

**The Pursuit of Happiness: The Veil as an Inducer of Subjective  
Well-being in Hadia Said's *Hijab Kashif***

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*In Hadia Said's Hijab Kashif*

The veil is one of the controversial phenomena that Muslim women can experience. Some scholars see it as a tool of patriarchal oppression exercised against women with the aim of marginalizing them and securing a docile subject position for them. For instance, in *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* Katherine Bullock sums up the theory upon which different critics build their normative attitude towards the veil<sup>i</sup>. She states that the main traits of this false perspective are: the veil smothers femininity, essentializes the superiority of men, indicates that women are essentially secluded from public spheres, is imposed and is oppressive.

Many critics refer to these stereotypical characteristics to highlight a specific view about veiled Muslim women. Leila Ahmed, for example, argues that the colonial discourse on Islam has propagated the idea "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' (*Women and gender in Islam* 152)<sup>ii</sup>. According to Ahmed's claim, the veil is not only the epitome of Islamic oppression towards women, but also the reason behind the backwardness of Islamic societies.

Many feminists also claim that veiled Muslim women are hostages within the confines of their veils which in its turn make them incapable of rational thought and, as a result, unable to make free choices. According to this line of thought, veiled women; even if they have chosen to don the veil, are adopting the veil because they are subjected to cultural influences emanating from their Islamic tradition. Cecile laborde refers to this condition by using the term "adaptive preference" (358)<sup>iii</sup>, an expression that refers to concealing unjust background conditions. These "forced choices", as Nancy Hirschmann writes, are a manifestation of male domination as they help in blurring the "lines between, agency, choice, and resistance" on the one hand, and "oppression, domination, and coercion"<sup>iv</sup> on the other.

In accordance with the notion that veiled women are irrational beings deprived from the ability of making individual choices, is the claim that women are also deprived from autonomy and agency; which is “synonymous with being a person”<sup>v</sup>. Denying all women the status of a subject puts veiled women in a particular case of a double denial. As Amira Jarmakani puts it: “the mythology of the veil constructs Arab and Muslim women as either hidden or revealed objects rather than thinking subjects” (229)<sup>vi</sup>. Thus, veiled women are presented not only as inferior to men but also as irrational objects.

Mino Moallem's argument that by donning the veil, women become more “desired yet objectified”<sup>vii</sup> reflects a belief that the veil helps in dehumanizing women through accentuating the sexual desire of the hidden female body. In other words, the veil is thought to be used as a form of control over women's aggressive sexuality.

However, the present paper aims at creating a counter argument to these stereotypes. It aims at offering a fresh way to see veiling as a practice which induces power by means of knowledge, spiritual development and “subjective well-being”. To reach this end, the veil, as the object of analysis, is approached as a phenomenon interpreted from within the experience of fictional veiled Muslim women to evaluate the possibility of its being a means of empowerment on many conceptual levels. The analysis of Hadia Said<sup>viii</sup>'s novel *Hijab Kashif*<sup>x</sup> (2009), a fictional account of the non-fictional cultural-namely religious- context in which the fictional characters are presumably conceived, takes as its basis a variety of conceptual tools which constitute the framework of argumentation: Michel Foucault's concept of technologies of the self, Ibn Al Arabi's belief that the veil is epistemic by nature, Edward R. Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman's definition of spirituality, Ed Diener's explanation of the term subjective well-being and W.R Walker et al 's concept of the fading affect bias.

Michel Foucault divides sciences into four major categories each of which consists of a matrix of practical systems which he calls technologies. The first of these is “technologies of production” which enable the modern subject “to produce, transform, or manipulate things”. The second is “technologies of sign systems” which allow him/her “to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification”. The third is “technologies of power” which guarantee a certain systemization of

individuals' conduct and "submit them to certain ends or domination" and thus objectifying them. The fourth is "technologies of the self" which

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality<sup>x</sup>.

Seen in this light, happiness or subjective well-being, could be viewed as a form of power exercised by individuals on their bodies and/or souls to ameliorate their functioning as modern subjects. Elsewhere Foucault claims that

It was life more than the law that became the issue of political struggles, even if the latter were formulated through affirmations concerning rights. The "right" to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions or "alienations," the "right" to rediscover what one is and all that one can be, this "right"—which the classical juridical system was utterly incapable of comprehending—was the political response to all these new procedures of power which did not derive, either, from the traditional right of sovereignty<sup>xi</sup>.

What Foucault is speaking about here is bio-power; "a power whose task is to take charge of life"<sup>xii</sup> through disciplinary strategies exercised directly on the body. The body is thus subjectified in the sense of being dependent on and controlled by an outer power regime as well as granted his/her ability to "rediscover what one is and all that one can be" and thus, being able to form a distinct identity. According to Foucault, the means used to attain such a state may differ; they could be individual or collective tools. However, whatever form they may take, they are directly applied to the corporeal, the cognitive and the spiritual levels of these individuals. *Hijab kashif* will be analyzed from this perspective. The corporeal level, the veil, will be investigated as constitutive of the spiritual, the affectionate, and the cognitive levels. In other words, the veil will be linked to notions of spiritual development as well as to subjective well-being as two models of empowerment.

