



Revisiting the Veil Ban during the COVID-19 Epidemic: The Shift in the Social Context

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Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to re-evaluate the veil ban in a new era. For many years, the prevailing belief was that covering the face obstructed successful communication between society members, thus eliminating cohesion, provoking peace, and endangering public security. However, when masks covered faces during the Covid-19 crisis, this belief became questionable, leading societies to renegotiate face politics and other social concepts.

Methods: The study analyzed social and media contexts to discuss how societies coped with face masks, even applauding individuals for covering their faces, while laws still rejected veiled Muslim women.

Results: The preliminary results of the study indicate that social structures exhibited high flexibility and adaptation to changes imposed by Covid 19; people managed to reshape rules of social interaction.

Conclusions: Surprisingly, the epidemic improved the social experience for Muslim women wearing a veil. The study also carried a practical advantage; it offered a new perspective on Muslim women's social future in the post-Covid-19 world.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Covid 19, facemask, face politics, Islam, veil.

إعادة النظر في حظر الحجاب أثناء وباء كوفيد 19: التحول في السياق الاجتماعي

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ملخص

الأهداف: مثلت جائحة كوفيد 19 فرصة لإعادة التفكير في العديد من النظم الاجتماعية. وقد سعت الدراسة الحالية إلى إعادة تقييم حظر النقاب في ضوء هذه الجائحة. حيث فرضت كندا وفرنسا ودول أوروبية أخرى منذ العام 2011م حظرًا على تغطية الوجه، واعتبرت هذه الدول الوجوه المغطاة تهديدًا للديمقراطية والأمن العام والاندماج الاجتماعي. وقد هدفت الدراسة إلى إعادة تقييم هذه المناقشات في ضوء الواقع الجديد عندما غطت الأقنعة جميع الوجوه خلال الجائحة، وتزايدت وتيرة النقاشات حول حظر النقاب.

المنهجية: وقد حللت الدراسة الحالية المناقشات الاجتماعية التي ثارت حول الحظر، حيث يرى المؤيدون بأن الحظر يضمن تحقيق مبدأ المجتمع المتناغم، ويشجع التفاعل وجهاً لوجه، ويمحو الرموز الدينية من المجتمع. بينما انتقد الكثير ممن درسوا الحظر ووصفوه بأنه تمييز ضد النساء المسلمات، وخطوة لعرقلة الحرية الدينية، بل ومؤشراً على الإسلاموفوبيا. وركزت الباحثة على التحولات الاجتماعية التي تم من خلالها مراجعة مفاهيم التمييز والسلامة العامة والتفاعل المباشر والحرية الدينية وحقوق الإنسان والسياسة من قبل الرأي العام.

النتائج: وجدت الدراسة أن البنية الاجتماعية للمجتمعات الغربية تقبلت الكمامات، وشجعت الأفراد على تغطية وجوههم. إلا أن القانون في هذه المجتمعات لا يزال يمنع النساء المسلمات من تغطية وجوههن في المناطق التي يسري فيها قانون الحظر. التوصيات: خلصت الدراسة إلى أن المجتمعات هي أجسام حية. تتكيف مع التغييرات وتواكب تغير الأوقات والأفراد. ونتيجة لذلك فإنه يمكن للمجتمعات في أوروبا وأمريكا تقبل النقاب كأسلوب حياة واختيار شخصي، كما تقبلوا الكمامات وتعاضوا معها. وتقدم الدراسة منظورًا جديدًا لمستقبل المرأة المسلمة في عالم ما بعد كورونا لحياة أكثر انفتاحًا وتكاملاً مع المجتمع. الكلمات الدالة: فيروس كورونا، كوفيد 19، الكمامات، سياسة إظهار الوجه، الإسلام، النقاب.



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Introduction

The study is a new reading for an old story. Veil¹ ban laws first implemented in France in 2011, later approved by the European court for human rights (ECHR) in 2014. Similar laws followed in Belgium, Switzerland, and Quebec in Canada. The veil ban aimed initially to eliminate religious symbols, protect the open society concept, and encourage face-to-face social interaction. For social activists, the veil ban discriminated against Muslim women, obstructed freedom, and amplified Islamophobia. Many social phenomena become obsolete and habitual after a period. That was not the case for the veil ban, right before the first law's tenth anniversary. Covid 19 virus struck the world, set a new social order in every city around the globe. The planet paused shortly, then launched again in a new order, governed by a microbe. Each individual on this earth must cover the mouth, nose, and eyes if possible. People will not see each other's faces for months. Life carried on with masks, medical as suggested first, then cloth masks, bandanas, shawls. All garments and fashion accepted, but no veils! On 6 April 2020, Canadian health officers recommended using a non-medical facemask while using public transit or shopping (Chase, 2020). On 9 April, the Canadian court rejected an appeal to suspend the veil ban (CBC, 2020). The ban persisted in France as well (France news, 2020).

