

The Hijab as The Identity of Muslim Women: An Analysis of Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki's Thought in *Ādāb al-Islām fī Niẓām al-Uṣrah*

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Abstract

*The hijab carries multiple meanings, representing spirituality, societal expectations, and political identity. However, Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki regards the hijab as a normative obligation that reflects moral and spiritual values, capable of shaping a women-friendly social order. This study aims to present a new perspective on the obligation of hijab by examining the interpretation of Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki, with particular attention to the construction of his arguments grounded in Islamic moral and spiritual values. This study adopts a qualitative approach utilizing a library-based research method, in which data are systematically analyzed through content analysis. The primary source of data is Al-Maliki's work titled *Adabul Islam fī Niẓāmil Uṣrah*, while secondary sources include books, works of classical and contemporary scholars, and journal articles related to the research theme. Findings indicate that al-Maliki understands hijab not merely as a religious obligation, but as part of a social transformation process that strengthens the status and dignity of women within Islamic society. The hijab serves not to isolate women, but to foster environments in which their contributions may flourish without the encumbrance of sexual objectification or social marginalization. His ideas serve as a critical response to Western views that problematize the hijab, by promoting a historical-theological approach rooted in authentic hadiths. This study offers a fresh perspective by examining the hijab discourse through spiritual and social dimensions, as interpreted in Al-Maliki's thought.*

Keywords: *Hijab, Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki, Adabul Islam fī Niẓāmil Uṣrah, Islamic ethics, women's dignity.*

INTRODUCTION

The hijab is one of the most prominent visual symbols representing Islamic identity, particularly for Muslim women. In the global context, the hijab is often perceived in dualistic terms. On one hand, it symbolizes piety, purity, and modesty, enhancing the wearer's sense of dignity and respect, while serving as a strong expression of religious freedom and identity. On the other hand, the hijab is frequently misunderstood as a symbol of female oppression,

especially in Western nations where it is associated with restrictions on freedom and gender subordination. (Putra, 2023)

During three critical periods, 1989, 1994, and 2003, the discourse surrounding the permissibility of the hijab in France became increasingly contentious. The rise of anti-immigrant right-wing political movements contributed to the perception of the hijab as a serious challenge to the principles of the secular republic. This tension was exacerbated by narratives linking the hijab to Islamism and terrorism, which led to the marginalization of Muslim women in public spaces. (Scott 2007: 21)

Muslim scholars have interpreted the commandment of the hijab in various ways. Some view it as a recommendation rather than an obligation, as argued by Quraish Shihab. He describes the hijab as a traditional loose-fitting garment paired with a headscarf. In his interpretation of Qur'an Surah al-Ahzab:59, Shihab contends that the verse does not explicitly obligate Muslim women to wear the hijab, noting that women during that period already wore it. However, their style of wearing it did not conform to the recommended extension, particularly for those who had not previously worn it. Accordingly, the verse functions more as a refinement than the imposition of a new universal obligation. (Rohman et al., 2024)

Conversely, Fatima Mernissi regards the hijab not as a normative rule but as a social construct. She asserts that the verse concerning the hijab was revealed in a specific context, when the Prophet Muhammad SAW was disturbed by guests who lingered after his wedding with Zainab. Mernissi highlights the unusual rapidity of this revelation, which contrasts with the gradual nature of other revelations and the Prophet's characteristically patient approach. She further argues that the hijab was not intended as an obligation by the Prophet, but emerged as a response to political pressures, slander against his wives, and encouragement from companions such as Umar ibn al-Khattab. (Shahin, 2024)

Against these diverse perspectives, from both Muslim thinkers and Western critiques, Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki offers a distinctive viewpoint. Al-Maliki defends the hijab as neither a backward practice nor a form of oppression. He considers it a normative obligation that contributes to the establishment of a more women-friendly social order. His perspective emphasizes not only the legal dimensions of hijab but also its spiritual and moral meanings rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith.

