

# **The *hijab* between men and women in Saudi Society**

Ibtisam Ali Alamri

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## **Abstract**

Many studies by international organisations and non-Saudi researchers conclude that all Saudi women are forced to wear *hijab*. This can now be questioned, particularly with the lifting of the requirement to wear *hijab*. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia is needed, especially in light of the monumental social reforms implemented in recent years. This study explores the concept of the *hijab* in Saudi thought, the social norms underpinning the wearing of the *hijab* within collectivist Saudi culture and the consequences of challenging these norms. The study also explores the views of Saudis on several stigmas linked to the *hijab* and the impact of specific declarations following the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030 on women's *hijab*. This was achieved using a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews to collect data on the studied topic. The findings of this study indicate that, according to Saudi thought, the *hijab* should cover a woman's face and conceal her identity. These findings also reveal that there are three types of *hijabs*: the *Sahwa hijab*, the current generation's *hijab*, and the *hijab* of new generation. These *hijabs* have varying degrees of modesty, and the study participants expressed different levels of acceptance for each type. Changing the rules around *hijab* is difficult, and it impacts the reputations of both men and women. The study findings show that Saudis reject the notion that the *hijab* is associated with oppression, thus invalidating the perceived stigma of oppression linked to the *hijab* in the West. Saudis have varying views on female freedom, with most supporting men's prerogative to prescribe women's behaviour regarding the *hijab*. Finally, participants expressed varying opinions on the recent changes in Saudi society, with most participants being aware of the impact of these changes on women's wearing of the *hijab*.

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## Glossary

<b><i>Abaya</i></b>	A loose garment is worn over a woman's other clothing which covers the entire body
<b><i>Adhan</i></b>	A call to prayer in Islam
<b><i>Alnadrāh alshariyah</i></b>	Legal viewing is when a man and a woman are allowed to look at each other without the <i>hijab</i> after the marriage request and before the marriage contract is signed
<b><i>Arak wla trany niqab</i></b>	A garment that covers a woman's face except for a small space around the eyes
<b><i>Awra</i></b>	The intimate parts of a person's body which must be covered
<b><i>Burqa</i></b>	A piece of fabric worn by Bedouin women that covers the face except for the eyes; this differs from the <i>niqab</i> as it has separate holes for each eye rather than one opening for both
<b><i>Dayooth</i></b>	A man who permits his wife to display her beauty and engage in illegal relations with other men
<b><i>Ekfa</i></b>	Hidden and wholly covered
<b><i>Eyb</i></b>	Shame
<b><i>Fatwa</i></b>	An official statement, opinion or interpretation is given by an Islamic scholar
<b><i>Fiqh</i></b>	Islamic jurisprudence
<b><i>Fitnah</i></b>	Source of temptation
<b><i>Hadith</i></b>	The statements of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH)
<b><i>Hajb</i></b>	Partition
<b><i>Hajj</i></b>	Great pilgrimage
<b><i>Halal</i></b>	Permissible
<b><i>Haram</i></b>	Forbidden
<b><i>Head abaya</i></b>	A type of <i>abaya</i> that starts on top of the head and covers a woman's entire body except the feet
<b><i>Hijab</i></b>	The religious veil is worn by Muslim women
<b><i>Ikhtilat</i></b>	Free mixing of men and women
<b><i>Imamah</i></b>	Leading the Islamic prayers
<b><i>Imam</i></b>	A prayer leader in a mosque

<b><i>Iqal</i></b>	A thick black band that men wear on their heads
<b><i>Jihad</i></b>	Fighting enemies in Islam
<b><i>Kata</i></b>	A piece of fabric that covers a woman's face, including the eyes
<b><i>Khimar</i></b>	A loose garment is worn over one's other clothing that covers nearly the entire body, from the top of the head to below the knees
<b><i>khususiyya</i></b>	National distinction
<b><i>Kuffar</i></b>	Non-Muslim
<b><i>Lathmh</i></b>	A garment that covers a woman's nose and mouth and exposes the eyes and forehead
<b><i>Mahram</i></b>	Men whom women were forbidden to marry under Islamic law
<b><i>Mufti</i></b>	A qualified Islamic scholar
<b><i>Niqab</i></b>	A piece of fabric that covers a woman's face except the eyes
<b><i>Non-mahram</i></b>	Men whom women can marry under Islamic law
<b><i>Opened niqab</i></b>	A <i>niqab</i> that completely exposes the woman's eyes
<b><i>Qwamma</i></b>	A man's guardianship over a woman; this includes the responsibility to protect, care for and provide for her
<b><i>Sahwa</i></b>	An Islamic awakening movement which began in Saudi Arabia and aims to revive the Islamic religion
<b><i>Sahwa hijab</i></b>	An extreme form of <i>hijab</i> that was popular during the <i>Sahwa</i> era which covers a woman's entire face and body
<b><i>Salfi</i></b>	A sect that advocates a return to the ways common during the life of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and the three generations of Muslims after his death
<b><i>Setr</i></b>	Covering
<b><i>Sharaf or erd</i></b>	Honour
<b><i>Sharia</i></b>	Religion
<b><i>Shia</i></b>	The second-largest Islamic sect; members believe that the Prophet (PBUH) appointed Ali bin Abi Talib as his caliph
<b><i>Shoulder abaya</i></b>	A type of <i>abaya</i> that starts at the shoulder and conceals the whole body except the hands and feet
<b><i>Sufism</i></b>	Mysticism in Islam
<b><i>Sunnah</i></b>	The primary sect of Islam; members believe that the Prophet (PBUH) did

not appoint a caliph

***Tarrha or shailah***

A piece of fabric is worn by Muslim women to cover the head

***Thobe***

A long garment with long sleeves that is worn by men; it is usually white in the summer and a different colour in the winter

***Ulama***

Senior Islamic scholars

***Umrah***

Non-obligatory pilgrimages

## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CPVPV</b>	The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice
<b>CSS</b>	The Council of Senior Scholars
<b>GDPALC</b>	The General Directorate of Passports, Airports and Land–Border Crossings
<b>KFUPM</b>	King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals
<b>KKU</b>	King Khaled University
<b>MIADG</b>	The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance
<b>PBUH</b>	Peace Be Upon Him
<b>PCSRI</b>	The Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta
<b>PPO</b>	The Public Prosecution Office
<b>SAR</b>	Saudi Arabia Riyal
<b>SWHG</b>	The Social Welfare Home for Girls
<b>UAE</b>	United Arab Emirates
<b>UK</b>	The United Kingdom
<b>USA</b>	The United States of America

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Inspiration for the research topic

I was nine years old when I first wore a *hijab*—the religious veil is worn by Muslim women. It was after I went with my father to the hospital to have my bandage changed. When I was walking through the hospital, all the men stared at me. I did not understand why they were looking at me until the nurse came to change my bandage. She smiled and said, ‘Wow, you are big...where is your *abaya*—a loose garment is worn over a woman’s other clothing which covers the entire body?’ She was not a citizen or even a Muslim, but she was surprised to see a girl with my body shape wearing a medium-length skirt, a short-sleeved top and no *hijab*. I was bigger than other girls my age. Her words caught my father’s attention; I could see it on his face. That day in the hospital was the last time I went in public without a *hijab*. The next day my father bought me a thick, long, wide, heavy, black *abaya* with a *tarrha*—a piece of fabric is worn by Muslim women to cover the head—and *kata*—a piece of fabric that covers a woman’s face, including the eyes—, as the *niqab*—a piece of fabric that covers a woman’s face except the eyes—was not allowed at that time for religious reasons. Wearing a *hijab* was not a good experience. I used to lose control of my *hijab* as it was heavy; it usually fell on the ground because it was so long, and I often tripped over it and stumbled or even fell down. Sometimes, when my father could not see me, I took off the *kata* as I could not breathe. When I was ten, I officially entered the women’s world. I was not considered a child anymore; playing outside the home with other children, swimming at the beach, and even riding a bicycle were all forbidden. I was not allowed to look at men, speak, or raise my hand to point at something as my arm would be uncovered. I was not allowed to wear shoes that might make a sound that men could hear. Over time, I got used to the *hijab*. When I became a teenager, I had to wear socks and gloves. The *niqab* then became more common, so I replaced my *kata* with a *niqab*. This has a small opening for the eyes, so I could see a bit better, but I covered it when I was with my father or in front of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) members to avoid their anger. I did not wear a shoulder *abaya*—a type of *abaya* that starts at the shoulder and conceals the whole body except the hands and feet—or a wide-open *niqab* until my final year of college. All those years, I wore the *hijab* in accordance with the Islamic

books and *fatwas*—an official statement, opinion or interpretation is given by an Islamic scholar—and my father’s views.

By 2015, although the *Sahwa* movement—an Islamic awakening movement which began in Saudi Arabia and aims to revive the Islamic religion—still influenced social life in Saudi Arabia, this was to a lesser degree than had previously been the case though the CPVPV, *hijab* and gender segregation were still common among pious Saudi Muslim country. At that time, I went to Ireland to study. That was the first time in my life that I experienced a different type of *hijab*. In Ireland, I uncovered my face and replaced the *abaya* with long loose blouses and trousers. It is difficult to describe what I felt at that time, but I did not feel shy or strange. I felt the freedom to be myself rather than hide behind a piece of fabric. I lived in Ireland for a year and half, and at the end of that period, I decided to uncover my face back in Saudi Arabia as well. At that time, more and more women in Riyadh, where I live, were challenging the national culture by changing their traditional appearance. Thus, I told my husband about my decision. He did not take it seriously at first, but when he realised I was serious about it, he became angry. He confronted me with all the religious evidence from the Quran for the obligation of covering the face and reminded me that I should fear Allah and abstain from changing my *hijab*. I came back to him with alternative Islamic interpretations of the same evidence he gave me. He was speechless when I presented him with this evidence. However, then he began to worry about what people would think of him. If I insisted on uncovering my face, he told me, the other men would not consider him a real man anymore. This showed me how central the *hijab* is to women’s and men’s lives in Saudi Arabia and how a man’s social image can be significantly affected by what a woman chooses to wear. This inspired me to conduct this research on the *hijab* and to explore the views of men and women on the meaning, purpose, benefits, and rationale for wearing *hijab*, as well as the influence of the collectivist Saudi culture on *hijab* and the impact of *hijab* on the lives of Saudis. I also wanted to examine Saudi perceptions and understanding of the Western stigmas that have come to be associated with the *hijab*.

Today, the influence of *Sahwa* movement in Saudi Arabia has decreased due to recent social changes. On April 25, 2016, the announcement of Vision 2030, by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman was accompanied by several new regulations and laws facilitating women’s public lives and returning rights that were taken from

women by *Sahwa* leaders. One of the significant changes was lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab*. These social changes have enabled me to finally uncover my face in public and practise what I believe with my husband's support. Subsequently, my own experiences inspired me to further explore the changes to Saudi women's *hijab* and the socio-cultural implications of these changes.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Economically, Saudi Arabia was recently confronted with difficulties stemming from corruption and plummeting oil prices, which slowed economic growth (Mitchell and Al-Furaih, 2018). Considering the unstable price of oil, the government of Saudi Arabia decided that oil would not be central to the economy in the future, as increasing the diversity of the Saudi economy would increase productivity and drive sustainable growth because economic diversity provides resistance to various external shocks (Al-Shuwaikhat and Mohammed, 2017). To tackle these challenges, the government recognised the necessity of transforming the old Saudi Arabia into a new Saudi Arabia. In April 2016, Saudi Arabia introduced a new strategic reform programme called Vision 2030, which would take 15 years to implement. This reform programme aims to expand the economy of the country, lessen its dependence on oil and diversify the sources of national income by developing the private sector (Al-Qahtani, 2020; Al-Shuaibi, 2017; Nuruzzaman, 2018; Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Building up the private sector requires encouraging foreign investment, growing the tourism industry by attracting tourists to Saudi Arabia and expanding the scope beyond religious tourists on pilgrimages to Makkah and AL-Madinah. It is also essential to develop the entertainment industry, including cooperative cinemas, concert spaces, and theatres, as well as new entertainment projects, such as resorts and amusement parks (Abu-Hjeeleh, 2019; Kinninmont, 2017). The growth of the private sector will further grow the economy, increasing employment among Saudis and creating new jobs—lowering the unemployment rate is a crucial goal of Vision 2030. A low unemployment rate is unachievable without empowering and including women in the labour force (Krane and Majid, 2018; Naseem and Dhruva, 2017); hence, its inclusion as a vital aspect of Saudi Vision 2030 emphasises the need to provide equal opportunity for everyone, including women, who are described in the blueprint as a 'great asset' (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016, p. 37; Tawfik et al., 2020).

However, transforming Saudi society into one that is receptive to foreign tourists, expanding the Saudi entertainment industry and empowering Saudi women all conflict with the cultural traditions and religious ideology of Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the plan behind Vision 2030 cannot succeed without making changes and overcoming obstacles to liberate society. The stranglehold that extreme religious ideology has over Saudi society is considered the greatest obstacle to achieving the Vision 2030 goals. Transforming Saudi Arabia from a conservative religious country to a modern, open Muslim country would encourage tourism, and relaxing the hold of religion over Saudi society would attract foreign investors and permit the development of the entertainment industry (Abu-Hjeeleh, 2019; Al-Qahtani, 2020; Hvidt, 2018). Thus, the government has committed to displacing religious authority and shifting the Islamic discourse from strict adherence to flexibility in religious thinking and the stance of religious institutions in keeping with the reality of people and the times (Al-Shlash, 2019; Sabir and Zenaïdi, 2019). Furthermore, to make female foreign tourists comfortable and help Saudi women perform their new roles, several significant reforms have been implemented by the government, including lifting the ban on women driving, curbing the power of CPVPV, granting women access to football stadiums, establishing laws to protect women from violence and sexual harassment, and ending the guardianship system, which placed women at the whims of their male guardians who made decisions on behalf of women regarding travel, release from a shelter or prison, getting an education, and securing employment (Al-Sahi, 2018; Naseem and Dhruva, 2017).

The pressure on women has lessened in Saudi Arabia, especially after the government announced Vision 2030 and the subsequent reforms to religious and social aspects of Saudi society. Women have been given the liberty of self-determination. Women are now seen driving cars, studying, and working in various sectors where women had never studied or worked. Changes in women's *hijab* have been another noticeable shift in the social landscape of Saudi Arabia, especially following the statement by the crown prince, Muhammed bin Salman, declaring that decisions regarding women's clothing are entirely up to women (see Chapter 3). This means that previous rules regarding the *hijab* are no longer binding, and strict religious enforcement of those rules is no longer necessary (Hvidt, 2018). Notably, any observer of female attire in Saudi Arabia will notice that these changes in women's clothing are

obvious in big cities. However, the vast majority of Saudi women are still seldom seen without the *abaya* and a face veil, despite the official stance of the government. This provides insight into the reality that wearing *hijab* among Saudi women is not in response to governmental and religious coercion; instead, there are other compelling reasons for committed women choosing to wear *hijab* after the regulations that made it mandatory were lifted.

In the literature, including studies by (Almila, 2014; El-Tantawy, 2007; Mahfoodh, 2008), it is assumed that women in Saudi Arabia wore the *hijab* largely because of the legal enforcement of specific laws. These laws took away the right of women to choose what they want to wear and compelled them to wear an extreme style of *hijab* that conceals their identity, which these studies do not consider to be the point of wearing *hijab*. Considering this aggressive dress code combined with a guardianship system and extreme sex segregation, certain activist organisations (e.g., Women's Rights Division) suggested that there was a need to free Saudi women from such an oppressive situation (Begum, 2017). These researchers and activist organisations view Saudi women as a single homogenous group with the same reasoning and a singular perspective and understanding of the *hijab*, all of whom are forced to wear *hijab*. If we assumed that the claims and analyses of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia put forward by these organisations and studies are true, all Saudi women would have taken off their *hijab* as soon as the restrictions on women's liberties and the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* were lifted. On the contrary, since the cessation of legal enforcement was lifted, many women continue wearing *hijab*. Consequently, I assume that legal obligation was not the only reason for wearing *hijab* among Saudi women, and the collectivist cultural values of Saudi society also exert a powerful influence over the decisions on what women wear. The pressure of these values on female attire varies among Saudi women depending on tribe, family, region, socialisation and personal views of *hijab*, gender and femininity (Quamar, 2016).

Despite the considerable number of studies on Muslim women's *hijab*, only a few studies have focused on the Saudi *hijab*. Extant research on the *hijab* in Saudi society predominantly concentrates on religious dimensions founded on gender-biased Islamic interpretations that favour male dominance as a justification for the imposition of the *hijab* and the basis for explaining the role of *hijab* in society (Al-Sndy, 1992; Al-Tarifi, 2015; Ibn-Uthaimin, 2008), as proof of women's obligation to cover their

faces (Al-Kharashi, 2005; Al-Sulami, 1987), and as a defence against anti-*hijab* feminists (Al-Juhani, 2015). All these studies primarily use Islamic text and the narratives of previous Islamic scholars to convey their views on *hijab*, ignoring the perspective of women, who get to wear *hijab*, and failing to convey their voice regarding *hijab*. Although some studies conducted on Saudi society are aimed at investigating the attitudes of Saudi women towards the *hijab* (Al-Jaouhari, 2013; Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Munajjed, 1997), these studies focus on limited aspects of *hijab*, such as women's attitudes towards the face veil and the *abaya*, the rationale for wearing these garments, and the role of *hijab* in women's lives. Although these studies aim to add to the knowledge on *hijab* among Saudi women, drawing conclusions on the subject is complicated. These studies fail to focus on several dimensions that provide basic knowledge critical to understanding the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, including its meaning, purpose and benefits, which these studies explain from a male gender-biased religious viewpoint rather than from the viewpoint of women as wearers of the *hijab*. However, ignoring the collectivist and patriarchal nature of Saudi society and ignoring male perspectives while studying the *hijab* would lead to an inadequate understanding of *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. These studies also ignore Saudi understanding of popular stigmas linked to *hijab*, such as oppression, freedom and male dominance, preventing these studies from presenting a clear and comprehensive picture of *hijab* in Saudi society. Furthermore, all of these studies were conducted before the significant reforms impacting women and their public attire in Saudi Arabia following the Vision 2030 announcement; this missing element in previous studies motivated this research.

Therefore, to fully understand *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, I have examined the *hijab* from the perspective of Saudi men and women, a viewpoint marked by the belief that gender impacts the way individuals perceive themselves and their experience of the world around them (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Thus, this research explores the views of participants on the meaning, purpose, benefits and rationale for wearing *hijab*. Because Saudi Arabia is an extremely collectivist culture, with the vast majority of Saudis belonging to tribes and large families, this study focuses on social norms around wearing *hijab* and explores how challenging these norms impact men and women. Furthermore, from the perspective of international Western organisations and feminists calling for the liberation and freeing of Saudi women from the control of men, *hijab* is considered a tool of female oppression. This study explores the views

held by Saudi men and women regarding the stigmas that have come to be associated with the *hijab* in relation to female oppression and female freedom. Regarding the changes in female attire in Saudi Arabia, this study addresses the need for more information and a deeper understanding of how Saudis perceive the latest social reforms in the country, particularly regarding current changes to female attire.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

*Hijab* as a research topic is not unique, as there are many studies on the subject. The *hijab*, as delineated in those studies, refers to the *hijab* headscarf and modest clothing. When I refer to the *hijab* in Saudi society, I am not necessarily speaking about the *hijab* headscarf in the same way that the *hijab* is mentioned in previous studies (Akou, 2010; Bullock, 2007; Mackay, 2017; Mahfoodh, 2008), because in Saudi Arabia, *hijab* has a different meaning, which is concealing women's identity. The *hijab* should cover the face, and the woman should also wear a black *abaya*. In Saudi society, the colour of the garment and the way women cover themselves and their faces—e.g., wrapping an *abaya* around the shoulders or over the head—all have significance; any changes a woman makes to her clothing impacts the image she projects in public and elicits a number of reactions from both men and other women. Thus, because of the generally poor knowledge of women's *hijab* in Saudi Arabia and its social significance, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on the *hijab* in general and in Saudi Arabia specifically. The findings of this research contribute valuable information on the meaning, purpose, benefits, and justifications for *hijab*, which can inform future research by other researchers in this space.

Notwithstanding the latest reforms that favour Saudi women and the efforts of the government towards gender equality, I argue that Saudi Arabia remains a patriarchal society in which gender inequality and the guardianship system still exist, albeit unofficially. The guardianship system has been a critical feature of Saudi society and was supported by religious institutions and the law. The system places the responsibility for most aspects of a woman's life, including her attire, her study and work, and her relationships with others, in the hands of a man—typically her father or husband. Consequently, men have been playing a central role in the lives of Saudi women for a very long time, which makes understanding the views of Saudi men critical to understanding the practice of *hijab* in Saudi society. In light of the absence

of inclusion of Saudi men in studies in extant literature on the *hijab*, to facilitate a deeper understanding of this subject beyond the female perspective, this study explores the male point of view and considers the opinions of both men and women on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, especially after the repeal of the guardianship system. The aim is to increase knowledge on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia from the perspective of Saudi men and thus bridge gaps in the literature.

This study posits that Islam is a religion based on freedom of belief and practice, including wearing the *hijab*. However, in Saudi Arabia, due to male interpretation of Islamic texts, restrictions were imposed on women requiring adherence to a certain dress code. Thus, women wear what men would like them to wear in public, despite the fact that wearing the *hijab* should be a feminine matter, not masculine. On the other hand, if we contemplate the Quranic command to the Prophet (PBUH) in the verse ‘O Prophet! Tell your wives, and your daughters, and the women of the believers, to lengthen their garments . . .,’ (33:59), it is clear from the use of the word ‘tell’ that the Prophet’s (PBUH) message was to inform women about the command and leave it open for them to decide what to wear, the colours and the shape. This study may contribute to views on women’s right to determine their own appearance in public, and the rights of men regarding controlling women’s appearance.

As a Saudi woman who grew up within Saudi culture, combined with my observations of *hijab* as practised by Saudi women, both within and outside Saudi Arabia, my conducting this research was marked by a persistent sense of urgency. Observing the behaviour of Saudi women regarding *hijab*, I noticed a duality: some Saudi women are committed to wearing a specific style of the Saudi *hijab* only when they are in the country, but as soon as they leave its borders, they switch to a different style. For instance, some women retain the same style of *hijab* and only change the colour of the garments, while others retain the *abaya* but shed the face veil. Some women shed the *abaya* and face veil, while others forgo the modest clothing element and the headscarf altogether. All these changes are made with the permission of the woman’s guardian. This study may provide an explanation for such behaviour by investigating the social norms around wearing *hijab* in the collectivist Saudi culture and the effects challenging these norms has on the image and reputation of women and men.

When Western media and liberal feminists talk about the *hijab*, they often bring up the subject of oppression, freedom, choice, and male dominance over women. These discussions become particularly intense when Saudi women are being addressed. This study explores the Saudi understanding of female oppression, female freedom and men's control over women. Therefore, in providing a more complex and nuanced account than is often given, this study contributes to the existing literature in this field by examining the views of both Saudi men and women on these issues. This facilitates a deeper understanding of these topics and provides a foundation for future research on Saudi women, *hijab*, and Muslim societies.

The changes in Saudi society through Vision 2030 were considered in this study. This research argues that there have been remarkable changes in women's attire and *hijab* in Saudi Arabia in the past few years, especially in the biggest cities. It is critical to study the impact of the latest social reforms on women's appearance and the Saudis' view about these changes. To my knowledge, research on the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia after the latest monumental social changes and how Saudi men and women look at these changes have not been researched or investigated critically, which accounts for a further unique aspect of this research.

#### **1.4 Objectives and Research questions**

The overall purpose of this research is to understand the ideology of Saudi men and women about the *hijab*, with particular emphasis on the concept and social collectivist norms of wearing *hijab*, stigmas and concepts that are linked to the *hijab*, and social reforms and its implication on *hijab*. This objective was guided by the lack of existing literature on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, which this research is aimed at making a contribution. This is to be accomplished by focussing on the following objectives:

- To explore Saudi understanding of the concept of *hijab* by analysing its meaning, benefits, purpose and rationale.
- To determine the core social collectivist norms behind wearing *hijab* in Saudi culture and the effects of challenging these norms.
- To explain how Saudis understand the negative stigmas related to *hijab* and how they perceive the ideas of female freedom and male dominance.

- To explore how Saudis perceive some of the reforms following the announcement of Vision 2030 and whether these changes have impacted the practice of *hijab*.

Taking into account that the study's main objectives are to provide greater comprehension of how men and women view the *hijab* in Saudi society, the goal can be framed by a number of questions that this study is aimed at answering:

- What is the understanding of the concept of *hijab* held by Saudi men and women?
- What are the collectivist social norms regulating the wearing of the *hijab*? What are the consequences of challenging these norms for Saudi men and women?
- What is the attitude of Saudis towards the negative stigmas that have been attached to *hijab*, and what is their understanding of the concepts of female oppression, female freedom, and male dominance?
- How do Saudis perceive the latest government regulations following the announcement of Vision 2030 and the implications of changing the style of *hijab* for Saudi women?

In answering these questions, this research makes a significant contribution to the current body of knowledge on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. To achieve this, a qualitative approach is employed in examining male and female perspectives on *hijab*, providing a description and understanding of *hijab*. To ensure the required level of understanding, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from participants selected using a judgemental technique. This strategy is particularly useful for obtaining in-depth details and facilitating a deep understanding of *hijab* (Robson, 2011).

## **1.5 Chapters outline**

This research is divided into nine chapters; the first chapter is the introduction of the study; it presents the statement of the study problem, the significance of this study, as well as the purposes of the study and the research questions. Chapter two reviews the literature on the *hijab*. This is an important chapter that contributes to understanding the meaning of *hijab* by providing a brief introduction of its emergence in Islam and debate about its meaning. This chapter provides knowledge about the

justifications for wearing Muslim women for *hijab*. It reviews the Islamic conditions of the *hijab*'s style and presents multiple styles of *hijab* among Muslim women with an emphasis on fashionable modifications to traditional *hijab* styles. This chapter reviews the debates among Muslim scholars with draws more attention to the face veil and the concept of *qwamma*. The chapter discusses briefly feminism by closely focusing on liberal and Islamic feminism perspectives in regard to Muslim women and *hijab* with giving attention to reviewing literature that delivers the voice of Muslim women who practice the *hijab*. It explains also the literature on *hijab* in Saudi society.

Chapter three provides an overview of the Saudi context that starts by presenting an overview of Saudi society under the restriction of *Sahwa* movement. This chapter also Additionally, explaining the transformation of Saudi Arabia started with the announcement of Vision 2030. It explains some monumental governmental and religious declarations that create the new face of the country. It focuses on the status of women and the norms around wearing *hijab* in different contexts: culture, *Sahwa*, and modernism.

Chapter four provides an overview of the methodology which has been adopted in this research. It begins by explaining the methodological approach that is used to explore how Saudi understand the *hijab* and the justification for considering it as the appropriate approach to answering the questions of the research. The chapter details the step of preparing for entering the fieldwork including justifications behind selecting research sites, the instrument for data collection and justification for choosing it, pilot study, recruiting the male research assistant and gaining ethical approval has been discussed in detail in this chapter. This chapter describes the process of conducting the interview from a describing, sample selection process, accessing, and recruiting process until the transcript of all recorded interviews is done. The process after the fieldwork also is explained by discussing the way of managing and analysing the data, writing-up process and language and translating issues of participant responses. Finally, researcher positionality and reflexivity of the fieldwork and analysis process are examined in this chapter.

Chapter five considers how Saudis understand the concept of *hijab* by considering how participants define the term *hijab*, it also examines its definition to set a basis for this research in determining what meaning the participants are assuming when they speak about *hijab*. It is discussed in three themes that include understanding Saudis'

views of *hijab*'s meaning, and discussed in an in-depth way in this chapter; these are as follows: a woman's face is considered *awra*, *hijab* is a piece of clothing or form of behaviour and a woman's voice as a source of temptation. Saudis participants' thoughts about the justification of imposing the *hijab* on women instead of men, the advantages of *hijab* for women and men, and the role it plays in Saudi society are all discussed. Finally, the multiple reasons for women wearing the *hijab* and men's thoughts about these reasons are discussed to demonstrate that there is no single reason behind Saudi women's *hijab* practice.

Chapter six is intended to analyse the various types of *hijab* in Saudi Arabia and the differences among them in modesty and religiosity and how the collectivist culture sees these types. It explains the differences that Saudis participants see between *abaya* and clothes of other Muslim women and the differences between the black colour and other colours of Muslim women's clothes. The chapter then analyses the disapproval of the Saudi style of *hijab*, which is *abaya* and *niqab*, among men and women. The challenges Saudis face concerning changing the pattern of the *hijab* and the terms of *inside and outside hijab* are also discussed in this chapter. The analogy between a woman as a piece of candy and the *hijab* as the candy wrapper and how the *hijab* can be used as a tool to judge women and their guardians, and the impact of the shape of the *hijab* on Saudi men's and women's reputations are also be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter seven examines the link between the *hijab* and some stigmatisation such as oppression, freedom and male control, from the point of view of the Saudis. This chapter discusses whether Saudi men and women see the *hijab* as oppressive, and it tries to determine whether and how the *hijab* is used by men to oppress women. It challenges the meaning of freedom in Saudi participants' thoughts and the limitations that the *hijab* imposes on women in public spaces. It discusses in detail whether the participants believe a woman should have the freedom to choose to wear the *hijab* or give a man the right to decide what a woman wears and to examine their justifications for such matters. The chapter then investigates whether Saudi women are free to choose the styles of the *hijab* that they want to wear. The participants' view of the right of men to control women and their attire is explained in this chapter.

Chapter eight examines how Saudis perceived the latest social reforms in Saudi Arabia including removing the requirement to wear the *hijab* and the influence of these reforms on the recent shifts in women's attire in public. At the beginning of the

chapter, I present the reception of Saudis to the latest changes and their attitudes towards the *Sahwa* era and the recent shifts in women's attire in public are described. The lifting of the mandatory overhead *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, the attitude towards this decision, and the ensuing changes in women's *hijab* are also discussed. I then analyse the weakening of male guardianship over women, the Saudi participants' perception of the practice, and their thoughts on its effect on women's attire in public. Furthermore, I shed some light on the restriction of powers imposed on the CPVPV, how Saudis are adapting to these changes, and its influence on women's attire in public. Finally, I put a little focus on the transformations in religious discourse about *hijab*, how Saudis acclimatise to these changes, and the Saudi justifications for the new discourse are explained.

Chapter nine concludes this research by identifying the important findings of this study and answering the research's original questions. It explains the link between context and the sample who are represented in this work. It presents the contribution, limitations of this research and the recommendation for future research in the area of *hijab* and women in Saudi society.

## Chapter 2. Review of the literature on *hijab*

### 2.1 Introduction

*Hijab* does not have a singular meaning and can be understood and interpreted in multiple ways. This diverse understanding of the concept of *hijab* is influenced by social context and individual differences, which leads to differentiation in the perspectives on *hijab* (Bullock, 2007). Currently, there are many Islamic and non-Islamic studies researching the *hijab* regarding its meaning, Islamic origins, styles, rationale, and its association with female oppression. In this chapter, I review the relevant literature that informs this research. This literature review begins with a brief examination of the background of the *hijab*, its historical Islamic emergence, and its meaning. I then introduce multiple justifications and rationales given by Muslim women who practice *hijab*, which prove that they are not a homogenous group, and that each woman has a unique experience with *hijab*. Then, the various *hijab* styles in the Muslim world and the Islamic preconditions for *hijab* styles in the Islamic faith are explained, with an emphasis on fashionable modifications to traditional *hijab* styles.

In this chapter, I also discuss ongoing debates among Muslim scholars regarding face covering and *qwamma*. Then, I briefly introduce feminism and its emergence and evolution while exploring its various schools of thought. Particular attention is given to liberal and Islamic feminist views and their perspectives on Muslim women with respect to gender inequality and *hijab* as a tool of oppression. In this chapter, I also highlight studies that convey the voice of Muslim women with regard to *hijab* and the negative stigmas associated with it. This is followed by an overview of recent literature on *hijab* in Saudi society, exploring the gaps and limitations in these studies.

### 2.2 A brief introduction to *hijab*

To understand *hijab* in Saudi society, it is necessary to be mindful of its historical emergence in Islam, its meaning, and the diverse interpretations of its history among Muslims. In the fifth year of Al-Hijra, after the emigration of the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) from Makkah to AL-Madinah, Allah commanded that the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) should not be looked upon by men. Allah states:

...And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not [conceivable or lawful] for you to harm

the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity (33:53).

After this command from Allah to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH), another command was given after some Muslim women complained that they had been bothered and harassed by Muslim hypocrites who justified their behaviour by suggesting that they had mistaken the Muslim women for prostitutes and slave women. Thus, Allah obligated Muslim women to cover themselves to distinguish themselves from slaves and prostitutes (Abu-Shehab, 1992; Madani, 2011). Allah states:

O Prophet! Tell your wives, and your daughters, and the women of the believers, to lengthen their garments. That is more proper, so they will be recognised and not harassed. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (33:59).

This verse states that Muslim women, including the wives and daughters of the Prophet (PBUH), must be modest and cover their bodies (Akou, 2010). This verse reveals that the rationale for wearing *hijab* is to distinguish women who are respectable and unavailable for non-marital sexual interactions from those who are available for such actions (who typically benefit from exposing certain parts of their bodies).

