



Diary of the Hijab

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Abstract

To understand the position the veil has within modern society and examine the perspective of women. It is also to understand and know the reasons for wearing and not wearing the hijab and the opinions of women about it. To study the respect issues associated with hijab, by actively wearing and not wearing; expectations and treatment on the streets. Interviews, observations and participant observations were methods to study.

Hijab? What does that mean?

The hijab: a mystery, the unknown, the censored. Who is this woman? What is her story? Why do we assume she is different? Who am I to think I can judge her rightfully? One simple piece of cloth covering the hair has caused a divide globally, a divide religiously even within Islam, easy stereotyping, mystery, fear and mostly confusion. It enrages feminists, supports patriarchy, lessens adultery (in theory), makes women feel safe, can be oppressive or liberating and most importantly contributes to one individual's personal devotion to Allah. One decision can have so many different reactions and interpretations.

Most religions hold one book very true to their faith but I have never experienced the devotion and importance given to one book as I see in Islam. The energy of the Quran must be very powerful. Before reading it, necessary cleansing must be done. The face of my brother whispering quietly to himself while washing each part of his body necessary for prayer is so full; full of devotion, focus and thought. I enjoy these moments. I should not be watching but I am. The Quran is held to be perfectly true, words straight from Allah through the messenger Mohammed. The words have never changed even though the meaning has been altered; a timeless book. Studying the Quran is not supported in school; instead the task of understanding the Quran is entrusted to qualified religious scholars. Allah does not expect us to understand. We are limited by our simple minds. We are also limited by language. Our minds have a way of creating what we need or want to hear, which is problematic. Different interpretations are the cause of so many problems.

Then again, who are these religious scholars? Who gives them the authority to successfully interpret the Quran as rules for the Muslim population? This is where the controversy of the hijab and its significance in Islam comes about. It also opens up an opportunity for corruption. Who can be trusted? Maybe only ourselves and our relationship to God; maybe no one. I respect the idea that possibly God is so above us that not everything can

be clearly explained. We are simple, but then why would he create something for us that we cannot understand? Possibly it is necessary for us all to have our own journeys to try to understand it in context with our own lives. What if different interpretations are necessary to answer specific situations? I am not here to come up with answers, I only create more questions. For this reason, I will attempt to analyze the main scripture about the hijab and make my own interpretation.

Fatima Mernissi supports and helps me understand this scripture more as I am also limited by my inability to understand and read Arabic. For this I am completely dependent on her interpretation...interpretations interpretations interpretations; an inevitable limit. Instead of referring to women wearing hijab to cover themselves, the verse in the Quran is actually in a different context. “The hijab- literally ‘curtain’ – ‘descended,’ not to put a barrier between a man and woman, but between two men. The descent of the hijab is an event dating back to verse 53 of Sura 33, which was revealed during year 5 of the Hejira (AD 627).” (Mernissi-85) It is presented in a situation having more importance in not annoying the prophet by prolonging one’s welcome in his house. “The verse of the hijab ‘descended’ in the bedroom of the wedded pair to protect their intimacy and exclude a third person- in this case, Anas Ibn Malikm one of the Prophet’s companions.” (Mernissi-85) This verse refers to respecting privacy else with the use of a curtain, what I do not understand is how it turned into certifying that all women should veil outside of the house all of the time? Repetition; we interpret what we want to hear.

There are other references to the hijab in the Quran that could lead to the idea of women needing to be veiled. There is an understanding that no man should marry any of the Prophet’s wives after he has died, those women are only for him. There was a lot of protection with those women including the Prophet having strict restrictions on outsiders seeing his wives. This protection and censorship may have been needed for the Prophet’s wives only to

be covered because they are sacred. The material idea of the veil came from recorded utterances by Mohammed in his home to his wives. It is understandable that Muslims would strive to be like Mohammed by living the way he did and therefore try to argue that their wives should be concealed as well. But perhaps concealment is only for the Prophet Mohammad's wives, not for all mankind; a special rule for a special person. Once again this is put up to interpretation.

I heard a story of a mother who always rewarded her child with frozen vegetables; tricky mother. She presented these vegetables as a treat. Therefore, the child loved vegetables and felt it tasted like what most of the world would consider candy. This was not brainwashing but a different perception of vegetables during upbringing. This child then viewed vegetables entirely different than others his age. While the perspective on the veil is levels deeper, it can compare to how what one sees and learns in his life contributes to a specific perspective. The women I have generally talked to, even the ones who did not currently veil plan on wearing it in the future. No women I talked to were against the veil for good. Their reason for respecting the hijab was its presence and clarity in the Quran. It is important to veil according to interpretations of the Quran, I was told. I was surprised to see that most women had not questioned the veil further especially when it changes a life so dramatically. Cultural norms probably attributed to some of that.

First, in history veiling was a part of traditional dress, not part of religion. Then there was apparent evidence in the Quran, at least women were told of the evidence. Women were illiterate for many years making them dependent on the men in their lives who could read and interpret the scriptures. When the illiteracy rate for women increased so did another restriction. An idea emerged that it was shameful to study and attempt to interpret the Quran because it could change the meaning. All of these progressive changes sound somewhat suspicious with men in control; constantly forbidding the interpretation by women, claiming it

to be illegitimate. Through this research, women found the controversy of the hijab and had a hard time locating the supposed evidence in the Quran. The only direct evidence of hijab being necessary in Islam is through interpretations by man. In my opinion, the Quran by itself is not clear.

