

## MUSLIMS IN DENMARK: DISCOURSE OF THE VEIL

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**ABSTRACT:** *Today the country of Denmark has two conflicting reputations. First, it is known for its tolerance and openness. Denmark is renowned for saving Jews during World War II. Since the late 1960s it has been socially acceptable for a man and a woman to live as an unmarried couple. Same sex marriage has been legal since the 1970s. Denmark's acceptance rate for asylum-seekers is the highest in Europe. During the last decade, on a per capita basis, Denmark was third on the list of number of refugees accepted by industrialized countries. At the same time that Denmark has this reputation for tolerance and openness, it also has seen rising levels of racism and anti-immigrant prejudice and hostilities. Much of the antagonism centers on the presence of Muslim immigrants. Muslim women wearing headscarves (hijab) are a particularly visible target for such discrimination. In 1999 three Danish supermarket chains refused to employ Muslim women wearing headscarves in positions where they would be visible to the public claiming that the headscarves were "unhygienic and against the stores' uniform policy." The underlying reason for this cultural intolerance, in the guise of the "unhygienic veil," is that the veil symbolizes the oppression of females and thus the inferiority of Muslim society. This paper analyzes the historical and current relationship between the West, including Denmark, and the Muslim East with particular emphasis on the discourse of the veil.*

### INTRODUCTION

The country of Denmark "prides itself on being a liberal political entity in which human rights are embedded in the constitution" (Simonsen, 2002). This pride was clearly demonstrated on June 5, 1999 during multiple celebrations of the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Danish constitution when "it was stated again and again how Danish society had developed a genuine tradition for tolerance and openness vis-à-vis the surrounding world" (Simonsen, 2002). Examples of this tolerance and openness are abundant. Denmark is renowned for saving Jews during World War II. Since the late 1960s it has been socially acceptable for a man and a woman to live as an unmarried couple. Since the 1970s same sex marriage has been legal (Simonsen, 2002). Denmark's per capita aid to developing countries is the highest in the world (Irish Times, 11/22/01). Denmark's acceptance rate for asylum-seekers is 43%, the highest in Europe (Finn,

2002). During the last decade, on a per capita basis, Denmark was third on the list of number of refugees accepted by industrialized countries (Wilkinson, 2002). At the same time that Denmark has this reputation for tolerance and openness, it also has seen rising levels of racism and anti-immigrant prejudice and hostilities, particularly against Muslim immigrants. A report by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance criticized Denmark stating that "problems of xenophobia and discrimination persist and concern particularly non-EU citizens – notably immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, but also Danish nationals of foreign background" (Agence France Presse, 4/3/01). The report further stated that "[p]eople perceived to be Muslims, and especially Somalis, appear[ed] to be particularly vulnerable". Muslim women wearing headscarves (hijab) are a particularly visible target for such discrimination. What has caused so many Danes to become intolerant and close-minded with regard to Muslims living in their country? This paper will answer that question by looking at the historical

background of the Muslim presence in Denmark and by discussing challenges to Denmark's tolerance and homogeneity caused by this Muslim presence. One major reason for the Danes' negative impressions of Muslims is the negative perception of Muslim women wearing headscarves. Thus, a large portion of this paper will be devoted to the discourse of the veil.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MUSLIM PRESENCE IN DENMARK**

"Thirty years ago, almost no foreign citizens lived in Denmark" (Togeby, 1998).

Prior to the 1960s there was an absence of any significant non-white immigration to Denmark. The only exception was the immigration of Greenlanders (Wren, 2001). Note that Greenland is a protectorate of Denmark. In 1967 only 10,000 third country nationals lived in Denmark (Togeby, 1998). "Third country" refers to any country outside of Scandinavia, the EU and North America.

The first sizable influx of third country nationals consisted of guest workers from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia. The guest worker program started in 1967. In 1973, when the legal immigration of foreign workers ended, the number of third country nationals had increased to almost 40,000 individuals. Many guest workers did not return to their native countries at the end of the guest worker program; instead, they proceeded to bring their families to Denmark. By 1984 the number of third country nationals had increased to 55,000 (Togeby, 1998). The second sizable influx of third country nationals began with the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers in the early 1980s. Most of these refugees and asylum seekers came from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and the former Yugoslavia (Simonsen, 2002). Their arrival greatly increased the number of third country nationals in Denmark. By 1993 third country nationals numbered 130,000, more than doubling their number – 55,000 in 1984 – in less than 10 years (Togeby, 1998). This dramatic increase in the number of immigrants continued through the 1990s. During this period, the largest refugee group was Somalis fleeing civil war (Simonsen, 2002). As

of January 1, 2003 there were 347,709 third country immigrants living in Denmark – 6.4% of the total population (Danish Immigration Service, 2003).

