

The Practice of Veiling as an Expression of the Moral Behaviour of Women and Their Social Status in the Qur'an

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Abstract Since the Qur'an has been revealed in a very specific historical and cultural context with distinct social conditions, the Qu'ranic regulations for concealment and veiling are investigated using the appropriate terminology. On the one hand, this approach shows how sociocultural conditions changed the Ancient Arabian dress code to promote moral attitudes and social status. On the other hand, it pinpoints concrete events during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad that triggered the call for concealment and made veiling part of the social and legal system of Muslim societies.

Keywords Qur'an. Shari'a. Hijab. Jilbab. Khimar. Veil. Zîna.

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1 Introduction

The ongoing and highly controversial debate about the veiling of women is by no means exclusive to the issue of integration within a European context, where conflicting sociocultural views, particularly in the area of religious liberty, are predominant. Heated debates about veiling and the interpretation of the Qur'an passages in question, and with respect to *hadith* literature, are prevalent within Muslim communities. The central question of these disputes is about a standardisation of the various manners of veiling for women. The concerns of global women's movements and Islamic feminists, who



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have declared a *jihad* against patriarchal control,¹ are likewise inextricably linked to these issues. According to these women, the time of the Prophet was marked by a much higher degree of equality, that is, that the patriarchal interpretive authority came about only after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Due to this, the interests and demands of this male authority were elevated into the position of status quo by a selective interpretation of the Qur'an passages in question. Because of these factors, it is imperative to take the sociocultural context of the 7th century, including its specific circumstances and challenges, into account when looking at the following passages. It has to be noted that veiling was a common fact of life in pre-Islamic times as well.

The *Bundesarbeitsgericht* (Federal Labor Court) has recently sided with a Muslim teacher from Berlin who had challenged the *Neutralitätsgesetz* (law of neutrality) on the basis that its barring of the wearing of any kind of religious symbols – including her veil – by teachers in public schools was discriminatory and in violation of her religious liberty. The plaintiff herself emphasises, however, that the conflict about the ambivalence of this symbol has in no way been settled by this ruling. On the contrary, the debate about it and the issue of religious liberty will, according to her, become only even more heated.² The Egyptian reformer Qasim Amin dedicated an entire chapter of his 1899 book *The Liberation of Women*³ to the “Veiling of Women”, where he generally agrees with the practice.

However, I demand that it has to be in accordance with the commandments of the Islamic *shari'a*. Veiling in accordance with the *shari'a*, however, is fundamentally different from what people today deem as transgressions against its religious articles in regard to veiling, thus both overstepping its boundaries, as well as acting to the detriment of the community itself.⁴

¹ See Barlas 2004; Wadud 1999. The present paper has been translated from German by Florian Ksugas. The verbal quotes from German sources are repeated in the footnotes for clarity.

² Finger 2020, 1.

³ Amin 1992, 64-5.

⁴ “Doch verlange ich, daß sie in Übereinstimmung mit den Geboten der islamischen *Schari'a* zu sein hat. Die Verschleierung aber im Sinn der *Schari'a* differiert ganz erheblich von dem, was die Leute heutzutage unter der Verschleierung in der Vorsicht und in der Befolgung der religiösen Satzungen schuldig machen und so die Grenzen der *Schari'a* überschreiten wie auch die wahren Interessen der Volksgemeinschaft schädigen” (Amin 1992, 64).

On the issue of religious veiling he writes:

Were there any passages within the Islamic *shari'a* that demanded veiling in a way as is custom among some Muslim communities today, I would consider it my duty to forego any argument about it. In such a case, I would not write a single line that would dare contradict these passages, even if the practice of veiling were overtly harmful, for the divine commandments require absolute submission without objection.⁵

What, then, does the Qur'an actually have to say about veiling and covering up? The topic is mentioned in two *surahs* in the form of three specific terms: *khimar* and *jilbab*, both in the plural tense, as well as *hijab*.

Specifically, the *surahs* in question are *surah* 24 ("the light") and *surah* 33 ("the confederates"), both of which were revealed at Medina at around 626-7 (in-between the Battle of the Trench 627 and the *Umrab*). All three passages are contextually related to specific events at the time, which led to a call for the veiling of women, as well as their proper behaviour. Veils, as was already mentioned, were worn by women in pre-Islamic times as well, however the same is true for men. Examples of male veiling are sparse and mostly limited to pre-Islamic poetry, much of which was ideologically reinterpreted in later, Islamic, times. According to Knieps, it can be shown that, in pre-Islamic marriage, women enjoyed a higher degree of opportunity and protection by their tribes.⁶ Aisha is quoted as saying that women were, at a time, not required to veil themselves and that the practice is a novelty.⁷ It is before this background that the Qur'an's call for veiling starts to make sense.