Studies around the ban focused primarily on the pretexts for the unveiling process. According to Franklin (2013), the ban represents orientalist discourse around Muslim women. Open society justice initiative (2011: 5) categorized the ban as Xenophobia, which fed on the fear of difference and the unfamiliar. Thus, the ban is a legal necessity in Europe to minimize the public display of competing ideologies (Mechoulan, 2018). Other studies suggested that Islamophobia is the real factor for the ban. (Bakali, 2019). More specifically, a gendered form of Islamophobia (Women's legal education and action fund (LEAF), 2019). Bullock (2020) described the veil ban theory as a modern echo of French and British imperialist attempts to unveil Muslim women. Another array of studies explored the effect of the ban on social context; McCrea (2013) considered the ban an infringement of personal autonomy. According to Maurin and Navarrete (2019), the ban challenged the fine line between two fundamental principles: individual freedom and the neutrality of the state and the public sphere. Lord (2020) suggested that the European bills in this concept impose social change through law enforcement.

Covid 19 added heat to discussions, motivated a new line of debates that re-evaluated the ban. Mario (2020) considered the Covid 19 tragedy an indirect threat to pluralism in society, a socio-semantic earthquake, and an urgent call to rethink traditional approaches to intercultural conflicts. The alteration in social context highlighted many ideological assumptions passed off as objective facts, raising questions around the ban's consistency in western² countries. European network for equality bodies (EQUINET) re-considered the ban, taking into account new decrees on face covering. Under these circumstances, fining women who wear a veil for religious reasons would constitute religious discrimination. (El-Morabet et al., 2020). In conclusion, the crises questioned the fairness of the ban (Stansbury, 2020).

Covid 19 is a society-wide phenomenon that touched many social structure components. Communities revised Laws, norms, beliefs, social relations, and interactions. This study aimed to draw an inference to one particular law during Covid 19 era and beyond, namely the veil ban law. This paper's vital contribution is to highlight new questions around the veil ban's objectivity, which surfaced during a few months of the Covid 19 outbreak. Covering the face did not harm the social order, democracy, or public safety in western societies. Therefore, the validity of the ban for the new social future is under scope light. The study gained momentum from the social value of Muslim presence in western communities. Muslims represent a significant proportion of European communities nowadays. Thus, recurring discussions around headscarf and veil indicate an unwelcoming environment for Muslim women, a tendency to limit their participation in the public sphere and even impede their integration process in society. The study attempted to answer the following questions;

1. How does an open society deal with facemasks?
2. What was the effect of facemasks on the social concept of face-politics?

¹ Burqa, Niqab, Hijab, and veil, are terms for clothes used to conceal the face or body by Muslim women. This paper used the term 'veil' to indicate a face cover.

² The study used the terms 'west' to identify Europe and North American countries.

3. Is public safety still a valid social pretext for the veil ban?
4. Did Covid 19 masks improve the quality of social life for veiled Muslim women?
5. Can Covid 19 era represent a turning point in dress code laws for Muslim women?

Methods

The study used two methods of qualitative research: content analysis and oral history. The author collected data from articles, news, interviews, and media coverage, analyzed justifications and benefits proposed for the ban in society, and compared social context around the veil ban before and after Covid 19 crisis. The content analysis followed the conventional approach; the following coding categories were derived from the text data:

- i. Public Safety.
- ii. Face politics.
- iii. Quality of social life.

Given the topic's novelty, the study cites more social and media websites than scientific articles. Data was collected between 15 July 2020 and 30 September 2020. The content analysis is limited to arguments presented in western literature and media, however excluding literature and media coverage in the Muslim world. The author reached out to many Muslim women in Germany, Switzerland, France, and the US. However, it was not possible to interview a veiled Muslim woman. Intermediates provided many reasons, fear of persecution or refusal to participate in the study. However, as a part of the content analysis, the study cites interviews with Muslim women using the veil in Europe and North America.

