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Ali Shariati's Views on the Hijab and Its Relation to His Islamic Ideology

This article explores Ali Shariati's views on the hijab and its connection to his Islamic ideology. A prominent ideologue during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Shariati opposed the enforcement of religious attitudes. His position reflected his understanding of the Prophet Muhammad's didactic approach. Prior to the revolution, Shariati criticized Saudi Arabia for mandating religious practices. Instead, he urged women to adopt the hijab voluntarily, framing it as an expression of Islam as an "ideology" and presenting it as a symbol of resistance and self-awareness. At the same time, Shariati regarded this ideological view as aligned with the Islam of the Prophet Muhammad. For him, the hijab's significance lay not in its historical continuity but in its ideological function within a dynamic social context. Although both Shariati and the post-revolutionary Iranian government are considered Shi'a, his views on the hijab differ from those of the Islamic Republic.

KEYWORDS: Ali Shariati—Islamic ideology—Shi'a thought—hijab—gender

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In this article, the views on the hijab[1] held by Ali Shariati (ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, 1933–1977), an Iranian religious intellectual, are investigated, specifically by discussing their connection to the obligation to wear (or not wear) the hijab in Iran. Shariati advocated for not forcing religious teachings on people. He was critical of Saudi Arabia, which enforced religious observances, including wearing the hijab. Shariati assigns an "ideological" meaning to the hijab, defining "ideology" as the expression of one's own beliefs. He therefore encouraged women to choose to wear the hijab on their own accord in order to demonstrate not blind faith to an ideal but a faith in what they have chosen themselves, thus rejecting Western notions that devalue the hijab. Shariati's stance on the hijab aligned neither with the pre-revolutionary Iranian regime, which forbade women from wearing the hijab, nor with the post-revolutionary regime, which has mandated it.

Ali Shariati, known as an ideologue of the Iranian Revolution, was born in 1933 in a village near Mashhad in northeastern Iran, which has been ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty since 1925. During this era, as part of the Pahlavi policy favoring Westernization, the hijab was officially banned in public spaces in 1936, as wearing it, according to the regime, would interfere with women's work and education (Shirazi 2019). Paradoxically, the Pahlavi regime's enforcement of the ban on the hijab later served to justify the compulsory hijab instituted by the post-revolutionary government.

The law banning the hijab lasted until 1941, when Reza Shah abdicated the throne. After his son ascended to power, the government ceased enforcing the removal of the veil. However, Reza Shah's views on the hijab remained intact. The idea that the hijab was an outmoded symbol was imprinted in the minds of the public through the media after 1941 (Amirmijani and Sadegh 2021, 7276–79).

Beginning in the 1950s, Shariati worked consistently for social change based on Islam along with his father, Taqi Shariati, a prominent member of the ulama in the Mashhad area. Alongside his political activities, Ali Shariati continued his studies. After graduating from Mashhad University, he went to Paris on a scholarship in 1958. In 1964, on receiving his doctorate in France, he returned to Iran.

1. The word "hijab" is used to refer to the traditional covering of the head, face, and body of Muslim women. It is a symbol of modesty, privacy, and morality, with a range of forms at different times and places (Esposito 2003).

From then on, Shariati propounded his views on Islam and Islamic thought based on his studies in France. Presenting several notable lectures during this time, he became renowned for his lectures delivered at Hosseiniyeh Ershad.[2]

In "Islamology," one of Shariati's better-known lectures at Hosseiniyeh in 1972, he calls "Islam as ideology" (Sharīʿatī 2011–2012, 87) his notion of an ideal Islam. He did not consider ideology as that pertaining to the values and beliefs that support a particular political party or a system of ideas and representations that governs the psyche of a person or directs a social group (Althusser 2010, 208). Instead, he considered ideology as a belief, and the understanding of that belief, as governing human behavior in society.

> Ideology is a belief and the understanding of that belief. In its technical sense, it is a specific perspective and awareness that a person has about themselves, their class position, social status, national condition, global and historical destiny, and the social group in which they are involved. It interprets these elements and, based on them, discovers particular responsibilities, solutions, orientations, stances, ideals, and judgments. As a result, the person comes to believe in a particular set of ethics, behaviors, and system of special "values." […].
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> An ideology, therefore, is a belief that interprets a person's social, national, and class orientation as well as their system of values, social order, way of life, ideal state of individual and society, and human existence in all its dimensions, and it answers the questions: "How?" "What is to be done?" "What should be?" and "What is to be?" (Sharīʿatī 2011–2012, 42–43)

Shariati's conceptualization of ideology was intended to politicize religion (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2004, 510). He frames Islam as an ideology in opposition to the hegemonic Islam promoted by the ulama and as a counterpoint to the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements that were gaining momentum in pre-revolutionary Iran (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2004, 510). His ideological framework was also influenced by Franz Fanon, whose work emphasized resistance to Western colonialism (Ostovar 2016, 35).

