

FASHIONS AND FUNDAMENTALISMS IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE YEMEN: Chador Barbie and Islamic Socks

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I had to say goodbye to my friends with whom I had lived for nearly two years in the Yemeni town of Zabid, during the tense time that followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The common connections we had forged as neighbors, friends, fictive kin, and fellow residents of Zabid were suddenly strained. Zabidis asserted that Americans (and, by extension, Canadians) were in alliance with the oil rich Gulf Arabs at the expense of less-privileged Arab peoples like the Yemenis, who are often treated as inferiors in the Gulf states where they work as migrant laborers.

I did not return to Yemen until 1999. The intervening years had featured the Gulf War, the expulsion of nearly 800,000 Yemeni migrant laborers from Saudi Arabia, which resulted in a subsequent loss of \$1.8 billion in remittance income (Carapico 1998:43, 59), and the Civil War between the former North and South Yemens in 1994. I was expecting changes, and I found them in the capital city, Sanaa, which in many respects was almost unrecognizable to me. The burgeoning suburbs featured a proliferation of the new “villas” of the elite, enclosed by walls topped with glass shards and razor wire. Yet there were many more beggars on the streets and many of the once-dignified and well-kept citizens were now ragged and angry. The faculty apartment building housing colleagues at Sanaa University, once respectable, was now decrepit and, in some cases, rat infested. Most of the cars and taxis seemed to be the same ones that had been around a decade earlier; they were now listing and shabby, patched with duct tape. Yet screeching around these

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sad and rusting cars were a plethora of luxury vehicles: Mercedes, BMWs, and the much loved—even by those who cannot afford them—Toyota Land Cruiser. The 1999 model had been named the “Monica” after Monica Lewinsky, as its narrow top and wide bottom reminded Yemenis of Monica in her trench coat.¹ Like the rest of us, the Yemenis had been watching the Bill and Monica saga unfold, facilitated no doubt by the satellite dishes that now seem to adorn almost every roof in the capital. Widespread corruption and cronyism have for some time been held to be responsible for the country’s economic ills (Dresch and Haykel 1995:422). They have been blamed for increasing divisions—so obviously represented by cars—between the rich and the poor (Johnsen 2006:4; Philips 2006) as well as for the palpable erosion of the middle class (vom Bruck 2005a:262).

In search of some part of the city that I could still recognize, I went to the old *suq*, or market, where I had spent many happy hours on my prior trip to Yemen, finding my way amidst baskets of grains and spices, visiting perfume, fabric, and silver shops. The *suq* was reassuringly familiar to me, but I found three commodities that to me spoke volubly of changes I would observe across Yemen’s shifting political, economic, and religious terrains.

One was an ordinary dress fabric made distinctive by its satellite-dish motif, a sartorial index of how this technological innovation has profoundly reshaped contemporary politics by undermining the monopoly of the state-owned media and facilitating the communication of fashions, commodities, politics, and sex scandals (see Figure 1).

I made my second treasured purchase at a clothing stall frequented by Yemenis: a small box in signature Islamic green labeled “Islamic socks” (see Figure 2). These “socks,” manufactured in China, a socialist state hardly known for tolerance of religious sensibilities, turned out to be black knee-high pantyhose.

I moved on to the part of the *suq* where Yemenis rarely shopped, in which the antique shops held sway, aiming their wares at tourists rather than locals. These souvenir shop owners, whose business had evaporated after a spate of kidnappings of foreigners crippled the Yemeni tourist industry, greeted me warmly. Amid the silver jewelry as popular with foreigners as it is disdained by Yemeni women, who now favor gold, I was amused to find a doll that I immediately baptized “Chador Barbie” (see Figure 3). I found this little piece of cross-cultural kitsch somewhat shocking, although ironically funny as well. I think through this odd juxtaposition of satellite dish fabric, Islamic socks, and Chador Barbie in the second half of the article; I first want to discuss the ways in which Chador Barbie makes us laugh and analyze why that might be.²



FIGURE 1. An ordinary dress fabric sold at the suq in Sanaa displays a satellite-dish motif, yet another indication of how this technology has reshaped Yemen's politics and fashion.

The enchadored Barbie I found in the Yemeni suq is not the American Girl collector's doll called Leyla TM, whose short biography reports that she is a representation of a slave in the harem of an Ottoman sultan in 1720 (Islam OnLine.net 2003). Nor is she the American Barbie-like doll marketed by a Michigan company as a modest alternative to Barbie, less curvaceous, less flashy, less overtly sexy, and, more importantly, veiled (Associated Press 2003). The Yemeni Chador Barbie is not a Mattel product or, for that matter, the product of any corporate manufacturer. Instead, she is clearly a local imitation of this famous global commodity, destined to be a peculiar souvenir of Yemen manufactured for foreigners.

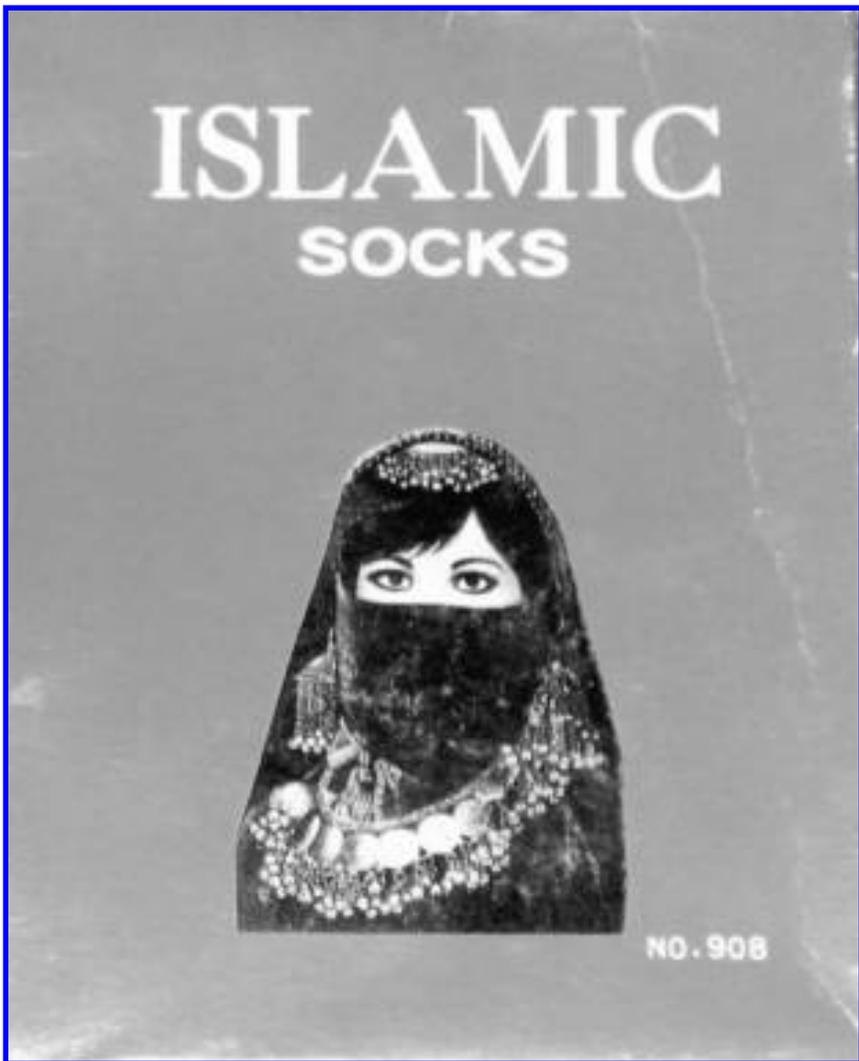


FIGURE 2. Islamic socks have become a part of the “intensification of veiling” in cities such as Zabid where Islamists are redefining public spheres for both men and women.

