

*Perceptions of the Veil among a group of Sudanese Women: A  
Qualitative Study*

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## ABSTRACT

The practice of the veil as an Islamic dress code has considerably increased among Muslim women in the recent years. Although this practice is not mandated in the Holy Qur'an, many Muslims believe that the practice is based on their religion doctrine. It is evident that the veil never existed as such during the Prophet Mohammed's time, however, it developed and evolved throughout history and has become an important symbol of Islam.

The impact of this dress code on the Muslim women is huge. It has raised a lot of debate among them. The debate about the veil takes many forms. Muslim women argue among themselves and say wearing the veil is a religious practice. It based on the Islamic principles. Thus, wearing the veil allows women total freedom, in terms of movement, for example, it gives them space and freedom to go to work outside the home without any one harassing them. Many believe the veil provides protection and saves them from the male gaze and allows them to be comfortable in presence of men.

In the year 1983, the National Islamic Front (NIF), launched Sharia Law and imposed the veil practice forcibly on the women of Sudan, regardless of their political, racial, social and religious backgrounds. Ever since the Government of Khartoum has silenced voices of these women and they are forced to obey the laws, otherwise, they will expose themselves to severe punishment. The question is, is the veil really an Islamic dress code? And how do these women feel about the government that implemented Sharia Law and forced these women to be veiled?

The study, therefore, aimed to explore and to investigate these women's perceptions around the veil in Sudan. The significance of the study is to give a group of Sudanese women a space to express their views and listen to their experience.

This study focused on a group of Sudanese women both Muslim and non-Muslims. It interviewed the women who were born and grew up in Sudan, but currently living in South Africa. During the study all these women were wearing the veil. The study simply, investigated these women's perceptions of the veil, whether the veil is a religious dress code or a tool that has been used to exercise inequality in a social reality and what were their reaction towards the Islamic government of Khartoum and its policy towards the veil.

The study is framed by feminist theory, which depends on the women's daily experience. The methods used are qualitative feminist methodologies, which are based on the face-to-face in-depth interviews. The sample was selected through the snowballing technique and it represented a wide spectrum of Sudanese women.

The findings gathered from the interviews, suggested that most of the women in this group have accepted wearing the veil, as a religious practice, some worn it as a protection tool, because the veil allows them freedom of movement inside and outside their homes, even in the presence of men. Some women have thought of it as apolitical symbol, which limits the influence of the Western colonialism on the Middle Eastern and Islamic culture. Some women especially, those who believe in secularism and freedom of individuals, consider wearing the veil as a human right violation.

The findings are processed and documented with hope that it will be used in producing valid and powerful knowledge, which will contribute to the transformation of the patriarchal society in the Sudan. The analysis suggested that the study dealt with the participants individually to avoid generalization, but to give a chance to all women to voice their opinions.

After highlighting the limitations, the study raised important recommendations for further studies in the same field in Sudan. The data should be collected in Sudan and larger sample would be appropriate, to produce powerful knowledge, which will not only benefit the women of Sudan, but women in the entire patriarchal Muslim world.



## Declaration

I declare that *Perceptions of the Veil among a group of Sudanese Women: A Qualitative Study*, is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in other University, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Catherine Wani

November 2004

Signed



## Acknowledgement

I am extremely grateful to the UWC to create such a program, indeed we need to learn about gender sensitivity and without the department of the WGS; I wouldn't have known how to defend a powerless person or to advocate on behalf of the subordinate.

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# *Perceptions of the Veil among a group of Sudanese Women: A Qualitative Study*

**Catherine Wani**

## **Key Words**

Sudan

Islam

Veil

Women

Patriarchy

Religion

Culture

Oppression

Collusion

Perceptions



## A LIST OF ARABIC TERMINOLOGIES<sup>1</sup>

Al-Ikhwan al-Musilmin: Muslims Brothers

Bourga: an Omani Veil

Hadith: Reports or sayings attributed to Prophet Mohammed

Haram: Religiously prohibited.

Jahiliyya: Originally the total pagan ignorance that is supposed to have characterized pre-Islamic Arabia

Jamaiyyat el-Ikhwan al-Musilmin: Muslims-Brothers' society

Nabi Mohammed: Prophet Mohammed

Nizam Islami: Islamic Order

Pourda: Also a name given to the veil

Salafiyya: The term derived from word salaf and it means ancestors or predecessors

Sharia: Originally a 'path' or a 'way' subsequently the part of religion as stipulated in the Qur'an and el Hadith

Sufi: Mystic

Thawb: A thin, full-body wrap-around, made of cotton

Ulama: Religious Leaders, also 'scholars'

Umma Islamiyya: A global Islamic community

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<sup>1</sup> See Glossary (Ayubi, 1991)



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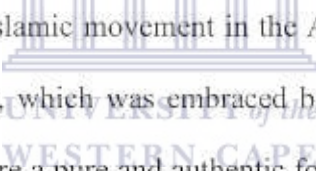
# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the focus of the thesis; it explains what the veil is and the concept behind it. It highlights the historical, social, political and religious backgrounds of the Sudan. It also explains the circumstances that lead to the imposition of the veil on the women of Sudan. The chapter includes the significance and the aim of the study, to clarify why it is important to research the veil and its wearers' perceptions.

### 1.2 The Rise of the Islamic Movement



The rise of the fundamentalist Islamic movement in the Arab and the Islamic world was certainly a political propaganda, which was embraced by the Islamists revivalists. The movement was intended to restore a pure and authentic form of religion that cleansed the historical distortion and modernist deviations (Beinin & Stork, 1997). According to Islamic militants, the movement has come as a reaction to European imperialism (Beinin & Stork, 1997). Most of the countries in the Middle East and Islamic world, which were exposed to the colonialism, suffered and lost their identity in the process, were the ones who embraced this movement (Ayubi, 1994; Beinin & Stork, 1997). Sudan was among those countries, which experienced the loss and strove to restore its identity through the restoration and implementation of the Islamic laws (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

### 1.3 Women & Political and Familial Structure

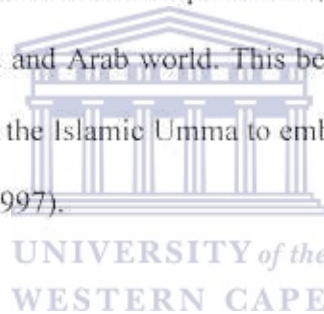
Turning the system in the region into an Islamic one, affected many lives, especially women, it is due to complications within the Arab and Islamic family structure. Within the Muslim and Arab patriarchal system, family is the center of life; therefore, this system must not change. The system demands that the father is the breadwinner; he goes out to work and earns a living, while the mother performs her domestic role at home. This system existed since the beginning of Islam. It seems that the Arab Muslims have existed outside history, and have carried over the old tradition from the time of the Prophet Mohammed (Mohanty, 1991).

As a pillar and foundation of the family women are a very important element, and the issues regarding women's roles occupy a central position in the Islamic politics in the Middle East and in the Arab Islamic world. Women are considered the bearers of the family honour. Men must always protect them, and they have to live up to the family standard (Beinin & Stork, 1997; Mohanty, 1991).

There is an assumption that women attain their value and security within the boundaries of their families, and this contributes to the stability of the family. The restriction of women within the family boundaries, however, causes them to be an oppressed group; living under the control of their men (Mohanty, 1991). For instance, men have control over economic resources and other issues in household. Women in the Islamic and Arab world, therefore, are expected to be obedient and submissive to their men. Men provide and take care of the financial issues and women receive men's protection. Division of

labour and duty is visible; it demands that women must not be allowed to invade men's territory, unless they are well mannered or dressed in the veil (Beinin & Stork, 1997).

Thus, women's presence outside the home is prohibited, unless there are serious matters, which need their attention but then they should wear the veil. In contrast men are allowed total freedom. Through women's behaviours and dress, family ethics and moral are measured. The Islamic movement focuses on the conduct and the appearance of women in public to achieve their goal of building a proper Islamic nation (Beinin & Stork, 1997). However, the colonialism in the region had facilitated the rise of the Islamic movement; it had apparently cooled down the Islamic and the Arab cultures, values and the social norms for long time and shifted to the European ones, until the end of the Western colonialism in the third, Islamic and Arab world. This behaviour awakened the Muslim, leaders and caused them to urge the Islamic Umma to embrace the revivalists' movement (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

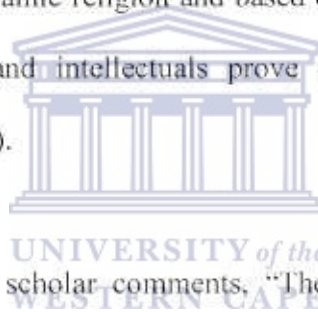


With the rise of the Islamic movements many changes have taken place, but women and family remained the same. Furthermore, issues regarding women become the central matters to these Islamic governments (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997). These movements have stimulated new interest and relationship between religion and politics and manipulated the state to implement and to make use of this relationship. The immediate reaction of this relationship is seen in the implementation of the Sharia Law (Moral codes), which is well manifested in women's dress code (Beinin & Stork, 1997).

That is to say the widespread practices of the veil as a (dress code) in the Islamic and Arab world is not an abrupt decision in relation to the religion, but a strategic plan that is used by the Islamic militants as a part of a bigger picture to execute the plan of restoration of the pure Islamic values to secure a sound Islamic community (Ahmed, 1992; Beinín & Stork, 1997).

#### **1.4 The Islamic Notion of the Veil**

Although the practice of the veil and veiling is widely spread throughout the Islamic and Arab world, in reality the veil is just a cultural, social and economic tradition, which has no religious base, the Holy Qur'an does not mandate it. Many Muslims believe that the veil is an integral part of the Islamic religion and based on the Holy Qur'an and Hadith, yet some Muslims scholars and intellectuals prove otherwise (El Saadawi, 1997; Goodwin, 1994; Mernissi, 1991).



Dr. Zaki Badawi, an Islamic scholar comments, "There has never been an Islamic obligation for women to cover up at any time. In fact, veiling the face is an innovation that has no foundation in Islam" (cited in Goodwin, 1994:23). So the covering of women's bodies from head to toes is a recent tradition, which might have existed previously, but not in a religious context (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Goodwin, 1994).

Hence, Sudan is one of the Arab and Islamic countries, which attempts to remove the elements of the colonialism by returning to Islamic law. Sudan implements the Sharia law to the fullest and imposes the Islamic dress code on women forcibly. In addition to that Sudan presents some interesting insights into the relationship between religion and



politics. The country does not only have significant Islamic movement resources, but it has to deal with a stubborn non-Muslim minority group in the South (Ayubi, 1991).

Thus, I am going to provide a brief account on the Sudanese history, and to highlight the stages that it had undergone during its development to this day. I may refer to the Egyptian involvements and connections from time to time, and that because Egypt and Sudan shared a common history, in order to explore the circumstances that allowed the Islamic movement to rise in Sudan.

## **1.5 The Historical Background of Sudan**

The history of Sudan can be divided into several sub-sections, to elaborate and clarify how Islam came to Sudan, and how it developed throughout history to the present time. The relationship between Egypt and Sudan is highlighted, for they have shared common history. The discussion reflects on the relationship and illustrates how Egypt influenced the birth of the Islamic movement in Sudan.

### **1.5.1 The Islamic Sudan**

Islam in Sudan acquired a distinct characteristic of the Sufi, and apparently Islam came late, towards the end of 1500s. It was not imposed by military conquest, but was spread by the merchants and the tribal leaders. Although Sufi groups widely and successfully spread the Islamic religion, they also retained several of pre-Islamic traditions and cultures (Ayubi, 1991). That is to say, "Sufi leaders' role was not confined to purely

religious matters, but also extended into various aspects of social and political life” (cited in Ayubi, 1991:105).

### **1.5.2 Egyptian Occupation**

Looking closely at the development of the Sudanese political entity, one could argue that, Sudan began to take its modern political shape, when Mohammed Ali the Egyptian ruler under the Ottoman Turks occupied the land in 1821 (Encyclopedia Americana, 1984).

Mohammed Ali’s intention was to expand his empire, and Sudan was the only country, which could provide him with the necessary elements for the expansion. He invaded the country and controlled it until the religious leader El Mahdi expelled him in 1885.

During the Egyptian occupation of Sudan, in the Nineteen Century the country witnessed a birth of two Sudanese political and Islamic movements, the Mahdist and the Khatimyya. The Mahdist combined an attack against the colonialism with a puritanical quest to restore simplicity and orthodoxy to Sudanese Islam. Although the two movements in Sudan were basically religious, on the political forefront they rivaled each other (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997). By the time Mohammed Ali controlled political power in Sudan; the two Islamic sectors were gaining power by the name of religion, and defeated Mohammed Ali in 1885. Unfortunately, they never lasted long and Anglo-Egypt reconquered Sudan until its independence in 1956 (Ayubi, 1991).

### 1.5.3 Anglo-Egyptian Occupation

The colonial forces defeated the Mahdist and the Sudan fell under the Anglo-Egyptian colonialism from 1899 to 1956 (Ahmed, 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

The colonial administration was known as condominium, which meant in theory a joint rule, but in reality Sudan was completely under British control (Ahmed, 1992; Encyclopedia Americana, 1984). During that time the colonial system basically changed and replaced the social, political and religious laws, with the British civil laws. The change not only affected the political machineries, but the whole structure of the country (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

The change was implemented strategically and systematically. The British introduced western education in Sudan. A large number of Sudanese people were trained in Europe and some were educated in the western institutions within the country (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997). With these elements old ways were slowly replaced by the modern education. That not only affected education, but the whole structure of the country. As a result people in Sudan shifted their interest to the European cultures, values, and languages (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

Before colonialism, political and religious leaders played a significant role, but after the Sudan became westernized, the role of the religious and political leaders became relatively insignificant (Ahmed 1992; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

#### 1.5.4 The Islamic Movement Principle of Nationality

This drastic transformation that shaped the social, political, economic and religious systems of not only Sudan, but the Middle East as a whole, led to the emergence of some intellectuals and Islamic leaders, like Jamal El Din El Afghani and Mohammed Abdu, who were concerned with issues of the reformation and restoration of their identity through the revival of Islam (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinini & Stork, 1997).

Although Jamal El Din was from Afghanistan, he concentrated most of his political activities in Egypt. Mohammed Abdu and he urged people to oppose and to stop the penetration of British to the Islamic world, and called for the unity of Muslims in the Islamic world. They urged Muslims to confront European, especially British imperialism in the region. El Afghani called for the unity of brotherhood of all Muslims in one Umma<sup>1</sup>. All the attempts of the Islamic leaders to oppose and to stop the penetration of the British to Islamic world and to unite all Muslims in one Islamic community were relatively unsuccessful (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinini & Stork, 1997).

Surprisingly enough, the Islamic ideas never ended with Jamal and Mohammed Abdu, but the Arab world witnessed the birth of new leaders (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinini & Stork, 1997). Rashid Rida who came from Lebanon, followed them, and became the most influential student of Mohammed Abdu's. He wrote and compiled many publications in El Manar magazine to promote what his teachers had been teaching to promote the "Salafiyya Movement" a neotraditionalist orientation that restricted what

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<sup>1</sup> Islamic idea of creating one Islamic nation or community

was regarded as “correct” in Islam; and this notion is based on the teaching of the Holy Qur’an and El Hadith. El Hadith is a book contains the reports of the Prophet Mohammed (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

Hassan al Bana an Egyptian school teacher was one of those who were influenced by Rashid Rida. He established in 1928 the first “Jamiyyat al Akhwan al Muslimin” the society of the Muslim Brothers, which became the largest and most influential Islamist organization in the Sunni Islamic and Arab world, where they established branches in Syria, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and Sudan (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

The Islamic militants in Sudan were inspired by those Islamic thinkers who came before them and used the same slogan, which was used to fight British imperialism and to return to the pure Islamic laws to control the social, the religious system and the political power of the country (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).



As mentioned earlier, the Sudanese Muslim Brothers Society branched off from the active Islamic movement, which was in Egypt. The Islamic movement for liberation emerged from within the students’ circles, and formed an association with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers in 1949, and Dr. Hassan al Turabi, the Sudanese Islamist leader, was the first Muslim Brother, who established the Islamic Front in Sudan in 1954 (Ayubi, 1991; Goodwin, 1994). At the beginning it was a small movement, but it gained strength as years went by. The Muslim Brothers were inspired by El Afghani’s and Mohammed Abdu’s thoughts, activities and slogans about returning to pure Islamic laws (Ahmed 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

### 1.5.5 The Islamic Political Movement

It has been argued that Islamic political movements are products of deep political and social crisis, of economic difficulties, and of the failure of other solutions and regimes to solve people's problems. A return to what people are familiar with is essential, i.e. Islamic laws, including Mohammed's teaching are reassuring a protest movement against corruption, oppression, and exploitation (El Saadawi, 1997).

