

Creation of Islamic Norms: How the Veil Became Proper Attire for Muslim Women

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Introduction

Fashion mirrors society. It provides a glimpse into the values and ideas shared, as well as the codified and uncodified rules shaped, among people during a specific era. This chapter examines the practice of wearing veils,¹ which spread rapidly among Muslim women in various parts of the world during the latter half of the 20th century, and discusses the factors that played a role in spreading and sustaining this practice.

Within academia and beyond, two major movements related to the use of veils have received considerable attention.² The first major movement refers to the wearing of veils made compulsory by political forces; this movement was noted in Muslim societies across various regions wherein women were required to dress in a manner that covered their body and hair. The movement took root in Iran after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule of the 1990s, and in some contemporary Gulf states. The second major movement refers to the voluntary wearing of veils. Since the 1970s, some women in the Middle East, East and Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America have claimed that they were self-motivated wearers of the veil.

The compulsory wearing of veils has been criticized as a form of gender discrimination, sexual violence, and oppression against women, whereas the voluntary wearing of veils has been interpreted within the context of identity politics in the political and social settings of the wearer. Although the scope of discussion about the veil has widened and investigations have presented extensive details, the following question has yet to be sufficiently addressed by the literature: when and how did the veil gain status as an appropriate attire for Muslim women in the modern era? In this chapter, the author will address this question by examining two cases.



The first case is that of Iran, where veils were made compulsory by the revolutionary regime since the end of the 1970s. The second case is that of contemporary Egypt, where more women opted to wear veils voluntarily. Each of these cases is considered an example of the two aforementioned major currents regarding the veiling of contemporary Muslim women. In both cases, the veil became the prevailing attire for Muslim women and has also been considered fashionable since the 2000s.

The development of modern discourse on the *hijab* played a role in both Iran and Egypt. *Hijab* is an Arabic term that originally referred to a covering used to hide a person or object from others or a partition to separate two individuals (cf. Ibn Manẓūr n.d., vol.2, 777). This term was borrowed from the Qur'an—the holy book of Islam—and the practice of covering women or separating men and women has long been observed in the history of Muslim societies. Toward the end of the 19th century, the meaning of the term *hijab* and the practices related to covering and separating became controversial.

In the following sections, a brief history of unveiling and the development of discourses on the *hijab* in Iran and Egypt will be traced. The comparison of influential writings on the *hijab* during the latter half of the 20th century and their reception in the two societies highlights some variations in the process of how the veil became appropriate attire for Muslim women.

1. Creation of Islamic Norms in Contemporary Iran

1.1. *Hejab* as Fashion

In March 2012, an event called the Fajr Fashion Festival was launched in Tehran (the capital of Iran) during the Iranian New Year (*Nowruz*). Based on the second edition of the festival conducted the following year, the Iran Islamic Fashion Association published a magazine called *Shima*. The magazine cover included the subtitle “Fashion Chador Journal,” and featured a woman wearing a beautiful *chador*, which is a semicircular cloth that covers the entire body from head to toe, with a large paisley pattern on turquoise fabric (Figure 1). In the following pages, models were presented wearing white or floral *chadors* for worship, black *chadors* for travel, and Gulf-style *abayas* (loose-fitting coats).

The magazine included the following foreword by Ali Moradkhani—then deputy minister of culture and Islamic guidance in Iran:



Figure 1. Front page of the Iranian magazine, *Shima* (2013).

Dress is one of the most important cultural indicators, both past and present ... [In Iran,] because of the “modernization” under the reign of two Pahlavi kings, *hejab* was abolished and Western attire was imitated. However, the people of this land (Iran) were not captivated by such foreign culture, and they tried to maintain *hejab*.

Fortunately, based on the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Islamic and Iranian identities were preserved, and the imported culture was removed, thereby leading to the emergence of a new approach toward clothing. (Morādkhānī 2013: 7)

Hejab is the Persian rendering of the Arabic word *hijab*. As indicated in the above quote, the *hejab* was abolished during the Pahlavi era (1925–1979). The next section will present details of the story of unveiling in Iran.

1.2. Unveiling in the Early 20th Century

Until the early 20th century, women in Iran covered their entire bodies with *chadors* and their faces with white cloths called *rubands* when they ventured outside of their houses (Figure 2). During the reign of the first Iranian king Reza Shah (1878–



Figure 2. “Two Veiled Women and a Child” by Antoin Sevruguin, late 19th century. Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 3. Iranian women parliamentarians in the mid-1970s. Wikimedia Commons.

1944), which lasted from 1925 to 1941, a movement aimed at eliminating the wearing of men’s turban and women’s *hejab* gained prevalence as part of a large-scale project to modernize the country.³ For the Shah and other modernizing forces, thick covers over women’s bodies were perceived as a symbol of regression for the nation.