The perceived ironies of a transcultural object such as Chador Barbie will rest for many on some deeply embedded stereotypes held around the globe: that West and East are somehow mutually exclusive, opposing categories that occupy different spaces. And, yet, encapsulated within Chador Barbie’s form are two icons of the “oppression of women” that build on other stereotypical forms. Barbie the doll is an icon of sexualized, commodified femininity, associated with the West. The chadored woman is an icon of masculine control of women’s sexuality and of



FIGURE 3. In her clothing and adornment Chador Barbie reveals the conflicting movements toward covering and toward exposure and fashionable consumption.

women's subordination, associated with the East. The juxtaposition of these two mutually exclusive locales, West and East—as well as the stereotypes of sexuality associated with both places represented in the body and the clothing of Chador Barbie—makes us laugh, ironically, in a “matter out of place” way before we are consciously aware of why we are laughing.

Many U.S. scholars have argued that Barbie is an inappropriate role model for young girls as Barbie stands for a kind of femininity critiqued for the shaping and adorning of one's body with fashionable commodities for the sole purpose of pleasing men. Feminist critiques of Barbie point to her impossible physique: her hyperslim, large-breasted figure presents an ideal body type that the young girls who play with her can never achieve. Barbie stands as a visible symbol for the self-surveillance that North American girls are inculcated to master, surveilling their body against fat and age, often with health threatening consequences like bulimia or anorexia (Urla and Swedlund 1995). Todd Haynes's film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987) uses Barbie and Ken dolls to tell the story of the candy pop star Karen Carpenter's descent into anorexia, exposing the morbidity of suburban, 1970s, middle-class hypocrisy.³ Critically depicted in Haynes's film, the kind of self surveillance that girls learn to do contains its own oppression, as feminists like Susan Bordo (1993) have argued.

Of course, these perspectives on Barbie are not hegemonic. Barbie's place in North America is clearly more complicated than literal minded readings of the determining effects of popular culture would suggest. In fact, Barbie has been a source of inspiration for much pop art, as well as providing the actual material for it. For instance, a museum show entitled *Kunst und Barbie* at Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, Germany in 1994, had Barbie art as its theme. It featured, among other gems, a Barbie floating in a big glass jar of olives, peppers, and pickles. As Erica Rand argues in *Barbie's Queer Accessories*, it is obvious that Barbie is hardly a simple or unshakable symbol of the oppressions of heteronormativity (1995).

But Barbie is also, in many ways, a symbol, like Coke and McDonald's, which stands for America writ large, despite notable variations in transnational versions and receptions. Veiled in a chador, Barbie is wrapped in an equally potent symbol that denotes the resolute Otherness of the East. This is the Chador Barbie that I found in the suq in Sanaa's Old City. But Chador Barbie's signature garment is open rather than closed, revealing a form fitting dress, whereas a chador is usually relatively shapeless, designed to obscure and shield rather than reveal what lies beneath. Chador Barbie's face veil, the *lithma*, which Yemeni women usually wear just

under their eyes, is pulled down, revealing her lipstick, which is considered shameful to wear on the street. Chador Barbie's jewelry, another item of adornment that ought to be covered, is here revealed. The decoration of the hands and feet with *khithab*, an adornment for weddings or other special events, is also exposed on Chador Barbie, although women do not show this type of adornment to non-related men. Chador Barbie's purportedly pious garb coyly reveals what it is supposed to conceal. Commodified femininity seems to reach its apotheosis in her body.

Paradoxically, this doll embodying such contradictions was sold to tourists seeking a representation of an authentic Yemen. Given the key role of veiled women in establishing the moral superiority of Muslim Yemenis over depraved Westerners, this struck me as odd, particularly the overt sexualizing of a garment of modesty. The garb and adornment were clearly Yemeni: the Barbie chador is made from the same fabric that forms a modesty garment called the *sitarah*, still worn by older Sanani women, perhaps because tourists are known to value the old, authentic things from Yemen, including the silver jewelry that contemporary Yemeni women find unattractive and old fashioned. The arrangement of these items on the body of the doll contradicted most emphatically the logic of veiling in contemporary Yemen. Although sometimes a doll is just a doll, Chador Barbie became for me a way to think through some of the sartorial transformations and shifts in ideas of nakedness, exposure, and space in Yemen at the end of the 20th century.

THE SHIFTING SIGNIFICANCE OF VEILING

After my nine-year absence, I found striking changes in styles of religiosity among Yemeni women, and attendant changes in their comportment in public. First, however, I should note that although strict gender segregation is practiced in Zabid, women and men have two separate public spheres. These public spheres, particularly the women's, are often instantiated in private homes. The homes of wealthy families have a reception room (*mabraz*) with a separate entrance in which men entertain their guests during afternoon visiting sessions involving the consumption of *qat*, a leaf that contains a mild amphetamine, a central feature of Yemeni sociability. These events are the primary venue for politicking and business deals.⁴ Women's sociable gatherings take place in their homes, at certain times when men can be expected to be absent, in the late mornings and in the evenings, from around 5 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Men as well as women uphold gender segregation; for instance, a man would not enter his own home during visiting hours without a query from the foyer asking if there were any "people" (*nas*) present. Women's parties, as I have argued

elsewhere (Meneley 1996), are also salient for the political life of the community, as maintaining ties between families through the extension and acceptance of gracious hospitality are important for a family's social position in Zabid.

As Leila Ahmed pointed out a quarter of a century ago, practices like veiling and gender segregation should not be automatically read as oppressive. After all, being deprived of male company does not necessarily mean one is deprived (Ahmed 1982), although we should not automatically assume that homosociality will generate solidarity and "sisterhood."⁵ There is no universal meaning to either veiling or gender segregation, despite how they are stereotypically depicted. Rather, as the Turkish feminist scholar Deniz Kandiyoti (1987) suggests, we have to see how veiling practices, gender segregation, and debates about Islam are articulated morally and legally in different historical, national, and transnational contexts, in various political and economic relations of power.⁶ I will articulate here some of the salient points about the way in which these debates have unfolded in Zabid.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, when Yemen was part of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans began to adopt Western styles of governance through changes to bureaucratic procedures, the army, and education. Although these transformations filtered into Yemen via the Ottomans, as Brinkley Messick (1993) describes, the forcible unveiling of Yemeni women was not part of Yemeni state reforms, even after the Republican revolution in 1962. This is in marked contrast to Atatürk's revolution in the 1920s that established Republican Turkey from the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. Although veiling was not legally banned, Atatürk himself ran a fierce campaign urging women to adopt Western dress, as veiling was understood by the Turkish modernizers and their Western interlocutors to be a sign of backwardness (Kandiyoti 1991:23).

