

“WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND”: VEILING, WOMEN’S BODIES, AND ‘ORIENTALISMS’ PAST AND PRESENT

“ Between patriarchy and imperialism ...the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernisation.”¹

The last quarter century has seen regular attention in western media to the presentation and politics of ‘veiling’ - the dress codes of head and/or body covering associated with women in societies in the Middle East and North Africa or with women identified as Muslim.² Press coverage of women wearing *chadors* during the revolutionary upheavals in Iran in 1979 and of the new theocratic regime’s concerns with female ‘veiling’ included the American Kate Millet’s supposedly ‘feminist’ intervention in the conflict over the issue. The climate created by the Iranian revolution in the 1980’s generated greater western attention to Islamic trends and movements in Algeria, Turkey, and Egypt which had in some cases been developing for some time including much writing on headscarves and ‘veils’. In the 1990’s hostile discussion of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan foregrounded their treatment of Afghan women including enforced wearing of the *burqa* [an indigenous all-over women’s head and body cover] - an issue which did not preoccupy western writing on Afghan movements, including the Taliban, during their war with the Russians in the 1980’s. This culminated in the coverage of the US/UK military intervention in Afghanistan in 2002 whose attack on the ‘fundamentalist’, ‘pro-terrorist’ Taliban was further legitimated as supportive of the ‘rescue’ of Afghan women, with numerous references to the *burqa* [a local form of all-encompassing cover worn by women] including remarks by the well known progressive lawyer and wife to the UK Prime Minister.

Nor has media attention to female dress codes been solely a matter of representing far-away people of whom western audiences know little. The French ‘headscarf affair’ of 1989 over the question of whether female pupils could wear the head covering considered appropriate by some Muslims when they went to school linked the ‘veiling’ issue³ to questions about the cultural pluralism

¹. G.Spivak, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ in C.Nelson and L.Grossberg [eds.] *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p.306

². As will be seen this involves *selecting out* this phenomenon from among the many variants of dress code relating to concealing/revealing body parts which might include eg. conventions of covering among men like the Touareg, concerns over ‘topless’ female bathing attire in Europe, or nun’s veils, and gives to the material discussed in this paper a particular significance. More generally it is important to remember that *all* forms and codes of bodily presentation can be understood as material and cultural signifiers with political and symbolic power in their particular cultures.

³. The terms *hidjab/hijab* [Arabic term for head-covering], *voile* [=veil], *tchador/chador* [the Persian language term for the head-to-foot covering worn by Iranian women] and *foulard* [= scarf] all appeared in French media coverage. See D.Blank ‘A veil of controversy: the construction of a “Tchador affair” in the French press’,

of French society and the secularity of the French state. This debate reappeared in sharper form in 2004 when the French government brought in legislation to restrict the use of blatantly religious elements of clothing in state schools, which was in fact focussed on girls' wearing of head-coverings in conformity with Islamic dress codes. As with debates on arranged marriages, clitoridectomy, or 'honour killings' among particular communities recently settled in various European countries, views on the control of women's bodies combined with anxieties over immigration and cultural diversity, and with racial prejudice and stereotyping, as well as with woman-centred agendas.

Such attention to 'veiling' has featured not just in western media, but also in various social and political contexts in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey in recent decades. From public, scholarly, and official engagement with 'good'/'bad' *hijab* in Iran under the Islamic Republic⁴ to extended legal, political and administrative contests over female head-covering in Turkey⁵ and Egypt⁶, cultural and political controversy has engaged women and men, politicians and religious specialists, state authorities and civil society. A complex set of diverse, if overlapping, interests and beliefs have informed contests over the morality, practicality, and symbolic significance of the use/non-use by women of particular styles of covering of their heads, bodies, and faces. At the turn of the twenty-first century concern with codes of female self-covering is a significant component of cultural and political discourses in so-called 'Middle Eastern' and 'Islamic' societies and communities as well as marking European and North American media presentations of those societies or communities.

These concerns can be addressed in a number of ways. Should we analyse women's 'veiling'/'unveiling' in terms of their emancipation or lack of it, and/or of their negotiations and conflicts of interest with men or male-dominated institutions? Should we focus on the interventions of governments on this particular matter of dress code and consider 'veiling'/'unveiling' as part of the terrain of state/subject relations and state-led social engineering? Should we emphasise the role of religious legitimation and religious debate on 'veiling'/'unveiling' and explore the issue as part of the interaction of faith-based and secular elements

⁴ . See H.Afshar *Islam and feminisms: an Iranian case study*, Macmillan, 1998, ch.9; P.Paidar *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran*, Cambridge UP, 1995, ch.10; F.Adelkhah, *La revolution sous le voile*, Karthala,1991; F.Shirazi, *The veil unveiled*, University Press of Florida, 2001, pp.92-108; Z.Mir-Hosseini, 'Divorce, veiling, and feminism in post-Khomeini Iran' in H.Afshar [ed.] *Women and politics in the third world*, Routledge, 1996.

⁵ . For a brief account see E.Ozdalga, *The veiling issue: official secularism and popular Islam in modern Turkey*, Curzon Press, 1998, pp.40-48; see also N.Gole, *The forbidden modern, civilisation and veiling*, Michigan UP, 1996; E.Olson, 'Muslim identity and secularism in contemporary Turkey: the headscarf dispute' *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol.58, no.6 [Oct. 1985].