The shift was incremental⁴; in 1934, teachers and female students in schools were urged to discontinue the use of their *chadors* and *rubands*. In the following year, government officials conducted public events wherein they were accompanied by their wives dressed in Western attire. Women were thus encouraged to discard their *hejabs* and venture out in public. After a few years of these preparations, in 1936, Reza Shah declared that the *hejab* be abolished. Using *hejabs* was legally prohibited, regardless of the age, religion, or social class of the wearer. For offenders, their *chadors* would be ripped off in public, and their *rubands* would be confiscated. Physicians were forbidden from examining women wearing *hejabs*, and taxi drivers were forbidden from ferrying covered women as passengers.

The law banning the *hejab* faced strong opposition from both men and women across the country. Consequently, after the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, the law was repealed and women once again began wearing *hejabs*. However, during the 1941 to 1979 reign of Reza Shah’s son, Mohammad Reza Shah (1919–1980), many young women and those who entered the workforce began to wear Western attire without the

hejab (Figure 3).

After the 1979 revolution, the situation regarding women's attire once again faced changes. The newly established government encouraged women to wear *hejabs* and eventually made it compulsory. This development is explained in the following section.

1.3. Creating Islamic Norms

Question on the Hejab by Motahhari

The Islamic scholar Morteza Motahhari (1919–1979) published *Question on the Hejab*, which was based on his lectures conducted from 1966 to 1967, a decade before the outbreak of the Islamic revolution in 1979. Motahhari was known to have provided theoretical support for the revolutionary government's decision to make the *hejab* compulsory. He was born in a small village in northeast Iran and after completing his primary education, he moved to Mashhad and Ghom, the centers of Shiite learning. In these cities, he had the opportunity to study under well-known scholars, including Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), and became involved in their anti-Western and anti-monarchical political movements. After the Pahlavi regime deported Khomeini in 1964, Motahhari continued to express his perspectives on political and social issues through his writings and lectures at universities and religious institutions; his lectures on the *hejab* were included among them.⁵

Motahhari's lectures on the *hejab* provide various perspectives about why the *hejab* is necessary in Muslim society.⁶ He emphasized the maintenance of social morality by controlling sexual desires. According to Motahhari, sexual relations must only occur within the context of legal marriage. Engaging in a sexual act outside the institution of marriage is deemed adultery and should be prohibited. This restriction helps to maintain social morality, thereby strengthening family ties and marital intimacy, and preserving the vitality of social activities in the public sphere. However, sexual desire is a human instinct. If left unchecked, this desire can manifest in various social settings, such as schools and workplaces. Therefore, God provided two commands to maintain control over this desire. First, men and women should lower their gaze and avoid staring at each other. Second, women should cover their bodies.⁷

These views were substantiated by, for example, the following passage in the Qur'an: "Say to the believing men that they cast down their glance and guard their

private parts..." (24:30), and "Say to the believing women that they cast down their glance and guard their private parts and reveal not their adornment except such as is outward and let them cast their veils over their bosoms and reveal not their adornment..." (24:31).⁸

Only women were ordered to cover their bodies because, according to Motahhari, men and women express their desires through different methods. Women seek to adorn themselves and capture the hearts of men. Men, by contrast, want to dominate women's bodies when they see their beauty. To avoid such desires, both men and women were commanded to lower their gaze. In addition, women were ordered to wear *hejabs* to cover their bodies, with the exception of their hands and face.

According to Motahhari, ensuring that women wear the *hejab* served as the first step toward achieving an ideal society based on God's precepts, which was lacking in Iran during the 1960s. His reasons for this are as follows:

The truth is that this situation of the lack of *hijab* [among Iranian women] is a disgrace that exists among us, and we were even ahead of Europe and America. It is among the characteristics of filthy, capitalist Western societies, and one of the results of the worship of money and of the covetous capitalists of the West; indeed, it is one of ways and means that they use to stupefy and desensitize humane societies and compel them to consume their products. (Motahhari 2000: 85/ Ridgeon 2021: 119)

According to Motahhari, the *hejab* was missing in Iran because the country had been under the influence of the "covetous capitalists of the West" and was unknowingly poisoned by their control.

