



## **The Discursive Politics of Women's Clothing in Iran at Revolutionary Transition Era (1979-1981)**

**Seyedeh Razieh Yasini<sup>1</sup>, Mahdi Montazer Ghaem<sup>2</sup> and Abdollah Bicharanlou<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Research Institute of Culture, Art and Communication, Tehran, Iran. P. O. Box: 14155-6619*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Communication, the University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. P. O. Box: 14395-773*

### **ABSTRACT**

This research is based on descriptive-analytical study on the changes of aesthetic standards of Iranian women's clothing following the discursive politics during the revolutionary transition era (1979-1981). Until the Islamic revolution, women's clothing was one of the most controversial politico-cultural issues for decades. The harsh policies of the Pahlavi regime for women's emancipation and unveiling was opposed by the emotional resistance of religious leaders and their traditionalist followers. Based on social constructionist discourse analysis, this article investigates the aesthetic styles of women's clothing during turbulent era and examines the discursive practices of various dominant and competing groups and ideologies. Laclau and Mouffe discourse analysis method is used to analyse the polemics and practices carried out by all competing classes and ideological discourses that resulted in the domination of hijab at a national level. The dominant revolutionary discourse opposed the symbolic power of modernity, freedom, and rationality represented by western fashion and replaced a symbolic force of morality, chastity, and conceitedness. This symbolic power has since remained alive although contested in a variety of forms due to social and cultural changes. Although the form of Iranian women's clothing after 1979 revolution remained a religious code, the aesthetics of woman's clothing is still influenced by numerous cultural,

social, economic, and political factors. The post-revolution discursive politics led to the homogenisation of women's clothing in Iran denying the differences between clothing cultures.

### **ARTICLE INFO**

#### *Article history:*

Received: 18 October 2017

Accepted: 01 February 2018

#### *E-mail addresses:*

[raziehyasini@yahoo.com](mailto:raziehyasini@yahoo.com) (Seyedeh Razieh Yasini)

[mmontazer@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mmontazer@ut.ac.ir) (Mahdi Montazer Ghaem)

[bikaranlou@ut.ac.ir](mailto:bikaranlou@ut.ac.ir) (Abdollah Bicharanlou)

\* Corresponding author

*Keywords:* Discursive politics, Iran, revolutionary transition era, women clothing



## INTRODUCTION

It is important to know how dominant discourses in every period in the Iranian history have dealt with the issue of women's clothing - whether the governments decide to take a stance or not - as it has made a significant difference on the aesthetics of Iranian women's clothing. It is noteworthy how, in different epochs, politics and the state can effectively influence cultural attitudes and the culture of women's clothing in both social and cultural systems and subsystems. Various aspects of culture (such as clothing) are tremendously influenced by the discourses and ideologies championed by governments. This role is better understood during regime changes, especially those cases fuelled by a mixture of cultural as well as political revolutionary motives. Such a study can open a window towards understanding the interrelationships between culture and politics by discovering the structuration and domination phases of a competing discourse.

Clothing is an important sign of cultural identity: 'Important indicators of cultural identity include popular rituals and ceremonies, festivals, eves, traditional values, clothes and dressing, architecture of buildings and places, customs, and national and local art' (Varjavand, 1999 [1378]). Also, in creating one's social identity, clothes play the same role as they do in creating one's personal identity: 'In many settings of pre-modern cultures, appearance was largely standardised in terms of traditional criteria. Modes of facial adornment or dress, for example, have always been, to some degree,

a means of individualisation; yet the extent to which this was either possible or desired was usually quite limited. Appearance primarily designated social identity rather than personal identity. Dress and social identity have certainly not become entirely dissociated today and dress remains a signalling device of gender, class position, and occupational status (Giddens, 1991).

Having been populated by various ethnicities, Iran is a multicultural society which has left its mark on the aesthetics and function of women's clothing. 'The way the Kurdish women in Khorasan (Kurmanj Kurds) dress and choose their clothes' colour differs based on a number of factors such as the clan, age, and the presence (or absence) of a husband. A yellow skirt accompanied by a simple purple scarf, for example, indicates a virgin, while a scarlet skirt with striped margins and also a chador (Islamic covering) worn in a specific manner are signs that the woman in question has recently lost her husband' (Papoli-Yazdi, 2002). 'While having aesthetic attributes, the way Qashqai women dress relays some information about their age and personal and tribal status. Young mothers and wives wear clothes of vivid, light colours. However, they can now dress clothes in red or any colour of their choice with some design on them. Old women wear dress in black and grey' (Amirmoez, 2002).

Considering the religious, cultural, geographical, and ethnic characteristics of Iran, power centres and discursive signifiers have had a considerable influence on the changes of women's clothing in the



discursive fields attended by this essay. Whereas the discourse of the Pahlavi regime revolved around modernity, the Islamic revolution focused on religious fundamentalism, and they both influenced women's clothing, which has always been subject to the ruling power. While the former placed a woman unshackled from the binds of religion in the centre of its discourse, the latter introduced an ideal Muslim woman at the central point of the Islamic revolution's discourse. According to Moghadam, gender relations play a pivotal role in culture, idealism, politics, and revolutionary societies, and the 'ideal society', as it were, implicates the notion of the 'ideal woman' (Foran, 1997). To counter the Pahlavi discourse, the revolutionary discourse during the transition phase (the 1979-1981 Period) tried to formulate in its meta-discourse the features of the ideal Muslim woman, while going to lengths to once again promote the Islamic covering for women. Thus, a special form of clothes with a specific aesthetics was introduced for the revolutionary Muslim woman. This paper aims to examine this type of aesthetics in contrast to the one prevalent during the Pahlavi period, and determine its characteristics within the scope of the Islamic revolution discourse during its Transition Phase.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article aesthetically analyses women's clothing according to the concept of discourse and its aesthetic function. Discourse 'is a language or system of

representation socially and politically developed to produce and distribute a coherent set of meanings about a critical subject; these meanings serve a part of society where the discourse originates and makes attempt to turn these meanings into the common sense through its ideological function' (Mehdizadeh, 2005 [1384]). In the 1970s and 1980s, the concept was introduced, according to Foucault's ideas, as a place where power and knowledge meet. Discourse analysis includes 'a set of analytic techniques applied to uncover the patterns of understanding, beliefs, values and the structure of faith embedded in a discourse. It is an interdisciplinary field comprised of grammar, text analysis, cultural, and semantic studies' (Connell & Galasinski, 1996).

