

# **Mirror on the Veil**

**A Collection of Personal Essays on Hijab and Veiling**

Edited by Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi and Shaheen Pasha



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## CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	5
<b>Mirror on the Veil</b> Ansha Zaman	6
<b>Introduction</b> Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi	7
<b>PART 1: BECOMING VISIBLE</b>	
<b>Sabr</b> Zahra Cheema	25
<b>Just a Piece of Cloth</b> Tanya Muneera Williams	30
<b>My Journey after the Hijab</b> Farhana N. Shah	38
<b>Adventures in Hair and Hijab</b> Nadia Eldemerdash	44
<b>Metamorphosis: a Journey of Reflection and Change</b> Skifou F.	48
<b>Beautiful</b> Cassie (Nadiya) Madison	55
<b>The Essence of Hijab</b> Maryam Nasser	61
<b>Emerging from the Chrysalis</b> Saadia Faruqui	66
<b>A Million Scattered Pieces</b> Faizah Afzal Malik	72
<b>A Covered Racer</b> Aida Othman	77
<b>Letters from the Re-jabi</b> Zehra Naqvi	83
<b>PART 2: THE DISTRIBUTION OF NORMAL</b>	
<b>Veiled to speak: finding a voice in Doha's souq</b> E. Dawson Varughese	97
<b>Hijab, Niqab, Thongs, and Pac Man</b> Louise Lambert	102
<b>#Islamophobia: A Non-Muslim Faces the Prejudice</b> Caitlin Elaine	108
<b>It's Complicated</b> Patricia Tkach	115
<b>Scarves</b> Dragana Randelovic	122
<b>To Hijab or Not To Hijab</b> Reverend Nell Green	129
<b>PART 3: CHOICES IN BELONGING</b>	
<b>Who Am I?</b> Fawzia Mai Tung	137
<b>Confessions of a Confused Muhajjabah</b> T. Akhtar	144

<b>Loving a Headscarf</b>	Scotty Enyart	149
<b>High School Hijabi</b>	Yvonne Pilar Mesa El Ashmawi	154
<b>Where I Least Expected to Meet a Woman in Hijab</b>	Kathryn Kraft	159
<b>Ghūnghaṭa: A Patriarchal Tool for Veiling Women’s Subjectivity and Sexuality</b>	Sukhdev Singh & Satwant Kaur	163
<b>PART 4: A LESSER MUSLIM?</b>		
<b>Never Good Enough</b>	Shaheen Pasha	171
<b>Seeking Cover</b>	Zehra Naqvi	175
<b>Khawater al-Hijab — Thoughts on Hijab</b>	Umm Lina	183
<b>Reflections on the Hijab: Choice or Obligation?</b>	Laila S. Dahan	186
<b>PART 5: THE PURSUIT OF SENTIENCE</b>		
<b>Reflections on the Veil: An art work in Yemen and an experiment in Germany</b>	Angelika Böck	197
<b>The Veil and the American Belly Dancer</b>	Carol Tandava Henning	205
<b>I Am My Hair</b>	N.B. Sky	210
<b>Lifting the Veil on Islam in Hollywood</b>	Kamran Pasha	215
<b>Glossary of Terms</b>		221
<b>Notes on the Editors and Contributors</b>		224

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## **Mirror on the Veil**

### **Ansha Zaman**

I am from blue and black and magenta fabrics of cotton and satin and chiffon.  
I am from a rusty green *almirah* that a certain Nani kept all her hidden  
treasures in and the labors of a *dorji* who never quite knew how to get the  
seams right.

I am from endless walks to Chandni Chowk on hot summer Dhaka days to find  
the perfect matching brooch.

I am from the smell of *itar* on Eid and from the stains of Rajshahi mango pulp  
dripping down the chin.

I am from the love of a paranoid mother who won't let her daughter leave the  
house without a salaam and a hurried prayer.

I am from the teachings of a father who cares only about what his daughter  
thinks and not what she wears.

I am from that young woman's love affair with Islam, with God.

I am from choice.