Ali Shariati's Hejab

Motahhari's argument regarding the *hejab* was later supported by Ali Shariati (1933–1977). Shariati, a Muslim sociologist, discussed various issues related to Islamic teachings. His style attracted the attention of young people. Shariati's lectures and writings faced government interference because they were highly popular. However, after being imprisoned a few times, he left Iran in 1977 and passed away at the age of 44 in London, where he had been granted asylum.⁹

In 1976, a year prior to his death, Shariati published an essay entitled *Hejab*. The

primary theme of the essay was determining methods through which Iranian women could be encouraged to wear the *hejab*, instead of following Western fashion trends. According to Shariati, some women felt ashamed while wearing the *hejab* because it was an old-fashioned garment related to customs and traditions. However, despite being regarded as a newer trend, Western fashion was forced on people through colonialism. The *hejab* was attire that served as a resounding “no” to 50 years of conspiracies, exclusion, and nefarious schemes. In recent years, a gradual increase has been noted in the number of Iranian women opting to wear the *hejab* in an effort to counter Western colonialism and consumerism, and proudly displaying their social, historical, and cultural values, and demonstrating their faith as believers (Shari’ati 2012: 381–382/ Bakhtiar 1996: 48–49).

The 50 years of conspiracies, exclusion, and nefarious schemes refer to the reign of two Pahlavi kings, which began in 1925. The *hejab* served as a means of rejecting their reigns during which the nation endured colonialism and the negative influences of Western capitalism. Moreover, the status of a proper attire was accorded to the *hejab* for women who would shoulder a new era by restoring their ideal values and faith.

1.4. Process of Popularizing Islamic Norms

The Iranian Revolution and Compulsory Wearing of the *Hejab*

Iran witnessed rapid economic growth in the 1970s due to a sudden increase in oil revenues. However, the influx of people from rural areas gave rise to urban slums, and disparities developed in various societal aspects, such as the economy, living environment, education, and public health. During this period, the poor, who comprised the majority of the population, became increasingly dissatisfied with the Shah. This led to the formation of an anti-monarchical movement by various political forces, such as communism, socialism, and Islamism.

A revolution broke out in 1979. On February 1, Ruhollah Khomeini—regarded as the de facto leader of the revolution—returned from Paris, where he had been living in exile, to replace the Shah, who had left the country for medical treatment. The interim government took office on February 11, after being recognized by the military.

This revolution marked the beginning of a new battle. Those who had remained united based on anti-monarchical slogans and stances lost cohesion after losing their common enemy, the Shah (Sakurai 2001: 23). Two weeks after the Revolution, on February 26, women who had been involved in the anti-monarchical movement were

addressed during a surprise announcement regarding the abolishment of the Family Protection Act. This law was established in 1967 and is sensitive to gender equality issues. For example, under classical Islamic law, men could unilaterally divorce their wives, whereas under the Family Protection Act, both men and women were required to file lawsuits in court to attain divorce. Moreover, following an amendment in 1975 to prevent underage marriage, the minimum age for marriage increased from 15 to 18 years for women and from 18 to 20 years for men. However, these provisions were abolished by the new government, which regarded them as “un-Islamic.”¹⁰

Furthermore, on March 3, the positions of female judges were abolished, and on March 6, Ayatollah Khomeini, who had become the supreme leader of Iran, reportedly decreed that women must wear the *hejab* at their workplaces. The first major protest against these developments occurred on March 8, on the occasion of International Women's Day, when a crowd of thousands of people, primarily women, took to the streets and marched toward the office of Mehdi Bazargan (1907–1995), who was the then Prime Minister (February 1979–November 1979), and the Ministry of Justice building, shouting slogans such as “freedom,” “no tyranny,” and “no forced *hejab*.”¹¹ The police fired shots at the demonstrators to warn them, and a few citizens also attempted to block the demonstrators' path. Two days later, on March 10, another demonstration was conducted against the compulsory wearing of the *hejab*. On the same day, the prime minister announced that Khomeini's remarks had been misinterpreted, and no plans were set to make the *hejab* compulsory. The government's position was also officially released the following day, and issues related to the *hejab* seemed to have been resolved.

However, on March 29, a gender segregation rule was announced for beaches, followed by a similar rule for all sports facilities a few days later. On March 30, the revolutionary committee punished a few male and female adulterers by flogging them. In April, a decision was made to abolish coeducation. The new government thus gradually began the spatial separation of men and women and started to exercise control over their interactions.

Khomeini's “administrative revolution” was announced in June 1980, and women working for government agencies were ordered to wear the *hejab*. Thousands of people once again took to the streets and visited Abolhasan Banisadr (1933–2021), the president (February 1980–June 1981), to submit a petition. Although he persuaded them that he wanted women to wear the *hejab* in an effort to “fight consumerism

and maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the workplace,” he also promised to suitably address the issue. However, the government’s policies on the *hejab* remained unchanged.

