

Unveiling Orientalism in reverse

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Why does the hijab arouse such passion? The woman and her hair, her neck, her earlobes, all have become a battleground between cultures, where both sides assert their identity by showing how different they are from each other, demonstrate weaknesses and blame them on the woman too. I will consider these issues as a woman philosopher, with some reference to my empirical research. It seems to be a characteristic of humans that we think in terms of opposites, or pairs, and we often choose to see them as mutually exclusive. Those who insist upon creating binary systems to explain the world have had to accept that communism and capitalism no longer provide a useful polarisation, and they have selected the pairing of Islam versus the West. The hijab has become one of the symbols of this polarisation that I wish to contextualise within the idea of Orientalism in reverse, as developed by Achcar.¹ He asserts that there is a trend both in the Muslim and the non-Muslim world towards the idea that Islam holds the key to its own salvation, and that only truly Islamic solutions to life's problems will be both authentic and effective. He explains how Orientalism in reverse assumes that Muslims develop Islamic solutions to problems. Moreover the solutions that Muslims choose are, by definition, incomprehensible to non-Muslims. I will argue that this is one, although not the only motivator for the passion that surrounds the hijab, both from the viewpoint of the Western secularist and the devout Muslim. In this context I pay less attention to the political aspects of Achcar's exposure of Orientalism in reverse, and focus more on Western attitudes towards the female as object. Finally I will suggest a third way, as recommended by Said himself, the critic of Orientalism, in his plea that we should look towards a different interpretation of the relationship between knowledge and power: he believed we should ask how we can study other cultures and peoples from a non-repressive and non-manipulative perspective.²

In order to consider how to develop such a perspective I will also use my research on the French hermeneutical philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1912-2005) because of his writing on the hermeneutics of suspicion and our responsibility to be suspicious of our own motives as well as those of others (Scott-Baumann 2009).³ The work of Paul Ricoeur provides a clear way of looking at this debate because he analyses humanity by seeking similarities and he recommends a faith-based attempt at effective conciliatory social action. In the second half of his essay *Freedom in the Light of Hope*, he discusses Immanuel Kant, one of the greatest of European philosophers.⁴ Ricoeur shows us that Kant sowed the seeds for the hermeneutics of suspicion in three significant ways: in terms of doubt about the self, the limits of

reason and the doubts about institutional religion. Ricoeur was also influenced strongly by Hegel, Husserl and Freud, Nietzsche and Marx. Ricoeur ascribed to Marx, Nietzsche and Freud an emphasis on a pervasive suspicion, telling us that we hide our true desires (for sex, power and money respectively) behind false consciousness and should endeavour to be more open with others and ourselves. Ricoeur believed this to be an unduly pessimistic distortion of human life, but welcomed the stimulus provided by these three masters of suspicion as their ideas helped him to propose a more honest way of living together in a complex, multinational world. He also believed that some veiling of the truth might be necessary, in order that life still holds some mystery.

For Ricoeur the hermeneutics of suspicion is invaluable as it leads to destruction of old beliefs and old illusions and it must then lead to a hermeneutics of recovery (Scott-Baumann 2009).⁵ Before applying his approach, it is necessary to analyse the dominant discourse about the hijab, which I will argue is dominated by opinions expressed by those who may have an exclusively secularist agenda and who do not talk to British Muslims. Every word in this debate has special meaning; the term 'secularist' alone could take up a whole chapter; in this context it is often used in contrast with faith. In his essay 'Urbanization and Secularization' Ricoeur describes secularism as having two main characteristics; the transfer of power from the churchman to the civil servant, and the 'erasing of the distinction between the spheres of the sacred and the profane'.⁶ Current debate includes rhetoric in the media, in policy-making circles and among intellectuals, analysing the discourse around faith, secularism, democracy and freedom of choice and often suspecting faith of irrationality. We need to take personal responsibility for this process, which is often blamed on journalists. Ricoeur argued that suspicion is vital, but that it must be proportionate to the situation. He also argued for attestation, which will form part of my concluding argument. If we do not speak for ourselves and also fail to speak with others there is a chance that we may retreat into the comforting strong place of sceptical doubt, the scepticism which Cavell describes as the overbearing conviction that we know more than other people do about themselves and that we believe we are therefore able to stand back and judge.⁷

The Muslim woman and her hijab demonstrate very clearly the power of this sceptical doubt, as I will show. The hijabbed Muslimah is seen by different people as symbolizing a range of different ideas: I wish to contextualise these ideas which often represent themselves as conflicting polarities involving freedom and oppression, and between knowledge and power. It will be necessary to set the scene briefly for Britain, as this is my main area of activity.

