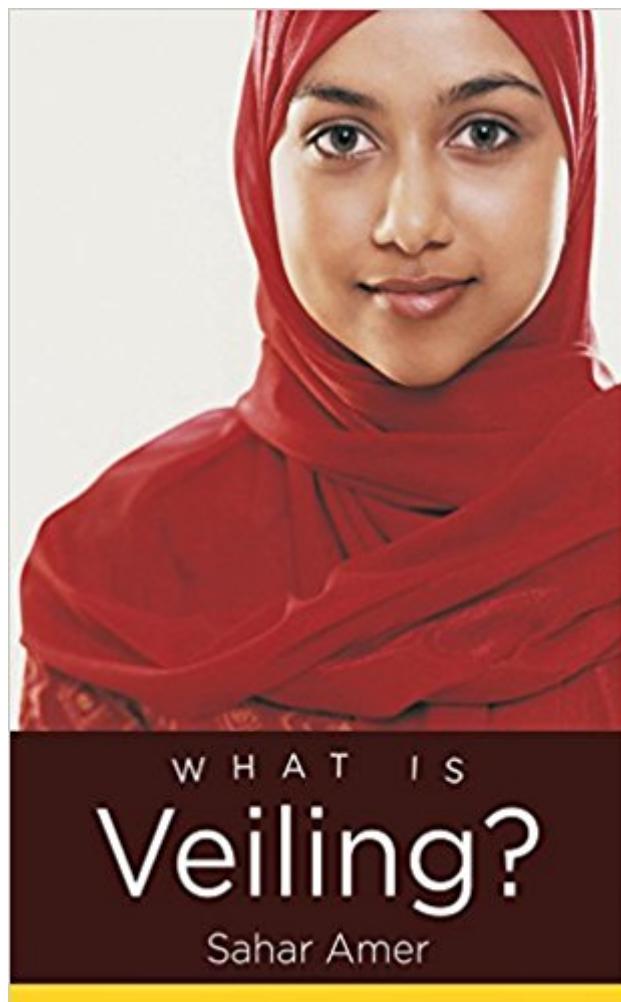


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# What Is Veiling? (Islamic Civilization And Muslim Networks)



## **Synopsis**

Ranging from simple head scarf to full-body burqa, the veil is worn by vast numbers of Muslim women around the world. *What Is Veiling?* explains one of the most visible, controversial, and least understood emblems of Islam. Sahar Amer's evenhanded approach is anchored in sharp cultural insight and rich historical context. Addressing the significance of veiling in the religious, cultural, political, and social lives of Muslims, past and present, she examines the complex roles the practice has played in history, religion, conservative and progressive perspectives, politics and regionalism, society and economics, feminism, fashion, and art. By highlighting the multiple meanings of veiling, the book decisively shows that the realities of the practice cannot be homogenized or oversimplified and extend well beyond the religious and political accounts that are overwhelmingly proclaimed both inside and outside Muslim-majority societies. Neither defending nor criticizing the practice, *What Is Veiling?* clarifies the voices of Muslim women who struggle to be heard and who, veiled or not, demand the right to live spiritual, personal, and public lives in dignity.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

[Amer] offers perhaps the definitive glossary on veiling. . . . Amer's deliberate and caring scholarly treatment is pitch perfect. This book about 'hijabistas,' 'muhajababes,' and veiled Muslim hip-hop artists, among others, is not just about veiling; it is the story of Islam, especially modern Islam, told through the prism of the veil.--*Publishers Weekly*, starred reviewA strong introduction to the

multiplicity and polysemy of veiling practices.--Contemporary French CivilizationRemarkably nuanced and thoughtful, this timely book takes readers on a riveting intellectual journey that brings into focus the complexities of the veil as a discursive, political, and material object. . . . Beautifully written and exhaustively researched, this book is a must read for novices and experts alike.-- New Books NetworkIn Amer's able hands, the often feminist, anti-colonist nature of veiling is brought to light. . . . In prose that is approachable and sympathetic, and with research spanning nations and centuries, Amer's project manages to be both comprehensive and illuminative. . . . An important work that stands to advance multicultural conversations and is a must-read for all those who wish to intelligently approach the subject of Muslim women and autonomy.--ForewordA remarkable primer that guides newcomers and scholars alike through the range of issues, contexts, debates, and ethics of what is sure to be a continued controversy for some time to come.--SCTIW

