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## Interpretations of *Hijāb* in the Middle East: Policy Discussions and Social Implications toward Women<sup>1</sup>

Rafidah Abdul Razak,\* Rohaiza Rokis,\*\* and Bazlin Darina Ahmad Tajudin\*\*\*

**Abstract:** Discussions on *hijāb* or veil in the Middle East is highly controversial and debatable even until today. Although the majority of the population in the Middle East countries are comprised of Muslims, yet the policies and laws regarding the wearing of *hijāb* by women, vary. Except for Iran and Saudi Arabia, other Middle East countries did not set the clear rulings for *hijāb*, in fact some governments restrict its wearing in certain occupational sectors like what had been practiced in Turkey. This article aims at examining the implications of *hijāb* policies in the Middle East in terms of the reactions and interpretations the societies make including the Western analysts towards *hijāb*. While the famous assumption about *hijāb* often lies at its symbolic representation as a form of men's oppression against women, many Muslim women in the Middle East see it as a symbol of power and freedom. In order to achieve the objective, a secondary research that involves collecting of information and data from existing resources on the topic of *hijāb* was applied. As found, the different implementation of *hijāb* policies in the Middle East led to various interpretations and influenced women – *Muslimah* or not – around the globe.

**Keywords:** *Hijāb*, women, Middle East, the West, oppression, policy

**Abstrak:** Isu *hijāb* atau tudung kepala di Timur Tengah sering menimbulkan kontroversi dan hangat diperbincangkan sehingga hari ini. Walaupun majoriti masyarakat di Timur Tengah adalah beragama Islam, namun polisi dan undang-undang berkaitan pemakaian *hijāb* berbeza diantara satu sama lain. Negara-negara di Timur Tengah, kecuali Iran dan Arab Saudi, tidak menetapkan perundangan yang jelas tentang *hijāb*, malah sesetengah negara menghadkan pemakaiannya di beberapa sektor pekerjaan sepertimana dipraktikkan di Turki. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk memahami implikasi daripada pelaksanaan polisi *hijāb* di Timur Tengah dari segi reaksi dan penilaian masyarakat termasuk penganalisa barat terhadap *hijāb*. Biarpun ia sering dikaitkan sebagai satu simbol penindasan oleh kaum lelaki ke atas wanita, ramai di kalangan wanita Islam di Timur Tengah menganggap *hijāb* sebagai satu simbol kekuatan dan kebebasan. Bagi mencapai objektif, penyelidikan sekunder telah dijalankan melalui pengumpulan maklumat dan data daripada bahan bacaan berkaitan *hijāb*. Hasil daripada penyelidikan mendapati pelaksanaan polisi *hijāb* di Timur Tengah telah mengundang pelbagai reaksi dan mempengaruhi wanita – *Muslimah* atau tidak – di seluruh dunia.

**Kata Kunci:** *Hijāb*, wanita, Timur Tengah, Barat, penindasan, polisi

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## Definition, Types and Origin of Veiling or *Hijāb* Practices

Much of the scholars' analyses about veil or *hijāb* are directed at linking the face and head covering with Islam and Muslim women in the Middle East. By definition, veil is similar to men's hat, where woman used to cover themselves, their hair, face and neck (Kulenovic, 2006). However, in the Islamic context, it is a part of the women dress code, and understood as "the dress that covers the whole body of the woman including her head, face, hands and feet" (Abdul Rahman Abdullah, 2006, p.30). Islamic veil is known with different names and types and varies across cultures. The most common one is headscarf or *hijāb*, where it covers the head but exposes the face. Other types are *niqāb* (mostly Gulf countries), which covers the face and head but exposes the eye, and the *burqa'* (mostly Afghanistan), which covers the whole body, including the head, face and eyes (Charrad, 2001a; Everett et al., 2015).

According to historical records and evidences, veiling practice has existed for thousands of years in the Middle East. In fact, putting on *hijāb* existed even before the coming of Islam in the early seventh century. It is pre-Islamic in origin (Chatty, 2013; Sahar Amer, 2014). Through her writing, an Egyptian American author Leila Ahmed indicated that Muslim women has adopted veiling after coming in contact with other cultures such as Greeks, Romans, Jews and Assyrians, where veil was put on to signify a woman's social status (Charrad, 2011b). During their conquest on Mesopotamia, the Persians have adopted the Assyrian custom of veil wearing for their women, and the veil subsequently spread throughout the Middle East (Claxton, 2012). Today, despite it has been practiced during the past two millenia by Christian, Jewish and Muslim women, veil continued to be associated primarily with Muslims, in fact it turned into one of the most visible signs of Islam as religion (Sahar Amer, 2014).