In the summer of 1980 and thereafter, the prosecutor’s office, the Revolutionary Committee, and the Agency for the Fight Against Social Corruption intervened and enforced the compulsory wearing of the *hejab* in public institutions and private organizations. A poster entitled *Pattern of Islamic Hejab* was released by the Agency for the Fight Against Social Corruption and Agency for Public Education in Iran (Shirazi 2001: 105). This poster depicted an image of two women whose bodies were completely covered by a scarf and black coat or *chador*, except for their face and hands. The poster also included a sentence that is claimed to be Khomeini’s *fatwa* (opinions regarding Islamic law): “It is an obligation for women to cover all their body parts, except for their face and hands up to the wrists.” The poster also stated:

Working sisters must observe the following: (a) At the place of work, they must appear in full cover in conformity with the presented models without any sort of adornments; (b) The color of the manteau [the outer gown] should, preferably, be black, dark blue, brown, or dark gray; (c) The use of tight and fashionable clothing and any sort of makeup is prohibited. Committed brothers and sisters, we are ready to receive your constructive opinions and suggestions with regard to fighting social corruption. (*Ibid.*)

This method was used to regulate how women covered their bodies. Policing was reinforced on the streets, and women who did not follow the new rules were frequently harassed.

In 1983, a penalty of up to 74 lashes was prescribed for women who did not wear *hejabs* in public. Later, in 1987, a law was established prescribing cautionary guidance, warning, imprisonment, and flogging for the retailers who sells clothing that are “against the *shari’a* (religious law) and corrupt public morals.”¹² In 1996, the punishment for women who did not wear the *hejab* was further intensified, with a prison sentence ranging from 10 days to 2 months¹³.

“Death of a Mannequin” by Mehrangiz Kar

What effect did such an enforcement of norms regarding attire have on the hearts and minds of women? To examine this issue, “Death of a Mannequin”, an essay

written by Mehrangiz Kar (1944–),¹⁴ a female Iranian lawyer, scholar, and activist, is discussed below. In this essay, Kar focuses on mannequins at a Western clothing store to describe how wearing the *hejab* became compulsory in Iranian society. The essay begins as follows:

I can never forget the day in Tehran when a few extra inches were added to the short skirts of mannequins in the shop windows. I witnessed with my own eyes armed officials entering a clothes shop. With their guns, they pointed to the naked leg of a female mannequin and stared into the frightened face of the shop owner. (Kar 2006: 30)

Kar recalls that the incident occurred in 1979. Women glanced at the shop window and laughed, stating “They are not powerful enough to make us change our style—that is why they have made the mannequins look more Islamic ...” (*ibid.*: 30). However, when the rumor spread that officials were utilizing force and spraying acid on women’s faces and skin, women began to experience “the shadow of fear” (*ibid.*: 32).

In the Iran–Iraq War, which started in September 1980 and lasted until the August 1988 ceasefire, boys were drafted and “martyred.” Slogans were inscribed on the walls of cities reading “My sister, your veil is even more powerful than my blood. Signature: the martyr” (*ibid.*: 33). Therefore, not wearing the *hejab* was regarded as a criminal act of betrayal against Iran and the Islamic Republic.

During this period, “luscious hair” was removed from mannequins by shop owners, thus rendering them bald because shop owners did not want to be found guilty by “mobile Islamic moral courts”—sports cars from which the officials meted out rulings. Concurrently, women began to reluctantly cover their hair with veils when they walked on the streets in response to the rumor that they would be flogged if they did otherwise. Changes were also made to other parts of the mannequins. Gradually, the color of the mannequin faces faded away. The rouge of their lipsticks and blush evaporated (*ibid.*: 33–34). Eventually, the owners of clothing stores removed the heads of mannequins to ensure the survival of their businesses. “A diagonal surface replaced the necks of these beheaded dolls, on which the owners had now thrown long and dark scarves” (*ibid.*: 35).

In post-revolutionary Iran, women wore the *hejab* as a symbol of their resistance to Western colonialism and consumerism, or to portray their religious faith, as was

expected of them. In addition, the fear imposed by guns and acid attacks, posters and slogans, news reports, rumors, and mobile Islamic courts played a key role in women's selection of their attire. Published in 2006, "Death of a Mannequin" also describes how Iranian women subsequently began to express their resistance and individuality through the *hejab*. "They confounded the enforced values and created their own fashion out of Islamic veil" (*ibid.*: 36).

Coats became shorter, and more attractive colors and patterns, as well as more elegant materials, were utilized. Despite the risks of arrest, fines, or being sent to corrective classes, Faegheh Shirazi—a scholar of Middle Eastern studies—noted that, "every day the Iranian women protest the compulsory hijab decrees with small but visible defiance, wearing their hijabs too low or wearing a small hijab barely covering their heads, wearing tight pants and short *manteau*, following colorful seasonal hues, wearing makeup and nail polish" (Shirazi 2019: 24). This occurred during the same period in which the fashion industry related to the *hejab* began to grow. This was followed by governmental involvement in promoting Islamic fashion by the organization of shows and publication of magazines (*ibid.*: 24–26).