Discourse in this paper is the analysis of thought systems in lingual forms (MacDonell, 1986) viewed from a critical vantage where power and ideology are dealt with as elements that go beyond the text. As Macdonell says, 'All discourses are ideologically positioned; none are neutral'. 'Critical discourse analysis, as a qualitative methodology, studies language as a social action in relation to ideology, power, history, and society at the level of both written and spoken text' (Agha-golzadeh, 2006 [1385]).

This paper seeks to analyse multiple discourses on women's clothing in a specific period. According to Laclau and Mouffe's theory, critical discourse analysis has a post-structural viewpoint, which 'speaks of multiplicity of discourses and, more specifically, of tensions and discursive



contradictions within the texts. As a matter of fact, we no longer have a homogeneous text written based on a single discourse aimed at a homogeneous audience which produces a homogeneous response. The text itself is fraught with contradictions. This is where discourses are in tension and interaction. These are the nodes of which Laclau and Mouffe speak as 'places where discourses relate to each other' (Moghadami, 2012 [1390]).

According to Foucault, power is the main player in the field of discourse distributed across society, and the most general sense in which power is productive for Foucault is through knowledge. Knowledge, especially the social sciences, is closely implicated in the production of docile bodies and subjected minds. 'Discourses' is the term Foucault uses for these systems of quasi-scientific knowledge. Knowledge as discourse is not knowledge of the 'real' world as it exists prior to that knowledge. Although it presents itself as representing objective reality, in fact, discourses construct and make 'real' the objects of knowledge they 'represent'. Knowledge is distinguished from other ways of apprehending the world and considered to be 'knowledge' of the objective world, because it is supported by practices of power. As Foucault sees it, knowledge involves statements uttered in institutional sites in which it is gained according to certain rules and procedures, by speakers who are authorised to say what counts as 'truth' in that particular context (Nash, 2010).

This paper considers the feminine body and, therefore, feminine clothes as the central signifier of the ruling discourse and/or rival sub-discourses in the discursive field. The prevalent signifiers put forth in the body of the discourses of the period are as follows: freedom, women's rights, chastity, identity, feminine beauty, etc., each defined differently from the perspective of various discourses to reach different discursive meanings for women's clothing that would ultimately exclude other definitions provided by rival discourses for these signifiers. Articulating the central and prevalent signifiers around the subject of dress in the discourses of both Pahlavi and the Islamic Revolution, accompanied by an analysis of the subject in the light of the discursive practices of the two fields, will lead us to determine how the aesthetics of women's clothing was influenced by the definition of this central signifier by these discourses.

As this paper seeks to discover the discursive aesthetics of women's clothing in different periods and communities, it makes use of the sociological approach as well. [This is because] sociology places immense importance for the aesthetics of clothes. In Veblen's analysis, then, are the foundations of an approach that interprets fashion goods as aesthetically inscribed resources, collectively consumed by individuals whose primary rationale for purchasing particular ranges and types of garments is their use in the articulation of shared lifestyle statements (Bennet, 2005). Thus, in analysing women's clothing during the Transition Phase of



the Islamic Revolution, theoretical and sociological aesthetic concepts act as the basis of our analysis and are made use of in our quest for effective discursive factors in these fields.

### Methodology

The present study relies on the discourse analysis method, which is a popular qualitative method in various fields, due to its multidisciplinary character. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis suggests rather plainly how we might construct linguistics for the next century, which, in addition to its pervasively critical and explanatory focus, would require interdisciplinarity as a central principle, without, however, compromising in any way the central capacity to describe (Fairclough, 1980). The study seeks to recognise the aesthetic changes of women's clothing before and after the Islamic Revolution and the way they appear in the society. Accordingly, the critical discourse analysis method is selected due to its practical advantages in the subject matter. Laclau and Mouffe extended the critical discourse analysis from linguistics to politics and social sciences and used it as a powerful means of their social analyses. This type of discourse analysis emphasises the role of power and ideology and aims to reveal the hidden relationships between the power and the ideological processes in the lingual texts that study the social applications of the language.

Discourse is a historical phenomenon; thus, in this article, the aesthetics of women's clothing in the transient revolutionary period

is compared to the aesthetics of the women's clothing in the preceding Pahlavi discourse. By identifying the discursive elements of the mentioned discourses and analysing the discourse of each period regarding clothing, the effect of the discursive elements and the type of their application to form and aesthetics of clothing are recognised as the central core of each discourse, and the results, including types of women's clothing in each period, are explained.

The context of studying the type and aesthetics of women's clothing in each one of the aforementioned periods is the study of texts about the Iranian women's clothing in the subject periods, including 'textual' and 'visual' documents, and putting them into qualitative analysis. The print texts like 'news, speeches, interviews, and compilations'; 'pictures and magazine images' are regarded as the visual media sources, which prepare the ground for interpretation of the aesthetical cores of the aesthetics of women's clothing through pictures. Thus, beside special women magazines, all the issues of "Ettelat" and "Keyhan" newspapers—which were the main newspapers published in Iran during the mentioned era—were studied.

### Dominant (Hegemonic) and Rival Discourses during the Revolutionary Transition Era about Women's Dressing

The 1979 revolution brought about a tremendous evolution in the Iranian society. One of its consequences was the changes in the rules of women's dressing and the aesthetics of their clothes on a religious



basis. One of the reasons for this was the widespread and effective participation of women in the Islamic Revolution. During the formation of this revolution, women formed a large group of protesters (fighters) against the Pahlavi regime, but not all of them had religious attitudes. Nevertheless, the clothing and dressing of these women were distanced from the patterns of women's clothing during the Pahlavi era, influenced by the religious spirit of the revolutionary period. However, as far as the Pahlavi's discourse and the Islamic Revolution's discourse are concerned, the influence of non-Iranian culture on women's clothing continued to be observed. Yet, it was a phenomenon strengthened by the dominant discourse of the Pahlavi regime, and discarded and marginalised by the discourse of the Islamic Revolution.