"Alavid Shiʿism, Safavid Shiʿism (tashayyo'-e ʿalavī va tashayyo'-e ṣafavī)" is another of his representative lectures at Hosseiniyeh Ershad. In this, Shariati

2. Hosseiniyeh is a building used for various events commemorating the third Imam Hossein and mourning his martyrdom (Momen 1985, 240). Hosseiniyehs already existed in Baghdad and Aleppo in the tenth century (Calmard 2004, 517) and are scattered throughout modern Iran. One of these, Hosseiniyeh Ershad, was built in Tehran in 1956 by members of the Iranian Freedom Movement, including Mehdī Bāzargān (1906–1995), with the aim of teaching Islam to the public (Sharī'atiraẓavī 2014–2015, 139). Later, Hosseiniyeh Ershad distinguished itself from other Hosseiniyehs by its Shariati lectures in which contemporary social issues in the Islamic context were discussed.

referred to the Islam that he believed in as Alavid Shiʿism, referring to Ali, the first Shiʿa Imam, and he called for Iranians to believe in Shiʿa Islam. In this lecture, Shariati criticized certain ulama who wielded authority in Iranian society, believing that they stood between God and the people. He said they were causing the stagnation of Islam and indoctrinating people with a false version of the religion. This claim was not accepted by the ulama. Even Morteza Motahhari (Morteẓā Moṭahharī, 1920–1979), who originally provided Shariati the opportunity to teach at Hosseiniyeh Ershad, gradually began to criticize Shariati's lectures (MOṬAHHARĪ 1993, 35–60). Moreover, Shariati's activities were considered dangerous to Pahlavi rule. He was under surveillance by the secret police, commonly known as the Organization for National Security and Intelligence of the State in Iran (SAVAK), who banned his lectures (RAHNEMA [1998] 2014, 217).

During the 1970s, Shariati presented his views on the ideal Islamic woman. In *Fatima is Fatima* (*Fāṭeme Fāṭeme ast*), referring to Fatima (Fāṭima bint Muḥammad, ?–633), the youngest daughter of the Prophet of Islam and wife of Ali, the first Shiʿa Imam, Shariati portrayed Fatima as the embodiment of what he considered the ideal Shiʿism: Alavid Shiʿism. In "Hijab," another lecture that he delivered targeting Iranian women, he recommended that women should choose to wear the hijab (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017). His lectures had an impact on Iranian women. According to *Hijab and Intellectuals* (*Ḥijāb va rowshanfekrān*), which contains a detailed examination of how intellectuals in modern Iranian history addressed the issue of the hijab, a prominent religious woman testified that before hearing Shariati's lectures she and her group of women did not wear the hijab but did so after (AḤMADĪ KHORASĀNĪ 2010, 161).

The revolutionary momentum intensified during the 1970s, culminating in the success of the anti-Shah movement in 1979 (1399 AH in the Islamic calendar) under Khomeini (Rūḥ Allāh Mūsavī Khomeynī, 1902–1989). However, by then it was two years since Shariati had passed away. He died without seeing the end of the revolution, but those who were inspired by the Islam he propounded were motivated to join it.

Following the revolution, most governmental institutions and organizations were in the hands of the new middle class, which had been placed on a path of economic and social development by the Shah. At this point, a problem arose: in government institutions, female employees did not wear the hijab (AMIRMIJANI and SADEGH 2021, 7279). In response to this, on 7 March 1979, in *Keyhān*, a daily newspaper, Khomeini declared that "naked" (*lakht*) women should not enter Islamic ministries, and all women would be required to wear the hijab. This call drew public outcry, and a week-long demonstration that began on International Women's Day in March 1979 was attended by fifty thousand people (AFARY and ANDERSON 2023, 83). However, their voices went unheeded, and eventually, the hijab became mandatory. In 1983, a law was passed to punish women

who refused to wear the state-mandated hijab (Sedghi 2007, 207). From then on, laws supporting the mandatory wearing of the hijab have become essential tools in policing women's political and dissident activities and have served as a pretext for the harassment, intimidation, assault, and imprisonment of women activists of all ideologies (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023, 410). In Iran, it became obligatory for women, regardless of their beliefs, to wear the hijab after the 1979 revolution.