These two verses are the subject of continued debate on the obligation to wear *hijab* and whether *hijab* was introduced for all Muslim women or exclusively for the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and as a solution to harassment at that time (Madani, 2011). Among Islamic scholars representing different schools of thought and interpretations of Islamic texts (including the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence: *Shafi'i*, *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, and *Hanbali*), there is a consensus that the commandment of *hijab* still applies to all Muslim women even now, although the requirement was initially directed at the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and Muslim women at that time (Madani, 2011; Osman, 2014). This same style of commandment appears in many verses in the Quran, such as this verse addressing divorce: 'O Prophet, when you [Muslims] divorce women, divorce them for [the commencement of] their waiting period and keep count of the waiting period, and fear Allah, your Lord' (65:1). This commandment is clearly not directed exclusively at the wives of the Prophet (PBUH), but is intended as guidance regarding all Muslim women (Madani, 2011). Thus, this same argument can be applied to the commandment to wear *hijab*.

However, a large body of research rejects this stance, arguing that the

commandment was directed specifically and exclusively to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and as a solution to the issue of harassment at that time, and consequently, *hijab* should not be part of contemporary Islamic practise (Agayev, 2013; Amin, 2000; Barlas, 2002). These researchers assert that the *hijab* is a vestige of ancient norms and traditions that have existed across human civilisations to deny women the freedom to fully enjoy their lives and exercise their human liberties. They consider prescribing *hijab* as a religious obligation to be offensive to Islam and the Prophet (PBUH) himself. Despite these arguments, exactly how the concept of *hijab* spread across the various Muslim regions is still unclear, and there is no conclusive evidence to resolve the debate as to whether *hijab* spread among Muslims as a consequence of Islam or some other culture (Ahmed, 1992; Mizel, 2020).

This study treats *hijab* as an Islamic practice and a symbol of religious identity among Muslim women. The word *hijab* comes from the Arabic language and can be defined as a veil or curtain used to prevent or hinder something. The word may also mean a barrier between two or more things, such as a bar or partition (Ahmad, 2011; Farid, 2006). Although the word *hijab*, as used in the Quran and during the era of the Prophet (PBUH), has various meanings depending on the context, all these meanings have no relation to female clothing. The word *hijab* is used in some contexts to mean a barrier, which may be visible or invisible, between two places or groups that are not permitted to mix for any of various reasons: physical, psychological, or spiritual. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, during the era of the Prophet (PBUH), the literal meaning of the word *hijab* was a curtain, which was the method originally employed to segregate the Prophet's wives, and the words *khimar* and *jalbab* are used in the Quran to refer to the obligation for women to be modest (Aziz, 2010; Munir, 2014). From the literature on *hijab*, it is unclear how the word *hijab* spread throughout the modern Muslim world as a description of female Muslim clothing instead of the words *khimar* or *jalbab*.

Today, the term *hijab* is a concept that refers to a modest dress code and behaviour (Bullock, 2007). Although *hijab* is used by the majority of Muslim researchers to refer to the practice of women covering their head and neck but not their face while in public or within sight of male strangers or those labelled non-*mahram*—men whom women can marry under Islamic law (Abu-Bakre, 2018; Al-Albani, 2001; Al-Banna, 2007; Al-Sharaawi, no date; Amin, 2000; Ammoura, 2013; Bin Nafisah, 2015;

Bullock, 2007; Fani et al., 2020; Mizel, 2020; Osman, 2014). *Hijab* is used by several scholars to refer to covering the face (Addwesh, 2000; Al-Kharashi, 2005; Al-Musnad, 1996; Al-Sulami, 1987; Madani, 2011), and is also used to refer to modest behaviour (Ali, 2001; Roald, 2003; Ruby, 2006; Jackson and Monk-Turner, 2015) as a woman is required to lower her gaze and avoid attracting male attention, which is a fundamental aspect of *hijab*. *Hijab* is also used to refer to a command to both men and women to lower their gaze before each other (Barlas, 2002). In the literature on *hijab*, the words *hijab* and veil are used interchangeably, but this is inaccurate (Sintang et al., 2016). The term *hijab* is complex and carries significant religious underpinnings. It has multiple meanings and generally implies changes in the wearer's behaviours and attitudes. However, wearing a veil does not carry any religious Islamic underpinnings and can be practised by non-Muslim women (Ali, 2001; Sintang et al., 2016). In this study, I use the word *hijab* to refer to the covering of the face, as this is common usage in Saudi society. However, the terms headscarf and face veil (i.e., *niqab* or *kata*) are used when necessary to convey the meaning intended by the study participants or to ensure clarity. I also attempt to encourage the study participants to communicate their various interpretations of *hijab* and explain their views on the notion of *hijab* along with the rationale behind their views. In the next subsection, I outline the justifications and rationale for women wearing *hijab*.

### **2.3 Multiple justifications for *hijab***

Muslim women's experience of the *hijab* is not unitary, as different Muslim women wear *hijab* for varied reasons and with different justifications because their interpretations of *hijab* differ depending on the social context (Bullock, 2007). In this subsection, I focus on presenting several justifications that Muslim women give for *hijab*. I want to demonstrate that *hijab* is a complex concept and that it cannot be worn for a single reason alone. This is made evident by this study, which gives Saudi men and women a chance to communicate their justifications and rationale for *hijab* and their interpretation of the term based on their social context.

The religious views held by a woman, her family, peer group, personal experiences, and the cultural context play significant roles in determining her decision to wear or not to wear *hijab* (Fani et al., 2020; Peek, 2005). A woman may wear a *hijab* style that she does not like—or does not even take off—due to pressure from

social groups when giving up *hijab* may jeopardise her religious, cultural, or national identity (Ali, 2005; Al-Rasheed, 2013; Delcroix, 2009). Several studies agree that women wear *hijab* due to pressure from family members (Ahmed and Roche, 2018; Arar and Shapira, 2016; Fayyaz and Kamal, 2017; Majeed, 2016; Ratiba, 2008; Tariq-Munir, 2014). These influences may begin exerting pressure on the individual right from childhood, e.g., a young girl growing up in a religious family who is encouraged by family members to wear *hijab* or directly instructed to do so. Although a young girl may initially refuse, there is a high probability that she will choose to wear *hijab* in the future. Similarly, in his study on Palestinian women, Mizel (2020) found that the majority of Palestinian women wore the *hijab* not for religious reasons but because of cultural and familial motivations. He states that the influence of social values is stronger than that of religious values because women are intrinsically motivated to integrate into their society. However, Tariq-Munir (2014) emphasises that not all the women in her study who wore the *hijab* had been influenced in that direction by their families. She argues that the families of some participants were resistant to them wearing *hijab*. A family may discourage a daughter from wearing *hijab* to protect her from potential negative ramifications, such as religious discrimination and limited employment opportunities, because of the stereotype that women who wear *hijab* are less modern and less educated than those who do not.

School is another effective socialising agent that may motivate women to wear *hijab*. Tariq-Munir (2014) reports that several interviewees in her study had been socialised to wearing *hijab* from childhood. In school, they were told stories about the darkness of hellfire and the beauty of heaven, where they could live forever if they donned the *hijab*. In some schools in Muslim societies, the *hijab* is required as part of the school uniform. Girls may conduct themselves in a manner that matches the values of the school to experience acceptance and avoid criticism or being the subject of gossip as a consequence of dissenting. Wearing *hijab* may be the easiest way to gain acknowledgement from women in a group and to experience a sense of belonging, which generates a sense of harmony (Maqsood and Chen, 2017; Wagner et al., 2012; Williams and Vashi, 2007).

Beyond the pressure exerted by some social groups, as a girl grows older, she may begin to consciously consider the meaning of *hijab* and thereby gain an understanding of its religious purpose. Over time, a woman will conceive her own reasons for

wearing—or not wearing—the *hijab* (Tariq–Munir, 2014). The Quran and *Hadith* have long been considered guides for Muslim life, and *hijab* is one means by which women may express love and surrender to Allah by forgoing their feelings of beauty, restricting sexual expression, and concealing their hair, which is a symbol of beauty and femininity (Ruby, 2006). *Hijab* has a religious role that involves protecting women from Satan and preventing them from engaging in shameful acts; this keeps their hearts strongly connected to Allah and helps them avoid falling into sin (Khan, 2009). Furthermore, Fayyaz and Kamal (2017) and Sogolitappeh et al. (2017) established that there is a relationship between wearing *hijab*, happiness, and psychological satisfaction derived from religious commitment. Through *hijab*, women seek Allah’s approval, as well as feelings of inner peace and deep contentment that comes from being close to Allah (Abu–Bakre, 2018; Jackson and Monk–Turner, 2015; Mackay, 2017; Utomo et al., 2018; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018). Similarly, Abu–Hwajj (2012) maintains that *hijab* engenders healthy emotions and mental stability and may even cure depression; however, she does not provide any scientific evidence to back her claim.

Islamic society has various means of encouraging women to wear the *hijab*. Respect and admiration for women who wear the *hijab* are one of these means. Society attempts to influence women who do not wear the *hijab* to adopt its use by judging them and accusing them of immoral behaviour (Al–Kateeb, 2013; Mackay, 2017). ‘Do clothes speak?’ is a question that Fred Davis (2013, p.3) tried to answer in his book *Fashion, Culture and Identity*. In his answer to the question, he confirms that clothes can make a statement about themselves and their wearers and viewers. The details of clothing, such as fabric, colour, cut, weight and texture, play a significant role in how individuals or ‘a community of clothes wearers’ are perceived (Davis, 2013, p.13). These features of clothes reflect various meanings that can be read and interpreted differently. These meanings and values attached to clothes are cultural productions. Thus, perceptions and conceptions of clothes and individuals’ appearances are not the same among all observers due to differences in individual preferences and social identity. Furthermore, the meaning of clothes is not steady, as it differs from time to time, from one group to another and from one society to another (Davis, 2013). Twigg (2007, p. 286) noted, “Clothing ... mediates the relationship between the body and the social world, ... offering means whereby it is experienced,

presented, and given meaning”. Through clothing, individuals can explain themselves and send messages to others (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). Clothes play an important role in society. They indicate the wearers' identity and social status, and every item of clothing has a social meaning. Clothing plays a crucial role in creating a first impression, which impacts the wearer's reputation and the way people treat him or her (Adotey et al., 2016; Czernecka, 2019; Kodžoman, 2019). It is regarded as a channel in which personality is demonstrated and individuals discover aspects of someone's personality and religiosity (Naumann et al., 2009). Damhorst's (1990) study proves that dress plays an important role in the formation of impressions; 109 participants formed various impressions based on individuals' clothes: 81% pertained to competence, power, and intelligence, while 67% were impressions of character, sociability and mood.

Clothes do not only impact first impressions; they also influence others' behaviour. Johnson et al. (2014) found that, for over 85% of participants, clothing impact observers' behaviour towards the wearer. This can be applied to the *hijab* as well; Williams and Vashi (2007) demonstrated that people react differently to women who wear a *hijab* than to those who do not, as the *hijab* is a clear identity marker. A number of previous studies (Gueguen, 2011; Koukounas and Letch, 2001; Montemurro and Gillen, 2013) show that men are more likely to harass women who do not cover themselves and who wear revealing clothing, such as short skirts or very tight dresses. Tight clothing can indicate that a woman is open to a sexual relationship with men. This can be used to explain some cases of sexual assault against women, as men usually blame women who wear such clothes as they understand this to mean the woman is interested in a sexual relationship. In his study, Harkness (2019) noticed that men in Qatar look at women without *abaya* and *shailah* as whores while women who cover themselves well and wear proper *hijab* will be not flirted with. The *hijab* has thus become a measure of security for women, as wearing it draws the respect of men, which is obvious through the way men treat them in public (Ruby, 2006; Williams and Vashi, 2007). Simorangkir and Pamungkas (2018) state that women in *hijab* are considered more respectable, trustworthy, and well-behaved. They are expected to have self-control over their actions and emotions as well as the ability to manage their image and enhance the way people perceive them by distinguishing themselves from other women who believe they are less desirable (Almila, 2014; Johnson and Lennon,

2015). However, according to Rahman et al. (2016), though the *hijab* may provide some information about a woman, it cannot tell the whole story; observers' views do not always accurately reflect someone's intention and do not require evidence, which can impact the accuracy of their judgement (Schwarz, 2000). Furthermore, women choose to wear the *hijab* not just to earn respect but to show respect. Abu-Lughod's study (1986) shows that in a Bedouin or nomadic tribe in Egypt called *Awlad Ali*, women wear the *hijab* as a sign of respect and appreciation for the men in their families in positions of authority and respect, such as married and older men, while they reveal their features for younger and unmarried men.

Women also wear *hijab* to protect themselves from being targets of sexual harassment, as it functions as a reminder to men to conduct themselves appropriately (Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018). A number of studies have confirmed that Muslim women wear *hijab* as a protective measure, to tone down their attractiveness to men (Almila, 2014; Arar and Shapira, 2016; Fayyaz and Kamal, 2017), and to preempt others' labelling them as the *hijab* is indicative of a certain degree of piety (Hopkins and Greenwood, 2013; Jordan et al., 2020). *Hijab* offers psychological and physical protection because with it, a woman signals, 'I am a religious woman, leave me alone' (Kulenović, 2006, p.717). Mahmud and Swami (2010) examined the attitudes of Muslim and non-Muslim British men towards images of women with and without *hijab*. They found that the *hijab* lowers the perceived attractiveness and intelligence of women in the eyes of men. Similarly, Jordan et al. (2020) reached the same conclusion regarding the role *hijab* plays in lowering perceived female attractiveness. Increased desegregation of the sexes and nudeness all over the world has been matched by an increase in negative social consequences, including divorce, adultery, prostitution, and moral corruption (Fani et al., 2020). *Hijab* is an intervention to protect individuals and society by maintaining a healthy social and moral order (Almila, 2014). It places a barrier between men and women that discourages them from getting involved in premarital relationships, as the *hijab* lessens perceived female sexual attractiveness and protects women from being targets of men's sexual desires (Khan, 2009; Mernissi, 2011). *Hijab* protects both sexes from each other and from the sin of adultery, and it supports marriages, keeping them from breaking down by preventing men from looking at other women (Tarlo, 2010), which positively impacts the purity of society (Mahfoodh, 2008). Consequently, *hijab*

gatekeeps the purity of women, men, and society, the corruption of which is linked to women's clothing (Williams and Vashi, 2007). Ruby (2006) argues that women are responsible for the morality and purity of society, which they safeguard by committing to modest behaviour and clothing, and men are absolved of any responsibility to protect women, society, or themselves. Tarlo (2010) disagrees with this perspective and asserts that it is not women's responsibility to regulate men's behaviour. However, in a study conducted in Toronto, Majeed (2016) observed that, far from protecting women from danger in this locale, the *hijab* seems to expose women to danger and makes them targets for racist behaviour. She found that one in six female participants had been the recipients of negative comments and attempted sexual assault while wearing a *hijab*, especially following terrorist attacks.

The *hijab* plays an important role in forming the wearer's identity and becomes a chosen identity marker when a woman begins to understand its religious and cultural meaning (Khan, 2009; Peek, 2005). In Muslim minority countries, women wear *hijab* to build their Islamic and social identity (Fondren, 2019; Pazhoohi and Hosseinchari, 2014; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018; Wagner et al., 2012), thus distinguishing themselves from other non-Muslim women (Bullock, 2007; Khan, 2009; Paruk, 2015). The *hijab* is thus considered a 'cultural symbol' women wear to make a statement about themselves and their community and a strong bond to the people or group to which they feel they belong (Almila, 2014; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018, p.28). However, while some women wear the *hijab* to represent their beliefs, others have stopped wearing it to hide their identities. Majeed (2016) demonstrates that some women stopped wearing the *hijab* because it identified them as Muslim. Without this visible sign, no one could recognise them as followers of Islam, and they were no longer greeted with '*Salaam Aliakmon*' by Muslims. This can afford them protection against racism and discrimination, especially in non-Islamic societies. A woman may also stop wearing the *hijab* to hide her religious identity so that she can be free to practise activities which are deemed unacceptable for Muslim women.

Health is another reason women wear *hijab*. Wearing *hijab* protects a woman's hair from pollutants and the sun and keeps it from being tousled by the wind or damaged by styling tools (Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018). *Hijab* also protects the skin from the harmful rays of the sun and decreases the risk of skin cancer (Autier et al., 1998). In a study of Muslim Singaporean nurses who were forced to not wear *hijab*

due to hygiene concerns, Zainal and Wong (2017) report that former physicians prescribe that nurses should be allowed to wear *hijab* because it is more hygienic than leaving them without any covering in a work environment where the air contains many harmful pathogens. Furthermore, some studies (Al-Shamrani et al., 2021; Khamis, 2021) proved that the *niqab* effectively decreases the spread of some viruses, e.g., the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19.

A fear of spinsterhood and loneliness also motivates women to wear the *hijab* in order to find a husband. The *hijab* identified a woman as a good Muslim, wife and mother who is obliged to traditional gender roles. Thus, it is argued that the majority of Muslim men prefer to marry a concealed woman who symbolises morality, honour, and purity (Hafida, 2014; Shimek, 2012). In a study by Utomo et al. (2018), young girls wore *hijab* due to marriage or their husbands' requirements before marriage. Similarly, Al-Kateeb's study (2013) shows that 12% of Saudi women who participated believed they had a greater chance of marriage by wearing the *hijab*. Men who prefer veiled women may have grown up in conservative families where they were surrounded by women wearing *hijab*. Moreover, there is a common belief that covered women spend less money on clothes and their appearance than those without the *hijab* which motivates men to marry them (Hafida, 2014). This is evidenced by Kulenović's (2006) argument that *hijab* limits the expenses on beauty and women wear it if they cannot afford to visit the hairdresser or wear makeup. However, Al-Kateeb (2013) reports that 73% of her interviewees felt that there was no link between wearing the *hijab* and a family's income or reduced expenditure. Due to the segregation of sexes in Saudi Arabia, the *hijab* is an outer uniform to wear in public whereas women remove their veils in educational institutions, workplaces, and houses. Saudi women may spend more money on their appearance compared with their counterparts in other Islamic and non-Islamic countries where such segregation does not exist. Additionally, *hijab* is a way for women to grab men's attention to themselves through express their beauty which helps them to find a husband. Pazhoohi and Hosseinchari (2014) state that the traditional *hijab* prevents men from looking at women by reducing their attraction. Thus, young women wear fashionable *hijab* as a way to flirt and attract suitors for marriage by drawing attention to their beauty (Harkness, 2019; Mizel, 2020). Although the *hijab* is not just worn for religious reasons, it has social meanings and plays several roles in the lives of Muslim women

today. In the next subsection, I examine another variable among Muslim women regarding the styles of *hijab*.

## 2.4 The *hijab* in multiple styles

Islam has not determined any specific style of clothing to be worn by women; women have the right to choose their clothes based on their needs. According to a number of Islamic scholars, including Al-Albani (2001) and Ibn-Uthaimin (2008), any garment can be considered Islamic clothing or *hijab* if it meets several conditions. For these scholars, it is crucial that the *hijab* and a Muslim woman's clothing must not be tight-fitting and that her skin cannot be seen through it; if a woman's clothing is made of a material that allows the body to be seen through it or if it is too tight and highlights the curvature of her body, it may evince more attractiveness than complete nudity. Neither should her clothing be similar to male garments, nor should it be a display of fame or pride, such as excessively fancy clothing that elicits the admiration of others. Furthermore, it is forbidden for a woman to wear perfume when she is stepping outside her home (Ahmad, 2011; Al-Muqaddam, 2006; Badawi, no date; Madani, 2011). Islam gives leeway for individual expression, permitting women to create varying forms of the *hijab* (see figure 1)<sup>1</sup>, as Islam does not provide an exact name or specific form for the dress code of Muslim women.

One form of *hijab* that is worn by Afghan women is called a *burka* (which is different from the *burqa*, as I explain later) that conceals a woman's entire body, leaving a mesh screen before the eyes to be able to see (Ahmad, 2011). In India and Pakistan, for instance, *shalwar kameez* is the traditional dress described as loosely fitting trousers, a long shirt, and a long scarf used by Muslim women to cover their heads and shoulders (Munir, 2014). *Chador* is another form of Muslim women's dress worn by Iranian women; it is a large black open piece of fabric held together by a chain and put over the head to cover the body and leave the face exposed. In Indonesia, *jilbab* is an outer garment used to cover the entire body and the head (Sintang et al., 2016). In the Arabic world, there are many forms and names for the *hijab*; *khimar* is a loose-fitting long headscarf that hangs down to the waist or slightly

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pinterest.co.uk>.

above it. It covers the hair, ears, and shoulders but exposes the face. *Al-Amira* is another form of *hijab* made of two pieces: one is close-fitting covering the hair and ears but leaving the face showing, and this is covered by another scarf (Ahmad, 2011). *Bandanna* is a form of *hijab* that is used to partly cover the hair, but it leaves the ears and neck uncovered. This is generally worn by those living in rural areas or by modern young Muslim women, because it makes them look more beautiful than other types of *hijab*, enabling them to have a career, get married, and enjoy life (Al-Kateeb, 2013).



**Figure 1. Various types of hijab are worn in Muslim world**

These differentiations in the *hijab* can be seen in Saudi society, as women wear a style of the *hijab* that differs from the styles mentioned earlier. The common style of the *hijab* among Saudi women is called *abaya*. The *abaya* covers the entire body from head to foot (Munir, 2014), and the wearer is typically regarded as particularly modest, conservative and committed to Islam. The second garment comprising the *hijab* of Saudi women is a headscarf called *shailah* or *tarrha*, which covers the head, neck and ears. The third garment in the Saudi *hijab* is the face covering, which has three styles with distinct names. The first is the *burqa*, which is common among nomadic women. The second style of face covering is the *niqab*, which is considered the most common. The third is *kata*, which is considered the most extreme, covering the entire face, including the eyes. It is regarded by some people as the most ideal of the three and is the style most strongly associated with modesty and religious commitment.

From the descriptions in the preceding paragraph, it is apparent that there is a wide variety of *hijab* styles worn by Muslim women. Some women prefer one *hijab* style and stick to it permanently. Some other women change their *hijab* style depending on the situational context, and they are attired in different fabrics, accessories, and colours on various occasions. Despite the degree of diversity in the levels of modesty and styles of the *hijab*, all variants are considered Islamic *hijabs* by the wearers. This diversity does not include a spectrum of right or wrong in terms of *hijab* style, but it reflects how the understanding of the concept of *hijab* differs among Muslim women. Social, financial, and material availability and geographical factors play vital roles in the variation of the *hijab* style across the globe (Ahmad, 2011; Almila, 2014; Hochel, 2013; Tarlo, 2007). Understanding how Saudis perceive this diversity in *hijab* styles among Muslim women is crucial to this study, with particular emphasis on their views on the variety in *abaya* and the face veil, the significance of these garments being black in colour, and contemporary fashionable alterations to *hijab* styles. This requires a brief explanation of *hijab* in the fashion space, which is presented in the following subsection.

#### **2.4.1 The fashionable *hijab***

The *hijab* has become a part of fashion and a beauty statement. The term ‘fashionable *hijab*’ describes a practice in which the women wearing *hijab* also wear makeup and tight-fitting clothing, and in some cases, the clothing reveals parts of their head or neck (Abu-Hwajj, 2012) (see figure 2)<sup>2</sup>. This style of *hijab* has become common among Muslim women—especially younger women—who, as Paruk (2015) asserts, were raised in families that do not believe in religious socialisation or doubt the meaning of the *hijab*. This practice has taken root more deeply among upper-class women than among low-to middle-class women (Fani et al., 2020; Utomo et al., 2018). Women who wear fashionable *hijabs* evince a lower level of religiosity and tend to belong to a higher social class than those who wear the traditional *hijab* and have not made any major changes to their conduct due to the influence of current societal changes (Ali et al., 2015; Mackay, 2017). Several studies have argued that

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<sup>2</sup> <http://static.soltana.ma>

women who view religious values as important show little interest in the fashionable *hijab* because they feel the *hijab* should not be attention-grabbing or tight-fitting. These women fear that the media portrayal of the *hijab* as a fashion item has diluted its meaning as an Islamic symbol that protects women's modesty (Albrecht, 2012; Zainal and Wong, 2017).



**Figure 2. Some different types of fashionable hijab among Muslim women**

Fashionable modern *hijabs* are a means by which some women deal with social and religious discomfort. It is a way for young Muslim women to strike a balance between their sense of beauty, their religion, and the demands of their families. By wearing the fashionable *hijab*, a woman can draw similar attention to her beauty as she would wearing Western clothing while maintaining the esteem and approval of her family and culture (Albrecht, 2012; Bin Sufyan and Hakkana, 2017; Mizel, 2020; Ratiba, 2008). In her study on Somali women in Finland, Almila (2014) highlights the significant impact of culture and space on women's *hijab* styles. She reports that the Saudi *hijab*, which covers the entire body (including the face), is less acceptable in Finland because it visually, spatially, and ideologically conflicts with Finnish ideals. Women are aware of the degree of acceptability of the style of their *hijab*, and because people tend to exhibit a liking for those who are similar to themselves, Muslim women develop strategies for adapting to the cultural atmosphere in non-Muslim countries (Ivy and Wahl, 2019). Conversely, in her study on Muslim women in Britain, Tarlo (2010) expresses admiration for the Saudi form of the *hijab*, describing it as beautiful, feminine, elegant, and modest.

The emergence of the fashionable *hijab* could be a result of what was noted by a number of previous studies (Bullock, 2007; Jackson and Monk-Turner, 2015; Wagner et al., 2012) that, the concept of *hijab* has a negative connotation of backwardness and narrow-mindedness toward Muslim women. By wearing colourful and stylish *hijabs*, women try to reconcile Islamic principles with modernity and revoke the stereotype of Muslim women's gloomy attire and backwards (Beta, 2014). It also could be a result of the influence of Western culture due to direct and indirect interactions with it. Marifatullah (2018) confirms that the *abaya* is seen as a national and religious symbol of the UAE. Traditionally, the *abaya* is plain and black. However, when Emirati women travel to Western countries, they may not wear the *abaya* to avoid attracting attention and to show respect for other cultures. Indirectly, overseas travel has influenced the traditional design of the *abaya* and led to the emergence of the modern fashionable *abaya*. The *abaya*, originally a religious garment, has become a mark of style and beauty. It has become the way that Emirati women express their personalities, enhance their beauty, and show their social class. The modern *abaya* comes in many colours, although most Emirati women continue to wear a black *abaya* (Marifatullah, 2018).

Women did pay attention to the shape, weight, and feel of the *hijab* and its impact on their physical needs and lifestyles. Women look for *hijab* that does not restrict their movement or comfort, because the traditional *hijab* may cause difficulties moving and prevent women from integrating into societies (Albrecht, 2012; Maqsood and Chen, 2017). Regarding face cover, Vahed (2000) states that women in Durban city in South Africa have given up covering their faces as their lifestyles have changed. Older generations stay at home but today women go to different places. Ahmed and Roche (2018) support Vahed's argument that those who wear the traditional *hijab* and cover their faces have become a minority. In their study, Omani women anticipated that face covering would disappear since the percentage of women who practise *niqab* is gradually decreasing. As Omani women become educated professionals, their employment as policewomen, doctors, nurses, and teachers does not support the *niqab*. The fashionable *hijab* allows women to meet their religious demands while playing a role in society.

Fashionable changes to the *hijab*, no matter how small, led to resistance from society since the *hijab* is a type of symbolic communication of religiosity and family

devotion. In his study of *hijab* on Qatari women, Harkness (2019) assert that showing part of a woman's hair or arms and wearing tight colourful clothes may cost some women their reputation; to others who find the *hijab* restrictive, it is a kind of deliberate and gradual resistance to the patriarchy (Harkness, 2019). Even those who do not intend to resist social situations unconsciously contribute to change. What Koo (2014, p.47,37) calls the 'secular *hijab*' is regarded as a symbol of resistance to the governmental imposition of the traditional chador in Iran. Women who do not wear chador and exercise their freedom of choice may be regarded as dangerous cultural criminals who are 'morally evil' threats to Iran.

The growing literature on fashionable *hijabs* among Muslim women highlights the change in the significance of the *hijab*, from covering to exposing a woman's beauty. The Saudi woman's *hijab* as a fashion item has not been investigated in the extant literature. It is important to understand the perspective of Saudi men and women regarding fashionable changes to the traditional style of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, which is discussed in this study. The following section looks at the ongoing debate among Muslim scholars regarding women.

## **2.5 Ongoing debate**

Islamic texts can be interpreted in diverse ways, with interpretations ranging from strict to permissive. Various Islamic interpretations are regarded as the result of Muslims struggling to find the truest path in Islam after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), who consolidated divine and earthly knowledge (Shahi, 2012). Matters related to women have been under the spotlight of Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history. For example, proving an honourable position of a woman in Islam is a major topic in numerous studies (Agayev, 2013; Al-Aqqād, 2013; Al-Banna, 1987; Al-Ghazali et al., 1991; Al-Ghazali and Altaey, 2014; Al-Khayat, 2003; Al-Rahbi, 2014; Al-Zayyat, 2014; Imara, 2008; Syed, 2004; Zeno, 1994). Similar topics include denying the role of Islam in conferring high positions to women (Al-Saadawi, 1982; Amadiume, 1997; Fahmy, 1997), representing women's rights in Islam (Abu-Hageer, 1994; Al-Ansari, 1982; AL-Hamad, 2010; Al-Nojimi, 2007; Boufaghes, 2012; Brraj, 1981; Khan, 2016; Muhammed and Fattah, 2015), discussing gender roles in Islam (Ahmed; 1992; Al-Madkhali, 2014; Awaidah, 2000; Barlas, 2002; Abu-Bake, 2013), and Muslim women's *hijab* (Abu-Dayya, 2012; Abu-Hwajj, 2012; Abu-Ghada, 2004;

Addwesh, 2000; Ahmed and Roche, 2018; Akhter and Munir, 2017; Al-Albani, 2001; Al-Banna, 2007; Al-Kateeb, 2013; Almila, 2014; Al-Muqaddam, 2006; Al-Sndy, 1992; Al-Tarifi, 2015; AL-Wahabi, 1988; Aziz, 2010; Bullock, 2007; Ibn-Uthaimin, 2008; Khan, 1998). These studies raise the issue of an ongoing debate on issues concerning women in Islam, including the *hijab*. All these aspects of women's lives have been examined from different perspectives. The variation in these interpretations reflects diversity in the understanding of Islamic texts, which are influenced by political, economic, and social considerations (Bullock, 2007). For this study, in this section, I highlight the debate around the face veil and *qwamma*. The face veil is the primary component of women's *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, and to convey an understanding of the views on the *hijab* in Saudi society, I cannot neglect the ongoing debates surrounding the face veil. This exploration will facilitate an understanding and proper analysis of the *hijab* by presenting answers to the research question on the meaning of the *hijab* (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, although this study does not focus on *qwamma* or male guardianship as its primary topic, the historical debate on these two subjects cannot be ignored. The Islamic extremist interpretation of *qwamma* influenced Saudi society immensely and evolved into law, birthing a system of guardianship that required a woman to be under the custody of a man, giving him the right to decide on her behalf for the entirety of her life (see Chapter 3) (Al-Enazy, 2017; Al-Kameis, 2014). This subsection mirrors the understanding of the concept of *qwamma* among Muslim scholars, which is critical at this point for an understanding of the *hijab* with respect to the significance of oppression, female freedom, and male dominance (see Chapter 7).

### **2.5.1 The face veil**

A heavily debated issue among Islamic scholars is whether Muslim women's faces and hands should be covered. The majority of established scholars, such as Al-Nawawi, Al-Auzai, Malik, and Abu-Hanifah, agree that Islam permits Muslim women to leave their faces and hands uncovered based on evidence in the Quran that Allah commanded women to cover their distinctly female parts, which they interpret as permission for women to expose their faces and hands (Ahmad, 2011). Allah states:

And tell the believing women to restrain their looks, and to guard their privates, and not display their beauty except what is apparent thereof, and to draw their coverings over their breasts, and not expose their beauty except to their husbands... (24:13).

Several Muslim scholars, including Amin (2000) and Bin Nafisah (2015), state that there is no evidence of an obligation in the Quran or *Hadith* for women to be concealed or imprisoned inside their clothing. The obligation is to ensure women's modesty and dignity without infringing on their liberties. The covering of women's faces can have a significant impact on men and women. The face veil can be a source of *fitnah*—temptation—, which may entice men to desire to see the veiled face. It impacts women both societally and individually; for example, it creates considerable difficulties for women while they perform their daily activities and while at work, as it constitutes a communication barrier for women who wear it and limits their societal integration, which limits their job options (Al-Banna, 2007; Amin, 2000; Kabir, 2012; Tarlo, 2010; Zainal and Wong, 2017). Moreover, in current times, face covering raises security concerns in society (Ahmed and Roche, 2018). However, some well-known advocates of uncovering women's faces assert that the face veil should neither be mandatory nor banned; rather, if a woman's face is extraordinarily beautiful, she should cover it, while women of average beauty should not be obliged to do so (Al-Albani, 2001; Al-Sharaawi, no date). In general, they recommend that women conceal their faces and hands of their own volition, not as an obligation.

An opposing stance posits that the woman is the source of *fitnah* and that her entire body, including her face, is *awra*—the intimate parts of a person's body which must be covered. Based on the doctrine put forward by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, founder of the *Hanbali* school of *Sunni* jurisprudence, every part of a woman's body is private and must be concealed when she steps outside her house—even her nails (Al-Kateeb, 2013). However, opinions vary among famous Islamic scholars who advocate for the covering of women's faces with respect to the parts of the face that can be left uncovered. Ibn Jarir and Ibn Al-Munzir believe it is compulsory for Muslim women to wear a *hijab* that covers their faces and all of the body except the eyes, while Ibn-Kathir and Ibn Sireen recommend the exemption of only one eye from concealment (Madani, 2011). Ibn-Uthaimin and Ibn-Jibreen (senior Islamic scholars) believe that exposing the eyes is permitted, but widening the opening to expose the nose and eyebrows is not allowed because the woman then becomes a source of *fitnah* (Al-Musnad, 1996).