The Context

The hijab as a head covering is reasonably well tolerated, if not accepted in daily British life. Britain provides a more hijab-friendly environment than many European countries, such as France, where the hijab is censured as a sign of religious identity and forbidden in schools and among the civil service. However, there are pressures in Britain too; these conflicting ideas of freedom and oppression form part of the rhetoric about Muslims in the media at a time when the modern state is striving for homogeneity (Parekh 2000).⁸ Jackson and O'Grady perceive this in the apparent hardening of attitude against Muslims in some government pronouncements about multiculturalism, such as that of Ruth Kelly in 2006, and leading, as they see it, to

more strident expressions of racism in the media.⁹ Indeed civil debate about Muslims in Britain is currently characterized by pervasive and divisive media coverage of Islam as the alien 'other' and by cultural traditions living side by side but never meeting.¹⁰ This was intensified by the 2001 riots in Blackburn and elsewhere, the catastrophe of 9/11, and the horror of 7 July bombings in London in 2005.

Half a million of the approximately 2 million Muslims in Britain are of school age. This is a young and relatively speaking very religious group; this applies to both their faith observance and their identity politics and can create an impression of being different from British mainstream culture (Mukadam and Scott-Baumann 2010).¹¹

Orientalism

Several attempts have been made by the government to resolve what they perceive as this inability within Muslim communities to cope in modern society and the hijab is taken to indicate an unwillingness to engage with secular life. The government has had some impact but risks the increase of friction between policy implementation and various Muslim communities, although many Muslim women we interviewed feel this is one of the best countries for Muslims to live in (Contractor and Scott-Baumann 2010).¹² The government established a policy on social cohesion, and the London bombings of July 7 2005 led to the establishment of a Muslim working party called *Working Together to Prevent Extremism* and to a great number of initiatives. In 2006 Bill Rammell, Minister for Higher Education at DfES set up a working party to look at *Islam in Higher Education* chaired by Dr Siddiqui.¹³ Dr Siddiqui agreed to investigate two areas; the teaching of Islam in universities and the pastoral support provided for Muslims on campus. His recommendations include the need to update the teaching of Islam, make it more relevant to the diversity within UK Islam, and ensure that Islamic experts with theological as well as secular understanding teach Islam. He also recommended the appointment of Muslim chaplains. Working parties have been created to look at such issues, including the establishment of Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB) and the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAGs)¹⁴. The Government has also commissioned independent research such as the Muslim Faith Leader Training Review, which I co-chaired with Dr Mohamed Mukadam (2008-2010).

Counter-terrorist policies are dominant in the current official attitudes, even when those attitudes are apparently based upon the desire for social justice and equity within UK for all communities. The governmental cross-party Starkey Report recently challenged the value of such an approach, with evidence that it is counterproductive and risks alienating British Muslim communities.¹⁵ In this context, competing cultural positions depict the hijab as a sign that has become a double symbol; on the one hand symbolising the veiling as a way of guarding AGAINST evil (guarding against arousal of the impregnating male?), and on the other hand the veiling AS evil itself (denying the male his right to arousal?). In *The Symbolism of Evil*, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur explores how an object or a phenomenon in our lives can become a symbol that gives rise to thought. Of course he asks us to consider how an object becomes a symbol in the first place: I will consider that briefly here.¹⁶

Public rhetoric about hijab and terror conveys to me that feeling of a closed debate and one that can also be clarified by Ricoeur's work on ideology and utopia..... he shows us that ideology cannot be argued with as it permits no possibility for

discussion or challenge; using Marx's concept of ideology as a 'total structure of the mind'¹⁷ almost everyone I know, who is not a Muslim, tells me that women who cover up are oppressed and the implication is that they are oppressed by men who threaten the free choice of the woman to be uncovered – I ask them why women who wear clothing that is very revealing are not also oppressed? Often I am pitted for my naïvety when I ask such questions. Western culture presents a strange equation between showing the body and showing that one is thereby free, perhaps from rape, but this challenges the concept of freedom. The woman herself, whether she is hijabbed or not, may benefit from a healthy suspicion about what freedom is or can ever hope to be.

How does Orientalism fit in here? Edward Said's 1978 book *Orientalism* shows the tendency among western observers to see the exotic (literally and metaphorically) in the Muslim world.¹⁸ From this comes the associated tendency to perceive Islam as so different as to be incommensurate with one's own culture. Said's ideas have been contested and indeed can be demonstrated to be stereotypes in their own right. Despite its weaknesses, Said's thesis leads us to an interesting discussion of the position that 'only we can understand us'. While he denies that it is tenable to argue that only *we* (whoever we are) can understand *ourselves*, it clearly forms a key role in his argument, and must be true to a certain extent.