“And tell the faithful women ...not to display their beauty except what is apparent of it.”
Quranic injunction (see Surat An-nour, verse 31)

While this excerpt clearly mentions the importance of modesty with women, there are no specifics of what should be covered. There was a question of the specificity of it even to the Prophet supposedly laid out in a Hadith. I was told, “In a Hadith, the prophet (Peace be upon Him) was asked to explain "what is apparent of it". He didn't say anything but he pointed to his face and hands. That's why women should cover themselves and show only the face and the hands. It is significant because you don't need to see more to deal with a woman as a human being not a sex object.” (Interview with Rachida)

Muhammad’s reason for having his wife cover in the streets was to avoid harassment and create some sort of identity. Men in the medinas routinely harassed slave women and were socially allowed to. “Women, whatever their status, were being harassed in the streets, pursued by men who subjected them to the humiliating practice of ta’arrud –literally ‘taking up a position along a woman’s path to urge her to fornicate,’ to commit the act of zina.” (Mernissi-180) The men’s excuse for harassing the Prophet’s wives was there was no significant identification of slave women, so instead all women would be harassed.

Muhammad advised his wives to wear a certain cloak to clearly show their status as not belonging to the slaves. He advised them to cover themselves with it so it was obvious. It was not to introduce a new type of clothing necessary in Islam, but instead a different way to wear the clothing they already had, in order to distinguish their identity to avoid unnecessary harassment. The Prophet Muhammad wanted all people to be able to walk freely. The hijab

nowadays may have been opposite of what he wanted, concealment of women and an excuse for men. “The hijab represented the exact opposite of what he had wanted to bring about. It was the incarceration of the absence of internal control; it was the veiling of the sovereign will, which is the source of good judgement and order in a society.” (Mernissi-185) He ideally wanted everyone to be individually responsible for their own action while following the guidelines mapped out by Allah. The hijab actually allowed for the torture and harassment of slaves to continue, by creating a divide between women. If the veil had not been created, instead for lack of identification, all women would need to be respected. Abdallah Ibn Ubayy kept this from happening, addicted to women as sex object and being able to own them and do as he pleased.

For some women nowadays, the hijab could be a way of making a woman equal, covering parts that make her feminine instead of a trophy. While I respect this, why must women conceal themselves instead of a man simply controlling himself and his thoughts? I feel that with a certain mindset, a man could turn any girl into a sex object. Why is the man’s conscious and control over his thought ignored and the dress of a woman targeted instead? And why is nudity and even more simply, skin interchangeable with sex? Bare skin does not mean sex. Nudity is natural, the body exists for everyone, so why, especially in Morocco, is the subject of concealment always pertain to the control of sexual desire? With concealment, there is no separation between nudity and sex, thus making the forbidden more desirable.

Scalding Hot

This was the hottest experience of my life. The hijab, worn in many ways and with many colors comes with a lot of physical restrictions. Wrapped tightly around my neck and face I struggled with heat exhaustion. I was trying hard not to think about it too much so as not to hyperventilate and burn up, cooking from the inside out like a batch of brownies. It was like

experiencing menopause for two weeks. The hijab; temperature torture for an inexperienced American.

It definitely restricted the things I was able to do; then again I was only at the first stages of getting used to the veil. There were a few days I had to go back and take it off because I was miserable in the heat; stripping as soon as I got through the door, making sure there were no men of course. Itchy neck syndrome was also a common occurrence. I had a hard time eating, drinking, hiking (especially with luggage), travelling and anything else active where I would need to be advanced in hijab-wearing. With each bite of a chawarma, I could track every movement through my throat with the scarf wrapped tightly around my juggler. This caused two things; chewing happened less and therefore swallowing was hard. Choking was a constant possibility. Eating was the most uncomfortable part of the hijab, with pressure always on the throat.

Once while sitting on a wall, eating a sandwich, the rapid throat movements progressively made my hijab looser and looser around my face. I was so nervous, hoping that I could fix it as to not be instantly exposed to a shocked street. At first, I tried to be sly with rewrapping and fixing but as I was failing I became more panicked and finally turned around to face the wall. That was probably very obvious. I got some confused and amused looks. Close call; almost a *shuma bezzef*.

Hijab and Etiquette

There is certain etiquette to follow while wearing hijab that I failed miserably. I felt very ashamed and inappropriate for things I normally can do with no problem. For example, I was lying down on the train sleeping; culturally unacceptable while wearing hijab. I was aware of this beforehand but as the train ride got longer, my head got heavier, and the seat

next to me was consistently unoccupied I just could not resist. (Sidenote: No man tried to sit by me or talk to me even when I was sitting by myself; a change from daily life as a Westerner.) I felt instant shame when I woke up. On the bright side I did not have to worry about wild, sleep hair. Just a little hijab joke.

