

Media and the Issue of Hijab and Veil across European Countries

Asyiqin Ab Halim,* Nor Fahimah Mohd Razif** & Nur Shahidah Paad***

Abstract

The issue of *hijab* has become a controversial and ongoing topic discussed mainly in European countries and has been perceived differently by the media. The discourse of *hijab* and its controversy, particularly in France, Netherland, Germany, as well as in the United Kingdom, has not been interpreted by the media according to the Islamic perspective, thereby implicitly creating tension between Muslims and the local society. Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the controversial issue of *hijab* that arose in the European countries by focusing on France, Netherland, Germany and the United Kingdom and how the issues have been reported and perceived by the media. This study employs a qualitative approach that applies library research focusing on data collection via secondary sources. Furthermore, the data are analysed according to thematic analysis in identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within the data obtained. The finding of this study shows the issue of *hijab* within European countries is regarding more on veil and purdah or niqab rather than headscarves as wearing of headscarves is commonly recognised by the European communities. As a conclusion, it is suggested for Muslims to be more visible in society and media in countering negative views and perceptions towards Muslim as well as in depicting constructive image of Islam.

Keywords: *hijab*, Muslim women, media, European countries

Introduction

Over the past decade, the appropriateness of traditional clothing worn by Muslim women, particularly the head covering known as the *hijab* has been the focus debates in the media. The *hijab* debate has become a symbol of the clash of cultures between Muslims and 21st century terrorism. It is eye-witnessing that America courageously propagates its monopoly to rule over the whole world. Due to this reason, it has perpetually been using all forms of media including newspapers, radio and television as forceful communication tools to ensure its supremacy. However, the Western media analysed through its coverage of Muslims, is terribly biased as it demoted the progressive edges of Muslims making them less worthy. Identity and image of Muslim women in particular have been distorted adversely by the Western media. The first image come in mind of people about Muslim women is a heavily veiled and isolated woman.

History of the prejudiced depiction of Muslim women in western media traces back to the beginning of 21st century.¹ Western image of Muslims is of a backward, barbaric and violent nation directly and this verifies the oppression of Muslim women indirectly.² Events like imposition of *hijab* in Iran and *Burqa* in Afghanistan, Taliban attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries on girls' schools, terrorist operations in various countries around the world etc. certified the Western misperception about Islam and Muslims.³ The discussion of *hijab* in Western media is directly linked with national interests of Western society. *Hijab*'s association with the Islamic oppression by western media is basically intended to save the West's hegemony in the world.⁴ The West has been extremely infatuated with unveiling Muslim women for many years. Muslim women are viewed as repressed and disowned by their society

* Asyiqin Ab Halim (corresponding author) (PhD), Senior Lecturer, Department of Islamic History and Civilization, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: aasyiq5@um.edu.my.

** Nor Fahimah Mohd Razif (PhD), Senior Lecturer, Department of Fiqh and Usul, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: norfahimah@um.edu.my.

*** Nur Shahidah Paad (PhD), Senior Lecturer, Department of Dakwah and Human Development, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: shaaz2301@um.edu.my.

¹ Muhammad Ashraf Khan and Sadaf Zahra (2016), "Portrayal of Muslim by Western Print Media: A Textual Analysis in Feministic & Orientalist Perspective," *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research*, Vol. 17, pp. 41-57.

² Yahya R. Kamalipour (1997), *The US Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*, United States: Greenwood Publishing Group, pp. 178.

³ Mei-Po Kwan (2008), "From Oral Histories or Visual Narratives: Re-Presenting the Post-September 11 Experiences of the Muslim Women in the USA," *Social & Cultural Geography*, Vol. 9, No. 6, pp. 653-669.

⁴ Ronit Lentin (2007), "Ireland: Racial State and Crisis Racism 1," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4, pp. 610-627

so they needed to be salvaged by the west.⁵ The West has been fighting against Taliban in Afghanistan and Iraq from three decades to liberate Muslim women.⁶

In fact, the act of veiling has existed even before the existence of Islam.⁷ It has particularly spread in Arab cultures even in Greek and Rome. When Islam as religion is concerned and related to the veil, however, it is worth mentioning that it also exists in other religions and faiths such as Judaism, Christianity and Catholicism. The act of veiling is also taken up by women beyond Abrahamic religions such as Hinduism and Sikhism. Nevertheless, it seems that veiling in other religions except Islam is not often associated with oppression.⁸ Muslim women are portrayed by the Western media either as veiled victims in need of liberation in foreign lands because of a lack of free choice, or a threat to the Western societies in which they reside because of their choice to adopt traditional Islamic dress.⁹

