

Article

The Veiling Issue in 20th Century Iran in Fashion and Society, Religion, and Government

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Abstract: This essay focuses on the Iranian woman's veil from various perspectives including cultural, social, religious, aesthetic, as well as political to better understand this object of clothing with multiple interpretive meanings. The veil and veiling are uniquely imbued with layers of meanings serving multiple agendas. Sometimes the function of veiling is contradictory in that it can serve equally opposing political agendas.

Keywords: Iran; women's right; veiling; veiling fashion; Iranian politics

Iran has a long history of imposing rules about what women can and cannot wear, in addition to so many other forms of discriminatory laws against women that violate human rights. One of the most recent protests (at Tehran University) against the compulsory hijab¹ was also meant to unite Iranians of diverse backgrounds to show their dissatisfaction with the government. For the most part, the demonstration was only a hopeful attempt for change. In one tweet from Iran [at Tehran University] we read in Persian:

When Basijis [who receive their orders from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Supreme Leader of Iran] did not give permission to the students to present a talk against compulsory hijab, the students started to sing together the iconic poem of *yar e dabestani man* من یار دبستانی / my school friend². "Basij members became helpless and nervous, but the students sang louder and louder. It is true that the sound of unity is always much louder than the voice of dictatorship."³

The Iranian government continues to arrest and prosecute women (sometimes sympathetic men as well) for protesting discriminatory dress code laws. Since its establishment in 1979, the Iranian Government has imposed many restrictions on women, which include travel (a man's approval required), marriage (a male guardian's permission required yet supporting temporary marriage (*sigha* صغه) and

¹ In this paper, I am using the term hijab/hejab to indicate all type and variation of head and body coverings (not face covering) that are commonly used in Iran (such as long, one-piece semi-circular piece of cloth known as the Iranian *chador*, *chador va chaqchor* (no longer in use), fashionable scarves (*rusari*) worn with outer gowns (*rupoosh* or *manteau*) that can be very simple or trendy, fashionable, colorful styles, *maqnaeh* (a tight head cover that frames the face and is long enough to cover the back and the chest, usually worn with a chador on top of it or worn with a *rupoosh* or a *manteau*).

² https://twitter.com/hashtag/%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85_%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87?src=hash (13 May 2019)

"استیصال را درآ خواندند دبستانی یار#مانیکه بسیجی ها اجازه خواندن بیانیه ضدحجاب اجباری را به دانشجویان ندادند آنها یکصدا "چهره و حرکات برهم زندگان تجمع ببینید و طنین صدای همدلی را بشنوید صدایش همیشه بلندتر از صدای استبداد و دیکتاتوری بوده و هست (Author's translation from Persian to English)

Yar e dabestani man is one of the poems of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, it has a significant importance during the early part of the revolution, it is a symbol of unity among people.

³ Ibid.

polygamy), divorce, custody of children, and inheritance (favoring men). Other discriminatory actions against women relate to employment, favoring men despite Iranian women being more highly educated. In all such “official” discriminatory actions, the physical hijab/veiling and its link to the traditional patriarchal concept of the role of motherhood became an essential part of the post-revolutionary system, which was not initially a law, but was forced on women and then became a law. A wide range of legal and cultural misogyny is imposed on women by the current government in Iran.

For example, General Naghdi of Iran on the occasion of “media day in Iran” spoke of the dangerous use of foreign (i.e., Western) terminology in Iranian media

... as an example those prostitutes [referring to women who protest against compulsory hijab] that remove their hijab [in public] say we are against the compulsory hijab. Our media picks up the same term [compulsory hijab] and they [Iranian media] use it too without realizing that such terminology is a calculated choice [meaning invented by our enemies to destroy us].⁴

1. Theoretical Perspectives

According to the feminist political theory, the objective is to focus on how political theory is used to address feminist issues, particularly the subject of gender inequality. In this paper, following the feminist theory, I focus on the idea that the hijab has always been used to control and further implement the unequal status of women by misusing Islam and its interpretations, as we will see in the following pages in this study.

2. Methodology

My data for this study comes from various sources. The primary source materials for this study are published academic works on veiling in Muslim culture, including my own published academic books as well as other publications on this subject. For this research, I also have benefited from journalistic publications both in English and Persian, in addition to observing several Iranian parliamentary discussions (in Persian) on YouTube and following the outcome of decisions on any new ruling about women in the public space as it relates to her appearance and clothing regulations in addition to any other new legal actions pertaining to women.

I have also used archival (Persian language) newspapers and weekly magazines (accessed through the University of Texas at the Austin library system) pertaining to the subject matter and information relating to women’s news, movie stars, and the latest fashion themes on women such as *Today’s Woman* (*zan e rooz زن روز*), *Ladies* (*banovan بانوان*), *Black and White* (*siyah va sephid سیاه و سپید*), *Weekly News* (*etelaat haftegi اطلاعات هفتگی*), and *Teenagers* (*nou javanan نوجوانان*).

My research trips and personal visits to Iran over the past 30 years have also contributed much in substance to this research, as I have witnessed many changes over the years and debates that have taken place concerning the policies and regulations imposed on the Iranian people, particularly those related to women, and that always includes the subject of the hijab.

The most recent trends relating to the hijab involve fashion in the area of consumerism (Shirazi 2019; Lewis 2019; Bucar 2018; Chen et al. 2014). Other general research on the hijab continues to be produced on various aspects of the veil and veiling, for example, on how politics play into the hijab (Koura 2018; Ahmed and Roche 2018; Elena Negrea-Busuioc et al. 2015; Ares 2013; Rashid 2004), how religious ideologies play into the hijab (Pazhoohi et al. 2016; Nausheen Pasha-Zaidi and Padela 2015;

⁴ “به عنوان مثال به روسپهائی که حجاب خود را برمدارند مگوند مخالف حجاب اجباری و رسانه‌های ما نزار همان استفاده میکنند این در صورتی است که این واژهها حساب شده هستند”

“امروز آمریکا مداند هیچ کاری از دستش برنماید: سردار نقدی” ISNA Iranian Students’ News Agency. <https://www.isna.ir/news/97051909894/> (26 March 2019) (Author’s translation from Persian to English).

Curlin 2013), as well as on the topic of the hijab and feminism (Al Wazni 2015; Zimmerman 2015; Al-Nakib 2013; Jacobsen 2011).

The first notable Iranian women's movement dates back to the 19th century involving some major socioeconomic changes and organized groups of women whose aim was to initiate some changes in their social conditions. The historical data describes the penetration of European lifestyles and diplomatic contacts between the Iranian government and the European nations, which sparked the desire for an improved lifestyle. Educated men and women became aware of their own repressive life conditions that needed changing.

Constitutionalists such as Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi, Mirza Malkum Khan and Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh wrote about women's right to education and the evils of polygamy and seclusion—ideas also raised by Qurrat al-Ain (Tahereh) in the context of the spread of the Babi movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Early criticisms of the plight of women in the country were [was] also echoed in efforts and writings by Taj Saltaneh, Naser al-Din Shah's daughter, and Bibi Khanoum Fatema Astarabadi.⁵

The women's plight was not always related to the issue of veiling, but veiling was always associated with the restriction of women's movements and their oppression from patriarchal control, via interpretations of Islam.

All these women mentioned earlier: Qurrat al-Ain (Tahereh) (1814 or 1817–1852), Tāhīrih Taj Saltaneh or Tāj al-Salṭānah (1883–1936), and Bibi Khānoom Astarābādi (1858 or 1859–1921) were notable Iranian women with prominent family backgrounds who lived during the mid-19th to early 20th century. They were educated and literate women for their time. They were unusually courageous and outspoken and socially active for the betterment of the lives of Iranian women. Among the main beliefs shared by all of them was the belief in equality between men and women under the law. They believed in feminist ideology and that women's rights are natural rights. They all lived under similar cultural and societal conditions in a powerful patriarchy.

Qurrat al-Ain who converted to Babism was an accomplished poetess who dared to remove her veil in the public, which was an act of defiance. She is a highly respected individual among the Bahaei communities and known as the "first woman suffrage martyr."⁶

Princess Taj Saltaneh (Tāj al-Salṭānah), daughter of Naser al-Din Shah of Qajar and a pioneer in women's rights in Iran, organized Iran's underground women's rights and was an author who wrote about the Qajar Dynasty. Bibi Khānoom Astarābādi, also of a notable background, was an accomplished writer and well known for her satirical work. She also is known as one of the pioneering figures in the women's movement of Iran.