Similarly, throughout much of the Middle East, changes in veiling have reflected political and historical shifts, or helped create them. Because colonizers frequently regarded the veil as a source of women's subjugation, veiling was often invoked to justify colonial expansion. As Leila Ahmed (1992) has memorably noted, the allegedly poor treatment of Egyptian women by Egyptian men was one of Lord Cromer's chief justifications for colonizing Egypt in the 19th century, despite the fact that his commitment to women's rights is cast in doubt by his membership in the antisuffragette league at home in England. But such hypocrisy often fails to register with those bent on saving others.⁷

After September 11, 2001, Afghani women became the cause of choice for the Hollywood elite, spearheaded by Mavis Leno, Jay Leno's wife, and the burqa

became a visible symbol of two things: the oppression of the woman who wears it, along with the “fundamentalist” who forced her to wear it. As with the British in the 19th century, the U.S. government’s commitment to women’s rights was also cast in doubt when, to oust the Taliban, they supported Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a member of the Northern Alliance known to throw acid in the faces of women who refused to veil (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002:343). Western commonsense understandings of veiling, according to Charles Hirschkind and Saba Mahmood, remain locked in a singular logic of subordination and domination. They argue that “a Muslim woman can only be one of two things, either uncovered, and therefore liberated, or veiled, and thus still, to some degree, subordinate” (2002:353). The enlightened French have gone so far as to suggest a “philosophical model of the veil as a barrier to truth and knowledge” (Dobie 2001:28).⁸ The recent commentary by Jack Straw and Tony Blair about British school teachers wearing the *niqab*, a veil that leaves only the eyes exposed, shows that the veil is even perceived as a barrier to imparting knowledge (Cowell 2006:2), although this claim would no doubt be seen as nonsensical to the Zabidi schoolteachers I knew. Even for those of us who support the idea that clothing and bodily comportment can structure subjectivities and convey, nonverbally, messages in various publics, these assumptions accord a single item of clothing inordinate power, to say nothing of the fact that such assumptions are also ahistorical and acontextual.

Given this history of assumptions about veiling practices, it is not surprising that in Egypt, Turkey, and (for a time) Iran, unveiling women was considered progressive. In these places, women were made to carry much of the burden of signifying, sartorially, modernity.⁹ Unveiled women were seen as giving legitimacy to the states’ claims of secular modernity. But in Yemen the dynamic of veiling is distinctly different. It is of some irony that the modest garb that the Ottomans introduced to Yemen the *sharshaf*, what the Zabidis call the “*shaydar*,” is still retained in Yemen. The *sharshaf* became widespread in Sanaa after the Republican revolution in 1962 (Mundy 1983). Decades after its abandonment in Turkey it became the hegemonic garb in Zabid in the 1980s. Sanaa is the center not only of political power but also the source of elegant fashion for Zabidis. This garment signifies both piety and sophistication; it is designed to conceal a woman’s body, her clothing, and her adornment, from the eyes of all nonrelated men except close affines. By voluntarily wearing this garment on the streets, one constitutes oneself as a virtuous woman from a respectable family.

In Zabid, veiling is a key bodily practice in constituting oneself as a pious Muslim. Behaving modestly is also a sign that one has the social sense (*‘aql*) required

of an adult.¹⁰ In a tale I was told of one Zabidi woman's descent into madness, the first evidence of her illness was her wandering on the street without her chador and barely a kerchief covering her hair. Scantly dressed tourists in Zabid are said to scare children who think they are insane. The unveiled Western woman is seen—in a reverse stereotype—as a symbol of the licentiousness of the West and its moral inferiority, proof that it does not deserve its current position of political and economic dominance. I was routinely told by Zabidi women that in contrast to their own modest comportment, in Canada women walked down the street in their underwear. (Clearly they had never experienced a Canadian winter.) Like certain Western feminists, Yemeni women argue that making their bodies available for male objectification creates subordination rather than emancipation.

Despite all the critiques of Canadians (here standing in for all Westerners), I was accepted, in large part, because of my conformity to local standards of appropriate comportment by adopting a chador. After I realized that people thought unchadored women were prostitutes or downright mad, I quickly adopted one. But it was also true that I was accepted because no matter what our differences, according to local norms, the fact that I was a neighbor gave me an inalienable right to be included in social events. (Had I not worn a chador, it would likely have been the topic of endless conversation and outright criticism, but it would not have meant ostracism.) I also indicated my humanity by visiting and receiving visits: being willing to engage with others sociably is a sign that one is a decent human being. Westerners are assumed to stay at home, alone, with their doors locked. When I visited sick friends, a duty of a pious Muslim, surprise at a Westerner behaving with compassion (*rahma*) was evident in how they told and retold stories about my appropriate comportment with a degree of astonishment that was not entirely flattering.

Unlike the highland Yemenis who are mostly Zaydi Shia, Zabidis are Sunni Muslims following the Shafa'i legal school (*madhhab*). Islam in Zabid, as Islam most everywhere, has been “transnational” for centuries; Zabid was never isolated from wider religious currents. Of late it is common for Zabidi women to articulate their Muslim piety in terms of global politics, and as noted above, in terms of a modesty closely entwined with veiling. Even illiterate old women could produce at the drop of a hat a lecture about the West's political and economic domination of and shaping of knowledge about the Muslim world that would have warmed the heart of Edward Said. I myself received many such lectures during my first field trip.

The vagaries of international politics and concomitant flows of money, expertise, commodities, fashions, texts, and ideas continue to affect religious life in Zabid as they always have. For centuries, Zabid was famed for religious scholarship.

It was a place to stop on the pilgrimage route from Aden to Mecca, where scholars from all over the Muslim world would study for a time before making their way to the pilgrimage in Mecca. Although Zabid is no longer a center for religious learning, its historical fame continues to affect how Zabidis view themselves as Muslims; religious learning is still highly prized. While some elite women in the past attended a few years of Quranic school, most young women and girls now attend or teach in the state school system. More central now than Quranic schools are religious institutions (*ma'ahid 'ilmiyyah*) funded beginning in the 1970s by Saudi Arabia (Dresch 2000:142, 173). Although some of the teachers at the state schools quietly questioned the academic standards of the religious schools, these schools still provided an important source of respectable salaried income for women. Religious practices in Zabid have long been affected by various reformist or revivalist (*salafi*) currents that propose a return to the Islam as practiced by the Prophet and his companions; revivalist notions have circulated in Yemen since the 18th century (Haykel 2003). The Wahhabism associated with Saudi Arabia, which many Zabidis encounter via their relatives who are resident in Saudi Arabia is also influential in Zabid as it is in highland areas like Razih (see Weir 1997). Following from Talal Asad (1986), it is important to remember that no religious tradition provides a static historical edifice that is unchangingly or unthinkingly reproduced. Practitioners of world religious traditions like Islam interpret the relatively stable elements, the sacred texts, in this case the Quran and the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) in particular relations of power and conditions of debate. Although reformist trends are many and sometimes contradictory, the way they are enacted in Zabid tends to be a foregrounding of the importance of the sacred texts, the Quran and the Hadith, over mediated interpretations by religious scholars (*ulema*). There are deep suspicions of anything resembling “innovation” (*bid'a*) from these texts, persistent critiques of practices that smack of “polytheism” (*shirk*), and most germane here, critiques of women’s comportment. These Islamist reformists may not refer to themselves as anything other than Muslim; they do, however, critique the practices of others, particularly saint (*wali*) veneration, as not being properly Muslim.¹¹ They were, however, referred to by others in 1989–90 as “Ikhwani” (referring to the Muslim Brotherhood) or “Wahhabi”; by 1999, they were being referred to, particularly by those who did not agree with them, as “Islahis.” Although it is far from clear if those described as “Islahis” were actually members of the Islah party that articulates an Islamic agenda, the Zabidis in this instance were following a more general usage of the term to refer to reformists or Islamists of various stripes.¹²