It is difficult to determine how many of the 347,709 immigrants are Muslim as the Danish government does not register religion or race. However, scanning the countries of origin mentioned above would indicate that a sizable portion would be Muslim. Estimates range from 70,000 – 80,000 (Pedersen, 1998) to 218,000 (Finn, 2002). These estimates outnumber the estimated number of Catholics (40,000), thus making Islam the second largest religion in Denmark (Pedersen, 1998; Simonsen, 2002), although its membership is significantly smaller than membership for the state religion, which is Lutheran (4,532,000) (Agerskov, 2001).

As of 2002, Denmark had approximately sixty mosques (meeting places) and seventeen private Muslim schools, thus Islam is well established in Denmark. Furthermore, the needs of the Muslim community are being met by services such as "Islamic banks, halal food shops, travel agencies that offer special fares for persons going on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, companies that offer courses for young Muslim women who want to get their driver's license, sports clubs with lessons for women only and so forth" (Simonsen, 2002). This sizable Muslim community is challenging Denmark's reputation for tolerance and its sense of homogeneity.

## **CHALLENGES TO DENMARK'S TOLERANCE AND HOMOGENEITY**

As seen above, immigrants from Muslim countries are establishing their own Muslim communities within Denmark. The Danes perceive this as a threat to their homogeneity. Consequently, there has been a rise in Danish nationalism and a renewed interest in Danish culture.

External observers may wonder at the frequent use of the national flag [a white cross on a red background] both in daily contexts, and as a symbolic marker during festivities, and also the prevalence of the colours red and white in many everyday contexts, including newspaper lettering, road signs, Christmas decorations, art and even clothing and kitchen linen. Red and white are very much part of everyday life, to

the extent that this colour combination seems natural and is not noticed. In this way, the nation is flagged on a continual basis, and such routine nationalism ensures that the concept of the Danish nation is unconsciously present among its citizens. This flagging is closely tied in with the concepts of home and garden (many contain flags), hospitality and comfort, all key symbols of "Danishness" (Wren, 2001).

This increased interest in maintaining "Danishness" reflects the fear on the part of some Danes that Muslims are taking over Denmark. This fear is expressed in xenophobic propaganda such as recent election posters. The right-wing populist People's Party campaigned with a poster which featured a young blond girl next to the slogan: "When she retires, Denmark will have a Muslim majority" (Finn, 2002). Another right-wing provocative poster contrasted a group of blond Danish girls ("Denmark today") with a group of hooded, weapon-yielding and blood-covered Muslim youths ("Ten years from now") (Hale, 2002).

This fear of a potential Muslim dominated Denmark is reinforced by the perception that "the Muslim population has grown so strong that they are now openly seeking to introduce Islamic laws" (Burstyn, 2002). The main fear with regard to Islamic law is the fear of losing women's rights. Soren Espersen, press secretary of the People's Party, succinctly expresses this concern: "Medieval ways of treating women are introduced into a modern society and we're supposed to say, 'Aah, that's really interesting, how ethnic.' No! It's wrong and we want to fight it" (The American Prospect, 8/26/2002). Thus, one of the main justifications for calls for "Muslims in Denmark to go home" (Pia Kjaersgaard quoted in Suellentrop, 2002) and for "a Muslim-free Denmark" (the Progress Party quoted in Osborn 2001) is the perceived injustice of the oppressed and victimized Muslim woman. This Muslim woman is identified as a woman who wears a headscarf.