I was supposed to be respectable, composed, introverted and calm. Most of the time, without really thinking about it, I automatically fit the mold of a woman in hijab. Sometimes, the hijab especially when combined with jelaba closed me up. I became quieter, less like myself and diverting my eyes often. I could not be animated. It was intentional at the beginning, but as time went on it became normal, like I was putting on a costume and playing a certain character. Although many times I did not realize I was doing it.

The hijab is becoming more and more common in Morocco. It entails covering the hair and neck around the face. The term veil refers to covering the head. The hijab refers to covering everything but the hands, feet and face. There are all kinds of different styles and different levels of modesty. The niqaab is the more extreme form of hijab covering the whole face as well, leaving only the eyes. I think there could be a lot of sexual appeal to this which goes against the purpose. There are women completely concealed with dramaticized eye makeup. Doesn't this counteract the purpose of the hijab? To conceal as to not tempt men, keep men in check and faithful. Then why at the same time are they wearing eye makeup to stand out? Blending in while simultaneously trying to stand out. For me, things that are forbidden are all the more enticing. I want them more. I am a woman and yet I am still so curious to see the hair of a woman who wears hijab. I want to see it so bad. I am sure for a man it is only ten times worse. Does this concealment help in keeping men focused? Or does it promote more radical behavior when something is not concealed?

Skin Radar

Being in Morocco for four months has changed me; I am now so sensitive to skin. I have a skin radar. I used to have fish smell radar. I was not used to the intense smell of fish guts polluting the street close to my house in the medina. Now I am so familiar with it. It does not phase me. It may even be my new smell of choice. But now I have skin radar. I can spot legs and arms, especially shoulders or chest, instantly in a crowd. Without even meaning to I am instantly staring. I cannot imagine what it is like for these men having lived their whole lives with concealment. Even if there was no physical attraction which there obviously is, curiosity overtakes most people.

This man, an artist in a whole in the wall shop in the winding roads of the medina in Chefchaouen was nice enough. His face looked young but he was older. He was a typical Moroccan guy without a creep factor. He was happy to help and talk. His belly hung over his pants a little but not much. At the beginning, he was not very interested in my presence in the store until he realized I was not perfect in Arabic; or realized I did not know much Arabic at all, either way. Their faces always light up 10 times when they realize I am American. It is the most unbelievable thing. He became friendlier, asking me to sit, showing me each individual piece of art. (This all happened post questioning of my citizenship.)

Inti Maghrebia? Sometimes I lie as a joke, just to throw them off a little. He explained that the hijab is to keep men from looking twice. In his opinion, life is hard for a man when women are wearing short skirts or their belly is showing. He does not prefer anything right now in his search for a woman but would definitely like to have a wife who wears hijab; not expressed as possession but might as well. Men would prefer their woman to be covered so other men do not look at THEIR woman. I am almost positive they would not want all women to be covered. They want to be able to look around even while with a woman. I personally believe that a wandering eye is healthy as long as there is no intention of doing anything.

While being in the most liberal, predominantly Muslim country, I am amazed by the closed perspectives of the Moroccan men I have talked to. This is not speaking for all men either. This is the feminist in me coming out.

He painted this picture in my mind; if all women wore hijab outside the house than it would be easier for men to focus. Men could walk through the streets without needing to turn around (as if there was no control if a woman is uncovered). If he is walking and sees a woman with a short skirt he will automatically be thinking about that girl and not about his wife anymore. He even mentioned bringing her back with him or going somewhere... if a girl was uncovered. I complained about men's lack of control and responsibility. He then confirmed his own control stating that he can handle it a few times (acting it out physically) where he sees a beautiful woman, then turns, shakes his head to get his mind off of it and keeps walking. "But if it continues happening, 3, 4, 5 times..." (Pause then guilty smile and laughter). He was able to recognize his own control of diverting his thoughts a few times but still did not understand that it is his responsibility to keep doing this. His understanding is that if it happens too many times, it is just not his fault if he loses control and cheats. This drove me crazy. While he was very open, I walked home in my blue hijab and white scarf frustrated and empathetic for Moroccan women.

My theory; possibly hijab is a symbol of religion and control for men. It is a reminder to not sin. It is not about covering women; it is about reminding men. There is evidence of men being able to control themselves, even within Morocco but religious interpretations have provided an excuse for their actions so they can avoid blame. Islam is not at blame but interpretations of interpretations are problematic, like I always say. Men can live productively and healthy alongside uncovered women. Men have to learn of their own power over desire. The question is, do they want to?

Life in Morocco- “Tsst, Tsst Pretty Girl” style

Being white and American does not help in the *suques* of Morocco, trying to buy some traditional yellow *bilhas* or some cedar jewelry box. It does not help in walking the winding streets of the medina at night either. In this case you are walking *fluss* (\$). My friends were often threatened with knives for their money. It also does not help in walking down the street, dressed in a small tee with an animal on the front and jeans when you aren't aware of the skin radar yet. In the states, if your shirt raises and shows your belly *shawea* (a little), no big deal. In Morocco, a glimpse of your stomach, shoulder or leg is guaranteed for comments. Actually being a western woman alone is a guaranteed target for attention; a frantic attempt at any language you may know (Hola, bonita, ca'va, I love you, Tea?). What do they think of accomplishing from these comments? Are they thinking there are some odds that the woman of interest is going to turn around and pull the stalker into an embrace? How do men see this as desirable for women?