Entering the 20th century required that Iran undergo considerable change. These changes included emergence of a new educated class and decline of the old traditional elites in the society. "In contrast to popular assumptions, the ulama [the religious class] as a traditional elite showed a remarkable degree of adaptability in response to modernization and social change."⁷ Overall, the ulama (religious class) did not have much choice except to cooperate, since those who opposed and resisted the process of "modernization" would be physically eliminated or isolated by the state. Some of the ulama did not resist outwardly but were hopeful that eventually the state power would come to an end. A number of ulama abandoned the clerical garbs and adopted the secular attire to blend in with the rest of the populace.⁸

This essay focuses on the Iranian woman's veil from various perspectives including feminism, politics, culture, religion, and aesthetic to better understand this object of clothing with multiple

⁵ (Mahdi 2004, p. 427).

⁶ For a comprehensive history about Qurrat al-Ain (Tahereh) see: Sabir Afaqi (editor). *Tāhīrih in History: Perspectives on Qurratu'l-'Ayn from East and West*. Kalim'at Press (Independent Baha'i Publisher) 2004.

⁷ (Faghfoory 1993, p. 277)

⁸ (Faghfoory 1993, p. 277)

interpretive meanings. The veil and veiling are uniquely imbued with layers of meanings serving multiple agendas. Sometimes the function of veiling is contradictory in that it can serve equally opposing political agendas. Probably the most flagrant example can be perceived when one observes the differences between the two mandates: Forcing to unveil (*kashf e hejab*) in contrast to forcing to veil:

One of the fascinating aspects of the Iranian unveiling and re-veiling is that two different systems that ruled Iran (Pahlavi dynasty 1925–1979) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979–present) claimed that the government emancipated women by unveiling (during Reza Shah Pahlavi) and by re-veiling them (Islamic Republic of Iran).⁹

This functional versatility is notable, particularly in the case of Iranian culture since the early 20th century. This essay focuses only on the veil in relation to the Iranian culture over a span of eighty-three years (1936–2019).

2.1. The Pahlavi's' Government (1925–1979) and Women's Emancipation Projects

In 1936, Reza Shah, also known as Reza Khan, forcefully ordered women to unveil in a decree known as unveiling or *kashf e hejab*. This decree had negative effects on the population for the most part. The religious class used the decree to discuss the shameful act of making women naked in the public to please men. Obviously, being unveiled in public was a sensitive issue in a conservative society like Iran. The public unveiling of women was argued by the religious class as contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an and Islamic ethics. However, the state was determined to enforce this decree and vigorously promoted it at every level in society. Many early "feminists" saw *kashf e hejab* " ... as a "progressive" measure necessary for confronting clerical misogynistic approaches to women's concerns."¹⁰

Prior to the unveiling (*kashf e hejab*) of women in Reza Shah's era, the women wore a conservative garment mostly known as *chador va chaghchor*, which covered the entire woman's body, head, and face in outdoor settings. (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *chador chaqchur* Qajar era. source: <http://ghoolabad.com/article/198-qajar-women-yazd/women>. Photographer: Antoin Aeveuguin.

⁹ (Shirazi 2010, p. 21.)

¹⁰ (Mahdi 2004, p. 430).

Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza Shah (who replaced his father after a forced abdication), ruled Iran for a combined 55 years. The early 20th century in Reza Khan's time (1925–1942) is a significant era that included direct governmental and political engagement in dress codes for men and women. Reza Khan introduced compulsory unveiling and granted the authorities to forcefully implement this unveiling regime. *Kashf e hejab* had a significant effect on the lives of both genders, evident within every strata of Iranian society. The move to unveil Iranian women began in the mid-1930s after several decades in which social reformists pushed for the modernization of Iran, particularly after Reza Shah's visit to Turkey where Kemal Ataturk successfully introduced public dress codes, limiting symbolic markers of any kind of religious apparel. Reza Khan's edict was swiftly and forcefully implemented.

While unveiling was celebrated as a step towards the modernization and liberation of women, it had unfortunate consequences for women and girls from conservative and religious families. These negative consequences are documented in several publications revealed after the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979) was established. In 1990, the Islamic Republic of Iran published two volumes which were labeled under secretive and classified documents belonging to the era of *kashf e hejab* during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the first king of the Pahlavi dynasty (1924–1941).¹¹ The new Islamic government tapped into these unpublished secret archives.¹² The exposé proved how Reza Khan's administration enabled cruelty and violence to enforce the unveiling. Perhaps the greater revelation was that the majority of *women wanted to remain veiled*. The physical and mental abuse of the population to accept unveiled women in public resulted in a huge resistance from various social and religious classes. As a result of this resistance to *kashf e hejab*, Reza Khan was motivated to issue harsh punishments for those who ignored the rules that included fines and barring girls from attending school, which interrupted their education. The authorities also used force to unveil the women in public, which included grabbing, removing, and snatching away the chador. Physically touching the women was not only considered violence on women, it was and still is a dishonorable behavior, forbidden by the culture and the religion, and it resulted in many women staying home to avoid this unpleasant experience.

Women in public without the hijab were castigated, while women in public wearing the hijab were subject to its forceful removal. The removal of a hijab in public was understood as a form of insult and public shaming. In the veiling battle, many women chose to stay at home, safe from the forms of harassment caused by the pro- and anti-veiling camps.¹³

The resistance to *kashf e hejab* mainly came from Iran's clergy class and devout Muslim families. The ulama of the religious class disapproved of unveiling women and resisted it. In Tehran and other cities, the ulama and preachers inside mosques were busy condemning unveiling, while emphasizing the importance of veiling for Muslim women. The unveiling in public was equated to the image of prostitutes and dishonoring of one's own family.¹⁴ Meanwhile, any anti *kashf e hejab* messages mixed

¹¹ (Shirazi 2019, pp. 142–56).

¹² I have consulted and used the following documents published in Iran.

تهران. اسناد منتشر نشده از واقعه کشف حجاب در عصر رضا خان: واقعه کشف حجاب

وزارت فرهنگ ارشاد اسلامی ۰۹۹۱. *The events of Kashf e Hejab/Unveiling: Unpublished documents for the event of Kashf e Hejab during Reza Khan's rule*. 1990. Tehran: Vezarat e Farhang e Ershad e Eslami

ایران بخش مطالعات و پژوهش آرشو ملی: ۲۲۳۱۳۱۳۱. اسناد محرمانه کشف حجاب: هجری شمسی خشونت و فرهنگ.

Khoshonat va Farhang: Asnad e Mahramaneh Kashf e Hejab. 1313–1322 HS [Violence and culture, confidential records about the abolition of the hijab 1934–1943]. 1990. Iran, Tehran: Department of Research Publication and Education National Archives, Iran.

¹³ (Shirazi 2018).

¹⁴ Ironically in today's Iran the governmental authorities still use the metaphor of associating a publicly unveiled woman with the image of a prostitute, who is not only dishonoring herself but also her entire family members. See: Footnote #4 in this document.

with religious sermons was completely illegal and dangerous to deliver, as the police were authorized to arrest anyone resisting Reza Shah's edict.

Conservative families stopped their girls from attending school. Wealthier families allowed their daughter's education to be continued by either abiding by the unveiling edict or by keeping the girls at home to be educated by private tutors. In this way, the unveiling of women under the guise of emancipation worked negatively for many girls, because it deprived them from attending school.¹⁵ When the unveiling edict was established, there was a slow transition of women from complete coverage to wearing a scarf or hat along with an outer coat over their garments to finally removing the head covers and wearing European fashions in a modest form. (Figure 2). This big change corresponds to the final years of Reza Khan before his abdication and exile in 1941.



Figure 2. Association of the Progressive Iranian Women. 1936 (*Kanoun-e-Banovan*) Source: Internet Google Images.

¹⁵ (Shirazi 2014, pp. 28–42). It is interesting that the establishment of the Islamic government of Iran and its compulsory hijab rule made it possible for many small town and village girls to pursue higher education, because their families would allow them to leave and go to destinations away from their home towns. This is because these families feel that the hijab is a protection against corruption.

