Women as Subject of Defiance and Everyday Politics of Hijab as Dress Code in Modern Iran* **

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Abstract

In this article I delve into the cultural meanings of the hijab in urban Iranian society by examining the ways in which Iranian Muslim women use it. I discuss the hijab as symbol of social conflict rather than repression. Based on eighteen months of fieldwork in Teheran, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, I examine the Iranian women's subjective choices and narratives regarding the hijab. My data show that the hijab has become controversial as the government uses it as a tool to control and restrict the Muslim younger generations. The political significance of social identity is manifest in an oppressive dress code and state mandated use of the hijab intended to mask Iranian women in their social surroundings. My research has two goals: (1) to examine the subjective act of wearing certain kinds of hijabas symbolic performances and (2) to grasp the political meaning of the 'green hijab' as a symbol of resistance during the Green Movement in 2009. I argue that the issues surrounding the hijab in Iranian society are no longer exclusively concerned with gender oppression, but reflect a more complex cultural and political edifice in modern Iran. By analyzing women's narratives, I suggest that the Islamic government uses women's hijab to control the individual, while at the same time, Iranian women use the hijab as a political metaphor of resistance against the ruling government.

Key words

Iranian women, hijab, Muslim veil, Islam, subjectivity

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** This article grows out of my doctoral research. Some documents and cases are cited in my dissertation, "Making Their Own World: Emotion and Self among the Privileged Iranian Youth (2013)", but the analyses and data in the present work are much expanded.

Introduction

In June 2009 in Teheran, with upcoming presidential elections, women with green headscarves and green *mānteau* (a tunic or thin overcoat called *mānteau* in Iran) poured into the streets crying out for change. The green hijab was no longer a symbol of 'faithful Islamic attire' but of the resistance leading the democratization movement. In Iran, *hijab*[1] refers to the attire and attitude of faithful male and female Muslims, despite the tendency to limit hijab policy and practices to female Muslims. At times the Muslim hijab has been a mechanism for manifesting ethnic identity (Nagata, 1995), at others, a symbol of Iranian democratic resistance against Western powers (Charrad, 1998). In some cases, it has also been a means of providing stability and moral protection for working women in their professional lives (Hessini, 1994).

There are many discussions on the Muslim women's veil and associated political agenda in Muslim nations to be found in recent research (Bilge, 2010; Gökarıksel, 2009; Macdonald, 2006; Shirazi, 2010). The different kinds of hijab and their multifaceted nature are evidence that the meanings and functions of the hijab have changed, depending on the nature of political and cultural situations (Shirazi, 2003). As part of the 1936 modernization movement, the Iranian government forbade, for the first time, the wearing of the hijab (El Guindi, 1999; Paidar, 1995, p. 206; Zahedi, 2007, p. 82). Subsequently, during the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1979), the demonstration marches of women in black chādor (the most conservative form of hijab which covers a woman head to toe) caused shock amongst Western civilizations and other Islamic societies (El-Solh & Mabro, 1994). According to Shirazi (2010, p. 112), the Islamic Revolution brought in a "new era of violence against women in the name of religious morality."

In 1981, after the Islamic Revolution, despite strong opposition by Iranian women, the state mandated compulsory use of the hijab by all women (Moghadam, 1993; Paidar, 1995). As the hijab was forced upon women once again, this time by a government the women themselves had established (Reeves, 1989), the state-mandated policy became one

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[1] *Hijab* is pronounced as *hejāb* in Iran, however I will use the general term *hijab* instead of *hejāb* in this article.

of the most impactful family laws complementing gender segregation and adultery laws (Paidar, 1995, pp. 336-339). The Iranian women's images were exploited to serve a political agenda and had accepted the government's messages (Shirazi, 2010, p. 135). As a result Muslim women came to embody a struggle between supporters and opponents of modernity (Moghissi, 1999) while the hijab has become a strong symbol of the nationalism and the patriarchism of Iranian society since. But what is its cultural significance in Iranian society today?