In 1990, the Islamic Republic published documents called the *Secret Documents of Kashf e Hijab*, drawn from the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi. These documents, which expose the cruelty of forced unveiling, were used by the Islamic regime to justify its implementation of compulsory veiling (Shirazi 2019). Due to the mandate, guidance patrols (*gast-e ershād*), also known as the morality police, are now stationed in the cities to police public morals; in other words, Iranian women are monitored to see whether they are wearing the hijab or even to check whether they are wearing it correctly.

Forty-three years after the revolution, in 2022 (1444 AH in the Islamic calendar), Mahsa Zina Amini was traveling with her family to Tehran and was struck on the head by the morality police, a blow that eventually led to her death, after being interrogated for not wearing the hijab. Protests over her death went viral and global, with the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom" calling for women's freedom of choice in wearing the hijab.[3]

Considering the above situation in Iran, I examine how the hijab was discussed in Shariati's discourse and what led many women to wear the hijab in pre-revolutionary Iranian society when it was not obligatory and was, in fact, forbidden.

Additionally, this article offers a novel perspective on the general assessment of Shariati's views on the hijab, which differ from contemporary interpretations, especially those upheld by the current Islamic Republic. By distinguishing between these positions, often conflated due to their shared Shi'a background, the article helps clarify their respective stances.[4]

3. Now, almost three years after this event, the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement has become more complex: its adherents not only oppose the forced hijab but also seek solutions to all the contradictions with which the political system has afflicted people (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023).

4. Although studies have noted a discrepancy between the Shi'a ideology that Shariati sought and the ideology of the post-revolutionary republican regime, society tends to equate the two. This is because Shariati, who died in a foreign country without witnessing the revolution, was partly praised by the ulama of the Islamic Republican Party who led the revolution and came to dominate the post-revolutionary republican regime (Abrahamian 1982). In other words, even though Shariati was known for his advocacy of an Islam that rejected power, Shariati's opposition to a section of the ulama who were close to power and the Western thought that

1. Literature Review

Immediately following the Iranian Revolution, studies on Shariati emerged alongside analyses of the revolution itself, positioning him as an ideological contributor to the movement. These early studies approached Shariati from a historical perspective. Scholars such as ABRAHAMIAN (1982) and KEDDIE and RICHARD (1981), for example, analyzed his role within the broader historical context of revolutionary Iran. Within this framework, Shariati's reinterpretation of Shi'a thought played a central role in shaping his image as a driving force behind the revolution. In the 1990s, scholarly attention began to shift toward examining Shariati as a thinker in his own right. A representative example of this trend was Rahnema's comprehensive study *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati*, which sought to reevaluate Shariati's life and thought by offering a detailed biographical and intellectual account. Subsequently, Shariati also began to attract attention within the field of gender studies, with pioneering contributions by scholars such as Ziba Mir-Hosseini, who critically examined Shariati's widely praised text *Fatima is Fatima*, arguing that he did not sufficiently engage with women's issues in Islam (MIR-HOSSEINI 1999; MIR-HOSSEINI 2002). Her critique stems from her focus on Islamic law and women's rights, highlighting that Shariati largely overlooked these concerns within the framework of Sharia. SEDGHI (2007) regards Mir-Hosseini's studies particularly significant for their emphasis on the intersection of revolution and gender (SEDGHI 2007, 16).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Shariati's portrayal of Fatima began to receive scholarly attention and critical evaluation. SADEGHI (2007) demonstrates how Shariati criticized the gender policy of the Pahlavi regime by presenting Fatima as a revolutionary woman through analyzing the discourses of veiling in contemporary Iran. Further, according to SADEGHI (2007), although Shi'a fundamentalists rejected Shariati's ideas on women during the time of the revolution and its immediate aftermath, his arguments helped them mobilize women to protest against the Pahlavi regime. As a result, many Islamist and secular women, inspired by Shariati's ideas, demonstrated their solidarity with Islamic fundamentalists (SADEGHI 2007). This point is crucial for understanding the diversity within Shi'a thought and why it remains a subject of ongoing debate. Despite this acknowledgment, she does not offer a detailed examination

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influenced him were left out of the picture. Moreover, many of Shariati's supporters in the public either became supporters of the Islamic republican system or joined the Mojahedin (*sāzmān-e mojāhedīn-e khalq*), an armed organization that sympathized with the social revolution that Shariati advocated. However, it is said that the Mojahedin also selectively follow Shariati's perspective (ABRAHAMIAN 1982).

of Shariati's thought, nor does she explore the relationship between the historical development of veiling practices and Shariati's ideas on the subject.