⁶ . See F.El Guindi, *Veil: modesty, privacy, and resistance*, Berg, 1999, chs.8, 10, 11; A. MacLeod, *Accommodating protest: working women, the new veiling and change in Cairo*, Columbia UP, 1991; S.Zuhur, *Revealing veiling: Islamist gender ideology in contemporary Egypt*, State Univ. New York Press, 1992; V.Hoffman Ladd, 'Polemics on the modesty and segregation of women in contemporary Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.19 [1987] pp.23-50; M.Hatem, 'Economic and political liberalisation in Egypt and the demise of state feminism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol 24[1992]pp231-51.

within particular cultures and communities? Should the extent or form of 'veiling'/unveiling' be discussed as a measure of 'progress' or 'modernisation' in a specific group or society? Do contests over 'veiling'/unveiling' express conflicts between world-views which emphasise cultural plurality and relativism, those which emphasise 'universal' needs and norms, and those which emphasise commitment to 'authentic' beliefs or traditions in a particular society? Should we make the existence of debates and conflicts associated with 'veiling'/unveiling' itself the issue for discussion, or insert them within other agendas and explanatory frameworks such as class and community structures, or global relations of production and domination? ⁷

Whatever emphasis is chosen - and all have been used separately or together by scholars and commentators in interesting and useful ways - it is undeniable that the veiling question concerns the politics of women's presentation of their bodies. It is political in the sense that veiling or unveiling has become the subject of ideological differences, governmental and social sanctions [including physical punishment], and conflicts of practice and interest between groups and individuals. Testimony from Turkish teachers, North African migrants to Holland, Egyptian and Iranian activists, and Moroccan women indicates the complex range of choices, possibilities and constraints around veiling which is part of their daily lives. ⁸ Debates by intellectuals, religious specialists and political organisations on the matter show how belief, theory and legitimation in relation to veiling are contested and hence *political* issues. The use of official, communal, or legal regulation of veiling demonstrates the role of power and the presence of power relations, pitting authority against choice and control against acceptance of diversity. The adoption or removal of veils or their equivalents have been acts of political assertion and resistance chosen by individuals or groups to express opposition to 'foreign' intrusion and state regulation, claims to classed, gendered or patriotic rights and identities, aspirations for change, or loyalty to religion and cultural tradition.

The particularity of such politics lies in its focus on the management of women's bodies whether by governmental, religious, communal, familial, or political authorities, or by women themselves. Like the politics of reproduction [birth control, fertility and infertility issues, abortion], sex relations [age of consent, rape, same or opposite sex sexual preference, marital rights and restrictions], or harassment and violence against women [sexual and other physical assaults], the politics of dress and veiling expresses powerful material and cultural concerns with bodily practices and meanings. Just as physical acts of body concealing or revealing have symbolic power and shared or contested meanings, so their consequences are both material [rewards and punishments impacting on living bodies and material well-being] and cultural [moral and social debates, sanctions, or

7, Thus far I have self-consciously placed the words 'veil', 'veiling', and 'unveiling' in scare-quotes in order to indicate that they are symbolic and ideological as much as, if not more than, descriptive terms, as well as being an unhelpful, and, as we shall see, mystifying, single concept supposedly naming a whole diverse range of garments and dress-codes. In order not to clutter the text or irritate readers I shall now desist from this, urging them to keep in mind the problematic nature of these terms.

⁸ Gole ... : A.Karam, 'Veiling, unveiling and meanings of the veil: challenging static symbolis, *Thamyris*, vol.3, no. 2 [autumn 1996]...Mir Hosseini...Egypt, Hessini in Gocek & Balaghi

prescriptions]. Although much of the following discussion will focus on questions of meaning, rhetoric, and politics, the profoundly material and physical aspects of the veiling question, whether the killing, fining or imprisoning of offenders against dominant conventions, or the expansion of practical opportunity consequent upon particular veiling practices, should not be forgotten. The act of presenting one's body with particular garments in particular ways should be understood in both its material and cultural reality.

This paper seeks to historicise the rhetoric and politics of veiling and suggests that the twentieth-century concerns with veiling issues in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey and among communities identifying as Muslims in western Europe have specific genealogies and also a place in broader histories of body politics. Rather than being some sudden and inexplicable manifestation, current language and practice around veiling draw on a rich repertoire of experience and discourse developed over the last two centuries. Rather than being cast in the mould of western discourses on gender and sexuality, this repertoire expressed the engagement of Egyptians, Turks, and Iranians with both indigenous and external influences on their culture. Rather than being seen as mysteriously inherent features of 'Muslim' or 'Middle Eastern' cultures, they can be placed on a spectrum or terrain of culturally and politically meaningful body practices from the role of corsetry and hats in European gender, class and sexual histories to the veiling practices of the Byzantine elite or dress codes of east European orthodox Jews. The discussion here will be attentive to the creative agency of those concerned with veiling issues and to the cross-cultural and temporal comparisons which might illuminate them.

This historical approach to the current politics of veiling in the Middle East and in self-identified Muslim communities in Europe does not propose some linear narrative which 'explains' them. Rather it takes an archaeological or genealogical approach to explore how this particular body politics has accumulated specific agendas and layers of meaning over time. These historic legacies become resources to be drawn on by people responding to the particular circumstances of the late twentieth century. Three important elements have played distinctive roles in the formation of such responses, each associated with a recognisable historical 'moment' in the history of power relations between societies in the Middle East and the west. First of these is the 'moment' of orientalism in which people and societies in or from the Middle East were conceptualised as cultural 'others' in a context of colonial dominance by varied means including reference to veils and veiling. A second element emerged in the confrontations of colonial power and influence with demands for 'national' autonomy, emancipation and progress in which women's rights and needs, and gender codes, including dress codes, played significant roles in movements and discourses of nation-building, 'modernisation' and cultural authenticity. A third element was created in 'post-colonial' contests over failed/embattled anti-colonial agendas and over diversity and national/religious/ ethnic 'authenticity' in which veiling was a politically and symbolically charged issue. While each development began at a particular point in time and in distinctive circumstances, their influence has been cumulative and continuing rather than sequential, as shown in the discussion to follow.