The study of hijab has evolved widely, encompassing multiple approaches. Previous research has explored hijab from feminist perspectives (Hannan Nazari & Musa, 2021), classical and contemporary scholarship (Hamzah & Abidin, 2021), the shifting significance of the hijab (Nurdianik et al., 2022), interpretations of hijab within Qur’anic exegesis (Sulton & Mashudi, 2022), particularly thematic tafsir (Zein et al., 2025) and studies on the phenomenon of unveiling, examining identity construction and expressions of piety among Muslim women. (Yunianti, 2022)

Similarly, research related to the book *Ādāb al-Islām fī Niḡām al-Uṣrah* has typically addressed normative principles governing parent-child relationships (Wahid, 2022), the formation of ideal Islamic families (Lil Insan & Mustafa, 2022), the role of marriage in youth character development (Ar-Rasyiid Zako, 2023), and ethical considerations of polygamy in Islamic family law (Muhalling & Salma, 2024). However, this study focuses specifically on the meaning of hijab as interpreted by Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki in *Ādāb al-Islām fī Niḡām al-Uṣrah*, a subject that remains underexplored within the scope of Islamic family law. This research aims to present a new perspective on the hijab’s obligation through the interpretive lens of Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki. Furthermore, it seeks to trace the construction of his arguments in formulating an ideological foundation in defense of the hijab’s obligation, emphasizing moral values and spiritual dimensions.

This research uses a qualitative, library-based research approach, focusing on the analysis of Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki’s thought regarding the concept of the hijab, particularly his arguments in affirming its status as an obligation as articulated in *Ādāb al-Islām fī Niḡām al-Uṣrah*. The primary data source of this study is *Ādāb al-Islām fī Niḡām al-Uṣrah* authored by al-Maliki, while secondary data consist of books, works by classical and contemporary scholars, as well as scholarly articles relevant to the research theme. Data were collected in accordance with library research procedures, and data analysis employed Miles and Huberman’s model. The data analysis process includes: first, data reduction, which involves selecting and simplifying data to maintain analytical focus and avoid dispersion; second, data display, which aims to facilitate the organization and verification of data through re-examination and comparison with various sources, thus strengthening the justification for the research findings (Magdalena et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

Biography of Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki

Sayyid Muhammad bin ‘Alawi al-Maliki was born into a distinguished scholarly lineage in Bab al-Salam, Makkah al-Mukarramah, during the month of Ramadan in 1365 H (Al-Husaini 2010: 17). He passed away at dawn during the mid-Ramadan of 1425 H and was buried the same evening following the ‘Isha prayer (Al-Husaini 2010: 65). His genealogical title “Al-Hasani” denotes his noble descent tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad SAW through Sayyidina Hasan. His complete lineage includes Sayyid Muhammad ibn al-‘Allamah ‘Alawi ibn al-Sayyid ‘Abbas ibn al-‘Allamah al-Sayyid ‘Abdul ‘Aziz ibn Sayyid Muhammad al-Maliki al-Makki al-Hasani al-Idrisi, which connects to Sayyidina Idris al-Azhar, then Idris al-Akbar, Abdullah al-Kamil “al-Mahdi,” al-Hasan al-Muthanna, al-Hasan al-Sibt, and finally to Sayyidina ‘Ali and Sayyidah Fatimah al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet SAW (Al-Husaini 2010: 17).

From an early age, al-Maliki studied the Qur’an under the guidance of his father. Following his father’s passing in 1972 M, he continued his father’s da‘wah mission, teaching at Masjid al-Haram and serving as a lecturer at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah and Umm al-Qura University in Makkah, where he taught Hadith and Islamic theology (Ushuluddin). Eventually, he resigned from both institutions to devote himself fully to teaching at Masjid al-Haram. He also established a religious study circle (Majelis Ta’lim) at his residence in Utaibiyah, Makkah, later relocating to Rusaifah (Hamdani, 2022).

Al-Maliki’s intellectual development was shaped by his extensive pursuit of knowledge across the Islamic world. He obtained ijazah (certification) from numerous prominent scholars, ranging from Morocco to India, including figures such as Sheikh Hasanayn Makhlof, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, and Sheikh Muhammad Zakariya al-Kandahlawi. This broad scholarly network significantly informed his authoritative approach to Islamic jurisprudence. Later, al-Maliki obtained a doctoral degree in Hadith studies from Al-Azhar University. He also has authored a comprehensive corpus of original works, compilations, critical editions (*taḥqīq*), and academic commentaries (*ta’līq*), amounting to more than sixty titles across various disciplines in Islamic law and theology (Al-Husaini 2010: 35-37).

