

Student's name

Instructor's name

Course

Date

The Battle of the Veil

In Islam religion, compulsory veil has become a contentious issue. Among other issues that bring officials to the feet, the dilapidated, the police brutality, the extreme poverty; the criticism about hijab regarding Islamic dressing style in which women were supposed to cover their heads and necks with veils became a hot debate during the 19 century. Qassim Amin's *Tahrir Al-Mar'a* is a writer who wrote about the liberation of women in 19 century, and she wrote a story of a young girl who wore a headscarf made of newspaper patterns (Ahmed 36). The reason why the article was famous was because she defended the right not to wear veil. Women contested that there would be no compulsion regarding the wearing of veil. Before 1979, women did not have to fight for their rights in the Islamic religion; they had no choice but to wear veil covering their heads and neck. Today, the practice is being abandoned as more Islamic women dwell on fashion industry by wearing miniskirts and abandoning veil to the tugging fabrics of ancient rules about how women should dress. However even during the 19th century, the debate was no longer about if women should wear Islamic dress, but the defiance against the traditional order imposed on them the concentrated on accusations of immorality, heresy, promiscuity, depending on how women were supposed to behave and the types of dresses to wear. The essay will show that they debate on whether Islamic women should wear the veil centers on rules that the Islamic community enforced on women in the name of religion.

On the debate about the veil, there were two opposing campaigns about what women should wear, which is slowly tore apart the Arab world. There are those that supported the argument that Islamic women should wear conservative clothes which did not expose their bodies such as the veil. They start their argument by posing a question, “What makes a man?” Some argued that a “real man” is that who takes charge of what his family wears and ensures that females are completely covered in public. For example, feminist philosopher Dr. Janan Faraj Falah led a discussion of the philosophical writing known as theoretician Nazira Zain al-Din. She commented in her personal statement that Islamic followers supporting the idea that women should wear veil (Scott 62). In her book, *One Hundred Years of the Arabic Novel*, she pioneered women writers as opposed to men writers on the issue of Islamic culture and the battle of the veil (Ahmed 136). However, men argued against her commentaries on women freedom by stating from Quran that families (including females) wearing conservative clothes. They argued that when women wear veil and conservative clothes, they protect themselves from ‘unwanted attention.’ Some of the comments contain posts that compare women to objects. Another important scholar is Fatima Mernissi a scholar from Morocco who studied and wrote about struggles of women in North Africa and Saudi Arabia. She discussed ways in which contemporary Islamic woman was changing in the contemporary world by studying whether women viewed themselves as part of the Islamic culture or as standing outside it (Knotts 335). She conceded that women liberation was paramount to win the struggle against sexual discrimination, including empowerment of women on the right to wear the dress of their choice.

Feminist literature and culture has also been discussed by well-known Palestinian writer Layla Halabi. She based her arguments is from Quran, which states that believing men and women should lower their gaze by dressing conservatively, which includes women wearing veil

(Harding 59). She explained that men argued that God has made it an obligation for women believing in Islamic religion. These verses of Quran have been referred to as hijab and Islamic scholars have reached a consensus that it is mandatory that women should wear veil and conservative clothes that cover their bodies. The code was enforced in some countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran. The code stipulated that women should cover their hair and wear some loose fitting, which does not reveal the adornment of their bodies in presence of the public and even men that are not their close relatives. Literally, the meaning of hijab is to cover, or screen a woman. Thus, Islam is recognized as a religion that emphasizes on the importance of community cohesion and moral boundaries. However, Halabi discussed that the problem was not women fight against religion that was supposed to shape their behaviors, but there was a need for women to achieve empowerment and to have a higher status in a society that was foreign and patriarchal to them.