We are familiar with accounts of the operations of 'orientalism' as a powerful set of European images and structures of knowledge positioning cultures, people, governments, and social institutions in 'the East' [typically extending through North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, west and south Asia

to the East Indies, China, and Japan] as 'others' with distinctive 'oriental' characteristics. These operations evolved from early European military, commercial, and cultural encounters with societies in the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, Spain and Sicily in the medieval period and the confrontation of Europeans with the expansion of the Ottoman empire from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. From the later seventeenth century the strengthening organisation of European commerce and government locally and globally was accompanied by new techniques of scholarly and descriptive depiction of 'eastern' topics and new ideas of social analysis and explanation. By the nineteenth century the colonial, commercial, and strategic involvements of the French in North Africa and the Levant, the British in India and the Ottoman empire, the Dutch in Indonesia, and the Russians in the Caucasus and central Asia, the revival of missionary activity, and new possibilities for travel and mass communication fuelled a broader more elaborated spectrum of constructions of 'the east'. Compounded of learned discourse, visual and verbal imagery, popular stereotypes, and political debate, the practices of orientalism described, theorised, and analysed various aspects of 'the East', exoticised them, judged them, and subordinated them to controlling ideas and imaginings and to policies informed by those ideas and imaginings.⁹

These practices were by

no means monolithic, including as they did missionary pamphlets on work among the heathen, learned texts on 'oriental' languages and religions, music hall and cartoon portrayals of pashas, Chinamen and dancing girls, travel books for middle class readers, and high-status art objects. Their diverse purposes included policy making, opinion forming, entertainment, and education, and often diverged from, contested and competed with one another.¹⁰ The missionary enthusiast for conversion, the travel-writer seeking to provide colourful and 'authentic' description, the colonial administrator making sense of his responsibilities, the cartoonist and novelist deploying exotically appealing images, or the scholar constructing authoritative analyses, each had distinctive contributions and aims. The fact that the producers of 'orientalism' frequently moved between and combined these aims and roles adds further complexity. As Stoler has suggested, those groups who created the material, cultural, and political structures of colonial dominance and those subordinated to and negotiating with those structures were both internally complex and intertwined with one another.¹¹ It is more useful to see 'orientalism' as a dense, variegated growth of structures of knowledge and

⁹ . Said etc

¹⁰ For discussion of the dangers of monolithic versions of orientalism and colonialism see for example N. Thomas *Colonialism's culture: anthropology, travel and government*, Princeton UP, 1994, chapter 2; B. Parry, 'Resistance theory/theorising resistance' in F. Parker et al. [eds.] *Colonial discourse/postcolonial theory*, Manchester UP, 1994 and the introduction to that text; L. Lowe, *Critical terrains: French and British orientalisms*, Cornell UP, 1991 chapter 1; R. Young, *Colonial desire: hybridity in theory, culture, and race*, Routledge, 1995, pp. 159-175; J. Clifford 'On orientalism' in his *The predicament of culture*, Harvard UP, 1988; specifically gendered discussions are found in Lowe *op.cit.*, B. Melman, *Women's orients*, Macmillan, 1992, R. Lewis, *Gendering orientalism: race, femininity and representation*, Routledge, 1996, and M. Yegenoglu, *Colonial fantasies: towards a feminist reading of orientalism*, Cambridge UP, 1998

¹¹ A. Stoler, 'Rethinking colonial categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31, [1989], pp 134-161; see particularly pp. 135-6. Said, revisiting earlier

representation embodying shifting sets of relationships between power, knowledge, experience and imagination rather than as a single coherent system.

This complex set of structures was both gendered and sexualised. In 'orientalising' discourse and policy women, and the treatment, roles, and status of women,¹² were used as objects or issues signifying and defining Middle Eastern societies and Islam, which itself was misleadingly used in a similar way. From medieval western Christian denunciations of the prophet Muhammad's sexual promiscuity to early modern and later fantasies about the *harems* of Middle Eastern elites, and nineteenth century travelogue or missionary depictions of oppressed and confined 'oriental' women and sexually permissive 'oriental' men, these themes were staple fare. Beyond that they were regularly used to represent the instantly recognisable 'essence' of Middle Eastern culture in book or picture titles and topics and in visual culture from elite book covers and paintings to advertising and cartoons. Like the use of the crescent and minaret to signify that Middle Eastern societies should be defined through the presence of Islam, or scimitar-wielding warriors signifying the central role of despotic violence there, dancing girls, bath and *harem* scenes and veiled women figured as common images telling European audiences that the topic was the 'orient'. Eighteenth-century cosmetic advertisements, nineteenth-century missionary writing, and twentieth-century cinema, as well as travel literature, fiction, and journalism, presented the 'orient' in female form, whether desirable and exotic [feeding western fantasy and consumption], or oppressed and needy [feeding projects of western reform and control].

Descriptions of sexual and marital customs, and of glamorous, or domesticated, or degraded 'oriental' women, were entwined with more broadly symbolic and essentialising uses of gender and sexual references to characterise the 'orient' in general. Images of and references to women and sex. The dangerous desirability of exotic places and people was shown by the central placing of sexually charged scenes in written or visual texts and equally importantly by the use of 'oriental' motifs in the depiction of sexual and erotic topics within European settings.¹³ The French historian Michelet's reference to the Orient as 'the womb of the world', like that of French traveller who as soon as he saw veiled women on board his ship 'knew' he was in the 'East' even if that ship was in Marseilles, placed female bodies at the core of the colonial imaginary. This positioning was as much the work of practical administrators like Lord Cromer in Egypt speaking of **INSERT**, and travellers with political commercial agendas 'penetrating' the 'virgin' territories of North Africa, India, and Arabia as it was of scholars and artists.¹⁴

discussions, commented "imperialism is after all a co-operative venture" [E.Said 'Yeats and decolonisation', *Nationalism, colonialism and literature*, Field Day Pamphlet, no.15 (1988) p.9]

¹² See J. de Groot 'Conceptions and misconceptions....' in H.Afshar [ed.] *Women, development and survival in the third world*, Macmillan, 1991

¹³ See Lowe, *op.cit.*; J de Groot "'Sex" and "race" in the nineteenth century: the construction of language and image' in S.Mendus and J.Rendall [eds.] *Sexuality and subordination*, ... 1989