The Islamic movements drew their strength from widespread deficiencies of the post-colonial states in the Middle East and the Islamic world. Those states were characterized by massive corruption and failure to build the Arab nationalism and socialism. The tendency to create new mechanism was manifested in Egypt, where the Muslim Brothers' movement began (Ahmed, 1992; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997). The failure of the Arab and Islamic projects for nationalism and in some cases socialism coincided with the collapse of various secular, national, and left-wings political projects, leaving the field of opposition policies to the Islamists.

However, the combination of the socio-economic and the political crisis intermingled and underlined the rise of the Muslim Brothers Movement in Sudan (Beinin & Stork, 1997).

After the former Sudanese president felt the need to enforce and to implement the Sharia Law, he invited the leader of the Muslim Brothers into his government in 1983. Since then the Muslim Brothers have a visible power based within the state, the struggle between the secular has been intensified and the power is visible and affecting the non-Muslim Southerners and women (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

### 1.5.6 National Islamic Front

The former president of the Sudan Nimeiri adopted the Islamic law and implemented the Sharia as the legislative authority of the country. One of the reasons to launch the Sharia was his reliance on Oil-rich Arab states. If any Islamic state accepts sponsorship or receives aid or has been financed by an Islamic nation, Saudi Arabia in particular, that country must pay back the favour by adopting and implementing the donor's fundamentalist ideology (Goodwin, 1994; Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997).

Hence, that is to say, there is a strong relationship between the Oil-rich countries and the rise of the Islamic movements in the region (Beinin & Stork, 1997; Goodwin, 1994). It is represented in a two-way flow. In short the Oil-rich countries allow migration and flow of people from resource-poor countries to Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries; in return the Oil-rich countries facilitate the flow of cash and aid, plus greater political influence on these poor Islamic nations. For instance, Saudi Arabia is a major aid donor; it increases its political influence and pressure considerably on the poor-resourced Islamic nations. Meanwhile those poor-resourced countries, which depend on the Oil-rich states, receive pressure from the internal elements of Islamic constituencies, or receive direct pressure from Saudi Arabia, pushing them to cooperate and implement their fundamentalist religious ideology and declare their commitment to religious orthodoxy as a means of upstaging more radical Islamist platforms.

The Sudanese government implemented Sharia Law during Nimeiri's time in 1983 as the legislative authority of the country (Ayubi, 1991; Beinin & Stork, 1997). The Islamic

militants claimed that with the implementation of the Sharia<sup>2</sup> Law, Sudan was returning to pure Islamic laws to re-address cultural and social change. These Islamic laws are rigid and have been criticized nationally and internationally (Ayubi, 1991; Beinín & Stork, 1997; Goodwin, 1994).

Generally, the rise of fundamentalist movement in Islamic countries marks dramatic and detrimental changes in the lives of women. The rigidity of the extremists' thoughts, behaviours and practices has a profound effect on every aspect of women's existence (Goodwin 1994:15). With the implementation of Sharia in the Sudan women's situation has deteriorated. The Islamic militants embarked on the custom of veiling as a critical feature of Sharia to control women in Sudan. It is imposed forcibly on women, and they are pushed from the public sphere into their homes. They are not allowed outside the house without the veil; otherwise, they will be punished severely. The veil in particular is imposed upon all women even the non-Islamic women of the Southern Sudan. Hale has written about it to reflect on the veil and harsh government treatment:

In November 1991, "The Islamic fundamentalist military Junta decreed.... That henceforth all Sudanese women will wear long black dresses to their ankles and a black veil covering their head and face.... those who disobey, to be instantly punished by whipping.

(Cited in Beinín & Stork, 1997:245)

The laws show the rigidity of the political system in Sudan and how it curtails women's freedom. The message is, whoever disobeys the rule, will face the consequences

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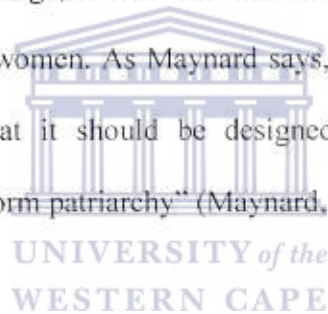
<sup>2</sup> Sharia 'also shar' originally a 'path' or a 'way', subsequently the part of religion as stipulated in the Holy Qur'an and El Hadith" (Ayubi, 1991:255).



“punishment by whipping”. In this context, the veil is not only a religious practice but also an oppressive device used against women.

The veil in the Sudan has become compulsory for all women regardless of their ethnic groups, religion beliefs or political affiliations. These circumstances cause any feminist to question gender inequality and women’s oppression in Sudan.

As a feminist researcher I will try to explore the social reality that is happening in the Sudan, and document various perceptions around the veil by listening to experiences and voices of a group of women and their perceptions. I hope with my documentation I will be able to produce useful knowledge, which would be used to transform the religious and patriarchal power in favour of women. As Maynard says, “feminist’s research was ‘for’ ‘on’ and ‘by’ women and that it should be designed with the aim of producing knowledge, which would transform patriarchy” (Maynard, 1994:16-17).



## **1.6 The Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is to contribute towards raising awareness and establishing self-esteem. With the same capacity women internalized the patriarchal virtues and values; they can also deconstruct these viruses.

## **1.7 The Research Question**

The Islamic dress code (the veil) has been forcibly imposed on the women in Sudan, since 1983, and many feminists researchers have criticized the practices of the veil as a tool to oppress women (Goodwin, 1994; Beinin & Stork, 1997). The question is how women feel about veiling and the laws that forced them to wear the veil. Is the veil experienced as a tool of oppression against women? Or do they believe it is purely an Islamic dress code? How do women themselves construct the significance of the veil?

## **1.8 The Aim**

The study aims to explore, a group of Sudanese women's experiences and perceptions of the veil. The study intends to listen to experiences of this group, with respect to enforcement of the veil. Through the documentation of the women's stories, the study will give space to the silenced voices, which will help to create a transformation of patriarchal power in the political arena of this society.

## **1.9 Chapters Outline**

Chapter one introduces the subject of the study, it explains what is the veil and the concept behind it. It contextualizes the veil in Sudan. It provides a brief account of a historical background, aim and the significance of the study.

Chapter two again contextualizes the veil and provides the study with reviews of what has been said about the veil by other scholars.

Chapter three presents feminist methodology, and how to deal with the subject within a feminist methodological framework, and which methods to adopt in order to attain useful results

Chapter four deals with the procedures of selecting the participants, ethical issues, interviews, data production and data coding

Chapter five provides the analysis of the interviews, hoping to unpack the meanings that emerging, the findings are discussed in the light of literature review and presented within the key themes.



Chapter six provides the conclusion; it summaries, discusses and concludes all the salient points that emerge from the findings. To promote positive and creative thinking among women and to erase the essence of being socially constructed within any given society, with hope of contributing to the betterment of women's position in a male dominated world.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter contextualizes the veil and provides the relevant reviews of the studies of the veil, in the Arab and Islamic world. It shows how those studies were conducted and discussed to highlight the circumstances that dictate women's position in Sudan, Arab and Islamic world. It also throws light on the limitations and the contradictions that the researchers have encountered, with especial references to the case study done by Ziegler in Egypt and her counterpart Hale in Sudan and the results that they both have obtained.



#### 2.2 Contextualizing the Veil

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This section looks at the literature that generally assesses the role of the veil, and explores the different meanings currently attached to or made of the veil. The section also focuses on the lack of study and research on the essence of the veil within restricted Islamic context (with a particular focus on Sudan). I would like to highlight the contradictions and ambiguity that continue to surround the veil.

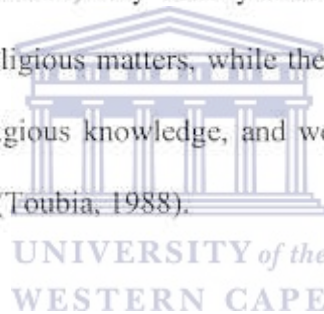
It has been an Arab custom for both men and women to dress up in long and loose dresses since the time of El Jahiliyya<sup>3</sup>. Covering the heads as well as the faces was

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<sup>3</sup> (El Jahiliyya) Sometime Muslims brothers called the state, which is not following Islamic principles as a regime or a state of (Pre-Islamic). Also see a list of the Arabic terminology

originally an Arab's custom to protect their bodies from the roughness of the desert environment (D'Oyen, 1996). The tradition, therefore, was not initially associated with women alone but it was for both sexes, and it was rooted deep in historical and environmental necessity (D'Oyen, 1996). In this light a lot of questions arose as to how the veil became central to Muslim women's identity.

Arab feminists and theorists argue that women have become victims, because they have left the religious issues to be handled by men, and men in return have become the immediate medium of religious teaching; thus, they interpret the religious texts to suit their own interests (Toubia, 1988). They argue that men have managed to veil women not only physically but mentally as well; they usually ensure that women's minds remain occupied with emotional and religious matters, while they enjoy the political and social life. Men demonstrate their religious knowledge, and women have to collude with the patriarchy and religious system (Toubia, 1988).



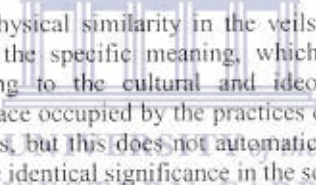
Toubia argues, women especially in the Arab and Islamic world must be encouraged to develop self-esteem as well as the freedom to think and to exercise the power of their minds. For instance, "Lifting the veil from the Mind" the title of a conference that was held in Cairo in September 1986; sums up the argument (Toubia, 1988:5). It was argued that women must 'free' themselves and start to read and study the religious texts to dispute, display and replace the interpretations that the Islamic conservative movements have circulated and mostly based on distortions of Islam and other unknown philosophies (Toubia, 1988).

The Egyptian psychologist and author, El Saadawi refuses to accept the veil as an identity for Muslim women. She emphasizes that “The authentic identity of a Muslim woman is not to be veiled, and that the veil is not an Islamic dress” (1997:96). Mernissi (1991:93) argues on the same lines as El Saadawi. She also criticizes the assumptions built around the source of the veil, and the misinterpretation of the word El Hijab (the veil). She says, “El Hijab” first appeared in the Qur’anic sura 33, verse 53, and that the word veil was not meant only for women to cover up their bodies. It was directed to Prophet Mohammed and his companions to show decency and tact. The believers should not enter someone’s home without permission. In this context, men were supposed to discipline themselves, to be tactful and decent. She explains it in a different context that, “El Hijab was also meant particularly for Prophet Mohammed’s wives to prevent them from getting married after his death”. She argues that men have subverted the notion of El Hijab and misinterpreted the meaning of the word veil, as a disciplinary and moral code into an Islamic dress code and forced it upon women. The criticism by both El Saadawi and Mernissi emphasize the importance of women studying their own religious text, to gain insight to the facts by themselves, instead of waiting on others to interpret the religious texts for them.

In some Arab countries women do not wear the veil for religious purposes but they do it as a result of cultural norms and as practices related to being a woman. For example, Wikan (1982) confirms Oman women never connected the Bourga (The veil) to any Islamic tradition. To them it is a cultural heritage from the past; it has been passed down from generation to generation. To Oman’s women the Bourga symbolizes beauty, decency, dignity and freedom.

The veil has been in many contexts reflected the social status of the Arab and Islamic woman (Ahmed, 1992; Wikan, 1982). For example, in Oman a slave woman is not allowed to wear the veil, until she obtains her freedom. Only then; she can dress in the Bourga. Wikan (1982) argues that the veil should, therefore, be treated within the historical and social contexts, because the concept does not necessarily have any religious link nor is necessarily linked to the oppression of women. Rather it is purely a social concept and a social heritage, which survives and evolves throughout the history of the people of Oman.

Similarly, Mohanty comments on the practices of the veil, and argues that



While there may be a physical similarity in the veils worn by women in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the specific meaning, which is attached to this practice, varies according to the cultural and ideological contexts. In addition, the symbolic space occupied by the practices of the pourda may be similar in certain contexts, but this does not automatically indicate that the practices themselves have identical significance in the social realm.

(Mohanty, 1991:67)

Mohanty emphasizes that it is not necessary for women to wear the veil for the same reasons, for example the purpose of wearing the veil in Oman, and Saudi Arabia differs from the reason behind circumstance of women wearing the veil in Iran, who wear the Chador<sup>4</sup>. She adds that these practices never indicate that they have the same significance in the social realm. In Saudi Arabia most of women wear the veil purely for religious purposes and some women wear it for social reasons. In Sudan women, however, wear the veil as a result of political pressure. They are obliged to wear the veil

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<sup>4</sup> The veil that worn by women in Iran and the Far East

for political reasons. Similarly, in Iran, before the revolution, women used the veil as a political symbol of liberation against the Shah's regime. That same symbol of resistance later on, however was used against them by the new government, and became the symbol of exploitation and oppression (Mohanty, 1991; Talegani, 1982).

Iranian Islamic leader, Talegani (1982:104) uses similar cultural arguments. He says in an interview (Statements from Islamic leaders), it is not necessary for Iranian women to wear the chador, but the veil is essential in accordance with the Islamic principle. For the veil in general "preserves purity, dignity and personality". He says when considering the veil from a historical and traditional point of view, it is rooted deep in the history and tradition of the Far East. He continues, "For the veil played a significant part in the history of the Far East. It was known as chador and it was worn by both Muslims and non-Muslims women, to preserve women's purity, dignity and personality in the Eastern countries. He points out India as a non Muslim country that uses the veil. He says, although India is not Islamic country, but Indian women wear the veil to preserve their national heritage and tradition. His final comment is,

The perfect symbol of Eastern progressive women – and a competent politician – is Mrs. Ghandi. She managed to run a vast country for years, despite all those religious and national difference. She succeeded in safeguarding India's independence and honour. She is respected by all the politicians... rarely seen her picture in the newspapers without a scarf, and she is not even a Muslim.

(Taleghani, 1982:104)

The Sudanese context is however, different. Despite the historical strength of the two religious and political sectors in Sudan, Muslim people were relatively relaxed about



Islam. They showed tolerance and displayed their tendency for diversity. Northern Sudanese women wore a body covering called thawb<sup>5</sup>, but the Islamic movement caused the Islamic militants relatively recently to consider the veil to be a religious dress code.

Some Sudanese Islamic militants believe the veil originated from the time of the Prophet Mohammed, and has therefore, considered the veil to be a religious costume, which should be used to evoke the pure Islamic laws. This can however, be seen in contradiction to the other interpretations of purely Islamic traditions, the tradition that had been initiated by the Prophet. For instance, Naim Attallah (1987) states that the environment in, which the Prophet Mohammed had lived was different. The Prophet Mohammed in his time dealt with gender issues differently. He encouraged gender equality. For example, he accepted Khadija to work outside the home. Khadija was a prosperous businesswoman who assigned the Prophet to take care of her business, and Khadija eventually, became his first wife. He also used to tell his followers to consult with his younger wife Aisha in religious matters, especially in his absence (Goodwin, 1994; Attallah, 1987). His behaviour suggested that the Prophet Mohammed supported gender equality; therefore, one could conclude that those Islamic militants, who laid claims to the Islamic fundamentalism, never shared the Prophet Mohammed's view on gender issues (Goodwin, 1994; attallah, 1987).

Many Muslim men are aware of the absence of the Qur'anic injunction for the veil, yet insist on its use. Other more liberal men believe that wearing of the veil is a mistake, and women must fight against it. All these attempts indicate the fact women do not take

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<sup>5</sup> The thawb is a thin, full-body wrap-around made of cotton. It began as a conservative dress, but by the 1970s was worn by many urban women as a form of voluntary national dress.

enough responsibilities for their fate, because they allowed men to take the initiative of interpreting the religious matters in a way that suits their patriarchal interest. Ali appears to confirm that point when he says "It appears that women hold themselves accountable for their adherence to the veil" (Wikan, 1984:104).

### **2.3 The Previous Studies**

There have been relatively few studies exploring women's own perceptions of the veil. As mentioned earlier, Ziegler conducted her research in Egypt in 1988, focusing on women's perceptions of the veil. During her investigation, she conducted some interviews, on two different groups of students (the veiled and the unveiled students) in Egypt. She concentrated her efforts on the Cairo University students (Zenie-Ziegler, 1988). Ziegler's study highlighted the issues of gender relationships in patriarchal Egypt. Ziegler's study was limited, in a sense; her sample concerning the veil issues was only confined to 10 students at Cairo University. Similarly, her findings were not representative of the whole country. In her study, Ziegler finds out that Egyptian women both (Muslims and non-Muslims) prefer to remain veiled; for most women prefer to keep Middle Eastern tradition to avoid the Western culture of not wearing the veil. They express the unwillingness and no tendency towards change (Zenie-Ziegler, 1988).