ReviewNuanced, thoughtful . . . Amer weaves a complex picture of the historical, religious, political, and sociological dimensions of Muslim women's head coverings.--CHOICEA sweeping historical and sociopolitical overview and perhaps the most comprehensive one on veiling.--Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review

Veiling is a difficult but timely and important topic. Sahar Amer explains that Muslims didn't invent the veil, not all Muslims veil the same way, and ideas about Muslim veiling have served and continue to serve political and polemical purposes. A vivid resource for general readers as well as students in courses on Islam and women's studies.--Kecia Ali, author of Marriage and Slavery in Early IslamIn this well written, succinct, and much needed overview of the role of veiling in the Muslim world, Sahar Amer interweaves the perspectives of Muslim women themselves, with emphasis on the many meanings attached to veiling. Given that veiling has been commonly practiced by many religions, why has the veil become so strongly associated with Islam? Why is it that Muslim women who veil are automatically assumed to be oppressed, ignorant, pious, or militant? How is it that a piece of clothing is so politically and emotionally charged? Amer answers these questions clearly over the course of this highly readable book.--Lynne Huffer, author of *Are the Lips a Grave?: A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*

Lots of well-researched historical information on the wearing of hijab, origins of the words, reasons for wearing over the centuries. Ultimately, though, the book ends up being an overview of the polyphony of Muslim voices across the world, giving us a slightly positive view of the wearing of the veil through implication - despite earlier claims that she wants to present a neutral view of the

various practices. Some discussion of "Muslim women's art" ( gracious!) near the end was not well received by this reader as it made bare assertions about what the pieces meant and said. And anything gender specific and religion specific seemed somewhat irritating in this context - more than they usually do for me. So, the first chapters good, and read very carefully by me, the last half I scanned and sped through.

This was a disappointing book to read but then, trying to justify the practice of veiling would hardly be easy to do. A religion that tells women they must not show their face in public takes a lot of justification so it isn't surprising that the book fails on that score. I found some of her statements contradictory e.g. "no one is coercing the women to wear the covering but then having them admit that it is other women who pressure them if they stop", or a bit odd "they are doing it to support the women in Muslim majority countries who are forced to wear the veil" (how this gave them support wasn't stated). Wearing a veil as a rejection of Western values didn't inspire me much either. Being told (over and over) that people from western cultures hold "stereotypical views of Muslims which have been formed from looking at paintings in art galleries of women in Turkish bathhouses or harems" was irritating to say least. Having visited many art galleries in the world I have to say I can't recall seeing a single painting of either and I also know that I have formed my opinions of Muslims from my interactions with them, seeing them take part in current affairs programs on TV and extensive reading as well as travel to some Muslim majority countries - as I suspect most other people from the "so called West" do as well. Could the author hold "stereotypical views" of we "Westerners"? It seemed like it to me. There was a pretty comprehensive explanation of the different types of covering and the history of wearing them including a defense of this practice if it isn't forced on them. Reading the book I felt I was being lectured to and being put down rather and I could not help but be amazed that learned clerics spend so much time debating how much flesh a woman should be allowed to show the public and still go to heaven when they die - as though there aren't more important things going on in the Islamic world that might be debated.

An important and easy to read primer on veiling practices which emphasizes the ever-changing meaning of veiling practices. The book is divided in three parts (here given 'my' titles): 1. Veiling in key Islamic texts and contemporary Muslim cultures; 2. Veiling in contemporary non-Muslim cultures; and 3. Veiling as seen through the eyes of Muslim women intellectuals and artists. The book gives a clear overview of scholarly arguments on the subject of veiling in a surprisingly easy to read, jargon-free prose. A comprehensive glossary ends the book and showcases the great

diversity of veiling practices around the world. The glossary reads well and is fascinating in itself, although illustrations would have been nice. This book will make you realize that everyone (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) project their own meaning onto the veil, so misunderstandings on the topic are sure to abound.

This book is a very important read for every American interested in understanding the historical, political, social and cultural meaning of veiling for women throughout the world.

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