As translated by William C. Chittick in *The self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al Arabi's cosmology*<sup>xiii</sup>, Ibn Al Arabi, one of the leading

figures of the *Sufi*<sup>xiv</sup> tradition, states "vision is through the veil, and inescapably so." (156). Ibn Al Arabi builds his claim on a correlation between two Prophetic *hadiths*. The first includes the statement that God's "veil is the light"<sup>xv</sup> and that if God removes His veil off his face, the glory of His light will burn all the creatures as far as His divine sight reaches. The second hadith states that people will see God as clearly as they can see the moon and that they will "have no trouble in seeing Him"<sup>xvi</sup>

Ibn Al Arabi claims that since the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states that the splendor of *Allah's* (SWT) face will inevitably burn away everything that the divine sight reaches, and since the Prophet (PBUH) states that all creatures will see God and won't be burnt away then, it could be argued that this vision is happening through the veil of light that covers *Allah's* face. Ibn Al Arabi is thus reinforcing the idea that veiling is epistemic. It is a medium to perceive knowledge, truth and power. The title of the novel *Hijab Kashif* is an oxymoron. The paradox between the concepts of *Hajb* (to veil) and *Kashf* (to unveil) could stand for the idea that to be veiled is also a way to *DIScover* (to unveil) new horizons of meanings and Truth and, thus, attain power. The novel could be read as a journey of discovery and development.

Edward R. Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman's *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice*<sup>xvii</sup> defines spirituality as a process which entails both religious and nonreligious aspects aiming at ameliorating a person's conceptual framework of "meaning, purpose, morality, and well-being in relationship with oneself, other people, other beings, the universe, and ultimate reality, however understood" (75). This process, as far as they explain Cheryl Delgado's definition of spirituality, consists of aspects of "harmonious interconnectedness, and self-transcendence that may result in inner peace and successful adaptation and good health" (71). Delgado argues that:

Nurse authors have defined spirituality as harmonious interconnectedness ... Spirituality for many involves faith or the willingness to believe, a search for meaning and purpose in life, a sense of connection with others, and a transcendence of the self, resulting in a sense of inner peace and well-being. A strong spiritual connection may improve one's sense of satisfaction with life, or enable accommodation to disability. It may be a powerful resource for holistic care (157)<sup>xviii</sup>.

Delgado thus claims that enjoying a certain degree of spirituality results in creating bonds with the Divine, the society and the self which in turn leads to a sense of well-being, satisfaction and happiness. In the same vein, Robert C. Atchley claims in *Spirituality and Aging*<sup>xix</sup> that spirituality is related to three fundamental aspects: "intense awareness of the present, transcendence of the personal life, or a feeling of connection with all life, the universe, a supreme being, or a great web of being" (2). He also argues that these basic components are conceived to induce a sense of "spiritual development or spiritual growth" (2). In the novel under study, the protagonist's experience after donning the veil is an example of how she managed to know *Allah (SWT)* better and understand His logic of asking women to don the veil. She ends by acquiring a comprehensive sense of herself as well as building strong and moral relationships with others. Additionally, the protagonist's spiritual growth due to being veiled carries in itself seeds of her existential health; the conditions under which a person gets to know who he/she is, where he/she belongs, his/her purpose in life and the logic behind this chosen aim<sup>xx</sup>.

This spiritual growth leads to a sense of subjective well-being<sup>xxi</sup>; a term which refers to the person's ability to evaluate his/her life cognitively and affectively<sup>xxii</sup>. Diener et al. 1997, explain the mechanisms of this evaluation process saying:

[A] person is said to have high [subjective well-being] if she or he experiences life satisfaction and frequent joy, and only infrequently experiences unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger. Contrariwise, a person is said to have low [subjective well-being] if she or he is dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and affection and frequently feels negative emotions such as anger or anxiety (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997, p. 25)<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Thus, a person's feeling of enjoying subjective well-being could be viewed as the product of an overall assessment of life which creates some sort of rapport between the good and the bad. Elsewhere Diener<sup>xxiv</sup> claims that subjective well-being is evaluated through three dimensions: 1) a holistic cognitive estimation of life, 2) the presence of pleasant affect, and 3) the absence of negative affect. The first dimension refers to the overall evaluation that a person makes to judge to what extent his/her life is satisfactory. The second criterion entails the personal experience of a preponderance of positive emotions. The third component points to the absence or the rare presence of negative emotions. A close analysis of Hadeel's life before and after being veiled proves that after donning the

veil she has reached a degree of subjective well-being which is associated with the idea of human development.