In Sudan's case Sondra Hale conducted a similar research. She confined her interviews to upper-middle class and university students; and it was not representative of the Sudanese women's perceptions of the veil (Hale, 1997). She concentrated her efforts on the participants in the Islamic regime and organizers. Their devotion to NIF (National Islamic Front) is unquestionable. Although their language sometimes is contradictory; yet

they support the Muslim Brothers' claims around the veil. According to her study Hale finds out that most women believe that if they are veiled, they will have a better chance of moving inside and outside the home easily. The veil allows them the freedom of movement, even in the presence of men. It allows them to work outside the home, when they are wearing the veil. Her results indicate that most of the participants colluded with the Islamic system though they know their freedom is limited and controlled.

Although both studies were conducted in two different countries, under different conditions, Ziegler and Hale come to the realization that women in these two studies; expressed their views regarding women's issues amazingly close to those of the Islamic militants' (Hale, 1997; Ziegler, 1988).



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework for the study. It provides an overview of the feminist research methodology, which is employed in this study. Chapter four will then present a detailed description of the study, its methods and procedures used for the data collection and analysis.

#### 3.2 Methodological Framework

It should be noted that methodology in social science is concerned with procedures for making knowledge valid and authoritative (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002:9). Although feminist researchers are generally critical of male-centered knowledge of gender relations (Maynard & Purvis, 1994), they take on the methodological problem of situating their own knowledge in relation to the dominant conceptions of scientific method.

It is evident that feminist studies challenge male-centered knowledge. Feminist research aims to explore and investigate a social reality in which women have been located, and how these women live within a patriarchal controlled society. It urges women to fight against gender inequality (Ramazonglu & Holland, 2002). Feminist knowledge, therefore, is based on the knowledge, which patriarchal authority is aware of, what the

feminists produce is not new knowledge, but it is a reinterpreted and reconceptualized knowledge in order to suit a new feminist framework to justify the unjust or harmful, to serve women's interest. Meaning, the feminist researchers are working within the same traditional framework, and putting the women's experiences as the starting point.

Although feminist critics express discomfort about traditional social science, they admit that they are not creating a new method to address women's oppression and women's exploitation, rather are modifying the theoretical framework of the traditional social science to accommodate women's experience, the experience that was previously invisible and ignored by men studies (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). Feminists' researchers are therefore, working within traditional research, but shifting their priorities to ground women's experience as the base for the feminist study (Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Ramazonglu & Holland, 2002).



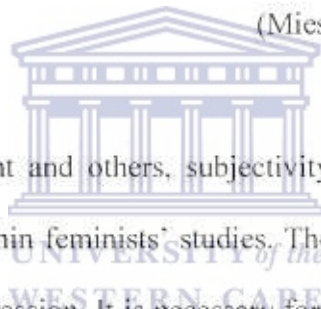
Feminist methodology comprises of a set of rules that specify how social reality should be investigated in order to produce valid and authoritative knowledge. Women's experience forms a central theme in feminist research (Ramazonglu & Holland, 2002). To facilitate the task of a researcher, feminist methodology implies that researcher should bear moral and political responsibilities, because political and ethical issues are acknowledged as integral parts of the feminist study (Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Mies, 1993; Harding, 1987).

The emphasis, which is placed on political and ethical issues, dismisses the assumption of neutrality of natural science; when conducting feminist study. Feminists research, should

be objective towards the cause women's problems, that is to say feminist methodology must be grounded on women's daily lives experiences, to serve the objective and aim of the feminist research, and to represent the powerless women against the patriarchal power control in male-centered world. As Mies argues, it is impossible for feminist researcher to be impartial, it is necessary for the researcher to be conscious, and feel the sympathy towards the researched subject to achieve better results.

The postulate of the value free research, of neutrality and indifference towards the research objects, has to be replaced by conscious partiality, which achieved through partial identification with the research objects. For women who deliberately and actively integrate their double-consciousness into research process, this partial identification will not be difficult

(Mies, 1993:68)



Drawing from Mies's argument and others, subjectivity in the feminist methodology stands a privileged position within feminists' studies. The researcher must be conscious of women's experiences of oppression. It is necessary for the researcher to locate herself within her own research and becomes a research subject; to facilitate and help the researcher to create an interactive situation in which the researcher could give a researched subject a word of encouragement, by telling her own story. On other hand caution should be exercised, because sometimes our personal accounts could be damaging (Maynard & Purvis, 1994).

The slogan "Personal is Political" is a key component of feminist research. It reminds the researcher of the feminist political role of challenging gender inequality and facilitating women's emancipation (Mies, 1993). Dealing with women's experiences and acting as a

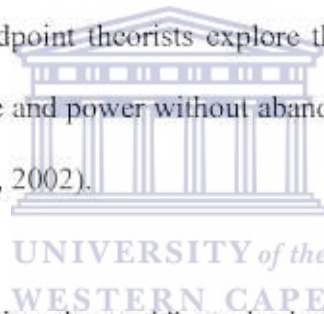
mouthpiece of the subordinate people, places political responsibilities on the feminist researcher's shoulders, thus the researcher must take responsibility to tell accurate stories concerning the matter that she is researching (Ramazonglu & Holland, 2002:42). Feminists argue that researcher's personal history is a part of the research process through which 'understanding' and conclusions are reached. Therefore, researcher should interact with the researched subject to create a proper environment and to establish trust among the partners in the research. Simply, it implies that the researcher must be an integral part of the research (Mies, 1993:68; Maynard & Purvis, 1994:16).

Similarly, feminist researchers must use the academic method of analysis that debates women's studies within political contexts, and leads to production of the positive understanding and authoritative knowledge (Mies, 1993). Feminist research emphasizes the subjectivity and reflectivity; this includes the researcher's tendency to reflect upon, examine critically and exploring analytically the nature of the research process and the social identity of the researcher (Harding, 1987:9; Fonow & Cook, 1991). With reflexivity in place, this action of positioning the researcher, as an active agent in the research process, his or her personal involvement could be a good asset to establish trust and thus obtains reliable information. It could also reinforce the assumption that feminist research is political. When the researcher reflects critically upon the interviews and the analysis of the stories, examines and explores analytically the nature of the research process in an attempt to demonstrate the valid and true information with intention of how the useful knowledge would be achieved, it shows the actual involvement of the researcher politically and at the same time bearing in mind the ethical issues. This confirms my situation, how to locate myself historically and politically within my study.

It portrays my actual position, showing my empathy and impartiality towards my researched subjects; I associate myself with this issue and experience the same problem, as non-Muslim and non-Arab woman who has been affected by the social inequality and the Sharia law in the Sudan.

Feminist research should be sensitive to the issue of knowledge production. Although feminist researchers are generally very critical of male centered knowledge and whose knowledge is to be used, they must take the methodological problem of situating their own knowledge that is women's experiences (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002).

Feminist standpoint is one epistemological framework that serves feminist research (Harding, 1987). Feminist standpoint theorists explore the difficulties of establishing a relationship between knowledge and power without abandoning the hope of telling better stories (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2002).



The notion that "women speaking the truth" results in a new knowledge of gendered social lives, grounded in women's experiences is a central theme of the feminist standpoint theory. (Ramazanoglu, & Holland, 2002:63-64). Although some feminists have criticized the feminist standpoint theory as an inadequate epistemology process, because it simplifies women's experiences and unifies women's categories. This study adopts standpoint theory as a way, to allow participants' voices to be heard and the power relationship between the researcher and the researched subject to be experienced as a non-hierarchical and reciprocal relationship.



### 3.3 Qualitative Methods

In order to explore social reality, researchers need to hear, listen to and record the experiences and the stories of the research participants. Some decide to use the qualitative approaches as the more appropriate methods to provide accurate, reliable and positive results. With qualitative approaches, researcher comes face-to-face; in-depth interviews with the researched subject during the process of data collection (Maynard, 1994:34).

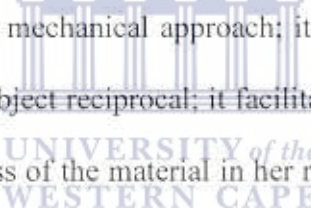
There are many debates around which method should be used by feminist researchers in order to explore social reality (Harding, 1987; Ramazanoglu, & Holland, 2002). Because feminist researchers focus their effort to create a new knowledge about women's experiences and what women face in their daily life and how they are constructed within male-dominated society, some researchers suggest that the feminist researchers should make use of the qualitative methods as long as they are more interested in women's lives experiences, they frequently should use the qualitative approaches as more appropriate methods, which provide accurate, reliable and positive results (Maynard & Purvis, 1994).

Similarly, Kotre (1984:3) recommends these methods, and he argues "Only qualitative analysis can accurately capture the complex of an individual life without violating the integrity of the life or dehumanizing the individual".

Mies agrees with Kotre's argument. She believes that the qualitative approaches would be appropriate, because they allow the researcher to engage in the process fully or partially with the researched subject, when she comes face to face with the interviewees. She says, these methods provide space for flexibility and discovery of meaning (Mies,

1993), because with the qualitative approaches; women are allowed to express and view their own experiences and feelings, instead of having the pre-defined structure imposed by the researcher.

Similarly, feminists have rejected the inevitability of a power hierarchy between the researcher and the researched subject, and have argued for the possibility that the researched subject should not be placed in a passive situation where the researched subject becomes the giver of the information, while the researcher soaks up the details needed (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). In other words they recommend a qualitative approach where the researched participant has the right to answer the question that suits her or even asks the researcher questions in a two way dynamic process.



Qualitative method offers a less mechanical approach; it keeps the relation between the researcher and the researched subject reciprocal; it facilitates respect and dignity. Oakley (1981:41) argues that the richness of the material in her research is due to the qualitative approach, she confirms that the best way to achieve research goals is “When the relationship of the interviewer is non hierarchal”.

This chapter has covered the feminist’s appropriate methods that should be adopted to do a positive feminist research; in addition to that it has been indicated, which theory or method of data analysis that the study strives to adopt. The next chapter presents detailed description of the study and the successful procedures used in data collection.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE METHODS & THE PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed description of methods of data production, data collection methods, participants and data analysis, as well as description of the procedures taken for selection and recruitment of the participants. It primarily presents methods used to select and identify the research participants and the implications of these methods. It also deals with coding the data into categories according to their relevant themes. It also involves data translation and data transcription and interpretation of the captured data. This chapter highlights the ethical issues.



#### 4.2 Data Production

Data production refers to the gathering of information during data collection process by the researcher. The information produced was collected during the in-depth face-to-face interviews (Ramazanoglu, & Holland, 2002). The researcher must be alert to the unspoken language, as well as to facial expressions, sighs, gestures and hysterical laughter, to convert the unspoken language into meaningful information. The researcher must successfully integrate these components together to produce data that is reliable for powerful knowledge production.

### 4.3 Participants

Participants were selected on the basis of a snowball sampling method. The need for inclusion of this method in the study was that to enable me to get as many Sudanese women, who grew up and lived most of their time in Sudan, but for various reasons known to them; are now living in South Africa.

Although I identified 12 Sudanese women (Muslims and non-Muslims) as my research participants, my target was to interview between 8 – 10 women, I managed to interview 9 women. They were as follows, seven Muslims (Northerners) and two non-Muslims (Southerners) Sudanese women. All of the participants were born and grew up in Sudan. All of them were wearing the veil. Due to my political position, I could not go to Sudan to collect data, therefore, I chose and managed to conduct all my interviews in Cape Town, South Africa. Most of the participants were visitors, students or those who were staying in the country for other reasons. The sample represented and reflected a broad spectrum of Sudanese women's perceptions around the issues of the veil.

I identified 12 possible participants and interviewed 7 women from the Muslim Northern Sudan and 2 women from the Christian Southern Sudan, whose ages ranged from 18 to 45 years old. When I approached those women, they showed readiness to take part in the research.

This is the breakdown of the interviews

Northern Sudanese women

No	Name	Occupation	Religion	Age
1	Nada	Housewife	Muslim	29
2	Rasha	Student	Muslim	18
3	Sanaa	Journalist & PhD. Student	Muslim	38
4	Washila	Saleslady	Muslim	43
5	Shareen	Businesswoman	Muslim	31
6	Maymouna	Politician & Teacher	Muslim	40
7	Zienab	Engineer	Muslim	36



Southern Sudanese Women

No	Name	Occupation	Religion	Age
1	Julia	Student	Christian	27
2	Mary	Teacher	Christian	35

The main feature, which unifies these two categories of the Sudanese women, all of them were wearing the veil inside and outside Sudan.

#### **4.4 Methods of Data Collection**

The method that I used in this study is the individual in-depth face-to-face interview, where the relationship between the researcher and the researched subject is reciprocal and non-hierarchical (Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Oakley, 1981; Kotre, 1984).

Qualitative method is the most appropriate technique to use to collect data. It encourages research participants to voice their personal, experiential and emotional aspects of women's existence. It also helps in deconstructing power relationship between the researcher and the research participants in the research (Ramazanoglu, & Holland, 2002). Qualitative methodology asserts women's right and gives them freedom of expression. Equally, it allows the research participants a space to express and view their own experiences and feelings, instead of having a pre-defined structure questions imposed on them by the researcher. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule, with open-ended questions (see appendix 2).

##### **4.4.1 Interviews**

During the interview I asked my candidates permission to use a tape recorder to capture the whole interviews and avoid missing any information. During the interviews, I wrote down and noted some expressions, which could not be captured by the recorder, such as facial expression or shaking heads, shrugging shoulders and frowning to make sense of the overall impression.

The comfort of the research participants was considered and the venues of their choice agreed upon. I gave the research subjects a chance to suggest how to meet, where to meet and how long the meeting would last. I used more than one language during the interviews, especially with the Northern Sudanese women; because they mainly use Arabic language as a means of communication.

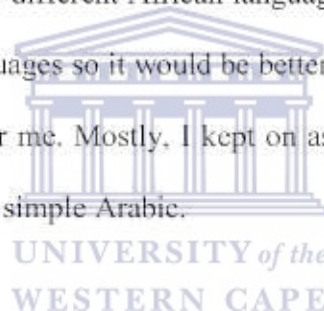
Flexibility and transparency are needed. I was flexible with my candidates and treated them throughout the interviews with gentleness and delicacy; though I planned my questions in advance as guidance. I was ready to answer any question even if it were personal, to create an interactive situation and establish trust among us. I led the interviewees gently with respect through the process. During the interviews I gave the interviewees enough time to contemplate on the questions and to respond comfortably in their terms. I never put any interviewee under pressure, because to me as a feminist researcher, the researched subject's identity is not less important than the information. I put much effort to keep the relationship between the researched subject and myself to take a non-hierarchical form; I succeeded in doing so and would describe the relationship between us as a reciprocal relationships.

#### **4.4.2 Self-reflexivity & Language**

Reflecting on the research process, I realized I have experienced some problems, which created some obstacle to me. As a researcher to conceptualize the power relation was not an easy task. I have been through a lot of difficulties. For example, I experienced some problems in pursuing the study, though I tried to share my personal experiences. The first obstacle I encountered was when the Northern Sudanese women, held back some

information. I knew there was a missing link in what she was saying, but as a feminist researcher, I could not patronize her, or insist to obtain that information, especially information about religious matters and personal relationship within the family.

Other problem I came across was the language used. The study is done in English, but the research participants were given a chance to speak in the language of their choice. The research participants were not English speakers, and many of them especially women from the Northern Sudan preferred expressing themselves in their mother tongue (Arabic Language). They felt comfortable to speak in Arabic. In the contrary, the Southern Sudanese women, mainly spoke in English, although sometimes they were shifting from time to time to Arabic and other different African languages. I had to remind them that I don't know many Africans languages so it would be better if we could stick to English or Arabic to make things easier for me. Mostly, I kept on asking them to repeat what they had said in English, or in a clear simple Arabic.



It was difficult to translate and transcribe the interviews, because I had to transcribe first the text in the language that I used during the interview. While translating and editing the text, I bore in mind that I should not change the original words of the interviews. I kept up to the standard, for example, some women spoke grammatically incorrect language, but I corrected the document to make it readable. Eventually, translated, transcribed and edited the text and produced the final version of the interviews in English. I took a full responsibility to avoid the misuse of the information.