One of his significant works, *Ādāb al-Islām fī Nizām al-Ussrah* (Islamic Ethics in the Family System), serves as the central focus of this study. In this text, al-Maliki elaborates on

spousal relations, child education, and socio-family jurisprudence. He also critiques Western thought, particularly in relation to the hijab, underscoring how the hijab functions not merely as a dress code but as an integral part of a social system that upholds the dignity and identity of women.

Definition of Hijab

Etymologically, the term *hijab* derives from the word *hajaba*, which signifies covering, concealing, and preventing (almany.com). In relation to an individual, it denotes the existence of a boundary that restricts or prohibits entry. In Arabic usage, *hijab* is also associated with *sitr*, meaning a covering or veil. Terminologically, *hijab* refers to a means by which a woman's body is concealed so as not to be visible to men who are not her *mabram* (Misshuari & Rodiah, 2023).

Throughout its historical development, hijab is often understood as clothing that functions to cover a woman's body from the gaze of men. In contemporary usage, the term *hijab* has undergone a semantic shift and is now more commonly referred to as *jilbab*. However, within the Islamic tradition, the meaning of *hijab* is not confined to clothing alone. It also denotes a barrier or partition that separates one entity from another. Thus, the use of *hijab* in the context of clothing represents only one dimension of its broader meaning. At present, *jilbab* is regarded as the specific manifestation of the term *hijab*. The *jilbab* is defined as a long clothes worn by women to cover the head, chest, and other parts of the body, serving to maintain modesty by limiting male visual access to the body. During the time of the Prophet, the *jilbab* functioned as an outerwear that covered a woman's body from head to toe (Tawakalni et al., 2022).

The practice of covering the body has a long history, encompassing cultural, religious, and social dimensions. Since the early period of Islam, the practice of veiling has constituted an integral part of the construction of Muslim women's attire. Its normative foundation derives from the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him), which provide guidance on modes of dress in accordance with the principles of Islamic law. From this normative framework emerged diverse forms of coverings, such as the *khimar*, *jilbab*, and other variations, which adapted to the cultural contexts and local traditions of different regions. Consequently, the practice of veiling functions not only as an instrument

of compliance with religious injunctions, but also as a representation of collective identity and as an affirmation of the dignity of Muslim women within the social sphere (Wijaya et al., 2023).

The use of the hijab has also been understood as an instrument of political and cultural resistance. The historical roots of this practice can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Persia and Greece, where head coverings functioned as markers of social status. In Persia, for instance, women of the aristocracy were required to wear head coverings as a representation of their dignity and rank. Meanwhile, in Greece, similar practices were more closely associated with strict moral and spiritual norms. These traditions were later adopted within Islam, which endowed the hijab with a religious dimension, thereby transforming it into a symbol of modesty as well as a means of protection for women (Merlins, 2024).

Nevertheless, the rules and practices surrounding the use of the hijab have not been free from controversy within feminist discourse. On the one hand, some feminists interpret the hijab as a marker of gender identity or as a symbol of womanhood rather than merely a piece of cloth covering the body. For instance, Asma Barlas argues that the purpose of the hijab as a social identity is to distinguish women who are under the protection of men from those who are vulnerable to harassment when appearing in public. The Qur'an even associates the concept of the hijab with the context of societies that still recognized systems of slavery, in which female slaves were frequently subjected to abuse. Accordingly, the implementation of the hijab was intended to differentiate free, believing women from enslaved women (Maghdalena & Lessy, 2024). On the other hand, there are perspectives that regard the hijab as a symbol of oppression, restriction, and the exclusion of women from the public sphere, even considering it a form of bondage that limits women's freedom (Wijayanto & Ulinuha, 2022).

Women's Position in al-Maliki's Thought

Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki was an Islamic scholar who played a significant role in guiding the Muslim community through various forms of da'wah, including public religious sermons, *majelis* (scholarly forums), and *halaqah* (discussion group in Islamic learning). His role extended beyond teaching activities, as he also served as a moral and intellectual guide for society, including both spiritual and intellectual dimensions. In addition to his da'wah endeavors, he was widely recognized as a highly productive scholar in terms of

written works. His expertise was particularly evident in the field of hadith studies, as demonstrated by the numerous works he authored. One of his most important contributions lies in his formulation of foundational principles in the science of *musthalab al-hadith*, which introduced innovative perspectives rarely found in the works of other scholars (Muhammad et al., 2021).

