



**LOOK THE WORLD IN THE FACE:
A Review of STEPHANIE CRONIN (ed.),
ANTI-VEILING CAMPAIGNS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD:
GENDER, MODERNISM AND THE POLITICS OF DRESS.
London; New York: Routledge, 2014, 288 pp.**

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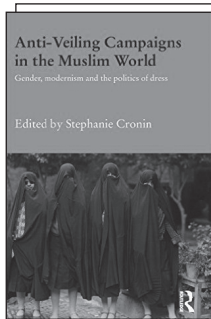
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Abstract: This book examines the state-sponsored anti-veiling campaigns that swept in the period between the two world wars in the Balkans and Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The publication is the result of a conference held in September 2011 at the St Anthony's College University of Oxford and represents a collection of articles. All of the papers also contribute to the understanding of contemporary debates about gender, Islam, and modernity by raising a number of questions about the relationship between Muslim woman dressing discourse and the real politics derived from it.

Keywords: gender studies, history of Islam, Islam and modernism, history of the hijab, woman in Islam, politics of dress.

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Stephanie Cronin (ed.). *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress*. London; New York: Routledge, 2014, 288 pp.

This book examines the state-sponsored anti-veiling campaigns that swept in the period between the two world wars in the Balkans and Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The publication is the result of a conference held in September 2011 at the St Anthony's College University of Oxford and represents a collection of articles. All of the papers also contribute to the understanding of contemporary debates about gender, Islam, and modernity by raising a number of questions about the relationship between Muslim woman dressing discourse and the real politics derived from it.

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Look the World in the Face

Show your faces to the world and look the world in the face.

Slogan in Atatürk's Turkey, 1930s

The central theme of this book is the campaign against women's veiling initiated by the new governments of Muslim states between the wars, in the 1930s. The publication of this collection of articles follows a conference at St Antony's College, Oxford, in September 2011.

Current public and scholarly debates within the Muslim world of Europe on women's headgear as symbol and practice (see, for example: [Gole 1996; Benhabib 2003; Mahmood 2001] et al.) may be reinterpreted when they are juxtaposed with earlier periods of the analogous, but perhaps even wider political and cultural fragmentation that took place in the Muslim world at the beginning of the last century. Neither the current campaigns against the niqab in France, nor the Turkish secular elite's horror at the popularity of the hijab are new — on the contrary, they are strictly predetermined by previous conflicts.

As Professor Stephanie Cronin, the editor of the book, writes in the introduction, the question of women's clothing as a whole, and women's

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veiling in particular, has had an important place in the developing critique of the existing gender roles throughout the Muslim world. This critique of the relationship between genders has in turn become a trope leading to the wider discourse on modernism, which aims to explain and, more to the point, correct the backwardness of Muslim societies. It concentrated on bringing that half of the population which is responsible for bringing up the next generation out of its isolation. Particular attention was paid to women's education and a revision of family law (the prohibition of polygamy, child marriage, etc.). This modernist gender discourse provoked powerful counter-discourses, which became widespread at the beginning of the twentieth century, and were included in the discussion of Middle Eastern self-defence against expanding European hegemony.

The modernist gender discourse, like the resistance to veiling the face and female isolation, appeared and took shape in the interval between the end of the nineteenth century and the First World War. From the beginning of the 1920s this discourse gained momentum in many countries of the Muslim world as a result of the seizure of power by various regimes with a modernist orientation. In the 1920s and 1930s the covering of women's heads and faces became the object of government disapproval in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Balkans, was publicly declared to be a sign of backwardness and was officially denounced in all kinds of ways. Although completely different political regimes were in power in all these countries (Turkey was run by a charismatic war hero, Iran and Afghanistan by monarchs anxious to modernise — Reza Shah and King Amanullah Khan — and Central Asia and the Caucasus by the Communist Party), their campaigns against veiling have many features in common, at least a first sight. For the nationalist, modernising and secularising elites, who identified themselves above all with European culture, removing the veil was a key sign of modernity and a central element in the emerging national character. In Central Asia and the Caucasus the young Soviet state began these campaigns as part of a wider struggle for a revolutionary transformation in the social, cultural and economic spheres of life. Despite their different political forms, all these regimes, be they communist or nationalist elites, were disposed against what they regarded as the reactionary forces of Islam and tradition (forces which they equated with each other and regarded as having coalesced). They wanted to create a new, modern woman — unveiled, educated, another element of the workforce.

Although campaigns against veiling were everywhere presented as emancipatory, state support for what were in practice authoritarian measures meant that the question became highly politicised.