There is no specific mention of a face veil in the Qur'an (*burqu'* and *qina'*). This, together with the Qur'an commentaries, has led to the position that the terms used in the Qur'an do not demand the veiling of the face and hands. However, the hair, neck, and ears are indeed to be covered.

5 "Gäbe es in der islamischen *Schari'a* Textstellen, die Verschleierung nach der bei einem Teil der Muslime heutzutage üblichen Art und Weise verlangten, dann hielte ich es für meine Pflicht, jede Diskussion darüber zu vermeiden. In diesem Falle schriebe ich auch nicht eine Zeile, die sich zu diesen Textstellen in Widerspruch setzte, selbst wenn diese Verschleierung offensichtlich auch noch so schädlich wäre, weil ja die göttlichen Befehle einen unbedingten Gehorsam verlangen, und zwar ohne Diskussion und Disput" (Amin 1992, 66-7).

6 Knieps 1993, 213.

7 Knieps 1993, 209.

2 Surah 24, 30-31⁸

This verse has to do with virtue and posits rules for the proper behaviour of both men and women. In other words, it is intended as a general code of conduct.⁹

Tell the believing men to lower their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely God is Aware of whatsoever they do.

And tell the believing women to lower their eyes and to guard their private parts, and not to display their adornment except that which is visible thereof. And let them draw their kerchiefs [*khumur*, sg. *khimar*]¹⁰ over their breasts, and not display their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their husband's sons, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or male attendants free of desire, or children who are innocent of the private areas of women. Nor let them stamp their feet such that the ornaments they conceal become known. And repent unto God all together, O believers, that happily you may prosper.

Grammatically, the verbs are expressed in the jussive mood, i.e. as an exhortation: "shall". "Private parts" is expressed by the plural tense of the Arabic word *farj*, namely *furuġ*, translating into "the folds on one's body". Specifically, the term describes the armpits, the area between the thighs and buttocks, and - in the case of women - the cleavage.¹¹ The instruction to "lower their eyes" is generally interpreted as a call to avoid gazing at the other sex so as to prevent the instigation of passion. Most scholars thus interpret the verse as a demand for female modesty to prevent the arousal of men.¹²

The term *khimar* has been interpreted in several ways:

Paret: "they shall draw their shawl over the slit of their garment running down from the front of the neck".¹³

⁸ See at-Tabari 1988, 10: 116-25.

⁹ The Qur'an passages follow the translation by Nasr et al. 2015.

¹⁰ Nasr et al. 2015, 875: "A *khimār* can mean a cloth that covers the head or neck; a scarf; a flowing garment; a garment without stitching; or a man's turban".

¹¹ Ghadban 2013, 8.

¹² See Hawting 2015, 1.

¹³ "Sie sollen ihren Schal sich über den (vom Halsausschnitt nach vorne heruntergehenden) Schlitz (des Kleides) ziehen" (Paret 1979, 246).

Asad: "let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms".¹⁴
Zaidan: "that they draw their headdresses over their cleavage".¹⁵
Knieps: "they shall place their veil cloth over their breast".¹⁶
Bobzin: "and that they draw their shawl over their cleavage".¹⁷

According to most scholars, this verse of *surah* 24 was revealed in connection to the so-called "Event of Ifk" during the campaign of 626-7. While the army had set up camp, Aisha, the Prophet's wife, left shortly before departure. On her way back she realised that she had lost her necklace and turned back once again. In the meantime, the caravan had already moved on, assuming that Aisha was sitting in her howdah. In the hope that she would be picked up soon, Aisha remained at the campsite. There, a member of the rearguard found her and gave her a lift on his camel back to the main army, which they reached at dawn while it had set up camp again. Soon, rumours about Aisha's supposed infidelity started spreading. When she asserted her innocence, the verses were revealed to the Prophet, proving Aisha's innocence, and speaking of a "tremendous calumny" against her (24, 16):