As Asad argues for the notion of an Islamic discursive tradition:

An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. . . . It will be the practitioners' conceptions of what is *apt performance*, and of how the past is related to present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form. [1986:14–15]

The apt performances that most concerned the Zabidi women I know had to do with covering and exposure, signaling the people from whom one ought to cover, in front of whom one could be exposed, and the comportment of one's body in terms of adornment. These debates could be about something as minor as whether women ought to part their hair at the side, which was the fashion of older women, or in the middle which one reformist young woman claimed was recommended in the Hadith of the Prophet. Other debates, such as those surrounding what constitutes "nakedness," had many more consequences. The following example from my trip to Zabid in 1999 will serve to demonstrate some of the changing debates and struggles over what constitutes "apt performance."

RETURNING TO ZABID

I am sure we anthropologists all nurse a secret fear that the communities we worked in will be unrecognizable when we return; the changes in the capital made me worry about how Zabid had fared. Zabid's physical appearance has changed as much as that of Sanaa. Despite having been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993, new concrete block houses or additions have altered the appearance of the streets so greatly that I would have been lost had I been left for a moment without escort. This building boom was the result of the mass deportations of Yemenis from Saudi Arabia after Iraq invaded Kuwait; the Yemeni government had not condemned this act with enough alacrity (Carapico 1998). Although many Zabidis had returned to Saudi Arabia after the tensions eased, they had decided to build houses in Zabid in case they were ousted again when political climates change.¹³ Their new houses that had so radically changed the cityscape had been left in the charge of their Zabidi relatives.

However much Zabid had changed physically and socially, much remained the same. I was quickly caught up in the everyday routines that were so familiar from my last stay. A few days passed before I got over my relief that Zabid was as I remembered it; I then began to wonder if anything had changed at all, except

for the production of an astounding number of children. The elite families with whom I was staying seemed in roughly the same financial state as when last I saw them, as did their poorer neighbors. Despite the changes on the street, the interior of their houses, were, for the most part, warmly familiar. Consumption patterns seemed, on the surface, to have remained similar: People still chewed qat (a leaf that contains a mild amphetamine) every day, at considerable expense. Zabid's position as a bit of a backwater in contemporary Yemen—although it had been a central locale for earlier dynasties, notably the Rasulid dynasty in the 13th through 15th centuries—sheltered it from the economic upheavals in Sanaa and the southern city of Aden, the former British colony and capital of the erstwhile South Yemen.¹⁴ Yet I did discern distinct alterations in practices of women's hospitality, adornment, and religious practices.

While it was heartwarming to return to Zabid, it was also anxiety provoking. Before I had even arrived, my social events were already planned. I was invited out to lunch every day by each family that I had been closest to, in physical proximity or affection. The complex schedule was arranged between my friends and neighbors, and I was not consulted, merely told when and where I should be. (Once again, I recalled just how silly it is that veiling is equated with passivity, because Zabidi women make New Yorkers look shy.)

My former next-door neighbors requested my presence one Friday evening, negotiating with my other neighbors by saying that they had a special event planned. I arrived at the appropriate time, only to find the house in chaos. When I had left Zabid in 1990, the family had just built two additions to their large family complex to house the two young brides of the family's two eldest sons. Both were pregnant when I left; nine years later they had five children each. Lunch was late, the children were hungry and querulous; the toddlers lurched about, practically falling into the dishes of steaming rice and lamb that were arranged on a mat on the floor. After this chaotic affair, I was relieved to be taken to the house of an old acquaintance, Samiya, to "relax" (*irtah*), to wash, and change for the evening reception period in peace. Samiya dithered about with chores and dressed very slowly. Her sister-in-law dropped by and we chatted, and then Samiya insisted that we pop by another dearly missed neighbor's house on our way, although I was getting nervous about being late, knowing from long experience that my former neighbors could be quite scathing if they felt slighted. I knew Samiya knew that too, and I was perplexed by her dallying.

By the time we arrived back at our host's house, it was after dark. When we walked into the house, we were greeted by the sight of around 40 young women,

still dressed in their chadors, sitting on the mud floor of the courtyard. My hosts' daughter, Intisar, who I had known as a shy and quiet 14 year old, was standing and preaching in a fluid, authoritative style to the assembled women about how to be a proper Muslim woman. Samiya and I were ushered into an adjoining reception room. Although I could not hear what Intisar was saying because of Samiya's incessant grumbling, I could hardly take my eyes off her. I was amazed at her confidence and rhetorical skill in the face of her considerable audience, many of whom were older than she. I was also amazed to see women sitting on the floor of the house in complete chador, in a lecturelike format; it was certainly a departure for women's sociable practices common in 1989–90, and I had attended hundreds, if not more, sociable gatherings. In Zabid then, and still today, a home's interior space was a women's space during the evening visiting hours. Women removed their chadors on arriving, and although some women would wear a small kerchief, many would not have their hair covered at all; this signified, importantly, that their reputations would come to no harm in the host's house and that the men in the household could be trusted not to infringe on the gathering. Wearing chadors in the house was a noteworthy divergence from accepted practice.

This social event was also peculiar in that it disrupted the usual division of hospitality labor among female kin. Usually the younger women (unmarried daughters and sons' wives) are expected to seat guests, to bring them tea, light the water pipe, and plump extra cushions behind their backs. (They "move" [*harak*], which in this context means that they do the work that requires fetching and serving.) The older women in the host family sit back, ask after the guests' families in a dignified fashion, urge guests to relax, and, perhaps, distribute gifts of qat. At this particular gathering, all of the younger women in the family were attending the meeting in the adjacent room. The hospitality tasks were left to the older women. The guests started pouring in, but there was no tea to be served or water pipes lit. The poor old grandmother was so senile that she merely sat babbling to herself. The elderly aunt had had some kind of stroke that left her partially crippled, but her mind and sense of propriety were left intact. She was so incensed that the guests were left unattended that she tried to light a water pipe herself, and nearly knocked burning coals over the guests. The mother, herself aging and still mourning her husband's death, was carrying the squalling and soiled baby of one of her praying daughter-in-laws. Then one of the little children let the goats out from behind the house and they careened into the reception area. The mother was at this point hysterical as she beat the goats and screamed for her youngest daughter's assistance. However, this young teenager merely shrugged and said she did not know how to

light the water pipe, at which point Samiya snapped that she was old enough to know how. Usually Zabidi women manage to make dozens of guests comfortable and make it seem effortless; the coordinated and cooperative labor this requires was exposed by its absence at this party, the most chaotic one I had ever attended in Zabid.

