

## Article

# THE HIJAB, THE VEIL, AND SEXUATION

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## Abstract

*I examine Ragland's thesis that, within Islamic Society, the Hijab may function not only as a marker of sexual difference but also as a signifier in a "feminine" strategy of what Joan Rivière calls masquerade – one of the two ways in which, according to Jacques Lacan, human beings (men or women) may cope with the psychic state of lack, that is, a condition of their entry to subjectivity. I then examine Lacan's further claim that through such a strategy human beings may gain access to another form of Jouissance, which, in breaking with the dull, tedious phallic rituals of imposture, goes "beyond the pleasure principle." I also differentiate the Hijab from the Veil of Hollywood fame that has been so strongly criticized by Laura Mulvey and other feminist authors.*

## Keywords

Hijab; masquerade; Lacan; sexuation; liberal-feminism; Jouissance

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## Introduction

**I**n Islamic law, "Hijab" refers not to a specific item of clothing, but rather to a state of proper modesty:

Those who harass believing men and believing women unjustifiably shall bear the guilt of slander and a grievous sin. O Prophet! Enjoin your wives,



your daughters, and the wives of true believers to draw their cloaks over them [when they go out]. That is more proper, so that they may be distinguished and not be harassed. (Qur'an 33–58)

In a Western context, however, “Hijab” tends to refer to particular items of clothing, whether the headscarf (*khimâr*) or the full body covering, including eye-cover (*burqa*). In this paper, I address both the question of what the Hijab means for “us” here and now, specifically for US liberal-feminists, as well as what it means in the context of Islamic society.

On one hand, liberal principles insist that, especially in the area of religion, rather than adversely judging other cultures’ practices for failing to meet our own local standards, we should respect their differences; if we do judge them, then we should do so by their standards, not ours. On the other hand, a contrary feminist argument insists that, because it is a tool of patriarchal repression, Islamic women should be liberated from the Hijab. Thus, it seems, for “us”, and in particular for US liberal-feminists today, the Hijab has become a site of internal contradiction. In concrete terms, we are torn in our attitudes to the Hijab: on one hand, liberal respect for other cultures enjoins us not to judge it adversely; on the other, despite protests by Islamic women that the Hijab has a positive, liberating impact upon their lives (see below), it is difficult for “us” to see the Hijab as anything other than an instance of patriarchal oppression at work. In short, the Hijab is a site of ambivalence – not an emotional ambivalence (as in the ambivalence between love and hate or good object and bad object) but rather in Karl Bleuler’s sense of an intellectual ambivalence that involves “simultaneous adherence to contradictory propositions” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p 26).

How are we to understand this intellectual ambivalence to the Hijab? Should we analyze it as merely an ideological contradiction – an internal point of contradiction within a liberal-feminist political framework? Or should we allow that it has a psychic dimension? Should we, for example, take the Hijab as a fetish object, in which case our ambivalence towards it indicates that it is a site of disavowal between contradictory beliefs? Or, then again, should we think of its ambivalence more as a matter of vagueness – indicative, perhaps, that the Hijab is a site of non-meaning, which, through an appearance of meaningfulness, attempts to screen a hole in the symbolic order that is created through repression?

All of these questions may then be re-posed in the context of Islamic society: what does the Hijab mean within Islamic society? Is there the same ambivalence to the Hijab that exists in our society, and if so, should we understand it along the same lines as we understand our own ambivalence towards the Hijab? If we ask this question from an outsider perspective, especially one that is shaped by liberal-feminist concerns, then (rightly or wrongly) we will tend to pose it in

ways that build in gender differences (differences that, it should be noted, we often ignore when we consider our own attitudes to the Hijab). In particular, we wonder not only what the Hijab means for the Islamic men who want, even insist, that their women wear it, but also, of course, wonder what it means for Islamic women themselves. In particular, we wonder whether Islamic society's attitudes to the Hijab take on a gender-specific dimension. For example (and here we see how the question of the Hijab may be couched in question begging ways), we might ask whether in Islamic society there is a difference between a dominant masculine meaning for the Hijab and a marginal feminine meaning, a difference that, in turn, would indicate a structure of patriarchal oppression. We might even ask whether the differences between masculine and feminine attitudes to the Hijab play a role in differentiating the sexes, perhaps even – and this is Ragland's (2008) bold suggestion – constituting sexual difference within Islamic society.<sup>1</sup>