Orientalism in Reverse from an 'Orientalist' perspective

Gilbert Achcar takes Said's idea of Orientalism and critically analyses its reversal: that Islam sees itself alone as containing the power to understand itself. Through this reversal, Islam is seen as arguing that only Muslims can resolve their own problems. Islamism therefore is the only possible agent of modernization and the religion of Islam is the essential language and culture of Muslim peoples. Islamism can be seen variously as a form of purism, as a form of religious authenticity, as a flight from Western modernisation or a consistent development of a new future for Islam, and in its various permutations I believe it helps us to understand the hijab debate. In particular Achcar charts the adoption of Orientalism in reverse by various French intellectuals, who then abandon it.¹⁹ He is critical of both the adoption and the abandonment of Orientalism in reverse, preferring to hope for a more nuanced approach. Just to complicate matters, there is a version of Orientalism in reverse as proposed by the Muslim world and a different one as proposed by the world of those who are not Muslim. I will take the second one first, Orientalism in reverse as proposed by the 'Western' world. Exaggerated representations of Muslims are rooted in the belief that Muslims seek solutions that are alien to 'us.' This has the added advantage of course, of giving the illusion that 'we' are identifiable as similar to each other and therefore able to show solidarity, in being unified against the alien Other, the exotic oriental. Reverse Orientalism forms part of the British dilemma, because non-Muslims are encouraged to perceive only those aspects of UK Muslim life to which they can attribute the embodiment of extreme versions of Islam, such as honour killings and terrorist acts. What needs to be acknowledged is that most Muslims reject these acts, as do most of those who are not Muslim. However, what we actually focus on is the determination to see Muslim solutions to problems as alien and even the problem itself is seen as alien and therefore not really a problem: Muslims' concerns over British foreign policy are often dismissed as overreaction, Muslims' concerns about their women are generalised, seen as totally inappropriate and therefore not a response to a legitimate problem.

In order to see whether the idea of Orientalism in reverse is useful for understanding the hijab, we need to explore how Westerners interpret the ways in which Muslims think about their women. This may show us, as Yegenoglu puts it, 'the cultural representation of the West *to itself* by way of a detour through the other.'²⁰The detour can be made via the exotic other, and may lead to a feeling of superiority. Orientalist thinking is predicated upon asymmetries of power, whereas Ricoeur's approach to self understanding depends upon seeing how similar one is to the other, not how different. The covering of the head, hijab, and the covering of the face, niqab, are seen by many as demonstrations of oppression; the woman waits submissively for permission to have some agency granted by her males. May she go out? May she communicate with others? May she even accept the 'veiling' of her voice in that she will decide not to communicate with men outside her family and marriage circle? We know from the prevalent media discourse that the hijab is perceived in Western Europe as a symbol of oppression, in support of which there are news stories about horrific honour killings and forced marriages. We whose heads are uncovered rejoice in our freedom of choice and emancipated womanhood when we see such oppression, without considering that we may also experience oppression of a different kind. Hirji shows us how the idea of the oppressed exotic woman may even feed the fantasy of the white colonial male that he is needed to rescue the Muslim woman from this oppression, as recently in Afghanistan.²¹ With regard to Afghanistan, this fantasy disregards the complex historical reasons for the position of Afghan women in their society, which includes incursions over the centuries by foreign powers. In their analysis of Orientalism in films, Shohat and Stam apply this to the colonial mind and its conquered lands; 'The Western imaginary metaphorically rendered the colonised land as female to be saved from her environmental disaster' (1994: 156).²² This distorted understanding that we have is not good enough to persuade the thoughtful person, such as the journalist and academic Madeleine Bunting, that the hijab is truly a sign of oppression.²³ However, it is good enough for many Europeans. I believe we need to understand how this head covering came to have such a dominant position in the modern psyche; the hijab seems to me to be a symbol for many things, depending on who you are.

Being over-suspicious, creating pre-terrorist ideas

From the secular viewpoint of an Orientalist approach, theologically driven behaviour in a secular society almost seems to be thought of as suspicious in its own right. Such religious behaviour can then seem conducive to pre-terrorist activity, by which I mean activity that indicates sympathy with terrorism. In this way the *pre-cogs*, young people with special powers (so-called pre-cognition) in the film *Minority Report*, identify the *not-yet-thought-about* crime before it has even taken place (Toscano 2009).²⁴ The police in this science fiction film are able to use information from the *pre-cogs* to track down the person who *will have* the desire to murder, and prevent them from executing the crime. This is a situation where thought can be evil – instead of being presumed innocent until proven guilty, the *pre-cogs'* society shows us the dangers of humans as thinking, knowing and acting beings. Many philosophical issues arise here, such as whether we have freewill, whether we can