What I was witnessing was in fact a profound challenge to the hierarchies of age and class. The younger women in the family were clearly marking the work of hospitality—and as I have argued elsewhere (Meneley 1996), it was considered an important part of the work that women do for the reputations of their families—as less important than their pious seminar. Although this was considered arrogant and vastly inconsiderate to one's elders, the older women had very little means to challenging it directly, and the effort that the mother did make fell on deaf ears. I had never seen a teenager behave so rudely to her mother, and judging from the hisses and snorts around me, my neighbors were equally appalled. The problem was that it was very hard to challenge an event organized in the name of Islam. This was true despite the fact that the often competitive exchange of hospitality was, in fact, very much understood and justified within an Islamic framework, where acknowledging the special events of others was thought to be a duty of a proper Muslim. The visiting sessions themselves were structured by the afternoon (*'asr*) and evening (*layl*) prayer calls, and part of the hospitality offered to guests was to offer them the opportunity to perform their prayer ablutions and to provide them with the cotton cloths for covering themselves and prayer mats. Yet these young, reformist Zabidi women were presenting their gathering as an opposition to the other form of gathering, which involved qat chewing, smoking, and elaborate adornment.

The other guests and I sat casting curious glances at the pious gathering in the adjoining room while Samiya snorted and rolled her eyes. At last I realized why she had been dragging her feet in returning to our hosts' house. Never one to hide her opinions, Samiya unfurled her obvious disapproval of the encroachment of this preaching seminar, in which she was put in the role of an illiterate outsider instead of an older matriarch to be treated with respect. In previous women's gatherings at this house, she had reigned supreme, as the best friend of the wife of the head of the household and as a skilled raconteur whose wit and definitive pronouncements on everyday affairs in Zabid I had rarely seen contradicted. Samiya and I had not been close during my first years in Zabid. Despite my efforts to conform to Zabidi standards of comportment, my inevitable transgressions were on occasion the subject of one of her signature definitive pronouncements, and

although the nuances of these rapid fire tirades were often lost on me, I was always embarrassed by them. I was surprised to find her, nine years later, treating me as an ally. She seemed to be using me as a witness to a series of changes that she did not like but could not address verbally, although her disapproval was palpable in her surly facial expression and sniffs of disgust.

In 1989–90, reformist Islam had an obvious presence in Zabid, but by 1999, they were referred to explicitly as “Islahis” or reformists.¹⁵ One of the intellectuals associated with the Islah movement is Shaykh ‘Abd Al Majid Al-Zindani. He recruited Yemeni men for the anti-Soviet crusade in Afghanistan, taking advantage, one might imagine, of the \$3 billion that flowed into Afghanistan in the 1970s and 1980s, funding military training and arms for the mujahedeen (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002:342). Those Yemeni fighters returning from Afghanistan were referred to as the “Afghanis”; they are viewed with a certain degree of ambivalence, although there is no doubt that Al-Zindani and his followers have had considerable influence on how everyday Islam is practiced in Yemen. After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, what was then North Yemen was the recipient of considerable Saudi aid in the form of sponsorship of informal religious colleges. Egyptian and Sudanese teachers were hired to staff them, promoting a form of Islamism that was explicitly anticommunist, making what was then North Yemen a part of a covert Cold War battle (Carapico 1997:1). Despite the fact that Al-Zindani has recently been accused by the U.S. government of being part of Al-Qa‘ida, he has not been turned over to the Americans, and remains close to Yemen’s President, ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih. Al-Zindani argues for the compatibility of science and Islam, even arguing that the scriptures predict scientific discoveries (Dresch and Haykel 1995:428). He may well have been the source for the young Zabidi Islamist’s claim that the prayer postures, which involve kneeling and prostration, function as exercise for the body. (I was pulled aside by another woman, the daughter of a respected Islamic scholar, who informed me that they prayed because God expected it of them, not because of some functionalist purpose.)

Islah proclaimed itself to be “the first Islamist party to come to power in 1993 through the ballot box” (Carapico 1997:2). The Islah party is now often described as the official opposition, although cynics doubt that the position of the president is really up for contestation. Islah’s association with the very powerful Shaykh Abdullah, head of the Hashid tribal confederacy, makes it not only a moral voice in the republican state but also a very well armed political force. Although Zabid is far from the Islahi stronghold in the highland north, Shaykh Abdullah is a household name there as elsewhere.

My former neighbors who hosted the party I attended were described by others as “Islahi”; while the label had changed meaning in the last decade, the family was already among the most widely recognized Islamists in Zabid in 1989–90. When I returned in 1999, I found that the elder daughter had been appointed the head of the local religious institute for girls. This appointment mystified me because the older daughter showed none of the academic prowess or rhetorical talent of her younger sister; indeed, she had cheerfully confided to me in 1990 that she was lazy (*kaslana*) about schoolwork and had barely graduated from high school. Her happy-go-lucky personality was in stark contrast to her sister’s earnest religious zeal and her sister-in-law’s self-righteous contempt for non-Muslims; when the latter two tried once again to convert me, as they had several times in my earlier stay in Zabid, the older daughter hovered anxiously around, and when they had left asked me if I had been angered by them because it was considered a very strong breach of hospitality to anger a guest in your house. Unlike other Zabidi schoolteachers, who tend to be mindful of their position, comporting themselves with reserve, she always appeared slightly unkempt, even in a chador. Some Zabidis, admittedly those opposed to Islamist trends in general and this family in particular, said that the only reason she had been appointed as head was that her father had given a big donation to the institute.

At first glance, the Islahi movement seemed to have had the most impact on the public sphere that women share with men, primarily schools and hospitals, settings where women are veiled. Many have noted that, in some ways, veiling allows women to move more freely in the men’s public space, affording them what Goffman calls “public inattention.”¹⁶ But Islamists in contemporary Zabid have escalated veiling to what many consider an uncomfortable level: Islamic socks and gloves are worn, despite Zabid’s heat and humidity. Most of the older women, and many of the younger ones, thought this escalation of veiling to be not only barely tolerable physically but also piously pretentious. Plenty of women do not agree that exposed hands and feet constitute an infringement of modesty (*istihya’*).

The Islamists were far from universally popular in Zabid, because of shifts that they introduced to modes of public comportment and the social use of space. The struggle to define appropriate Islamic comportment shifted ground even more radically in the women-only interior public sphere that is enacted in people’s homes. In my previous stay, women were never veiled in the interior of the house, except if they dropped by in the morning for a brief visit; the reason they would give for not taking off their chadors was that they were in their everyday housework clothes, as it was considered bad manners to enter someone’s home improperly groomed and

dressed.¹⁷ But the Islahis are attempting to shift ideas about what is “naked” and what kind of exposure is possible and to whom. The guests at the event described above, including myself, came to my neighbor’s house, washed, wearing fresh, clean party frocks, and adorned for a party. After we shucked our chadors as we entered, we uncovered the transparent dresses, gold jewelry, and makeup typical of formal women’s parties. Yet suddenly we seemed out of place in front of the enchadored women, who were conspicuously not wearing party frocks, makeup, or jewelry.