Hijab in Islam

Muslims follow various schools of thought which have differences of opinions on Islamic law. Women who wear a face-veil tend to observe the *hadiths* instructing women to cover all that is not essential, which some interpret as everything except the eyes and hands. This belief is a minority position. Most Muslims believe women should allow their faces to be visible, but should cover the hair (and, in many cultures, the throat as well). An even smaller minority wear all-covering garments such as the *burqa*. These rulings (*fatwa*) are based on the understanding of modesty and the public display of the body (*awrah*).

According to Islamic teachings, the notion of modesty or *al-haya'* is an intrinsic part of the religion and encompasses faith, speech, thought, action and affection.¹⁰ It also influences what Muslim wear and how they wear it as these choices reflect their *deen* or way of life.¹¹ The concept of modesty is addressed in Islamic teaching from many angles. In physical terms, modesty is connected with the *awrah*, an Arabic term meaning inviolate vulnerability,¹² or what must be covered and consisting of the private body parts of human being. For men, the *awrah* is from the navel to the knee (or mid-thigh in some rulings).¹³ For women, the *awrah* is more extensive and a more complicated matter entirely. A woman's *awrah*, with respect to men outside her *mahram* (family members and those forever ineligible for marriage to her) and non-Muslim women, consist of her entire body, with the exception of her face and hands. There are twelve categories of *mahram* and these people may see a woman's hair, ears, neck, upper part of the chest, arms and legs. Other part of her body such as the back, abdomen, thighs and two private parts are not to be exposed before anyone, man or woman, excepting her husband. Some scholars have also ruled that a woman's *awrah* with respect to other Muslim women, is the area between her navel and knee.¹⁴ In practical terms, this means that these areas of the body are not to be shown to anyone except the spouse or if necessary, a doctor, and in the case of women, it refers to what she must cover when in public not when she is at home or with her family members in a private area.

As Islam is a *deen* and modesty is its central, modesty in clothing is an obvious component.¹⁵ The discussion on clothing presented here focuses mainly on women's clothing, and women's clothing in the public sphere (i.e., clothing that is worn in the company of strangers, non-mahram). This means that the public sphere is defined here as 'in the company of strangers' rather than 'outside the home', although often these two situations coincide. Therefore, the definitions of 'public space' and 'private

⁵ Sajad Kabgani (2013), "The Representation of Muslim Women in Non-Islamic Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study on Guardian," *International Journal of Women's Research*, Vol. 2, No.1, pp. 57-78.

⁶ Kevin J. Ayotte, and Mary E. Husain (2005), "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 112-133.

⁷ Fadwa El Guidi (1999), *Veil, Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, New York: Berg, p. 14.

⁸ Siti Juwariyah (2019). "Muslim Women and Veiling: What Does it Signifies?" *MIQOT*, Vol. 43, No.1, pp. 79-94.

⁹ Terrie C. Reeves and Laila Azam (2012), "To Wear Hijab or Not: Muslims Women Perceptions of their Healthcare Workplaces," *Journal of Business Diversity*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 41-58.

¹⁰ Aisya Wood Boulanour (2006), "The Notion of Modesty in Muslim Women's Clothing: An Islamic Point of View," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 134-156.

¹¹ Fashela Jailanee, Rich Ling and Pranav Malhotra (2019), "Re-veiling the Hijab: Social Media, Islamic Fashion and Religious Identity in Singapore," Conference Paper in ICA Regional Conference, 16-17 October 2019, pp. 1-31.

¹² Fadwa El-Guindi (1999), *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Oxford and New York: Berg, p.142.

¹³ Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1995), *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam (al-Halal wa al-Haram fi al-Islam)*, Kamal El-Helbawy, M. Moinuddin Siddiquia and Syed Shukry (trans.), Kuwait: Al Faisal Press, p. 154.

¹⁴ al-Qaradawi (1995), *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, p. 160.

¹⁵ Sk. Mahrufur Rahman, Md. Nazmul Islam and Atia Ferdousi (2018), "Is Hijab a Fashion Statement? A Study on Bangladeshi Women," *Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 21-27.

space' in Islam differ from those in a Western paradigm.¹⁶ There exist several requirements and prohibitions concerning clothing in Islamic teachings. Fundamentally, the awrah must be covered, but the method or style of coverage varies greatly from country to country and person to person.