Before approaching these questions, they must be qualified in several ways. First, it is clear that, no less than the term “Christian society”, the term “Islamic society” poses problems of definition. But it is also clear that in most of the ways in which we might think to define it, the meaning of the Hijab for women will not be uniform across Islamic society as a whole. So, for example, to use one of Ragland's examples: consider a young single Islamic woman in England, who wears the Hijab as a means of protesting an insult to the name of the father. For her, it is clear that the Hijab has a quite different meaning from the one it has for an older married woman living under traditional Islamic law in Iran. The meaning of the Hijab may also become overlaid with a characteristically liberal emphasis upon freedom of choice: the practice of the Hijab is understood as a sacrifice freely made by a woman as an expression of devotion to her husband and family. A further complication: Tayyibah Taylor, publisher and editor of a new American Muslim woman's magazine, *Azizah*, makes the comment, “In this environment, the *hijab* has unfairly become an ‘alien marker’ signifying restriction and restraint. Yet increasingly, young Muslim women see it as a ‘statement of womanhood’ and an acknowledgement of intelligence over physical appearance” (cited in *The Age*, August 7, 2007, p 5). Here, Taylor seems to be suggesting that, by missing the positive aspects that the Hijab has for Islamic women, an outsider perspective of Islamic society misses some of the important commonalities of meanings that it has for a young Western Islamic woman as well as for her older, more traditional counterpart. Whatever account of the Hijab we come up with must do justice to these complications.<sup>2</sup>

It is at this theoretical juncture that Ragland makes the bold suggestion, which will be my focus here: namely, that one way (but *not the only* way) in which the Hijab functions in Islamic society is as a prop by which the “feminine” strategy of masquerade is executed. This is not to say that, like the Veil in Hollywood film, the Hijab functions as a tool in a strategy of seduction. On the contrary, Ragland raises the possibility that, depending upon how it is used, the Hijab liberates women from the demeaning role of an object, which,

through being looked at, produces a phallic voyeuristic *Jouissance* for the male spectator. Instead, she argues that the Hijab provides woman with access to another, distinctively “feminine” form of *Jouissance*.

Two points must be made immediately in defense of this risky, seemingly essentialist hypothesis: (1) Ragland does not propose that this is the only way in which the Hijab is or may be used. On the contrary, as I indicated above, she allows that the Hijab takes on a plurality of possible meanings and functions. Rather, her suggestion should be understood as a theoretical hypothesis that, were it valid, would be one explanation for the positive meaning that the Veil may take on for Islamic women. (2) In advancing this thesis, Ragland does not conceive the term “feminine” *biologically* in terms of anatomical differences, nor *sociologically* in terms of gender roles. On the contrary, following Lacan, Ragland proposes a *psychic* difference between masculine and feminine, which cuts across both biological and sociological differences between the sexes. In particular, she proposes that there is a way of differentiating “man” and “woman” psychically, in terms of two opposing strategies for coping with the failure of the symbolic order which, she argues, as a result of the Oedipal prohibition and related processes of repression, afflicts all human beings who enter the lists of subjectivity.