be held responsible for thoughts. Toscano draws our attention to a famous case in France, known as the Tarnac 9, in which young activists were labelled by the state as terrorists, even though their actions were acts of civil disruption and fell far short of legal definitions of terrorism. We know also that the stop and search procedure has been changed in the fear of terrorist attacks, so people can be stopped and searched even without reasonable suspicion.²⁵ I wish to consider whether a girl dressed in black, wearing a hijab, seems to arouse fears of pre-terrorist activity, similar to the *pre-cog* identification of evil intent before the action is committed. Guilt by association is thus being attributed because of a dress code, and generalised to a group of people who dress similarly. We note this from our research; a Muslim prison chaplain told us about her, otherwise good, training programme:

Bi-monthly meetings for counter-terrorism, it's quite a knock on your self-esteem. Also they ask me, tell us please, do the women prisoners say they are happy when British soldiers die in Iraq or Afghanistan? I mean, what can I say? Why would they be happy about that?²⁶

Of course there is potential for friction, given certain aspects of British foreign policy, yet such assumptions create concern about the way in which many non-Muslims perceive Muslims. Achcar provides one way of understanding this apparent paradox; his work on Orientalism in reverse explains the belief that Muslims develop Islamic solutions to problems. By Orientalist definitions the solutions that Muslims choose are incomprehensible to non-Muslims; in this case the celebration of modesty, the principle of the hijab. Westerners can deny the importance of modesty and can then construe such solutions as alien. By a strange form of argument it then seems acceptable to look at extreme and alien behaviours (e.g. suicide bombing, honour killings and forced marriages) and decide that they fit the Orientalism in reverse argument (even though other groups of people use suicide bombing e.g. Tamil Tigers, who are not Muslim). Then we can activate suspicion; we can think like the *pre-cogs*, believing that we know more than most people do (which is true of the *pre-cogs* in their science fiction world) and attributing these acts *potentially* to all Muslims. Using the same way of thinking, it can be argued that Muslim clothing reflects the behaviour of those who hold beliefs that are alien to 'the West' and, therefore, that this clothing must signify alien cultural habits.

Using clothing to symbolise values is not unusual, and we probably accept that we think in ways that reflect and support what we want to believe. Kant, with his interest in universal rules, showed that in fact our viewpoint and our perceptions are determined by the way we are as people, what we already know. Ricoeur admired Kant's insight into the way we think, and accepted Kant's sense of how dangerous it can be: he cautioned us to be suspicious about the Kantian sequence, thinking, knowing and acting; thinking and knowing have the potential to be possessive, territorial and potentially avaricious acts that can allow us to possess an image of the world so that we perceive it as we wish to see it. Ricoeur took it even further by emphasising the potency of knowing, our capacity to think we know more than other people do, and to be suspicious in certain circumstances, even when we have no evidence. Ricoeur wished to show that this is not inevitable, although I argue that it may seem so with a concept such as pre-terrorist activity.

Ricoeur argued that we only understand life in dualisms, because each of us is destined to be out of step with ourselves, out of step with the person we want to be

and the one we think we are; out of step with what we want to achieve and what we realistically attain. It is in language that we can find the key to meaning and understand ourselves better, to deal with these discrepancies and also, arguably, deceive ourselves. I will argue that the Orientalist hijab story (about the hijab being an instrument of oppression that may even represent the desire to oppress 'us' with terrorist acts) has no substance in reality, only in language. I wish also to argue that the use of language takes on its own life and becomes part of the ideology of the lives we live; as Ricoeur argues, ideology has no opening for debate and is very difficult to challenge. Ricoeur explored in the 1950s the idea that our understanding of evil is a special case, because we find it difficult to conceptualise evil and we have to use images and myths to represent evil. Oppression by one human of another is an example of evil, and I suggest that the hijab is often used in Western thought as a symbol to represent a form of evil.²⁷

The symbol gives rise to thought: signifier and signified and evil

The Symbolism of Evil (1967) describes Ricoeur's belief that we cannot represent evil to ourselves, because it is so complex and so ambiguous, so we have to develop shorthand, symbolic representation. The method he demonstrated in his book *The Symbolism of Evil* involves immersion in the full richness of language and culture in order to analyse a hermeneutics of evil, as we represent it to ourselves in myth, symbol and sign. In Christianity, evil predates us (as we see with the serpent, the evil other that was there before Adam and Eve). Evil also cannot be grasped in its essence but only by representation; defilement, sin and guilt are the three ideas, and they occur in verbal imagery such as the stain, the fall and blinding respectively: 'Life is a symbol, an image, before being experienced and lived' and the work now is to decipher the wrongdoing wrapped up in the symbol.²⁸ In myth and religious stories, there are certain strong images that become symbolic; stain becomes the representation of evil because the stain itself represents dirt and defilement. Another example is the Biblical fall; falling down represents falling into sin because falling is a deviation from the straight pathway that avoids temptation. The danger is that we then use the shorthand without thinking seriously about the original idea.