## **WESTERN IMPRESSION OF PURDAH**

Why is this happening? What can explain this discrimination against Muslim women who choose to wear a head covering? The answer lies in understanding the Western impression and interpretation of the concept of purdah – "the term

commonly used to designate seclusion of women behind the walls of the harem or the folds of the veil" (Webster, 1984). To many people, the veil is "a symbol of women's oppression by Islam" (Saharso, 2003), a "mark of women's inferior status in their societies" (Webster, 1984), a "sexist religious tradition that denies women full access to the public sphere" (Saharso, 2003) and a "sign of male dominance and female suppression" (Simonsen, 2002). This concept of the "oppressive" veil was solidified further by practices in Afghanistan – recently overturned by the defeat of the Taliban – where women were required to wear the burqa in public. Westerners saw the burqa as "a cumbersome and insulting outfit whose only purpose must have been to restrict women's freedom of movement" (Hirschmann, 2003). This restriction on freedom of movement included, but was not limited to, the prohibition of the schooling of girls, the prohibition of women's waged work and the prohibition of women walking abroad unless accompanied by a male relative (Hirschmann, 2003).

Where did this Western concept of the oppressed and victimized Muslim female originate? According to Leila Ahmed (1982), the image of the oppressed veiled woman can be traced as far back in time as the Crusades. From the time of the Crusades up to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the West and the Muslim world were intermittently at war. Through the centuries Western scholars wrote volumes "about the evil, irrational, and so forth, conditions of the Muslims – naturally including statements about the degraded condition of Muslim women" (Ahmed, 1982). The image of the oppressed Muslim female was used to advantage during the colonial era at the end of the nineteenth century:

The thesis of the new colonial discourse of Islam centered on women was that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies...Veiling – to *Western* eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies (Ahmed, 1992).

Lord Evelyn Baring Cromer, British consul general in Egypt at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, strongly espoused this view, believing that Egyptians would never be civilized until they changed their degrading practices of oppressing women through the use of veiling and seclusion (Ahmed, 1992). Lord Cromer applied the discourse used by feminists against idealized Victorian womanhood to the situation in Egypt. Thus the call for women to unveil and western feminism became associated with colonial domination (Ahmed, 1992). The importance of this association will be discussed later.

### **VEILING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE WEARER**

Women around the world are freely and purposively adopting the hijab. The women who are choosing to veil are usually in their twenties and early thirties and tend to belong to urban lower and middle classes (Odeh, 1993) and according to Ahmed (1992), have “the abilities and aspirations of the upwardly mobile.” They are either university students or women working as civil servants, schoolteachers, secretaries in private enterprise, bank employees or nurses (Odeh, 1993). These women are choosing to veil for multiple reasons: for practical purposes, for religious convictions, for self-protection, for psychological well being, for social conformity, as a symbol of wealth/status, and as a political statement. Some of these reasons for veiling are quite simplistic. As in the past, women are veiling as a symbol of wealth and status:

Severe veiling and seclusion of women indicate that a man has the economic resources to safeguard the honor of his family by having servants to perform the jobs delegated to women in poorer households. Ironically, it is the women from rural settings who are inclined to don the most severe forms of the veil, covering all or most of the face, when the burdens of physical labor are lifted from their shoulders, thus indicating that they have ascended a notch or two on the social scale (Webster, 1984)

Other simplistic reasons include the desire to beautify the wearer or to hide the wearer’s identity (Hoodfar, 1994).

As a more profound reason, many women speak of the sense of community that they have as a result of wearing the veil. This is particularly true for Muslim women living in a non-Muslim country as Read and Bartkowski discovered during their case study of Muslim women living in Austin, Texas:

Several other respondents also underscore the significance of Islamic women’s friendship networks that form around the veil, which are particularly indispensable because they live in a non-Muslim country (i.e., the United States). In recounting these friendship circles that are cultivated around *hijab* in a “foreign” land, our veiled respondents point to an important overlay between their gender identities (i.e., good Muslim women veil) and their ethnic identities (i.e., as Middle Easterners). The common foundation on which these twin identities are negotiated is distinctively religious in nature...these veiled respondents find comfort in the cultural and ethnic distinctiveness that the veil affords them. In this way *hijab* is closely connected with their overlapping religious-gender-ethnic identities and links them to the broader community (ummah) of Islamic believers and Muslim women (Read, 2000).

Many young women take this sense of community one step further: “[Y]oung women from cultural minorities in the West sometimes react to the negative stereotyping of Islam by defiantly emphasizing their religious identity and wearing a headscarf. Wearing a headscarf is thus an act of religious consciousness” (Saharso, 2003).