Throughout this article, the term *hijāb* will be applied to refer to any type of head-covering Muslim women worn for religious reasons. This article further seeks to understand the interpretation that the societies, mainly the Westerners made towards *hijāb* as a result of the practice and the policies that were implemented in some Middle East countries. The implementation of these policies has a direct and major influence on women around the globe regardless of their religious beliefs as it always symbolises women's right and position in the societies.

This article is based on a literature analysis of data, information and reading resources on the theme 'women' and '*hijāb*' in the Middle East. The various interpretations and discourses that were discussed may provide a significant influence of women, particularly *Muslimah*, around the world.

## What and Where is the Middle East?

The term "Middle East" was first used by an American military officer to describe the geopolitical region that covered the countries between the Mediterranean Sea and India. But today, "Middle East" has many definitions. Some scholars include the countries of northern Africa in their definition, whereas others use a cultural definition that includes

all the predominantly Islamic countries in Africa and Asia (Raff, Segalla and Synder, 2004). Moreover, the definition has changed over time and therefore, there is no consensus to the definition of what is the Middle East (Kort, 2008).

Similarly, there is no generally agreed geographical definition of the Middle East and what countries can be labelled “Middle Eastern”. The region even has different names, such as West Asia and Persian Gulf (Peretz, 1994 as cited in Carkoglu, Eder, and Kirisici, 2005; Gunderson, 2004). According to Duignan and Gann (1981), in narrower sense, the Middle East includes Egypt, the lands of Arabian Peninsula, Turkey and Iran. But in a broader sense, the Middle East extends all the way from the Atlantic coast across North Africa through the Fertile Crescent to the eastern border of Iran. Furthermore, some cultural geographers considered Mauritania, Sudan, and Afghanistan as part of the Middle East.

For this article, in addition to geographic definition, the cultural definition of the Middle East will also be employed as to guide the discussion on *hijāb*, which as Sharp (2011) wrote, “The Middle East can be defined in a cultural sense as an area of the world where Islamic traditions are the norm” (p. 7). Therefore, the situation of women in the Middle East countries including those in North Africa such as Egypt, and the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, as well as those in Indian sub-continent like Afghanistan and Pakistan will be covered in the discussion. This is because women from these countries experience different challenges in their life, which one of it is related to the practice of *hijāb*.

### **Overview of Women in Middle East**

Universally, women’s status has always been considered secondary to men. In any culture, women are commonly perceived as mother and wives, which negatively limit their roles to domestic such as nurturing children and performing household chores (Rivera, 2004). Men, on the other hand, are responsible for economic provisions (Moghadam, 2003), which are deemed important and significant, therefore deserve higher and better position in the society. As a result, women suffer from all sorts of discrimination and are deprived from having equal rights as men including the right for education, participation in economy and political spheres, and in some culture, they have no say to their own marriages.

The above situations are experienced by many women in the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, women are prohibited from driving all this while until 2017. They were also restricted from participating in political activities even though King Abdullah said they should be allowed to vote and run an office in 2015 election (Eltahawy, 2015). The same situation can be seen in Kuwait, where women are yet to be granted with the right to vote (As`ad AbuKhalil, 2012). Meanwhile in Maghribi, it is unnecessary for a bride to give her consent to marriage during her marriage ceremony. Yet, it is sufficient to obtain the consent of woman’s guardian, either her father or the next male in the kinship line that makes the marriage valid. In addition, there is no legal minimum age of marriage (Charrad, 2001a).

Despite of gaining more equal access to education among women in the Middle East, their access to employment outside the home is still low (Clawson, 2009). Data showed that from the period of 1991-2001, Arab women made modest gains of increasing employment by 18 percent across the region, with exception of women in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, where no substantive changes were shown (Momani, 2016). Gender gap in workforce remains consistent even after many years, whereby the young women's participation in labor force is below than 35% compared to young men with more than 80% participation (Gallup survey 2011 as cited in Crabtree, 2012).

