of the verb *hide* are formed from the two words *sitr* and *hijab*. *Satara* and *hajaba* both mean "hide." (1991, p.93-4)

As mentioned by Mernissi, the three dimensions "blend into one another," making it difficult to arrange thoughts under each category. However, all three dimensions make specific references to the wives of the Prophet, for they are unquestionably segregated, and therefore, hidden; separated from other women in terms of their status; and, belong to the world of the forbidden, meaning only they are appointed to be the wives of the Prophet and no one else's.

The first dimension of the veil—the visual component—which consists of hiding something from sight is often understood negatively, especially among the Sufis[16], as explained by Mernissi. Among Muslim Sufism, the hijab (known as *mahjub)* has nothing to do with a curtain; instead, the hijab "is an essentially negative phenomenon, a disturbance, a disability" (1991, p.95). A veiled person "does not perceive the divine light in his soul" because their "consciousness is determined by sensual or mental passion" (1991, p.95). Thus, according to Sufism, a veil prevents a Muslim from becoming closer to Allah. In opposition, Mernissi notes that to Muslim Mystics, the opposite is true: the hijab (known as *kashf*) is the discovery to discovering Allah (1991, p.95). According to the second dimension—the spatial aspect— the hijab is "to separate, to mark a border, to establish a threshold" (1991, p.93-4). In this regard, the hijab was used as a curtain behind which the caliphs and the kings sat in order to avoid the gaze of members of their court (1991, p.94). Also as a divider, "the drawing of cloaks" was intended to separate those who belonged to Prophet Mohammad's camps and those who did not, distinguishing the believer from the unbeliever (Hajjaji-Jarrah, 2003, p.192). Accordingly, the word "*hidjab*" in *The Koran* means to mark a separation: "It is the veil of the curtain behind which Mary isolated herself from her people" (Mernissi, 1991, p. 96). And, on the Day of Judgment, "the saved will be separated from the damned by a *hidjab*, which is glossed as a wall (*sur)* by the commentators" (1991, p.96).

In regards to the third dimension—the ethical element—Mernissi describes the veil as a barrier which was sent down by Allah to place a border between what is forbidden, which referred to the wives of the Prophet. This is also reiterated by Sajida S. Alvi in "Muslim Women and Islamic Religious Tradition: A Historical Overview and Contemporary Issues": verse 53 of chapter 33 "refers exclusively to the Koranic prescriptive mode of communication between believing men and the wives of the Prophet" (2003, p.184). In this interpretation, the "*hijab*—literally 'curtain'—'descended,' not to put a barrier between a man and a woman, but between two men. [...] [This] is an event dating back to verse 53 of surah 33, which was revealed during year 5 of the Hejira (AD 627)" (Mernissi, 1991, p.85). In addition, Mernissi provides the story leading to this occurrence. The Prophet was celebrating his marriage to Zaynab Bint Jahsh to

[16] Sufism is generally understood to not be a distinct sect of Islam, but the inner, mystical dimension of Islam.

which he invited the majority of the Muslim community residing in Medina. After the wedding supper, guests departed except for three men, causing the Prophet to become impatient because he wanted to be alone with his wife. However, because of the Prophet's personality, he did not raise his concern to his guests; instead, he waited for them to leave on their own terms. Upon their departure, Allah revealed the verse on the hijab to the Prophet. As he drew a *sitr* between himself and Anas Ibn Malik, the Prophet recited verse 53 of surah 33 which reads as the following:

> O you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that behaviour was troubling the Prophet, and he is shy of dismissing you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask his wives for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not conceivable or lawful for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity. (Saheeh International, *The Koran*, 1997, p. 588*)*.

Historical accounts recall Anas hearing the Prophet murmur the following verse when he drew the curtain between them. In this situation, "the message inspired by God in His Prophet in response to a situation in which Mohammad apparently did not know what to do nor how to act" (Mernissi, 1991, p.87). Furthermore, reference to the hijab as a curtain is also mentioned in *The Hadith*. In "Hijab According to the Hadith: Text and Interpretation" by L. Clarke, he says the following: "*The Hadith* tale of Mohammad's wedding with Safiyah tells us more about the Muslim community's memory of the dividing curtain called hijab (or sitr, a synonym for hijab also sometimes appearing in the Prophetic Reports)" (2003, p.232). Leila Ahmed also provides another similar occurrence in which either at the marriage to Zaynab or some other meal, "the hands of some of the men guests touched the hands of Mohammad's wives, and in particular 'Umar's hand touched 'Aisha's" (1992, p.54). 'Umar was the most powerful of the four Rashidun caliphs (a Sunni[17] concept used to refer to the first four caliphs who ruled after the death of the Prophet) and one of the most powerful and influential Muslim rulers. Furthermore, Mernissi argues that verse 59 of surah 33, which reads: "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful" (Saheeh International, *The Koran*, 1997, p. 590) was revealed to the Prophet as a solution to protect his wives from being confused as women who were subject to *ta'arrud*, meaning "taking up a position along a woman's path to urge her to fornicate" (1991, p.180). Before the rise of Islam, women (particularly slaves) were subject to sexual encounters, so the hijab clearly expressed that the wives of the Prophet should not be confused with slaves: "This

[17] Sunnism is the largest denomination of Islam. Its teachings are based on *The Koran* and *The Hadith*. Sunnis accept the first four Rashidun caliphs.

was the reason Allah revealed verse 59 of surah 33, in which He advised the wives of the Prophet to make themselves recognized by pulling their jilbab over themselves" (1991, p.180). This is also argued by Homa Hoodfar: "Another verse recommends that the wives of the Prophet wrap their cloaks tightly around their bodies, so as to be recognized and not be bothered or molested in public (Surah al-Ahzab, verse 59)" (2003, p.7). Here, it can easily be misinterpreted as Allah only viewing the wives of the Prophet as worthy of any protection. However, this argument can easily be defused when *The Koran* is perceived as a story stating the life of the Prophet with solutions presented to him whenever he confronted an obstacle. Nonetheless, the wives of the Prophet needed protection because of the threat Mohammad presented to the Hypocrites.[18] Here, Ahmed provides two accounts: (i) 'Umar wanted the Prophet to seclude his wives from Hypocrites who were not hesitant to abuse Mohammad's wives and then claim that they had mistaken them for slaves, and (ii) 'Umar further insisted that the Prophet seclude his wives because his success and reputation attracted many visitors to the mosques, visitors which could be of danger to the Prophet's, and his wives', wellbeing (1992, p.54). Furthermore, in "The Hijab Descends on Medina," Fatema Mernissi explains that 'Umar strongly suggested to the Prophet that the hijab be instructed to all women. He said the following to the Prophet: "'Messenger of God, you receive all kinds of people at your house, moral as well as evil. Why do you not order the hijab for the Mothers of the Believers?' Despite all the criticism of him, the Prophet persisted in not consenting to the hijab, not being of the same frame of mind as 'Umar" (1992, p.184-5). Therefore, Ahmed argues that during the Prophet's lifetime and toward the end of it, his wives were the only women who were required to veil (1992, p.5). Hence, seclusion was introduced, and again, this only applied to the wives of the Prophet (1992, p.53).

Koranic and Hadith Interpretations on the Veil

The word hijab is only found in *The Koran* seven times, as presented by Mernissi (1991, p.96). Furthermore, both Homa Hoodfar and Leila Ahmed argue that nowhere in *The Koran* does it specifically refer to hijab as an item of clothing which covers the hair, or the entire body for that matter. Both refer to Suraht al-Nur, verses 30-31, the only verses that deal with women's clothing, instructing women to guard their private parts and throw a scarf over their bosoms" (1991, p.55; 2003, p.6-7). Hence, it is this verse which, Hoodfar argues "has been interpreted by some that women should cover themselves" (2003, p.7). Furthermore, in "Women's Modesty in Qur'anic Commentaries: The Founding Discourse," Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah claims that the references made on hijab "retains the connotations of either a physical or a metaphorical barrier without any reference to women or their clothing. Verse 15 of Chapter 83, for example, reads: 'Verily, from their God, that Day, they will be veiled.' Likewise, verse 45 of Chapter 17 states: 'When you recite the Koran. We have put between you and those who believe not in the

[18] The Hypocrites were enemies of the Prophet.

Hereafter, an invisible veil'" (2003, p.184). However, it is important to mention that the hijab is addressed to man first, urging the following: "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" (Saheeh International, *The Koran*, 1997, p. 482). "[C]ast down their looks" refers to a "man's veil," the covering of one's eyes from lustful and sinful images. Following thereafter, women are addressed: "And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts" (Saheeh International, *The Koran*, 1997, p. 482). Here, the hijab is addressed to both genders, and therefore is understood in non-binary terms. Moreover, if the hijab is understood as a demand put forth on all women, then one must also question what the consequences are for those who fail to obey such a demand. Sheila McDonough tackles the following concern in "Voices of Muslim Women," reaching the following conclusion: "Then I focused my attention on the two specific hijab verses, and did not find any hudud [warning of punishment] for not wearing hijab. As a matter of fact, the reason recommending it is 'so that they will be known and not get hurt'" (2003, p.114).

The Hadith is also crucial in understanding Islam's standpoint on the veil. In "*Hijab* According to the *Hadith*: Text and Interpretation," L. Clarke provides a detailed summary on *The Hadith's* view on the hijab. In regards to women's dress, Clarke mentions that the canonical *Hadith* is not at all concerned with necklines; however, there are two references which address hemlines: (i) it is reported that the Prophet made the following remark: "'On the Day of Judgment, God shall not look upon those who trail their robes pridefully'" (2003, p.220). In response to this, Umm Salamah, one of the wives of the Prophet, asked: "'What then should the women do with their hems?'" to which the Prophet responded by saying, "'They should let them down the measure of their forearm [*dhira*], but no more'" (2003, p.220) and, (ii) The second hemline reference tells the story of how a woman approached Umm Salamah and "asked her what she should do about her train dragging over impure ground and then over the pure ground of the interior of the mosque. The question implied is: May I pull up, or perhaps shorten, my skirt to avoid dragging it through filth? Umm Salamah indicated that neither was necessary, for the Prophet had said that 'if she [a woman] passes through an impure place, and then through a pure place, that [her garment] is considered pure'" (2003, p.220). Clarke too demonstrates that there is no clear reference to women covering their hair or their hands in *The Hadith*—"there is no warning that stray hairs should not show, that those who expose their hair will be punished, or anything of this kind" (2003, p.222)—; however, there are references made on hair, both men's and women's. For example, there are references made on the thickness, length, and colour of the Prophet's hair; the dislike of "binding back (*kaff*)" hair while praying; the attention to carefully washing hair during ablutions, especially after having sexual intercourse; the proper length and style of hair for men; the undesirability of braiding hair so tight that it prevents one from partaking in proper ablution; the style of hair that is acceptable for a woman's corpse; the rules on women adding false hair to their own; and so on (2003, p.222). With the many

references made to hair rather than the covering of the hair, Clarke argues the following: "One would think that, with so much attention paid to hair, if the covering of women's hair were of great importance, it would certainly be mentioned. Shouldn't we expect, in that case, not only explicit references to covering hair but even a discrete bundle of *hadiths* on the subject" (2003, p.222). Furthermore, Clarke illustrates that in regards to the covering of the hair, *The Hadith* makes a large number of these references to men, as opposed to women. For men, the area from the thighs to the knees (also known as *'awrah*, meaning the private or shameful parts) should be covered (2003, p.218). Furthermore, "despite the reference in *the Koran* to *'awrat al-nisa*—'women's private parts'—and the popular tendency in our day to associate *'awrah* mainly with women [...], nearly all occurrences in the *hadith* of the term where it refers to private or shameful parts relate to men's *'awrah* and not women's" (2003, p.218). However, *The Hadith* is clear in its disagreement to ostentatious dress.

The avoidance of ostentatious dress is addressed to both sexes. Clarke makes references to two references in *The Hadith* which warn against wearing thin clothing: (i) in the first instance, the Prophet asks his companion to tear a robe into two: one to be used as a shirt and the other to dress (takhtamir) his wife because the clothing she was wearing was thin and revealing her form (2003, p.218); and, (ii) in the second instance, Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter (the daughter of the Prophet's father-in-law) came before the Prophet in thin clothes, to which he turned away and said, "'Asma, if a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it is not fit that anything be seen of her except this and this'"—and, according to *the hadith*, he pointed to his face and hands" (2003, p.220).