I am from the privilege that comes with having that choice when there are so  
many women who don't.

I am from the frustration that comes with justifying that choice to those who  
are not entitled to it.

I am from the refusal to become another broken/oppressed soul saved by the  
"good natured" colonialists next door.

I am from the rebellion against white imperialist ideals of beauty.

I am from ties with innocence, with childhood and a home always so far away  
and always so close.

I am from comfort, I am from habit in a land that is alien.

I am from faith, from resistance, from the heart.

## **Introduction**

Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi

*“Look directly into every mirror.  
Realize our reflection is the first sentence to a story, and our story starts:  
We were here.”  
~ Shane Koyczan*

I currently do not wear a headscarf, although I have in the past. This has caused quite a bit of consternation among many when discussing my research interests in hijab and veiling. While working on my Ph.D. dissertation, I was asked why I would want to pursue this line of enquiry considering that I am not a Muslim woman who covers, *per se*. And for the last few years, while working on this collection, I have felt that perhaps my lack of a headscarf has made it more difficult for some people to trust me with their words. Recently, a student asked me if I was interested in this topic because somehow I felt guilty for not wearing the headscarf as a sign of my religious affiliation.

Actually, I have been interested in head cover for almost thirty years, when at the age of sixteen, a medical condition forced me to watch my hair slowly float into the washbasin, leaving me with an unusually wide side parting and wispy strands that did not suitably cover my head. At the time, some of my Pakistani friends and acquaintances were finding a voice and an identity through the headscarf. For me, though, it was merely a visible representation of religion, which was (and continues to be to some extent) a private matter. So, instead of being a part of the new found freedom that my friends enjoyed in the hijab, I lamented the loss of my hair as the loss of my femininity and the loss of my potential career in broadcasting. I began to pray, many times reading and re-reading the prayers in the hopes of perfecting my communication with God. And I begged Him to give me back my hair. For many years, I struggled with this loss. I gave up on my dream of being on TV, although I did do some work on ethnic television for a while, which gave me a small taste of the world that I could not be a part of. Eventually, I realized that I wasn't cut out for a career in broadcast media with its unrealistic standards of beauty. I wasn't going to make it. I didn't have the right look – I didn't have the hair.

But the loss had brought me closer to my religion and I had learned to embrace the simplicity that I found in having a direct relationship with God. I fought to overcome my obsession with rituals and became more interested in the spirit of my faith. At one time, I felt that I needed to express my faith through the headscarf. At this point in the United States and in many other countries around the world, the hijab had become more or less equated with a Muslim woman. This was in the early 2000s. The headscarf was no longer seen as a reflection of the traditional immigrant woman or as a fad among young girls searching for an identity.

So, I tried it. And I loved looking Muslim – for a while.

But I am a person who needs constant change. Embracing change is the only thing that has been constant in my life. Although I removed the headscarf after only six months, my faith did not fade. In fact, it kept me afloat as an expatriate crossing national and international boundaries, creating new homes, saying goodbye to new friends, and hello to even newer ones. My faith was, and continues to be, a huge part of who I am. It is what keeps me breathing.

But as I no longer wear the headscarf, my faith has become almost a hidden entity to others, invisible under the strands of hair from the extensions that cover my head. So, you see, my interest in the headscarf is not a simple thing that can easily be explained to people in passing. I am grateful for this journey that has led me to consider the diverse aspects of who I am – a Muslim, a woman, a Pakistani and an American, a teacher, an academic, and a person of colour. It is because of these identities that I feel I can relate to the emotions and reactions that the headscarf invites and to the different experiences of veiling that are presented in this collection.