## 4.5 Procedures

The sample that I selected was through a snowballing technique. Snowball sampling is a method through which you develop an ever increasing number of participants. You ask one participant in the event under study to recommend others. Simply, snowballing is a scientific method that involves a statistical process in selection (Earl, 1995). Initially, I wanted to contact the research candidates myself, but found that it was time consuming and I could not get sufficient sample for my research. Then I switched to the snowballing technique. With the snowballing I was allowed access to a greater number of women, whom I wouldn't have or never have met at all.

Through the snowballing I established and created trust and confidence among the women, especially those with whom I spoke to in the beginning. They felt needed, for I have given them power and authority to contact other women whom I did not know. This act gave the women the sense of belonging to the project and encouraged them to take part in the study without any hesitation.

In fact snowballing helped a lot, because it lessened my burden of going around talking and explaining the purpose of the study to the researched subjects, that part was done by my ambassadors. I was happy with the snowballing, because it increased the diversity of interviewees. Their ages ranged differently and they came from various social standards, family status and different religious backgrounds.

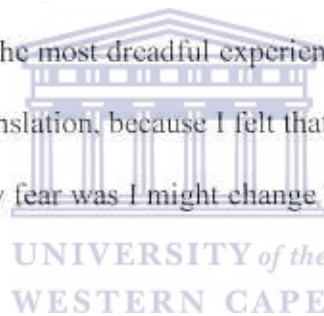
Initial to the snowballing practices, I issued consent forms to inform the candidates about the aim and purpose of the research and that was totally dependent on their readiness and

cooperation to take part in the study. The other appropriate method I used to contact my research participants, especially the early group, it was either by phoning them or visiting them personally in their homes or at their workplaces.

Prior to the interviews, I obtained permission from the participants to use a tape recorder; otherwise, the researched subjects would not be comfortable. I told them it was necessary for me to use the recording facilities, so that I would not miss a point, or misinterpret any information.

#### **4.6 Translation and Transcription**

Translating the interviews was the most dreadful experience I have ever had. I was afraid that the data might be lost in translation, because I felt that I might miss out a lot of words and sentences in translation. My fear was I might change the real meaning of the original interviews.



Transcription was not a big problem, because I could transcribe the translated interviews without any difficulties. But the ones, which were done in English were challenging I had to edit the text by omitting and correcting the grammatically incorrect language and cross off most of the stammering like ahhh...mmaa... or long pauses and silence to make the transcription neat, and readable.

I want to emphasize that I translated and transcribed all the interviews by myself. I had to check several times and make sure that the translation and the transcription corresponded with the original data collected.

To avoid publicity of the information; usage of the devices or the tools where the data is captured was necessary, i.e. tape recorder; video and tapes are used and kept in a safe place. I handled the devices with extra care. It was necessary to keep the records until the research is over, because I might need to listen again to the interviews, to verify certain points, which I might have missed. I used the source of the data collection as references when I needed that. I also asked the research participants to repeat certain sentences that I could not comprehend in order not to misinterpret the actual meaning, when translating or transcribing.

During the translation and the transcription I tried to edit the text without losing the original meaning of the interviews, any omission made was to make the text readable, and acceptable for research purposes.



#### **4.7 The Dynamic Power Relations**

Feminist researchers praise the qualitative approaches as suitable methods to conduct in-depth interviews. They emphasize that with qualitative approaches the researcher and the researched subjects are able to keep reciprocal relationships, where the researcher and the research participants are at a non-hierarchical level. I found my position, however, was different. Most of the time I felt powerful, sometimes to the extent that I felt as if I have been exploitative with them, especially by directing my questions to certain areas of my concern and interest. Of course as a researcher who places herself within the questions, I have a mission to fulfill to serve the purpose of the research. I knew what I wanted and how to direct my questions and not to lose focus, to obtain the information that I want, which is necessary for the study. I sensed some how vulnerability in some women,

especially those who were coming from Sudan and planning to return to Sudan. The other observation was although I am not a Muslim, I sensed that they feel intimidated by me, as if I knew more than what they know, they felt somehow uncomfortable. To hide their feelings and not to allow their senses to betray them, some women were showing off and trying to appear knowledgeable. It was well manifested when I spoke to Sanaa the journalist and the Ph D. student. She was one of the people who wanted to prove the opposite perceptions. She felt proud and thought that she might be able to manipulate the interview. She knew that, due to my political, cultural, racial and religious background, I would not dare to ask her question about the Sharia Law or to ask her about the perceptions of the veil. I disappointed her, for I knew what I was after. She assumed that she knew what I wanted to hear. She acted and pretended to know women's rights, especially the non-Muslims rights: as a journalist, she showed concern about the transformation of the patriarchal power control in a country like Sudan, where majority of women are educated. Sanaa contradicted herself by saying, how beautiful for the Sharia to be implemented in the Sudan, because it is the right way. One could assume that she is one of many women who helped men in distracting change in the country and striving to facilitate the operation of the Muslim militants' patriarchal power.

There are more of these examples in Sudan. For example Wisal a wife of El Turabi, and a sister of Sadiq El Mahdi, Najwa a first woman who was appointed as a Sharia Judge and finally Sarah the wife of El Mahdi. All these women are well educated and professionals. They are from upper-middle class to upper class. Instead of defending women's right they are defending the Sharia seriously and saying that the Sharia Law promotes women and permits them to work, but conditionally only (Hale, 1997: 243).

The reality is, the Islamic militants in the government of Khartoum, perceive that women are central to their cause and among visible organizers. Therefore, Islamic militants target women and make them to be spokespersons for the Sharia and to advocate to the young men from high schools, the new graduates and those people from the unprivileged backgrounds to execute their policies, though the Islamic movement is not an emancipatory for them.

#### **4.8 Data Analysis**

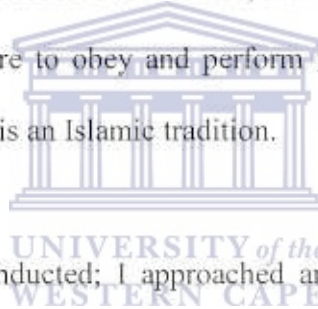
In this study, information collected using qualitative approaches was obtained from the in-depth face-to-face interviews. I elicited the adequate information that I needed to serve the purpose of the study from the respondents and reflected upon their real life experiences. Through listening and transcribing of the information gathered, I was able to verify different responses easily. Thus, the gathered data was processed, and coded into the relevant themes.

It is obvious that the analysis of data starts the minute the researcher comes face-to-face with the interviewee, because the researcher can listen, interpret, ask, observe and read body and facial expressions, gestures, silences, pauses and sometimes the laughter of the researched subjects.

The usage of the devices and tools where information was captured; secured rich data and was essential. I asked the participants for permission to record the interviews before starting the interviews. Although some of the researched subjects were not comfortable,

eventually, all of them accepted my request. It was necessary to keep copies of the original interviews, recorded as back-ups to go to when I need to.

Playing the recorder over and over again gave me insight into the women's stories. Coding the information into similar categories enabled me to see the hidden messages and unspoken expressions of those women. The stories simply, uncovered the oppression that they had been through from their own families, as a result of the structure of the Arab and Muslims family the agony and the discomfort was felt in their voices. I have come to know that Islam has a distinct family structure, where there are a lot of controversial issues within their families. The Islamic and Arab family hierarchy is well structured and organized; according to a certain order. For instance, men are to provide financial support to their families, and women are to obey and perform their domestic roles to suit the norm and must wear the Veil, it is an Islamic tradition.

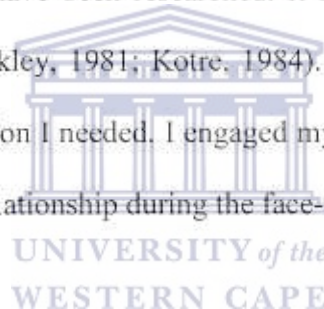


Before the interviews were conducted; I approached and talked to the participants. I explained to them the aim and the purpose of the study and said how it was important to do such a study. To listen to women's perceptions, to record and to document these perceptions in order to create awareness among them. I told them, this is to facilitate transformation to remove doubts concerning men interpretation of the religious text to women; in fact women should be given a chance to interpret Islamic texts in their own terms, which would not result only in wearing the veil.

However, feminist methodology implies that the researcher should bear in her mind moral responsibilities, (Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Mies, 1993; Harding, 1987;

Ramazanoglu, & Holland, 2002), in other words feminist research is more of moral obligation than a scientific approach. I never lost focus on following the scientific stages to conduct my study. I presented my research participants with a written document with all the explanation needed. I showed them the outlined examples of the expected questions. Again I presented them with the consent form to read, understand and sign before any interview took place. The consent form guaranteed them the right to remain anonymous, and also they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without offence.

Since, qualitative approach concentrates and focuses on the women's experiences and giving meaning to those who have been researched. It is the most appropriate method ((Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Oakley, 1981; Kotre, 1984). I agreed to use this method to collect the kind of the information I needed. I engaged myself fully with the participants, and I established a reciprocal relationship during the face-to-face interviews.



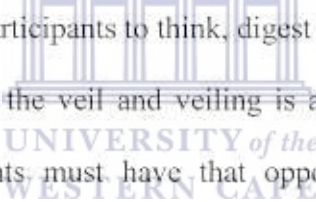
To protect interviewee's privacy, I coded the relevant themes, put the similar cases together, processed, compared data and discussed the information within the feminist methodological framework, to make it ready for analysis and documentation. Coding is an important stage, where, if the researcher has not coded the information carefully and correctly, she/he might not be able to extract any valuable information to use in producing positive and valid knowledge that contributes to real social change.

Listening to the interviews over and over more than once helped me to pick up some information, which escaped me during the interviews. Also it gave me a chance to verify

the omitted or ambiguous information. In addition to that repeating and listening to the tape more than once, gives the researcher different insight to the stories.

#### **4.9 Ethical issues**

It is evident that feminist research incorporates the ethical concerns regarding consent, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Hence, I managed to handle the ethical issues and covered that before time in terms of “Consent form” (See appendix 1). It calls for fair and decent treatment of the research candidates. The consent form basically was used to give the respondents full information about the purpose of the interview and the study before time. It was also to appeal to openness between the research participants and the researcher.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building with columns and a pediment, with the text "UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE" below it.

It was used to give time to the participants to think, digest and decide whether to take part in the research or not. Because the veil and veiling is a sensitive issue and related to religious matters the participants must have that opportunity to contemplate. Thus “Consent Form” was given to read and sign before any interview takes place. It guaranteed the researched subject the right to anonymity and confidentiality. The “Consent Form” allowed the participants to continue or to withdraw from the study at any time they feel uncomfortable and without any prejudices.

I treated my interviewees with dignity, respect and delicacy; I never put them interviewee under pressure, because I wanted to stick to the feminist’s research principles where the researcher must treat the researched subject with respect and dignity, and the relationship between them must be non-hierarchical. As a feminist researcher it is good to respect



human dignity, and show that the identity of the research subject is not less important than the information that the respondent gives. Good treatment allows the energy of the participants to surface so that they will never feel patronized or intimidated.

#### **4.10 Challenges and Difficulties Anticipated**

The fear of the unknown nearly crippled me. I was wondering how could I approach those women and how could I interview strange women on sensitive issues such as religious matters. I was not sure what their reactions would be. The other obstacle, which was about to set me back, was the issue of language barrier. I anticipated and expected many obstacles, for instance some women would like to use a different language apart from English and it was obvious.



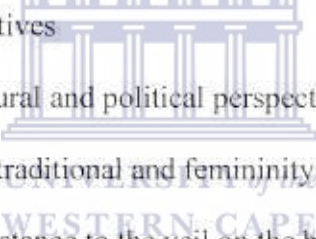
As a feminist researcher I was troubled by what kind of questions that I should ask. As Kelly argues that “What distinguishes feminist research from the other forms of research is the questions we have asked, and the way we locate ourselves within our questions” (Maynard & Purvis, 1994:15). Also, because the feminist researcher is concerned with the questions, she should not forget the ethical and political responsibility while conducting the research. I was fully aware of these responsibilities.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA FINDINGS & DATA ANALYSIS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study. It centers on the thematic analysis of the data collected and analyzed, according to the procedures detailed in chapter four. The key themes that emerged were related to different perceptions of the veil and included the following: -

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- i- Religious perspectives
  - ii- A normative, cultural and political perspectives
  - iii- An expression of traditional and femininity
  - iv- Rejection and resistance to the veil on the basis of commitment to freedom
  - v- Collusion with the Islamic political system

#### 5.2 Analysis

i - The religious perspectives: -

A strong sentiment that emerged from some of women in this category is related to seeing wearing the veil as a reflection on the religion of Islam. A number of women who wear the veil believe it as a part of the religion of Islam. For them, wearing the veil is a

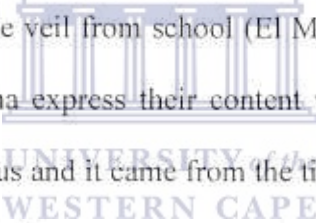
tradition that is carried out since the time of El Nabi<sup>6</sup> Mohammed. These women believe that the Prophet commanded them to wear the veil and to protect themselves from men's gaze. They are not willing to change or attempt to fight for change.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Spiritually? Politically? Religiously? And Culturally?

Washila: Religiously, the Nabi Mohammed commanded women to wear the veil so that they can protect themselves from the eyes of evil men.

Rasha: I feel good I was taught at school (el Madrassa) that the veil is mentioned in the holy Qu'ran, and the practices of wearing the veil, started with the wives of our prophet Mohammed.

Maymouna: I personally, glad because I am practicing my religious tradition to the fullest and feel blessed to have my parents who introduced to me the right practice. In fact if they wouldn't have done it I would have, I mean I would have worn the veil.



Rasha says, she learned about the veil from school (El Madrassa) and it is mentioned in Holy Qu'ran. Washila and Rasha express their content with the fact that the tradition wearing the veil is purely religious and it came from the time of the Prophet Mohammed. They believe the veil is special because even Mohammed's wives wore the veil. According to them Nabi Mohammed commanded Muslim women to veil themselves from the eyes of evil men. Maymouna is also glad that her parents have introduced her to the right practice. Her content with wearing the veil is an indication of her commitment to her religion and her sentimental acceptance of her fate is all centered on wearing the veil.

These women who believe that wearing the veil is a religious tradition could not tolerate any criticism and Shareen confirms that

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<sup>6</sup> See a list of the Arabic terminologies

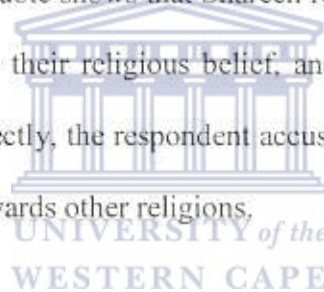
Catherine: The practices of the veil and veiling has been heavily criticized by some grouping in the west and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled in any way?

Shareen: These kind of criticisms won't affect my decision, because as a Muslim woman, I know what is the veil is all about, and I personally know why I chose to be veiled, and I am telling you I will remain veiled as long as I live no matter what criticism that they do, still I will be the same.

What I beg for is that let these grouping in the west or these other elements within the African society should show respect to the other religions, and let them mind their own business. Their interference is not welcomed as far as I am concerned.

Also they must have religious tolerance and tolerate me as a human being and respect my right as a human. They must accept and respect my religion and belief and what I stand for. They must respect me for what I am.

This quote views how Shareen reacts to the criticism, she practically asks the critics to mind their own business. This quote shows that Shareen represents these women who are drawn into wearing the veil by their religious belief, and they are consciously content with the veiling practices. Indirectly, the respondent accuses the international community to lack respect and tolerance towards other religions,



Catherine: The western criticism is out of place, because I believe their criticism is due to ignorant. If the westerners say they believe in the freedom of expression, why then interfering in our private lives?

Washila: Like me wearing the veil is a way of my life, I was brought up in a Muslim family, surrounded by people who mostly wear the veil, why someone from somewhere tells me what I am doing is wrong what like what happened in France, if they don't want me in the veil, it means they don't want me as a person, and I don't need them. My private life is mine and I don't allow any intrusion. No one must intrude in my lifestyle.

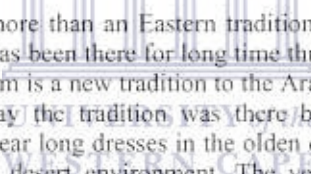
Let me add something indeed those kinds of criticism make Muslims more aggressive, and because of that I would even wear a bigger veil.

The final caption in this category exhibits how Washila is happy and content with her situation. She never wanted any pressure from outside her religious environment. She

expresses that she never considered the veil as an oppressive practice, as long as she is exercising her religious right. She says too much criticism will bring opposite results, meaning any criticism, especially, from the West and non-Islamic communities, makes Muslim women to be more aggressive and will wear bigger veil.

ii- A normative, cultural and political perspectives: -

The second category is made up of three excerpts, which reflect on the different situations of women's daily life experiences. These women's perceptions around the veil are coloured with normative, cultural and political perspectives. The answers of Sanaa (Journalist and PhD. student) and Nada (Housewife) highlight the veil as Eastern societies' norm and it has more than one name.