While research on Shariati's discussion on women and the image of Fatima has been ongoing—such as in the works of Moqaddam (2023) and Inoue (2023)—little to no detailed examination of his views, specifically on the hijab, exists. In analyzing the evolution of Iranian women's identity, Mansour Anbarmoo mentions that Shariati differentiated between the hijab and the chador (Anbarmoo 2022, 284).[5] Nevertheless, while Anbarmoo quotes Shariati's saying noting that although they are both veils, the latter posing an obstacle for modern women living in modern times (Anbarmoo 2022, 285), he did not specifically analyze the meaning of the hijab based on Shariati's thought. Shafāhī (2023), writing in the independent media outlet *Zeytoon*,[6] analyzed Shariati's discourses on women in Islam and the means of understanding religion from Shariati's perspective. While previous research has addressed Shariati's views on the hijab with only a secondary focus, without engaging with the topic in depth, Shafāhī (2023) recognizes the hijab as one of the central themes in Shariati's discourse on women. Although Shafāhī (2023) makes a scholarly contribution by citing a cross-section of the discourse on Shariati's views on the hijab from several of his works, he does not engage in a detailed analysis of Shariati's position on the hijab.

Shariati's interpretation of the hijab has not been analyzed in-depth despite the fact that his discourse played a major role in encouraging Iranian women to adopt the hijab in pre-revolutionary Iran. Considering how the wearing of the hijab has been made mandatory in post-revolutionary Iran, and given the emergence of movements opposing this law, Shariati's views on the hijab can be seen as a key point of divergence for understanding the differences between his thought and that of the post-revolutionary Shi'a regime.

2. Consequences of Enforcing Religious Diktats

Shariati's views on the hijab appear in his work *Hijab*, which is included as an appendix in volume twenty-one of *The Collected works of Shariati*.[7] "Hijab" is a private lecture that Shariati delivered in the winter of 1976, when he was under unofficial house arrest.[8]

5. The chador is a piece of black cloth that covers the whole body.

6. *Zeytoon* is run by supporters of Bazargan, the prime minister of the interim government who was ousted in a conflict with former supreme leader Khomeini (Chisaka 2021).

7. All translations in this article are based primarily on the original source text and are by the author.

8. Shariati was released from prison in 1975. However, Taqi Shariati, Ali Shariati's father and a prominent ulama, mentioned in *Ommat*, volume 5 (16 May 1979), a weekly magazine

The lecture "Hijab" is a response to parents' concerns about how to get their children to wear the hijab.[9] Shariati's response indicates that although the Pahlavi regime had enforced the removal of the hijab, the idea that pious Muslim women should wear it was already prevalent in Iranian society in the 1970s.

Shariati begins by saying that religion should not be forced on others.[10] If parents impose religion on their children, they are more likely to resist it than adhere to it. A child who is forced by his parents to be religious, according to Shariati, "instead of whispering prayers to God, insults their parents" (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 252) or will appear pious only in front of the parents (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 253).[11] Shariati sarcastically describes this counterproductive parental behavior as "blowing a trumpet from the wrong end" (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 251).

Shariati views the hijab as part of religious belief and practice.[12] However, he does not regard religious teachings and practices, including the wearing of the hijab, as compulsory. His discourse is based on the didactic approach of Prophet Muhammad. According to Shariati, Muhammad did not introduce Islam and all of its religious rules and faith in the first year of his twenty-three years of religious mission (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 254). He notes that Muhammad raised the issue of the hijab after eighteen years into his mission, along with the approach to the issue of alcohol (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 255). Regarding drinking alcohol, Shariati said that, at that time, the prophet did not force anyone to refrain but instead explained to the people the great loss they would

published by the Movement of Militant Muslims (*jonbesh-e mosalmānān-e mobārez*), that Ali Shariati's movements were monitored by the SAVAK.

9. However, as Islamic jurisprudence debated which ornaments women should cover as mentioned in the Quran and, based on the fear of *fitnah*—the sense of temptation or trial of faith, with women considered the greatest *fitnah* for men—hair came to be included in the scope of women's covering, which eventually led to the wearing of the hijab (GOTŌ 2014, 53–84; AMER 2017, 21–37). Even in post-revolutionary Iran, Supreme Leader Khamenei ('Alī Khāmene'ī 1939–) insisted that the hijab is required as per Islamic law (KHĀMENE'Ī 2023).

10. The Quran does not enforce religion. In his literary work, Shariati quotes the verse "No compulsion is there in religion" (Q2: 256), stating that the duty of intellectuals to society is not to force people and that people have the right to choose (SHARĪʿATĪ 2012–2013, 1026).

11. According to Shariati, a woman who wears her hijab in front of her parents and removes it in their absence is a "'split personality,' a 'dual personality,' living two different lives, a split, hypocrisy, faking human existence (not lying; falsifying human existence), and the manifestation of human disintegration" (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 252). These words could be said to foreshadow life in post-revolutionary Iran.