The young Islamists were critical of the transparent dresses that were, and still are, very popular in Zabid. These see-through dresses are worn with a fancy bra and lace underskirt reaching to the feet. These dresses, I should stress, are considered by most Zabidi women to be appropriate going-out garb. The fabric is available in myriad colors and patterns, and women make much of their capacity to exercise taste (*thawq*) in their selection. The number and quality of these gowns also create distinctions between families, as do all forms of adornment. But these dresses are also practical: They are cool and relatively shapeless, adjustable to many female figures. Yet the Islahis say that these dresses expose too much flesh, that one should not expose one’s body to anyone except one’s husband. They attempt to redefine this form of dress as being too revealing for the public sphere composed of women.¹⁸ This view seems nonsensical to many Zabidi women, as does the claim of some reformists that women should not wear lipstick in front of their brothers, lest they attract them sexually, which for many Zabidi women, even those who are identified by others as Islahi, was simply beyond the realm of commonsense. It was also an assertion that attempts to restrict exposure to a very narrow field, the nuclear family.

This particular evening, like every evening on my return to Zabid, I had been adorned with a lavish string of jasmine flowers, and had partaken of the staples of hospitality, the incense and perfume offered to me by my hosts. I had been adorned with khithab on my hands and my feet by my Zabidi friends who had hosted me the day before. After the pious lecture, I was sharply criticized by a couple of women who had just emerged from it. I was told that it was “forbidden” (*haram*) for me to accept perfume, incense, or wear jasmine flowers because my husband was not present with me in Zabid. The Islahis try to shift the meaning of adornment aimed at other women to being exclusively for husbands.¹⁹ Adornment practices were always aimed, in a subsidiary way, at husbands; this was evident in the restrictions of adornment for unmarried teenaged women. Yet for married women whose husbands were not present, unmarried women past marriageable age, and divorced women, the adornment practices had a significance that was understood as a part

of generosity and hospitality. I was surprised by the criticism because it had not occurred to me to refuse the flowers that my hosts had specially prepared for me merely because my husband was not present. Countless times I had seen these lavish strings of jasmine flowers given to long-absent guests; it served as a welcoming and honoring practice for women, one whose meaning was separate from the sexual attraction of husbands.

I later asked the women in whose house I was staying about this new style of public interaction for women. They conveyed considerable quiet resentment about what they feel is constant lecturing on what is “proper Islam,” especially because they do not see themselves as anything other than believing, practicing Muslims. As Asad notes, “orthodoxy” is always created in situations of power (1986). The reformist Islamists attempt to shift understandings of public comportment in Zabid in often unpopular ways, their “holier than thou” attitude provoking deep resentment. But the contestations mostly take place in private, behind the Islamists’ backs.

It was interesting to me that our neighbors in 1989–90 were routinely criticized because their children’s clothes were shabby, even though they were one of the largest landholders in Zabid, because the interior of their house—the women’s part where guests are hosted—was sloppy, and because the head of the household, who also was accused of being less than fair in land deals, was a miser (*bakkil*). These are all evaluations made within an understanding of Islam in which both prestige and otherworldly benefit redound on the generous host, the giver of charity, the honest man, and the head of the household who ensures that all the people under his care are well dressed and clean. With this worldview, it is much easier for the rich to be good Muslims than the poor. The Islamists implicitly question this hierarchy by rejecting hospitality and consumption patterns that create distinctions, and by providing regular, impersonal charity to the poor, who then do not have to rely on the inclination of their wealthier neighbors.²⁰

In 1999, it was notable that the criticism of the Islamists was framed in a different way: they were critiqued for lacking manners (*adab*), a term that connotes religious piety as well as social propriety. I had been accompanied to the above described social event by a young woman, Wafaa, who was clearly uncomfortable, sitting very stiffly and leaving abruptly after no longer than 15 minutes. She later said that she had left early because the hostess had not asked after her mother or her family, nor did the hostess make any attempt to dissuade Wafaa from leaving, which is considered bad manners. Although the offering of hospitality in the women’s public could be quite competitive and bound up in family honor, which they themselves recognized, women did not perceive this as a “secular” sphere untouched by religion,

by any means. In contrast, they understood it to be part of the duty of a pious Muslim to acknowledge others, through greeting and by visiting, especially at times of birth, marriage, death, and illness. It was also considered a pious duty to be generous (*karima*) to guests. In addition, the devil was thought to “whisper” (*uwaswis*) to those who “stayed alone in the house.” Refusing to visit or receive guests was also a challenge to one’s spiritual status.

Wafaa also noted afterward that the mud floor of our hostess’ house was in a terrible state; most Zabidi homes have mud floors, which require daily maintenance to keep them evenly damp so that guests were not covered in dust. Rather than a mere critique of housekeeping, Wafaa aimed her criticism at the younger women’s lack of “compassion” (*rahma*) for their elderly relatives who were clearly unable to manage the considerable work of maintaining a Zabidi household. This accusation of lack of “compassion” was a particularly searing criticism, connecting the behavior of the young Islamist women to Westerners who, Zabidis argue, watch Muslim people being hurt or killed without seeming to care. Zabidi women also criticized Westerners for lack of “respect” (*ihthiram*) for their elders, particularly their mothers. But even though both these qualities—compassion and respect—are ratified by deep Islamic genealogies and held dear as moral evaluations by most Zabidi women I knew, I did not see these criticisms aimed at the Islahis by their critics in the women’s public sphere, although they were leveled in private. The bitterness of these tensions may have been the result of the fact that no one in Zabid claimed to have a “secular” identity; most women veiled, fasted during Ramadan, and prayed daily.²¹

A question that may be posed is whether the Islahi movement was empowering women or enlisting them in their own subordination. I was amazed at the rhetorical skill of my former neighbor, a quiet and shy teenager when last I saw her, who had developed into a formidable young preacher. In some senses, Islahis are allowing women to poach, as it were, on a traditionally male domain of the dispensing of religious opinions and directives. I also heard of another Sanani woman who, after becoming trained as a preacher, gained the courage to agitate for divorce from her philandering, drunken husband, even though she was illiterate and he was a university professor.²² The Islah party enables women to circumvent the usual route to divorce, whereby a woman must be sponsored by her father or brother, as the Islah party will sponsor a woman’s divorce from a man deemed to be a fallen Muslim, subverting the authority of both natal kin and husband.

The Islahis in Sanaa also organized “cost saving mass marriages” (Clark 2004:125) and some women even chose their own husbands, who they had met through Islahi networks (Clark 2004:14); these practices also provide an opportunity

to become independent from kin hierarchies. The Islahis launched a female voter recruitment drive while its women's section agitated for the right to have separate voting facilities (Carapico 1997). Like many organizations around the world, the women's section of the Islah party participated in antiwar rallies during the weeks preceding the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (*Yemen Times* 2003). In 2004 they staged rallies in support of French Muslim women's right to wear the headscarf (*Al Sahwa Net* 2004).

Yet this framing of the "empowerment" question may itself contain a problem, situated as it is in a set of assumptions about empowerment and emancipation steeped in our own understandings of how political struggles to achieve gender equality occur. In an important article, Mahmood (2001) discusses the ways in which Western understandings of resistance and subordination cannot really capture the dynamics of agency in other contexts. In agreement with Judith Butler, Mahmood argues that the possibility of resistance to norms is located within the structure of power itself; she does not agree with the second part of Butler's argument, which situates resistance to dominant norms, particularly heteronorms, as the "paradigmatic instance of agency" (2001:211). Mahmood argues that this cannot account for operations of power that construct different kinds of desires, capacities, and virtues and that do not follow the trajectory of liberal politics.²³ For Mahmood's Cairene Islamists, agency was engaged in proudly embodying traditionally sanctioned virtues, those of modesty and patience that may be read by Westerners as oppression.