The second method is oral history. The author conducted a series of in-depth interviews with Olwi, a Muslim woman who resided in Germany from 1973-1980, toured western countries over the years, and shared the experience of many Muslim women in these countries. The oral history provided a historical account of a Muslim woman who witnessed decades of dress code laws in western countries.³ The author also conducted email and personal communication with two Muslim women outside western countries, Al-Hasawi, and Kaymak. Both women had a different experience with the veil. Their expertise helped the author present the big picture of the veil experience. All interviews and communications were conducted and translated by the author. The language used was Arabic with Olwi and Al-Hasawi, and Turkish with Kaymak.

Public Safety:

The media categorized the veil as a symbol of terror after 9/11 (Aziz, 2012). France passed the veil ban law to ensure public safety. (Open society justice initiative, 2011). Other European parliaments discussed the threat of the veil on general security. Those criminalizing the veil explained the risk it poses to society. The veil could be a tool to conceal identities, commit crimes, or hide weapons. Even if not a direct threat to security, people could be uneasy, insecure in front of a woman wearing a veil (Brems, 2014: 174). In 2017, Quebec, Canada passed Bill 21, which prohibits public workers from wearing religious symbols, including hijabs and veils. Besides, it prevents these workers from providing services to people who cover their faces. The refusal of service is justified because of security reasons and the failure to prove the identity (National assembly of Quebec, 2019).

Covid 19 masks raised eyebrows around the possible tolerance in the identification concept; In Quebec hospitals, the identification process continued with patients wearing masks, which triggered severe assumptions about the real motivations behind Bill 21. As Muslim women agreed to unveil their faces when ordered for security reasons, a move was not enough for legislators (Stansbury, 2020). The comparison is striking; thousands of patients were identified, hospitalized, and treated with their masks. Nevertheless, a Muslim woman could not be identified while wearing a veil. The same comparison applies to the threat a covered face represents; during Covid 19 epidemic, people commuted, worked, and traveled with masked covering their faces. Meeting on all levels communed between leaders, politicians, and employees.

³ Olwi is mother of the author. In order to prevent reflexivity caused sometimes by researcher-researched relationship, the oral history was limited to facts and events, excluding personal reflections.

Ironically, meeting people with masks did not trigger a feeling of Insecurity or uneasiness. Millions of covered faces around the world did not endanger social order or public safety. However, few Muslim women with veils could cause danger. A veiled woman is a threat to security, but a masked woman is not.

Looking outside Covid 19 concept, laws targeted Muslim women specifically; the veil ban prohibits Burqa, a long, bulky, non-revealing sort of clothes used by Muslim women, which poses a security threat. The same rule does not apply to other baggy clothes, like long coats and different bulky outfits used by other people. (Nussbaum, 2010). The veil ban proposed in Switzerland in 2016 excluded helmets and carnival masks. Explicitly targeting veils (Robbins N, 2018: 13). In Quebec, Bill 21 does not apply to a person who covers the face due to health reasons, a handicap, special requirements tied to his functions, or specific tasks' performance. (National assembly of Quebec, 2019: 7). Laws are an essential element of social structure; their effect expands to civic life and penetrates cultural discourse. A Muslim woman living in this atmosphere, where she considered a threat to the community, would not find the doors open for her integration and involvement. Her development on personal and carrier levels will not be smooth. Such a situation needs urgent attention from lawmakers. The modern age presents new safety and identification methods; using fingerprint, eye print, voiceprint, and full-body scanners could assure higher security standards while respecting Muslim women's rights to cover their faces in public.

Face politics:

The concept of face politics implies the importance of the human face in European culture; individuals accomplish contact through full-face (Nussbaum, 2010). Thus, concealing the face represents suspicious behavior. (Bullock, 2020). A veil restricts the possibility of interaction with others; it prioritizes religious identity and conflicts with one's duties as a member of society (McCrea, 2013: 65). Face politics theory prevailed throughout Europe after 9/11. The veil was described as an un-European style that contradicts modernity aspired by European communities (Grillo and Shah, 2012: 22-23). French philosopher [Elizabeth Badinter](#) emphasizes the idea;

'a woman who wears the Burqa reserves the right to see others but denies others the right to see her, and seeks to avoid impure gazes, while at the same time making an exhibition of herself.' (Enright, 2009).