Many women in the Middle East wear the veil for the simple reason that it provides protection from male harassment. Women, who publicly travel between home and school or work, are frequently exposed to uncomfortable situations. Women “are stared at, whistled at, rubbed against, pinched... [and hear] Comments by men such as, ‘what nice breasts you have’, or ‘how beautiful...you must be,’ or something more subtle in tone such as, ‘what a blessed day this is that I have seen you’...” (Odeh, 1993). A veiled woman is less likely to be treated in such a manner. Ahmed (1992) found similar results in a study conducted among 200 veiled and unveiled women at Cairo University. Responses to a questionnaire revealed that the women noticed a marked difference in the way they were treated in public spaces when they were veiled. Veiling protected them from male harassment.

Veiling is also used as a form of negotiation between traditional values and women’s

desires/needs to enter the male/public sphere. For example, in her study of young Muslim women in Montreal, Hoodfar (1994) found that by wearing the veil, the young women were able to defuse parental resistance to their going away to university and living on their own. By wearing the veil, the young women indicated to their parents that they were not going to lose their cultural values and become "white Canadian". Another advantage to wearing the veil in public is that "the veil is a great equalizer that enables women to work alongside of men" (Read, 2000) in both occupational and educational pursuits. Ahmed (1994) reported similar comments in her study of Cairo University students. The university students attested that wearing Islamic dress allowed them the freedom to have male friendships without the fear of being dubbed immoral. Other authors like Bullock (1999), and Read and Bartkowski (Read, 2000) refer to this "liberating" effect of wearing the hijab. Hirschmann (2003) takes this concept of liberation a step further by stating that, "[T]he higab (sic) can be seen as a tool of women's agency, in that it allows women to negotiate the strictures of patriarchal custom to gain what they want, to assert their independence, and to claim their own identity". The veil as an instrument of women's agency will be discussed in the next section.

## **THE VEIL AND WOMEN'S AGENCY**

Because a woman wears a veil does not mean that she is passive and submissive. Several authors demonstrate this point. Lama Abu Odeh describes women who

constantly [attempt] to subvert the blandness of the veil. They invent a million ways to tie the scarf on their heads, which itself becomes more varied in colours than the more standard white. The loose dress of the veil suddenly becomes slightly tighter, more colourful, more daring in emulating Western fashions, even if it doesn't explicitly reveal more parts of the female body. One also notices them on the streets conversing with men, strolling with them, subverting the segregation that the veil imposes on the sexes (Odeh, 1993).

Schirin Amir-Moazami and Armando Salvatore have studied the phenomenon of new veiling in France and Germany. They discovered that women with

headscarves were challenging the Islam of the former generation. They were developing their own versions of Islam due to their education and their religious knowledge, which caused them to question certain norms and values hitherto taken for granted. For example, they challenged the practice of forced marriages by pointing to the fact that the Qur'an gives them the right to accept or refuse the parental choice of spouse (Amir-Moazami, 2003). Fatema Mernissi (2001) states that "Imam Khomeini's decision to force women to veil only politicized Iranian women and made them bolder." She quotes Haleh Esfandiari, who interviewed dozens of Iranian women, "Young women found ways to conform and yet challenge Islamic dress – showing a puff of hair, called Kakol, under their scarves, using lipstick and nail polish despite the 'morals police'. In myriad ways, they have reclaimed public space." In her book, *The Subject of Liberty*, Nancy Hirschmann (2003) discusses Lila Abu-Lughod's ethnographic study of Arab Bedouins. The female Bedouins readily wear the veil, interpreting it as a mark of modesty but also as a mark of their autonomy. "The veil thus serves as a statement that the wearer is intent on preserving herself as separate from others, emotionally and psychologically as well as physically; it is a tangible marker of separateness and independence. Thus, rather than a tool of oppression, veiling is an instrument of agency and freedom for these [Bedouin] women." In their study of veiled and unveiled women in Austin, Texas, Read and Bartkowski (2000) suggest that the women are "exercising agency in crafting their gender identities." Both the veiled and unveiled women were accepting of each other's choices regarding the practice of veiling, indicating that their gender identities were "malleable and inclusive enough to navigate through the controversy surrounding the veil" (Read, 2000). Sheila McDonough interviewed and analyzed statements made by seven Canadian Muslim women regarding the hijab. For these women, agency took totally opposite forms. Several interviewees indicated that wearing the hijab had "been empowering and [had] given them a sense of dignity and self-worth" while some of the women "felt empowered when they removed the veil, which they saw as a public symbol of piety" (Hoodfar et al., 2003).