According to research on women's performance and position in the world revolutions, 'gender relations have tremendous contribution in revolutionary cultures, idealism, politics, and societies'. Hana Papanek maintains that the construction of the 'ideal society' entails a notion of the 'ideal woman (Foran, 1997). In the meantime, and after the revolution, a system of language was formed that, on the one hand, was developing the values, and on the other hand, was a combination of Islamic values due to its religious background. To understand this system of obviously ideological language and its functions in the case of women's clothing, the social texture of this system during the revolutionary

period of 1979, 1980, and 1981 should be taken into consideration.

The integration of politics and religion (government and religion) is the result of the new perception of the founder of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, of the way of governance which was presented in the theory of 'absolute authority of the jurisprudence', brought about a great transformation in the history of Iranian governance and, as the theoretical basis of dominant discourse, redefined various social, cultural, economic, legal, judicial, administrative, and military relations of Iran, leading to the emergence of a new legal juristic political discourse that affected the issue of women's clothing.

In the early months after the victory, the late leader of the revolution expressed clearly his opinion about the type of covering - and not the women's clothing - that eventually led to the determination of a structure for women's clothing in the society. Before the revolution, in an answer to a question about women's rights after the victory of the revolution, he said that 'the Muslim women have chosen to wear Chador because of the Islamic education. In the future, women will be free to decide on this; we will only ban the fripperies' (Imam Khomeini, 1979a). His apparent position at the beginning of the victory of the revolution on the need to observe the Islamic limits as far as the women's clothing is concerned led, after much ups and downs, to the 'revolutionary state bureaucracy' on this issue, and various perceptions of 'Islamic Modest Dress'.



At the same time, popular and political groups were engaged in producing different discourses on this issue.

During the transition period of the revolution, 'being revolutionary', in the sense of denying past beliefs, was one of the most important paradigms of the Islamic Revolutionary Dialogue. In the important paradigm of being revolutionary in Iran in 1979, in addition to the proactive and thought-minded features that existed to establish this characteristic in individuals, some lifestyle characteristics were also considered effective to bring revolutionary appearance to one's face, including the aesthetics of clothing as the closest object to the body of women and men that had undergone tremendous development in these years.

At that time, the type of dress was an indication of the identity of a person as a revolutionary; therefore, many Iranian women who contributed to the formation of the revolution and its victory, as well as the women who followed it after the victory, tended to show their revolutionary identity through choosing a special type of dress. The Islamic Revolution had just come to a victory; thus, there was no chance for systematisation of the various aspects emerging from the revolution and the formation of political-cultural discourse. Therefore, it cannot be said that the women's revolutionary dress was part of the discourse of the revolution, but more should be acknowledged that this kind of dress was naturally tied with the intellectual foundations of the revolution expressed by

its leaders and rooted in Islamic beliefs that were also worn by religious women before the victory of the revolution. But these clothes - including Chador - were subject to structural changes in the context of the events of the revolution and in accordance with its necessities. On the one hand, the unanimous rise of most Iranian people, in conjunction with the revolution, created social conditions that made people in Iran lack any social class, except the supporters of the Pahlavi regime. Consequently, the revolutionary style had come to be enjoyed by all, a manifestation of which was in the form of women's clothing. This was a kind of dressing that, combined with a comfortable and loose coat and a scarf, was a manifestation of feminine simple lifestyle and fighting spirit, even though jeans were seen among them.

Of course, these particular conditions were related to the first months after the victory of the revolution. The statement of the leader of the revolution was the beginning of a discourse on the coverage of body by the women and 'revolutionary dress of Muslim women', which gradually distinguished it from other women's revolutionary dresses, which did not necessarily adhered to the religious limits [of Hijab]. The basic principle in this discourse was the obligation of women to observe the limits [of Hijab]. Of course, the traditional religious class also had a special interest in the Chador as a Muslim woman's modest dress.

Women are considered key human elements in the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Through reviewing



developments related to the type of women's clothing after the Islamic Revolution, as well as some attitudes of the legislative institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the status of women and men, Moghadam noted that 'the signal importance of the woman question to the Islamist revolutionaries and state-builders and in particular the significance of veiling has been widely discussed in the (expatriate) literature on Iranian women.' Afsaneh Najmabadi, for example, has discussed an editorial that appeared in a 1984 issue of *Zan-e Rouz* (Today's Women), which described the veil as 'a shield that protects [woman] against conspiracies aimed at her humanity, honour, and chastity', as well as the means to protect Islam from cultural imperialism. The editorial maintains that the revolution 'transformed everyone, all personalities, all relations, and all values' and that 'woman was transformed in this society so that a revolution could occur.' Other publications of the Islamic Republic and speeches by its leaders indicate the importance of the family unit, and the links between veiling and family values: 'hijab is a spiritual bulwark around the family which protects it against degeneration' (45), and 'the family is the basic unit of the society and plays a crucial role in prosperity, public morals, and education of new generations, as well as social integration and social stability' (Foran, 1997).

Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the non-observance of the Islamic modest dress (Islamic hijab) is against religion and law

and a disrupting factor for social affairs. As a matter of fact, he referred to this issue many years before the revolution's victory. In 1962, in a critical review of the situation of that time, he said: 'The uprising that took virtuous women's headscarves was an uprising for personal gain; and now this matter which is contrary to religion and law is ongoing in the country' (Khomeini, 2000 [1379]b).

He considered the lack of faith in the principle of hijab contrary to the laws of Islam and contrary to the principle of the right to freedom and said: 'Is it possible for a person to be a Muslim, and on the other hand, be agree with not wearing hijab? ... Says you are free, but you should go to schools without Chador or scarf; is this freedom?' (Ibid).

Ayatollah Khomeini also did not know the Chador as the sole Islamic modest dress and did not consider any obligation to use Chador: 'The Islamic modest dress means observing the limits [of Sharia' (religion)] and wearing simple dresses..., not necessarily Chador' (Ibid).

