Unfolding the Modern Hijab: From the Colonial Veil to Pious Fashion

Mihret Woldesemait

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Under the supervision of Prof. miriam cooke, Department of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies

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Trinity College of Arts and Sciences
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**Glossary**

**hijab** – “veil,” specifically the headscarf and more generally the practice of covering

**muhajiba/muhajabat** – veiled woman/veiled women

**abaya** – black “cloak” that is usually worn on top of other clothing

**jilbab** – long overcoat that is usually worn on top of other clothing

**niqab** – a head covering, usually black, with a slit open for the eyes

**haram** – “forbidden,” sinful

**sunnah** – written record of Prophet Muhammad’s life and teachings
Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of the appropriation and meaning of the *hijab* in the modern Middle East. During colonial times the veil’s depiction as a sign of backwardness, in social artifacts and in colonial discourse, was used to justify colonialism. Following the colonial period, indigenous scholars and other elites called for unveiling, seeing the *hijab* as an obstacle to “progress.” However, in the 1970s, a new veiling movement emerged that appropriated the veil as a sign of an authentic identity and an instrument to accommodate a changing modern world. This neo-veiling movement, furthermore, standardized a set of Islamic norms and practices that would use the veil as the embodiment of inner piety and ethical states. It is within this context that this thesis discusses contemporary pious fashion in Amman, Jordan. The ethics and aesthetics of veiling in Amman have again shifted the meaning and appropriation of the veil. Establishing an agreement or balance between piety and fashion/ethics and aesthetics in veiling is significant for contemporary urban residents of Amman. Furthermore, this balance has social significance and guides social and cultural interactions. Harmony, however, is not easily achieved; pious fashion is a complicated maze that is carefully navigated by veiled women.
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Introduction

My earliest memory of attending church every Sunday includes the torturous ceremony of my mother wrapping a white veil around my hair and tying a firm knot on my neck. I remember spending the first half of the three hours of the Ethiopian Orthodox service struggling to untie this knot and free myself from the veil. I not only found this piece of fabric on my hair ugly and hot: it was also uncomfortably constraining. Ethiopian Orthodox custom requires all women to don the veil in church. One of the oldest forms of Christianity, the Church shares veiling with most ancient world religions. Different forms of veiling can be found in Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. Because of my own experience with veiling in the context of my church, I was not curious about the Muslim girls in my school that wore the hijab (“veil” or “headscarf”): I understood their adoption of this clothing as a religious practice.

During the summer of 2011, I studied abroad in Turkey, an experience that opened my eyes to the aspect of the veil beyond religious practice. Upon my arrival in Istanbul, I had two strong yet contradictory observations. The first was this: although Turkey is 99% Muslim, all the women I saw as I gazed out of the van taking us to our dorm in the European side of Istanbul were unveiled. My second observation was that most of the models I saw on bright billboard ads were veiled women who at the same time were very fashionable. I was curious to know why these women in ads did not look anything like the women I saw on the street in front of my dorm, who wore miniskirts, crop tops, and sun dresses. I came to learn the hijab had been systematically stigmatized and banned as a sign of backwardness by the government of Ataturk (1881-1938), the revolutionary statesman and founder of modern Turkey. When I was in Turkey
in 2011 the stigmatization of the veil and the ban on the hijab in public spaces still remained. And yet ads in public spaces were allowed to feature veiled women. This contrast was already puzzling. Furthermore, as we traveled outside the bubble of European Istanbul, it became clear to me that in some parts of the city the billboard ads reflected real life. The day we went to the Fatih, a historic and diverse district in Istanbul that houses both a conservative religious community and high end Islamic fashion shops. I was surprised to see the line of stores selling fashionable Islamic clothing similar to what I saw on the billboards earlier. The hijab, which I had always associated with religion, piety and modesty, was here presented as an article of fashion. A woman frequenting such stores would spend a large sum to wear a brand-name hijab when she could spend a quarter of that amount and buy a generic scarf to cover her hair. After I returned to the United States I started to notice the different ways that the women, and even the young girls, at my church styled their veils in order to make them more aesthetically pleasing. I also noticed that some of my Muslim friends who veil are also among the most fashionable people I know.

My interest in the apparently paradoxical connections between veils and fashion was sparked again during my study abroad in Jordan. The first weekend I spent with my host family, I was nervous about how my younger host sister and I would communicate. She was the only member of my host family who did not speak any English or Fusha Arabic, the dialect that I know. To my delighted surprise it did not take long for us to bond over an age-old activity: “dress up.” Now, when you are the dress-up model for a five year old girl you expect certain things: excessive make up, piles of jewelry, layers of clothing, a perfume bath—but the one thing I did not expect was a hijab. As I sat there waiting for my little sister to pick the most colorful scarf and to try on me different styles of wrapping until she found one suitable for my
face, I started to wonder what the hijab symbolized for this young girl. She always demanded to wear the hijab although she was too young. When she played dress up, without fail, every weekend, the hijab was the central piece of her “big girl” performance. My five-year-old sister was too young to understand the religious reasons behind veiling. For her the hijab was a fashion accessory that symbolized being grown-up. Once again my interest was sparked in the significance of the hijab beyond purely religious meanings.

The hijab is one of the most controversial clothing pieces in the modern world. In laique France and secular Turkey the hijab has been banished from some public spaces. Some see the hijab and its wearers as a hindrance to modernity, a stall to women’s development, and a threat to public security. According to scholar Shumaya Hassan, “The media demonizes Islam, portraying it as a threat to Western culture with its ascribed backward and uncivilized way of life where women are being dominated by the religion of Islam and the hijab is seen as a way to oppress and attack women…” (Hassan 2010, 2). As misunderstandings and mistrust of Islam continue to grow in the West, the hijab, a clear symbol of Islam, has come under attack. The veil and veiled women remain constant subjects of discussion in media, politics, and pop culture. Some say that mankind’s greatest fear is the unknown, the greatest satisfaction conquering it; the mystery of the veil and the unknown women behind it have led to many quests to unveil those who wear it. The veil, ironically, brings the women who wear it the exact thing they seek to avoid: attention.

The hijab has held a fascination for academics as well. Historical studies have shown that the veil has been appropriated for many different purposes and has changed in meaning over time. During the colonial period in the Middle East (1830s until mid-1990s), the veil was a symbol of the backwardness and the inferiority of Muslims and Islam. According to Leila
Ahmed’s analysis in *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), the veil was viewed as a peculiar Islamic practice underpinning the colonial narrative of the “quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam.” It was also the “symbol of … the oppression of women … and it became the open target of colonial attack” (Ahmed 1992, 149). Further analysis reveals that social artifacts like travel diaries written by European visitors to the Middle East and European novels from the mid-19th to the early 20th century contributed to this colonial discourse and shaped the image and perception of the veil. Like Ahmed, Malek Alloula intervenes in this construction, this time to turn the gaze back on the colonizer. His *The Colonial Harem* (1986; originally published in French in 1981) argues that Algerian postcards from the colonial period do not accurately represent Algerian women, but rather a Frenchman’s Orientalizing fantasy. He reveals the colonial eroticization and exoticization of the veil and the veiled body.

By the late 19th to mid-20th century, with decolonization, national independence movements, and concomitant efforts to modernize, there was mass unveiling all over the Middle East. As Miriam Cooke reveals in her book about pioneering Lebanese feminist Nazira Zeineddine, many Arab reformers and elites during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both female (like Zeineddine) and male (such as Qasim Amin, Egyptian lawyer and advocate of female emancipation), called for unveiling. Feminism linked with nationalism, and from the mid-1900s to the 1960s unveiling became the norm in most Arab Muslim countries.

In the 1970’s, the Middle East saw the resurgence of the veil, which took on new meanings and new styles. Leila Ahmed provides a comprehensive analysis of the new veiling in *A Quiet Revolution: the Veil’s Resurgence from the Middle East to America* (2011). She argues that the practice of veiling was revived by grassroots women’s movements and then co-opted by Islamist men. Fadwa El Guindi’s 1981 article “Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's
Contemporary Islamic Movement” is one of the first pieces of scholarship to examine the new veiling in Egypt during the 1970s and 1980s. In *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance* (2003) she elaborates the revival of Islam and the new veiling, tracing the grassroots movement that would later become organized Islamism. She also argues that contemporary veiling, starting from the 1970s, is about resistance, authenticity, and identity as opposed to more traditionally understood and strict notions of piety. Juxtaposed with El Guindi’s account, the ethnographic work by Arlene MacLeod, *Accommodating Protest* (1993), helps us to understand the new veiling in the context of social class: she notes the appropriation of the veil by lower-class women who were not involved in wider resistance or political movements. Lastly Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2005), provides an analysis of a largely ignored part of the Islamic revival, the piety movement. Through her ethnographic research on the piety movement in the mosques of Egypt her work gives a clear understanding of the ways piety was perceived and understood in this movement. It is largely her work that informs the pious aspect of the “pious fashion” discussed in this thesis.

The contemporary *hijab* and its history have thus been comprehensively and generally studied. These topics have also been discussed in relation to specific political topics; many of these works were set in Egypt, but Algeria, Iran, and Turkey have also been closely studied in the context of veiling. Banu Gokariksel and Anna Secor have conducted research on modesty dress in relation to ethics and aesthetics in Turkey, specifically looking at the consumption of fashion; similar work has been done in Indonesia by Carla Jones (2007-2013) and in Iran by Elizabeth Bucar (2013). These studies thus focus on three major Islamic fashion capitals.

Meanwhile, Jordan has been extensively studied in the context of the Palestinian issue by scholars such as Frances Hasso (2005) and Daniel Price (1999). Jordan’s society and culture has
been studied by Fida Adely (2012). However, even among studies about politics, culture, gender, and society, scholarly works on bigger and more influential countries like Egypt or Iran outnumber those on Jordan. Not surprisingly, therefore, little scholarship exists on the contemporary veil in the urban center of Amman, Jordan. As a small, resource-poor country that is culturally non-influential in the Muslim world, Jordan seems unimportant unless the discussion concerns Palestine. However, Jordan’s non-centrality to Islamic and Arab popular culture, particularly fashion, and its marginal position in relation to Middle Eastern cultural “super-powers” such as Egypt and Turkey can give us a unique view into the transcultural dissemination in the Arab world via the internet of everything from religious norms to clothing styles. This thesis therefore aims to provide a different perspective on Jordan. Building on the prior work of numerous scholars, this thesis will add to the literature through sociological research conducted about attitudes toward the veil shown by urban women in Jordan today.

**Research Methodology**

This thesis will include research from a study conducted in Amman, Jordan. Over four weeks in spring 2012 this study collected data from 4 interviews, 47 surveys, and 2 male and female focus groups, composed of 5 participants in each group. In total it collected data from 61 respondents. The main focus of this study was urban Jordanian Muslim *muhajjabat* (“veiled women”) between the ages of 18 and 40. This age group was chosen because they wear the new styles of the veil. In addition, most of the women in this age group and in this research have come of age fairly recently, and they have therefore experienced modernization and its effects on their state.
The study was based on four components: individual interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations. My first method involved interviewing four Muslim women ages 30-40. I got in touch with these women through my research advisor. Three of the interviews were formal and included a written consent; two interviews were informal with oral consents. Each interview lasted between 30-90 minutes. Only one interview was conducted through a translator; my other three interviews were conducted adequately without a translator in English. All the women interviewed were muhajjabat, although all wore the hijab in different ways. Two of the women wore the *jilbab* with veils and the three other women wore veils with trousers and long shirts or long sweaters. These are the names (invented to mask their true identities) and descriptions of my interviewees:

1. Dr. Noor: researcher for the International Institute for Islamic Thought, currently studying gender relationships in Islam and teaching in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Jordan.

2. Professor Khaloud: professor in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Jordan

3. Fatima: current program director of the School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad Jordan

4. Yasmine: former School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad Jordan coordinator, now working at the Central Bank of Jordan

5. Reem: teaches Arabic part-time at School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad Jordan, born and raised in the *Badia* (Jordanian desert), now lives in Amman.

The first two women interviewed have academic backgrounds and in at least one case is expert in Islamic Studies. The last three interviewees have no academic background in Islam or religious studies.
My second method of collecting data was through focus groups. All the participants of my focus groups were college students between the ages of 18-25. I conducted two focus groups, one for women and one for men. The focus group for men was essential to bring the male perspective on the hijab into my study. My male focus groups included five participants. Although all my participants spoke some English, it was necessary to have an interpreter, so my advisor acted as the interpreter for my male focus group. Originally I feared that because my advisor is one of my participant’s older sister and a muhajaba herself, her presence might affect the men’s answers; however, the men were not afraid to give controversial answers even in the presence of my advisor. My women’s focus group was conducted at the University of Jordan the day after the men’s focus group. After such a candid and honest conversation with the male focus group, I expected an even more open discussion with the women. There were also five women ages 18-23, all students at the University of Jordan, with enough knowledge of English that an interpreter was not needed. The young women were very excited to discuss the hijab and most were very open in their answers. One problem that arose during the group discussion was the inability of some girls to voice their opinions even when they seemed to disagree with the statements being made by some of the other girls. Thus it was important to pay attention not only to what the girls were saying but also what they were expressing through their body language. I later approached these girls individually, and they were more open about their opinions. Although the discussion within the time allocated for the focus group provided great data, my observations and discussions with the girls before and after the focus groups also provided important information for my topic.

My third methodology was surveys. I created a survey asking 21 questions. A student volunteer translated my survey into Arabic. Having an Arabic-language survey allowed me to
distribute my survey to a wide variety of students, not just students who spoke English. I administered the surveys at the University of Jordan. About 27 were distributed in a classroom and about 20 of the surveys were offered at random to muhajjabat around the campus.

Finally I also conducted observations at six hijab stores. Two of the hijab stores were small shops near the University of Jordan. The other four shops were larger shops located in one of the more high-end shopping areas in Amman. I had a translator with me at each of the six hijab stores. I also conducted observations of muhajjabat at the University of Jordan to see which styles of the hijab were prevalent.

**Thesis**

This thesis will analyze the evolution of the hijab’s meaning and significance through three distinct phases. It will trace the meaning of the veil from the colonial period through unveiling and new veiling movements of 19th and 20th century across the Middle East, and finally to the juxtaposition of ethics and aesthetics in the rising phenomenon of pious fashion. While the first two chapters will offer a broader context by looking at colonial veiling and new veiling across the Middle East, the third chapter will offer a focused perspective on pious fashion in contemporary Amman, Jordan.
Chapter 1: The Colonial Veil

Beautiful and exotic; oppressive, yet liberating; sacred, yet sexy; preserving anonymity, yet affirming cultural identity. Any or all of these complex and conflicting terms may come to mind when one thinks about the veil. Where do these ideas and images come from? What contemporary meanings has the culture of the veil acquired? How have these images shaped modern Western views about those who don the veil in all its forms? These questions cannot be answered without addressing a phenomenon that shaped the meaning of the veil in the West: the European colonial presence in the Middle East. It is this presence that epitomized the veil as a significant part of Muslim identity. Without understanding this historical root one cannot begin to understand how the veil became a critical identity marker of a certain culture and its appropriation by that culture.

The present always carries traces of the past. The conception of the veil produced by the self-justifying and self-empowering colonial gaze still haunts our understanding of its wearers today. From the 19th to the 20th century, European governments, especially in Britain and France, established themselves as colonial powers in Muslim countries (Ahmed 1992, 150). Jordan, then known as Transjordan, became a British colony under a puppet Arab monarchy, while places like Egypt were placed under the direct rule of colonial administrators (Stockdale 2013). While European fascination with veiled “Oriental” women—for instance, the odalisques of paintings by Boucher and Delacroix—existed before the 19th century, the place of women in Islamic societies came to play a central role in colonial discourse (Ahmed 1992, 150). In spite of the facts that the veil was pre-Islamic and mainly worn to shield elite women when they ventured into public spaces, the veil came to symbolize the general oppression of Muslim women in
colonized Arab countries. This discourse was imbedded in and promoted through travel diaries, literature, art, and photography of the period produced for Anglo and European audiences. These social artifacts drew on and contributed to the colonial discourse, shaping the image and perception of the veil and related practices of covering and seclusion, such as the *harem*.

**Images of the Harem**

As in many traditional cultures, particularly those that practice polygamy, elite Arab families with substantial economic means organized separate living quarters for women and for men. (Non-elite and rural families could not afford the luxury of excluding their women, who had to work outside the home in order to provide for the families’ needs.) The *harem* was the separate part of an elite Muslim household designated for the women of the family. “*Harem* in Arabic means sacred, inviolable place and it also means the female members of the family. From the same root comes the world *haram*, which bears a double meaning: forbidden, or sacred and protected” (Brown 1988, 71).

The origins of the *harem* are widely debated. For some scholars the *harem* represents a form of patriarchal control of women and their powerful sexuality (Mernissi 1987, 19). “The desire to control women was often expressed in terms of safeguarding family honor and was manifested primarily in the physical segregation of women’s space from that of men” (Brown 1988, 72). Other scholars, such as Leila Ahmed, claim that it was the “women who were doing the forbidding, excluding men from their society, and it was therefore women who developed the model of strict segregation in the first place” (Ahmed 1982, 529).