Critiques on Koranic Interpretation

In "Women's Modesty in Qur'anic Commentaries: The Founding Discourse," Soraya Hajjaji-Jarrah is critical of al-Tabari, a prominent and well-known exegete of *The Koran*. Hajjaji-Jarrah is particularly interested in the ways al-Tabari interprets "adornment" and "ornamentation," particularly when applied to women. al-Tabari, Hajjaji-Jarrah argues, is only interested in applying the term adornment as something that can either be covered or uncovered (2003, p.190), especially since *The Koran* "never defines either kind of adornment in any detail" (2003, p.187). Thus, he provides his own hermeneutics—explaining that adornments which should be concealed are anklets, bracelets, earrings, and necklaces (2003, p.187). Furthermore, al-Tabari seems to imply that believing women should avoid any sort of adornment whatsoever (2003, p.188). Clarifying what is considered as impermissible adornment, he also clarifies what is considered as "permitted-to-view adornment," which he argues is the face and the hands; however, even so, he registers his uncertainty stating, "that his support for such an interpretation is based solely on the unanimous agreement of scholars" (2003, p.188). Furthermore, Hajjaji-Jarrah demonstrates that his interpretation of adornment—as something that is either concealed

or unconcealed—only applies when speaking about women's dress, elsewhere in *The Koran* it is understood differently (2003, p.188). Hence, the exegesis of *The Koran* is solely determined on the values of a certain time period: "Thus these commentators, wittingly or unwittingly, tailored their definitions of the 'visible ornamentations of a woman' and 'the concealed adornment' to serve the needs and 'ideology' of their own particular time and place" (2003, p.208-9). Hence, it is these authoritative interpretations which are based more on Koranic commentaries rather than *The Koran*'s own prescriptions that placed importance on "the religious importance of the veiling of Muslim women" (2003, p.186). *The Koran*, Hajjaji-Jarrah argues, avoided any reference to particular parts of the body which needed to be covered and introduced no references to the women of Mecca and Medina who changed their dress upon Mohammad's ruling: "The women of Mecca and Medina who accepted the message of the Qur'an and became believers may have changed many things in their lives, but they did not change their normal way of dressing" (2003, p.190). Hence, Hajjaji-Jarrah argues that the reason *The Koran* is vague and does not define the term adornment is because it allows room to interpret text according to the norms of conduct that are appropriate within a certain community and time frame, making *The Koran* flexible: "This omission signals one of the important features of the Qur'an, namely, flexibility and dynamism. It is this feature that renders the Muslim Scripture valid for all nations, times and places" (2003, p.209). Furthermore, Hajjaji-Jarrah provides three historical stories to prove that al-Tabari's hermeneutics are flawed.

Three historical women, which Hajjaji-Jarrah refers to as "heroines," are the clear proofs that "seem to suggest that al-Tabari's understanding of women's modesty was born out of his own social reality rather than that of the early Muslim community" (2003, p.194). The first heroine, Nusaybah bint Ka'b, is spoken about in great detail in the works of scholar, Ibn Sa'd, as a courageous woman who fought in the Battle of Uhud; her bravery is more esteemed than some of Mohammad's other companions (2003, p.194). Furthermore, after the Prophet's death, she became more engaged in fighting major wars; in the Battle of al-Yamama, she is said to have "lost one of her arms and received ten wounds" (2003, p.194). Nonetheless, fighting to protect the Prophet's life, she "had lifted her garments and gathered them around her waist. She undoubtedly exposed her legs in the presence of a large number of men. Interestingly, both al-Waqidi [Nusaybah's teacher] and Ibn Sa'd relate the scene without even hinting at any stigma against females exposing their legs" (2003, p.194-5). The second heroines are Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet to his first wife, Khadija, and Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet and the sister of Hasan and Hosein, Islam's most esteemed martyrs.

Hajjaji-Jarrah argues that Fatimah and Zaynab's sartorial behaviour should not be dismissed because "they, more than any other believers, learned and comprehended the new or Islamic mode of behavior by being an integral part of [the Prophet's] private life" (2003, p.195). Ibn Sa'd shares the following story about Fatimah: 'Urwah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Qushayr entered

the house of Fatimah and watched as Fatimah wore two thick ivory bracelets on each wrist, a ring on her finger, and a beaded thread around her neck (2003, p.195). When 'Urwah asked her about her excessive adornment, "she answered in a brief retort that is a testimony to her pride in her femininity and her confidence that a woman's desire to beautify herself must not be contested: 'Women are unlike men'" (2003, p.195). Furthermore, the story illustrates that Fatimah was present in the company of a non-*mahram* male (a possible suitor) with her neck visible, "an adornment that al-Tabari has stated must certainly be concealed. By revealing and adorning her neck, Fatimah, Mohammad's own daughter, appears to have demonstrated a different regard for custom than al-Tabari later thought proper" (2003, p.195). The second heroine's story is set in the Battle of Karbala, a significant battle in the history of Islam. In this battle, al-Tabari's valuable annals called *Tarikh al-Rusul wa-al Muluk*, depicts Zaynab as "not only leav[ing] her face, ears and neck revealed, she is also described as having torn, in a moment of despair and in public, the neckline of her garment" (2003, p.196). Of this incident, Hajjaji-Jarrah argues the following: "Obviously, Zaynab was not entirely concealed by a cloak as she did this. Interestingly enough, al-Tabari relates this narrative without so much as implying that Zaynab bint 'Ali ibn Talib was breaking the Islamic rules of modesty. Nor does he feel the need to justify her unconcealed appearance or behavior as an uncontrollable act born of grief and despair" (2003, p.196). Hence, Hajjaji-Jarrah concludes with the following: "Thus, the Qur'anic usage of the term *hijab* seems somewhat removed from the notion of dress or clothing of any kind. For this reason, we maintain that the early Muslims, Mohammad's contemporaries, did not understand the Qur'anic term *hijab* to mean what many people today think it means, namely, the near-total concealment of a Muslim woman's physical features" (2003, p.184). Nonetheless, the meaning of the hijab had changed after the life of the Prophet.

The veil is also an indicator of the Hypocrites' success. The verses on the veil (verse 58, 60, and 61) all have been revealed at the height of power of the Hypocrites in Medina (p.191). In "*The* Hijab *Descends on Medina*," Fatema Mernissi explains that during Mohammad's lifetime, two opposing views occurred in regards to women and their presence: Mohammad dreamt of a society in which "women could move freely around the city (because the social control would be the Muslim faith that disciplines desire)" while the Hypocrites saw women "as an object of envy and violence" (1992, p.187). Nevertheless, it is the latter view on women that "would carry the day"; thus, "the veil represents the triumph of the Hypocrites. Slaves would continue to be harassed and attacked in the streets. The female Muslim population would henceforth be divided by a *hijab* into two categories: free women, against whom violence is forbidden, and women slaves, toward whom *ta'arrud* is permitted" (1992, p.187). Furthermore, Leila Ahmed contends that after the Prophet's death and during 'Umar's rule, women were subjected to inequality: he introduced stoning as punishment for adultery, he was harsh to women in both private and public life, he physically assaulted his wives, and fought to keep women locked in their homes, preventing them from attending prayers at mosque (1992, p.60). Mernissi argues that 'Umar

took the easier path: rather than changing oppressive attitudes that were imposed upon women during his time, he carried forward, attaching the name Islam to his untrue actions (1992, p.188). After the lifetime of the Prophet, the veil has evolved from a reputable item of clothing to clothing that cannot escape negative connotations. For example, in the time of the Prophet, the veil signalled status whereas in the later years, such as in Iraq, the veil became adopted by prostitutes as a solution to conceal their identity from male kin who might take their vengeance upon them in order to protect their family honour (Bezirgan and Fernea, 1977, xxv). Also, among the Tuareg of the southern Sahara, it is the men who veil and it is viewed as freedom and honour (Bezirgan and Fernea, 1977, xxv).

Chapter Three:
The Muslim Veil Today

"Damm, if mirrors were created by sand
then I'm looking in the water for reflections of man."
-k-os *"Crabbuckit"*

Representations of Veiled Women in Scholarly Work

The veil is an item of clothing that is perpetually "pregnant with meanings" (Ahmed, 1992, p.166). No other item of clothing compares to the veil. The veil is always being defined, and each time it is defined, it has been distorted. The veil cannot escape egregious interpretations or dichotomous relationships: it is both an area of interest for the West and the East; the Muslim and the non-Muslim; and, the veiled and the unveiled. In "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," Deniz Kandiyoti identifies the struggles in grasping the essence of the veil:

> In countries where the most prominent form of cultural nationalism is Islamic, for instance, feminist discourses can legitimately proceed only in one of two directions: either denying that Islamic practices are necessarily oppressive or asserting that oppressive practices are not necessarily Islamic. The first strategy usually involves counterposing the dignity of the protected Muslim women against the commodified and sexually exploited Western woman. It is thus dependent on a demonified 'other.' (1994, p.380)

Such a chiasmus depends on a duality: the Muslim woman in juxtaposition to the Western woman, and Islamic practices in opposition to cultural rulings. Furthermore, any binaries created because of the veil create further complications. Leila Ahmed notes the following: the "Western narrative [is] that the veil signified oppression, therefore those who called for its abandonment were feminists and those opposing its abandonment were antifeminists" (1992, p.162). Hence, such logic is not as simple as it presents itself to be. The veil, as an entangled and misapprehended headscarf, can never be assigned one meaning or state of being.

Within mainstream interpretations (from both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars) there seems to be two opposing discourses on the veil: one negative and one positive. As the former, the veil serves to cover women's shameful bodies; hinder women's sexualities; and, seclude women from the public realm. As the latter, the veil as an act of seclusion is a political (and therefore feminist) act. In a film called *Faith Without Fear*, Irshad Manji interviews Arwa Othman, a writer who refuses to be veiled, arguing that "women are not genitalia that need to be covered" because "something that is covered is bad and ugly" (2007). Nonetheless, a similar

attitude is present in the works of Fatema Mernissi, as she argues the following: "Islam took an unequivocally negative attitude towards body ornamentation, especially for women. It required pious women to be modest in their appearance and hide all ornamentation and eye-catching beauty behind veils" (2003, p.492). Mernissi's reference to ornamentation (or "adornment") is a direct reference to *The Koran*'s reference of ornamentation, which states the following: "And tell the believing women to [...] [also] not expose their ornamentation except that which necessarily appears thereof [...].And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their ornamentation" (Shaheeh International, *The Koran*, 1997, p.482). Unlike Othman, the covering of a Muslim woman's body is not for reasons of ugliness, but rather the opposite: a female body is "eye-catching" and therefore it must be hidden. Here, one must pause and investigate terms such as "ornamentation." Ornamentation consists of two specific meanings: private parts and anything that beautifies a person. In the former, ornamentation applies to both man and woman, and in the latter, ornamentation only applies to a woman. The private parts of both man and woman are to be covered. In *The Koran*, man is addressed first: "Say to the believing men that they [...] 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 [...] guard their private parts" (Saheeh International, *The Koran*, 1997, p. 482). In the latter, ornamentation can mean both the female body and anything which beautifies a woman such as makeup, excessive jewellery, and certain clothing which reveals the woman's body shape and form. According to my experience as a Muslim, the female body parts that are considered as ornamentations are every body part except for the face, the hands, and the feet. Special attention was paid to the covering of the neck, the arms, and the legs (from the knee down), which is why women who only covered their hair (revealing their ears and neck) and revealed parts of their arm and legs were considered as not practicing the "proper" veil. In response to Islam's insistence on covering female ornamentation, Homa Hoodfar illustrates that some women choose to veil because it "beautif[ies] the wearer" while others choose to veil because it "hide[s] the wearer's identity" (2003, p.11), opposite reasons which are equally liberating to the wearer. However, such a view towards women's bodies lead to another view: If Islam takes a negative view on women's bodies then Islam must also take negative views on women's sexuality.[19]

Despite contrary belief, Islam does not take a negative view on sexual activity. Unlike Christianity, sexual intercourse is encouraged and seen as an act of pleasure between a man and a woman rather than just for the purpose of procreation. References to sexual intercourse is made both in *The Koran* and *The Hadith*; however, there are restrictions pertaining to sex: pre-

[19] By sexuality, I am not referring to the condition of being characterized or distinguished by sex; instead, I am referring to sexuality in terms of sexual activity.

marital sex is not permitted and sex is prohibited during menstruation, during daylight hours of Ramadhan (a month dedicated to fasting), and during pilgrimage (surah 2, verse 187 and surah 2, verse 222). A woman who performs pre-marital sexual intercourse with another man is considered a threat to the social order, and thus, she must be stopped. In "The Meaning of Spatial Boundaries," focusing on gender politics, Mernissi is critical of certain cultural practices that are imposed on women by men such as secluding women from the public realm. She asserts that a female who trespasses male space is considered "both provocative and offensive" because she is "upsetting the male's order and his peace of mind"; thus, inviting the male to commit *fitna* (sin) (2003, p.494). According to this interpretation, any occasion when a man is confronted by a woman, fitna is unavoidable: "When a man and a woman are isolated in the presence of each other, Satan is bound to be their third companion" (2003, p.497). In such occurrences, the male is "passive" and the female is "lust-inducing" (2003, p.492-3). However, there are exceptions: elderly women and unattractive women, "who consequently have a greater freedom" (2003, p.492-3), can go unveiled because their presence would not disrupt a man's intellect. Here, Mernissi is critical of men's interpretation in terms of which women should be veiled and which women should not be veiled. Islam's prescription on abstinence, particularly for women, is enforced because of Islam's emphasis on marital sexual intercourse, as reiterated by Mernissi: "The most potentially dangerous woman is one who has experienced sexual intercourse" (2003, p.497). In "The Seen, the Unseen, and the Imagined: Private and Public Lives," Sarah Graham-Brown explains that Islam's distrust of women is difficult to defuse because "the figure of the nun, the celibate woman who dedicates her life to God, is complemented on the ideological level by the image of the Virgin Mary, the mother figure untouched by human sexuality. In Islam, no equivalent roles have been created for women which similarly defuse the notion of sexual danger" (2003, p.504). However, the image of Virgin Mary is equally significant within Islamic belief, having an entire chapter in *The Koran* dedicated to her. This chapter is the only chapter in *The Koran* which is dedicated to a woman; thus, the image of Mary as a celibate woman who gives birth to Jesus Christ is presented within Islamic belief, except Mary takes the name "Maryam" and Jesus Christ takes the name "Issah." (Surah 19: "Surah Maryam"). Nevertheless, the veil as a piece of clothing that protects celibacy further dichotomizes the spheres: the public sphere, that which belongs to the male; and, the private sphere, that which is dedicated to the female.