Although this was a solo endeavor for almost three years, it could not have been completed without the commitment and collaboration of my sister, who enthusiastically stepped into her role as co-editor. Our goal with this anthology is not to provide the answer or uncover the truth. Each contributor shares the truth and it is these paradoxes of truth that we hope to convey. The veil is undoubtedly a controversial piece of cloth. It has many forms and functions, not all of which are related to religion. However, it is most often associated with Muslim women. As Western media outlets gloss over cultural diversity and portray Muslims as one monolithic nation (Eid, 2014), the veil becomes



symbolic of “those people”. The systematic “othering” of Muslim women is justified by highlighting the unjust cultural practices in those Muslim majority countries that either limit or completely eliminate the rights that were given to women in the early days of Islam. Although the oppression of women in many Muslim societies is a real concern that should not be overlooked, it is also important to consider that the singular narrative of the oppressed Muslim woman belittles the voices of those women who choose to cover and those who are fighting systemic oppression in its various global forms. Laws that ban different forms of veiling, such as the hijab and/or *niqab*, are becoming increasingly common in European countries. Such policies create additional tension between Muslims and the non-Muslim nations in which they live (Ajrouch, 2007). A recent foray into this controversy was the anti-burkini law in France that sparked numerous debates and provided fodder for satirical perspectives regarding the concept of acceptable beachwear. It also opened up discussion on freedom of dress and the patrolling of women’s bodies, bringing these issues to the forefront of feminist discourse on covering.

Western secular feminists often oppose veiling by using campaigns that spark anger from Muslim feminists, who believe that their fight for gender equity is being hijacked by misguided attempts that demean the value that they place on the hijab. Western feminists have historically used the female body as a symbol of gender equality (Bordo, 2003), thus less clothing is equated with more freedom and improved gender rights (Pasha-Zaidi, 2015; Sheth, 2006). One example of this is the “Topless Jihad” led by the Ukrainian feminist group, Femen, in 2013 to protest Islamism in Tunisia. The protest did not go over well with Muslim women, who were outraged by the effort (Nagaran, 2013).

Recent discussions have revolved around different kinds of feminist discourse and the appropriation of cultural symbols by mainstream feminist movements. Women of colour have been speaking up about their unique feminist struggles – many of which fall at the intersection of race, religion, and gender (Davis, 2008). Whereas the secular feminist’s fight for gender equality calls for equal access for men and women to socially-valued goods, services, and rewards (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016), the goal of Islamic feminists is not necessarily that of gender equality, but rather gender equity (Bullock, 2002). Gender equity demands fairness between men and women – a

concept that may apply more readily to the notion of complementary gender roles as reflected in Islam. With gender equity, men and women are expected to be treated with fairness “according to their respective needs and interests. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities” (International Labor Office, 2007, p. 92). Veiling then becomes the intersection at which these two inherently different goals of feminist discourse collide. From the Western feminist point of view, veiling represents the oppression of femininity through the covering of the female body, whereas from the Islamic feminist perspective, it symbolizes freedom from the objectification of the female form (Bullock, 2002; Bullock, 2000).

The veil as a symbol of oppression stems in part from the attitudes cultivated during the colonial era when Eastern practices were promoted as both exotic and sensual while simultaneously being barbaric and foreign (Ahmed, 1992). Islamic dress codes began to gain popularity worldwide during the 1970s in response to the lingering influence of colonialism and Western notions of superiority. The rationale was often to regain a sense of power by reintroducing the cultural norms and values that were suppressed as a result of colonialism. By embracing traditions that had been systematically disparaged during the colonial era, the emergence of a visible Islamic identity in many countries symbolized a decolonization of ideals and a return to the cultural values of the region (El Guindi, 1999; Hoodfar, 1992). These global movements were prominent in Malaysia, Nigeria, and Egypt in the 1970s (O’connor & Khalid, 2011; Mahdi, 2009; Bullock, 2000), and in Turkey in the 1980s (Göle, 1996).

A visible Muslim appearance became increasingly popular in Western countries such as the United States during the 1990s when Muslim women began to shift away from Western norms of dress. This was and continues to be partly a response to Western secular feminism. It also entails the development of a religious identity as a way of dealing with the stress of acculturation that Muslim immigrants faced. For Muslims growing up in Western countries, there was continual pressure to maintain two identities, one Western identity for public consumption and one cultural minority identity which was expected in the home. The need to find oneself in the plethora of available and conflicting notions of “normal” facilitated a process of reflection wherein many Muslims

embraced a religious identity that allowed them to have a voice that neither their home culture nor the mainstream culture provided (Ali, 2005).