Advocates of these claims posit that a woman's beauty and attractiveness and the potentiality of her causing temptation lie in her face; thus, it would be logical for Allah

to command a woman to cover her face to prevent men from looking at her (Addwesh, 2000). They posit that the phrase ‘...except what is apparent...’ (24:13) cannot be used as evidence that a woman’s face should be exposed because they believe the reference is to outer garments, and the face or hands are not mentioned (Muhammed, 1989). Al-Kharashi (2005) and Al-Sulami (1987) assert that those in favour of women exposing their faces and hands have built their claims on a weak and fabricated narrative that cannot be trusted and have chosen to ignore contradictory evidence. However, women should not be forced to cover their faces to protect men from *fitnah*, as this is not a woman’s responsibility; rather, men are obligated to avert their gaze to avoid *fitnah*. The stance demanding that women cover their faces considers men to be weak and lacking control over their thoughts and behaviour, which is not right, as Allah, in the Quran, commands men to lower their gaze before women, placing the responsibility on men to protect themselves from *fitnah* (Al-Aqqād, 2013; Al-Sndy, 1992; Khan, 1998; Tarlo, 2010).

### 2.5.2 *Qwamma*

Islam brought rights to women and regarded them as complete human beings who were equal to men. As the Quran states:

‘O mankind, indeed, we have created you from male and female and made you people and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you’ (49:13).

Some scholars (e.g., Al-Ghazali et al., 1991; Al-Rahbi, 2014) believe that in the above verse, Allah made men and women equal in humanity and rights; one sex is not more human than the other. However, there is just one element of man or woman that is preferential – piety. In contrast to this, some scholars (e.g., Al-Aqqad, 2013; Al-Banna, 1987; Al-Karbi, 2017) believe that Islam has not made the sexes equal between men and women as they have different natures. The Quran states: ‘...But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority] ...’ (2:228). This verse suggests that men have responsibility and authority over women, which undermines gender equality. For example, *qwamma*, is a system that men enjoy in Islam. Men are given the right of guardianship because they are responsible for spending money on their families as well as working and earning money due to their nature and physical ability; moreover, they are able to protect and care for women and fulfil their needs, such as food, clothing and so on (Al-Ghazali et al., 1991; Madani, 2011). This belief is

based on the following excerpt from the Quran: ‘Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth’ (4:34). This refers to that the *qwamma* is the duty of men toward women in providing protection, living and care.

However, the concept of *qwamma* is used by Islamic scholars to justify the lowly position of women in society and isolate them. This belief was put forward by the Islamic scholar Ibn-Kathir (1999, p.292) and is based on his interpretation of the verse ‘Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other ...’ (4:34). Ibn-Kathir states that:

The man is responsible for the woman, and he is her maintainer, caretaker and leader who disciplines her if she deviates... men excel over women and are better than them. This is why prophethood was exclusive to men, as well as other important positions of leadership.

Based on this interpretation, women must follow men’s orders, and if they disobey, or if a man is disappointed by his wife, he has the right to discipline her, as he is superior to her (Al-Hibri, 2012; Al-Saadawi, 2017). Numerous Muslim scholars support Ibn-Kathir’s argument and have provided several explanations for why men are granted this right (Al-Karbi, 2017; Hassan, 2011; Zeno, 1994). They argue that *qwamma* is granted to men because of innate characteristics, such as their physical strength and their ability to bear the burdens of life and protect women from danger. Men possess firmness of purpose, determination, and strength that stems from knowledge and the ability to think before responding. Another supposed basis for male *qwamma* is their perfection of faith, which refers to the numerous religious activities in which men have to partake, such as *Jihad*, *Imamah*, and *Adhan*. These justifications have been linked to some *Hadiths* of the Prophet (PBUH). For example, ‘...I looked at the (Hell) Fire and saw that the majority of its residents were women’ (Sahih Al-Bukhari 29, no date) and ‘...I have not seen any among those lacking in intellect and religion...’ (Jami at-Tirmidhi 2613, no date). The meaning of these *Hadiths* has been debated by both modern and traditional Islamic scholars, in addition to debates about their authenticity. Nonetheless, they have been used to justify and explain male guardianship (Roald, 2003).

The rights bestowed by *qwamma* are used by some Islamic scholars to formulate rules governing the relationship between a wife and her husband. *Qwamma* requires a wife to obey her husband and makes it forbidden to disobey him. If a wife disobeys

her husband, she is deserving of Allah's punishment because her husband has been given authority over her (Zeno, 1994). Al-Madkhali (2014), in his book *Rights and Duties for Men and Women in Islam*, posits that Islam imposes duties on women and men towards each other. He states that a man is to provide clothing and a home for a woman, while a woman has the duty of listening to, obeying her husband, and taking care of her home and family. He adds a wife must not fast without her husband's permission and must not go outside the home or even invite another person to his house without his permission. Al-Madkhali proposes that admitting women the privilege of men exercising authority over them while they perform the duties required of them as wives and mothers will lead to the happiness of the husband, wife, family, and the entire nation. The woman must obey and reverence her husband, and she must accept his position of authority and power over her. However, in the event that a wife deviates and does not perform her role towards her husband, the husband is permitted to ignore his wife when he goes to bed, and if that does not work, then he is permitted to hit her. This is seen as a way to fix the devastation and corruption of women, which can lead to the corruption of the family, society, and all human civilisations according to Zeno (1994). With regard to convincing wives that obedience to their husbands is a means to enter heaven, the *Hadith* often cited as supporting evidence is as follows: 'Whichever woman dies while her husband is pleased with her, then she enters Paradise' (Jami at-Tirmidhi 1161, no date). This *Hadith* is not considered authentic by most Islamic scholars, even though it has been used to encourage wives to obey their husbands (Roald, 2003).

These Islamic interpretations of *qwamma* succeed in justifying the lowly position of women and male dominance. Johnsdotter (2000) found that Muslim women who participated in her study agree with these interpretations and believe that they are obligated to obey their husbands; they are accepting of their husbands making decisions on their behalf based on the belief that men have the requisite knowledge required to make these decisions (cited in Roald, 2003). In some Muslim societies, women have lost their liberty and are prevented from conducting business, working, and travelling without their husband's written consent, all in the name of Islam (Al-Hibri, 2012; Hassan, 1991). However, *qwamma* should not prevent women from making choices and managing their affairs, and it does not give men absolute authority over women. A man has the right to be a guardian if he is the breadwinner and has

advantages over a woman in a specific matter. However, if these two conditions are not fulfilled, he has no right to be her guardian. For example, if a woman wants to make a commercial decision and finds that she lacks knowledge of commercial matters and that her husband possesses such knowledge, then he could be regarded as her guardian in this matter (Al-Gwily, 2013; Al-Hibri, 2012).

The ongoing debate about women and their clothing is not exclusive to Muslim scholars but is also ongoing among Muslim and non-Muslim feminists. In the next subsection, I present a brief explanation of feminism and its evolution over time, with an emphasis on the perspectives of liberal and Islamic feminism on the oppression of Muslim women and *hijab*.

## **2.6 A brief outline of feminism**

The term feminism refers to the work of Western feminists in North America and Europe during the late eighteenth century. The term was first used by Charles Fournier in response to the movement calling for women's rights to suffrage (Bulbeck, 1998; Hart et al., 2021; Malinowska, 2020). There is no single definition of the concept of feminism, but it can be defined as seeking equality for women and the same liberties that have been given to men (Evans, 1995). Feminists believe that women find themselves treated unequally by social institutions and laws based on their sex (Nussbaum, 1999). Women in patriarchal societies occupy an inferior position to men, while men possess sovereignty and status and thus have the power not only to shape and control women's lives but also to subject women to various forms of oppression, repression, and restriction. This prevents women from playing a genuine role in society, and these inequities are based solely on women's sex. Patriarchal interests limit the value of women and restrict their roles to those of wife and mother within the family (El-Kholy, 2018; Murphy, 2004). Consequently, feminists believe that because all human beings are born equal, they must also be treated equally. The question, however, is: equal to whom? Hughes (2002) explains the concept of equality in feminist thought, which is equality with men, who—as feminists believe—have rights and access to positions that women do not. The equality that feminists call for involves establishing norms, laws, and principles that apply equitably to both sexes. Equality means establishing equal opportunities for all individuals in society to access the same prospects (Hughes, 2002).

The goals of feminism today have been defined by different movements, with each movement pursuing different goals based on the era in which they arose. Inspired by the nature of these movements, a wave narrative has been used to describe the development of feminist ideology. Despite the number of criticisms against using this approach (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015), I will use it to explain the evolution of feminist ideology. Feminism is divided into four waves: the first wave emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the context of a liberal political and industrial society. This movement focused on women's right to suffrage and secured women's right to vote. In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave emerged, and it was more complex than the first wave as it challenged the way society was organised along patriarchal lines. They called for equality in wages compared to men and a woman's right to determine the course of her life and power over her body. The third wave arose in early 1990 and reflected the ambition of feminism to be comprehensive and wide-ranging and to focus on issues affecting non-white middle-class women (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015; Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006; Watz, 2020). The fourth wave is controversial, as there is no consensus on its existence. It emerged in early 2010 and is reflective of the role of the internet in creating spaces for the feminist community to discuss and advocate (Munro, 2013; Maclaran, 2015).

Wave narrative segments the development of feminism based on the commonality of purpose that characterises each wave; however, there is another way to characterise the evolution of feminism, one that focuses on differences in focus areas and beliefs. With the second approach, feminism can be divided into multiple categories and schools that hold different perspectives, but all aim to realise equality between the genders and address the various forms of oppression that women have suffered in patriarchal societies (Evans and Chamberlain, 2015; Medini and Ghorfati, 2014). For example, socialist feminism focuses on highlighting the connection between female oppression and capitalism based on Marxist thought (Mills et al., 2009). Radical feminism focuses on men's oppression of women and regards it as a fundamental form of oppression in all societies, with an emphasis on sexual oppression and revolt against the system (Mackay, 2015; Mills et al., 2009; Tong, 2009). The focal point of black feminism is the double-bind oppression that Black women suffer because of their gender and race, which is distinctly different from the discrimination experienced by White women or Black men (Davis and Brown, 2017; Nash, 2019). Poststructuralist

feminism aims to address the issues of knowledge and power and how these two factors impact women's lives (Mills et al., 2009).

In this subsection, I have provided a brief overview of feminism, its definition, its evolution over time, the various forms of feminism and how they differ in perspectives on female oppression. One goal of this study is to explore how Saudis view the claims that *hijab* is a tool of oppression and male dominance, which limits female freedom, and what these concepts represent in Saudi ideology. By exploring these issues, it is possible to demonstrate that Saudis have a different perspective of female oppression than those espoused by all forms of feminism. In subsequent subsections, I focus on introducing two forms of feminism (i.e., liberal feminism and Islamic feminism), which have opposing views on Muslim women and *hijab*, and their understanding of the oppression of Muslim women in general and *hijab* in particular. I also convey the voice of the wearer of the *hijab*, which is the foundation for the analysis of my findings.

### **2.6.1 Between liberal and Islamic feminism**

Liberal feminism is the first form of feminism and is associated with the first wave of the feminist movement. It is relayed in the thoughts of writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Sarah Grimké and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who believed that women have the capacity to make the same decisions as men and should thus be treated as equal to men under the law (Reid Jr, 2012; Wolff, 2007). Liberal feminism calls for the liberation of women and seeks to give women the freedom to self-determination and similar standing to men in the eye of the law, as well as in the spheres of politics, education, and the labour market. However, liberal feminists believe that human society is full of discrimination against women and is structured to disadvantage women and prevent them from engaging fully on equal footing with men in social life (Friedman et al., 1987; Schlueter and Wenzel, 2016; Tong, 2009). Thus, liberal feminists claim that gender equality can be realised by pushing for equality between men and women, and by giving them similar and equal opportunities without discrimination (Talbot, 2015; Giddens and Sutton, 2013; Fiss, 1994; Shildrick, 1997). To realise this equality, liberal feminism believes that there is no need to change social institutions or restructure society, but that the actions and choices of individual women can realise this equality because female liberation is an individual decision (Giddens and Sutton, 2013; Mills et al., 2009; Rowbotham, 2015; Tong, 2009).

Liberal feminism has attracted various criticisms, a major one being that it neglects the role of social institutions in the realisation of gender equality. Another criticism is that it makes universal claims about men and women from the perspective of middle-class and white women without considering differences in class, race and culture. (Mills et al., 2009).

The interest of liberal feminists in liberating Muslim women began during the colonial era. European countries began colonising many parts of the world in the 18th and 19th centuries. The European sense of superiority during Western colonisation of Muslim nations facilitated the formation of several assumptions about these nations and the females in these populations, e.g., they were illiterate, religious, and domesticated, whereas Western women had more liberty to make decisions about their lives (Bullock, 2007). These notions birthed the idea in the West that Muslim women are oppressed and considered inferior by their religion. Domestic violence, polygamy, seclusion, easy divorce, and *hijab* are some of the various forms of oppression said to be experienced by women in Muslim society, which are cited as justifications for the invasion of these societies to liberate Muslim women (Ahmed, 1992; Bullock, 2007).

The influences of colonialist discourse are apparent in the thinking of feminists, who believed that Muslim women were oppressed by their religion (Ghanem, 2017). In Western liberal feminist discourse, Islamic doctrine is a patriarchal religion awash with misogynist practices that justify, facilitate, and support male dominance and male gender bias. In this worldview, the *hijab* is considered a major symbol of these practices, from which Muslim women need to be liberated (Bullock, 2007; Chakraborti and Zempi, 2013; Hasan, 2018; Khan, 2009; Mancini, 2012; Mohanty, 1984). In Western liberal feminist discourse, the *hijab* is considered a tool for reaffirming the dominance and power of men and an assault on female dignity and femininity because it reduces them to sex objects (Mancini, 2012). Wearing *hijab* is perceived as a tool that segregates women from their surroundings and limits self-expression in public spaces (Mohanty, 1984; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018). *Hijab* is thus labelled a symbol of gender oppression, as it expects women to be concealed and gives men possession of their bodies and control over their lives. From this perspective, *hijab* is considered a method of silencing women, making them invisible and depriving them of validation; a reflection of the underdeveloped and

inferior status of women in Islam. Liberal feminists propose the adoption of an attitude of *sameness* between men and women as a way to liberate women from oppression; thus, the *hijab* should be banned (Abu-lughod, 2002; Bullock, 2007; Chakraborti and Zempi, 2013; Mancini, 2012). For Muslim women who indicate that they wear *hijab* by choice, liberal feminists explain this as a case of these women being victims of false consciousness (Choudhury, 2009). The argument is that Muslim women are usually forced to wear *hijab* by their fathers and husbands, but it is difficult for them to feel. The *hijab* can be used as a tool of oppression because the coercion applied by the men is almost imperceptible, and these women obliviously practice *hijab* without perceiving it as oppression (Billaud and Castro, 2013; Tokhtakhodjaeva, 2000). Women who wear *hijab* thus unconsciously promote their seclusion and strengthen men's dominance over them, which makes realising gender equality difficult (Coene and Longman, 2008; Koyuncu Iorasdagi and Onur Ince, 2010).

In the Muslim world, some Muslims embraced the liberal Western feminist perspective and the call to liberate women from backwards traditional practices and ignore the voice of women who choose to wear *hijab* as an expression of their religious faith (Bullock, 2007). These Muslims were persuaded that *hijab* is not an Islamic obligation but a tool used by a patriarchal culture to oppress women. Several Muslim feminists (Baraka, 2002; Grami, 2009; Salama, 2005) rejected the idea of *hijab* as an element of Islam. They all applied a historical approach to reach the conclusion that *hijab* and the idea of sex segregation are ancient traditions practised by the Assyrians, Sasanians, Jews, and Arabs before the emergence of Islam. Furthermore, they contend that the commands regarding *hijab* in the Quran were not given as part of worship but as a tool to distinguish between free and slave women, but its meaning has been exaggerated into an Islamic obligation to suppress women, which is an injustice to Islam and women. They also argue that women wearing *hijab* today are reflective of the oppression, slavery and coercion that Muslim women suffer in a patriarchal culture. Other Muslim feminists also challenge the historical meaning of '*hijab*' in the Quran and reach similar conclusions (Ahmad, 1992; El-Guindi, 1999). They believe that the *hijab* mentioned in the Quran clearly applies to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and not to all Muslim women. Muslim women wearing *hijab* take away their right to autonomy and participation through segregation and by making them invisible.

Fatimah Mernissi (2011; 1999) is a Muslim feminist, and in her books *Beyond the Veil* and *The veil and Male Elite*, she discusses the *hijab* from her personal perspective. She believes *hijab* does not refer to the covering of women's heads; rather, it has various meanings, all of which are linked to the time of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH). According to Mernissi, the *hijab* requirement, therefore, does not apply to all Muslim women after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). She criticises interpretations of the word '*hijab*' in the Quran, arguing that the historical meaning of the term does not refer to the garment Muslim women wear today. She argues that the current *hijab* reflects injustice, represents male authority over women, and is used by men to control women. She adds that *hijab* originally referred not to a woman's garment but to a curtain that separated the Prophet (PBUH) from visitors. Furthermore, Al-Saadawi (1982; 1990; 2018) rejects the idea of *hijab* and considers it a symbol of sexuality that draws the attention of men to women's bodies to the same degree that an uncovered body would. She posits that the imposition of *hijab* on women is based on the association of women with the devil, which must be veiled to protect men from *fitnah*.

Calling for the liberation of Muslim women from Islamic law because it conflicts with feminism may have precipitated the emergence of a feminist discourse that attempted to find meeting points between Islam and feminism, shape gender equality, and fight gender discrimination under the umbrella of Islam; it is known as Islamic feminism (Althalathini et al., 2022; Baker, 2019; Bullock, 2007). The term Islamic feminism surfaced in the academic writings of Muslim authors during the 1990s and was used to describe female activism in the Islamic world (Badran, 2005; Kynsilehto, 2008). This term has been the subject of various debates. The first debate concerns the emergence of Islamic feminist thought. It is assumed that Islamic feminist thought emerged in the early 20th century in Iran via *Zanan*, a monthly women's magazine. Islamic feminism reflects the rejection of the Western version of feminism by the political-religious regime in Iran, which precipitated the emergence of such a discourse—one that combined Islam and feminism (Afshar, 1998; Tabari, 1986). However, some Arabic scholars (Abu-Bakr, 2012; Salem, 2001) suggest that the emergence of the thought movement began in the late 19th century through the works of Huda Sharawi, Aisha Timur, and Zineb Fawaz, who challenged the traditional view of *qwamma*, *hijab*, and female work and education.

The second debate revolves around the acceptance of the existence and role of Islamic feminists in fighting discrimination against Muslim women. One argument posits that because Islam affirms traditional gender roles, while feminism, as a Western effort, seeks to liberate women from their traditional roles and establish gender equality, it is impossible to find a meeting point between Islam and feminism (Poston, 2001). This viewpoint argues that the existence of Islamic feminism as a feminist school of thought has been exaggerated, as its achievements consist of validating the legitimacy of the Islamic system rather than feminism (Moghissi, 1999). This argument has been refuted by Bulbec (1998), who affirms the need for multiple and various forms of feminism and the rejection of single hegemonic feminism. Islamic feminism meets the need for a form of feminism that identifies with Islam and understands the oppression that has been imposed on Muslim women without undermining the idea of religion, which is absent in Western liberal feminism (Grech, 2014).

The third debate concerns who has the right to speak under the umbrella of Islamic feminism and who does not. Some scholars perceive Islamic feminism as an umbrella that indicates any project to improve the status of Muslim women within the Islamic community, regardless of whether it is secular or religious (Abu-Bakr, 2012; Cooke, 2004). However, other scholars distinguish between Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism (Badran, 2005; 2013; Uthman, 2010). The former refers to efforts against injustice and female oppression using Islamic teachings, while the latter employs secular matrices to achieve the same objective. Islamic feminist does not refer to those who merely study Islamic principles, but those who also practice Islam and believe in the way of life it espouses. In this study, Islamic feminism includes feminists who practice Islamic principles and recognise and challenge Muslim women's issues from an Islamic religious angle. Thus, in contrast to Cooke (2004), I regard Al-Saadawi (1982; 1990; 2018), Ahmad (1992), El-Guindi (1999), and Mernissi (2011; 1999) as Muslim liberal feminists who seek to liberate women from Islamic regulations, among which *hijab* is a major concern.

There is no consensus on the definition of Islamic feminism. The definitions vary widely, but all include the objective of empowering women by ensuring their Islamic rights and rejecting all cultural norms and traditions legitimised in the name of Islam that infringe on those rights (Barazangi, 2000). Some Islamic feminists are more

precise in defining their purpose, e.g., Karam (1998), who specifies improving the legal, social, economic and political awareness of Muslim women and enhancing the social status of Muslim women as goals. Islamic feminists believe that Islam established a foundation of equality between the genders: women in the era of the Prophet (PBUH) were capable, effective leaders, and exercised the liberty to discuss their needs directly with the Prophet (PBUH). Islamic feminists believe that the Prophet (PBUH) played a significant role in weakening patriarchal powers and restoring stolen rights to women, but as soon as the Prophet (PBUH) died, these values returned to dominate Muslim society through patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts and unreliable *Hadiths* (Abu-Bakr, 2013). In these interpretations, male scholars ignore the gendered nature of law and base their renderings on their personal experiences and perspectives, disregarding those of women. This is a consequence of the fact that men occupy the most prominent positions in most societies (Abu-Bakr, 2012; Al-Sharmani, 2014). Therefore, Islamic feminism aims to destroy discrimination against women in the spheres of education, marriage, divorce, political participation, and public discussions of the principles of Islam by creating a feminist theology of Islam to correct these unjust interpretations and facilitate the realisation of equality between men and women (Ramadan, 2003; Uthman, 2010). Islamic feminism seeks to employ a feminist approach to understanding Islamic texts and building Islamic knowledge that emphasises justice, equality and partnership between the sexes and excludes all Islamic interpretations that prescribe exclusion and discrimination against women (Bijdiguen, 2015; Hassan, 1991).

*Hijab* is one of the major subjects weighing on the minds of Islamic feminists. Calls to force Muslim women to stop practising their religion—by giving up wearing *hijab*—are evidence of the liberal feminists' misunderstanding of gender inequality in Islam and *hijab* itself (La Fornara, 2018). Bullock (2007), in *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*, and Roald (2003), in *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*, challenge the liberal feminist view of *hijab*, with an emphasis on the views of Mernissi and Ahmad, who regard *hijab* as a cultural tradition rather than an Islamic obligation—reflecting a misinterpretation of Islamic texts. Islamic feminists assert that wearing *hijab* is not a tool of female oppression, as liberal feminists argue. They believe liberal feminists are ignoring the voice of women who choose to wear *hijab* and argue that the liberal feminist view of *hijab* is a colonial one. They urge

other scholars to respect and listen to Muslim women who wear *hijab* by choice. Al-Ghazali (1972), an Egyptian Islamic feminist, affirms that Islam guarantees equality with men, which is based on respecting compatibility and not competition, as liberal feminists believe. She believes Allah has given her the right to participate in social life in the roles of wife and mother, and *hijab* is not an obstacle to playing her roles. Al-Ghazali describes *hijab* as a system of organising the relationship between women and men through which a woman demonstrates her pride in her faith and signals that she is independent while she participates in social life. Furthermore, Al-Juhani (2015), in her book, *Women's Issues in Contemporary Feminist Discourse: The Hijab as a Model*, challenges the liberal feminist view of *hijab* and explains that it is the product of a lack of understanding. She posits that the *hijab* is a symbol of modesty, dignity, and piety, and a means by which a woman shows respect for her body and indicates her rejection of ideas that reduce women to just their bodies.

It is obvious that this subsection presents feminist perspectives on Muslim women and *hijab* from two distinct angles: liberal and Islamic. The former considers *hijab* a tool of oppression, while the latter acquits *hijab* of this claim, which it frames as a consequence of ignoring the voice of Muslim women who practice *hijab*. Hence, it is important to explore the voices of *hijab* wearers in the next subsection.

### **2.6.2 The voice of *hijab* wearers**

The stereotype of the *hijab* as a symbol of oppression is based on the perspective that all Muslim women who wear *hijab* have been forced to cover themselves and have no freedom of choice in the matter, with the media contributing to the spread of this misleading narrative (Kabir, 2012; Zempi, 2014). The liberal feminist claim that the *hijab* symbolises has been supported by using only the most extreme cases and some of the most unjust anecdotes to come out of Islamic societies; for example, oppressed women in Saudi Arabia cover themselves in black *abaya* and do not have the liberty to travel, work, or drive cars. However, this liberal feminist narrative fails to consider the successes of female Saudi doctors, artists and engineers (Ali, 2005; El-Tantawy, 2007). Several studies on Muslim women highlight the stigma that has been linked to *hijab* by Western organisations, Western media and Western liberal feminists who cannot relate to the reality of Muslim women (Al-Wazni, 2015; Baniani, 2019; Bullock, 2007). This stigma has been able to spread because of the absence of women in the public domain in countries such as Afghanistan. However, the social status of

women in Afghanistan society is not reflective of the overall condition of Muslim women in Islamic and non-Islamic societies. Liberal feminists have failed to understand female oppression, specifically within Muslim cultures (Mohanty, 1984). Medina (2014, p.879) states that:

Anti-*hijab* feminists presume to know these women better than they know themselves, thereby consuming Muslim women's agency and exerting their ideological power and dominance over them—much like what they accuse pro-*hijab* Muslim men of doing.

Liberal feminists limit female freedom and violate the religious beliefs of Muslim women (Ammoura, 2013; Hamdan, 2007; Zainal and Wong, 2017). Women who choose to wear *hijab* should be respected for exercising self-determination, as respecting women's choices and honouring the individual differences between women are the heart of feminism (Afshar, 2008; Marshall, 2008). Therefore, feminists should be against any initiative that forces women to wear or stop wearing *hijab* (Idriss, 2005). According to La Fornara (2018), liberal feminists attempt to address gender inequality by regulating *hijab*, which has been unsuccessful and harms the majority of Muslim women (Wagner et al., 2012). Furthermore, negative portrayals of the *hijab* draw attention away from crucial issues, such as the exploitation of women by the fashion industry and patriarchy (Hasan, 2018; Janson, 2011). Abu-Lughod (2002) condemns the disrespect directed at the values of Muslim women and argues that instead of looking to save Muslim women, which implies a sense of superiority, Westerners would do better to work with them and try to understand the Muslim woman's view of *hijab* and the face veil. Fighting sexism involves encouraging women to know their rights and working collectively—with Muslims and non-Muslims collaborating—to eliminate misunderstandings around *hijab*. If liberal feminists want to understand *hijab*, they should take its historical, cultural, social, and religious context into consideration (Hamdan, 2007).

The *hijab* itself is not responsible for the oppression of any Muslim woman. Attacking *hijab* as though it were responsible for Muslim women's suffering is not justified, as all social norms have the potential to be misused and appropriated. The *hijab* itself is not the issue; those who use it improperly should be blamed (Hasan, 2018; Wagner et al., 2012). The principles of *hijab* can be hijacked for negative ends, and families, government, and religious institutions in Muslim-majority countries play an integral role in the subjugation of women (Awad and Al-Deeb,

2000; Fondren, 2019; Harkness, 2019). If *hijab* is oppressive to women, it is because of the power and authority vested in men in some Muslim communities in which the rules are made and enforced by men (Hussain, 2016). A study by Koo (2014) reveals that in Iran, the government uses posters as a tool to influence women and their choice of attire. The government also requires all businesses to display reminders regarding attire and refuse to serve any woman who is not wearing the proper *hijab*. The Iranian government considers enforcing *hijab* a holy war against Western values. This system uses *hijab* to signal that the women wearing the proper *hijab* are adherents of *Shia* Islam, and Muslim women who do not wear *hijab* are criticised for being anti-nationalist and anti-*Shia* Muslims (Koo, 2014, p.35). Iranian women who do not wear the proper *hijab* are compared to ‘Satan looking up to Western ideology’. From the information shared by the women who participated in Koo’s study, the heart of the problem does not lie with the *hijab* as an Islamic code, but with the fact that their freedom of choice has been eliminated by government regulation.

Studies in the literature have shown that Muslim women hold positive views of *hijab* and the freedom to decide their attire. Several studies (Kulenović, 2006; Labored, 2006; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018; Siraj, 2011) reach the conclusion that the *hijab* is not a marker of exclusion and oppression but a symbol of modesty, virtue, respect, and a source of protection and dignity, and women wear *hijab* with full awareness of their commitment to follow Islam. These studies report that the female participants refuted the idea that the *hijab* separates them from others or prevents them from participating in public life. It is not considered a barrier to a woman’s performance as a professional because contemporary women are accomplished in various fields which draws a direct association between feelings of empowerment and *hijab* (Akhter and Munir, 2017; Mizel, 2020).

A study of Qatari women by Sloan’s (2011) argues that the *hijab* is not a symbol of oppression for Qatari women, as they wear it to show their devotion to Islam. However, she believes that the situation is different for Saudi and Iranian women, as they are legally required to wear *hijab*. She also found that the *hijab* plays a significant role in protecting women from men’s desires. According to her, this is demonstrated by the rate of rape cases in Qatar, which is zero. In contrast, in the USA, one in three women has been raped in her lifetime (Sloan, 2011). Similarly, Ruby (2006) found that Muslim women in Canada did not view the *hijab* as a symbol of subordination,

but wear *hijab* as a function of choice. Ruby reports that many non-Muslim women who expose parts of their bodies are considered more oppressed than Muslim women who wear *hijab* because the former are conditioned to spend large sums of money trying to attain a specific ideal of beauty. Furthermore, many studies on Muslim women's *hijab* reach similar conclusions regarding Muslim women's self-determination of what they wear. For example, Mackay (2017) and Al-Wazni (2015) found that women in their studies acted with individual agency when making decisions regarding their *hijabs*. They insisted that their decision to wear *hijab* was a personal decision regardless of the age at which they started and was based primarily on the command in the Quran that women should cover themselves.

In this subsection, I have presented the voice of Muslim women who reject the linking of *hijab* with oppression and the resulting stigma, as reported in the existing literature. In this study, I also present the voice, perceptions, and experiences of Saudi women and men regarding the stigmas that have been attached to *hijab*. This contributes to the body of knowledge on schools of thought that contest the notion of the *hijab* as a symbol of oppression. In the next section, the literature on *hijab* in Saudi society is explored.

## **2.7 Literature on *hijab* in Saudi society**

Thus far, in this chapter, I have examined existing literature on *hijab* and women from different backgrounds, cultures and nationalities. There are also a few studies on the role of *hijab* in Saudi society. One such study by Quamar (2016) reveals that the popular belief that Saudi women wear *hijab* because it is imposed on them by the government is inaccurate. However, in Saudi society, the *hijab* plays the crucial role of social enabler and facilitator of women's empowerment: it gives women licence to enter public life as it lends women a unique kind of freedom by concealing their identity (Al-Jaouhari, 2013; Quamar, 2016).

The face covering is the primary component of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. In her mixed methodological study, Al-Kateeb (2013) found that the majority of the participants (68%) cover their faces with a *kata* and *niqab* because they believe the *hijab* should cover a woman's body from head to toe. In contrast, 17.9% of the participants believe the *hijab* should cover a woman's body and head, exempting her face and hands. A number of studies found that not all Saudi women who wear *hijab*

do so as a result of coercion, which refutes Western claims that Saudi women who wear veils are oppressed (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Jaouhari, 2013). Wearing a face veil is a way for women to express deep-rooted links to their religion, culture, and national identity, as the face veil, is a national and Islamic code. It protects women by giving them anonymity and shields them from male attention and gaze, all of which provide women with a sense of comfort and power. The veil also plays a significant role in preserving the decency and honour of the woman and her family, as it is a woman's family, rather than the woman herself, who determines whether she should cover her face. It helps women establish a good reputation and earn respect, which eases the way for them to get married, as Saudi culture treats uncovered women harshly in this respect. Notwithstanding the various roles face covering plays in the life of Saudi women, some women do not believe they are obligated to wear a *niqab* or face covering, and deem it an unnecessary and inconvenient component of the *hijab*. They would not wear a face covering if they had their way because it limits their freedom; however, they cannot directly challenge the social expectations for female attire in public spaces (Quamar, 2016). According to Altorki (1986), this shift in the attitude of some Saudi women towards face covering can be explained by a combination of factors, including travelling abroad, education, the growing autonomy of women in marriage, and the nuclear family replacing the extended family as the basic unit of the family from the extended.

The *abaya* also caught the attention of a number of scholars. In religious discourse, the *abaya* should be thick and wide, covering a woman's head and her entire body. However, the shoulder *abaya* is widely accepted among Saudi women, although it conflicts with the ideal in religious discourse (Le Renard, 2014). In her study, Al-Kateeb (2013) focused on the styles of *abaya* (e.g., shoulder *abaya* and head *abaya*) and found that more than half (62.1%) of the Saudi women who participated in her study wear a shoulder *abaya*, and 10% wear a head *abaya*. The traditional head *abaya* makes it difficult for women to participate in physical activities in public, as it makes movement difficult, and it is easily noticeable when the garment is stained with dirt. This can be especially challenging for women who work in the medical sector and thus prefer wearing a lab coat over an *abaya*. For some Saudi women, the black colour also makes it uncomfortably hot, especially during the summer (Benjamin and Donnelly, 2013; DeCoursey, 2017).