Truly those who brought forth the lie were a group among you [...]. Why, when you heard it, did not the believing men and women think well of their own, and say, "This is a manifest lie?". Why did they not bring forth four witnesses thereto? For when they brought not the witnesses, it is they who were then liars in the Eyes of God. [...] And why, when you heard it, did you not say "It is not for us to speak of this! Glory be to Thee! This is a tremendous calumny!". God exhorts you, lest you ever return to the like of it, if you are believers. (24, 11-20)

This revelation, which proved Aisha's innocence, is embedded into several other verses within the same *surah*, dealing with the issue of adultery and the defamation of innocent women:

Truly those who accuse chaste and heedless believing women are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and theirs shall be a great punishment [...]. Vile women are for vile men, and vile men are for vile women, and good women are for good men, and good men are for good women. They are innocent of what they say. (24, 23)

¹⁴ Asad 1980, 676-7.

¹⁵ "Dass sie ihre Kopfbedeckungen bis über ihre Kleidungsanschnitte ziehen" (Zaidan 2009, 590).

¹⁶ "Sie sollen ihre Schleiertücher über ihre Brust legen" (Knieps 1993, 204-5).

¹⁷ "Und dass sie sich ihren Schal um den Ausschnitt schlagen" (Bobzin 2010, 307).

This is, in other words, a direct reference to the Event of Ifk.

Before the mentioning of a headscarf, yet another misdemeanour is addressed. Specifically, the entering of another person's house without permission.

O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own, until you inquire and greet the dwellers thereof. That is better for you, that haply you may remember. But if you find not anyone therein, then enter them not until permission is granted you. And if it is said to you "Turn back", then turn back. That is purer for you, and God knows what you do. (24, 27-8)

This verse has two explicit demands. On the one hand, that the *khimar* shall be drawn over the bosom, on the other hand that a woman's adornments shall be only visible to the persons stated in the following lines. What kind of clothing should one picture when hearing the term *khimar*? A comparison with old-Arabic women's clothing can serve as a point of reference. It consisted

of a long and wide shirt-like dress with a long slit running from the front of the neck down to the waistline. In other words, had this opening not been specifically covered, there would have been the possibility of the woman's chest area becoming visible during certain movements or within certain postures.¹⁸

Furthermore, the woman's *khimar* should be pictured

as an unstitched wrap-around garment or a large wrap-around piece of cloth, which women could drape and position in a large variety of ways, including drawing it in front of their face in order to cover it.¹⁹

The term *khimar* was used to refer to the male turban as well. Before this backdrop, the above-mentioned verse has to be understood as a call for women to draw their drapery (*khumur*) over the slit of their garments, thus negating the possibility of arousing glimpses at their décolleté.

18 "Aus einem langen und weiten hemdartigen Kleid, bei dem vom Halsausschnitt aus ein offener Schlitz in Richtung Taille nach unten reichte - ein Schlitz also, der, wäre er nicht zusätzlich bedeckt worden, bei bestimmten Bewegungen oder Körperhaltungen den Brustbereich der Frau hätte sichtbar werden lassen" (Wielandt 2009, 1-2).

19 "Als ein ungenähtes Schalgewand oder auch als ein großes Umschlagtuch ..., das die Frau in sehr vielfältiger Art drapieren und auch vor das Gesicht ziehen konnte, so daß es verhüllt war" (Knieps 1993, 106; see also 102-9).

The question then becomes whether the plural tense of *khimar*, i.e. *khumur*, specifically refers to a means to cover one's head or simply to the drapery intended to cover the neck and breast area. In accordance with Islamic tradition, the term *khimar* has come to describe the headscarf with which women are to cover their head, as well as their hair. According to the Qur'an commentator Ibn Kathir, the term *khimar* describes "something to cover the head with".²⁰ He goes on to say that "the *khimar* was also drawn over the neck and the breast so that they were no longer visible in any way".²¹ According to Kaddor, it was likely to have been "loosely placed over the head so that the hair was only partially covered, instead of the highly accurate way which we are familiar with today".²² The wearing of the *khimar* was not linked to social status, meaning it could be worn by all women.

However, opponents of the headscarf argue that both verses fail to explicitly mention the head, nor do the utilised terms make it clear which body parts are to be covered specifically. Instead, women were simply meant to cover the slit of their garments, and therefore their décolleté, by means of this piece old-Arabic women's clothing. Wielandt correctly notes that the covering of the cleavage could have been easily achieved by means other than the *khimar*, whether by a shawl or a high-necked gown.