One of the tenets of Islam is a requirement for modesty in both men and women. This concept is known in Arabic as *hijab*, which refers to far more than Islam and clothing. The word "hijab" has entered English and other European languages with a somewhat different meaning, referring either to sartorial hijab, or the headscarf worn by many Muslim women. The hijab in its literal sense, means barrier or partition.¹⁷ Hijab also means the veiling or seclusion of women in some Islamic societies, customarily practiced in order to maintain standards of modesty.¹⁸ This relationship between modesty and sartorial choices is obviously reflected in discussion surrounding the hijab.

Issues Regarding Hijab in Media within European Countries

Countries across Europe have wrestled with the issue of hijab. The debate takes in religious freedom, female equality, secular traditions and even fears of terrorism. Issue of hijab has become part of a wider debate about multiculturalism in Europe, as many politicians argue that there is a need for greater effort to assimilate ethnic and religious minorities.

Muslim immigrants had arrived in European countries in the early 1970s and even now are struggling to live according to Islamic rules within a non-Muslim community. For the Muslim women, they are continuing to fight for their right to wear hijab to fulfil the religion's requirement. Thus, hijab is still perceived as alien and abnormal among the local society although some countries have now begun to tolerate this condition.

As the hijab has indexed the religion of Islam, there is a tendency for people especially in the West to see it as a symbol of oppression. Seeing hijab as the symbol of oppression and subordination to men has made the West and the feminists against it since it does not conform with Western values. Thus, they feel that there is a need to free Muslim women from hijab. The derision they feel towards the oppression and the radical Muslims has leads to the rejection and banning of hijab itself, along with the Islamic values, such as the case in France and the United Kingdom.¹⁹ In a case of hijab debates in France, El Hame suggests that: The French media and their political officials have determined on how one sees the hijab in France: the media demeaned the scarf when French newspapers such as *Le Monde* pictured the hijab in caricatures that were deliberately exaggerated to produce grotesque effects in the reader's imagination.²⁰

United Kingdom and France

France has around five million of Muslims which is the largest Muslim minority in Western Europe.²¹ In France, a hotbed of media and political debate on issue of hijab, the issue has a polarising effect on the Muslim community and divisive impact on society and feminism. In February 2004 during the first year of French Parliament's banning of the hijab operation, the legislation saw the expulsion of 48 Muslim girls and three Sikh boys from government schools. The capture of two French journalists by terrorists in Iraq who demanded the French Government lift the ban fanned the debate in August 2004. When the hostages were taken, hijab-wearing French women took to the streets demanding for their release, the media reportedly saying "send me instead" and "I don't want my hijab stained with blood". The media portrayal of these women went from sinister symbols of Islamic extremism to brave heroines of the republic overnight.²² Meanwhile in 2010, the state enacted another prohibition on religious attire.

¹⁶ Carol Tavris (1992), *The Mismeasure of Woman*, New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 17.

¹⁷ Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad b. Makram Ibn al-Manzur (n.d.), *Lisan al-'Arab*, Vol. 9, Qaherah: Dar al-Ma'arif, p. 777.

¹⁸ Wizarat al-Awqaf wa al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah (1983), *al-Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah*, Vol. 17, Kuwait: Wizarat al-Awqaf wa al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah, p. 7; Fadila Grine and Munazza Saeed (2017), "Is Hijab a Fashion Statement? A Study of Malaysian Muslim Women," *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 430 and 443.

¹⁹ John R. Bowen (2011), "How the French State Justifies Controlling Muslim Bodies: From Harm-Based to Values-Based Reasoning," *Social Research*, Vol. 78, No. 2, pp. 325-348.

²⁰ Chouki El Hamel (2002), "Muslim Diaspora in Western Europe: The Islamic Headscarf (Hijab), the Media and Muslims' Integration in Franc," *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 293-308.

²¹ Mir Azri Shaharudin (April 2021), "Umat Islam Kesal Tindakan Perancis," *Sinar Harian*, <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/133005/GLOBAL/Umat-Islam-kesal-tindakan-Perancis>

²² J. Ezekiel (2005), "Magritte Meets Maghreb: This is Not a Veil," *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 47, pp. 231-243.