According to Baehr and Gordon (2013), the veil ban took place in European countries, but not in the United States. The latter deals with religious freedom from a legal perspective. In contrast, Europe's approach is through social context. Thus, the Muslim women's dress is subject to many legislations in France. Roy (2020) suggested that multiculturalism is not a valid option in Europe due to constant confusion between culture and religion. Integration is the only option for non-Christian cultures in Europe. During Covid 19, a new line of face politics emerged in Europe; people discovered that communication through the face is not the only norm of human interaction. Many see communication between individuals done primarily through eyes (Nussbaum, 2010). Communicating through masks could be challenging, especially in the early stages of adaptation; people complained of muffled voices in general. Nevertheless, as the human race is born to evolve, people adapt and change speedily. Therefore, individuals practice new techniques to communicate through masks, learning about the importance of the eye region in communication, and 'theory of mind.' Shakespeare said it long ago: 'Eyes are windows for the soul.' (Ong, 2020).

Facemasks are the latest fashion style, called the 'future wear' with different designs to guarantee maximum protection. Many shapes are identical to Muslim women's veil (Taylor, 2020). Western media considered facemasks at Paris Fashion Week as evidence of hypocrisy (Rahman, 2020). The unveiling process will prove problematic to accomplish in light of the prolonged Corona epidemic. Especially with warnings about new outbreaks.

Covid 19 had put another policy under the scope, namely 'No handshake No citizenship.' In 2018, a Muslim woman refused a handshake with a male officer during a naturalization ceremony, citing her religious convictions. French Authorities denied her citizenship because she did not assimilate into the French community (Breedon, 2018). Covid 19 set new rules; In February 2020, French authorities recommended that people refrain from shaking hands to prevent infection (Reuters, 2020). According to French etiquette expert Philippe Lichtfus, 'handshakes are a relatively recent development that began in the Middle Ages, simply looking into a person's eyes can suffice as a greeting' (Agence France Presse (AFP), 2020).

Quality of social life:

According to legislators, the veil ban protects women's freedom and dignity (Open society justice initiative 2011: 1). The veil indicates a male that forces female family members to cover their faces. A veiled woman is an oppressed individual controlled by a terrorist male (Aziz, 2012). The veil is a showcase of female inferiority (Shingler, 2019) and symbolizes Muslim women's silencing. (Bullock, 2020). French president Sarkozy explained this theory in 2009:

'The problem of the burka is not religious; it is a problem of liberty and women's dignity. It is not a religious symbol but a sign of subservience and debasement; the burka is not welcome in France. In our country, we cannot accept women prisoners behind a screen, cut off from all social life, deprived of all identity. That is not our idea of freedom...; we must not be ashamed of our values. We must not be afraid of defending them.' (Chrisafis, 2009).

The approach to liberate Muslim women has proven to be a risky maneuver. European authorities considered the veil a lack of integration by Muslim women (Zempi, 2019). On the other hand, Studies warned that outlawing headscarves in schools hinder Muslim women's economic and social integration (Abdelgadir and Fouka, 2019). Some studies rejected the veil ban as it objectifies Muslim women (Aziz, 2012). others saw the Islamic dress code itself as a sign of women's objectification. Even though feminist groups use the same term in the opposite context, especially to criticize indecent marketing policies that use a woman as an object (Nussbaum, 2010). Many western sources described the laws affecting Muslim women's attire as counterproductive, a contradiction to the principles of liberty, democracy, and respect for human rights and equality.

ECHR accepted a case challenging the full-face ban, considering three violations; the right to respect private life, the right to freedom of religion, and the prohibition against discrimination. (Open society justice initiative, 2011: 3, 12). In 2014, the court ruled that banning the veil does not represent any of the mentioned violations. (Zempi, 2018: 67). The level of freedom accomplished for Muslim women through the veil ban is debatable. The veil ban context suggests that a Muslim woman wears a veil only when forced by a dominant family member. To protect her from wearing it by force will be freedom, a chance to maintain her dignity. In another context, when a Muslim woman chooses to wear the veil, depriving her of this right is not considered freedom, nor grace. It is evident controversy to women who convert to Islam in western communities. A convert Muslim woman can choose to cover her face in cohesion with her faith obligations, she will go against her family's will in this matter, but the law forbids her to use this right. The law ignores the context of the veil's value for the Muslim woman. To a Muslim woman, the veil could mean a sign of subservience, a freedom from the male gaze, more importantly, a practice of faith. (Ferrari and Pastorelli, 2010: 212). I academics (2018) wondered; how Forcing women not to wear the veil is no different from the Taliban, forcing women to wear it!