The Islamic regime has used the image of devout Muslims who wear conservative hijab to represent the nation and has established physical constraints for women in an attempt to assure that all will meet this ideal. The hijab is simultaneously referred to as protection allowing women to access public space safely and as a tool of coercion by the government (Gökarıksel, 2009, p. 660; Zahedi, 2007). Yet Moruzzi (2008) maintains that the hijab is "recognized as social capital" among Teheran's young women. She states that in Iran, especially amongst the educated young urban women, the hijab is worn as "a conscious manifestation of different forms of social status" (Moruzzi, 2008, p. 227) rather than as a sign of religious or political identification. While I agree with Moruzzi's position, I take this research further to discuss the politicization of the hijab in Iranian society today, rather than focusing on its role as a symbol of social status. My research situates Iranian women as subjects resisting oppression through the element of the hijab, as I emphasize how the government uses the hijab politically to restrict women, as well as how women take up the hijab as a political tool to stand up against the government (Shirazi, 2010).

Despite the common perception of veiled Iranian women as the "dominated," I have found that they are more than mere, passive subjects. Women's level of education has continuously increased since the 1990s and the advancement of women into public space through education goes hand in hand with the greater proportion of females to males in university enrollment (Shavarini, 2006, pp. 189-193). Iranian society has proven to be no exception to globalization trends. In fancy shopping arcades and shopping malls in Teheran, Korean and other international cosmetics boutiques are gaining popularity, while new media channels allow young women of the cities to watch fashion shows in Paris and see the way Koreans wear makeup in trendy Korean dramas.

As they are prohibited by the state, these productions are typically only accessible through illegal satellite connections, but young women still gain access through private sources. The Iranian Muslim women's interest in appearance is surprisingly high, which naturally extends onto high levels of makeup and clothing consumption. In this process the hijab, mandated by the state as a "mechanism of restriction," is also being used as a fashion accessory. Furthermore, in contemporary Iranian society, the hijab becomes the subject of debate rocking the political sphere. Taking a multilateral approach in a political and cultural context that transcends Islamist or Western feminist perspectives, Mahmood (2001) relates the women's use of the hijab with their autonomy. Similarly, Macdonald (2006) states that the veil was reconstructed as a form of resistance to Western ideology and secularism, as a fashion accessary or as evidence of Muslim women's agency and freedom of choice (p. 15).

The issues surrounding the hijab in Iranian society are no longer exclusively a woman's problem. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the hijab has become a political, symbolic, and dynamic cultural product. As one Iranian youth has affirmed "the hijab is not simply a woman's problem, but a social issue." In contemporary Iranian society, the hijab is an issue involving men and family as well as women; it is a cultural production that must be understood in intersecting contexts.

Research Methodology

With this research I seek to reveal urban Iranian women's voices as collected in fieldwork data (interviews and participant observation) during six months in 2002 and during twelve months between 2009 and 2010. I carried out in-depth interviews in Persian, mostly with educated middle-upper class citizens from Teheran and other big cities like Shiraz, Isfahan and Mashad. The interviewees include 32 men and 47 women,[2] and while in-depth interviews on the hijab were mainly carried out with women, the men's thoughts and perceptions about the hijab have proven to be important. The majority of the interviewees were people tending toward secularism and political reformism. Nonetheless, they repre-

[2] For the safety of all the people interviewed in this text, they have been made anonymous and there have been limitations in describing the informants in detail.

sented diversity with respect to religious transition, and individual religious values and practice were widely distributed. Only five interviewees were women who usually wore the most conservative hijabs, especially the *chādor*, while the majority of the rest used simplified hijabs like the *maqna'e*[3] or *russari*.[4] Through the Iranian women's narratives drawn from the in-depth interviews, I seek to understand the cultural and social meanings of the hijab for young, urban women and to address the struggle between the state and the individual around the hijab policy.

While the 2002 interviews are focused on the use of the hijab, the year-long fieldwork research carried out in 2009 investigates the hijab as an extension of identity problems faced by Iranian youth. In Iranian society, it is not easy to publicly display a critical stance against the hijab; to do so, one must endure political risks. In order to hear uncensored stories about the hijab, I scheduled interviews inside homes or dorm rooms, while my participant observation was carried out in both public and private areas. During the fieldwork research, I was not just an observer but also a subject; I had first-hand experience in Iranian policies for female dress. My position as a woman dressed in hijab proved to be an advantage as I interviewed Iranian women to share their personal experiences about the private and public debate surrounding the hijab.