¹⁴ . refs. to female imagery, Cromer..... etc. **TO DO**

Within this spectrum of gendered and sexualised constructions of 'the orient' images of veils and veiling in many forms had a prominent place. In addition to providing a verbal or visual marker of the erotic, alluring, available 'Other' to be desired, denigrated or dominated, if not all three, it served as a signifier or symbol of western relationships to 'the east', and was also internalised within *western* sexual vocabularies. The metaphor of unveiling used to describe the acquisition and appropriation of knowledge of 'distant' people and places [urban slums at home as well as 'foreign' cultures] by privileged Europeans, like its association with the modernisation or religious conversion of 'native' peoples linked body politics to the politics of improvement and control associated with colonial power.¹⁵ The use of images of veiling and unveiling with western narratives of heterosexual desire, seduction and romance placed the trope of 'oriental' sexuality *within* the western imaginary, as its own internal 'other' making desire safe as exotic fantasy. Thus the scanty wisps of veiling on women in western *harem* and bath scenes, the heavily draped female figures in the genre depictions of 'eastern' streets and landscapes, and the eroticised figures on French postcards, might stimulate pleasure or criticism but also embedded powerful cultural and moral repertoires through their deployment of veils.¹⁶

Veiling also played a role in the practices of colonial power. From the provision of veils for girls attending schools in French colonial Algeria in the 1850's to efforts to encourage their removal a century later intervention over this practice was a part of a colonial presence which was invested both in sustaining ethnicised boundaries between rulers and subjects and in a *mission civilisatrice* which sought to 'modernise' indigenous groups. British missionaries in India, their American equivalents in the Ottoman lands and colonial administrators in Egypt engaged with similar concerns MORE?.¹⁷ The veil was thus a politically charged object or issue entwined with gender and colonial power relations. As a term serving these multiple purposes it ignored the variegated forms and codes of body and head covering among different groups of women, let alone men, in the Middle East or India. Whether affirming 'differences' which legitimised colonial hierarchies, appearing as a challenge for colonial reformers to overcome, or signifying the fixed, exotic 'inferiority' of natives, a practice which had formerly expressed the local cultures, and power relations of users and their communities, was now also shaped by new global relations between those communities and European power.

It was in that context that another conjunctural

¹⁵ **CITE** G.Bell, et.al. Of course such references mobilised other meanings of the veil which were part of western culture

¹⁶ **EXAMPLES** incl.Alloula

¹⁷ **ALGERIA REFS** incl Y.Turin, *Affrontements culturels dans l'Algerie coloniale: ecoles, medecins, religion 1880-1830*,

Algiers, 1983, M.Lazreg, *The eloquence of silence*, Routledge, 1994; K.Basci 'Shadows n the missionary garde of roses: Turkish women in American missionary texts', in Z.Arat [ed.], *Deconstructing images of "the Turkish woman"*,

Palgrave, 2000

moment was layered into the politics of veiling. The relations of dominance and subordination which joined European commercial, colonial and cultural influence and advantage to the political, cultural and social worlds of people in the Middle East and India produced a range of complexities and responses among them, just as it did with practitioners of 'orientalism'. Different social groups [peasants, ruling elites, traders, minority groups, landowners, craft producers] acted to protect and advance their perceived interests in varied ways. Iranian carpet entrepreneurs, Egyptian cotton growers, Armenian financiers, Lebanese silk spinners, Indian merchants, and Anatolian opium cultivators, each established their links to the new international networks of investment, transport, production, and trade created by Europeans. Governments in Istanbul, Hyderabad, Cairo, Tehran or Tunis manoeuvred to accommodate, resist, learn from, or neutralise the pressures of European diplomatic, financial, military and strategic power, and their modernising projects, from railway building to legal reform, and from managing state finances to remodelling education and administration. Indigenous intellectuals, bureaucrats, religious specialists and educated groups grappled with the stimulus, whether threatening or attractive, of incoming ideas of progress, knowledge, government, science, and political or social analysis, in addition to confronting the assumptions and 'expertise' of orientalism and colonialism. These often overlapping involvements produced a rich range of responses including angry rejection of imported and 'polluting' ideas or practices, enthusiasm for the models of education, government, business or medicine offered by westerners, and growing critiques of foreign intervention and control as inimical to the progress and prosperity of Turks, Egyptians, Iranians, or Indians. Just as the exponents of these views contested European hegemony so they also contested each other's perspectives upon it.¹⁸

The codes for women's body covering and spatial separation, with their established religious, gendered, class, and communal significance in Ottoman, Indian, Iranian or Egyptian society, now acquired new cultural and political resonances as 'the woman question' was raised in conjunction with 'national', 'reform', and 'religious' questions. From the last third of the nineteenth century these questions were taken up not only by male anti-colonialists, reformers, nationalists, and religious specialists in those societies but equally by certain groups of women. In their debates and activities new styles of veiling or contests over the whole practice of veiling combined a number of agendas, discourses, and ideals. They could be included among aspirations to modernise society and attain standards of progress by appropriate treatment of women and by updating the forms of women's participation in family and society. They could be associated with the particular aim of involving women practically and symbolically in the cause of 'national' emancipation and advancement. They could seek affirmation of the value of cultures and customs which were valued as 'authentic' expressions of indigenous identities, now threatened by foreign dominance, and especially with the religious aspects of culture which were ignored, misrepresented or denigrated by Europeans.

As critiques of foreign control and intervention, both direct, as in Egypt, India, or Algeria, and indirect, as in the case of Iran and the Ottoman lands [where Ottoman power was also a contested issue], became politically organised and active, these discourses and agendas developed their own characters and complexities. From the

18 .REFS

1870's until the Second World War gendered forms of nationalistic, modernising, and anti-colonial politics spread among the educated, commercial, governing and sometimes the popular strata in Iran, India, Egypt and the Ottoman lands. The unveiling and public exposure of 'our' women was developed as a theme to mobilise opposition to foreign or anti-Muslim influences whether Iranian religious leaders in the 1870's and modernising intellectuals in the 1890's, Indian nationalists like Tilak at the turn of the 20th century, or Algerian '*ulama* in the 1930's.¹⁹ It was seen as a desirable element in schemes to improve women's lives along with reforms in polygamy and access to formal education, and satirised as part of the 'backwardness' from which reformers and nationalists sought to distance their societies. Beyond this the question of female veiling also played a part in nationalist and reformist debates over the position of women in 'the nation' as equal or subordinate partners, as citizens, and as patriots.²⁰