At the beginning of the novel, Hadeel Salem Aly, the protagonist, is an unveiled *Sunni* Muslim Iraqi-Palestinian widow living with her two grown-up sons; Mo'nes and Samer, in Britain and she is about to decide whether to get married to Yusuf Kaman; a Lebanese Christian, or not. The fact that she embraces the veiling practice at the end of the novel puts an end to this relationship. The protagonist's concern with her appearance throughout the novel makes her think about eastern women living in the west and why they tend to care about how they are perceived because, firstly, they are raised in environments which pay great attention to women's dress codes. Secondly, eastern women want to assimilate into their host countries to appear to be modern, tolerating difference, liberated and fashionable and consequently they appear to be ready to adopt western life style. Finally, some westerners/ western minded people classify veiled eastern women and put them in the category of the 'fundamentalists', the 'backwards' and the 'oppressed' this is one reason why some Muslim women prefer to be unveiled to be assimilated in the West.

The protagonist's desperate concern about her image in the minds of whoever surrounds her is adopted as soon as she came to England and starts with changing her name from Hadeel to Haidy telling her English friends a fake story about her father's admiration of Haidy Lamar; a famous spy (*Hijab Kashif*, 16) and an actress.

Being obsessed with over thinking about the others' mental picture about her appears to be one of the main reasons behind Hadeel's repudiation from adopting the veil until she has reached her fifties. This inclination in itself happens to be one of the unnecessary manacles "she has tightened up around herself" (232) in what concerns veiling.

Hadeel's phobic concern appears to hold remedy seeds in itself. Hadeel and Taghreed; her recently veiled friend, decide that the latter puts "a black chapeau studded with diamonds and a peacock feather" (32) on her veil during the wedding she is about to attend. Hadeel tells

Taghreed "Although I am not convinced, *Astaghfirul Allah, Astaghfirul Allah*, I may think one day to put the veil in this way"(32). This conditioned declaration conveys a cluster of ideas.

Hadeel knows that the veil is a Divine obligation because she asks twice for God's forgiveness for her lack of conviction. She unconsciously declares that she is not against hijab but against a specific veiling style.

On the subconscious level Hadeel wants to look fashionable and elegant if she dons the veil. Her previously quoted comment is followed by her wish to put on a veil like that donned by Hollywood stars (32). Elsewhere in the novel, Hadeel expresses her admiration of the nuns she once saw in Baghdad. She describes them as angelic in their "clean and handsome clothes" (103). Another incident that proves this claim is that Hadeel tells us that she used to be veiled when she gives condolences and she describes her "vague sense of tranquility" (129) when she is veiled on the way back and forth. This is the first sign that links her veil to her sense of subjective well-being.

Likewise, Taghreed tries to assimilate in the British society while preserving her veil, so she devises a new style of veiling that suits her aim. Though it is not clearly stated in the novel what happened during the wedding or how people deal with Taghreed after being veiled, I believe that Taghreed's experience discredits Khiabany G. and Williamson M.'s statement that "veiled women are considered to be ungrateful subjects who have failed to assimilate and are deemed to threaten the British way of life" (69)<sup>xxv</sup>. First of all, she tries her best to fit in the British society while preserving her Islamic identity. She wishes that the new responsibility of veiling; which may create some sort of limits, could be inspiring, beautiful and respected. Second, failing to assimilate could not be put on her shoulders alone, the society too has a role to accept her or to refuse her. The discredited statement defeats itself as it assumes that "the British way of life" is fixed or unchangeable and at the same time demands British subjects to change and adopt to that style.

The need to look beautiful in veil is judged by Dana, one of Hadeel's friends, to be a kind of hypocrisy and is thus described as a "hideous act" (55). The philosophy behind this defaming classification is clarified through Dana's belief that "The veil is primarily set up to hide not to show; which means it is there to prevent temptation" (252). She adds that this kind of veiling with its "bright colors and numerous styles" (252) is meant to advertise beauty. Far from the idea of fraudulence, Dana's claim stands as an indication that the veil is powerful as far as it is

used to stop temptation. The word "temptation" in the original Arabic text comes in the indefinite form which means that the veil is powerful enough to prevent temptation in society in general to protect both men and women. The validity of this proof is highly estimated as far as it comes from an unveiled, liberal, and westernized woman sharing the same social world with the protagonist.

Dana provides another reason for the duality she sees in Hadeel as a result of being veiled. She stresses the fact that Hadeel puts the veil while going to music concerts and theatrical performances and that she does not cut off her relationship with all her friends who "wear revealing clothes, are indulged in illicit relationships and drink [wine]" (252). What Dana considers a form of hypocrisy could be viewed as an evidence that the veil does not prevent its wearer from socializing, from being cultured and enlightened. It does not confine Hadeel into a specific zone, it does not prevent her from keeping her friends although she morally refuses their behavior, and it does not prevent her from hanging out with them and going to parties, theaters and cinemas. Eventually, the veil on her head does not cover Hadeel's mind, it does not alter her into a backward woman imprisoned at home fearing socialization and denying herself simple forms of enjoyment and enlightenment. Her deeds stand in sharp contrast to her misconception about hijab when she once wonders where she hides her appreciation of beautiful artworks like those of Renoir and Monnet (72).