In specific, it has banned face veils or the niqab in public spaces such as government buildings, restaurants, movie theatres and public transportation. Pursuant to this measure, commonly but erroneously referred to as the “Burqa Ban,” law enforcement officials may request the removal of the niqab to verify a woman’s identity. They can also fine Muslim women with hijab up to 150 Euros and subject her to citizenship instruction for non-compliance. Since then, the French media have reported on the suspension of a Muslim meter reader who wore a hijab under her hat, the banning of a fashion show of veiled women, the prevention of hijab-wearing mothers from volunteering in schools; the refusal of service to a student wearing a hijab by a university cafeteria and the banning of a witness to a civil service wedding from signing the documentation because her hijab prevented her from being formally identified. Clearly, the hijab story remains newsworthy in France, and Muslim women’s identities are inextricably linked to the headscarf as a result.²³

Meanwhile in United Kingdom (UK), situations where Muslim women are compelled to remove their hijab or suffer the consequences still exist today in the UK – these are humiliating, abusive and cruel situations for any woman who believes in hijab to be placed in as well as the expression of Islamophobic hatred that scars collective Muslim psyches and strengthens anti-Muslim mindsets be they right-wing, liberal, religious or other. The facilitation of religious observance in public and social life extends beyond the hijab and includes e.g., prayer rooms facilities in public institutions, again with an eye on the requirements of female hijab. Often where prayer rooms available do not consider the fact that some worshippers may be women who wish to be segregated from men.²⁴ However, there is no ban on Islamic dress in the UK where schools are allowed to decide their own dress code after a 2007 directive which followed several high-profile court cases.²⁵ Certainly, for those women who wish to wear hijab, wearing it in London is probably easier than wearing it in any other European capital city. Though it should also be added that for those who do not wish to wear hijab, choosing not to wear it is more difficult in London than elsewhere in Europe.²⁶

As the Muslim population in Britain were coming to terms with what had happened in the United States due to the attack 9/11, some newspapers were reporting that the blame was immediately being placed on all Muslims by a minority section of the British population. Within hours of the events happening in the U.S.A. Muslims in Britain were being targeted. In *The Guardian* newspaper, Chrisafis reported on how ‘a Muslim woman went to the doctor in Harrow, north London. “You Muslims have done this!” the receptionist said in front of a packed waiting room’.²⁷ These attacks were predominantly on Muslim women, who wore the hijab and were therefore instantly identifiable as Muslims. The British press were also reporting that these attacks were not just verbal, but could have a physical and violent element to them. According to Chrisafis these included: a hammer attack on one woman; a little boy who was doused with pepper spray when out with his hijab wearing mother; a Muslim teacher who was asked if she thought she would live until 9 pm that night; and two students who had had their headscarves ripped off. The article states that: ‘simply the sight of a woman wearing hijab or “looking Muslim” has provoked a vicious reaction’. These attacks appeared to offer two scenarios for the hijab wearing women in Britain.²⁸ They could either take off the hijab to avoid identification as Muslim women, or put on the hijab to make a stand and be visible as Muslims.

Boris Johnson, Britain former Prime Minister has expressed his disapproval of the burqa. Writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, Mr Johnson said Muslim women who don the full-body veil look like “letter boxes” and “bank robbers”. That people choose to wear them in public, he wrote, is “absolutely ridiculous”. Some Dutch lawmakers seem to agree. Later the Netherlands became the fifteenth European country to implement some kind of ban on face-coverings in public places. Some countries have introduced national bans which cover all public spaces; others have passed bans that apply only in certain regions or cities, or in limited public locations, such as schools, public transport or government buildings. While

²³ Julie N. Posetti (2006), “Media Representation of the Hijab. Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers. 1822,” accessed on 17 October 2020, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/1822>.

²⁴ Ameli, Saeid R. and Merali, Arzu (2006), *Hijab, Meaning, Identity, Otherization and Politics: British Muslim Women*, United Kingdom: Islamic Human Right Commission, p. 74.

²⁵ BBC News (2018), “The Islamic Veil across Europe,” accessed on 17 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-1303809>.

²⁶ Tarlo Emma (2007), “Hijab in London: Metamorphosis, Resonance and Effects,” *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 1-26

²⁷ Angelique Chrisafis (Dis 2001), “Under siege,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2001/dec/08/weekend.angeliquechrisafis>.

