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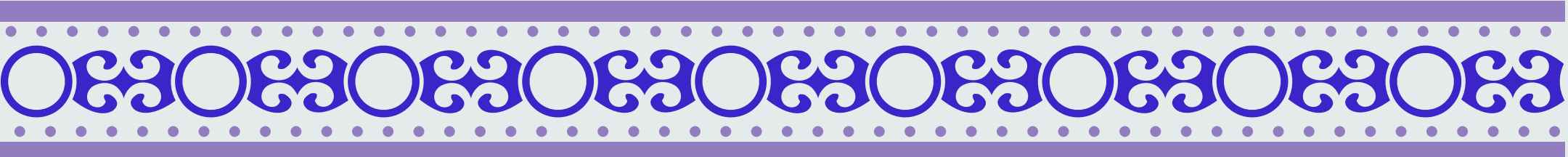
# ISLAM & THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE: HIJAB

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WOMEN IN ISLAM SERIES



MUSLIMS FOR  
PROGRESSIVE VALUES



# Hijab in the Qur'an

In the 21st century, Muslims and non-Muslims alike understand the hijab to be the head covering worn as a symbol of modesty by Muslim women. However, this monolithic understanding of the phrase is contrary to its use in Islamic jurisprudence. So to develop an accurate understanding of hijab as it relates to bodily autonomy, we'll begin by looking at the Qur'an and how hijab was used in the holiest text in Islam.

33:53

Screen to separate the Prophet's (PBUH) wives from visitors.

42:51

Separation between deity and mortals.

7:46

Separation between wrongdoers and the righteous

38:32

Separation between light and darkness



# Hijab in the Qur'an

And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts

Quran 33:53

Tell the acknowledging men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts, for that is purer for them.

God is fully aware of what you do. Tell the acknowledging women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and that they should not show off their attraction except what is apparent, and let them cast their clothes (*khumurihina*) over their cleavage.

Quran 24:31

There is no denying that the Qur'an demands modesty in appearance (i.e. covering the breasts and genitals) and behavior from both men and women. However, the concept of *darabat al-hijab* or the taking of the veil was initially only practiced by the wives of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who held a special status in the community and whose private living quarters were often visited by the public at all hours of the day. We can understand verse 33:53 to reference *hijab* as a way of separating public life from private life, particularly as it pertained to the Mothers of the Believers.



# The Khumurihina

As previously mentioned, hijab, though utilized often in the Qur'an, does not actually refer to a head covering. Instead, khumurihina (plural of khimar) refers to a piece of cloth that the Qur'an commands women to utilize to cast over their cleavage. Believing women are invited to cast a khimar over their chest as a way to distinguish themselves from the pagan Arab women as a way to counter the classism practiced amongst the tribes in the Arab peninsula. Over time, the term hijab replaced khimar to define what we understand to be the modern headscarf today.

## ACCORDING TO ASMA LAMRABET:

*"It is not the Khimar -that existed before revelation- which is important, but rather its new meaning and the context in which it was revealed. The Khimar, according to its original meaning of women's liberation and as a symbol of their participation along with men in the socio-political space, was therefore gradually replaced by the other Qur'anic concept of Hijab to prevent women from participating in the social field. By considering Hijab as sacred and disregarding the Islamic vocabulary of Khimar, a new Islamic social code is invented to endorse the separation of men and women."*



# The Khumurihina & the Countering of Classism

According to Fatema Mernissi's analysis, the Qur'an's mandate of covering the chest was a way to counter classism common amongst the pagan tribes in the Arab peninsula at the time. The various tribes, according to social status, had instructions on how much women were able to cover. The more a woman covered, the higher her class as the covering indicated that she was an urban elite who was not enslaved or did not have to do manual labor or work in the fields. This also contributed to the colorism rampant amongst the tribes at the time, as those who covered and lived in urban areas often had fairer skin than the women who were enslaved and women who worked in the fields and weren't able to cover.

*Therefore, the recommendation to cover in the Qur'an was an effort to flatten the elitism rampant amongst the tribal society in the Arab peninsula. By recommending that all women cover their chests at a minimum, the Qur'an attempts to eliminate the common practice of judging individuals by their attire or class and instead to judge individuals by their character and their convictions.*



## THE MANIPULATION OF HEADSCARVES AS A POLITICAL TOOL

As Lamrabet states, the shift from the use of khimar to hijab to describe a headscarf had severe consequences on the social codes of society. Now, in the 20th and 21st century, we see how headscarves are being manipulated to represent political movements that predominately serve the interests of men in power who seek to promote a religious or secular form of government. In the next section, we'll look at the dozens of countries that have used headscarves as a way to control women and to promote a political agenda.



# Hijab As A Political Tool

## **Iran - 1930s**

During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, he issued kashf-e hijab, which banned all headscarves in an attempt to “westernize” the country. Women who wore hijabs had them forcibly removed and were considered backwards and lower class.

## **Iran - 1980s - Present**

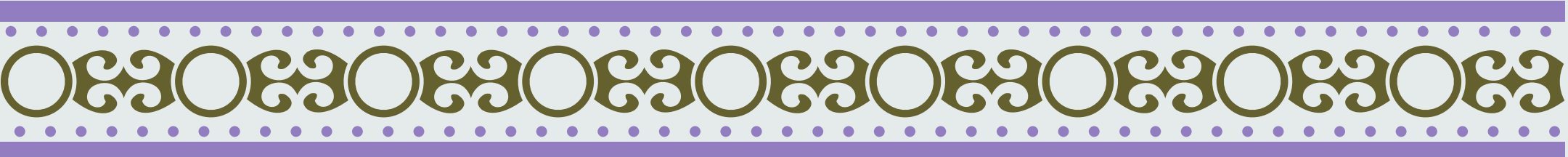
After the revolution, the headscarf became a symbol of opposition to the old regime & many middle class women began to wear it. However, it was again manipulated by the new Islamist government who mandated it in a 1981 edict & which is violently enforced to this day.

## **Turkey - 1980s**

Following the 1980 coup, the headscarf was banned in the public sector, including universities, educational institutions and the civil service. In 1997 the ban was expanded and women who refused to comply were expelled from public buildings or sentenced to jail.

## **Turkey - 2013 Present**

In 2013, the ban on scarves was lifted. Since then, both the opposition and the governing parties have embraced a women’s right to wear a headscarf but not without criticism from Muslim feminists who claim politicians use the headscarf as a political tool to win votes.



# The Regulation of Head / Face Coverings



## **BANS/PARTIAL BANS**

BELGIUM  
FRANCE  
INDIA  
BULGARIA  
NORWAY  
AUSTRIA  
DENMARK  
KAZAKHSTAN

## **BANS/PARTIAL BANS**

XINJIANG, CHINA  
THE NETHERLANDS  
KOSOVO  
QUEBEC, CANADA  
SRI LANKA  
CHAD  
GABON  
TUNISIA

## **MANDATES**

SAUDI ARABIA  
KELANTAN, MALAYSIA  
AFGHANISTAN  
IRAN  
ACEH, INDONESIA  
OMAN





# REGULATING HIJAB

| <b>Hijab Bans</b>   | <b>Compulsory Hijab</b>   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Represents the far right populist political movement.</li></ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Represents the political Islam political movement.</li></ul>                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Denies women the four tenants of autonomy: agency, choice, dignity, and freedom</li></ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Denies women the four tenants of autonomy: agency, choice, dignity, and freedom</li></ul>         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Violates a woman's right to freedom of expression.</li></ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Violates a woman's right to freedom of expression.</li></ul>                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Violates Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Violates Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)</li></ul> |



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