

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Veil is customarily identified with Muslim women. Numerous studies have been conducted over the course of years, exploring the relevance of the ‘veil’ (Leibold & Grose, 2016). In this study, the label ‘veil’ alludes to Gökariksel & Secor’s (2014, p. 177) notion of a woman’s garment that covers “their hair and parts of their bodies according to professed Islamic codes of modest dress”. Thus, in this study, the term is interchangeable with varieties of Islamic veil, namely *headscarf*, *hijab*, *burqa*, *niqab*, *chador*, etc.

Veiling practice is embraced by Muslim women worldwide, with remarkably diverse reasons. In her book *What is Veiling*, Amer (2014, pp. 109-111), expounds her findings on the motives behind the act of donning the veil, explaining how “social, political, cultural and economic, as well as personal and spiritual” reasons influence a woman’s decision to veil. Women don the veil for the purpose of avoiding the spending of new clothes or haircuts. However, some women don the veil in order to express their frustration over political issues – “a tool of resistance ... or as a means of declaring their opposition to the commodification of women’s bodies” as Amer explains. On the other hand, within the realm of spirituality, women seek for a heartfelt sense of piety in the implementation of

Islamic rules. Joan Wallach Scott (2007, p. 41) claims that cultural significance was also attached in the practice of veil (p. 41). Furthermore, Scott (2007, pp. 143-144) draws on Saïda Kada's insight of "the place of the veil in the systemic of Islamic belief", claiming that one's decision to veil is a step in the formation of one's "spiritual relationships", not of Qur'an's requirements. Amer (2014, p. 55) clarifies that the practice of veil is embraced personally, as an individual choice. Scott, in accordance with her research, adds how veil also acted as "a sign of humility, spiritual commitment". Mahmood (2005, p. 23) in her book *Politics of Piety* addresses the necessity of veil as a mark of righteousness and humility.

The term 'veil', however, is an English term, and the Al-Qur'an discussion of the veil refers to the discussion of '*hijab*', where it was mentioned a number of times. The sanctity of garments was mentioned in Chapter 7 Verse 26 and *hijab* as the protection of women's virtue in Chapter 33 Verse 59. The obligation for women to shroud their body parts under the *hijab* as a means to prevent sexual attachment was noted in Chapter 24 Verse 31, where women are instructed to "lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms."

Despite rapid increase of Islamic feminism – which, as a consequence, expands the practice of veiling (Amer, 2014, p. 146) – it is commonly believed, both, by Muslims and non-Muslims, that there is an absurdity in the concept of a veiled Muslim woman as a feminist, since the notion of women's liberation – "from patriarchal, familial, sexual, political, and/or economic power dynamics" – is the primary objective of feminism (p. 133). Moreover, Qasim Amin, explained by

Amer (2014, p. 138), considers an impression of impediment is represented within the veil. Such impediment supports what Copjec (2006) regards as an instrument to curb 'public gaze' from women. Drawing on the psychoanalyst Elisabeth Roudinesco's argument, Scott (2007, pp. 157-158) describes how "a natural psychological process: the visual appreciation of women's bodies by men brought women's femininity into being" is obstructed by the veil. Scott goes on to illustrate that the feminine identity relies heavily on the visible stimulus of male desire, therefore, in the situation when one's body is unable to be seen, one experiences a sense of loss of her feminine identity. Chahdortt Djavann, an Iranian feminist whose work is cited by Scott (2014, p. 158), goes even further to the extent of claiming veil as a manifestation of "psychological, sexual and social mutilation". The discussions of Islamic veil often spark arguments in the field of feminism. This is due to the assumption of veil as an indication of defiance towards the objectification of women's bodies (Mahmood, 2005, p. 16). Thus, appertaining to previous explanations, Scott (2014, p. 161) argues that veil "must be removed in the name of equality," despite the practice of veiling is embraced by feminist Muslim women on the grounds of piety, not out of subjugation or oppression (Amer, 2014, p. 146).