The Hijab as Symbolic Performance

According to Michael Fischer (2003), in Iran, the hijab serves as a multivalent moral sign and simultaneously reveals religious and political identities. Furthermore, it is represented in different ways according to place, situation, and social status. The regulations regarding the hijab are the most visible change since the Islamic Revolution. The black *chādor* of the woman in Friday prayer is more than mere attire; it holds great political significance. The women's hijab is no longer a choice based on religious principles, but it has become a "political issue." Firstly, let us consider the types of hijab in Iran. Hijabs in Iran can be roughly div-

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[3] The *maqna'e*, though simpler than the *chādor*, possesses a sense of officiousness. *Magna'e* is the more formal form of hijab, it usually worn at school of work.

[4] Russari is a headscarf and traditionally worn tied under the chin. Its fabric and colors are diverse. Russari is the most informal of the hijab.

ided into three types: *chādor*, *maqna'e*, and *russari*. The hemisphere-shaped *chādor* is mostly worn by religious people and government officials. As a simple but formal form of hijab, *maqna'e* is the uniform of working women and students. The scarf-shaped *russari* is favored by modern, secular women for its fashionably diverse colors and patterns. Conservative religious leaders and government functionaries regard *russari* as improper; however, young Iranian urban women prefer *russari* and consider it a tool of fashion and decoration rather than a religious symbol.

After the Islamic Revolution, due to new social regulations based on Islamic religious laws, the conservative government asserted an immediate gender separation policy and tried to fix public space as Islamic space, that is, a sacred and male dominated moral space. In particular, implementation of the state-mandated use of the hijab by women symbolizes the "Islamic Republic of Iran," both in and out of Iran. According to Moon (2001, p. 75), after the Islamic Revolution, Islamization of policies regarding women was harsh. Policies were changed in all aspects, especially education policies, employment policies, gender separation and segregation in public spaces, the use of Islamic garments, and the revival of Islamic customs in family policies. Hijabs like the *chādor* were considered symbols of resistance against the secular Pahlavi regime (1925-1979). The hijab transcended social and class boundaries and was a pivot around which women could be united. It also symbolized resistance against the "Western model." However, by July 1981, the Islamic government had rebranded the hijab as an ideological and political symbol of the Islamic state (Paidar, 1995, pp. 341-344). Three years had barely passed since the Revolution when the mandate was issued that all women working in public institutions had to wear black chādor and all women over the age of nine were to wear the hijab in all public spaces. For women of secular families who had worn mini-skirts and did not use the veil before the revolution, the sudden imposition of the use of the hijab caused shock, betrayal, and defiance.

[Case #1] Testimonial from a 55 year old former female teacher

> This was when my eldest child was very young. It was just after the revolution, when the use of the hijab had just been

> decreed compulsory. I was not used to wearing the hijab, because I did not use it before the revolution. That day, I must not have worn the hijab as I was supposed to, for a man in the street handed me a note with a verse from the Quran about the hijab and was scolding me. I was so angry that I ripped the note up right there. Then, a few minutes after, a group of men suddenly came up behind me with wooden sticks. I just managed to escape, but that day remains a horrific memory to this day.

For secularists, young people, and even faithful Muslims, the types and uses of the hijab are not the real issue. The actual problem that suffocates these people is the imposition of a regulation for political and social agendas set by the government. The government insists on the religious and political character of the hijab and binds the people under the dichotomy that "the woman who does not wear the proper hijab" is "Satan looking up to Western ideology." Furthermore, the government identifies women's hijab with the *Jihad* (The Holy War), and thus creates a social atmosphere that criticizes the woman with an improper hijab as an anti-nationalist, anti-Sh'ia Muslim (Koo, 2002, p. 44). The more educated, secularist or reformist a woman is, the greater the antagonism she is likely to feel about the state-enforced use of the hijab. On the other hand, the religiously traditional and faithful women are ill at ease about the political significance of the hijab and consider that what need to be reformed is not just the hijab but also women's rights, and human right to choose in general.

The strong political message and the significance of social identity as manifested through the oppressive dress code regulations and use of the hijab have made the women disguise their true senses of self in their social surroundings. The middle-upper class educated women with whom I worked confess that the strong regulations regarding the hijab have prevented them from properly establishing their own identities. The absence of freedom of choice is directly related to a problem of identity, and it is in this gap, between external and hidden inner selves, that many of these women despair.