The headscarf and veil ban was a move to liberate the society of religious symbols; in French schools, the prohibition was criticized for being unequal. The law allowed students to wear a cross to school, even though it is not an obligation. In contrast, a Muslim female student could not wear a headscarf, even though it is a religious obligation. (Nussbaum, 2010). There is a fine line between freedom and neutralizing; to go too far in the direction of naturalizing the state could threaten freedom of religion (Maurin and Navarrete, 2019: 21). The veil ban laws use secularism as a tool to suppress religious freedom (Stansbury, 2020). Heated debates around headscarf and veil have a clear indication; the gendered nature of values and norms that widely prevail in liberal democracies in Europe (Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS), 2006). Veil ban made the public more sensitive to the veil, mainly as it represents a breach of the law. Each time a politician chose to attack the veil, hate crime incidents increased against veiled Muslim women. Islamophobia incidents directed at women rose by 375% after Britain's Prime Minister Johnson compared Muslim women wearing veils to 'Ninjas' and 'letterboxes' (Deardin, 2019).

Another benefit proposed by the veil ban for Muslim women is to ensure gender equality (Open society justice initiative, 2011: 1. and National assembly of Quebec, 2019: 3, 5). Banning a piece of clothes to assure equality between men and women should apply to other garments. High heels, corsets, and different female attires should follow, which did not happen. The veil ban did not serve gender equity. It was utterly the opposite; gender oppression (Zempi, 2018: 67). The

benefits of the veil ban go further; to protect the Muslim woman's health. Wearing a veil causes Vitamin D deficiency, shortness of breath, limitation of mobility and vision, even mental problems for women, as figures show in Afghanistan (Robbins M, 2011). Syed (2013: 5), on the other hand, saw the veil ban itself as an unhealthy policy intervention threatening mental and psychological health for Muslim women as deprivation from a religious practice could trigger health issues.

Covid 19 raised a new line of questions: when people were forced to wear masks, how did that affect their dignity, freedom, and health?. Stansbury (2020) argues that public health is a more pressing and valid reason than religious freedom for permitting face covering during Covid 19 epidemic. According to this theory, the law applauds a Muslim woman for covering her face with a cloth mask to protect her health, while it summons her if she covered her face with a veil to protect her beliefs. Covid 19 epidemic is not the first standoff between Coronaviruses and Veil. In 2012, during the Middle East Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Coronavirus outbreak, scientists wondered whether the veil could protect women from the virus when statistics showed that men were affected far more than women in Saudi Arabia (Khazan, 2013). Covid 19 episode will not be the last confrontation between microbes and human societies, but it could be the latest confrontation between European democracy and Muslim women's justice.

Studies did not indicate an improvement in Muslim women's quality of life by the veil ban. On the contrary, the ban represents a direct threat to studying and working Muslim women in particular. It prohibits the veil in workplaces, educational institutes, and government offices. A statement for (LEAF, 2019) warned that the veil ban deprives veil wearing Canadian Muslim women of their public service rights. Public transport in Britain became a place of much trauma for many Muslim women wearing a veil because of the pressure it represents (Begum, 2020).

Covid19 crisis managed to improve the quality of life for a Muslim woman wearing a veil; the Canadian health ministry allowed a person who wears a religious sign made of fitted fabric covering the nose and mouth not to wear an additional mask or face covering. (Bessonov, 2020). Wearing masks during daily activities caused many people to rethink the veil ban as discrimination against Muslim women. Public life became more pleasant for Muslim women wearing a veil in the US. They marked differences in the way they perceived, no dirty looks because of their covered faces or gloves anymore (Piela, 2020). Begum (2020) interviewed a sample of Muslim women in Britain; she registered their celebration with the practice of using masks during the last few months. The new social norm of face covering changed these women's relationships with society; it lessened their feeling of 'otherness' and made them feel more compatible with the community. The face coverings becoming mainstream strengthened their hope of increased empathy and understanding in the future. Maryam, a veiled Muslim woman in Blackburn-England, was surprised that people replaced abusive comments with pleasantries. A friendly 'Hello' made her feel a lot safer (Khan, 2020). The growing acceptance of face covering gave courage to Rumana, A Muslim from Croatia. She overcame her reluctance to use the veil (Piela, 2020). Besides, the temporary Coronavirus confinement allowed the public to try the life of Muslim women who wear the veil in restricted territories, how they had to choose between leaving their houses covered up and risk paying fines or staying under house arrest (Khemilat, 2020).