In colonial images, however, the *harem*’s complex and debated social meanings were simplified and misrepresented. Harems were represented as places where Muslim men
imprisoned their women, who had nothing to do other than beautify themselves for the insatiable sexual appetites of their husbands and lovers (Hoodfar 1994, 8). In the colonial imagination, the harem, in reality a complete feminine sphere in the household, was reductively associated only with sex: fears (and perhaps desires) of promiscuity, resultant oppression and imprisonment, sexual and material indulgence were projected onto this imaginative space.

Colonial writing promoted this skewed image of Muslim social organization for the audience back home. As William Howard Russell, a British journalist, wrote in his diary during his tour of the Middle East:

…to see no one but a dreary old Minister of State, a lady superior, and leguminous-looking black eunuchs, would drive one would think, most women, including the British washerwomen who are in the Viceregal service, out of their senses; but the ladies externally bear no signs of their woe, though they must envy their infidel sisters their ample liberty (Russell 1869, 410-411).

While Russell can cite no direct evidence of unhappiness (no external “signs of their woe”), he projects imagined sources of discontent onto the protected women he describes. He pities these women who, in his view, envy the “ample” freedom enjoyed by their European counterparts.
This photo, taken in Egypt sometime between 1870 and 1880 in Egypt, mirrors Russell’s description. The “Pasha” is an older patriarch with two younger women. The photo does not reveal whether they are his wives or concubines, and it doesn’t really matter in the presentation for the camera of the colonial harem. The women are simply part of the decoration: bored and distant, reminding the viewer of the “pity” felt for such women by colonial visitors such as Russell. The photograph was taken in a studio, under the photographer’s direction. It is important to note, therefore, that in spite of its title, technically this representation is not of a harem at all, since the photographer would not have been allowed into such a private space. A sign of the photographer’s effort to portray authenticity is the presence of the veils covering the women, which would not be worn in the protected space of the harem. Along with the veils, the photographer drew upon other pre-existing notions of the “Orient” and evoked them in his staging. The stereotypical imagined harem accouterments are present: the black slave, the water
pipe, the rich fabrics, and the Turkish slippers. “The process of photography… could transform these imaginative arrangements in the studio into proof of the way people in the Middle East and elsewhere lived and behaved” (Brown 1988, 40). The documentary, realistic nature of photography gives authority to invented scenarios.

The staged photograph produces an externalized image that corresponds to the imagined subjective state projected by Russell’s diary entry. Though these two works were not published together, they show that the colonial image of the harem was produced in visual and written works that supplemented each other. Orientalizing fantasies of harem life pervaded and clouded understanding of the actual lived experience of women of the harem. One of these fantasies projected women who deserved pity and possibly rescue because they were prisoners of the “Other” men, culture, and religion. Another part of this fantasy was that their prison sentence included living luxurious, yet dull and boring lives waiting to satisfy the lust of their captors.

The French noblewoman Catharina Fouché, duchesse d'Otraute, accompanied the Prince and Princess of Wales in their tour of the Middle East starting in 1868. In her journal she expresses pity for the women of the harem who she feels live dull, “useless” and “ignorant” lives. Though she acknowledges their material wealth, she feels more pity for the “miserable creatures” than she does for a peasant woman (Fouché 1870, 44). To her their class, their culture, and their religion sentence them to a dull life without purpose. In reality she herself might have been one of the numerous female travelers who “wrote about the boredom of oriental women’s lives…[when] it was precisely the boredom and the limitation of domestic life which had been the major motivating force behind many western women’s travels to the orient” (Hoodfar 1994, 6). Some of the presumed conditions that elicited pity for Muslim women in the harem should have done the same for upper-class European women. Importantly, the women in the harem did
not mention these “problems” with their lives to Russell and Fouché. Both of these writers take it upon themselves to speak for and represent the women of the “Orient.” Although most European men did not have access to Arab women, it seems that Russell did. Although he might have been limited both by custom and language he did apparently have them chance to ask them about their lives—yet rather than asking he simply assumes they had afflictions. Fouché’s assumptions about the inner misery of Arab women are worse because she had full access to the women and was able to cross the language barrier: she writes that “the young Prince, who accompanied us and acted as our interpreter…” (Fouché 1870, 38). Yet she does not take this opportunity to ask the women about their lives; instead she imagines their lives and feels sad. In many of these works the lived experiences of Muslim women are not represented; instead they are made to fit into the preconceived notions of the writer, photographer, or painter.

Through both images and literature images of the harem were constructed that drew pity for Muslim women “trapped” in this institution. This pity would fit well into, an emotional and moral, justification of colonialism.

The “Disgusting” Veil: Colonial Discourse about Islam and Women

Even though, as a protective garment, the *hijab* gave women free access to the public sphere, colonial writers perceived it as an extension of the *harem*’s imprisonment. The veil thus incited disgust from the West. In a photograph taken by James Buel (Figure 2), of a young woman featured at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, the caption provides insight into Western reactions to Middle Eastern dress: this veiled girl was the object of curiosity, pity—and disgust.
In the streets of Cairo [a section of the exhibition] at the World’s Fair there was exhibited the peculiar manners of the Egyptians, and a veiled lady was of course one of the curious objects displayed, though she did not always appear in that unsightly disguise, thus proving she was not a slave to the requirement of all Mohammedan [sic] women (Buel 1894).

Buel describes the girl’s veil and face-covering as a “revolting disguise.” Not only does he find it aesthetically displeasing, but he describes a woman who chooses not to wear such garb as “proving she was not a slave.” It is obvious he sees the veil as a mode of enslavement, and unveiling as gaining freedom from Muslim customs that suppressed women. He views the fact that veiling was still dominant in Egypt as a failure of foreign immigrants to change the natives, and thus the continuation of this fashion is seen as negative; conversely, he sees the
disappearance of this practice in India is seen as advancement. The veil thus became a measure of civilization: Egyptians and Persians, who veiled heavily, were at the bottom; Indians, who were slowly, unveiling, were in the middle; and the West, completely unveiled, took its place at the top of the scale. The veil for him was not just an “unsightly” article of clothing but also a signifier of the relative status of cultures on the ladder of civilization.

Colonizers attempted to justify their actions by proving the inferiority of all colonized societies, whether Africa, India, or the Middle East. The discourse of colonialism in the Middle East targeted Islam and attacked Muslim men’s treatment of women. The veil came to signify a wide variety of religious, social, and cultural customs, including purdah and polygamy (Macmaster and Lewis 1998, 121). This veil became the signifier of the oppression of Muslim women, which was in turn seen as proof of the backwardness of Muslim societies. Through this chain of reasoning, the veil came to symbolize the primitiveness of Islam (Ahmed 1992, 152).

Lord Cromer was Controller General for Egypt from 1877-1880 and Consul General from 1883-1907 (Cromer 1916, 1). In his book Modern Egypt, he claims:

Mohammed’s general plan did not involve a future life for women, there can be no doubt that not only did he, by precept and example, relegate women to a position in this world inferior to that of men, but also that the religion which he founded is eminently one conceived by the genius of a man and intended for men (Cromer 1916, 541).

Cromer attacks Islam as having subjugated women and thereby essentializes woman’s place in Islam as static: her role cannot change because it is deeply rooted in the religion. The veil and the seclusion it represents symbolize this innate oppression and “it cannot be doubted that the seclusion of women exercises a baneful effect on Eastern society” (Cromer 1916, 155).
linking of the status of women to the status of a society places the veil, as symbol of women’s status in Muslim societies, at the center of the colonial discourse. Thus it becomes the aim of colonialism to, both symbolically and literally, unveil Muslim women to civilize “Mohammedan” societies. Cromer continues:

The position of women in Egypt, and in Mohammedan countries generally, is therefore, a fatal obstacle to the attainment of that elevation of thought and character, which should accompany the introduction of European civilization, if that civilization is to produce its full measure of beneficial effect. The obvious remedy would appear to be to educate the women (Cromer 1916, 539).

Cromer saw the status of Muslim women as the primary cause of the backwardness of “Mohammedan” countries and as a fundamental challenge to the civilizing mission. Symbolically, as the veil was equated with oppression, the education of women would in Cromer’s eyes lift the veil and the status of women in society. Cromer was a strong advocate of women’s education: the symbolic unveiling of women. He also advocated the literal unveiling of Egyptian women since he believed, as stated earlier, that seclusion, which includes the practice of veiling, had a negative effect on the society. Cromer saw women as the key to “lifting” the thought and character of Egyptian men to European levels. This rhetoric of uplifting and rescuing Muslim women from the “Other” men and from “Islam” was the ammunition of colonialism, and the veil was the focus through which to accomplish this goal.

Elevating the position of women seems like a noble idea. However, reading between the lines of Lord Cromer’s program suggests that the elevation of women was intended to capture the minds of those they had already physically colonized.
The European reformer may instruct, he may explain, he may argue, he may devise the most ingenious methods for the moral and material development of the people, he may use his best endeavors to “cut blocks with a razor” and to graft true civilization on a society which is but just emerging from barbarism, but unless he proves himself able, not only to educate, but elevate the Egyptian woman, he will never succeed in affording to the Egyptian man, in any thorough degree, the only European education which is worthy of Europe. (Cromer 1916, 542).

The way into the minds of Egyptian men was through their women. Thus a status change for women was only incidental to the real purpose: using women to civilize the “Other” men. Cromer writes, “In as much as women in their capacities as wives and mother, exercise a great influence over their characters of their husband and sons…” (Cromer 1916, 156). Education and emancipation of Egyptian women were just a means to the end of the mental and emotional colonization of male Egyptians. Cromer’s emphasis on feminine education fits within the Victorian ideal of domesticity (the “angel in the house”). The education of women was deemed necessary so that they could rear “civilized” sons.

**Colonial Feminism**

It is interesting to note the ways the language of feminism was used in the colonial discourse against Islam. It was the marriage of colonialism and feminism that produced the veil as the optimal symbol of women’s oppression and the innate backwardness of Islamic societies. This child of colonialism has survived through present day, and still haunts the meanings attached to the veil. Furthermore, according to Ahmed, “the Victorian colonial paternalistic
establishments appropriated the language of feminism in the service of its assault on the religions and cultures of other men and in particular on Islam in order to give an aura of moral justification to that assault at the very same time as it combated feminism within its own society” (Ahmed 1992, 152). The hypocrisy of colonial feminism is that while Anglo and European elites used feminist discourse to justify colonialism they did not support feminism within their own countries or even within the colonial states. For example Lord Cromer, “the champion of the unveiling of Egyptian women was, in England, founding member and sometime president of the Men’s League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage” (Ahmed 1992, 153).

It was believed that Victorian womanhood and culture was at top of the evolutionary process and the ideal measure of civilization. This theory was supported by the observations of missionaries and travelers from which the study of anthropology was born (Ahmed 1992, 151). The science of anthropology also supported Victorian ideals of women’s inferiority and the natural domestic role of women. Claims of oppression and increasing feminist voices were challenged by the science of anthropology (Ahmed 1992, 151). Victorian males captured this “science,” to suppress the feminist movement within their borders and justify colonialism. Interestingly, while in the West, feminism struggled with and engaged within its own culture, in the East and other non-Western societies, it was thought that the position of women could only be achieved through the total replacement of the “innately misogynist culture” by the superior European culture (Ahmed 1992, 151-152). In addition, the positioning of Victorian ideals of womanhood on a pedestal on which to measure other civilizations was an obstacle to feminist movements in Europe.

Lord Cromer asserts the better position of European women for three reasons: they do not have to veil; they are not secluded; and the only limitation to their movement is their own
“sense of propriety” (Cromer 1916, 155). The supposed superiority of the Victorian gender structure and roles not only legitimized European colonialism, but also the position of women within European countries. The perception of this gender structure required that European women be content with their position, even when they were at times in worse positions than their Muslim “sisters.”

However, there is an alternate reality to this dichotomy of “oppressed” Muslim women and “liberated” European women. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was the wife of a British diplomat to the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. Her writing, published in a collection of letters, is “the very first example of a secular work by a woman about the Muslim orient. Lady Montague’s Letters were written before deep political or colonial interest in the Middle East” (Melman 1992, 2). Though ignorance, misrepresentation, and eroticization of the Orient were rampant even in Montague’s day, for her, “accuracy and an unbiased approach to foreign, “Other” cultures are vital” (Melman 1992, 84). It is her attempt at a relative and objective description about Muslim women that gives us a different perspective on the lives of Muslim women and European women. Montague claims

‘Tis very easy to see they have more Liberty than we have, no Woman of what rank so ever being permitted to go in street without 2 muslins…you may guess how effectually this disguises them…this perpetual Masquerade gives them an entire Liberty of following their inclinations without danger of Discovery (Melman 1992, 86).

To Montague, instead of constraining women the veil offered them a sort of liberty through anonymity. European women, by contrast, were burdened with a “sense of propriety” that
actually limited their movement. However, a parallel relationship could also be drawn between these two groups of women:

When Lady Mary Montague was pressed by the women in a Turkish bath to take off her clothes and join them, she undid her blouse to show them her corset. This led them to believe, she said, that she was imprisoned in a machine, which could only be opened by her husband. Both groups of women could see each other as prisoners—and of course they were both right” (Mabro 1991, 23).

While the veil was seen as an oppressive object, so was the corset that physically suffocated Anglo and European women. Both groups of women could be viewed as victims of different forms of patriarchal orders. However, in later colonial discourse the oppression of Muslim women was highlighted and the oppression of European women was ignored.

Gerard de Nerval, traveller to Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century, strikes a similar note to Montague’s in his travel writings:

Though we are in a land where women are supposed to be prisoners, … in actual life they enjoy more liberty than European women. It is true that women of position go out, perched up on donkeys, where nobody can get at them; but even in our own land, women of a corresponding rank hardly ever go out except in a carriage. There is certainly the veil, but possibly it is not such a ferocious obstacle as might be imagined” (Nerval 1930, 2).

This was the reality of the majority of Muslim women: not the life of seclusion laid out by Cromer and so many others, but a life with access to the public sphere. In lower income families, strict seclusion was not feasible for two reasons. First, the houses of poorer families were not big enough for strict seclusion. Second women sometimes worked outside the home to
support their families. They would veil when they would go out into the streets (Brown 1988, 73). True seclusion in both European and Middle Eastern societies was offered only to those who could afford it.

However, this commonality, and the parallel between the veil and the corset, or the freedoms that the veil offered were not and could not be included in the discourse colonial writers built around the veil and Muslim women. If similarity was recognized, it meant observers like Cromer would have to admit that either European women were oppressed or that Muslim women were not oppressed, both of which would counter the colonial discourse that was carefully constructed around ideas of Muslim women’s suppression and European women’s relatively superior position. Thus themes of similarities or parallels between the position of women in Europe and the Middle East were not really explored in colonial art, written works, or postcards. Rather, themes of “exotification,” “sexualization” or eroticization, seclusion, imprisonment, and suppression were created and spread by both the works of female and male authors, as well as postcards, paintings, and photography.

**Erotic Fantasies: Unveiling the Veiled Woman**

Even at the same time the veil was seen as ugly and disgusting or as a sign of backwardness, it also drew curiosity and lust for what it hid. Colonial writings, photographs, paintings, and postcards betray an obsession with unveiling veiled women. The following section will look at erotic fantasies about the veil and the women who wore it. The veil is a double signifier. In one way it covers the women who wear it and in another way it “hides and conceals the Orient and Oriental women from apprehension; it hides the real Orient and keeps the truth from Western knowledge/apprehension” (Busse 2010, 192). This very aspect of the veil
leads to both frustration and fantasy. The veil rejects intrusion while invoking mystery, which initiates fantasy. In the observer’s imagination, this frustration was released and the fantasy brought to life. While describing veiling as a depressing habit, at the same time Nerval projects beauty beneath it:

It is when we feel impelled to ask a question of the veiled Egyptian eyes and that is the moment of the greatest danger ... from behind that rampart, ardent eyes wait you, with all the seductions they can borrow from art .... I did not understand what the attraction could be about the mystery with which the most interesting half of the people of the orient enshrouds itself. But a few days sufficed to show me that a woman who knows herself to be the object of attention can usually find an opportunity to let herself be seen—if she is beautiful. Those who are not beautiful are wiser to retain their veils, and we cannot be angry with them on that account (Nerval 1930, 3).

These observations encode major themes about the veil and the women who wear it. While Nerval admits that he finds the veil depressing, he nevertheless finds ways to sexualize the hidden woman and to lust after her. Furthermore, he attributes this lustfulness (“ardent eyes”) to her. The veiled woman becomes an object of his fantasy and in his fantasy he embeds the eyes, the only part that he has access to, with the power of dangerous seduction. In effect, while seemingly presenting himself as vulnerable to her, he makes her vulnerable and open to him: for him, the European man, she has seductive eyes. He attributes the fascination with veiled women to the fact that behind the veil is a sexual woman, waiting to be released, waiting to show her beauty to the European man. He claims that a woman who knows she is beautiful finds a way to reveal herself (and those who are not attractive do not); she thus understands the veil as an
aesthetic rather than moral object. The “most interesting half of the orient,” Arab women incite mystery through the veil while, beneath the veil, beauty and sexuality wait to be discovered by the European male. To European eyes, the veiled woman was “an unknown that begged to be known, an unseen that begged to be seen” (Busse 2010, 192). Seeing was knowing, knowing was possessing. Thus, themes of intrusion and penetration surrounded colonial images of the veil and veiled women.