2.2. Transition to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi 1941–1979

As the last Shah of Iran, the son of Reza Khan, Mohammad Reza Shah stayed in power from 16 September 1941 until his overthrow by the Iranian Revolution on 11 February 1979.

Mohammad Reza Shah decreed that women could choose whether or not to wear a veil, which perhaps was again emancipating for those who wanted to wear it. Those who believed westernization of an Islamic nation was antithetical to the religious doctrines of Islam criticized Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. However, most of the opposition to the shah himself was based upon his autocratic rule, creation of large gaps between the poor and the rich, corruption in his government, the unequal distribution of oil wealth, as well as forced westernization, which many experts believe came too soon and too fast for the Iranian nation. Active fashion scenes, the craze of following the European (not the American) fashions for every season and occasion, reading translated news about which designer was creating something new, and using local tailors to duplicate the latest fashions from the European fashion journals were not unusual. Many young people during this era (1960s–1970s) were also busy watching foreign movies (mostly American) dubbed in Persian, following the gossip news about Hollywood and their favorite European movie stars. In a variety of Iranian women's magazines of the time¹⁶, and in European fashion journals published for Iranian audiences such as *Burda* from Germany, one would find actual patterns for home sewing (Figures 3–5). Although forced westernization freed women to a certain degree, for example, allowing them to follow western fashions, access to higher education, and some employment opportunities, it was the western public social behavior that offended not only the ulama, but also the conservative families that felt they were losing their tradition to the western ways of life. Historians are in agreement that the downfall of the Shah was due to too swift westernization efforts promoted by him, efforts that were too fast for their time and needed to be implemented over a wider span of years.

¹⁶ Majaleh Banovan. *Majaleh Zan e Rooz*, *Majaleh Nou Javanan*. Additionally, other weekly magazine publications with large circulations such as *Majaleh Sepid Va Siyah*, or *Majaleh Etelaat*, devoted a section of their publications to news and images of what was happening in the world of fashion, cinema, art, and theater.

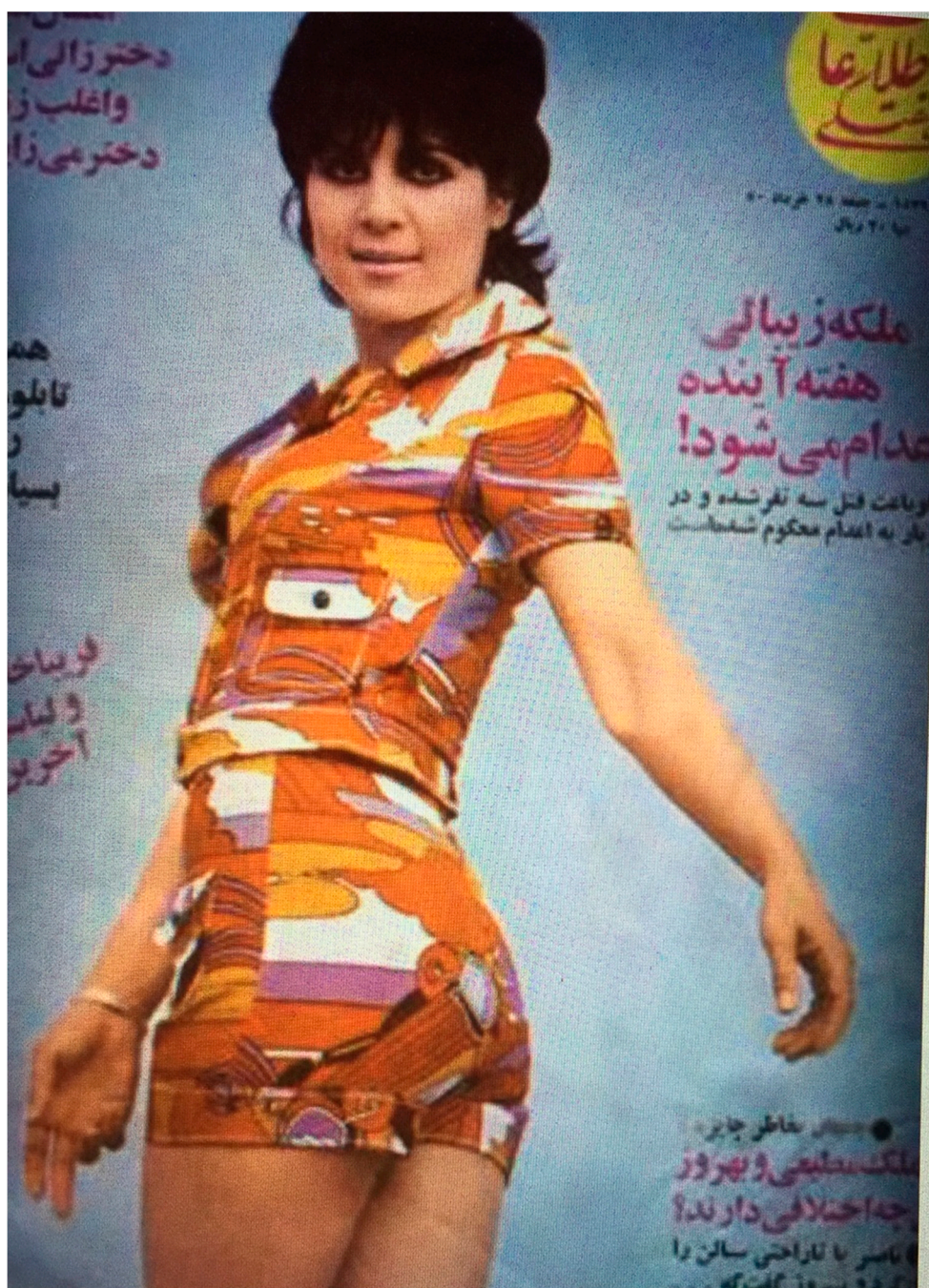


Figure 3. Cover of *Etela'at e Haftegi* (Weekly News) Magazine 1970s. http://www.parstimes.com/fashion/pre_revolution/.