Another key point is that Ayatollah Khomeini's approach to the issue of Islamic modest dress was positive through inviting women to observe this kind of covering, not a negative approach: 'Hijab ... does not oppose the freedom of [women] ... and we invite them to observe the Islamic hijab' (Ibid).

Although he also adhered to observing the regulatory rules in this regard: 'the Islamic ministry is a place where no sin



should be committed. Women can go to the Islamic ministries ..., but they should wear hijab' (Ibid. V. 6).

Currently, the main challenge in respecting the scope of Islamic modest dress (hijab) was for the freedom of women. Thus, several clergies expressed their views and announced that the purpose of the invitation to wear hijab is not the social isolation of women, and women will enjoy all legitimate benefits and social rights. As a result, Ayatollah Khomeini focused his attention on the type of women's clothing, not their social activity. He said 'there is no obstacle to women's working ... but they should observe the limits of Islamic hijab' (Ibid).

Contrary to the view that the type of women's clothing during protesting against the Pahlavi regime was Islamic, and it is therefore necessary to observe the Islamic hijab, some others believed that the use of Islamic modest dress by a group of women in the Pahlavi anti-regime marches was symbolic and remonstrative, and had nothing to do with their religious beliefs. 'The street march involved a huge number of women who came to the streets while wearing hijab as a sign of opposition to the bourgeoisie or the Pahlavi westernised decadence. Many women who used hijab as protest did not expect the hijab to become mandatory' (Moghadam, 1995). From this perspective, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, this kind of covering (cloth) has lost its symbolic function and could have been replaced by any other clothing.

Prior to this, Ali Shariati expressed his view of Islamic hijab as a symbolic matter and appreciated it. He said: 'Hijab belongs to a generation of consciousness who returns to Islamic modest dress; a generation that wants to say 'no' to western colonialism and European culture ... This person who consciously chooses the Islamic modest dress or hijab ... is a representation of a specific culture, a particular school, a particular intellectual party, a particular wing, and a particular front' (Shariati, 2012).

After expressing the position of the dominant discourse on the type of women's clothing (hijab) in 1979, the minority spectrum among government officials as well as the religious intellectual spectrum, with an emphasis on 'no compulsion in religion', emphasised the modesty in both men and women's behaviour. Pro-revolutionary thinkers took positions and contributed to the formation of this discourse through sharing their interpretations of the words of Ayatollah Khomeini. They emphasised the correction of the appearance and inside of the government offices simultaneously and considered the observance of Islamic hijab as a change in the appearance.

In deepening this discourse, conferences were held in Tehran with the presence of pro-active Muslim women, and the speakers of these conferences sought to formulate principles for the realisation of Islamic modest dress (hijab), which guaranteed the goals of the revolution in this regard and, at the same time, protected women's rights. In addition, the production



of literature focusing on Islamic modest dress in the press, including the publication of the 'Ettelaat Banovan'<sup>1</sup>, which was a weekly magazine focusing on women's issues, was also aimed at strengthening this discourse.

### **The Practices of the Dominant Discourse during the Revolutionary Transition to Establish the Signifying Islamic Dress Code for Women**

Given that the social developments in Iran are the outcome of two hegemonic discourses of traditionalism and modernity, it can be inferred that the traditionalist discourse deemed the obligation of Islamic dress code as the demand of the Islamic Revolution, and interfered with women's choice of clothes, while the modernist discourse emerged as the opposing one.

The dominant discourse openly announced their stance regarding the female dress code, but the differentiation between the pros and cons took a while to build up. Those women, who did not embrace the Islamic dress code, marched in February 1979 to voice their dissent. Later, similar demonstrations were spotted in smaller scales, which were occasionally suppressed by the supporters of the Islamic dress code. Ayatollah Khomeini declared his opposition to disoblige women who did not wear the hijab, as did some other clerics, and even the then-attorney-general of Tehran said that in

case of any insult to the women, the violator would face punitive acts.

Seculars and religious leftists also declared their stands in this regard. The Marxist organisation called *Peykar* held a rather moderate ground and stated that the majority splinter of the People's Mujahedin of Iran guerrillas would condemn the restraint of women's social and legal rights, and would stand against any set of beliefs that degrades women to mere 'dolls'. Their minority splinter as well condemned the compulsory Islamic hijab. The Tudeh Party, too, had a moderate stand. The Women's Party of Iran and the Laborers' Party of Iran expressed opposition to the demonstrations held against the compulsory Islamic dress code. *Rahaaaii-ye Zan* Community was against the compulsion of the Islamic dress code. It goes without saying that in the years 1979-1980, in the heat of the revolutionary atmosphere, leftist and nationalist parties were all about fighting the Arrogance (referring to the capitalism led by the United States and the Pahlavi Dynasty), and all other phenomena were defined for them within that context. Thus, the issues of Islamic dress code and woman's rights were considered functions of this principle, and communities and parties took it into consideration, along with their interests, when taking positions. This was how female leftists accepted the Islamic dress code against their absence of religious beliefs, as they saw it as a symbol of opposition to the concept of the ideal woman in the west. Educated intellectual females, too, took it as

<sup>1</sup>It means 'women information'



the symbol of a revolution against the status quo and the undesirable rule of the Pahlavi, and they accepted it even though they were not religious.

Meanwhile, most people and Islamic parties and communities, who saw the practice of Islamic rules as the cause of their revolution, not only had already accepted the observation of Islamic dress code for women, but also demanded that this law should be put into practice. Religious traditionalist revolutionary people held peaceful rallies and issued statements and resolutions to further stress the importance of observing the Islamic dress code as the fortress of battle and the barrier of virtue. The discourse also used revolutionary press to propagate the Islamic hijab through literature and poetry.

After the official establishment of the rule of the Islamic Republic in April 1979, the efforts made to establish the traditionalist discourse on women's clothes grew more rigid. The revolutionary press started producing articles and graphics, publishing summons to call people to the rallies, and reciting the resolutions issued in the rallies.