This came to be even more relevant after the events of 9/11 when Islam and Muslims ruled the airwaves, becoming instantly linked with terrorism, any visible signs of the faith instilling fear among the general public. This prompted many Western Muslims to search for the meaning of their faith, to understand themselves and how the ideology of Islam was being used and misused for political gain. As a result, many Western Muslims underwent a religious renaissance after the 9/11 attacks, asserting their religion as a declared identity to strengthen their self-image and provide a positive counter-narrative to the negative one that purported to describe the “true Islam”.

The “re-Islamization” of Muslim women after 9/11 made the hijab a symbol of the political struggle of Western Muslims, and raised the prestige of the women who chose to wear it, as they took on the role of ambassadors of the faith (Haddad, 2007). As Islamophobia continues to spread, the hijab becomes even more engrained as the symbol of Islam the world over. Although dress codes are mentioned in only two verses of the Quran, the importance of head cover for Muslim women has been described by some as the sixth pillar of Islam (the five pillars being the belief in one God and his Prophet, prayer, charity, fasting, and Hajj – the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca). As a result, within Muslim communities, the hijab is often considered a litmus test of faith that is used to separate the “pious believing women” from the not-so-pious. It is not uncommon to find individuals and even community leaders who make comments regarding the lower status of Muslim women who do not wear the headscarf. Too often, a bareheaded Muslim woman is considered less of a Muslim (Hussein, 2007). “This view is reinforced by the media, Islamic associations and even the government when they turn to veiled women to speak on Muslim women's issues. The veil is assumed to give Muslim women the authority and credibility to speak on behalf of all Muslim women and Islam” (Akbarzadeh, 2010, p. 7). Notice the visuals that one sees in mainstream media. A Muslim woman wearing a headscarf is labeled a Muslim, but a Muslim woman not wearing a headscarf is usually labeled according to some other trait, such as her ethnicity, regardless of how much influence her faith may have on her identity. Unfortunately, these practices simplify, and perhaps even nullify,

the diversity inherent in a global religious community that is comprised of over 1.6 billion people – a number that is expected to rise to 2.76 billion by 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015)

Veiling has implied virtue since ancient times, long before the birth of Islam (*circa* 600AD). Veiling and the seclusion of women was practiced in ancient Mesopotamia, where the veil was a sign of respectability and status. In fact, the Assyrian codes of law that date back to 1000BC identified those women who were allowed to veil. As covering was a reflection of higher status, women who inhabited the lower rungs of society (slave girls, concubines and harlots, for example) were not allowed to veil and could face harsh penalties for doing so (Dossani, 2013; Ahmed, 1992). Jewish women may have also practiced some form of veiling, as Biblical evidence from Genesis (24:65) indicates, “And Rebekah lifted up her eyes and when she saw Isaac ... she took her veil and covered herself.” However, it is not clear whether veils in Jewish tradition were related to the concept of modesty or to what extent veiling was a normative practice. Christianity also embraced veiling in its early days. The verse most often associated with Christian head cover is from Corinthians (11: 4-7):

Any woman who prays with her head unveiled dishonours her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair, but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

Thus veiling was a known practice when Islam came into being as another branch of the Abrahamic tradition, following Judaism and Christianity. However, it became more pervasive during Ottoman rule when again veiling and the seclusion of women signified status and an exclusive upper-class lifestyle (Ahmed, 1992).

Islamic scholars have traditionally concluded that the headscarf is a necessary component of a Muslim woman’s dress. Recent work by Muslim feminists and scholars, however, has attributed the requirement of a head cover to cultural and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts (Armstrong, 2007; Ahmed, 1992; Aslan; 2005; El Fadl, 2001). Whether one believes that head

cover is mandatory, the ultimate goal that all Muslims can agree upon is that of modesty (Siraj, 2011). From an Islamic perspective, modesty is a code of conduct that not only includes one's dress, but encompasses the larger context of behaviour and human interaction. For example, Muslims are expected to be modest in speech. Speaking loudly, especially in anger, is considered a sign that the person does not have control over his or her behavior. Modesty, however, also applies in private because from a religious point of view, we are never truly alone. God is always with us or as the Quran (50:16) states: "And indeed We have created man, and We know whatever thoughts his inner self develops, and We are closer to him than (his) jugular vein". Thus modesty is a form of submission to God, which is the literal meaning of the term "Islam".