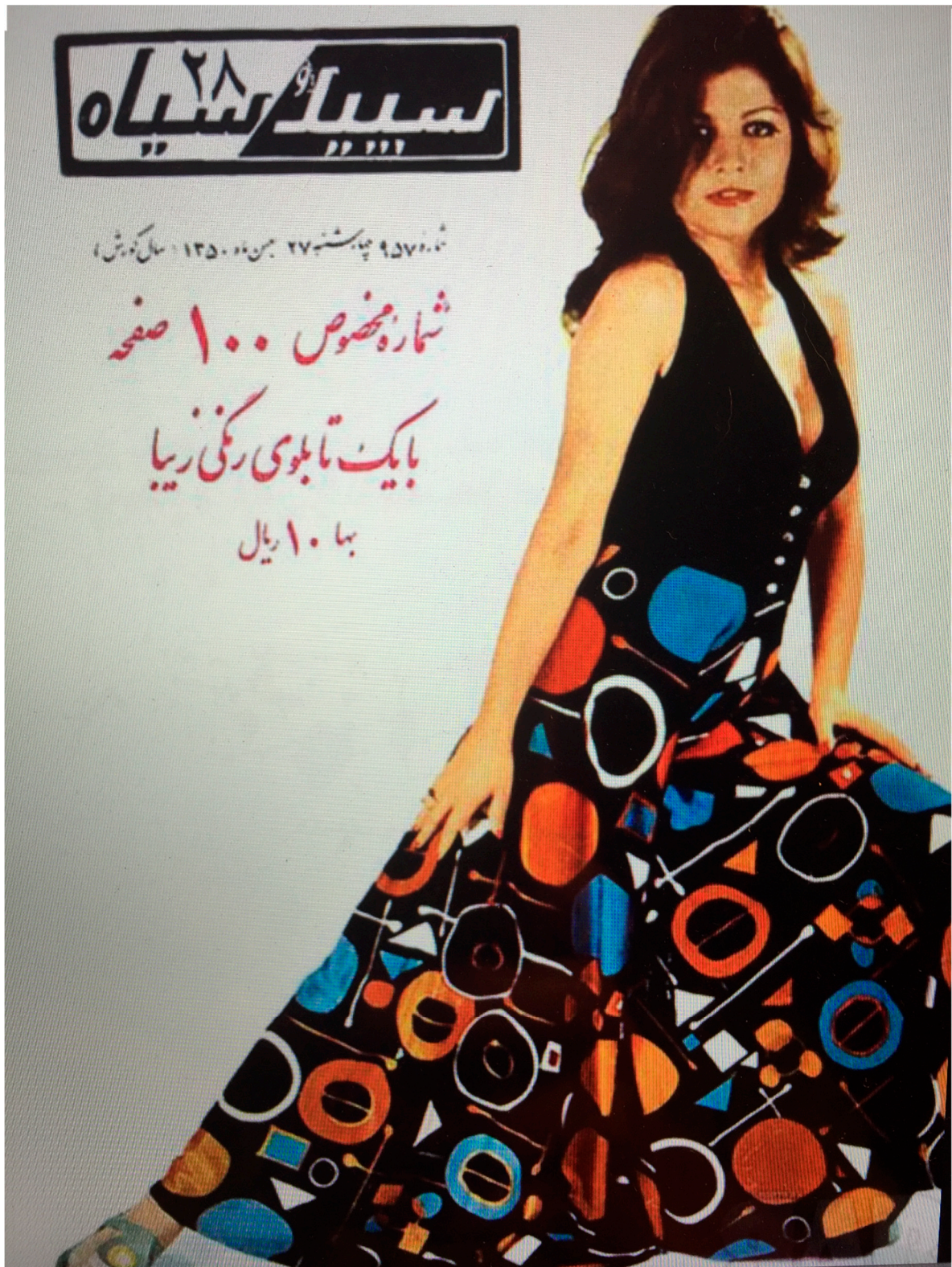


Figure 4. Cover of *Sepid va Siyah* (Black and White) Magazine 1970s. http://www.parstimes.com/fashion/pre_revolution/.



Figure 5. Cover of *Zan e Rooz* (Today's Woman) Magazine 1970s. http://www.parstimes.com/fashion/pre_revolution/.

Despite a superficial appearance of modernism fostered by rising oil revenues, the Iranians economic and social infrastructure was found increasingly inadequate to meet the rising expectations of the Iranian people . . . to encourage realistic hope of progress toward obtaining the material benefits of

a modern industrial nation, that contributed to increasing dissatisfaction with the Shah's government and to a climate of public opinion conducive to revolution.¹⁷

The rapid increase in the price of crude oil in the 1970s made oil-producing Iran rich,¹⁸ which created a big gap in the Iranian society. The wealthy had a lavish lifestyle with access to resources, while the poor struggled to survive. The poor families and lower middle-income classes, who were in general the more devout believers and traditional, felt annoyed by the fast-changing lifestyles around them, since they did not have the means to catch up. They felt discriminated and ignored by a wealthy, oil-rich government that did not work for the betterment of less fortunate citizens. At this point in history, various ideologies (anti-monarchical) among the religious class and ulama, in addition to other dissatisfied factions of various groups of people (such as socialists) became more popular not only among the poor but also in various segments of the university-educated and the intelligentsia.

Regarding women's veiling issues, although no forced unveiling or veiling was mandated, most traditional families reverted to wearing their conservative chadors without any face covering, and it was common to see mixed gatherings of *ba chador* and *bi-chador* (with and without chador) women in the same place, in addition to seeing women of the same family with the mother wearing a traditional chador while the daughters were unveiled often dressed in miniskirts or the latest fashion trends of their time. In the streets, one could see a mix of traditional clothes and fashionable European styles. This meant that women felt no pressure from the government to veil or unveil; depending on their family household traditions they followed their own rules. It was not uncommon for some female students to leave their home wearing a chador, and when arriving to their higher institutions or schools, would remove their chador in the rest rooms and spend the entire school day without a chador. The same students before returning home would wear their chador again. These girls found ways to compromise between their religiously conservative home environment and the secular public schools they were attending. It should be noted that schools did not have a rule for veiling or unveiling, nor were there public signs or reminders as to what a woman should wear in public. It was clearly understood by following the culture and each individual household traditions (Figure 6).

¹⁷ (Hethrington 1982, p. 362).

¹⁸ (Karl 1999, pp. 31–48).



Figure 6. Cover of *Zan e Rooz* (Today's Woman) Magazine 1970s. Source for images 3–6: http://www.parstimes.com/fashion/pre_revolution/.

2.3. The Revolution Era: The Islamic Republic of Iran (1979–Present)

The arrival of the Islamic Republic Government was not a sudden event, but in the making for several years towards the end of Reza Shah Pahlavi's government. The monarchy was replaced by

a government based on the principle of rule by the Shia Islamic jurists, *Velayat e faqih*.¹⁹ This new government was orchestrated by Ayatollah Khomeini, who was also the supreme leader until his death (1989), replaced by Ali Khamenei (the current supreme leader of Iran). One visually notable change that the Islamic Republic Government mandated is the wearing of the veil. The compulsory hijab itself has gone through many changes, not only stylistically but politically as well. Numerous changes in governmental organizations and the constitution occurred after the new government of the Islamic Republic replaced the Pahlavi Monarchy. The Islamic Republic of Iran uses religious themes and glorification of Shia holy women, especially Fatimah al-Zahra and Zynab al-Kubra (Prophet Mohammad's daughter, and his grand-daughter, respectively) to retell the historical victimization of Shias in the religious history. The story of the resistance of Fatimah al-Zahra and her support of her husband Ali ibn Abi Talib (first cousin to Prophet Mohammad) and their impoverished lifestyle is used to set an example of women's strength and the belief that Islam will save them. The heroic story of Zainab al-Kubra is told in relation to the Tragedy of Karbala/Persian: *Mosibat e karbala مصیبت کربلا*.²⁰ The concept of martyrdom plays a significant role in Shia Islam. In Iranian society, martyrs are greatly revered, including martyrs from the distant past as well as those from the contemporary time. The exemplary example of a true martyr in Shia Islam, particularly the Twelver branch (Iran), is Imam Hussain known by the Shia population as the master of martyrs (Arabic and Persian: *Sayyid al-Shuhada* (سدالشهدا), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.

These female Arab religious figures were used as symbols of ultimate women to be emulated. Later when the war between Iran and Iraq ended (after nine years), the same religious female characters served as inspirations to withstand the brutality that caused close to the loss of one million people combined from both sides of the borders. Poster images of faceless Fatimah and Zainab praised them as the symbols of resistance, one as a mother and supportive wife, and the other as a brave young warrior who, despite the loss of lives of numerous members of her family, faced the unjust rule of her enemy. Thus, by using the Karbala paradigm, again the ulama exercised their religious power by inspiring women to pour out into the streets and partake in the daily demonstrations against the Shah. They wanted the Shah not only to resign but to abdicate his throne as well (he did not abdicate after all).

... some younger, secular, unveiled women resorted to the chador (veil) in a symbolic defiance of the Shah's Westernized dictatorship and in solidarity with the massive women's participation. Women of all classes and ideological persuasions participated in these anti-government demonstrations. Where some young women engaged in armed confrontations with police and military forces, older women offered them support and protection against police chase.²¹

In Iran one can read the pulse of the government by how it is reflected on the issue of the hijab and how women appear in the public. Iran has deployed thousands of undercover agents known as *gasht e ershaad* (Persian: گشت ارشاد) guidance excursion, or simply morality police, whose role is to enforce in particular the hijab code. These agents have a long history of physical and verbal abuse (Figure 7).

¹⁹ *Velayat-e faqih* or guardianship of the Islamic jurist is a system of governance that has underpinned the way Iran operates since the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. At its most basic, *velayat-e faqih*, which is rooted in Shia Islam, justifies the rule of the clergy over the state. <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/what-velayat-e-faqih>.

²⁰ The Battle of Karbala took place on Muharram 10 in the year 61 AH of the Islamic Calendar (10 October, 680 AD) in Karbala (present day Iraq). The battle took place between a small group of supporters and relatives of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussain ibn Ali, and a larger military detachment from the forces of Yazid I, the Umayyad Caliph. The result was a devastating loss of lives in Hussain's army including Hussain himself. Zainab al-Kubra, Hussain's sister, was a prominent heroic character in this group who lived to retell the tragedy to people. Her supportive role and care for Hussain's children and other braveries during this tragedy are popular among the Shi'is sermons, particularly during the month of Muharram, which is the annual time for all Shi'is for observance of the martyrdom of Hussain.

²¹ (Mahdi 2004, p. 433).