Al-Maliki's authority as a hadith scholar and his consistency in adherence to the Sunni doctrine shaped his perspective on the position of women within Islamic law and ethics. The epistemological framework of the Maliki Maddhab served as the foundation for his *ijtihad*, including his views on women's roles (Ramadhani & Muhid, 2025). Within the Maliki framework, there are several methodological approaches that constitute the basis of *ijtihad*. First, the Qur'an is positioned as the authoritative source of law. Second, the acceptance of Hadith as a legal source subsequent to the Qur'an was highly selective, necessitating that each Hadith be consistent with the practices of the Medinan community and attain the level of *mutawatir*.

Imam Malik prioritized Hadith that had been practiced continuously in Medina, as these were considered to represent a consensus of authentic religious practice, rather than Hadith transmitted by a single individual. Third, *ijma'*, the consensus of scholars, is regarded as a firm foundation for establishing legal rulings. Fourth, when no clear evidence is found in the Qur'an or hadith, the method of *qiyas*, or analogical reasoning, is employed. However, if the application of *qiyas* under certain circumstances risks producing injustice, *istihsan* is preferred, a form of legal discretion that emphasizes the principles of public benefit (*maslahah*) and substantive justice (Simanjutak et al., 2025).

Although the Maliki Maddhab emphasizes deriving law directly from authoritative sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith, Al-Maliki did not simply follow the texts literally. He provided a deeper interpretation, emphasizing that every command or prohibition has a specific wisdom that can be understood and applied to guide the community ethically and rationally. For example, in the context of career women, one of al-Maliki's reasons for forbidding women from working is because women have a vital function, namely the role of motherhood and responsibility within the family. In economic aspects, the selection of workers is usually based on a person's level of productivity and ability to work. However, Al-Maliki believes that this standard is not entirely balanced when applied to women. This is

because women's biological condition carries certain consequences, such as every month women will menstruate, during which women are susceptible to pain and hormonal changes that can affect mood and psychological conditions. (Al-Hasani, nd).

Furthermore, pregnancy and childbirth expose women to physical and mental vulnerability. After giving birth, a woman's body requires a significant recovery period, as her reproductive organs and physical condition must stabilize. Therefore, al-Maliki emphasized that the heavy public workload is incompatible with women's biological constitution. As a result, domestic and maternal responsibilities should remain a priority (Al-Hasani, nd). This perspective may appear conservative when compared to the views of contemporary scholars who allow women to work, such as Quraish Shihab, as-Sya'rawi, and Buya Hamka (Hikmatul Haq et al., 2023).

Therefore, it can be inferred that Al-Maliki's view of women reflects a normative framework that situates female identity within the preservation of social harmony and religious ethics. He interprets women's biological and emotional particularities not as deficiencies, but as distinctive attributes that necessitate protection and prioritization. In this framework, al-Maliki emphasizes the complementary nature of gender roles, where men and women are envisioned as fulfilling different but equally vital responsibilities in sustaining the moral fabric of the family and community. Therefore, this approach represents a holistic integration of theological, ethical, and sociological dimensions, positioning women's roles as an integral part of his vision of Sharia, which is directed toward the realization of social balance and moral order.

Al-Maliki's Interpretation of Qur'anic Verses and Hadith Related to The Hijab

From Al-Maliki's perspective, the hijab is not merely a physical garment but a profound symbol of a Muslim woman's identity and devotion. Wearing the hijab symbolizes piety, serves as a protective mechanism for honor and dignity, and reflects a woman's sense of modesty and self-respect. Within Islamic law, the hijab aims to safeguard women from various forms of harm, especially from the gaze of ill-intentioned individuals who exploit vulnerabilities to seduce faithful women. Such behavior may lead to disgrace, the erosion of self-worth, and the degradation of feminine dignity.