The concept of modesty and self-control is not unique to Islam. "The heart, not the hemline" is a saying that appears in Christian writings when discussing modesty and humility (Mahaney, 2008; Lebron, 2012). In the New Testament, Timothy 2:9-10 states "that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with broided (braided) hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works". Thus, modesty is equated with godliness in Christianity as well as Islam.

Among many Muslim scholars, modesty is what differentiates human beings from other animals. Covering one's *awrah*, or intimate parts, is a necessary part of being human. Which parts of the body constitute the *awrah* is a much debated topic and certainly, a woman's *awrah* includes more of the body than a man's, but it is important to note that modesty is required of both male and female followers of Islam. In fact, the verse in the Quran which initially talks about modesty (24:30) commands this to men first: "Say to the believing men that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste). This is better for them." The verse then goes on to address women: "Say to the believing women that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste) and not display their beauty except what is apparent, and they should place their *khumur* over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons, or their women or the servants whom their

right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex, and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O you Believers, turn you all together towards Allah, that you may attain Bliss.”

The debate over head cover essentially comes from the Arabic word, *khimr* (which is the singular of *khumur* as used above). A *khimr* is a scarf, which in the Pre-Islamic era was worn by women on their heads, but not necessarily covering their chests. “Commentators on the Quran repeatedly emphasize that women in Mecca and Medina were in the habit of exposing all or most of their chests, even if their hair was covered” (El Fadl, 2006, p. 197). The commandment, therefore, ordered believing women to use this fabric to cover their bosoms. Those who believe this commandment mandates head cover say that it is only logical in the context of the verse for Muslim women to cover their hair. After all, if a *khimr* was already used to cover the head, then why would God need to emphasize this point? From this perspective, it would be like telling someone that your shirt needs to cover your back! On the other hand, those who believe that head cover is not the primary mandate emphasize the idea that God does not specifically tell women to use the scarf to cover their heads. The commandment instead focuses on covering the chest area. According to this perspective, a scarf does not necessarily have to cover the head. That’s what women did at the time, so it was a garment that was readily available but not necessarily being used in the most modest way.

Our intention in this collection is not to tell anyone what to believe. Both arguments have a point that is eloquently addressed in different ways by contributors to this anthology.

The second verse in the Quran that discusses modest dress is the following (33:59):” O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.”

This verse was revealed in 627 AD, five years after the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) had migrated to Medina. Due to the increasing rights being given to women, such as the right to inherit, the men of the region were beginning to feel a loss of power, resulting in civil unrest. As such, Medina was becoming

particularly dangerous, especially for women. “Muslim women, including the wives of the Prophet, were harassed regularly and required protection. When the Prophet inquired about the reasons for this increased harassment, he was informed that men believed the women on the streets to be slaves. In the culture of the time, this meant that they could be purchased, were sexually available, and toward whom sexual aggression was permitted” (Amer, 2014, p. 44). The verse therefore commanded women to wear their cloaks around them to be recognized as wives or daughters of the Prophet or as Muslim women, so that they may be protected.

In simple terms, this verse basically tells believing women to wear long, loose clothing so that they may be recognized as modest and not be harassed on the street. Even in this day and age, I can attest to the fact that in many parts of the world where I have personally travelled, it is less annoying and more comfortable (even if it is not necessarily safer) to wear clothing that fits these criteria. I emphasize this point about safety because in the current climate of Islamophobia, wearing the Islamic headscarf (or any head cover that may be presumed to be Islamic) actually *decreases* the likelihood of a woman’s (or man’s) safety in non-Muslim majority countries such as the United States (Cainkar, 2009; Amer, 2014). Even in Muslim majority countries, veiling does not necessarily prevent a woman from being harassed on the street.