Figure 7. Caption. The vehicle of *gasht e ershaad* (Persian: گشت ارشاد) the morality police is arresting a woman for her improper hijab in Tehran.

Sometimes people's complaints about them to the authorities can slow them down on the crackdowns, but only temporarily. In a week or two they are back in urban, popular uptown locations hunting down women for the crime of being improperly dressed.

By now after so many years of dealing with *gasht e ershaad* and forty years of hardliners in power, Iranians have learnt that members of the morality police enforce harsh inspections during certain times in a year. For example, a high number of arrests is recorded during the milder spring season and summers. Summer times in Iran are sometimes unbearably hot and difficult to maintain a cool body temperature when one is wearing a tight scarf over the head with long pants and long sleeved *manteau/mantou*, an outerwear long garment over their clothes. Most Iranian women wear a button-up tunic called a *manteau*, which is French for "coat," while most traditional women avoid wearing a *manteau*, because they do not consider wearing this garment equal to wearing a proper hijab (chador). The chador is a single, large enveloping semi-circular piece of cloth covering the entire body with no fitted parts, placed on the top of the head and the corners close to the neck are held by one's hands. The chador has been discussed many times by religious figures and Ayatollah Khomeini as the proper "better hijab" for Muslim Iranian woman in keeping with its tradition. The term "Westernized Hijab" has a negative connotation and the term is used mostly by hardliners in Iran. Young women refuse to wear a chador as a reaction to the compulsory rule of the hijab. At the same time, nothing in the simple, loose style of the chador can be manipulated to be trendy in the fashions for women. However, wearing a combination of *manteau* with other clothing items and long trendy shawls draped in various ways can give a sense of individuality, making the wearer look trendy in keeping with the seasonal fashions and colors.

2.4. Resisting *Ghast e Ershad* (Morality Patrol) and the Compulsory Hejab Since 1979

“Men and women who believe in veiling have argued that forcing the hijab upon non-believers undermines the value of hijab.”²² The NGO Justice for Iran reported in 2014 that within the span of ten years (2003–2013), more than 30,000 women were arrested for wearing a hijab deemed improper.²³ Based on the 2018 Iranian Center for Strategic Studies, a research arm of the President’s office by the Iranian government, 49% of the population is opposed to the compulsory hijab.²⁴

In one of the most recent incidents between a woman and a female member of *ghast e ershad*, the Iranian Interior Minister apologized for the misbehavior of *gasht e ershad*.²⁵ It is not very often that any official in the government of Iran publicly admits wrongdoings. Continuing on the subject of *ghost e ershad*, besides recording and exposing improper behavior of the members of this organization in the public filming them, other technologies, such as software applications, are utilized to help people, particularly women, to be able to detect if there is a *ghast e ershad* vehicle or on foot patrol nearby.

An anonymous team of Iranian app developers have come up with a solution to help young fashion-conscious Iranians avoid the country’s notorious morality police known in Persian as ‘Ershad’ or guidance. The new phone app, which is called ‘Gershad’ (probably meaning get around Ershad instead of facing them) however, will alert users to checkpoints and help them to avoid them by choosing a different route. The app uses data from the user to pinpoint where mobile checkpoints have been placed.²⁶

The application’s developers say their motivations for creating an application for *gasht e ershad* (called *Gershad* app) was to prevent the humiliation that Iranian people endure for their basic human rights of what to wear in public. “Police need to provide security for the citizens not to turn into a factor for fear.”²⁷ The *Gershad* app also has created an interesting conversation between those who agree or disagree that such applications in the future might be used against the police force, security, or in other inappropriate ways. One clerk tweeted:

God has ordered us to encourage people to do good, and forbid them from doing wrong, and the way to do it is not the morality police. However, the way to solve the morality police issue is not this app either. I am worried about the impact of this work in the future.²⁸

In recent years many citizens are fed up with *gasht e ershad* and endeavor to interfere in the arrests of women, in particular, in public. A report by CNN (Wed., 20 February 2019) provided an example of ordinary citizens’ help to prevent the arresting of two young Iranian women by *gasht e ershad*. Apparently, some people united and attacked the morality police van for arresting two young women for wearing improper hijabs. People tore off one of the doors of the van, which caused the police to fire shots in the air. However, people did not run away and stood their ground and demanded the release of the two young women.

The group prevented the officers from driving the women away, IRNA said citing an unnamed police official. “When the morality police personnel were issuing a warning to two ladies with improper hijab, people in the area surrounded them and prevented them from driving the two ladies away,” the police source told IRNA. “After the two ladies got off the police van, the crowd dispersed and that was the end of the incident.”²⁹

²² Homa (2018) (Special to Al Arabiya English).

²³ <https://justice4iran.org/>.

²⁴ (Mackintosh 2018).

²⁵ (Video of Gashte Ershad 2018).

²⁶ BBC Trending. Iranian youth get app to dodge morality police. 9 February 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-35533287> (accessed on 22 June 2018).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ (Qiblawi 2019).

Social media clips show that people driving by are honking their cars in protest of the action of the morality police, some men shouting, "Let them go." This incident could be the beginning of more civil disobedience and public uprising against the role of the morality police. In recent years, women have shown more bravery in challenging the morality police. Many women have also observed the dress rules more loosely and appear to be indifferent to the postings of preaching about the hijab that have been part of a daily life around them in the last 40 years. While *manteaus* (outer gowns) are getting tighter, more stylish and colorful, the headscarves are getting smaller and barely cover the entire hair, or the large headscarves are fashionably draped with a lot of hair showing.

The government repression has contributed to more activism and protests by people against economic situations and unpopular hijab arrests. Mansoureh Mills, Amnesty International's Iran researcher, reports that observing what is published on social media, and seeing, for example, how different groups who have not been paid wages for months are talking about the repressive government makes one realize that it is not just the hijabi women who are tired of the authorities, but many other groups are very angry at their government. "We do not fear prison because we have nothing more to lose."³⁰

2.5. One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality (2006)

A movement called *One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws* (Persian: کمپین یک میلیون امضا برای برابری حقوق زنان با مردان) *Law*, also known as *Change for Equality*, is an Iranian woman's campaign in protest of discriminatory laws against women. This campaign started in 2006, originally as a conference with a number of speakers, celebrity members of society, and the founders to explain the goals and efforts of this campaign. However, the plan did not materialize because the authorities prevented the group from the planned action, and it became a public street campaign. The organizers met people outside in the streets and spoke with them face to face. Women's rights advocate Sussan Tahmasebi said:

Perhaps it was an appropriate way to start our Campaign, as one of its main aims was to reach ordinary people on the streets, in public spaces, on the metro, on buses, in parks, wherever they could be found.³¹

The aim of collecting the signature was that after attaining the one million mark, the petition for change along with the signatures would be presented to the government.

The method was to talk to people at the street level about the discriminatory issues and also to provide a pamphlet that could be taken home to discuss the issues with friends and family members. The Campaign sought to address the legal discriminatory laws in place for the Iranian women, specifically the following:

... equal rights for women in marriage, equal rights to divorce for women, end to polygamy and temporary marriage, increase of age of criminal responsibility to 18 for both girls and boys, right for women to pass on nationality to their children, equal *dieh* (compensation for bodily injury or death) between women and men, equal inheritance rights, reform of laws that reduce punishment for offenders in cases of honor killings, equal testimony rights for men and women in court, and other laws which discriminate against women.³²

Unfortunately, the members of this campaign were arrested and were watched and monitored such that they could not meet in a group even in the privacy of their homes. The activists were arrested and taken to the Evin prison in Tehran. The campaign was not able to meet its goal of one million

³⁰ (Ritchie 2019).

³¹ (Tahmasebi n.d.).

³² (Tahmasebi n.d.).

signatures, but the campaign had some impact on some issues and made some changes on improving certain laws such as:

... changes in inheritance law, changes in regulations requiring equal compensation to both men and women by insurance companies in cases of accidents and limited reform of nationality laws, allowing women to pass on their nationality to their children. These changes were as much a response to the realities of Iranian society, as the efforts of the Campaign.³³

As a result of the efforts of this campaign, basic rights and demands were brought forward and the ideas exposed women's rights in Iran. "What is for certain, is that the demands of the Campaign will remain a major and basic demand of the Iranian women's movement and the Iranian public."³⁴ This effort proved that engaging people in the public and speaking to citizens on the streets proved to be one successful way to bring peoples' attention to injustices done to women. The lesson learnt from this grassroots level efforts by people proved to be an effective tool in the mobilization and disseminating of news.