This was the case in Iran. Let us now consider the case of Egypt.

2. Creation of Islamic Norms in Contemporary Egypt

2.1. *Hijab* as Fashion

Hijab Fashion is one of Egypt's first full-fledged fashion magazine, focusing solely on the *hijab*. Launched in 2004, it was initially a thin, vertical booklet featuring photos of models wearing veils, interviews with women who had decided to wear veils, and information about trendy shoes and bags. Several years later, the magazine's size and content underwent radical transformation and became similar to that of women's magazines in European countries. Many articles featured women without veils with such photographs, likely using Western-looking models. On the front cover of one issue, a model in loose clothing and a veil adorned herself with accessories and facial makeup (Figure 4).¹⁵

The Iranian magazine *Shima* was published from a government-related association, whereas *Hijab Fashion* had no traces of official involvement. The following is an explanation of how the practice of wearing veils spread across Egyptian society.



Figure 4. Front page of *Hijab Fashion* (2014).

2.2. Unveiling in the Early 20th Century

Until the 19th century, regardless of their birthplace, social class, or religion, Egyptian women covered their bodies entirely with the *habara* or *milaya* (wraps) and their faces with the *burqu'* or *niqab* (face veils) (Figure 5). This situation transformed toward the end of the 19th century, after the establishment of modern nation-states.

In Egypt, similar to modern Iran, veils were associated with the oppression of women and societal regression. In the latter half of the 1900s, students attending



Figure 5. Egyptian women demonstrating in the anti-British movement in 1919. Wikimedia commons.

Christian schools started to forgo their veils. Eventually, older Christians, as well as students attending public schools, followed suit (Baron 1989: 379).

Since the end of the 19th century, there have been debates among Muslim intellectuals regarding the type of attire commanded by God. In these debates, the word *hijab* attracted attention. At the time, this word referred to a full body covering and face veil, as well as the segregation of women and the prohibition of interaction among men and women (Sugiura 2022). However, women shunned the *hijab* within a few decades. Although laws that required women to take their veils off were not enforced, Westernization resulted in the replacement of traditional dresses and coverings with European clothing. A growing number of women began to study and work alongside men at schools and workplaces without veils, especially under the socialist government of Gamal Abd al-Nasser (1918–1970) during the mid-20th century. At the end of the 1960s, some women wore miniskirts (Figure 6).

However, a new trend emerged at the beginning of the 1970s. The number of women wearing covering clothing called “the Islamic clothing (*al-ziyy al-Islami*),” or the *hijab*, gradually increased in Egypt. This development is examined in the following section.



Figure 6. Egyptian women wearing miniskirts in *Radio and TV* magazine (1970/5/9).

2.3. Formation of Islamic Norms

Tabarruj (Adorning Oneself) by Ni‘mat Sidqi

The booklet *Tabarruj* was published in 1967 and is regarded as a catalyst for the revival of the *hijab* in Egypt. The author, Ni‘mat Sidqi,¹⁶ studied at a French school and

became enthusiastic about studying Islam around the 1940s. During her pilgrimage to Mecca, she met Muhammed Hamid al-Fikki (1892–1959), a renowned Islamic scholar. Under his guidance, she began to read religious literature and, on Fridays, listened to his sermons together with her family. She also conducted study sessions for women who wanted to learn about Islam and eventually gained popularity as a preacher (Maclarney 2015: 110–111).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Sidqi composed many religious booklets for women, and *Tabarruj* was the first of these publications. The title, *Tabarruj*, was taken from a passage of the Qur'an (33:33), which states that God commanded Muhammad's wives as follows: "Do not adorn yourselves (*tabarruj*) as you did before Islam." The booklet begins by explaining the author's intent:

Egyptian women were humiliating themselves by exposing their bodies and feminine parts on the streets, in public places, and on the beaches. It brought more pain to my heart than anything else. I witnessed men and women in this society not simply overlooking such depravity, but also being gratified, pleased, and entertained. They do not pay attention to what is happening around them. For this reason, they fall into deviation, and they disbelieve God and His book (The Qur'an) ... I took to writing, although I am powerless, with fear and hope in my heart to stop this evil. I prayed for God's help so that I could do something about this situation. (Sidqi 1972: 7)

Sidqi stated that her heart ached when she observed women wearing Western style short skirts on the streets and revealing swimsuits at the beaches, as well as when she saw people being gratified and pleased by women wearing such attire. She decided to inform people that *tabarruj*—displaying one's beauty—was forbidden by God. Moreover, according to Sidqi, wearing the *hijab*—a wide, loose garment that covers one's beauty and hair—was an act commanded by God.