[Case #2] Testimonial of a 28 year old female graduate student

> We have to be *Do Rui* (double faced). This society doesn't let us be honest. My behavior and dress code change depending on whether I am on campus, in court, or at home. For example, I wear a *chādor* (the most conservative veil in Iran) when I visit my supervisor in graduate school or in court. I should show my visible religiosity in the public sphere. When I wear the conservative veil, Iranians think, "That girl is faithful and good." However, that is obviously a *tanaqoz* (contradiction)! Somehow that is not the real me. This society makes us liars and urges us to have two faces. *Nemituni kodetun bashi*!! (You can't be yourself!!)

Facing the presidential elections in June 2009, President Ahmadinejad's infamous "CD of lies" was distributed throughout Iran. Just as had occurred with the tape containing Imam Khomeini's voice while he was on exile before the Revolution, hundreds and thousands of the "CD of lies" were uploaded onto YouTube,[5] Facebook, Twitter, and various personal blogs. In the clip, one of ex-President Ahmadinejad's most emphasized "lies" is his remark about the "hijab problem." The video is separated into before and after the elections. Clips and photos create a contrast between a first part consisting of a television interview with candidate Ahmadinejad before the 2004 presidential elections, and the second part showing the dress inspections carried out after his presidential inauguration. In the interview before the elections, then presidential candidate Ahmadinejad says,

> Does the real problem of our society lie in how the youth wear their hair? Does it lie in the hijab? Does it? (laughing) Is our nation's real problem what the women wear and how the youth wear their hair?

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[5] Referenced YouTube video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bi5q6P2yEFg

Thus he maintains that the real problems in Iran are economic and political problems, rather than issues like the hijab or the youth's outerwear. Before the elections, he seemed to insinuate that the government would not intervene in the hijab issue, yet from the early years of his regime, expectations were overturned. As soon as Ahmadinejad was inaugurated as president, he started a massive "dress code crackdown."[6] After 2004, the greatest and most common conflict between the young people from the cities and the Islamic government was that about the hijab.

Every Thursday evening marking the start of the weekend and throughout the hot seasons, in the streets of Teheran, one can witness the unseen war between the youth who try to hold fast to their "fashion" and the religious police who try to catch them. The harsher the state regulations, the more women use looser scarves, blow-dry their hair, leave a space of 3-5cm between their foreheads and their scarves, and wear brighter makeup (See also Moaveni, 2007). Men are not exempt from this use of attire and appearance as a form of protest. The young men wear tight shirts, use jell to style their hair, and wear their pants so low as to show the imitation "Calvin Klein" underwear underneath. These stylish youths turn into "cultural criminals" in front of the *comiteh* (religious police) repression. In particular, the *Bad-hejabi* (the women who do not wear the hijab properly) are considered "dangerous beings" who can threaten the moral space; women's non-conservative dress becomes the most obvious target of strict moral standards. According to most of my interviews with young women, conservative men create conflict in public spaces. However, the men tend to avoid discussing the actual subject at hand, i.e. the government's strict intervention in private lives, by referring mostly to outer, shallow criticisms, "Wear the hijab properly!" or "Hide your hair!" For them, "The woman who does not wear the hijab properly is a morally evil woman." For this reason, with the exception of the women who usually wear traditional clothing like the chādor, every woman can tell of at least one episode in which they were subject to dress code control.

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[6] Referenced BBC article "New Iranian dress code crackdown" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7457212.stm)

[Case #3] Testimonial of a 21 year old female university student

> Dark nail polish gets caught at the dress code inspection at the university gates. So you have no idea how much acetone gets sold just outside (laugh). So when my friends and I pass the gates, we put our hands in our bags or we hide them in our pockets. If you get caught at the inspections at the entrance, you can't even go to class. Mostly, only dark colored *mānteau* are allowed. But, it can't be too loose and it can't be too short. If it is so tight that it marks the breasts, it's okay, but if the outer clothing is loose but short, it is not acceptable. Does this make sense? The male students aren't under any kind of regulation. Who says that there is gender equality in this society? It's rubbish. In this society equality is just a word. One of my friends was with her boyfriend in the park when she was arrested for public indecency [she was wearing a *russari*], she was asked at the police station whether she had had any physical intercourse with her boyfriend, and even though she continuously denied it, she was forced to sign a declaration that she had had sexual relations with him.