²⁸ Kathryn Mackay (2013), “Muslim Women and the Hijab in Britain: Contexts and Choices,” PhD Thesis, University of Derby, p. 19.

the Dutch law will have little practical impact—many government officials have said they will not enforce it—it is symbolic, nonetheless.²⁹

Germany and the Netherlands

The European disapproval of the face veil has a long history. In Europe, veil bans aimed at clothing which cover portions of the face, including masks and certain helmets. They tend to target religious garments especially niqab and burqa. This is related to Islamophobia in Europe. France went first in introducing veil bans, followed by Belgium, a limited bans in the Netherlands and many European countries have seen a number of discussions of veil ban, including Bulgaria, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway.³⁰

In 2016, a German politician of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) who served as Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maiziere proposed the plan to outlaw the burqa or any full-face veil in public buildings but there has been no national law restricting the wearing of veils in Germany prior to these proposals.³¹ In the following year, hate crimes were committed against Muslims and mosques.³²

The refugee crisis and the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the Ruhr Valley has occurred in 2018. But then fortunately a former German president, Christian Wulff defended Muslims there to stop the rising tide of intolerance.³³ Christian Democrat (CDU) renewed calls to outlaw the veils in the next year. CDU stated that Germany should enshrine a dress code for Muslim women to help protect their dignity, having equal right with man and because covering face is against humanity.³⁴

In the present year, German education laws were made at state level, thus it is up to every single state to provide its own laws for schools and universities, some outlaw the full-face veils while the rest do not because Muslims have a right to unconditional protection of their freedom of religion.³⁵ There are regulations at the federal level: female federal officials, female soldiers, drivers, and also during women's identity examinations, all of them are not allowed to cover their faces. Germany has no general ban on wearing full-face veils in public.³⁶ Plus, Germany's highest court upheld a ban on headscarves for Muslim trainee lawyers in courts.³⁷

In the Netherlands, Dutch Members of Parliament backed a ban on the Islamic full veil in public places such as schools and hospitals and on public transport in the year of 2016.³⁸ This largely in response to the growing popularity of Geert Wilders' anti-Islam Freedom party.³⁹ The wearing of headscarves is far more common. In the following year, Human Rights Institute Rules Police Administrative Staff were allowed to wear hijab with uniform. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race, or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.⁴⁰

The Dutch Senate has banned the wearing of face-covering clothing in schools, public transport, government buildings and hospitals in 2018. Yet, it does not apply to the hijab, or Islamic headscarves

²⁹ The Economist (2019), "Burqa Bans Have Proliferated in Western Europe," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/08/09/burqa-bans-have-proliferated-in-western-europe>.

³⁰ NYE Bevan News (2019), "Dutch Burqa Ban Comes into Effect," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://nyebevannews.co.uk/dutch-burqa-ban-comes-into-effect/>.

³¹ BBC News (2018), "The Islamic Veil across Europe," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095>.

³² Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2018), "Germany Sees Almost 1,000 Anti-Muslim Crimes in 2017," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-sees-almost-1000-anti-muslim-crimes-in-2017/a-42810445>.

³³ Elizabeth Schumacher (2018), "Mistrust and Islamophobia See Dramatic Rise in Germany's Melting Pot," *Deutsche Welle (DW) News*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/mistrust-and-islamophobia-see-dramatic-rise-in-germanys-melting-pot/a-42994090>.

³⁴ Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2019), "German Conservatives Renew Calls for a Burqa Ban," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-conservatives-renew-calls-for-a-burqa-ban/a-49861694>.

³⁵ Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2020), "Hamburg Court Rules against School Niqab and Burqa Ban," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/hamburg-court-rules-against-school-niqab-and-burqa-ban/a-52246574>.

³⁶ Christoph Hasselbach (2020), "German Authorities, Politicians Divided on Niqab, Burqa Ban," *Deutsche Welle (DW) News*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-authorities-politicians-divided-on-niqab-burqa-ban/a-52297543>.

³⁷ Al-Jazeera (2020), "German Court Upholds Headscarf Ban for Legal Clerks," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/german-court-upholds-headscarf-ban-legal-clerks-200227100402475.html>.

³⁸ BBC News, "The Islamic Veil across Europe."

³⁹ The Guardian (2019), "Dutch 'Burqa Ban' Rendered Largely Unworkable on First Day," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/01/dutch-police-signal-unwillingness-enforce-new-burqa-ban>.