Gender norms of the society are factors to gender inequality, which rooted in culture, religion, and family structure. Women in the Middle East have limited engagement in community politics and restricted decision-making power, justified by a general acceptance of normalize male roles and leadership (Saneya El-Neshawy, 2014). Some critics have put the blame on Islam for being irrevocably gender-inegalitarian (Keddie, 2007). They argued that under Muslim *shari'ah* law statutes, women do not enjoy equal rights particularly on matters governing divorce, inheritance and child custody (Webb et al., 2012).

The objective of this article relies the exploration of the interpretations of *hijāb* by the Westerners as an understanding of an implication of *hijāb* policies in the Middle East.

### **Revivalism in the Middle East and the Emergence of *Hijāb* Policies**

The process of colonisation and Westernisation have led to the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism in many parts of the Middle East. In Gaza, beginning from late 1970's, a most notably Islamic movement *al-Mujamma' al-Islāmiyy* (today known as *Ḥamās*), emerged as a political force and offered a practical solution to the social problems faced among the poorer residents in Gaza. They proposed a return to a moral social code embodied in their interpretation of Islam, which includes imposing the wearing of *hijāb* on all Gazan women. Until the eruption of *intifāda* in 1987, the women were barely seen going around without wearing a headscarf. However, in 1988, the religious youths broke into classrooms and demanded schoolgirls to use *hijāb*, and it marked the first attempt to deal with the growing pressure the women were facing as because of the *hijāb* campaign launched by the *al-Mujamma'* or *Ḥamās* (Rema Hammami, 1990).

A similar situation can be observed in Afghanistan. During the 1970s and 1980s, before the country came under the control of the Taliban, women wore clothes much like women in the Western nations. Besides, they participated in the economic sectors such as agriculture, medicine and law. Surprisingly, nearly 50 percent of Afghanistan doctors were women, and seventy percent of teachers in the city of Kabul were women. However, things changed when the Taliban took power, where women were no longer free to dress as they wanted, or to work outside of home. The Taliban enforced a strict dress code on women. When a woman left her house, she was required to wear a *burqa'* (Rivera, 2004).

Notably, some forms of coercion took place in Gaza and Afghanistan with regards to *hijāb* wearing. As an implication of this ruling, women's participation in the society were

restricted and their roles were confined to domestic activities. Many considered this ruling as a political agenda the Islamic fundamentalists were implying as part of their missions to fight against their enemy - the West, rather than as a religious duty the women has to observe as Muslims. However, in terms of enforcement, only Saudi Arabia and Iran legislate *hijāb* and making it mandatory on every Muslim women. The religious authorities in these countries, for example the Saudi Arabia's religious police, known as the *muṭawwā*, sometimes use force in their enforcement of *hijāb* (Stewart, 2013).

Meanwhile in Turkey, the women experienced different kind of situations due to its *hijāb* policy. It was since the period of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk that *hijāb* was banned for women working in government sectors. In year 2013, under the ruling of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the banning policy was lifted to allow *hijāb* to all workers of civil services and government offices, but this new rule does not apply to those working in military or judiciary. For many years, the restrictions on *hijāb* by the secular government of Turkey had discouraged women from conservative backgrounds from seeking government jobs or higher education (Smith, 2013). With the new policy, many women in high position were seen wearing *hijāb* and at the same time, continue to make important contribution to the country's economy, politic and social development.

### **Interpretations of *Hijāb* from the Western Perspective**

The policies on *hijāb* had influenced the way the non-Muslims, in particular the West, interpret Islam and how it treats women. Most of the time, *hijāb* is associated with the position of women in the society, and because *hijāb* is a part of women's dress code in the Middle East and other Islamic nations, they tend to believe that Islam do so as means to control women so that they never go above men.

According to Kahf (2008), the most stereotype interpretation of *hijāb* is it symbolises patriarchal oppression in a backward society, perpetuating male domination and control over female and their body. In the West, there is ubiquitous assumption that a woman is 'forced' to cover by her husband. *hijāb* serves as a potent marker that suppressed female sexuality. Eventually, it has become the mechanism of patriarchal control by the social structures such as through value systems and normative practices. These restrictive and repressive practices against women were expressed by the monopolisation of the female body (Ghanim, 2015). Such practices are different from the Western, where overt display of sexuality is regarded as central to personal identity and celebrated as a sign of freedom from religious taboos and norms (Bullock, 2010; Saba Mahmood, 2013).