### ... as long as he loves his (M)Other

Let us look more closely at this symbolic failure that gives rise to sexual difference. The Oedipal prohibition separates the subject from the beloved (M)Other: in particular, it prohibits not only the early close relations that the child enjoyed with the (M)Other, and around which its whole life circulated, but also the very *desire* to continue those relations. But such an across the board prohibition is counter-productive: as a result of this prohibition and the correlative separation from the (M)Other, the child is wracked by the prohibited desire to continue relations with her. As Freud himself puts it: for the child, the pursuit of the prohibited desire takes the place of the forbidden early activities through which it gratified itself in the mother’s arms. But because the desire in question is prohibited, the subject suppresses it at a conscious level but restages it at the level of an unconscious phantasy, which he or she manifests in distorted form through the performance of symptoms – symptoms that represent in coded form the subject’s restoration to the forbidden status of the object of (M)Other’s desire. Because the desire in question is “repressed” in this way – that is, banished to the unconscious – the subject experiences it not in so many words, but rather as a personal and (apparently) inchoate lack – a lack of whatever it is that (at an unconscious level) the subject identifies as making him or her the object of (M)Other’s desire.

Furthermore, and this is the key point, even if the subject were to get together again with the (M)Other (and why not?) the lack in question would not be

filled. Why not? Because of the Oedipal prohibition, such an alliance would be unsatisfactory, obscene, shameful, and so on. In short, whether or not the subject manages to get it on with the (M)Other, the subject will experience him- or herself as always and already falling short – the site of personal lack that can never be filled, whatever concrete objects are put in its place, even (indeed especially) the mother herself. This, in turn, means that there is a hole in the symbolic order, a missing signifier in the place of that little (or big) something extra that the subject desires, and which, so the subject phantasizes, were he or she to have it, would make him or her complete. This missing signifier, like the corresponding desire, is “repressed”, that is, banished to the level of the unconscious (In the case of psychotics, of course, the missing signifier is not merely repressed, but instead is totally expelled from the symbolic order – “foreclosed”).

Lacan distinguishes two ways in which subjects cope with this Oedipally induced lack and the correlative failure in the symbolic order – a failure which, Lacan claims, afflicts all human beings: First, the strategy of imposture, which Lacan calls “the masculine strategy” (albeit without reading any biological significance into the name). This strategy, which is open to biological men and women alike, involves subjects hiding their lack – their failure to come up to the mark. They do this by displaying symbols of their plenitude: fast cars, military regalia, and so on – which stand in for, and thus conceal what they lack. Lacan’s name for these symbols is “phallic signifiers”; and his name for the object, the lack of which the signifiers hide, is the “phallus.” In the context of the masculine strategy of imposture, the phallus emerges as what a subject must have in order to be the object of (M)Other’s desire.<sup>3</sup> To be specific, the phallus is what the “real man” must have in order to do the job that would make him the object of (M)Other’s desire. In this respect, we see, contrary to popular misreadings of Freud/Lacan, the phallus is not what the (M)Other wants – on the contrary, it may hold no interest for her at all in the sense of being something that she wants for herself. Rather, it is that which a man must have if he is to be the object of her desire. Indeed, in this context, what the (M)Other wants remains totally inscrutable – functioning merely as a pretext in response to which the subject’s lack emerges: “she doesn’t want me because I am lacking.”<sup>4</sup>

John Wayne’s apparently tautological injunction that “a man’s got to do what a man’s got to do”, beautifully captures the ambiguity of the phallus. It implies both that there’s some task that a man – a “real man” – is destined to perform, but also that there’s some thing that he has which will enable him to perform it. By saying that the task in question is something that men have *got* to do, Wayne’s injunction implies that for any actual men (as opposed to the real man) the task in question is difficult, perhaps even impossible. Why? Because “they (actual men) simply haven’t got what it takes,” “they’re not up [*sic*] to the task,” and so on. To be specific, they haven’t got the thing that a *real* man has got,

which enables him to do the job. In short, in the equipment department, actual men fall short of being real men, because the “thing” they need to be real men is beyond their reach. According to Lacan, it is a defining characteristic of “men” – by which he means the imposters who adopt a masculine strategy – that they respond to this lack by a strategy of imposture: filling the place of the thing that they lack with substitutes, qua phallic symbols, that falsely signal that they are up to the job. (In the case of biological men, of course, behind the impressive phantasy screen of the phallus lies the pathetic penis, as the anatomical slag that is left behind when phallic signifiers are stripped away.)