In "Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail," Reina Lewis attests that seclusion and veiling were introduced by Islam "as a border which distinguishes inside from outside, as a screen or cover, [since] women are associated with the inside, home and territory" (2007, p.62). In *Scheherazade Goes West*, Mernissi argues that in the Orient, "men use

space to dominate women" (2001, p.112) and uses Imam Khomeini[20] as a popular example. Through veiling, Mernissi argues that women are granted access to trespass into the public sphere, but they are also accepting that they are "invisible" and have "no right to be in the street" (2003, p.493). Participating in their invisibility, Mernissi argues that veiled women in the Mediterranean practice a political statement: "Veiling is a political statement. When stepping into the street, the veiled woman agrees to be a shadow in the public space. Power manifests itself as theatre, with the powerful dictating to the weak what role they must play. To veil on the Muslim side of the Mediterranean is to dress as the ruling Imam demands" (2001, p.114). Even though these veiled women are forced to "dress as the ruling Imam demands" and perform the "role they must play" as "a shadow in the public space", they are still active agents and participators in political acts. Under the rule of patriarchal control, these Mediterranean women are active agents; they exercise their power to enter the public realm, that which is forbidden and only reserved for men. By leaving their private domain and trespassing into the public sphere, they are going against patriarchal demands, and therefore making a political statement. The same idea is suggested by Homa Hoodfar, who not only views the veil "as a symbol of patriarchal control", but also as "a marker of status and as a tool of emancipation, empowerment and, in some cases, a means of exerting power over those generally considered to have ultimate control" (2003, p.33-4).

In "More Than Clothing: Veiling as an Adaptive Strategy," Homa Hoodfar pays close attention to two veiled women in terms of political action: Tahera and Mona. In an interview with Tahera, Tahera claims the following: "This scarf, that to so many appears such a big deal, at least has made others aware of Islam, and of my identity within the Canadian society" (2003, p.30). Hoodfar translates Tahera's veiling as "an expression of particular religious currents" and "a declaration of Muslim identity in primarily non-Muslim society" (2003, p.10-11). Mona, on the other hand, responds differently. She says, "I would have never taken up the veil if I lived in Egypt. Not that I disagree with it, but I see it as part of the male imposition of rules" (2003, p.30). According to Hoodfar, Mona's veiling would be translated as a political act because it is "a symbol of opposition to the state" and "a symbol of patriarchy and misogynist tradition" (2003, p.10-11). In either case, these veiled women demonstrate "a clear statement to parents and the wider Muslim community that [they] are not relinquishing Islamic mores in favour of 'Canadianness'"; rather, they are publicly asserting their Muslim-Canadian identity" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.39). Both Tahera and Mona are balancing both identities equally. However, some veil for the complete opposite reasons. In *My Journey, My Islam*, a group of girls reveals that they veil for reasons of segregation. Aside from commenting on the veil as a feminist act, they make the

[20] Imam Khomeini was an Iranian religious leader and politician. He was also the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

distinction that their veil separates them from the society of miniskirts, especially since it is "a flag that says, 'I'm Muslim!'"

In opposition, some women veil because of the advantages it provides as a "trade-off" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.29). Under such circumstances, a young woman may veil for involuntary reasons such as to satisfy their parents, especially since veiling to many families is a "reassurance to one's family that one's respect for Muslim mores remain strong despite unconventional activities and circumstances" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.10-11). Here, the veil "offers a means to mitigate parental and social concerns" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.18). Thus, satisfying their families, and their community as a whole, they are rewarded by having access to greater freedom such as having the freedom to communicate with the opposite sex without being scrutinized. Onwards, in regards to communicating with the opposite sex, many veiled women would agree that "since donning the veil, it has become easier to interact with men, both Muslim and non-Muslim" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.21). Leila Ahmed also argues that veiling makes it easier for women to build relationships with men:

> Wearing it signals the wearer's adherence to an Islamic moral and sexual code that has the paradoxical effect, as some women have attested, of allowing them to strike up friendships with men and be seen with them without the fear that they will be dubbed immoral or their reputations damaged. Women declare that they avoided being seen in conversations with a man before adopting Islamic dress, but now they feel free to study with men in their classes or even walk with them to the station without any cost to their reputation. (2003, p.224).

Oppositely, some veil for protection from men, as described by Ahmed: "The dress also protects them from male harassment. In responding to a questionnaire, women stated that wearing Islamic dress resulted in a marked difference in the way they were treated in public places" (2003, p.223). Also, Ahmed adds that the veil (though not the sole purpose for veiling) is economical: "For women Islamic dress also appears to bring a variety of distinct practical advantages. On the simplest, most material level, it is economical. Women adopting Islamic dress are saved the expense of acquiring fashionable clothes and having more than two or three outfits" (2003, p.223). However, there has been a shift—fashion and the veil are congruent. Muslim fashion designers, particularly in Dubai, are targeting veiled women throughout the world with their fashionable and expensive veils.

However, despite contrary belief, many scholars argue that the veiled woman is a symbol of power. In "Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail," Reina Lewis discusses in detail the power of the veiled woman, particularly in the West. Lewis mentions that "for the European subject, there is always more to the veil than the veil" (2007, p.42). The veiled woman offers a threat to unveiled Western women because "*the veiled woman can see without being seen*" (2007, p.43). For the Western woman, "instead of being looked at, the object now looks at" (2007, p.62-3). This becomes threatening for the following reasons: "It

is the veil which enables the Oriental other to look without being seen. This not only disturbs the desire of the Western/colonial subject to fix cultural and sexual difference, but also enables the colonial other to turn itself into a surveillant gaze" (2007, p.63). The power of looking without being looked at, hence their "omnipresence" causes "frustration" (Alloula, 1986, p.13). As a surveillant gaze, the West wishes for nothing but to dismantle this image. Therefore, it is assumed that certain Muslim women who are dressed in veils must be hiding something:

> The veil gives rise to a meditation: if they wear a mask, or masquerade or conceal themselves, then there must be a behind-the-mask, a knowledge that is kept secret from us. The *mystery* that is assumed to be concealed by the veil is *unconcealed* by giving a figural representation to this mask and to the act of masquerading as an enigmatic figure. However, what is thus concealed, i.e., the 'masquerade', the 'veil', is the *act of concealment itself*. The veiled existence is the very truth of Oriental women; they seem to exist always in this deceptive manner. (Lewis, 2007, p.45)

Such "mysteriousness" that the veiled woman displays immediately transforms to deception in the eyes of the viewer. Her deception becomes entertaining: "The Oriental woman/Orient is so deceptive and theatrical" (Lewis, 2007, p.45). According to Nietzche, Lewis mentions that the veiled woman is "deceptive because she has no essence to conceal" (2007, p.52). Furthermore, in *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula presents "a sort of ironic paradox: the veiled subject [...] becomes the purport of an unveiling" (1986, p.13). According to Alloula, the veil, symbolizing "the closure of private space [...] [,] signif[ying] an injunction of no trespassing upon this space" (1986, p.13) tempts the "trespassers"—the Western gaze—to trespass upon this space by "unveiling" the veiled woman. Here, the act of unveiling, and arguably an act of violation, becomes a sexual encounter: "she [the veiled woman] is nothing but the name of untruth and deception. If the Oriental is feminine and if the feminine is Oriental, we can claim that the nature of femininity and the nature of the Orient are figured as one and the same thing in these representations. This equivalence positions the Orientalist/Western colonial subject as masculine: the other culture is always like the other sex" (Lewis, 2007, p.56). Nonetheless, after being unveiled, the veiled woman is finally able to be represented.

In "The Muslim Woman: The Power of Images and the Danger of Pity," Lila Abu-Lughod makes the following argument pertaining to veiled Muslim women: "Our lives are saturated with images, images that are strangely confined to a very limited set of tropes or themes. The oppressed Muslim woman. The veiled Muslim woman. The Muslim woman who does not have the same freedoms we have. The woman ruled by her religion. The woman ruled by her men" (2006, p.1). Such stereotypical images have entered mainstream thought, reinforcing demeaning narratives on a culture.

Representations of Veiled Women in Literature, Film, Photography, and Art

This section will delve into certain representations dedicated to veiled Muslim women. Veiled women are almost always portrayed as flat characters. As characters that reveal only one or two personality traits, they are depicted as two opposite extremes: either they are fundamental and closed-minded individuals, or they are a silenced, oppressed, and submissive group of women. Thus, characters which do not qualify in either category are an exception—they become the tolerant and acceptable Muslim women; thus, they are the heroines of the story. As the former, two credited autobiographical Muslim writers and "experts" are accredited for their expertise in depicting one-dimensional characters: national bestseller Marjane Satrapi and Nawal El-Saadawi. In Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*, Marji, the protoganist, is caught struggling between two different worlds: the rational and forward-thinking world of the West, in juxtaposition to the stubborn and backward-thinking world of the East. Set during the Iranian Revolution, Marji is placed in situations where she struggles to assert her individuality. One example is when Marji inserts her will to exercise sexually in a classroom filled with traditional women. She says, "'Can you explain to me what's indecent about making love with your boyfriend? Shut up yourself! My body is my own! I give it to whomever I want! It's nobody else's business!'" (2004, p.149). Furthermore, in Nawal El Saadawi's *Memoirs From the Women's Prison*, Dr. Saadawi, the main character, is also placed in a similar situation as Marji. As a political prisoner recognized for her prison writing, Saadawi shares insights on other prison mates. The memorable characters, serving as foils to Dr. Saadawi, are Boduur and Fawqiyya. Boduur is described as "a young woman of about 30 who wore a niqaab. She would chant the Qu'ran in tones which reminded [one] of Qu'ran recitation at a funeral" (1986, p.36-7) and Fawqiyya, an unveiled woman is portrayed as a woman that "placed a veil over her mind and could not imagine that there exist people who think in ways different from hers. [...] Fawqiyya resembled Boduur in her blind faith in one idea, believing that anyone who did not believe as she did was an infidel" (1987, p.37-8). Nonetheless, Dr. Saadawi recalls being in a conversation with Boduur in which Boduur reminds her of her duties as a Muslim woman:

> 'Get up and wash so you can perform the prayer, and don't say that you're ill! Prayer cures you of sickness. It is God who heals. Don't write any complaint to anyone. God is present. If you are innocent, God will make you victorious. Do not say that you didn't do anything wrong: you must have done something sinful in your life and then forgotten about it. God could not possibly expose you to pain or torture or prison or beating without a sin on your part. [...] You absolutely must stay up all night to pray—the five obligatory prayers are not enough. [...] It is important, though, that you keep God in your mind and speech, day and night. Staying up at night to pray is better and more enduring than sleep. You went to the correction cell because you were not staying up at night to pray and because you haven't memorized the Qur'an. I've told you more than once that you must learn two chapters of the Qur'an by heart every week. This is

> a sacred duty. Whoever does not fulfill it must have her feet whipped fifty times. Who knows, maybe it was God's will that you were beaten by the hands of others so you would atone for your sins. It's not enough that you cover your face with a *niqaab*. You must cleanse your heart of Satan's whisperings. Woman is nearest to Satan than man—through Eve, Satan was able to reach Adam. Woman was created from a crooked rib and she becomes straightened only through blows which hurt. Her duty is to listen and obey without making any objections—even a blink or a scowl.' (1986, p.131-2)

In this long conversation, Budoor not only reinforces misconceptions pertaining to Muslim women, but she also depicts Allah as misogynistic and vengeful towards women, the root of all evils. Furthermore, Saadawi provides an illustrated account on veiled women as a whole, degrading them to animals: she says women who wrap their heads make themselves appear "like the heads of crows as they stay carefully in single file, with their white handkerchiefs raised above red eyes or waving through the air around their black heads as they utter the harsh, sharp calls which convey the public expression of grief" (1986, p.36-7). However, to Saadawi, hope for these women is possible upon the lifting of their veils. She says, "Even those faces hidden under the black veils...when the niqaabs were lifted I could see faces that were shining, clear, overflowing with love, a cooperative spirit, and humanity" (1986, p.39).