The book cites two reasons for the prohibition of *tabarruj* and the obligation to wear the *hijab*. The first reason is the Qur'an; regarding God's reason for prohibiting *tabarruj*, the author cites 33:33, which states that God commanded Muhammad's wives to avoid dressing up as they did before Islam; 30:30, which states that God determined the nature of human beings; and 17:32, which states "Do not go near adultery." She explained that God created humans such that men and women were attracted to

and desired each other. However, God commanded that this desire must only be expressed within the context of marriage. If a woman exhibits her beauty outside of her marriage, men's desires will be provoked. God prohibited *tabarruj* to prevent the chaos, corruption, and terrible harm that would spread in society because of this provocation.

Regarding the obligation to wear the *hijab*, the book cites 24:31 (which was mentioned earlier in Section 1.3), and 33:59, which states: "O Prophet! Say to your wives and daughters and the believing women that they draw their outer garments (*jilbab*) close to them; so it is more proper that they may be known and not hurt."¹⁷ Regarding the latter, Sidqi noted the rampant harassment faced by women on the streets and in the markets of modern Egypt, a problem caused by people's disobedience to God's commands. She also wrote: "*Jilbab* (in the Qur'an 33:59) refers to a loose-fitting garment. By covering their bodies with a wide garment, women demonstrate their chastity, piety, and modesty. In this way, they will not suffer vulgar harassment, ruin their days by receiving shameless stares, or have indecent and humiliating words said to them" (*ibid.*: 32).

The second reason is based on the author's personal experiences. The book's introduction includes the following recollection: At some point, Sidqi found herself in a dire situation because of a worsening wound after a tooth extraction. "My cheek swelled as though it was about to burst. My neck and head swelled, and my eyelids were heavily shut. Surgeons and internists were perplexed about my condition. Nothing could be done about my condition medically, and medications were useless" (*ibid.*: 13). Sidqi saw her red, swollen face, and the bandage wrapped around it as though it were a *hijab* and believed this to be God's punishment for adorning herself with cosmetics and clothing and refusing to wear the *hijab*. She wrote that, as she spent time feeling remorseful of her past and grateful to God for enabling her to realize her mistakes, she was miraculously healed from that condition.

Sidqi believed that the "depravity" rampant in Egypt before the establishment of a system requiring the use of the *hijab* had been caused by people's ignorance about Islam and their carelessness. In study sessions with other women, and in the book that she wrote 30 years later, she called for a recovery of religious knowledge and awareness.

2.4. Process of Popularizing Islamic Norms

Hijab and Public Morality

The first edition of *Tabarruj* was published during a period when an increasing number of Egyptian women were creating inroads into higher education and labor markets.¹⁸ This was also the period immediately before religious revivalist movements established a foundation, particularly among university students (El Guindi 1981).¹⁹ This booklet was issued by a religious publisher and must have been passed along and read by women and men participating in the movement. Subsequently, many editions of *Tabarruj* were released by different publishers in a similar format. More than a decade later, numerous sermons have been delivered and booklets regarding women's *hijab* have been published.²⁰

Similar to the author of *Tabarruj*, these sermons and publications emphasized that wearing the *hijab* is an obligation for Muslim women, as prescribed in the Qur'an. The relationship between the *hijab* and social morality was transformed into the key issue. For example, an account by Muhammad Mutawalli al-Sha'rawi (1911–1998), a prominent Islamic scholar and preacher in modern Egypt, titled "*Hijab—Why?*" stated that the purpose of the *hijab* is to protect society from temptation and confusion. "It stabilizes women's position and allows them to live in peace. (If there is *hijab*, women would not have to worry) that their husbands might be seduced by a woman, might marry another woman, might not come back, when they go out" (al-Sha'rāwī 1998: 107).

In the latter half of the 20th century, the *hijab* became a tool for preventing male lust and stabilizing Egyptian society. In addition, the *hijab* served to protect the purity of the hearts, bodies, and dignity of women. Preachers and writers mentioned that, if the *hijab* is worn for this purpose, it must "cover the woman's entire body," "not being decorative in and of itself," and must be "loose and not adhering to the body" (Goto 2014: 149–152).

Hijab and Religious Faith

Despite the advice and warnings regarding the use of the *hijab* to maintain social morality being grounded in the Qur'an, words and expressions indicating a connection among the *hijab*, personal experiences, and religious faith was the second reason noted by Sidqi for wearing *hijab* and gained prominence among others. The most widely known cases of the latter phenomenon were narratives of "repentant" female

celebrities. Since the 1980s, famous female actors, singers, belly dancers, and announcers in Egypt have been opting to wear the *hijab* and announcing their retirement from the entertainment industry, although they could have continued to thrive in their careers. They were called “repentant artists” because they utilized religious language to explain their actions.²¹

One such entertainer was Afaf Shoaib (1948–), an actor who had been actively involved in movies and television dramas for nearly 20 years, since 1972. She decided to wear the *hijab* and retire from the entertainment industry in 1992, when she was in her mid-40s. A magazine featuring remarks from these female entertainers includes an account detailing how Shoaib found faith in religion.