The idea of appreciating beauty is closely linked to the process of change undergone by Hadeel. After reading her son's letter when she first arrives to Dubai, she stands in front of the mirror and for the first time doesn't "think about beauty and elegance" (188). The whole scene reflected in the mirror sheds light on the transformation process after being enlightened, after being able to see the truth that Hadeel has striven to hide for long. This scene could be read in contrast to the one in which Hadeel, back in Iraq, is confronted with her image in the mirror showing her black veil. This experience made her see herself "another person, suddenly elder by ten years" (130). Imagining herself to be old while she was still young is Hadeel's way to refuse to be veiled. She didn't manage then to see the truth that what she really didn't like is the black colour of the veil not the veil itself.

Hadeel's process of development begins with thinking and doesn't end with veiling. In one of her conversations with the narrator, she expresses her doubt that the veil is a final step in the process of developing "a thorough conviction" (128) of the "many religious matters

that lead us to danger zone if they are thought of as mere mental beliefs" (243); to borrow Mo'nes' words. Though representing a radical shift in her life, the veil, according to Hadeel, is a mode of religious behavior that is linked to a non-stop flow between religiosity, subjective well-being and existential health. Hadeel begins her self-development by questioning "Does every situation require a specific style [of clothing]? Why can't we pray unless we cover our hair and wear long clothes that hide the tips of our toes?" (130). She then starts to wonder about the change Mo'nes has undergone. Jibran's metaphor "People are but lines written in water" wittily used by Yusuf offers a view about the true nature of all things<sup>xxvi</sup>. People are in a constant motion like water which flows in the rivers, turns to be water vapor, and then is rejuvenated in the form of rains.

Hadeel's experience is a manifestation that Islam appreciates enlightened rather than blind acceptance. Deep inside herself she knows that the veil is a religious obligation, but she doesn't choose to adopt it unless she undergoes a process of enlightenment that begins with raising questions. In other words, her experience is a practical example that Islam doesn't prescribe obligations, like veiling for instance, to block the flow of logical and intellectual perceptions.

Like questioning and thinking matters deeply, the social milieu plays a crucial role in the protagonist's life. On coming to her new office in Dubai, Hadeel meets a veiled woman, Dina, who works in a near office in the same building. Hadeel is fascinated by Dina's veiling style and how it is "tightly fastened" (191) around her head. She also describes her colleague to be "stylish" as she wears "classy and comfortable clothes" (191). To stress her feeling of comfort and admiration towards Dina, Hadeel declares that she "cannot see [Dina] except as an angel" (198). The image of the angel signifies more than one meaning: purity, strength, beauty and carrying a message. Thus, comparing a veiled woman to an angel turns a veiled woman into a powerful, beautiful, pure social agent. The simile challenges the stereotype of the oppressed, debased, idle veiled woman. This figure of speech comes also to signify the change in Hadeel's perception of veiled women on both the inner and the outer levels.

Coming to her office one day, Hadeel finds "a pile of colored bonnets and a card that says: Not all that is known is delivered, this beauty is not exclusive to veiled women" (196). The gift and the kind words are bewitching. It is not only enticing Hadeel by its elegance but also by the temptation to be indulged in a new beauty experience. The statement "this beauty is not exclusive to veiled women" carries seeds of

delight and enlightening. It combines the power of the concept of beauty which Dina knows is appealing to Hadeel as well as the power of knowledge which lies in the new experience awaiting Hadeel when she gives the veil a try. Hadeel's new friend is also fascinated with beauty. She believes that *Allah* is beautiful and likes beauty; that is why she is keen about her appearance even when she is veiled. Dina's belief is an indirect call to all veiled women who do not care about their appearance mistakenly believing that the concept of modesty, which is a mandatory condition related to the veil, is to neglect one's outer look.

The relationship between the two women appears to be the main cause behind Hadeel's decision to wear a veil (194) which reflects the importance of interpersonal relationships in religious self-development. Hadeel believes that Dina has reconciled in herself "the meanings of freedom and religious commitment at the same time" (194).

Dina explains that she dons the veil because she loves Prophet Muhammed (*PBUH*). Through this love, as Dina says, she has learned to enjoy her life while being committed to Islamic Divine rules. She confesses to Hadeel that she has experienced veiling and unveiling so many times. Her gradual transition from being a young woman who has lived with some sins; "mortal sins" (202) as she describes them, "wearing Bikinis, *décolletés* and miniskirts, as well as dancing and flirting with young men"(202), to one that regularly listens to prophetic eulogy songs, enjoys a deep sense of loving *Allah*, Prophet Muhammad (*PBUH*), and herself, and finally puts on a veil marks her ability to have a kind of balance between her mind and her body. Dina's experience could be read as an indication that veiling, as a religious duty, is carried as a result of love rather than coercion and oppression. The idea of rationality is manifested on another level. Though Hadeel has said more than once that the sight of black clad women causes her irritation and recoil she states that she does not "repudiate this tradition" (194). The same idea of accepting differences of believing in a right style of veiling is echoed in Dina's "I respect all the groups who don the veil with the style they are used to or that which they conceive the right way. i.e. the legitimate way" (208).

