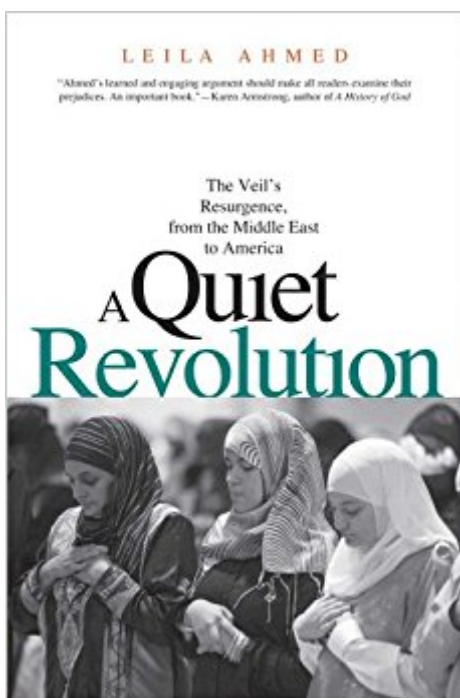


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A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, From The Middle East To America



Synopsis

In Cairo in the 1940s, Leila Ahmed was raised by a generation of women who never dressed in the veils and headscarves their mothers and grandmothers had worn. To them, these coverings seemed irrelevant to both modern life and Islamic piety. Today, however, the majority of Muslim women throughout the Islamic world again wear the veil. Why, Ahmed asks, did this change take root so swiftly, and what does this shift mean for women, Islam, and the West? When she began her study, Ahmed assumed that the veil's return indicated a backward step for Muslim women worldwide. What she discovered, however, in the stories of British colonial officials, young Muslim feminists, Arab nationalists, pious Islamic daughters, American Muslim immigrants, violent jihadists, and peaceful Islamic activists, confounded her expectations. Ahmed observed that Islamism, with its commitments to activism in the service of the poor and in pursuit of social justice, is the strain of Islam most easily and naturally merging with western democracies' own tradition of activism in the cause of justice and social change. It is often Islamists, even more than secular Muslims, who are at the forefront of such contemporary activist struggles as civil rights and women's rights. Ahmed's surprising conclusions represent a near reversal of her thinking on this topic. Richly insightful, intricately drawn, and passionately argued, this absorbing story of the veil's resurgence, from Egypt through Saudi Arabia and into the West, suggests a dramatically new portrait of contemporary Islam.

Book Information

Paperback: 360 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press; 5.6.2012 edition (June 5, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300181434

ISBN-13: 978-0300181432

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 6 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 20 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #185,305 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #53 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > Women in Islam](#) #133 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Islam > History](#) #139 in [Books > History > World > Religious > Islam](#)

Customer Reviews

"Ms. Ahmed gives us a fascinating portrait of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially of its 'unsung

mother,' Zainab al-Ghazali." *Mira Sethi, Wall Street Journal*"Ms. Ahmed's narrative deftly captures the mood of the [colonial] era, registering the range of ironies surrounding the status of the veil." *Mira Sethi, Wall Street Journal*". . . an acute study of how issues of political power and empire interact with women's own claims to autonomy within families and communities. Ahmed beds her analysis into the wider political currents of Egypt without ever losing sight of women's own interpretations of what they were doing and why." *Madeleine Bunting, The Guardian*"The portrait of post 9/11 Muslim America that Ahmed offers up in her book is strikingly hopeful, full of individuals, trends, and stories that make her case for this new era's promise." *Time Magazine*"The veil may be the most evocative symbol of Islam for many non-Muslim readers, and Ahmed's treatment of the subject is wide-ranging, discursive, and utterly fascinating." *Library Journal, starred review*"A discerning account of feminists, veiled and unveiled, and their creation of what [Ahmed] sees as a new space within American Islam." *Christine Stansell, New Republic*"A discerning account of feminists, veiled and unveiled, and their creation of what [Ahmed] sees as a new space within American Islam...In delicate passages, Ahmed ventures her own longings for a larger space for women within the faith—for free-spirited inquiry and discussion and a return to the rational interpretation and scrutiny of holy texts. Ahmed finds a distinctly American Islam where women are playing an unprecedented role and gender inequality is often discussed." *Christine Stansell, New Republic*"A Quiet Revolution is an important book.It provides a thorough history of the resurgence of the veil both in the Muslim world and in the U.S. and adds significant nuance to the complex issues that surround the veil. Ahmed's work will no doubt continue to inspire a new generation of Muslim feminists." *Los Angeles Times*"The book's critical and self-consciously feminist perspective makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature." *J. Hammer, Choice*"In this wonderful book, Ahmed explores the complex interrelationships between the use of the veil and social and political contexts. . . . This intimate, very readable book effectively presents issues of women's life in modern Egypt and America." *Religious Studies Review*"[A Quiet Revolution] . . . can importantly inform feminist contemplations of the veil's meaning and expression of philosophies that are both personal and political." *M. Christian Green, Hypatia Reviews Online*"Leila Ahmed takes a subject that arouses great emotion, shows how the resurgence of veiling has come about, and explains with great clarity what it means. Ahmed's learned and engaging argument should make all readers examine their prejudices. This valuable and much needed introduction to major trends in the modern Muslim world leads to some novel and surprising conclusions. An important book, it should be required reading for journalists,

educationalists, politicians and religious leaders." — Karen Armstrong, Author, *A History of God*

