# The Significance of the Veil in Islam and the Reasons why it has become Popular

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

A veil is a type of clothing that is loose, non-distinctive and opaque clothing that is wrapped around the body. A veil should be able to hide the wearers head, ankles and torso while leaving the hands, feet and face exposed (Wienman, 2013). Murphy (2008) identifies the veil for Muslim women as the hijab. In the Islamic faith, a veil is worn as a religious garment. In fashion, the veil is not as significant, but rather just a cosmetic attire. In a verse from the Holy Quran, it means that there exists a separation in the sacred from mundane. The Muslim women are able to gain a complete and whole image of themselves being pure and dedicated mothers, daughters, sisters-in law and sisters (Murphy, 2008).

Wienman (2013) states that in the past all the members of the Muslim religion were asked to wear a veil. He adds that with the coming of colonization and westernization a separation of responsibilities came about to with wearing the veil. Some of the Arab urban elite men were later seen to start copying the new ways of dressing of the traditions of keffiyeh. During this time, a small percentage of Muslim women also started following the same pattern and started to wear veils (Wienman, 2013).

There are various changes that the veil has taken over time. Some of the reasons why Muslim women cover their heads include respect for convectional values. In other instances, the veil is a sign of beauty, complimented with makeup. According to Hamdani (2011) there have been different interpretations of wearing a veil, with some being negative, which mostly relate to terrorist acts or radicalization. In the modern world, Muslims and non-Muslims recognize wearing of veils phenomena. However, there are no specific mentions in the Holy Quran about the veil but there are descriptions about the use of the veils but are not direct. An example is Surah al-Nur verses 30 and 31. This requires the chest and jewelry of women to be covered. This means that their whole body should be wrapped with clothing especially when going out. Another verse that adds to this is Surah al-Ahzab verse 59. The verse asks the wives of the prophets to envelop their bodies tightly because they should not be disturbed, recognized and molested while they are outside.

In this paper, we are going to discuss the significance of a wearing a veil for Islamic women, and why it has become popular with time. It is also worth noting that the use of veils has become popular around the world, for various other reasons, despite religion. Part one of this paper examines the historical perspective of the veils as Islamic dress for the women. Part 2 will look at the significance of the veil in the Muslim religion that is worn by women. Part 3 will look at the reasons why the veils are being popular. The last part will provide a summary of the major points that will be covered by this paper.

## Historical perspectives on veils

The practice of wearing veils for women started from a pre-Islamic and non-Arab Middle Eastern and the tradition society of Mediterranean. In the 13th Century is where we can trace the first instances of wearing veils (Lapidus, 2002). During this time, wearing of veils was specific to women who were considered respectable in the society. Example, the prostitutes were not allowed to wear the veils in the society. Veils were used by the elite in ancient Roman, empires of Byzantine, Greece and pre-Islamic Iranian as signs of status. This was how the Muslims were able to seclude a life, which followed the tradition of wearing the veils.

In the world of Muslims in some areas, the wearing of veils has been reinforced by the belief that the conduct of the women is where the honor of the family resides (Bullock, 2010). The women remaining chaste are what the honor of the society depends on. This is when she is violated in any kind of way when in the public. This is taken as the men of the family not wanting to be seen as weak when compared to the women. As a result, a woman should not flout her looks in order to be protected and respected by men when in public.

As the Islam religion reached the other lands, the practices included the covering of the women, which was adopted by the Muslims. The veil became common in the second Islam century when it was used by the rich and powerful in the society as a symbol of status (Knysh, 2015). The quotation, “Draw their veils from over their bosoms” from the Quran became interpreted by some people as to cover the ears, neck, and hair of the women. The urban classes were the ones that were veiled and covered while the rural and nomadic women were not covered. The women were not allowed to go out when unveiled.

## Significance of the veil

There are a number of reasons why the Muslim women wear veils. The women believe that God has made an obligation for the women who believe in the religion. The believing men and women are told in the Quran by God to lower their gaze and dress modestly. Quran 24: 30 and 31, God addresses the women when he asks the women not to show off their adornment. This is with the exception of what is apparent and they should draw their veils over their bodies. Such verses in the Quran make the wearing of hijabs mandatory for the Muslim women because God requires them to dress modestly in the presence of men that are not close relatives.

The Quran verse 33:59 states that “O Prophet! Tell Thy wives and daughters and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garment over their persons: That is most convenient, that they should be known and not molested.” This verse supports the idea of Muslim women covering their hair. This shows that the women believe that it is an obligation that was given by God to them.

The veil is the literal meaning of hijab. The Islam religion is known as being concerned with the cohesion and moral boundaries of a community. The hijab is a way of ensuring that moral boundaries are respected between men and women who are not related. This shows that the hijab is more than a scarf and dressing code to the Muslim women because it is used to show dressing and behavior that is modest. Example, if a Muslim woman wearing a veil is using bad language will not be fulfilling the requirements of the hijab.