The second strategy that Lacan distinguishes for coping with lack is (what Joan Rivière calls) the strategy of masquerade – and which (again with no biological connotation intended) Lacan calls “the feminine strategy.” Rather than hiding lack, the strategy of masquerade involves its agent situating herself on the side of truth by recognizing the inevitability of lack, indeed identifying with it – “I know/admit that I am lacking, and there’s not much I can do about it.”

How does masquerade go beyond merely *recognizing* lack to *coping* with it? Lacan illustrates his answer to this question in the context of the hysteric (although without implying that cases of masquerade are always cases of hysteria).<sup>5</sup> The hysteric copes with her lack not by hiding it (as in the case of the masculine strategy) but rather by (a) blaming the big Other while also (b) handing over to particular little Others the task of filling the lack, in the process (as Lacan puts it) making men of them (*faire l’homme* – 1988, p 85). More generally, the strategy of masquerade enables woman to cope with her lack by a double-deception: she displays her flaws not as personal, but rather as visited upon her as a reflection of more general flaws in the Other – *il y a une faute, mais ce n’est pas ma faute, c’est la faute de l’Autre* (there is a fault, but it’s not mine, it’s the Other guy’s). In this way, she displays her fault, but, and here’s the double-deception, she does so only in order to distance herself from it by laying it at the feet of the Other. To be specific, she affirms her fault to others in such a way that they come to recognize that after all it is not hers personally but rather part of some more global fault.

So, for example, the woman at a party who, listening politely and saying nothing, interpellates those who engage with her to fill the silence that gathers around her. From her point of view, the silence is not her fault, and, in particular, not a matter of her personally being stuck for words. Rather she experiences the fault as the result of there being nothing worthwhile to say. In short, the fault lies not with her, but rather with all the others, who chatter on so meaninglessly. In this way, through her fault (whose ownership she does not acknowledge) she identifies with the Other – her fault becomes the Other’s fault. At the same time, however, she ingeniously passes responsibility for doing something about the fault to the unfortunate little men (imposters) who, like moths drawn to a black flame, gravitate into her presence, where, in a

self-fulfilling prophecy, they chatter nervously in the hope that what they offer is what she lacks. The woman thus displays her fault in a universalized form that conveniently removes her from the frame-up: namely, in the form of what Lacan calls the signifier of lack in the Other – designated “S(Ø)” – which symbolizes the fault in the Other. (The bar across the capital “O” indicates that the Other is present here as barred, that is, flawed.)

What is not clear in Lacan’s exposition of the masquerade is how much of the psychic structure of hysteria should be assimilated to the masquerade. At the very least, it seems, the masquerade duplicates the structure of double-deception-plus-identification-with-SØ that we find in hysteria. But for two reasons, it seems unwise to go much further in claiming a homology between masquerade and hysteria. First reason: on good feminist grounds, it seems inappropriate to pathologize the category of women by drawing it into full coincidence with the category of hysteria (a point which Freud already made). Instead, it seems more reasonable to take hysteria as a clinical condition in which the structure of woman is laid out especially clearly (in the same way that for Freud, perversion provides an especially clear clinical instance of the splitting of the subject).

The second reason: because hysteria is a form of neurosis, characterized by symptoms and a corresponding structure of repression, the pleasure of the hysteric falls under the aegis of the pleasure principle – what Lacan refers to as “the phallic ... jouissance of the idiot”, which, like masturbation, is dedicated to dull and mindless repetition performed in the throes of the partial drives. But a key point for Lacan is that the pleasure of woman is associated with a special feminine form of Jouissance that exists, and is produced in a domain “beyond the pleasure principle.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it seems, *if Lacan is to retain some purchase on his principle of a special “feminine Jouissance”, then he cannot afford to equate the condition of woman with the combination of hysteria and the correlative idiotic phallic form of Jouissance.* And, indeed, Lacan associates feminine Jouissance directly with the disintegration of the symbolic order – as embodied in S(Ø) (1988, p 84). (I return to this point below in my discussion of the Hijab.)