Postcards from colonial Algeria reflect many of the themes of the eroticized veil. In his 1986 work *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula, Algerian poet, writer, and literary critic, analyzes and critiques postcards from the early 20th century. His work offers the refreshing perspective of an Algerian examining French observations of Algeria: he gazes as an Arab, or the Other, at the West. By adopting the opposed gaze of the colonized at the colonizer, Alloula aims to “return this immense postcard to its sender.” His critical gaze focuses on the real and imagined roles women played in the colonial interaction between France and Algeria (Alloula 1986, xi).
Figure 3. (Left) Moorish women in town attire and (right) Kabyl woman covering herself with the haik. Source: Alloula 1986, 11&15.

Veiled from top to bottom, the women in the image on the left discourage the gaze of the photographer and, in a sense, the West. These are the images of frustration and underlying fantasy. “Draped in the veil that cloaks her to her ankles, the Algerian Woman discourages the scopic desire … she is the concrete negation of these desires and thus brings the photographer confirmation of a triple rejection, the rejection of his desire, of the practice of his ‘art’ … ”(Alloula 1986, 7). In a way the veiled woman is unconquerable and inaccessible, rebelling against the photographer’s gaze and desire. She is frustrating because he can’t see her, he can’t know her, and he can’t possess her. However, in his studio (the image on the right), he can take revenge on the veiled women who have denied him access by “unveiling” the model. In his studio he commands her, he sees her, he knows her, and he possesses her. He creates his version
of a veiled woman, which he will sell through a postcard as the real veiled woman. His fantasy becomes the reality:

The entire distorting enterprise of the postcard is given here in schematic form. It is contained in the gesture of drawing the veil aside—a gesture executed at the photographer’s command and destined to be followed by others. When she completes them, the algerienne will no longer have anything to hide (Alloula 1986, 15).

This woman is different from the woman to the left: she is made to reveal herself, she is available, and she is sexual. The algerienne to the left dissolves, replaced by the photographer’s fantasy. The photographer, like the photographer of Figure 1, uses props and costumes to create an “authentic” scene. While the studio becomes “the symbolic appropriation of the space,” the model becomes a “symbolic appropriation of the body” of Algerian women (Alloula 1986, 21). In this way the photographer has, in a quasi-sexual act, penetrated the veil, released his frustration, and created his fantasy. These postcards of erotic veils and veiled women speak more truthfully about the photographer and the society, which accepted them so readily, than they do about those photographed. The colonial postcards and photographs were “illustrated forms of the colonialist discourses … a ventriloquial art the postcard—even and especially—when it pretends to mirror the exotic, is nothing but one of the forms of aesthetic justification of colonial violence ”(Alloula 1986,120). The postcard reflects the colonial discourse and never actually represents what it intends to represent. These erotic fantasies were part of the power play between the colonist and the Orient. The postcard aimed, through unveiling the women, to conquer the soul of the nation. “The … reinforced image of eastern women was highly eroticized while, through the allegory of unveiling and disclosure of the harem, the Western eye
asserted a colonial invasion and violation of the central values of Muslim society” (Macmaster and Lewis 2013, 124). As mentioned before, women were believed to hold the honor of the family and, in this sense, the honor of the nation. The veil thus protected the honor of the nation. In this identification the veil denied the colonizer from knowing and possessing the inner and most sacred aspect of the Muslim society: its soul, its women. Thus unveiling the veiled woman was a way to conquer the heart of the subjected society. Postcards and images played a major role in this colonial conquest.

However, this effort at conquest caused an opposite reaction. “It strengthened the attachment to the veil as a national and cultural symbol and gave it a new vitality” (Steele 2012, 413). The veil became a form of resistance: a symbol of a Muslim nation and culture, a way to challenge colonial rule. For example, in Algeria “the veil became women’s refuge from the French denuding gaze…. Its forms changed, becoming longer, and it acquired a new significance as a symbol of not only cultural difference but also protection from and resistance to colonial-qua-Christian domination” (Lazreg 1994, 53). As the colonizer became obsessed with unveiling, the veil adapted to guarantee a safe haven for women as carriers of traditional culture, becoming at the same time a form of resistance to the colonial intrusion. The styles of the veil even changed to meet the demands of the context. At the same time the veil gained importance as a marker of cultural identity.

Social artifacts—writings and images—sent from the colony back to the hegemonic nation projected a fantasized view of the oppressive and erotic veil and harem and the imagined pitiful women subjugated by both traditional institutions. Such artifacts as those discussed in this chapter played a role in constructing the colonial discourse. “In this manner images of Muslim women were used a major building block for the construction of the orient’s new
imagery, an imagery which has been intrinsically linked to the hegemony of western imperialism, particularly that of France and Britain“ (Hoodfar 1994, 5). The meanings of the harem and the veil created in postcards, painting, photographs, travel diaries, and writings borrowed from a developing colonial discourse, but in their very discursive and formal reiteration of the same language and ideas about the “Orient” they contributed to the political justification of colonialism.

Conclusion

The veil was a target of colonial discourse: constructed in the midst of attack through official policy, travel diaries, painting, photographs, and postcards that all borrowed from and added to hegemonic discourse. In recent times the hijab again has been the vital point through which the West has criticized Islam. The increased interest in Islam, especially after 9/11, has led to many misconceptions and misinterpretations. “The representation of Muslims in media and in common discourse is often fraught with violent and oppressive images and connotations. Islam is depicted as an obsolete religion with outdated practices … not applicable to the twenty first century” (Hassan 2010, 2 ). One of its outdated practices is wearing the hijab. However, negative images and the continuation of the colonial discourse on the veil have not deterred women from wearing the hijab. Instead some women “are donning it in reaction to Western racism, as a visible identity politic” (Winter 2006, 40). It is not surprising that some women today veil in reaction to the representation of Islam and specifically the veil in the West. If one examines the colonial history of the veil, one can see ways in which the contemporary discourse about the veil in the United States and Europe repeats certain basic themes and in this sense is neo-colonial: “the hijab is seen as a way to oppress and attack women…”(Hassan 2010, 2). At
the same time, contemporary debates about the *hijab* also show how the veil is continually renegotiated and contextualized. The veil during colonial times and even now increases in vitality and validation as an expression of authentic Muslim identity when it becomes the center of Western criticism of Islam and of Muslim cultures and nations.

With decolonization and the beginning of independence, Arab scholars began to call for unveiling. This era was the age of mass de-veiling all over the Middle East. This phase ended around 1970 with mass re-veiling, especially with waves of revival of Islamic piety and related transnational political movements. Both of these phases will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 2: Birth of Islamic Feminism

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Muslim Arab world saw the mass unveiling of women, especially of the upper class. The players in the unveiling movement, however, had changed drastically; no longer colonialists or foreigners, but indigenous, especially elite, men and women led the unveiling movement of this era. In addition, while the language of this movement sounded similar to colonial discourse it was distinctly different in how it attacked the veil. What was the nature of this movement? Who were its key players? What were the differences between this unveiling movement and the similar-but-different colonial discourse? And how did the meaning of the veil change in this new context? These are the questions the following chapter aims to answer. This chapter will ultimately explore the new veiling era of the 1970s, which has deeply affected the meaning and the fashion of the veil today. To illuminate this era it is necessary to start with the roots of unveiling in Middle Eastern modernization movements.

Colonial powers had, in self-justification, used the veil discursively to criticize and undermine the people and religion of Islam. As noted in Chapter One, for some countries such as Algeria the veil became, in response, the quintessential method to oppose colonial rule as a marker of cultural and national identity and a safe haven for women. However, some in the Middle East community agreed that the veil was an obstacle to progress and modernization. Aisha al-Taimurya, an Egyptian aristocrat, in her 1887 autobiography, The Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds, wrote about the obstacle the veil created in furthering her education. Addressing her inability to attend “the assemblages of the learned scholars,” she wrote, “How my eyelids overflowed with tears because I was deprived of harvesting the fruits of
their beneficial learning! What hindered me from realizing this hope was the tent-like screen of an all-enveloping wrap” (Badran & cooke 1990, 127). Taimuya’s seclusion as an aristocratic woman was manifested in her veil when she travelled in public, but her veil still did not allow her to enter into all-male realms such as scholarly communities. She viewed this barrier not only as a physical barrier but also a mental barrier. It was not just Aisha- al- Taimuya but other women such as Zaynab Fawwz who saw the veil as an impediment to education. In 1891 Zaynab Fawwz , a Lebanese encyclopedist, linked the progress of the West not only to women’s participation in work but also to their ability to compete with men in work, thus interlocking desegregation of the genders and advancement (Badran and cooke 1990, 223). Their frustration marks the optimal reason for unveiling; veiling was seen as an obstacle to education, and education was believed to be the key to progress.

While these women provide examples of early calls for unveiling and many 19th century reformers addressed the issue of the veil, two prominent players provide a more concise view into the unveiling movement of the late 19th century and early 20th century. Many claim it was the work of Qasim Amin in 1899, who did not acknowledge his debt to Taimurya and Fawwaz, that brought the “Women Question” to the forefront of Egyptian and Middle Eastern society (cooke 2010, 6). However, he was not the only prominent player in this movement. Nazira Zeineddine, in the 1928 publication of her work Unveiling and Veiling, took on Islamic authorities and argued against veiling and for women’s rights. This work earned her both international acclaim and religious foes. The next section will offer insight into the broad movement through a brief comparative analysis of the arguments used by Amin and Zeineddine for unveiling.
Qasim Amin, a French-educated Egyptian judge, was born to a Turkish Ottoman father and an Upper Egyptian mother. His argument about women’s rights combined his knowledge of Islam and a scientific approach that used logic, hypotheses, data comparison, and deductive conclusions (Peterson 2000, xi-xxi). Similarly, Nazira Zeinedinne came from an elite background. Her father’s emphasis on the importance of Islamic education allowed her to become an authority on Islam (cooke 2010, 13). Both Amin and Zeinedinne use Islamic knowledge in their arguments against veiling. In his work *The Liberation of Women* (1899), Amin argued that the use of the veil is not commanded by the Shari’a (Islamic law), but is the “product of interaction among nations” (Amin 2000, 37). According to Amin, the veil, a harmful custom, was adopted and exaggerated by Muslims from other cultures and was injected into the religion, when it actually was purely cultural (Amin 2000, 37). By cutting the tie between the veil and the Shari’a, and by pointing to the veil’s purely cultural roots, he undermines the veil’s power as a religious object. On the other hand, he uses religion to argue that misinterpretation of the Quran and Shari’a has actually deprived women of their God-given rights. Amin argues that God created men and women to share equal obligations and privileges. According to Amin, seclusion and the veil keep women from working, conducting their lives and business, and restrain them from enjoying the equality granted to them by God (Amin 2000, 40). Thus, seclusion and veiling, he argues, actually go against Islamic values.

In her book *Unveiling and Veiling: The Liberation of Women and Social Renewal in the Islamic World* (1927), Zeineddine also uses religious texts and reasons to guide her argument against veiling. She notes that the only verse in the Qu’ran dealing with covering refers to the chest and breasts, not the hands and face (cooke 2010, 52). She also questions the necessity of the veil since “so many women around the prophet did not cover” (cooke 2010, 52). Like Amin,
she argues that the veil is an obstacle to God-given rights: “Woe to us if we do not join with our men in breaking our chains to seize our freedoms that are gifts from the almighty God” (cooke 2010, 52). While colonial discourse had used the veil as symbol of the innate backwardness and inferiority of Islam, Amin and Zeineddine used Islam in their call to end what they believed was a backward cultural practice. To them not Islam nor Muslim men but the misinterpretation of Islam by shaykhs (religious leaders) deprived women of their God-given rights (cooke 2010, 6, 82). Unlike the colonial discourse, Amin and Zeineddine viewed the veil not only as a non-Islamic custom but actually as an obstacle to the equal and liberated place offered to women by Islam.

Furthermore they saw a direct link between the position of Arab women within their societies and the position of Arab societies among nations. Both scholars saw the symbolism of the veil—the seclusion of women from education and public space—as an obstacle to the advancement of Muslim societies. Zeineddine wrote, “I have noticed that the nations that have given up the veil are the nations that have advanced in intellectual and material life. Such advancement is not equaled in the veiled nations” (Badran and cooke 1990, 272). Amin pointed to Europeans, with their “intellectual and emotional maturity” and technological advancement: “Can we believe that such people would have eliminated the practice of secluding women, which was firmly established in their societies, if they found advantage in it?” (Amin 2000, 59). Their shared correlation between veiling and advancement mimics colonial discourse. However, while colonial discourse essentialized or naturalized the backwardness of veiled states, Zeineddine and Amin do not attribute such backwardness to the innate character of Muslims or Islam. On the contrary, they saw no connection between the character of Muslims and the state of the Muslim nations. To them the obstacle to advancement was the position of women. By comparing their
“veiled states” to “non-veiled” states they do not claim an essential difference from those more “advanced” countries, but a difference marked by a superficial and nonessential cultural practice like seclusion of women. They believed “no society can progress while its women are not respected and their rights are not protected … the veil is not the sign of lack and inferiority, it is its instrument” (cooke 2010, 55). Thus unveiling and the education of women were seen as instruments of modernization and advancement. Other elite female and male reformers joined Amin and Zeineddine to lead a transnational unveiling movement.

This debate, however, was not just a scholarly but also a national one, with secularist and modernist on one side and religious authorities on the other (Hoodfar 1994, 7). By the 1920s, as women started to play a major role in nationalist movements in the Middle East, unveiling also became linked with upper-class women’s entrance into political life (Macleod 1991, 102). The progress of the nation was interlinked with the “liberation of women.” “The New Woman,” a phrase coined by Qasim Amin, was anticipated to be “unveiled, educated, and happy in her bourgeois family with a loving husband by her side” (cooke 2010, 8). Some advocates argued, following Amin’s thought, that unveiling, education, and the end to seclusion would “civilize” women in order to enable them to provide proper upbringing for children who represented the future of the nation (Abu-Lughod 1998 131).

In Turkey and Iran, the state actually outlawed wearing the veil. However, in many other Middle Eastern countries, such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, de-veiling occurred without state intervention. In 1923 Huda Shaarwi and Saiza Nabarawi, two Egyptian feminists and activists, took symbolic action that was internationally acclaimed and shocked the world: they removed their veils, thereby “launching a movement among upper-class women to abandon the face veil and move about the city without it” (Macleod 1991, 102). Their act, and the writing
of Amin and Zeineddine and those who followed them, deeply “influenced broad discourses and public attitudes on the headscarf” (Patel 2012, 300). Both upper class and middle-class women slowly started to unveil and to wear modest Western dress. While for middle-class women Western dress was a sign of their middle-class status, for lower-class women this movement was essentially foreign (Macledo 1991, 103). Over time, however, fewer women covered and in modernizing states such as Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan, veiled women became a rare sight (Patel 2012, 301). From 1900 to 1920 was the era of unveiling; from 1920 to 1960 unveiling was the norm (Ahmed 2011, 46).

However, the 1970s brought on an age of new veiling, different in style and meaning from the veil of colonial times and the veil that had recently been discarded by women of the unveiling age.

Religious Revival

In 1967 Egypt and its neighboring states Syria and Jordan were defeated by Israel in the Six Day War. The 1967 war left Egyptians, and much of the Arab world, humiliated. In this context, a religious revival began that lasted until 1973, with religious intensity increasing among Muslims in all sectors of society (El Guindi 1999, 131). Believers interpreted the loss as “God’s will to punish Egypt for the increasing decline in people’s morals” (El Guindi 1981, 469). In 1973 a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria garnered a victory in the Ramadan War. The surprise win of the Ramadan war seen as “victory over Israel in the name of Islam” and gave birth to a transnational Islamic movement. In the 1970s, starting in Egypt and spreading to many neighboring Arab countries Islamic consciousness rose, and the subject of the veil was revived (El Guindi 1999, 143). Women and the control and management of their bodies
would play a central role in projecting cultural stability and authenticity. Unlike the 1979 Iranian Revolution where newly installed state powers forced veiling, the Islamic revival and the neo-veiling movements in places like Egypt and Jordan were grassroots movements. These were movements of national and cultural identity, authenticity, appropriation, and resistance.

The Islamic Revival Movement

The transnational Islamic Revival movement was at base a creative alternative to political, social, legal, and religious institutions (El Guindi 1981, 466). While the victory in the Ramadan war was its catalyst, the movement also sprang from social change in Egypt and in many other places in the Middle East. As will be discussed later, the social change set in motion in 1950s Egypt by Nasser’s reforms had educated women and brought them into the public sphere; however, women were still vulnerable to harassment in this sphere (El Guindi 1981, 481). Furthermore, in the 1970s, infitah, Sadat’s open door economic policy to promote growth in Egypt, was accompanied by westernization, materialism, and consumerism (El Guindi 1981, 478). This policy had unintended moral consequences such as social disintegration (El Guindi 1981, 481). The Islamic Revival movement directly interacted with such social changes and effects of modernization.