However, Amer (2014, pp. 56-57, 59) explains that aside from the religious aspect, many adopt the practice of veiling due to the countries' regulation which consider veiling practices as mandatory, where such obligatory occur in a number of countries with Muslim-majority population, such as Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia's Aceh Province. Regardless, not all Muslim-majority countries implement the rule, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, and Morocco. Women

are offered with freedom to veil according to “local customs, age, education, social class, familial and group background, profession, and, at times, peer pressure”, which subsequently develop a great deal of Muslim clothing. Notwithstanding that, there seems to be an intentional motive for women to don the veil, for instance to avoid harassment in public transportations (Mahmood, 2005, p. 16).

Regardless of what motivates women to don the veil, the practice of veiling is adopted worldwide, with controversies set off based on the discussions of the veil, in particular among European countries and the United States of America. The major interest of these countries concerns the policy of prohibiting the veil practice, with France as the first European country to begin the debate of veiling during the 1980s, with the notion of ‘headscarf ban’ (Scott, 2007, p. vii). Scott (2007, p. ix) further argues that the West's attempt to secularise the East plays a part in the banning of headscarves. She goes on with “laws banning the Islamic headscarf ... are fueled by racism, post-colonial guilt and fear, and nationalism.” Scott also mentions that France has had a long history with veiling practices, especially after France’s loss in the Algerian War (1954-1962), during which time, the veil obtained its new association with militancy (p. 62). Amer (2014, p. 88) recalls the work of Marc Garanger – a French photographer who completed his military service then in Algeria – in his book entitled *Femmes algériennes 1960* which exposes French approaches in the “control and objectification.” He describes that approximately the two thousand Muslims he photographed, which predominantly women, were unveiled vigorously. The Muslim women “were not oppressed by their male family members or by their affiliation with Islam,” but “mainly by the European civilizing

mission,” which restrains, dominates, and degrades them. Mernissi (2011) discusses ‘Europeans’ obsession’ of veil which she precisely illustrates the former President of France Nicolas Sarkozy who stresses consistently of the government’s responsibility to argue the matter of veiling in order to “defend *laïcité* (preventing religion from invading public space.” The issue of veiling ban in European countries reaches its pinnacle after the policy of banning full-face Islamic veils was issued in France back in 2011, and the laws of veil ban across the Europe soon followed, with Belgium in July 2011 (full-face veil ban), Switzerland in September 2013 (face veils), Lombardy – a region in Italy – in December 2015 (burqa ban), and Austria in January 2017 (full-face veils) (BBC, 2018). The primary reason behind the banning of the veil is French outlook on the matter of gender equality, which regards the veil as an indication of subjugation to patriarchy and Islam (Amer, 2014, p. 103).

Quite the opposite, the United States of America offers a different take on the matter of veiling. Despite the depiction of veil in a number of Hollywood movies, which elicit the sense of lewdness, following the 9/11 incident, the portrayal of veil has been corrupted. Amer (2014, p. 112-113) draws on her own inquiry and her students’ answers to her question of the association of the word “veil” that leaves her astonished. Veiling to her students, and also to American society, becomes the token of the act of terrorism and radical Islam. Scott (2007, p.1) justifies the notion by confirming the symbol of terrorism attached to veil now “has served to further reaffirm their status as agents of a dangerous irrationality.” This leads to the discrimination towards many veiled Muslim women in America, which most instances are experienced in the field of school, workplace, as well as sports and

governmental bodies (Amer, 2014, p. 115). Although the right for every individual to practice the religion they embrace is ensured by the Constitution of the United States of America, veiled Muslim women in America still suffer from discrimination in their workplace, such as the risk of being fired as a consequence of their *hijab* (Koura, 2018, p. 2).

In European context, the matter at hand constantly concerns the notion of body, particularly the control towards it. The subject of body has been the focus of discussion among scholars in Europe regarding the veil. Jelle Wiering (2017) and Jennifer A Selby (2014) investigate the idea of ‘secular body’ imposed in European countries to resist the practice of veil. Drawing on two cases of niqab-wearing women outside of Paris and in Montréal, Selby (2014) noted in her article that government’s proscriptive regulations in France and Québec, Canada, has been supported by the media in the production of ideal ‘secular female body’. Vom Bruck (2008) explains in her article regarding national crisis owing to the “headscarf affair” in a number of European countries, identifying the veil as a mark of women’s subjugation that contradicts the ideal image of women in Europe. The notion of body in Europe is also addressed in articles written by Hametner et al. (2020) and Akou (2021). While Hametner et al. (2020) concentrates on the encouragement by Austrian women’s magazine to “unveil” in order to “appear as “emancipated” and “self-determined” agents, as opposed to veiled Muslim women who are considered as “passive”, “oppressed” “victims”, Akou (2021) puts attention to France’s fixation to burqa, which started with the ban of burqa in 2009 and followed by the ban of ‘burqini’, “a full-body swimsuit that does not cover the face” (p. 6). In

addition, Baldi (2017) clarifies Europe's fixation to female body and veil in her article, through the investigation concerning the regulation of clothes that is deemed significant in European society.