## The Hijab

Now let us turn to the Islamic Hijab. I will focus upon three suggestions for its meanings/functions here (without implying that they are in any sense exhaustive) and in each case comment briefly upon the political possibilities as well as opportunities for pleasure that they offer. First, it is tempting to understand the Hijab as a conventional item of clothing, which functions purely at the level of the symbolic order, namely as a signifier with a meaning that is constituted through its differential relation with other signifiers (in particular, other items of clothing). In Lacan’s terminology, then, the suggestion is that the

Hijab functions as a binary signifier, S2. From this perspective, although there may well be pride on the part of those who wear it, there is no pleasure in the technical sense that Freud associates with the pleasure principle. Why not? Because the *trompe l'oeil* effects of double-deception that Lacan associates with the pleasure principle, especially in its scopic form, are missing (see Sections 6–9 of Lacan, 1981). Thus, it seems (and here the usual feminist critique gains some traction) the Hijab works to the political disadvantage of its wearers. That is, without offering them any pleasurable compensation, it consigns the women who wear it to reduced public visibility, which, in many cases seems to amount to a total vanishing from public life. In traditional Islamic society, it is said, the public sphere belongs to men:

Wives of the Prophet, you are not like other women. So, if you fear God, do not be too complaisant in your speech, lest the lecherous-hearted should lust after you. Talk with such people in plain and simple words. Abide still in your homes and do not display your finery as women used to do in the days of ignorance. (Qur'an 32–33)<sup>7</sup>

Although against this one must balance the point made by Tayyibah Taylor (see above) that, even considered as a purely conventional item of clothing, the Hijab carries a positive meaning, namely that, by making invisible the aspect of woman that traditional Western clothing highlights, namely her body parts, it refocuses attention upon women's intelligence. To put the point even more strongly: the Hijab functions literally as a physical interruption to the masculine fetishization of woman's body of which traditional Western feminism is so critical (on this last point, see the classic critique by Laura Mulvey, 1975). In short, the Hijab interrupts the fetishistic pleasures of the men who look at it as a point of access to the women who wear it.

But (and I return to this point below) even as a signifier, the Hijab has more to offer than merely spoiling the pleasures of the spectator. By taking the Hijab as not only an item of clothing S2, but also, more specifically, a uniform, its wearers accord it the status of a phallic signifier  $\Phi$ . In this case the Hijab does after all find a place in relation to pleasure, which, contra Mulvey, is a pleasure for the women who wear it rather than for the men who look at it. Although, one might argue, the pleasure that it offers doesn't amount to much. To be specific, for its wearers, the pleasure in question is like the purely repetitive, idiotic pleasures of wearing/displaying a uniform or medals: an activity that, by highlighting the self-same lack that it sets out to screen (the return of the repressed) falls on what Lacan identifies as the masculine rather than feminine side of the hedonic ledger.

Clearly, however, there is yet more to the Hijab than even a uniform or medal (and here I enter the dangerous territory of the dance of the seven Veils). For those who have the eyes to see, the Hijab partakes in a structural homologue of the usual Western regime of the feminine strip-tease (cf. p 19) – depending on

the extent of cover that it offers, it may be a frame for a pair of flashing eyes, or perhaps an index of a body of slender and diminutive proportions. Here, of course, there are obvious pleasures for the *spectators* of the Hijab, namely exactly the phallic, fetishistic pleasures of which Mulvey is so critical. In this context, for its spectators the Hijab plays the role of what Lacan calls the *objet a* (or more correctly its imaginary envelope, which Lacan (1988, p 6, 82) designates as the *semblant*). To be specific, the Hijab is the hitch in the field of vision that, by getting in the way of what he can see, gets the spectator looking.

