

# **‘Hijab Day’ in Paris 2016 - Many voices for veiled women’s rights, so few for non-veiled ones**

Monday 25 April 2016, by [DUCOS Lalia](#), [HELIE LUCAS Marieme](#), [SADOU Zazi](#) (Date first published: 24 April 2016).

**Articles by Lalia Ducos and Zazi Sadou, Algerian feminists. Introduction by Marieme Helie Lucas.**

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## **Introduction**

On Wednesday, April 20 2016 , some students at the prestigious Paris Institute of Political Sciences which prides itself with educating France’s elite, organized a ‘Hijab Day’, a replica of the worldwide event that was initiated in 2013. It is supposed to help non-veiled non-Muslim students realize how discrimination affects veiled women.

This will no doubt come as a surprise to many English speaking readers who still believe that veiling is legally banned in France, thanks to gross disinformation organized by the mainstream media.

Although i have doubts that the event itself (with display tables for head scarves and distribution of leaflets) had been authorized by the Director of the Institute, it was nevertheless perfectly legal to wear a veil at Sciences Po Paris, as is the case everywhere in France, except on two occasions : in primary and secondary schools in secular state schools (where education is entirely free) for pupils (who are usually under age 18), teachers and admin ; and for civil servants when in contact with the public, i.e. when s/he is due to represent the secular republic. This legal provision was set into the laws on secularism passed in 1905-1906 – i.e. very long before there was the beginning of a ‘Muslim’ immigration in France. Some of my foreign visitors initially display shock at the sight of a veiled woman in the streets, so intoxicated are they with fundamentalist propaganda about French laws. (As for the full face covering veil, it has nothing to do with secularism: it was banned recently, together with helmets and masks, for reasons of security, as is the case in several Muslim majority countries where armed fundamentalists operate.)

The two articles below point at the discrepancy between defending ‘the right to veil’ in a country where this right is already well defended under the 1905-6 secular laws which guarantee freedom of belief and freedom of practice to all citizens. Moreover, human rights organizations in France regularly take up cases when veiled women are verbally assaulted by extreme right-wing people, and

French courts do condemn the perpetrators. In short, yes, there are people who openly discriminate against veiled women (so far they are not many, but the far-right is growing – as is the case everywhere in Europe); and no, France is not a ‘racist’ country, its laws and judicial system protect all citizens – and this includes, of course, veiled women.

But who, today in France, defends the right not to veil, when it is needed ? Who defended it when Algerian women were slaughtered by armed fundamentalist groups in the nineties? Who does what today for the Nigerian girls forcibly converted, veiled and sold as slaves by Boko Haram and who are still held by them. Or for the Iraqi women at the hands of Daesh ? Who speaks up at Sciences Po Paris or at LSE London for the Sudanese women who were publicly denounced on Facebook as ‘unveiled’ by Muslim fundamentalist groups, and thus facing death threats by both the religious far-right groups and State courts ? Who actively engages in their defence, among the Left, human rights, feminist organizations in France, in Europe ? Why so many voices for veiled women’s rights and so few for non-veiled ones, be they Muslim believers or not ? It is this discrepancy, this inequality in the treatment of women’s rights and human rights that both these articles point at. Who will speak up for us ?

France’s elites-to-be are in denial regarding the role played by ‘the veil’ in the fundamentalist global strategy to insure visibility and gaining ground as part of an ‘Islamisation’ of societies. The two articles below also point at the fact that ‘the veil’ is not Islamic per-se but cultural, as progressive scholars of Islam pointed at very clearly; and that it is only a first step in a series of demands by fundamentalists who cleverly use the principles of democracy and equality to advance their goals. What looks like, at first sight, an inoffensive Muslim ‘fashion’ leads to other demands for segregation, unequal rights for women, teaching creationism, ban on arts and music, etc...

Algerian women are well placed to speak about it, as the introduction of a culturally alien form of covering took place in the seventies, was followed by many other diktats regarding their freedom of movement, their access to education and to wage labour, etc... and culminated in assassinations and massacres of civilians, with women tortured, burnt alive, raped, sold to fundamentalist armed groups and taken into slavery, – just like Daesh is doing right now in Iraq and Syria.

Isn’t it ironical that – at a time when France and Europe begin to be confronted to armed attacks against civilians by Muslim fundamentalist armed groups – , what seems most urgent to defend right now, for France’s elite-to-be – but also to rights groups and left organisations – is the right to cover one’s head ? It is for survivors of the Algerian decimation (200 000 victims) to unveil this uncomfortable truth.

**Marieme Helie Lucas**, April 24, 2016

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**« Hijab Day » at the Paris Institute of Political Sciences : « in the name of all the Algerian women who were assassinated for having refused to bend to the fundamentalist dress code diktat.**

**In the name of :**

Katia Bengana, secondary school student

Leila Kheddar and Amel Zenoune, law students

Zhor Meziane, school director

In the name of all the Algerian women who were assassinated for refusing the dress code diktat, i want to scream my revolt against this 'day' organized by the very students who are supposed to become the elite in our country.

True enough, twenty years passed since the Algerian tragedy and some people put a cover over memories – this is why i can understand that students may not have any knowledge of this period of time, during which we lived in isolation and faced international hypocrisy.

In the name of a generous idea of freedom and tolerance, some female students legitimize a veil which is supposed to be Islamic, while only obscurantist theologians support it. Moreover, they banalize it.

Is it a delirium on the veil, on the seductive woman, reduced to her sex, exposed to men who are unable to control themselves ? Is it a response to this insult made to men ?

