

# TO VEIL OR NOT TO VEIL: COMPULSORY HIJAB AND PORNOGRAPHY

Mozhgan Malekan

*University of Cincinnati*

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## Abstract

Until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic world consisted of powerful empires without any need to Europe. By the advent of industrialization and modernity, Islamic empire began to decline in power. As the result of need of industrial economies for raw materials and markets as well as political and economic competition, European countries colonized the Islamic countries. It was the starting point for Orientalism as well as Islamism and extremism. Three themes are distinguished in extremism: nostalgia, otherness, and religious machismo. While in democratic countries, gender roles and sexuality are regulated by individuals or their families, in Islamized societies that are ruled by extremists, state laws regulate them. Extremist leaders are against the concept of individual rights as a Western idea. They believe that in a Muslim society, individual rights are meaningless. The Islamic priority is Muslim community, so the other concepts must be sacrificed to save the community. In the light of such a belief, their official policies justify any desexualization, such as the hijab and punishment of adultery, of women outside their homes. In such societies, women are considered 'others' and are dehumanized. Forcing women to wear the hijab can be considered as an implication to degradation of women. Such dehumanization and objectification serve as hatred of women, so compulsory hijab is an attempt to humiliate and degrade the female body. Women in such societies are considered sex objects, robots, and an agent for corrupting the safety and security of society.

Keywords: tradition; modernity; Islamized countries; extremism

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## INTRODUCTION

Until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic world consisted of powerful empires without any need for Europe (Tohidi, 2003). Although these Muslim societies were diverse, they shared the same cultural values and religious teachings. By the advent of industrialization and modernity, the Islamic empire began to decline in power (Tohidi, 2003). As the result of industrial economies' needs for raw materials, markets and political and economic competition, European countries colonized the Islamic countries. This was the starting point for Orientalism (Leitch et al., 2010) as well as Islamism and extremism.

In such a condition, Muslims, who imagined Islam was the perfect religion chosen by God, tried to figure out the reasons for the inferiority of Muslims. To solve the problem, some Muslim intellectuals believed the best response was retrogressive in nature, so they challenged the modernity and found it

to be a manner of Westernization (Tohidi, 2003). The other elites suggested progressive ways to redefine Islam and form a secular nationalism. As Tohidi (2003) pointed out, "Progressive response coming from the newly formed intelligentsia and political elites (a new stratum of professional military, bureaucratic, or landowning intelligentsia, modern-educated middle-class professionals, and technicians) who were trained in western techniques" (p. 34). On the middle point, some scholars believe in accepting those aspects of modernity that were proper for Muslim societies, and rejecting the improper ones. They emphasized empowerment of the people over improper, traditional social and cultural conditions (Alini and Bijani, 2013).

Progressive intellectuals tried to change the traditional characteristics of Islamic societies into modern countries, but at the same time, as the modernity was developing, anti-modernism was growing in its womb. To figure out the inconsistent

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Corresponding Author: malekamm@mail.uc.edu

situations of these societies with regard to modernity, some explanations are required.

### **Tradition, Modernity, and Modernization**

Tradition is the heritage that transfers from parents to offspring, from one generation to another, to keep customs, hierarchy of values, and beliefs. Traditional societies focus on the past because it has been tested over and over. They share some similarities in their features; these features include:

- Relying on established traditions as a way of social life;
- Slight tendency for social change (Alini and Bijani, 2013)

Modernity, on the other hand, celebrates the humanities' abilities in changing the world. Additionally, its institutions as well as industrial productions and economy are based on market (Alini and Bijani, 2013). More importantly, modernity is accompanied by democracy and limitations in power.

There exists a difference between modernity and modernization. In Third World countries, particularly in the Middle East, modernization refers to economic growth, industrialization, and the transformation of rural societies to secular and urban ones which is led by an authoritarian leader and serves the interests of a privileged minority (Nagpal, 2010). Modernity, on the other hand, includes a vast area that comprises of political and cultural growth as well as economic dimensions. Accordingly, with socio-economic development and industrialization, many traditional customs and beliefs will be switched towards higher individualism. In the process of modernization, there is a movement from a traditional, simple, community-like setting toward a rational, complex and business-like social and economic arrangement (Nagpal, 2010). As history demonstrates, modernism in European countries brought about social justice, political democracy, and secularism, but most of these factors were absent in Middle Eastern and Islamic countries.

