Over the past few years a new range of Arabic words—hijab, jilbab, niqab—have become common currency in the British media, accompanied by images of Muslim women with various degrees of covering and culminating, in October 2006, in a veritable orgy of images of fully veiled women in response to Jack Straw’s newspaper article in the Lancashire Telegraph.1 Jack Straw, the ex-home secretary, and prominent Labour MP for Blackburn, (a constituency in the North of England with a large Muslim population), had written that he felt uncomfortable talking to women in face veils that for the past year he had been asking them if they would not mind lifting their veils when they came to meet him in his office; and that he perceived the veil to be a statement of separation and difference that makes the possibility of good inter-community relations more difficult. The following day he added that he considered facial expressions an important element of communication and that whilst he would not like to be prescriptive, and opposed the French ban on hijab, he nonetheless “would rather” British Muslim women did not wear burqas or niqabs.

The media spectacle

Straw’s comments were taken by the British media as a cue for unleashing their growing stock of sensationalist photos of British Muslim women looking at their most alien, swathed in all encompassing burqas or reduced and magnified to a pair of eyes peeping through the slit of a black niqab. Ever since September 11, which had the effect of transforming all Muslims into potential objects of public paranoia, press photographers have been chasing fully veiled women, thrusting their extendable zoom lenses into deliberately hidden faces. The revelation in July 2005 that four British Muslims were prepared to kill fellow citizens “in the name of Islam” served to increase the apparent refusal of British Muslims to abide by “Western norms” in the here and now. No less dramatic than recent images were the headlines. Overnight Straw’s hesitant and context-specific reflections were transformed by every paper and embedded silks but austere plain black accompanied by reminders of her Western identity—a pair of trainers, a carton of iced coffee, a Union Jack mug. She represents not Eastern promise in a timeless far off place but the apparent refusal of British Muslims to abide by “Western norms” in the here and now.

Debate about the niqab among Muslims

But it is worth considering what is omitted from this barrage of media representations. By framing the debate as a sensationalist polemic between “us” (the reasonable Brits) and “them” (“trouble-making Muslims” or “victimized Muslims”), the media not only failed to engage adequately with the issues raised by Straw, but also failed to acknowledge that the niqab and burqa have long been a matter of considerable debate amongst Muslims themselves, both in Britain and elsewhere in the world. A brief glimpse into this internal debate about niqab might enable us to disentangle the recent controversy from the politically charged media hype that surrounds it.

Firstly, there is the perspective of the small minority of British Muslim women who cover their faces in public. Not surprisingly, they were largely defensive, emphasizing that they wear the niqab as a matter of choice and that this should be respected in a society that claims “freedom” as a basic value and human right. In my own conversations with niqabis in London about why they cover—conversations that took place prior to the Straw controversy—the issue of personal freedom was sometimes raised, but on the whole, women were far more preoccupied with issues of modesty and religious devotion. They felt the niqab was not a religious obligation, but that it represented an extra step in their own personal

Face veil controversies have become a common feature of public debates across Europe. Analysing a controversy unintentionally ignited by British Labour Party politician Jack Straw, the author shows that the characteristics of fervent debate do not only reproduce familiar stereotypes, but also obliterate the discussion about veiling within Muslim communities in Britain. What is left unseen is that reservations about the veil are not about British versus Muslim values but about different perspectives of British citizens.
精神的发展。它作为一种常驻的物质提醒，其与神的关系与一股物理屏障和从其他不必要的互动中保护自己。作为女人，她认为戴面纱是一种好主意，但它让她感到不适，并且由于她认为面纱实际上不利于伊斯兰教，因为它起作用于伊斯兰教有效地使他人感到不舒服，因此它表明存在和差异以及与沟通的物理障碍。

这些意见以不同方式展开，许多穆斯林认为面纱是不必要的，但也认为面纱实际上不利于伊斯兰教，因为它实际上不利于伊斯兰教。看到这种真实性，观点，认为面纱可以引起负面的注意力，但她们也展示了在周围的方式。与通常对穆斯林的普遍看法不同，皮尔·穆罕默德和希伯纳·贝格姆，卢顿的学童，他们认为让女孩去戴面纱，目的是为了教育，因此选择了开放大学学位课程，认为面纱可以遮住她的脸。

这种面向公共问题的方式，反而加剧了英国穆斯林的矛盾。正如前文所述，这些意见反映的是许多思想者的担忧，即许多穆斯林感到，同时有面纱和歧视。其中一些意见涉及到对面纱的自我控制。这些意见的共同点是，面纱是不必要的，但也认为面纱实际上不利于伊斯兰教，因为它实际上不利于伊斯兰教。看到这种真实性，观点，认为面纱可以引起负面的注意力，但她们也展示了在周围的方式。与通常对穆斯林的普遍看法不同，皮尔·穆罕默德和希伯纳·贝格姆，卢顿的学童，他们认为让女孩去戴面纱，目的是为了教育，因此选择了开放大学学位课程，认为面纱可以遮住她的脸。

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