The silenced veiled woman is a common representation. Irshad Manji, a "Muslim Refusenik," a term which she coined to mean a Muslim who "refuse[s] to join an army of automatons in the name of Allah" (Manji, 2003, p. 3) is known for degrading Muslim women, particularly veiled Muslim women. As a Muslim living in the West, she makes it clear that her significant presence is the *reason* to why she is still a Muslim. She says, "No need to choose between Islam and the West. On the contrary, the West made it possible for me to choose Islam, however tentatively. It was up to Islam to retain me" (2003, p.21). By referring to Islam and the West as two separate entities, she further separates the two by electing the women of Islam as a subject of difference to the women of the West. In an interview with George Stroumboulopoulos to promote her film *Faith Without Fear*, Irshad Manji presents veiled women as backward and frozen in time and space. She says the following about the burqa[21]: it "eras[es] independent thinking" (2007). Furthermore, in her film, she elaborates on the veil, saying it effects women negatively because their "personal expression takes a back seat to the pressures of conformity" (2007). Observing veiled Yemeni students in a classroom setting, she makes the following remark: "unity looks a lot like uniformity" (2007). Later, she tries to experience the "veiled experience" by purchasing and roaming around the streets in a burqa, which she is not hesitant to ridicule. She says, "What's demeaning is that it erases my individuality" (2007). Upon purchasing the burqa, Manji implicitly ridicules a Yemeni man who tries to sell her a burqa in

[21] A burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions for the purpose of cloaking the entire body. It is worn over the usual daily clothing. The burqa covers the wearer's entire body and face except for a small region about the eyes which is covered by a concealing net.

which he describes it as "the modern Yemen" (2007). To this, she repeats twice, questioning, "This is the modern Yemen? This is the modern Yemen?" (2007). She makes fun of him further by saying, "You realize I've always wanted someone to dress me" (2007). Here, her sarcasm is used to demonstrate the complete opposite: unlike the women of Yemen, who lack personal and "modern" expression due to their adherence to Islamic dress code, she is free to express her personal expression; thus, not wanting someone to dress her. Furthermore, as he is dressing her, she tries even further to express the confinement of the veil, saying, "Wooh. That's tight. [...]. I'm having a hard time breathing" (2007).

Furthermore, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is also accused of portraying Muslim women as silenced and submissive women. Her acclaimed film, *Submission*, was a short film which used the female body as a canvas to portray the oppressed Muslim woman that is subject to rape, violence, injustice, and incest. The film, which caused a great uproar within the Muslim community in the Netherlands—leading to the tragic murder of Danish filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, by a Muslim extremist, Mohammad Biyar; the world-wide circulation of prophetic caricatures; and, the burning of mosques and Muslim schools—is a film that cleverly mashes all the stereotypes based on veiled Muslim women. Koranic verses are printed all over the female's body (a strategy that has possibly been borrowed by Shirin Neshat, a female Iranian visual artist), verses which prove Allah's "injustice" towards women. An example of a verse that is used from *The Koran* is "men are the protectors and maintainers of women." Furthermore, Ali uses a certain verse of *The Koran* to distort its meaning, transforming it into a negative and misogynistic verse, as voiced by the protagonist of the film:

> Just as you demand of the believing woman, I lower my gaze and guard my modesty. I never display my beauty and ornaments, not even my face or hands. I never strike with my feet in order to draw attention to my hidden ornaments, not even at parties. I never go out of the house unless it is absolutely necessary, and then only with my father's permission. When I do go out I draw my veil over my bosom, as you wish. Once in a while I sin. I fantasize about feeling the wind through my hair or the sun on my skin, perhaps on the beach. And I daydream about an extended journey through the world, imagining all the places and people out there. Of course I shall never see these places or meet many people because it is so important for me to guard my modesty in order to please you, oh Allah (2004).

Here, the concept of sin within Islamic belief has also been exaggerated by saying that the fantasizing of wind through one's hair, or the sun on one's skin is sin. The main character, whose name is not provided, possibly as a result of her invisibility, is a naked Muslim woman who is praying on the prayer mat. Here, Ali is using nakedness to play with notions of modesty which is associated with the veil. Also, nakedness is used as a response to the female body that is supposed to be covered during prayer time. Nonetheless, the protagonist (also the victim) is a woman who is in love with a man named Raman, but she is forced to marry a religious and strict man named Aziz who constantly abuses her, rapes her, and accuses her of fornication.

Furthermore, she is later raped by her uncle, Hakim, and is now carrying his child, an act that is not taken seriously by her parents. Throughout the film, the character makes it clear that she has been betrayed by Allah. She says, "we thought your holiness is on our [her's and Raman's] side" and "The verdict that has killed my faith and love is in your holy book. Faith in you. Submission to you. Feels like self betrayal. Oh Allah, giver and taker of life. You admonish all who believe to turn toward you in order to attain bliss. I have done nothing my whole life but turn to you. And now, that I pray for salvation under my veil, you remain silent, like the grave I long for" (2004). However, regardless of her mistreatment, she is still submissive to Allah. She says, "but I submit my will to you" and "So, I cheerfully do as you say and cover my body from head to toe, except when I am in the house, with family members only. Generally, I am happy with my life" (2004). Here, Ali is reinforcing the damned Muslim woman image that submits to Allah because of fear. Nonetheless, one would think that Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a woman who later revealed her hardship in her bestseller, *Infidel*, would think that she actually did experience hardship in her life as a Muslim individual. Ironically, her "story" cannot escape controversy: she was caught lying about her name, her hometown, her age, and her forced arranged marriage which caused her to apply for asylum to the Netherlands, putting her Dutch citizenship at risk (BBC News, "Profile: Ayaan Hirsi Ali," <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4985636.stm>>, Thursday, June 29, 2006). Nevertheless, it is this particular oppressed image of the veiled woman that leads to representing Muslim women as women who need rescuing (read: colonizing). Such unveiling of the veiled women also leads to a sexual fantasy, just as the act of unveiling implies.

The act of unveiling the veiled woman cannot escape the harem fantasy, a place which Reina Lewis in *Gendering Orientalism* has explained to be the place where "veils were removed on arrival since there is no prohibition on women seeing each others' faces" (1996, p.155). In "Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail," Lewis explains that the veil "is one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the other are fantasmatically achieved" (2007, p.39) because for the male viewer, there is the "desire to penetrate, through his surveillant eye, what is behind the veil" (2007, p.62). The veil, as an off-limits sign, is turning into a fabric that must be unravelled because the veiled woman presents the Western male with a mask, a mask that leaves the male "troubled," "threatened and seduced at the same time" (2007, p.45). The sexual undertone of the veiled women is beautifully portrayed in Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem*, where he has collected and compiled harem postcards of Algerian women (where "[h]istory knows of no other society in which women have been photographed on such a large scale to be delivered to public view" (1986, p.5)) that were taken and distributed by Western tourists. In these postcards, Algerian women are partially naked, reinforcing concepts of Orientalism. Furthermore, the Western female is also involved in the harem fantasy, not just the men, because Western women in harems succeed "in penetrating deep into the heart of the other, its mysteries, its true nature, its essence" (Lewis, 2007, p.90). Furthermore, her look is just as

violating as the male's, leading the women's gaze to turn "into a masculine gaze. She takes up the masculine, phallic position and employs his frame in enjoyment, wickedly" (Lewis, 2007, p.90-1).

Other forms of modern day art also further reinforce the sexualized image of the veiled women. In "Mask," the New York solo debut exhibition of Justine Reyes, Justine displayed photographs of herself in different masks, masks which take the shape of a veil. Part Mexican and part Italian, she has often been mistaken for being from an Islamic nation (2006, p.1). As a result of the aftermath of 9/11, Reyes has taken on this assignment to demonstrate the newfound mysteries the veil has projected on her and others. Reyes "observed firsthand the duality of the veil, as something that can protect a woman from unwelcome leers and also eloquently provoke desire" (2006, p.2). In regards to the former, the veil as a protection, she relies on images of violence that veiled women are associated with, saying, "Through gauzy nylons and lace, they peer with unblinking directness wantonly out at any taker. She is your willing victim, perhaps, who owns you; or the one who kills you, slowly, to your infinite pleasure" (2006, p.1). Hence, some of her masks take the form of gas masks and hazmat gear to further represent the fear and aggression that has been associated with the veil post 9/11. On the contrary, the veil is also represented as danger rather than a protection as it leads to their rape: In some of the photographs, one would think of the veiled woman as a "kidnapper's mewling prisoner, silenced as she is raped, struggling to breathe" (2006, p.2). In addition, fulfilling the latter part of the duality, Reyes notes the following about the veil: "The mystery that the veil or mask creates is one that is highly sexualized. There is a tension created by veiling. Some people are afraid of not knowing what lies beneath the veil. In this work, I use the mask to explore issues of identity, veiling and the gaze in relationship to power and sexuality" (2006, p.3). With the emphasis on sexuality, the hand-sewn pantyhose veils and the nylons make appropriate choices of fabric for this project. Focusing heavily on sexuality, she admits that the "veil is not inherently anti-sexual" (2006, p.3), drawing emphasis on the eyes since "the eyes are the most erotically dangerous part; even sometimes, [...] when they are covered" (2006, p.3). However, according to Lewis, regardless of the attempts in trying to represent the Oriental veiled women, the "more the Orientalist subject has tried to know and conquer the zone of darkness and mystery, the more he has realized his distance from 'authentic,' 'real' knowledge of the Orient and its women" (2007, p.73). Thus, leaving "the very act of representing the veil is never represented; the desire that represents the veil cannot be represented" (Lewis, 2007, p.47). However, due to such representations one should consider the following question: Why the fear and the reluctance to accept the veil?

Why Such Hatred toward the Veil?

According to Fatema Mernissi, the image of the veiled woman serves of great significance because "[a]ll debates on democracy get tied up in the woman question and that piece of cloth that opponents of human rights today claim to be the very essence of Muslim identity" (1991, p.188). Focusing mainly on Quebec's response to the veil, in "Perceptions of the Hijab in Canada," Sheila McDonough provides readers with a few responses as to why many are unwilling to accept the veil. In general, McDonough claims that Canada's distrust of the veil is "linked with this memory of a long history of religious leaders opposing changes in the status of women" (2003, p.122). However, concentrating only on Quebec's intolerance towards the veil (rather than Canada as a whole) since Quebec, according to McDonough, is arguably the main province in Canada that displays such unacceptance for the veil is due to the following account: "The fact that negative reaction to the hijab[22] may be strongest in Quebec may be linked to the fact that female suffrage and the legal guarantees of women's rights came later in that province than in the rest of the nation" (2003, p.126). Furthermore, the veil is distrusted because it resembles a uniform and "the sight of uniformed young people awaken bad memories in European society of an association of youth in uniforms with fascist groups" (2003, p.127). This uniform, to many Westerns, is a suffocating item of clothing that prevents women from movement, as mentioned by Homa Hoodfar: "Nonetheless, the imaginary veil that comes to the minds of most Westerners is an awkward black cloak that covers the whole body, including the face, and which is designed to prevent women's mobility" (2003, p.11). The veil as a uniform is also touched on by Alloula, where he says the veiled uniforms homogenizes women, leaving them indistinguishable from one veiled woman to another (1986, p.7). Also, the veil is frustrating to many because it "instills uniformity," "disappointment and deficiency of expression" (Alloula, 1986, p.11). Such distrust towards the veil makes associating the veil with cynicism easy.