The veil is conceived of, first and foremost, as a flag that makes fundamentalists more visible : it is mostly political, just as the clothes worn by those men mimicking the Taliban are.

Islamist fundamentalism is a totalitarian ideology that manipulates Islam towards political ends. We saw it at work in Algeria, over a ten year-long war against civilians (not a civil war, as is often said) in which were eliminated women, journalists, intellectuals, medical doctors, the modernist elite as a whole.

Fundamentalists were defeated militarily but their project of 're-islamisation' of society succeeded, thanks to the Arab satellite TV channels from the Gulf that, as we know, have the financial means to do so. One just needs to listen to their preachers who are engaged into a true destruction of minds.

It is important to face the fact that they are reproducing in Europe today what they started in our countries of origin. This truth is difficult for some progressive anti racist- people to grasp, and it divided feminists, but the net result is the abandonment of women struggling against the fundamentalist aggression.

It is not acceptable that veiled women be discriminated against, however, by confusing religion and culture, by considering veiled women as the only 'representatives' of Islam, one runs the risk of discriminating against the vast majority of Muslim women who do not veil and who struggle for the separation between religion and politics, i.e. for secularism, and for the universality of rights.

**Lalia DUCOS**, April 21, 2016

Féminist activist,

President of the Women's Initiative for Citizenship and Universal Rights (WICUR)

Sunday 24 April 2016

<http://www.siawi.org/article11410.html>

Source: siawi, 24.04.2016

*\* Translated by Marieme Helie Lucas*

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## **Souvenir Day : Amel Zenoune, assassinated for refusing to wear a veil**

Amel Zenoune, a young university student, was leaving Algiers in a university bus and going back home to Sidi Moussa, about one hour before the time for breaking fast. On Sunday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1997, on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Ramadan, the bus was stopped on its way by what Algerian people used to call 'fake control points' to differentiate them from the control points which were under the army control.

The ambush was set by GIA terrorists (Islamist Armed Group) in a hamlet called Benedja on the commune of Bentalha- Bentalha which remains in our memories as the place of one of the most terrifying massacres in the nineties.

The passengers in the bus were shivering with fear and they thought they were looking death in the eye. But terrorists showed no interest : they looked for one person only, Amel Zenoune. They ordered her to get out of the bus and the young woman did so with much courage.

One of the armed men sharpened his knife on a stone and, without showing any emotion, he sliced her throat under the eyes of terrorized passengers. The man then said that this would be a deterrent to all women who go to university and to work without being veiled. That was a terrifying message sent to those who refused to bend to their moral order.

She was just 22.

She was meant to serve as an exemple in order to terrify women and girls who in Algeria resisted FIS' diktats ( Islamic Salvation Front) and its various armed branches'.

In other countries of the world, where Islam prevails, millions of women, as Amel Zenoune did, continue in all possible ways to resist Muslim fundamentalism and its limitless ambition to force women and societies into their backward theocratic project.

Today, it is in Paris, - the capital city of secular France, the heir of the Enlightenment era and of the Republic, which promotes human rights and equality of rights between men and women - that a new initiative is being launched : the so-called 'Hijab Day'. This worldwide initiative was started in 2013 by a network which fully achieved its political marketing in Europe. Here is the proof under our very eyes : the action is taking place in Sciences PO Paris, the prestigious School where they teach reason so as to enlighten the mind !

Whatever the motivations of the young female students who mobilized in support of their 'veiled pals', they should not forget that hundred thousands - no, millions - of Muslim women - bare headed - risk their lives to occupy the public space in their own countries. That they resist by any mean in order to state their desire to be free and not to submit to the moral order which hides women as sexual objects ! How many of them paid the high price by being raped and killed as ' butty of war' ?

These young French students, who for sure are secular and emancipated, should not forget that the battle over 'the veil' is used, above all, to hide the ambition of violent politico-religious forces which are determined to conquest the world and to turn 'citizens' into a community of believers only, in a totalitarian order where women are due to hide, fade away, obey, disappear...

As for the veiled young girls who are courted by preachers and 'paradise dealers' through a misleading discourse of tolerance and benevolence, they should make the effort to question this practice which is imposed outside its context, and which stands miles away from the enlightened Islam they seek to represent ! They should read Ibn Sina, Ibn Rochd, Mohamed Arkoun, Fatima Mernissi, so as to promote another spirit of Islam than the one which parades in a uniform.

My position will certainly not be widely accepted : i am just screaming here my outrage as an Algerian feminist activist who lived, together with hundred thousands citizens, under the rising fundamentalist order. Without women's resistance and that of all citizens who believed in the idea of democracy in its fullest humanist sense, Algeria would have been radically transformed.

Granted, France is neither Algeria, nor Tunisia, nor Iraq, nor Egypt. However, let us not forget that all fundamentalist extreme right conquest movements' primary stand is that -whatever their disguise is - their first victims are women. This is the lesson we learn everyday from history.

Is the wearing of a veil a matter of liberty which is guaranteed by democracy ? I do not think so. The 'battle over the veil' is only the most visible expression of the fundamentalists' will to bring women into submission. To brandish the principles of democracy and freedom are just means to succeed...

Let us not forget the sacrifice of the student Amel, of the agronomist Rachida, of the vet Khadidja, of the teacher Lila, of the housewife Rabéa, and this very long list of women resisters...

**Zazi Sadou**, RAFD, 22.04.2016

\* Zazi Sadou was for many years the spokesperson of the Rassemblement Algérien des Femmes Démocrates ( RAFD - Algerian Assembly of Democratic Women).

<http://www.siawi.org/article11409.html>

Sunday 24 April 2016

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\* *Translated by Marieme Helie Lucas*

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