Sanaa: The veil is not more than an Eastern tradition; in Iran for example they called it chador. It has been there for long time throughout their history. The veil in its current form is a new tradition to the Arabs in general, even in Saudi Arabia. Let us say the tradition was there before Islam and that because Arabs used to wear long dresses in the olden days and that was due to the roughness of the desert environment. The veil in its form started recently in the time of king el Saud.

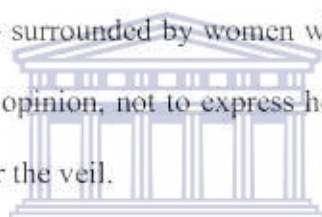
Nada: The tradition of the veil within the Islamic and Arab world has different shape and size; it depends on where it is worn, and for what purpose it is worn. For example in the North Africa they called purdah, it was a cultural dress where the woman used to cover herself completely leaving only her eyes. Burga is used in Oman; it has a cultural and traditional significance, but nowadays, it is used as a religious outfit.

These quotes also show not only the acknowledgement but also the acceptance of the veil as a normative and cultural practice and political perspectives. The interviewees say, the veil has a long history and it has evolved and developed throughout history to this day.

Sanaa explains that the tradition of wearing the veil is not only confined among the Arabs and the Muslims but the Far East societies it also known for body cover-up tradition.

Rasha: I grew up in that atmosphere where every woman in the family is veiled, not that alone I was told often to cover my head specially if there were strangers at home or if we were going to visit, or shopping. At school we were told to wear scarves or "Taraha" to cover the head and the upper part of the body "The breast".

Rasha the young Muslim girl represents those women, who were born during the period when the Sudan government implemented the Sharia Law. She and her family live within the system and find themselves obliged to wear the veil as part of their religious tradition, and cultural practices. She was born in early eighties; when Nimeri launched the new law in the country. She grew up surrounded by women who wear the veil. She is taught not to comment or to voice her opinion, not to express her desire. What is needed from her is to follow the rule and wear the veil.



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Catherine: The first question is when did you start wearing the veil?

Rasha: I don't really know when exactly I started wearing the veil. I will tell you why? First of all I was born in the time when the Sudan government implemented Sharia. Let us put it this way, Nimeri brought the Sharia, but two years after that he was overthrown and came the government of the Allied Parties, they disqualified what Nimeri used to call Sharia and said they what Nimeri had introduced were September's laws, they purely secular laws. The Allied Parties ruled the country for four years and in June 1989 the Islamic Salvation Front overthrew the Allied Parties, with collaboration with the Islamic Militants they brought back the modified Sharia laws, this time they claimed that what they are implementing are the true Sharia laws. They used the slogan that says "The return to the pure Islamic laws".

The same situation is applies to Mary. As a Christian, she represents the minority group of non-Muslim women of the South. She is aware of the rules that forced women to wear the veil. Women in general must follow the rules of the country. If they do not meet the

conditions and try to disobey the political rules, they will be punished by “whipping”. As an individual she finds herself entrapped in a country, which does not respect women rights or human rights principles. Furthermore, her situation indicates how rigid is the system that launched the harsh rules and the laws in Sudan. It also shows the vulnerability and hopelessness of this non-Muslim community. The Christians have no say about the veil. Like the others they are forced to obey the Law, otherwise, they would jeopardize their safety and face severe punishment.

Catherine: When did you start wearing the veil?

Mary: I started wearing the veil in 1995, when I started working at high school in Khartoum. I met a lot of discomfort from my colleagues at work. I found most of my peers teachers are already wearing the veil, though I am a Christian I was exposed to pressure, they could not said directly but usually they use examples that would provoke me. Not that because I was using public transport from home to work and vice versa, I was to verbal harassments, or sometime you some one will come from nowhere and pushes you around without any apology. If it happened that I meet with the authority I mean the “police” it would be another issue, because I might end up in one of those Sharia courts and receive the punishment, usually it was 10 to 15 slashes.

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Her comment suggests that women’s oppression prevails in Sudan. This Christian woman is an example of many small and marginalized groups, who are silenced by the government.

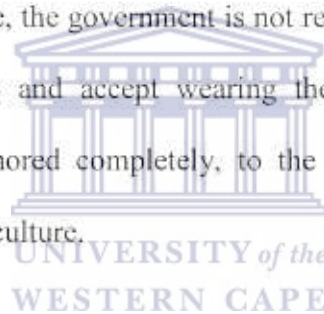
Catherine: What meaning did the veiling have in your family? Did you at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female child did? What influenced you in making the choice?

Mary: We are Christians and we never experienced wearing the veil before, though some times my mum and some older women in my family wear “El thoub”. That one is not compulsory you wear it on occasion when you like it otherwise the person is free to wear or not to wear the “Thoub”. With the Islamic militants in power every thing is changed. The police, the society and even your friends they won’t leave you alone. For instance you somebody approaching and asking you why don’t you wear the veil? Or why

don't you dress up in a proper way? One day I was confronted by one of the Muslim brother he wore big beard, and hailed at me, he said "Listen I am from (he mentioned another Islamic grouping) you appear a decent person and I don't want you to end up in troubles that is why I am warning to change the way you dress up" I looked at him and said instead of talking to me why don't go and tell the traders to remove the unreligious clothes from the shops.

Mary: We the Southerners our culture is different from the Northerners. We follow two kinds of cultures, the European culture and African culture. Mostly in the South we wear an outfit made that made of three pieces, made of a certain cloth called "Wax". It is well known in DRC, Central Africa, Great Lakes Region and West Africa in general.

The excerpts exhibit women's opinion about the veil. Mary explains how the non-Muslim women have to suppress their feelings, because they are not given a chance to express their resentment. The women of the South have their own tradition and culture there is diversity in the Sudanese culture, the government is not ready to consider that, but expect any woman to obey the rules and accept wearing the veil without any resistance. Precisely, their presence is ignored completely, to the extent the southerners cannot practice and exercise their own culture.



In addition to that, Participants throughout this section say wearing the veil is not their strong point. Sanaa, Nada, Rasha and Mary express their opinions, saying, wearing the veil is not purely Islamic or a Sudanese tradition. It is a borrowed culture, which is not confined to Sudan or Islamic world only, but extends up to the Far East. It also shows how passive and receptive the women to the Sharia Law.

Thus, because of their passivity, the government of Sudan denies them their rights by imposing the veil on every woman and as a result the veil becomes an integral part of the Sudanese women's identity as well as a symbol of control over them.



iii- An expression of traditional and femininity

What is central to this category is the construction of women as objects. Their bodies have been treated as vehicle for the inscription of masculinity and femininity. These women have been objectified in the society. Much emphasis is placed on the women's seclusion. They must cover their bodies and dress in a proper manner to set examples to their daughters, present themselves as respectful women.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Religiously? Culturally? Politically? And Spiritually?

Shareen: Personally I guess wearing the veil is not my strong point, but it does not harm to wear the veil to win people respect. Culturally and politically it gives space, to go out and work and earn money like men. It is a sort of freedom. Our culture praises the woman who respects her husband. To tell the truth we are different from the European. An Islamic culture is about the family. Everything in the family is going according to certain order. The man is to go out, work and bring home money. A woman must be at home doing her domestic duties, and not to worry of any financial problems. Children must honour and respect their parents. You know it is a system, which came down long ago from our ancestors. No to forget, mothers are to set good example for their daughters. You know I gave birth to Iman my daughter and I want to be that mother.

And from the political point of view, the NIF publicized the wearing the veil and made it for every woman. I have no problem but sometime feel sympathy for the Christians. Any way nothing we can do if they say "do it, we obey". They right, because women should wear respectful outfit.

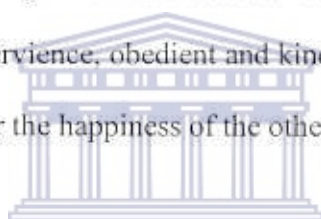
The excerpt exhibits women's opinion, and contrasts it of how they play into men's rules and regulations, to entertain or please their men. Shareen wears the veil, because she is married and has a daughter. She wears the veil for two reasons. First, Shareen does it because her husband wants her to wear the veil. Secondly, as a mother she wants to set a good example for her daughter. The veil in this context is used as a tool for women's oppression; only through the help of women themselves this tool becomes effective. It

indicates the patriarchal power over women needs. It is not what women need but their husbands want them to do by concealing their bodies but also their minds, in order not loose their marriages and to set good examples for their daughters. This quote illustrates how women in this particular position collude with men to please them.

Shareen: The veil to me meaning dressing up in a certain way, I mean to put on long dress and cover the head with the dock or scarf. The concept behind the veil simply is to cover up. This practice depends on two factors. One some husbands ask their wives to dress up in that manner (social) and the other factor is a religious practice.

If we look at the first factor is some women are asked to dress that way whether they like it or not, and sometimes if the woman does not want to consider wearing could cause her to lose her marriage.

Femininity in both quotes portrays women's role in the family as a sacrificial role. Women are expected to be subservience, obedient and kind, to the extent that they should be ready to give up their need for the happiness of the others.



However, these women are wearing the veil following the patriarchal philosophy; they have worn the veil, because their husbands told them to wear the veil. Wearing the veil simply is an integral part of the Islamic and Arab family structure. In this category women exhibit the non-resistance attitude towards what their men want them to do. They display femaleness and complete obedience and submission to men. They wear the veil to keep their marriages and to be good mothers for their daughters.

iv- Rejection and resistance to the veil on the basis of commitment to freedom

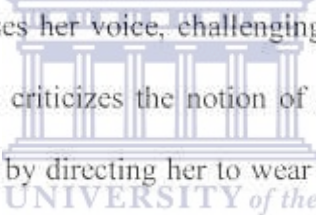
Zienab is one of these women who believe in secularism and appreciate the freedom of individuals. She articulates her views strongly, refusing to settle to what they are not convinced with. For her religion is personal, private and simple. She believes that not by

wearing the veil a woman will prove herself as a good Muslim. The relationship between God and His creation is personal as long as the person prays that is all.

Catherine: How do you feel when you are wearing the veil?

Zienab: Angry, and I want to scream. I believe it is a human rights violation, if not where is the freedom of a woman? Why not she or them to be left alone? They must choose for themselves what to wear but not to be told what to put on.

The other thing is that let the environment dictates over women. We don't need any human beings interventions. For instance, have you ever seen a person without clothing unless that person is sick or abnormal? What I know in winter every body dress up in accordance with the weather to protect themselves from the cold. In summer they put light clothes to the heat. The other example is that, I never seen a person going for job interviews in pyjamas, or going to beach in full suit in summer. Why then, should women be forced to wear the veil forcibly? Is it not a violation of their rights?



In her anger this participant raises her voice, challenging and resisting the authority of patriarchal system strongly. She criticizes the notion of a woman being constructed in society and being dictated upon, by directing her to wear the veil. In her final comment, she says, let the nature dictates upon people, but not a group of politician to pass rules on people to execute.

The next quote shows the resistance of women who are forced by their states to wear the veil, but are not allowed to voice their opinions. Julia shares the same views with Zienab. They both prefer secularism and freedom of individuals. In this area the study highlights the circumstances that surrounded those women. Although they are expressing their views, challenging the system and resisting strongly the laws, which violate human rights, their efforts are in vain. Since the government ignores such small marginal group, they are forced by their circumstances to leave their homeland and go to exile.

Julia is a Christian woman and student. She experiences the same fate as Rasha. They both were born during the Sharia implementation in Sudan. Wearing the veil was part of their growing life. As a Christian she is ready to abundant the veiling tradition because she believes it human right violation, the reason the leads her to leave her country. She says if Sudan cannot provide her with the freedom that she needs; she rather lives in exile.

Julia: Politically, the veil is imposed on us and I consider it as human rights violation. It is unfair to bring someone's culture or religious belief and impose that on people who are ethnically, culturally and religiously different.

I could not live in Sudan that is why I am now here in South Africa. Some times you experience more freedom outside your country and it is better this way.

Zienab: I still wear the veil but not the regular basis. I wear the veil if I go to Muslim community; I wear it if I want to process a document from Sudan. Catherine, let me tell you something; I think I have passed that stage of living in the false environment. I mean living a day. Now I have a Canadian citizenship. Free at last, no one would dare to force me to wear the veil, or to go to Sudan. If I want to visit and see my family or the other way round, it will happen outside Sudan.

Catherine: If you had the freedom of choice as a child or within your own religious community or among your peers, would choose to wear the veil? Should any political conditions change, would you continue to wear the veil?

Julia: Religiously I have nothing to do with the veil. When the government imposed the veil on every woman they never asked any body opinion. I wouldn't have chosen the veil and let us if at any circumstance the policy or the government changed I will change immediately nothing will hold me back.

Julia and Zienab although they are from different political, racial and religious background, they share similar views concerning the human right violation, the way they

sought to live in exile and finally, their readiness to abundant wearing the veil as soon as any change takes place in the country.

v- Collusion with the Islamic and political system: -

Finally, the category of represents those women, who colluded with the philosophies of the Islamic militants. These women practically are under the militants' spell; they could not comment, argue or contradict the Islamic militants' ideology. Their devotions and commitments are visible, for the Islamic militants made them to be among the organizers. Most of them are new or young graduates, who are given positions equal to men. Most of the recruits are from the new middle class, which is created by the militants, to secure the continuity of their regime, and to guarantee having supporters. These new and young graduates immigrated recently to urban cities. Precisely, their social class is created to promote the militants' government. Among them also some women from upper class, who are occupying, and are engaged in professional and political activities, and furthermore some even occupy high positions on the same level with men.

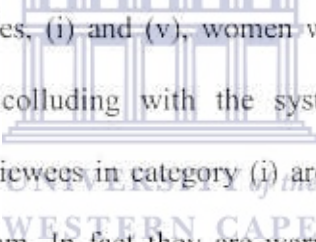
Catherine: When did you experience wearing the veil?

Sanaa: I did wear the veil for the first time at the university. Although wearing the veil was compulsory for sometimes, when the militants came to power, but no more. The veil to me has been a secondary thing, because I prefer wearing thawb, especially on private occasions when I want to show off my henna. Of course wear el Hijab every day to go to work, for it is the official out fit, it gives me freedom of movement among my peers and colleagues, and at the same time I don't want to look different.

This excerpt shows how these women, who collaborate with the system, present their issues. Sanaa justifies the reason behind the veiling. She presents the militants to be

heroes, and considerate of the situations of the poor women. She says the veil is meant to be as a unifying dress at the university, she not only deliberately ignores the fact that it was a rule, which was passed on every woman by the state, but continues to praise the Islamic militants for their stance towards the poor.

I said I started wearing the veil at the university the reason is that, as you know in Sudan we have few universities and in these universities many students are coming from different backgrounds. Some are filthy rich and some are poor to the extent they could not eat a decent meal. Leave alone the way they are dressing up. This social gap between the rich and the poor causes a lot of depression and psychological problems, and automatically affects the performance of these poor students. Many would drop off along the way and some would continue but with lower grades. To prevent this phenomenon, the administration passed and circulated a rule that students especially girls must wear unifying outfit, made of cheap material. This is how we came to wear the veil.



If we compare the two categories, (i) and (v), women who wear the veil for religious purposes and those who are colluding with the system, we see some important differences. The religious interviewees in category (i) are convinced that they wear the veil as the right practice of Islam. In fact they are wary about the interference of the others in their own matters. The participants are ready to fight back to defend their faith. These women simply, express purely their Islamic beliefs which are based on the Prophet Mohammed's teaching.

Meanwhile, women in category (v) read too much to politics. They relate wearing the veil to the political situation and consider it as a political move to unify women from all aspects of life. This is to reinforce unity among the social classes; though it is confusing. Sanaa represents women in category (v). She selects her words carefully in order not to contradict her statements. She is sure that she would be able to put her political message

across. She says, despite of the Sharia Law in the country, Sudanese women are still among the luckiest women in the world. Her response is as follows:

Sanaa: First of all, women in Sudan are not oppressed neither are they exploited. I have just told you about the way they dress. Even though, if you consider the chances those Sudanese women are getting from the economical, educational and political point of view; statistically it has been proven that Sudanese women have the highest rate of employment. Do not forget the civil war, which has been going for decades. Many men died and still dying and automatically women are replacing them.