One must question why the urge to distinguish the Muslim veil as something iniquitous. Negative portrayals of the veil make it easy, as argued by Lila Abu-Lughod, for the West to think of the Muslim world incongruent to the Muslim women (2006, p.2). I argue that such a label is necessary in order to constantly have the world divided into two: the East and the West; the progressive and the retrogressive; the Orient and the Occident. Meyda Yegenoglu argues that such a divide is "a *process* in which both the 'Western subject' and the 'Oriental other' are mutually implicated in each other and thus neither exists as a fully constituted entity" (1998, p.58). The veil, in particular, is the ultimate symbol by which the West can distinguish the Oriental woman from the Occidental (Lewis, 2003, p.536), creating a further divide between the Oriental repressed woman and the Occidental freed woman. The veil is semiotics. Nonetheless, the veil has "[become] the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on

[22] Here, Sheila McDonough is using the word "hijab" to mean the Muslim veil.

Muslim societies" (Ahmed, 1992, p.152). Viewing the veil as a forced garment forced on women by men invites hate towards Muslims and Islam. Furthermore, if Islam equates evil, then there must be an alternative, or in other words, another way to show men and women the correct path; hence, another divide is created: Islam equates immorality and Christianity equates morality.

In "Muslim Women and Islamic Religious Tradition: A Historical Overview and Contemporary Issues," Sajida S. Alvi illustrates the difficulty the West has when trying to understand Islam: "In search of a typology for Islamic ideology, social scientists and humanists have coined various terms and labels such as 'secularism,' 'Islamic modernism,' 'fundamentalism,' 'radical Islamism,' 'Islamic totalism,' 'traditionalism,' 'neo-traditionalism,' and more currently using the term 'Islamism'" (2003, p.170). Also, in "Perceptions of the *Hijab* in Canada," Sheila McDonough provides readers with three occurrences which speak Islamophobia: (i) in the first account (on April 21, 1995), an editorialist, Claudette Tougas, for the newspaper *La Presse* wrote an article indicating that no one was to blame for the Oklahoma bombing. However, a cartoon (showing a Muslim on his knees before a donkey, together agreeing that "the thinkers and the intelligentsia are the enemies of God") placed right next to the editorial clearly demonstrates that Muslims were to blame for the Oklahoma bombing (2003, p.129-30); (ii) in the second example, McDonough provides a case in 1993 in which a judge expelled a woman from a courtroom because she was wearing a veil (2003, p.123-4); and, finally, (iii) the third example is dated from 1995 when the CEQ (the federation of Quebec teachers) "agreed by majority vote that no '*signe ostentaire*' should be permitted in Quebec schools" (2003, p.124). The phrase, "signe ostentaire," McDonough explains, is also used in debates which take place in France for advocating the veil ban (2003, p.124). Furthermore, more recently, Dutch parliamentarian, Geert Wilders, made a movie titled *Fitna* (2008) which is also Islamophobic. In this short film, he compares Muslims to the Germans during the Nazi period. He uses very selective Koranic verses to "justify" his arguments and he shows Muslim protestors holding signs which say "Freedom Go to Hell," "Islam Will Dominate the World," and "God Bless Hitler" (2008). Moreover, he ends his film with the following:

> For it is not up to me, but to Muslims themselves to tear out the hateful verses from the Quran. Muslims want you to make way for Islam, but Islam does not make way for you. The government insists that you respect Islam, but Islam has no respect for you. Islam wants to rule, submit, and seeks to destroy our western civilization. In 1945, Nazism was defeated in Europe. In 1984, communism was defeated in Europe. Now, the Islamic ideology has to be defeated. Stop Islamisation. (2008)

He is controversial in drawing comparisons between Muslims and Hitler. However, is he also not drawing comparisons between himself and Hitler? Like Hitler, Wilders is also demeaning a group of people. Such a divide and invitation to further demean Islam and its believers make it justifiable for open target to colonial attack, particularly with Muslim women. Muslim women

suffocated underneath their veils are the particular images that lead many Westerners to pity Muslim women. Lila Abu-Lughod argues the following: "If one constructs some women as being in need of pity or saving, one implies that one not only wants to save them from something but wants to save them for something—a different kind of world and set of arrangements" (2006, p.5). Nonetheless, the image of the pitied Muslim woman must defuse in order to recognize their agency.

Doing Away with the Pitied Muslim Woman Image

I agree with Leila Ahmed's statement on veiled women: "My argument here is not that Islamic societies did not oppress women. They did and do; that is not in dispute. Rather, I am here pointing to the political uses of the idea that Islam oppressed women and noting that what patriarchal colonialists identified as the sources and main forms of women's oppression in Islamic societies was based on a vague and inaccurate understanding of Muslim societies" (1992, p.166). Unfortunately, Muslim societies, along with many other societies, have and continue to degrade women. However, Islam is the only religion constantly attacked; Islamic women have become a popular subject of debate and critical interrogation. The veiled woman is always categorized into a very limited category. The veiled woman is always represented for. The veiled woman can never escape extreme interpretations. I agree with the following comment Fatema Mernissi makes on the veil: "Reducing or assimilating this concept to a scrap of cloth that men have imposed on women to veil them when they go into the street is truly to impoverish this term, not to say to drain it of its meaning [...]" (1991, p.95). Furthermore, Leila Ahmed questions why many are willing to attach the veil but hesitate to question society:

> It would be unreasonable to fault the young women of today for adopting Islamic dress, as if the dress were intrinsically oppressive—which is how the veil, at least, was viewed by the former colonial powers and by members of the indigenous upper and middle classes who assimilated colonial views. It would be even more unreasonable to fault them for adopting Islamic dress as a means of affirming the ethical and social habits they are accustomed to while they pursue their education and professional careers in an alien, anomic, sexually integrated world. (1992, p.230)

Women donning the veil should not be blamed or questioned for wearing the veil because to do so would be a human rights violation. Moreover, as mentioned by Lila Abu-Lughod, the veil "must not be confused with, or made to stand for, lack of agency" (2006, p.3). As a dress granting agency, veiled women are not secluded from society, but rather the opposite, as eloquently explained by Ahmed: "The adoption of the dress does not declare women's place to be in the home but, on the contrary, legitimizes their presence outside it" (Ahmed,1992, p. 224). Hence, sometimes the reliance on analogies is needed in order to prove that the veiled woman, and furthermore, Islam as a religion, is not a threatening and dangerous subject.

The act of covering one's hair as an indication of modesty is not accepted by many Canadians, as discussed by Sheila McDonough (2003). However, whether the veil is a marker of modesty or not is not important; what is important is why is the veil as an indication of modesty troubling for many to accept when "one or two generations ago, hats were commonly worn by women in churches" (2003, p.141). Furthermore, also looking back in history, Ahmed comments on the following: "It was never argued, for instance, even by the most ardent nineteenth-century feminists, that European women could liberate themselves from the oppressiveness of Victorian dress (designed to compel the female figure to the ideal of frailty and helplessness by means of suffocating, rib-cracking stays, it must surely rank among the more constrictive fashions of relatively recent times) only by adopting the dress of some other culture" (1992, p.244). How is it possible that a culture which disapproves of tight and see-through clothing be accused of pressuring their women to wear veils which disrupt mobility when generations ago, women were confined to tight-fitted corsets even through pregnancy and were not labelled with the negative accusations that Islam is so easily accused of? Because of the negative connotations the veil has been associated with, Lila Abu-Lughod asks: "why are we surprised when Afghan women don't throw off their *burqas* when we know perfectly well that it wouldn't be appropriate to wear shorts to the opera?" (2006, p.3). Why must the West expect Muslim women to dismiss their veils? It would be absolutely inappropriate to ask a nun to not be in her uniform, or ask a priest to not be in his. Also, if it is incorrect to say that Muslim women should abandon their cultural ways in order to adapt to those of the West's, then why is it incorrect to say that "Arab and Muslim women need to reject (just as Western women have been trying to do) the androcentrism and misogyny of whatever culture and tradition they find themselves in, but that is not at all the same as saying they have to adopt Western culture or reject Arab culture and Islam comprehensively" (1992, p.166). To further "send the message home," "The Guerilla Girls," a group of women artists dressed in gorilla masks to fight against discrimination, have dressed up two dolls and described them as having the following characteristics to demonstrate the ridiculousness that is attached to Muslim women: Scheherazade[23], "the harem girl," is described as the following:

> She's a curvy, bare-naveled Muslim woman who lives in either a lantern or a harem. The model, when rubbed, appears and disappears to grant wishes. The harem model is one of many wives of a rich and mysterious sheik. She spends all day lounging around with the other wives, hoping to be chosen as the sex object for the night! In her free time she does belly dancing and peels grapes. We based Scheherazade on paintings by 19th-century European artists like Delacroix and Ingres, and on the 1970s TV series, *I Dream of Jeannie.* Scheherazade wears a halter top, harem pants and a sexy veil that reveals more than it hides. Accessories include toe rings, tons of eye makeup, and heavy jewelry that makes noise when you move her. *(*2003, p.14).

[23] Scheherazade is a legendary Persian queen and the storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

In addition, Nizreen, the "Good Muslim Wife," is described as the following:

> Unfortunate Nizreen! Her father couldn't find a rich man to marry her so he shipped her out to a fundamentalist who keeps her silent, repressed, invisible, and illiterate! Practically all you can see of her under those robes are her sad, sad eyes! She would never dream of demanding an education, a job, or any rights at all. But she does dream of having a son or daughter who will become a suicide bomber! Comes with brightly colored burka or somber chador. Beneath, dress her any way you like! *(*2003, p.14).

In the cases of Nizreen and Scheherazade, upon the usage of humour, a message is delivered effectively. Nevertheless, in regards to Islam as a religion that mistreats, Lila Abu-Lughod makes the following statement:

> Even if we are critical of the treatment of women in our own societies in Europe or the United States, whether we talk about the glass ceiling that keeps women professionals from rising to the top, the system that keeps so many women-headed households below the poverty line, the high incidence of rape and sexual harassment, or even the exploitation of women in advertising, we do not see this as reflective of the oppressiveness of our culture or a reason to condemn Christianity—the dominant religious tradition (2006, p.6).

One must question why certain downfalls are always attributed to Islam, but never to Christianity. However, rather than blaming certain dominant religions, or in this case "reduc[ing] the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing" (Abu-Lughod, 2006, p.4), we should concern ourselves with "the humane and just treatment of women, nothing less, and nothing more—not the intrinsic merits of Islam, Arab culture, or the West" (Ahmed, 1992, p.168).

Chapter Four:
Veiled and Unveiled Perceptions

Regardless of the different forms and types of veiling[24], the Muslim veil has turned into one of the most visible symbols that represent the Islamic faith. Becoming a widespread phenomenon, the veil has sparked a lot of controversy and debate. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the reasons for veiling and unveiling have entered the minds of many Muslims and non-Muslims, including myself. As a researcher, I took on interviewing five veiled and five unveiled (ages 20-60) Muslim women who reside within the Greater Vancouver area.

Participants were recruited in many ways: I distributed flyers in Az-Zahra (a mosque[25] in Richmond) and Al-Salaam (a mosque in Burnaby), and I posted advertisements on *Al-Ameen*, *Fanoos*, and *Miracle* (Islamic newspapers). I received a lot of phone calls and gathered certain information from all of the potential participants. However, upon deciding which participants to interview, I took the following factors into consideration to ensure that I was interviewing women from diverse backgrounds: age, marital status, education background, occupation, and cultural background. The interviews were done all within a three month time period. No interview took longer than forty-five minutes and every interview was held in a place suggested by the participant (either in their home or in a public setting such as a coffee shop). The women were asked to share their reasons for choosing to veil or unveil, their perceptions on Islamic women who veil and unveil, and Western conceptions of veiled and unveiled women. Furthermore, the participants were asked to choose an anonymous name, which many did, while some used their actual names (first names only).

The five veiled women interviewed were Mary (21, Afghani descent), Zara (22, Iranian descent), Rabia (29, Iranian descent), Farzana (34, Afghani descent), and Roqia (51, Afghani

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[24] Some of the many different types of veiling include (but is not limited to) the following: burqa, niqab, chador, abaya, and headscarf. A burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions for the purpose of cloaking the entire body. It is worn over the usual daily clothing. The burqa covers the wearer's entire body and face except for a small region about the eyes which is covered by a concealing net. Niqab is a veil that covers the face but does not cover the eyes. Unlike the burqa, the niqab does not have a concealing net for the eye region. A chador is a full-length semicircle of fabric open down the front, which is thrown over the head and held closed in front. It has no hand openings or closures but is held shut by the hands or by wrapping the ends around the waist. An abaya is a robe-like dress which covers the whole body except the face, feet, and hands. It can be worn with the niqab. Also, some women choose to wear long black gloves underneath their abaya so their arms are fully covered. And, a headscarf covers the hair and neck, leaving the entire face exposed.