Accepting differences in people's inclinations gives Dina the power to realize the huge difference between "the gaze that desires and the look which respects" (209). The original words of this quotation are: "لكن هناك فرقا أيضا بين النظرة التي تشتهي و النظرة التي تحترم" Translating the word *نظرة* with two different terms is intended. The first time it is

translated as a "gaze" and the second it is a "look". This translation comes in correspondence to Jacques Lacan's differentiation between the eye and the gaze in which the eye performing the act of looking is that of the subject, whereas the latter is related to the object<sup>xxvii</sup>. Being veiled, Dina witnesses a change in the way people look at her. She describes the after-hijab looks as "decent". Men "don't dare to stare or to trespass [the limits of decency] insolently" (209). The veil is thus seen as Hadeel's "safety zone"<sup>xxviii</sup>, to use Katherine Bullock's term, meaning that the veil is a safe zone in which women are immunized from different kinds of masculine harassment.

This scene portraying the relationship between men and veiled women is contrastingly echoing a previous situation in which Hadeel was put back in Iraq. At the beginning of the novel she remembers that boys used to stand in the streets to monitor what women are wearing beneath their *abayas*. Their looks are described to be "more powerful than ray-cameras revealing the veiled [parts of female bodies]" (17). These forbidden looks are fixed on women's breasts and legs. Stressing two sexual symbols tends to reinforce concepts of patriarchal views about the feminine nature of sexuality resulting in the fetishization of women's bodies. The male gazes not only symbolically denude the veiled bodies but also turn them into objects of desire and control. It is to be noted that in the tow situations, women are veiled. However, the male sex is described in two different ways: "boys" and "men". This could be interpreted that it is only real men who appreciate the value of women and that it is adolescent immature men who gaze at women's bodies.

The difference between the lustful boyish and the honourable manly looks in relation to veiled/unveiled bodies takes another dimension in the case of Fatema; the young woman meeting Hadeel at a party. Fatema says that, though she is putting the veil in the first place because it is a requirement of her work place, she notices that the looks directed to her while being veiled are different from those gazes fixed on her body while she is unveiled. The former looks are described to be honorable and amiable causing her to feel relieved. This feeling of comfort and relaxation is threatened while exposed to "the gazes that [she doesn't] like" (236). Her feeling of comfort with the people's looks while veiled

has induced her to put the veil regularly until she “has loved herself more” (246).

Hadeel’s phase of oscillation between taking the decision to be veiled or forgetting about it altogether (200) approaches its end when she makes a deal with her son to put on a veil while being in the street only. During Mo’nes’ second visit to Dubai he advises his mother to put on a veil around her head because it is hot and dry. She notices that it has hidden the wrinkles on her neck and thus, she “appear[s] more beautiful” (226) which makes her more comfortable when wearing the veil that day.

The decision to veil has come to Hadeel after performing *Al Fajr* (dawn) prayer on a Friday. The scene of waking up at dawn after hearing *adhan* comes in a serene and tranquil tone. Hearing a voice inside herself telling her to “wake up to be comforted, wake up to be happy” (230) is directly followed by her decision to don the veil even at work contrary to her deal with Mo’nes. It could be deduced that this feeling of tranquility and happiness is not only associated with praying but is also reflected in veiling.

In *Perfection Makes Practice Learning Emotion and The Recited Quran In Indonesia*<sup>xxix</sup>, Anna M. Gade calls this process the dynamicity of ritual structure (90) meaning that a structured ritual is effective on many levels which leads to a variety of meanings that touch other dimensions of a person’s life as well as giving a deep meaning to the structure itself. The veil could be thus seen to be in a causality of spiritual power. Prayer, tranquility and veiling are thus to be seen within a cause and effect equation which shows a special kind of inter-related connectedness between these religious acts. Caring about having some relation to the Divine through prayer; especially in hardships, causes Hadeel to find the sweetness of faith which is illustrated in her feeling of inner tranquility during which she manages to take another step in her relation to God through adopting the practice of veiling without any stimulation from Mo'nes's side” (230).

Being veiled has also induced Hadeel to end her relationship with Yusuf after refusing to become a Muslim. The veil has strengthened Hadeel’s clinging to the Islamic code of marriage which prohibits Muslim women from getting married to men from other religions. Thus, there is a cyclical effect of religious practices: you believe, you practice, you

strengthen your belief even further, and so on. The *fajr* feeling of happiness spreads to Hadeel's place of work in which she feels surprised to receive so many congratulations for her being veiled. Congratulations fall on her head "like roses and rice" (230). This warm atmosphere makes the readers see Hadeel with a bridal veil receiving sincere wishes of blessedness. One of her colleagues even says to her "we are all seeking this *hedaya* (Divine guidance), [will you] ask *Allah* to bestow it upon us?" (230).