Whatever the older significations of veiling, encounters with external fantasies and criticisms reshaped them in the new era of colonial and quasi-colonial confrontations. The practice came to be understood and debated in new ways, whether defensively as a marker of indigenous virtue, honour and [increasingly] 'national' identity against foreign/infidel intrusions, or as a 'problem' and constraint upon progress. The inherited associations of veiling with Islamic prescriptions and ideals gained new force in a context where Muslim ideas and practices were being *internally* contested between reformers, traditionalists and secularisers as well as externally challenged by colonial policies. These contests were predominantly the domain of male members of the educated and privileged classes, who created 'modern' discourses of politics, social analysis, and morality which hybridised local cultural and intellectual resources with ideas and practices of reform and nationalism taken from western sources. These hybrid and arguably 'derivative' [in Chatterjee's phrase²¹] discourses of nation, state-building and social progress incorporated meanings of veiling shaped by indigenous codes of family, communal, and sexual morality alongside new perceptions of veiling as a marker of boundaries between 'colonised' and anti-colonial selves and the foreign 'other'. They accepted orientalist terms of reference which positioned veiling as a defining characteristic of 'the east' through which its people might be known or critiqued, while contesting its use to stigmatise or denigrate Egyptians, Turks or Iranians. As with European counterparts, questions of veiling became 'issues' to be self-consciously debated by people in the Middle East, India, and North Africa, so that those who did this stood on a shared terrain while also confronting each other within the power relations of colonialism.

¹⁹ . see Muhammad Karim Khan Kermani, 'Nasiriyya' [c.1870], in his *Collected Persian essays*, ed. Kirman 1967-9, pp.395-6 quoted in M.Bayat, *Mysticism and dissent : socio-religious thought in Qajar Iran*, Syracuse UP, 1982, p.85; Abd'al Rahim Talebzadeh/Talebou, *Kitab-i-Ahmad [Ahmad's book [1894]* ed. B.Mo'meni, Tehran, 1967, vol. I, p.99; A.Merad, *Le reformisme musulman en Algerie de 1925 a 1940*, Paris, Mouton, 1967, pp.319-29; Tilak **CHECK**

²⁰ . Kandiyoti, Najmabadi, de Groot, Tavakoli-Targhi, Badran, Baron, Ahmed MORE

²¹ . See P.Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world - a derivative discourse*, Zed Press, 1986 [see especially pp. 36-43

On this shared terrain overlapping but conflicting strands of body politics emerged. One of these was the politics of self-assertion in which the pious defended veiling as part of divinely ordained moral and gender practice, and the patriotic associated it either with 'national' virtue and cultural authenticity, or with the imposition of 'alien' practices which undermined that authenticity. Thus Iranian modernisers like Talibov and Maraghe'i as much as a conservative cleric like Muhammad Karim Khan Kermani presented veiling as a valuable, virtuous, cultural and national practice, and Fakhr al-Islam argued that advocates of unveiling sought to discredit the modernising potential of Islam and the cause of constitutional politics in Iran.²² The Turkish ideologist of 'national' identity Zia Gokalp proposed a story of ancient Turkish gender equality in which women rode unveiled beside men on the Central Asian steppes before succumbing to corrupting *un-Turkish* customs. To unveil thus became a 'return' to authentic practice rather than imitation of European manners. In this he paralleled the arguments of Egyptian nationalist feminists that Egyptian peasant women and the example of Pharaonic Egypt showed that there were indigenous and patriotic precedents for uncovering female faces.²³

Thus covering the female face, head, and body could signify adherence to religious traditions against 'westernising', reforming, or foreign criticisms. *Fokoli / afrangi*²⁴ advocacy of European ideas and practices or religious support for modernising perspectives on Islam could be rejected as incompatible with religion and cultural authenticity. From this standpoint the topic of veiling became part of the new projects of constructing and imagining 'nations' [Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Algeria] which preoccupied anti-colonial reforming movements between the later nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. In these imaginings the modest and culturally authentic veiled woman was part of a politico-cultural repertoire which countered the pressures of European dominance and colonial power, invoking male protective concern for 'honour' [now 'national' as well as familial and sexual] and for material and political autonomy and authority. It became associated with the images of rape, violation and sexual/national dishonour invoked by nationalists in their opposition to foreign intervention and influence. Iranian journalists and activists like Mirza Agha Khan Kermani and Ahmad Kasravi, Egyptian poets and intellectuals like Bayrami al-Tunisi and Mohammad Heikal, Turkish novelists and writers like Namik Kemal, or the activist and

²² Talibov, *loc. cit.*; Zein al-'Abdin Maraghe'i, *Siahat-nameh yi Ibrahim Beg [Ibrahim Beg's travel book]* ed. M. Sipanlu, Tehran, 1985, p. 96; Fakhr al-Islam, *Vujub i-niqab va hurmat i-sharab*, Tehran, 1911, pp. 36-7 quoted in A. Najmabadi,

Women with mustaches and men without beards: gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity, University of California Press, 2005, p. 137

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²⁴ Persian and Turkish terms for those who were enthusiasts for European ways. The former term refers to the *faux-col* [bow tie] which was part of European male dress, the latter to the adoption of *farangi* = European customs

theoretician of anti-colonial struggle in Algeria Franz Fanon all touched on these themes.²⁵ In the modernist politics of the Young Turks, Indian, Egyptian, and Caucasian nationalists, and the activists of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution during the decades before the First World War veiled or unveiled women's bodies were imagined as expressions of the integrity and authenticity of the nation both by secularists and pious Muslims.