Finally, during the analysis I come to realize that there are unexpected information and interesting issues emerging. For instance, the weakness of the men is highlighted many times, in these women comments. Many women say that one of the reasons to wear the veil is to protect men. In contrast to the stereotyped image of men protecting women, it appears that men are the ones who need women protection. These women say, they wear the veil to protect men, because men get tempted easily. Men cannot resist temptation, especially, when they see a woman walking down the street with a half naked body. It provokes their sexual desire and this could lead to commit sexual offences.

Washila: The concept behind wearing the veil in addition to the religious reason, I believe women should wear respectful outfit to prevent men from temptation. You know men are weak by nature, they could not bear seeing women dressing in tight clothes or half naked dresses; straightaway they would be tempted and commit unpleasant behaviours. So women are to wear the veil to reduce the chances of getting hurt or harassed by men.

Feminist in this conjecture would argue the Sudanese women who collude with the system need to be educated and oriented to know their rights and live for themselves not for the others. Fundamentalists in another hand argue that in Islam the good and

respectful woman is the one who obeys her husband and does what he demands. The fundamentalists maintain their views regarding women's obedience. Not to adapt contrary opinion, we see women who are favoured and employed by the fundamentalists as their agents, would argue that wearing the veil is essential, because through it the women would acquire their identity within the family and outside the home at the workplace.

### **5.3 The Results**

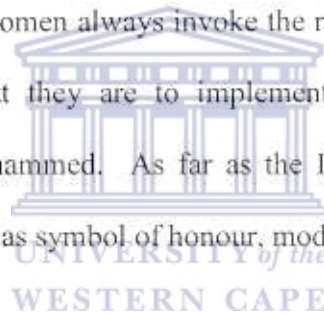
During the interviews I was aware that many Sudanese women, especially, the Northerners were going to collude with the Islamic philosophies and politics, and they would resist change. I didn't want to be judgemental; however, I proceeded with the interviews, as if I was looking for justification and evidence to prove such experiences do exist. My intention was not to assume, but to provide information, which would be possibly useful to change the mentality of these women who are influenced by the patriarchal concepts in a religious and patriarchal society.

Listening to these women, I have come to realize that feminists' researchers are faced with a serious problem. To produce useful information, they have to present and to build a new strategy in order to expose an exploitative and oppressive situation. They must listen to every woman's story even with those whom they have disagreed, especially, intellectuals from the North, whom, most of them expressed great resistances to change and don't acknowledge that there is a problem. In fact they play a vital role to assure their tendency to collude with men. Precisely, their views were similarly close to those of the



Muslim Brothers. Although the situation is a complex, feminist researchers must work according to the feminist aim and theory to achieve positive results.

As mentioned earlier, most of the Sudanese women intellectuals show resistance to change. Their views are nearly identical to the Muslim Brothers. Most of them are not willing to accept change, in fact some are excusing the men and sympathizing with them of being weak and cannot resist temptation, for that reason many never perceived wearing the veil as an oppressive tool. Instead they display their readiness to wear the veil as a solidarity gesture, where they must show their obligation, to fulfill their duties towards the families and to exercise their religious rights. If at any circumstance a question is raised about wearing the veil, women always invoke the religion as the main cause; they always justify their points that they are to implement the tradition that once was introduced by the Prophet Mohammed. As far as the Islamic and Arabic tradition is concerned, they look at the veil; as symbol of honour, modesty and respect.



Similarly, wearing the veil suggests equality among women. There is an unspoken view, or hidden purpose that the veil is used to disguise poverty. Though sometime those women who are wearing the veil; wear make-up and beautifying their faces, and wearing the most expensive fabrics, yet they say when wearing the veil the class issue disappears and all of the women will look the same. We have realized that most of the participants started wearing the veil, when they still students at the university, and through wearing the veil as a unify dress, the social difference between the poor and the rich disappeared.

There are some issues, which feminists' question and at the same draw their attention.

For example one of my questions reads as follows: -

Catherine: The practices of veiling has been criticized heavily by some grouping in the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled in any way?

This question draws a lot of reactions towards the westernization policies. The interviewees express openly their resentment for the western culture and say, they don't need any oppressor or colonial culture to be brought back. In fact they do not welcome any remarks that made by the feminists. Washila is one of the participants who speaks boldly, she says,



Washila: The western criticism is out of place, because I believe their criticism is due to ignorant. If the westerners say they believe in the freedom of expression, why then interfering in our private lives?

Like me wearing the veil is a way of my life. I was brought up in a Muslim family, surrounded by people who mostly wear the veil, why someone from somewhere tells me what I am doing is wrong. Or what to like or not and again try to tell me what is happening in France, if they don't want me in the veil, it means they don't want me as a person, and I don't need them. My private life is mine and I don't allow any intrusion. No one must intrude in my lifestyle.

Let me add something indeed those kinds of criticism make Muslims more aggressive, and because of that I would even wear a bigger veil.

This open rejection and refusal of the western criticism and the willingness to retreat to the traditional and Islamic values is clear indication of the Islamists' success. The Islamic Militants have succeeded in conveying their message. They have used poor people from different ways of life to promote their cause. The Muslim Brothers have recruited women

and engaged them in professional and political activities on the same level as men; to encourage and reinforce the practices of the veil. Most of the participants from the Northern Sudan choose voluntarily to raise their children according to Islamic teaching. They say wearing the veil is the most beautiful dress code. It is a tradition that started long back and is there to stay for it is the right way to follow. Such mentality helps the Muslim Brothers to distract change and strive to facilitate the operation of the militants' patriarchal power through the implementation of the Sharia Law.

#### 5.4 Contradictions

In listening to the tape recorder and rereading the stories, I noticed that a number of contradicting issues were surfacing, which were integral to the veiling process. For example, the fundamentalists say, Islam allows liberation of women, but within a limited space. This echoes what Wisal el Mahdi, Sarah and Judge Najwa mentioned earlier in defending the Sharia Law as the legitimate law of Sudan. Women in Islam are believed to have rights but within Islamic family structure. A woman in Islam is considered as an inferior; because, in marriage issue she cannot represent herself, only her father or a guardian. She could not travel alone without a guardian (muharam). What man says is an order and must be executed. She has to be controlled by male in every aspect of life.

According to Muslims fundamentalists, women are considered as destructive forces and should be excluded from male-dominated space, and one of the methods of exclusion is through wearing the veil (Mernissi, 1975).

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter does not operate in isolation from the others. In fact it is a continuation of the whole process. It explains and interprets the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the veil. It summarizes and provides the possible solution by combining the intellectual and the practical issues to improve women's knowledge and women's understanding, which change their lives.

This study explores and investigates a group of Sudanese women's perceptions of the veil, the meaning and the value attached to the veil. I would like to comment and conclude this study with a personal note, word of encouragement and caution. I wish the study could contribute to produce valuable information to raise awareness among these women, so that they can take full responsibility in decision making and to encourage them to resist being constructed in oppressive ways in Sudanese society.

#### **6.2 The patriarchal & The Islamic Philosophy**

Patriarchal power is one of the key mechanisms behind women's oppression (Ramazanglu & Holland, 2002). Women must learn that femininity or of being female is socially constructed, it is natural for women to be discriminated upon using femininity.

Simone de Beauvoir (1949) puts it clearly, "One is not born a woman, but one becomes one". She points out that the objectification of women by men to be others; denies them their own subjectivity. Furthermore, she adds that women themselves internalize this objectified vision, which makes them live in a constant state of inferiority (cited in Moi, 1985:92).

Simone says that patriarchal oppression consists of men imposing certain virtues and social standards of femininity on all women, in order to make them believe that the chosen standard for femininity is natural. Thus the female who refuses to conform to the femininity is considered as abnormal, unfeminine and unnatural (cited in Kemp & Square, 1997).

Patriarchy wants women to believe that there is such a thing as femininity or an essence of femaleness. The patriarchy develops a whole series of virtues of feminine characteristics as "sweetness, submission, modesty, humility, obedience, subservience... and so on" (Moi, 1997:247). Most of the political and religious organizations use the same concept to make women believe that to be a female one should be feminine, obedient and submissive. The painful fact is that women often enact the roles that patriarchy has prescribed for them.

Meanwhile feminists especially, in the western world are concerned of the veil and think of it as an oppressive issue. They believe that the veil is a method of excluding women from the society by forcing them to wear the veil. Women in the Arab world must oppose

the idea that the veil is an integral part of their religious practices as well as a source of beauty, grace, pride, prestige and protection.

### **6.3 Limitation of the Study**

One limitation is that although I obtained a large amount of information, which I could not incorporate into this thesis and that is due to the mini-thesis, which is limited in scope. Therefore, many complex issues are left undeveloped.

Second, the sample taken is small and not representative to draw a satisfactory conclusion to the experiences of women wearing the veil. Furthermore, the data is collected in South Africa; if the study is conducted locally in Sudan, using a bigger sample, it might have yielded different findings.



### **6.4 Recommendation**

This thesis has focused mainly on the perceptions around the veil alone and to document the information, I tried to limit myself to the issues and perceptions of the Sudanese women around the veil. I have come to know, however, that there are links to the whole Islamic system. Most of the issues in Islam are linked to one another. For example, women in Arab and Islamic world are exploited and oppressed to facilitate the building of the 'Islamic order'<sup>7</sup>. This could be summarized in two words; women are oppressed in the Islamic world and used as oppressive devices to control their men. In order to build

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<sup>7</sup> Islamic order is more integrated, cooperative society based on true Islam (cited in Ayubi, 1991)

more integrated, cooperative and strong Islamic nation, women should be controlled as well as men. So, exploring these issues thoroughly could produce a number of studies.

In addition, the analysis suggests more studies to examine connections among Muslim people, for example, women and the veil, women and the family and finally people and Islam. Lastly, this study could be used by the feminist scholars to advocate and represent the oppressed by creating positive and powerful knowledge to transform the patriarchal society.

## 6.5 Conclusion

Islam is not merely a religion but a holistic and total system (Mernissi, 1975). When debating or discussing any aspect in Islam, directly or indirectly a person have to highlight other issues to build up the meaning, because most of the issues interweave together to make Islam. In addition, Islam is not uniform. It treats women in many different ways.

No matter what truth we obtained, this study highlights women's denial of their strong desire to unveil. Some argue that veiling shows their vulnerability to the patriarchal power. Although many believe that women should be blamed of not taking initiative to fight against gender inequality and strive to transform the male-dominated society by accepting change.

The feminist' researchers need to conduct more studies to further and reinforce the cause of women's struggle against patriarchal power and gender inequality in the society. We must ask if the veils are oppressive or not? And who should decide?

More qualitative studies will highlight the importance of women's independence and strengthen the challenge to sexism in traditional patriarchal societies.

Patriarchy system constructs people in the society into categories of female and male. It asserts the distribution of duties according to their status respectively. In this respect women deserve to be informed, and to have access to ways in which they will have a deeper understanding to allow them to manage their own issues and master their decisions-making. While being sensitive to the complexity of the situation, especially the relationship within families.





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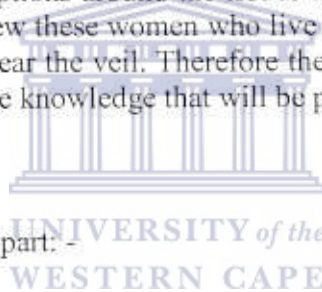
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## Appendix 1

### Consent Form

This document guarantees and promises anonymity and confidentiality to participants in this research. It gives the participants full freedom to withdraw at anytime they wish not to continue with the interviews. Simply the participation is voluntarily; the participant is free to quit without any offence.

This research is about the perceptions around the issues that led women to wear the veil in Sudan. The study will interview these women who live under the Islamic laws, and are obliged by the government to wear the veil. Therefore the study will explore, investigate the perceptions and document the knowledge that will be produced from the interviews.



The interviewee must fill in this part:

I ----- have read all the instructions and fully understood them and I have also known the purpose of the study. I am hereby accepting freely to take part in this research.

Date:

Signature:

## Appendix 2

### Interview schedule

Interviewer: What do you know about the veil?

Interviewer: When did you start wearing the veil?

Interviewer: Do you think that every woman should start wearing the veil at the same age?

Interviewer: What meaning did the veiling have in your family? Did you at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female child did? What influenced you in making the choice?

Interviewer: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Spiritually? Culturally? Politically? And Religiously?

Interviewer: If you had the freedom of choice as a child or within your religious community or among your peers would you choose to wear the veil?

Interviewer: When the Sharia was implemented for the first time, and the veil became compulsory that every woman must wear veil, otherwise will be punished, what was your reaction?

Interviewer: How do you feel when you are wearing the veil?

Interviewer: The practice of the veiling has been criticized heavily by some grouping from the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled at any way?

Interviewer: Is it necessary for non-Islamic women to wear the veil?

Interviewer: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you want to add?

## Interviews



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Catherine: Hello, my name is Catherine your aunt told me the other day that you have come to spend your holiday with us in Cape Town, welcome.

Rasha: That is right thank you.

Catherine: I suppose not to do interview with you straight away but you know I am doing a research about the veil as an Islamic dress code; on top of that it happens to be the compulsory dress for the Sudanese women. The reason that makes me to think to interview you is that you have just arrived from Sudan and I know your information still fresh.

Rasha: It is OK I hope I will give you the information that you need.

Catherine: The interview is not complicated it is about basic things nothing personal

Rasha: Let us see then

Catherine: The first question is when did you start wearing the veil?

Rasha: I don't really know when exactly I started wearing the veil. I will tell you why? First of all I was born in the time when the Sudan government implemented Sharia. Let us put it this way, Nemiri brought the Sharia, but two years after that he was overthrown and came the government of the Allied Parties, they disqualified what Nemiri used to call Sharia and said they what Nemiri had introduced were September's laws, they purely secular laws. The Allied Parties ruled the country for four years and in June 1989 the Islamic Salvation Front overthrew the Allied Parties, with collaboration with the Islamic Militants they brought back the modified Sharia laws, this time they claimed that what they are implementing are the true Sharia laws. They used the slogan that says "The return to the pure Islamic laws".

I grew up in that atmosphere where every woman in the family is veiled, not that alone I was told often to cover my head specially if there were strangers at home or if we were going to visit, or shopping. At school we were told to wear scarves or "Taraha" to cover the head and the upper part of the body "The breast".

Catherine: What meaning did the veiling have in your family? Did you at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female child did? (Or if adults?) What influenced you in making the choice? (Bear in mind whether influenced primarily by parents).

Rasha: One cannot tell whether the influence was from the parents or there was an outer power, which over ruled them. Because my mother used to say by their time they never used to cover up, in reality they were dressing up like Europeans and their pictures proved that especially when they were in young like me right now. She used to say that

we are unfortunate to be born at this time. She said when she was in my age she used to wear tight skirts, blue jeans and used to go to party with open beautiful hair, because if it happened to be a party in the area they must go to the hair salon to fix up their hair, and choose the most beautiful hair to look unique. From my father's side I could sense that he did not want to get into trouble, because every time he would say "Girl cover up your head what do you think you are doing, what do you want people to say? Do you want people to jump in here to show you how to dress? You know I don't want troubles just do what the others are doing. Cover up you head."

So what I am trying to say here wearing the veil is not my personal choice, but something imposed on me by the environment surrounding me, and I accepted it without questioning.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Politically? Culturally? Spiritually?

Rasha: Personally although it was not my choice in the first place but I use to it now, I find it difficult some times even for a second if the scarf fall off my head. The other point it becomes part of my life, because I was told for a woman to be respected she must be veiled. My brothers keep on reminding me to fix my scarf, especially when we are walking in the street.

Culturally, I guess it has become a part of the Sudanese culture no way that we can deny it. It is a reality we should accept that it is happening whether we like it or not.

Religiously and spiritually I feel good because I was taught at school that the veil is mentioned in the Holy Qu'ran and the practices of wearing the veil started by the wives of our Prophet Mohammed. Again I am told that a woman should dress up in decent clothing and cover up her "Aura" it is haram to expose oneself to men specially the strangers. I am also told that if I wear the veil I will enter the paradise "El ganat" because I am a God fearing person. Whom do you think does not want to enter the paradise?

Politically, if you old enough to work, a person could be assisted and find a job easily, because you will considered as one of the Muslim brothers or sisters. With the veil the future is secured

Catherine: How do you feel when you are wearing the veil?

Rasha: (Laughing) the question should be how do I feel when I am not wearing the veil? When I am wearing the veil I feel normal, I feel that nobody is watching me or looking at me, because some times I feel embarrassed if I feel someone is following what I am doing or what I put on. I feel respected and it is the most important thing if you feel the others respect you. Without the veil I feel as if I am naked and very light.

Catherine: If you had the freedom of choice as a child or within religious community or among your peers would you continue to wear the veil? Under which conditions (If any) would you ever consider not to wear the veil?