But what, then, can we add about the pleasures for the *wearers* of the Hijab? One not very happy suggestion is to follow John Berger (1977, p 46), and invoke the vicarious, self-absorbed pleasure of the woman who looks at herself through the eyes of man – pursuing a pleasure that, as its *modus operandi*, demeans her by reifying her as its object. For example: a woman behind the Hijab attending to her own appearance through the eyes of the men who look at her, preoccupied with the difficult balance of showing enough flesh to attract their attention but not so much as to quench their desire to see more, let alone to raise the classic specter of castration anxiety. The pursuit of such pleasure, Mulvey argues, is not only politically objectionable but also locks woman into the toils of either narcissism or masochism (Mulvey, 1975).

Another suggestion: the Hijab enables the paradoxical phallic pleasure of what Jacques-Alain Miller calls “the postiche woman” (the fake woman) who displays conventional signs of femininity – whether it is a robe that, by covering her body, signals her modesty, or its converse, a skillfully arranged *décolletage*. For the postiche woman, such signifiers can be combined in various ways to create a range of uniforms through which she identifies with other women. As such, she rejoins the masculine regime of the imposter with his phallic signifiers (to which I alluded earlier): not merely a passive object for the look of others, but an active agent of display and self-regard. Here, however, it is clear that the phallic signifier is totally divorced from the penis, and instead functions purely as a power-signifier that, by mis-signaling the completeness of the one who bears it covers over her lack.

What other options are available to the woman wearing the Hijab? In particular, and here we come to the question that Ragland raises, is there a way for her to engage with another *Jouissance* that breaks with the phallic toils of the pleasure principle, but without compromising feminist political principles? Here we enter the difficult area of what Lacan calls “feminine *Jouissance*,” and, more generally, the difficult Freudian question of the possibility of a “pleasure” beyond the pleasure principle. I can make only a few speculative remarks here. Lacan hints that for woman there is another path through which she can gain access to a beyond-of-pleasure – an ecstatic encounter with *Jouissance* that transcends the simple phallic pleasures of the pleasure principle. Lacan (1988) associates this *Jouissance* with the ecstasy of the mystic, toward which Bernini’s statue of St Theresa gestures (p 76). He also associates it with the love that a

woman offers which, even if she happens to take a man as her beloved, “is not ... at all occupied with him”, and which, as Lacan puts it, “she gets off on (*dont elle jouit*) beyond all this playing (*jouer*) that constitutes her relation with man” (pp 87, 89). Lacan associates this beyond-of-pleasure with a direct, unflinching encounter with the truth of the disintegration of the symbolic order – a disintegration which, because characteristically a man cannot face it, he covers over through strategies of imposture (whistling into the wind because *contra ventum non est pissandum*). At the risk of invoking romantic stereotypes, we might say that woman gets off by recognizing this weakness in man, thus putting herself on the side of truth – but even so (indeed, because of this) loving him. As Lacan (1988) puts it, she “loves in a man only the way in which he faces [or not] the knowledge thanks to which he souloves” (p 88), where, by “soulove”, Lacan means an inferior form of love (*sous-love* = under love), namely the only form of love of which man is capable: a love that is flawed by a lack, which, in turn, flows from man’s failure to face the fact of his own lack.

In short, Lacan associates feminine Jouissance with woman’s self-identification with  $S(\emptyset)$ , the signifier of the lack in the Other, a self-identification that we may understand as her recognition of a failure of the symbolic order (Lacan, 1988, p 84). In the terms that I introduced above, this path to Jouissance corresponds to the feminine strategy of masquerade (that is, identifying with  $S(\emptyset)$ ). The difficulty for woman in implementing this strategy is to avoid the Scylla of hysteria and the Charybdis of the postiche woman: on the one side, the phallic pleasures of the hysteric with her somatic symptoms, and on the other side, the equally phallic pleasure of Miller’s “fake woman,” displaying with phallic zeal her signifiers of femininity.