[25] A place of worship for followers of Islam.

descent). Mary is a Pharmacy Technician. Currently engaged, she is still living with her parents. She has been veiled for fourteen years and has been living in Canada for nine years. Before that, she lived in Afghanistan and Iran. Zara is an Assistant Manager at a movie theatre. The highest level of education she has completed is high school. She is single and therefore living at home with her parents. She has been veiled for the past five years. Zara has been living in Canada for ten years and before that, she used to live in Iran and Pakistan. Rabia, a mother of two (one daughter, one son) who is living with her husband and children, has completed her undergraduate degree in Biology and Psychology. Currently, she is a homemaker. She has been veiled for the past ten years and has been living in Canada for twenty years. Before that, Rabia was living in Iran and in Pakistan. Farzana, a mother of three (two sons, one daughter), is a married woman living with her husband and children. With a Bachelor of Arts Degree, Farzana is currently a fulltime mother. She started veiling at the age of nine. She has been living in Canada for sixteen years and previous to that, she used to live in Afghanistan and Iran. Roqia lives with her husband, son, and daughter. With an MA in Persian Literature, she is now the owner of a childcare centre located in her very own home. She took the veil two years ago. She has been living in Canada for the past eleven years. She also used to live in Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. All the five veiled women practice veiling in the form of a headscarf: their hair and neck are completely covered but their faces are exposed. Also, their hands and feet are also exposed.

The five unveiled women interviewed were Fatema (21, Afghani descent), Zora (23, Iranian descent), Anna Belle (24, African descent (Ivory Coast)), Leila (29, Afghani descent), and Amelia (29, Afghani descent). Fatema is a single woman living at home with her parents. Completing only her high school graduation, she currently works for a day care. She has been residing in Canada for ten years. Before that, she used to live in Afghanistan and then in Pakistan. She has been unveiled for ten years; the only time she was veiled was when she was attending school in Pakistan. Zora has completed her third year university degree in Social Work and she now is a homemaker. She has been living in Canada for twenty-one years, and before she arrived to Canada, she used to live in Iran, India, and Pakistan. She is married and has a daughter. Anna Belle, a woman who has openly been dating her interracial boyfriend of six years, resides with her parents. Completing her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, she is currently a Registered Nurse. At the age of fifteen, she moved to Canada. Before that, she was born and raised in Africa (Ivory Coast). Leila, a twenty-nine year old woman living with her husband, is a Senior Accountant. She is studying business and accounting. Her journey consists of being born in Afghanistan and then moving to Iran. From Iran, she moved to Pakistan, then to India, and then to Canada. Amelia, a twenty-nine year old mother living with her husband and son, is studying to become a Certified General Accountant. She has been living in Canada for nine years. Before that, she used to live in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and India.

As a researcher, I experienced some minor difficulties upon interviewing which were easy to overcome. Though the majority of the veiled and unveiled women were very open about their experiences, there were a few who were reserved and uncommunicative, and therefore needed encouragement to continue a little further, especially in terms of elaboration. Without trying to appear forceful, I would ask participants to elaborate. I made it very clear that they could take their time upon responding to each question. I waited patiently for a response after every question and sometimes during questions. Through the use of body language, a few participants demonstrated their discomfort; however, as the interview progressed, the participants were feeling more comfortable, leading to a more engaged interview. One woman in particular later revealed that she disclosed information that she should have not disclosed, and therefore asked me to omit it from the interview, which I willingly did.

Reasons for Veiling

In regards to veiling, the participants, both veiled and unveiled, provided the following reasons as to why the veil is worn: submitting to Allah's command; non-conformism to unjust systems of thought such as universalized ideas of femininity and sexuality; indicator of modesty; deviating from the wrong path; and, participating in political acts.

One interpretation of the veil is that it is an immediate response to Allah's commandments. Every veiled women interviewed agreed that the wearing of the veil is stated in *The Koran*. Obeying deity commands, both Rabia and Zara feel a closer connection to Allah, a connection that not only allows them to become better Muslims, but also better human beings. Rabia says, "The reason why I am still wearing my hijab[26] after ten years is the fact that I know I am closer to Allah than I was [unveiled]." However, executing such instructions to wear the mandated attire is not expressed in oppressive terms; quite the contrary. Being veiled for the past two years, Roqia says the following about her veil: "Since I have worn a veil I feel more comfortable and I think I am free and I can do what I want and it gives me a feeling of inner peace like I am doing something to please Allah by not exposing myself to other things like I would be if I were not covering." Although Roqia is trying to insert her freedom, Roqia leaves room for speculation by saying "I think I am free." Exactly how "free" are these women for wearing a veil that they have been advised to wear? Would these women choose to veil if the veil was not "advised" in *The Koran*? Nonetheless, when these veiled women were asked to provide scriptural support that supports the veil, a few of their answers were vague: Zara said, "[Veiling] is in *The Koran* but I do not know exactly where in *The Koran* it says this"; Rabia said, "All of what I have said is in *The Koran*"; and, Mary said, "Wearing hijab is something that covers

[26] During interviewing, some of the women used the word "veil" and "hijab" interchangeably. Arguably, though the hijab to many Muslims is considered a concept of modesty, as opposed to the visual covering of the hair, the hijab is also used to indicate the Muslim veil.

female modesty." Roqia and Farzana, on the other hand, were the only veiled woman who gave reference to a surrah.[27] One would think that the majority of these women, if not all—especially since they have been veiled for many years of their life—would be able to provide *actual* scriptural support rather than just asserting that it is mentioned in *The Koran*.

The veil, to every veiled women interviewed, has meant non-conformism to unjust systems of thought, specifically designing one's body for a man. Such universalized ideas of femininity and sexuality are what these women take issue with. Thus, the veil becomes their safeguard and body shield, providing them protection, safety, and relaxation. To Farzana, her veil keeps her from becoming an object of sexual gratification. She says the following:

> By wearing hijab, I find a voice to express my being the way I want, the way I think, the way I believe. I feel like wearing hijab is like breaking the silence, the silence that has been imposed on being a woman in the West because the Western social expectation from a woman is for her to put on makeup, to wear specific types and styles of clothing, to be in certain ways in order to be accepted and liked by the society. This expectation, I believe, suffocates a woman's thinking power; she becomes a machine that tends to just follow the social order. In fact, she is being silenced. Her actual self is being silenced. When I wear hijab, I find a voice. I am not a passive follower of the pre-molded roles anymore. I prove to the society that I control my life. I have freedom to actively practice my power in choosing the way I want to be.

Farzana's understanding of the veil is similar to Mernissi's perception of the word "hijab" in which she describes as three-dimensional and all three dimensions overlapping one another. To Farzana, the female body is a body that needs to be hidden from sight (the first dimension); a body that needs to be separated from the body that is a "passive follower of the pre-molded roles" (the second dimension); and, a body that is a forbidden space (the third dimension). Thus, her understanding of freedom is understood in binary terms. She differentiates herself from the "Western woman" that is "silenced", "suffocate[d]", and "pre-molded." She categorizes the women living in the West as one category—those subject "to put on makeup, to wear specific types and styles of clothing, to be in certain ways in order to be accepted and liked by the society." Depending on this binary, she assumes that veiled women have a voice and unveiled women are silenced. Farzana is disinclined to believe that veiled women can also "become a machine that tends to just follow the social order." Moreover, this sense of freedom that Farzana described and the "breaking [of] the silence" that Farzana argues a veil guarantees allows a woman to become an autonomous subject; she will be appreciated for her intellectual qualities, and her physical appearances will subordinate to her intelligence and personality, a view expressed numerously by Rabia. She says:

> It means that I am not being listened to because of the short shorts I wear. I know that if I accomplish something whether in the work place, at school, or

[27] A chapter from *The Koran*.

> anywhere else it would be because of my capabilities and intelligence and not for any other reason. I am not saying that any other women not covering their hair will not advance in life because of their revealing outfits, but when a woman gets a promotion in the West, everyone says 'oh she probably slept with the boss'; However, if a Muslim women who follows the Islamic conduct of hijab were to get a promotion at work, none of her friends or family or colleagues would say that she got the job because she slept with the boss, but they will say she got the position because of her capabilities. Before wearing the hijab, I used to feel the eyes follow when I walked on the streets, however now I know men do not do this to me any longer, which means I am being treated as a human being and not a piece of meat.

Like Farzana, Rabia is also exercising her freedom by seeing herself in opposition to women living in the West. However, whereas Farzana's perception was that unveiled women were suspected of conforming to roles of femininity, Rabia's perception is more extreme because she associates sexual promiscuity and lack of "capabilities" with unveiled women. As the interview progresses, Rabia's guarantee of sexual freedom is again discussed: "Like I said the hijab to me is a form of freedom. I am judged for my actions and not for what I wear. I know when I go to a job interview that I got it based on my abilities and not for how much cleavage I was able to show." Again, the dichotomy between the veiled and unveiled woman is emphasized, presenting a problem: just as the belief that veiled Muslim women are the ultimate symbols of backwardness and oppression, the image of the Western provocative, promiscuous, and immoral female has also not been destroyed. However, unlike Farzana, Rabia is careful in not allowing herself to situate veiled women over unveiled (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) women. She says, "I am not saying that any other women not covering their hair will not advance in life." Also, not having to rely on her sexuality, Rabia feels a greater sense of freedom and protection when walking down the streets, knowing that men's violating eyes will not follow her. A similar response came from Zara: "You're more comfortable walking home in the middle of the night knowing that no one will approach you or pass a vulgar comment." The following response is also presented by Leila Ahmed who argues: "The [veil] also protects them from male harassment. In responding to a questionnaire, women stated that wearing Islamic dress resulted in a marked difference in the way they were treated in public places" (2003, p.223).

The veil, as a protection from universalized ideas of femininity and sexuality, has been left to be an indicator of modesty (in terms of dress). Because of the symbol of modesty attached to the veil, Reina Lewis argues that "there is no single garment that equates to the veil: different versions of clothing that are held suitably to preserve modesty in gender-mixed environments have been adopted by different countries" (2003, p.428). In surrah 24, verse 31 of *The Koran*, the following is said: "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 not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers so that you may be successful" (Shaheeh International, *The Koran*,

1997, p.482). It is this section that many Muslims use as a defence to argue that the veil is a marker of modesty. According to my Muslim community, which consists of the Afghani community that resides within the Greater Vancouver area, the forbidding of the striking of one's feet has been translated by some as the covering of one's feet and/or as the forbidding of women dancing in the presence of a man. And the insistence of hiding one's "ornaments" has been translated as covering one's beauty (see chapter three) and therefore going unnoticed.

In opposition, many argue that the veil only provides the illusion of modesty and serves to absolve men of the responsibility for controlling their lustful behaviour. Samira Ahmed, the narrator of the film, *Women and Islam: Islam Unveiled* (parts I and II), takes her viewers on a journey of struggle as a Muslim woman living in the West. Born in Iran and now living in London, Samira is intrigued as to why many Muslim women "are interpreting their religion this way" (2006). She believes that the veil invites more attention—even sexual attention—rather than prevents attention. Anna Belle and Amelia, both unveiled women, also agree that the reasoning behind the veil is to cover up female beauty; however, they do not agree with this reasoning. Amelia argues that to wear the veil in Western countries is irrational because it defeats the purpose of veiling: rather than diverting the attention elsewhere, Muslim women are attracting attention to themselves, because the veil is something new and foreign to the West. Here, Amelia is assuming that any form of attention is bad; some attention may be sparked because of curiosity rather than the kind of attention Muslim women are trying to prevent, which is lustful, and therefore sinful behaviour from men. Also, Amelia is assuming that the West is completely ignorant of the veil's existence.

Not attracting sexual attention, the veil is an effective barrier which prevents these women from wrongdoings. The veil, to Zara, is a constant reminder of Judgment Day, allowing her to live her life patrolling her behaviours and actions. Accordingly, to Rabia, her veil helps her to follow the correct path:

> I know wearing the hijab has changed my life, if not drastically, but there are many changes that I myself notice. First of all my physical appearance: I no longer wear revealing clothes; I no longer dance in parties where both of the sexes are present, and I watch how I behave or speak because I do not want people to judge my religion based on my behavior. I don't want anyone to say so this is how Muslims are in a negative form. I try to be the best to represent the Muslim women not only in my clothing, but also in my speech, behavior, manner, and all the other aspects to the best of my ability.