This attitude could be compared to that of Hadeel's Muslim friends back in London who are ready to cut off their relationship with Hadeel to abandon her veil because they believe that it stands in the face of women's freedom and autonomy. No one of them has clear logical reasons to associate between veiling and lack of freedom. In fact, their attitude contradicts their conviction of personal freedom because they deny Hadeel her right to choose to be veiled. Moreover, as it appears their attitude towards a pure Islamic religious matter is *normalized* to fit in the western stereotypical system whether they like it or not. Their refusal of the veil is not built on a secular demonstration against Islam; rather it follows from their belief that freedom is what a person does freely in accordance with the normal social codes of his/her social milieu. This line of thought is an echo of Jeffrey T. Nealon's claim that freedom is a normative attitude that hinders recognizing difference in others. He states:

[B]ecause intersubjective theories argue that we *need* each other for recognition and happiness, such theories continue to harbor a regulatory ideal of complete subjective freedom, which is actually *freedom from recognition, freedom from difference itself*. It is not necessarily surprising, then, that needing the other often shows itself as resenting the other<sup>xxx</sup>.

This process of being free from difference appears to be strategically planned by media in order to create a material profit from hot issues like the Muslim veil. For instance, Joana; an English public relations manager in one of the competing companies to that in which Hadeel works, believes that media is a political and an economic business run by a gang as everything else in the world. Joan's subtle critique of the role of media in shaping western public perceptions is very informative. She believes that ordinary people live in a simple way, "whereas politicians and media people make business" (268). She states that media as a business is

concerned with presenting what does not stir boredom, and thus it sheds light on "hot" issues. She also declares that "exaggeration means excitement which carries in itself meanings of deceit, defacement and even depreciation of important matters"(267)<sup>xxx1</sup>. Joana's argument stresses the fact that it is western media which draws the public line of perception by means of exaggerating the presentation of negative stereotypes through the accumulation of the flaws of some Muslims and thus giving false accounts of Islam in general and of Muslim veiled women in particular.

To challenge this negative representation and transform it, Hadia Said ends her novel by giving a positive example of a Muslim woman whose veil is an emblem of her spirituality, rationality, happiness and subjective well-being with their underlying conditions of sociability and tolerance to deal with difference. The very ending pages of the novel highlight the points of development in Hadeel's personality due to embracing the veiling practice.

the novel states clearly that Hadeel's veil turns her into a better person. It makes her perception alert and she becomes able to criticize men who gaze fiercely at women's bodies whether veiled or not. She then realizes that as a Muslim she does not belong to this category of people who invade the privacy of others. She belongs to "those who avert their gazes and treat women, no matter how they are dressed, with respect and dignity"(233). Veil helps Hadeel to reach this thoughtful claim and to stress her belonging to the "righteous" party. In other words, veiling helps Hadeel to step over her anxiety to be falsely categorized and, thus, gives her more self-confidence.

Hadeel states that she is now convinced that "the veil is a religious duty performed because God knows better than us" which makes her now "closer to *Allah*". She has learned how to "eliminate laziness" through ablution or prayer and how to seek refuge in *Allah* in all her problems. She also feels that veil has left a great impact on the way she prays as it helps her to purify her heart and her mind from doubts and illusions.

On another level, Hadeel discovers that she has become "freer and more confident"<sup>xxxii</sup> and that the claim which sees the veil turning a

Muslim woman “to a statue or a spook” is totally wrong. Moreover, she notices that the veil has left a great impact on her way of dealing with people as she eschews gossiping and hoaxing her colleagues. She also highlights the fact that people’s behavior with her, especially men, has changed. Men’s looks become “caring”, “honorable” and “welcoming” “as if saying "good for you!". The most important development in Hadeel's character is that “the positive aspects [of the veil] are much more than the negative ones”. As it appears, the veil helps Hadeel to acquire a sense of balanced and fair evaluation of her life. Though the veil puts some rules and limitations upon her, she manages to know and feel its positive effects and be satisfied with it. This tendency is called the fading affect bias or FAB<sup>xxxiii</sup>; a term which refers to the extent to which the intensity of negative emotions tends to fade faster if compared to positive ones. It is this fading of affect that is referred to as the FAB. In other words, the term points to the ability of people to think that they are leading a pleasant life through minimizing unpleasant emotions and keeping pleasant ones over time. Thus, the veil as a religious practice could be considered as a healthy coping mechanism that help getting rid of or decreasing the impact of negative emotions.

It could be safely argued that the veil has enriched the protagonist's 'subjective well-being' embodied in three dimensions of spiritual development. It has enhanced her ability to communicate better with herself, her colleagues, and with *Allah* (SWT). Through veiling, Hadeel embraces both intrinsic as well as extrinsic forms of religiosity. In their “Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice”<sup>xxxiv</sup> Gordon W. Allport and M. J. Ross state “the extrinsically motivated person uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion”(434). As it appears, Hadeel succeeds in internalizing her religious commitment sincerely in her daily life and she uses religion as an instrument "to solace and sociability"(32). The veil has coloured her life with a moral dimension exemplified in the honourable way of dealing with colleagues and in the respectful and encouraging male looks she experiences after veiling.