Another imagining of the nation in which women and their veils played a central part was as a terrain of modernity and progress. The varied voices for and against veiling, or for gradual and voluntary unveiling as against imposed unveiling policies, developed their arguments in the context of the introduction of modern education, monogamous marriage and hetero-normative sexual codes. Was female veiling compatible with schooling and modern training for girls, and 'suitable occupations' [teaching, writing, welfare work] for women? Would unveiling assist or jeopardise the development of 'proper' male/ female relations and roles in marriage and society? Would it foster commitment to companionate heterosexual marriage underpinned by romance, male restraint, and the rejection by men and women of 'corrupt' and 'backward' homosocial/homosexual relationships?²⁶ While different participants in these debates [male, female, pious, secularising, radical, gradualist] took varied positions on these questions, they all contributed to the embedding of questions of veiling as broader issues in the shaping of independent progressive nations in the Middle East and North Africa. Several commentators have noted that they were often addressed less as matters where women should determine and follow their own views and preferences than as symbolic issues of state and national identity.²⁷ It is notable that advocates of unveiling like Kasravi and Kermani in Iran, Qasim Amin in Egypt, or Gokalp and Atatürk in Turkey argued that it would produce social and national progress while asserting male superiority and female domesticity as foundations of the modernised state and society.²⁸ As Reza Shah, the authoritarian modernising ruler of Iran, reportedly put it in 1936, "It is easier for me to die than to take

²⁵ Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, *Sad khitabeh*, no.41 and *Seh maktub* [1890's] pp.10-11 quoted in M.Bayat, 'Mirza Aga Khan Kermani' in E.Kedourie and S.Haim [eds.] *Towards a modern Iran*, F.Cass, 1980, pp.79, 81; see J.de Groot, 'The dialectics of gender: women, men, and political discourses in Iran c.1890-1930', *Gender and History*, 1993; *eadem*, "'Brothers of the Iranian race": manhood nationhood and modernity in Iran c.1870-1914' in S.Dudink *et.al.* [eds.], *Masculinities in politics and war*, Manchester UP, 2004; M..Khouri, *Poetry and the making of modern Egypt*, Brill, 1971, pp. 54-102; M.Badran, 'Competing agendas: feminists, Islam and the state in 19th and 20th century Egypt' in D.Kandiyoti [ed.] *Women, Islam and the state* Macmillan, 1991; B.Baron, 'The construction of honour in Egypt', *Gender and History*, 1993; *eadem*, 'Unveiling in early 20th century Egypt: practical and symbolic considerations', *Middle East Studies*, 1989; D.Kandiyoti 'End of empire: Islam, nationalism and women in Turkey' in *eadem* [ed.] *Women, Islam, and the state*; *eadem*, 'Women and the Turkish state' In N. Yuval-Davis and F.Anthias [eds.] *Women -nation-state*, Macmillan, 1989; *eadem* 'Slave girls and temptresses; women in the Turkish novel', *Feminist Issues*, 1988; F.Fanon *Studies in a dying colonialism*, revised ed., Earthscan Publications, 1989, pp.35-67 ['Algeria unveiled']

²⁶ Ayat, Kandiyoti 1998, Baron, Badran, Najmabadi 2005 & sources **FINISH**

²⁷ **TO DO**

²⁸ **REFS** - deG, Najmabadi, Badran, Baron, Turkish

my wife unveiled among strangers, but I have no choice. The country's progress requires that women must be set free and I must be the person to do this".²⁹

Here we see the body politics of veiling/unveiling moving from the realm of modern intellectual debate and opposition politics to that of state building and modern governmental power. In Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Afghanistan between the two world wars, as in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa in the period of post-colonial state building after World War II, official policies on economic development, state schooling, and administrative modernisation were often associated with explicit encouragement if not actual legislation for the abandonment of veiling. This often cohabited uneasily with support for 'traditional', 'indigenous' dress codes and gender roles seen as part of proper national or religious practice as well as the modernised male-dominated gender order. Thus the legislative attack on female veiling by Reza Shah in Iran in the 1930's was resisted in the name of religious opposition to an ungodly innovation but also as governmental tyranny.³⁰ While the actual spread of unveiling was uneven and shaped more by class, urban or rural location, education, and material opportunity than by government authority, the modernisation of women, including unveiling, formed part of the politico-cultural repertoire of the states that emerged from Ottoman or European colonial rule. The party politics of Iran in the 1940's and the repressive modernising rule of the second Pahlavi Shah from the 1950's to the 1970's, the development of Nasserist Egypt in the 1950's and 1960's, the post-colonial politics of Tunisia and Morocco in the 1960's and 1970's, all deployed rhetorics and policies in this sphere. From state-sponsored women's organisations and photographs in official publications, to administrative or legal regulation, explicit and implicit links were made between new codes of body covering and the social advance of the 'modern' nation.³¹

Nor was this just a matter of state power or official policy. The nationalist and anti-colonial movements which came to power in the Middle East and North Africa between the 1920's and the 1960's were based in the aspirations and support of significant sections of society seeking opportunity, progress or profit from political and economic autonomy and reform. These ranged from members of the commercial and governing classes and intelligentsias to those inspired by populist ideals of patriotic emancipation and self-assertion, and included groups of women activists and thinkers seeking access to education, employment and recognition of their personhood. For these various sections adaptation and negotiation around dress codes, as well as direct advocacy or opposition to veiling/unveiling, became part of their self-making and making of others in specific gender, class, national, religious or communal roles and identities. They shaped and were shaped by the growth of large public sector work-forces and modern urban middle classes who might celebrate female modesty and domesticity [Algeria] or look to increased

²⁹ Interview with Muhammad Baheri [8 August 1982] for the Iranian Oral History Project quoted in A.Najmabadi, 'Hazards of modernity and morality: women, state, and ideology in contemporary Iran' in Kandiyoti, *op.cit.*, p.73

³⁰ Veiling Iran 1930's [Fischer, Chehabi, Najmabadi et.al

³¹ **DO REFS**

opportunities for women to study and work in 'suitable' occupations [Turkey] or combine both elements [Egypt, Iran].³² The unveiled modern woman, with or without education, employment, legal autonomy or political rights, now became part of socio-cultural realities alongside other female figures distinguished by age, class, or location who used old-established or adapted codes of covering. Such diverse practices signalled the complex engagement of different groups with local, national, and global material and cultural influences, as well as attachment to and critiques of particular norms and identities. Non-veiling was established not just as the 'modern' binary opposite to 'backward' veiling, but as a practice which contributed to varied and sometimes conflicting discourses of modernity whether patriotic, woman-centred, class-specific or patriarchal.