12. The lecture does not address men's clothing, but it does mention beards. Shariati humorously argues that beards, like the hijab, in and of themselves, carry no inherent religious significance. "If we were to regard beards as a religious symbol absolutely, then all American hippies would be first-class religious people!" (SHARĪʿATĪ 2016–2017, 258).

suffer if they continued to drink it (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 256). He quotes the Quran on this topic: "There is gross sin in them [intoxicants and gambling], and some benefits for people, but their sinfulness outweighs their benefit" [Q2: 219] (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 256).

According to Shariati, although Muhammad succeeded in persuading people to obey the religious teachings without having to force them, Saudi Arabia's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV; in Arabic, the Hay'a al-Amr bi-l-Maʿrūf wa-n-Nahy ʿan al-Munkar) required people to surrender to the teaching during the time he lived. Shariati unfavorably contrasts the CPVPV's actions with those of Muhammad.

> Without the police needing to go out, without starting moral enforcers with a revolver, and without pretending to be an enforcement officer and a cop to confiscate alcohol, the people themselves, with just one word from the Prophet, poured it all out and didn't keep a single drop in their homes. […] However, we, without thinking about why, keep saying over and over: "Ah, It's impure, it's blasphemous!" (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 257)

Shariati's criticism of the CPVPV in his lecture on the hijab serves as conclusive evidence that his views on the hijab differ fundamentally from those of the post-revolutionary Iranian regime. As will be discussed later, the regime established a similar organization in Iran that began to strictly enforce hijab regulations. In Saudi Arabia, the CPVPV, established in 1924 by the government, fields a religious police force. It orders and regulates Islamic order in the public sphere based on the Quranic injunction "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity" (Q3: 104) (Takao 2021a, 111). This Quran-based policing was theorized and practiced during the Middle Ages under the name of *ḥisba*, which refers both to the duty of every Muslim to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" and to the role of supervising moral behavior in towns and markets (Takao 2021b, 142). In other words, Saudi Arabia's CPVPV is an attempt to revive the *ḥisba* system (Takao 2021a, 112). During the Middle Ages, the *muḥtasib*s, individuals charged with supervising public order based on *ḥisba*, played a role in the market, while the religious police in Saudi Arabia became increasingly strident (Takao 2021b, 142–143).

The CPVPV developed branches in various cities. Its main activity was to form city patrols along with police officers. The duties of these patrols include the monitoring of women's behavior and decorum in public (Hay'a 2009a, 96; Takao 2021b, 149). Women's clothing, including the wearing of the hijab, is also subject to guidance, and if it is deemed to be against Islam by the CPVPV, it is sanctioned (Takao 2013, 70). This could include flogging and detention for

those who disobey (Hay'a 2009b, 130), and even the military can be mobilized when necessary (Takao 2021a, 112).

During Shariati's lifetime, King Faisal (Fayṣal ibn ʿAbd al ʿAzīz Al Suʾūd, 1906–1975) ascended to the Saudi throne in 1964, promoting modernization, including the introduction of television broadcasting and girls' education, although simultaneously religious governance was also strengthened. The main body of the CPVPV was moved to Riyadh in 1952, where it was upgraded to an agency directly under the royal palace administration (Takao 2021a, 113). In "Hijab," Shariati criticizes the CPVPV's approach of enforcing religious practices through coercion, even resorting to violence. He describes their approach as a forbidden act.

> Saudi Arabia has two sets of rules. One set of rules made by religious leaders and the other by the king. Both have their own exclusive armies. The king has an American-made and modern army, while the religious leaders have a strange and unusual army: they have twenty thousand men, their beards are long, each of them has strapped on a bandolier of bullets, and they are holding a whip in their hands too! They are the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention! They go among the people with their whips and whip some to wear hijabs, others not to shave, others to ask why you didn't show up for prayer on time! For example, they promote enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong, yet their very appearance is a denial of decency!
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> (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 253)

Ironically, in light of Shariati's criticism of Saudi Arabia's CPVPV, similar organizations were established in Iran after the Revolution of 1979. The Islamic Republic of Iran is based on Khomeini's *Velāyat-e faqīh*[13] plans to "Islamize" the society. Since the implementation of the CPVPV has been the most important Islamization strategy, the Constitution also makes it clear that this is an obligation (Golkar 2015, 75–76). To implement this constitutional article, Khomeini created a Morality Bureau (*Dāyere-ye amr be marūf va nahy az monkar*) first; then, on the basis of Khamenei's order in 1992, the Bureau for the Revival of Commanding the Right and Forbidding the Wrong (*Setād-e ehyā amr-e be maʿrūfr va nahī as monkar)* was formed (Golkar 2015, 76–77). The Basij, a committee established to enforce moral discipline within society, was established in 1980. This organization maintains a close relationship with related institutions. In 1992, after the passage of the Judicial Support for the Basij Act, which authorized Basij militiamen to act as judicial agents in enforcing law and order,