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *hijāb* was taken by Europeans to be an oppressive custom amongst Muslims. The notion of *hijāb* as oppressive assumed a new and important focus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because that was the era of European colonialisation of the Middle East (Crocco, Pervez and Katz, 2009; Ingber, 2015).

The colonialists, the orientalist and other Western observers have always showed their antagonism against the Muslim practice of *hijāb*. According to Amal Talaat Abdelrazek (2007), rather than focusing on the right of women to choose whether to cover

themselves, these groups of people view *hijāb* as a source of women's suppression. They presume that women in the Middle East are bound by a restriction that prohibits them from showing their faces in the public and have been forced to adopt such a lifestyle. They also assume that donning *hijāb* as an act of male's submission and thus a threat to women's freedom and individuality. It is none other than an act of oppression (Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd, 2016; Yusuf Jailani, 2016). Furthermore, *hijāb* separates women and secludes them from men's space, making them present but invisible and has no right to be on the street (Fatima Mernissi, 1987 as cited in Barry, 1979).

When the European colonialists took over the Middle East, they brainwashed the Muslims with the negative representations of *hijāb*. Muslim women were provoked to unveil, and many were affected with the belief that unveiling is synonymous with progress and female emancipation (Bahier, 2013). The native elites in the Middle East internalised the view themselves, thus became convinced that they were backward, their women were degraded, and improvement can only be achieved when they follow the Western prescriptions of development (Bullock, 2010). As a consequence, Islamic dressings like *hijāb* were viewed as a symbol of backwardness and no longer conceived as a relevant practice. Most people in the modern societies perceive *hijāb* as a symbol that implies something old, traditional, historical, religious, rural, and backwards (Asghar Ali Engineer, 2005; Kulenovic, 2006).

*Hijāb* is not simply a neutral or descriptive term, but also a judgmental term. It is a notion that often conjures anxiety, fear and threat to the West, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. It was seen as a symbol of Islamic extremism and self-segregation as well as a sign of gender oppression (Sahar Amer, 2014; Zempi and Chakraborti, 2014). Following the incident, several non-Muslim nations like France started to pass law that ban *hijāb* in public schools, and the same legislation is sweeping across Europe. A radio presenter in Australia triggered both open debate and public outrage when he urged for the ban of the face veil (*niqāb*) from public centres such as banks and post offices (Stacey, 2009; Mirza, 2012). Such are the results of Islamophobia.

Furthermore, the opposition also came from groups of feminists, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who fight for women's rights in the society. The Western feminists find the threat to physical violence and the punishment received by women in some Middle Eastern countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Algeria for not covering as frightening and tragic for the women concerned. For them, the enforcement to cover is truly oppressive and they are against it (Bullock, 2002). A Muslim feminist, Fatima Mernissi, apart from claiming that Islam and feminism are incompatible, also insisted that Islam as a religion is inherently patriarchal. She argued that while all believers have to submit to God, women have to submit to both Him and male authority (Badran, 1985). *hijāb* is therefore, to many feminists, a form of control used by men on women, which is perpetuated by religion and culture.

### **Does *Hijāb* Really Mean Female Oppression?**

From the perspective of the West, the practice of *hijāb* supports patriarchy and perpetuates gender segregation. Most of the time, the Western orientalist and observers

insist that women in the Middle East are always under the control of men. As they argued, one of many means men use to control women is through *hijāb*. Nevertheless, other literatures indicate that *hijāb* has a wide range of interpretations. Charrad (1998c) wrote that it could take different meanings, among others are resistance, protest, empowerment and entry into male space. Hence, it is important to look at the other sides of *hijāb*. Is there a chance that *hijāb* is worn out of female's consciousness and a result of their choice?

For many Muslims, *hijāb* is often associated with religion. Believers of Islam consider *hijāb* as a commandment of Allah given in the Holy Qur'ān, even though others especially the Western, view it as a ridiculous, if not a barbaric, practice (Asghar Ali Engineer, 2005). *Hijāb* is seen as an obligatory dress code derived from some Qur'ānic verses, especially the ones in Surah Al-Nour (24:30-31), whereby Allah urges the believers, both men and women, to protect their private parts and "lower their gazes"; and He urges women to draw their veils over their necks and bosoms and not to display their *zīnah* (adornments), except to close members of their families (Fathi-Rizk, 2011). As such, covering oneself with *hijāb* signifies an act of faith and submission to God, not to man (Sadiki, 2004). In fact, many Muslim women mentioned the reasons they wear *hijāb* is because it is a command from Allah, and it represents submission to God and serves as a symbol of worship (Read and Bartkowski, 2016).