⁴⁰ The Library of Congress (2017), "Netherlands: Human Rights Institute Rules Police Administrative Staffer Can Wear Hijab with Uniform," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/netherlands-human-rights-institute-rules-police-administrative-staffer-can-wear-hijab-with-uniform/>.

that only cover the hair.⁴¹ In the following year, a fine of at least €150 if they cover their face with a veil. The ban not only applies to burqas and other veils, but also full-face helmets and balaclavas. It was unclear whether authorities will enforce the law, many cities have said they will not press fines.⁴²

In the year 2020, The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March. As the world looks for ways to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, face masks have become common in countries that restrict face veils. The wearing of protective face masks has become one of the most widespread means of combating the coronavirus pandemic globally even in countries where religious coverings are banned, an irony not lost on many. After initially discouraging residents from wearing face masks over concerns to supply chains for key workers and doubts over their effectiveness, authorities across the world now near unanimously encourage their use, with some requiring that people wear them in areas they are likely to encounter crowds, such as on public transport.⁴³

In the Netherlands, citizens are now required to wear masks on trains and buses. In 2019, a law came into effect banning face coverings on public transportation, in hospitals and in schools. Satvinder Juss, a lawyer and a human rights expert said that Europe's burqa wearers are now legally, on much "firmer ground" given the newly publicized health guidance around face coverings. He said that if a police officer were to single out and challenge a woman for wearing a burqa or niqab in public, since she would potentially be surrounded by others wearing home-sourced face coverings, the officer would "clearly be engaging in religious discrimination and sex discrimination," which is forbidden under the European Convention of Human Rights.⁴⁴

A medical drama on U.S. television, contains many scenes of doctors and nurses in full gear (hospital scrubs, surgical caps, face masks) around the operating table. As they talk, laugh, and argue, close-ups of the actors' eyes convey concentration and emotion. These scenes contradict one of the common arguments against face coverings, or more accurately, niqabs worn by some Muslim women that they are a barrier to communication. Now that face masks are being used to help fight against the spread of COVID-19, it has caused some to look anew at general discrimination against Muslim women wearing niqabs.⁴⁵

Lawyers and critics now say that in light of coronavirus, legal arguments against the burqa ban are much weaker and that it's time to put an end to the criminalisation of women who choose to cover their faces in public. For Karima Rahmani and other Muslim women who wear the niqab, verbal or physical attacks by people opposed to their religious clothing are a regular occurrence. After more than a decade of a highly politicised discussion, a so-called burqa ban came into effect last year, prohibiting women from covering their faces in certain public spaces, including government buildings, schools, hospitals, and on public transport. The government says the bans are needed to encourage integration and are necessary for public safety reasons. Similar arguments have been used to implement bans in various European nations, including France, Belgium, Denmark, Austria, as well as to place restrictions in parts of Germany. Yet with the coronavirus pandemic leading to mandatory mask measures, lawyers and critics are now saying that in light of these rules, legal arguments against the burqa are much weaker, and that it's time to put an end to a discussion that they say has criminalised women who choose to cover their faces in public.⁴⁶

Wearing face masks and therefore covering face, has become a condition for living together. The necessity of wearing face masks or alternatives in the current situation is clear: wearing face masks is necessary to protect others and specially to protect vulnerable members of society. The pandemic has

⁴¹ Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2018), "Dutch Parliament Passes Partial 'Burqa Ban'," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/dutch-parliament-passes-partial-burqa-ban/a-44405421>.

⁴² Marco Müller (2019), "Where Are 'Burqa Bans' in Europe?" *Deutsche Welle (DW) News*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/where-are-burqa-bans-in-europe/a-49843292>.

⁴³ TRT World (2020), "Face Masks Become Popular in Countries Where Face Veils are Banned," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/face-masks-become-popular-in-countries-where-face-veils-are-banned-35365>.

⁴⁴ Lou Stoppard (2020), "Will Mandatory Face Masks End the Burqa Bans?" *The New York Times*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/style/face-mask-burqa-ban.html>.

⁴⁵ The Conversations (2020), "We Are All Niqabis Now: Coronavirus Masks Reveal Hypocrisy of Face Covering Bans," accessed April 8, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/we-are-all-niqabis-now-coronavirus-masks-reveal-hypocrisy-of-face-covering-bans-136030>.