The solemn demand of the Revolution about the necessity of observing the Islamic dress code by the women was further established in July 1980, following the command of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to the government demanding the Islamisation of offices and organisations. As an answer, the announcement approved by the Revolutionary Council, which banned women without Islamic hijab from entering offices, was dispatched, and measures were taken and announced by the Revolutionary Attorney-General. Also, the government ministers and managers all circularised the regulations regarding the female employees' dress code on July 5, 1980. The regulations instructed women to wear plain dresses with head scarves or long-sleeved outfits, pants, and head scarves. Also, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a circular to oblige women in the foreign missions to observe the Islamic code of conduct and dress code in public appearances. Figure 1 shows the network of the dominant discourse's practices (Islamic Traditionalists) in the revolutionary transition era, and Figure 2 shows the articulation of women's clothing in Pahlavi and Islamic revolution fields of discourses (1926-1979).



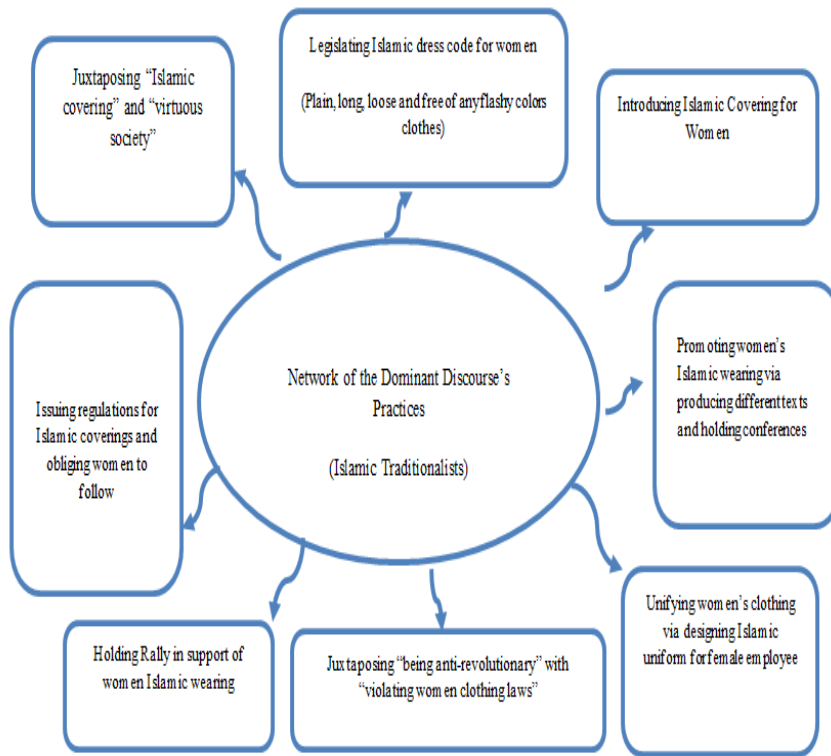


Figure 1. Network of the dominant discourse's practices (Islamic traditionalists) in revolutionary transition era

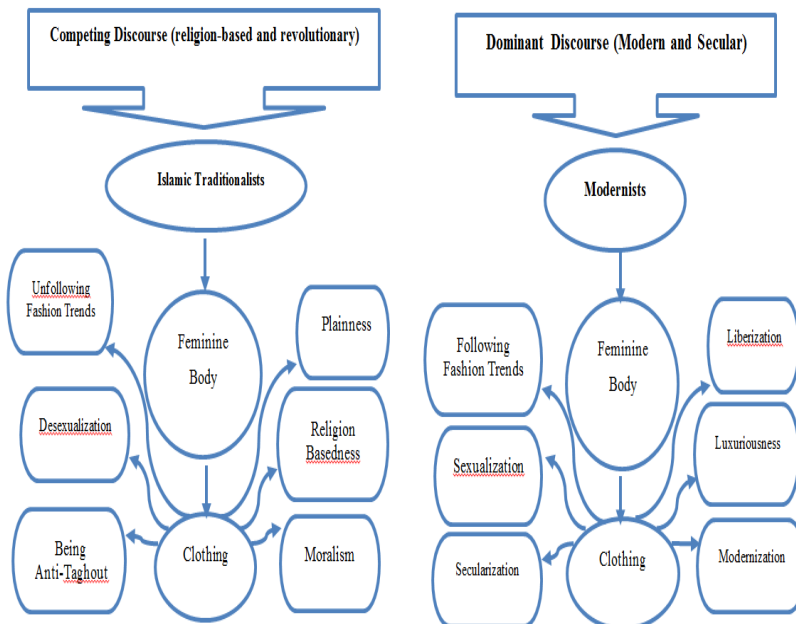


Figure 2. Articulation of women's clothing in Pahlavi and Islamic revolution fields of discourses (1926-1979)



### Types and aesthetics of women's clothing during the revolutionary transition

The women involved in the triumph of the Islamic Revolution of Iran came from a wide range of political and religious tendencies as 'there were countless women participating in Iranian people's uprising against the Shah during 1977-1979. Like any other social groups, they had their own reasons for opposing the Shah, such as economic deprivation, political repression, determination of Islamic identity, and a tendency towards a society with a socialistic future' (Moghadam, 2011). Thus, women who belonged to various revolutionary groups wore distinct types of clothes, somewhat reflecting their tendencies. They presented themselves to society with clothing that had distinctive features.

For example, girls and women in Marxist groups, such as Organisation of *Iranian Fadaiyan-e-Khalgh* Guerrillas, wore plain clothes (Figure 3), including a loose blouse, a coat, or a jacket, coupled with loose jeans or trousers, sometimes accompanied by a kerchief, which represented their ideal: defending the rights of the workers.

Another active political group with eclectic Islamic tendencies, which had numerous supporters among women, was the People's Mujahedin of Iran. Supporters of this organisation wore ordinary clothes as most of their activities were covert and, therefore, it was necessary for them not to stand out. Since they considered themselves Shia Muslims, they emphasised the observance of Islamic coverings. Sometimes, especially during special occasions and political meetings, they wore green overcoats and white kerchiefs.