The tolerance in face politics around western countries will help improve the social environment for both residents and visiting Muslim women who wear the veil. Al-Hasawi, a Saudi Associate professor, a fellow in inter-cultural dialogue, visited Vatican City in 2015. Al-Hasawi chooses to wear the veil in public, whether she is inside Saudi Arabia or abroad. The guards denied her entry to the Vatican; they asked her to remove the veil to enter the city's premises. She endured disrespect by the guards. She was embarrassed in front of tourists from different countries. After hesitation, she removed her veil. For Al-Hasawi; The Vatican represented an essential institute of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. The experience was not exactly what she wished for; Al-Hasawi hopes Covid 19 masks will change these rules and open more frontiers for Muslim women worldwide (Al-Hasawi, N. 2020, email communication, 28 August).

The future of unheard voices:

Some studies categorized the veil ban in Europe as a historical extension of the headscarf ban. Most arguments put forward are similar in both cases. Women who wore headscarves and veils were considered oppressed, unwilling to integrate, and used for religious propaganda and fundamentalism. (Shadid and Koningsveld, 2005: 35) Thus, Banning

headscarves and veils was a move to liberate the society of religious symbols (Nussbaum, 2010). Meanwhile, other studies differentiate between headscarf and veil bans as different theoretical terrains, with multiple conceptual representations for each discourse (Baehr and Gordon, 2013).

Contradictions among dress code laws for Muslim women are a reoccurring phenomenon. Olwi is a Muslim woman who stayed in Germany from 1973-1980; she applied for a driving license in 1976 in Hildesheim. The driving school asked her to join a comprehension test: A test designated for drivers with problematic situations, such as drivers with disabilities or DUI records. In Olwi's case, the reason for requiring a comprehension test was her headscarf. According to the driving school, the scarf will block her hearing, and she could cause danger to herself and others when she misses security and travel announcements on the radio, let alone other car horns. After appeal, Olwi gained admission to a driving course without a comprehension test. Over the decades, Olwi and other Muslim women living in the west endured a challenging experience coping with social integration and dress code laws; some women were denied education, others expelled from work. Despite the political and social objection, Olwi registered how small rectangle headscarves barely covered the heads of literate Muslim homemakers in Europe, later transformed into burka and veils worn by young Muslim women and new converts. Like many Muslim women, Olwi's experience with headscarf and veil extends to her family history. Her ancestors migrated from Turkey upon imposing dress code laws in 1925, which discouraged using the headscarf and the veil. The family relocated to Medina, Saudi Arabia. The freedom of wearing a 'Hijab' in the new land was a blessing for the family. Olwi learned in school how the veil is worship to Allah. Once a girl reaches puberty, Islamic law allows mahram men only to see her. Among them is her father, son, husband, brother, and many others. A non-mahram male is considered a foreigner. The woman should cover her body in the presence of a non-mahram while covering the face is optional. Olwi also learned from family traditions that wearing a veil adds light and prettiness to a woman's face. The elderly in her family believed that the gazes of non-mahram males would rake a lady's beauty. According to this, a female could brag about her face, never been seen by a non-mahram male. Many Muslim women share these values. Olwi witnessed how successive laws only pushed Muslim women to grow an attachment to headscarves and the veil. The sentimental importance of these attires for a Muslim woman overcomes the effect of social and legal laws. (Olwi, S. 2008, 2012, 2020, personal communication, 15 January, 3 July, 1 September).

Opposition to the veil ban was not limited to Muslim communities, Politicians, feminist, and human rights groups joined. During these arguments, the Muslim women, whose lives touched directly by these laws, remain mainly unheard. Muslim women affected by these laws are divided into two groups; Muslims by birth; in this category, there are Immigrants, descendents from immigrant families, expatriates for study or work. For these women, uncovering Muslim women's headscarf and veil represents a painful history. When French authorities carried unveiling laws for Muslim women in Morocco and Algeria (Falecka, 2017). Descendants of migrant families are mostly European citizens today. In Britain, a new generation of younger Muslims tends to wear the veil regardless of whether their mothers or immediate families do (Soni, 2013). The second group is women who convert to Islam in European societies. Who practiced their right to choose Islam as a religion, only to find themselves deprived of practicing its rituals as a whole way of life. Estelle, a convert Muslim in France, chose to wear the veil. For her, France became an open-air prison since the veil ban (Khemilat, 2020). The veil ban laws directly affect both groups. However, more often, these Muslim converts are out of the equation. The authorities categorize the veil as a matter of migrant Muslim women only (Mullally, 2011).