Leila Ahmed's views on women, Islam and Islamism are not only interesting but courageous and need to be read and debated. Her new book brings the critical historical perspective necessary to understand the deep and quiet revolution that is occurring among American Muslims." — Tariq Ramadan, University of Oxford

A powerful and critically important analysis of the veil's modern history and reemergence in our time. This is a history Leila Ahmed herself has lived through and witnessed, especially in North America. It is compelling reading for the many readers with questions about the veil and its meanings." — Diana Eck, author of *A New Religious America*

What lies behind the phenomenon of Muslim women wearing Islamic dress? Leila Ahmed provides an engaging tour through nationalism, socialism, Islam, and anti-imperialism in her beautifully written book, weaving together the themes of politics, dress, and women's changing roles with her usual historical and literary skill. A fascinating read." — Jane Smith, Harvard University

Leila Ahmed is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School. She is the author of *"Women and Gender in Islam"* and *"A Border Passage: From Cairo to America--A Woman's Journey."* She lives in Cambridge, MA.

As other reviewers have noted, veiling gets less attention in this book than might be surmised from the title. Ahmed began the research that led to this book as a study of veiling, but the final product is really a book about modern Islamic socio-political activism, which Ahmed calls "Islamism" in keeping with academic usage, and of which veiling had been a typical manifestation. Ahmed traces its emergence in Egypt with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, its transmigration onto US soil and its eventual transformation into a distinctly American brand of civic-minded Islam. What I found particularly compelling is the internal plot of Ahmed's changing perceptions. She starts by intimating the us-vs-them attitude toward Islamists prevalent in the cultural milieu to which she belongs. She doesn't romanticize this movement along the way, but as she shares with the reader new things she learns about it, her surprise is sometimes palpable on the page. When the book ends with a sort of tribute to the Muslim American activists who are heirs to the Islamist tradition, one can't help being impressed both by the happy ironies of history and by Ahmed's remarkably open mind.

The focus of this book is on modern Egypt and then America. That makes it very timely. In some ways the modern history of Egypt overwhelms the focus on the veil, but that is appropriate. The veil

should not be the primary focus, since it is a sign and representation of a larger political context. that is the point. In the latter part of the book the focus shifts to America. Here again the veil is put in the context of a much larger development of Muslim society in America - if one can speak of "a" Muslim society. My one concern with this book is that she refers to the leadership of the largest Muslim organizations in America, generically, as Muslim Brotherhood. I see the point that she is making. The form of Islam that has become normative in the Islamic Society of North America has an intentional piety that might be associated with the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt. I question how accurate it is to carry that description over to America, as if somehow various American Muslim organizations are extensions of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. They are not, even if some of the practices look similar. This book is rigorous in its research but at the same time personal and sensitive.

I was curious about the issue of women choosing to wear the veil particularly in Egypt in the 1970's and this book did a very good job illuminating the circumstances where women made the shocking-at-the-time choice to adopt the veil. This is a very quick and easy read.

I thought this book was going to concentrate more on the hijab subject, but what it mainly talks about is the history of Egypt's colonization and the Muslim brotherhood. I feel that it barely talks about the hijab revolution as it says. I am happy to be able to understand more about Egypt's development, but don't think this book has the correct name.

I like when Ahmed writes about women's lives and stories-she gets too bogged down in academia, she gives the whole history of the Muslim Brotherhood, and while interesting, not what I had expected. Had to put it down, will get back to it when I want a history lesson. A good reference book, just overly detailed on what I thought were esoteric topics.

This book is an incredibly well written history and well backed argument about the resurgence of the veil now and the reasons for the veil in the past and today. I can honestly say that Leila Ahmed has changed my perspective about veiling and the Muslim religion's connection to people. She gives reams upon reams of evidence and facts about the veil and the women who do or do not wear it. I would recommend this book to anyone looking to widen their perspective or to simply learn more about muslim women in the Middle East and America.

This is an illuminating, well researched and written book that will ever be a favourite of mine. The fact that the resurgence of the veil is partly driven by Muslim women wanting to make a statement of a proud identity is not a surprise to me. It is also not a surprise that it is for some women in the Muslim world, influenced by Muslim men and their particular strain of belief and politics. Muslim women are no different to us in this way they are influenced by their men. No-one can deny that we western women dress to please our men, but we focus on getting their attention and many of us in the wrong way. It is fascinating though that the motivations are so opposed. The Hijab appears extreme to us and it is in comparison. Although since I have been learning and opening my mind, the more beautiful I find it. Just for the record though, I am one who does not approve of our young women presenting themselves in society like Las Vegas Hookers from a very young age, but that's just me. The history of the resurgence of the veil is an efficient reflection of recent Middle Eastern history, coupled with Muslim women's now growing rejection of many elements of the western lifestyle. In my opinion this is very understandable given that western dress was an influence virtually forced upon their societies through unwanted colonisation, aggressive annexing and brutal warfare. This was all the time fuelled by a stream of callous greed and strategic alliances forged for the protection of western interests with no regard for the safety, rights or sensitivities of the local people. Whilst the book is completely non-political in its intent, once you read and reflect upon what has happened in the last century alone, one cannot help sympathise with the innocent mainstream of people in the Middle East and what they have endured at the hands of the rest of the world and that it has built understandable mistrust and resentment. The Middle East have rarely had any respite from outside power and influence and when they have they have shown, in my opinion, that they simply want what the rest of us do, peace, freedom and the right to worship as they wish. This book highlights the resurgence of one of the most arresting and confronting visible identities of Islam as a "ladylike" show of pride in their identity and a stand for their right to firstly please their God and then themselves. Elaine Beers

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