2.6. Compulsory Hijab: My Stealthy Freedom Campaign (2014)

The issue of the hijab is a very sensitive issue and non-negotiable in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2013, the *Huffington Post* quoted President Hassan Ruhani, a cleric considered to be a moderate within Iran's political system, who criticized the morality police: "[M]any women in our society who do not respect our hijab laws are virtuous. Our emphasis should be on the virtue, not on the mere outward appearance."³⁵ Of course, this statement by the president did not go without a sharp, insulting reply appearing in the headlines of the conservative newspapers such as *Kayhan Daily* the next day. He was criticized in a humiliating manner. This was not the only time the hardliners and the moderate Hassan Ruhani would clash. The hardliners block any relaxation of the nation's social rules, particularly the woman's dress code. Hardliners always believe that the infiltration of Western culture is to blame for all ill manners in the Iranian society, inclusive of how women want to dress in public. Ruhani was also condemned for criticizing the police for arresting women for hijab violations, expressing the opinion that the task for police should be to enforce the law rather than Islam. He stated in 2014, "You can't send people to heaven by the whip," a comment that brought a sharp reaction from the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. The conservative *Kayhan Daily* in response replied that Ruhani could not block the gates of heaven by his statement.³⁶ Ruhani and other officials also criticized some female members of *gash t e ershad* for enforcing abusive behavior and beating on a female they deemed to be wearing an improper hijab. This incident did not go without notice, since it immediately appeared on Iranian social media and YouTube. The hardliners pointed their fingers to the enemies of Iran in the West for creating such videos as propaganda and denied the incident.³⁷ There are many political factions working in opposition to one another in current Iranian politics, with the issue of the hijab just one of them. Hijab indeed is an important issue because it blocks and negatively affects other activism for the status change of women under Iranian law at this moment in the history. As we noted at the beginning of this section, the public statements of President Ruhani to ease up the pressure on women about their hijab faced humiliating responses by the hardliners.

The My Stealthy Freedom Persian: *azadi e yavashaki* (آزادی پواشکی) campaign, which began in 2014, is an online movement created by Masih Alinejad, an Iranian-born journalist and activist. Alinejad stated: "I called it 'stealthy freedom,' which means you create your own freedom in secret."³⁸

³³ (Tahmasebi n.d.).

³⁴ (Tahmasebi n.d.).

³⁵ (Shirazi 2018, p. 97).

³⁶ (Sharafedin and King 2016).

³⁷ (Karimi and Nasiri 2018).

³⁸ <https://www.nhpr.org/post/iran-exposing-hair-public-stealthy-freedom#stream/0> (accessed on 20 June 2019).

Alinejad's protest against Iran's compulsory hijab rule has numerous followers around the world. Any woman inside Iran can join this campaign by posting a picture of themselves not wearing the hijab. Some participants to not risk being identified remove their hijab but turn their faces away from the camera, showing their exposed hair from the back. Some women pose while still wearing their hijab but hold signs with some statements about the hijab. In most recent postings, many women not only remove their hijab freely in front of the camera, but also speak directly to the recording camera and walk unveiled in public. These images were first posted on social media. While Twitter and Facebook are banned in Iran, they use Instagram and Telegram Applications, sending their videos and images to Alinejad who copies and pastes them on Facebook. "Iranians are very angry with morality police these days," tweeted Masih Alinejad to indicate the current level of disagreement on the compulsory hijab.³⁹

In a recent meeting, Masih Alinejad met with the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, which created a lot of discussion on social media, mostly negative by the Iranian people who claim that she (Alinejad) is not for Iranian people but is an agent from the Islamic Republic, or she was accused of being an agent from the US government trying to influence the internal politics of Iran by manipulating women.⁴⁰ Alinejad indicated that she emphasized three different areas of concern when she met Mike Pompeo:

First, many Iranians want an end to the Islamic Republic. Opposition voices should be heard". Second, International community should focus on 40 years of human rights violations by the regime, and third, the Trump administration travel ban hurts human rights activists and students, not the regime.⁴¹

This campaign against the compulsory hijab motivated women to defy the morality police in public. Some women shaved their hair and came to the street protesting that they should be left alone, since they no longer had hair and therefore did not need to cover their head. Men also joined the women to fight compulsory hijab by voicing their support or donning the veil in solidarity with the women who are forced to wear it. Images of men wearing scarves are posted in *My Stealthy Hijab* web link.

2.7. White Wednesdays Campaign (2017)

What Masih Alinejad started in 2014 has taken another route with an emphasis on weekly, silent protests in the streets of Iran by women (and some men as well) who are fed up with the compulsory hijab. This turmoil has lent itself to a new campaign called *White Wednesdays*, (Persian: چهارشنبه های سفید) which is yet another movement for the Iranian woman's freedom of choice to veil or not to veil. Masih Alinejad is the supporter of this movement as well.

Men and women who support the campaign wear white colors and white scarfs on every Wednesday, and women either remove their own headscarves and place them on a long stick and wave it silently, or simply wave a white scarf on a stick and stand quietly (Figures 8 and 9). Those holding a headscarf atop a stick have been charged with three crimes: "Spreading immorality, presentation "haram" act and defying the Islamic dress code."⁴²

³⁹ Qiblawi (2019). Ibid.

⁴⁰ (Radio Farda 2019). See below link to follow the thread in both Persian and English discussion about Alinejad's meeting with Pompeo: https://twitter.com/StateDeputySPOX/status/1092578620487462918?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1092578620487462918&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.radiofarda.com%2Fa%2Fwish-alinejad-pompeo-meeting%2F29751692.html.

⁴¹ (Radio Farda 2019) "Pompeo Tells Iranian Rights Activist of U.S. Support."

⁴² (Homa 2018).



Figure 8. Aman in support of White Wednesday waving a white scarf. Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-31-2018-1.4510938/iranian-women-risk-arrest-as-they-remove-their-veils-for-whitewednesdays-1.4510942>.



Figure 9. Vida Movahed, 31, known as *Dokhtar e Kheyaban e Enghelab* / The Girl from the Enghelab Street was arrested for her act of protest against the compulsory hijab removing her white scarf and waving it on a stick (#WhiteWednesdays) Women in Iran are waving white clothes on the end of sticks—but it is an act of defiance, not surrender. Source: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-january-31-2018-1.4510938/iranian-women-risk-arrest-as-they-remove-their-veils-for-whitewednesdays-1.4510942>.

On 27 December 2017, Vida Movahed, a 31-year-old Iranian mother, climbed atop a utilities box on one of Tehran's most crowded streets and silently waved a white headscarf on a stick. She stood unveiled, her long hair flowing in the breeze. Movahed was arrested a few hours later, but a photograph of her solitary act went viral. The image helped galvanize the exiled Iranian Masih Alinejad's social media campaign. The movement encourages people to protest against the mandatory headscarf law by wearing white [scarves, or what clothing or in combination] on Wednesdays or going out unveiled.⁴³

In the arrest, authorities said that by removing her hijab in public "she is encouraging people to commit corruption and prostitution." "تشويق مردم به فساد و فحشا از طريق كشف حجاب: اتهام او" Her arrest file indicates that her answer to the authorities as to why she removed her hijab was "personal joy." Later she was pardoned for her imprisonment time, but not the fees, by the judge. After Movahed's arrest and its media reportage went public, many women started to film themselves unveiled or wearing white scarves in crowded streets to support the cause in solidarity. Alinejad receives pictures of women in white scarves and posts them on her social media. Now both *My Stealthy Freedom* and *White Wednesdays* combined have a following of more than 2.3 million. Associated with this solidarity movement is the recent arrest of Nasrin Sotoudeh, a well-respected female Iranian human rights lawyer who took a case representing a woman (Shajarizadeh) for hijab disobedience. Shajarizadeh claims that while waiting to be sentenced for her "crime," she was illegally taken to the prison and tortured. Her crime, according to the authority's statement, included corruption and prostitution for posting her pictures without her hijab. Shajarizadeh says, "They [authorities] told me to drop Nasrin Sotoudeh as my lawyer—threatening to charge me with national security charges against the country if I kept her."⁴⁵