Furthermore, the hijab functions as a moral barrier, preserving a woman's decency and honor while she engages in public life to fulfill her necessities. Al-Maliki places particular emphasis on the dangers of unveiling (*sufūr*), which he identifies as a clear and harmful practice with serious moral and social consequences. He considers it a form of blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of non-Muslim customs, echoing and reinforcing the warnings found in the Hadith of the Prophet SAW: (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 94)

لتتبعن سنن من كان قبلكم، شبرا بشبر، وذراعا بذراع، حتى لو سلكوا جحر ضب؛ لسلكتموه، رواه البخاري

“You will surely follow the ways of those before you, inch by inch, and span by span, so much so that if they entered a lizard's hole, you would follow them.”

(H.R. al-Bukhari)

Several verses of the Qur'an explicitly (*dalalah sarib*) affirm the obligation of the hijab, revealed during the fifth year of Hijrah. These verses not only establish the requirement for women to cover their *aurah* (intimate parts), but also include prohibitions for men against gazing at women who are not their mahram, as well as the reciprocal prohibition for women from gazing at men who are not their mahram. As stated in the words of Allah swt, in Surah al-Ahzab [33]:59: (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 95)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذِينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”

Q.S. an-Nur: 31:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَنْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ

“Say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts, and not expose their adornment except that which [ordinarily] appears thereof, and let them draw their veils over their bosoms.”

These verses explicitly articulate the contrast between Muslim women and the women of the pre-Islamic era (*jabilyyah*). Islam provides a moral framework that upholds the honor of women through the obligation of hijab, serving not only as a sign of modesty but also as

a protective measure against potential harm. More broadly, this legislation is part of the Islamic mission to foster a virtuous society, free from slander (*fitnah*) and social disorder.

Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī notes that exegetes differ regarding the manner of extending the hijab (*ṣifatul idnā*). One interpretation defines *idnā* as covering the head and binding the fabric securely around the forehead. Another opinion holds that *idnā* involves covering the entire face and head, leaving only one eye visible for sight (At-Tabari, n.d.: 182). This view is supported by a Hadith narrated from Abdullah ibn Abbas r.a (At-Tabari, n.d.: 324):

أمر الله نساء المؤمنين إذا خرجن من بيوتهن في حاجة أن يغطين وجوههن من فوق رءوسهن
بالجلابيب ويبدین عینا واحدة

“Allah commands believing women, when they go out of their homes for a necessity, to cover their faces from the top of their heads with the jilbab, leaving only one eye visible.”

According to al-Maliki, there is an opinion that the participation of women in several battles before the fifth year of Hijrah was abrogated (*nasakh*) by a later verse, Q.S. al-Ahzab: 33:

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى

“And stay in your houses and do not display yourselves like the display of the former days of ignorance.”

However, this opinion is rejected on the basis that there is no definitive evidence indicating such abrogation. Thus, the permissibility of women leaving their homes still requires further analysis and examination. Al-Maliki emphasizes that even if a woman leaves her home while maintaining modesty and adhering to the conditions prescribed by Islamic law, there are authentic Hadiths that indicate the superiority of women remaining in their homes. As narrated by Aisyah r.a.: (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 96)

استأذنت النبي ﷺ في الجهاد فقال: «جهادكن الحج» رواه البخاري.

“I (Aisyah) asked permission from the Prophet Muhammad SAW to participate in jihad, whereupon he said: ‘The jihad for you, is pilgrimage (hajj).’ Narrated by al-Bukhari.

وعنها أيضًا عن النبي ﷺ سأله نساؤه عن الجهاد فقال: «نعمَ الجهاد الحج» رواه البخاري

Aisyah r.a. narrated from Nabi SAW, some women asked the Prophet about jihad, and he responded, “The best form of jihad is Hajj.” Narrated by al-Bukhari.

وعنها أيضًا أنها قالت: قلت يا رسول الله، ألا نغزو ونُجاهد معكم؟ فقال: «لكن أحسن الجهاد وأجمله الحج حج مبرور». قالت عائشة: فلا أدع الحج بعد إذ سمعتُ هذا من رسول الله ﷺ. رواه البخاري

“In another narration, Aisyah r.a. said: O Rasulallah, shall we not engage in battle and jihad alongside you?” The Prophet replied: “However, the best and most noble jihad is Hajj, a Hajj that is accepted (by Allah).” Aisyah r.a. then said, “I will never cease performing Hajj after hearing this from him.” Narrated by al-Bukhari.