The removal of the veil¹ was the battlefield on which the opposing sides under any of these regimes could attract mass support. For the secular elites the removal of the veil was a sign of modernity. For their adversaries it was a loss of cultural purity and integrity and a weakening of religious feelings, that is, the basis for opposition to European interference.

All the campaigns against veiling between the wars have been studied, but in most cases the analysis has been restricted within national boundaries. Even though the phenomena studied coincided remarkably in time, there has not been any inclination towards a comparative analysis of them nor many attempts to discover what was similar across these campaigns, and what was unique and confined to a particular regime.

Until the publication of the book which is reviewed here, so its editor claims, many questions remained unanswered. What did the removal of the veil actually mean? What was this new, emancipated woman supposed to look like? Is it correct to speak of the emergence of a pan-Islamic modernist gender discourse and counter-discourse? Did the appearance of nationalism share this pan-Islamic conceptualisation of the veil? How important was the circulation of ideas in the Islamic world anyway? What connection was there between these campaigns and changes in male attire? Who was for unveiling, and who against? What role did women's organisations play?

This book is an attempt to interpret these questions and others.

The book does indeed reveal similar significant elements for the understanding of the campaigns: in practically every case the first women to remove the veil from their faces were from socially, culturally and economically protected elites, whereas the followers of tradition belonged for the most part to the middle classes and the nouveaux riches. Moreover, the research published in the book shows that neither among upper-class modernists nor among the middle strata of society was there complete agreement about whether women should cover their faces or not: both sides were far from monolithic. Still, as Stephanie Cronin maintains, the critique of gender practices and the veiling of women's faces can be better understood if modernism itself is regarded as a project of the elite.

Islamic modernism, which asserted that the veiling of women was not a religious requirement, was an influential movement throughout the Muslim world. At the end of the nineteenth century a distinct and vigorous faction in favour of removing the veil appeared within this

¹ Here and elsewhere I use the general term 'veil', because in each of the countries described Muslim women's headgear had its own character and its own name. Where necessary in the text I shall use the native designation.

pan-Islamic reformist discourse. The Iranian, Turkish and Balkan variants of nationalist ideology began to promote this idea as a basis for the creation of a new national (as opposed to religious) identity. The new identity was based on the distinction between their own cultures and the wider Arab or Muslim world, and on the uniqueness and superiority of national cultures. These ideas were promoted together with a growing general religious scepticism and anti-clericalism. But there was another side to all this: refusal to wear the veil was treated as a rejection of the faith altogether, and was associated with godless women who had cut themselves off from religion, which had a negative connotation amongst a large part of those who were in favour of retaining the headscarf / hijab / niqab, etc. Thus, as Adib Khalid, a Tartar woman who had migrated to Central Asia, writes, those women who regarded themselves as agents of modernisation and were the first to refuse to wear headscarves were considered by the local population to be living 'outside Islam' [Khalid 1998: 228].

Whereas at the beginning discussing whether the veil should be removed or retained was for the most part a male prerogative, later on women's voices became more audible and more significant in answering the question; women's social movements and organisations appeared, as did media outlets run exclusively by women. In this way women's voices, sounding louder than ever before, turned them from the objects of modernist transformation to active participants in the process. It is interesting that it was not only the discourse about the necessity of the female headscarf that was transformed, but also the actual practices of wearing it, which changed women's clothing as a whole. For example, European influence on the upper-class women of Istanbul gave rise to a fashion of wearing a token transparent chiffon scarf, which was taken up a few years later by the inhabitants of other large cities in the Islamic world, such as Cairo. It is more important here that this fashion arose without the approval of the male half of society, as a result of independent behaviour on the part of women. One cannot help remarking that in response to this fashion some women in Ottoman cities started to cover themselves up even more, wearing even thicker, more opaque headscarves. At the same time the actual strategies of veiling changed: from a complete cover-up to complete unveiling, depending not only on the class to which women belonged, but also on their circumstances and on the external environment in which they found themselves. Thus the same Uzbek women who veiled themselves in Tashkent could unveil themselves in Moscow, and the schoolgirls of Teheran could cover themselves up outside and go bareheaded at school.

Even though women had become independent participants in the modernising processes of the early twentieth century, the campaigns against veiling continued to rely on the role of men and the patriarchal

family, which still reigned at that time. In this connection most campaigns were aimed at changing the consciousness of men and even their outward appearance, at doing away with any symbols of 'backwardness'. In all the cases studied, it was only in the USSR that there was no attempt to transform the outward appearance of men in order to ensure that women would comply with the policy of rejecting the veil. This was one of the basic elements of difference between the Soviet regime and the nationalist regimes studied.