Figure 3. Fadaiyan-e-Khalgh Guerilla Women



Moreover, many of the women participating in the Islamic Revolution were Shia Muslims. These women, who were marginalised during the Pahlavi dynasty, found the opportunity during the Revolution to wear Islamic coverings of their choice, which were in accordance with their religious law, and chador was the first choice for many of them. At the same time, there were other groups of Muslim women who accompanied the Revolution without any political tendencies and participated in special occasions without full Islamic coverings. They wore common feminine clothes, but tried to cover more of their bodies using socks and long sleeves. This effort was a result of the revolutionary spirit, as Islamic coverings still were not a legal requirement. Like the years of the Pahlavi reign, during the revolutionary transition, more traditional women preferred to wear chador, while wearing kerchiefs along with common women's clothing was also prevalent among religious women.

Large kerchiefs became very popular during the revolutionary transition. Kerchiefs were used as a piece of clothing along with home and party dresses and were not part of a uniform. They were either ready-made or were sewn by women themselves. They were even decorated

with embroidered flowers on the back and ribbons on the edges. Women who adhered to Islamic coverings used kerchiefs to cover their foreheads and extended their sides to cover their shoulders, while other women did not cover themselves fully and parts of the hair and neck were visible. Since most religious women wanted full coverage of the front hair and adherence to the religious boundaries of clothing, an attempt was made to secure the sides of the kerchiefs. This was done through a rubber band attached to the kerchief at the forehead sides – like a prayer maghna'e' (wimple) – which provided full coverage of the hair. Securing the kerchief under the throat using a pin and covering the whole upper body using its sides were observed in special occasions, such as military parades. Aside from kerchiefs, another type of head covering used was called a 'maghna'e' (wimple). Wimples were originally a piece of head covering women wore under their chadors during prayers. This head covering is like a very short chador covering the shoulders; it has a closed front, and is secured on the head using a rubber band. Underneath, the chin is covered with a triangular piece so that full Islamic covering is observed during prayers. Different forms of Iranian women's wimples in 1979 and 1980 are shown in Figure 4.





Figure 4. Women's Wimples in 1979 and 1980

During the Islamic Revolution, wimples got popular amongst the women, to the extent that sometimes they wore prayer wimples in the public, though this was very rare. Many of the women used plain or black textiles to make wimples, which were longer than the prayer wimples, and stretched a band fixed underneath the wimple around their heads to make it look better. Besides several types of headdresses, the women used to wear sunglasses, which sometimes functioned like a mask to cover their faces. Since the sunglasses were relatively large at that time, they provided a better coverage for beauty of the face.

In those years, chador was one of the major garments of the Muslim Iranian women. The chador used in Pahlavi era had a semi-circular pattern, and, when worn, covered from the head to the feet. Usually both hands were used to hold the chador, and normally one hand brought the chador up to cover the lower half of the face, almost to the nose, which was called 'face-covering'; only a small part of the eyes and the nose

remained uncovered. During the Pahlavi's reign and the first year after the revolution, in addition to the black chadors, some less official thin cotton chadors, known as 'Kudari', were also used by urban women. The black chadors were usually made of non-cotton heavy fabrics and were held on the head by hands. When women needed to use their hands, they would hold the chador by their teeth. Of course, the cotton chadors were lighter, and this method was more used more for the black chadors.

The chadors were not fixed on the head; but later, women who participated in the demonstrations, made some changes to their chadors to fix them on their heads. One of these methods was to sew a long rectangular band to the upper edge of the chador to the front of the forehead, which was tied behind the neck and fixed the chador on the head. Later, this band was replaced by an elastic tape, which did not need to be tied and was also more flexible. Different types of wearing chador in 1979 and 1980 are shown in Figure 5.





Figure 5. Different types of wearing Chador in 1979 and 1980

In other creative methods, measures were taken to release the hands when using the chador. The front part of the chador was stitched to the bottom of the chin, and a triangular piece was added to the chin to allow only the 'face', which is permitted under the Islamic dressing code. The two sides of the chador around the forehead were tied behind the head using an elastic tape or a band. In the elbow area or lower, two slots were made on the front of the chador to pull out the hands. This solution was especially useful for releasing the hands when chanting, taking banners and handwritings, and holding weapons - which were often symbolic. The front part of the chador was stitched, and two sleeves were added to them. A triangular piece was placed under the chin and the two sides of the chador around the forehead were tied behind the head using an elastic tape or a band.

In 1979 and 1980, women's clothing faced changes, which were known on one side, and unknown on the other. Most

women, being exposed to the religious atmosphere of the Islamic Revolution, tended to follow the clothing style of the fighting women; the clothing which were possibly not chador, but close to the Islamic dressing codes. These clothes were selected from the ordinary and the most commonly used clothes, which were more covered, were not fancy looking, and complied with the active revolutionary environment, while allowing more mobility. This analysis is based on the case study of the clothing style of women who participated in the demonstrations, which spread all over the country, especially to the big cities, and created the dominant atmosphere. In other places and environments, the woman's clothing still consisted of clothes which were popular before the revolution. Before the late leader of revolution decreed that the women must observe the Islamic dressing code, there were no concerns about the women's clothing. Therefore, the same pre-revolutionary clothing was used



by the women with the aforementioned considerations. The late leader's remarks attracted attention to woman's clothing and led to reflections on types of clothing that could meet the Islamic Revolution requirements. The women who did not wear chador wore trousers or socks, and covered their hair by scarf to respect the Islamic dressing code to some extent. Of course, there were some women who kept on their original clothing style without covering their hair.

Up until this time, there was no structured outfit for women, and they dressed just the same way as the men did, with similar variety. There were few exceptions, including certain rituals or ceremonies, where the women's clothes would be harmonised in one way or another. For instance, on those occasions when women would march with weapons, all would dress uniformly with head scarves and jackets of the same or similar colour and shape. The ends of the head scarf would drape over the chest, or chador was worn.

All in all, it is safe to say that most women wore the 'revolution outfit', which was characterised by being plain, long, and loose, free of any flashy colours. It reflected the spirituality which emerged in revolution, and avoided the common attractions attributed to the female clothing styles in the previous regime.