Although I agree with Mahmood's critique of Western feminist unilineal conceptions of emancipation, the way Islamists are situated in Yemen is not the same. Both Mahmood's (2001, 2004) and Hirschkind's (2001, 2006) work on male Islamists in Cairo suggests that these groups are formulating an alternate mode of being virtuous, of being a good Muslim in a counterpublic, and one that is very threatening to the Egyptian government. The situation is very different in Yemen, not surprisingly, for despite the international circulation of Islamist ideas, they take root in different national histories, and more importantly here, local practices that govern everyday comportment.

For one, in Zabid, Islamists are not opposing people who consider themselves "Westernized" or "secular" but rather women who themselves have a strong commitment to inculcating pious, modest selves. Many of those associated with Islamist initiatives, Islahi or Ikhwani, have participated in democratic elections, however flawed they might be. The Islah party is powerful, but its power does not challenge the president or the imagined public sphere; rather it functions within a consultative

assembly (*majlis as-ashura*) that is elected. Although elections are a site of enormous energy and concern for ordinary Yemenis, the consultative assembly does not fundamentally constrain the president's power. And as Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel note, while there were Islamists in Islah, it was at the center of political life in Yemen, drawing on a style of connections and patronage that very much resembled how the government's party operates (1995:426).

The challenge the Islahis pose is not so much to the male, outside public sphere of the republican state, but to the women's public sphere and the ways in which honor and Muslim virtue are created through accepting and offering generous hospitality. At the gathering described above, an Islahi woman in chador, Islamic socks, and gloves, refused to shake my hand in greeting because I was not a Muslim. I had not known her from my prior stay in Zabid, but it was still an obvious refusal of the most basic acknowledgement of another person, an acknowledgement that is deeply embedded in Muslim ethics. It was not as if my origins had ever been irrelevant during my prior stay in Zabid. Women constantly criticized me as a representative of "the West" and interrogated me on U.S. government policy about the Middle East, which they refused, not without reason, to distinguish from Canadian government policy. I was given lectures on the immoral comportment of Western women, and several women tried to convert me to Islam, including my above-described neighbors. My statements, even about my own society, were not always accepted without question. My shortcomings in living up to high expectations were always brought to my attention, and if, God forbid, I made an error of taste in dress selection, I could rest assured that someone would tell me that the color looked terrible on me. Yet, in all my time in Zabid, I had never found someone who would not acknowledge my presence. My position as a neighbor, a coresident of Zabid, and a woman, was enough to ensure that I had a place, even as a Christian foreigner.

CHIC CHADORS

I found in Sanaa, the fashion mecca for the Zabidis, Chador Barbie at the same moment that I found Islamic socks. It was also the moment that sexy chador shops opened their doors just as veiling practices intensified and women covered more of their bodies. Chadors designed to hide adornment were themselves adorned. In 1999 there was a prolific elaboration of chador fashion: Chadors were adorned with fancy buttons, colored embroidery, and even rhinestones. What struck me so forcefully was the extent to which the pious dress had itself been commodified as fashion. Several storefronts feature a veiled woman sporting a "come hither" look

above her lithma, sexualizing the chador. And even the box of Islamic socks had a little peek-a-boo window in the shape of a heart and a picture of a veiled woman with her jewelry exposed. Chadors themselves are becoming items of consumption and a means of conveying distinctions.²⁴

The finery available for purchase was certainly not in the reach of everyone because plenty of women appeared to be wearing old and tired chadors. As from the cars, one could read from the chadors the changing class positions—and an increasing gap between the wealthy elite and the rest of the people. These new, fancy, and expensive chadors were for sale on a prominent shopping street in a wealthy suburb in the capital city. After dark, this busy street was also lined with women in chadors. When I asked a friend why these women were loitering about on the street after dark, I was told that they were prostitutes. A decade earlier, I had not seen one prostitute on the streets. But the 1990s had not been kind to ordinary Yemenis, nor one suspects, was the government helping, as evidence of corruption was everywhere. With high unemployment, wages that did not go up despite rapid inflation, withdrawal of government subsidies for staple foods or fuels, or husbands who went away to work and did not send enough money home, women found themselves with few options. Ironically, what made their activity possible in this culture in which prostitution is very seriously stigmatized, was the anonymous cloak of the chador.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to comment on the reconfiguration of a male public domain and definitions of *space*. Without a doubt, the Islahis have helped open an outside public sphere to women that until relatively recently was reserved for men. Greater access to divorce, the right to vote, the right to choose one's own marriage partner, and the right to demonstrate are all rights that are taken by many to be strategies for (or indicators of) women's emancipation.

The more radical challenge the Islamists pose is to the women's public sphere in Zabid. As Annelies Moors argues in many Middle Eastern contexts, as modern heterosocial public spheres expand, "female homo-social semipublic spheres have often become devalued and turned into something 'merely private' " (2006:122). However, by wearing their chadors in the house, the Zabidi Islamists are extending the outside public sphere (predominantly male) into an interior public space (predominantly female). The Islahis are implicitly defining other women as "like men" in terms of how they might infringe on their modesty; the unmarked standard for women is men, not other women. This fundamentally alters the ethos and aesthetics

of women's gatherings, which however competitive they can be, at least provide a sphere where women do not have to defer to men, where they can be with other women, in comfortable, aesthetically pleasing dress without the constant demands of little children, where they can constitute themselves as adults. It also shrinks drastically the domain audience to whom a woman can reveal herself to a nuclear family sphere. The Islahi challenges may seem Islamic in form but are secular liberal in content.

The other challenge the Islahis pose is to traditional hierarchies within the household: the younger women had all but quit the domestic labor in the name of piety, neglecting the deference owed to older female kin. It also serves to question the important political function of hospitable competition between households. The Islahis challenge the encompassment of the host family; they refuse to take their chadors off and they refuse to accept the hospitality of the host, making instead the interior of the host's house an outside public space. This is an egalitarian move, of course, because it undercuts the honor and prestige that redound on a host when she offers generous hospitality, but egalitarian initiatives often contain their own exclusions.

The Islahis masculinize the female public and at the same time provide a challenge to kin hierarchies and also to the practice of creating distinctions through hospitality. The stage for female display is taken away. In contrast, the decoration of the chador takes the distinction and display of private hospitality out into the public realm. These are exactly opposite initiatives.

In contrast to the Islahi masculinization of the female public sphere, which undercuts the power of distinctions created through hospitality, is the decorating of the chador, which takes the distinction and display once carried out within private hospitality to the streets. Both of these developments, toward covering and—in the opposite direction—toward exposure and fashionable consumption, are visible on the body of Chador Barbie, shedding light on the continuing struggle to define appropriate Islamic comportment in both male and female spheres: The Islahis reach into the female public sphere to constrain displays while those who wear decorated chadors take display and distinction to the street. Chador Barbie thus serves as an apt index of tensions in the practice of Islam in contemporary Yemen, which have profound social and political implications. For although these tensions are particularly visible in elite domains, there are cross-cutting implications for the women in shabby chadors scraping together a living in harsh times, who are often dependent on charity, for how charity is conceived and enacted is itself at stake in shifts in elite women's dress, comportment, and hospitality.²⁵

ABSTRACT

This article examines the complex relationships between changing forms of commodity production and consumption and changing styles of religiosity in Zabid, the Republic of Yemen. I examine a couple of prominent logics of veiling in Fin-de-Siècle Yemen: Some reformist women add “Islamic socks” and gloves to their already fully modest garb, while other women don chadors that decorate these garments with embroidery, making them into items of fashionable consumption and adornment. Other commodities, like a Chador Barbie that I found in Yemen’s suq, are used to think through changing practices of consumption, adornment, and women’s sociability in Zabid.