Here, however, a key question arises. The very term “feminine *masquerade*” suggests that there is an added possibility for woman: namely a “true woman,” who exists beyond the respective masks behind which men and women encounter each other in their sexual relations (encounters which thus take on the form of always and already *missed* encounters). In some of her remarks, Ragland seems to lead us in the direction of exactly this suggestion that there is a “true woman” beyond the masquerade; and moreover that it is to this true woman, and only to her, that privileged access to a feminine Jouissance is granted, while the woman in the masquerade must put up with an inferior phallic form of Jouissance. For example, (citing Miller) she writes: “The hysteric, for example, is a false woman. She identifies as a man pretending to be a woman. But on the other hand, the woman in the masquerade is a false woman too, a *postiche* woman, Miller says, one wearing a wig”.<sup>8</sup>

I endorse a rival suggestion, which divides differently the terrain of woman between the departments of the hysteric, the postiche woman, and the masquerade. In particular, I take the range of options open to woman to be fully represented by the categories of hysteria, postiche and masquerade, in which case (*pace* St Theresa) the concept of a “true woman”, like the concept of

a true man, becomes a fiction created by the use of terms such as “mask” and “masquerade”. To be specific, the term “masquerade” creates the false impression that there is a positive truth behind the mask – a world where true women (and perhaps true men) can meet openly, in all honesty. Lacan’s hard lesson is that such a fictional realm is just that – a fiction, indeed a phantasy, created as a *mise en scène* for our sexual life – and that, when push comes to analytic shove, the real secret is that there is no secret. This hard lesson has its silver lining, namely that access to feminine Jouissance is not restricted to some idealized “true woman”, but instead is open to all the various and varied women who, in entering the lists of the masquerade, identify with the  $S(\emptyset)$ . Or to turn the point around: if we redefine “true woman” as the woman with access to feminine Jouissance, then she is not so hard to find, restricted neither to saints nor sinners. Indeed, one need look no further than the woman in the masquerade (on this point, I am indebted to Friedlander, 2007).

The question, then, is whether, for its wearers, the Islamic Hijab somehow offers special access to the masquerade and the corresponding favors of feminine Jouissance – and if so how does it manage to make such a step outside the phallic realm? Again I can only offer some brief speculative remarks. The question, I suggest, is not how the Hijab enables its wearer to *resist* the pleasure principle and its phallic pleasures, but rather how it enables her to *move beyond* them – beyond the pleasure principle – *but without leaving behind the body*. Whatever else she is doing, St Theresa *is not* leaving behind her body (more generally, we may make the point that the mystic is not the same as the ascetic, although in Christian mythology the two are often run together).

Here Slavoj Žižek’s concept of overconformity is helpful (Žižek, 1977, pp 18–23). My suggestion is that the Islamic Hijab enables its wearer to subvert the phallic pleasure principle not by enabling her head-on resistance to it, but rather by enabling her to follow it uncompromisingly – “overconforming” – to the point that it topples over under its own weight. How does this come about? Within the masculine phallic regime, the principle of the Hijab is a sustained interplay between partial exposure and partial concealment. In short, as in the strip-tease, the workings of the Hijab are bounded by the convention that, even as it reveals, it leaves something to the imagination – exemplified by the story of Salomé’s dance of the seven Veils, but also in real life, by the modest flash of an ankle or an alluring glance from a modestly lowered pair of eyes. The Islamic Hijab, by contrast with Salome’s Veil, subverts this convention. Not by violently breaking with it, but rather by a strategy of overconforming – specifically, by holding back something to the extreme point of holding back everything, but, by the same token, revealing a minimum that goes beyond even the bare minimum: that is, revealing nothing that is bare, but instead revealing only that which conceals what is bare.

At the same time, however, the Islamic Hijab (by contrast with its opposite, the equally subversive money shot) enables its wearers to identify with  $S(\emptyset)$ .

How? Because, in virtue of its indexical relation to that which must be hidden, the Hijab functions as a signifier of the hole in the symbolic order that is the effect of repression; in short, the Hijab functions as  $S(\emptyset)$ , thus grounding the identity:  $\text{Hijab} = S(\emptyset)$ . But also, by a familiar metonymic shift that is grounded in a relation of juxtaposition, the Hijab provides a ready point of identification for its wearer, thus grounding the second identity:  $\text{Hijab} = \text{Wearer of the Hijab}$ . Combining the two identities, we then derive the key identity between the wearer of the Hijab and  $S(\emptyset)$ .