13. *Velāyat-e faqīh*, Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, is a Shiʿa doctrine that advocates for the establishment of a state governed by Islamic jurists (*faqīh*). According to Takao (2019), in Saudi Arabia and Iran, the CPVPV plays a key role in building a new society, each shaped by its own ideological background, Wahhabism, and *velāyat-e faqīh* (Takao 2019, 80).

the Basij became even more deeply involved in imposing Islamic moral codes (Golkar 2015, 77–78). In 2009, the Basij participated in a new morality initiative, the Hijab and Chastity Plan (*tarḥ-e ʿefaf va ḥijāb*), designed to promote the Islamic dress code, for instance by arresting women who violated the code by wearing Western-style clothing and avoided wearing the hijab (Golkar 2015, 81).

In addition to the Basij, guidance patrols began patrolling in 2006,[14] again focusing on enforcing Islamic dress codes for Iranian women (Mehrābī 2022). They considered nail polish, makeup, and a revealing attire to be violations of the code. Depending on the situation, women may receive a verbal warning or be detained and sent to a reeducation center (Motamedi 2022). The morality police were at the center of the September 2022 incident that led to the death of Mahsa Amini. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran has institutionalized efforts to compel adherence to religious teachings, Shariati, in his lecture on the hijab, clearly expressed his opposition to coercion in matters of faith.

Shariati attributes no inherent or essential value to the hijab itself—a view that stands in sharp contrast to the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which enforces the hijab as a symbol of state legitimacy. The regime not only penalizes the absence of the hijab but also regards styles of veiling that do not conform to its strict standards as "improper-veiling" (*bad ḥejābī*) (Sedghi 2007, 211). While the Republic treats the hijab as a meaningful political and religious emblem, Shariati regards it as merely a piece of cloth.

> Someone once asked me about the hijab. I spoke very briefly (he wanted me to say something against the hijab and chador so that he could seize on it as a pretext and make a scene in public). I said what he wanted me to say. I said, "Hijab is whatever you say it is. By God, I am neither an Islamic jurist nor a merchant. I am a sociologist." And the person then asked, "From a sociological point of view?" I replied, "Yes. A sociologist is not concerned with the piece of cloth itself. They are concerned with the person inside it!"
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> (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 264)

What matters to him is not the veil itself, but whether a woman adopts it by her own free choice. As will be discussed in the following section, Shariati hopes that women will discover new meaning in the hijab through the act of choosing it for themselves.

14. Some sources say it was founded in 2005. According to Mehrābī (Mehrābī 2022), in the summer of 2006, police officials announced the start of the Ershad patrols, saying that these patrols were only tasked with warning people who were "not wearing a hijab."

3. Wearing the Hijab as "Ideology"

As noted earlier, Shariati believed that religious practices, including wearing the hijab, hold no true meaning unless they are performed voluntarily as an expression of inner faith and with an understanding of their significance. This is because religious acts carried out under social or governmental coercion remain merely formalistic. However, the absence of social or state intervention in religious acts does not imply that these acts lack social or political meaning or relevance.

In "Hijab," Shariati recounts an incident that occurred at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad. According to Shariati, an attempt was made by fanatics to enforce the hijab there and was unsuccessful. At the same time, the anecdote also mentions women who began wearing the hijab after hearing Shariati's lecture, as noted in this report. Shariati refers to women who do not wear hijabs as "modern women." The efforts of the directors at Hosseiniyeh Ershad to enforce the wearing of the hijab were unsuccessful. However, Shariati observed that, after attending his lectures, many of these women voluntarily adopted the hijab, recognizing its ideological significance (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 258–59).

> At Hosseiniyeh Ershad, this was an experience that many people must have been, more or less, familiar with or in contact with. Some of the women who came here to register were sometimes so modern and bold that, even at the very beginning, when they went to the office to sign up, the staff who were supposed to register them felt intimidated. Some people complained about these modern women, and some were afraid of them. Others lied to them, saying "The classes are full." Among the board of directors at Hosseiniyeh were some who were highly religious and intolerant. They did not know what to do with these modern women. Then they brought a chador and a rusari[15] and then came the pleading with this one and begging that one.... They [these modern women] took them and threw them away!... After a while, even though I never said a word about it—absolutely not—I and all those in charge of Hosseiniyeh could recognize the girls who used to be from the unveiled crowd by how strict and meticulous they had become in their Islamic modest dress! (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 258)

According to Shariati, women like those who attended his lectures voluntarily chose to wear the hijab because they came to believe Islam to be an "ideology" (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 262). The hijab was associated with economic deprivation and traditionalism, while affluent and educated women favored the latest European fashions (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 262). Shariati, however, noted a shift: Islam was beginning to emerge as an ideology, carrying new social significance

15. A rusari is a scarf used to cover the hair.

(Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 262). Regarding this characterization, Shariati considered ideological Islam "as a new human responsibility" (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 262).