Recently, Nasrin Sotoudeh was handed a new sentence for helping opposition activists and women arrested for the crime of removing their hijab as a show of disobedience in the public. Sotoudeh is charged by the government for spying, spreading propaganda and, most of all, insulting Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran. She was sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes. Later BBC Persian clarified that according to Ms. Sotoudeh's husband (Reza Khandan) she had been convicted of three crimes with sentences totaling 38 years, however she will serve a maximum of 12 years, per Iranian law.⁴⁶

Resistance to the forced hijab comes in many forms, such as in underground fashion shows, while the government attempts to arrest those involved in such shows. To counter *un-Islamic haram* (religiously not permissible) shows, the government itself creates and organizes hijab fashion shows (Figures 10 and 11). These shows are not only for casual daywear, but also for special occasions such as football events for the world cup (Figure 12). These sporty fashions were created during 2014, when female football fans were not allowed entrance to these games. However, these fashions were not allowed due to some complications about the images of the flags that were used and copyright issues between the officials and the designer's house. However, these were technical issues. The biggest wonder is why there were specific women's fashions designed for watching sports, when no woman was allowed to attend the football stadiums to participate and cheer for their favorite teams? It is only since 20 June 2018 that the Azadi football stadium was open to women to watch the official Iranian national football team (Team Melli (Persian: تیم ملی)) playing their opponents, the Moroccan team televised from Russia in the Azadi Stadium in Tehran. Iranian news reports that *Iran's Fashion House*, an officially authorized design house in Iran, creates the modest Islamic dress for women to wear at

⁴³ (Ritchie 2019). See (in Persian) below the most updated news about Vida Movahed is on 26 May 2019 she was set free. See the following link in Persian news on line *Zamaneh*. https://www.radiozamaneh.com/448048?fbclid=IwAR1rdpvB0ISKDyIrlJ_qm5A7HBjnaXF28zvKzwjFIWpHBK-wND1GrcH5UtmA "ودا موحد آزاد شد" (accessed on 16 June 2019).

⁴⁴ *Zamaneh* on line.

⁴⁵ *Zamaneh* on line.

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47531312>.

the world cup series.⁴⁷ On the same note, Myriam Klink, a Lebanese super model, also showed her support for the Iranian team in 2014 by posting her unconventional images (with lots of skin exposed) draped in the Iranian flag and posting it on Facebook⁴⁸ (Figure 13). This oddity perhaps contained a message for the Iranian government, but its meaning is unclear.



Figure 10. Fashion show organized by the Iranian government. This example is a reminiscent style of Qajar woman's hijab (*chador va chaghchor* see figure# 1 for comparison) that was abolished by *kashf e hejab* or forced unveiling edict in 1936. Photo Credit: Sina Shiri, FARS News Agency, Iran, 2013.

⁴⁷ (NA 2014b).

⁴⁸ (NA 2014a).



Figure 11. This fashion was presented at the “3rd International Festival of Women of My Land.” organized in 2008. The garment basically is a zip up loose version of the Arabian Abbaya with herringbone design in white and gray pattern. These earlier governmental organized fashion festivals did not have any innovativeness in design or colorful fabrics. That was the main reason for such garments not selling. Iranian women did not care to look like anything as the model presenting. Source: <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/jul/1192.html> ISNA/ Photo credit: Homa Hoobehfekr.



Figure 12. Iranian model presenting an outfit bearing the Iranian national flag's colors in Tehran on June 24, 2014 Source: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/iran-bans-fashion-show-organiser-over-flag-designs-144004947.html>.



Figure 13. “Lebanese model supports Iran in World Cup.” Myriam Klink body wrapped in Iranian National Flag -during the World Cup 2014 showing her support for Teme Meli football of Iran. Source: <https://features.kodoom.com/en/entertainment/lebanese-model-supports-iran-in-world-cup/v/5427/>.

2.8. Resistance to Hijab: World Hijab Day (2013) compared to No Hijab Day (2018)

World Hijab Day (February 1st) is celebrated every year globally, founded by Bangladeshi-American activist Nazma Khan in 2013 and observed by 140 countries worldwide. Its purpose is for all women of diverse religions and cultural backgrounds to experience and show solidarity with Muslim women once a year by wearing a hijab. This event provides the opportunity for non-Muslims to experience wearing the hijab in an effort to change the negative connotations about wearing the hijab in non-Muslim communities around the world. In an interview, Nazma Khan stated that she is all too familiar with the discriminations that Muslim hijabi women must go through every day, as she was a victim herself, particularly after the 11 September 2011 terrorist attacks:

“Every day, I would face different challenges just walking on the street,” she told *Al Jazeera News*. “I was chased, spit on, surrounded by men, called a terrorist, Osama bin Laden, etc.”⁴⁹ According to Afaf Nasher, Council of American-Islamic Relations “A Muslim woman wearing a hijab is hypocritically viewed as foreign, submissive, and backwards.” Hijabi women are openly discriminated in securing employment. *The World Hijab Day* Organization is working on a program to build an educational program in order to lessen the discrimination against hijabi women in the corporate world

Meanwhile, in opposition to *World Hijab Day*, the social media on *No Hijab Day* with the hashtag #NoHijabDay encourages women to protest *World Hijab Day* to sympathize with and support Iranian women who are demonstrating against the compulsory headscarf since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. The *No Hijab Day* on line campaign started in 2018 by the Canadian human-rights campaigner Yasmine Mohammed to “... celebrate the women who have defied social censure and the state to remove the hijab.”⁵⁰ This is the day to celebrate and support all the brave women who decide for themselves what to wear and what not to wear, says Yasmine Mohammed. In 2018, on the occasion of *World Hijab Day*, several Iranian women burnt their headscarves in public, resulting in their arrests,⁵¹ in line with other brave women publicly protesting the hijab laws in the face of the irritated hardliners.

In the urban areas, particularly in Tehran, some young fashionable women are trying to get away with the somber look of what is favored as a “proper hijab” as was discussed earlier in this paper. They challenge the police and *gasht e ershad* and push the boundaries by wearing tighter clothes with a scarf loosely covering their head. They technically meet the requirements of the ordained headscarf, long sleeves and long dresses or long pants under their *manteau*, but such articles in the manner they wear them are not acceptable by the conservatives. Additionally, every day the Iranian women protest the compulsory hijab decrees with small but visible defiance, wearing their hijabs too low or wearing a small hijab barely covering their heads, wearing tight pants and short *manteau*, following colorful seasonal hues, wearing makeup and nail polish. They are arrested often and may also be served with a fine or short jail sentences, but they continue the same after they are released. Although Tehran’s chief of police in recent years has stated that they no longer impose fines or take women to jail for hijab disobediences. Instead, states the chief, the disobedient women are forced to take a class with the police regarding the principles of Islam. However, one cannot be assured of no arrestments, as the laws in Iran at times can be flexibly enforced and one can never know whether arrests are made or not.

2.9. Eventual Death of the Underground Fashion in Iran

To emerge from the hidden underground fashion and move to a fully operative legitimate business, it was important to have the approval of the religious authorities. The fashion business is a booming, lucrative market in Iran, and with it the demand for professional modeling agencies is growing. In 2014, one of the first modeling agencies in Iran, Behpooshi, obtained its official license to open its business

⁴⁹ (Aziz 2018).

⁵⁰ (Dunphy 2018).

⁵¹ (Friedman 2018).

with both male and female models. One wonders after more than four decades of governmental resistance to modeling and the fashion industry what made the change possible? When Behpooshi started in 2008, it was an underground modeling agency. In 2012 Sharif Razavi, Behpooshi's director wrote "... to the office of Iranian supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and asked for a religious edict to find if Islam forbade fashion and modeling. To his delight, it did not."⁵² The new permission by the government is causing the underground fashion to eventually fade away, since there is no need for hiding unless the designs do not comply with the modest Islamic clothing.

Each model carries an official license issued by the government to be able to work legally for modeling agencies. The fashion industry in Iran, as in global fashion, runs for four seasons with new fashion trends. The designers also have their own fashion models and professional photography. However, they mostly rely on their own social media, rather than running ads.

