



Hijab & The Republic: Uncovering the French Headscarf Debate (Gender and Globalization)

Bronwyn Winter

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The hijab is arguably the most discussed and controversial item of women's clothing today. It has become the primary global symbol of female Muslim identity for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and is the focus of much debate in the confrontation between Islam and the West. Nowhere has this debate been more acute or complex than in France. In "Hijab and the Republic", Bronwyn Winter provides a riveting account of the controversial 2003 French law to ban Islamic headscarves and other religious signs from public schools. While much has been written on the subject, Winter offers a unique feminist perspective, carefully delineating its political and cultural aspects. To understand the current controversy, the author traces the history of secularism in France and the shift in interpretations of Islam before turning to a review of the more recent past. Drawing on both scholarly literature and popular commentary, she examines the headscarf debate from its inception in 1989 through fluctuations in its intensity in public consciousness over the 1990s to its surging significance in the wake of 9/11 and the consequent shift in global politics. Winter argues convincingly that the issue must be understood within the specific historical and cultural context of France and through a feminist lens, since gender is fundamental to the debate about veiling Muslim women. "Hijab and the Republic" presents a fresh and richly detailed examination of a subject that remains at the forefront of discussion about Islam and the West.

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