Ricoeur also showed us how the linguistic analysis, that Saussure developed, can help us to understand how we come to certain conclusions: Saussure, great linguist and one of the first to develop systematic analysis of language and meaning, analysed language through the use of the signifier, the signified and the referent. The signifier is the term used and recognised (hijab), the signified is the meaning of the term (agent of oppression) and the referent is the object (material used by Muslim women to cover their head). In this way the hijab has been adopted by western press and media as a symbol for evil and Ricoeur warned us of the dangers of letting the signifier and the signified become so interlocked that they have no need of a referent i.e. they do not need to check out in reality their resemblance to the phenomenon that they originally represented.

The symbol gives rise to thought, Ricoeur argued. This raises the deeper question about why the symbol of the hijab becomes one of evil to many Western commentators; I need to look further back, to challenge the very idea that a head covering is evil: how did we reach this way of thinking? There must be a range of different factors, one will not be enough, but it is likely that several factors react with each other to create the idea that hijab is bad. One factor is likely to be the

preoccupation with terrorism and the way in which the British and European public seem to be encouraged to see terrorism as synonymous with Islam. Such a view can be reflected in, for example, the research conducted by Insted.²⁹ There are exceptions such as Bunting, whose writing takes a more positive approach.³⁰

These two polarities; faith versus secularism and Islam versus the West, create a hermeneutics of suspicion, which is a distortion of meaning, the construction of prejudices, that prevent the world as we might understand it through our own reasoning from being allowed to be; i.e. suspicion functions as a challenge to our beliefs. However, we become stuck in ignorant prejudice if we accept selectively the information that strengthens our suspicions, instead of challenging our suspicions to ensure that we are being fair and accurate.³¹

Orientalism in reverse from an imagined Muslim perspective

Clearly, as a non-Muslim I can only imagine how to discuss this, and hope to be challenged if I get it wrong: there are many different ways of being a woman, and a Muslim. I hope to avoid the Orientalist perspective, and the reverse one too! Not all Muslim women wear the hijab. For those who wear it, the hijab provides a practical manifestation of concealment as modesty, and modesty in the form of the hijab principle; the veiling of the head and neck, which can extend to veiling the body such that one is modest. The interpretation of modesty may also cause one to avoid seeking out the company of men. The hijab principle can also become the veiling of the voice as the desire to avoid speaking to others, as the voice is an extension of the woman's beauty. It is possible to provide a protected environment, such as we attempted between 1999-2002, providing teacher training for Muslim women who sought a Muslim-friendly environment in which to train (Scott-Baumann and Khan Cheema 2001, Scott-Baumann 2003).³² Yet clearly these trainee teachers could not veil the voice as they had to do a placement in a mainstream school as well as a Muslim one. Another factor that may determine the debate about hijab therefore surrounds the customs and practice around women's clothing and behaviour. Muslim girls and women who do not wear hijab may be considered less authentic than those who do, just as Western girls who reveal too little when going out with friends may be considered less authentic members of a group than those who reveal more. For all groups, the concept of authenticity is necessary and some of our interviewees believe that historically, Islam as expressed in the Qu'ran is fair to women, but that this fairness can become overlaid by customs and practices that may have less desirable effect:

The main thing in Islam is that girls at the time of the prophet were well-educated and studied philosophy and other subjects. But more cultural issues can be seen as important, and sometimes people mix religion and culture and confuse them with each other.³³

In secular space there is an unexamined tendency among Western women to believe that authenticity is about attaining consumerist targets through being visibly fashionable and attractive, which currently means wearing less and less clothing and displaying more and more skin, or revealing curves and cleavages through tightness of clothing. It would be understandable to predict dissolute behaviour from such a dress code, which suggests that the Western woman may unwittingly appear to be a contaminant, with whom contact is a risk. There is a tendency among many Muslim

women to wear more and more clothing and to cover up their curves and cleavages. It is possible that each group is, at least in part, reacting to the other. This increasing polarization between the majority and the minority in Britain reveals and perpetuates some sort of tension that goes beyond clothing and fashion and places British citizens at odds with each other – potentially – and forces them to take up positions to do with identity, chastity, modesty and fertility. Yet they are not, on the whole, talking to each other as mothers, daughters, sisters, they are using their clothing as a symbolic presentation of their position. Look at my *hijab*, I am free to move modestly. No, look at my *skin*, I am free to show it to everyone. It can be argued, as Modood does, that the debate is polarised not between Christianity and Islam, as might appear to be the case, but between those who believe there is a place for religion in secular society and those who believe there is not.³⁴ The urgency for dialogue is great and we know that it happens already in some places in Britain, as demonstrated by the research of Laurence and Heath, and of Holden and of Pennent.³⁵

