

HIJAB & SPIN
Part 3

A response to the Oxford
conference on hijab (28 Feb 04)
by

Shaikh Riyad Nadwi M.A., PhD.



**Oxford Cross Cultural
Research Institute**

A Think Tank for Muslims in the West

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Part 3

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Are we creating too much fuss over a trivial matter – *hijab*?

Shaikh Riyad Nadwi Responds to the
Oxford Hijab Conference of 28th February 2004

It was argued by some Muslims in the conference that *hijab* is a small component of Islamic practice when compared with the full spectrum of what it means to be a Muslim in the West and therefore the uproar in the Muslim community about *hijab* is disproportionate and ill-informed.

This, I am afraid, is an extremely shallow understanding of the issue. If we accept that there is no difference between wearing *hijab* and not wearing it, then by implication it would mean that we must also accept a monumental change in the way we relate to Quran and hadith in general (*usul al-fiqh*). To all intents and purposes, this would constitute laying the foundation for an artificial reformation of the entire structure of our jurisprudential principles. This is exactly what the pro-Israel activists have been trying to achieve for several decades. We should note here the keenness with which Daniel Pipes¹ quotes Bencheikh when he argues that the reforming and liberal trends that he hopes will emerge in France can be "**transferable to the Muslim world as a whole**". (Daniel Pipes review of *Marianne et le Prophète: L'Islam dans la France laïque* by Soheib Bencheikh)

The issue is not just about *hijab*. It is about setting a precedent. Such a precedent would then be used as a catalyst to dictate to us the terms of our commitment to the Quran and the way we relate to our entire scholastic heritage. This could lead to a situation in which we are eventually presented with a list of verses in the Quran which would be 'unacceptable' to read.

Some Muslims have been arguing that *hijab* is an obligation on Muslim women purely as the result of a scholastic heritage dominated entirely by men. It has been argued that the recent participation of some Muslim women scholars has brought about a 'liberation' from the old, 'oppressive' rulings. We are therefore led to believe that the obligation of the *hijab* can be interpreted in a more lax way, to the extent that it may not even be an obligation after all.

By way of correction, it is crucial for Muslims to realise that our scholastic heritage includes *thousands* of female scholars and that (their) traditional rulings are based on sound principles rather than political correctness. In fact, there is an Alim here in Oxford who is in the latter stages of compiling an encyclopaedia of more than **ten thousand women hadith scholars**, some of whom were teachers of Imam Bukhari, among others. *Ten thousand women scholars* – and that is in only *one* discipline (hadith). It is therefore a sign of gross ignorance for people to argue that the Islamic

¹ See review at the Daniel Pipes website: <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/861>

sciences are built entirely on male scholarship and that female scholars are only now beginning to participate. This is another major '*spin*' on our heritage.

As a Muslim community, we must not become an easy target for the '*spin*' doctors. It is time for them to stop interpreting our generosity and hospitality as idiocy. My advice to the Muslims of Britain and Europe remains that we should explore the motives of every politician and their advisers whenever they make an attempt to interfere with our faith and we need to demonstrate our complete rejection of this ban with consistency.

Shaikh Riyad Nadwi M.A., Ph.D.

OCCR Institute

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Note: Please also read Shaikh Riyad Nadwi's response to Dr Harris's lecture at the Oxford Hijab Conference.