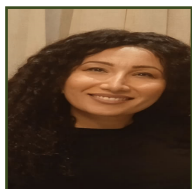


Decolonizing the Veil: The Headscarf in Literature, Fashion, Paintings and Photography



Dr. Jyhene Kebisi

MA Convenor of the Gender Studies Program at Macquarie University in Australia

There is a wrong tendency to equate the veil with the stereotypical photo of the blue burqa that pervades right-wing media in Western countries. However, the veil and veiling styles are much more diverse than this clichéd picture that aims at giving the impression of submissiveness. My keynote speech sheds light on the diversity of Muslim women's veiling styles and tries to understand the reasons that lie behind associating the Muslim headscarf with female subordination. Accordingly, my presentation has 3 main focal points that respond to 3 key questions:

1. What is the veil?
2. Why is the hijab equated with women's oppression?
3. Who benefits from associating the hijab with female subjugation?

Accordingly, my presentation starts by historicizing the veil in order to show that its roots predate Islam. In order to question the homogenization of the veil and veiled women, my presentation explores the diversity of head covers worn through an analysis of Islamic fashion and hijabistas. Moreover, in order to complicate the simplistic misrepresentation of the hijab that pervades Western media, my speech discusses the Orientalist paintings and photography that have tied the headcover to the image of subjugation and submission. Countering the misconception that associates the veil with women's oppression leads me to delve into the French history of compulsory unveiling, hence connecting the forced removal of the veil to colonialism. Finally, in order to further interrogate the misleading link between veiling and women's inferiority my presentation analyzes the self-Orientalist literature that benefits from "veiled best-sellers" (Whitlock 155).

Biography:

Dr. Jyhene Kebisi is the MA Convenor of the Gender Studies Program at Macquarie University in Australia. Dr. Kebisi's research has appeared in the *Journal of World Literature*, *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/New Zealand Literature*, the *Journal of Global Postcolonial Studies*, *Postcolonial Text*, *Law & Literature* and the *Journal of North African Studies*. Her op-eds have appeared in key outlets like *The Berkley Forum*, *The Conversation*, *Overland*, *The New Arab*, *Jadaliyyah* and *Arena*. Dr. Kebisi is the recipient of multiple prizes and awards, including Fulbright.