In Iran, the type of hijab one wears conveys a message about one's political and religious position (See also Shirazi, 2003, 2010). And as positionality varies by situation, the dress code changes according to space. For example, in schools, public institutions or work, the *maqna'e* must be used. It is possible to see women changing their *maqna'es* into scarf-like hijabs like the *russari* or shawl in bathrooms before they attend classes in private institutions. The following case recounts an episode I experienced directly, and it was an opportunity from which I was able to understand the shame and embarrassment faced by Iranian women in their daily lives.

[Case #4] Personal anecdote from July 19th, 2009, in a co-educationa l[7] class at Teheran OO English Institute

These days, the temperature in Teheran is around 38-40 degrees Celsius. Not only is it hot, but today, because I was late, I was unable to change from the *russari* to the *maqna'e*. I remembered that when I had tried to go to the bathroom to change into the *maqna'e* before the last class, two women in the same class, named Mariam and Hastee, had told me, "It's okay, you don't need to wear it," so I stayed in my seat. I was out of breath from having walked fast, I was wearing my scarf so loose that my neck showed, and I was fanning myself. The man next to me, Mehdi, kept eyeing me. Then, he pointed out, "Please wear your scarf properly." I took out the *maqna'e* from my bag and asked whether I should go wear it outside to which he told me to ask the teacher. He called out to the teacher right away saying, "Teacher, this person has something to say." The teacher, a woman in her early thirties, asked me what the matter was and I said, "This person said there is a problem with my hijab and that I should ask you whether I should go to wear my *maqna'e* outside." To this, she replied, "I don't mind. I'm fine whether you decide to wear your *maqna'e* or not. But the administration may say something. Since the class has already started, you don't need to change into it today."

In a somewhat calmer atmosphere, I still felt all eyes were on

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[7] Most private English institutes in Teheran city are organized by last names. Even though they are private institutes, they require governmental support and permission, so they need to separate male and female students. Furthermore, because they are educational institutes, the conservative *maqna'e* must be worn, even in the all-female institutes. I have compared the experiences in an all-girls institute and in a co-educational institute, by spending four and five months, respectively, in these two institutes as part of my fieldwork research. The classes in the all-girls institute mostly consisted of housewives, university students, job-hunters. On the other hand, in the co-educational class, there were mostly 20-30 year old university students, graduate students, single workers preparing to go work abroad.

me. Those who came into eye contact with me silently lifted their heads back.[8] It was a sign that I did not need to go outside to change. I was suddenly taken aback, as if I had been chastised by policemen in the streets, and I felt a sudden fear. I started feeling self-conscious about the man next to me, and he kept on looking at me. I untied the neck part to tie the scarf tight around my neck. During the English debate period, I asked my partner, "Why would Mehdi have said something like that to me?" She replied, "It's because he is afraid that you will be kicked out of the institute for not following regulations. Don't worry." I also asked a male student next to me, "Does it bother you too that I was not wearing my *maqna'e* today?" to which he replied, "Why do you ask me that?" I said, "Because the other guy told me to wear my scarf properly." "That's your problem, it's not something I can say anything about. I don't care," he said. After the end of class, I approached Mehdi and said, "If you were uncomfortable today because I was not wearing my hijab properly, I'm sorry. Does it bother you that I was not wearing my *maqna'e*?" He replied, "It's not that, it was because I was afraid you may get into trouble if you didn't wear your *maqna'e* and you were seen by any police as they look though the office or into the institute" and he apologized. My heart was heavy and I was very disconcerted.

The hijab policy is a direct extension of the government's Islamization policies that try to impose Islamic regulations on every aspect of public space and convert it into a moral space. In every government building, school, and institute as well as public buildings, restaurants, real estate, and even small news agencies, there is both an advertisement[9] and a

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[8] In Iran, the body language to say "no" is to lift your head back and click the end of your tongue.

[9] Stickers and advertisements related to hijab (Koo, 2002)

- Women with proper hijabs have better personalities. Your hijab is your dignity.

warning[10] about the use of the hijab on the walls.