It is a game. It is a game of power. Men know they can do it and therefore abuse it. The term harassment would not even be used to explain the treatment of women on the street. A Moroccan woman told me she had never encountered harassment in Morocco. (Interview with Asmae) I stopped, disbelievingly and then realized the definition of harassment is different compared to America. Verbal harassment is not included and the physical harassment has to go pretty far to be labelled HARRASSMENT for Moroccans. An extreme definition of harassment keeps men from feeling like they are doing something wrong. Most Moroccan men talk negatively about it when it happens to their sister, friend or a female in the family, but then do it themselves while in the streets; an interesting and aggravating twist. For men, they advise us to simply “ignore it” like that is a solution. How, when it is affecting your safety? How do you ignore a creepy man hissing in your ear repeatedly ready to pounce on you at any moment?

Or are they telling themselves that although women ignore that underneath the yell back and roll of their eyes women really like it? The problem is harassment is so common in Morocco that it has become normal leading to its acceptance. Now most men do it. This slowly makes it acceptable. Moroccan women sometimes do not even complain about it, because they have no idea what life could be like. They have no idea of anything otherwise. Interestingly some women have started wearing the veil mostly or purely for harassment sake; for safety. Women have to change their lifestyle in order to avoid men. How is that fair, even within religion?

The effect of American movies on Moroccan TV can also sometimes be seen on the streets. Once mid-conversation a Moroccan man smoothly leaned close to my face to exclaim “Extreme Action” without hesitating for a second in his stroll. Moroccan men are prime driven by harassers, losing no time or space. Extreme action had to have come from a movie preview of some sort. I can only imagine the phrases Moroccan men could pick up from movies, use and possibly not even understand.

Men will try anything to get your attention, waving, jumping, every language, sounds, and the most famous hissing. There seems to be a constant hexagon of men surrounding me at all times; reforming their position at my every step. The best is when a group of men is intensely discussing something, but everything stops when I (or any woman for that matter) come into view. (Even me, an average looking girl with frizzy hair, crooked teeth and probably having showered 5 days ago. A woman can always look to the streets for some self-esteem. I feel pretty attractive in Morocco; I will have attention shock when I get back to the United States. I may even miss being hit on by old men with no teeth. Who knows?)

Regardless, the harassment is intense. I have been followed, grabbed, yelled at and the worst breathed on. There was an attempted kiss in Tetouan. It is frustrating to always have to be on guard, and to remember that even if they are calling your name, do not turn around. Eye

contact is an instant regret. The language with the eyes is unknown to me therefore I shouldn't toy with things I don't understand. Men are adamant about their harassment. No shame in Morocco. I have observed men repeatedly try to get a girl's attention, openly, obviously and intensely. The woman will have no response whatsoever and the man goes back to talking. In America, this would be so incredibly embarrassing and rightfully so. Rejection is expected on the streets. It is more of a surprise when the girl responds in any way. This is where I had some trouble. I have a hard time ignoring. *Safi* was a lifesaver for harassment. That and *shuma*.

I successfully got a persistent stalker of my friend to stop following us. This was attributed to the word *shuma* and also the fact that I was wearing hijab. A religious woman forcefully saying *shuma* must have more meaning. It was a rewarding experience. Especially when I knew that she was unable to get rid of him the day before.

Then again, I made a *shuma* comment that backfired. A whole group of little kids were following me on the streets of the medina. I thought cute, I like kids. Then they started commenting on my boobs. First of all, I have a small chest and second of all, they were all around eight years old. Where are they learning this? A cute interaction with Moroccan kids quickly became annoying and embarrassing; they were yelling anything to get a rise out of me. I started swatting at them like flies and said *shuma*. This was by my house, so it wasn't the last time I would see them. Daily they followed me to mimic my *shuma*. Just one of those things you regret.

As the night grows on, the harassment gets scarier and more persistent. Life for a woman is very limited when it comes to time. My host niece and nephews who are 8 and 10 were safer on the streets than I was. They were allowed out later than me. It is like the older you get, the earlier the curfew. While using a public phone men just stand, staring and making comments. These comments are usually, "beautiful", "I want you", "*zweena*", "*jameela*",

“gazella” and the creepy “hot sex”. There is such a big range. All men look, turn around and scan the figure of women constantly. I feel like a walking TV, always playing the latest soccer game.

Life behind the hijab

This is the peak of the paper; the actual experience of an American in a hijab. First of all, I was nervous and excited but knew there were parts of my personality that needed to be concealed, like extensive hand movements and facial expressions or dancing whenever there is music.

Speedy Arabic

My first encounter was at seven in the morning at the Rabat train station. I was dressed in a long, blue flowery shirt with a purple long sleeved shirt underneath and a purple hijab glove over my hair; a typical fashion hijab. A man approached me respectfully, keeping his distance asking me in fast Arabic which train went to Meknes. He clearly thought that I was Moroccan. Even after I answered not knowing, with broken, chewed and spit up Arabic, he continued to speak to me in fast Arabic. When he finally realized that I really did not know much Arabic (by me telling him) he went to French. I told him I was American. This was very weird news to him. As I don't like to lie, when confronted with the question “Are you Muslim?” or “Why are you wearing that?” I respond with “There are Muslim Americans”. I think it is pretty sly. It could be very offensive to some people that I am wearing it without being Muslim.