Aside from individual acts of agency for personal reasons, wearing the veil can be a statement

reflecting beliefs held by the local Muslim community. For example, in Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, where almost half the population consists of immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, “young women wear the veil in a statement of religious separatism” (Evans-Pritchard, 2002). Other women wear the veil for political reasons: to show resistance to Western colonialism/imperialism and as a rejection of Western feminism. As mentioned earlier in the paper, Western colonialists used the image of the oppressed veiled woman as verification that the Muslim culture was backward, thus justifying their imperialist objectives. Ironically, this colonial narrative has been reversed into a narrative of Islamic resistance. In this Islamic narrative the veil has come to symbolize “the dignity and validity of all native customs” (Ahmed, 1992). Women’s agency of purposefully adopting the veil as an act of resistance against Western colonialism/imperialism has occurred in Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Algeria and Afghanistan during the late twentieth century (Hirschmann, 2003).

This linking of the wearing of the veil with anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism has “undoubtedly hindered the feminist struggle within Muslim societies” (Ahmed, 1992). Because the discourse of colonialism/imperialism used the tactics of the feminist movement, removal of the veil has come to mean support of western feminism. Thus arises a problem. The colonialist/imperialist discourse links wearing the veil with Islamic culture, while the feminist movement, in its struggles for women’s rights, tends to include unveiling as one of those rights. Therefore, when feminists call for unveiling they are perceived as attacking Islamic culture – just as colonialism/imperialism attacked Islamic culture – rather than the laws and customs found in Muslim societies (Ahmed, 1992). Thus the rejection of western feminism and the trend to reveal are political statements defending one’s culture.

## **THE VEIL AND WOMAN’S BODY**

Another important aspect of the veil needs to be discussed: the veil and its association with sexuality. “[T]he Islamic Republic of Iran advocates women’s hijab, so that men’s strong sexual urges will

not be aroused by women’s exposure of their beauty” (Nakanishi, 1998). Read and Bartkowski also refer to men’s strong sexual urges. “Many expositors of the pro-veiling discourse call attention to the uniquely masculine penchant for untamed sexual activity and construe the veil as a God-ordained solution to the apparent disparities in men’s and women’s sexual appetites. Women are therefore deemed responsible for the management of men’s sexuality” (Al-Swailem in Read, 2000). These statements regarding men’s strong sexual desires are based on two underlying currents: (1) a fear of female sexuality; that is, a fear of the power that women have over men due to their ability to seduce men and therefore, (2) the requirement that women deny their sexuality. As to the first, many Muslims scholars believe that, “unconstrained, women’s sexuality has the potential to cause fitna, civil war and the destruction of Muslim society” (Shirazi, 2001). Shirazi uses an Iranian graffiti slogan to illustrate this point, “If unveiling is a sign of civilization, then animals must be the most civilized.” This slogan implies that wearing the veil is a symbol of a civilized society and that any society that does not veil its women belongs to the animal kingdom (Shirazi, 2001). Abu-Lughod discusses the importance of the requirement that women deny their sexuality in her book entitled, “Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society.” She does this through her discussion of the “good woman”. “The modest woman admits no interest in men, makes no attempt to attract them through behavior or dress, and covers up any indication of a sexual or romantic attachment (even in her marriage). The woman who does not is called a “slut” (qhaba) or a whore (sharmuta)...Good women deny interest in sexual matters and deny their own sexuality” (Abu-Lughod, 1986). Nancy Hirschmann (2000) expands on the concept:

The veil and the seclusion of women are convenient and powerful ways to accomplish this denial of sexuality, for it is a way to “avoid” men’s attention and to “screen” women from men, both literally and symbolically. But such denial occurs “behind the veil” as well, that is, among women, who seem to be the harshest critics of women who express sexual desire. Women encourage negative and dismissive attitudes about sex among themselves, and women who are perceived to want sex are scorned as weak.