To her, wearing the veil is a great responsibility because she feels that she has to set positive examples in order for veiled Muslim women to be accepted in a positive light. And, the idea that the veil is a barrier that prevents sin from occurring is also expressed by Zara. She says, "I am able to have conversations with men knowing that I will be guarded. And, my parents trust me having male friends because they know I won't act on it." Homa Hoodfar and Leila Ahmed also

present this viewpoint. Hoodfar mentions that when communicating with the opposite sex, many veiled women agreed that "since donning the veil, it has become easier to interact with men, both Muslim and non-Muslim" (Hoodfar, 2003, p.21). Ahmed also argues that veiling makes it easier for women to build relationships with men:

> Wearing it signals the wearer's adherence to an Islamic moral and sexual code that has the paradoxical effect, as some women have attested, of allowing them to strike up friendships with men and be seen with them without the fear that they will be dubbed immoral or their reputations damaged. Women declare that they avoided being seen in conversations with a man before adopting Islamic dress, but now they feel free to study with men in their classes or even walk with them to the station without any cost to their reputation. (2003, p.224).

Zora, an unveiled woman, also reaffirms this belief, arguing that had she been veiled, she would have led a wiser and less rebellious life: "I am quite certain that being veiled would have affected whom I would have associated with and what I would have been doing with these people. I do feel that being veiled would have almost encouraged me not to slide so far off the path." Nevertheless, just as it is important to consider why Muslim women choose to veil, it is equally important to consider why Muslim women do not choose to veil.

Finally, veiling was practiced because it demonstrated political action. To Mary, the veil gives her freedom because there is less attention directed to her. She says, "I am fine wearing my hijab**.** I feel like I am free because less people pay attention to me because I am covered." Her practice of seclusion is a political act. Her seclusion is seen positively. This concept of seclusion due to veiling that is accepted as something positive is also demonstrated by Fatema Mernissi: "The seclusion of women, which to Western eyes is a source of oppression, is seen by many Muslim women as a source of pride. The traditional women interviewed all perceived seclusion as prestigious" (2003, p.493).

Reasons for Unveiling

In regards to choosing to go unveiled, the five unveiled women provided the following reasons: veiling is not mentioned in *The Koran* and they are not ready for the "it" factor. Four out of the five unveiled women claimed that there is no reference of the veil in their holy text. Like the veiled women, they too did not provide actual scriptural support: Leila said, "I have read *The Koran* and did not interpret that women are required to wear a veil. I interpreted that women are required to dress with modesty, but where do you draw the line? I only found evidence in *The Hadith,* which are somewhat interpretations of *The Koran* which could have an element of culture at that time than religion"; Amelia said, "I am more comfortable in not wearing a veil because it gives me a sense of freedom, equality (not only to men, but to successful women of my generation), confidence, and self-fulfillment"; and, Anna Belle said, "None that I can think of. All of my reasoning [for believing the veil is not mentioned in *The Koran*] comes

from my head." Whereas Amelia and Anna Belle do not even answer the question, Leila answers the question without providing full details. Leila says that modesty is a factor without providing a specific verse from *The Koran*, and she says that the veil is evident in *The Hadith* without providing a specific teaching. Zora and Fatema, however, are the only two unveiled women who admit that the veil is a command placed on every Muslim woman. Zora says, "I am not going to say that I have Islamic support on why I am not being veiled. I am just going to say that it is my own personal flaw in not being strong enough to be veiled and to be confident in being veiled." Though she states that she cannot provide an actual surrah or verse that demonstrates her view, she makes it clear that the veil is mandated: "I know that in *The Koran* it says that women must be veiled as Prophet Mohammad's wives were veiled." However, she too is confused since she questions what the "correct" form of veiling is: "I do still wonder what the correct form of veiling is? Which Islamic culture has gotten the correct form of being veiled? Is it a burqa, a scarf, or is it just to be plain conservative with no headpiece? Sometimes I wonder if all forms are right." Fatema, on the other hand, is able to provide scriptural support on the veil even though she does not veil herself. She alludes to two verses, but claims that she cannot remember the second one: "In *The Koran* it said that women should draw their veils over their heads so they do not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, and their sons. This is so that other men do not draw attention to them in a wrong way. And, there is also another verse in *The Koran* in which the veil is mentioned, but I am not sure which one it is."

Another common reason for not veiling is because some of these women are not ready for the "it" factor. According to Rabia, the veil is a huge responsibility because it affects one's life in numerous ways (ie. dress, behavior, sexuality, actions, etc...). She claims that one has to be brave with their identity in order to practice the veil, saying, "A Muslim woman in the West that keeps her hijab shows that she is a strong individual and is confident about herself and her identity, and if she is able to fight with the West in order to keep her identity, then she can fight for all of her other rights as an individual." The brave identity that is demonstrated by veiled women is also expressed by Zora, as she demonstrates her weak character in juxtaposition to veiled women. She says, "I have seen several people I love treated negatively or differently just because they have worn the veil. I do not feel that I am a confident and strong individual to take on these prejudices thrown specifically towards myself if I were to be veiled." Again, Zora alludes to her lack of bravery when asked if she could provide scriptural support for her position in not veiling, she says, "But the point is I am not going to say that I have Islamic support on why I am not being veiled. I am just going to say that it is my own personal flaw in not being strong enough to be veiled and to be confident in being veiled." Zora's fear in veiling is that the veil would make her feel insecure and uncomfortable because of how her husband and her in-laws may treat her and how the veil may affect her career choices. Even more, she worries that her child's friends or her child's friend's parents may treat her differently. On the contrary, Amelia's reasons for not veiling have led to her brave character. She says, "Not wearing a veil has contributed to my self-

respect, confidence, personal, and career success." However, it is this great responsibility, which I call the "it factor", that a few of these unveiled women are not ready to take on. Both Zora and Fatema have claimed that they are not ready for "it." Fatema reveals: "I don't wear a veil simply because I am not ready for it." Later she says, "I don't mind wearing one at all it's just that it isn't so easy carrying it out." At first, I wondered what this "it" meant, but as they continued to speak, it became clear to me that they were referring to the accountabilities that come with wearing the veil. Thus, the fear in wearing the veil also leads to the fear in "wearing" the other qualities that proceed with the veil, such as the change of dress and the change of one's actions and behaviours. However, though Fatema does believe the veil is prescribed to every Muslim woman, she also says, "I do not think that not wearing a veil makes a big difference" because to her, she does not believe that by wearing the veil she will become a better person. She says, "There is much more to be done before I would wear a veil." However, Fatema is not against wearing the veil in the near future. Fatema says she may take the veil after marriage and Zora prays to have the courage of veiling one day in her life. She says, "I do pray and hope that Allah will eventually instill and encourage the blessing of such a practice upon me." Besides the ongoing debate as to why a Muslim woman should veil or should not veil, another area of investigation worth examining is another ongoing debate: is the veil oppressive or liberating?

The Heated Debate

The women who are veiled argue that the veil is liberating while the women who are unveiled argue that the veil is oppressive. Zara, in particular, expresses herself through a song titled "Free" by Sammi Yousuf, an Afghani singer and songwriter, to which she claims the song perfectly expresses her feelings towards the veil. She advises me to search for this song, which I do, and I discover that her reasons for veiling are quoted directly from the song. She says, "I'm truly free and this piece of scarf on me I wear so proudly to preserve my dignity, my modesty, and my integrity." Thinking back, I remember the words coming out of Zara's mouth like a song. On the contrary, Anna Belle and Leila feel a greater freedom in comparison to veiled women because they have advanced in their careers. Anna Belle says, "Not wearing the veil has probably affected me in a positive way and by that I mean that I probably got jobs that I potentially would not have gotten had I been wearing the scarf." And, later she shares: "I do feel like I have more freedom over women who wear the veil because I have family members who have been denied jobs because they wear the veil or have had to entirely switch careers because of the veil, so yes I do feel like women who wear the veil are oppressed." Leila too feels unrestrained; she says that not wearing a veil "opens up more opportunities for girls in terms of career advancement." Additionally, Anna Belle feels more freedom for the following reasons: "It probably has also spared me problems crossing the border to the US or somewhere else. And, I'd bet my hand that it has spared me thousands of looks and judgments." Hence, for these three unveiled women,

their freedom is understood in opposition to veiled women, thus creating a binary: the veiled woman who does not succeed in terms of career advancement and the unveiled woman who does succeed.

The only exceptions are Zora and Fatema, who feel that being veiled or unveiled does not signify oppression or liberation. Zora says, "Personally, I don't think I see either freedom or oppression in the action of veiling or unveiling. However, what I do see is that there are situations around women that entail actions of freedom and actions of oppression. However, I see this in all of women (regardless of being veiled or unveiled)." Fatema, on the other hand, says, "Do I feel any freedom from not wearing a veil? No, none whatsoever." In spite of her claim, Fatema contradicts herself, arguing that it is easier to find a job when one is unveiled. Furthermore, the veil as an expression of liberation or oppression is not the only subject that is disputed amongst these women; the age in which veiling has to be practiced is also stirring controversy. Rabia argues that females are to wear the veil at the age of nine, covering their entire body except for the face, the hands, and the feet. Mary, on the other hand, took on the veil at the age of seven, explaining "that is the time that God has asked girls to be covered." According to my experience, I recall that age did play a factor in veiling, but not always. The moment a female entered her menstruation cycle, she was required to veil. For some girls, menstruation occurred at a younger age, and for some menstruation occurred at an older age. However, some members of my family veil their daughters at a really young age (at the age of five or six), so that by the time they reach that age where they are supposed to veil (whether it being younger than the age of nine, or older), they have already adjusted to the pressures of the veil. Also, this is done so that when they reach an older age—where they are capable of making their own decisions—they will not rebel and take their veils off because they have been conditioned to wearing the veil at a young age. Furthermore, some women veil upon entering marriage, upon old age, or after they have made a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Discriminated Women

Discrimination was another serious area that was examined. Veiled women were asked if they were either treated poorly or well for veiling both within their own Islamic community[28] and outside of the community.[29] Similarly, unveiled women were also asked if they were treated poorly or well for unveiling both within the Islamic community and outside of the community. What was interesting to find was that all of the five veiled women faced equal discrimination, both within and outside of their communities. Even though all five were greatly respected for

[28] Here, I am not identifying the Islamic community as one homogenous entity. The "Islamic community", like any other community, is diverse in ethnicity, class, etc.

[29] The term "community" is a complex term and is diverse in ethnicity, class, etc. However, I will not be focusing on class; I will be focusing just on the veil.

veiling amongst older generations and other women who were also veiled, the only form of discrimination these women received were from Muslim women who were unveiled. Zara comments that her veil is a popular area of discussion, saying, "As a Muslim who veils, there are those Muslims who don't veil and tell you 'why do you hide behind that scarf?' It's heartbreaking sometimes to see your fellow Muslims trying to talk you into taking off your scarf." Being persuaded into taking her veil off by individuals who categorize outside of the Muslim community is not mentioned by Zara; only her "fellow Muslims" place such pressures on her. However, with those who are veiled, Zara feels welcome and a sense of belonging, saying, "When I see someone who is veiled as I am, we always say 'salam alaykum' [a way of greeting] even though we do not know each other. It's a really nice feeling. It's like being amongst people you know." Meanwhile, Roqia is not pressured by her Muslim community to unveil; instead, she is treated as backward. She says, "A small number of people think that I am a low class or a villager." Farzana, on the other hand, discusses that her Islamic community views her as overtly religious and fundamental.

Not all of these unveiled women share negative views on veiled women. Anna Belle, Zora, and Fatema have associated veiled women with bravery, admiring their courage for veiling in Western societies. Anna Belle notes on the following:

> "Don't get me wrong, despite the fact that I don't wear [the veil], I have immense respect for women who do because that shows me the amount of commitment they have to their religious beliefs, especially when it's thirty degrees and they are hanging out at the park wearing their veils. Kudos to them! Of course that is assuming that they made the choice to wear the veil because I'm sure the majority of women who wear the veil did not have a choice."

Furthermore, Zora says, "I usually view women who are veiled as strong individuals. I think they are able to stand for what they believe, and they show it in their daily practice." Fatema says, "For the people who do wear them, hats off to them because I am sure it isn't easy. It's extremely hard to find a job and it's also hard fitting in." This concept of bravery that is associated with the veiled woman is also reaffirmed by both Roqia and Rabia. In terms of prejudices faced outside of their communities, all of these women were victims. Rabia explains her mistreatment for veiling because of people's lack of education; Mary explains her unjust treatment because the veiled woman is associated with terrorist activities; Roqia explains her ill-treatment due to the fact that the veiled woman is represented as backward; and, Farzana explains her debasement because she is viewed as fundamentalist. Nonetheless, Leila explains why discrimination is present within these women. Pitying veiled women, she explains that they are constantly marginalized because "of the never ending struggle to convince people that they are not a stereotype, essentially one of those who are predominated by men and are not allowed to go to school, work, etc., but rather are capable of taking any career challenges." However, even though Roqia is treated poorly outside of her community, she is also accepted, saying, "Fortunately, Vancouver is so

multicultural that people are so used to seeing all different kinds of dress." Furthermore, just as veiled women are treated poorly for veiling among Muslims who do not veil; unveiled women are also treated poorly for unveiling among Muslims who veil.