Speedy Arabic happened automatically at my first question in every city I visited including Rabat, Asilah, Tangier, Tetouan and Chefchaouen. Even when I was openly and fluently speaking English with other Americans I was with, there was no possibility of me

being from anywhere but Morocco. Instead of asking if I was from somewhere else when I couldn't understand fast Arabic, Moroccans would just repeat things louder. I was asked for directions; but always treated respectfully. I was not followed or asked for food by little kids. I was not followed by creepy men. It was fantastic. For this reason, I felt very liberated. My ultimate wish came true; I was mistaken for Moroccan, even after I spoke. Check.

While rummaging through shoes in the amazing leather shops with some of my American friends, people were confused. It seemed like I always ended up in a shoe store no matter what my plans were previously. The bright colors and pointy toes just attract me. It was interesting trying on lace up sandals in a *jelaba* and headscarf. But while laughing, joking and talking in English with my friend Hannah, the shopkeeper continued to speak to me in fast Arabic. This happened for more than one day. Either I am really good at acting and pronunciation, or the presence of hijab sold me as a Moroccan woman. Hannah would ask him a question like *bshell* and he would turn to me to answer in fast Arabic. Most of the time I did not understand and looked to Hannah in panic for some help. I really did not want to give it away. Even after responding badly and him repeating phrases more than once, progressively louder and with less patience, he still believed me to be Moroccan.

I was watched very closely only because I was with Americans, people were very curious of our relationship. How did we meet? Let's just say I had some very good practice on my Arabic during my research. The fastest and most Arabic was spoken to me in this time. I also felt a lot more pressure to understand to keep my research more accurate. Being treated like a fellow Moroccan was fun, exciting but also frustrating.

Ignorance is bliss, unless you are the one being ignored. When in *hanoots* I could move in and out of people easily without a stare down, but I was also pushed aside and very often ignored. I lost a lot of importance to people. When asking prices or for something, shop

owners did not mind making me wait, sometimes serving everyone else before me. I had to fight for my place. This was different from previously wanting to disappear a little with my fairer complexion and blue eyes. The hijab took me a few steps further.

It was interesting picking up something, obviously interested and having no man on my hip, presenting it for me. In contrast, I often decided I did not want to buy it anymore. I felt disrespected, acting like a five year old girl repeating “Fine if you don’t want my money, you won’t get it.” Sometimes I was not even acknowledged or noticed. This definitely depended on the situation and way I wore the hijab. Other women who wear have also experienced being ignored in trendy shops and in banks. (Interview with Rachida)

One woman wearing hijab experienced some criticism in receiving a job she was certainly qualified for. It was not personal discrimination but rather a public rule forbidding the hiring of a woman wearing hijab. She received a high score on the test necessary for applying. Her interviewer also was very impressed with her. The only factor was her choice of dress. This was an outward and obvious example of discrimination in a more liberal Islamic country. (Interview with Nawal)

Fashion

While wearing fashion hijab, I had a good amount of respect but was definitely still looked at. I still did not experience the traumatizing glances from men on every side, the ones that make you feel like you are naked. (In their eyes, you probably are. Ewwwww.) There are three kinds of harassment in regards to Morocco. There is harassment with fashion hijab, not very intense and not disrespectful; usually an innocent glance or two. Then there is the harassment that Moroccan women without hijab experience; catcalling, lude comments. But all does not compare in my opinion to the harassment of a foreigner. It is the most intense, the most often and the most persistent. Possibly they can sense uncertainty and uncomfortably because of not

being used to it. Maybe there is something deeper; like suppressed anger against westerners because of all the colonizing and degrading interactions. There is so much Spanish, French and Portuguese influence, previously being a dominating presence. The treatment of foreigners could be a soft and bitter spot for Moroccans. It could be an unintentional attempt to make their experience negative; make them pay. Moroccans have mostly dealt with these countries in a dominating relationship, so feeling this power of fear placed on these arrogant travelers because of their lack of familiarity with the city is perhaps very satisfying. I have received the worst looks, looks that make me cringe all the way down my body; so uncomfortable. Overall based on my experiences, interviews and observations, foreigners get the worst harassment.

There could be quite a few factors that play into this statement. Foreigners are not used to the modest dress code and could be violating it without even realizing. This would cause more comments especially for women. It could be the dominating and degrading relationship between Moroccans and Westerners (also supported through migration) and also the certainty of a reaction. This could be attributed to the fact that as a foreigner, you might not know where you are; harassed in unknown territory.

My treatment from hijab to jelaba with hijab was strikingly different. Even if I was not diverting my eyes; no one was looking at me. Men passing by would not look at me. Some would but quickly looked away. I was actually looking around frantically to get people to look at me. That was a weird sensation, wanting more people to notice me. It also felt amazing. I not only was not harassed (so refreshing) but went completely unnoticed. I was invisible.