⁴⁶ Gouri Sharma (2020), "Mandatory Covid-19 Facemasks Expose Bigoted Nature of Burqa Bans in Europe," *TRT World*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/mandatory-covid-19-facemasks-expose-bigoted-nature-of-burqa-bans-in-europe-36959>.

shown us that the obligation to uncover our face is not necessary to socially interact, contrary to what has been highlighted in the past to limit the freedom of some Muslim women. Women who wear religious face veils are now in a stronger position because of the new legislative initiatives regarding face masks.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Generally, issue of hijab that has arisen in the European countries gradually has been accepted by the media as an obligation yet benefit to the Muslim women for wearing it and no longer as an oppression towards them or under man's dominance by wearing it. Besides, the ban of hijab, particularly in France is seen as a violation to the freedom in practising their religion by the media. Furthermore, issues of hijab in European countries currently is concerning more on veil and purdah or niqab rather than headscarves as wearing of headscarves is generally accepted by the European communities. Hence, effort and endeavour towards educating the local European community regarding the subject of hijab and other Islamic principles need to be enhanced. A bridge between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities should be built in an attempt to understand each other. Moreover, Muslims should be more visible either in the local society or in the media to refute all the bad images and perceptions towards Islam, as well as to portray them in media to the community with the true and fair image of Islam.

References

- Al-Jazeera (2020), "German Court Upholds Headscarf Ban for Legal Clerks," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/02/german-court-upholds-headscarf-ban-legal-clerks-200227100402475.html>.
- Al-Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad b. Makram Ibn (n.d.), *Lisan al-'Arab*, Vol. 9, Qaherah: Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf (1995), *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam (al-Halal wa al-Haram fi al-Islam)*, Kamal El-Helbawy, M. Moinuddin Siddiqui and Syed Shukry (trans.), Kuwait: Al Faisal Press.
- Ameli, Saeid R. and Merali, Arzu (2006), *Hijab, Meaning, Identity, Otherization and Politics: British Muslim Women*, United Kingdom: Islamic Human Right Commission.
- Ayotte, Kevin J., and Mary E. Husain (2005), "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil," *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 112-133.
- BBC News (2018), "The Islamic Veil across Europe," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13038095>.
- Boulamour, Aisya Wood (2006), "The Notion of Modesty in Muslim Women's Clothing: An Islamic Point of View," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 134-156.
- Bowen, John R. (2011), "How the French State Justifies Controlling Muslim Bodies: From Harm-Based to Values-Based Reasoning," *Social Research*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 325-348.
- Chrisafis, Angelique (2001), "Under siege," *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2001/dec/08/weekend.angeliquechrisafis>.
- Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2018), "Dutch Parliament Passes Partial 'Burqa Ban'," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/dutch-parliament-passes-partial-burqa-ban/a-44405421>.
- Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2018), "Germany Sees Almost 1,000 Anti-Muslim Crimes in 2017," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-sees-almost-1000-anti-muslim-crimes-in-2017/a-42810445>.

⁴⁷ European Network of Equality Bodies (2020), "The Ban on Full-Face Veils and the Covid-19 Pandemic," accessed April 8, 2020, <https://equineteurope.org/2020/the-ban-on-full-face-veils-and-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2019), "German Conservatives Renew Calls for a Burqa Ban," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-conservatives-renew-calls-for-a-burqa-ban/a-49861694>.

Deutsche Welle (DW) News (2020), "Hamburg Court Rules against School Niqab and Burqa Ban," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/hamburg-court-rules-against-school-niqab-and-burqa-ban/a-52246574>.

El Hamel, Chouki (2002), "Muslim Diaspora in Western Europe: The Islamic Headscarf (Hijab), the Media and Muslims' Integration in Franc.," *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 293-308.

El-Guindi, Fadwa (1999), *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Elizabeth Schumacher (2018), "Mistrust and Islamophobia See Dramatic Rise in Germany's Melting Pot," *Deutsche Welle (DW) News*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/mistrust-and-islamophobia-see-dramatic-rise-in-germanys-melting-pot/a-42994090>.

European Network of Equality Bodies (2020), "The Ban on Full-Face Veils and the Covid-19 Pandemic," accessed April 8, 2020, <https://equineteurope.org/2020/the-ban-on-full-face-veils-and-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

Ezekiel, J. (2005), "Magritte Meets Maghreb: This is Not a Veil," *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 47, 231-243.

Fashela Jailanee, Rich Ling and Pranav Malhotra (2019), "R(e)-veiling the Hijab: Social Media, Islamic Fashion, and Religious Identity in Singapore," Conference Paper, 69th Annual ICA Conference, Washington DC.