The traditional *abaya* has evolved from a wide, plain garment that conceals a woman's beauty to a fashionable, elegant garment that enhances her beauty (Sobh et al., 2010). Changes to the traditional *hijab* in Saudi Arabia can be attributed to the influence of globalisation and Western lifestyles. The media, tourism, and growing opportunities women have to travel to other countries have opened the door for interactions with other cultures. This has impacted Saudi women's views of the traditional *abaya*, birthing a desire to change it (Lindholm, 2010; Shimek, 2012). Saudi women view the modern, fashionable and flexible *abaya* styles positively. According to DeCoursey (2017), who explored the attitude of professional Saudi women towards wearing the *abaya*, the modern shoulder *abaya* is believed to help women express their personal style, provide opportunities for self-expression, look fashionable and elegant, and meet the demands of their jobs and all Islamic requirements for *hijab*.

Consequently, many women now wear the modern *abaya*, which combines trendy Western fashion elements with some elements of the traditional *abaya*. However, unlike the traditional *abaya*, modern ones allow women to express their individuality and sense of fashion and display their wealth. Thus, widely travelled, wealthy women can display these qualities while still meeting the social expectations of modesty (Lindholm, 2010; Shimek, 2012). The *abaya* gives a woman a significant degree of personal freedom while allowing her to give expression to her personal identity. In a collectivist society like Saudi Arabia, deviation from social standards such as the *abaya* would typically be impossible. The fashionable, colourful and revealing *abaya* thus gives women an opportunity to engage in self-expression without violating social rules. In her study on Saudi women, Le Renard (2014) argues that the *hijab*'s purpose as a covering for a woman's body has changed, as women now use it to show off and be seen instead of to be invisible. This is evidenced by Saudi women wearing the shoulder *abaya*, using soft fabrics, embroidering, decorating the garment with sequins, having it in different colours, and through a small space over the eyes, they can draw attention to themselves by applying bright eyeshadow. The *hijab* of Saudi women has become a means for women to present their identity and individuality, which may indicate the end of extremist views on *hijab* styles and a shift away from the ideals of modesty expressed through uniformity and anonymity (Al-Qasimi, 2010; Shimek, 2012).

Certainly, the studies mentioned in this subsection provide some insight into *hijab* in Saudi society. However, they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of *hijab* because they cover only limited aspects of the research topic of this study. Discussing the face covering, its significance, the various styles of the *abaya*, and Saudi women's attitudes towards the *abaya* are necessary but also insufficient for presenting the big picture of *hijab* in Saudi society—which encompasses the meaning, benefit, and purpose of *hijab*. Furthermore, all of these studies fail to provide a comprehensive picture of the role of *hijab* in Saudi Arabia as they neglect the fact that Saudi society is patriarchal and collectivist, such that female attire and behaviour are governed by collectivist and not individualist principles. Despite the bashful attempts of some of these studies to explore the cultural influence on *hijab*, they fail to account for the social norms around wearing *hijab* in Saudi society and the consequences of challenging these norms on Saudi women and men. Furthermore, they do not explore the extent to which Saudi women are able to express their individual identities through the *hijab*. Although some studies refute the oppression claims about the *hijab*, these studies do not provide an understanding of the Saudi perspective of oppression, freedom, male dominance, and men's control over women's attire, all of which are the objectives of this study. In addition, previous studies neglect the monumental changes that followed the announcement of Vision 2030, which is ineluctable, as some of these studies were conducted before this announcement. Therefore, there is a need to examine how these changes have impacted the role of *hijab* in Saudi society.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Studies in the extant literature on *hijab* reveal that the *hijab* has occupied the thoughts of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars alike. After the death of the Prophet (PBUH), *hijab* became the subject of debate among Muslim scholars regarding its meaning and its status as an obligation. Notwithstanding this debate, Muslim women have begun wearing *hijab*, not for religious reasons but for various non-religious reasons. Pressure from social groups, the desire to gain respect, protection, expressing one's identity, health, and getting married are some justifications given for women wearing the *hijab*, depending on the social context in which they live. Furthermore, the variation in the reasons for wearing *hijab* can be seen in the range of styles of *hijab* today. Despite the guidelines for Muslim women's clothing in Islamic literature,

Muslim women interpret these guidelines differently. *Burka*, *shalwar kameez*, *chador*, *jilbab*, *khimar*, *al-amira*, *bandanna*, and *abaya* are all names for various traditional styles of *hijab* in the Muslim world. These traditional styles are now being altered and treated as fashion statements, especially among young Muslim women. These variations reflect differentiation in Muslim women's understanding of *hijab* styles.

There are a significant number of studies in the literature on the ongoing debate among scholars regarding Muslim women and their clothing. The tradition of women wearing *hijab* to cover themselves and the male guardianship of women are historical topics of debate among Muslim scholars. Furthermore, there is the debate among feminists, which is most epic between liberal feminists and Islamic feminists who view the oppression of Muslim women and *hijab* as a manifestation of that oppression from different angles. In the existing literature, there are only a few studies that explore *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. These studies focus on the covering of the face, the *abaya* and its significance, the attitude of Saudi women towards the *abaya*—which highlights several gaps regarding the understanding of its meaning, social norms around wearing *hijab*, the *hijab*'s links to oppression, female freedom and male dominance, and the changes in *hijab* since the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030—which this study seeks to address.

In summary, in this chapter, I provide a broad background of the *hijab*'s history, its meaning, various justifications for *hijab*, various *hijab* styles, an overview of the Islamic vs. feminism debate, and a review of the literature on Saudi women's *hijab*. All these perspectives and insights on the *hijab* are a foundation for the analysis of the findings presented in subsequent chapters. The discussion in this chapter highlights the need to consider the culture and social context when studying the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. To understand the social scene, in the next chapter, I discuss the significant eras in Saudi history: the era of the *Sahwa* movement, including its rise and dominance, and the era birthed after the *Sahwa* movement ended with the announcement of Vision 2030. With women being a significant element in religiopolitical ideology during both eras, it is necessary to understand the status of women in the cultural context, in the context of the *Sahwa* movement, and in the context of modernisation.

## **Chapter 3. Saudi Arabia: During and after the *Sahwa* era**

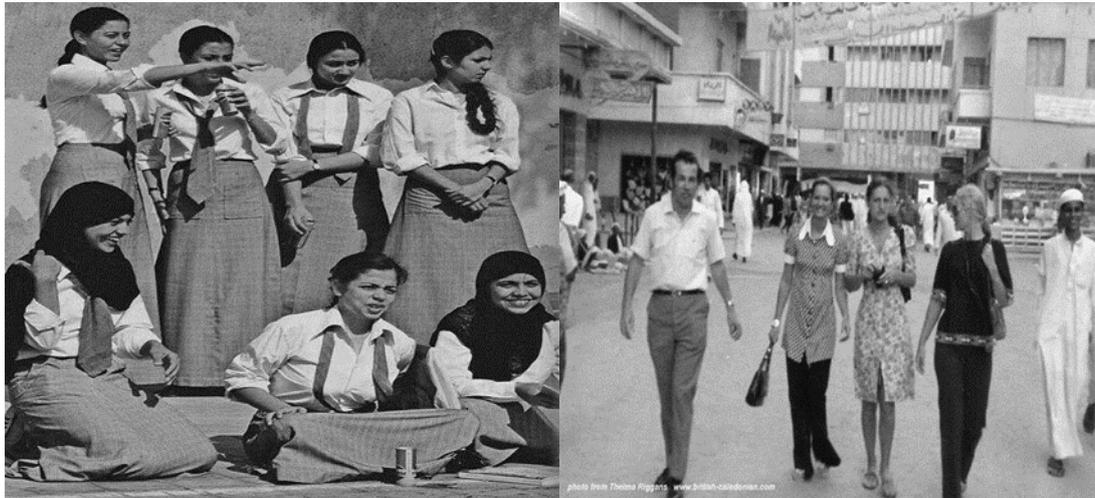
### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I give context to this study by providing an overview of the religiopolitical scene in Saudi society during two distinct eras: the period during *Sahwa* control and the period beginning after the *Sahwa* era ended with the announcement of Vision 2030. Saudi society changed significantly under the *Sahwa* movement and again after it ended, as these two eras are characterised by opposing ideologies in which women's affairs and clothes were crucial elements in both ideologies. The chapter begins by discussing Saudi Arabia during the *Sahwa* era by describing the situation in Saudi Arabia before 1979 and after. Following that, I move on to discuss the second significant period after the *Sahwa* era, which started with the announcement of Vision 2030. I draw on explanations of the new face of religion in Saudi Arabia by looking at changes in Islamic discourse and explaining the social resistance to the transformation of religious institutions. The status of women and the norms around wearing *hijab* in different contexts: culture, *Sahwa*, and modernism, which are explained in the final section of this chapter.

### **3.2 1979: The turning point**

The year 1979 was a turning point in the history of Saudi Arabia, as before this year; the nation was not closed or restrictive and was in conflict with extremist ideology (Al-Nahar, 2017). People were behaving based on Islamic beliefs that prevented them from hating others or considering those who were different from them enemies (Al-Muhaini, 2017). The education curriculum was based on openness to others and encouraged creativity and critical thinking. It was not full of anger and hostility toward anything secular or non-Islamic. Music, singing, drama, and all types of art were not religiously prohibited and were taught in some schools (Al-Ghareeb, 2018; Al-Muhaini, 2017). The country accepted all kinds of entertainment, such as concerts and films, which operated in some hotels in Jeddah city; families were able to rent projectors that played movies, which were called 'cinema machines' (Mahjoob, 2018, no pagination). Before that 1979, women were free from restrictions imposed on them after that year. Women had the right to study and work inside and outside their homes without suspicion about their behaviour, and

did not require a guardian to watch them all the time or to wear full covering clothes (see figure 3)<sup>3</sup> (Al-Muhaini, 2017).



**Figure 3. Photos show aspects of social life in Saudi society before the emergence of Sahwa movement**

In 1979, the oil boom in Saudi Arabia led to many governmental projects aimed at modernising the country, including the expansion of women’s employment in the fields of education and health. These developments were considered a deviation from Islamic doctrine by a radical religious group called ‘The Salafist Group’ who decided to take action by attacking and taking control of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. Despite its success in ending the rebellion, the government had to appease this radical group by reaffirming the religious identity of the country and imposing more restrictions on public spaces (Al-Enazy, 2017; Grace, 2002). After the attack and the peaceful response of the government to this rebellion, members of the *Sahwa* movement started to gather. *Sahwa* principles are based on two ideological sources: the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabism. The Muslim Brotherhood ideology was brought to Saudi Arabia by exiled members of the brotherhood from Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, who found in Saudi Arabia a place that would protect them from the oppression they experienced in their own countries. The ideology of the Muslim brotherhood builds on political positions that reject Western imperialism and the existence of Western regimes in the Middle East (Lacroix, 2011). In their view, the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://atheistuniverse.net/profiles/blogs/saudi-arabia-before>

dominance of Western values and their influence over Muslim society posed a real danger and would destroy Muslim society via the Westernisation of Muslim women (Al-Ghathami, 2015). The second ideology is Wahhabism, which is based on the teachings of Muhammed ibn Abdulwahhab and revolves around a call to return to the purity of Islam—and religious practices instituted by the Prophet (PBUH) and practised for three generations after his death—by fighting any heresies against Islam (Lacroix, 2011; Shahi, 2012).

The combination of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahhabi ideology in the *Sahwa* movement created a religious discourse marked by fear, anger, and rejection of all those who do not follow their principles (Hilole, 2004). It creates a reality predicated on the literal application of militant Salafism and opposition to all trappings of intellectual and material modernity (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). The *Sahwa* discourse calls for Muslims to return to the traditions of the *salaf* (i.e., the first three generations of Muslims) and to revive and remind Muslims of the ways of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. It is a call to fight ignorance among Muslims and the wider world, and for all Muslims to unite (Abu-Rumman, 2014; Al-Muqaddam, 2008; Al-Aqeel, 2011). *Hanbali* jurisprudence is the legal framework for *Sahwa*, which is known as the strictest Islamic sect because it is based on a literal interpretation of Islamic religious texts and rejects the use of human reason in its interpretations. Thus, they claim to offer the only authentic and original interpretation of Islam, representing the purest form of Islam after centuries of misunderstanding and misleading interpretations of Islamic texts by deviant Muslims (Al-Mushawah, 2012; Shahi, 2012).

The *Sahwa* discourse and ideology were welcomed and embraced by Saudi society, which was not the case in other countries, such as Egypt, which rejected it and exiled, imprisoned, or executed its proponents. The social embrace of *Sahwa* may have been the result of its acceptance by the Saudi government and religious institutions (Al-Ghathami, 2015). It may also be the result of the youth adopting *Sahwa* ideology and changing their behaviour regarding seeking knowledge and becoming more committed to performing their religious duties. This impacted the way Saudis understood the *Sahwa* movement, as they began to perceive it as a religious and ethical movement which they needed to follow (Al-Ghathami, 2015).

To establish *Sahwa* movement principles, the *Sahwa* figures began with the education system, as education had become saturated with Wahhabi and Muslim

Brotherhood ideology and justifications of these doctrines. The Saudi curriculum was filled with extremist views and interpretations of Islamic texts and extremist views of all external political, cultural, and religious matters (Al-Wedinani, 2016; Lacroix, 2011). *Sahwa* leaders built educational institutions on a single religious stance that was averse to dialogue; wielded influence over students' personalities, behaviour, and lifestyle; and had the power to induce suspicion and fear of anything in conflict with *Sahwa* doctrines (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). Establishing *Sahwa* ideology in the education system was not enough for *Sahwa* leaders as their principles needed to reach beyond the education system. Thus, the *Sahwa* movement used media such as books, cassettes, brochures, and Islamic lectures as vehicles to deliver their doctrines to individuals (AL-Ghathami, 2015; Al-Shoqiran, 2017).

*Sahwa* figures urged the transfer of their principles from the theoretical to the practical. They saw Islam as a complete system that must be present in the daily lives of people, including in their appearance, speech, and social behaviour (Lacroix, 2011). *Sahwa* leaders worked to control social space by establishing and spreading Quranic institutions, charity institutions, and mosques (AL-Ghathami, 2015). They used *fatwas* as religious justifications for all of the new changes and restrictions imposed on public life. These *fatwas* were built on Quranic and *Hadith* texts. And for matters that had no Quranic foundation, they sought to copy the Prophet's (PBUH) companions' behaviour or what some previous Islamic scholars had recommended (Al-Rasheed, 2013), or, in many cases, *fatwas* were issued based on weak and unreliable evidence of the Prophet's (PBUH) statements (Al-Shlash, 2019). They encouraged people to think that the only way to escape punishment from Allah and his anger was through *Sahwa* preachers and obedience to their teachings and *fatwas* (Al-Shoqiran, 2017).

*Sahwa* produced *fatwas* that insisted on the closure of all institutions they deemed destructive to Muslim society, such as cinemas, concert halls, and theatres, and the act of filming became an ethical crime that Islam did not allow (AL-Hussain, 2017). *Sahwa's fatwas* came to prohibit many things that were allowed in Islam out of fear that allowing some permissible things would lead to the allowance of forbidden things that would threaten society and its purity (Al-Shlash, 2019). *Sahwa* prohibited many things that were not prohibited in Quran or during the Prophet's era (PBUH), such as clapping and standing for the national flag or anthem (Al-Faifi, 2019). Most forms of entertainment, such as playing cards, watching TV, and listening to music, were

prohibited. All forms of entertainment were seen as tools of Western society and part of a conspiracy to destroy Muslim society; Muslims were discouraged from wasting time that should be spent worshipping on entertainment. Watching football matches was not excluded from prohibition as some *Sahwa* leaders saw it as encouraging hatred and some objected to the players revealing part of their thighs (Al-Shlash, 2019). Photography and video recording were prohibited, as keeping pictures inside the home prevented angels from entering and enticed devils to enter (Al-Faifi, 2019). Moreover, *Sahwa* came with formal rules about attire. For example, men who followed *Sahwa* should not wear *iqal*—A thick black band that men wear on their heads—and should wear short clothes and have long beards (Al-Shlash, 2019). Wearing hats and other imported clothes such as trousers and jeans were prohibited, and clothes that featured icons such as a cross, flag of a Western country, or cartoon characters like Micky Mouse were also subject to *fatwas* seeking to limit the influence of the *kuffār* or non-Muslim (Al-Faifi, 2019).

However, the *fatwas* alone did not give *Sahwa* enough control over people's lives and so; *Sahwa* leaders with governmental permission gave CPVPV the power to enforce *Sahwa's* rules and *fatwas*, and maintain their authority over people (Al-Shlash, 2019). CPVPV was established by the state as a religious force in charge of ensuring that citizens followed their gender policies and Islamic doctrine. It fights crime and disgraceful behaviour, and its role was to provide guidance, direction and awareness (Madkour, 2016). Members of this organisation were given absolute power to arrest and bring cases against people with and without material evidence other than their testimonies, as the court and the judiciary trusted them to be good people fighting sin in society (Al-Enazy, 2017).

It is clear that the *Sahwa* movement, with the assent of the government, succeeded in changing the landscape of Saudi society by introducing new rules and making some behaviours religiously acceptable while deeming others inappropriate. Through these social and cultural changes, the lives of Saudis and their attitudes towards themselves and others changed. Thus, viewing Saudi society through the lens of the *Sahwa* era facilitates an understanding of the responses and attitudes of the study participants, and I assume that the majority of these attitudes were formed during that era, considering the age of the participants. While exploring the changes in the politicoreligious discourse and influences on Saudi society after 1979 is crucial to this study, it is also

critical to discuss how this discourse changed significantly after the announcement of Vision 2030, which is explored in the next section.

### **3.3 Vision 2030 and religious reforms**

The *Sahwa* principles and discourse in Saudi Arabia were recognised as an obstacle to fully realising the Saudi Vision 2030 plan. The traditional religious discourse conflicts with the goal of modernising Saudi society, which is the primary aim of Vision 2030, as this discourse is premised on an anti-science posture, anti-modernisation, and the belief that Islamic society has one job—to defend Islam (Nuruzzaman, 2018). To achieve economic, political, and social transformation and to help the citizenry absorb these changes, modern Islamic thinking must be allowed (Al-Hamad, 2019; Quamar, 2015). For this reason, modernisation and renewal of religious discourse became a priority for the Saudi government. The intention of the Saudi government is to destroy extreme religious ideology and transform society based on a modern Islamic ideology that accepts other religions and cultures. These goals were made obvious in a speech by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman at the Future Investment Initiative conference in Riyadh in 2017:

All we're doing is going back to what we were: a moderate Islam that is open to all religions and to the world and to all traditions and people.... Seventy per cent of the Saudi population is under the age of 30. In all honesty, we will not spend 30 years of our lives dealing with extremist ideologies. We will destroy them today and immediately.

The first step taken by the government in the battle against extremism was to withdraw the power and authority of the CPVPV, ending their oppression of people in the kingdom. For years, members of the CPVPV have committed crimes against people, with the number of these crimes and unsavoury incidents increasing over time. Nevertheless, these actions were not proven to be crimes and were seen as justifiable. Their negative behaviours were excused as accidents and deserving of forgiveness because CPVPV members were perceived as defenders of morality, safety and religion in Saudi's Muslim society (Al-Ghathami, 2015; Madkour, 2016). However, with the emergence of social media and cell phones, CPVPV members' oppression and crime were documented by cell phones and published on various social media platforms, which created a negative image of the committee and its members in the minds of Saudis, thus causing problems for the committee (Mufti, 2019). Before

the royal decree about removing the CPVPV, a video clip was circulated showing a girl screaming in front of a major commercial complex in the Saudi capital. She was being hunted, beaten and dragged by CPVPV members because the girl did not obey their order to cover her face. This video caused a campaign on social media through the hashtag #Girl\_Nakhil\_Mall, which circulated the video clip and caused controversial arguments among Saudis between those with the girl and those who justified the CPVPV members' behaviour (AL-Hussain, 2016). The CPVPV members in this incident abused and insulted the girl both physically and verbally to impose their personal opinion and enforce their authority, which was supported by the government, religious institutions, judicial authority and security forces, as well as countless Saudis who viewed them as men who would defend Saudi society from corruption and avert Allah's anger (Al-Ghathami, 2015).

On April 11, 2016, the royal decree was issued to strip the CPVPV of the power to arrest and pursue people. This decree was made after a long history of oppression and crimes committed by its members in the name of Islam. Stripping the CPVPV of power also reflected the position of the state regarding the institution and its legitimacy, as well as the institution of religion itself. The decree concerning the CPVPV indicates the state's rejection of the vision and identity of a specific religious institution that prevails over the rest of society. The decree also calls into question the idea of an institution that controls the morality of society instead of leaving morality to personal choice (Al-Ebrahim, 2014). This decree indicates a belief that society has changed and that the young generation needs social freedom despite religious and traditional objections (Kinninmont, 2017). In issuing this decree, the Kingdom acknowledged that it is based on a moderate religious approach that preserves the dignity of human beings and guarantees their rights based on constructive religious texts (Madkour, 2016). Despite Detrick's (2017) insistence that the CPVPV continues to be an effective formal institution for societal control, even after being stripped of its power, the reality contradicts his statement. Since the decree, fewer CPVPV members have been seen in the streets, and they now call people to prayer without raising their voices or shouting. The majority of their headquarters are now empty, and the number of committee members has decreased, which has impacted their role in society (Kinninmont, 2017).

The loss of power of CPVPV has caused a strong debate between those who agree with it and those who are against the decree. The hashtag #Organising \_ The Committee\_Works is accessed via Twitter. Saudis are divided between those who support the decree and regard the stripping of the committee power as a victory that Saudis must celebrate. Those who reject the decree regard it as the beginning of society's destruction by unchecked sin and moral crimes. Furthermore, some religious men who belonged to the religious institution or others who were active on social media have considered stripping the committee of power and the rapid monumental social changes as weakening Saudi Arabia in the face of Western power and serving their conspiracy to destroy Muslim society. For example, on Twitter, Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Tarifi, a former legal scholar with The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance (MIADG), criticised the government for removing the power of the CPVPV, regarding it as a way to surrender their religion in response to *kuffar* pressure (Al-Tarifi, 2016).

The decree to remove the power of the CPVPV was not the only measure opposed by members of religious institutions. For example, concerning reopening cinemas and concerts after more than 30 years of ban, the grand *Mufti* Abdelaziz Al-Sheikh warned about the dangerous effects of such events on the morality of Muslims and society, but he did not ask that they be closed (Kinninmont, 2017). As a statement issued at the highest level of the religious institution, it was followed by many Islamic activists on social media, who have millions of followers. For example, Abdulaziz Al-Tarifi and Abdulaziz Al-Fawzan tweeted their rejection of the changes in society and considered them a war against religion and its values, and they regarded those who supported these changes as in danger of losing life in the hereafter. In response, in September 2017, there was a wave of arrests of several *Sahwa* figures and religious activists on TV and social media. The government ordered the arrests of those who oppose the liberation of society, and their principles are regarded as obstacles to achieving the objectives of Vision 2030. These arrests have been intended as negative examples for others who may follow their path against the Vision (Abu-Hjeeleh, 2019; Ulrichsen and Sheline, 2019).

The successful silencing of religious men by imprisoning extremist *muftis* and radical religious figures has not been the only effort made by the government along the road to the transformation to modernised Islam. A noticeable transformation in

Islamic discourse has unfolded in the course of this societal shift (Al-Otaiby, 2020; Nuruzzaman, 2018). The government has played a crucial role in such changes and the emergence of new voices by changing the structure of The Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Ifta (PCSRI) and appointing new Islamic scholars who have modern Islamic interpretations to help the religious institution adopt modern Islamic discourse and a progressive stance (Ulrichsen and Sheline, 2019). In May 2019, the success of the government was obvious in a statement by a famous figure, Aid Al-Qarni, in the *Sahwa* movement, who apologised to Saudi citizens for all the restrictions that the *Sahwa* movement imposed on Saudis over the years (Nuruzzaman, 2018).

By making transformation of religious discourse, the government succeeded in decreasing the power and authority of the religious institution over the Saudi people and changing how they look at the religious institution members (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). The phrase ‘*Ulama’s* —Senior Islamic scholars—flesh is poisoned’ was repeated by *Sahwa* figures to avoid any criticism against them or their *fatwas*, which was accepted by Saudis who rejected any doubt in their *ulama’s* behaviour or statements. However, today, none of the members of religious institutions are immune from criticism, and people question their *fatwas*, which has opened the door to different religious opinions (Al-Ghathami, 2015, p. 130).

In a constantly changing society, individuals differ in their acceptance of social changes (Kazlauskas and Zelviene, 2017). In the context of Saudi Arabia, during the lengthy period of *Sahwa* control, a strong culture was established. For years, traditional Islamic discourse in Saudi society was founded on a fear of freedom and resistance to any changes in thought or material expression that could lead to the corruption of society and thus incur punishment from Allah (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). Transforming a Saudi society long controlled by *Sahwa* ideology into a society in which people are accepting of political, economic and social reforms is challenging; it may take years for *Sahwa* ideology to be supplanted by modern Islamic thinking (Al-Shlash, 2019; Hvidt, 2018). The deep roots of *Sahwa* culture are manifested in some Saudis’ resistance to social changes, especially regarding Islamic *fatwas*. Although from a religious point of view, it is acceptable to change *fatwas* when cultural norms, customs, and religiosity rates within a society have changed or new developments have occurred, many Saudis deny that new *fatwas* are founded on Islamic precepts

(Al-Janahi, 2020). They consider these new *fâtwas* the result of internal political pressure imposed on them because of recent government-facilitated changes and the current opening up of Saudi society (Marghich, 2018). The resistance of some Saudis is obvious via the wave of arguments and debates on social media after each new change or new *fâtwas* that contradicts previous *fâtwas*. Saudi resistance to the new discourse has been understandable, as this change affects the main element upon which Saudi society was built: its religious institutions and their principles (Al-Sadhan, 2010).

The resistance of some Saudis can be viewed as representing their fear of the consequences of these changes, especially regarding religion, culture, and gender because these are delicate issues, and these changes may require time to be accepted (Al-Qahtani, 2020; Oreg, 2003). Humans are creatures of habit, and change to any aspect of their lives raises the fear of the impact on their lives and their futures, especially in Saudi society, where cultural and religious changes are connected to potential punishment from Allah (Godbole, 2017). This is particularly true among the older generation, who lived most of their lives during the *Sahwa* era; in contrast, young Saudis are more accepting of the new social changes (Abu-Hjeeleh, 2019; Hvidt, 2018). Social change may also evoke anxiety and anger in some individuals, which may be reflected in their behaviour as they proceed to persuade others that the changes are negative and that they too must resist the changes (Oreg, 2006).

The aforementioned review provides an overview of the significant governmental reforms regarding religious institutions and the stripping away of the power of the CPVPV, which changed the religious landscape of Saudi society. This section touches on some of the tensions between members of religious institutions and citizens who are against the new social changes and those who are in support. In this study, Saudi men and women express how they perceive these social changes in general, and from their responses, I highlight the changes I believe have influenced the changes in the norms around wearing *hijab* (see Chapter 8). In the next section, I discuss the status of Saudi women and *hijab* norms in different contexts.

### **3.4 Saudi women in different contexts**

A Saudi woman's position, role, and rights are shaped by the religiopolitical discourse and social norms. In this section, it is crucial to focus closely on the status of Saudi women and the norms around wearing *hijab* to fully understand the subject

matter. I propose three contexts to facilitate an understanding of Saudi women: culture, *Sahwa*, and modernism. The Saudi woman holds a different status in each of these contexts, and grasping these dynamics can provide an understanding of Saudi women and contribute to establishing the context of my research.

### **3.4.1 The cultural context**

Saudi Arabia is regarded as a highly collectivist society in the Arab world because of the strong influence of religious and tribal values (Al-Qahtani, 2015; Ourfali, 2015). Collectivism is a social structure in which individuals consider themselves part of a group are motivated by the norms and duties imposed by those collectives, and consider achieving collectivist goals more important than achieving individual goals (Triandis, 2018). In such a society, individuals avoid any behaviours or actions that could bring shame or give a bad reputation to their in-group or themselves as part of that group (Arpaci et al., 2018). Under collectivism, individuals depend on their group, which impacts their privacy since it makes their lives less individualistic and therefore less private (Sampson, 1997). In contrast to collectivist cultures, in individualistic cultures, individuals behave as individuals, not as part of a group, because they are more independent and place more value on their privacy and personal beliefs (Arpaci et al., 2018).

In the Saudi context, Saudis seek to conform to the opinions and beliefs of their group and other groups (Bohnet et al. 2010). Family, tribe and nation are examples of groups that play a significant role in shaping the behavioural decisions of Saudi individuals in collectivist cultures (Ourfali, 2015; Triandis and Suh, 2002). For example, in Saudi Arabia, the family is one of the most important groups to which individuals must be loyal, and individual actions must honour the entire family (Al-Zahrani and Kaplowitz, 1993). Family members—including males and females—are expected to behave in a way that protects the family *sharaf*. Negative or positive behaviour by family members affects not only themselves but the whole family; if a family loses its honour, it loses everything. However, women bear more responsibility for protecting family *sharaf*. The misdeeds of female members raise suspicion about the morality of the women and the family as a whole (Stanger et al., 2017). Thus, the strong collectivist culture in Saudi society and pressure on individuals to avoid being attacked by their family and community produce two types of personality in Saudis: the public self, which meets social and cultural demands, and the private self, which

may conflict with social demands and which Saudis embody while they are not being observed by their in-groups (Hawamdeh and Raigangar, 2014).

Regarding women, cultural values played a vital role in the formation of women's position in Saudi society. The woman as a person does not exist in traditional thought; she has long been represented as a wife, daughter, and mother who relies entirely upon men to survive (Al-Rawaf, 1990; Arebi, 1994). Culturally, the main task of Saudi women is to look after the home and family and to ensure that their husbands are satisfied. Some people in Saudi Arabia believe that education and a career are not necessary for women and that getting married is the most important thing in their lives. In several strict cultures, if a woman is tasked with choosing between her husband and studying or employment, she must choose her husband, as divorced women are not respected (Al-Amri, 2017; Al-Rawaf, 1990).

Collectivist cultural expectations of the behaviour of men and women are different. Some expectations are applied to one gender and not the another in the name of Islam, essentially establishing cultural values, even if these expectations are not gender specific in Islam. For example, modesty, decency, and shyness are Islamic values that both men and women are expected to uphold; however, culturally, such values have been imposed more on women than on men. Saudi women are strongly expected to behave and dress modestly at all times, especially when they deal with men (Stanger et al., 2017). The high regard attached to the values of modesty was clearly discernible in the clothing women wore in Saudi society before the ascendancy of the *Sahwa* movement and the emergence and proliferation of uniform clothing (see figure 4)<sup>4</sup>. For example, the Bedouin women, who constituted the majority of Saudi society's female population, wore loose clothes and *burqas* (Al-Kateeb, 2013). In the south of Saudi Arabia, women wore different colours and did not wear a veil over their faces. Young girls who were not married wore a small scarf, usually yellow, which was generally regarded as an indication that the girl was available for marriage. In the west of Saudi Arabia, the women wore traditional, modest clothes that covered their hair and body while revealing their faces (Al-Washmi, 2009; Al-Kateeb, 2013). However, after the ascendancy of the *Sahwa* movement, the black *abaya* and face

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<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/nasserturki1/status>.

covering became the acceptable religious form of female clothing, which also permeated Saudi culture, as uniform full covering clothes are consistent with the cultural values of chastity and sexual modesty (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018).



**Figure 4. Examples of some Saudi traditional dress styles for women in three regions, from left to right: south, north and west.**

Culturally, Saudi women are required to wear a uniform style of *hijab* as evidence of their conformity to collectivist Saudi values and in-group values of chastity and modesty (Al-Enazy, 2017; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). Wearing a uniform style of *hijab* does not reflect personal desire—as can be seen among Muslim women in different cultures—but exemplifies the demands of a collectivist culture (Entwistle, 2000). Saudi women are required to undermine their individuality by repressing any personal preferences and adopting only new changes to the styling of the *hijab* that are acceptable to the in-group in an attempt to preserve their cultural identity (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018; Yuval-Davis, 1992). Making changes to the style of the traditional *hijab* is considered an attempt by women to express their individuality while protecting their in-group from the risk of criticism (Beck, 1992). Despite the slight changes that have been made to the traditional style of the *hijab* in terms of the fabric, design, and colour, each change was received with cultural resistance, which reflects the rejection of any attempt to express individuality and the reinforcement of the collectivist cultural thinking that—as I explained earlier—a woman exists as a component of the group, not as an individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). For a woman, wearing a *hijab* that conflicts with the standard societal rules for a woman's

*hijab* can bring shame to her family, and she may risk ruining her reputation (Arpaci et al., 2018).

In a collectivist culture, family and men's *sharaf* protection is women's responsibility, and wearing a *hijab* based on the society's standard is used as a sign of protection for this *sharaf* (Stanger et al., 2017). Women maintain their own *sharaf*, as well as that of their men and family, by engaging in good deeds and violating it with immoral acts, such as having sex or being visible in public (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Kurdi, 2014). Thus, men strive to keep the women in their families invisible; this is a point of pride and a way of protecting *sharaf* (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). A man who allows his woman to be publicly visible fails to protect his *sharaf* and his woman, leading to doubts about his manhood, which is highly valued in Saudi culture. This type of man is called a *Dayooth*, a person who permits his woman to display her beauty and engage in illegal relations with other men; he is forbidden from entering heaven, based on the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings (Al-Dawood, 2008). Keeping a woman socially invisible and separating her from public life are related to a man's image among other men in Saudi society. Therefore, in Saudi society, a woman behaves according to values and norms that protect her *sharaf* and that of her family (Al-Mannai, 2006). Though, *sharaf* in Saudi culture is linked to women due to the existence of hymen and the ability to get pregnant which men have not, some women are born without a hymen or the ability to get pregnant. Thus, *sharaf* should refer to thoughts, principles and good deeds of both men and women (Al-Saadawi, 2018).