According to al-Hafiz (Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani), jihad is not obligatory upon women as it is upon men. However, the lack of obligation does not imply prohibition. In the Hadith of Umm ‘Atiyyah, it is mentioned that women would go out to treat the wounded, which indicates that women could participate in jihad within their capacity. In the same context, Aisyah r.a. and others who shared her view understood the recommendation of Hajj for women as a sign of permissibility for them to perform it more than once, similar to how men may perform jihad repeatedly (Al-‘Asqalani 1379: 75). Both cases demonstrate the possibility and permissibility for women to actively engage in religious and devotional acts, albeit in different forms than men.

Furthermore, al-Maliki emphasizes the obligation of hijab for Muslim women based on a Hadith narrated by Aisyah r.a. concerning a dispute between Sa‘ad ibn Abi Waqqas and ‘Abd ibn Zam‘ah over the lineage of a child. The two went to the Prophet SAW, and Sa‘ad said: (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 100)

يا رسول الله، إنَّ أخي قد كان عهدَ إليّ فيه. وقال عبد بن زمعة: أخي، ابنُ وليدة أبي، وُلِدَ علي فراشه. قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: الولدُ للفراش، وللعاهر الحجر، ثم قال لسودة بنت زمعة: احتجبي منه لما رأى من شَبَّهه بعتبة بن أبي وقاص

“O Rasulallah, my brother left instructions to me regarding him,” while ‘Abd ibn Zam‘ah said: “He is my brother, the son of my father’s slave woman, born on his bed.” The Prophet SAW then declared: “The child belongs to the owner of the bed, and for the adulterer is the stone (i.e., punishment).” Then he said to Saudah bint Zam‘ah, “Observe hijab from him,” because he saw the child resembled ‘Utbah ibn Abi Waqqas.”

Based on the explanation, al-Maliki’s approach to interpreting the verses of hijab tends to rely on authentic Hadiths to reinforce legal legitimacy. In his analysis, he affirms that the obligation of hijab is not merely a religious command but also closely linked to the social dynamics experienced by women at the time. Additionally, he bases the obligation of hijab

on the moral values inherent in Islamic teachings. Through this historical and normative approach, al-Maliki highlights how hijab serves as part of a broader reform in the system of values and the social life of women in Islamic society.

Al-Maliki's Defense of the Hijab

Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki argues that some individuals have misinterpreted the essence of the hijab. They often claim that hijab constitutes a restrictive framework for women, a normative system that imposes undue burdens and reflects outdated traditions responsible for societal regression, as posited by certain Muslim intellectuals. Moreover, hijab is seen by critics as a form of female enslavement that alienates women from public life and undermines their dignity and personal identity. Such views, Al-Maliki contends, may lead to *fitnah* (social discord); some individuals may be swayed by these claims, while others remain steadfast in their beliefs, protected by the grace of Allah swt. Meanwhile, those caught in uncertainty may find themselves increasingly consumed by doubt and indecision (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 101).

To challenge negative perceptions, Al-Maliki utilizes a compelling sequence of rhetorical questions, confronting the idea that the hijab signifies societal backwardness, illness, military failure, or intellectual stagnation. He provocatively inquires whether observing the hijab could ever obstruct the flow of goodness or livelihood, thus revealing the unfounded nature of such criticisms. Al-Maliki affirms that if hijab is labeled as a form of backwardness for women, then such backwardness carries a positive dimension. Because it is distancing women from the culture of ignorance and shielding them from the harmful influence of deviant groups. He emphasizes that even Western scholars and intellectuals, who are objective, have acknowledged the merits of Islamic ethics and its legal principles (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 103).

According to Al-Maliki, the hijab is not a manifestation of oppression against women, but rather a component of the Islamic moral system that confers dignity and protection from social exploitation. In the pre-Islamic (Jahiliyyah) era, women endured immense suffering, disgrace, and disenfranchisement. They were treated like livestock, deprived of autonomy over their lives and dignity. Women were considered inheritable property, passed from one person to another, traded in marketplaces, and viewed as impure (Al-Hasani, n.d: 101). Islam,

in this context, arrived as a liberating force, eradicating injustice and oppression while elevating the status of women to a level previously unattained by even modern civilizations.