Islamic Revival was an overwhelmingly voluntary grassroots youth movement that spread in Arab cities, through connections on college campuses. The word mitdayyinun, which means “the state of being religious,” was coined to address the individuals following the new spiritual trend; though unrelated by blood, Islamic Revivalists addressed each other as “brother” and “sister.” Membership in these communities was informal and unmediated by institutional religion; no overt pressure from the state or other outside entities was exerted on them. Once a
person reached *iqtina* (“spiritual conviction”), this person became a member of the community (El Guindi 1999, 132). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, to this day this idea of conviction plays a major role in veiling. As a member of this spiritual community, an individual adhered to certain rituals and prescriptions through dress and behavior (El Guindi 1981, 474). Thus youth and college students began to act and dress differently from the majority of the urban population, who wore modern Western clothing (El Guindi 1999, 131).

Religious enlightenment was accompanied by conservative behavior, such as avoiding contact with individuals of the opposite gender. Interaction between the sexes on co-ed university campuses did not stop but was marked by “reserve and austerity, almost ritualized” (El Guindi 1999, 133). Gendered interactions were guided by “Islamic” values. Islam, unlike most other religions, accepts sexuality as normative, as an aspect of everyday spiritual life: “there is no contradiction between being religious and being sexual” (El Guindi 1999, 136). However, sex must be enjoyed within matrimony; outside marriage, interaction between men and women must be desexualized. Thus as interpreted by these *mitdayyinin*, social interactions between men and women must be controlled through conservative behavior and clothing.

The specific styles of acceptable dress came to be called *al-ziyy al Islami* (“the Islamic dress”); these modes of dress became a transnational code shared by all parts of the informal movement (El Guindi 1999, 134). These new styles were invented and unfamiliar: they reflected “neither the traditional dress of Egypt nor the dress of any other part of the Arab world or the West, though they often combined features of all three” (Ahmed 1992, 220). Soon women were replacing “their western outfits of colorful and silky skirts and blouses with long, loose-fitting dresses and headscarves…they call themselves *muhaggabat* [sic], the covered women” (Macleod 1991, 4). This time period is also when the *jilbab* emerged and became associated
with the *muhajjabat*. The *jilbab* was a specific type of covering: usually unfitted, ankle-length, in a solid color such as beige, brown, navy, white, or black, and made from thick opaque fabric. It was accompanied by *al-khimar*, a head covering wrapped low on the forehead and tied to cover the mouth, chin and neck. When the cross-sex avoidance behavior became the norm or “Islamic” mode of interaction, such loose-fitting dresses and headscarves became the “Islamic” way of dressing.

The degree of coverage in Islamic clothing—for example, rejecting a less modest *hijab* and choosing instead the highly conservative *niqab* (a veil covering the whole face, leaving only an eyeslit for vision)—became associated with the degree of “belief, conviction, religious research and Islamic knowledge” (El Guindi 1981, 475). Outerwear choices were held to correspond to inner ethical states. Those who became *mitdayyinin* marked their switch from a secular road to an Islamic way of life through their public behavior and dress. They thus foregrounded the public performance of their inner religiousness as an essential part of their movement—an aspect that continues to today, where piety is publically performed through veiling. This understanding of dress as parallel to inner ethical states will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Though Islamic Revivalists were dispersed among larger Arab and Muslim communities, they were ideologically unified and could identify each other through their dress, rituals, language, and behavior. More importantly, through their symbols and rituals, they expressed two fundamental features of Muslim ethics: egalitarianism and sexual segregation (El Guindi 1981, 474). The revival movement united men and women from all class strata. In addition, it served as a way to mediate the public space that had to be shared by the sexes due to modernizing social and economic changes. Their dress and behavior also became “symbols of
an ‘Islamic model’ of comportment and dress” and they personally became examples to emulate (El Guindi 1999, 133). Thus as ideals and as models, they set the norms and ethics of “Islamic” behavior and “Islamic” wear.

**Resistance through Islamic Identity and Dress**

These *mitdayyinin* were not at first formally organized or secluded from the rest of the society, but were dispersed transnationally among secular and religious schools and universities. Early on college students made up the majority of the core informal members. They did not form their own organization but were assimilated students and continued their interaction with secular students (El Guindi 1999, 133). Their Islamic way of life guided their conduct and interactions in a secular world. They joined the student organizational structure already established, ran for student elections on their Islamic Revival-based ideology, and formed clubs dedicated to religious activities (El Guindi 1999, 33). Slowly their ideology began to appeal to more secular Muslim students, and their beliefs—along with their practices—spread to other sectors of society outside of college campuses (El Guindi 1999, 133).

Their beliefs and behavior (including dress) provided a welcome resistance to the established status quo in modernized Arab states. This resurgence of allegiance to traditional Islamic values and behavior expressed “alternative,” “oppositional Islam” against both the state and the religious establishment (Macleod 1991, 104). It was also a resistance to Western influences in the Arab world. However, the return to traditional ideals or Islamic values did not mean a return to the early veil of seclusion or an early Islamic community; it did not erase all that early Egyptian feminists (among others) had achieved. The women of these Islamic Revival movements were active and visible in the public sphere, enrolled in higher education for hard
professional fields; they were modern while asserting their Muslim veiled identity (El Guindi 1999, 168). In addition, veiling in particular was viewed as a form of Islamic feminism, a way of emancipating women from “imposed, imported identities, consumerist behaviors, and an increasingly materialist culture” (El Guindi 1999, 184). Western attire carried with it the “‘capitalist’ construction of the female body: one that is sexualized, objectified, thingified, etc…” (Abu Odeh 1993, 3). The movement of the new veiling sought to emancipate women from inauthentic imposed and imported identities and behaviors associated with the capitalist West and to create in their place an “oppositional” Muslim identity. The veil became a symbol of this resistance against Western ideology through Islamic values. The veil was appropriated during the Islamic resurgence and the grassroots movement of the 1970s and early 1980s to construct a resistant, authentic Muslim identity.

Islamism

By the mid 1980s the mitdayyinin of Islamic Revivalism were replaced by Islamiyyin (Islamists), and they became a major oppositional political force (El Guindi 1999, 134). What had been a grassroots movement of students became a political and an Islamic nationalism that threatened the secular governments of the early 20th century. More than this, as Islamism became a more formalized and organized movement, it changed from a movement initially owned by women to one co-opted by men (Ahmed 2011, 125). Islamic leaders and Islamism spread the norms and ethos about Islamic behavior and dress from a top-down approach into the wider population, while popular demands rose for the larger role of religion in public life. Jordan specifically was a unique case. The Hashemites, the royal house of Jordan, claim political legitimacy from Islam as descendants of the Prophet (Rabo 1996, 168). Thus King
Hussein, Jordan’s monarch during this period, tried to align his sentiments with that of the movement to appropriate its power. He publicized his personal piety and was often seen on television at prayer or performing other rituals; in addition the amount of religious programming on state-run television and radio increased (Price 1999, 53&54). However, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, in effect the only legal political opposition force in Jordan, began to challenge the king’s commitment to Islam and considered him not “wholly Islamic” (Price 1999, 54). The Brotherhood in Jordan had been legalized in 1946. At first it had a mutually beneficial relationship with King Hussein, as the two were allied against leftist ideologies (Krishna- Hensel 2012, 100). However, by the 1980s the Brotherhood had become politicized, allying with professional organizations and forming strong student groups at the University of Jordan and Yarmuk University, Jordan’s two largest universities (Krishna -Hensel 2012, 101). Islamist student groups began to attract more students and gain control of the student government at these universities, surpassing Palestinian and nationalist organizations. As in Egypt they also began to expand their influence into neighborhoods surrounding the campuses (Price 1999, 54). This politicization of the Islamist movements, their formalization and organization, helped to strengthen and spread their ideologies.

The veil played a vital role in Islamism, embodying the “success” of Islamist ideology. Among the four signs of the Islamist movement’s advances listed by the prominent Islamist leader al-Aryan, the first was the increase in veiling (Ahmed 2011, 134). Women’s veiling and their participation in the movement was of great concern to Islamist leaders. Just as de-veiling had been for modernizing Arab states a symbol of “westernization” seen as progress, veiling for Islamist groups became a symbol of pious commitment and resistance to the West (Ahmed 2011,134). Veiling was central to Islamist debates and criticism of imperialism and Western
ideas that had infiltrated and diminished Egyptian and other modernized Arab societies (Ahmed 2011, 139). The control of women’s bodies—early feminism—played a central role in modernization efforts and thus it had to play a central role in the Islamist movement as well. Women’s bodies were again the crux at which national identity and authenticity was formed.

Since the veil was an integral part in the antimodernist and Islamic aims of the Islamists, Islamic attire was systematically and deliberately promoted through charismatic young preachers and other propaganda. Islamist groups even offered Islamic dress to women at low cost (Ahmed 2011, 133 & 151). In addition, there were the added benefits of becoming a *muhajjaba* (a covered woman). *Muhajjabat* gained access to a transnational network of Islamists. More immediately, their dress was a mark of true belief; this ethical superiority gave women a sense of moral authority that they could deploy to gain rights and independence. Their Islamic dress enabled them to move freely and to call upon their rights in Islam against mistreatment by parents and spouses (Ahmed 2011, 151). In Jordan,

Islamic Movements [gave] women a new kind of public freedom outside the web of family and patriarchy. It is within the confines of “Islamic” dress that young women become physically mobile, verbally articulate and able to choose their own (Muslim) husbands, jobs, and friends outside family control (Rabo 1996, 168).

By wearing “Islamic” dress women were able to assert more freedom and independence because they could carry the private patriarchic protection of seclusion into the public sphere. Ironically, in this way an object that constricts and covers actually enabled women to break traditional restrictions. A historically patriarchic object of suppression was appropriated during this period to transcend the limitations of patriarchy.
More than anything, Islamist popularized and spread their interpretations of Islam that was different from the mainstream form (Ahmed 2011, 150). The religious faith and practices they endorsed would standardize the norm and ethos for veiling.

**The Grassroots Movement: The Veil as an Instrument**

While the neo-veiling movement discussed so far was started by well-to-do university students, and continued by Islamists, simultaneously, lower-middle-class women also returned to veiling. During modernization and economic change, traditional symbols, customs, images, and behavior form an important countertext (Macleod 1991, 11). The 1960s brought many economic reforms to Egypt. A new economic class emerged through Nasser’s reform of education and the availability of employment in government bureaucracy. Most women who started veiling at this time came from newly developed lower-middle-class families. These women were usually the first women to be educated and the first women to work outside their home in government and clerical jobs (Macleod 1991, 3). Likewise in Jordan, the state depended heavily on the presence of women in the public sector: many of the females that attended Jordanian universities in the 1980s became part of the state apparatus (Rabo 1996, 168). These women experienced rapid social change. For the first time they were leaving the safe and protected spaces of their families’ house to enter public spaces. Their experience was “shaped by the search for an authentic identity coherent with traditional culture yet consistent with women’s goals of increased opportunity, a search for modernism that builds on, rather than rejects, a traditional culture and traditional sources of women’s power” (Macleod 1991, 17). These women appropriated the veil to create an authentic identity that would balance between their identity struggles brought on by modernity and their loss of traditional power and security.
Such veiling was not a return to traditional uses or meanings of the veil, but rather its active appropriation for new purposes.

The neo-veiling movement by the 1980s had moved on from a “powerful but limited, university phenomenon to a mass movement.” In this shift the meaning of the veil shifted. For working-class women, the reason for wearing the veil was not imbedded in larger political or transnational movements but in immediate relationships. It was tied more to their roles as wives and mothers in families than to the expression of oppositional anti-western feelings or nationalism (Macleod 1991, 115). For most working women in the lower-middle class, the veil was not appropriated as a symbol of resistance or religious belief; rather it had an instrumental use.

This instrumentality is in fact, deeply imbedded in the history of the veil: women have always used the veil for their own purposes. It is the veil’s visibility that allows it an instrumental use beyond mere symbolism. A muhajiaba can communicate a message to onlookers without actually expressing that message herself through words or gestures. The veil conveys a message about the wearer to the viewer —and it also conveys a message about the viewer (Macleod 1991, 98). For example, a veil allows a woman to communicate to onlookers who is kin and who is not: “it represents the dialect of separation and association” (Macleod 1991, 99). A veil can also be an instrument in the public performance of morality. Since morality is not just an individual or internalized belief but also a public performance and a social behavior, the veil plays its role as a communicator of morality to the wider public. More broadly, in the context of the Arab world where a family’s honor is centered upon its women, a woman’s body and her morality reflect the reputation and the honor of her family. “The focus of the woman’s body as the locus of morality for the entire family highlights the importance of the
dress symbol in maintaining the structure of familial institutions and the morality that supports it” (Macleod 1991, 100). Thus the veil can be seen to protect the honor of the women and the institution of family that depends on the morality of its women.

In addition, historically and practically, since those who have the economic means have observed female seclusion more strictly, a veil can communicate social class and economic status. “In the past, as well as today, rising in class status often involves the veiling and perhaps partial seclusion of previously unveiled women in the family” (Macleod 1991, 100). Furthermore, the veil can communicate individual information about the wearer. Styles in dress and how clothes are worn are under the direct manipulation of the women (Macleod 1991, 101). Therefore, women can make subtle alterations to convey social messages; the style in which a veil is worn can offer a glimpse into the personality and intention of the woman who wears it.

To sum: the instrumental use of the veil seen in the neo-veiling of 1960s Egyptian workingwomen is only one historical instance of the instrumental visibility that is the crucial feature of the veil.

Arlene Macleod’s ethnographic research in Egypt provides crucial insight into the new veiling. She argues that the veil was, in addition to the various traditional meanings outlined above, an instrument in accommodating protest. This protest was not against the West, since for modern workingwomen veiling was not entrenched in a larger political debate about nationalism or in the creation of an “oppositional” identity. For lower-class workingwomen, the need to cover themselves in their immediate and lived experiences took precedence over the veil’s larger abstract political uses. For them wearing the veil was a method to evade the male gaze in the public space, a subtle method to evade class categorization, and a protest against the erosion of their traditional gender role (Macleod 1991, 115).
One of the basic uses of the veil is to avoid harassment. Many middle-lower-class women had to walk on packed streets and use crowded public transportation to go to school or work. This kind of public exposure was uncomfortable physically as well as mentally: women were constantly harassed. Simply by being women they attracted unwanted stares, whistles, and comments by men. If a woman retorted and a public scene followed, the man might be chastised—but the woman might also be criticized for wearing inappropriate clothes that earned such attention. However, if a woman were veiled, the same criticism could not be applied. Furthermore, for a veiled woman, “her sense of ‘untouchability’ of her body is usually very strong in contrast to the woman who is not veiled…[and she] is more likely to confront the man with self-righteousness…[and] public reaction is usually more sympathetic to her” (Abu Odeh 1993, 29). Moreover a man might be less willing to harass a woman for this very reason. Such a woman’s protection derives from the piety that she is portraying and the public acknowledgment of this religious aura, both of which result from veiling. Thus veiling offered women protection from public harassment and the male sexual gaze. This protection has largely been compromised with the new fashionable veiling, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

As previously noted, veiling can be an instrument to communicate one’s socio-economic class—but it can also be an equalizing tool: “by adopting covering dress women can demonstrate their middle class position and evade the revelations Western dresses would inevitably make about their exact position within the middle class” (Macleod 1991,135). Just as uniforms do in schools, veiling can minimize class distinctions. In addition, veiling is a cost-effective mode of dress, as women can alternate between two or three jilbab instead of multiple outfits. Since the new veiling was adopted first by well-to-do university students who would later have respectable professional careers, veiling for the lower-middle class came to symbolize their entrance into the
middle class. Thus veiling can be a tool to highlight a women’s or a family’s entrance into a certain class, while at the same time hiding a family’s exact position in that class. In homogenizing appearance and thereby eliminating a social-class cue to onlookers, veiling can even be seen as a subtle instrument of resistance against classism.

Most importantly, veiling was mainly used to convey “strongly felt anger over the loss of traditional values that has accompanied the overwhelming thrust of modernization and development” (Macleod 1991, 135). While Nasser’s reform in the early 1960s, had pushed a greater number into the public space the open door policy of the late 1970s and 80s of Sadat, mentioned earlier had caused greater social inequality and an economic crisis that would pose an immense challenge for women of the lower class. The resulting economic downturn and political crisis, meant for the women, had to struggle to maintain their newfound class status and provide basic necessities for their families. This hardship did not challenge only Egyptian women. Jordan also experienced economic decline and political trouble during the mid to late 1980s. Jordan, unblessed with natural resources and lacking a developed industrial base, depended heavily on remittances from its educated citizens working in the Persian Gulf states and on foreign aid from these states. But in the mid-1980s, the decline in the oil market meant the repatriation of many Jordanians and losses in aid from the Gulf States (Price 1999, 56). These factors—a declining economy and political crisis due to an uprising in the West Bank that sparked criticism from its majority Palestinian population and inward calls for democratization (Price 1999, 56)—affected the daily lives of these lower class women in both Jordan and Egypt. Women no longer had the choice of staying at home in their traditional roles but were forced to work in order to provide for their families, and in this forced entry into the public space of work they felt as an erosion of their traditional identity.
The veil was the embodied objection to this erosion: an objection to the loss of their traditional selves in which their value and respect as mothers and wives were being replaced with a new value: the modern identity “working women” (Macleod 1991, 132):

Since women’s traditional identity and role are challenged by their new option of working outside the home… [women] face the dilemma of opposing forces pushing them into two quite different roles; their traditional identity is being eroded in the process and they must struggle to define a new identity in political space which has arisen (Macleod 1991, 124).