[Case #5] Conversation with a 50 year old owner of a stationary shop

(In one small store there is a large poster with the words, "Please follow the regulations about the hijab.")
Researcher: Why have you posted such an instruction here?
Store owner: (As if it were nothing) These days, the way women dress is too much. How can that be Muslim? Their hijab is almost falling off as they get out of the car, their clothes are tight, and the lengths barely cover their bottoms.

These kinds of posters are an active tool of control used by the Iranian government, over the women and over the businesses. By law, every business establishment must post a similar poster or sign, reminding women to wear proper hijab at all times or else they will be refused service. These posters are published and distributed by the government and imposed upon the stores. In this way, the government makes the business and shop owners into civil surveillants, enforcing state-led hijab policy. Thus, not only do these government laws and controls repress Iranian women, they indirectly support daily scrutiny and evangelization directed at women by other citizens.

At the same time, these posters recall the impact of the slogan saying "Workers of the World Unite!" in front of a vegetable shop, that Havel

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- Sister, your elegance and reputation comes from the Islamic hijab
- Sister, show your beauty through your hijab.
- The hijab is a holy duty.
- The hijab shows off the Muslim woman's elegance.
- A woman is valued when she wears the hijab.
- The hijab is our nation's pride.

[10] Warnings about the hijab (*op.cit*)
- The woman wearing a hijab improperly is Satan's plaything.
- An improper hijab symbolizes an unfaithful town.
- An improper hijab calls many people to stare upon oneself.
- If you don't wear your hijab properly, you are soiling his reputation.
- An improper hijab is the seed of corruption
- An improper hijab is disrespectful of the Islamic Republic.
- A bad hijab reflects mental ignorance and is a disgrace to the Islamic Republic.

(1985) analyzed as part of late totalitarian society and which he stated served as an alibi for "regime obedience" to protect those who display them from the regime's arbitrary abuse of power. In Iran, young secular people place Qur`anic verses or tapes reciting the Qur`an in their own cars to disguise themselves as faithful Muslim as described by Varzi (2006) and to protect themselves from arbitrary attention by the authorities. Similarly, it is possible to understand, in this context, why some high-school boys almost reflexively started reciting *salavat* (Prayer for Holy Prophet Mohammad and his pure progeny) when addressed by authority figures. I observed boys doing just this when a middle-aged man told them off for talking loudly in a bus. The signs promoting proper use of the hijab found in the stores can thus be interpreted to be a kind of "safety device" or a protection for the shop owners against the regime, rather than a dogmatic show of personal religious principles.[11]

Despite this kind of contradictory and daily control, secular women wear different hijabs for different occasions and, by understanding and choosing the different cultural meanings of each hijab, it is possible to understand how women appropriate hijabs to become subjective agents.

The Green Hijab as a Symbol of Resistance in Green Movement (2009)

As discussed above, after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the hijab acquired political meaning. The hijab is a symbol of Islam and it is the visible symbol of a repressive regime. The hijab distinguishes public and private spaces, and at the same time, it is a device of resistance for reformist women to make their voices heard. The Green Revolution provides an example of these simultaneous yet opposing significances of the hijab.

In June 2009, with the 10th presidential elections coming up, there was an eerie sense of tension in Teheran. As with the electoral cam-

[11] For example, when I asked store owners about their concerns associated with the "hijab use regulations," their answers were, "When the client goes against the rules while inside the store (e.g., if a woman does not wear her hijab properly), it is possible that the store be closed down." In fact, in Northern Teheran, there were many famous restaurants and coffee stores that had to close for "breach of the hijab regulation." In other words, shop owners are also the victims of state hijab oppression.

paigns of the reformist ex-president Khatami in 1997 and 2001, candidate Mussavi's most significant support base had been 20–30-year-old urban women (see Figure 1) and it was these women who extended the Green Movement onto the Muslim hijab. They showed their enthusiastic support of reformist candidate Mir-Hussein Mussavi by wearing green shawls, green manteaux, and green headbands. They stood in front of major subway stations, holding up his picture shouting out his slogan and handing out green wristbands in support of their candidate. Green, the color of the Mussavi campaign, symbolized "Hope of Change" and this green fever extended beyond those who could vote to include middle-school and high-school students, who started wearing green clothing or the green strap on their wrists as if it were a trend. Thus the green clothing and green hijab gained greater visibility than any other electoral tool and sent out a silent message to everyone (see Figure 1). The active use of the green attire and hijab made people believe that "voting for Mussavi may actually be of use" (Fischer, 2010, p. 52). The green veil, t-shirt, and wrist strap that could be seen on Iranian citizens in the streets of Iran daily built up a sense of solidarity in resistance (Koo, 2012). Thus, the hijab began to assume again its place as a political tool, this time in resistance to the government.