However, in the context of American society, veiled Muslim women are repeatedly criticised of their veil due to circumstances in the workplace. Koura (2018) explores the lives of "35 hijab-wearing Muslim women living in the United States" and the discrimination they underwent, specifically in the workplace (p. 1). Moreover, attempts to support the rights of veiled Muslim women in the workplace in the United States face obstacles, with the main issue is institutionalised discrimination (Robinson, 2016). Regardless of numerous cases concerning discrimination towards veiled Muslim women in the United States, there has not been many research covering the topic. The matter is acknowledged and highlighted in a study of 129 diverse Muslim women living across the United States, investigating the prejudice they face in the workplace, alongside the issue of job stress and social class (Ali et al., 2015).

The contrast of priority regarding the discussion of the practice of veil in most European countries and the United States of America is undeniably intriguing, and thus, becomes the focus of this study and is well-illustrated in two different journal articles which have been selected to be examined, in order to identify the position of the authors towards the topic. Both articles are chosen using the stratified purposeful sampling, with intended quartiles between Q1 and Q2. Ángeles Ramírez (2015) in her article entitled *Control over female 'Muslim' bodies: culture, politics and dress code laws in some Muslim and non-Muslim countries* expounds the laws

regarding the practice of veiling function as means to govern the bodies of Muslim women. Ramirez's article is selected owing to the comprehensive analysis of the veiling issue in Europe, covering a large amount of cases across Europe and providing detailed statistics of hijab and niqab prohibitions in several European countries. On the other hand, in the article *The Production of Acceptable Muslim Women in the United States*, Falguni A. Sheth (2019) investigates the factors contribute to certain suitable image of female Muslim in the United States of America through the construction of "neoliberalism". The motive of selecting Sheth's article lies on the point that the article is relatively new, and thus, indicates the constancy regarding the issue of discrimination towards veiled Muslim women occurring in the workplace in the United States.

This study applies M. A. K. Halliday's concept of Systemic Functional Linguistics, which includes the theory of Transitivity System and Appraisal, along with the framework of Appraisal proposed by J. R. Martin and Peter R. R. White. The objective of the adoption of both theories is to uncover the authors' attitude towards the issue of veiling practices in European context and American context through the specification of the wordings and phrasings.

1.2. Research Questions

Appertain to the aforementioned background of the study and reasons for the topic selection, this study attempts to answer questions as follows:

1. How do the two scholars view the case of veiling in some European countries and the United States of America?
2. How does the cases of veiling in some European countries differ from veiling in the United States of America according the two authors?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

In relation to the above-mentioned research questions, this study is targeted to examine:

1. The insights on the issue of veiling in some European countries and the United States of America set by two reputed international journal articles.
2. The distinction of the issue of veiling in some European countries and the issue of veiling in the United States of America set by two reputed international journal articles.

1.4. Scope of the Study

In this study, the focus is situated on two international journal articles. The first article is entitled “*Control over female ‘Muslim’ bodies: culture, politics and dress code laws in some Muslim and non-Muslim countries*”, written by Ángeles Ramírez and published in journal *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*.

The second article is written by Falguni A. Sheth entitled “*The Production of Acceptable Muslim Women in the United States*” and published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Both journals, from which the articles are taken to be scrutinised, are regarded to be authentic and reputable.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide several outcomes both for readers in general and those who pursue their study in English Literature. Overall, this study is expected to improve readers’ understanding concerning the notion of veil politicisation, particularly in European and American contexts. For those pursuing their study in English Literature, this study is anticipated to help improve comprehension regarding the theory of Transitivity and framework of Appraisal, specifically in the analysis of scientific papers.

