Mustafa Al Saedi

Professor Jim Roth

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The Hidden Consequences of the Veil

Many people throughout the word are confused as to why Muslim women cover themselves. Is it oppression or is it feminism? Many aren’t sure. In her essay “Veiled Intentions: Don’t Judge a Muslim Girl by Her Covering,” author Maysan Haydar describes her reasoning for covering herself and wearing a veil. She describes why covering for women is so important for purity, protection and feminism for everyday life. Haydar explained why it is her choice to cover herself, and that it is not due to oppression, which is assumed in some cultures. Haydar’s article made me realize several reasons why conservative clothing isn’t necessarily positive. I admire women who choose to cover because of their modesty and loyalty to Islam; however, excessive covering causes more harm than good, due to biased cultural standards, bigotry, and crime.

Muslims have twisted the Islamic command for modesty. The essay displays a couple of important passages from the Qur’an regarding clothing. In the Holy Qur’an, on Verse 59 of Chapter 3, it says that women should wear modest clothing as a shield against predators; however, the book does not go into explicit detail about covering the hair, face, and entire body (179). God was concerned about women becoming rape victims or being molested. He stressed that with conservative clothing, women will be less likely to be victimized, while showing respect to their husbands. He did not say anywhere in the Qur’an that he wanted women to hide their hair or face; he just wanted sexual parts covered. As noted in the essay, on Verse 30-31 of Chapter 2 of the Qur’an, it says “they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appears thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms…” (179). According to this translation, God wanted women to show what beauty is already evident, and for them to veil their breasts. When Mohammad was alive, rape was a problem and God recommended Mohammad to guide people with ways to reduce it. Muslim women have been taught that if a man looks at them, he is looking at them inappropriately, or he desires them, which isn’t true or fair to men at all.

Muslims have not only twisted the words of the Holy Qur’an, but they continue to exaggerate it as well. In the Middle East and throughout Islamic areas, women wear variations of modest covering called hijab scarfs, abayas, veils and burkas. Hijabs are scarfs worn to cover the hair. Many women and men in the Middle East have been taught that the hair is a sexual body part, and a distraction and therefore, should be covered. I am biased toward blondes so I understand the beauty of hair, although hair alone doesn’t make someone beautiful. Abayas are Islamic dresses that cover the body in a way that is still pretty, but doesn’t flaunt body shapes. Burkas on the other hand, are extreme black body veils of the hair and face. Burkas usually have eye-openings and are a standard among many Saudi Arabian and Beduioin women. These covering methods have unfortunately been traditionalized over time. Hadar even pointed out that her first days of covering was not out of a modest intent, but rather to sway her family into buying her the “board game Girl Talk” (179). Covering was something that she knew was a norm, and she used it to her advantage, and not for purity.

Today, if a woman in Islam isn’t wearing excessive clothing, she may be rumored to be promiscuous or unloyal to her husband, which isn’t fair. Many men and husbands in Islam, including myself, are not interested in excessive covering and think it is completely unnecessary. My father and I only ask my sisters to wear a hijab scarf and a baggy shirt when they leave the house in Baghdad, so strangers do not judge them, question them, or start gossip. When they finally make it to the United States, they will be able to take it off without any problems. I have four sisters that I love dearly. When they come to Spokane, my mother and one of my sisters are going to keep their hijab scarfs on, while my other three sisters are telling me how they are going to remove it right away. I support all of them and believe they are all growing up to be good women regardless of their clothing. I disagree with the cultural norm of covering because it has caused rumors and conflicts among women and families, and also many deaths because of ignorance. It makes no sense to me that a culture that preaches covering, places so much interest in belly dancing. If belly dancing is fine, and wearing a bunch of makeup with a hijab on is fine, why is hair left down so controversial when God said nothing about it?

Muslims do not always wear their veils in foreign countries because it is useless. In Western countries, many Muslim women either feel they are being judged by their clothing, or they know that excessive covering is unnecessary, and chose to remove it. Hadar even admitted in her essay that wearing an abaya in New York is pointless because it would “likely get stuck in a subway door or pick up the dust off any floor you glide across” (182). Also, I have noticed in non-Muslim countries, men are used to seeing women in less modest clothing and that hair is not a sexual entity, but merely an identification marker. Many women completely remove their feminist covering in the United States, and are still great respectable Islamic women, and loyal wives.

Conservative clothing is dangerous in public crowds. It is really important to be able to identify individuals in crowds, which cannot be done if particular features are removed from sight. Many criminals use excessive female clothing to commit crimes, suicide bombings, and murders without anyone being able to pick them out in a crowd. Recently, a Romanian-American school teacher in the United Arab Emirates was brutally stabbed to death in a public bathroom, and the killer walked out of the building with no problems. Security footage of the criminal showed the individual walk-in, enter the bathroom and leave in ease. Why did this happen? The attacker was wearing a burka. They have had issues identifying the killer until recent evidence has proved that it was a hate crime from a Muslim woman. She despises liberal American women and used her burka as a cover to commit murder, which is a horrific sin in Islam. In Iraq, many suicide bombings have been very successful because of loose Islamic female clothing and burkas, worn by both men and women.

Although I disagree with conservative hijabs, veils, abayas, and burkas, I respect the women who wear them genuinely. I do not disagree with female covering because I believe women are oppressed, I can promise you they are not. I strongly believe that the Qur’an was taken out of context, due to paranoia and extremist views and has been exaggerated to the point that many people have become ignorant, and they use their conservative shield as a mask for bigotry, hatred and crime. As long as a woman is not in any form of sexual danger, or is tempted to show off her body for sexual luring, and she tries to be as modest as possible through her actions, she shouldn’t need a veil.

Works Cited

Haydar, Maysan. “Veiled Intentions: Don’t Judge a Muslim Girl by Her Covering.” Viewpoints. Ed. W. Royce Adams, 8th ed. Boston, Wadsworth, 2013. (179-186).