However, it is not *being* safe, but rather *feeling* safe that perhaps should be emphasized. Feeling safe can encompass a larger frame of reference than just physical safety. For example, academia is currently dealing with the notion of “safe spaces” where students can express themselves without fear of being made unwelcome or uncomfortable. As such, safety is not just a physical concern, but also a psychological one. For many Muslim women who choose to veil, the physical form of the fabric can provide psychological protection by defining boundaries between men and women (Bullock, 2002; Droogsma, 2007). Women who wear hijab tend to have a more positive body image, so the veil can also offer psychological protection from media messages about beauty standards (Swami, Miah, Noorani, & Taylor, 2013).

It is important to note here that neither verse in the Quran discusses the specific nature of the dress that women are required to wear. It is unfortunate that many people refer to Arab dress or Afghani *burkas* as the norms of

“Islamic” clothing as this limited context negates the cultural experiences of other Muslims around the world. The increasing popularity of Islamic fashion can hopefully change these perceptions as head cover and modest designs begin to appear in branded catalogues and on runways around the world. In fact, the hijab made a grand appearance at New York Fashion Week in 2016 as a result of the creative endeavors of Anniesa Hasibuan, an Indonesian designer who had previously showcased her work at the Istanbul Modest Fashion Week. Such efforts open up the possibility of normalizing Muslim practices within non-Muslim contexts.

The headscarf is one form of veiling that is discussed in this anthology. Another even more controversial form of veiling is the *niqab*, or face veil. Islamic scholars generally agree that the *niqab* is not a mandatory component of dress for Muslim women. In the past, the seclusion of women – also known as *pardah* in the South Asian context – was considered a status symbol (McAleese, 2007; Haque, 2010). Today, as with the hijab, the face veil is worn for many reasons. Women who wear it may do so because it is their way of expressing their level of religious commitment; because they want to emulate the wives of the Prophet, who are considered, “Mothers of the believers”; or because it is in keeping with the cultural and/or legal requirements of the area of the world in which they reside.

The *niqab* is readily understood as a face veil, but the word “hijab” often communicates different concepts. Although the purpose of hijab is the practice of modesty as both a code of dress and a code of conduct, in general, the term “hijab” usually refers to the headscarf or veil accompanied by conservative clothing, such as long pants and loose skirts or dresses (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006). In many cases you may notice that the terms “hijab”, “headscarf”, and “head cover” are used interchangeably, while in some essays in this book, the authors may differentiate between these expressions. This reflects the reality of the practice and the multiple ways in which the term is used in modern discourse.

In this collection, you will read some of the experiences that women have as they become visibly Muslim. Some women describe their journey to hijab through their personal connection with God. Others discuss it more as a reflection of their identity. Some wear it because they were inspired by a



particular woman, while some people were encouraged by their family or friends. In the stories you read, you will get a glimpse into these journeys.

As our dress communicates a lot about who we are, it is also important to consider the experiences of people who interact with covered women. What do they think or feel or imagine? A woman in hijab or *niqab* may be saying one thing with her dress, but what is the message that is being received? Because there is so much noise and negativity about Muslim dress, I think many Muslims feel pressured to defend traditional Islamic norms. Our radar goes up and we fly into fight mode, ready to protect ourselves from the prejudice that we expect to receive. By understanding some of the ways in which the veil affects other people, we can hopefully continue the dialogue that is necessary for critical thinking and appreciation of human diversity.

And finally, it is important to hear the voices of Muslim women who choose to not wear the headscarf. Just as veiled women are subject to scrutiny, discrimination and pity in many non-Muslim contexts, unveiled women receive the brunt of the disparaging remarks, discrimination and pity in many Muslim contexts. The –isms in our own community need to be addressed if we are to work towards becoming an inclusive *Ummah* for future generations.