The development in the aesthetics of female clothing styles during the revolutionary transition that can be examined is part about the structures used in these styles, which are strongly influenced

by the boundaries of the Islamic dress code. The type of clothes used by women at this time was mainly the same as the old styles: several types of feminine outfits modelled after the European and American fashions, which were common during the Pahlavi's rule. The choice of outfit for traditional women's social appearance was chador. Those women who participated the revolutionary rallies and meetings in the heat of the revolution would wear chador or would cover their heads and hair with diverse types of head scarves or wimples. Yet some women would take part in rallies without hijab. After the revolution, too, women's clothing style, on occasions other than revolution-related meetings, was the same style, using the same clothing items. In other words, since there was no obligation regarding the observation of the Islamic dress code, women would opt for Islamic outfits at their own discretion. The clothing items were not new, but in the context of the revolutionary culture, they came to be used in new combinations inspired by revolutionary values. In other words, a new aesthetic perspective was emerging which belonged to the Islamic traditionalist discourse. In this discourse, the regulations of the dress code were decided by the majority revolutionary groups and were not officially issued. They would gain symbolic power as certain categories of revolutionary clothes would mark the person wearing them as a member of certain groups or parties.

Men would also wear revolutionary clothes, but since the women's clothes were of particular Islamic features, the female



revolutionary outfit of 1979-1980 was obviously distinct from other categories. The regulations pertaining to this clothing style created aesthetic principles of their own. As we know, beauty is a subjective entity, and can be influenced and changed by several factors. Women's revolutionary clothes would bring with them a certain type of aesthetics, which was acceptable in accordance with the newly emerging, mainly Islamic mindset and values. Thus, it was collectively accepted, and scores of women would be happy to adopt it.

All in all, the aesthetic aspect of women's clothes during that period was down to the covering and veiling of the body. This was observed by the women who donned the revolutionary clothes or supported the revolutionary discourse, insomuch as it sometimes breached the celebrate principles of aesthetics. It must be considered, however, that the heat of the revolution would not in fact call for the time or opportunity for a thought-out change in the structure and model of clothes while considering the aesthetic aspects. Thus, the demanded issues would be put on an agenda, and then put into practice in an equally urgent manner. An example of this was the chador designed and made under the name hijab chador, which was like the ordinary chador, except that it was stitched and sewn on the front side as well and had two openings to let the hands out up to the elbows or wrists. The formal structure of this outfit was nowhere near the visual aesthetics, but it was received and used well since it made possible the practical use of

chador as the revolutionary outfit, which in turn reflected commitment to the Islamic practice as a common value.

Also, when it came to tying the head scarves, all that was considered was the issue of coverage around the face, and thus the quality of the formal proportions made were absolutely ignored. In other words, during this course, the aesthetic function of clothes was overshadowed by the symbolic and ideological functions.

In the heat of the revolution, which corresponded a particularly cold winter, the winter coats provided another choice of clothing. Normally long and loose, these common outfits of the winter later inspired the design of another Islamic outfit called *Mantou*, which was especially meant for female office workers, and gradually came to be accepted and used for public appearance along with chador. Another piece of clothing that was considered as a part of revolutionary attire was the glove. This is yet another example that depicts the symbolic and aesthetic values of the time. Use of gloves, together with sunglasses that further covered the facial beauty like a mask, was the new fashion for some women. At that time, women's clothes in the metropolitan streets were not meant to add to the structural beauty or to complement their feminine beauty but were the outfits to present the revolutionary character of a woman and highlight her support for the revolutionary forces and the spirit of the revolution.

In the revolutionary discourse, use of chador was not mandatory, so the new



outfit and clothing style were a matter of various interpretations by different authorities. Confusions about the type of clothing style for women which would fit the paradigm of the discourse in question is evident in the regulations and circulars issued, even though they all highlight the necessity of eliminating the dressing style from the previous regime referred to as *Taqrati* (equivalent to 'tyrannical'). Various

government offices and other official entities would define the acceptable dress code for female employees as long-sleeved *Mantou*, pants, and plain head scarves, bare of accessories which might draw attention to the user, appropriate for the workplace, and distinct from party dresses (Figure 6). Some organisations, such as the former Ministry of Health, gradually started to design their own uniform clothes for the female employees.

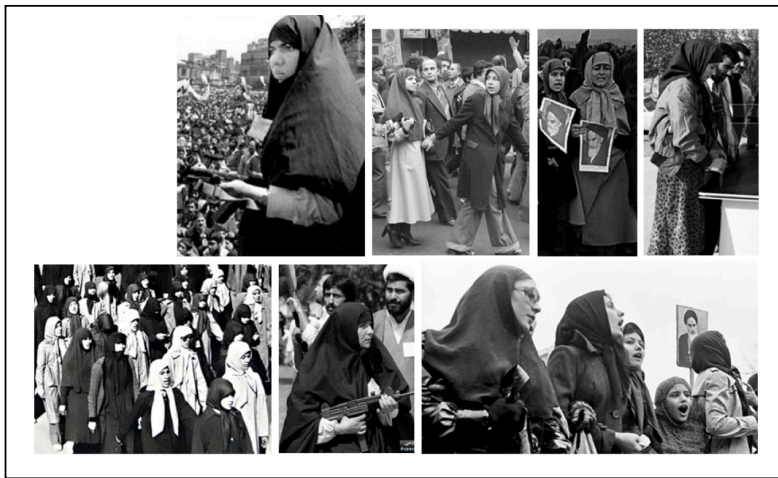


Figure 6. Diverse clothes of Iranian women during Revolutionary Transition Era (1979-1981)

## CONCLUSIONS

A set of values related to a discourse leads to development of certain principles for clothing style of the social groups related to it. Some of these principles are general rules. For instance, in a religious discourse with an Islamic approach, the principle of conceitedness and concealment is a general clothing rule, while in a non-religious discourse the main principle might be beauty and attractiveness. In the time of Pahlavi I, the state tended to change the women's

clothing based on the Non-Iranian and Non-Islamic patterns, relying on the authoritative power. In the time of Pahlavi II, the state discourse for development of Pahlavi I discourse was inevitable for adopting a cultural approach; because, relying on the authoritative power was proven inefficient in the time of Pahlavi I.