Figure 1. *Photo taken by the author in June 2009 of young female supporters of Mussavi wearing green color hijab*

However, despite this visible popularity, Mussavi lost the elections to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the then-incumbent president. The Green Movement evolved into a huge political uprising, which would be considered a turning point in Iran's modern political history and the largest demonstration since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Citizens observed police arresting those who came out to the streets denouncing the elections invalid due to electoral fraud. Millions of women from both religious and secular backgrounds participated in the rally and other demonstrations of the Green Movement. The women who came out to the streets cried out for democracy and the overthrowing of the dictatorship. What brought these women together in the streets of Teheran was "their resolve to achieve freedom and equality for all, their determination to exercise their civil rights, to have their vote be counted, and to be considered equal actors in Iran's political process (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010, p. 80). The death of Neda Agha-Soltan, shot dead during the protests, was publicized both nationally and internationally, arousing public indignation and creating a climate of fear. The green clothing and veil acted to unite the people and sent out a strong message. At its height, the political significance of wearing a green *mānteau* or t-shirt was so intensified that it became justification for arrest by the religious police. This green hijab was interpreted as an action of resistance against the government and the Iranian government acted to discourage the wearing of green, turning back girls in green coats from university, or denying entrance to anyone wearing green into a football stadium.

It is worth noting that green had not always been a political color representing Mussavi, but, rather, it had been the traditional symbol of Islamism. However, according to Mussavi's own expression, for the Iranians, this green means more than Islamism. It represents the "Iranian," uniting the different nations and tribes that constitute Iran. In other words, the green movement symbolizing the "Green Revolution," is designed to unite all of the diverse constituents of Iran. Today, the color green represents even more than Islamism and Iranians. It also carries a sense of resistance and struggle against the government.

Amongst people with these "reformist tendencies" there are many religiously faithful and religiously conservative Muslims. They complain

that they are misunderstood by a government that only emphasizes "Islamism as politics." For example, a woman who wears the *chādor*, the conservative Islamic attire, is also seen as politically conservative by the rest of Iranian society. In November 2009, I met several Social Sciences graduate majors of the University of Teheran through a friend. R made a very strong first impression. She was wearing the most conservative outfit, with a *maqna'e* and a *chādor* on top. As I shook her hand, I noticed the green band on her wrist. I asked her, "Isn't it dangerous to be wearing this green band?" She replied, "It is, but it's not a big deal," and she smiled brightly. She was 18 years old. She was so young that, when I mentioned I was interested in third generation Iranians, our friends next to us introduced her as *nasle chaharom* (the fourth generation).[12] Even though R was voluntarily wearing the *chādor*, a conservative hijab, she showed an extremely radical and progressive character regarding politics. Though R selected the *chādor* as a "faithful Muslim," she was sorry that even the Iranians regarded her *chādor* as "frightening and fearful."

[Case #6] Interview with an 18 year old female university student

Researcher: To be honest, I feel scared when I see people wearing *chādor*, I cannot approach them easily in case they are conservative and pro-government.

R: It's okay, even the Iranians look at me in that way. Because the government is tyrannical and psychologically repressive, many people think negatively of the current government. Even though I myself wear a *chādor*, I do not believe that the argument of the government that whoever doesn't wear a *chādor*, or doesn't have a long beard, is "non-Muslim" or "not a true Muslim" is not right. I also believe that the use of the hijab should be unregulated. Foreigners and non-believers

[12] Today, Iranian younger generations born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution are generally called *nasle-sevom* (the third generation). The fact that this girl is being introduced as "fourth generation" indicates that she is very young.

should have the right not to wear it.

Researcher: How does the Islam of the government differ from the Islam the public talks about?