Regardless of these circumstances, conservative religious scholars staunchly maintain that this passage commands the wearing of the *khimar*, or a modern variant of it, such as, for instance, the headscarf.²³

Many parts of the commentaries dealing with this verse revolve around the meaning of the Arabic word *zīna*, translated here as "adornment". The primary challenge is the distinction between an adornment that may only be revealed to close relatives while being concealed from others, and one that may be publicly displayed. Adornment, in this context, includes the body parts that it is worn on. In early Islamic times, scholars differed in their opinion about whether the hair was to be considered a kind of adornment that had to be concealed from external persons. Later, the opinion that a woman's

20 Ibn Kathir 1981, 3: 114, quoted in Kaddor 2010, 135 ("etwas, mit dem man den Kopf verhüllen kann").

21 Ibn Kathir 1981, 2: 600, quoted in Kaddor 2010, 135 ("der *khimar* werde zudem um den Hals und über die Brust geworfen, so dass man davon nichts mehr sehen kann").

22 Kaddor 2010, 135 ("locker über den Kopf geworfen worden sein, so dass er das Haar nur zum Teil bedeckte und nicht so akkurat wie wir es heute kennen").

23 Wielandt s.d., 2 ("Dennoch folgern traditionsgebundene Religionsgelehrte aus dieser Stelle bis heute einhellig, dass an ihr das Tragen dieses *chimar* selbst oder einer modernen Variante von ihm wie z.B. des Kopftuchs geboten ist").

hair was part of her adornments, and therefore had to be concealed from male strangers, prevailed. The question of whether to cover the face is similarly debated in this context since, as demonstrated by old-Arabic poetry, a variety of face coverings were already in use. The Qur'an makes no mention of face coverings. Scholars are hotly debating the issue; however, the majority has opined against the wearing of a face veil as a religious obligation.²⁴

In relation to the question of the covering of women, it serves to take the following Qur'an verse into account as well. Here, the wives of the Prophet are prompted to not spend time on the streets but rather to remain at home.²⁵

Abide in your homes and flaunt not your charms as they did flaunt them in the prior Age of Ignorance. Perform the prayer, give the alms, and obey God only desires to remove defilement from you, O People of the House, and to purify you completely. (33, 33)

Surah 24, 60 is of further interest. Here, the following concession is made:

As for elderly women who no longer anticipate marriage, there is no blame upon them to doff their garments (*thiyab*) without displaying any ornament.

According to Ghadban, this verse demonstrates the intention to control female sexuality "as to not jeopardise the legal parenthood of the father";²⁶ since people in pre-Islamic times practiced not only polygamy but also polygyny. Kaddor states

that women who were viewed as sexually irrelevant to men required no special protection from harassment by means of veiling. In this light, Qur'an 24,60 supports the hypothesis that the *asbab an-nuzul*, i.e. the events leading to the revelation of the dress code, were ultimately intended for the mitigation of potential conflict.²⁷

²⁴ See Wielandt s.d., 3; Duderija 2011, 107-8.

²⁵ See Kaddor 2010, 145.

²⁶ "Um die legale Vaterschaft nicht zu gefährden" (Ghadban 2013, 9).

²⁷ "Dass Frauen, die im Hinblick auf Sexualkontakte uninteressant für die Männer sind, keines besonderen Schutzes vor Belästigungen durch eine entsprechende Verschleierung bedürfen. Damit stützt Koran 24:60 die These, dass die *asbab an-nuzul*, also die Anlässe für die Offenbarung der Kleidungs Vorschriften im Grunde auf die Abwendung von Schaden abzielen" (Kaddor 2010, 147-8).

3 Surah 33, 53²⁸

O you who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for its time to come unless leave be granted you. But if you are invited, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse [...]. And when you ask anything of [his wives], ask them from behind a veil [*hijab*]. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts.

Hijab means “barrier, covering, concealment” from other people’s gazes. Following these connotations, it then received its meaning as a “curtain, veil”. In this passage, *hijab* refers to a curtain, not a head-dress. It was custom at Iranian and Byzantine courts to hide the women of the ruler from the gazes of visitors behind a curtain. Wielandt postulates that “this Qur’an verse could reflect an incorporation of this court etiquette into Islamic customs”.²⁹ Later on, scholars extended this specific rule for the wives of the Prophet to women in general, something that was justified by a call for gender segregation,

one of those early instruments of enforcement, apart from the covering of the head and - in an urban context - the face in front of strangers, also included the confinement of the woman into secluded quarters and her subsequent quasi-barring from the public space.³⁰

The isolation of the woman was also tied to a higher social standing. It is also the subject of debate why 33, 53 refers only to the wives of the Prophet while 33, 59 then goes on to include all Muslim women.