Everything completely changed if I was walking with another American. Then everyone looked. We were on display. I even saw a *shuma* motion in regards to me and the man I was with. We were just sitting on the wall talking, but everyone turned around to look

multiple times. Some people even stopped, stared and made comments to each other while pointing. One time a girl turned to look, then looked again, and then tapped her friend. It was a domino effect until everyone in the row had turned to look at us. I think they were trying to decide if I was a prostitute. It was so uncommon for a traditionally dressed woman my age to be sitting with a foreign man of similar age. The only clear explanation was prostitution. It was a mind boggler; clearly through the looks and attention we received.

With fashion hijab, I received many looks but they were more of awe and amazement, then raunchy and sexual. I was rarely whispered to and if there was a comment, there was a respect of my personal space. It rarely happened. Only once did a man follow me in Tangier, and it was from afar. He followed me for so long and from such a distance, I did not even notice. He wasn't creepy but interested. When I rejected him by turning the opposite way, he stopped following and kept walking in the opposite direction. He tried to talk to me, failed and left. That was so strikingly different to my experiences without hijab. "No" without hijab has no meaning.

One follower is very impressive, especially when I was completely alone. I went to a mostly male-populated park to observe. I wanted to catch them in the act. I sat at the far corner of a bench in a populated park. Men were seated all around me, clearly doing nothing but watching women walk by. I watched the difference in their eye language. The way the men looked at those with hijab was very different from the looks they gave those women without hijab. The looks for women without hijab were accompanied by a comment. The body language was also directed towards the woman without hijab. I sat there long and not one man approached me, talked to me or sat next to me. I was one of the only women alone. Most women regardless of hijab or not, travel in twos. I still had no disrespect; eye contact of course but nothing further. I never felt uncomfortable or that I was being hit on. It was

surprising. My bench stayed completely unoccupied until a group of girls sat down next to me.

A woman with hijab walking through the park in Tangier could easily go unnoticed. I wish the same could go for those without hijab, but instead every guy looks up. If hair and neck are exposed, poof, all attention is there. Some girls would wish it was that easy to get attention from guys, I may have wanted that too, before coming to Morocco of course. Now, I really enjoy not being noticed by anyone even when I specifically look at everyone.

The only time I heard comments from men while in hijab was usually in third person to their friends and if it was directed towards me, it was respectable and there was a significant distance. *Hiya zweena* really made me feel beautiful instead of uncomfortable. I really appreciated that compliment from a distance.

Exposed through Comparison

In relaxing Asilah, I walked around in fashion hijab studying everything that happened. Then it happened, I spotted Islamic women heaven; a store complete with every style of hijab imaginable. There were tons of scarves and head wraps. There were bright colors, lace, silk, cotton, two layer hijabs (one glove, then a shear top layer), everything. Without planning it, I made a direct turn into this place. I was excited feeling that even though I had been ignored earlier while shopping in the market, this would be a place that I would be an important customer. I looked for a while, and the man wandered around with no obvious direction. I asked how much a scarf was; he looked up, paused and looked away while saying *tltetine* under his breath. I asked again as I could not hear really well; mistake. He became more abrupt and louder, irritated and without interest. If I was his boss, he would be fired. I continued to ask about different scarves, even though he continued to walk away despite my interest. Then he left the store and stood outside looking for the next possible customers,

ignoring the fact that I was inside getting ready to buy something. I was the only customer by the way. I left in awe and simultaneously excited; a good observation for my research. He did not try to beckon me in, ask again about a certain scarf I had looked at previously or even say a goodbye. He barely reciprocated my *bslama*. I was obviously ignored and disrespected.

I knew that I had to go back without hijab to compare. After walking through the streets like a celebrity, with the attention I mean, where men turn, look, and make comments, I strolled into the store. It was pretty packed with people this time, unlike the day before. I was not wearing anything suggestive or risky. Then again, my hair was uncovered and my arms were bare. The same salesman was in the store. He noticed me instantly and walked straight on over to me. I knew he hadn't recognized me because he did not even really bother to look at my face last time. Plus he treated me entirely different. He stayed on my every move, pulled out every scarf I touched and answered my questions of price happily. He pulled them out, and then folded them back up, staying on my every move. He leaned over the table of scarves, moving underneath my field of view to see my face and look up at me. He realized my Arabic wasn't very good, which he would have realized before if he would have paid attention. He then asked me questions, his interest increasing, following me wherever I went and always looking at me. There were many other customers; I did not deserve all this attention. Plus I was the only woman not wearing hijab. I was less likely to buy scarves compared to all these other women. I even witnessed women repeatedly ask the price of scarves with no answer from him. Some turned and left the store. Others waited until he was forced to answer, which finally came out gruffly and somewhat rude. Towards the end, he started hitting on me, trying to get me to stay longer. There was such a stark difference of treatment. After witnessing that, I could not buy anything from him.