The link between the veil and sexuality has evolved into a cultural system with some interesting customs. "Since veiling defines sexuality, women, by observing or neglecting the veil, may define who is a man and who is not" (Pastner in Hoodfar, 1994). In Iran, women have an effective weapon in conflicts involving men and women who are outside the family group. The women can threaten to lower their veils. By doing so, they indicate that the contestee is not a man. Another custom involves status relationships. High status women may choose not to wear the veil in the presence of lower status men (Hoodfar, 1994).

A study of the relationship between the veil and sexuality would be incomplete without looking at the historical Western concept of the harem and the current use of the veil in western erotica. To Western eyes, "harems were supposed to be places where Muslim men imprisoned their wives, who had nothing to do except to beautify themselves and cater to their husbands' huge sexual appetites" (Hoodfar, 1994). It was a place where lesbian sexual desires were fulfilled, where any and all male sexual fantasies might be fulfilled. The women in those harems wore veils. "The veil, no matter in what form, shape, color, or size, had now come to signify not "real" Middle Eastern women, about whom little was known, but the heroines of *The Thousand and One Nights*. The veil had become the trademark of the wanton woman who finds pleasure in her subjugation to an often-sadistic master" (Shirazi, 2001).

*Playboy* and *Penthouse* frequently make use of the veiled woman in their photo stories; however, the women wearing the veil are Western. "The function of the veil is to rouse consumer fantasies of an Orient where voluptuous women eagerly submit to the sexual demands of a master" (Shirazi, 2001).

## **THE VEIL AS THREAT**

It is time to return to the original question: Why do Danes feel threatened by the presence of women wearing headscarves? The presence of headscarves in public spaces is interpreted as a disruption of the Danish norm of the separation between the public/private spheres. A woman

wearing a headscarf is bringing her private sphere into the public sphere. In other words, the headscarf is perceived as a portable home. Not only is she exposing her private life to the public, more seriously she is exposing her gendered body, a female body associated with oppression, victimization and "backwardness". This gendered body is unacceptable to the Danes who pride themselves on their accomplishments with regards to women's rights in Denmark. Furthermore, a woman wearing a headscarf is displaying her religious convictions in the public sphere. In spite of the fact that Denmark has a state religion (Lutheran), culturally Denmark is a secular state, and thus a state not accustomed to the display of religious beliefs in the neutral public sphere. Note that this neutral public sphere assumes and is dependent on a Protestant private sphere. In summary, the Danes' feelings of anxiety generated by the presence of headscarves in the public sphere cause them to lash out against the presence of Muslim immigrants in Denmark and veiled women in particular.

## **SUMMARY**

Until the 1960s Denmark was an extremely homogeneous country with very few immigrants from countries outside Scandinavia, Europe and North America. The last three decades of the twentieth century saw a rapid increase in the number of immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers entering Denmark. This rapid increase combined with the fact that many of the immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers came from Muslim countries is challenging Denmark's homogeneity, tolerance and open-mindedness. Centuries-old antagonism between the Muslim World and the West has resurfaced in Denmark. This antagonism has taken the form of the colonialist/imperialist discourse that used the image of the "oppressed" veiled woman as validation for the inferiority of Muslim society and therefore justification for colonist/imperialist rule. This discourse called for the removal of the veil as the first step towards modernization. Thus the custom of veiling became a "politicized cultural practice" (Lowe, 1997). Today, to the Western world the veil is a symbol of the oppression of females and the

inferiority of Muslim society. To the Muslim world the veil has come to mean more than a religious belief, it is now a symbol of defiance against the Western world and therefore, many young women are choosing to wear the veil.

Since the veil, in Canadian society, is the most significant visible symbol of Muslim identity, many Muslim women have taken up the veil not only from personal conviction, but to assert the identity and existence of a confident Muslim community and demand fuller social and political recognition (Hoodfar, 1994).

As seen by this quote, the clash between the West and the East is no longer physically restricted to Muslim countries. Through globalization, it has moved to many parts of the world including the small country of Denmark. Hopefully, Denmark will be able to find a solution to this perceived threat to its homogeneity – a homogeneity that no longer exists. It would be a shame if the country of Denmark, known for its “tolerance and openness vis-à-vis the surrounding world” would cease to be so.

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