According to Islamic tradition, this verse was revealed in the wake of the events surrounding the Prophet’s marriage to Zaynab bint Jahsh.³¹ Zaynab, a cousin of Muhammad, was the wife of Muhammad’s adoptive son Zayd. One day, when the Prophet came to Zayd’s house and asked for him, only Zaynab - who was unveiled - was at home. Zayd, knowing that the Prophet admired her, divorced his wife. According to tradition, the marriage ceremony took place in 627 at Medina. The Prophet, in accordance with custom, invited people off the street into his house to share a meal. Some of these guests overstayed their welcome, even though the Prophet had left several times before returning to see whether the guests had departed in the meantime,

²⁸ See at-Tabari 1988, 12: 33-41.

²⁹ “Dieser Koranvers eine Übernahme einer derartigen Hofetikette in den islamischen Rahmen reflektieren könnte” (Wielandt s.d., 4).

³⁰ “Zu deren Instrumenten in früheren Zeiten außer der Verschleierung des Kopfes und im städtischen Bereich auch des Gesichts der Frau gegenüber fremden Männern noch die Beschränkung der Frau auf ein Frauengemach innerhalb des Hauses und ihr weitgehende Ausschluss aus dem öffentlichen Raum gehörten” (Wielandt s.d., 4).

³¹ See Kaddor 2010, 144-5; Knieps 1993, 184-90.

which they only did at an extremely late hour. Umar supposedly recommended the Prophet to veil his women in general, reasoning that believers and non-believers alike were entering his home (this implicates that the women were not veiled). This may hold a kernel of factual concern. However, many traditions dealing with the *hijab* decree speak of immoral approaches toward the wives of the Prophet yet contradict each other in several details. Therefore, it has to remain unclear which events ultimately acted as the catalyst for the passing of the *hijab* decree. The final lines refer solely to the wives of the Prophet, not the wives of Muslims in general. In this way, they were identifiable as married women as opposed to a slave or a concubine. Thus, the *hijab* became “an expression of a social contract and legal order within Islamic society, a foundation for an ideal of virtue for Muslim women, as well as men”.³² Later on, contrary to the view displayed in the Qur’an, the *hijab* served as the foundation for the veil of the woman, leading to its contemporary use as the de facto term for the female headscarf.³³

The term *hijab* appears seven times in the Qur’an, usually bearing a somewhat metaphorical connotation, but always describing a boundary/divider, never as a piece of cloth to cover one’s body with.

42, 51: It is not for any human being that God should speak unto him, save by revelation, or from behind a veil, or that He should send a messenger in order to reveal what He will by His Leave.

7, 44-6: The inhabitants of the Garden will call out to the inhabitants of the Fire: “We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?”. They will respond: “Yes” [...]. And there will be a veil between them.

41, 5: They say: “Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and between us and you there is a veil”.

19, 16-17: And remember Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to an eastern place. And she veiled herself from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit [...].

38, 32: I have preferred the love of good things over the remembrance of my Lord, until [the sun] was taken behind the veil.

32 “Ausdruck einer Sozialverfassung und einer Rechtsordnung der islamischen Gesellschaft Die Grundlage für ein Tugendideal der muslimischen Frau und des muslimischen Mannes” (Knieps 1993, 173).

33 See Wielandt s.d., 3.

4 Surah 33, 59³⁴

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters, and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks [*jalabib*, sg. *jilbab*] over themselves. Thus is it likelier that they will be known and not be disturbed.

The following events are named as the catalyst for the revelation of this verse.

The wives of the Prophet left their house in Medina at night in order to relieve themselves. There, they were harassed by foreign men of the Ansar (the helpers) who were averse to the Prophet and his message. When questioned, they claimed that they had mistaken the women for slaves. Subsequently, the verse about the veiling was revealed. In other words, the wives of the Prophet should “draw their *jilbab* over their head and in front of their face”³⁵ Islamists took this passage as a basis for their demand that women had to cover their face when outside the house.