As she started reading religious books and expanded her knowledge about Islam, she realized that she had been following the wrong lifestyle. “For example, I wore makeup, exposed my hair, and worked with men. Some people might say that everyone does these things. However, these are grievous sins before God. As I continued to read religious books, I became scared of what was waiting for me. I was afraid of God’s wrath. I was fasting, worshiping, giving alms, and going on pilgrimages. However, these were not enough.” As she learned more about religion, Shoaib understood that it was a sin to wear makeup and expose her hair. She thus feared God’s wrath and began wearing the *hijab*, after being guided by her reading of the Qur’an (Abū al-‘Aynayn 1999: 133–134).²²

Many accounts by “repentant artists” focused on their growing faith and experiences about feeling God’s presence. These accounts spread throughout Egypt, accompanied by images of dozens of well-known women, along with normative narratives regarding the *hijab*, Qur’anic verses, and social morality (Goto 2014: 209–258).

During the early 2000s, some female celebrities began to wear the *hijab* for moral activities, such as charity concerts and appearances on programs dealing with religious subjects.²³ Around this time, the *hijab* was established as a fashion genre in Egyptian society. Stores specializing in the long dress, called the *abaya*, scarves, and face coverings, opened throughout the cities. Fashion shows were exclusively conducted with the aim of displaying the *hijab*, and various magazines were launched. Many famous female celebrities appeared on the cover pages of these newly established magazines and shared their thoughts and experiences regarding their faith and attire.²⁴

Although the “repentant artists” did not represent all Muslim women in Egypt,

they were, undeniably, the pioneers in the growing religious revivalist movement among the youth. Unlike Iran, wherein the imposition of values was lamented, an increasing number of women in Egypt claimed that they had realized the necessity of the *hijab* and began wearing it willingly. Unlike in Iran, wherein the “death of mannequins” was observed during the 1980s, people began to proactively place veils over mannequins in Egypt. The image of an ideal Muslim woman was presented to society, and the veil thus became a proper attire for Muslim women.

Conclusion

This chapter examined and compared the spread of the practice of wearing the veil—the *hejab* in Iran and *hijab* in Egypt—during the latter half of the 20th century. A common aspect between the two cases was that it started with spreading an “Islamic” perspective that sexual desires must be controlled in society, interactions between men and women should be restricted, and women must cover their bodies to aid in maintaining the morality of society. This was a common logic behind the formation of new norms regarding the manner of dressing for Muslim women in these two societies.

There were some differences between the two societies in terms of the background against which the norms were formed. For instance, the *hejab* was also considered a means of resisting Western colonialism and consumerism in Iran, whereas in Egypt, it was emphasized to relate to the religious experiences and faith of women. The final element may have attracted Egyptian women to voluntarily follow the new norms of wearing *hijabs*, as the religious movement gradually started spreading in society. For Iran, enforcement related to wearing the *hejab* played a crucial role in establishing Islamic norms related to dressing for women. In both cases, the veil became popular attire among Muslim women, even constituting a fashion statement, as suggested by magazines published in the early 21st century.

The contents of these magazines indicate that these norms were not simply created. The Iranian magazine *Shima* featured two women in a meeting, with one holding a design sketch in her hands. At first glance, their attire may appear similar to that of the women depicted next to Khomeini’s *fatwa* published earlier. However, a closer look reveals several differences, such as sophisticated designs, high-end materials, and shoes with somewhat higher heels. Meanwhile, the majority of the models in the *Hijab Fashion* magazine “adorn themselves” with accessories and

elaborate facial makeup, although they were wearing loose clothing and head coverings.

These findings suggest that norms are subject to changes in time, so as to sustain a motivation for women to abide by them. The clothes worn by these Iranian and Egyptian women reflect not only how Islamic norms were created, but also how they developed.