In this context, appropriation of the veil involved reclaiming a loss, the dignity of traditional identity; according to one of Macleod’s interviewees, “the veil above all demands respect for the wearer, ‘when I put on the *hijab*, men must respect me. It says that I am a good woman, and if they are a good man, they will see that it is right that they treat me with dignity’” (Macleod 1991, 133). These women deployed veiling to resist degradation of their status. Furthermore, veiling, as a public symbol, expressed the tension these women felt between their traditional and their modern identities, resolving their problem by creating a new identity: the covered working-woman” (Macleod 1991 124).

In Jordan as in Egypt, women who needed to work signaled through wearing the veil that they were still concerned about maintaining a traditional Islamic way of life (Rabo 1996, 168). The veil provided a way to harmonize their traditional Muslim identity with their new workingwomen selves. The visibility of the veil and its communicative qualities allowed women to appropriate it for the purpose of forging a new balanced identity. In the workplace, the veil embodied both the tension felt by women and its solution. The covered workingwomen presented to onlookers the resolved tension between their traditional identities and their newly
formed selves. However, at the same time that they used the veil to protest against and redress the traditional/modern tension, they accommodated to existing ideals about female behavior and women’s primary roles as mothers and wives. The veil “symbolize[d] women’s acquiescence to the existing power relations which structure their lives” (Macleod 1991, 138). Thus veiling was an instrument of both accommodation and protest, but nonetheless it was an instrument manipulated by women.

In Macleod’s study, though the interviewees considered themselves good Muslims and their religious identities played crucial roles in their lives; they did not feel that wearing the veil must be accompanied by increased religious observance or piety (Macleod 1991, 136). For these women the veil was not just an expression of piety but had a more practical and instrumental role in their lives, as the symbolic reconciliation between the tensions of women’s private and public roles.

Between the 1970s and the 1980s there was a shift in Egypt related to who wore the veil as well as how she wore it. While in the 1970s mostly university women with associations with Islamic groups veiled, by the 1980s the new veiling movement had casted a wider net. The 1970s version of the new veil worn by the religious was loose, covering hair, neck, and shoulders; its colors were usually dark. In the 1980s more fashionable styles of veiling emerged. These styles were close fitting, made of silk and gauze in a variety of colors. In addition, accessories like matching bags, shoes, and jewelry completed the outfits of women who veiled in this fashion. While these new fashionable styles covered the hair and body, there was also a clear focus on being fashionable as well (Macleod 1991, 06). By the late 1980s and the early 1990s extreme Islamic dressing had moved to the periphery of society and the new fashionable
veiling became the mainstream (Macleod 1991, 106-107). A new kind of veiling was on the rise, marking a new concern about fashion as central to veiling.

**The Piety Movement**

In the late 1990s, around the same time that veiling was becoming infused with fashion concerns, a new piety movement emerged in grass roots middle class and lower class populations. The new piety movement, unlike the Islamic revival and Islamist movements before it, did not challenge the secular nature of the state and did not confront the political order. The movement hoped to solve the problem of an increasingly secularizing society by incorporating various spheres of life with traditional Islamic ethics and values rather than modern secular ethics (Mahmood 2005, 47). In this piety movement, which continues to the present time, *da’wa* came to play a more central role than the concerns of resistance and authenticity that had marked veiling in the 1970s and 1980s. *Da’wa* is understood to be a “religious duty that requires all adult members of the Islamic community to urge fellow Muslims to greater piety, and to teach one another correct Islamic conduct” (Mahmood 2005, 57). The piety movement thus included a mosque movement in which religious lessons were given to women in mosques: a response to the perception that the importance and applicability of religious knowledge had become marginalized by “modernity,” “secularization,” and “westernization.” These lessons not only instructed Muslims in how to carry out religious duties and worship but more importantly how to conduct and organize their daily lives in accordance with Islamic piety and virtuous behavior (Mahmood 2005, 4). The piety movement focused not so much on the “the activities of state-oriented political groups but more broadly [on] … religious ethos or sensibility that has developed within contemporary Muslim societies. This sensibility has a palpable public
presence... marked [by] displays of religious sociability [including] the adoption of the veil” (Mahmood 2005, 3). What the piety movement in combination with the Islamic movements did was bring forth well-defined ideas of normative ethics and Islamic practices within Muslim societies. The veil is only one of the many practices that are public manifestations or symbols of this piety movement.

**Conclusion**

From the 1920s to the 1960s in various waves, the veil was discarded as an instrument of oppression and backwardness. Then in 1970s and 1980s the veil became an instrument and a symbol of resistance, authenticity, and identity. More than that, the Islamic movements of the 1970s and 1980s set norms and standards about Islamic values and Islamic dress. Since the late 1990s, the piety movement has begun to play a larger role across the region in all aspects/classes of Muslim societies and continues today to shape norms and ethics of Muslim religiosity and its expression.

Throughout all of these historical phases and movements the veil has been the outward, public expression of general ideologies (“progress,” “Islamization”) or inner ethical states (cultural identity, authenticity). While this chapter has attempted to provide the broader context of re-veiling, Chapter 3, which presents findings from research conducted in Amman, offers a more focused understanding of the relationship between the contemporary piety movement and the fashionization of the veil: in other words, the current relationship between current ethics and aesthetics in the experiences of young urban muhajjabat in Jordan.
Chapter 3: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Veiling

The Piety Movement in Jordan

Since the rise of Islamism in the 1980s, the Jordanian state has been in constant struggle with various Islamic groups to define and monitor religious knowledge and norms (Adely 2012, 86). In Jordan, a state-sanctioned piety movement has become legitimized and standardized. All Muslim public school students are required to take formal religious classes from 1st to 12th grade (Adely 2012, 83). State-run television networks broadcast numerous religious shows; to these are added transnational religious shows broadcast from Egypt and Saudi Arabia for those who can afford access. Piety has thus become popularized and normalized.

While state intervention and national religious projects are important factors in this popularization, this chapter will mainly focus on the roles that private citizens—from university professors and students to popular televangelists—play in the contemporary piety movement. In other words, this chapter will consider not the political promotion and shaping of piety but rather its social standardization. Further, debates surrounding proper forms of piety are deeply gendered and center on the role of women in contemporary Jordanian society (Adely 2012, 85). Both governmental and private efforts to define religious legitimacy focus on women and the veil. Therefore, this chapter will investigate the intricate and complex relationships among veiling, fashion, and piety: what one might call the ethics and aesthetics of veiling.
Fatima and the New Muslim Evangelism

When I announced my interest in studying the *hijab* to the director of my study- abroad program he excitedly recommended that I choose Fatima as my advisor. Fatima is the program’s events coordinator; she is young, beautiful, fashionable, and a *muhajjaba*. Fatima represents about 60% of the women donning the *hijab* in Jordan: they are young, middle-class, and educated (Tobin 2011, 227). Fatima is not married, though she has had many offers. She comes from a well-to-do family and is one of five girls. She is the only veiled woman in her family. When, at the age of 15, she first told her mother that she wanted to veil, her mother was shocked and told Fatima to think about it more before she made the decision. Fatima’s father was a member of Jordan’s military and as such was expected to present a secular and modern face; having a veiled daughter would not fit this image. When she finally decided to veil at 16, her family members were not fully supportive but they approved her decision. A century ago, a woman who wanted to shed her veil would have rebelled against her family; today women like Fatima go against the wishes of their parents to take on the *hijab*.

Fatima grew up in surroundings where none of the women she knew, including women of her extended family, wore the *hijab*; she felt no family or peer pressure to wear the hijab from within her circle. Who sparked her interest to veil? Amr Khaled.

Amr Khaled is a Muslim tele- and web-evangelist who has been called “Islam’s Billy Graham.” Khaled is secularly educated yet his preaching is hugely, transnationally influential: in his annual report he claims more followers than U.S. talk show host and media juggernaut Oprah Winfrey (Hardaker 2006). According to David Hardaker of Britain’s *Independent*, “[his] prime target is the youth of the Arab world, who feel that they are second-class citizens in a world
dominated by the United States and its values… Khaled's remedy is tough personal regimes of self-renewal, based on what he says are real Islamic values.”

Khaled’s lectures place piety and da’wa at the center of spiritual life and bring these “private” concerns to the public space (Echachaibi 2011, 30). Already discussed more broadly in Chapter 2, da’wa literally means, “call, invitation, appeal, or summon.” The concept comes from the Quran and is associated with God’s calling of humanity to the “true religion” of Islam.

State-legitimated imams (religious leaders) controlled the da’wa of the late 1990s, which was disseminated through mosques and later audiotapes (Echchaibi 2011, 30). Today lay interpreters like Khaled, who have secular backgrounds, use popular media outlets such as television and the Internet to spread their private and personal version of da’wa, along with normative ethics and “Islamic” practices. Khaled differs not only in his methods but also in his appearance and image.

Khaled is young, only 42 years old. “He defies the stereotype of the Islamic preacher” (Hardaker 2006). Clean-shaven, dressed not in flowing robes but in “fashionable clothes of haute couture,” he is easy to relate to for modern middle and upper-class Arab Muslim youth—he even carries an IPod. His language is accessible: he uses colloquial Arabic to explain Qu’ranic verses and Hadith, the collection of sayings and acts ascribed to the Prophet, crucial for scriptural understanding and jurisprudence (Echchaibi 2011, 24-31).
Khaled and other figures like him have come to be called the *al-noorh a-gudud* (“the New Preachers”). They are known for offering “Muslim youth post-Islamist religious discourse that [is] apolitical” (Moll 2012). These “new preachers” focus on change from within and faith enacted not only with required piety practices but also with ethics. As Khaled explains, “‘women who wear the scarf but are not religious give Islam a bad name. Women who do not wear the veil but have good ethics are better than them’” (Moll 2012). However, while “good ethics” is more important than good performance; good morality will find outward expression. Khaled has used this reasoning in combination with rhetoric to convince thousands of women, including Fatima, to veil. Fatima told me to listen to Khaled’s famous lecture on the *hijab* if I wanted to understand why women veil and why it is important to veil. Fatima, Yasmine (another of my research subjects), and other women often paraphrased Khaled’s homily:

Do you know when you’ll die sister? The death rate for youth is increasing! I will give you an example of a girl. A true story that really happened. This happened in Egypt, Alexandria last year in Ramadan. The man was telling me that his wife
wears hijab. Living in front of them was a young girl who was not wearing hijab. The girl had good things inside her heart, like all of our sisters in Islam. However, she didn’t understand the meaning of the hijab and the meaning it has in Islam. So this man’s wife (and this is obligatory for all the women who wear the hijab) had good relations with this girl. She didn’t ignore her just because she didn’t wear the hijab, no, she was friends with her. So one day the young girl came to ask the wife if she’d come shopping with her to buy some jeans. So the intelligent wife who knows that she has to call the girl toward Allah agreed to go shopping with her, but under one condition: that the girl would also accompany her to an Islamic [meeting] that was about to start. The girl agreed. So they went to the [meeting], which was about repentance to Allah. The girl was so inspired by what was being said, she started to cry until she kept repeating one sentence over and over again, “I have repented, Allah, please someone cover me.” The people told her okay, let us take you home and you can put the hijab on. But she refused, wanting to be covered right at the moment with hijab. So they got her a scarf and a dress, and she left the building with it on. And as soon as she left to cross the road, a car hit her and she died…She died after she had repented. She is lucky she repented before she died (Tobin 2011,230).

In this lecture Khaled argues that even if the inner morality and ethics of a woman are good, wearing the *hijab* is an integral part of achieving salvation. The veil is not only the public expression of good morality; Khaled argues that it is the very means of devotion and submission to Allah. The homily shows the urgency Khaled promotes in young women to wear the veil to deepen their piety (Tobin 2011,231). It also encourages the need for personal choice and
conviction; the young girl in the end chooses to wear the *hijab* because she was convinced by the religious lesson. Furthermore it hints at the responsibility that *muhajjabat* have in supporting and convincing other women to veil. He reinforces “the normativity of the hijab and motivates its donning by appealing to enhanced piety, spiritual blessing and ethics that fulfill some notion of a ‘public good’” (Tobin 2011, 231). Since 2005, when Khaled started his veiling campaign through lectures given across the Arab world, the percentage of *muhajjabat* has grown considerably (Echchaibi 2011, 35).

After hearing Khaled’s lecture, Fatima told me, she said to herself, “Allah loves me and he does so much for me and if I love him, I should do the one thing that he has asked me to do.” In the normative discourse around the veil that Khaled reinforces, piety is the primary reason women (should) wear the veil. Many people I interviewed, and all the women in my focus group, reiterated the same sentiment. One participant, Yasmin, began wearing the *hijab* after *hajj*. *Hajj*, one of the five pillars of Islam, requires all who can afford it to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, a holy city in Saudi Arabia. When she made her pilgrimage Yasmin was in her 30s and married. After *hajj* Yasmin felt closer to God and felt, she reports, “the calling to wear the *hijab*.” The *hijab* reveals a woman’s devoted relationship to God. Piety can issue from a fear of God that might result from not following religious requirements. However, most of the women in my study named devotion to God as their ultimate reason for wearing the hijab; they talked about the love and the indebtedness they feel because God has “done so much for them” and “loved them.” Among the students surveyed at the University, 38 out of 47 answered that they wear the *hijab* because it is divinely commanded; while three answered that they wear it both because it is divinely commanded and because they feel safer. Even the participants of my male focus group named piety as the primary reason women wear the *hijab*. 
Modesty, Piety, and the Veil

Muslim women value and uphold the Islamic virtue of female modesty, and for many Muslim women, including my study participants, wearing the veil is integral to modesty. Yasmine believes that “the idea of the hijab is to show modesty, when a person looks at a woman who wears the hijab they think she is a religious woman and they respect you.” The hijab as a signifier of modesty has the power to relay to others the wearer’s piety and devotion. It is the outward expression of an internal ethical stance. The veil externalizes what is within; it relays information to onlookers about the woman wearing it. Ideally, a woman does not and should wear the veil only to present herself as pious and hence to manipulate the public; she wears it because she is pious.

But the correlations among veiling, modesty, and piety are more complex. The “correct” form of veiling for some of the women interviewed is not just the public representation of modesty; it is an instrument to transform oneself to be more pious. While the inner meaning—piety—informs the outer sign—the veil—that conveys the message to the public, the outer manifestation also shapes the inner disposition. According to one scholar:

The veil expresses true modesty and is a means through which modesty is acquired...[there is an] ineluctable relationship between the norm (modesty) and the bodily form it takes (the veil) such that the veiled body becomes the necessary means through which the virtue of modesty is both created and expressed (Mahmood 2005, 23).

The veiled body signifies modesty and simultaneously generates it through self-cultivation:

Self-cultivation [means] that bodily acts—like wearing the veil or conducting oneself modestly in interactions with people, (especially men)—do not serve as
manipulation masks in a game of public presentation, detachable from an essential
interiorized self. Rather they are the critical markers of piety as well as the
inevitable means by which one trains oneself to be pious (Mahmood 2005, 158).

Furthering this idea, Yasmine and many of my other participants believe that “the hijab is
sacred”: it must be protected. A consensus emerged among all my participants that a veiled
woman must be more cautious about her actions and interactions, especially with men. She must
be more virtuous and more modest because she represents the veil. No matter how much a
veiled woman dresses “correctly,” if she does not exhibit modest behavior, then she brings
shame to the veil. In this way the veil creates modesty in women. Through religious and social
expectations of what it means to be a veiled woman, the norm of modesty, which is enacted
through the veil, is inwardly created. Thus, the veil is integral to forming modesty within even
as it expresses this modesty. Since modesty is an Islamic virtue, piety can thus also be expressed
and created through veiling.

This is the thinking promoted by the contemporary piety movement in Jordan and
elsewhere in the Middle East. The movement emphasizes change from within, the role played
by personal choice. Devotion and faith, as well as ethical behavior, require that the conviction to
be pious come from within and not from social, familial, or cultural pressures: “A key aspect of
the new veiling is that it is based on the idea of personal choice and personal reflection”
(Macleod 1991, 109). This focus on personal reflection and choice reverberated within my
study. Of the 47 University of Jordan muhajjabat interviewed, only 2 responded that they wear
the hijab because their family wants them to. None of the women surveyed indicated that their
family forced them to wear the hijab. However, family encouragement is definitely present for
many muhajjabat : when asked about family influence, 40 of the women surveyed responded
that their family encouraged them to wear the *hijab* while only 7 said that their family did not care whether they wore the *hijab* or not. Most of the women I interviewed also said that, although their family was supportive, they started veiling out of personal choice. The only interviewee who mentioned family pressure to wear the hijab was the only subject from the Jordanian *Badia* (a rural desert area).