Keywords: islamists, fashion, veiling, commodities

NOTES

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1. An earlier, more rounded version of the Toyota Land Cruiser was named after the curvaceous Egyptian film startlet, Layla Alawi (Dresch 2000:177).
2. The Zabidi pronunciation of *chador* is *shaydar*; I have chosen to use the more recognizable spelling even though it is commonly associated with Iran. The garment Zabidis refer to as the “shaydar” is referred to by Sanani women as the “sharshaf,” a garment of black fabric, which has a floor-length skirt, a long, loose overtop, a head piece, and a face veil; it covers the body and the clothes underneath.
3. The film was not officially released. More information about the film can be found at the Internet Movie Database (n.d.).
4. The suq and mosques are also public spheres for Zabidi men. Public spaces where nonrelated men and women encounter each other include the school system and the small medical clinic; women are veiled and polite men avert their eyes.
5. In Abu-Lughod’s widely cited piece “The Romance of Resistance” (1990), she critiques her own early article (1985) “A Community of Secrets” for this assumption.
6. This point is demonstrated admirably in the collection *Women, Islam and the State*, edited by Deniz Kandiyoti (1991). See also the essays in Kandiyoti 1996 and Abu-Lughod 1998.
7. Like Abu-Lughod in her article “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” (2002), Laila Lalami has noted the continued convergence between concern for the “pitiable” Muslim woman and evangelical and secular support in the West for contemporary projects of empire (2006:1).

8. The resurgence of the headscarf debate in France shows that veiling remains as potent a symbol now as ever; those on the right and the left curiously converge in their hostility toward it (Silverstein 2004).
9. In contemporary Turkey, veiling has been read as a sign of resistance to the Turkish regime, and it is an act for which women can be punished. For instance, they can be refused a place in university if they cover their hair.
10. This argument is made more fully in Meneley 1996.
11. This had been an important dimension of Islam as practiced in Zabid; by 1989, women who hosted events in honor of saints, including distributing food to the neighborhood poor, were criticized for being polytheists.
12. For an excellent account of the dizzying permutations of how these terms are used, and by whom, see Dresch and Haykel (1995: esp. 413–414). See also vom Bruck's useful discussion of the relationship between the Sunni Islamists and their Zaydi interlocutors (2005b:238–243).
13. Yemenis are rarely granted Saudi Arabian citizenship and, therefore, remain vulnerable to expulsion in times of strife.
14. Zabid has been marginal to Yemen's economy for some time. The coffee trade in the 17th and 18th century circumvented Zabid in favor of the coastal port Al-Mocha, while the coastal town of Al-Hudaydah became the regional capital in the 19th century and remains so today. Most of the wealthy Zabidis own land in the surrounding river valley (*wadi*), where sharecroppers produce date palms, sorghum, limes, bananas, and the like. Although Zabid is highly stratified, its distance from the center of power (and corruption, many claim) means that the people have been more sheltered from the startling gaps in wealth between the rich and the poor that have emerged in Sanaa.
15. For a detailed description of Islah, and its complicated place in Yemeni politics, see Dresch and Haykel 1995 and Dresch (2000:159–180).
16. In Europe and North America, as noted above, veiling has quite the opposite effect. See Asad (2003:159–180) for an excellent discussion about the way in which modern secularism makes Islam and Islamic dress seem like a "problem."
17. For the connections between women's comportment with other women and family honor, see Meneley 1996, 1999.
18. One of Zabid's most prominent Islamists in 1989 (described by those who resented him as "ikhwani," although he did not describe himself as such) was one of my husband's best friends in Zabid, although he would not even look at me, never mind shake my hand. When we were invited for lunch at his house, one of the man's young wives quietly explained to me about how one could only wear these dresses when pregnant and if any other women were around, one had to put a blouse on over it so that one would not be naked ('*ara*').
19. As I have argued elsewhere (1999), adornment goes far beyond sexually attracting husbands. For highland Yemen, vom Bruck argues "Adornment is one of those things that women value about marriage; it is appreciated aesthetically beyond what it signifies for sexual relationships between men and women" (2005b:99).
20. Clark (2004:115–144) notes the role of the Islah Charitable Society in Sanaa, composed of largely middle class women in providing welfare for the increasing number of the city's poor. The Islamists in Zabid were neither of the old elite (with one exception) nor of the very poor servant class, the *akhdam*.
21. Zabidis are willing to comment on and acknowledge that some are less "proper" Muslims among them, but there were no people claiming to be atheists or secularists, and aside from me and my husband and the occasional Peace Corps volunteer, no non-Muslims. Even the most demonstrably lax Muslim (a man who divorced his wife for no reason that our neighbors could discern, even though she had borne him five children) who was reputed to drink alcohol and watch videos of ill repute (which ranged, according to my husband, from Jane Fonda workout videos to Miss America contests to hardcore porn of the sort that would make a fraternity boy blush) gave up these habits for Ramadan, when he commenced with reading the Quran every evening.

22. As one reviewer noted, this could be seen as a venerable imitation of the Prophet Muhammad, who was himself illiterate. The contrast was striking: one emulating the illiterate but divinely inspired knowledge of the Prophet and the other representing a modern Western imprimatur of authority, a Ph.D. in Sociology from a British university.
23. Mahmood is in conversation with Butler's influential works on gender, particularly Butler (1990, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). Mahmood elaborates her argument in her recent book (2004).
24. Giorgio Armani apparently designed a \$20,000 *abayah* for the wealthy women of the Gulf and also a \$200 gown for Barbie dolls ("Hello Dolly" in *Elle Canada* 2003:43).
25. *Editor's Note: Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of articles that examine how women have helped configure, and have been reconfigured by, contemporary processes. See, for example, Aradhana Sharma's "Crossbreeding Institutions, Breeding Struggle: Women's Empowerment, Neoliberal Governmentality, and State (Re)Formation in India" (2006) and Priti Ramamurthy's "Material Consumers, Fabricating Subjects: Perplexity, Global Connectivity Discourses, and Transnational Feminist Research" (2003).

Cultural Anthropology has also published a number of articles that examine varied instantiations of Islam. See Naveeda Khan's "Of Children and Jinn: An Inquiry into an Unexpected Friendship during Uncertain Times" (2006); Arzoo Osanloo's "The Measure of Mercy: Islamic Justice, Sovereign Power, and Human Rights in Iran" (2006); Öykü Potuoğlu-Cook's "Beyond the Glitter: Belly Dance and Neoliberal Gentrification in Istanbul" (2006); Gregory Starrett's "Violence and the Rhetoric of Images" (2003); Charles Hirschkind's "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counterpublic" (2001); Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi's "Bombay Talkies, the Word and the World: Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses" (1990).

Like this article, Saba Mahmood's 2001 "Feminist Theory, Embodiment and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival" examines how changes in Islam intersect with changes in women's practice and sociality.

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