Cultural context is undoubtedly significant when discussing the status of Saudi women and *hijab* norms in collectivist Saudi culture. Reviewing women's status in a collectivist culture is important for this research, as it facilitates an understanding of the social norms around wearing *hijab* and how women are required to symbolise collectivist honour through their clothing. It is helpful to appreciate how slight attempts by women to express their individuality through their *hijabs* are viewed as a challenge to veiling rules and in-group honour, and such efforts can put women as *hijab* wearers and men as guardians at risk of social criticism (see Chapter 6). The next subsection discusses the status of women and *hijab* norms during the period during which the *Sahwa* movement dominated social life in Saudi Arabia, which provides further insight into women and *hijab* principles in Saudi Arabia.

### 3.4.2 In the context of the *Sahwa*

Women and their affairs were the central focus of the *Sahwa* doctrine, which was unmistakable, as evidenced by the massive number of religious *fatwas* on the subject. The *fatwas* address all aspects of a woman's life, ranging from worship and marriage to the wearing of high heels and various hairstyles to participation in sports (Al-Rasheed, 2013). These *fatwas* were considered a tool used by religious institutions to protect women from external influences—Western influence specifically—by protecting pious Saudi women from the moral corruption of the West (Anishchenkova, 2020). There are specific acceptable roles for women, which involve serving their husbands and representing families while demonstrating loyalty to Islam. Women are seen as symbols of a pious nation rather than as a social force within society. They exist as components of the family and are subject to male authority; they are unable to live their lives as individual citizens. Thus, the perception was that women should remain under the tutelage of male relatives who govern their movements, relationships, work, and education (Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Rasheed, 2013; Al-Rawaf, 1990). This view of the woman's status and role in the *Sahwa* ideology was clearly expressed in a Friday prayer sermon on women by a senior scholar named Saleh Al-Fawzan:

The male guardian of a woman controls her, otherwise, if she is left alone, she will get lost. Women lack in mind and religion; actually, she has no mind or religion. She needs a guardian because she is like foolish or crazy if left by herself [without a protector]; she will perish, waste her money and lose her religion (Al-Fawzan, 2013, no pagination).

Al-Fawzan denies women their humanity, faith, and sanity. This statement reflects the cultural beliefs of the religious figure, and beliefs constitute an Islamic declaration because they were stated in front of an audience. However, the above statement is not based on any evidence from the Quran or *Hadith* because an insane individual is not required to follow any religious practices, yet women have these obligations despite, according to Al-Fawzan, being insane.

These ideas about women were institutionalised, and women were obliged to obtain approval from their guardians to do most things, such as studying, getting married, travelling abroad, or even being released from prison (Al-Enazy, 2017; Al-Kameis, 2014). An unmarried girl must be under the custody of her father or another male relative, even if the relative is not an adult. After getting married, custody

transfers to her husband. This system is often considered humiliating and degrading to women, particularly if a woman's guardian is less educated or younger than her. It is a reflection of the common belief that a woman cannot be equal to a man as she lacks wisdom and faith in religion and does not think rationally or possess the mental capability of a man (Al-Rasheed, 2013). She cannot be allowed to make her own choices without a man's permission. Any voice that advocates giving women rights or freedoms is regarded as conspiring against Islam and disobeying it by calling for the liberation of women (Aba-Alkhail, 2017). Freedom for women would ultimately end the Islamic nation; when women are under the control of a guardian and obey him, society is protected and there is no way for moral corruption to spread'. Such statements have led some men and women to reject any reforms to the traditional norms regarding women or reforms that give women authority over themselves. Based on this reasoning, Saudi men have spent women's money and looted their inheritance, prevented them from leaving their homes or inviting anyone over, and denied them the possibility of becoming independent by refusing to allow them to study or work (Al-Khunaizi, 2012; Shanar, 2016).

In *Sahwa* doctrine, a woman's body is thought to be a source of sedition that must be concealed in public. Women are segregated from men to comply with these interpretations of Islam. Women, according to *Sahwa* doctrine, must be covered in clothing that is loosely fitted, and any attempt to show a woman's expression through dress is forbidden (Shahi, 2012). They insisted that the Islamic *hijab* must cover all parts of the woman that are forbidden. The first part of her body that she must cover is her face, and she is forbidden to leave the house with her face uncovered. However, some *Sahwa* leaders allowed women to make one or two holes in their face covering, as long as they did not show their eyes (Helal, 2014); widening the open space around the eyes to reveal the nose and eyebrows is not permitted, as this might become a source of temptation and making a woman more socially visible than a covered woman (Al-Musnad, 1996; Czernecka, 2019). This aggressive *Sahwa* discourse of women's *hijab* was built on weak argument and evidence and did not rely on correct Islamic evidence according to Al-Albani (2001).

The *Sahwa* movement insisted on the colour black for women's *hijab* and clothes, and any woman who wore *hijab* in a different colour, such as grey, blue, or brown, was perceived as committing a great sin (see figure 5)<sup>5</sup> (Muthffar, 2011). *Sahwa* leaders convinced Saudis that the *hijab* must be black based on the *Hadith* of Umm Salamah, the Prophet's (PBUH) wife:

'When the verse "That they should cast their outer garments over their persons" was revealed, the women of Ansar came out as if they had crows over their heads by wearing outer garments' (Abi Dawud, 2008: 4090).

Some *Sahwa* leaders have used this *Hadith* to argue that the *hijab* must be black. However, some scholars interpret the mention of 'crows' in this *Hadith* to refer to the time of day that the women left to pray: early in the morning, while it was still dark. In this case, this word does not mean that women should wear black or another dark colour (Shimek, 2012). Al-Khamis (2014) indicates that the black *hijab* was not originally the product of Islam or Saudi society and culture. It is speculated to be a result of Turkish influence during the Ottoman Empire, whose leaders covered their *harems* in black in the public sphere.



**Figure 5. Saudi women were compelled to veil themselves in black and conceal their faces.**

As a religion, Islam was not created for force but for choice; individuals have the absolute right to choose to believe in Islam because they are responsible for their own

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<sup>5</sup> <https://ultrapal.ultrasawt.com>

choices. As the *hijab* is considered a part of this religion, women have the right to decide whether to wear one. However, in *Sahwa* doctrine, women are not given this choice. For example, in his *fâtwa* about a wife refusing to wear a *hijab*, Ibn-Uthaimin (no date) states that women must be forced to wear a *hijab*, and if she refuses, the husband must prohibit his wife from leaving the house because he has *qwamma* over her. According to *Sahwa* ideology, women must follow the rules of *hijab* set by *Sahwa* leaders. A woman's guardian is responsible for ensuring that she does not attempt to break these rules by leaving home without a *hijab*. When a woman is in public, this responsibility falls on the CPVPV, which is responsible for maintaining strict control over women's behaviour and attire in public (Al-Khunaizi, 2012).

The CPVPV was essentially an extension of a patriarchal system that insisted that the right place for a woman was in her home with her children, that she should only appear in public when it was absolutely necessary, and that she needed to be kept under governance (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). If a woman did not wear a *hijab* at all in public or wore a *hijab* that was inappropriate from the viewpoint of a CPVPV member, that woman could be jailed or punished (Al-Kateeb, 2013; Grace, 2002). For a Saudi woman, being jailed by the CPVPV or being seen in the committee car was considered scandalous and would effectively ruin her reputation because the general belief was that the majority of cases investigated by this organisation were related to sexual crimes or alcoholism (Al-Enazy, 2017; Le Renard, 2014).

The *Sahwa* formulated *fâtwas* stipulating that women should remain segregated from men in public and private spaces, as *Ikhtilat* (i.e., free mixing between men and women) had emerged; hence, *fâtwas* were issued that forbade integration of the sexes. Thus, sex segregation was one of the features of Saudi society during the *Sahwa* era. Sex segregation was a mechanism adopted to protect women from sexual advances from strangers; hence, it disallowed women from mixing physically or socially with male non-relatives in various spaces, including banks, workplaces, certain restaurants, and libraries. (Al-Essa, 2013; Kurdi, 2014; Oshan, 2007). The segregation system was not exclusively focused on preventing women from communicating face-to-face with men but went even further, forbidding a woman's voice from being heard by men to prevent *fitnah*. Thus, several *fâtwas* were issued that deemed a woman's voice *awra*. Consequently, a woman could not speak directly to men and had to communicate through her guardian, who acted as an intermediary between her and other men, such

as vendors or doctors (Al-Ahmad, 2008). This extreme segregation created a sense of fear and suspicion between men and women, and the relationship between them was portrayed as that of two frightening monsters, each seeking to attack the other—its prey. This has impacted both men and women negatively, as it prevents the formation of healthy and normal relationships between men and women and eliminates opportunities for the exchange of insights, vision, and views between the sexes (Al-Khunaizi, 2012; Bullock, 2007).

The idea of segregation between sexes has built on the portrayal of women as Satan, able to rebel at any moment and deserving of punishment from Allah for their failure to protect men and society by giving up wearing *hijab* and mixing with men; as is evident in the following excerpt from a scholar who belonged to the *Sahwa* movement:

Satan's influence on people is strong in general, but his influence on women is stronger than on men because of women's weakness and lack of thought and religiosity, which can be seen in her abstraction of dress and nakedness. When a woman shows her adornment and mixes with men and deliberately works with them to draw their attention to herself, Allah's wrath and punishment will come upon them and lead to the fire (Al-Bader, no date, p. 55).

Al-Bader claimed that the influence of Satan is stronger on women than on men and that the integration of men and women is a cause for punishment from Allah. However, his claim is not based on evidence from the Quran or *Sunnah*, but on a statement made by Ibn Al-Qayyim, an early Islamic scholar. This lack of evidence shows that the *Sahwa* interpretation of women's clothes—and women's status in general—is based on the traditions, personal tendencies, and interpretations of some Islamic scholars (Al-Albani, 2001).

Saudi women in *Sahwa* era symbolised the virtue of the Islamic state and signalled the rules of Saudi society, as this conservative Islamic nation sought to distinguish itself from other nations. Therefore, Islamic principles were applied, including gender segregation and requirements for women to cover themselves in public spaces (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). The imposition of the *hijab* by the *Sahwa* movement was a way to challenge Western values, which were considered corrosive to Saudi women's morality. The Westernisation of the Muslim woman was regarded as part of a grand conspiracy by the West to dominate the entire world. When Muslim women adorn themselves or emulate Western women, these are considered signs of

Westernisation in the Islamic world (Al-Besher, 1994). Women's black *hijab* was a national symbol of Saudi society, distinguishing Saudi Arabia from other nations. They are also a religious symbol and a sign of piety, as is gender segregation in public spaces (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Anishchenkova, 2020). Women's adherence to the national identity in the form of cultural codes around veiling and clothing—the black *abaya* and face coverings—identifies true Saudis, whether or not these garments are legally required (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). According to Armstrong (1982), assigning people to specific cultural roles in terms of behaviour, customs, practises and clothing is a kind of boundary setting that identifies members of a specific group. Thus, abandoning or modifying the shape of the black *hijab*, even if the alternative garment fulfils the Islamic requirements for the *hijab*, could be regarded as a violation of religious principles and a threat to the Islamic nation (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Such actions would face religious resistance as they would be regarded as an attempt to Westernise Saudi society (Al-Badah, 2010; Al-Khunaizi, 2012). Yuval-Davis (1992) proposes that women are regarded as protectors and carriers of tradition rather than as symbols of changes or new trends. As a result, Saudis view women who challenge their culture and customs as naive victims of the Western plot to destroy the castle of Islam (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018).

The *Sahwa* movement, through its dominance in social life in Saudi society, set the norms regarding the status of women and the rules around wearing *hijab*, which shaped the existing cultural norms. For the purpose of this research, it is crucial to review this here because it facilitates an understanding of the Saudi perception of a woman's status and *hijab* norms. I posit that all participants in this study lived through the *Sahwa* era, and their views on women and religious *hijab* norms were shaped by *Sahwa* ideology. Presenting the *Sahwa* view of women and *hijab* helps lay the foundation for understanding the findings of this research. In the next section, I explore the point at which the *Sahwa* perspective of women and its *hijab* norms ceased to be the status quo for Saudi Arabia after the announcement of 2030 Vision, which established a new set of norms for women and their clothing.

### **3.4.3 In the context of modernism**

The empowerment of Saudi women is a major component of Vision 2030. However, Saudi women faced several social and legal restrictions that impeded the achievement of this goal. This led the government to adopt a number of new policies

and issue declarations to overcome these obstacles. One of the significant obstacles Saudi women faced for years was male guardianship. Empowering women and giving them the right to make their own choices conflict with the concept of male guardianship, which obscures women behind male authority (Shebaro, 2017). The guardianship system placed women in a lower status than men and treated them as less—than—human or second-class citizens who needed every aspect of their lives to be controlled by men. Therefore, the guardianship system has been a major hindrance to women, as they cannot work, travel, or live on their own without written approval from a male guardian. In this way, the legal authority of men over women ensured their subservience and powerlessness (Al-Sahi, 2018; Naseem and Dhruva, 2017). Thus, in May 2017, all government agencies were ordered to approve all women's requests and render services without a male's written approval. In July 2019, a series of decrees were issued, abolishing the greater part of the system. The liberties enshrined in these new laws include the following: women are allowed to acquire passports and to travel abroad without the permission of a guardian; like a man, a woman has the right to travel once she reaches the age of 21 without any conditions; women can register the birth of their new-born children at birth, obtain their family records, report cases of death, and they can be legal guardians of their children (Al-Enazy, 2017; Ulrichsen and Sheline, 2019). These actions attracted global media attention because of the significance of improving the status of Saudi women.

Regarding its efforts toward empowering Saudi women, the Saudi government has ensured that female citizens of the country are academically qualified and well-educated by making education more effective and training women in skills relevant to the goals of the new era in Saudi history. Many educational opportunities that were previously reserved for men have been opened for women. For instance, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) announced the admission of female students at the bachelor's degree level, which is the first time that this field has been opened for women to study in the fields of petroleum and mineral wealth at this university (Al-Dossary, 2018; Al-Shuaibi, 2017; Hvidt, 2018; Yusuf, 2017). Moreover, Vision 2030 has succeeded in creating various opportunities for women not only in education but also in the labour market in many fields that have been traditionally reserved for men, such as engineering, architecture, law, business and security (Al-Qahtani, 2020). For instance, in January 2018, Border force jobs for

women were advertised by the General Directorate of Passports, Airports and LandBorder Crossings (GDPALC). Moreover, the Public Prosecution Office (PPO) announced its intention to recruit women as investigators and employ them in the military and as soldiers on the ground at the mosque in Makkah (Hvidt, 2018).

Unlike men, Saudi women had faced many challenges and restrictions that prevented them from engaging fully in the labour market such as banning driving cars. Banning women from driving cars had rendered them unable to travel between their residences and workplaces, except when an adult male relative or employee drives them, which was not affordable for low-income families. In addition, cultural and religious restrictions have prevented some women from taking taxis and Uber transportation because riding with a strange man in a car alone is not acceptable (Hvidt, 2018; Naseem and Dhruva, 2017). In September 2017, a decree was issued to facilitate women's entrance into the labour market by providing them with the right to drive a car. Lifting the ban on driving a car is a major step toward achieving women's social freedom and mobility (Krane and Majid, 2018).

Though no law required women to veil their selves in public spaces, women were arrested by CPVPV and their security companions for not doing so. This situation concerning the *hijab* has changed, especially after the statement of crown prince Muhammed bin Salman in his interview with Norah O'Donnell on CBS in 2018 regarding the arrest of women by the CPVPV for not covering themselves:

The laws are transparent and stipulated in the laws of *sharia*: that women wear decent, respectful clothing, like men. This, however, does not particularly specify a black *abaya* or a black headcover. The decision is entirely left for women to decide what type of decent and respectful attire they choose to wear.

The crown prince declared that women should decide on the types of clothes they want to wear as long as the clothes are respectful and decent. This statement clarified that the previous rules regarding the *hijab* were no longer required, and their strict religious enforcement was no longer necessary (Hvidt, 2018).

Since releasing this statement, significant changes have become evident in public spaces. Presently, women can be seen wearing various colours and styles of *hijabs*. Some women still wear the traditional *hijab*, black *abaya*, and face veil. Others have altered the traditional style of the *hijab*, making changes to their traditional appearance, as they do not veil their faces or even their hair, and they wear their *hijabs*

in black and in several other colours. These women are considered a minority and are seen only in the largest cities (Al-Salh, 2018). These changes in women's clothing may be regarded as a reflection of changes in the gender-power dynamics and changes in the way people think and what people believe about women and gender relations in Saudi Arabia (Al-Shlash, 2019; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). However, Marifatullah (2018) views significant changes to Saudi women's attire negatively. He considers the *abaya* vital to Saudi society as it represents Saudis' cultural heritage and national identity. Therefore, the *abaya* should remain a part of Saudi culture and women should wear it every day. Freeing women to wear what they want endangered Saudis' religious and national identity which is clear as some Saudi women have replaced their black or coloured *abaya*, *niqab* and headscarf with sporty jumpsuits, dresses and trousers (Abdulaziz, 2019).

The governmental changes regarding women have been followed by religious discourse changes regarding the same matters. Religious institutions are known for their negative attitude towards women and their religious justification for maintaining male authority over women (Nuruzzaman, 2018). The discourse of religious institutions has been based on an ideology that is contrary to the current government's plan to empower women. Changes in the discourse around religious institutions were obvious, especially the shifts regarding the superiority of men over women and the emphasis on Muslim Saudi women obeying their husbands and guardians (Salem, 2001). Abdullah Al-Manea, a member of the Council of Senior Scholars (CSS), said that a woman is the guardian of herself in all matters of her life; she has no guardianship over her except in marriage, and she has the same rights as men (Al-Dubais, 2016). This statement by a famous figure in the Saudi institution of religion is regarded as a significant milestone of transformation in the religious institutional discourse on the authority of men over women. Also, there were noticeable changes regarding the stance of PCSRI on the longstanding attitudes of religious institutions that supported the ban on women driving cars. The religious discourse regarded that allowing a woman to drive a car would destroy Islam, undermine the castle of Islam, and proliferate Western values, and those who advocated such rights were regarded as not being Muslims or Saudis (Al-Enazy, 2017; Ulrichsen and Sheline, 2019). Today, the religious discourse has changed and

considered the ban on driving women for car has no religious roots and lifting the ban helps women to fulfil their needs.

The change in religious discourse includes veiling rules. A statement of a member of CSS, Abdullah Al-Mutlaq, who stated that the point of the *hijab* is modesty; thus, women should not be forced to wear the *abaya*. He also felt that women should be allowed to put the *abaya* on their shoulders rather than their heads, which led to the wide debate and arguments that emerged on social media, as he was accused of encouraging women to give up wearing the *hijab* and was regarded as losing his path (Al-Hadeeb, 2018; Hvidt, 2018). Similarly, Abdullah Al-Manea, a member of CSS, stated that the point of the *hijab* was that a woman should cover her body. If she covered it with a red or brown cloak, or with any colour, it would not be forbidden; rather, it would be contrary to the usual colour, which may indicate that by drawing the attention of some men to herself (Shar, 2020).

The government has used social platforms, TV, email, YouTube, radio and advertisements to disseminate information about Vision 2030 and changes in the status of women throughout the world with the goal of improving the old image of the state, thereby earning the trust of investors and capturing the attention of the world, to help to achieve the vision's goals (Al-Shuaibi, 2017). There have been attempts to undermine these changes by suggesting that the motivations behind them were not for Saudi women but for economic and political designs and to end the criticism from international organisations regarding the state of women's rights in the country. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that these changes in the status of Saudi women are significant, as, after years of the negatively perceived treatment of Saudi women in a patriarchal society, women are now treated as humans with self-determination (Al-Enazy, 2017; Al-Hussein, 2014; Al-Qahtani, 2020; Ulrichsen and Sheline, 2019).

The announcement of Vision 2030 and the significant changes that followed with respect to women and their clothing in public spaces have changed the face of Saudi society and challenged all cultural and religious restrictions on Saudi women. Thus, it is crucial to consider these monumental social changes to fully understand the *hijab* in Saudi society. This thesis also examines changes related to women's affairs, such as the repealing of the mandatory over-the-head *hijab*, the weakening of the male guardianship systems, the restriction of the powers of the CPVPV, and the transformations in the religious discourse. I explore the influence of these changes on

the recent shifts in Saudi women's clothing and comportment in public and how Saudis view these changes (see Chapter 8).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter is to provide a clear perspective on the religiopolitical scene in Saudi Arabian society by focusing on two significant periods in its history: the *Sahwa* era and the period following it. After 1979, the government gave the *Sahwa* movement the authority to control the public. To establish their ideology in society, the *Sahwa* movement controlled the education system, gave the CPVPV institution power to ensure that Saudis adhered to their principles both in public and in private, and issued *fâtwas* on every aspect of people's lives. The dominance of the *Sahwa* lasted for years, until the announcement of Vision 2030, which ended the long period of the dominance of *Sahwa* ideology over Saudi society and proclaimed the beginning of a new era. Transforming the religious discourse and stripping away the power of the CPVPV are examples of significant changes that followed the announcement and effectively ended the authority of religious institutions over Saudi society.

The existing literature on Saudi society identifies elements that play roles in shaping the roles of women and their norms around modesty, which are the religiopolitical and social aspects of Saudi culture. To understand Saudi women, it is important to understand their status in different contexts: culture, *Sahwa*, and modernism. In the context of Saudi Arabia's collectivist culture, the woman is considered a component of the in-group, and her behaviour is expected to conform to the norms of the group. In the context of *Sahwa*, a religious context, women also did not exist as individuals but as components of the Islamic nation and under male dominance. In the context of modernism, which follows the announcement of Vision 2030, women are considered citizens and individuals and are given liberties that were previously considered a male prerogative.

In summary, in this chapter, I have provided a brief background of Saudi society spanning two significant eras that provide context for this research, facilitating an understanding of the experiences and thoughts of Saudis on the topic of this research. In the next chapter, I describe the research design and explain why it is an appropriate approach for addressing the research questions. I also present the rationale behind the data collection methods employed.

## **Chapter 4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research approach and present the rationale behind the data collection methods. The chapter opens with an explanation of the qualitative approach and the epistemological stance of this study. The section that follows details the strategy employed in preparing the fieldwork by explaining the judgemental sampling strategy, which was used to select the research sites, and in-depth semi-structured interviews, which was the tool employed to collect the data, and the rationale behind these choices, the process of the pilot study, recruiting a male assistant and providing justifications for the latter with an overview of his training process and ethical considerations and strategies to protect the participants and their privacy. Next, the processes in the field, which include using a judgmental strategy in selecting the study sample, accessing and recruitment process, building rapport and trust, and transcription of the collected data, are all explained. This is followed by details of the processes that took place after the fieldwork, management and analysis, writing-up process and dealing with the issue of language and translation. Finally, The potential effects of the researcher's positionality on the research and its impact on the process of data collection and reflection on the research process are investigated.

### **4.2 Methodological approach and epistemological position**

Designing the research and choosing the research method depend on the aims of the study and the research questions (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This study explores the perspectives on the *hijab* held by men and women in Saudi society. Given this aim, a number of methodological approaches that may provide answers to the research questions were considered. However, I adopted a qualitative approach as an appropriate approach to answer the research questions.

Qualitative research is broadly associated with the idea of interpretivism, which holds that the natural science approach is not appropriate for the examination of the social world because the social world is not controlled by laws. Thus, to investigate the social universe, the researcher must understand the participants' thoughts and interpretations within the context of their lived experiences (Ritchie et al., 2013). The qualitative approach is used to answer questions that seek to investigate the

experiences, meanings, feelings, and perspectives of the individual (Hammarberg et al., 2016). It provides the researcher with thick data and an in-depth description of the subject of the study. It facilitates an understanding of issues by revealing the beliefs that human beings hold about their behaviour and surroundings. The aim is to comprehend human nature, culture, and society, to understand the drive behind human behaviour, and to place social issues in a cultural perspective instead of reducing them to elements arrayed for quantitative comparison (Babbie, 2011; Porta and Keating, 2008). Thus, qualitative data is not suitable for counting and measuring. It is generated by collecting data from a small group of people using techniques that investigate beliefs, perspectives, and experiences (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

This study seeks to provide thorough descriptions and a deeper understanding of the nature of *hijab* in Saudi Arabian society, as previous studies on *hijab* in the Saudi Arabia context have not fully explained *hijab* and neglected to capture the cultural perspective and its nature within society. Thus, the nature of *hijab* in Saudi Arabian society cannot be studied without plumbing the depths of the participants' understanding and knowledge of *hijab* and their society. Using a qualitative approach and speaking with people help me to explore deeply rooted knowledge, meaning, and experience of *hijab*. It also helps the participants to unveil their reasoning to themselves and me and to reflect on their lives and thus uncover aspects of their lives that are associated with *hijab*. This provided me with deep and rich data on the *hijab* in Saudi society. This would not have been achieved without using the qualitative approach and the chosen sampling strategy and data collection techniques, which make it the most suitable approach for this research.

Moreover, the qualitative approach provides flexibility through the research stages. This flexibility allows for modification of various aspects of the research plan, such as the research questions and the forms of data collection (Creswell, 2009; Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). This flexibility gave me the ability and freedom to make changes in the research process based on emerging results or participants' circumstances. Considering the sensitive aspects of the subject of this study, as this study asked participants about experiences and feelings that they may never have expressed, an approach that allowed me to tailor questions response to participant circumstances and make revealing their emotions easier was required. In line with this,

a qualitative approach with a flexible stance is the only appropriate approach to address the questions of this study.

Within the field of qualitative research epistemology and practice, this research positioned itself in line with feminist research. Feminist research aims to give a voice to women to express themselves and to raise the values, positions, and perspectives of women (Neuman, 2014). Feminism criticises various forms of male dominance in all aspects of the social world that women have been excluded from. This exclusion in the social world has been reflected in research, where said research has represented only male perspectives and values (Burns and Walker, 2005). Men, as Dale Spender (1982) argues, regard themselves as the centre of the world, which leads them to describe the world around them based on their experiences, not based on women's. This neglect of women has now led to the inclusion of the experiences and voices of women in research (Burns and Walker, 2005). Feminist research merely focuses on representing women and their experiences and interests, which feminists believe are different from men's. It involves a commitment to rewriting male research by bringing in the different experiences of women and identifying them based on women's experiences rather than men's (Malpas, 1997).

However, is not sufficient to simply conduct research about women and women's experiences and issues—feminist research must be completed for women. In other words, feminist research should use women's experiences and answers to bring about improvements in the lives of women and lead to social changes (Bowles and Klein, 1983). This study aims to give a voice to women and challenge their silence about the *hijab*. The *hijab* has been a main feminist topic for male Islamic scholars in Saudi society. There is an enormous amount of research about the *hijab* that reflects the experiences, perspectives and voices of men, but neglects the voices and experiences of women. This research is best described as being about women, but not for women, since the study presents women's experiences and perspectives about the *hijab* but has no direct link to making any changes or improvements for women's lives in Saudi society.

However, within feminist theory, there are theoretical differences between the causes of gender oppression and inequality, which lead to variations regarding suggested analyses and solutions, such as liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, postmodern feminism, black feminism, and postcolonial feminism.

However, within the feminist epistemology, I found that this research fits well into the Islamic feminist perspective. Islamic feminists (as presented in Chapter 2) believe that the Quran and *Hadith* are the main sources of Islamic principles that have been interpreted by men who seek to make women subordinate maids of a patriarchal order (Al-Hibri, 2012; Hassan, 1991). Muslim feminists reject the patriarchal interpretation of the Quranic texts as they consider such interpretations to not be a part of Islamic doctrine; thus, they demand a re-reading of the Islamic texts and the creation of a so-called ‘feminist theology’ in the Islamic religion to liberate such unjust interpretations that make equality between men and women impossible (Abu-Bakr, 2012; Bijdiguen, 2015). Considering the nature of the *hijab* as a feminist and religious subject and considering the nature of Saudi society as an Islamic country, I found that the Islamic feminist perspective linked directly to my research. As a Muslim Saudi Arabian feminist, I was aware that Saudi women have experienced social inequality in the name of Islam, as Islamic texts throughout Islamic history have been interpreted by males and Saudi Arabia is one of the Islamic countries where religious institutions have been controlled by men. I was aware that Muslim women knew the *hijab* to be a part of Islamic doctrine, and that the relationship between men and women in Saudi society was built on Islamic basics and the idea of *qwamma*, which was interpreted by a patriarchal system. I also believe that the women in this study are not passive; rather, they are active and able to make their own choices in a strongly patriarchal society. Thus, the Islamic feminist perspective is the epistemological stance in this research and is an appropriate framework for understanding the findings of this research.

Despite the fact that this research allows the voice of women in society to be heard and their perspectives about the *hijab* to be explained, as a Muslim feminist insider researcher it can be difficult for me to represent the voice of women without including men’s perspectives regarding the *hijab*. Thus, men were invited to talk about their perspectives regarding the *hijab* to examine feminist assumptions about the *hijab* as a kind of oppression for Muslim women. I believe that the experiences of women differ from the experiences of men, which is crucial to represent in this research. However, I needed to be sure that engaging men in this research would not affect the feminist foundations of this research. Stanley and Wise (1993, p. 31) explain the matter of conducting feminist research about men: ‘Feminist research must be concerned with all aspects of social reality and all participants in it. It seems obvious to

us that any analysis of women's oppression must involve research on the part played by men in this'. This shows that including men and talking to them about the *hijab* and their perspectives, voice, and relation to it is necessary to present a clear picture of the *hijab*.

### **4.3 Fieldwork preparation**

After setting the aims and questions of the study and adopting a qualitative methodological approach, I began the fieldwork preparation process. This stage is critical as it helps with obtaining a clear idea of where and what the researcher is looking for, which minimises the time and resources expended and prevents errors (Turner, 2010). The fieldwork preparation stage can be divided into five phases: selecting the research site, choosing the data collection techniques, conducting pilot studies, recruiting a male research assistant, training the male research assistant, and obtaining ethical approval. Each phase helped me develop the research tools required and eventually address the research questions.

#### **4.3.1 Sites selection and justification**

Judgmental sampling is considered extremely useful for obtaining in-depth details and a deep understanding of a topic; I used my judgment to choose the research sites where I hoped the participants would give me a deep understanding of their various thoughts (Robson, 2011). I selected the research sites while taking into account the aim of the study, the sites considered in previous literature, and the nature of the sites themselves. At first, given the nature of the research topic, it was crucial to choose sites that—based on my observations—reflected different appearances of women or, in other words, where the pattern of the women's *hijab* was distinguished, as the aim of my study is investigate the various thoughts and deep views about the *hijab*, views that I might not gain with other sites with similar features. Previous literature about the *hijab* that was conducted on Saudi Arabian society (e.g., Al-Jaouhari, 2013; Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Munajjed, 1997; Quamar, 2016) took place in the three main cities, namely, Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, which I assume are similar as they are more modern and include people from all state areas. Based on these studies, we cannot understand the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. Thus, it was vital to choose two sites that differ in nature, history, culture, population size, socio-economic status, and geographical

location in order to get a deeper insight while researching the *hijab*. Given that, two sites were chosen for this research: Riyadh and Abha (see figure 6)<sup>6</sup>.

Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia and lies in the northeastern part of the Najd region—the heart of Saudi Arabia. It is located in a desert land and has a dry and hot climate (Bogari, 2002). It is considered to be the largest city in Saudi Arabia in both size and population. It is the seat of government, ministries and embassies. It also contains various educational, financial, medical, and commercial organisations, which have led it to become the most modern and developed city in the state. Due to that, citizens from different areas, backgrounds, tribes, and cultures in the state are attracted to it (The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2016). Thus, Riyadh holds many of the subcultures of the kingdom and has diverse customs and traditions of various backgrounds (Al-Dossry, 2012). Also, based on my observations regarding changes related to female appearance, various types of *hijab* are in use in Riyadh, from extreme to liberal shapes; thus, it seemed to be an appropriate site for conducting this research.



**Figure 6. Map of Saudi Arabia showing the location of Riyadh and Abha cities.**

Meanwhile, Abha was chosen as the second site of this research. It is a small city located in the heart of the agricultural region. It is the capital of the Aseer region,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.geographyknowledge.com/2018/03/Saudi-Arabia-blanc-maps.html>

which lies in the southwest of Saudi Arabia. It lies in mountainous land and has a moderate climate and heavy rainfall all year round (Bogari, 2002). Due to its nature and weather, it has become a popular tourist destination in the summer months. Given its long history, it has a rich culture that distinguishes it from the other areas in the state (The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2016). Historically, before the *Sahwa* movement, women in this region were unveiled and were able to mix and dance freely with men, as opposed to Najd, where modern-day Riyadh is located (Al-Qahtani, 2012). Also, based on my observations, I can say that there has been no rapid change in women's appearances in the city—compared to Riyadh—, especially after the law that obligated women to cover themselves was lifted; thus, Abha appeared to be an appropriate site for the study.

Based on the above, I assumed that the differences in the nature, culture, geography and lifestyles of these cities may affect the participants' thoughts and views about the *hijab*. In addition, using two different sites gave me a chance to interview participants living in different social surroundings, which provided a deeper understanding and clearer picture of the *hijab* in Saudi society.

#### **4.3.2 Data collection technique**

Considering the nature of the topic of this study and Saudi society, in-depth interviews were the best instrument for data collection. An in-depth interview is a personal and interactive tool in which the interviewer interacts with participants by encouraging them to give details and explanations for their answers. This resulted in a deeper understanding of the *hijab* (Crano and Brewer, 2002). Questions were designed to explore the participants' knowledge, interpretations, views about and experiences and interactions with the *hijab* in Saudi society. In-depth interviews were used to obtain in-depth details about the *hijab* and to allow participants to describe their perspectives using their own words (Kalof et al., 2008; Mason, 2002; Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007).