Rasha: I never have the freedom or the choice to choose what I want or what I don't want. But if I have to think of the veil on the religious grounds I feel blessed to know it in the early age, otherwise it would have been difficult for me to cope up with this practice. If I were to be given that freedom under different condition and different place I might have considered that but with my situation born in Sudan to a Muslim family I don't think I would have considered that choice. Although it was not my choice but I am happy with it and I will continue wearing the veil whatsoever the case. Look now I am in South Africa enjoying my holiday, nobody is after or reminding of the veil or what to do but yet I always wear my veil. It becomes a way of life no way I would change. (Joking) you know I feel funny when I take off my veil, or sometimes in town when I see grown up women without the veil I ask myself am I wrong or the others are wrong, and why aren't they in the veil?

Catherine: The practices of veiling has been criticized heavily by some grouping in the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled in any way?

Rasha: The Western societies always they never happy with what is happening in the third world, they usually want to be the first to introduce any thing if it happens is not from them, so it falls under their criticism. They could call it in different ways and different names like backward or uncivilized practice or recently this feminism staff, women's oppression. I don't know why they are criticizing what we are content with, we never complained, otherwise their effort to come and rescue us is welcome. I think we should be left alone to examine what is good what wrong on our own. We don't need any rescue teams to come and help us deal with our problem, if I told there is any?

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Catherine: Under which conditions – if any – would it be important for non – Islamic women to wear the veil?

Rasha: First of all we do not have specific or certain condition where a woman should dress; all of us must dress in the decent way. In specifically in Sudan no women walk with or without the veil half naked in the street, because if no one says something you yourself will feel out of place. Again all the religions are speaking of women clothing. Like in Christianity and Judaism when entering a Holy place like church or synagogue, women should wear the veil. Only I don't know what kind of the veil, these religions are talking about.

To me it is not a big issue for none Muslim women to wear or not to wear the veil. It does not harm to wear the veil. What is the different between the veiling in the real sense I mean religiously and wearing the veil when for the fashion purposes?

I see like in Sudan the non-Islamic women they dress up in this African fashion they dress in a full suit the skirt the top and the scarf from the same, material or the same piece of cloth they called it African dress.

Catherine: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you would like to add?

Rasha: I have nothing more to say, but I would add the veil gives a Muslim woman pride, dignity and respect. It is a true identity of the Muslim woman. If you see a woman in the veil straightaway you will recognize that she is a Muslim. I think it is a wonderful thing to be identified in a special way.

Catherine: Thank you we have come to the end of our interview, I hope you will enjoy your holiday.

Rasha: I think I will if you people stop interviewing me, because some times I feel nervous talking to people. Anyway thanks.



Catherine: When did you start wearing the veil?

Mary: I started wearing the veil in 1995, when I started working at high school in Khartoum. I met a lot of discomfort from my colleagues at work. I found most of my peers teachers have already wearing the veil, though I am a Christian I was exposed to pressure, they could not said directly but usually they use examples that would provoke me. Not that because I was using public transport from home to work and vice versa, I was to verbal harassments, or sometime you some one will come from nowhere and pushes you around without any apology. If it happened that I meet with the authority I mean the "police" it would be another issue, because I might end up in one of those Sharia courts and receive the punishment, usually it was 10 to 15 slashes.

Catherine: What meaning did the veiling have in your family? Did you at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female child did? What influenced you in making the choice?

Mary: We are Christians and we never experienced wearing the veil before, though some times my mum and some older women in my family wear "El thoub". That one is not compulsory you wear it on occasion when you like it otherwise the person is free to wear or not to wear the "Thoub". With the Islamic militants in power every thing is changed. The police, the society and even your friends they won't leave you alone. For instance you somebody approaching and asking you why don't you wear the veil? Or why don't you dress up in a proper way? One day I was confronted by one of the Muslim brother he wore big beard, and hailed at me, he said "Listen I am from (he mentioned another Islamic grouping) you appear a decent person and I don't want you to end up in troubles that is why I am warning to change the way you dress up" I looked at him and said instead of talking to me why don't go and tell the traders to remove the unreligious clothes from the shops.

Culturally, we southerners our culture is different from the northerners. We follow two kinds of cultures; the European culture and the African culture like wearing an outfit that is made of three pieces, made of a certain cloth called "Wax" it well known in DRC and West Africa in general.

Politically, the veil is imposed on us and I consider it as human rights violation. It is unfair to bring someone's culture or religious belief and impose that on people who are ethnically, culturally and religiously different.

Catherine: If you had the freedom of choice as a child or within your own religious community or among your peers, would choose to wear the veil? Should any political conditions change, would you continue to wear the veil?

Mary: Religiously I have nothing to do with the veil. When the government imposed the veil on every woman they never asked any body opinion. I wouldn't have chosen the veil and let us if at any circumstance the policy or the government changed I will change immediately nothing will hold me back.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Religiously? Spiritually?

Mary: The veil means nothing in any aspect. I am not a Muslim and I personally don't like it. People who wear the full veil they look like ghosts. Or moving objects. They never resemble human beings at all.

Catherine: How do you feel when you are wearing the veil?

Mary: I think your question is not intelligent, how could you ask me such a question, definitely I will feel bad. I feel as if I am in prison. I don't move quickly and always feel the heavy weigh of the clothes. Leave alone the weather is not helping. Just imagine you are rolled up in this bundle and the temperature is 40% in the middle of the day. If you were in my place how would you feel?

In: The practices of the veil and veiling has been heavily criticized by some grouping in the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled in any way?

I don't want to interfere with someone belief, but basically I think it is uncivilized practice. And the other uncivilized practice is the fact that it has been imposed on people. The veil in general all over the world raises a lot of questioning. Not the veiling alone but the Islamic laws that have been shifted from its religious contexts to reconstruct the social order claiming that by restoring these laws people are returning to the pure Islamic laws. Don't you see that instead of progressing people are going backwards?

Catherine: Recently many people came from Sudan, and I interviewed some but they denied the existence of the Sharia laws in the country, yet I saw those people were still wearing the veil would you please explain that?

Mary: To tell you the truth, from the very beginning of the Sharia, it affected certain people the unfortunate ones. If you look around and see those people who have been harassed they are poor using the public transport, meeting police and encounter what so-called Muslim brothers in down town throughout the day. The rich people are not affected, they drive fancy cars, and the police cannot stop them. What they wear nobody cares they could be driving naked who cares.

The other point you say most of the women who denied the existence of Sharia still wearing the veil. It is a government policy any the government employees whether they inside the country or a broad must wear the Islamic outfit, to keep the image of the country and provide proves that Sudan is a Muslim country.

We the southerners find it difficult sometimes to keep up with someone culture, but yet it is not easy not wear the veil, because you will be punished. Clever enough the

southerners are modifying the veil and treat it as an African fashion with a matching scarf.

Catherine: Under which conditions – if any would it be important for non - Islamic women to wear the veil?

Mary: it is not important for the any one in Sudan to wear the veil, because before the veil people were dressing up decently. We have our traditions and cultures where women must not put half naked dress. We use to respect ourselves; we never dressed up leaving some parts of the body showing. In fact if there were any occasion people used to dress in accordance with the occasion. We used to respect the invisible and the unseen regulations of the society. In fact the Islamic rules draw people attentions to the differences of religions, and widen the gap between these beliefs.

Catherine: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you want to add?

Mary: The veil could be a beautiful thing but because it is imposed forcibly on women it loses it is meaning and turned to be undesired by many women. In fact it turns into a horrible and unpleasant tool of women's oppression.

Catherine: thank you, we have come to the end of the interview

Mary: thank you, I hope with my information you people would do something to bring change we need it.



Catherine: Hi, good morning

Shareen: Morning dear.

Catherine: I have come according to our arrangement to do the interview I hope you are ready?

Shareen: I am ready

Catherine: You know the interview is about the veil and I am going to ask direct questions I hope you will be ok with that.

Shareen: No problem.

Catherine: What do you know about the veil? I mean what is the concept behind?

Shareen: The veil to me meaning dressing up in a certain way, I mean to put on long dress and cover the head with the dook or scarf. The concept behind the veil simply is to cover up. This practice depends on two factors. One some husbands ask their wives to dress up in that manner (social) and the other factor is a religious practice.

If we look at the first factor is some women are asked to dress that way whether they like it or not, and sometimes if the woman does not want to consider wearing could cause her to lose her marriage.

In both cases men always take the initiative to ask women to dress up in a respective way with accordance with the Islamic dress code.

Catherine: What meaning did the veiling have in your family? Did you at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female child did? What influenced you in making the choice?

Shareen: First of all I never grew up with my parents in fact I grew up with my grandmother who used to wear normal dresses I mean European style. We in Sudan used to be fond of European fashions; we were influenced by follow European culture. For instance my grandmother never wore a veil in her life. Yes she used to practice her religion, with and Western touch. This never made her lesser Muslim.

In other words my family never influenced my decision in wearing the veil. What happened is most of my friends were the veil, long time before me but I did not consider wearing the veil until when I got married to Ahmed you know he is an Egyptian, and Islam and the veiling means a lot to him and his family. I considered wearing the veil for two reasons, one to save my marriage and the other reason is I gave birth to a girl, and I want to be a good example to her, although up to this point I still see myself not fully veiled. I still wear pants underneath because of the nature of my work, and again deep

inside me I don't think I will commit myself to wear full veil, I think what matter is as long as I feel I am covered that is enough.

Catherine: You said earlier that your granny used to follow the European style, do have any idea when exactly Muslim women started wearing the veil in Sudan?

Shareen: To tell you the truth, the veil is a new thing, although in the Muslim communities have been practiced for long time by those who used to travel to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage. The practice of dressing up in a Muslim way or wearing the veil relative is new. Wearing the veil was never an issue until Muslims started mingling with foreigners and people from the other Muslims countries, and also when they started traveling to the pilgrimage (El hij) in big numbers. During that period of time they acquired the new out look known as official Islamic dress code. Not that only but also some Islamic women started coming to the country but the connection was the veil was perceived as rich women outfit, especially those who were coming from Saudi Arabia. Precisely the veil was not connected only to the Islamic practices.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Religiously? Culturally? Politically? And Spiritually?

Shareen: Personally I guess is not my strong point, but it does not harm to wear the veil to win people respect. Culturally and politically our culture was an European culture politically women are forced to wear the veil, I did not like the idea of wearing the veil you could say I was not impressed but according to the laws and rules of the country I had to abide with whatever passed on us, I did not like it until when I got married and gave birth to a girl, every thing change automatically, I stopped being grumpy about the veil. So I have to listen to my husband and fulfill his desire and set a good example for my daughter.

Catherine: How do you feel when you are wearing the veil?

Shareen: Normal

Catherine: If you had the freedom of choice as a child or within your religious community or among your peers would you choose to wear the veil?

Shareen: As a child I had all my freedom, and yet now I am wearing the veil, I wear veil now because my circumstances have changed and I mentioned earlier. Still these reasons behind my veiling I won't consider them as pressure, because at the end of the day it is my choice to wear or not wear the veil. The other point I wear the veil partially on my terms. I wear long skirts under knees and loose pants, and I will continue to wear the veil in this manner as it pleases me.

Catherine: Is it necessary for non-Islamic women to wear the veil?

Shareen: The concept behind wearing the veil is a religious believe that women should wear respectful outfit to prevent men temptations. Men by nature are weak they could not bear seeing women dressing in tight clothes or half naked dresses straight away they would be tempted to commit (undispeakable) act. To prevent this kind of behaviour women are to wear the veil to reduce the chance of men getting tempted. Again Muslims in general pay respect to the covered up woman, whether she is old or young, ugly or beautiful what matters is long and respectful dress. The question is if long dresses are the cure to prevent men from committing any kind of funny behaviour then it makes no difference for any woman to dress in long and decent dress, but it is unnecessary for a non-Islamic woman to cover her head.

Catherine: The practice of veiling has been criticized heavily by some grouping in the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would this influence your decision to remain veiled in any way?

Shareen: Each and every one as an individual has her own choice. Some women choose wear the veil and some never thought of putting on the veil. To those who choose to wear the veil we should respect and salute them, because it is not easy to wear the veil outside the country, especially in a place like South Africa, which is strongly influenced by the European culture. It takes courage to come out publicly. When walking in the veil in Cape Town streets sometimes the person feels out of place, but still provide of the pressure yet they walk with their heads up. In fact we should encourage those women who hesitant to go ahead and wear the veil. What we need is encouragement not criticism.

Catherine: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you would like to add?

Shareen: I think the veil is a beautiful thing, provide I don't find a direct connection with the religious belief more than it is a tradition, yet we should respect those who believe that it is a Muslim's tradition, we should give them what they deserve.

Catherine: thank you for you cooperation we have come to the end of the interview.

Shareen: Thanks; I hope I have answered you in a proper way.



Catherine: Hello, my name is Catherine and I am doing Women & Gender at UWC and now doing a research about the veil and veiling. I don't whether it is good to help me.

Maymouna: (Saying her name) I don't mind I suppose I would help.

Catherine: What time do you think is suitable to talk to you?

Maymouna: Any time even now we can do it; if not long otherwise we should leave until Monday morning.

Catherine: It is about half an hour or a little bit more.

Maymouna: let us go for it, but from time to time if there is any customer I will interrupt and serve the customer, is it O.K. with you?

Catherine: No problem.

Maymouna: let us start, before any one come.

Catherine: What do you know about the veil?

Maymouna: The veil definitely is an Islamic way of dressing. It is a way that Muslim woman covers up her (Aura). It means her private parts by wearing a long loose pair of pants, a long dress or long skirts with long loose top and covering her head with scarf. Simply it helps her not to expose her body.

Catherine: When did you start wearing the veil?

Maymouna: I started wearing the veil at the age of six when I was still at home. My parents encouraged me especially my father, he used to tell me it is important to cover the parts of the body between the neck and the knees.

Catherine: do you think that every woman should start wearing the veil by that age?

Maymouna: Yes, no, it depends on the family. Some people prefer to introduce their daughters to the veil in the early age to give them a chance to grow up knowing the veil is a religious costume, and they have to dress up in that way. But there is a certain age where the veil becomes compulsory for every girl to wear, and it is a little bit before the puberty age, when her body starts growing, having the breasts (tittis) and having period. It will be a must for the girl to wear the veil it a Sharia, it is an Islamic law.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Spiritually? Politically? Religiously? And Culturally?

Maymouna: I personally, glad because I am practicing my religious tradition to the fullest and feel blessed to have my parents who introduced to the right practice. In fact if they wouldn't have done it I would have that, I would have worn the veil.

Culturally and politically, we never experienced any pressure on the political level, as long as it does not contradict with my belief. There is another point I don't know where to place it; they way people look at a woman wearing the veil. From men's point of view, a woman who wears the veil gets more respect than the one who is without the veil, that happens often within Muslim's community. Again when woman wears the veil she reduces the chance of a male to get tempted. You know the devil always around, and men are weak by nature and always the Satan overpowers them.

Catherine: The practice of the veiling has been criticized heavily by some grouping from the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled at any way?

Maymouna: I believe there must be freedom of religion. People should have that freedom to practice, what I believe in is my business as long as I am not offending anybody. What I need people to do is to treat the others with respect and accept them the way they are. What I know all religions come from the holy books. Precisely from God and should be treat equally with respect. I myself would not tolerate people to treat me with disrespect. Sometimes, people claim to know too much, but in the real sense they know nothing, and I would consider that a degree of lack of knowledge. For instance, feminism or what they called that Western philosophy it always interferes into some people business without knowing it. They must do their study; I mean their investigation before judging the others. As a Muslim woman and a South Africa I know what I stand for is right and it is my right to stick to it, and I want people to treat me with respect and treat my decision with respect as well.

Catherine: What was your reaction when the Sharia was implemented for the first time? And what were your reaction when the veil becomes compulsory and every woman. Do you think that it is important for the non-Islamic women to wear the veil?

Maymouna: From my own opinion, as an individual you can not force some one to practice what she or he does not believe in, does not know or even does not want to, exactly like to force some body to eat food that he/she is allergic to. Or like to force someone to be a Muslim overnight, it doesn't work like that because the person would not be comfortable with the whole process, and it could result in opposite reaction and lead to negative result.

Catherine: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you want to add?

Maymouna: Wearing the veil is a beautiful practice, and people should appreciate that beauty. We should respect and encourage those women who are wearing the veil and stop criticizing them. Many people look at those women in veil as if they are stupid or ignorant. In one word let me tell you “They are not”, they as clever as you are. What they need is respect and fair treatment. After all we are the mothers of the nation and deserved to be respected. To tell you last thing, you know when I wear the full veil I feel I am a complete woman.