Not only did the rejection of veiling serve the emergence of women from isolation and their legal emancipation, the tradition of going about with the head veiled was criticised from a medical point of view as hindering the production of vitamin D and engaging in physical exercise [Afary 2009: 142–73]. Furthermore, unveiling was also connected with another highly problematic gender discourse — the prevalence of homosexuality. It was considered that women who had removed the veil and a society in which they had equal rights resulted not only in enlightened wives and mothers, but also exclusively heterosexual men, who would therefore enter into equal marriages, and which would thus be a foundation for the new society [Najmabadi 2005: 146–50; Afary 2009].

Depending on the country, changes relating to veiling initiated by women themselves took the form of a more or less formulated state policy. As well as making ideological attacks on the veiling of women, the state gave all kinds of support to women who had removed their headscarves or veils or at least adopted a less concealing form of everyday headgear. Over time these campaigns became focused government policy. At the same time (although some earlier studies say the opposite) these state campaigns never led to a legal prohibition of veiling, not in Turkey, not in Afghanistan, not even in the Soviet Union or Iran. There was legislative prohibition only in the Balkans. The other regimes fell back on administrative measures and aggressive propaganda against veiling. It is notable that in the Soviet Union, despite a letter to the Soviet government from several radical activists of the women's section in 1927 which demanded that veiling should be legally prohibited, it was refused on the grounds that the removal of the veil must always be voluntary [Kamp 2006: 157].

Thus Kathryn Libal in her article on Turkey describes how Atatürk's government used magazines, newspapers, photographs and other publications to make society accept the modern unveiled Turkish woman. Marianne Kamp's article on the women of Central Asia recounts how the collective removal of headscarves by the members of the delegation of the women of Turkestan at the Comintern meeting in Moscow in 1921 was greeted with a storm of applause and tears of joy from those present. It must be said that, whereas in other countries unveiling took place in the context of a reassessment

of religious taboos, the distinctive feature of this demonstration in Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus was its clear anticlerical and even anti-religious slant.

In the introduction to the volume there is a detailed reflection on current debates about veiling. The editor convincingly demonstrates the depth to which the roots of this question descend, both in historical and especially in social terms. Stephanie Cronin concludes her introductory article with an attempt to elicit new questions from her readers and researchers: to what extent the female tradition of wearing the veil is comparable with the binding of feet in China or FGM in Africa.

The articles in this volume give an insight not only into gender-related changes or the politics of dress, as it is called in the title, but also into the overall character of the regimes studied, into the methods of social change and their key agents. All the works are distinguished by an understanding of the connection between veiling and the inculcation of a new ideology, and of the necessity of including such analytical categories as 'class' and 'historical context'.

The book is divided into four parts according to the geography of the regimes studied. The first part consists of three articles on Atatürk's Turkey. Kathryn Libal's article 'From the face veil to cloche hat: The backward Ottoman v. modern Turkish woman in urban public discourse' demonstrates how the discussion of what a woman in modern Turkey should be like unfolded through the opposition of this image to that of the veiled woman. The author describes the dynamic dialogue between the centralised state, the local authorities and Turkish society in their attempts to change and control women's behaviour and women's clothes. Kathryn Libal shows convincingly that the then new technology of printed periodicals distributed the iconic image of a woman in a neat little hat, and how these mechanisms of propaganda operated. The visual representations of beauty queens, female members of parliament, female doctors, school-mistresses and even mothers which were distributed everywhere made women the central subject of the emergence of the Turkish national state. Veiled women from the working-class and poorer sections of Turkish society were disapproved of as backward, but not hopelessly so: all hope was placed in the influence of the corrective force of education. The author's analysis through the perspective of orientalism and taking into account the class situation of Turkish society definitely deserves the attention not only of historians and researchers into gender, but also of sociologists of inequality, and will be no less interesting to specialists in visual anthropology.

Kathryn Libal's theme is continued in Sevgi Adak's article 'Anti-Veiling Campaigns and Local Elites in Turkey of the 1930s', with the accent on the role of local, or as they are now called in Russia

municipal elites (or officials). Her research has led to the unexpected conclusion that it was the local elites who were the most active agents in putting the ideology of the central Turkish government into practice, and who determined the forms that these campaigns should take in the absence of any consistent official instructions. This in turn allowed society and the authorities to negotiate and to reach mutually acceptable compromises. This meant that there could be considerable differences in the dress codes for women (as indeed in the progress of the modernisation project) in different parts of Turkey as it dynamically modernised itself in the 1930s. Nor has the author ignored the gender aspect of the campaigns: the role of women in their advancement and that of men in their obstruction. An extremely relativist approach to the analysis means that the article is full of useful details, but complicates the drawing of generalisations and conclusions.