We organized the collection based on the themes that stood out to us. You may find as you read that there are other ideas that cross over from one section to the next. One of the goals of this anthology is to find the similarities that lie under the differences, so we hope that you are able to come up with other ways in which the essays could have been organized – other themes that you find which illustrate the similarities among the different experiences.

Given the relationship between veiling and the perception of “otherness” in Western societies (Ruby, 2006), we felt that it was important to look at the various ways in which veiling is perceived in different parts of the world. What is an oppressive practice in one context, for example, may be a symbol of female empowerment in another (Read & Bartkowski, 2000). We consciously chose to explore this phenomenon through a participatory action framework using personal narratives to guide the dialogue. A great deal of collaboration and discussion went into the writing of each narrative to maintain the authenticity of the voices while adhering to the structural and communicative requirements of the English language. As the contributors were ultimately responsible for

their message, it was important to reflect on both their words and their intentions. Thus, the essays were drafted and re-drafted a number of times to ensure readability for international audiences. In many cases, foreign words and phrases were kept intact (aided by a glossary of terms) to allow for the nuances of the heritage culture and language to be communicated to bilingual readers (Lincoln & Gonzales y Gonzales, 2008). Interestingly, the foreign language elements were easier to address than the English colloquisms. English phrases and cultural contexts that were understood by some parties were sometimes incomprehensible to others!

By using a participatory action framework, this anthology is a conscious effort to decolonize research and examine the controversial topic of veiling from an approach that allows authentic experiences to be shared with an international audience. Decolonizing research is a relatively new way of approaching the process and entails cooperation between researchers and the people being studied in an attempt to lessen existing hierarchical power structures. In traditional research, the investigators are in a position of power. We define the area of enquiry. We collect data from people who serve as the subjects or perhaps more aptly, the objects of our research. We then interpret our results based on the existing literature and our understanding of the phenomena. Even in qualitative traditions, the crux of the responsibility for understanding the data lies with the researchers (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). With this collection, we wanted to do things differently.

As you read the essays, please bear in mind that the majority are not written by professional writers, but rather "regular" people from around the world. And for some, English is not their first language. By putting the contributors at the forefront, we specifically sought to include individuals who do not have as much access to the privileges of those in academic and media outlets. Our aim in doing so was to give a voice to perspectives that are often silenced due to a lack of access to the language and culture of the mainstream.

Part One, "Becoming Visible", discusses the challenges and the joys of those who have chosen to become visibly Muslim in the public sphere. Finding God and finding oneself are major themes in this section. Part Two, "The Distribution of Normal", discusses the dichotomous experience of veiling in Muslim and non-Muslim societies. This section highlights the complicated

relationship between norms and personal appearance in different social contexts. Part Three, “Choices in Belonging”, discusses head cover as a marker of group identity. Here you will find essays on the importance of belonging to a group and how the ways in which a person is treated by group members can affect the choices that are made. In Part Four, “A Lesser Muslim?”, you will read about the experiences of Muslim women who do not wear the Islamic headscarf and the implications of this choice. Part Five, “The Pursuit of Sentience”, is the final section of the anthology. Here, the essays discuss how veiling impacts the imagination and spirituality.

And so, we welcome you to explore hijab and veiling through the eyes of the women and men who have opened their minds and their hearts to give you a glimpse of their lives and their perspectives on this controversial topic. We hope this mirror on the veil helps you to reflect on your own experiences and ideas, and perhaps give you a reason to learn more about “others”.

Assalamu‘Alaykum

Peace be upon you

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## **Glossary of Terms**

Abaya: long robes used as cover over other clothes.

Ahmaddiyah: a disenfranchised community which has been labelled non-Muslim by mainstream Muslim populations.

Alhamdulillah: Praise be to God.

Allah-u-akbar: God is great.

Almirah: Closet.

Assalamu'Alaykum: Peace be upon you.

Baaligh: a Muslim child that has reached the age of maturity.

Buloogh: transition from childhood to adulthood, when one takes on responsibility for religious obligations.

Burka: outerwear that covers a woman from head to toe, including usually the face.

Burkini: bathing suit that fully covers the body.