Even though the hijab angers those who insist upon woman's freedom to display her body, I propose that the body as it is currently revealed according to Western fashion is a potentially dangerous way of demonstrating one's womanhood and based on an ideal of freedom that is perpetrated by forces that we should be able to challenge as useful in their own way, but limited and limiting - fashion houses, press and media, advertising, pornography. There is a limit to how much a woman can comfortably reveal without becoming subordinated as an individual person, to her body as a sexual object. This can create over-reaction. Recently even the female face has become an issue. In Britain the niqab, the face covering that leaves only the eyes revealed, is gaining popularity among women who wish to keep themselves safe from the contamination of Western ways. Some use it only out in the street and in other situations with strange males:

The niqab? I enjoy wearing it. I feel comfortable when I am out in the street. It must be used carefully; it is not something to be used without thought. When I am here talking to you two women friends in your room at the university I don't need it. When I am at work as a Prison chaplain I can take it off when I am inside the prison and working, I take it off because I know the men there as colleagues. I believe it should not be worn with children, like when you are teaching.³⁶

There are others who seek to challenge secularist ways with the niqab, and I will address this in my conclusion with some practical suggestions.

From suspicion to attestation

Ricoeur proposes that we must accept absolutely that the only way to understand ourselves is through understanding others: in his masterful *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and in *Oneself As Another* he presents the imperative that we learn about ourselves critically, through exercising suspicion of others and of ourselves, and seek to explain clearly our motives for thought and action.³⁷ He invites us to bear witness, to attest to what we believe in, in order to make it clear to others and to facilitate dialogue that may resolve misunderstandings:

In conversation we have an interpretive attitude. If we speak of ideology in negative terms as distortion, then we use the tool or weapon of suspicion. If,

however, we want to recognize a group's value on the basis of its self-understanding of these values, then we must welcome these values in a positive way, and this is to converse.³⁸

This approach can lead to pluralist visions of integration and identity, but this will only happen if women get together to talk and to deconstruct their views about each other. I believe so-called democracies should not accuse other ways of thinking of being unclear about what they stand for; Halstead has commented on 'an even greater reluctance in the democratic liberal tradition to spell out what the shared values implied in their positions actually are.'³⁹

Contractor has developed an important step towards such dialogue about shared values, by helping young Muslim women to make digital stories about themselves and showing them to girls and women who are not Muslim.⁴⁰ The change in attitude towards the hijab and related issues is significant in Contractor's findings. If we apply suspicion to our own ideologies (which is extremely difficult to achieve) I believe we will discover that women - of all faiths and of none - face difficulties about identity: the oppression that we assume is facing Muslim women may be there, and there is also oppression that I detect among young secular women. There is contradictory pressure to be modest, there is pressure to be promiscuous, to be slim, even to be thin, to cover up, to uncover, to follow the latest fashions, to refuse to reflect the fashions.

I do not believe that items of clothing should become symbols for values, and I have suggested that the hijab is being taken inappropriately, perhaps by both sides in this polarised debate, as a symbol of Orientalism in reverse, as a sign of protection against contamination and as a symbol of supposedly pre-terrorist sympathies. Values are not directly related to dress code – perhaps dress code is a reflection of behavioural patterns. Behaviour reflects the pressures that girls and women feel, to be a particular type of person, to gain approval, to be accepted as a woman. The biological identity of a woman is notoriously difficult to combine with her intellectual identity: being a mother and a worker is still very difficult. This is particularly interesting if we consider the high fertility and childbearing levels among many hijab-friendly cultures that seek to restrict male and female access to each other, and the decline in levels of fertility and childbearing among hijab-phobic cultures that seem to encourage unfettered male interest in the female as commodified object. We have the statistics regarding sexual health, such as the 63% increase in all new diagnoses of sexually transmitted diseases between 1998-2007.⁴¹ It would be naïve to attribute such increases only to better identification of disease. Alcohol consumption is known to play a role in promiscuity, and it seems reasonable to be suspicious of a culture in which alcoholism, obesity and infertility are accepted and are on the increase. Yet it seems to be difficult to face and tackle these problems; Halstead recorded a prevalent definition of democracy as 'people can do what they want unless there are good reasons for not allowing them to do so.'⁴²

