

The headscarf is not the issue, freedom is

Recently women's rights as to wear a hijab or burqa in public spaces have become a matter of discussion in many countries of the world: Turkey is one of them.

In the last weeks, for the first time in the history of the 90 year old Turkish Republic, three female MPs entered the parliament wearing headscarves, and they did not face any reaction from the opposition parties. In this way, a very deep-seated problem was solved through political consensus.

However, a member of parliament who made a similar attempt in 1999 was confronted with strong reaction from the opposition, expelled from the parliament hall and this episode caused great tension nationwide.

However, a lot has changed in Turkey and now women are granted their freedom to wear hijab both in public spaces and at universities. Nowadays there is a similar discussion underway in Singapore.

Meetings have taken place between government officials and Islamic groups who demand the right to wear the hijab for Muslim women who work in professions in the public sector that require a uniform like policing, nursing and the security services.

There are those who think that such a practice would injure feelings of equality and justice as well as those who say that this must be allowed in the context of freedom of faith.

I have no doubt that Singapore, which harbours several religious groups and ethnic communities, will overcome this problem easily because the Muslim minority, which is 15% of the total population, has lived freely in the country for decades without facing any pressure or oppression.

However, this problem is not limited to Turkey and Singapore. Whether in Islamic or Western countries, hijab and burqa are still an important matter of discussion.

For example, it is mandatory to wear hijab in Iran and in most of the Arab-owned airlines, hostesses have to wear a headscarf whether they are atheists or from another faith.

In Saudi Arabia, women are prohibited to drive. In Europe, there are often heated discussions on this subject.

In countries like France, Belgium, Italy and Germany, there are limitations on wearing either the hijab or burqa in workplaces that belong to the public sector and even in open public spaces. Especially France, which has a Muslim population of five million, has very strict and serious limitations on this. Therefore, a majority of covered women has cut themselves off completely from social life.

Actually, limiting these discussions to wearing of the headscarf is one of the primary causes of the tension. When we see this as a matter of freedom, no doubt, a solution will be much easier. Had the people who defended the rights of women wearing hijab defended the rights of women wearing low-cut dresses as much as they do regarding the headscarf issue, or vice versa, these problems would be solved in no time.

We should be troubled about women wearing low-cut dresses being treated as second class citizens and being indicted as "dirty and sinful" by bigots as much as we are about women wearing hijab being deprived of their rights to education and not being able to work in the jobs they want. We must consider the rights of all women within the context of religious freedom; the rights of Muslims, non-Muslims, atheists and Buddhists.

The way to prevent the matter of wearing of the hijab from becoming an artificial source of tension is not to open up discussions, marginalize those who don't wear hijab or establish an environment of spiritual pressure but rather to support freedom as much as possible.

It is important not to forget that the hijab is not the sole problem of women throughout the world.

For instance, one in every three women is exposed to violence at some time in her life throughout the world; one woman is raped every 90 seconds and there are millions of women who are killed by their husbands; one in every two women is illiterate in the Arab world; women are not entitled to the right to divorce in countries like Iran; 80% of immigrants throughout the world are women;¹ and there are hundreds of problems like these that women face. When we look at Muslim countries we see that these problems are much more deeply-rooted.

What needs to be done is to abandon the mistaken point of view that women's sole problem is wearing a headscarf and to strive for a change of mentality that will give women the value they deserve; especially in the Muslim world, when women are considered as second-class citizens and even as of equivalent value to animals, it is shutting one's eyes to reality that Muslims are focused on a debate regarding the hijab.

Let's first teach the entirety of humanity "respect, love and compassion for women", and talk about "the importance of treating women like a flower" as it is revealed in the Quran.

Together, let's eradicate the mentality that humiliates women by showing the superstitions in Islamic sources as evidence.

Let us show the whole world that women and men are equal in every way in the Quran. If we change this crooked mentality that has turned into a system of oppression against women through cooperation and with the spirit of Islam, no doubt debates such as the issue of the headscarf will disappear of their own accord.

Mr. Adnan Oktar's article on The Malaysian Insider

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/the-headscarf-is-not-the-issue-freedom-is-harun-yahya>

<https://www.harunyahya.info/en/articles/the-headscarf-is-not-the-issue-freedom-is>