In such countries, industrialization and urbanization were the two prominent factors in the process of moving towards modernization. Secularism was the only aspect of modernity that was considered in this process but the cultural norms remained

unchangeable because they did not change automatically in this process. In Muslim societies, cultural change is "path dependent"; this means that cultural norms and values, which are based on Islamic teachings, have enduring effects that influence development and resist change (Haghighat-Sordellini, 2010).

Modernity often reminds people of empowerment, improvement and freedom for women (Haghighat-Sordellini, 2010), which means that a change in constitution and cultural norms and values is needed to establish democracy (El-Feki, 2013). One of the most significant changes in Islamic societies is felt in the family, which is often undemocratic. The basis of a democratic country is on democratic families, and democratic marriages (Mill, 1970). In democratic countries and family, women and men have equal rights, so women are empowered to realize their rights (Mill, 1970). Islamized countries, on the other hand, have collectivistic views, and prioritize the society. The collectivistic system is not based on individualistic rights, so governments, and even ordinary people, are allowed to restrict the people in the name of keeping the society secure. In such a standpoint, the family is considered as the base of the society and has a specific status, so its safety must be preserved.

Such a society does not recognize human rights, because human rights are based on equality in rights between all people (Mill, 1970). This is why these societies are based on patriarchy. In a patriarchal system, families rather than individuals are the building blocks of social order (Tohidi, 2003). Obviously, in such societies, egalitarian and equality in rights between men and women are rejected. Some argue that men and women are biologically different (De Beauvoir, 1996), Islamists/extremists use this argument and believe that men and women have complementary but not equal roles, and consequently they have unequal rights. Such an incorrect way of thinking considers masculinity to be the scale for defining gender roles and rights (De Beauvoir, 1996). There exist some differences between men and women, biologically and physiologically, but this does not indicate superiority of one gender over another (De Beauvoir, 1996).

Descriptions of the structures of everyday life in patriarchal societies reveal that the family as an institution enacts a gendered division of labor, as it normatively relegates most women to the private sphere and most men to the public sphere (De Beauvoir, 1996). However, there is an extraordinarily unequal consequence for men and women resulting from the normativities of the public/private distinction. As long as women's natural social role consisted of reproducing the private sphere of family, motherhood, and marriage, women's access to the public sphere of work, decision making, law making, knowledge production, culture production, and politics remained minimal. As individuals and as a group or class, women did not enjoy equal liberties, parities, and opportunities in the public sphere as compared to those enjoyed by most men (Engels, 1993). The public/private distinction revealed an additional factor. Although society on the whole promotes its own social reproduction with natality policies, women, more than men, were expected to take on most of the responsibilities connected with social reproduction, such as childrearing and attending to family needs (Engels, 1993).

In fact, absolute tradition and full modernity can be considered as two polar sides of the same continuum. Different societies are located in different places on the continuum according to their conditions, but the situation of women with regard to their freedom, emancipation, and participation in the community is the most significant indicator in situating a society on this continuum (Phizacklea, 1983). Although world has been entered to post-modern era, traditional societies, Middle Eastern countries in particular, are still involved in a challenge between tradition and modernity.

An explanation is needed here; there is a crucial difference between an Islamic country and an Islamized country. An Islamized country is marked by a politicized Islam governing in both private and public lives and spheres of individuals, women in particular, whereas an Islamic society is a country where the majority of people are Muslim and Islamic beliefs and practices in private lives are dominant (Moghissi, 2009); Islamist societies are ruled by Islamists/extremists.

The majority of these societies are involved in a duality; they are bound by both tradition and modernization. In such societies, there exists a separation with Westernization, the realization of the importance of industrialization and technological advancement led them to modernization. On the other hand, traditional beliefs and practices based on religious laws, which are enforced by the Islamist fundamentalists/extremists, generate a traditional atmosphere in the society, especially in the case of women.

To understand the condition of societies under extremists and the situations of women there, different types of Islamism should be discussed. Islamists can encompass three different categories.