Notes

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- 1 In this chapter, “veil” is used as a general term to refer to the head and body covering worn by Muslim women. However, in certain forms and contexts, veils will be referred to as either *hejab* or *hijab*, based on the requirement.
- 2 Numerous studies have focused on recent movements regarding the use of veils. Almila and Inglis (2018) presented one of the most recent studies that examined both compulsory and voluntary veiling in various parts of the world.
- 3 For more details, see Goto 2019. Shah enacted the “Law of uniformization of dress for Iranian nationals inside the country” in December 1928. Under this law, all men aged above seven years, with the exception of religious figures, were required to wear the Pahlavi hat, short coat, shirt, and trousers, in European style.
- 4 Regarding the restrictions and abolishment of the *hejab* during the reign of Reza Shah, this chapter referred to Panāhī 1993, Paidar 1995, Baker 1997, and Shirazi 2018.
- 5 For the biography, thoughts, and influences of Motahhari and his writing, see Dabashi 2017: 147–215 and Ridgeon 2021: 90–126.
- 6 Ridgeon noted that in *Question on the Hejab*, Motahhari intended to convince two different audiences: conservative seminarians who believed that women should cover themselves completely, including their face and hands, and modern, secular individuals who believed that the *hijab* was a tradition of the past. Ridgeon also highlighted the work as a “wake-up call” to established seminarians, thereby inviting them to openly discuss women’s issues (Ridgeon 2021: 103–104).
- 7 Motahhari 2000: 75–81. For translation, see Bakhtiar 1992: 9–14 and Ridgeon 2021: 112–116.
- 8 The translation of the Qur’an provided here is derived from Bakhtiar 1992: 47. Detailed discussions regarding other passages are also included in Chapter 5 of the original book (Motahhari 2000: 115ff). See also Ridgeon 2021: 109–126.
- 9 On Ali Shari’ati, see Bakhtiar 1996, Dabashi 2017: 102–146, and Akhavi 2018.

- 10 For policies related to women after the Iranian Revolution, this chapter referred to Paidar 1995, Esfandiari 1997, Shirazi 2001, 2018, Sedghi 2007, and others.
- 11 There are videos uploaded online that show how the march progressed. See, for example, “March 8, 1979 Iranian Women March Against Hijab and Islamic Laws” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxGYLk92edY>, accessed February 2, 2022).
- 12 For the text of law, see the webpage of Islamic Parliament Research Center of The Islamic Republic of IRAN (<https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91340>, accessed February 2, 2022).
- 13 On the development of the laws on *hejab*, see Justice for Iran 2014: 10–14.
- 14 Kar is one of the earliest and most outspoken critiques of the Iranian Islamic regime policies on women and human rights. She has written extensively on the subject, including “Iranian Law and Women’s rights” (2007), an article that focused on the overall changes in circumstances that Iranian women experienced during the 20th century. Her recent interview, wherein her experiences and perspectives are detailed, can be heard in “Roqe Ep #92 Mehrangiz Kar” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIM0VGg0u50>, accessed February 2, 2022).
- 15 *Hijab Fashion* was originally published in Nasr City, Egypt, by Contact, a company focusing on advertising, design, printing, and publishing. At some point, the publisher was changed to Media Pages Limited in London, UK, which also has an office in Egypt.
- 16 For the biography of Sidqi, I have referred to Maclarney 2015. Her *Tabarruj* have also been introduced as “popular and influential treatments” in Hoffman-Ladd 1987: 29 and a writing of the “Salafi School” in Bouras 2017: 33–34.
- 17 The translation of the Qur’an here is extracted from Motahhari 1992: 87.
- 18 Howard-Merriam (1979) argued that the government policy of the 1952 regime for equal access to education and guaranteeing jobs to university graduates opened up the opportunity for women to enroll in higher education and become employed.
- 19 El Guindi (1981) presented an account of the growth of the Islamic movement during the 1970s and widespread veiling, with relation to the sociocultural change brought about by the development programs of the Nasser regime and *Infitah*, or the open-door policy of Anwar Sadat’s presidency.
- 20 Regarding the popularization of religious booklets and cassette sermons, see Eickelman and Anderson 1999 and Hirschkind 2006. I have collected 36 booklets and 13 cassette sermons on the *hijab* during my stay in Cairo between 2003 and 2005 (Goto 2014: 122–124).
- 21 For more on this, see Van Nieuwkerk 2013 and Goto 2014. Based on her long-term fieldwork, Karin Van Nieuwkerk provided detailed accounts of the phenomenon. Furthermore, she elaborated the transformation of the social, political, and spiritual environment in Egypt since the 1980s through the analysis of the phenomenon. In my work, I explored the logic behind the narratives of the “repentant artists,” seeking the connection between their narratives on death, suggestive dreams, and strange feelings that occurred during their daily rituals and the decision to wear the *hijab*.
- 22 For a recent narrative of Shoab, see the work of Van Nieuwkerk, who conducted an interview with her in 2005 (2013: 98–104).

- 23 See Van Nieuwkerk 2013: 186ff. Since the advent of satellite technology during the end of the 1990s, new TV channels for different genres flourished in Egypt and other Arabic speaking countries. Some of the channels offered casual style religious programs, which became popular among viewers. On these channels and programs, see Moll 2010.
- 24 The aforementioned fashion magazine, *Hijab Fashion*, often featured female celebrities on the cover and included interviews with them.

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