Furthermore, considering the merits of different interview types, from the unstructured interview, where the interviewer asks general and non-predetermined questions in a specific area, to the structured interview, where the interviewer asks the same predetermined questions for each interviewee in the same order, the semi-structured interview was selected as the best type of interview to collect data for the study. For instance, since I had limited time to collect the data, the time required to

conduct the interviews was an important consideration; an unstructured interview format is not ideal because it requires much time for data collection. Moreover, since I aimed to discover unexpected and interesting information that I did not initially consider in my research questions, a structured interview format would have been unsuitable. Hence, a semi-structured interview format was the best instrument for this research (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009).

The use of semi-structured interviews can be regarded as a compromise between the use of structured and unstructured interviews, overcoming the weaknesses of each (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). A semi-structured interview covers a number of themes and predetermined questions, but it is characterised by a high level of flexibility and a lack of structure, which gives the researcher the authority to change the order of the questions and ask for further explanation when the situation demands it, making it one of the most productive research methods (Gillham, 2000; Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). Due to its nature as a thematic and topic-centric method, I had the chance to cover all the aspects that I chose regarding the *hijab* in Saudi society, using a flexible structure to discuss and investigate any interesting themes or ideas that arose during the interviews (Edward and Holland, 2013; Mason, 2002). The semi-structured interview format helped me to understand participants' perspectives due to the nature of the method, which requires repeated contact and a significant amount of time with the participants to enhance the relationships and trust between them and the interviewer, which led to the collection of in-depth and rich information about the *hijab* in Saudi society (Kumar, 2011).

To help direct and organise the interview process, I create an interview guide. The guide included an introduction and instructions that helped the researcher to conduct the interview professionally and ensure all participants received the same information; this was especially important as the interviews were conducted by two interviewers (Friesen, 2010). The interview guide for this research comprised the creation of efficient questions, as each question allowed the interviewer to dig deeply into the views and thoughts of the participant to obtain the desired data and achieve the aims of the study (Turner, 2010). The interview guide started with general and broad questions and ended with specific and complex questions about *hijab*. The interview was structured into four sections. First, icebreaker questions were used to help put the interviewer at ease (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). The interview

guide included questions for participants about their background and personal information, such as their age, education, and occupation. The second section included general questions about the *hijab*, its meaning, ideal attire and colour, and the role of the *hijab* and how the shape of the *hijab* impacts women's and men's lives. The third section included questions about how the *hijab* has been used to judge women's and men's religion and manners. It also focused on the freedom of women to choose to wear what they want, the right of men to choose what they want women to wear, and the attitude of Saudi Arabians regarding several negative stigmas related to the *hijab*. The fourth section included questions about some social changes after the announcement of the Vision 2030 and their implications on the *hijab*. All interview questions were open-ended to gather rich and thorough data from the participants by allowing them to speak freely about their thoughts and feelings. When writing the interview questions, simple, easily understood language was used, and ambiguous, double-barrelled, and leading questions were avoided. The interview guide also included several probing questions to prompt the participants to speak about things that they might not have otherwise mentioned during the interview, or that they might not have clarified. As this study aimed to investigate two groups—men and women—two different interview guides were created. The majority of interview questions were similar, while a few questions were different; for instance, while female participants were asked about their feelings when they wear the *hijab*, the same question could not be asked of male participants. Also, some questions were asked about the same topic, but due to gender participant differentiation, some questions were altered as necessary; for example, female participants were asked, 'What do you think the guardian should do if he does not like his wife or sister's *hijab*?', while male participants were asked about the same theme, but in a different form: 'What would you do if you did not like your wife or sister's *hijab*?'.

#### **4.3.3 The pilot studies**

The pilot study is a vital phase in the preparation process for the interview. It can be a useful phase to examine the interview questions and gain some practice with interviewing participants. It can help to address any issues related to the interview questions or the researcher's practice (Abdul Majid et al., 2017). It is an opportunity to discover any needs for clarification, any repetition in the questions, and determine the ideal order of the questions and themes. Also, it gives the researcher an estimate of the

expected duration of the main interviews (Neuman, 2014). In this research, after finishing the design of the interview guides, the interview questions were translated from English to Arabic. Also, after translating the information sheet and informed consent to Arabic, some pilot interviews were needed in order to be sure the research instrument was workable.

I started the pilot studies by selecting the participants for the pilot studies, which Turner (2010) suggests should have as similar characteristics as possible to the potential participants in the major study. I recruited two female participants from my personal network who had lived in Riyadh. Also, as this study sample comprises different genders, I felt the need to interview a male participant; however, due to my position as a Saudi woman, it was difficult to interview a male participant; thus, I delayed interviewing a male participant until a male research assistant was trained (this will be explained later). The table below shows the participants' characteristics in pilot interviews.

**Table 1. The characteristics of the participants in the pilot studies**

Participant	Gender	Age	Site	Education	Marital status	Employ status	International Travel
1	female	32	Riyadh	Higher	Married	Employee	Yes
2	female	34	Riyadh	Higher	Married	Unemployed	Yes
3	male	26	Riyadh	Higher	Unmarried	Unemployed	No

The first pilot study was conducted on female participants in Leeds in December 2019. The interview was conducted in my home; however, due to my need to leave Leeds to start my fieldwork, I conducted the second pilot interview in Saudi Arabia before starting the fieldwork. Before interviewing participants, I started with a social conversation about myself and the participants to build a rapport with the participant to facilitate the interview process and gain trust (Abdul Majid et al., 2017). Then, the information sheet and a letter of informed consent were given to each participant. Each interview was recorded using two digital recorders to make sure that I could rely on them during the major interviews. During the interviews, I used the interview guide alongside a script to guide me through the sessions, as a script can help the researcher to remember important information to share with participants about the

research or the researcher, and help explain their rights (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012). I did not ask the questions in the same order for both participants; rather, I followed the flow of the discussion. The interviews ranged in time between 35 minutes and one hour, including the social conversation at the beginning of sessions. At the end of interview, I asked about the participants' opinions regarding the questions; specifically, the structure and content of the questions. I asked them also to assess my performance during the study.

The pilot studies helped me to identify some issues in the field. First, I became aware of the efforts that the negotiation with and recruitment of participants might require, as I faced rejection from numerous females in Leeds when I asked them to be a part of the pilot study. Second, they helped me to develop my performance by identifying my weaknesses and by gaining some new skills for interviewing, such as building rapport and taking notes without distracting the participant. This helped to raise my confidence when facing and interviewing individuals. Third, the pilot studies helped me to refine and improve the interview guide, as some questions were rephrased, omitted, or added, and some questions were put into another order in order to ensure the smooth flow of the interview. Also, some follow-up and probe questions were added where I thought necessary; however, the follow-up and probe questions that I used during both sessions were different, as the participants' answers were different. Finally, by transcribing the first interview, I was able to make the decision not to rely on software during the transcription process, and I used Microsoft word as it was familiar to me.

#### **4.3.4 Recruiting the male research assistant: justifications and training process**

This research aimed to give a chance for men and women to deliver their views about the *hijab*. Due to cultural considerations, it may have been difficult for me, as a female interviewer, to conduct face-to-face interviews with males in Saudi society because of the strict segregation system between the sexes, which prevents me from accessing the male sphere. Even if I could access male participants, they might not feel comfortable talking honestly to a female interviewer with her guardian present, as it is unacceptable for men and women to gather in the same place without a guardian. This also raises a number of ethical issues.

Moreover, due to my position as a female researcher who needed to gather data by interviewing participants about their views about the *hijab*, it was of benefit for female participants to be interviewed by a woman to ensure that their voices were heard. In contrast, this positionality placed before me a dilemma with regard to interviewing men and ensuring that their voices were also heard. Differences between the researcher and the interviewee, such as gender, race, age, language, etc., can have a great influence on all research processes and the type of data that the researcher aims to achieve (Neuman, 2014; Yong, 2001). Gender differences between the researcher and the participant might cause the latter to be less forthcoming in terms of disclosure of sensitive experiences and sharing emotions; the potential differences in power when men are interviewed by a female researcher led some to express concerns about researcher safety and comfort (Hassan et al., 2019). Feeling comfortable during the interview is crucial, as gaining genuine data is tied to building trust and rapport between interviewee and interviewer, which, as Hassan et al. (2019) stated, can be difficult in the case of a cross-gender interview. Also, when interviewing the opposite gender, the researcher might face difficulties when recruiting male participants, as the male participants may avoid or reject working with a female interviewer (Neuman, 2014).

For these reasons, I decided to use gender matching as a strategy to build rapport and trust and to collect genuine and authentic views and information (Gunaratnam, 2003). All male participants were interviewed by a male research assistant to mitigate potential negative circumstances of a cross-gender interview. The process of recruiting the research assistant started before leaving Leeds to undertake fieldwork. I selected an assistant who had a good background in qualitative interviews and had knowledge of ethical issues. He graduated from the social science school at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. Also, I made sure that he had the appropriate characteristics for this role, as suggested by Neuman (2014): he is responsible, mature, stable, and cooperative, and he has non-threatening attire and experience with many types of people through his work.

To assure his professionalism and high-quality performance, the research assistant took several training sessions before conducting the interviews for the present study. The training sessions took place on 17 January 2020, three days after my arrival in Riyadh. I arranged for two days of training sessions, due to the male assistant's time.

Each training session took a different amount of time—between two and four hours—and took place in my home. The first day, I described my research, its purpose, and the answers that I was looking for. I explained to him the major ethical issues related to the research and the necessity for protecting the privacy and dignity of the participants. I discussed with him the schedule for the fieldwork. Then I discussed the interview guide and how to be effective during the interview. On the second day, I asked the assistant to practise what he learned the previous day and to conduct the interview on me. I asked him to act as he would in a real interview. He asked to give me the information sheet and informed consent and record the interview. After finishing the interview, I discussed with him his performance and gave him some recommendations and advice. At the end of the session, the research assistant was asked to conduct a pilot study on male participants to make sure of the quality of the male interview guide and determine his performance in the field.

#### **4.3.5 Gaining ethical approval**

Qualitative research often requires that people reveal information about their personal lives and experiences that may not be known by other people, such as their relatives and friends (Mason, 2002). In this context, ethical issues can be mitigated by utilising ethical agreements through all research processes. Before starting the fieldwork, I applied for permission to proceed from the Business, Environment and Social Sciences joint Faculty Research Ethics Committee, which is responsible for providing ethical clearance for my study, and I succeeded in obtaining the ethical approval on 15 November 2019.

The first ethical concern that arose during the process of the ethical approval application was to ensure that all participants were fully informed about the research that they would participate in without any force and to gain their consent. Before meeting the participants and through the negotiation processes, all participants were informed verbally about the nature and purpose of the study, including how the data would be used and stored and who would have access to it (Flick, 2007). The participants were given a time of one to three days to consider if they would like to be part of the study. When the participants met the researcher and before conducting the interview, all participants were provided with a written information sheet; this was in informal and non-academic language and clearly outlined the aims of the research. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the

absolute right to withdraw from it at any stage without giving reasons. Participants were also informed that they were able to withdraw if they no longer wished for their data to be included in the research, but also that once the data analysis process had started it would not be possible to withdraw, as, at that stage, withdrawal from the study might severely alter the analysis. They were informed about their right to ask any questions about the research during or after data collection. The participants were informed about the expected duration of the interview and that they were free not to respond to any questions that they did not want to answer. All participants were informed about anonymisation and storage procedures and how long the data would be stored. The participants were given my and my supervisors' contact details so that they could receive any requirements regarding the research. All male participants were informed that they were being interviewed by my assistant instead of me and about his limited access to the data. After that, participants' informed consent was obtained. Informed consent is an ethical principle that involves the participants giving their consent and providing confirmation that they were informed about all aspects of the research such as aims, benefits, and risks that may affect their participation (Ruane, 2005).

Due to the inclusion in the interviews of some questions that could be described as sensitive, it was crucial to ensure that the participants were not exposed to any upset or harm (Creswell, 2009), which was regarded as another ethical concern in this research. Sensitivity must be shown by the researcher during the interviews, especially when participants become distressed (Almila, 2014). Thus, when we asked for some information that might be regarded as confidential, we gave the participants sufficient time to consider whether they would like to share such information, without any type of inducement from us to extract sensitive information from the participants that they may have regretted later. We made the effort to be sensitive during the interview and recognise the moment when the interview could start to become disturbing. We reminded some participants, who found some questions sensitive, that they had the right not to answer.

The ethical issues were not limited to collecting the data but also arose during analysis, interpretation, and publishing (Creswell, 2009). Thus, it was my duty to make proper ethical decisions about all ethical issues that emerged after collecting the data and ensure that no participants were exposed to any harm or risks. In line with

this, anonymisation and confidential procedures were followed by ensuring the prevention of any potential for identifying any of the participants. Specifically, participants' names and tribes were not collected; instead, participants provided their own nicknames or fake names, and for those who did not mind exposing their real names, I exchanged their names with fake ones, and these were used to label the participants' data (Flick, 2007). Strict confidentiality was maintained for all the study data; it was ensured that no information about the participants was shared with others, including the research assistant. He only had the authority to collect the data from male participants; he did not have any authority to access the data after the voice recorder was handed over to me after the end of each interview. I ensured that the information was secure and accessible to only me; all data was password protected, and only I had access to the password. All data was transferred from the voice recorder to my laptop, which was protected by a password, and the data was deleted from the voice recorder.

It was my responsibility to present and explain the data respectfully, and in a way that did not harm the participant or their interests in any way. Thus, to check the accuracy of the data, each participant was asked if they wanted a copy of the transcript of their responses to examine their satisfaction with the context and if they would like to offer any comment or explanation. The participants were not required to review their response transcripts or have a copy of their transcript. I made the effort to remain neutral and avoid using any language that reflected any discrimination or bias against any participant or gender throughout the writing stage (Creswell, 2009). I made sure to avoid being too selective with regard to the data and made sure to present the data without prejudice.

#### **4.4 During the fieldwork**

After finishing the fieldwork preparation process, I began the process of conducting the interviews. This research stage was divided into four phases: sample selection, accessing and recruiting, building rapport and trust and conducting the interviews. Although these phases were not conducted in a strict or separate order in the field, I discuss them separately below for clarity.

#### 4.4.1 Sample selection

This research aims to fully understand how Saudi men and women think about the *hijab*. In line with this, I needed a sampling strategy that would help me to achieve this aim. This research used a purposive sampling strategy to select the research participants. Purposive, or judgmental, sampling involves selecting participants with the researcher's purpose in mind (Neuman, 2014). This strategy helped me to use my judgment to choose individuals with interesting, rich, and varied knowledge about the *hijab* to answer the research questions (Kumar, 2011; Schreier, 2018). Identifying the study sample through this strategy was useful for obtaining in-depth details and a deep understanding of the *hijab* by selecting participants according to several criteria, which were guided by theoretical logic. Selecting the participants based on various criteria helped to make the sample more diverse and the understanding of the *hijab* deeper (Robson, 2011).

I based the research on several sampling criteria that I considered to be of the greatest potential relevance to this research. The first criterion that was sampled was age. It seemed to be important to sample those who were of different ages, as they were likely to have different attitudes and thoughts about *hijab*. I assumed that those who were of a younger age might have more liberal thoughts about the *hijab* than those who were older. Thus, I chose two age groups: those who were 18 to 40 years old, which reflected the youth, and those who were above 40 years old, who might look at the *hijab* differently. By choosing two age groups, those who were younger and those who were older, I assumed that age might influence the way participants see the *hijab*. The second criterion was education level; the sample comprised individuals from diverse educational levels in order to explore whether thoughts about the *hijab* were different depending on educational level. Thus, educational levels were divided into two groups: standard education and higher education. Standard education included those who could read and write and those who finished high school, while the higher education group included individuals who had a bachelor's degree or higher. It was felt that recruiting samples from different educational backgrounds provided a deeper understanding of the *hijab* due to the impact education has on individuals and how it can widen their views in many areas. Education also helps people to understand things for themselves and to develop their values and identity (Idris et al., 2012).

Marital status was the third criterion of sampling. Given the belief that the *hijab* in Saudi society is linked to the concept of guardianship of men over women, I felt that it was important to survey individuals with different marital statuses. Since a married Saudi man has direct and immediate authority over his wife, and a married Saudi woman's husband is her main guardian, married participants are expected to give information related to their real lives, not what they believe should be their responses. I posited that a Saudi husband shapes his wife's life, including her appearance, relationships, and lifestyle, and a Saudi wife follows what her husband believes; even if she has different beliefs, she will feel culturally, religiously, and financially compelled to behave based on his thoughts. Thus, I assumed that when men and women talk about the *hijab*, their partners will be in their thoughts. In contrast, an unmarried man may not have immediate authority over a woman, although he could share guardianship for a female relative with other members of his family, such as his father and brothers. The same situation applies to an unmarried woman, whose guardianship is divided between her father and brothers. Thus, I supposed that, when unmarried men and women talk about the *hijab*, their thoughts would not reflect one specific experience but be divided between multiple authorities and guardians. Thus, by choosing a sample comprised of married and unmarried men and women, it would be possible to gain a deeper knowledge of the *hijab*. The last criterion was whether participants had travelled overseas or not. Given the aim of this study, which explored thoughts regarding the *hijab*, it was vital to comprise the sample of individuals who reflected various thoughts. Due to the way travel and communication with other people from different cultures have an influence on the way that we look at ourselves and society, the sample comprised both individuals who had travelled overseas and those who had never before left the country. Those who had travelled outside of the state were chosen for the sample, including those who had left the state for a short time, such as for a tour, or for a longer time, perhaps for work or study. I assumed that those who had travelled outside the state would hold very different views from those who had never left the state. Exploring the thoughts of such individuals could illuminate the *hijab* in Saudi society. Individuals who had never left the state were an interesting sample to include, as I assumed that people who never saw any society except for their own may have had strict thoughts and radical opinions about the

*hijab*, compared to those who were able to interact with others from various countries all around the world and had the chance to assess their society and their behaviour.

A qualitative sample is usually small compared to a quantitative one, as qualitative research does not aim to provide statistical generalisation, but rather aims to access rich and deep information that is linked to the research questions (Schreier, 2018). The qualitative sample size is usually small to reduce potential costs, such as the time and money involved in analysing data; however, it can be difficult to anticipate in advance the size of the sample before starting fieldwork and before the collected data stops providing any new knowledge about the research under study (Mason, 2002). In this study, the time to collect the data and the money I spent on staying in the study locations were both taken into consideration. Also, due to my aim to have rich and in-depth information about the *hijab* to address the research questions, I kept the sample size small enough to avoid any potential costs in time and money that came from collecting or analysing the data. The target for the size of the sample was forty: twenty males and twenty females; these numbers were divided equally between the two cities. I assumed that this sample size would help me access sufficient and manageable data about *hijab* in Saudi society. However, after interviewing the forty participants I realised that I did not have enough data, so I added six participants: three women and three men. The table below shows the final sample that was achieved, including sample characters.

**Table 2. The total final sample was achieved**

Name	Gender	Age	Site	education	Employ status	Marital status	International Travel
Abdullah	Male	48	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Unmarried	Yes
Abdulrahman	Male	29	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Abu-Ahmad	Male	58	Riyadh	Higher	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Abu-Albaraa	Male	49	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	No
Abu-Ali	Male	30	Abha	Higher	Employed	Unmarried	Yes
Abu-Kahled	Male	53	Abha	Standard	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Abu-Sarah	Male	32	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Abu-Myas	Male	41	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	No

Name	Gender	Age	Site	education	Employ status	Marital status	International Travel
Abu-Mohsen	Male	44	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Abu-Fahd	Male	39	Abha	Standard	Employed	Married	No
Abu-Abdulaziz	Male	37	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Abu-Fares	Male	40	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Abu-Husam	Male	33	Abha	Standard	Employed	Married	Yes
Abu-Muhammed	Male	47	Abha	Standard	Unemployed	Unmarried	Yes
Abdullhadi	Male	28	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Unmarried	Yes
Aishah	Female	41	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	No
Albandry	Female	33	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Ali	Male	33	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Amnah	Female	52	Riyadh	Standard	Unemployed	Unmarried	Yes
Asma	Female	37	Abha	Standard	Employed	Unmarried	Yes
Bandar	Male	44	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Carlos	Male	27	Riyadh	Standard	Employed	Unmarried	No
Emad	Male	37	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Eman	Female	33	Riyadh	Standard	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Haya	Female	48	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Haifa	Female	51	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Fatimah	Female	35	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Hanan	Female	30	Abha	Higher	Employed	Unmarried	No
Halimah	Female	58	Riyadh	Standard	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Khazna	Female	37	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Kharia	Female	46	Abha	Standard	Unemployed	Married	No
Majed	Male	36	Abha	Higher	Employed	Unmarried	Yes
Muhammed	Male	41	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Nawal	Female	45	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	No
Norah	Female	24	Riyadh	Higher	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Rafea	Male	47	Riyadh	Standard	Unemployed	Married	Yes

Name	Gender	Age	Site	education	Employ status	Marital status	International Travel
Salha	Female	57	Abha	Standard	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Reem	Female	34	Abha	Higher	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Safyh	Female	41	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Sharifa	Female	47	Abha	Higher	Unemployed	Married	No
Souad	Female	68	Riyadh	Standard	Unemployed	Unmarried	Yes
Suhaim	Male	59	Abha	Higher	Unemployed	Married	Yes
Sumiah	Female	21	Riyadh	Higher	Employed	Unmarried	No
Um-Abdullah	Female	51	Abha	Standard	Employed	Married	Yes
Um-Kahled	Female	47	Abha	Higher	Employed	Married	Yes
Um-Naby	Female	25	Abha	Higher	Unemployed	Unmarried	Yes

#### 4.4.2 Accessing and recruitment process

An important task, which should be considered before conducting interviews, is establishing the researcher's access to the participants (Kalof et al., 2008; Crano and Brewer, 2002). Accessing the field does not simply refer to the researcher's presence in the study setting; it is also a social process that includes establishing, negotiating and maintaining relationships with the participants (Bengry, 2018). It is a fundamental task for the researcher, as gathering findings depends on gaining access to the field; '[if there is] no access, [there is] no research' (Kemp, 2010, p.290). To achieve a successful entry into the field, my research assistant and I had to take a number of steps, including calling potential participants and negotiating and building relationships with them. The accessing strategies used in this study differed based on the study site Riyadh or Abha. In each site, two levels of access were employed: physical and social. Physical access refers to the ability to contact the participants, while social access indicates being accepted among participants (Clark, 2011).

In Riyadh, I started the accessing process by meeting with my research assistant in my house to identify potential participants who met the criteria for the study sample. We made a list of 10 potential male participants and 6 potential female participants. This list excluded family members and close friends for ethical reasons. We attempted to make initial contact with the potential participants via text, email and telephone to

negotiate their engagement in the research. Contact information was obtained from different sources. We had phone numbers of potential participants we knew personally or with whom we had worked. We obtained phone numbers of potential participants who were not well known to me or my research assistant from family members, friends or others. I sent emails using the contact list in my work email to former co-workers whose phone numbers I could not obtain. Some female participants offered to communicate with other women who they thought would be helpful for the study. Negotiation was done directly with the potential participants, so there was no need to use gatekeepers. Since we lived and worked in Riyadh, we had a network of relationships that helped us identify potential participants. The negotiation with the potential participants involved explaining and clarifying the purpose of the study and the fieldwork. Also, the potential participants were informed that access would be limited, and only 45 minutes to an hour of their time was required. The potential participants were also assured that they had absolute control over the time and place of the interview. All potential participants were given three days to think about participating in this study, but some of them gave immediate consent and some asked for more time to consider. For those who took the offered time to consider the participation request, follow-up telephone calls were made and texts were sent to obtain their responses. All individuals who showed interest and agreed to participate in the study were notified that they would be given further details about the researcher and the research as soon as we met for the interview.

Meanwhile, in Abha, we did not have physical access to the field. My research assistant and I could not access potential participants ourselves as we lacked knowledge about the city and the community and were unable to find participants who met the sample criteria. Thus, we had an urgent need for gatekeepers to provide us with a physical bridge to participants. Gatekeepers are individuals who stand between the researcher and the participant and control access to the research setting (Keesling, 2011). In the present study, their involvement was necessary as we could not directly approach the targeted participants (Clark, 2011). The process of discovering and identifying the gatekeepers started before our arrival in Abha. The gatekeepers we used were local residents who were suggested by the research assistant, who had friends there. As soon as we arrived, we started the negotiation process, and the gatekeepers supported our access. We relied on six gatekeepers: two males and four

females. The two males were friends of my research assistant; one of them worked as a teacher, while the other was working in the technological sector. The females were my research assistant's friends' wives. Two of these females were housekeepers; of the other two, one of them worked as a teacher in an intermediate school, while the other one worked as a lecturer in King Khaled University (KKU).

The negotiation with the gatekeepers took place by telephone. Negotiating with the gatekeepers was vital as they held the key to accessing the field. The negotiation included an explanation of the study's aim and the wider purpose of the research. They were informed that their roles in the research were limited and included obtaining physical access to the participants. They were informed that their presence was not needed during the interviews to avoid any ethical issues. They were fully cooperative to help us gain full access to the participants. They did not receive any benefits or payments for their efforts and support; their motivations for engaging in the research were based on their personal relationships with the research assistant and me. After the initial negotiations, follow-up telephone calls and texts were made to the gatekeepers to identify and select potential participants based on sampling criteria. The gatekeepers made the initial approach to the participants and introduced them to us. Those who were interested in the study were asked for their contact numbers. We directly made the second approach to the potential participants via telephone. During the negotiation, the potential participants were given a brief introduction about us, and we had a brief conversation about them and their affairs.

**Table 3. Communication with potential participants**

Site	Gender	Number	Response				Tool for communication			
			Agreed	Declined	consideration	No response	text	calls	email	In-person
Riyadh	Male	21	11	3	2	5	2	19	0	0
Riyadh	Female	17	9	4	1	3	13	3	1	0
Abha	Male	22	12	5	0	5	1	18	0	3
Abha	Female	14	13	1	0	0	11	0	0	3

#### 4.4.3 Building rapport and trust

Success in achieving physical access to participants does not guarantee success in achieving social access to the participants (Clark, 2011). Therefore, after achieving

physical access, we had to gain social access, especially since the study involved some sensitive themes and required the disclosure of personal information about the participants' partners. In Saudi culture, individuals have a public self, which conforms to social and cultural norms, and a private self, which may conflict with social and culture once (Hawamdeh and Raigangar, 2014). Thus, gaining the trust and respect of participants was vital to encourage them to talk openly and disclose their thoughts and experiences. One of the challenges we faced during the data collection process was how to establish a rapport with the participants; since interviews in qualitative research require engaging in the life and experiences of participants, establishing trust and a rapport help researchers access high-quality and reliable data (Elmir et al., 2011; Doykos et al., 2014). We began to build rapport and trust with the participants from our first phone calls with them. During our initial contact with the participants, we briefly discussed ourselves and the participants and their lives, since, according to Elmir et al. (2011), having a short conversation before meeting helps participants develop a positive first impression of the researcher and leads to gaining their trust. Our rapport building continued during conducting the interviews and after we met the participants.

Building rapport is not an easy process that requires the researcher to share information with participants to make the process much easier. Booth and Booth (1994, p.417) suggested that building trust with participants is 'a two-way process of communication involving both information gathering and giving'. As such, it was not enough to ask participants about their personal lives and background, we also needed to answer their questions about our own personal lives (Hawamdeh and Raigangar, 2014) to ease our mission of obtaining information (Clark, 2011). We spent valuable time on rapport building before we began the interviews. For example, the participants whom we met at home welcomed us with coffee and dates, which are considered traditional welcoming food in Saudi society. For those whom we met in coffee shops, we spent some time drinking coffee with sweets before beginning the interviews. We asked the participants about their social and personal lives and were pleased to provide information about the research and our personal lives and answer questions from participants. Conversing with the participants made them relaxed and less nervous about talking openly about their experiences. The conversations varied based on whether we already knew the participants or were meeting them for the first

time; we spent less time on such conversations with those we knew than with those we did not.

#### **4.4.4 Conducting the interviews**

Data collection started on 20/1/2020 in Riyadh and on 6/3/2020 in Abha. The interviews were face-to-face, which allowed us to observe the participants' nonverbal features and make notes related to their interactions with the researchers (Neuman, 2014). Although some of the previous literature, such as Fontana and Frey (1994), recommend using group interviews to get deep information in qualitative studies, I decided to interview participants individually, as this research involved some sensitive aspects that might make it difficult for participants to talk openly and feel comfortable. This is especially true in Saudi society because a person's worth is based on his/her reputation and maintenance of gender-specific social behaviour. Thus, the participants' abilities to talk openly would have been affected if others were present, especially if their opinions conflicted with social norms. If the participants could not speak freely, it would have negatively impacted the research.

After finishing the personal and social conversations with the participants, I and the research assistant started to read the information sheet which explain the nature of the research and asked the participants if they had any questions about the research or the researcher. Then, we asked each participant to sign an informed consent form. The participants agreed to be recorded using an audio recorder; we chose this method of documentation since taking notes is 'not sufficiently accurate or detailed' (Bailey, 2008, p.130). Also, by using the recorder, we could concentrate on what the participants said and prevent the participants from any distractions that could affect their focus on their responses (Kalof et al., 2008).

The interview guide was used to direct the discussion with the participants and explore all of the themes we planned to investigate. We started each interview with questions on demographics, such as age and education, as warm-up questions. Then, general questions about the *hijab* were asked, such as 'Can you tell me about the meaning of the *hijab* as you see it?'. In the interview, we progressed from general to specific questions. Some questions were not clear to some participants; when participants asked for clarification, we tried to do so in an open manner to avoid any chance of leading the participants. Using the interview guide did not prevent us from changing the order of the questions; we adjusted the order based on the topics about

which the participants wanted to talk. In an interview, it is vital to not have time pressure and to give the participant time to speak freely (Elmir et al., 2011). Thus, we gave each participant time to answer our questions and share their experiences.

Due to the sensitive aspects of the study, we did not push participants to answer questions if they appeared reticent. Also, to ensure the privacy of the participants, we emphasised that the interview should not be interrupted and should be one-to-one. The interviews lasted an average of 30–85 minutes and took place in various locations. All interview sites were chosen by participants themselves and their preferences. The majority of interviews were in participants' or their friends' or neighbours' homes. Also, the interviews took place in public places such as café shops, a school, a library, a university and workplaces. During the fieldwork, we took notes and I kept a diary. The field notes included our observations and descriptions of events, places and actions throughout the data collection process. It also included my ideas and questions, which were raised during the fieldwork. At the same time, I kept writing in my diary, which contained my feelings and emotions and all of the difficulties and situations that affected my decisions about the data collection process (Punch, 2012).

#### **4.4.5 Transcribing the interviews**

The transcribing process is an essential stage in qualitative research on which the interpretation and findings of the research are based. It is the first vital step in analysing the data (Flick, 2009). Jenks (2018) suggests that there are two types of transcripts: open and closed. An open transcript refers to a transcript of all features of the participant's speech, while with a closed transcript, only the data that answers the research questions is recorded. In the present study, I decided to do the transcription myself due to ethical issues that could have been raised by allowing a trained transcriber to do the transcribing. I decided not to use software to transcribe the participants' speeches, as it was not beneficial for me; thus, I decided to use Microsoft Word as an easy way to transcribe the records. I started the transcription process after finishing the first interview. I did not wait for all of the data to be collected as I was concerned about any technical issues that might have caused a loss of data. I attempted to use my free time in the field when transcribing to start analysing the data. However, this process was not an easy task at all; for me, it was the hardest, longest, and most tedious part of the whole study. Transcribing did not go as I had wished, as transcribing one recording took more than two days, which meant that I did not finish

the transcription process at the same time as the fieldwork. This was confirmed by Bailey's (2008) argument that the transcribing process is an uneasy task that consumes time and effort. She states that each hour of talking consumes at least three hours of the researcher's time, and in some cases might consume up to ten hours if the transcript is fully all-inclusive.

I used an open transcript, where all recorded data was fully transcribed, except for the data that had no connection to the topic. I did not use a closed transcript, as this does not include all of the details and participants' reactions, such as laughter or pauses (Jenks, 2018). I transcribed each expression and observation during the interview. The transcription of nonverbal features in an interview, as suggested by Bailey (2008), plays a vital role in the interpretation of the data and can affect the way the researcher interprets the data; in addition, it can give the researcher a deeper understanding of the participants' responses and feelings. All nonverbal communications were transcribed in parentheses; for example, I referred to laughs (ha ha ha), timed pauses (.....), audible breathing (ahhhhhhh), and changed the tone of voice ('loud' or 'low' voice). I made an effort to represent and capture what was happening during the interview, including other reactions that I observed (changing of body position or slight smile). I edited all transcripts and made all necessary changes, such as bold, font style, and font size to prepare them for analysis.

## **4.5 After the fieldwork**

### **4.5.1 Managing and analysing the data**

Analysing the data refers to preparing the collected data for understanding and interpretation, which starts after the data collection and transcription processes are finished (Creswell, 2009). The study's data was analysed using thematic analysis, which is the popular analytical method in qualitative research (Guest et al., 2012). Thematic analysis is a method that helps the researcher to identify themes within the data (Evans and Lewis, 2018). It is a process that involves searching the data, interviews or focus groups for repetition of meaning and themes that should be linked to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six phases for the thematic analysis process, starting with the preparation of and being familiar with the data, then cycling codes and making the initial codes, searching for themes by

collating the codes into themes, reviewing and revising themes, naming and defining the themes, and then finally producing the report.