All of the unveiled women, except for Anna Belle, have faced discrimination for unveiling within their communities. Leila, Amelia, and Zora are perceived as unreligious in comparison to veiled women: Leila says, "By not wearing a veil, people in my community judge me as one that has deviated from the path of the Islamic religion, and most of the time the judgment comes without understanding"; Amelia says, "Of course the Muslim community is biased in favor of people who wear a veil; and, Zora says, "I feel that the Muslim community sees me as unreligious because I am unveiled." Zora, however, also admits that she herself discriminates against unveiled woman, saying:

> Women who are Muslim and unveiled, I perceive them as not as religious as women who are veiled. Maybe I pass this very ridiculous judgment because that was what I was told growing up (by my family and my Muslim community). Or, maybe because it reflects my own life, because I am unveiled and I am not as religious as other veiled women, so I might assume that is the case for other unveiled women.

And, Fatema, in particular, is constantly asked by Muslims as to why she goes unveiled, especially since the majority of her family members are veiled, leaving her noticeable. She even claims that her suitors keep insisting that she veil. Anna Belle is neither treated poorly nor well for unveiling. She says, "My Muslim community equals my family here and I am treated normally for unveiling, because half of the women in my family do not wear the veil, so I have no problems there."

Not all of the veiled women interviewed had negative views of unveiled women. Rabia answered in the following when asked how she perceives unveiled women: 'This is not a proper question to ask of the Muslim community." And, Mary said the following: "I don't care [if unveiled women choose not to veil]. Everyone has their own way of living, so I respect everyone's beliefs." Meanwhile, none of the five unveiled women are scrutinized for unveiling outside of the community: Amelia claims that she is "supported" and "respected"; Leila states that she is looked upon as a "mentor and role model"; Zora is seen as "more similar to them [people belonging outside of the Muslim community]"; Anna Belle is treated "fine"; and, Fatema is "not bothered."

Conclusion

Wearing the veil for a year and completely despising the head garment at the same time, I was convinced that veiled women were one-dimensional characters that lacked agency. To me, Muslim women only veiled out of fear of the vengeful Allah. However, my interest in Islam and women led me to research further on the Muslim veil.

As an insider of the religion, I also consider myself as an indigenous outsider, because I belong to the field under study, except that I am marginalized and take a critical view of it. I view the veil as a complex attire that cannot easily be defined; instead, I argue that the veil is a personal and individual (and sometimes communal) form of expression which differs from individual to individual and community to community. I am not particularly interested in arguing if whether the veil is oppressive or liberating; instead, I am fascinated as to why the image of the veiled woman has become so threatening and so negative, which has led many Muslims and non-Muslims the need to either defend or dismiss the veil.

As an unveiled Muslim woman practicing certain Islamic practices, but not all, I no longer want to criticize Muslim women for veiling or unveiling. On a personal level, to criticize veiled women would mean that I am also insulting the wives of the Prophet—women whom I have deep respect for—and the majority of my female family members who are also veiled. I respect women's decision to veil and unveil. However, I will not tolerate the following accusations and assumptions: being accused of manipulating veiled Muslim women to unveil; being called a hypocrite because even though I study the veil, I do not wear the veil; and, being labelled a "Good Muslim" or a "Bad Muslim."[30]

Interviewing the ten participants has been the most significant aspect of this research project because of the data it presents on discrimination as a major factor in the lives of these Muslim women. Muslim women, whether veiled or unveiled, face discrimination. Veiled Muslim women are illustrated as passive, violent, retrogressive, and fundamental, while unveiled Muslim women are depicted as unreligious, immoral, and Western. Moreover, the West cannot take full

[30] In "Islam Through Western Eyes," Edward Said argues that "bad Muslims" are equated with extremists, terrorists, and fundamentalists—as manifested by leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini, a leader that is most favorably recognized for his "irrational violence combined with extreme licentiousness" (*The Nation*, January 1, 1998, p.2). Also in "Islam Through Western Eyes," Edward Said argues that good Muslims are equated with anti-Communism, modernization, revivalist, and progressive—as represented by figures like Shah who wanted to advance towards Western thought and rationality. Thus, they become an exception; they become the tolerable Muslims. Nonetheless, as mentioned in a previous footnote, bad Muslims are the complete opposite. (*The Nation*, 1998)

credit for discriminating against veiled and unveiled Muslim women because discrimination is also present within our very own Muslim communities. Having experienced these exact prejudices, I feel that we as Muslims should first try to rid these negative portrayals within our own community before we try to reach out to the members who belong outside of our community. Furthermore, what strikes me is that the majority of the women interviewed discussed employment, suggesting that veiled women will have difficulties in employment as opposed to unveiled women. If this is the case, then this needs to change because it is a clear representation of racism, something that Canada should not tolerate. Thus, I would like to conclude by saying that hopefully my research has sparked interest in helping to improve the betterment of women's lives, whether veiled or unveiled, Muslim or non-Muslim.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Allah An Arabic word meaning God.

Bad Muslims In "Islam Through Western Eyes," Edward Said argues that "bad Muslims" are equated with extremists, terrorists, and fundamentalists—as manifested by leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini, a leader that is most favorably recognized for his "irrational violence combined with extreme licentiousness" (*The Nation*, January 1, 1998, p.2).

Believer A believer of the veil. Does not necessarily have to wear the veil, but believes that the veil is instructed in *The Koran*.

Burqa A burqa is an enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions for the purpose of cloaking the entire body. It is worn over the usual daily clothing. The burqa covers the wearer's entire body and face except for a small region about the eyes which is covered by a concealing net.

Chador A chador is a full-length semicircle of fabric open down the front, which is thrown over the head and held closed in front. It has no hand openings or closures but is held shut by the hands or by wrapping the ends around the waist.

East The term "the East" does not apply to any specific geographical location; instead, it is a concept borrowed by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) to mean certain societies (especially Islamic) which are represented as barbaric, savage, backward-thinking, and retrogressive. Furthermore, class, ethnicity, and gender also come to play in regards to determining what constitutes as "the East."

Good Muslims In "Islam Through Western Eyes," Edward Said argues that "good Muslims" are equated with anti-Communism, modernization, revivalist, and progressive—as represented by figures like Shah who wanted to advance towards Western thought and rationality. Thus, they become an exception; they become the tolerable Muslims. (*The Nation*, January 1, 1998, p.2)

Hadith, The A text which is based on the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad.

Hijab Arguably, though the hijab to many Muslims is considered a concept of modesty, as opposed to the visual covering of the hair, the hijab is also used to refer to the Muslim veil.

Hypocrite Enemies of Prophet Mohammad.

Imam Khomeini	Imam Khomeini was an Iranian religious leader and politician. He was also the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.
Koran, The	The Islamic holy text (written in Arabic) which is believed was revealed to Prophet Mohammad.
Mantan	Mantan is a character from Spike Lee's (American film director, producer, writer, and actor) film called *Bamboozled* (2000). The film which relived the minstrel show had Black actors wearing even blacker face rather than having White actors in Blackface. Nonetheless, Mantan was one of the minstrel performers who sold certain stereotypes of "Blackness" in order to move ahead in society.
Muslim	An individual practicing the Islamic faith and therefore accepting *The Koran* (the Islamic holy book) and *The Hadith* (the teachings of Prophet Mohammad) as their divine source. Furthermore, a Muslim believes in the submission of Allah, the oneness of Allah, and accepts Prophet Mohammad as the messenger of Allah.
Niqab	Niqab is a veil that covers the face but leaves the eyes uncovered. Unlike the burqa, the niqab does not have a concealing net for the eye region.
Non-Believer	A non-believer of the veil. Does not necessarily have to be unveiled, but believes that the veil is not instructed in *The Koran*.
Non- Muslim	An individual that practices (or does not practice) certain beliefs that are in opposition to Islamic beliefs.
Prophet Mohammad	Prophet Mohammad is the founder of the religion of Islam and is believed to be the messenger and prophet of Allah
Scheherazade	Scheherazade is a legendary Persian queen and the storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*.
Sheik	A religious Muslim official.
Sufism	Sufism is generally understood to not be a distinct sect of Islam, but the inner, mystical dimension of Islam.
Sunnism	Sunnism is the largest denomination of Islam. Its teachings are based on *The Koran* and *The Hadith*. Sunnis accept the first four Rashidun caliphs.
Unveiled	A Muslim woman who does not cover her hair.
Veil	A Muslim head covering. The veil can take any form of veiling (ie. burqa, niqab, chador, and headscarf) as long as the hair is completely covered.
Veiled	A Muslim woman who covers her hair. This definition consists of any form or style of veiling (ie. niqab, chador, burqa, and headscarf).

West

The term “the West” does not apply to any specific geographical location; instead, it is a concept borrowed by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) to mean a society which is depicted as forward-thinking, liberal, and progressive. Furthermore, class, ethnicity, and gender also come to play in regards to determining what constitutes as “the West.”

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Why do you wear/not wear a veil?
2. For how long have you been veiled/unveiled?
3. Has wearing/not wearing a veil changed or affected your life in any way?
4. What does wearing/not wearing a veil mean to the people of the West?
5. What does wearing/not wearing a veil mean to you as a person living in the West?
6. How do you view those who are veiled/unveiled?
7. Do you feel any freedom/oppression from veiling/unveiling?
8. How are you treated for veiling/unveiling within the Muslim community? And, outside of the community?
9. From where do you derive your knowledge of Islam from?
10. What scriptural support can you provide for your position on wearing/not wearing the veil?

Appendix C: Informed Consent

You are agreeing to participate in a research study on veiled and unveiled Muslim woman who live in the Greater Vancouver area. The study, called "(Un)Veiling the Veiled Muslim Woman" will be conducted by Rahela Nayebzadah (Principal Investigator) under the auspices of Simon Fraser University. The study is interested in veiled and unveiled Muslim women, particularly in the construction of their identities. The goal of this research is to educate the public about a specific group. Thus, you are agreeing that you are a Muslim woman who is either veiled or unveiled, over the age of nineteen, and are residing in the Greater Vancouver area.

Your participation in this project will consist of a semi-structured interview which will be located in an area that is the most comfortable for you. And, the interview will not take longer than an hour. In total, there will be ten questions generated. Each interview will be transcribed word-by-word by me. Shortly thereafter, you will be given the write-up portion of the interview before it is in its final form for you to ensure its accuracy.

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any point. At any time during the interview, you can ask the tape recorder to be turned off, not answer a question, or refuse to participate any further. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. No one will have access to the interview information you provide me with except for myself, and no one will be able to see your particular identity in the final research project. Thus, you will be given a fictitious name to further protect your identity. The information about yourself will not be obtained from sources other than yourself. Furthermore, confidentiality will be maintained when the research results are shared with others in publications, oral presentations, or other means of educating the public. In addition, information that may identify participants will not be disclosed to third parties. However, confidentiality may be breached if required by the law.

Also, I will maintain confidentiality by taking precautions to store data in a secure place. The data will be retained in a secure computer in my home. The data will be placed in a file with a password that will only be known by me. In addition, the data will not be transported from one location to another. The data will remain only in my home computer. And, the final version of the transcribed interview will be kept in a locked, and therefore, safe and secure filing cabinet located in my home. Furthermore, every data being used will be kept safe and secure for two years. Also, the tapes will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed.

The study may involve risks that are psychological. Discussing your reasons to veil or not veil may cause emotional stress. Also, discussing how the Muslim and non-Muslim community views you for veiling or not veiling may also be stressful. However, the nature of those risks that will be encountered upon the interview are at the same level as that one would expect you to encounter in your everyday life. Nevertheless, this study also presents benefits, which are to educate the public about certain misconceptions that are placed upon veiled and unveiled Muslim women.

To obtain research results or a copy of my final project, please feel free to contact me at my home address, which is [deleted for publication].. I can also be contacted by telephone [deleted] or by email [deleted]. Furthermore, complaints can be directed to Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada, V5A 1S6. He can also be contacted by phone: (778) 782-6593.

I understand the purpose of the research and what my participation will entail. I am willing to participate and give my permission to Rahela Nayebzadah, a Simon Fraser University Women's Studies graduate student, in a final research report for distribution and possible publication in scholarly journals.

Signature of Participant_____ Date:_____

Signature of Rahela Nayebzadah_____ Date: _____

The SFU Research Ethics committee has examined and approved the procedures to be used in this research.