Why might a culture reject the behaviour of another culture, when one of them seems on a self-destructive mission towards not replacing its population and the other is healthy and reproducing well? We see in the media the arguments against Islam: oppression, lack of choice, and conservatism. There may be truth in that, and here is the irony; when Ricoeur invited us to find out more about ourselves by the way we are reflected in others, he hoped that we would benefit from looking, yet he

knew that there is also the possibility that we transfer onto others the aspects of ourselves that we wish to disown and happily find them unattractive in others – but we do not see them in ourselves. Consumerist cultures can surely also be considered to manifest oppression through lack of choice (because, paradoxically, we are given lots of choice, but every choice is within parameters that are forced upon us, none are of our own making) and through conservatism (as seen in Western dislike of the hijab).

However, this is where Ricoeur's approach becomes very potent; we need to exercise suspicion, doubting and challenging our own behaviour and beliefs, yet without going as far as Cavell's scepticism, which gives us overbearing confidence:

[Ricoeur's] deployment of suspicion also invites us to *personalize* concepts. No longer can we pretend that laws, books, works of art and opinions based on racial stereotyping or cultural habits are impersonal representations of natural justice and beauty and nothing to do with us – Ricoeur urges us to challenge them as products of our own personal human action and therefore open to suspicion.⁴³

The pro-hijab and anti-hijab ideology that surrounds us like a striped wallpaper of the mind is easy to ignore and difficult to challenge (pro, anti, pro, anti, go the stripes: we should be suspicious of this dualistic simplicity). I suggest that oppression comes in many forms and is entrenched in the human tendency to refuse to be self-critical. I have shown how Orientalism in reverse can serve to mislead people into seeing the other as the exotic alien, whether Muslim or of another faith or of no faith. Orientalism in reverse can lead to false attribution of pre-terrorist motives, as with the *pre-cog* ability to predict evil, and it is inappropriate to use such thinking to condemn women who cover their hair. Some sort of secularism in reverse is also in play: how can I defend freedom of choice as an inalienable democratic right if it leads to generations of children being too fat, too thin, too drunk or infertile? I have presented here the polarised, dualist way of thinking that makes it difficult for women of different cultural backgrounds to trust each other enough to talk together freely, sharing problems and solutions. There are practical life skills at stake here; how can different cultures live together? If I may take two extreme forms; the underdressed young woman who attracts attention to her body parts is as likely to be a dysfunctional interlocutor as the young woman with the face covered by the niqab. With one we see too much to be able to concentrate on a productive conversation, with the other we see too little to be able to communicate clearly. However, I don't believe that the hijab is an inhibitor. The concept of hijab, as modest dressing, is useful and practical and should form part of a woman's life choices. Yet if protestations continue, the hijab debate will continue to be a distraction that obscures the problems that should unite women in their attempts to find solutions to the great problems that face us all, whether hijabbed or not.

¹ Achcar, G (2008) Orientalism in Reverse in *Radical Philosophy* 152, pp.20-30

² Said, E (1978) *Orientalism* New York: Random House

³ Scott-Baumann, A (2009) *Ricoeur and the hermeneutics of suspicion*. London, New York: Continuum

⁴ Ricoeur, P (1974: 411-424) Freedom in the Light of Hope in *The Conflict of Interpretations* transl. D Ihde Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press