Most of the Muslim women wear veils in order to obey God. This helps them to be known as women who are respectable (Quran 33:59). Hijab has been seen as a sign of consciousness by the Islam and the Muslim women indicates their desire of being part of a revival that is Islamic. This mostly happens in countries where the practice of Islam is forbidden or discouraged.

There are people who seek to burn the wearing of veils by Muslim women while referring to it as being a symbol of oppression that is gender based. The women that choose to do a scarf or wear hijabs they do so by making their personal decisions that are made out of independent choices. To the Muslim women wearing of veils is not a burden a sign of oppression but a right that they enjoy. The women that wear hijabs normally describe themselves as being set free from the fashion culture that is unrealistic and exists in the society.

Women are not thought as sexual objects when they wear hijabs (Parshall, 2013). They are not valued because of their looks or the shape of their bodies and this help them to be seen in terms of their intellect and minds. This makes them not to be slaves to consumerism. The women are liberated from the need of dealing with stereotypes that are unrealistic and images that are dictated by the media when they wear hijabs. The women that wear hijabs shows that the type of dressing that is modest and covering their hair helps in minimizing sexual harassments that can occur in the work place. This creates privacy for the woman, which is a great value that the Islam religion places on the women.

Some families and cultures force women to wear hijabs but it is not the norm. The Quran 2: 256 states that the religion has no compulsion, the women that choose to wear the hijabs do not make those decisions lightly. Several women have testified that they have faced great animosity from both Muslims and non-Muslim families when they made a decision of covering themselves (Caner). For instance, women have to defend their rights of wearing the hijab especially in countries that are against the religion.

Some of the Arabs and Muslim women choose to wear the veils as a sign of expressing their identity. The women communicate their political and social associations with their country of origin (Bulllock, 2010). They wear the hijabs to challenge the Western feminists who present the wearing of hijabs as a form of oppression. The Muslim women decide to wear the veils to avoid being harassed and stared by men. This is convenient for the places that are crowded like the public transportation systems.

Veils are symbols of piety and a sign of showing the inner strength that is great and fortitude for the Muslim women. Women that wear hijabs are visible signs that show the Islam religion to the rest of the world. The Muslim men find it easy to blend into the society while the Muslim women are put on the line. This forces them to defend their decisions on covering their bodies to the people who do not support the wearing of veils.

## Reasons why the veil in Islam is becoming popular

One of the reasons why the veil in Islam is becoming popular is because it is a matter of dressing styles because the fashion industry has been able to come up with new designs of the veils (Milani, 2000). A growing number of retails stores deals with the veils for Muslim women. They are able to offer the Muslim women with veils of different colors and styles that they can choose from. A good example is the headscarves that are now available in different sizes and also colors. The hijabs have been more popular because they are of different types for a person to make a choice. The first types are the ones that are modest and simple for the Muslim women to wear. The second types are the ideological hijabs; the ones that are looser, longer and are available in white, black or brown colors. The third type of the hijabs that are called the fashionable hijabs that are used in runways during fashions.

Being a beautiful religious statement makes the veils more popular (Hefernan, 2016). The women are able to choose how much they can reveal themselves when in public. The availability of the colors and prints that are vibrant and can be able to be matched by any outfit, which makes the women, wear different style every day.

People who wear the veils can be dealt with as individuals, which is another reason that the veils are becoming popular. People are not able to deal with a person because of the looks because the veil covers most of the body parts of the Muslim women. Some of the women wear the hijabs because it is part of the Islam religion, which helps in identifying them as Muslims. It is a sign of modesty that keeps the attention of the men away.

The women feel like the men respect them more when they wear veils, this makes the veils be more popular. This makes a person be courageous in facing the society because the men are able to treat the women with more respect. The veils are also becoming more popular because some of the women use them to promote feminism (Almila & Inglis, 2017). This becomes hard for people to express themselves because of the way the people view it. They take the hijabs and make them their own by choosing the colors that they wear which promote feminism. They are able to choose how and why they are able to exercise their basic rights.

## Conclusion

From the discussions above, veils are used to cover the bodies of Muslim women especially when they are in public. They are clothing that are loose, opaque and non-distinctive that the women use to warp around their body. The wearing of the veils is believed to have originated from a pre-Islamic and non-Arab Middle Eastern and the tradition society of Mediterranean. Most of the reasons that the Muslim women wear the veils are based on the readings from the Holy Quran. They believe that this is an obligation that God had given them and they should follow. There are also a number of reasons why the veils are becoming popular. Some of them are also from the readings of the Quran while others are about how the women who wear the veils feel. The feelings are based on how the other people take them when they wear the veils. Through the veils, the Muslim women can be respected and honored by the outside world and especially the men who are not related to them. This paper shows that some of the women wear the veils for religion, culture and fashion purposes.

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