After finishing the transcription of all of my data in April 2020, I started the process of preparing the data for coding, which is considered a vital step before starting analysis and enhancing the data (Dey, 2005; Saldana, 2009). First, I checked and edited all the data to make sure that it was clear and ready for the coding process (Sarantakos, 2013). Then, I started reading and rereading each transcript to become familiar with the data. I also made a memo about my early impressions of the data before I went further; Maguire and Delahunt (2017) emphasise that this is also useful. Through this stage, I gained an initial understanding of the data and developed my perception of the data by breaking it apart. Then, I started making my initial codes. In this phase of analysis of the data, I had planned to use NVivo to save time and organise my work. According to Al-Hojailan (2012) and Sarantakos (2013), NVivo software is considered to be more accurate, reliable, and flexible than a manual process. It is one of the most popular and valuable programs that assist in qualitative data analysis; it is able to gather all data and evidence into organised categories and themes. Thus, since the University of Leeds provides four training courses to teach the principles of this program, two of which I had attended before starting the collection of my data, I had intended to complete the training after finishing the data collection and before analysing it. However, due to the lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, I could not leave Saudi Arabia for two years and stopped attending several workshops, including the NVivo training course; thus, I was not able to complete my training in the program. As a result, I decided to code and theme my data manually on my computer instead of using hard copy transcripts, as Saldana (2009) recommends that it is important for first-time coding to be on hard copy data instead of a computer screen to give the researcher the opportunity to control and touch the data before transferring it to electronic files. However, due to the research data being massive and due to the lockdown and COVID-19 pandemic, I could not get a hard copy of my data. Thus, I completed this phase on a document on my computer, which did not prevent me from having control over my data, as Saldana suggested. I circled the keywords and highlighted the important information and quotes that could be used as evidence to support my interpretation. At this stage of coding, I did not use line-by-line analysis; I did not code every single line or piece of the transcript. Rather, I coded any

information that related to *hijab* or any piece of information that I did not anticipate but that was related to the research topic.

After finishing the first cycle of coding, I moved on to the second cycle. This included reviewing and refining the initial coding, which is a fundamental task, as not all code could be useful for the research (Bazeley, 2013). Then, I started to gather all data and code that fitted together and omit the data that was not associated with it (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). I reviewed the initial codes list and merged the codes that had similar meanings; some of the codes had to be omitted, as they had no relation to other codes and the created themes. Then I started to review the themes that I had created in the previous step. During this stage I changed the name of some of the themes that I felt were quite similar, that could go together, and that had been given a broad name, while others were merged under the name of another theme. Some of them did not have many supporting codes, which led to their deletion. At the end of this step, all codes were organised into 22 themes and 11 subthemes, all of which had data that was not anticipated, such as wrapped and unwrapped candy and inside and outside *hijab*. All these themes were gathered under four main themes, each of which has its own chapter in this study: the concept of *hijab*, the *hijab's* styles and social pressure, the *hijab* and stigmas and the *hijab* between the past and present.

During these steps, I created several memos about the data and the participants. A memo is the researcher's thoughts regarding the data and involves authorities allowing the researchers 'to formulate ideas, to play with them, to reconfigure them, to expand them, to explore them' (Lempert, 2007, p. 247). I created a number of memos about the coding process and some specific codes. I also made an early memo about my interpretation and analysis of some interesting quotes and codes. Some memos were linked to specific codes, while others were kept separate. My notes, which I took while I collected the data on the participants and my personal reflections on the interviews, included memo files, and each file was linked to the participant.

#### **4.5.2 Writing-up process and translation issues**

Writing is a significant part of the thesis process, as through writing the researcher develops their ideas about what is going on. The writing process includes reading about the meaning and intent of individuals' behaviour and actions and giving meaning to them (Schatz and Walker, 1995). The writing process should not be delayed until a late stage when other stages have already been completed but rather

should start from an early stage (Ryan, 2006). This stage of analysis started during the process of coding and theming through several notes, memos, and questions that highlighted some interesting and significant ideas that needed to be discussed or focused on. Despite the data from interviews being a crucial part of my writing process, questions, notes, and memos were significant in the discussion of such data. The data from interviews was massive, but I selected the data that related to my questions. This process was not easy, as the writing process did not stop with presenting the participants' responses and quotes as evidence; my job went beyond the surface value of words and involved digging deeply into such words and explaining the meaning beyond these words. Throughout this process, my discussion was supported by the previous literature.

One of the challenges of writing was representing the responses, words, and intent without negatively impacting the meaning through the translation process that was required in this research. Given that all interviews were carried out in Arabic and would be presented in English, which is not my native language, translation and dealing with language were very complex. Translating the results from Arabic to the English language raised the concern of losing the link between the participants' words and interpretation, which led to difficulty in understanding the interpretation of participants' experiences (Haak et al., 2013). To reduce the risk of loss of meaning in researcher interpretations, Van Nes et al. (2010) recommends that the researcher should deal with the original language through the analysis as much as possible, which reduces the loss of the meaning of the participants' words and to enhances the validity of the findings. Based on that, I decided to limit the translation to represent the findings and quotations of the participants. The management and analysis of the data, including the coding and theming processes, were in Arabic, as translation before analysis would consume much time and could negatively influence my interpretation and understanding of the participants' words. Regarding the quotes, the translation process was not an easy matter, as some words that were used by the participants had a cultural meaning that has no equivalent in English; for example, the words *erd* and *sharaf* have the same meaning in the Arabic language, referring to the reputation of women or men, and are linked to sexuality, while in English they refer to the word honour which means respect or reward. Thus, I requested help from a professional translator to work on these quotations, without providing any names for ethical issues.

#### **4.6 Researcher positionality and the voice of reflexivity**

In qualitative research, researchers should practise reflexivity (Mason, 2002), which is ‘an active engagement of the self in questioning perceptions and exposing their contextualised and power-driven nature’ (Greene, 2014, p.9). Reflexivity does not only involve self-scrutiny and self-consciousness, in which the researcher is aware of the relationship between his/her identity and that of others. It also involves continuous self-analysis related to the methodological approach used to collect and analyse the data (Bourke, 2014). Reflexivity is important because the researcher is not totally neutral in conducting, analysing and interpreting the data (Mason, 2002). I practised reflexivity during all research processes by asking myself questions about the roles my research assistant and I played and by considering the impact of my positionality on the research.

Describing my positionality was crucial because my personality and professional identity affected the research process and the way in which my research assistant and I interacted with the participants (D’Silva et al., 2016). Positionality is ‘determined by where one stands in relation to the other; this can shift throughout the process of conducting research’ (Greene, 2014, p.2). Moreover, positionality can be a strength or a weakness. A researcher’s positionality as an outsider who is unfamiliar with the participants’ community and experiences might negatively affect how he/she addresses research issues and the participants’ experiences (D’Silva et al., 2016). However, a researcher who is an insider and familiar with a community can understand the meaning behind participants’ experiences and stories (D’Silva et al., 2016). In the present research, I consider myself an insider who belonged to the group under study, was close to the community and shared the same culture and values (Chavez, 2008; Moore, 2012).

My position as a Saudi Muslim middle-class female, who is a wearer of the *hijab* and who has knowledge and understanding of Saudi culture, offered advantages in the research process from writing the research questions to collecting and analysing the data (Greene, 2014). As Usman (2011) suggested, comprehension of the social and political environment is fundamental in collecting and analysing data; without such understanding, such tasks would be difficult for the researcher, particularly if the research includes sensitive aspects. Moreover, being an insider eased my access to the participants, being a member of the participants’ social group gave me access to the

participants, which would have been a hard mission for an outsider. Accessing the field was not time or energy consumption, as I did not need a long time to build a rapport with the female participants. The community considered me to be a friend instead of a stranger; therefore, they were cooperative and overtly willing to be part of the research.

Although my identity and gender served as a bridge, connecting me to the female participants, this was not the case with the male participants. I considered myself an outsider to the male participants due to our gender differences. My experiences are different from theirs given the segregation system in Saudi Arabia, which has historically led men and women in the country to live in two different worlds. Although I aimed to engage the participants in frank and honest conversations about their experiences and perceptions of the *hijab*, I assumed that my position as an outsider would require special effort to encourage the male participants to disclose their experiences and views to me. This assumption was built on observations made by Bourke (2014), who stated that individuals gravitate toward those with whom they have something in common.

Since I expected the male participants to refuse to disclose information to me and to react to me as an outsider, all male participants were interviewed by my research assistant, who, as a male insider, was familiar with the community and shared their culture, nationality, religion and gender. The research assistant's position helped him access the field and gain the male participants' trust faster than I would have been able to do as an outsider. His interactions with the participants and the ways in which he perceived their responses were based on his own experiences as a Saudi Muslim middle-class man.

Interviews should be conducted in a cosy, private and comfortable place with minimal chances for interruptions (Edward and Holland, 2013; Kalof et al., 2008). However, the conditions of all of the interview locations were not always ideal. The majority of the interviews were conducted in the homes of participants or their friends or neighbours. Interviews also took place in public places, such as cafés, schools, libraries, universities and workplaces. All of these places teemed with interruptions and noises. I had thought that a private room in a home would be the ideal place for an interview because there would be few distractions and it would protect the privacy of participants, especially with regard to the sensitive nature of the research, the possible

presence of family members, and the possibility of the women's comments becoming known to their partners and family members, which might expose them to a risk of violence or negative reactions. Houses in Saudi Arabia are an appropriate environment for confidential discussions, as they are divided into two sections, one for men and another for women, which prevents the sexes from associating with each other. Thus, conducting the interview in a room in the women's section where men were not allowed to enter, or in the men's section where women were not allowed to enter, protected the participants' privacy and comments from being known to their partners or any other family member.

However, the homes were not as private as they needed to be. Often, family members, the host and the host's or the participant's children were present. One time, a female relative of the participant stayed in the room and listened to the interview. These conditions were very difficult, as they affected the atmosphere that I was trying to build. Since asking children or others to leave might be considered rude or disrespectful, I usually accepted their presence. Also, the participant whose relative was present during the interview did not consider it problematic that she heard the interview nor did she consider her answers to be sensitive information. Occasionally, I asked others to leave to ensure the participant's confidentiality. For instance, I asked one female host to leave the room to give the participant some privacy. This created an awkward situation since the host wanted to stay to offer coffee and dessert during the interview. She considered the interview to be a social visit and a normal conversation about the *hijab*. At the end of the interview, I apologised for my action, explaining that it was for the participant's benefit.

The school environments were not as controlled as the other interview locations and raised a number of ethical issues related to confidentiality. I conducted five interviews in schools. These locations did not offer privacy as telephones were ringing, people entered the room seeking signatures and students and other teachers were present in the room or knocked on the door. One time, I interviewed a teacher in an office she shared with three other employees. I attempted to change the location, but the participant said it was a private office and all of the women in the office were her friends. The participant did not consider the topic to be problematic, so she did not mind talking in front of the others. More than once, the employees tried to interrupt the interview to answer a question or add information. Twice during the interview, I

politely asked one of the employees to stop interrupting the interview, telling her I would be willing to listen to her when we finished. Despite losing control of this interview, the participant provided deep, rich and personal information about herself and her life. Therefore, although the interview location is important, I do not think it had any significant power or influence on the participant's response.

All interview sites were chosen by the participants because I believed that giving the participants the opportunity to choose their preferred location and environment would positively impact the quality of the data. Ecker (2016) stated that participant contributions differ based on whether the participant is familiar with the interview location. Some participants asked to be interviewed in places they knew. For instance, one male participant refused to be interviewed in a private room and insisted on having the interview in a noisy room in the presence of his friends while he smoked hookah. He said, 'If you want me to talk honestly, I have to be comfortable'. This quote highlights that feeling comfortable and being in a preferred atmosphere are important factors that impact the ability of participants to talk freely. This participant provided a deep understanding of and rich information on the research topic.

Our insider status and familiarity with the male and female participants eased the data collection process. I felt that we were not strangers to the participants. In fact, I felt as if the participants were relatives who opened their homes and their hearts to us. Unprompted, one participant commented, 'You are from us and I have to help you'. She refers to that we share the same nationality. During the interviews, the participants were excited to talk with someone who understood and appreciated a topic they had in common. They were comfortable speaking and made jokes and laughed. All of the women were willing to share information about their experiences and lives with me. Some of the women engaged me in conversation about matters that were not connected to the research topic, such as their struggles to raise their children, issues with their husbands and work problems. I listened to them and understood their feeling and thoughts. Occasionally, it was challenging when some participants talked elaborately on topics that were not relevant to the study or gave answers that were not connected to the question. To deal with this issue, I used probing and follow-up questions to redirect the participants to the questions or the research topic. While doing this, I was cautious not to interrupt or force the participant or cause any offence to them.

I felt that my positionality might create space for the female participants to talk and allow their voices to be heard, especially in a society where men dominate all aspects of social life. I heard many experiences and stories from women of different ages and educational backgrounds. Some women talked about sensitive issues and were emotional while they opened up old wounds and told their stories, which made me feel emotional and sensitive as well. I found these stories to be deeply rooted in our experiences as women who shared the same culture and gender. However, being an insider led to data collection challenges as well. For example, as members of the same community, most of the participants used phrases, such as ‘you know what I mean’, or ‘you know that’. This situation led me to pretend that I had no knowledge about what they said, and my response was ‘no, what do you mean?’.

In contrast, one of the challenges we faced while collecting data was that the male participants were closed off, which prevented us from getting deep information from them. The majority of the men had difficulties providing details about their experiences and themselves. To address this challenge, the research assistant changed the form of the questions and divided them into sub-questions to encourage the participants to give more and deeper information. Also, probing questions, such as ‘Can you tell me more?’ and ‘What do you mean?’, were used to encourage the participants to give more information. Despite the researcher assistant’s efforts to alternatively probe and be silent in order to give the male participants space to describe their experiences, they were not willing to express their feelings or emotions. Unlike the female participants, none of the male participants told stories about their own lives or their wives. This may be due to cultural norms that prevent men from talking openly about their feelings and wives. Also, the majority of the male participants had difficulties using language and choosing words to express their feelings. Hesitations, pauses and difficulties in expressing themselves were common among male participants. More than one participant responded, ‘I do not know. How I can explain this to you?’. This has an impact on the amount of data and the length of male interviews. The interviews with the female participants were longer than those with the male participants; the former lasted an average of 45–85 minutes, while the latter lasted an average of 30–60 minutes.

Regarding the relations and interactions between the interviewer and the participants, the interactions between the female participants and me were more

dynamic than the interactions between the male participants and the research assistant. Overall, I felt equality between the female participants and me without any imbalance of power between us. Our relations were hierarchical at the beginning of the interviews, but I tried to make them non-hierarchical by incorporating emotions in the interviews and answering personal questions from the participants, which raised the quality of the interview (Gunaratnam, 2003). Female participants were asked questions and also had the chance to ask me questions, such as ‘In your opinion, what is the most beautiful part of a woman?’, ‘Which kind of *hijab* do you wear in the UK?’, ‘Why do you think there are more calls these days to liberate women from the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia?’. Other questions that I was asked were personal, such as ‘How many children do you have?’, ‘Do you advise me to study overseas?’, ‘Does your husband agree to reveal your face?’, and ‘Do you believe in revealing the face or not?’. I was open and honest in answering these questions and more, as sharing information with the participants helped me build closeness and trust, which is vital for successful interviewing.

However, sharing my personal information with the participants also exposed some issues. For instance, I was reluctant to answer questions on my opinion about revealing my face and the style of *hijab* that I wear outside Saudi Arabia. When I answered such questions, I received reactions of surprise and shock, especially on the faces of religious participants. Khairiyah, a 46-year-old woman, identified herself as religious. She asked me, ‘What do you wear in the UK?’. I answered, ‘I wear the *hijab*, a long blouse and loose trousers’. She was shocked as she believes covering the face and wearing the *abaya* is the only acceptable form of *hijab*, and asked me, ‘Are you serious?’. Her sister-in-law, who was in the same room during this last part of the interview, was surprised and asked, ‘Are you joking?’. Then, they asked, ‘What does your husband think about it?’. I hesitated at the beginning to disclose more information about my husband in order to give the participant space to talk about herself, as the interview was about her and not about me. Also, despite the participants’ desire to know more about me and my life, I needed to stop sharing deep information about my husband for his own protection. I wanted to protect my husband and his image because a Saudi man who agrees to let his wife reveal her face is exposed to criticism. I realised after this interview that deciding to reveal the face and not wear the *abaya* is not an easy matter, especially for religious people. I became

sensitive about sharing any information about my *hijab*. Even though revealing information about my attitude at the end of the interview had no impact on the participants' opinions or attitudes as the data had already been recorded, this experience gave me a lesson about being cautious about revealing my attitude to other participants. After this, I began informing participants who insisted that I answer their questions that I would answer them after the interview.

Meanwhile, the research assistant and the male participants had a hierarchical relationship and an imbalance of power. Their interactions were not dynamic, and the engagement was in one direction; the research assistant asked all questions, and the participants answered all questions passively. The male participants did not ask the research assistant any questions about the research or his personal life. Moreover, one of my challenges in conducting fieldwork was related to getting deep information from male participants about some themes I did not anticipate. Because the research assistant was focused on getting answers to each question, he did not follow up on unanticipated but potentially interesting topics and themes that arose during the interviews. For example, in his answer to one question, Abu-Husamm, a 50-year-old participant, mentioned that 'a woman is like glass'. This was not an anticipated theme, but it has been an opportunity for rich detail about the meaning of 'glass'. The research assistant did not ask about the participant's use of the word glass, losing the opportunity to gain rich details on the meaning behind it. Thus, I asked the research assistant to make a follow-up call with the participant in order to get the meaning of the word 'glass'.

The *hijab* itself is not considered a sensitive topic, but it involves some topics that people could find sensitive. Even so, all female participants were open about their experiences and told stories about themselves, their husbands and their children. Many of them told stories about people they knew or with whom they communicated. Only one woman was not comfortable with my use of a recorder during the interview. Sometimes, when she wanted to tell a story about her husband, she asked me to turn off the recorder; otherwise, she felt excited to talk about her life and experiences. None of the women withdrew from the study, questioned the worth of her help, was sensitive about answering the questions or refused to answer a question. However, this was not the case for the male participants. Two male participants withdrew from the interview as they questioned the worth of their information and knowledge. One said:

Please, forgive me, I thought my answer will be yes and no. I do not have enough knowledge about the topic, but I can lead you to some of my friends who I believe will be able to help you more than me.

Some male participants were sensitive about answering some questions and took some time before deciding whether to answer. One participant was sensitive about answering the following question: ‘What do you think is the reason for the emergence of the new *fatwas* about the *hijab* in recent years?’. The participant laughed quietly, said, ‘To be honest, this is a political subject’ and did not answer the question. Such an answer was anticipated as freedom of information, opinion and expression regarding political affairs in the state is limited and talking about political matters, especially if contradicting the attitude of the state may cause trouble. Some male participants refused to answer questions about the latest changes in the country and their effects on the *hijab*. For instance, one participant did not answer the following question: ‘Do you think stripping the privileges of CPVPV has had an impact on woman’s *hijab*?’. He disagreed with the word (stripping) as he believed that the Islamic police still had the same power it had in the past and that the government had just reorganised its mission. Some male participants did not answer the following question: ‘What do you think about the announcement of lifting the force over women to wear the *hijab*?’. They rejected the idea that women were forced to wear the *hijab*; they believed that women had and currently have the freedom to decide whether to wear the *hijab*.

In the interviews, we used empathy to show our understanding of the participants’ responses and advice even if we did not agree with them; being empathic requires active listening and showing respect (Friesen, 2010). We made sure to show our understanding through our body language, such as by looking in the eyes of participants, which reflected our focus on what they said, or by nodding our heads based on the participants’ responses. The participants expressed varied attitudes, and we received many pieces of advice and warnings about the research and how to present the results. For instance, one male participant offered advice to omit participants’ opinions if they conflicted with the Islamic doctrine about the *hijab*. He suggested presenting the Islamic opinion about the *hijab* and the views of Islamic scholars and then presenting participants’ opinions that confirmed what Islam said and omitting other opinions. He believed that people follow their desires, that life is short and that Allah will judge me based on what I write. Another male participant believed

that the latest changes such as women's empowerment, weakening of the guardian system and stripping of the privileges of CPVPV in the state occurred because the government has more knowledge about everything than its citizens; therefore, he suggested that, if the findings conflicted with those changes, I should alter them to coincide with what the government wants.

Some participants saw my research as a chance to deliver their voices to Western people. For example, one female participant told me, 'Please, tell them the *hijab* is not a form of oppression to us. It is a sign of respect'. Some participants believed the latest changes in the state were attempts to Westernise, and that these changes came from Western demands not the demands of Saudi citizens. For example, I asked Souad, a 68-year-old female, about how weakening the guardian system impacted the use of the *hijab* among Saudi women. She said in low voice, 'Please, do not tell them about the guardian system. I am afraid they will ask for more'. Souad believed that discussing the guardian system in the study would make the Western world ask for more reforms in this regard. This belief reflects some people's belief that all of the changes occurring in Saudi society are a Western conspiracy to destroy the state. I paid attention, listened and showed respect to all participants regardless of how I felt about their beliefs and advice.

Despite the fact that I did not collect the data from the male participants, I was behind the scenes making a transcription of male responses and recording, coding, and analysing them. As a Saudi woman, each aspect of this research was mediated through my position, lens, and the way that I see the world. My position led the process of coding and theming the interview transcript and, as Mason (2002) notes, sorting data and coding it is not completely neutral as it is based on this process that the researcher opens some analytical possibilities and closes others. Through female Saudi eyes, I interpreted and analysed the study's findings. Sharing a common culture with the participants and having life experiences similar to those of the participants helped me to fully understand what the participant described and felt. My own experiences came to my mind while analysing the data, which helped me to present accurate explanations and the stories as the participants intended. This, as Corbin and Strass (2008) suggest, did not reflect bias, as I did not try to impose my personal experiences on the data; rather, this experience helped me to truly understand the participants'

words, something that those who were not familiar with the subject would have struggled to do.

Being an insider, I had the ability to understand the participants' stories and easily interpret their experiences, which enhanced this research. However, as a result of my positionality as an insider, this raised the issue of potential bias. Due to the closeness of the researcher to the culture and the participants, and the impact of the researcher's values, beliefs, and experiences with the research process, the concern of bias might be raised, which could make the study's findings questionable and untrustworthy (Greene, 2014). Researcher biases not only affect participants and their responses or interpretations of their responses but also affect the nature of the study as a whole (Bourke, 2014). Thus, due to my status as an insider, it was crucial to ensure that the data of this study, including the analysis process and coding, was trustworthy, enhanced the quality of my research, and was beyond any potential bias. Greene (2014) suggests that researchers practise reflexivity through all research processes. Reflexivity is a technique that helps the researcher to avoid any potential bias or subjectivity. I kept asking myself questions, from writing the research questions to the stage of writing up. Answering these questions helped me to avoid any chance of losing my neutrality or becoming biased. I ensured that each participant's voice, regardless of their gender, was heard and that their story was adequately presented in this study.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has given a brief overview of the methodological decisions of this study. This study employed a qualitative approach, which helped to gain an understanding of the topic by revealing the participants' perspectives regarding their behaviour, experiences, and surroundings. The current study was discussed in light of the Islamic feminist perspective, which served as an appropriate framework for understanding the findings and interpreting the men's and women's responses. Furthermore, this chapter then discussed the fieldwork preparation process, which was divided into five phases, the first of which was selecting the research sites, and the use of a judgmental sampling strategy in choosing the study sites. The second was choosing the technique of collecting the data, taking into account the aim of the study and previous literature sites, which were considered extremely useful for obtaining in-

depth details and a deep understanding of the topic. To achieve its aim, this study used semi-structured interviews to collect data and obtain full details about the topic, including the participants' behaviour, thoughts, and feelings. The semi-structured interview format helped the researcher to understand the participants' perspectives, due to the nature of this method. It required repeated contact and significant time with the participants to enhance the relationships and trust between us, leading to the collection of in-depth and rich information about the *hijab* in Saudi society. The third phase was conducting pilot studies on three participants, one male and two female. The pilot studies were a vital phase in the preparation process for the interview. It can be a useful phase for an examination of the interview questions and for gaining some practice with interviewing participants. It helps to address any issues related to the interview questions or researcher practice. The fourth vital phase in the preparation process was recruiting and training the male research assistant, as interviewing the opposite gender may have prevented male participants' voices from being heard. The last phase involved gaining ethical approval; it involved some ethical issues that were raised through the research process and explained how they could be mitigated.

After describing the fieldwork preparation process, the chapter discussed the process of doing the fieldwork, which was divided into four phases: using judgmental sampling to choose the participants, accessing and recruiting, building rapport and trust, and conducting the interviews. The chapter explained how the data was managed and analysed through describing, coding, and theming the data, which led to thematic analysis and then involved explaining the writing-up process and some issues that were raised during this process in terms of translation, and how they were mitigated. This is a qualitative study that required the researcher to practise reflexivity in all phases of the research, which was explained at the end of this chapter.

The following chapter answers the first question of this research by examining the meaning of *hijab* concept as held by the participants in this study.

## Chapter 5. Saudis' understanding of the concept of the *hijab*

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores participants' understandings of the *hijab*. I aim to understand the meaning of the *hijab* among Saudi men and women, especially after the long domination of a single attitude about the *hijab* set by *Sahwa*, which ended with the announcement of the Vision 2030. Since the end of the *Sahwa* era, new meanings and interpretations of the *hijab* have been proposed. It is important to explore its concept among Saudis, as the way people understand and practise wearing the *hijab* differs and shifts based on social context (Bullock, 2007). To date, through a review of the previous literature about the *hijab* in Saudi society, there was obvious neglect in exploring the concept of the *hijab*, as academic researchers just focused on women's reasons and explanations without examining the most important aspects of the *hijab*. Since this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, understanding the concept of the *hijab* in Saudi thought is crucial, especially after the significant transformation of the state.

The chapter demonstrates the agreement of the majority of participants despite their different genders and backgrounds about the concept of the *hijab* as a way of hiding women's identity and their belief that covering a woman's face is an essential part of the *hijab*. It reveals that the participants have varying opinions about the *hijab* as an ethical belief or a piece of clothing, and these differences are not associated with gender, education, age, location, travel experience, or marital status. The chapter explains why the majority of participants reject the idea of hiding women's voices as part of the idea of the *hijab*. It considers the multiple reasons for imposing the *hijab* on women (women as *fitnah*, men's strong sexual desire, traditional gender roles). The chapter also describes the various benefits of the *hijab* for women, men and society (religious, social, psychological, health, security benefits). It presents the various reasons for wearing the *hijab*, including pleasing Allah, habits, hiding feelings, gaining respect and conforming to family attitudes and expectations.

In this chapter, I examine themes that help address the central question of the research on the *hijab* concept as held by individuals in Saudi society. The analysis in this chapter can be broken down into four main themes. I begin with representing the meaning of participants for *hijab* and their views on the idea of considering a woman's

face as *awra*, *hijab* as a piece of clothing or form of behaviour and a woman's voice as a source of temptation which contributes to understanding the meaning of *hijab* among the participants. The participants' thoughts about the justification of imposing the *hijab* on women instead of men are discussed. Then I attempt to present the benefits of *hijab* for women and men and the role it plays in Saudi society. Finally, the multiple reasons for women wearing the *hijab* and men's thoughts about these reasons are discussed to demonstrate that there is no single reason behind women's *hijab* practice.

## 5.2 What is the *hijab* mean?

The majority of participants in this research, both men and women, defined the *hijab* as a way of hiding a woman's identity. The words *hajib*, *ektā*, and *setr* are all used to describe the *hijab*, which is an item of clothing that blocks a women's visibility to *non-mahram* men, who are restricted from seeing them. Abu-Myas (male, 41 years old) states, 'A woman's adornment must be concealed by covering her entire body, from the head to the foot'. Haya (female, 48 years old) confirms this definition, as she believes the *hijab* '...is to cover the whole body of the woman'.

Three participants associated the definition of *hijab* with their identity and differentiated between 'our' and 'their' *hijab*. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old), emphasises that the meaning of the term *hijab* in Saudi Arabia is different than in other Islamic societies:

I believe that, in our society, *hijab* is the *niqab*, and it is what we grew up with, but in the Islamic custom, when one reads and learns about Islamic doctrines, one discovers that in most Islamic countries, women wear head and chest veil.

In Saudi Arabia, the word *hijab* refers to covering the face, while in other Muslim societies the meaning is changed to exclude the face. When asked to define the *hijab*, Haifa (female, 51 years old) says, 'if I am going to talk about our *hijab*, it is to abide by covering what may tempt men and may make me commit sin, for example, hair, face and chest'. It is notable that she uses the words 'our *hijab*' here to imply that this definition applies to the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia specifically, which differs from the definition in other Islamic countries with regard to the areas the *hijab* should cover.

However, seven participants –three women and four men– stated that the *hijab* covers the hair without the face and hands; for example, through his reading of Islamic

literature, Suhaim (male, 59 years old) reaches the conclusion that *hijab* is a covering of a woman's head and does not include the covering of the face:

The whole body of the woman is *awra* except for the face and the hands. This represents my conviction because I have read the opinions of the scholars, in the past and in the present, and I follow the opinion of Sheikh Muhammed Nasir Al-Din Al-Albani.

In the past, Suhaim believed the *hijab* covered the whole woman's body, including the face, but when he studied the concept, he learned that the *hijab* covers the head but not the face. It is clear that he was raised in a society that taught that women's faces must not be seen, but because of his self-education, his belief on this topic changed. Similarly, Sumiah (female, 21 years old) was the youngest participant and the only one who left her face uncovered. She believes the *hijab* should cover the head and body but not the face and hands. Sumiah stated that since she turned 15 years old, she has covered her face completely. However, as she investigated the matter, she found many contradictions and different opinions. Sumiah began to research the mandatory of hiding women's identities when she reached college. She found the following verse: '... and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof' (24:31). She states that the majority of Islamic scholars interpret the word 'appears' to refer to the face and hands. Another part of the verse reads as follows: '... to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments' (33:59). Some scholars say that this means the covering of the chest, while others say it refers to covering the neck by wrapping the *hijab* over it. Sumiah states:

I consulted my heart, and I felt that it is only obligatory to cover my hair and body. As for my face and hands, I think it is not a pudendum, especially with the many different opinions we have on the matter, and a *Hadith* which says: "Consulted your heart".

The findings regarding this theme confirm that the majority of participants regardless of gender or age defined the *hijab* as a tool to hide a woman's identity. The words that were used were *hajib*, *ekfâ*, and *setr*; all of which refer to covering the whole body of a woman and concealing the hair, body, and face. This is in line with the literature (Addwesh, 2000; Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Musnad, 1996; Al-Sndy, 1992; Madani, 2011), which suggests that the term *hijab* refers to covering a woman's face and body. This finding was unsurprising, as the *hijab* has been defined for years in media, mosques, and educational curriculums through the control *Sahwa* movement in Saudi society as covering the whole woman's body (Roald, 2003). The same

discourse influence was obvious in the participants' the distinction between 'our *hijab*' and 'their *hijab*'. 'Our *hijab*' represent the authentic Islamic form of *hijab* that distinguishes Saudi women from other Muslim women. Saudi women's *hijab* reflects *khususiyya*, or the national social distinction where Makkah and AL-Madinah are located (Le Renard, 2014).

However, this attitude did not prevent some of the participants of both genders from engaging in self-education and adopting the view of the *hijab* covering the whole woman's body but not the face and hands. This attitude represents the attitude of the majority of scholars (Al-Albani, 2001; Abu-Bakre, 2018; Al-Jaouhari, 2013; Ammoura, 2013; Bullock, 2007; Fani et al., 2020; Khan, 1998; Osman, 2014; Ruby, 2005), as there are no Islamic texts that oblige women to cover their faces or hands, and in fact, this notion has been rejected in the religious and educational discourse in Saudi society. However, despite the participants' beliefs, just one practised what she believed. This highlights the difficulty of standing against society's attitude about the *hijab*, which I explain further in the coming chapters.

Furthermore, in relation to the meaning of *hijab*, I have identified three themes that were detected in participants' responses when providing their thoughts and understandings of *hijab*. All of the themes provide further explanation and justification of what the concept of *hijab* includes.

### **5.2.1 A woman's face as *awra***

From the findings and discussion above, it can be observed that the term *hijab* includes covering women's faces. The belief that the face is *awra* emerges from the idea that the face is considered an intimate part of women's bodies. This idea was supported and justified by the majority of participants male and female regardless of their diversity. The major justification given by the participants is that the face is the essence of a woman's beauty. It is believed that the face can attract men's attention and cause admiration (or a lack thereof). Because of this, it is compulsory for women to cover this source of attraction to protect men from being tempted by women. Nawal (female, 45 years old) explained that:

The temptation of a woman is in her beauty and face, as I judge whether a woman is beautiful or not by her face; sometimes, from the face, you may know that a woman is from a specific family. So, I see that a woman's face is all her beauty.

Emad (male, 37 years old) confirmed what Nawal suggested and explained the face is the main source of temptation for men as the beauty of a woman's face, and body in general, is the reason why women are appealing to men. He states that sometimes a woman has a pretty face and 'an ugly body', yet, she captures attention to her by the beauty of her face. On the other side, 'an ugly face' woman with a beautiful body does not draw attention. So, he thinks that, for men, a woman's face is the first source of temptation and should be covered.

Two male participants who were working in government security jobs believed the face is *awra* because it is the main doctrine of Saudi Arabia. For example, Muhammed (male, 41 years old) was not sure if the face is *awra*, but he followed the doctrine that the state has been following:

I cannot advise you about religious matters, but I think that the doctrine we follow here in the Kingdom is covering the face, and other doctrines have other views on the issue, and that's why we were previously following the *Shafi'i* doctrine in the south and women did not cover their faces.