2.10. Iran's New Trend in Fashion and Taste

Since 2011 the government of Iran has promoted Islamic fashion organized by the government in a yearly event called the *Fajr International Fashion (Festival) and Clothing Festival*. In 2019, this fashion and clothing festival celebrated its 8th anniversary. Designs must be accepted by a government-assigned committee that makes sure all the regulations are met for this once a year event. The censorship obviously limits the creativity of the artists. A group, created by the Iranian parliament, assists in organizing the clothing and fashion industries "... making it compatible with Islamic standards [censored accordingly]. It is headed by a deputy minister of Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and its members are mostly government officials, with a handful of representatives from the fashion industry"⁵³ (Figure 14). Thus, the 8th *Fajr International Fashion Festival* fulfills many objectives that are not only artistic and economic, but mostly political in nature. In the case of Iran, the fashion festivals bring attention to a country that is known around the world to be in tight control of women's lives.



Figure 14. 8th *Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival* (2019). The outside border design of this poster contains a traditional hand embroidery of Mokran in the province of Iranian Baluchistan on the eastern border of Iran. Photo credit: Iran Press Mahdieh Baharmast Source: <http://iranpress.com/iran-i132465>.

⁵² (Dehghan 2015).

⁵³ (Serjoie 2014).

As a result of the interference of *gasht e ershad* and the negative attitudes towards women desiring to look their best and appear to be updated in their appearances, the local supplies of the domestic modest fashion were basically the extension of the same somber look that the government wants to see women wear. Most secular Iranian women create their own fashion sense and individualistic, updated colorful fashions for their own consumption. In the past because of an absence of private fashion houses in Iran, foreign brands were more desirable, trendy and pricier, and the young generation has sought the foreign brands more often.

One of the most important Iranian designers since 2012 is Abdoulaye, who creates colorful, traditional clothes for women's daywear, work, and shopping. She has noted that the shapeless garments in the somber and dark shades and the black chador were depressing, and so she wanted to bring in cheerful fabrics and fashion to her clientele. Her fashion Instagram is popular with Iranian women and her prices are reasonable.⁵⁴ One of the benefits of the *Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival* have been its inclusiveness of the foreign nation's designer collections and variety they offer as modest clothing for the Iranian woman. On the 8th year anniversary occasion of the *Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival* in 2019, more than 20 nations from Asia, Middle East and Europe participated.⁵⁵ One of the primary purposes of this festival, according to the Iranian organizers, is to create a competitive environment between the designers who are showcasing creative work to encourage international participation and to facilitate direct contacts between Iranian and foreign companies.⁵⁶ The government of Iran realizes that fashion collaboration in modest clothing is a lucrative business with lots of cash value, particularly during the recent harsh, economic and political sanctions imposed by the Western nations. The fashion industry must be considered an open avenue to the betterment of the economy in Iran.

Many local brands are thriving in Iran at this time, for example, Pooshema (meaning Our Garment) with an official link on Facebook. Another popular brand is Radaa (meaning kaftan), created by a young female architectural designer named Maryam Vahidzadeh. She states:

My designs do not have a signature theme. I only believe that one must feel comfortable in her clothes . . . I pick the fabrics, which don't need regular ironing and my themes are not raw and characterless. I can say they are more modern and comfortable rather than classic and formal.⁵⁷

Farnaz Abdoli is another successful Iranian fashion designer and stylist who left Iran in 2002 and works from Washington D.C. Her online products are sold in Iran and she has loyal followers. Her creations take into account the modest fashion followers found among many different groups and religious entities. For an example of a fashionable modest clothing see the work of Behi Bahar. (Figure 15).

⁵⁴ (NA n.d.).

⁵⁵ Tunisia, Singapore, Canada, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Italy, Syria, Oman, France, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Spain and Indonesia attended the festival and presented collection of their modest and hijab fashion. (MEHR News Agency 2019).

⁵⁶ (MEHR News Agency 2019).

⁵⁷ (Global Voices Online 2014).



Figure 15. Modern fashion daywear in Iran- Designer: Behi Bahar Source: <https://www.tasvirezendeji.com>.

3. Conclusions

The hijab and chador have long been integral to Persian/Iranian culture. Within the past 100 years between the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911), which led to the establishment of a parliament in Persia/Iran, and the Islamic Revolution (1979), women in Iran saw a drastic change politically and socially regarding veiling, unveiling, and re-veiling, and in the altering of their rights in society under the guise of *women's emancipation*. The hijab became a political symbol in 1936 when Iran's pro-Western ruler, Reza Shah Pahlavi, banned the hijab and also made changes to the men's clothing. Reza Shah's primary aim was to modernize Iran fast. His clothing decrees were a big part of his emancipation/modernization projects, which insulted a large number of ulama (religious scholars) and lay conservative men and women of the Iranian society.

New policies by Reza Shah promoted secular law and modernizing Iran. He forced the unveiling of women (*kashf e hijab*). Family laws were modified, and a rapid development of women's schools was promoted, while in the meantime Reza Shah fought the clerical resistance and patriarchal society. However, Reza Shah was known to be against any opposition by women to men decisions, he would not tolerate it. Elite educated women formed organizations, established publications, magazines, and newspapers pertaining to women's issues.

The son, Muhammad Reza Shah, continued to promote women's education and also created opportunities for social freedom, such as the creation of women's organizations, although they could not function independently of the government. During Muhammad Reza Shah's era there were women in local councils in the two houses of parliament and one female minister. Muhammed Reza Pahlavi, like his father, tried to control the power of the clerics, while attempting to modernize Iran. Under Pahlavi's reign, women gained the right to vote (in 1963, as part of Mohammad Reza Shah's White Revolution). College educated women served in education and health corporations. Another family protection law was passed, making polygamy difficult. Qualified women served as judges but were condemned by Shia theologians.

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, most of the initial rights gained by women one by one were taken back. However, woman's education has thrived because families believe their daughters will be secure under the Islamic government regulations, thus they can leave towns and pursue their higher education. However, some areas of studies have been closed to women, such as several branches of engineering. For women, the government promotes traditional degrees such as nursing, medical fields, and education. However, women with the highest degrees face discrimination, because employers promote male employment over women.

Women and the hijab have experienced much in recent history. Each respective regime in Iran was preoccupied with what women should or should not wear. Women's opinion on clothing matters was never consulted; male authorities always made the decision for what women should wear, just as we are still witnessing in Iran. The *One Million Signatures* campaign that began in 2006 was one of the earlier women's resistance crusades to discriminatory laws since the Islamic Republic was established. Based on their efforts, a few changes in favor of women became the law. The organizers of this campaign educated people about their rights, while learning that grassroots mobilization is a very effective tool to bring changes in a society.

Resistance of women against the compulsory hijab through the *My Stealthy Freedom* and *White Wednesdays* campaign have gained momentum, in spite of the consequences for women inside Iran and continued arrests by *gasht e ershad*. This movement symbolizes women's power and the use of civil disobedience to gain their freedom of choice to select what they desire to wear or not to wear. Like the earlier movement called *One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws* (also known as *Change for Equality*), these campaigns are Iranian women's protests of discrimination against women.

In Iran today, the most visible change regarding the fashion scene is the shift of the young generation's taste from desiring foreign western clothing brands to preferring the creations of homegrown Iranian designers. Currently, there are many Iranian women in the fashion business, operating in Iran, creating fashions for women only, and this is a unique phenomenon. Young women

prefer the traditional fabrics and choice of colors and styles created by their own designers for Iranian taste, from the traditional textiles made in Iran and not by a foreign fashion house of European culture. The Iranian government's decision to relax the rules for talented local fashion designers, who understand the demands of youth, perhaps has resulted at last in the recognition that fashion is here to stay no matter how harsh the authorities become anti-fashion. The young women find a way to dress in the manner they desire to project their own sense of fashion and expression. The government has made compromises by organizing the annual fashion festivals and involving the international communities with this event, and the fashion industry is currently a thriving and lucrative economical entity that benefits everyone. It is not an accident that the government recognized that trained and talented designers were required in the fashion industry for creating local, tasteful fashion, in contrast to the time when the government controlled the entire design process by unqualified people, and which proved unpopular.

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yar dabestani man is one of the poems of Islamic Revolution of Iran, it has a significant importance during the early part of the revolution, it is a symbol of unity among people.

"به عنوان مثال به روسپهایی که حجاب خود را برمدارند مگوند مخالف حجاب اجباری و رسانهای ما نزار همان استفاده میکنند این در صورتی است که این واژهها حساب شده هستند"

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