Catherine: I think I have finish my interview and unless you want to add any thing about the veil.

Maymouna: I have nothing more to add it seems that we have exhausted the whole topic.

Catherine: thank you for cooperation, and let me leave the contact open I might come back for more information.

Maymouna: Thank you, and you are welcome at any time, it seem that you have come to the right person to talk to.



Catherine: Nada, here I am, I hope I never come in a wrong time.

Nada: Welcome, you won't find better time than now.

Catherine: Then let us get starting.

Nada: Sure, prepare your questions meanwhile I am making the tea.

Catherine: Don't worry about the tea; we will have the tea later on.

Nada: OK, as you like.

Catherine: What is the meaning of the veil to you personally?

Nada: The veil to me is when a woman wears a long and loose dress and covers her head, leaving only her face and hands. The veil to me personally is purely a religious tradition.

Catherine: Is it true that in Sudan it has any political influence?

Nada: Catherine to tell you the truth, the way I have conceived the veil is purely religious and it has nothing to do with any policies of the country or any political issues at all.

Catherine: What meaning did veiling have in your family? Did you at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female children did? (Or if adults?) What influenced you making the choice? (Bear in mind, whether influenced primarily by fathers or mothers).

Nada: To answer this question, I must explain to you first that wearing the veil in Sudan comes from different ends. Either the person who is wearing the veil is coming from a family with religious background where the atmosphere or the environment is loaded with religious practices or the person grew up in such surrounding and surrounded by people wearing the veil, or from schools. I mean the person is educated and through reading she finds out about the importance of the veiling, and how it is necessary to wear the veil, and also believes that wearing the veil is the right thing to do.

Those who wear the veil as individuals because they found out about the veil by themselves I mean outside the influence of the family, sometimes meet criticism from

their own families. Because sometimes the family never experiences the tradition of wearing the veil, but she is influenced by her peers group at the educational fields and through they face a lot of challenges and oppositions from the members of their family. I personally picked up the practice of wearing the veil on my own. It is personal, and by the time I decided to wear the veil my family was not happy, because my fellow friends at school influenced me. I told them if I enter high school I would wear the veil and that was it.

Catherine: What age do you think is a suitable time that a girl must wear the veil?

Nada: We do not have a specific time for a girl to wear the veil. Like in Sudan usually the little girl wears whatever she wants, until the time she starts noticing breast growing or seeing her period. But what women experience in Sudan is not the veil straightaway, we put a "Taraha" first, it is like "thowb" but half size, where the girl throws it over to cover her breast and after she wears the thowb, because it covers down to the legs, and many women replace the thowb with the veil. All these practices are not compulsory. It is up to the girl wear what she wants, it could be a mini skirt or a pair of pants. It depends on what the family in which that girl is coming from, whether a liberal family or a religious family.

Even at school wearing the veil or wearing the thowb or the taraha is not compulsory. Like, what is happening in South Africa is that the minute the child enters the Islamic school "el madrassa", she has to wear the veil. What happens is that everybody is introduced to the veil but at end of the day the choice is hers. As I said before wearing the veil was my choice. I vowed that if I reached high school I will, and in fact I did. I was exercising my own right as a grown up person.

Catherine: There is a rumour saying that the veil is not Islamic dress code and it has nothing to do with any religion, in fact, it is a patriarchal way of controlling women's bodies is it true?

Nada: No, it is not true, what I know is that the veil is not a tool used by men to control women neither political propaganda to manipulate women politically. I believe wearing the veil is 100% religious not only Islamic but also other religions also practice the same. Perhaps, you know more about the churches. We see the nuns in the church wear long dresses and scarves. The Iranian women or rather say women in the Far East wear chador. The Jewish women must cover their heads when entering the synagogue. So it is not a matter of a Muslim woman covering her head or body but generally all the religions spoke about it. Again I want to say whether it is a traditional or a cultural it is the same, as long as it serves the same purpose. Like the chador it has evolved from the cultural into religious practice.

The tradition of the veil within the Islamic and Arab world has different shape and size; it depends on where it is worn, and for what purpose it is worn. For example in the North Africa they called purdah, it was a cultural dress where the woman used to cover herself

completely leaving only her eyes. Burga is used in Oman; it has a cultural and traditional significance, but nowadays, it is used as a religious outfit.

There is a group of people wearing the veil in between, you cannot really tell whether it is for fashion purposes or religious reasons. They dress up in long dresses but yet they wear transparent scarves on their heads and around their necks. It could be considered as veiling.

Let me tell you something, interference of a man could be felt ; if the man wants women in his household to wear the veil, and it is personal, in my case I chose to wear the veil by myself, believe me it was the right decision I ever made to practice my faith. In fact my family and I mean my parents were against it, and it was met by a lot of challenges, but I insisted to hold into it. What I am trying to emphasize here is, I chose the veil with my free will, it was not imposed or pushed on me by nobody. I am happy with it and no matter what I will not abandon the veil.

Catherine: The practice of the veil has been heavily criticized by some grouping in the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled in any way?

Nada: To me, wearing the veil is the highest level, or degree of freedom, and expression of human rights. I express my personal freedom in a way to choose what to eat or what to wear as a human being. I will consider any criticism whether it from the West or within Africa as a human right violation; in a sense that they are trying to interfere with other people freedom of choice. They practically are criticizing others traditions and beliefs out of ignorance. These grouping before criticizing others, they should do their home work, by spending a little time to research and find out about the veil, what is it and why Muslim women are so persistence in wearing the veil. What I want to add is that in both cases, their criticism will never affect my decision to remain veiled. I think according to human rights principles, everybody has right to do pleases that person; provide that it is not hurting any one. Again any one deserved to be respected and treated equally like the others, I do not want to sound ridiculous, but every one should his/her own business. I am with my choice and will remain as I am.

Catherine: Under which conditions –if any- would it be important for non-Islamic women to wear the veil?

Nada: You know, it is a double standard question, I could say it is not necessary for non-Muslim women to wear the veil, and at the same looking back at what I have mentioned earlier, I could say it is important for any woman regardless of her political affiliation, religious belief, race to wear not necessarily the veil but any thing that is respectful to invite people's respect and to dignify themselves among the others.

Catherine: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you would like to add?

Nada: The veil is a beautiful thing and it reflects the inner qualities of a woman. It shows how nice to deal with human beings not because of their outer look or physical appearance, but simply to deal with women wearing the veil, because of what they are. It is an appreciation in itself that you have valued the person, and not judge her for what she wears, but you have looked beyond her appearance to reach her intelligence, kindness and love.

Again I want to place emphasis on this point; look if a person specially a woman is half naked she invites trouble with a capital "T", because a lot of unpleasant incidences happen to women always, like sexual harassment and rape cases, usually women are to blame. If that is the case, why don't women make an effort to reduce the chances and be careful of what we dress?

Sometimes walking around in tight dress could result in horrible and rude words, in order to prevent the unnecessary comments, why not the woman just wears a respectful outfit to avoid these kinds of harsh comments.

Catherine: Thank you for your time I have come to the end of the interview. It is a pleasure talking to you.

Nada: thank you, likewise the pleasure is mine.



Catherine: Hello, how are you today?

Zienab: Well, sorry I supposed to call you earlier, but I was completely occupied by Muntasir, he never wanted me to put him down anyway you are here, welcome.

Catherine: Is it OK, if we start right away?

Zienab: Yes, of course.

Catherine: you know the interview is about the perception of the veil and the veiling, and to find out whether the veil is a religious, a political or even a cultural dress code? With special reference to Sudan, as the state, which implemented the Sharia law and made the veil to be compulsory on every woman regardless of the background.

Zienab: It is an interested issue, and I would love to be interviewed, but before we proceed with the questions let me give you a brief account about the veil tradition in Sudan and how it came to be. The veil and veiling tradition in Sudan relatively a new tradition, it came to Sudan from Saudi Arabia in early seventies, when families started going to Saudi Arabia for work. As you know before that Sudanese women used to follow the Western tradition and fashion especially in the capital Khartoum. Not to forget the tradition of the wrap around "el thowb". The thowb tradition was weakening, because most of the young women were moving away from the thowb to the Western culture. They turned to tight skirts, wearing jeans and long dresses like the movie stars, and they used to go to hair salons often if not every weekend.

That was the life we knew until when the families from Saudi Arabia started coming back for holidays. They were usually wearing the fancy veil. Many women especially those who can afford started imitating those women, because the veil by then looked gorgeous. It was a beautiful fashion, which was associated with the rich people from the Saudi Arabia. We used to call those people "el Hanakish" you know the term. The women used to wear fine fabric and silk, with scarves decorated with silver and golden threads. They usually put on those kinds of dresses on especial occasions. The veil was veil very distinct and was admired by many women; you know most of the Sudanese women are fond of fashion. Little by little the number was getting bigger, especially with those who had connections and relations with those people living in Saudi Arabia. Definitely they did not want to be left out, and from this phenomenon the veil and the veiling becomes a popular fashion in Sudan.

During Nimieri's regime, the Muslim brothers took that tradition to be a winning card and a base for their Sharia law, saying Sudan is an Arab and Islamic state. Nimieri was told if he wanted to be a president for long time he must implement the Sharia, because it was the right thing. Like any leader who loved leadership, Nimieri played right into the Muslims brothers' hands and implemented the Sharia in September 1983. With the declaration of the Sharia laws, Muslim brothers immediately adopted the veil as an



Islamic dress code, and it was made compulsory for every woman in Sudan. I mean every woman should abide with those new rules; otherwise she will be exposed to a severe punishment.

You know Catherine what was funny about the veil, in the beginning the Sudanese women never complained or protested, you know why, because it was associated with a specific class, I mean high class, those people who came from Saudi Arabia. Women felt good and accepted the veil without questioning or analyzing the dress code whether it was really religious or not.

After sometimes the veil and the veiling turned into nightmare, it was not a fashion show any more, but it has become an obligation that women could not do without it. They were not allowed to leave their houses without the veil. Wherever they go, to schools, offices, markets they should be in the veil.

The wave of the veil finished with the end of Nimieri's regime. During the period of the allied parties in Sudan, people witnessed going back to the old ways where people were free to eat and wear whatever they liked. Unfortunately, in that period there were some Islamic pockets still existing in the new system, and soon they became active and again in June 30<sup>th</sup> 1989, they sprang up and came to power. This time they are more determined, more vigorous and stronger than ever. They soon put every thing into Islamic perspectives, claiming that they were amending and modifying the September laws, that was what they called the Sharia implemented by Nimieri. Since then the Sharia is built on a firm ground, no even one in a hundred years could and would be able to challenge, change or demolish.

The National Islamic Front imposed the veil upon every woman regardless of their political, religious or race backgrounds. As long as you are in Sudan, you must be dictated by the Sharia law and the veil and that limit women movement in many ways.

Catherine: You have just told me how the veil has come to Sudan, and then tell me when did start wearing the veil?

Zienab: I started wearing the veil in my first year at Khartoum University, as I mentioned earlier the Sudanese woman was not allowed to be outside her home without the veil. At the university we tried to resist and made riot, imagine what happened we were blacklisted and considered as criminals and charged with criminal offence.

Let me something, recently when I sent to my family to process a certificate of good conduct, because it was needed by the Canadian Embassy, you know I was shocked to find out that I was issued with a misconduct certificate, you know why? Because of the riot that we made long time ago at the University, they are still keeping the record.

Catherine: What meaning did the veil have in your family? Did you have at any time make a personal choice or was it just what female child did? What influenced you in making the choice?

Zienab: Veiling has no meaning to my family; we never knew the veil and the veiling before. It was a political thing that was imposed on every woman in Sudan. In my family we had no pressure, we were free to choose what to eat or wear, but when the state implemented the veil, it was a heavy duty; it took us a long time to get use to the idea of wearing the veil and veiling. Like in my case I was feeling hurt, because I did not want to jeopardize my studies I gave in easily and wore the veil like the others.

Catherine: What does wearing the veil mean to you personally? Religiously? Spiritually? Culturally? Politically? (If so) Has this changed from the time you first started wearing the veil?

Zienab: No personal meaning attached to the veil. In my opinion wearing the veil is out of the question. To impose it on people is a human right violation, because you cannot force someone to eat or drink leave alone to dress in the way she/he does not like. Culturally, it is a borrowed thing; our culture is to wear the "thowb" not the veil.

Religiously, it means nothing; let us say it is a religious dress code, when did the Islamic religion appear on Earth? And where was this tradition all this time? Now suddenly it becomes important, I believe that Islam came in 14 or 15 century. So it has nothing to do with Islam, but I will assure you that the veil and the veiling are political propaganda, used by the politician to serve their own interest.

There are a lot of changes taking place, first of all I am outside the country, nobody is forcing me to wear the veil, but what happens is I do wear the veil occasionally. Like the time I wanted to renew passport last year, I had my photos taken in the veil, so that the Sudanese authority would process my document. If I need any document from Sudan I must show that I am wearing the veil otherwise, they will never issue me any official document.

Catherine: How do you feel when you are wearing the veil?

Zienab: I feel angry and I want to scream. I mentioned it before and I will repeat it again, it is a human rights violation. Why shouldn't these women be left alone? We could say let the culture and the environment dictate on women. For example when winter comes, everybody covers up properly in winter clothes, the person will not wait for someone else to remind him/her that it winter and must dress up. If it is summer is the same. I haven't seen a person going to the beach wearing winter cloak during summer.

Again, what I mean by culture, we have many cultures. As Africans, we have many tribes and communities that influencing us, plus the western culture. Whether we like or not we are affected. Like going for job interviews, never heard of someone going to interview in pyjamas. What I mean to say, nature, culture, whatever is already dictating, why then human being interference?

Catherine, believe me I when I say want to scream I mean it. Not because they forced us to wear the veil, but because of the younger generation. They have been misled by the muslim brothers, and followed them blindly. They believe that the veil is an Islamic dress code. These young people; judge women by their outer appearance, if a woman wears (el Hijab), she is considered God fearing person and deserves respect, otherwise without the veil this poor woman is treated with disrespect, could be harassed simply, because she is not wearing the veil.

Catherine: If you have freedom of choice within your religious community or among you peers, would continue to wear the veil? (If by political choice) should the political condition change at any time, would You continue to wear the veil?

Zienab: I did not have any pressure at home. As a child I grew up in a democratic environment, I ate, drank what I want and wore what I like. Until when I was accepted to the university, then forced us to wear the veil otherwise we were to stay at home. I personally, did not want to jeopardize my education, I wanted to finish my studies and I did. I still wear the veil but not at a regular basis. I wear the veil if I go to the Muslim community; I wear it if I want to process a document from Sudan. Catherine let me tell you some thing; I think I have passed that stage of living in false environment (lay). Now I have Canadian citizenship. Free at last, no one would dare to force to wear the veil, or to go to Sudan. If I want to visit and see my family or the other way round, it will happen outside Sudan.

Catherine: The practice of the veil and veiling has been criticized heavily by some grouping in the West and from within African society. How do you feel about these criticisms? Would it influence your decision to remain veiled in any condition?

Zienab: I do agree with these grouping, and I believe what is going on in Sudan is acrimin8nal offence against women. I urge the Sudanese women whether they are inside Sudan or outside the country to recheck the reason why are we wearing the veil? Also to find out whether the veil is really an Islamic dress code or not, because we don't want the truth to be twisted. With respect to the other cultures I believe the veil is a Saudi Arabian culture, and it is unfair to be imposed on us.

The last part is whether these criticisms would influence my decision, don't worry I have already made up my mind. The problem is not me any more, but the others who are still behind and cannot escape the Sharia.

Catherine: Under which conditions – if any – would it be important for non-Islamic women to wear the veil?

Zienab: The matter is not non-Islamic women and the veil, to me I suppose any woman should wear not be forced to wear the veil simple as that. But in case any chooses to wear

it is up to her. In Sudan, we have diversity of culture and I insist to say that. If we want to be fair, we should allow every one to practice her own culture. As far as I am concerned, there is no any better or important condition that should make the non-Muslim women to wear the veil.

Catherine: Is there anything else regarding the veil that you would like to add?

Zienab: A lot but what I want to highlight, these women in Sudan need to be empowered and to be educated to resist and fight for their rights. The right they could not do anything about, because of fear. They simply, become victims of corruption. I will repeat again and again the veil is not a religious dress code. It is a political way of controlling people unfortunately women are the victims.

Catherine: It is a pleasure to talk to you. We have come to the end of the interview. Thank you.

Zienab: Yes, Catherine we must educate these women so that they will know their rights. What is the use of obtaining high degrees if we cannot check the facts for ourselves? Do you think these people (Muslim brothers) have managed to veil women's minds too? Anyway thank you. If you want any addition, you know where to get me.