Piety seems to play the major role in my research subjects’ choice to wear the *hijab*. While most of participants felt that the *hijab* was a divine command they also believed that a woman must freely choose to wear it. When the male focus group was asked if they would want their wives and daughters to veil, one participant said “I will try to convince my wife and daughter to veil, but I will not force them because it is their choice.” Since piety is a reflective spiritual state and veiling as its expression; it cannot and should not be externally forced but instead must issue from personal choice and conviction. My interviewees repeatedly presented the view that a woman who did not have religious conviction and did not choose to wear the veil of her own accord but instead was forced would wear a “wrong” style of the veil. Thus the inner ethical state of piety, which comes from conviction, must match the outer aesthetic, the veil, which is its reflection. The next section will explore the ways in which fashion is a means through which harmony between ethics and aesthetics can be created or destroyed.

**Piety and Fashion**

At the University of Jordan or in the streets of Amman, one can see a rainbow of colors and styles of the veil. Women wear the veil in many different ways, from the enshrouding (and usually black) *abaya* and the *jilbab* to a more minimal *hijab* worn with western-style jeans and shirts. Even within groups who don similar styles of modesty dress there are further variations:
among *muhajjabat* clad in jeans and shirts, there are some who wear tight shirts with tight jeans, while others wear longer shirts with looser jeans or trousers. One can even find differences in the way the *abaya* is worn: one girl might wear a conventional loose *abaya* while another wears a tightly fitted one. Similarly with the *jilbab*: one might wear the *jilbab* loose and long, while another might choose a tight fitting or shorter *jilbab*. The wealth of variety in style, cut, color, and wrapping is amazing.

At the beginning of my research, the girls who participated in my focus group easily accessed from the Internet the cartoon in Figure 5 to show me different styles of veiling. Though the image is drawn by Puppeteer, a Syria blogger-cartoonist, and though the image is meant satirically, the variety in *muhajjabat* styles (and corresponding socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes) it depicts is, they felt, applicable to Jordan as well. This circulation of imagery (and humor) around the *hijab* reveals a transnational veiling community and culture that exists for those with Internet access.
Figure 5. Categories of the Veil. Source Orbala Blogspot.
My subjects’ interest in this image also reflects another fact that must be taken into account in any attempt to understand the contemporary veil among young urban women: appearance matters. Many of the women I interviewed attach great importance to being fashionable. In response to a survey question asking if they coordinate their outfits with their veils, 41 of the 47 surveyed answered “yes.” In addition, when asked if they feel stylish wearing the hijab, 43 of the 47 said “yes.” Most importantly, 27 of those surveyed strongly agreed it was important to look fashionable (beautiful) wearing the hijab, while 16 agreed and only 4 had no opinion; not one person said she strongly disagreed. Since the veil is not legislated by the government in Jordan, wearing the hijab is a realm in which an individualized and diverse plurality of piety can be enacted at the same time that norms of public ethics and morality are maintained (Tobin 2011, 224). Within these norms, pious diversity is embodied through a variety of styles and fashions.

While fashion has become an important aspect of the veil, however, it is limited by piety. There is only a degree to which women can be fashionable while also being pious. The relation is reciprocal: her level of piety affects the level to which a woman is perceived to be fashionable, while the stylishness of a woman also determines her perceived piety. There is a spectrum of piety that parallels the spectrum of fashion.

“Correct” Styles

Modesty and the hijab can be interpreted in different ways; the Sunnah (“clear and well-trodden path”: a written record of the normative Muslim way of life based on the Qu’ran and on the teachings and practices of the Prophet) provides some guidelines for Muslim women to follow. For example, clothing must be loose and covering your body and not revealing the shape
of your body and it must not be transparent. At the same time, local differences can emerge where the Sunnah provides flexibility. For instance, in Jordan a woman showing her face and hands is generally accepted. Dr. Noor explained,

When (the Prophet’s wife) Aisha’s sister was a young woman, the Prophet said to her that when a girl reaches puberty she should cover all her body except, and he pointed at the face and hand, this is why it is ok to show the hands and the face, there is no proof that women have to cover the face or hand—that is something that is completely cultural.

(Most of my participants regarded covering of the face with the niqab to be “un-Islamic”: that is, a cultural tradition rather than a religious obligation.) Showing the neck, which my (Jordanian) interviewees referred to as “the Egyptian style,” they considered wrong. In their view, most colors are acceptable, while subtle colors are looked upon especially favorably. Apart from these restrictions, women can be stylish, fashionable, and free to wear what they like. As Dr. Khaloud put it, “Islam fits with modern times, what is practical now; within the limitations a woman can wear any style and fashion.”

Dr. Noor and Dr. Khaloud, both in their early forties, teach at the University of Jordan and were both recommended to me as experts and women who are very knowledgeable about the hijab. They are highly respected by members of my focus group as well as Fatima, and Yasmine. Dr. Khaloud leads a women’s religious group that includes Yasmine and Fatima. Both professors wear long dark jilbab with subtle colored hijab. As mentioned in chapter 2, during the Islamic revival those who wore the most conservative styles were believed to be the most pious and most knowledgeable and this thinking has continued until today. My other interview subjects consider them to be at the top of the piety spectrum, and their deep piety is
reflected in their style. In other words, these two women were viewed as placing piety above fashion: the styles they choose place them high on the scale of piety and correspondingly low on the scale of fashion.

Yasmine and Fatima, in their early 30s, also abide within modest dress requirements by wearing loose trousers or skirts, long, loose shirts, and long, loosely tied hijabs with subtle, neutral colors. However, they do not identify themselves as pious on the level of Dr. Khaloud or Dr. Noor, and this self-perception is reflected in the styles they wear. Although they follow modesty restrictions as much as possible, they wear what they consider “modern” or “western” clothes, for example: trousers, fashionable skirts, and shirts. When asked why she did not wear the abaya or jilbab, styles which she had identified as the most correct form, Yasmine responded that she does not feel as comfortable in these styles and does not consider them practical in her work place. Her need for practicality in her clothing leads her to choose a less pious style that also happens to be more fashionable than the more correct forms of pious dress she rejects. For Fatima, who was interested in fashion before she started veiling, there is no reason she cannot fully meet the requirements of the hijab while being fashionable. In this belief she has support from her influential Egyptian televangelist, Amr Khaled. She says, “The older imams and preachers they tell you, you have to wear the abaya or the jilbab—but this discouraged me from wearing it. But Amr Khaled says that it is okay to wear what I want as long as I am modest.” For Fatima, the approval to wear a modest veil that is simultaneously fashionable was one of Khaled’s attractive arguments. Both Yasmine and Fatima, however, place more emphasis on the pious aspect of their styles and adhere strictly to the requirement of loose fitting clothes and loose, subtly colored hijabs. More than that, these four women were the only women interviewed who read the Qu’ran on their own, pray daily, and attend local mosque meetings and
women’s religious gatherings. While these observances are not in themselves measures of piety (which as an internal state cannot be measured by externals), they do show the commitment and devotion of these women. This great commitment to piety is parallel to their strictly pious fashion, the outward expression of their modesty.

However, such spiritual styling is not the case for everyone I studied, especially focus-group participants between the ages of 18-23.

“Half and Half” Styles

When I conducted my female focus group at the University of Jordan, the first thing the girls did was to bring into our gathering a classmate wearing the *abaya*, which they identified as “the right kind of *hijab*.” They also pulled in another girl wearing the *jilbab* as a second example of an appropriate *hijab*. The *abaya* of the first girl was black, as is traditional, but it also, untraditionally, had a design running along its sides (see Figure 6, for an example of this kind of ornamentation); she had carefully matched the color of her *hijab* to the design’s hues.
Figure 6. Fashionable *abaya*

The other girl’s *jilbab* was salmon pink with silver buttons and a belt in the middle (see examples at Figure 7); she accessorized her *jilbab* with a matching purse.

Figure 7. Fashionable *jilbab*
Four of the girls in my focus group wore tight jeans and a long shirt or a long cardigan with a tight shirt underneath. One girl had on loose cargo pants with a loose top, and a long cardigan. All wore hijabs, and their veils precisely matched their shirts or cardigans. One wore a blue hijab, another light purple, another a red, and another what the girls described as a “Burberry-styled” hijab, which was what was “in” at that time.

After instructing me that the abaya and the jilbab represent the “right” form of the veil, reflecting ideal piety, they then told me that they were all wearing the wrong hijab. All the girls except one went to say that what they were wearing was the “half and half” veil meaning a hijab that was half “correct” and half “wrong.” Their style was in the middle, and, step-by-step, they planned to move to correct forms of veiling like the abaya or the jilbab. For these young women, veiling is a practice that prompts spiritual reflection, and as piety grows the form of the veil changes to reflect the developing state of piety in the wearer. In addition, the mere fact that these women could identify the correct form of the hijab is perceived as evidence of their spiritual maturity.

But this relationship between piety and correct veiling picture becomes more complex upon further investigation. According to my subjects, the girls wearing the jilbab and the abaya are worthy of admiration not only for their expression of piety, but also because they follow fashion. They are revered for donning what the girls describe as “true Islamic dress.” In the context of emerging understandings and classifications of what constitutes Muslim dress, some regional styles conventionally popular among Muslims are classified as “un-Islamic” while other styles, especially those regionally associated with the Middle East and North Africa, like the Gulf States or Egypt, are viewed as authentically “Islamic” (Tarlo 7). While “abaya-as-fashion” has also grown (Al Qasim 49), and garners criticism from these girls, the old-fashioned black
*abaya* is seen as authentic “Muslim” dress even though it is culturally specific to the Gulf States. (The Puppeteer cartoon at Figure 5 satirically reflects this view of authenticity in its representation of the “Qubeisya.”) The *jilbab*, on the other hand, is close related to the Islamist movements of the 1970s; conservative Islamists consider it an acceptable style of dress. The consensus among the girls was that these “Islamic” dresses were better at expressing the Muslim virtue of modesty. But it is important to note that the “stylishness” of these garments issue from other considerations such as their provenance and their associations.

When the survey asked which style of *hijab* they wore 23 of the 47 girls surveyed said they wore tight colorful *hijabs* with form-fitting blouses and jeans, while only 7 said that they wore their *hijabs* with loose clothing. When asked what they thought was the most acceptable form of veiling, 37 of the 47 surveyed responded “covering your hair while wearing loose clothing” while only 4 thought that the style the majority actually wear—the colored veil with jeans and blouse—is the most acceptable. The majority of the young women in the study, whether surveyed or in a focus group, do not see the styles they wear as the most appropriate form of veiling. However, they fit into hegemonic norms of modesty. Thus while their style is not the most appropriate, it is acceptable. In effect, while piety is a factor in their decisions to veil, piety clashes with their wishes to be fashionable. To address this complexity of desire, the veil is today mediated through fashion, in effect balancing modesty with attractiveness. These young women negotiate and manipulate the veil to thread a line between piety and fashion. Maintaining a balance of the two, modesty and attractiveness, is key to preserving their piety. If they become too fashionable, their modesty—and their piety—are lost.
“Above Mecca, below Mecca Mall” Styles

“A lot of girls today do not respect the *hijab*, they wear tight jeans and short tight shirts with the *hijab*, sometimes even showing their elbows, we call these styles ‘above Mecca and below Mecca Mall.’” A subject in my male focus group gives this description of the style that all my interviewees categorized as wrong, commenting on the contradiction that such a style portrays. Mecca is the holy city in Saudi Arabia where the Prophet was born and where the Qu’ran was revealed to him. All Muslims who can afford to do so are required to make the *hajj*, a pilgrimage, to Mecca. Since veiling is considered sacred like Mecca, the idiom uses “Mecca” to signify wearing the part of the outfit worn “above”: the *hijab*. “Mecca Mall,” on the other hand, represents the bottom part of the outfit: tight pants and a tight short shirt. While Mecca is holy, religious, and Islamic, Mecca Mall is one of the biggest and most expensive malls in Amman; it carries western brands and “western” non “Islamic” styled clothes, Although a girl with such a style might wear the appropriate *hijab* the rest of her attire, revealing her body’s curves, does not fulfill the modesty requirement: she is a walking contradiction.

Furthermore, it is not just the “below” in the outfit that can be wrong: it can also be the *hijab* itself, even if it covers the whole head. A prevalent wrapping style during my time in Jordan was the hijab with a bump on top. A girl following this style might use an empty yogurt cup or some other kind of support to create an allusion of a big bun under her veil (derisively called a “camel hump”). Figure 8 presents a cartoon image on the left of the humped veil, which my focus group participants showed me to illustrate the “wrong and right style” of the *hijab*. The prevalence of such images is striking. This particular one appears in numerous websites, blogs, and social media sites. The girls easily Googled “wrong styles of *hijab*,” and this image
popped up, one of numerous similar depictions. One can speculate from this image’s online omnipresence that questions about “right” and “wrong” styles are not limited to Jordan. While the source of this cartoon is unknown, it proliferates online, shared on Facebook pages and among chat groups, copied into personal blogs. Such media are mainly used by youth of a certain class with access to the Internet.

Figure 8. The “right” and “wrong” hijab. Source: Orbala BlogSpot

The image at left is what focus group participants referred to as the “wrong” style, with humped *hijab*, exaggerated makeup, and tight clothing exposing bodily curves. The image at right shows the “correct” or “appropriate” style, with hijab worn appropriately, *jilbab* in a light color, and minimal makeup. Most of my participants’ *hijab* styles fell between these two images. Source: http://orbala.blogspot.com/2012/04/best-hijab-related-pictures.html
When the girls’ discussion group concluded, we walked outside. A girl wearing a tight, short shirt, tight pants, and the humped hijab walked by the group of discussants. They all tsked. The girl resembled the woman to the left in the cartoon depiction in Figure 8. One girl turned around to me and said, “You see that, that is the wrong hijab.” Throughout the day, similar judgments were issued every time a girl with the “wrong” hijab or inappropriate attire walked by us. The group not only criticized girls, who wore tight pants and short blouses, but also girls who wore abaya or jilbab that were tight and revealed their curves. Interestingly, immodest styles such as these are not simply viewed as inappropriate. They are also subjected to an aesthetic judgment: they are viewed as unstylish or unfashionable. The focus group viewed such styles, which crossed the ethical and aesthetic boundaries of normative limitations, as “bad styles” or “wrong fashion.”

Such wrong styles are not just unacceptable: they are haram (“forbidden”). Both Dr. Khaloud and many participants in my focus group cited a religious dictum: the Prophet had said there would be a time when women would wear “clothes so tight that they were almost naked, with a bump on their head like a camel: these women would not smell the scent of heaven.” This prophecy was mentioned to me by many of my participants, including the males. Those who did not mention the specific prophecy would simply say that such styles are haram.

These girls push the norms beyond the limits of the religiously and socially acceptable forms, and for this infraction, they were ostracized by my interviewees. All my participants believe that these girls choose fashion over piety. As one girl put it, “If the whole point of the hijab is modesty and to cover the attractive aspects of your body, what is the point of these styles that show of the lines of her curves? The girl has chosen to follow fashion.” Furthermore, my participants believe that the reason these girls wear these “wrong” style is because they wear the
hijab for the “wrong” reasons. Girls who wear these styles are suspected of being “forced” by their parents or culture to wear the hijab. Worst are the girls who, my subject’s feel, wear the hijab to be fashionable. They are seen as wearing the hijab without conviction or commitment. Thus their presumed lack of piety parallels the extreme immodest fashion they adopt.

As mentioned above, the veil is not required by law in Jordan, and there are many girls that do not veil. Therefore, girls who veil in the “wrong” styles are seen as less pious than girls who do not wear the hijab at all but wear more modest clothes and exhibit more modest actions. All the males of my focus group expressed a preference for a non-veiled girl to a girl veiled in the “wrong” style. My male participants criticized the girls veiled in the “wrong” style because their veiled bodies do not express the modesty that a veiled body should express.

Ironically, however, nowadays one can wear the veil and appear to be pious without actually being pious because the “religious ethos” set by the piety revival has interlinked the veil with piety; the veil is the public marker of piety.

Within the contemporary context of heightened Islamism and the Islamic Revival, one need not cultivate an inner, pious self in order to fulfill the mandates of the religion as public norms and ethics dictate; orthodoxy is not a prerequisite for orthopraxy, and authenticity here does not assume a predetermined inward state (Mahmood 2005, 6).

Such mimicry of piety is abhorrent because the false muhajjaba tries to portray an image of piety by using the public norms and ethics from the revival while actually stepping outside of it. Through determining the “wrong styles,” my participants feel they can identify who is hypocritical and lacks ethical and spiritual authenticity. My participants believe that the inner must match the outer, and therefore they believe that one’s piousness must match ones fashion.
Thus girls who wear the “wrong styles” are believed to be less pious because their less pious fashion must match their inner ethic.