- *Quietists*-Apolitical groups or individuals whose concerns are only on religious institutions and seminary schools. They believe in the separation of state and religion, and consider clerics too beyond politics to involve themselves in the running of the state. (Moghissi, 1999);
- *Islamic liberal reformers*-They try to both reform their societies according to the principles of Islam, and at the same time, adjust Islam to the modernity and the new needs in the society (Moghissi, 1999);
- *Islamist fundamentalists/Extremists*-Fundamentalism refers to lack of rationality and is an attitude towards time (Moghissi, 1999). As mentioned above, Muslim intellectuals can be categorized into two groups, progressive (aforementioned) and retrogressive, regarding modernity. Fundamentalists/retrogressives imagine the "Islamic golden age" as the ideal past, and try to reconstruct society according to it. To restore the imaginary golden age (Tohidi, 2003), they do not tolerate any modern values and try to enhance traditional pre-modern norms and values. The fundamentalist belief is based on absolute total "truth." They believe that the subordination of Islamic societies is the result of their deviation from the absolute "truth," true Islam. In fact, fundamentalism emerged in reaction to

the inferiority, which was experienced by Muslim societies under colonialism, industrialization, modernity, and later Westernization (Tohidi, 2003).

The salient characteristic of an extremist society is its basis on a correct interpretation of the scripture, and its being modeled after the first Islamic state under *the Prophet Mohammad, the Messenger of Islam* (Kaya, 2000). Establishing such a society, extremists require the eradication of the corrupted situation and the state in power to purify the society (Barber, 1992). As Moghissi (2006) explained, “They look to the Quran not merely for its moral principles, but to find clues for the future of the world. Jihadist movements are similar in that they are determined to subjugate all aspects of human life—be they economic, political, cultural, aesthetic, familial, or personal—to the will of God, as declared in religious scripture” (p. 70).

To obtain this goal, they justify any brutal force (Moghissi, 2006). They consider themselves as righteous to regulate all aspects of public and private life. *Ayatollah Khomeini* in Iran, *Taliban* in Afghanistan, *ISIS* in Syria and Iraq, and *Hezbollah* and in Lebanon are prominent examples of fundamentalists. Two different types of fundamentalism can be distinguished with regard to their level of literacy:

- *High fundamentalists*-Are those who are highly trained and well-educated in scientific disciplines, most of them are educated in Western and modern countries, but at the same time, they believe in a violent irrational version of Islam. Generally, they support the low fundamentalists, financially and technically (Quzgane, 2006);
- *Low fundamentalists*-Are those who are not well educated in scientific disciplines, but believe in a violent irrational version of Islam (Quzgane 2006).

Although both of these groups oppose modernity, low fundamentalists represent their opposition in local dimensions while high fundamentalists show it in global aspects (Quzgane, 2006). However, despite ideological, political, and cultural differences between fundamentalist movements, they share

plenty of similarities. Three themes are distinguished in fundamentalism: nostalgia, otherness, and religious machismo (Tohidi, 2003).

Firstly, as mentioned above, they are all anti-modernity; obviously, any rejection of rationality and focus on the past will result in the rejection of enlightenment and modernity. Any individual rights, or separation of religion and state are meaningless in their viewpoint (Haghighat-Sordellini, 2012). However, a paradox is clear in their behavior and thoughts; Islamic fundamentalist leaders use modern living conditions and send their youth to modern educational institutions in the West. Students in religious schools use computers and the Internet and so forth. The majority of their leaders are living in luxurious modern mansions. It seems that fundamentalists are just against the ideas and ideals of modernity, not the products of modernization (Moghissi, 1999).

Secondly, extremists are anti-democracy because their focus is only on the Muslim society (Afshar, 2007). According to the Quran, non-Muslims are considered as “others” and are dehumanized. In such societies, those non-Muslims whose religions emerged before Islam, such as Jews, Christians, and so on, are considered to be second-class citizens. Those whose beliefs emerged after Islam, for example Baha’is or atheists, have no rights and live under severe pressures (Tohidi, 2003). Such beliefs make fundamentalists highly intolerant to other people, who are considered as “others” not “us.” Again, there is a paradox here; Muslims always criticize Westerners for considering Muslims to be “others,” but non-Muslims in their countries are under severe pressure and are considered to be “others” and second-class citizens. It seems that according to Muslim extremists, only Westerners are expected to act according to equal rights.