Islam also stresses on the principle of modesty in every aspect of life, and that includes modesty in attire. *Hijāb* is known as a part of modest dress which supposed to protect the wearers, as found in sūrah al-Aḥzāb (33:59) where Allah advises the Prophet's female warden and the believing women to "lengthen their skirts" so that they will not get molested (Nashat and Tucker, 1999; Fathi-Rizk, 2011).

Despite the belief that *hijāb* is a religious command, there are debates going around on whether it is compulsory for Muslim women or is it a matter of cultural milieu (Glasse, 2002). Islamist feminists and others note that the term *hijāb* is not used in the Qur'ān to refer to women's attire specifically, whereas others interpret the passages in the Qur'ān require not only *hijāb*, but also segregation between men and women. These conflicts result into a wide range of *hijāb* practices throughout the Muslim world including the Middle East countries (Stewart, 2013).

Among Yemeni women, practicing to be modest is closely linked to their understandings of appropriately pious behaviour and morality. These practices include covering with *hijāb*, gender segregation, the control of one's physical appetites and self-expression. For these women, modesty practices are not for men's honour, but rather for themselves and their families (Rothenberg, 2003). In reality, many Muslim women in Cairo who wear *hijāb* mentioned that they feel less exposed to verbal and physical male abuse when using public transportation or when moving anywhere in a public space. Such experiences indicate that *hijāb* serves as a mechanism that permits both spatial mobility for women and a sense of social and psychological safety (Abu Odeh, 1993; Afshar, 1996 as cited in Fenster, 2002).

However, interesting to note a dichotomous interpretation of *hijāb* among women in the Middle East. Of recent discussion, Webb et al. (2012) found that *hijāb* is used by women to symbolise their resistance and rejection towards the Western ideologies. During the colonisation period, Muslim women in the Middle East wore *hijāb* to resist against the imperial or colonial assaults. At the same time, it was also a symbol of cultural preservation thorough customary beliefs and traditions (DeFrancisco and Palczewski, 2014). Historically, *hijāb* too, had been an explicit symbol of Islamic fundamentalism among Iranian women during the 1979 revolution to show an act of opposition to the Shah and Western colonisation (Tohidi, 1991 as cited in Fenster, 2000). In short, *hijāb* becomes the indication of political protest, an affirmation of Islamic identity and a rejection of a Western culture (Megahed and Lack, 2013).

Ironically, when globalisation changes one's social status through fashion and trend, *hijāb* too, since ancient times was regarded as a symbol of high social status that signals the social class in which the wearers belong. History recorded the first instance of veiling practice among Assyrian women from the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, in which veil was used to signify class distinction and was restricted merely for noble women. The law prohibited peasant women, slaves and prostitutes from wearing the veil and the infringement of the law resulted into the women being punished. It is also a man's attire. Among the Tuareg for example, the veil is worn by men rather than women, where it symbolises male identity and is taken as a rite of passage into manhood. This veil, known as *anagad*, is used to indicate the status of the wearer and the degree of respect he deserves (Claxton, 2012).

In short, literatures have proven that *hijāb* is not an exclusive practice of women from uneducated, poor and backward societies. Neither is it an attire used by women nor by Muslims per se. Indeed, *hijāb* was (and still is) a symbol of social prestige for women.

Its prestigious status was further enhanced in Islamic history. *hijāb* is associated with its role to increase the status of women and to preserve their dignity. After the coming of Islam to the Middle East, the Prophet Muhammad (saw) had instructed his wives to wear face veils with reasons to set them apart, to indicate their special status, and to provide them with some social and psychological distance from the Muslim men that regularly congregated at his home. Through this act, women are secluded from men because they are treated as a wealth that has to be hidden and kept for private viewing and pleasure (Chatty, 2013). Contradicting this fact was the view among the Westerners that *hijāb* is used to seclude Muslim women from the outside world and subsequently restrict them from getting involve with what had been classified as the men's world.