Piety is not just mediated by fashion and styles but also by cultural beauty norms. When a close friend’s birthday arrived, her host sisters and her friends (including myself) decided to have a spa day and experience Jordanian beauty treatments. Arrangements were made to have our hair done and our eyebrows threaded. While we were in the salon, the woman who threads eyebrows called to cancel. This led my Jordanian friends, all muhajjabat, to frantically call other salons. My friends and I were confused and asked why we couldn’t just get our eyebrows done at the salon where we were already. It turned out that the salon does not do eyebrows because the woman who owns the salon “believes it is haram.” This was the first time I had heard this viewpoint, and it was surprising because most of the women I knew in Jordan had their eyebrows perfectly shaped at all times. I asked the girl what she meant by “it is haram” and she, in her makeup with her shaped eyebrows, said to me nonchalantly: “Oh yeah, getting your eyebrows threaded and wearing makeup is haram, it’s more haram than not wearing the hijab.” At first I thought this was one of those debatable rules because I did not understand how the many women I saw everyday appeared in public with their eyebrows shaped and makeup fully applied if it was generally and normatively believed to be haram. Further, 29 out of the 47 in the survey said that they get their eyebrows shaped and 25 said that they wear makeup every day.

However, repeatedly again young women in my focus group, women that I interviewed, and even the men kept telling me that make up and getting one’s eyebrow shaped was haram. This is because making oneself attractive and beautifying oneself was associated to sexualizing the body. Yasmine would point out the contradiction: “What is the point of the hijab if you are attracting attention by beautifying yourself?” Furthermore, how can young women
who judge harshly those they identify as wearing the “wrong styles,” the styles considered *haram*, also participate in *haram* actions themselves? How are these contradictions justified?

My participants did not deny their desire to be attractive. As mentioned above, 27 of the girls surveyed believed that being beautiful or fashionable is important. One girl in my focus group said “of course it is hard being a *muhajjaba*, you’re a girl and you want to look pretty and cute but you can’t really.” Even young men understand this struggle; as a subject in my male focus group declared: “The *hijab* takes away about 50% of a girl’s beauty, so it is okay for girls to do some things to feel more pretty.” How do women deal with these two desires, the oscillation between beauty and piety? As with fashion and modesty, balance is the answer. There must be a balance between piety and the desire to look attractive. The most pious women like Dr. Khaloud and Dr. Noor do not wear any makeup or have their eyebrows threaded. Yasmine and Fatima do not wear makeup but they do have their eyebrows shaped. The girls in my focus group have their eyebrows shaped and wear natural looking makeup, achieving the required balance. Girls who wear heavy or obvious makeup are judged to be less pious by participants of both my male and female focus groups. All the members of the male focus group agreed that while natural looking makeup is acceptable, heavy makeup is not. Those who are seen as going “over the top” in styling their appearance are believed not to be “convinced” by their own agency to wear the *hijab*. For example, women from the Gulf, who tended to wear heavy makeup and show half their hair thus not meeting the localized norms of modesty, are scrutinized suspiciously by both men and women in my urban Jordanian study.
Islamic Fashion and Consumption

Appearance and aesthetics are important not only to participants of my study but the numerous women on the street with perfectly matched clothes, accessories, name brand bags, flawless makeup and perfectly shaped eyebrows. Ironically, in a place where many women cover their hair and wear modest clothes to hide their attractiveness to men, consumption of beautifying products and services is highly emphasized. In central Amman, beauty salons sit on every street corner, while cosmetic shops and boutiques carrying the latest fashions are abound. A further irony: women get their hair done and eyebrows threaded only to walk out of salons wearing their *hijabs*.

“Veiling–fashion with its array of brand names and ever-changing styles” (Gokariksel and Secor 2012, 847) has a very visible presence in Jordan. The main entrance of the University of Jordan includes an underground market where more shops sell scarves than school supplies. During the time of this research the style was Burberry-styled scarves for the winter. During the springtime those scarves were abandoned for light scarves with bright colors and floral patterns. Women spend hours shopping for scarves that complement their skin color or accent their eyes. They look at fashion magazines and websites for wrapping styles that fit their face shape or their
outfit. In a marketplace report about headscarves in Jordan, Lowei, a scarf shop owner, claims “there are a lot more hijab … stores than there used to be in Jordan not because people are more religious, he says but because it’s the style…. headscarves keep up with clothing fashion” (Roth 2010). Jordan’s old city center filled with rows and rows of hijab stores, selling the latest styles, colors, and patterns, at an average price of less than 10 Jordanian Dinar (JOD) about 14 US Dollars.

While these stores offer the cheaper options, there are also chic hijab shops carrying expensive styles and material for those willing to spend about 100 or more JOD about 140 US dollars or more on abaya from the Gulf, jilbab from Turkey, and scarves from Italy. The importation of styles is highly selective and culturally mediated. While Jordanian women readily accept Turkish styles and some Gulf fashion, they tend not to adopt wholesale global fashion trends. For example, during the time of this research “Ruby” was a television show imported from Lebanon, where it was highly popular. Contemporary Jordanians often identify television shows and other cultural products from Lebanon and Egypt, because these states are more westernized and more globalized, as threatening to the “Jordanian” way of life and Islamic values (Adely 2012,34). Members of my male focus group identify the main character, Ruby, with her tight dresses and short skirts, with the “wrong” style of the hijab. Asked about Ruby, my female focus group participants were highly critical of her immodesty—but they still admired her fashion sense. As one participant said, “Of course we want to look like that and dress like that, but we can’t because we are Muslim and it is not our culture.” However, styles like Ruby’s—and influences from foreign media more generally—are not completely discarded but rather are mediated: the girls reported that they shop for dresses at non-Islamic stores and boutiques that they wear as shirts layered with cardigans on top and loose pants underneath.
This “Islamization” of what they consider a “western” style is a means for them to balance their desire to look attractive and imitate global trends with their desire to maintain their modesty.

By contrast, Turkish Islamic fashion is deeply appreciated and adopted without mediation in Amman. During a spring excursion to Turkey, many of the study abroad staff members who veiled were keenly impressed by Turkish veiling fashion among the students at Istanbul University. The chique jilbab made of high quality material, the elegantly followed the body without revealing curves, and the vibrant color provoke admiration. Though, Turkish veiling fashion is debated within Turkey (Gokariksel and Secor 2010), the Jordanian women I studied accepted it without question as true Islamic dress. Many boutiques I visited advertised and carried Turkish fashion, a sample of which is illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Turkish style jilbab
While Turkish fashion and imports lie at the more expensive end of veiling fashion, Jordan also has its own Islamic fashion companies. However, in Turkey veiling-fashion companies use marketing strategies, while Jordanian companies do not seem to advertise in the same way. During my whole stay in Jordan I never saw billboards or advertising for Islamic clothing, while in Turkey the high fashion women in jilbab staring down from tall billboards were a prominent part of Istanbul’s landscape.

In both Turkey and Jordan “producers of veiling fashion present their collections as seamless confections of fashion and piety” (Gokariksel and Secor 2012, 848). For example, in Jordan Sajeda Islamic Clothing, a company founded in 1987, claims to be the leading design and manufacturing house for the latest fashions and modes of Islamic women’s clothing. As it states on their official website, Sajeda Islamic Clothing company offers its customers “the best Islamic clothing: modest, elegant and professional” (Sajeda). What they consider makes their Islamic clothing the best is that it melds modesty with the latest fashion. However, this marketing strategy is not a realistic understanding of veiling fashion. As I have shown, my study subjects view veiling and fashion in some ways contradictory and at the least pulling in different directions. “Veiling–fashion as an object of consumption does not consent to be wholly captured within the moral discourse of Islam…It is …morally ambivalent, caught between its function as modest covering according to Islam and its social significance, which can be variously located in terms of fashion, aesthetics, politics, and class status” (Gokariksel and Secor 2012, 848). Furthermore, it is also caught between oppositions in its function as a signifier of piety. Piety and consumption are mutually antagonistic: “While the former is often defined as modesty, thrift, other-worldly devotion, spiritualism, and communitarianism, the latter is perceived to
cultivate self-indulgence, conspicuous consumption, this-worldly orientation, materialism, and individualism” (Gokariksel and McLarney 2010, 2).

On the other hand, the mortification of the flesh is traditionally seen as an enactment of piety. In this regard, the complexity of the different styles, the attention to detail, the amount of time spent on veiling fashionably cannot be taken lightly. Furthermore, the willingness of fashionable muhajjabat to wear layers of clothes in humid and burning weather is a form of mortifying the flesh for devout reasons. As the saying goes, women suffer to be beautiful and this suffering can be form of expressing piety.

Participants in my study attempt to balance between the Islamic ideals of modesty and piety and their own desires to look attractive through the consumption of fashionable scarves and clothes. “Their everyday decisions about what to wear thereby involve navigating a complicated ethical terrain.” (Gokariksel and Mclarney 2010, 2).

Piety and Fashion: Cultural and Social Significance

This section examines the ways in which the veil as an expression of piety has been appropriated for cultural reasons. The degree of fashion in veiling and the public portrayal of oneself as pious can have cultural and social rewards or consequences. Listen to Yasmine:

When I wear the veil I feel respected, I feel like men look at me and know that I am a good Muslim woman, and they respect me. Before I started wearing the veil, there were many embarrassing things that happened with men, but now they don’t because I am respected.

For Yasmine and many of my other participants, the veil brings rewards that go beyond “feeling close to God.” Veiling is a way to mediate social interactions, especially with men, and it plays
an informational role, in a society where fully open interaction between men and women does not take place. In contrast to the women of the 1970s and 80s who veiled to minimize harassment, enter the working place, or to manifest protest (Patel 2012, 301), my participants did not mention these things as causes but rather as effects of wearing the veil. Only 5 of the women surveyed answered that they wear the veil *because* it makes them feel safer, while 3 chose this response and, additionally, choose the option “a command from G-d” as their reason for veiling. Thus while for a few women the protection offered by the veil might be an important reason for wearing it, for most of my participants a sense of protection is a result, a reward for wearing the veil. In Yasmine’s case, having embarrassing encounters with men did not lead her to wear the veil; rather, a positive effect of wearing the veil is that men respect her and thus do not harass her, “since men fear for social (and divine!) Sanctioning if they harass a pious Muslim woman”(Patel 2012, 302). Many of my participants said that they feel “respected,” “safer,” and “protected” when wearing the veil.

My participants also reported that the veil shields them from the sexual gaze of men. Thus, not only does the veil protect women from harassment; the veil establishes a better relationship between men and women by removing the temptation of sexualization of women by men. Dr. Noor explains:

> The veil says to the men, look at my mind and my personality and not my body; instead of being viewed as a sexual object you are saying that I am a full human being, my body is mine: you are not welcome in until I have given permission, but we can still have dialogues and exchange ideas.
This aspect of the hijab is viewed as one of its greatest virtues: it rewards women with the agency to control who sees their bodies. It is “…empowerment through the reclaiming the female body from the public gaze, from determining what may be observed…”(Hassan 2010, 4).

However, this protected status is not the reality for all women who wear the veil. Veil-fashion has further complicated and in a way compromised the protection offered by the veil itself. Men consistently harass women who wear the less pious, more “fashionable” forms described above. Participants of my male discussion groups admitted that they do not assume that a woman is pious just because she wears the veil. One subject of the male group told me, speaking generally, that men believe “50% of the women wearing the hijab wear it for fashion.” Thus, it is not just that a woman wears the hijab but rather the style she wears it in and her action while wearing it that they judge to determine whether the hijab is worn for fashion or for modesty. If they decide that she is motivated by fashion, then they are not prevented by respect for the hijab: they proceed to do “whatever” (in the words of one of my male focus group members). Women seen to be following the wrong styles, being overly fashionable, are perceived as not wearing the hijab for the right reason—modesty—and can be punished by male harassment. “Harassers now know that many covered women are not really pious and are therefore more willing to verbally harass, approach, or grope women wearing headscarves” (Patel 2012, 302). Thus, for women who wear the “wrong” styles of the hijab, social rewards such as protection from harassment and the sexualizing male gaze do not exist. Instead, women who engage in veiling-fashion not only attract the sexual gaze of men but also a critical moral gaze.

Marriage
Other forms of social relation in which the veil plays a significant role are courtship and marriage. Marriage is normative for women in Jordanian society: “Women may work but their primary function is seen as belonging in the home…. She … is responsible for the marital home” (Sonbol 2003, 183). All the women in my focus group were in college; they all wanted to work one or two years after college—and then they wanted to get married and have children.

In the important goal for women of marriage, the veil plays a crucial role in the courtship process. “The point of the hijab is not to show off your body, your beauty, not to show your attractiveness. Just one guy gets to see it, you are all his and even how you look—your beauty, your hair—it is all his.” These are the views of a subject in my female discussion group, and as she spoke all the other girls in the room vigorously nodded in agreement. This is a romanticized, cultural view of the hijab. It takes the veil, which these young women otherwise stress should be worn for piety, and appropriates it into an object meant to preserve the wearer’s beauty for her spouse. A feminist scholar explains the logic:

In a social context, such as the one in the Arab world, where women can incur violent sanctions if they express themselves sexually … loving, teasing, flirting, and seducing was not the way these women normatively saw their sexuality …. They therefore experienced the veil as normatively necessary: precisely because women should not go around seducing men (except the ones they are married to), then they should be veiled (from other men) (Abu Odeh 1993, 30).

Moreover, the veil in this view becomes an object that preserves the virtue and honor of the woman and the family. As one of the subjects of my male focus group explained, “The beauty of a woman belongs first to her family and then to her husband.” Culturally, the beauty and virtue of a woman must be safeguarded from other men, first for the honor of her family and
second for the honor of her husband. The veil can in principle empower a woman by allowing her to decide who is able to see her, and thus take her body out of the public gaze; however, practically it is not a body that belongs to her but a body that belongs to her family and her husband.

In this cultural context, the veil becomes an informational tool to communicate such attitudes about gender and sexuality, as well as other virtues desirable in a marriageable female.

Muslim men and families prefer pious women over less pious women as marriage partners. They expect pious women to have good moral character and exhibit propriety ... raise virtuous children ... [be] trustworthy and honest ... [and] less likely to seek ‘no-fault’ divorces. (Patel 2012, 298).

Pious women are believed to have qualities that the culture deems important in wives. Four out of the five participants in my male discussion group reported that they would prefer to marry a veiled girl. While they do not believe that their wives should wear the abaya or the jilbab, which they see as too constraining, they also do not want their wives to be too fashionable. Ideally, they would choose women in the middle of these two extremes who are balanced in their style. Again fashion has a social significance: the simple fact of being veiled does not make a muhajjaba attractive; it is her choice of style that signifies likeable qualities. (One might think again of the relatively unappealing, scowling and stern qubeisya in contrast to the chic muhajjaba in Figure 5.) While the social significance of veiling fashion is undeniable, such fashion must also embody piety. Recall the perceived reciprocal relationship between piety and fashion: her level of piety affects the level to which a woman is suppose to be fashionable, while the stylishness of a woman also determines her perceived piety. This equation allows the hijab to be mediated for cultural and social processes. As veiling is the signifier of piety, piety also
becomes the signifier of other culturally desirable qualities, such as affability in a candidate for marriage.

**Rite of Passage**

Another form of culturally mediated reward that the *hijab* offers young girls is initiation into adulthood. Whenever my host-sister and her cousin play dress up they grab their mothers’ handbags and accessories, put on makeup, and, of course, drape on the *hijab*. For my host-sister, who I watched countless times don the *hijab*, slip her feet into my heels, grab a notebook, and walk mimicking the university students she sees, the *hijab* symbolizes adulthood. All the women interviewed said that a girl should start wearing the *hijab* when she starts her period and thus becomes a woman. They quote the *Sunnah* passage about a sister-in-law of the Prophet, whom he told to cover everything but her face and hands when she reached puberty. Thus this initiation is not just cultural but also “religious” to those who believe that the *hijab* is required.

Many of my participants who started to veil not at puberty but at 17, 18, or even 19 said that they didn’t feel like adult women until they started to wear the *hijab*. A subject from the focus group observed: “When I started to wear the *hijab* I finally felt like a woman. It is exciting because you throw away your childish clothes, you get new clothes.” All the other girls agreed with this sentiment. It was not only that she finally felt like a woman but also that her family started to treat her like one as well by buying her clothes that reflected her new status. Not one participant mentioned this as a reason for wearing the *hijab* but it was one effect that issued from veiling. “As with young people in many other parts of the world, becoming ‘a committed Muslim’ was one way in which some girls [seek] to demonstrate maturity and to shape their sense of self during a period of young adulthood” (Adely 2012, 84). The pious veil has been
appropriated as a cultural mark of initiation into adulthood. Furthermore, it is not only veiling but, as Adely, points out, the piety that signifies an adult spiritual state that allows the veil to act as a rite of passage.