Another criticism was brought up by a young contemporary writer Amana Al-Janidi from West Bank who wrote about women subversion of the accepted norms of the West bank. Also, she focused on national-political reality of life that the society created by weaving the feminist values and issues pertaining to woman's dress, especially the issue of the veil. She wrote that some women wore hijab, obeyed God, and had established good reputation among the Islamic community (Ahmed 99). However, they also chose to don the veil to express their gender-based values such as the need to have the freedom to make personal and independent decisions. She explained that the wearing of veil was losing touch among the Islamic women who were embracing the women empowerment during the 19 century. They viewed that donning the veil was a right and not a burden and at the same time, they had no intention of disregarding hijab as a sign of oppression. Wood and Lodge (124) reveal that Islamic women that had chosen to

abandon wearing the veil described themselves as embracing an aura of privacy created by being set free from a culture that was unrealistic about fashion. Although it is true that women in some families were forced wear the veil, it did mean that this was the norm. Nielsen (177) reveal that Quran clearly indicates that there should be no compulsion in religion, meaning that women should not be forced to wear the veil, but they had a choice to make whether they should defend hijab or refute it. It is therefore arguable to say that the wearing of veil by women was a norm that has been enforced by Islamic leaders as a way of preserving the great value that the religion placed on women.

Finally, Adi Katz was a woman who came from the world of art, and she spoke the issue of gender and nationality of Islamic women and contributed to the work of a Palestinian writer and an artist, of Manar Zuabi. Katz campaigned for Islamic women to fight for the right to dress. However, during the 19 century, these campaigns were done anonymously for fear of safety, which portrayed Islamic region was suppressive to women. Rassooli (705) reveals that some women chose to abandon wearing the veil because it was a piece of clothing same as that which was used to make miniskirts. Opponents of feminist rights and advocacy to shun away the veil argued that wearing the veil did not align their behaviors with the teachings on morality and respects as stated in Quran. Instead, they still obey God and lived by good morals even when they chose to stop wearing the veil. They believed that the teachings espoused by wearing of the veil could be achieved in other ways. There were those who believed that even if they allowed women to engage in public society without attracting too much attention, headscarves that had replaced the veil had brought too much attention to women than the original purpose it was designated for. Others believed that the wearing of the veil was inappropriate to the central practice of Islam religion, and they had opted to focus on internal and spiritual relationship with

God (Kamerling and Gustafson 29). While there are minority of women writers who choose not to wear the veil, most women agreed that it was a choice of a woman to decide whether or not she would wear it. Many women writer who supported the right to dress within the Muslim culture became staunch advocates of women liberation.

Therefore, one can make a conclusion that the debate on whether women should wear the veil rests on the argument that the teachings of Quran dictate those that follow the Islamic religion must adhere to the rules. However, following the contention between the supporters and the opponents of women wearing the veil, all arguments seems to center on the basic statement the it is a question of men struggling to control the respect and place that is bestowed on a woman in the society. Some arguments have revealed that if hijad is what is supposed to force a woman to be presentable in society, there would be group of women who would consider that liberation was a necessity and everyone had freedom to choose the cloth she wanted to wear, and this did not mean that she had abandoned her religion. The direction of this debate that it seem to take is based on the projection that women would eventually not only embrace full freedom of choice of dress, but they would still practice the moral principles that are taught in the Islamic religion.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*.
New York: Yale University Press, 2014. Print.
- Harding, Nathan. *Behind The Veil – paperback*. New Jersey: Lulu.com, 2013. Print.
- Kamerling, Jane and Fred Gustafson. *Lifting the Veil: Why They Hate Us*. Carmel: Fisher King
Press, 2012. Print.
- Knotts, Dennis. *The Battle of Es-soh-en: The Dulan Archives - Book Two*. Houston: Strategic
Book Publishing & Rights Agency, 2014. Print.
- Nielsen, Jorgen. *Muslim Political Participation in Europe*. New York, NY: Edinburgh
University Press, 2013. Print.
- Rassooli, IQ al. *Lifting the Veil: The True Faces of Muhammad & Islam*. Bloomington:
AuthorHouse, 2012. Print.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. *The Politics of the Veil*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010.
Print.
- Wood, Nigelm and David Lodge. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
Print.