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- ⁵ Scott-Baumann (2009) Chapters 3, 4 and 10. See endnote 3.
- ⁶ Ricoeur, P (1974: 182-3) Urbanization and Secularization in *Political and Social Essays* (orig. published in French 1956-73)(ed. D Stewart and J Bien) Athens: Ohio University Press
- ⁷ Cavell, S (2003: 9-10, 143-4) *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ⁸ Parekh, B (2000) *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* Basingstoke: Macmillan
- ⁹ Jackson, R and O'Grady K (2007: 181-202) Religions and Education in England: Social Plurality, Civil Religion and Religious Education Pedagogy in *Religion and Education in Europe. Developments, Contexts, Debates* (eds. R Jackson, S Miedema, W Weisse, J-P Willaime) Münster: Waxmann; Kelly asserts in her speech that multiculturalism may be a source of division and not of unity, partly because of increased ethnic and racial diversity in Britain.
- ¹⁰ The Greater London Authority commissioned Insted's (2007) survey of treatment of Muslims in the media: the team of Insted researchers who analysed English newspapers in a typical week, 8-14 May 2006, found 97 % of tabloid coverage and 89% of broadsheet coverage to be negative towards Islam. The Islamic Republic News Agency (2008) reports the distress caused by Islamophobia. Insted (2007) *The Search for Common Ground: Muslims, non-Muslims and the UK media* Greater London Authority www.insted.co.uk/islam.html <http://www.London.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/docs.co>
- ¹¹ Mukadam M and Scott-Baumann A (2010) *Muslim Faith Leader Training*. Independent research conducted for Department for Communities and Local Government. In preparation.
- ¹² Contractor. S and Scott-Baumann A (2010) Women under pressure In preparation
- ¹³ Siddiqui, A (2007) *Islam at Universities in England: The Siddiqui Report* London: Department of Innovation Universities and Skills
- ¹⁴ www.minab.org.uk
- ¹⁵ Starkey Report <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/com200910/cmselect/concomloc/65/65/pdf>
- ¹⁶ Chapter 2 of my book *Ricoeur and the hermeneutics of suspicion* provides more detail: Scott-Baumann 2009: 22-39
- ¹⁷ *ibid*: 70. Ricoeur discusses this in terms of Mannheim's analysis of Marx
- ¹⁸ Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* New York: Random House
- ¹⁹ Two of those he discusses are Olivier Carré and Olivier Roy
- ²⁰ Yegenoglu, M (1998) *Colonial Fantasies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- ²¹ Hirji, F (2009) *The War for Women's Freedom: Orientalist Imaginaries of Rescue in Afghanistan*. Paper presented at annual meeting of the International Communication Association. Sheraton New York, NY City, NY online. http://www.allacademic.com/met/p14796_index.html
- ²² Shohat, E, Stam, R (1994: 256) *Unthinking Eurocentrism: multiculturalism and the media*. London: Routledge
- ²³ Bunting, M 25.2.08 Secularists have nothing to fear from women wearing headscarves *The Guardian*
- ²⁴ Toscano, A (2009) The War Against Pre-terrorism: The Tarnac 9 and The Coming Insurrection in *Radical Philosophy* 154: 2-7
- ²⁵ Security concerns can take strange forms: I was denied an invitation to the Siddiqui Report launch because I was considered to be a security risk by default: there was no time to check up on me, even though I was on the advisory committee for the Siddiqui Report.

²⁶ Contractor and Scott-Baumann 2010

²⁷ This will be Ricoeur's linguistic turn, and it happens at a time when Saussure's linguistics and then Lévi-Strauss' development of Saussure's work into anthropology are offering French academics an opportunity to break free of classical traditions. Saussure saw both signifier and signified as purely psychological forms, not substance

²⁸ Ricoeur, P (1967: 387) *The Symbolism of Evil* transl. E Buchanan. Boston: Beacon Press

²⁹ See endnote 9

³⁰ Bunting, op cit. 25.2.08

³¹ Scott-Baumann, A (2009: 67-8) *Ricoeur and the hermeneutics of suspicion*. London and New York: Continuum

³² Scott-Baumann, A and Khan-Cheema, A (2001) A Case Study in Widening Participation with British Muslims in *Journal of Learning and Teaching* 6(1): 6-8; Scott-Baumann, A (2003) Teacher Education for Muslim Women: intercultural relationships, method and philosophy in *Ethnicities* 3(2): 243-261

³³ Contractor and Scott-Baumann 2010 in preparation

³⁴ Modood, T. (1994) *Establishment, multiculturalism and British citizenship* Political Quarterly 65 (1) p.71

³⁵ Holden, A (2009) *Religious Cohesion in Times of Conflict. Christian-Muslim Relations in Segregated Towns*. New York and London: Continuum; Laurence, J and Heath, A (2008) Predictors of community cohesion: multi modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey Race, Cohesion and Faiths Summary No.3 *Communities and local Government Publications* www.communities.gov.uk; Pennant, R (2005) Diversity, Trust and Community Participation in *England Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) Home Office Findings* 253

³⁶ Contractor and Scott-Baumann 2010 in preparation

³⁷ Ricoeur, P (Engl. 1987/Fr 1997) *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. New York: Columbia University Press; Ricoeur, P (1992) *Oneself As Another* transl. K Blamey Chicago: Chicago University Press

³⁸ Ricoeur, op cit., *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 1997: 255

³⁹ Halstead, J M (1986: 7, 25) *The Case for Muslim Voluntary-aided Schools. Some Philosophical Reflections* Cambridge: The Islamic Academy.

⁴⁰ Contractor, S (2010) *Demystifying the Muslimah*. PhD thesis, University of Gloucestershire

⁴¹ 'All new episodes seen at GUM clinics: 1998-2007'. UK and country specific tables. Health Protection Agency July 2008. www.avert.org/stdstatisticuk.htm

⁴² Halstead, J.M. (1986: 18) op cit