The approach of the third article on Turkey to Atatürk's policies is not a standard one. It casts doubt on 'modernisation from above', and gives pride of place to everyday life and the reception of Atatürk's modernist reforms at street level, in particular the campaign against veiling. Murat Metinsoy examines the opposition to such campaigns at the everyday level and indicates the flexibility and relativism of Turkish secularism at that time. He uncovers three important aspects which other researchers do not touch on: first, the negative perception of the transformations by ordinary people, their everyday resistance and selective adaptation to the reforms in practice; second, in contradistinction to the cultural perspective, he examines the socio-economic, gender and psychological foundations of public dissatisfaction with secularist reforms; and third, he stresses the influence of social control by neighbours and local communities, which, he affirms, is far more significant than state control.

The second part of the book, about Iran and Afghanistan, also consists of three articles. Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi and Afshin Matin-Asgari conduct a comparative analysis of the campaigns to encourage the wearing of the open hijab (*kashf-i hijab*) in Iran and similar campaigns in Turkey. According to their conclusions, a more detailed analysis of the historical sources shows that these campaigns were more similar than had previously been supposed. Their main aim has been to reassess certain opinions on certain aspects of these campaigns that are common in Iranian historiography, for example that the open hijab had been categorically rejected in a fatwa of Reza Shah's most authoritative clerics; they draw the ironical conclusion that current policies on female apparel in Iran are to a significant extent a repetition of the policy of 'the uncovered female face' of the 1930s. In their examination of the practice of wearing the hijab and niqab in Iran before the 1930s the authors make what is in my opinion a significant observation: the difficulty in making a clear distinction

between local customs in wearing the hijab and niqab and the adherence to religious norms is complicated by the fact that the 'Islamic hijab' is itself the object of differing legal interpretations and always embodies this duality, if not plurality. Although the authors have made use of a large quantity of historical sources, their analysis gives the impression of one-sidedness, being founded for the most part on official documentation, and largely ignoring sources of other kinds which could have been useful in elucidating the question.

The article 'Dressing up (or down): Veils, Hats, and Consumer Fashions in Interwar Iran' by Professor Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet of the University of Pennsylvania deals with another interesting question: what economic and consumer opportunities arose from the dictates of the new dress policy. The author examines how changing women's fashions changed light industry in Iran, the practices and geography of purchasing, and the overall consumer culture, and also stimulated the emergence of new professions and everyday habits among women. Even though the campaign against veiling divided Iran, it produced new commercial opportunities which gave both women and men a certain freedom of choice and influenced their entrepreneurial capacities. The law promulgated on 8 January 1936 'On the Removal of the Veil', and Reza Shah's proclamation of 'Women's Freedom Day' were the culmination of a process of cultural change initiated from below that had been going on for decades, in which people's outward appearance had been regarded by the authorities as an instrument of public manipulation and control. The author concludes that despite a strict and sometimes confused dress code between the wars, Iranians managed to express themselves in an individual style of dress and found various commercial means of doing so.

The third article in this section is about Afghanistan. Thomas Wide discusses the clothing economy during the reign of the reformer Amanullah Khan, that is, from 1919 to 1929. The author's holistic approach allows him to avoid making a fetish of the female veil and assess the practices of both men and women concerning clothing equally, and to examine the reforms in their relationship with changes in class structure and continuity with previous cultural policies. In his description of the interrelationship between public ideology and people's actual practice, Thomas Wide aims to show that women were never captives with absolutely no voice in their own society, as they tend to be regarded from today's perspective. An enthusiasm for British India, by which the reforming Amir's predecessors had already been moved, had led to a gradual transformation not only of clothing, but of the whole culture of the body, thanks to gym instructors brought in from India and to the spread of a new form of sport — football. Besides, the building of roads, followed by the appearance of motor cars and motorcycles, the acquisition of

personal sewing machines, and the popularity of photography led to a practice of a more careful selection of apparel for the perpetuation of one's image in the precious frame (not unlike the present culture of the selfie, perhaps?). All this led to a gradual cultural transformation which Amanullah Khan multiplied a hundredfold, until he finally fell victim to his own reforms. The author concludes that whereas women's clothing was the object and subject of an ideological struggle, the transformation of men's clothing was more practical in character in adapting itself to the technical changes in everyday life.