Thirdly, Islamic fundamentalists are all anti-feminism. They consider women to be a potential threat for Islamic society, and they must be controlled (Moaddel, 1998; Gerami and Lehnerer, 2001; Kazemzadeh, 2002). They emphasize patriarchy in order to restrict women, and limit their activities in the family. According to Haghighat-Sordellini (2012), “Patriarchy is considered a system that enables men to dominate women and maintain the

power and control of resources. Women-especially younger ones-have minimal power and are dependent on men” (p. 13-14). Therefore, patriarchal social structure is characterized by four dimensions include:

- *Male dimension*-Men hold the powerful roles while women hold the least ones.
- *Patriarchal control*-Women are controlled by men and experienced various kinds of abuse such as physical, psychological, and verbal in everyday lives.
- *Male identified*-Highly valued and most prestigious aspects of society are identified as male's characteristics, and the less valued ones as females'.
- *Male centricity*-Public sphere of the community is dedicated to men while women are marginalized (Haghighat-Sordellini, 2012).

#### **Nature and Culture of Islamized Society**

Extremists believe that women must take their roles in their family because of their specific biological and psychological nature and traits. Islamized culture is traditional, and patriarchal (Price, 2001). Since the majority of people in these societies are Muslim, tradition and cultural norms are rooted in Islam. For this group of people, extremists, *hijab* is a requirement for women; also, they believe women should take domestic roles while public roles are more appropriate for men. Polygamy and temporary marriage are acceptable and adulterous men are less punished than adulterous women, who are severely punished. Obviously, in such an environment, daughters' behaviors are more monitored than sons' behaviors (Price, 2001).

While in democratic countries, gender roles and sexuality are regulated by individuals or their families, in Islamized societies, state laws regulate them (Mahdavi, 2009). Extremist leaders are against the concept of individual rights, seeing it as a Western idea. They believe that in a Muslim society, individual rights are meaningless. The Islamic priority is Muslim community, so other concepts must be sacrificed to save the community. In the light of such a belief, their official policies justify any desexualization, such as *hijab*, punishment of adultery, and restricting women from going outside their homes (Yeganeh, 1993). In such societies,

women are considered “others” and are dehumanized. In fact, forcing women to wear the hijab can be considered as an implication to degradation of women. Such dehumanization and objectification serve as hatred of women, so compulsory hijab is an attempt to humiliate and degrade the female body. If pornography considers women to be sex objects in the West (Mackinnon, 2000), compulsory hijab refers to considering women as sex objects all around the world, especially in the East.

Muslim women have different approaches regarding wearing the hijab. Some believe that the hijab is a must for Muslim women and they are obliged to act according to God's will. Some other Muslim women believe that wearing the hijab is not necessary for Muslim women. Haddad et al. (2006) pointed out:

Some women express their allegiance to Islam in very public ways. Rejecting the social norms of Western culture, they try to dress, speak, and live in as close adherence as possible to what they understand to be the dictates of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. Others may practice Islam in private and with their families but do not choose to show publicly that they are Muslim (p. 8).

In 2000, Ghazal Read and Bartkowski explored how a sample of middle-class educated Muslim women in Turkey, negotiated their gender identities with regard to the suitability of the hijab. They explained that some Muslim women wear the hijab to demonstrate their belief about gender differences, while others are strongly motivated to wear the hijab as a mechanism for criticizing Western colonialism in the Middle East. Thus, the hijab for Muslim women has a range of meanings.

Ghazal Read and Bartkowski (2000) highlighted that veiled women not only offered religious reasons for wearing the hijab, but also presented arguments regarding the differences between masculinity and femininity to advocate for the propriety of the hijab; therefore, for many of the participants in her study, the notion of masculine hyper-sexuality and feminine vulnerability to the male sex drive was an essential reason to justify the rationale for the hijab. Those Muslim women who did not wear the hijab, on the other hand, argued that the hijab enforces gender differences that have created unsuitable conditions for

Muslim women (Ghazal Read and Bartkowski, 2000). According to many of the unveiled women, the hijab was imposed on Muslim women due to the unwillingness of Middle Eastern men to appropriately manage their sexual drive and their eagerness to dominate women.

Recently, some Muslim women protested against the hijab by posting an article in *the Washington Post* and challenging the concept of the hijab in Islam and among Muslim women. Nomani and Arafa (2015) stated,

We reject this interpretation that the “hijab” is merely a symbol of modesty and dignity adopted by faithful female followers of Islam. This modern-day movement, codified by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Taliban Afghanistan and the Islamic State, has erroneously made the Arabic word hijab synonymous with “headscarf.” This conflation of hijab with the secular word headscarf is misleading. “Hijab” literally means “curtain” in Arabic. It also means “hiding,” “obstructing” and “isolating” someone or something. It is never used in the Koran to mean headscarf (2015, December 21).