Veiling hasn't only induced a spiritual transformation within Hadeel's life. It has proved itself to be a marker of her subjective well-being. The previously stated realms of development which Hadeel experiences as a result of being veiled are strong indications of her

subjective well-being. They serve both the intellectual and the affectionate levels of spiritual growth mentioned in the introduction of this paper. They also stress the positive effects of veiling, minimize its limitations and signal Hadeel's satisfaction with her veil as well as her life. Moreover, through veiling Hadeel managed to stop judging people by appearance, a symptom of western perception. Her own experience with the veil proves that veiled women are not oppressed and are not irrational.

Hadeel's pursuit of happiness, subjective well-being, is accomplished through thinking, reflection, analysis and creation. Her friends' (Dana's, Fatema's and Taghreed's) experiences with the veil prove that it is a form of productive power. It produces loving, insightful, beautiful, social subjects and thus, proves itself to be a powerful tool in the process of spiritual development, subjective well-being and existential health experienced by all the veiled women presented in the novel.

#### Abstract

This paper aims at offering a fresh way to see veiling as a practice which induces power by means of knowledge, spiritual development and "subjective well-being". To reach this end, the veil, as the object of analysis, is approached as a phenomenon interpreted from within the experience of fictional women; Muslim and non-Muslim, veiled and unveiled, to evaluate the possibility of its being a means of empowerment on many conceptual levels. The analysis takes as its basis a variety of conceptual tools which constitute the framework of argumentation: Michel Foucault's concept of technologies of the self, Ibn Al Arabi's belief that the veil is epistemic by nature, Edward R. Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman's definition of spirituality, Ed Diener's explanation of the term subjective well-being and W.R Walker et al 's concept of the Fading Affect Bias (FAB).

**Key words:** Veil, Hadia Said, *Hijab kashif*, Michel Foucault, Ibn Al Arabi, technologies of the self, power, subjective well-being, happiness, spiritual development, Fading Affect Bias (FAB).

ملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية الى تقديم رؤية جديدة للحجاب كنوع من الممارسات التي تعطي قوة لصاحبها عن طريق تزويدها بنوع خاص من المعرفة والنضوج الروحاني والرفاهية الذاتية عن طريق تحليل الحجاب كظاهرة أساسية في تجارب بطلات رواية حجاب كاشف للروائية اللبنانية هاديا سعيد. يعتمد هذا التحليل بشكل رئيسي على عدة مفاهيم: مفهوم تكنولوجيا الذات لميشيل فوكو و اعتقاد بن العربي أن الحجاب ظاهرة معرفية بطبيعته و تعريف كلا من ادوارد ر. كاندا و ليولا دايرود فيرمان لمفهوم الروحانية و شرح اد دينر لمصطلح الرفاهية الذاتية و مفهوم تضاؤل التحيز للمشاعر السلبية كما عرفه و. ريتشارد ووكر و آخرون.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحجاب، هاديا سعيد، حجاب كاشف، ميشيل فوكو، تكنولوجيا الذات، القوة، الرفاهية الذاتية، النضوج الروحاني، تضاؤل التحيز للمشاعر السلبية

<sup>i</sup> Bullock, Katherine. *RETHINKING MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE VEIL Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*. Herndon, USA: The international institute of Islamic thought, 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> Ahmed, Leila. *Women and gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992.

<sup>iii</sup> Laborde, Cecile. "Female Autonomy, Education and the Hijab." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 9.3: 351-77. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/136982306009009098>

<sup>iv</sup> Hirschmann, Nancy J. "Eastern Veiling, Western Freedom?" *Review of Politics*, 59.3(1997): 461-88. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S00364670500027686>.

<sup>v</sup> Davies, Browyn. "The concept of Agency: A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis". *The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*. Berghahn Books, 30 (December, 1991). 42-53 <http://www.Jstore.org/stable/23164525> Accessed:02/04/2014 05:00

<sup>vi</sup> Jarmakani, Amira. "Arab American Feminisms: Mobilizing the Politics of Invisibility." Abdulhadi, Alsultany, & Naber 227-241.

<sup>vii</sup> Moallem, Minoo. "Transnationalism, Feminism, and Fundamentalism." C.Kapan, N. Alacronand, M. Moallem eds. *Transnationalism and Fundamentalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999 320-48. P337

<sup>viii</sup> Hadia Said (1947- ) is a Lebanese writer, novelist and script-writer. She is the wife of the famous Iraqi poet Jalil Haydar. She has lived in many Arabic countries (Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, and Dubai). She is currently residing in London where she also works as the editorial manager for SAYIDATY magazine. Her Literary oeuvre began in 1978 by publishing a short story collection entitled *Ya Layl*. She has wrote many novels including *Bustan Aswad* (1996), *Artist* (2006), *Hijab kashef* (2009), and *Sanawatma'a al Khawf al Iraqi* (2014). Her 1996 novel was awarded the Katiba Magazine Literary Prize. *Hijab Kashef* (2009) is specifically chosen in this paper because it offers a fresh representation of the veil phenomenon. The majority of previous fictional literature about the veil confines it into the contours of the previously mentioned stereotypical vision. However, *Hijab Kashef*, a contemporary novel written by an Arab Muslim veiled woman, offers new horizons of portrayals that allow for seeing the veil in a positive light.