The *jilbab* is a type of wrap-around garment, which, as a cloak-like mantle, offered a large variety of ways to cover oneself. At other times, the *jilbab* is equated with the *khimar*. Only free women were allowed to wear it outside the house, slaves were barred from doing so. As such, the *jilbab* was a means of establishing and displaying social status, namely the position of a free, honourable woman as opposed to a slave. This display of class distinction between free, honourable women and slaves had been ubiquitous throughout history in the oriental region.³⁶ It is also an element in old-Arabic poetry. It is not, however, present in the Qur’an, originating instead during later times. As with the *khimar*, it is also a subject of debate whether the term *jilbab* refers to a headdress or simply a covering for the neck and breast area. It should be noted that the term occurs in the plural tense as well. Therefore, this verse contains no concrete instructions with regard to the covering of the hair or the face of the woman, either.

Kaddor points out that in old-Arabic times, the *jilbab* was worn over the *khimar*. Ultimately, the difference between the *khimar* and *jilbab* may have been miniscule at best. “This also means that the face remained generally uncovered by both the *khimar* and the *jilbab*. In this light, the call of Qur’an 33, 59 to ‘draw over themselves’ the *jilbab* makes sense”.³⁷

³⁴ See at-Tabari 1988, 12: 45-7.

³⁵ “Ihren *dschilbab* über den Kopf vor das Gesicht ziehen” (Wielandt s.d., 5).

³⁶ See Kaddor 2010, 137.

³⁷ “Das bedeutet auch, dass das Gesicht beim *khimār* und auch beim *jilbāb* prinzipiell frei blieb, sodass die Aufforderung in Koran XXXIII, 59, den *jilbāb* herunterzulassen, Sinn ergibt” (Kaddor 2010, 136).

5 Conclusion

Summarising, it can be stated that Qur'an commentators are of widely varying opinions as to how women should cover themselves.³⁸ Tradition agrees in that the wives of Muhammad and the wives of the believers in general should not leave the house without a veil as described in the *Jahiliyyah*. However, none of the presented Qur'an passages explicitly mentions the covering of the head. Due to *hadith* verdicts, they were nonetheless interpreted in such a way by the later Islamic tradition.³⁹ Stipulations regarding the "private area" ('*aurah*') of women, i.e. the body parts that are in need of covering, are derived from the *hadith* as well.

It was typical for jurists to discuss the question of dress, for both men and women, in terms of what must be covered in order to perform the canonical prayer, which was usually taken as equivalent to what had to be covered in the presence of those not listed in this verse.⁴⁰

Jurists distinguished between three types of '*aurah*'. That of men, female slaves, and free women. Among Qur'an commentators and legal scholars, the idea of the female "private area" has shifted through the centuries to a point where it is believed "that every part of a woman, excluding her face and hands, belongs to her 'private area' and therefore needs to be covered".⁴¹ Some early viewpoints did not consider the veiling of the hair necessary either, arguing that there is no explicit mention of it in the Qur'an. "Other jurists considered a free woman's entire body to be '*aurah*'".⁴² According to these schools of law, only the area from the belly to the knees is considered part of the 'private area' in men and female slaves. This also has to do with the fact that women in general "are reduced to their sexuality".⁴³ The entire Islamic legal tradition has furthermore asserted that the duty to cover herself only applies to sexually mature women "whose bodily features might cause arousal in men".⁴⁴ This particularly extends to the allure of the female hair. However, no passage in the Qur'an as-

³⁸ See Knieps 1993, 203.

³⁹ See Wielandt s.d., 5.

⁴⁰ Nasr et al. 2015, 875.

⁴¹ "Dass bei der Frau alles außer Gesicht und Hände, Blöße' und daher zu bedecken ist" (Wielandt s.d., 6).

⁴² Nasr et al. 2015, 875.

⁴³ "Auf ihre Sexualität reduziert wird" (Ghadban 2013, 11).

⁴⁴ "Von deren Körpermerkmalen Reize auf die Männer ausgehen können" (Wielandt s.d., 7).

sociates the covering of the female hair with moral behaviour. This was a later development. The great theologian and legal scholar Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) has contributed markedly to the picture of the woman as the great seductress and her subsequent styling as a purely sexualised object. According to him,

due to the psychological inferiority of men, they are in need of protection from the power of women. Due to his physical superiority, this protection takes on the shape that the woman has to burden the “necessary” restrictions - namely, to cover her nakedness.⁴⁵

According to Al-Ghazali, women should better not leave the house at all.