Muslims and people from Islamic cultures represent a growing proportion of the current population of immigrants and refugees worldwide (Hunter, 2002). It is estimated that the Muslim population in Europe is over 15 million, which places Islam as the second-largest religion in the continent after Christianity (Hunter, 2002). However, this population is highly heterogeneous (Moghissi, 2006), not only due to the internal differences in each society, class, ethnicity, rural–urban status, and sectarian affiliation, but also due to the national–cultural traits and their influence on each immigrant community as a result of their originating from different cultures and societies, alongside the integration policies of the host societies (Moghissi, 2006).

Some of these immigrants have a number of difficulties in integrating or adjusting themselves to Western culture; so sometimes, veiled women have different problems in Western countries, which are always accompanied with Islamized protests and demonstrations around the world. Again, there is a paradox here. Muslims, especially extremists, are always criticizing the West because of its behavior

towards veiled Muslim women in European countries. They claim that Westerners do not treat veiled Muslim women in accordance with human rights and force them to wear Western style dresses instead of letting them enjoy freedom of dress. However, women, either Muslim or non-Muslim, are forced to wear the hijab in Islamized societies. They do so under the excuse that human rights is a Western concept and that they do not believe in it, they only believe in Islamic rules. So the question is: how do Islamists expect that Westerners let women enjoy freedom of dress while women in their societies are not allowed to wear whatever they want?

In Islamized societies, women who personally do not believe in the hijab are forced to wear it by extremists or their male relatives, such as fathers, brothers, husbands, and so forth. Although in Islamic countries (such as the United Arab Emirates) women enjoy the freedom of dress, in Islamized societies (such as Iran and Saudi Arabia) or Islamist groups (such as ISIS and the Taliban) women are forced to wear the hijab. In such countries, exercise of physical and psychic forces can be seen either in a general scheme in the society and the public sphere as a whole, or in some families and the private sphere. The physical force (physical violence) engages threats of or use of physical behavior to enforce the government’s or men’s will upon women; this restricts women’s freedom, e.g., restricting the freedom of choice is used by the police force in public or the repercussions of injury or death are used by husbands, brothers, or fathers. Using psychic force corrupts women’s self-image, self-confidence, self-esteem, and wellbeing. The dominant belief in such countries is that women ask to be raped if they do not wear the hijab; they should have worn the hijab, and should not have been out so late at night. It is not considered that blame and responsibility for a criminal assault are the assailant’s, not the victim’s.

In all patriarchal societies, women are considered “Others,” so they are dehumanized. In Islamized countries, women are forced to wear the hijab as an excuse for making the society secure and keeping the women safe of violence and immoral actions. However, as Gore (1994) believed, it is necessary for a woman “To look suspiciously at what is taken for granted about the superiority of the ‘we’ who empower a ‘you’ an ‘Other’, and asks ‘What can

'We' do for 'You'?' (p. 430) This is an excuse to justify gender-based behavior to restrict women's freedom with the justification that women must be protected from immoral treatment.

According to Gheyntchi (2001) and Mahdi (2003) to achieve limitations on women, the Islamized societies apply three strategies: first, the rejection of women's rights through the statement that such rights are the product of Westernization. Second, it restricted the spatial maneuverability of women by segregating buses, university classes and many other areas of the public sphere into male and female regions, and forced women to wear the hijab. Third, it limited any communication between women and not-previously-known men.

It seems that the premises of pornography and the compulsory hijab are the same: that sexual aggression occurs within a patriarchal power structure. Pornography and the compulsory veiling are two extreme points of the same continuum of women's dehumanization. Such physical, sexual, and emotional abuses can be considered as stimuli to the social subordination of women (Mackinnon, 2000). Both pornography and the compulsory veiling cause objectification and dehumanization of women and communicate with one another based on the same reason: women are naturally inferior to men, and do not deserve respect, safety, or basic human rights. Violence against women is a consequence of an established gender inequality within society and of existing structure of power in gender relations. It is rooted in cultural patterns, especially in harmful influences of particular traditional practices or customs, education systems, religious beliefs and media influences. Violence against women perpetuates gender inequality and stands as an obstacle to achievement of equality.

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