<sup>ix</sup>All translations from the novel are mine.

<sup>x</sup> Michel Foucault. "Technologies of the self." In Martin, Luther H., Gutman, Huck, and Hutton, Patrick H. (ed) *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Great Britain: Tavistock Publications, 1988. p 18.

<sup>xi</sup> Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Tr. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. p 145.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid, (144)

<sup>xiii</sup> William C. Chittick. *The self-Disclosure of God Principles of Ibn Al Arabi's cosmology*. USA: State University of New York Press, 1998.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Sufi* is an Arabic word meaning a mystic. Islamic mysticism is called *tasawwuf* in Arabic and Sufism in English.

<sup>xv</sup> Sunnah.com/search/?q=veil. The hadith narrated by Abu Musa (R.A) and reads:

The Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) was standing amongst us and he told us five things. He said: Verily the Exalted Mighty God does not sleep..... His veil is the light...if He withdraws it (the veil), the splendour of His countenance would consume His creation so far as His sight reaches.

<sup>xvi</sup> Holy Hadith (SahihBukhari) Volume 9, Book 93, Number 529. The Full hadith reads as follows:

We were sitting with the Prophet and he looked at the moon on the night of the full moon and said, "You people will see your Lord as you see this full moon, and you will have no trouble in seeing Him, so if you can avoid missing (through sleep or business, etc.) a prayer before sunrise (Fajr) and a prayer before sunset (Asr) you must do so"

<sup>xvii</sup> Edward R. Canda and Leola Dyrud Furman. *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>xviii</sup> Cheryl Delgado. "A discussion of the concept of spirituality," *Nursing Science Quarterly* 2005, 18 (2), 157–162.

<sup>xix</sup> Robert C. Atchley. *Spirituality and Aging*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, 2009.

<sup>xx</sup> N.W.H Blaikie and G.P. Kelson. "Locating self and giving meaning to existence: a typology of paths to spiritual well-being based on new religious movements in Australia." In *Spiritual Well-Being: Sociological Perspective* sMoberg D. O. (ed). Wahington: University Press of America, 1992.

<sup>xxi</sup> I see the term subjective well-being in another light. The term is divided into two parts the first of which suggests the notion of a fully-fledged subjectivity, the second refers to being happy and independent on so many levels. Viewing the term through this explanation and linking it to veiled women who can enjoy subjective well-being offers a challenge to the negative stereotype that sees veiled women as oppressed, submissive entities occupying a lower status than that of men or unveiled women and a higher status than that of objects.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ed Diener. "Subjective Well-Being" in Ed. Diener (ed.), *The Science of Well-Being: The Collected Works of Ed Diener*. (USA: Springer, 2009) 11-58. The article first appeared in *Psychological Bulletin*, 95/3 (1984), American Psychological Association.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ed Diener, E.Suh & S. Oishi, "Recent findings on subjective well-being," *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology* 1997, 24, 25–41.

<sup>xxiv</sup> D. G. Myers & Ed Diener. "Who is happy?" *Psychological Science* 1995, 6, 10-19.

<sup>xxv</sup> G. Khiabany and M. Williamson "Veiled Bodies\_naked racism: Culture, politics and race in the sun" *race & class* 2008, 50 (1): 69- 88.

<sup>xxvi</sup> The reference is to the famous Lebanese –American poet Jibran Khali Jibran and to his poem " *AlMawakeb*".

<sup>xxvii</sup> Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 1964. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977. p103.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Katherine Bullock. *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes*. Herndon VA: III T P, 2003. p207.

<sup>xxix</sup>Though Gade applies this claim to Qur'an recitation, it could also be applicable to a wide range of ritualistic religious behaviours. Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice Learning Emotion and The Recited Quran In Indonesia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press, 2004.

<sup>xxx</sup>Jeffrey T. Nealon. *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 7.

<sup>xxxi</sup>For instance, Ayan Hirsi Aly's *Infidel* and Norma Khoury's *Forbidden Love*.

<sup>xxxii</sup>When she becomes veiled, Hadeel does not dare to put the veil in its "overt form"(232) in London as she does in Dubai because she feels embarrassed and alienated. Though she is not courageous enough to do express her choice to be a veiled woman, Hadeel has achieved a certain level of self-development through her will and confidence after wearing it in Dubai.

<sup>xxxiii</sup>W.R.Walker, J. J. Skowronski, J. A. Gibbons, R. J. Vogl, &C.P. Thompson."On the emotions that accompany autobiographical memories: Dysphoria disrupts the fading affect bias,"*Cognition and Emotion* 2003 a, 17, 703-723. doi: 10.1080/02699930302287.

<sup>xxxiv</sup>G.W. Allport, & M. J. Ross."Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*1967, 5, 432-443. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0021212>