Dream Bride

First while in hijab, I am not noticed. I blend into the crowd. I am not bothered. I can walk freely through the streets while I watch others getting harassed like crazy. It is so nice. It almost makes me want to wear it permanently in Morocco. It would be a possibility if I was not prone to have an itchy neck. With men I talk to, I am nothing special at first. Then as they find out I am American the interest triples; the most amazing thing in life. A Muslim American; I instantly become anything they could ever dream of. But even still the interest is kept subtle. I can sense it with their energy and transformation from before. They do not voice it or move closer to touch me. They instead become helpful and overly friendly; convinced I am the perfect person for them. While their interest in me heightens extremely, they are still respectful. They are even too shy to ask anything from me; no number, no follow up date. They just enjoy the moment and are as friendly as can be. It was so refreshing.

Spatial Boundaries

Normally, in the streets of Morocco, I am on guard to maneuver past the creepy men speaking right in my face or grazing my arm. All of these precautions are vetoed while wearing hijab. Even if I am wearing fashion hijab and Moroccan men are still on the prowl (a softer more respectable prowl of course) there is a spatial distance that is significant to note. It is like I am being admired purely from afar. The comments are kept positive and clean, and the looks are not traumatizing.

Once in Chefchaouen, I was entering a cyber café in a jelaba and hijab and the entrance was blocked by three men talking excitedly. They instantly stopped their conversation and opened up a spot for me. They treated me like I was a queen. I can only imagine the stark difference if I wasn't wearing it, they probably would have barely moved so that I would have to maneuver through them, having to get close. That would be an invitation to whisper something in my ear. The space that Moroccan men give women with hijab is out of respect. It is really beautiful to witness and experience. I realized that even in crowded

places, I was never touched or grazed by men while wearing hijab. There was always space between. The religious admiration was amazing to see. Is it because it makes them feel guilty? Or is it because of respect? The hijab produced a man-repellent protective shield around the perimeter of my body. It also made me more respectable and wholesomely beautiful to these men. This was a positive experience.

While studying, I many times preferred to wear the hijab. It made me feel safe. I felt safe at night, or during the day. I felt safe by myself. It was a protection for me. Once even, we had run out of milk for dinner (actually the dry milk went chunky like *leben*) and I volunteered to go out by myself, only because I was going to wear hijab. It was 10 at night in Asilah and I was by myself. I was not harassed by any men. I even passed by a whole group of young men at the prime age for me, and they did not say one word. Coincidentally, the next night I went out without hijab and there comments were flying constantly, in my ear and from across the street. It is almost as if non-coverage is a reminder to hassle, while hijab is a reminder of religion and modesty for men; ridiculous.

Treatment from Women

An old woman on the train to Tangier from Asilah, wearing hijab and a scarf tied around her face under her nose, smiled at me as soon as I sat down across from her. This would not have happened as fast if I was not wearing hijab. I could not see her smile but I could feel it. And her eyes were giving it away, with wrinkles gathering at the corners. She warmed up to me instantly and I believe it had something to do with the hijab. It was like neutral ground, a common and familiar respect. She felt comfortable and compelled to show me live pigeons she kept in a bag and forced me to eat some grainy pastry she had in the other bag. She also became even more excited when she realized I was American. She started speaking Arabic a mile a minute; which would be hard already as I don't know Arabic but through her face veil, I could barely even hear mumbling. She was so excited, laughing and rambling. She was

raving on and on about Islam and how beautiful it was. There was a lot of *mezzien*'s and *zweena*'s; at least I think so.

Women, particularly old women trust me and warm up to me a lot sooner when I am wearing the hijab. More women smile at me while walking on the streets, and I never get any glares. It is a pleasant experience especially with the trust from older women. They are so happy to see younger women in the veil. Then again, I feel that the treatment I am receiving is not deserved. I sometimes feel guilty. There are some ethical problems with wearing hijab for research, something held so important and sacred. Then again, I know that the research was thorough and I am attempting to understand the women behind the veil more fully.

Hijab as a choice?

The presence of a choice makes it liberating. From a Western perspective I assumed there would be a lot of pressure on women to veil from peers and family. All the women I talked to did not feel any pressure to wear it at all. It was presented to them as a choice. One woman felt pressure in high school, because the majority of her friends were veiled.

(Interview with Asmae) All had open-minded families, usually supporting either decision. All women I interviewed took significant time to think about it and really make a strong decision to veil. (Informal interviews, plus Interview with Nawal and Rachida) Yet there are still stories of fathers and brothers forcing their sisters to veil. There is even an example of this within the extended family of my host family. One woman experienced the opposite, a lot of resistance to her wearing the hijab. Her family was against her decision and they still have not fully accepted it. (Interview with Nawal)

Morocco is such a submersion of new ideas and old tradition, there is also a new category that has emerged having new ideas that support tradition. More of the younger generation especially in Morocco is choosing extremism. The combination of the veil being a liberating statement, a fashion and new extremist groups all contributes to a rise in a higher

percentage of women wearing the veil. All the women I talked to believe that woman should have a choice. The unveiled women wish to veil in the future but know that they are currently not ready or worthy. (Informal interviews, Interview with Asmae) There is an understanding and responsibility of wearing the hijab. It is not something one decides to do for a while. There is no flip-flopping aloud. It is a permanent decision; therefore there should be some considerable thought beforehand.

