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**ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: OMD675A.08S**

**Response to an Ethical Issue: “You work for an International organization, with HQs in the USA, that has banned Muslim women from wearing headscarves at work.” Describe my ethical reasoning; defend my position using the ethical decision making model; describe how I might try to change this policy: using CSR arguments.**

My first human impulse is to state categorically that I could never work for an Organization that banned the wearing of religious decorations or garments, so I have to imagine myself in a situation where this policy pronouncement has just occurred. At an *earlier* time in my life, my first instinct would have been to resign- if all the facts established this policy to be intentionally discriminatory. This ‘gut response’ is, mostly based on Teleological egoism. I would justify it to myself as also acting from a personal ethical standard- a Deontological obligation to withdraw my support/labor from discriminatory organizations. If this were to occur at this stage in my life, I think my leaving the workplace would feel like compromising my ethics for a private or virtuous sense of ‘right’- because the action of resigning is passive and unhelpful to those discriminated against. Far better to be responsible and responsive to the situation and to those involved: as with the ethics of ‘Care’. (I have been in situations, usually involving the mistreatment of clients- when *not* advocating for them/their rights would have been an act of acceptance and legitimization of unethical practices, especially if followed by everyone. This is an example of Kant’s: “categorical imperative”).

My sense is that the personal dissonance at core-values level that I would encounter, would direct me to some kind of principled conduct and/or organizing action together with those objectified as well as those within the various human resource and political frameworks of the organization. In my position as an immigrant to the USA, I could reflect to each group on the surprising and subtle discriminations I have experienced, even as a: white, Anglo-Saxon, male. I could recount discussions with former colleagues in the UK, who were Muslim and who struggled greatly, with the mixed messages of some of the enlightened organizational policies that sometimes felt very ‘token’ to them. However, this personal activism would only be

appropriate if invited by my Muslim women colleagues, who may not need my help at all in making their discrimination a public matter. I think it could be important to communicate my support, with diplomacy, both to demonstrate the ethic of care as well as to demonstrate my own intrinsic obligation to be a proponent for Shared Rights (as per the Deontological approach).

Individual rights often clash with Universal rights, and it is highly probable that ‘my’ organization has enacted this policy for utilitarian ethical reasons, and in light of the growth of secularism, of gender equality, but also, of anti-Islamic fundamentalism. Consequently, on each of these three grounds, I would feel it was my duty to inform my organization that it heading on the wrong course- quite against the gathering tide of corporate social responsibility. The ideal of religious freedom is not the same as freedom from religion, but these are often confused, in the mindset of reasonable people. Secular societies and large Organizations like to boast about non-discriminatory values and particularly about the increased equality of opportunities for women and minorities. When a woman freely engages in the wearing of a religious decoration such as a cross or a headscarf – and she is cognizant of a workplace’s health and safety regulations- she is exercising the option of greater equality through equal social recognition. Some think that treating everyone ‘equally’ defines anti-discrimination. I like to say anti-discrimination policy is a process of demonstrating and being instrumental to the ideals of *equal representation and social identity*, which gets to the moral heart of the matter. However, I feel sure that at least some of the supporters of the headscarf ban, in France, would admit they are making an unfounded assumption to suggest that the women wearing them are Islamic fundamentalists and potential terrorists, and are thereby stereotyping and ‘scapegoating’ this visibly easy ‘target’, just as color/race conveniently provides. Such discrimination should be ‘exposed to the disinfecting effects of daylight’ if its representatives are otherwise unwilling to raise ethical consciousness through change. (Deontological obligation seems correct, in my view).

A socially responsible Organization would not be caring for all its stakeholders: employees, customers or its wider community, if it were to support such a policy. I feel it would be my role to raise its “moral awareness”(Kohlberg) to the level of recognizing the relativity of the wide variety of values and beliefs of all its constituents, and to communicate to all concerned that these differences are strengths worth nourishing.

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References:

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