When the veil ban took place in France in 2011, the number of Muslim women who wear the veil was around 1900 (Mullally, 2011: 33). A number inflated from the original number of 367 women (Karim, 2013). Pazardzhik in Bulgaria implemented the veil ban due to [about two dozen women who wore the](#) veil (Petkova, 2016). According to experts, such small numbers of veiled women is a marginal phenomenon, thus does not require legislating a law (Mullally, 2011). Even for such small numbers, women's agency, decisions, and views are absent from the veil ban's decision-making processes and other laws affecting Muslim women (Sealy, 2020). The numbers could be statically marginal or microscopic; however, this is not the case in the matter of human rights, freedom of choice, and acceptance. Every Muslim woman whose life is touched by the veil ban does count.

The characteristics of Muslim women living in the west changed; their integration in society is indispensable (Author,

2015). Thus, different contexts require different reactions. Paul Mackney, joint general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), said:

'For years, people said that Muslim families would not let their women go to university. Now there are more Muslim women at university; people tell them what to wear.' (UCU, 2009).

Each day passing with masks on faces exposes the veil ban; it was never about the veil itself. It was about the Muslim woman wearing it. Covering the face suddenly shifted from being a degrading or dangerous behavior to good respiratory etiquette; painfully, the meaning of the mask depends on the identity of the person wearing it (Mazigh, 2020). The paradox in France attracted the media's attention, as authorities insisted on carrying on a veil ban during Covid 19 crises (France news, 2020). According to the Washington post; If an observant Muslim woman wanted to get on the Paris Metro, she must remove her veil and put on a mask (McAuley, 2020).

Covid 19 proved how flexible the human communities are and how people manage to adapt to changes; the new phenomenon soon becomes a familiar scene when time elapses. European program for Values Equality and Differences in Liberal Democracies and Debates about Female Muslim Headscarves in Europe (VEIL) studied the headscarf ban's arguments in some European countries in 2006-2009. The program reached the following conclusion:

'Fundamental values and norms of liberal democracies are not only renegotiated but also collective identities re-constructed within the European integration process.' (CORDIS, 2006).

A Muslim woman living in a liberal society is the only authority to decide. If the veil is her choice, she has the right to use it. If it is oppression, she has the right to reject it. Wearing a headscarf and veil is a form of worship for Muslim women. Although the headscarf is compulsory for all Muslim women, the veil is optional, as many schools in Islam gave the woman the freedom to use it. Wearing the veil is an experience lived and shared by millions of Muslim women around the world. It is a unique act of personal freedom.

Kaymak is a Muslim woman who tried a veil for the first time in Medina during the Umra, a sub-pilgrimage trip. She purchased the veil out of curiosity, used it while being in Saudi; according to her, the experience was overwhelming. She felt secure, unique, and protected (Kaymak, E. 2003, personal communication, 4 May). For a Muslim woman, wearing the veil carries two aspects; social and personal. Kaymak tried the veil in Saudi society, which is a veil-friendly environment. She focused on the personal element and how the veil made her feel. Today, the veil adds another personal value for a Muslim woman: It protects her health.

Nowadays, Muslim women in the west are experiencing a more intimate relationship with the veil. A Muslim woman wearing a veil is less anxious towards her appearance in public; she is not obliged to make herself less visible while wearing the veil (Begum, 2020). It is indispensable to poll both groups of Muslim women in the west, immigrants, and converts, after Covid 19 crisis; explore their new social experience, attitudes, and expectations regarding the ban in the future. The unheard voices of Muslim women are becoming stronger during Covid 19 crisis; several organizations are appealing to the House of Representatives and the senate in the Netherlands to revoke the face-covering law. The appeal comes in the light of the recent Covid 19 rules, where most legal arguments supporting the veil ban became void (Gercama and Derks, 2020). Policymakers must use this opportunity to scrap laws prohibiting wearing full-face veils (Perolini, 2020).

Conclusion:

The argument around the veil ban laws is not new. However, the study attempted to explore the social response to a unique situation. Covid 19 epidemic raised many question marks, encouraged people to revisit every aspect of their lives. If we could work and learn online, why have we commuted to offices and schools for so long? If we could enjoy family life in our homes, why did we drift apart so far? If we could minimize our carbon print, why did we exhaust our planet? The current study asked the following question; we could check identities with masks on, why not with veils? Western societies could tolerate millions of covered faces; why not endure a few veiled women? Masks worn to protect from Covid 19 exposed a controversy in human rights and personal freedom. Those little masks concealed features but revealed breaches of human rights. The study registered how western media used terms such as hypocrisy, paradox, and irony to

describe the new trends Covid 19 provoked in traditional face politics.