R: Islamism does not lie as easily as the government. I was impressed by Obama becoming president in the States. In an Islam-phobic, anti-Islam society such as the American one, Obama did not drop his middle name, "Hussein."[13] I believe that is how a true Muslim should be. But, how ironic is it? That the society that is regarded with most hostility, the American, can represent Islamism so beautifully… Prayers, hijab or Friday prayers are not important; the religiousness that comes from a true heart. Schools tell people to go to Friday prayers, and in Seminars, there are presentations that talk of the importance of the *chādor*, but I am against all that is only outwardly and forced. They have told me to go to the Imam Khomeini mosque, but I have refused to do so, until now. It is because I am very much against anything that is "forced."

What does Islamism and its symbol, the hijab, stand for among today's Iranian urban women and youth? In modern day Iranian society, Islamism presents itself, at times, as a coercive voice of the administration, and at times, as the religion of peace that listens to their sorrows and worries, and completes them. Nowadays, the collective conscience of the younger generations' makes use of the regime's arguments as material on which to base their own actions. In other words, the younger generations with greater reformist tendencies are making up their resistance ideologies based on Islamism as a religion, not as a political system. In this manner, although the hijab has become a politicized symbol by the Islamic government, the green hijab is a clear example of how it is also being politicized by young people rising up

[13] The American President's full name is: Barak Hussein Obama Jr.

against the regime.

Conclusion

> We have no choice because we were born Muslim. But I like the Islamic religion. A religion is a religion. But the Islam that "they" talk about is different. I do not comply with any of the conditions they talk about, that is, the conditions of an "ideal Muslim." I do not pray, I do not fast. I do wear my hijab outside, but I don't wear it even in front of nāmahram (potential marriage partner). In that sense, I am not fulfilling my duties nor do I have proper accomplishments as a Muslim. But I do not believe that is important. When young people join demonstrations against the government, they are not rejecting Islamism. It is because the religion the government talks about and the religion in people's hearts are too different. The people have become more distant from Islamism because the government tries to impose and brainwash Islamism onto the people.

From what was said by the student the heart of the problem does not lie with the "hijab as an Islamic attire," but with the fact that the people's freedom of choice has been taken as the hijab becomes a social regulation. As discussed above, in modern day Iranian society, according to the type, the hijab can be a religious dress of a faithful Muslim, or a symbolic and cultural code that shows social status. Although the traditional hijab holds greater political significance than ever in the public space, the secular hijab in the private space has also gained an equally important meaning as a symbol of resistance. Secular women show off their identity through a looser and brighter colored hijab.

In private debates Iranian women have cautiously started to demand the right to freely choose the hijab. Recently, a Facebook page[14] called "My Stealthy Freedom" became a hot issue with Iranian Facebook

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[14] https://www.facebook.com/StealthyFreedom

users. As a private movement that started with Masih Alinejad, a female journalist living in England, it is creating a great sensation amongst the people of Iran. On June 10th, 2014, just a month since her page was made, 490,000 people had already "liked" the page and hundreds of people from all around Iran had posted photos with their veils off. Below each photo there were women's opinions on the veil regulations: "Freedom of thought is my right. Awareness is my right. Freedom of speech is my right! The hijab is not the one and only problem I have. Actually my major problem is living in a prison made up of rotten thoughts. We must have right to choose." This movement of change is an extension of the flexible position on the hijab and new media taken by the reformist president elected last year, Hassan Rouhani. However, the conservative factions are greatly enraged by developments and have held seminars[15] on the streets calling for stronger regulations on the hijab. As a consequence, the hijab is not a mere Islamic garment, but a political symbol in itself, more political than it has ever been. The hijab is being used by the Islamic government to control the individual, but, at the same time, it is also being used by Iranian women as a political metaphor of resistance against the regime and against the image and identity that has been imposed upon them (Zahedi, 2007, p. 95). Furthermore, what Iranian women sincerely want is more than just being free from the hijab regulation. What they really want is a broader, more inclusive and more autonomous freedom in their daily lives. As the hijab attracts the political gaze and also becomes a political medium, Iranian women become significant political actors.

[15] "Iranian women post pictures of themselves without hijabs on Facebook (Saeed Kamali Dehghan, *The Guardian*, Monday 12 May 2014)" (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/12/iran-women-hijab-facebook-pictures-alinejad).

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