In sum, I have argued that Ragland's Lacanian account of the pleasurable aspects of the Islamic Hijab must be modified. In particular, I have argued that in the state of Hijab we locate not the "true woman" (as Ragland seems to imply), nor the hysteric, nor even the postiche woman, but rather the woman performing the masquerade, enjoying herself not according to phallic rites, but instead partaking in the other feminine Jouissance.

### About the author

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### Notes

- 1 It is interesting to note here how in the case of our own society we tend to connect differences in attitudes to the Hijab to political and ideological differences, whereas in the case of Islamic society we tend to connect them to sexual differences. It is tempting to attribute this difference to a failure on our part to allow for the patriarchal exploitation of sexual difference in our own case, but a readiness to see it in other "less civilized" societies.
- 2 For a more detailed account of this line of argument see Marilyn Charles's paper in this volume. There is a huge literature on the topic of the Hijab – see, for example, Hildson and Rozario (2006), and Hessini (1994).
- 3 The masculine strategy of imposter is not the only context in which the phallus appears. On the contrary, as the distinction is often made, man *has* the phallus, but woman *is* the phallus. As we will see below, however, this aphorism is valid only as an aspect of man's phantasy of woman, rather than as an intrinsic aspect of the feminine (see endnote 4).
- 4 Neither should we follow other popular misreadings of Freud/Lacan, which say that the (M)Other *has* the phallus. On the contrary, the (M)Other's desire is presented as a desire for a subject who, *unlike her*, has the phallus. At best we might say that the (M)Other *is* something like the phallus. Why? Because woman is not the object of man's unconscious desire, but instead, Lacan claims, is its object-cause, namely what Lacan calls the *objet a* (Lacan, 1988, p 80). But, insofar as it is an embodiment of lack, the phallus is also like the *objet a*. Therefore, it seems to follow, woman is like the phallus. But here too we must be careful. As I will point out later, woman identifies with the signifier of lack in the Other,  $S(\emptyset)$ . But Lacan also points out that it is man's mistake to confuse  $S(\emptyset)$

with the *objet a*, and thus, it seems, it is also a mistake to equate woman with *objet a*, let alone with the phallus that resembles it.

- 5 Lacan (1988, p 85). Here, incidentally, we see an issue that, already since Freud, has bedeviled psychoanalysis, namely the relation between the feminine and hysteria. I return briefly to this issue below.
- 6 This follows from his remark that “the *Lustprinzip* is, in effect, based on a coalescence of [the *objet a* with  $S(\emptyset)$ ],” where by *objet a* he means a pure signifier without a signified – a linguistic structure which, he points out, is shared by the phallus, although not of course the phallic signifier (Lacan, 1988, p 84). More specifically, Lacan categorizes the *objet a* as a *semblant*, the raw material of a signifier, clothed in an imaginary envelope, which, by gesturing beyond itself to something that it leaves unspecified, conceals a lack by the simple device of sticking a mystery in its place (Lacan, 1988, pp 6, 83). But, as Lacan also points out, because woman is identified with  $S(\emptyset)$ , she separates herself from the *objet a*. Indeed, Lacan strengthens this point by remarking that it is man’s mistake to confuse woman’s point of identification, namely the  $S(\emptyset)$ , with the mystery of the *objet a*, a mystery which, in the case of woman takes the form of the feminine mystique (Lacan, 1988, pp 72, 83, 86). It follows that woman cannot partake in phallic Jouissance, and as such, insofar as she enjoys herself, her Jouissance must come from elsewhere.
- 7 It is a controversial point within Islamic theology whether this injunction, which applies to the wives of the Prophet, applies as a moral prescription to all devout women.
- 8 The “true woman” here, is not, of course, *the* archetypal woman – who, according to Lacan, does not exist.

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