Today, *hijāb* is used among the educated, high-class and urban women in the Middle East. Many independent-minded, well-educated Muslim women refused to adopt Western ways and decided to keep their *hijāb* (Lockard, 2009). In Iran, despite the legal enforcement of *hijāb*, the women in that country can do many things including driving, hold public office, and attending universities. In Tehran, there is a professional all-women fire brigade, which is the only female fire fighters in the Middle East, who wear *hijābs* under helmets while responding to fire calls. It is the only company of female

firefighters in the Middle East (Celizic, 2007). Fernea (2002) mentioned that Islamic dress today (which includes *ḥijāb*) is a middle- and upper-class phenomenon, found mostly among educated working women. Throughout Egypt, the wearers are mostly young, in their early twenties, and many are in the universities and professional schools.

Women in the Middle East also view *ḥijāb* in a more positive term, taking it as a symbol of freedom and a form of liberation. At one point, *ḥijāb* means liberation from the shackles of male scrutiny and standard attractiveness. Women who cover feel that they are safe from becoming the prey of male lusts and thus can equally participate in social activity like men (Hughes, 2013). At another point, Muslim women feel that the *ḥijāb* they wear enables them to show their identity and a fixed part of their culture to the world. To be given the right to choose how to dress, act and express themselves means freedom to many Muslim women (Yusuf Jailani, 2016) especially when objection towards Islamic dress including *ḥijāb* is still very persistent. An Islamic scholar, Yvonne Haddad explains that many Muslim women wear *ḥijāb* as a matter of choice that affords them with freedom, liberation, relief and even great joy (Marger, 2015).

### **Conclusion: A Theoretical Debate of *Ḥijāb* in the Middle East**

From the discussion, it can be concluded that *ḥijāb* is a very complex issue that has heated the global debates. Stereotypically, the practice of *ḥijāb* had been associated with the Arabs and Islam, and often been given the negative interpretations and meanings including oppression, subjugation, control and seclusion of women. The Western observers, missionaries, travelers and colonialists often believed that Islam is a religion that oppressed women and *ḥijāb* is one of the means used by men for that purpose. Particularly in post-9/11, *ḥijāb* has become an overtly political symbol for the oppression and violence of Islamic belief, and removal of *ḥijāb* was seen as a corrective action (Zeiger, 2008), which further result in the banning of the attire in some European countries like France and the United Kingdom.

However, as discussed by the literatures, *ḥijāb* in the Middle East means many more than just a symbol of women oppression. In fact, some Muslim women in the Middle East believe that *ḥijāb* is neither repressive nor restrictive. Rather, *ḥijāb* is viewed as a sign of their identity with Islam (Hawkins, 2003). According to Afshar (1993) and Lake (2014), some females in the Middle East decide to start wearing *ḥijāb* when they start menstruating as a symbol of becoming a woman. For others, *ḥijāb* is a form of empowerment or acceptance into society. It gives them the right for them to become a person rather than sex object. Wearing *ḥijāb* can be used as a visible message identifying oneself as a Muslim. Meanwhile, for women all around the world, *ḥijāb* can be used for piety, prudence, fashion or even cultural identification among many other reasons.

In short, every woman who wears veil or *ḥijāb* has a personal and unique reason in doing so. The decision to wear veil is sometimes made voluntarily without being forced by anyone.

It is equally important to stress that *ḥijāb* today is a practice adopted by successful women, a fact that negates the negative associations it used to have with backwardness and lower class societies. In modern days, it is not surprising to discover that *ḥijāb* is worn among the educated and professional women in the Middle East and other parts of the world (Hessini, 1994). Moreover, many women who cover themselves reported to feel certain degree of respect particularly when they are surrounded by the opposite sex. In most cases, males will set their gaze on the ground when meeting female strangers with *ḥijāb* (Alvi, 2017), hence endowing women with greater feeling of security and freedom.

There are some limitations of this article. First of all, it generally discussed *ḥijāb* based on the experiences of women in multiple countries and cultures in the Middle East. A more thorough analysis on the topic can be produced if a policy implementation in a specific Middle East countries is discussed, for example the implications of *ḥijāb* ban policy in Turkey during the period of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk or the practice of *ḥijāb* among women in prosperous Arab countries. The second limitation is since this is a conceptual paper, no primary data collection based on a systematic method and procedure was done. Perhaps in future a research on the topic of *ḥijāb* can be performed, focusing on the context of modern women and the challenges they are facing as a *ḥijāb* in their societies.

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