Figure 11. Host sister and cousin playing dress up

Social Pressures

Veiling fashion’s cultural significance means that cultural and social pressures exist for women not only to veil but also to veil in a certain style. For some women, veiling and, more generally, the choice of specific clothing styles are influenced by social pressure to appear modest. My host-mother, who is in her mid-forties, does not have countless headscarves in her closet, nor does she try to match her outfit with her scarf. Her hijab is always a last minute thought, something she just throws on. While my host-sister is obsessed with securing her mother’s scarf, which would otherwise slowly fall off her hair, my host-father sometimes flirtatiously pulls at her scarf, attempting to take it off.
My host-mother grew up in Amman when veiling was not the norm. She shares her thoughts on her own relationship to the *hijab*:

Growing up I did not wear the *hijab*. We wore modest western clothes. But now I have to wear the *hijab*, you know, [because] people talk. My family does not really care but other people do. It is bad for a married woman with children to not wear the *hijab*, so I wear it. My husband, it’s funny, he is a very jealous man and does not want me to even take taxi alone anywhere, but he doesn’t want me to wear it. He wants me to wear western clothes, but I am too old and what will people say?

She wears the *hijab* only because it is the social norm; if she flouts the norm she fears being judged not by her family but by the wider society. Now, “when everyone wears the headscarf, no one wants to stand out by not wearing it” (Patel 2012, 305).

The dynamic between my host-mother and her husband is fascinating. While she succumbs to social pressure to veil, he reacts against her gesture, possibly because the veil seems to a man in his generation old-fashioned and backward. However, his insistence on her limited mobility, his jealousy and possessiveness, is interrelated to his resistance against the hijab, that would extend a patriarchal protection and allow her to move freely in public; even taking taxis unescorted. Juxtaposed in his reactions to his wife’s *hijab* are two contradictory desires: to embrace modernity and simultaneously to resist it.

Related to the *hijab* there is not just general social pressure but also specific peer pressure, especially for the younger generation, even extending to the style they choose to wear. One girl in my female focus group nodded reluctantly when everyone claimed that they hoped to move from the “half and half” *hijab* to more appropriate forms like the *jilbab* or *abaya* in future.
When I later approached her she said, “I don’t want to move to the jilbab or the abaya, I like the style I have now.” When I asked her why she agreed earlier she told me that she feared being judged. Though she is fine being a “half and half” muhajaba, she fears that saying that she wants to stay in this style instead of moving to a more modest one would bring judgment on her, even though she is a “good” Muslim. Social and peer pressure in these ways not only affects those like my host-mother, who do not care to wear the hijab, but also the muhajjabat themselves, in the styles they choose.

Conclusion

Piety and veiling-fashion have a complicated relationship. Largely due to the Islamic movements of the last thirty years and current day media evangelists such as Amr Khaled, veiling has come to signify piety for contemporary, mostly youthful Arab Muslims. This chapter has presented a comprehensive exploration of the complex relationship between ethics and aesthetics of veiling. The “correct,” “wrong,” and “half and half” styles provide examples in which ethics and aesthetics intertwine. Furthermore, ethical/aesthetic harmony in pious fashion has social significance and helps to regulate social and cultural interactions. Participants in this study believe that achieving harmony between inner spiritual states and outer appearances is critical to a sense of self and to productive social interactions. Pious fashion is thus a terrain that requires careful navigation and negotiation.

During my stay in Jordan I enjoyed a weeklong immersive trip to a city in the southern Badia (rural) desert region of Jordan. There I stayed with a woman named Zainab and her three daughters. Zainab is an elderly lady, and like most other older women in the town she wore the traditional Jordanian thobe. However, her daughters and all the other younger women I saw
wore humbler versions of the veiling styles seen in Amman. Because of their limited access to funds and chic shops, the girls usually had one or two jilbab or overcoats that they switched every other day. Although they tried to imitate Amman fashion, they also seemed to have more conservative styles. Reem, one of my interview subjects who was originally from this rural area, said that the styles one wears in the Badia are completely different from what one wears in Amman. She said that wearing makeup, shorter length shirts, and tighter pants is acceptable in Amman, but such styles are not at all appropriate in the Badia. Even other participants admitted to a stark difference in veiling between Amman and the Badia regions. Interestingly, in the Badia younger women did not allow me to photograph them; only the elder women offered me this opportunity. Possibly prohibiting personal photography issues from a traditional Islamic view that forbids the depiction of the human form. However, since the people I met in the Badia did allow me to take pictures of small children and older women this does not seem to be entirely the case. More likely, I believe, the younger women feared that I would show their pictures to men who were not their relatives, since in the Badia strict separation of unrelated men and women still exists. Therefore it seems the Badia differs not only in styles of the hijab but also why women veil. When I asked Reem why she wears the hijab, her immediate answer was “culture.” Unlike other participants who prefer piety over culture, she did the opposite. She said that in the Badia veiling is not really a choice: a girl must wear the hijab when she reaches puberty. My other participants also commented on this lack of choice and “conviction” among muhajjabat in the Badia. It would be interesting to do more in-depth research on the meaning of the veil in the Badia, specifically looking at the relationship between ethics and aesthetics found in veil culture there, and how this relationship is complicated further by unique factors found in the Badia.
Conclusion

During the colonial period in the Middle East, the veil was seized upon as representing the inferiority of Islam and the “oppression of women,” both perceptions that were used to justify colonialism itself. Furthermore, the fascination with the veil expressed by hegemonic colonial powers, particularly French and British, projected a veiled body that was eroticized and highly sexualized. Most importantly, this period witnessed the assignment of extreme significance to the veil as a marker of Islamic identity and backwardness—perceptions that continue until today among some Westerners. It is through an understanding of the way colonizers appropriated the veil as a symbol of the backwardness of Islam, that one can truly comprehend what has happened in the last 40 years.

We need this historical understanding to recognize the transformation of the veil during the rise of Arab Feminism. During this period the veil and women’s bodies were again placed at the center of national and political debates, and in order to modernize many countries abandoned the veil. We need to understand this history, too, to see how the veil was once again transformed in the neo-veiling movements of the mid to late 20th centuries: it came to be considered an articulation of authenticity as well as an expression of female agency and religiosity. In the 1970s, veiling reemerged with new meaning and new styles: no longer a sign of backwardness but rather a signifier of authenticity, identity, and resistance. Furthermore, the instrumental use of the veil, which allows women to control access to their bodies in public space, was particularly helpful in dealing with the unintended consequences of rapid modernization and social “disintegration.” Most importantly, Islamic movements of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s standardized the norms and ethos of Islamic values and Islamic dress. The piety movement of the
1990s, especially, linked modesty to piety, and the *hijab* came to be considered the embodiment of modesty; hence piety became synonymous with veiling.

Somewhat ironically, in the 1980s and 1990s aesthetics began to play a larger role in veiling culture, leading to the “fashionization” of the veil. Today in Amman, Jordan, my research shows that ethics and aesthetics have a complicated relationship, and women navigate this ethical maze every day. My research subjects’ discussion of “wrong” styles and “right” styles reveals that an important aspect of veiling today is the harmony that must exist between the outer and inner, between ethics and its aesthetic expression.

Overall, my study has sought to show the ways that the veil has evolved in meaning and in appropriation throughout history; as a dynamic symbol and instrument, it will continue to do so. At the same time, I must admit to some limitations and concerns about this study’s methodology. The first obvious limitation is that it is based on a small sample of participants and was completed in a very short amount of time. Another limitation concerns the participants: they were all recruited through the SIT staff and thus were not completely random. For example, there was not much diversity in the economic status of all my participants. Most of my participants lived in west Amman and were from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds. In addition, all of my survey and both focus groups included participants from University of Jordan, which further narrows the diversity of my sample. Another limitation to my study is that most of my participants were between the ages of 18-23; only my interviews (rather than focus groups) were with women that were older, between the ages of 30-45. Furthermore, due to the set up my program I only had 3 weeks of research, hence the limited numbers of interviews. Thus, one of the biggest limitations of my study was the limited pool and diversity in my sample of participants.
In addition, I feel that the negative perception of the hijab in the West—and the fact that I am a Westerner—might have affected the answers of my interviewees. They might have wanted to present the hijab in a particularly positive light to me because they wanted to disprove stereotyping misconceptions about the hijab. For these reasons, the results of my interviews and focus groups may be skewed.

Still, overall, I am confident that my study does capture some of the complexity in the life of the women I studied: the push and pull between ethics and aesthetics that they negotiate daily.

I would like to suggest future directions in such research. Today when we talk about veiling we cannot limit our scope to the Middle East. Rather we need to view veiling as a transitional movement. Aided by social media and the Internet, a transnational community of muhajabat is growing. Numerous YouTube videos in English and Arabic instruct young women about the latest styles, colors, and patterns most suitable for various skin colors and face shapes. Many online stores and blogs offer fashion tips to aid women in finding their “style.” These social media sites also stage debates around right and wrong styles and makeup, the same issues addressed in this study.

Western Muslims have a significant presence on these sites, not surprising considering the easy access they enjoy to computers and the Internet. In addition, Western Muslims are considered a market segment, as demonstrated by the subscription magazine Azizah. The first magazine of its kind, Azizah describes itself as the “world’s window to the Muslim American women” (Azizah). The magazine aims to counter the negative image of Muslim women in the U.S. and presents instead women who are “women and leaders” (to quote the Azizah cover in Figure 12), homemakers and working women, modernized and traditional, Muslim and Western.
The magazine layout always includes a woman on the cover, presenting a polished image: the various cover models wear different styles of hijab, in an array of colors and patterns. And they always flash radiant smiles. Such images are meant to counter the stereotypical image of Muslim women in dark clothes and gloomy settings.


Azizah reveals that U.S.-based research on veiling and Muslim women today needs to turn its telescope into a mirror. The unbalanced study of Arab Muslim women or non-Western Muslim women, without the corrective inclusion of Muslim women in Europe and the U.S., can lead to the orientalization of a phenomenon that is truly transnational.

Throughout the process of my research and writing this thesis, I have been concerned with the representation of my participants. No matter how much time I spent in Jordan, and no matter my personal history (I am Ethiopian), I have attended and been educated in an American university. Thus I have concerns about how this study might be construed by friends and
interlocutors in Jordan. Have I succeeded in avoiding the exoticizing norm of studies on the
hijab?

During a two-day conference on veiling held at the University of North Carolina in
Chapel Hill, I posed this question to scholars who were presenting work based in Turkey, Iran,
and other Middle Eastern locations, as well as Indonesia. I wanted to know whether they feared
that their research might orientalize their participants and how they avoided crossing that
boundary. All the speakers gave different reasons why their research was not orientalist: some
credited their research process; others named the agency their participants had in their work; still
others said that since they were tied to the culture somehow they didn’t think they could stand
outside it and objectify it in that way.

However, at the end of this discussion, the only muhajjaba present countered that she felt
that the entire proceedings had been orientalist. Although she herself wears a veil, she had felt
out of place at this conference. She did not recognize the topics discussed as reflective of the
veiled women she knows. Her repost to the panelists has stayed with me. While I cannot
overcome my position as a student at an American university and the perceived Americanness of
my identity, I hope that I have at least correctly represented the views of the women whose
friendships I treasure.

But prompted by the lone muhajjaba at the veiling conference, I now question whether
the identity marker, the hijab, that I chose for the women I studied is truly a large part of their
identity, or rather whether this choice stemmed from preconceptions nurtured by my American
education. As my advisor said, instead of pretending to be collaborative, if we were actually to
be collaborative, we would design a project in which my participants did surveys on tight clothes
and makeup, which they consider to be significant to American women’s identity, just as we
have followed the colonizers of the 19th century in identifying the veil as significant to their identity. Would we be offended that they have “occidentalized” us? Is placing the veil at the center of our studies of Muslim women in itself orientalist?
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Appendix

Survey in English:

Survey about the veil

Age: 18-20   21-25   26-30   31-35   36-40

Gender: FEMALE

1. I consider myself:
   A. Very religious
   B. Religious
   C. Somewhat religious
   D. Not religious

2. I pray:
   A. I pray five times a day
   B. I pray once a day
   C. I pray on Fridays
   D. I don’t pray

3. Reasons for wearing the hijab:
   A. I wear the Hijab because it is a command from G-d.
   B. I wear the Hijab because I feel safer.
   C. I wear the Hijab because my family wants me too.
   D. I wear the Hijab because my friends do.
   E. I wear the Hijab because it is my culture.

4. I believe the hijab is:
   A. Required for all Muslim women
   B. A choice for Muslim women
   C. Cultural and Religious
   D. Cultural
   E. Religious.
5. Family influence
   A. My family encouraged me to wear the hijab
   B. My family discouraged me to wear the hijab
   C. My family did not care whether I wore the hijab
   D. My family forced me to wear the hijab.

6. What kind of Hijab do you wear-
   A. I wear a subtle color hijab with a long jacket
   B. I wear a tight, colorful hijab with an abaya
   C. I wear a tight, colorful hijab with a blouse and jeans
   D. I wear a loose hijab with a blouse and jeans
   E. I wear a loose, simple hijab with an abaya
   F. I wear a loose, black, nicab with an all black abaya

8. At what age did you start wearing the hijab-
   10. 18-20  21-25  26-30  31-35  36-40

9. How often do you go shopping for a hijab :

10. How much would you pay for a hijab
    Price range:

11. It is important to look fashionable (beautiful) with the hijab
    Strongly Agree    Agree    No Opinion    Strongly Disagree    Disagree

12. Do you make sure to match you hijab with what you wear Yes or No
13. Do you feel that that hijab is fashionable
   YES                   NO

14. When I wear the hijab I feel stylish.
   Yes                   No

15. I feel that the kind of hijab that I wear helps be modest while at the same time modern.
   Yes                   No

16. I paint my nails:       Yes or No

17. I get my eyebrows done: Yes or No

18. I put on make up everyday: Yes or No

19. I get my hair done Yes or No

20. I wear accessories with my hijab: (like hair clips under the hijab or pretty pins)Yes or No

21. I feel that the thobe is outdated? Yes or No

22. In your opinion, what is an acceptable hijab?
   a. Just covering your hair
   b. Covering you hair and face
   c. Covering your hair and wearing loose clothing
   d. Colorful and stylish with jeans and a blouse
   e. White or dark colors with the long jacket
   f. All forms are acceptable
دراسة الاستقصائية عن الحجاب

العمر: 18 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40
الجنس: أنثى

1. أنا أعتبر نفسي:
   أ. متنبي جداً
   ب. متردد
   ج. متوسط
   د. غير متميّز

2. أنا أصلتي:
   أ. أنا أصلئ خمس مرات في اليوم
   ب. أصلئ مرة واحدة يوميا
   ج. أصلئ الجمعة فقط
   د. أنا لا أصلئ

3. أسباب ارتدائي الحجاب:
   أ. أنا ارتداء الحجاب لأنه أمر من الله
   ب. أرتدت الحجاب لأنني أشعر بأنني أكثر أمناً
   ج. أنا ارتداء الحجاب لأن عائلتي تريد مني ارتداءه
   د. أنا ارتداء الحجاب لأن أصدقائي والمحيط يرتدونه
   ه. أرتدتي الحجاب لأنه هو جزء من الثقافة

4. أعتقد أن الحجاب:
   أ. مطلوب لجميع النساء مسلم
   ب. الاختيار للنساء مسلم
   ج. أمر ديني وثقافي

5. تأثير العائلة على الحجاب:
   أ. عائلتي تشجع على ارتداء الحجاب
   ب. عائلتي لا تشتكي على ارتداء الحجاب
   ج. عائلتي لا يهمهم ما إذا ارتدت أم الحجاب
   د. عائلتي ضد ارتداء الحجاب
6 ما هو نوع من الحجاب الذي ترتدي:
أ. أرتدي الحجاب ملون مع سترة طويلة
ب. الحجاب الملون مع العباءة
ج. حجاب ملون مع بلوزة وبنطلون جينز
د. حجاب فضفاض مع ملابس فضفاضة
ه. الحجاب بسيط مع العباءة
و. ونقات وحجاب أسود فضفاض، العباءة السوداء

8. في أي سن ارتديتي الحجاب،
40 36 35 31 30 26 25 21 20 18 17 10

9. كم مرة تذهب للتسوق للحصول على الحجاب:

10. ما هو المبلغ الذي دفع لشراء الحجاب

11. من المهم أن أظهر جملة مع الحجاب

أعراض بشدة أوافق بشدة لا رأي
لا

12 هل تطابق الحجاب مع ما ترتديه
لا

13 هل تشعر أن الحجاب هو الموضة
لا

14 عندما أرتدي الحجاب أشعر أنيق.
لا

15 أضع المنافذ
لا

16 اعطني مظهر الحجاب حاجي
لا

17 أضع الماكياج كل يوم
لا

18 اعطني بشرى
لا

19 أعطني بشرى
لا

20 أرتدي الأكسوار مع حجابي (مثل مقاطع الشعر تحت الحجاب أو دبابيس جميلة)
نعم أو ل

21 أشعر أن أرتدي الثوب موضة قديمة
نعم

22 في رأيك، ما هو الحجاب مقبول؟
أ. الذي يغطي فقط شعرك
ب. الذي يغطي ك الله شعرك والوجه
ج. الذي يغطي شعرك وارتدي ملابس فضفاضة
د. الحجاب الملون والأنيق مع الجينز وبلوزة
م. الحجاب الأبيض أو الداوكر الألوان مع سترة طويلة
و. جميع أشكال الحجاب مقبولة