Allah swt said in Surah an-Nisa' [4]:1:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا
وَّنِسَاءً ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

“O mankind, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul (Adam), and from it He created its mate (Hawwa), and from the two of them He dispersed many men and women. So be mindful of Allah through whom you ask one another, and honor the ties of kinship. Indeed, Allah is ever watchful over you.” This verse affirms that women constitute one of the two foundational elements in the continuation of human existence. Their role is a noble endowment and a divine honor that warrants deep reverence and protection (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 102).

Historically, contrasting realities emerged in parts of Europe, particularly France and England. In France, scholars debated whether women could even be considered human, eventually concluding that while women were human, they were created solely to serve men. In England, under King Henry VIII's rule, it was deemed unlawful for women to read or study sacred scripture. Moreover, women were excluded from legal citizenship. During this period, women endured systemic injustices, especially regarding property rights, personal autonomy, and recognition of their labor (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 102). Islam, by contrast, elevated the status of women with commands aimed at preserving their dignity and moral integrity, while protecting them from *fitnah* (moral and societal corruption). One of the key instruments employed for this purpose is the legal framework surrounding hijab, which is not merely a physical garment but functions as a safeguard of moral and social integrity (Al-Hasani, n.d.: 103).

This view aligns with that of Professor Von Hammer, who observed that the Islamic concept of hijab and the prohibition of free interaction between non-maḥram men and women, cannot be construed as a form of distrust toward women. Rather, it is designed to honor and protect that which is rightly theirs; personal dignity and immunity from belittlement. Similarly, the British scholar Hamilton emphasized that Islamic laws regarding women reflect a profound concern for protecting them from harm, defamation, or degradation. Contrary to Western accusations of hijab being a rigid imposition, he argued

that it accords well with the principles of moral vigilance (*ghīrah*) and personal honor (*murū'ah*).

Vaglieri further explains that the obligation of hijab serves a preventive role, guarding against potential moral deviation. She posits that the hijab is intended to cover the female body, with exceptions for parts essential for practical movement, such as the eyes and feet. Vaglieri rejects claims that hijab promotes discrimination or suppression, instead emphasizing its role in shielding women from the sexual impulses of men. She adds that the Islamic social system, which encourages spatial separation and ethical norms between the sexes, has historically led to lower occurrences of organized prostitution in the East, except in areas under foreign control. As such, she concludes that hijab is an invaluable and indispensable component of a morally structured Islamic society.

CONCLUSION

Sayyid Muhammad bin ‘Alawi al-Maliki is a prominent scholar from Makkah, whose lineage traces back to the Prophet Muhammad SAW through Sayyidina Hasan, the Prophet’s grandson. In addition to his role as a scholar, Al-Maliki was a prolific academic, authoring more than sixty works. One of his major contributions, *Ādāb al-Islām fī Nizām al-Ushrah*, serves as the primary object of analysis in this study. Among the key themes addressed in this work is the hijab.

Al-Maliki offers distinctive views regarding the obligation of the hijab. He interprets hijab not merely as a normative religious duty but as a component of social reform with profound implications for the role of women in society. His interpretation of the Qur’anic verses on hijab is grounded in authentic Hadiths and is closely linked to the sociohistorical transformation of women's status before and after the advent of Islam. Al-Maliki also critiques Western thinkers who regard the hijab as a symbol of regression or as a form of female oppression. In contrast, he frames the hijab as an element of Islamic moral values that affirms women’s identity and dignity within a faith-based society. His perspective aligns with several Western Orientalists who objectively assess Islamic culture, demonstrating an analytical approach that takes into account both historical and sociological dimensions in understanding the religious imperative of hijab.

This study makes a meaningful contribution to ongoing discussions within Islamic scholarship on gender and religious identity by highlighting the complex and nuanced thought of Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Maliki. By combining normative-theological reasoning with sociohistorical analysis, his perspective challenges both external Western critiques and internal Muslim discourses that tend to simplify the meaning of the hijab. The value of this research extends beyond its historical insights, as it also speaks to the lived realities of contemporary Muslim women who negotiate questions of faith and identity in an increasingly globalized context. Further research may expand this inquiry by engaging in comparative analyses with other modern Islamic scholars or by examining how al-Maliki's views are received, interpreted, and practiced within diverse Muslim societies.

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