Consequently, Shariati viewed the hijab, when worn as an ideological statement, as a powerful symbol of resistance to Western imperialism (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 266).[16] To illustrate this idea, he cited the example of Chinese women adopting coarse hemp clothing to resist European influence, drawing a parallel to Iranian women wearing the hijab as a form of resistance (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 261). Shariati argues that when Iranian women see the hijab through the lens of Western-dominated values, it may seem outdated or even degrading. However, when reinterpreted through the lens of "ideology" as an expression of resistance and identity, it takes on a new and empowering meaning.

> This is the case in the previous story. Now, what will happen in this case? You belong to this society. You will understand how values have changed. What did it mean if a young girl is wearing a hijab at university, 15 years ago, or 7, 8 years ago? It meant that she was fanatical. It meant that she was outdated, or that her family was backward in terms of sociality, civilization, culture, etc. Or that she was so poor that her chador was a "shame cover." The clothes were not right, not fashionable, like garbage—there's just something off about it! There is no other explanation. Naturally the one without the hijab felt a sense of superiority over her, and she, in turn, felt an inferiority complex in front of the unveiled woman. Then, this unveiled woman's values moved increasingly toward wearing whatever was more luxurious, more novel, and whatever had just arrived on the European market. As time went on, she presented herself in such a way that it was obvious where she had bought her clothes. If I bought on Ismail Street, or if I bought it on the upper street of Persepolis. My style was totally different. It often turned out like this... sometimes even looking a bit sloppy—because those were the kinds of values at the time. The person who wore the hijab was seen as lacking modern values, associated with values that were fading, dying, and decadent, and tied to a backward culture.
>
> That era has passed. A new era arrived in which Islam was no longer presented as an inherited tradition, but rather as a fresh ideology and a new human responsibility. Suddenly, these effects can be observed in the behavior of young women. Now the young women who pretended to be sophisticated in an intellectual environment have changed.
>
> (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 261–262)

16. One of the meanings that Shariati ascribed to the hijab, namely resistance to the West, has an echo in the meaning that the current Islamic Republic of Iran ascribes to it, so the two stances can easily be confused. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (ʿAlī Khāmeneī, 1939–) described the Western model of dress as failing to defend women's dignity, while presenting the hijab as a means of protecting women from the dangers of sexual attraction (Khāmeneʾī 2023).

The concept of wearing the hijab as an ideological statement is innovative, particularly in its rejection of the meaning of hijab in the context of Westernization. Shariati contrasts the hijab with the chador, describing the latter as a hereditary garment rooted in traditional practices, while he considers the hijab as a deliberate and conscious return to Islamic values by an "awakened generation" (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 264).

At the same time, Shariati situates his concept of ideology within the context of Prophet Muhammad's Islam. He frequently references the time of Prophet Muhammad as an ideal period, central to understanding his ideological framework. While Shariati was openly aligned with Alavid Shiʿism, he also described his vision of "Islam as an ideology" (Sharīʿatī 2011–2012, 21–22), or what he often referred to as "Muhammad's Islam" (Sharīʿatī 2013–2014, 102). As the term suggests, Shariati equated true Islam—faithful to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad—with Shiʿa Islam, in which he deeply believed. According to Shariati, wearing the hijab during the Prophet Muhammad's reign was a deliberate expression of Islam. He argued that the hijab symbolized Islam as an "ideology," emphasizing its role as more than a religious obligation: it was a conscious and ideological choice.

> Do you know how hijab was introduced during the Prophet's time? It wasn't introduced like this: "O women! Protect yourselves from unrelated men with whom marriage is permissible!" No, not at all! The Islamic dress meant this: "O people! I am myself. I stand before you as someone affiliated with this party, this ideology, this goal, and this movement. I am not your victim, your plaything, or a doll crafted by your hands for you to decorate. I am not your plaster mannequin!" Even in the Prophet's own time, it meant exactly the same thing. (Sharīʿatī 2016–2017, 267–68)

In the 1970s, as Shariati gave the hijab ideological significance, a parallel resurgence of veiling occurred in other Middle Eastern countries, influenced by the rise of Islamic revival movements (Carvalho 2012, 343). In Egypt, for instance, many highly educated women began to wear the hijab by choice (Ahmed 2011, 87–89). This movement was supported by various Islamic groups aiming to establish an ideal Islamic society grounded in the Quran and the Sunnah, the foundational texts that record the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (Ahmed 2011, 79–80). Furthermore, this revival was partly driven by a growing distrust of Westernization, especially in a society that had previously succeeded in promoting unveiling among women (El Guindi 1981, 476).