Gouri Sharma (2020), "Mandatory Covid-19 Facemasks Expose Bigoted Nature of Burqa Bans in Europe," *TRT World*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/mandatory-covid-19-facemasks-expose-bigoted-nature-of-burqa-bans-in-europe-36959>

Grine, Fadila and Saeed, Munazza (2017), "Is Hijab a Fashion Statement? A Study of Malaysian Muslim Women," *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, Vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 430-443.

Guidi, Fadwa El (1999). *Veil, Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. New York: Berg, 14.

Hasselbach, Christoph (2020), "German Authorities, Politicians Divided on Niqab, Burqa Ban," *Deutsche Welle (DW) News*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-authorities-politicians-divided-on-niqab-burqa-ban/a-52297543>.

Kabgani, Sajad (2013). The Representation of Muslim Women in Non-Islamic Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study on Guardian. *International Journal of Women's Research* 2(1): 57-78.

Kamalipour, Yahya R. (1997). *The US Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*. United State: Greenwood Publishing Group, 178.

Kwan, Mei-Po. (2008). From Oral Histories o Visual Narratives: Re-Presenting the Post- September 11 Experiences of The Muslim Women in the USA. *Social & Cultural Geography* 9 (6): 653-669

Lentin, Ronit (2007). Ireland: Racial State and Crisis Racism 1. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (4): 610-627

Lou Stoppard (2020), "Will Mandatory Face Masks End the Burqa Bans?" *The New York Times*, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/style/face-mask-burqa-ban.html>.

Mackay, Kathryn (2013). Muslim Women and the Hijab in Britain: Contexts and Choices. PhD Thesis. University of Derby, 19.

- Marco Müller (2019), "Where Are 'Burqa Bans' in Europe?" *Deutsche Welle (DW) News*, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/where-are-burqa-bans-in-europe/a-49843292>.
- Mir Azri Shaharudin (April 2021) "Umat Islam Kesal Tindakan Perancis" *Sinar Harian* <https://www.sinarharian.com.my/article/133005/GLOBAL/Umat-Islam-kesal-tindakan-Perancis>
- Muhammad Ashraf Khan and Sadaf Zahra (2016). Portrayal of Muslim by Western Print Media: a Textual Analysis in Feministic & Orientalist Perspective. *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* 17: 41-57.
- NYE Bevan News (2019), "Dutch Burqa Ban Comes into Effect," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://nyebevannews.co.uk/dutch-burqa-ban-comes-into-effect/>.
- Posetti, Julie N. (2006). Media Representation of the Hijab. Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers. 1822. Accessed on 17 October 2020 <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/1822>
- Rahman, Sk. Mahrufur, Islam, Md. Nazmul and Ferdousi, Atia (2018), "Is Hijab a Fashion Statement? A Study on Bangladeshi Women," *Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 20, No. 12, 21-27.
- Reeves, T.C and Azam, L. (2012). To Wear Hijab or Not: Muslims Women Perceptions of their Healthcare Workplaces. *Journal of Business Diversity* 12 (2): 41-58
- Siti Juwariyah (2019), "Muslim Women and Veiling: What Does it Signifies?" *MIQOT*, Vol. 43, No.1, 79-94.
- Tarlo. Emma (2007), "Hijab in London: Metamorphosis, Resonance and Effects," *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1-26
- Tavris, Carol (1992), *The Mismeasure of Woman*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- The Conversations (2020), "We Are All Niqabis Now: Coronavirus Masks Reveal Hypocrisy of Face Covering Bans," accessed April 8, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/we-are-all-niqabis-now-coronavirus-masks-reveal-hypocrisy-of-face-covering-bans-136030>.
- The Economist (2019), "Burqa Bans Have Proliferated in Western Europe," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/08/09/burqa-bans-have-proliferated-in-western-europe>.
- The Guardian (2019), "Dutch 'Burqa Ban' Rendered Largely Unworkable on First Day," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/01/dutch-police-signal-unwillingness-enforce-new-burqa-ban>.
- The Library of Congress (2017), "Netherlands: Human Rights Institute Rules Police Administrative Staffer Can Wear Hijab with Uniform," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/netherlands-human-rights-institute-rules-police-administrative-staffer-can-wear-hijab-with-uniform/>.
- TRT World (2020), "Face Masks Become Popular in Countries Where Face Veils are Banned," accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/face-masks-become-popular-in-countries-where-face-veils-are-banned-35365>.
- Wizarat al-Awqaf wa al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah (1983), *al-Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah*, Vol. 17, Kuwait: Wizarat al-Awqaf wa al-Shu'un al-Islamiyyah.