In the Islamic Revolution discourse, the symbolic power of modernity, freedom, and progress in the form of western fashion which was derived from Pahlavi discourse,



was replaced by the symbolic power of chastity and conceitedness in form of the revolutionary clothing, which was influenced by the Islamic Revolution discourse. This symbolic power is still alive, although it has appeared in a variety of forms due to the social and cultural changes that have been taking place for years. This study investigated the transverse discursive currents in clothing style of the Iranian women from 1979 to 1981, which were rooted in the religious, ideological, or aesthetic tendencies of the social groups and led to some controversies. It is a subject that involves Iran's contemporary cultural society as well, and requires serious investigations. Pahlavi and Islamic Revolution discourses both focused on antagonism to consolidate their approaches towards women's clothing; but, considering the fact the two-year transient revolutionary period had inherited the women's clothing culture from the 50-year Pahlavi state, the Islamic Revolution discourse stressed specifically on this antagonism. Therefore, the emphasis on observing the Islamic dressing code by women a few months after the revolution targeted the most the antagonism towards Pahlavi discourse and manifestations of the anti-religion state. At that time, most of the Iranian women observed the Islamic dressing code and liked it. By the way, marginalisation of Pahlavi discourse in women's clothing, which was still represented by a small part of the Iranian women, made it necessary for Ayatollah Khomeini to point out the

necessity of observing the Islamic dressing code by everyone.

There is certainly a close interrelationship between the cultural system and the political system in the field of dominant discourses. In most cases, culture acts beyond politics and covers the realm of power, so that the politics are derived from the culture. For this reason, the political systems of the dominant discourses may cause changes in the cultural approaches and prepare the ground for emergence of new cultural thoughts, but cannot develop or annihilate a culture relying on their power.

We believe that the aesthetics of women's clothing, having confronted various discursive alternations, and a combination of post-revolutionary negotiations and resistance, led to certain differences in types and levels of covering the body. Although the form of women's clothing, as a religious code of the Iranian society, remained a function of social-political circumstances after the 1979 revolution, the aesthetics of woman's clothing was still influenced by numerous cultural, social, economic, and political factors, which are sometimes in line with (negotiation) and sometimes against (resistance) the clothing aesthetic approach of the dominant discourse. Sedghi (2007) refers to the issue of gender for the state and politics and explains how urban women in Iran under different states veiled in the early 1900s, unveiled from 1936 to 1979, and re-veiled after the 1979 Revolution. The studies show that the discursive policies and emphasis on



the antagonism of the Islamic Revolution discourse towards Pahlavi discourse led to a type of homogenisation of the women's clothing in the post-revolutionary Iran. The Islamic state built itself on the ruins of the old regime, that it succeeded (Sedghi, 2007, p. 276). The revolutionary Islamists in Iran felt that "genuine Iranian cultural identity" had been distorted by Westernization or what they called *gharbzadegi* (a coinage literally suggesting "West-struck" or "Westoxicated"). The unveiled, publicly visible woman was both a reflection of Western attacks on indigenous culture and the medium by which it was affected. Following the policy of homogenising women's clothing, the differences between the clothing cultures of various ethnic groups were not considered. This was an outcome of disregarding the natural diversity of type and level of clothing in different contexts and different cultural-social grounds. Neglecting the fact that the cultural functions changed the dressing style years after the transient revolutionary period, it led to a kind of turmoil in the dressing system and women's clothing in Iran, and it is foreseen that it will cause further problems in the future.

## REFERENCES

- Agha-Golzadeh, F. (2006[1385]). *Tahlile goftemane enteghadi* [Critical discourse analysis]. Tehran, Iran: Elmi farhangi.
- AmirMoez, Y. (2002). The Qashqa'i. In R. Tapper & J. Thompson (Eds.), *The Nomadic peoples of Iran*. London: Azimuth Editions.
- Bennet, A. (2005). *Culture and everyday life*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE.
- Connell, I., & Galasinski, D. (1996). Cleaning up its act: the CIA on the internet. *Discourse and Society*, 7(2), 165-186.
- Fairclough, N. (1980). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. New York: Longman.
- Foran, J. (1997). *Theorizing revolutions*. London: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Imam Khomeini (1979, January 21). Interview with As-Safir Newspaper reporter, Keyhan Newspaper, 3, No. 10618.
- Khomeini, S. R. (2000 [1379] a). *Sahife Noor* (Vol. 1). Tehran, Iran: Moassese Tanzim va Nashre Asare Emam Khomaini [Institute of Imam Khomieni Works].
- Khomeini, S. R. (2000 [1379] b). *Sahife Noor* (Vol. 6). Tehran, Iran: Moassese Tanzim va Nashre Asare Emam Khomaini [Institute of Imam Khomieni Works].
- Macdonell, D. (1986). *Theories of discourse: An introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mehdizadeh, S. M. (2005 [1384]). *Barrasie mohtavai va herfeiyi matalebe 7 khabargozarie gheyredolati* [Content analysis of seven nongovernmental news agencies]. *Resaneh Journal*, 35(3), 11.
- Moghadam, A. (2011). Introduction. In *Militancy and political violence in Shiism*. Routledge.
- Moghadam, V. M. (1995). Gender and revolutionary transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989. *Gender and Society*, 9(3), 328-358.



- Moghadami, M. T. (2012). *Nazarieh tahlile goftmane Laclau va Mouffe va naghde an* [Laclau and Mouffe Discourse Analysis theory: introduction and criticism]. *Journal of Marefate Ejtemai*, 2(2), 91-124.
- Nash, K. (2010). *Contemporary political sociology: globalization, politics, and power*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Papoli-Yazdi, M. H. (2002). Kurds of Khorāsān in Tapper. In R. & J. Thompson (Eds.), *The nomadic peoples of Iran*. London: Azimuth.
- Sedghi, H. (2007). *Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling, and re-veiling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shariati, A. (2012 [1391]). *Fatemeh Fatemeh Ast* [Fatemeh is Fatemeh]. Tehran: Chapakhsh.
- Varjavand, P. (1999 [1378]). *Pishraft va tose'e bar bonyade hoviyyate farhangi* [Progress and development on the basis of cultural identity]. Tehran: Sherkat Sahami Enteshar.