Compared to the Egyptian case, Shariati—an Iranian male intellectual—held a perspective on the hijab that similarly emphasized women's agency and saw veiling as a voluntary act of resistance. Like the Egyptian women, he redefined the hijab as a symbol of anti-Western sentiment and a return to the values of

early Islam. However, while Shariati identified his interpretation of Islam with Prophet Muhammad's message, his thought remained distinctly Shi'a, even in its appeal to the early Islamic tradition. In addition, unlike examples in Egypt, Shariati regarded Fatima as the ideal woman for his Shi'a. She is highly respected among Muslims as a direct descendant of the Prophet, and especially revered by Shi'a Muslims as the mother of the second and third Imams, Hasan and Husayn.

Moreover, although women in various Middle Eastern contexts reinterpreted the hijab as a marker of renewed Islamic identity, Shariati did not regard the hijab as the exclusive medium through which ideological Islam should be expressed. For him, the form of ideological expression could vary depending on the cultural context. Like the hemp garments worn by Chinese women during their resistance to Western powers and the sari worn by Gandhi's wife at the United Nations, Shariati argues that the ideological significance of clothing varies across regions and cultures. According to him, Iran is no exception. During a lecture, he was asked by an audience member, "What is the traditional attire of Iranian women?" (Sharī'atī 2016–2017, 267). He responded, "Traditional attire? 'Culture and art' know everything about women better than you or I do" (Sharī'atī 2016–2017, 267). This response encapsulates Shariati's belief that the meaning of clothing, including the hijab, is shaped by cultural and regional contexts and can evolve. For him, the hijab's importance lies in its role as a marker of Islamic ideology, interpreted through the lens of resistance and self-awareness.

Conclusion

In this article, previous studies on Shariati in the field of gender studies were reviewed prior to examining Shariati's views on the hijab. An important point to note is that Shariati did not advocate for imposing religious practices, including the wearing of the hijab, on women. His position reflects his understanding of Prophet Muhammad's didactic approach and his observations on the consequences of enforced religiosity in Saudi Arabia. Shariati's criticism of the CPVPV in his lecture on the hijab reveals that his views on the hijab are clearly different from those of the post-revolutionary Iranian regime. Shariati believed that religious practices, such as wearing the hijab, hold no intrinsic meaning unless they are undertaken voluntarily as an expression of inner faith, with an understanding of their significance.

The second point clarified is that Shariati encouraged women to choose to wear the hijab, recognizing Islam as an ideology, guiding principle, and a motivation that governs human behavior in society. His conceptualization of the wearing of the hijab as an ideological statement includes rejecting the meaning of the hijab as defined through the lens of Westernization. At the same time, Shariati considered this ideology consistent with Prophet Muhammad's Islam.

The concept of hijab as a symbol of anti-Western sentiment and a return to the values of early Islam is common to both the Islamic revival in Egypt and Shariati's thought. Yet, Shariati identifies Muhammad's Islam as the ideal form of Shi'ism. For him, the hijab's importance lay in its role as a marker of Islamic ideology as interpreted through the lens of resistance and self-awareness. At the same time, the forms of such ideological expression may vary across cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that wearing the hijab in post-revolutionary Iranian society while adopting Shariati's stance is fraught with challenges. Opposing the regime's mandate to wear a hijab while asserting one's choice to do so voluntarily carries significant risks. Sedigeh Vasmaghi (Ṣedīqeh Vasmaqī, 1962–), a scholar specializing in Islamic law, argued that many socio-legal rulings of the Islamic Republic do not apply in the contemporary context (AKBAR 2022, 1061). She publicly challenged the compulsory hijab, advocating for women's right to choose whether to wear it or not (TAYEBI 2023). However, she was arrested and imprisoned because of her claims (MIR-HOSSEINI 2022, 231).

Ironically, Vasmaghi, who had previously chosen to wear the hijab herself, removed it in protest following the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022 (IRANINTERNATIONAL 2024). The meaning that Shariati attributed to wearing the hijab—as a symbol of his ideal Islam in pre-revolutionary Iranian society, where the Pahlavi regime discouraged or even banned it—may now be reflected in not wearing the hijab in the post-revolutionary context, where the Islamic Republic mandates it.

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