The study discussed many justifications for the veil ban; to grant Muslim women their freedom, dignity, and equity. Western policymakers constructed the theory of liberating Muslim women decades ago. The reference in this hypothesis was Muslim women who lived in the west as migrant homemakers, secluded in their houses, forced by their spouses or male family members to wear headscarves or veils when they go out. It was never appropriate to generalize such a hypothesis to Muslim women, to begin with, and it no more applies to Muslim Women in western societies nowadays. These women are educated, willing to integrate with the community while studying, raising their kids, or providing for their families. Many have prominent careers and enjoy independent lifestyles. It is indispensable for lawmakers in the west to consider Muslim women's new criteria in their societies. If a Muslim woman in Europe chooses to put on a veil, it is her right to practice religious freedom and enjoy her dignity. On the contrary, being summoned by police for practicing her belief does not comply with the free lifestyle Europe has promised her. The study suggested that statutes and regulations should adhere to changing realities, conditions, and trends in people's life.

The study concluded that the only valid justification for the veil ban in the after-Covid19 world is the rejection of Islamic symbols in Europe. The study showed how Muslim women carried the burden of freeing western societies from religious symbols, but not other citizens. The veil ban targets only one religious character, thus partially omitting one Islamic sign. However, laws generally allow headscarves in western societies. The ban attempted to keep a partly secular context in a diverse community. Western societies accept Muslim individuals' contribution as workers and professionals, but still reject their style and tradition. Muslims are welcomed to be part of the community, but not their Mosques, minarets, headscarves, and veils. Muslim women work in different carriers; society appreciates their participation in social development. However, their belief, culture, or choice of costume is not well received.

The study established that the veil ban affects working Muslim women directly. Most bans focus on public institutes, schools, and government offices. If a Muslim woman avoided these places to protect her right to cover her face, it would obstruct her integration process. She will seclude herself at home, skip school, and miss her chance of employment. In particular, Muslim women should feel Laws are neutral, unbiased to all citizens. The study suggests that further studies are needed to navigate the effects of dress code laws on Muslim women in the west. It is vital to explore their views around the dress code laws; whether these laws achieve the planned target of serving their rights as females, protecting dignity, freedom, and full integration into society

The study found that Human society is a living body; it absorbs surrounding changes, interacts with different influences, and evolves through time. Western nations accepted radical changes imposed by a virus, changes that proposed new social norms in daily interaction, and human socializing. It is worth accepting new social norms and cultures related to religious beliefs for a part of society. This acceptance will pave the road for equal rights and privileges for all members of the community. If western policymakers considered Islamic culture a visiting culture decades ago; Today, Islam has become a resident and influential culture. The only solution is to absorb this component. This study demonstrated societies' high flexibility to accommodate change; such organizations can assimilate Islamic culture to be part of Europe and North America's diverse heritage.

The study documented many positive effects on Muslim women's social status during Covid 19 crisis. The tragedy became a breeze of freedom for veiled Muslim women. A Muslim woman could choose to use veils more often to protect from health hazards, shield her skin from harmful light waves, dust, pollution, or use it to fulfill her religious obligation, making her more comfortable with herself. In many ways, Covid 19 represented a chance to live Muslim women's lives. In the first weeks of the epidemic, people who started to use face masks faced awkward perceptions from individuals who did not believe Covid 19 was a real threat. They received gestures of mocking and sarcasm. This exact uneasy feeling is what a Muslim woman wearing a veil confronts in society; besides, she will pay a fine in veil-banned territories.

Having trouble to socialize, breathe, and interact did not stop people from wearing masks. The same applies to Muslim women wearing the veil, they may find it difficult to wear, but they practice what they believe. House confinement is another experience lived by many during Covid 19 crisis. Muslim women with veils lived with this feeling for years,

reluctant to face a discouraging society judging her by the appearance she chooses to dawn in public.

Covid 19 crisis inspired humanity to be more careful about daily habits and self-hygiene, leading to prevention against exposure to diseases in the future. Hopefully, the awareness of Muslim women's social experience will create new social habits to replace old attitudes and misconceptions towards Muslim women.

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