Thus the experiences of post-colonial state-building and socio-economic development in the new global order added new layers of meaning for the body politics of veiling to the practices and discourses shaped within colonial relationships. The disparate anti-colonial and modernising groups who mobilised against foreign intervention and indigenous obstacles to their projects for progress and prosperity resisted colonial power and denigration by assertions both of equality ["we are or can be as powerful and modern as they are"] and of difference ["we celebrate the indigenous authenticity and 'otherness' which foreigners denigrate"]. Gendered and sexualised body politics, including the politics of veiling, was a powerful expression of such assertions allowing some men and women to construct patriotic, reforming, and gender agendas of national advancement, female empowerment, or male authority. Their re-visionings/revisions of community, femininity, masculinity, and domesticity drew on local established meanings for veiling as well new or external ideas about its value or disadvantages to restructure and re-legitimise state power, social boundaries, and gender relations. The new modesty of the respectable unveiled urban middle class Iranian woman explored by Najmabadi, or the Kemalist 'daughters of the republic' discussed by Kandiyoti, Arat, and others were powerful images to be deployed alongside those of patriotic mothers and educated domesticated females as part of reconfigured political and cultural repertoires.³³ Some of the promise of new nations were embodied in the veiled/unveiled figures who signalled progress and tradition, 'authentic' and modern identities.

It was the unravelling of these promises which helped to constitute the 'moment' in which new layers of meaning were added to and developed from the existing body politics of veiling. Hopes for national progress, prosperity and autonomy in post-colonial states in the Middle East were frustrated by the difficulties of material development within unequal relationships to the global economy, and the growing reliance of ruling regimes on repression and the cultivation of privileged groups of clients and supporters. Self-determination and empowerment were put in question by the entanglements of Middle Eastern states in the great power politics of the Cold War and its aftermaths, and the persistently unresolved Palestinian/Israeli question. Urban and cross-border migrations, like the spread of formal education and new employment patterns, however unevenly, unmade and made communities with new structures, pressures, and opportunities. Such

³² DO REFS

³³ Najmabadi in Abu Lughod & *Women with mustaches*; Kandiyoti refs; Gole refs, Arat refs & articles by others in her book; Paidar, Botman

changes and frustrations stimulated renewal in movements and ideas of national and social self-assertion against the neo-colonial power of American influence and the failures of ruling regimes. The discrimination and racism experienced Middle Eastern and south Asian migrants to Europe and its combined and uneven relationship with complex processes of assimilation and separation and anti-racist politics opened up comparable opportunities for political and re-figured Muslim activity and ideas to develop.³⁴

In a context where anger at continued foreign influences and at the ways in which the benefits of state-led material change, often legitimised in secularised collectivist, liberal, or socialistic terms, were unevenly and unpredictably distributed, discourses of communal authenticity and morality provided by religion provided an appealing resource for critics of the *status quo*. The potential for debate and self-activity within dominant Muslim traditions enabled creative initiatives by thinkers and activists which re-figured religious ideas and movements in response to the needs, hopes, and fears of the late twentieth century. Their constituencies included young people caught between the aspirations generated by modern education and restricted opportunities, urban migrants adapting to harsh material demands with limited resources or social support, women seeking to combine communal approval and respectability with active roles, and activists demoralised by the failures of reforming, nationalist and leftist politics. Their politics involved not so much a discourse of 'return to the past' as arguments for the relevance of religious approaches to current issues, and for the place of religious practice in the core identities and experiences of these constituencies. It tapped into familiar anti-colonial, popular, and religious discourses while also having an immediacy which addressed their actual circumstances which differed from those of previous generations. These developments underpinned the emergence of new forms of Islamised politics and politicised Islam which mobilised many who participated in the revolution of 1977-81 in Iran, and Islamist movements in Algeria, Turkey and Egypt as well as similar movements among migrant communities who identified as Muslim in France, the Netherland and Britain.³⁵ While each of these had its highly specific characteristics they shared comparable agendas which combined religious with dissident and modern discourse and also gave a central place to gender and body politics.

Within the context of this gender and body politics the politics of veiling was prominent. As with the ideas of the new Muslim movements more generally, the adoption and promulgation of 'modest', pious, *hijabi* dress was not so much a return to traditional practices as a re-configuration of veiling to meet the convergent concerns of religion and contemporary circumstances. New forms and variants of head and body covering have been developed by women in Turkey, Egypt and Europe, just as the state regulation of veiling in the Islamic republic in Iran has been modified and adapted in gestures of resistance and autonomy.³⁶ Many women who adopted the new styles of Islamic dress did so in defiance of family or peer opinion

³⁴ REFS

³⁵ REFS

³⁶ Ozdalga, alGuindi, Duval, Naghibi, Adelkhah

and in conjunction with a determination to pursue education and professional employment and to be socially and publically active. Their politics of negotiation and self-assertion co-existed uneasily with other discourses of control over women and of gender inequity which were also deployed by advocates of veiling.³⁷ Whether veiling marked an assertion of female subordination which could affirm resistance to western and local elite corruption, strengthening manly resistance to defeat and repression, or whether it provided a new gender marker - a personal and portable signifier of decent separation - which allowed women to be religiously moral and committed while also publicly active was a contested question. Just as this paralleled differences over female autonomy among Muslims a century earlier it also paralleled the difficult discussions about the form and content of 'modern' religious precept and practice in 'new Muslim' movements generally.