Some women chose to veil because of harassment, but most veiled because of Quran. One woman explains that if it is what Allah really wishes, it is worth it. It is a small sacrifice. She does not do it for men, even though she feels she is less harassed. It is about her personal relationship with God. If it not right, it is not a big loss and if it proves to be essential than it was worth it. (Interview with Nawal) From a woman that is not veiled, it is important but clearly not as important as other things. She felt strongly that being a good person and treating people with respect, giving almsgiving was more important. She said this was clear when there are women who wear the veil who do a lot of inappropriate things. (Interview with Asmae) On the contrary, there are great, caring and respectable women who do not wear the veil. She wants to wear it in the future but knows she needs to have more preparation and is not ready for the responsibility that comes with the hijab. The five pillars are more important first. (Interview with Asmae) Then again, some women have claimed that the veil is part of the five pillars. (Informal interviews) This confused me, but I heard it more than once. I am curious to know with which pillar it is included?

There are still those that occasionally veil and wear hijab, especially when coming home from the *hammam* but then wear a tight v-neck shirt the next day. There are so many beliefs and emerging styles that I can only begin to understand the veil and the role it plays in a few lives; a generalization would be limited and unjustified.

Women in Morocco usually respect each other to make their own decisions about the veil, and they do not segregate from each other. I see hijabed women walking with women without hijab often. There is no judgment that I can see. The judgment is not voiced or shown through actions but through interviews I can see some analysis. Most women who wear hijab respect other's decision but believe in theory that all women should veil. "It is God's command and every Muslim woman should obey God's command." (Interview with Rachida)

Hijab vs. Not; Respect

My personal experience with the hijab presented me with different types of respect and different types of disrespect at the same time. There were ups and downs of both decisions excluding religious. As I am not a Muslim I cannot truly understand the benefits and feelings wearing the veil for God holds. While wearing hijab, I was disrespected by not being treated as important. I was ignored and rarely addressed. It was frustrating and irritating. Then again I was greatly respected by the pure help I was given. There was huge respect in not harassing me, keeping me safe and keeping spatial boundaries. No man ever tried to make me feel uncomfortable or scared while in hijab. It seemed that intentions became more pure. All women with hijab reported having had less harassment on the streets while wearing the hijab. The women without hijab found no significant difference. Then again, they had not experienced being a hijabed woman. For this reason I give more credibility to those women who have experienced life on the streets with and without hijab.

While wearing my normal clothes I am respected by being given a voice, and given attention. I never felt invisible. I was always aware of my presence and affect on others. I feel free to speak and do as I please. Then again, I am very limited in where I can go, how late I can stay out and what I accidentally speak with my eyes. I am disrespected so often on the streets with harassment, with comments, with grabbing, with certain expectations based on

American media (in terms of how easy a girl is), with being ripped off and also with men using fear as a means to have power.

Both sides have negative qualities and positive qualities in relation to respect. I am shocked at the stark difference of treatment especially living in such a mixed society, where the conservative and liberal have merged. I guess the reality is that women are always disrespected in some way, especially in Morocco.

America: The Bubble

Being American limits my perspective to see things in a certain way based on my background. Much of this perspective has been shaped by media, friends and family. I was taught to view the veil as something that is oppressive towards women. I was conditioned to be against it and in some ways fear the unknown especially with the war on terror. It was engrained; hijab = oppressive but I always knew there was more to it. The hijab can be liberating. One opinion from a woman was very unique explaining it as a way of neutralizing herself. It covers all the parts of her that make her a woman, therefore allowing her to be treated as an equal, as a man.

The newer idea of the hijab emerged as a silent revolution in Iran. It was coincidentally a symbol of rebellion, the opposite of oppression. This insight is not known in Western society. For this significant historical event, the hijab was a statement that a woman does not need a man. The veil was used as a separation; a symbol to divide men from women. It was used to exclude men from the relationship between the woman and God. At this time, the hijab became fearful and women wearing hijab were discriminated against. People were afraid of them causing isolation, criticism and oppression of women with hijab, which labeled hijab within that realm. For a time, the hijab was dangerous which may be the reason for its negative connotation in Western society. One woman's father disapproved of the hijab for

fear she was a part of an extremist group on the lines of these feared women in Iran.

(Interview with Nawal)

Based on situation, the veil can be liberating and oppressive. Why does one small cloth, a style have so much affect on how a woman is treated?

I believe there is so much talk, criticism and stereotyping of the hijab but still the most important aspect is ignored. Regardless, if the interpretations are wrong, if men are subconsciously trying to control women, if men are trying to find excuses for their lack of control or if God really wants women to be covered; it is a women's personal decision in respect of Allah. One woman at the age of 40 decided to wear hijab for no one but herself and God after completing the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. "Everyone should be free to choose their way! Islam is the religion of tolerance and peace!" (Interview with Rachida) The sacrifice of veiling oneself especially in the heat of Morocco while covering arms and legs, giving up comfort ability in doing daily things (like exercising and swimming) is beautiful. That devotion should be appreciated and admired rather than the possible corruption behind the hijab. "God is more important than human beings and their judgments of you." (Interview with Nawal) If a woman feels it is what God wants and she is willing to sacrifice, it is beautiful.

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