The Qur'an, therefore, did not establish a new dress code, incorporating old-Arabic traditions and customs regarding dress code and veiling instead. Quite a few of these traditional guidelines were, however, abolished or reinterpreted as defined by God.⁴⁶ When the different schools of law established the guidelines for covering, they naturally included the opinions of the scholars, as well as the morals and customs of their culture and society. This illustrates how deeply ingrained into contemporary influences the concept of the veiling of women had been. It can be ascertained “that the majority of existing arguments don't date to the time of the Prophet but to the world of the (male) scholars of the Abbasid period and later on”.⁴⁷ Particularly the verses of *surah* 24 are sought out by commentators as an argument for the veiling of women since they also happen to include a code of conduct. All these elaborations exist before the backdrop of a demand for a change in the social behaviour of men towards women. On the other hand, stands the call for a shift in the social attitude of woman towards men. In this, the veil is an expression of a social structure and reflects the ideal of a free, married woman within the society in question.⁴⁸ The distinction between the sacred and mundane veil exists in Islamic times as well. The passages in the *surahs* 24 and 33 refer to the mundane veil. An example for sacral clothing would be the gown for the pilgrimage to the Kaaba.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “Aufgrund der psychischen Unterlegenheit des Mannes, muss er vor der Macht der Frauen geschützt werden. Aufgrund seiner physischen Überlegenheit sieht der Schutz so aus, dass die Frau die, erforderlichen, Einschränkungen zu (er-)tragen hat - nämlich ihre Blöße zu verbergen” (Kaddor 2010, 142).

⁴⁶ See Kaddor 2010, 134.

⁴⁷ “Dass ein Großteil der Argumentationen nicht auf die Zeit des Propheten zurückgeht, sondern auf die (männliche) Gelehrtenwelt der Abbasiden-Zeit und später” (Kaddor 2010, 141).

⁴⁸ See Knieps 1993, 173-4.

⁴⁹ See Knieps 1993, 373.

Ultimately, the veil can only ever make sense before the background of the social realities of the Arab world of its day. “There is in no way a clear dictate for veiling but an indirect compulsion resulting from the social circumstances at the time”,⁵⁰ which required the veil as a protective social mechanism. However, because the environment that humans exist in is subject to constant change, the circumstances for the verses relating to veiling in the Qur’an must inevitably change as well.⁵¹

The female veil is a “veil of habit”, a fabric difficult to grasp which was and still is subject to a constantly changing social reality, which in turn is an expression of the sociological and psychological state of a society.⁵²

Nowadays, the varying hermeneutical approaches to the Qur’an show two conflicting approaches. On the one hand, those who consider the headscarf to be a mandatory and integral part of societal norms and who not only take the Qur’an into account, but also the *hadith* where the Prophet’s Sunna is expressed, which claims authority as a guideline for proper Muslim behaviour. On the other hand, those who dismiss the command to wear a headscarf as irrelevant in contemporary times, arguing that God and the Prophet

addressed a highly specific social framework shaped by the cultural realities of the time. As such, they had to choose the means to reach their goals in a way that would be intelligible and implementable [...] to the people of old Arabia during Muhammad’s lifetime.⁵³

50 “Von einem direkten Zwang zur Verhüllung kann also keine Rede sein, sehr wohl aber von einem indirekten Zwang, der aus den damaligen sozialen Gegebenheiten resultierte” (Kaddor 2010, 148).

51 See Kaddor 2010, 149.

52 “Der Schleier der Frau ist ein ‘Schleier des Verhaltens’, ein nur sehr schwer fassendes Gewebe, das stetigen gesellschaftlichen Einflüssen und Änderungen unterworfen war und immer noch ist, der auch Ausdruck einer sozialen und psychischen Verfassung einer Gesellschaft ist” (Knieps 1993, 182).

53 “In eine ganz bestimmte zeit- und kulturbedingte sozialgeschichtliche Situation hineingesprochen haben, in der Wahl der konkreten Mittel, die sie zur Erreichung dieses Zieles vorsahen, so äußern mussten, wie es den damaligen Verstehens- und Verhaltensmöglichkeiten [...] der alten Araber im Umfeld Muhammads, entsprach” (Wielandt s.d., 10). See Duderija 2011, 169-87.

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