The third part of the book is devoted to Central Asia and the Caucasus, but consists only of a single article, by Marianne Kamp, who examines state campaigns against the paranja and hijab in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Questioning the common approach to Central Asian history that opposes state and society and understands the state as the colonial policy of the Soviet centre and society as the homogeneous object of this colonialism without any influence over its own fate, the author attempts on the one hand to demonstrate the heterogeneity of society and on the other to clarify the initiatory role of women as agents of these campaigns and their central actors. In this sense Marianne Kamp is engaged in a polemic with Douglas Northrop's well-known book *Veiled Empire* [Northrop 2004], in which the campaign to remove the veil in Uzbekistan is seen as a colonial import, for which reason it was violently rejected by society (meaning only its male part). The author also chooses a polemical model of narrative in her examination of the history of Azerbaijan, this time attacking Gülzar İbrahimova's idea that any policy concerning the women of Azerbaijan was an expression of the totalitarianism of the Communist Party and was imposed upon both women and men against their will [İbrahimova 2009]. Thus she shows that both Uzbek and Azeri women had begun to remove the veil before the Communist Party started its campaign. But when the state supported this women's movement, it undoubtedly changed both its significance and its symbols, and became an element of the socialist struggle. Moreover, Central Asian women tried to initiate a much more rigorous dress policy, demanding legal prohibitions, which was further than the Soviet government was prepared to go. At the same time, even though the authorities were relying on men as their agents in changing women's clothing, the husbands and fathers of women who had dared to remove the paranja often dealt with them very severely, thus expressing their own position that both women and their clothing ought to be under the control of their menfolk and not of the party.

The last part of the book deals with the transformation of Islam in the Balkans. Nathalie Clayer's article 'Behind The Veil: The Reform of Islam in Inter-War Albania or the Search for a "Modern" and "European" Islam' tells how Islamic clerics in Muslim, or rather

multi-faith Albania co-operated with the government to combat the communist ideas which were so attractive to young people at that period. The clerics were also used to propagate the young state's enlightened and nationalist ideas through their sermons. It must be said that this co-operation was mutually beneficial and served as a sort of protection for the religious leaders of Albania, who enjoyed the support of the authorities. However, the reform of Islam also included the suppression of sharia courts and the recognition of certain Sufi brotherhoods, who were supported by the Albanian nationalists as the most liberal form of Islam. At the same time the prohibition of veiling for women gradually gathered strength. Up to 1929 attempts to prohibit it had been no more than resolutions passed by intellectuals or politicians at various political events, but in that year Behxhet Shapati, the new head of the Islamic community, demanded that the Ministry of Justice should prohibit the *perçe*, the veil used by Albanian Muslim women. In the years that followed the authorities intensified these measures by means of propaganda and administrative steps. Constant debates on this issue led to a complete ban on the veil in 1937. The author's analysis stresses the discussion around the question of veiling and its participants, distinguishing among them between secular intellectuals, government representatives and Muslim clerics, among whom she further distinguishes the ulema. Noting that a reference to 'Europe' as an attractive variant of the 'way of development' is common to them all, Nathalie Clayer examines in detail the specifics of this reference in each case.

Finally, the last article, by Mary Neuberger, recounts how a search for 'Bulgarianness' in a newly reconstituted multi-ethnic Bulgaria after the dissolution of the empire led to propaganda against the veil. Even though Muslims were a minority and lived mostly in the countryside, such campaigns were mounted in that country both at the beginning of the century and throughout the Soviet period, first as a means of homogenising the population, and afterwards as part of the struggle against backwardness. Ethnographic research, initiated by the government, which denied the tradition of wearing the veil, movements inspired by Atatürk inside the Turkish minority, and later the communist authorities' attempts to absorb the Muslims, and 'the most vulnerable element of Bulgarian society', Muslim women, within their ranks are all described in detail in this final article. Nevertheless, this article is the weakest in terms of its analysis of these campaigns, perhaps because of the specific nature of the country it deals with.

All in all, the book will be of interest not only to historians and anthropologists of the Muslim world, nor only to researchers into gender studies, but to other social scientists as well: it is so full of unexpected perspectives and non-trivial questions that it unquestionably develops the professional imagination. However, the unequal

attention bestowed on the various territories under consideration (not to mention the fact that a full picture would have needed the story of Egypt and Syria — and it would have been interesting to analyse the Soviet Volga littoral as well) leaves an unfinished impression. Besides, the comparative analysis announced in the introduction and seemingly called for by the very material is by no means present in every article, which is a reason for a certain amount of dissatisfaction, but does make one think and make one's own comparisons. Furthermore, a separate article on the mutual influence of the countries studied on each other's policies would have been appropriate. Some of the authors have touched on this in passing, but no complete and comprehensible picture has been drawn, and the early twentieth-century Muslim world remains a scattered mosaic that it is left to the reader's imagination to put together.

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