Chador: long shawl or sheet used as a modest cover.

Chai: tea with milk.

Corniche: coastal area or beach.

Dawah: educating people on Islam.

Djinn: mystical beings that are part of the creation of God, according to the Quran. Satan belongs to this class of beings.

Dorji: tailor.

Dua: prayer or supplication.

Duhr Salat: afternoon prayer.

Dupatta: long scarf worn with South Asian clothing.

Eid: Muslim holidays that commemorate either the end of Ramadan or the completion of the Hajj pilgrimage.

Ghūnghāṭa: Hindi word for veil that is used to cover a woman's head and/or face.

Hadiths: sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), also known as Sunnah.

Haik: a large outer wrap typically worn by people in North Africa.

Hajj: Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca that occurs only at specified times of the year; one of the five pillars of Islam.

Halal: Arabic word for permitted or lawful.

Haram: Arabic word for forbidden.

Hijab: Islamic headscarf; the practice of modesty in Islam.

Iftar: the breaking of the fast at sunset during Ramadan.

InshaAllah: God willing.

Istikhara: a specific prayer for guidance when a Muslim is ambivalent or unsure about a decision.

Itar: a natural perfume derived from botanical sources.

Jannah: the Islamic concept of paradise or heaven; in Arabic, literally translated to mean garden.

Jellaba: long loose-fitting unisex robe with full sleeves, often worn in North Africa.

Khaleeji: Gulf Arab.

Khap: an organization or council made up of clans or groups of related clans in northern India that is separate from elected government but can exert significant social influence in its local community.

Khimr: headscarf worn in Arabia at the time of the Prophet.

Kippa: Hebrew word for skullcap.

Kurta: tunic.

Lāja: Hindi word for modesty.

Lengha: long Indian skirt.

MashaAllah: Arabic phrase to express joy, praise, or thankfulness for something or someone that was just mentioned.

MENA: Middle East and North Africa region.

Muhajjabah: Muslim women who wear the hijab.

Muslimah: a Muslim woman.

Naan: Round tandoori bread.

Nani: maternal grandmother.

Niqab: face veil.

Payot: Hebrew word for side locks or side curls, worn by men and boys in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Quran: Muslim holy book.

Rajshahi: a region in Bangladesh.

Ramadan: holy month in Islam that is spent fasting from dawn to sunset and reflecting on moral and religious obligations.

Revert (to Islam): used by many Muslims as a substitute for the term “convert”



to refer to the Islamic belief that people are born with an innate belief in God and in accepting Islam, they revert to their original state of submission.

Roti: Indo-Pakistani flat bread.

Sabr: patience.

Sadaqa: act of charity.

Sahih Bukhari: one of the Hadiths.

Salaam: a common greeting in Arabic-speaking and Muslim countries.

Salat: Muslim ritual prayers.

Sarma: Hindi word literally meaning shame but can be used to mean shyness.

Shahada: declaration of faith in Islam in which supplicants recite “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”.

Shalwar Kameez: traditional Indian and Pakistani attire consisting of a long tunic over loose trousers and a scarf.

Shayla: headscarf, usually black, worn with the abaya.

Sitar: a stringed instrument belonging to the lute family which is popular in Indian music.

Sola Scriptura: a Christian doctrine that the Bible is the supreme authority in all matters of belief and practice.

Souq: Arab outdoor market.

SubhanAllah: Arabic phrase, literally meaning Glory to God, used as an exclamation.

Sunnah: the body of traditional, social and legal customs based on the teachings and practices of the prophet Muhammad.

Surah: chapter in the Quran.

Tabla: a percussion instrument consisting of two hand drums which is popular in Indian music.

Tahajjud: voluntary nightly prayers that are in addition to the 5 required Muslim prayers.

Ummah: Muslim community.

Umrah: pilgrimage to Mecca that is considered the lesser pilgrimage to Hajj.

Wahabism: a puritanical movement in Islam.

Zakat: obligatory charity, one of the five pillars of Islam.

## Notes on the Editors and Contributors

### The Editors

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### The Contributors

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