Here again we are dealing with multiple meanings. Just as 'orientalist' constructions of veiled women combined markers of inherent cultural inferiority, exotically attractive difference, and 'backward' customs to be modified by colonial reformers, and anti-colonial activists made them symbols of cultural authenticity or of the need for national progress, so post-colonial cultural politics made them signifiers of resistance, or of contested gender and religious power. For some the use of veiling is a matter of female choice and autonomy, whether of religious commitment or of the ability to pursue lives and careers while recognising and negotiating with communal and religious expectations.³⁸ For others it represents the power of state institutions [as in Iran] or male-dominated political and religious organisations [Egypt, Algeria] or male dominated political debate [Turkey]. For others veiling signifies opposition to elite corruption, and foreign influence in Middle Eastern states, or to racism and communal vulnerability among migrants in Europe as well as a gesture of resistance in the face of global power relations. For others again it is part of contests among Muslims as well as between Muslims and others over what it might currently mean to be Muslim, modern, respected in a world where these are unresolved issues.³⁹

Thus to return to body politics the key question to ask is, "whose politics"? Veiling has been a core theme controversies about how to interpret Islamic prescriptions and texts, about what is modern, moral, or culturally authentic, and about female agency and autonomy have stimulated a plurality of voices and practices. These reveal divisions among women as well as between women and men, reminding us that body politics is linked to the politics of class, religion, generation, ethnicity and community as well to the politics of gender. The young 'Islamically' dressed woman in Egypt or Turkey may be expressing differences between herself and her parents as well as between herself and 'westernised' women of more privileged groups and solidarity with the moral community of Muslims, or respect for 'religious tradition' or male authorities in that community. *Hijab* wearing women in France or Britain may be managing parental, male or familial pressures on women of 'immigrant' communities [now of course three and four generation old], but

³⁷ Oral testimony refs; refs to female inequality

³⁸ **Refs** to Egypt, Morocco, Iran

³⁹ **DO REFS**

equally asserting claims as members of those communities to have cultural difference respected and included rather than racialised by a hostile state or non-Muslim majority. In 2004 French Muslim women tied *tricolore* sashes [signifiers of the French tradition of citizenship and republican inclusiveness] over their '*voiles*' to make precisely that claim. Other French Muslim women spoke of the patriarchal control and disempowerment of women signified by the *hijab*, echoing similar debates among Turkish and Egyptian women.⁴⁰ At the extreme of these contests is the argument over whether such a phenomenon or project as 'Islamic feminism' or an 'Islamic' approach centred on women's rights and interests is possible let alone desirable. In this contest some criticise the capitulation of Middle Eastern feminists to cultural imperialism and to racialised and ethnocentric definition of what women want or need, while others criticise the surrender of women's agency and opportunity to apologetics for patriarchal Islam.⁴¹ In contexts where women have been killed for not veiling, as in Algeria, and where the policing of veiling codes now combines the use of public street or governmental power by men, alongside the familial and community authority exercised by senior women, issues of power and inequality are clearly significant..

Around such sharp formulations swirl more nuanced interactions and adaptations of veiling, as of the arguments about gender and Islam. Rather than any simple opposition of unveiling/freedom to veiling/repression, there are groups of women for whom identification with religious movements and dress codes has been associated with claims to free themselves for work and study and for choice-based marriage and political activism against the control of elders. Whether the Tehran domestic servant turned Khomeini activist defying her father, the Egyptian Muslim Sister criticising the restrictive views of women held by male group members, or the Turkish school teacher battling with government restrictions on head-covering the use of the veil embodied self-assertion and independence.⁴² This is complemented by the contests over Islamic precepts and veiling practice in which women argue against woman-unfriendly interpretations of texts and tradition as active intelligent believers using reason and learning as Muslims are encouraged to do, just as Iranian women have introduced their modifications of prescribed forms of veiling.⁴³ The question for analysis is to what extent these are subaltern initiatives within a context of male power, be it popular, governmental, ideological or organisational. A body politics of accommodation with strongly androcentric power structures [secular and religious], or of female agency and autonomous action?

Such multiple and shifting discourses indicate a layering of meanings rather than a linear movement across time. The continued significance of veiling as a marker of identity and difference for both those in societies where it is

⁴⁰ REFS [newspapers, Gole, al-Guindi]

⁴¹ Moghissi, Ahmed, Sullivan, Abu Lughod OTHER

⁴² Khosrokhavar, Duval, Ozdalga

⁴³ REFS - Mir Husseini, Naghibi ...other

practised and outside observers indicates its politicised, ideological and symbolic character. The confrontational aspects of colonial encounters begun two centuries ago continue to resonate in the counterposing of the veil as signifier of decency and honour [national, communal, familial] to its construction as signifier of oriental oppression and immorality. In a further twist to this confrontation modern Muslim critiques of decadent western sex-gender culture and its 'painted doll' imitators invoke a moralised domestic ideal which echoes the ideals against which European orientalism judged 'eastern' sex-gender arrangements and found them wanting. Like the reforming projects of secular nationalists and modernisers since the late nineteenth century the new religious movements invest female domesticity and modesty, and hence the body politics of veiling with symbolic power related to the defence of faith, nation and community rather than the lives and interests of women as such. Similarly female discourses of nation, progress and women's interests show a similar layered character in which the varied concerns of Iranian, Egyptian, and Turkish feminists from the early twentieth century remain embedded in more recent debates. Events in the 1990's and early 2000's, like western responses to the 1979 revolution in Iran, revived images of veiling as part of Islamic fanaticism and backwardness alongside opposing images of veiling as part of resistance to western power in the Middle East, or racialised Islamophobia in Europe. At the same time new layers of meaning were also being laid down by the new Islamic movements and by those looking for pluralistic approaches to the veiling issue whether in post-Kemalist Turkey or multicultural Britain or in the uneasy diversity of current Egyptian practice described by Ahdaf Soueif.⁴⁴

At no time has the body politics of veiling been a matter of monolithic positions or binary oppositions. Authoritarians have enforced both veiling and unveiling while advocates of progress have both supported and condemned veiling. Just as the gendered debate on veiling has been inflected by class and generational difference as well as religious and secular ideas, so religious/secular confrontations over veiling were entwined with nationalist, reforming and conservative agendas alongside class and gendered agendas. Veiling issues have shaped and been shaped by the politics of nation making, of women's advancement, of religious revival, of anti-colonialism, of heterosexual masculinity, of elite social engineering, of visions of a better society, and of populist resistances. They have often been out of the control of those most directly concerned - women who choose to veil or not to veil - but women have certainly not been absent from the political terrain on which the issues have been addressed. If the many layers or strands of meaning which the practice of veiling now carries mean that there is no straightforward narrative to present, it is equally the case that its contemporary significances can best be grasped by a historicised analysis. It is a form of present-day body politics which carries the weight of its past.

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⁴⁴ Soueif et.al

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