Conversely, Suhaim (male, 59 years old) contradicted what Muhammed suggested. He believed that covering the face of Saudi women is not because of the *Hanbali* doctrine but because of social norms. He justified his viewpoint as follows:

I am completely convinced that *hijab* in Saudi Arabia is more customary than a legal matter, why? Because I have questions that are not answered; if they commit to the *Hanbali* doctrine that the face and hands are part of a woman's pudendum, why I do not see women covering their hands except in very rare cases, which is considered impermissible?

Suhaim denied that Saudi women wear *hijab* for religious reasons, as most Saudi women do not cover their hands as frequently as they cover their faces; this contradicts the principles of the Islamic school. He suggested that Muhammed's belief that women should cover their faces is a type of conformity with social norms rather than with religious doctrine.

*Alnadrāh alshariyah* or legitimate sighting is one matter that proved to two female participants Um-Kahled (female, 47 years old) and Khazna (female, 37 years old), that the face is *awra* and must be covered. *Alnadrāh alshariyah* refers to allowing a man to see a woman before deciding whether to marry her. This is an exceptional but religiously lawful moment in which a covered woman can be seen uncovered by a

man in the presence of her guardian. They demonstrated that the face is *awra* because of legislation concerning *alnadrah alshariyah*. They believed that a man is allowed to see a woman's face at a specific time is clear evidence that women's faces must not be seen at other times.

Interestingly, four participants three men and one woman, established a condition of whether the face is *awra*, that is, whether or not the woman is beautiful. If a woman is beautiful, then her face is *awra*. Beauty is based on the judgement of society, which dictates whether or not the woman should cover her face. Hanan (female, 30 years old) stated that when women are beautiful and thus would attract the attention of men they should cover their faces. However, in an environment in which all women's faces are not attractive to men, they can remain uncovered.

Several participants expressed that covering the face is mandatory but they rejected the term *awra* in describing the face, as this term refers to a women's intimate parts as explained above. In their view, equating a woman's face to her intimate parts is a kind of insult to her because the face is honoured compared to the intimate parts. Souad (female, 68 years old) explained her view as follows:

The face is not *awra*, as the real *awra* is the private parts, but because it is beautiful and the beauty must be concealed from those who have a disease in their hearts, and Allah has commanded us to cover this beauty except among unmarried men.

However, while Souad regarded the term *awra* to describe a woman's face as an insult to women, Ali (male, 33 years old) suggested that the term *awra* does not include any offence to women. Rather, it refers to the source of temptation rather than offence. He explained that, when he looks at a beautiful woman, Satan calls him to communicate with her and have sexual contact either in a legal or illegal way, thus a woman's face must be covered.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, covering or uncovering the face has been considered a controversial matter throughout Islamic history. This controversy was clear in the participants' responses. Four female and one male participant revealed uncertainty regarding the Islamic opinion about covering the face. Amnah (female, 52 years old) said that she covers her face because of fear; she did not know if uncovering the face would be legal or illegal in a religious sense. She was afraid of uncovering her face, and then finding out it is illegal. Similarly, Sumiah (female, 21 years old), despite being the only female participant in this research who uncovers her face, was still anxious about

the true Islamic opinion about covering the face. Sumiah raised problematic differences in interpretations of Islamic text, she explained: 'I do not know, I am confused about one verse, that is: 'That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused' (33:59). However, this uncertainty does not prevent her from leaving her face uncovered.

Annah and Sumiah were not the only ones to express doubt about the Islamic law about showing the face. Haifa (female, 51 years old) and Muhammed (male, 41 years old) acknowledged that there were questions about the truth of the Saudi religious discourse related to the prohibition on revealing a woman's face. According to this discourse, the *hijab* and the mandatory face covering are absolutely correct, while Muslims in other Muslim countries are wrong. Haifa explained:

I used to say that no one will enter Paradise except Saudi women, because they cover up. In Egypt, women are also veiled, and I had this question and problem; Allah did not say that only Saudi women will enter Paradise, and women who do not get covered and veiled in most public places may have more righteous deeds known to their God than I already have.

Haifa expressed uncertainty about the Islamic discourse on *hijab* and the mandatory covering of the face in Saudi society. Specifically, there are doubts about the truth that Saudi women are the only Muslim women who practice the Islamic model of *hijab*, and other Muslim women are committing a sin by not following it.

The few participants in this research who did not agree that the *hijab* should hide a woman's identity justified their attitude as a conflict with women's role in society. For them, the face cover is a barrier in daily life and activities and makes it difficult for women to contribute to society. For example, Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) contradicted the idea regarding the face as *awra* and covering the face as mandatory. He believes in if a woman's face is *awra*, this requires that she be in a closed place, and a closed place does not fit with the idea of life. As life is dynamic, evidence throughout history proves that women used to participate and had activities for which it is difficult to cover their whole faces.

The controversy regarding the religious covering of women's faces continues today, taking the form of social-religious debates. The findings of the present study indicate that the vast majority of participants, regardless of their gender or other characteristics, believe that the face is *awra*, which means it must be covered; without doing so, women cannot be considered as *hijab* wearers. The impact of *Sahwa* was

obvious in the participants' justifications of their beliefs regarding face covering. The *Sahwa* ideology is based on weak and indirect evidence, and thus *Sahwa* resort to using emotion to make individuals conform (Al-Albani, 2001). This was obvious in the participants' responses, as was the lack of logic behind the ideology, and all participants failed to provide direct Islamic evidence to support their beliefs.

The face being a source of beauty is one of the most long-standing justifications for convincing women that if they do not cover the face the *hijab* is meaningless, as the primary source of a woman's beauty remains uncovered (Addwesh, 2000; Al-Kharashi, 2005; Al-Musnad, 1996; Al-Sulami, 1987). A woman's beauty and identity can be known through a woman's face, which justifies the mandatory face covering. *Alnadrah alshariyah* is also used to support mandatory covering of the face. At this time, a man can look at a non-mahram woman's face when he seeks to marry her. This justification was also used during the *Sahwa* era to convince society about the notion of the face as *awra*. However, the use of *alnadrah alshariyah* as a justification is based on personal opinion, not Islamic evidence. The idea that according to Islam it is not permissible for men to look with desire at women during *alnadrah alshariyah* is incorrect; in fact, during the *alnadrah alshariyah* a man can look with desire at a woman's face, hair, and body. Thus, it cannot be used as evidence for a prohibition on seeing a woman's face (Al-Albani, 2001; Uthman, 1984). Another justification raised by the participants in this study was considering the *Hanbali* doctrine as the official doctrine of Saudi Arabia. As noted in Chapter 3, this doctrine asserts that every part of a woman's body is private and must be concealed—even the toenails, as they indicate how a woman's feet look (Al-Kateeb, 2013). The *Hanbali* doctrine can be seen as a reason for believing in or wearing face coverings, as society supports or promotes covering the face as a state-adopted religious doctrine. However, this reason conflicts with the fact that the *Hanbali* doctrine has only been regarded as an official religious doctrine since 1928 (Ibrahim, 2007; Al-Kateeb, 2013). The idea of regarding a woman's face as *awra* arose with the rise of *Sahwa* ideology in Saudi society, and it was adopted in the *Hanbali* doctrine.

Several of the participants were unsure about the mandatory covering of the face. This could be due to the increase in the number of new *fatwas* issued by some reliable Islamic scholars in Saudi Arabia, which support women uncovering their faces (e.g., Al-Albani, 2000). In addition, the fact that Saudi women are the only Muslim women

who wear the Islamic form of the *hijab* raises doubts about the authenticity of this discourse. Although the majority of participants supported the idea of face coverings for women, the minority disagreed, stating that it hampered women's enjoyment of life. Compelling women to segregate their bodies is a way to segregate women from their surroundings, which contradicts the fact that women have long been fighting in the battles of the Prophet (PBUH) and working to heal injured men in these battles. None of the historical stories about Muslim women and their roles in Islamic society could have occurred if women were covering their faces, as doing so would have made it difficult or even impossible for women to perform their roles in society and daily life (Khan, 1998; Al-Aqqād, 2013).

### 5.2.2 *Hijab* as a form of behaviour

As stated by Kelly (2010, p.222), 'Both males and females.... must live up to the more dignified, reserved behavioural standards implied by their clothes'. Her argument indicates that individuals' actions and behaviour should be transformed based on their clothes. Thus, the *hijab*, as a type of clothing, must affect the way women behave. Importantly, not all participants linked the *hijab* to women's behaviour. Some regarded women's modest behaviours as a condition for women wearing the *hijab*, and without such conformity, women could not be regarded as *hijab* wearers. Reem (female, 34 years old) was the only female participant who defined the *hijab* as modest behaviour. Reem is a *hijab* wearer, but she saw *hijab* as a behaviour, not just a piece of clothing or covering. She suggested that she respected women who feel proud to be Muslim through their behaviour even if they do not wear the *hijab*. In contrast, she would not respect a woman who covered her face and hand but exhibited behaviour that was in conflict with her appearance. However, she emphasised wearing the *hijab* is necessary:

It is true that *hijab* is a behaviour, but the outer appearance gives an impression of what approach a woman adopts; it is unreasonable for one who loves Rap music while wearing classic clothes or vice versa. I accept that a person may have some imperfection or a defect in her *hijab* and admit that, but she still has straight behaviour, but wearing *hijab* while her behaviour is completely abnormal, I do not see this acceptable.

What is evident from Reem's comments is that the *hijab* as clothing is a woman's way of sending messages to people about their practises and morals, but the fundamental aspect of *hijab* is modest behaviour. Suhaim (male, 59 years old) and Majed (male, 36

years old) support Reem's view of the *hijab* as a behaviour. They believe the *hijab* is a type of worship that should start from a belief in people's hearts. It is an internal action that reflects on a woman's appearance. They suggested that if a woman does not intend to wear a *hijab* to be modest, she cannot be considered a real wearer of the *hijab*, as modesty comes before the clothes. Thus, women's modesty and respectful behaviour are more important than a piece of fabric, and women must commit to the rulings, morals and laws of Islam.

For some of the participants, behaviour is not more important than the *hijab* as a piece of clothing. They believe that clothing and behaviour cannot be separated, as a woman's outer appearance is as important as her modest behaviour. Ali (male, 33 years old) believed behaviour is a part of *hijab* and women through their behaviour, achieve the meaning of *hijab* mentioned in the following verse: '...that is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused' (33:59). A woman's *hijab* should always be linked to her behaviour and a woman who wears *hijab* must have behaviours that are consistent with her outer appearance, as *hijab* is worn to prevent a woman from being known and drawing attention to herself. Ali suggested that the fundamental meaning of *hijab* is for women to avoid attracting attention for them, whether by their behaviour or clothes. Women's commitment to *hijab*, which is practised in what they wear and their modest behaviour, reflects their respect for what they are wearing. Asma (female, 37 years old) described:

Whoever wears *hijab* must respect the *niqab* and *hijab* she wears and not indecently behave, such as thinking that she has the right to loudly speak and laugh. I am a veiled woman, so I must respect what I am wearing, not speak or laugh loudly, not recklessly behave, and must control myself as much as possible.

Asma differentiated between women who wear and do not wear the *hijab*. She considered speaking loudly and laughing to be behaviours that are acceptable for non-covered women, but for covered women, such behaviour would be interpreted as showing a lack of respect for *hijab*.

Some participants rejected the link between *hijab* and behaviour. They thought that the *hijab* is related to women's clothes, while behaviour is related to manners and morality. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) explained:

If I consider the word "*hijab*" only, it refers to clothing, but the behaviour is a different matter. *Hijab* has more indication of clothing; it means concealing what the *Sharia* orders to

be concealed by women. But, the behaviour, falls further on the matter of principles and morals.

Abu-Abdulaziz suggested that the term *hijab* is linked to women who cover themselves and wear the *hijab*, while modesty refers to women who behave modestly and do not wear the *hijab*. He distinguished between covered and modest women ‘.....I say that this woman is modest and not veiled, and this is the habit of many women in all countries to have a lot of modesty, kindness, and respect, but do not wear *hijab*’.

Ruby (2006) and Jackson and Monk-Turner (2015) confirm that *hijab* wearers recognise that the *hijab* is not just about covering the head or face but also refers to modest behaviour, which requires a woman to lower her gaze and avoid attracting male attention. The present research findings reveal different views among the participants with regard to looking at the *hijab* as an ethical belief or as a piece of clothing. For some of the participants, the behaviour is the main aspect of *hijab*, and women cannot be regarded as real wearers of *hijab* if they do not engage in respectful behaviour. In other words, they regard the *hijab* as a consequence of good behaviour, not the other way around. For some participants, the *hijab* is an ethical belief and a type of clothing that cannot be separated, and through their good behaviour, women represent their respect for the clothing. This is in line with Al-Farrhi (2018), who argues that despite the importance of *hijab* as a piece of clothing, the behaviour of women in the *hijab* is also important and can be considered evidence of her understanding of the meaning of being a Muslim in the *hijab*. However, for some participants, the *hijab* is more important as a piece of clothing than as a behaviour. A woman is regarded as a *hijab* wearer whether or not her behaviour conflicts with the principles of what she is wearing. The point of the *hijab* is to cover the external parts of women. Even so, the *hijab* as a type of modest clothing has a positive impact on women’s moral values (Siraj, 2011).

### **5.2.3 A woman’s voice as a source of temptation**

During the *Sahwa* era, there was an increase in *fatwas* that forbade women’s voices from being heard by men. This is significant for understanding the *hijab* and exploring whether Saudi participants believe a woman should hide her voice as a part of hiding her identity. Based on the data, just one male participant still believes that the voices of women are *awra*. The effect of *Sahwa* ideology was clear in Abu-Kahled’s (male, 53

years old) response while speaking about the *hijab* of his wife and the way she covers herself:

Praise be to Allah, nothing of her body or face is uncovered, whether she rides the car or goes to the market, and if she goes to the market, she goes with me, I am talking about her behaviour, and if I am not with her, her children talk to the cashier on her behalf because her voice is *awra*.

He mentioned that his wife covers her whole body, including her eyes, hands and feet and voice as she does not speak in public. Abu-Kahled explained that his wife cannot go outside without a mediator guardian, either himself or one of his sons, to serve as a link between his wife and other men.

In contrast to Abu-Kahled's belief, nine participants, men and women, rejected the notion that women should keep their voices from being heard by men. However, they believe women's voices become *awra* when they are raised. They believe it is acceptable for women to talk but not to speak loudly and that women should restrict their talking in the public sphere. Albandry (female, 33 years old) for example, considered that raising women's voices is a source of temptation because women cannot be compared with men since the vocal tones and ways of behaving are different between sexes, she explained:

regardless of whether it is permissible or impermissible for women, her voice is different from the men's. A woman's voice is *awra*, and a man's configuration differs from that of a woman.

Kharia (female, 46 years old) supported the Albandry point and stated that women's voices being raised is *awra*. The idea here is that women's raised voices can easily attract men's attention, which women in *hijab* should avoid. She explained her opinion about women's raised voices and why she thinks they are *awra*:

The woman's voice must be low.... But, a woman should be soft, gentle, and bashful and her voice should be faint, even when she speaks on the phone and laughs... *Hijab* includes a women's voice.

Here, Kharia drew on gender to justify her view that women should not raise their voices. She suggested that a woman should be soft and shy, and she should avoid raising her voice or laughing because she should seek not to attract others' attention. Here, Kharia placed women in the pattern that society has built, whereby those women should be soft and emotional.

Women's voice is *awra* is a principle that is perceived as a religious rule, but due to the force and pressure of social changes, this principle may change. Four men and one woman indicated that a woman's voice is *awra*, but due to social and time changes, it cannot be applied today. This is reflected in the following comment from Nawal (female, 45 years old):

It is well known that a woman's voice is *awra*. But, today, life has changed; there are circumstances, a woman's voice is heard, and it should be heard. For example, I am a teacher, and sometimes parents ask me about their children, or to find someone's daughter, I reply, for example, that she went out, and other times I go to the market and be in a situation in which I need to speak... Today, the situation is different from before when there was a total veil, but now there has become a kind of openness because the circumstances of life now force you to do so.....Now, I speak to drivers and teachers, the time has changed, but there must not be softness in speech to men, no, but the ordinary tone of speech.

This can be compared with Abu-Husam's (male, 33 years old) discussion of the difficulties of living in the modern era while holding such beliefs: 'we were raised on the fact that a woman's voice is *awra*, but in the modern era, it is not reasonable to be the translator or mediator between the man and your wife'. The conflict between believing that women's voices are *awra* and living in modern society is clear in both accounts. Nawal and Abu-Husam have the same belief, but due to the challenges they face while dealing with daily situations while they hold such beliefs, they changed their beliefs about woman's voices. It is clear from the above accounts that, even if it is true in a religious sense that a woman's voice is *awra*, this was true for the previous era, not the current one.

In the Quran, it is clear that women's voices are not forbidden except when they are speaking softly. Allah said, 'If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech' (33:32). The majority of participants, men and women, regardless of their diversity, supported the Quranic view and asserted that a woman should talk normally, not softly. Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) explained that it is necessary to communicate with the outside community, but without softness in speech, i.e. to talk with a manager in her company the same way as she speaks to her brother or father. Even in relation words, she argues that she should choose those that are appropriate and avoid talking in a coquettish and indulgent way with marriable persons. Um-Naby's life requires dealing with men, especially with the development and inclusion

of jobs that have occurred which makes her wonder ‘how could I hide it? Should I speak with signs?’. This suggests that women should talk to men without softening their voices. By doing this, Um-Naby maintains her communication with men in the public sphere and workplace without conflicting with her religious doctrines. Similarly, Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) agreed with Um-Naby’s view, stating: ‘In some cases, if a woman has an attractive and seductive voice, I think she must avoid talking to men, or that she talks roughly, if necessary’. Abu-Mohsen’s comment suggests that a woman should subdue her voice and avoid talking to men if her voice can raise men’s desire. He also gave another solution for women to follow if they cannot stop speaking to men: He suggested women should talk harshly to avoid causing *fitnah*, or their voices become a source of temptation to men, which can lead women to fall into sin.

These participants argued that life requires women to talk and be heard, as there are no Islamic roots for this prohibition. Abu-Myas (male, 41 years old) and Norah (female, 24 years old) agreed that during the life of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions, there was no barrier between men and women when it came to talking, and women did not mute their voices during that era. Norah reflects on women talking during the life of the Prophet (PBUH) era:

No, of course, it is impossible for me not to come to my mind that a woman’s voice is a part of the *hijab* since the day man was created, and women used to speak even during the time of the Messenger (PBUH) in religious matters, yet the *sharia* did not forbid their voice.

The same theme is evident in Abu-Myas and Norah’s view that women’s voices are not part of their bodies that should be covered, even in the best era in Muslim history, which was during the time of the Prophet (PBUH). However, this did not prevent some *Sahwa* figures to convince Saudi individuals about the religious aspect of this matter. Safyh (female, 41 years old) argued that:

We used to hear that a woman’s voice is *awra* is a fact established by an honourable *Hadith*, eventually, it is found that this is a lie. For a period of time, we were affected by the *Sahwa* and there were very wrong rulings.

Safyh explained that, in the *Sahwa* era, there was a claim that the PBUH said that women’s voices were *awra*, but she later discovered this was a lie. She believes this idea of hiding women’s voices along with their bodies, which was popular and

widespread, has had a negative effect on women, as they have become shy when it comes to talking and engaging in the world of men today.

Looking at the history of Muslims during the Prophet's (PBUH) era, there is no evidence that women had been silent, especially as speeches by the Prophet's (PBUH) wives and daughters are widely known and accepted. The voices of Muslim women have not been a controversial matter among Islamic scholars in comparison to the number of debates about women's matters such as face covering. Women's voices are not *awra*, as a woman can speak and be heard by men unless she is speaking in a soft or alluring voice. This attitude is followed by most Islamic scholars and the majority of participants in this research regardless of their diversity (Al-Ahmad, 2008). However, in Saudi Arabia, as explained in Chapter 3, there were beliefs during the *Sahwa* era that women's voices were forbidden to be heard by men and a woman should not speak directly to men, and if she wanted to speak, it should be through her guardian, who would act as a mediator between the woman and other men, including vendors or doctors. This thought was not based on Islamic evidence but rather on cultural religious opinion that represented women as *fitnah* that should be concealed.

The prevalence of such an attitude was obvious through one male participant, who indicated that he still practises this and believe in it. While nine participants rejected the idea of silencing women, believe women's voices become *awra* when they are raised. This observation further indicates how much the religious culture has become rooted in Saudi society, and it continues even after the official end of this era. The previous religious cultural discourse regarding hiding women's voices was a continuance of the general discourse about concealing the existence of women in public spaces and hiding them inside their homes (Al-Rawaf, 1990; Arebi, 1994). This idea conflicts with the new roles of women in society today. This was obvious in some of the participants' understandings of the idea of hiding women's voices. They stated that they believe in such an attitude but cannot practise it anymore as it conflicts with the idea of engaging women in life and sharing the societal domain with men. Participants noted that life for women is now not simply inside her house but outside it, and women must be able to communicate with men outside the home, whether vendors, doctors, judges, or police officers. The idea of the importance of preventing women from talking to men under Islamic law has long existed, along with strict rules over the mixing of men and women in the public sphere. In light of this and *hijab*

rules that obliged women to cover their whole bodies, led to shy, afraid and weak women who could not be responsible for their own lives or make decisions on their own. Such beliefs were justified as adhering to Islam (Amin, 2000).

### 5.3 The *hijab*: why women, not men?

The *hijab* is imposed on women in the Quran, which raises consideration about the purpose of concealing women and not men by wearing the *hijab*. The participants justified imposing *hijab* on women by giving diverse reasons. The majority of participants, men and women, regardless of their characteristics suggested that women being *fitnah* and a source of temptation to men are the main reasons for imposing *hijab* on women. Women are responsible for causing *fitnah*, as they fascinate men with their voices, beauty, and behaviour. Thus, they are required to wear *hijab* instead of men. Haifa (female, 51 years old) described why women are considered *fitnah* and not men: ‘because she is more beautiful, she titivates herself for the man, and she has charms. Indeed, there are beautiful men, but it is not the rule’. Haifa highlighted that beauty among women is normal, while men are rarely beautiful. She also stated that, regardless of what a woman looks like, fat or thin, white or black, tall or short, she will find a man who desires her. This desire for women is not just because of women’s beauty but also because women have some attractive body parts that men do not have. Hanan (female, 30 years old) explained what Haifa meant by the attractive body:

A woman is a *fitnah* in herself. As there are – Glory be to Allah – more attractive things in women. Basically, women are more sexually seductive than men. A woman's body has things... Curves that are erotic and sexually appealing to men, and men have nothing that may sexually draw our intention. Yes, women are seductive for the nature of their bodies.

It was not only the women in this research who regarded women as a source of *fitnah*. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) acknowledged the influence of women on men. He argues that women are always more beautiful, and they are more capable of seducing men, *hijab* was imposed on them, not on men. Abu-Abdulaziz states that ‘the issue is not only about beauty as much as the effect on men, meaning that a woman may lose the desire to effect on the man when she gets old, but she still can do so’. A woman is beautiful, by her voice, style, and way of speaking, as these aspects are much stronger in women than in men who are clearer and sharper. So, they do not have the power that women have. The perspective expressed by Abu-Abdulaziz

suggests that men are weak against women's power. This weakness is not only because of their beauty and behaviour, which distinguish women from men. These things have a powerful effect on men, which lets women have privileges over men. Thus, the *hijab* is imposed on women to reduce women's power over men and to support men in their battle against their desires as Suhaim (male, 59 years old) described his view on this point as follows:

Women are ordered to fully cover up as they are attractive to men, who are more daring, more charismatic, more capable, and more initiative. So, in my estimation, Allah has also wisdom in this matter, as women were created for men for reasons. Allah, the Almighty, knows this reason. Although, in my opinion, Allah always tests us, and he made women part of the test men are put on in terms of their religion and resistance to desires in life.

Here, Suhaim reflected that a man's features, such as encouragement and power of management, led Allah to impose *hijab* on women. His response expressed uncertainty about the main reason for this imposition, but he stated that women were basically created for men and there are several reasons for the *hijab* obligation, even if he was not sure what they were. He assumed that one of the reasons women were created was as a kind of test for men so they could fight their strong desire. Thus, as being a woman positions her in a man's attention, she is ordered to wear a *hijab* as a tool to help the man pass the life test.

The idea of women as *fitnah* and having the power of seducing men is not only related to women's attractive features but also to the strength of men's sexuality. It was a common belief among the participants, irrespective of their demographic characteristics, that men have stronger sexual desire than women, which is a reason for imposing the *hijab* on women. Reem (female, 34 years old) was one of the participants who expressed such thoughts: 'A man's desire is stronger than a woman's; a woman is more attracted by a man's morals rather than his shape'. Reem believes that there is no comparison of the strength of sexual desire and the way to drive such a desire between men and women. She thought women's attire is the main reason for tempting men, while women are not driven by sexual desire, so the character of a man and his manner are what attract a woman to a man. Thus, there is no need to cover men because their attire does not attract women's attention. Sumiah (female, 21 years old) agreed with Reem's argument; she expressed that men are weak when it comes to controlling their sexual desire, and they can easily lose control. Thus, to protect men

from making mistaken and protect women from men's assaults, the *hijab* was imposed on women:

Men have instincts that are not as similar as women's, I mean that they could be tempted, but women rarely do because men are sometimes not able to control themselves, unlike women who have the ability to control themselves.

The sexual strength that Sumiah speaks about can be seen in the way that men look at women in public spaces, even when they are wearing the *hijab*. Eman (female, 33 years old), said even if she is in the *hijab*, men still look at her, which makes her wonder what would happen if she did not wear it. Eman believed men are too weak to lower their gaze and *hijab* is imposed on women to lower men's gaze forcibly.

The fact that a man can get married to more than one woman, while a woman is owned by one man was another reason the participants cited in this research. Two men and a woman identified this as a justification for imposing *hijab* on women. Abdullah (male, 48 years old) explained his view about why he thinks *hijab* was imposed on women. Abdullah suggested that woman was created from a man's ribs, making men the origin of the existence of women. Thus, women were created for one main purpose, which is to please a man in this life. He states 'For the woman is one of the man's pleasures, no other man is allowed to share this pleasure, as she is for only one man'. In his view, *hijab* was imposed on women as protection for the source of satisfaction of men and as protection for each man, who would not allow another man to violate his pleasure source.

Gender roles represent one explanation that has been given to justify imposing *hijab* on women. The traditional roles of men and women in society conflict with the idea of men wearing the *hijab*. The traditional role of a man as a provider for the family and working outside the home in challenging jobs would make *hijab* an obstacle for men in making a living. However, the *hijab* is considered convenient and appropriate for women to wear as they normally work inside the house, which is regarded as a soft and easy job to do. Haya (female, 48 years old) explained that women have an internal role, which supports women wearing the *hijab* but conflicts with the possibility of men doing so. She explains the difficulty that women faced who were practising *hijab* in men's realm and why men are not ordered to cover up:

It is easier for women to wear *hijab* as they stay at home most of the time, regardless of the European and other countries where women are forced into men's areas of work in order to

provide for themselves, a woman there would suffer from hardship and many other challenges when it comes to wearing *hijab*, but here, thanks to Allah, we still have female schools and women can wear *hijab* with complete freedom, not like men who have sometimes hard jobs.

Haya considered changing women's roles and women working outside the home conflict with the idea of *hijab*. She pitied women who wore the *hijab* and worked in men's domains where they suffer from wearing *hijab* and working in jobs in the public sphere which is not suitable for them. Haya is a teacher in a girls' school. The education system in Saudi Arabia is separated by gender. She considered herself lucky that she did not have to wear the *hijab* while she is working because she works in a domain that is exclusive to women.

Regarding the participants' responses above, it can be argued that cultural and religious influence was obvious in regard to the purpose of imposing *hijab* on women. The participants from different levels of education, ages, site, travel experience and marital status, shared the belief that women are *fitnah* and they have power in their beauty, as women's bodies are imbued with sexuality in their movements, shapes, styles, and the colours of their clothes (Siraj, 2011). Due to this, women must then protect men from sinning by wearing *hijab*. Seven women from diverse backgrounds indicated the *hijab* is imposed on women because of the strong sexual desire of men, which cannot always be controlled. Moreover, as noted above the idea of marriage was used to explain the purpose of the *hijab*. Thus, the *hijab* was not understood to be about women but rather imposed for the sake of men. These findings reflect the Saudi cultural view of both men and women, where men are seen as the mind and women as the body. The meaning of women is reduced to a beautiful body that provokes men's sexual desire and has the power to seduce them. This desire, which women believe is far stronger than their own, reflects men's privilege over women with regard to sexuality. Thus, the *hijab* is imposed on women to help men reduce their sexual desire. Such findings are in line with Afshar (1987) and Mernissi (2011), who argue that the *hijab* was not imposed to protect women but to protect men from any sexual desire for and attraction to women, their bodies, faces, movements, and voices. However, this finding contradicts Bullock's (2007) argument, that the *Quran* emphasises men's responsibility more than women's by ordering men to lower their gaze whether or not women are wearing *hijab*. For her, *hijab* is imposed to discourage

both strange men and women from touching each other or engaging in intimate conversation, not for men's protection.

Moreover, the cultural and religious influence is obvious in the definition of the role of women in society and is used as a justification for imposing the *hijab* on women. The belief that a man's role is outside the home while a woman's is inside it has also been used to explain why women were instructed to cover themselves rather than men. This supports the argument of a number of Islamic scholars (Abu-Hageer, 1994; Al-Afghani, 1970; Al-Banna, 1987; Al-Karbi, 2017; Al-Aqqad, 2013; Zeno, 1994) who say that women have a different nature than men, making women responsible for specific roles like pregnancy and raising children and making her unsuitable for many roles that are suitable for men. This statement is not backed by any Islamic evidence, yet it has influenced traditional Arabic cultures that require women to remain inside the home and men outside it. During the Prophet's (PBUH) lifetime, many women worked both outside and inside the house—for example, tending to animals, performing agricultural work, weaving, making clothes, working as nurses, and caring for men injured in war (Awaidah, 2000; Al-Khayat, 2003). Muslim women during that time were practising *hijab* while they fulfilled roles inside and outside the home, and *hijab* did not prevent them from doing their jobs or becoming an obstacle for them. This can be compared to today where many Muslim women work outside the home while they are wearing *hijab*. However, considering *hijab* in Saudi Arabia must cover the face, this can be considered in contradiction with women working outside the home. This will be explained in the next chapter.

#### **5.4 Benefits of *hijab***

Like Bullock's (2007) study, the *hijab* plays a significant role not just for women as wearers but also for men and society as a whole. The overwhelming majority of participants in my study, both male and female and despite their diversity, stated that women wearing the *hijab* has benefits for both women and society. However, a few participants denied this view. I identified three main beneficiaries of *hijab* that emerged from the participants' comments—women, men and society.

##### **5.4.1 *Hijab's* benefits for women**

One of benefits that was evident from participants' responses was that the *hijab* allows the wearer to gain Allah's approval; seven women and two men believe

wearing the *hijab* is a good deed by which women can avoid falling into sin and protect themselves from the fire. As Um-Kahled (female, 47 years old) stated, the *hijab* protects her from feeling guilty and releases her conscience by avoiding being a sinner. She stated: 'I feel comfortable and no sins burden my shoulders, on the contrary, when I do not commit myself, I emotionally suffer'.

Wearing the *hijab* can also provide a woman with a sense of security and self-confidence. Two women and a man believe that *hijab* benefits women by providing them with secure feelings and self-confidence. The *hijab* protects women from being targeted by men's harassment, gossip and staring, which protected them from feeling uncomfortable and enhanced their feeling of security; in contrast, exposure to these things leads to a lack of confidence. Khazna (female, 37 years old) described that when she wears *hijab*, she feels safe and comfortable inside Saudi Arabia or even when she travelled outside. She confirmed that she cannot take it off anywhere as she feels that *hijab* is a protection for her. 'I feel that it preserves me like a girl when she sees her father and ran towards him to feel safe, I feel the same when I wear my *hijab*'. However, this is not always the case, as the *hijab* sometimes leads to a sense of insecurity and lack of confidence for women, as in the case of Haya (female, 48 years old). She disagreed with the argument that *hijab* always provides secure feelings for a woman, but it is based on the society she exists in. She thought:

When I went to Syria and the *hijab* was fully absent. In Damascus, women wear a headcover but not black *abaya* and *niqab*, but they were wearing decent clothes, but I felt fear when I walked among men in another city that I do not remember its name, but the majority wore trousers, so I was scared and tense until I went out. But in Saudi Arabia, I do not feel fear I rather feel Glory and honour.

Haya expressed that she feels proud of her *hijab* in Saudi society, where women wear the same form of *hijab* she wears, but this was not the case in other societies where just she was wearing the black *hijab* and face covering, as she felt unsafe and scared walking.

Among female participants, four employed women believed that there are beauty benefits to wearing the *hijab*. They found wearing it more comfortable, with the effect that they were unconcerned about their looks. When wearing the *hijab*, they did not need to care about their hairstyle, clothes, makeup or even their body shape. They thought that caring about looks and matching clothes or tying hair to gain

people's admiration is a waste of time which limit their feeling of freedom as Um-Abdullah (female, 51 years old) expressed 'I cannot have my true freedom'. Nawal (female, 45 years old) explained the beauty benefits that she gains by wearing the *hijab* as follows:

Sometimes, when I am in a hurry, I wear *abaya* over the pyjamas, and no one knows what I wear, also this hides my body and conceals my inner details, and this is one of the advantages, as sometimes, my hair is oiled and I have to go out, so all I have to do is to cover it up.

In terms of health, Hanan (female, 30 years old) and Abu-Albaraa (male, 49 years old) suggested that the *hijab* has health benefits for women. The *hijab* plays a role in protecting women from dust and hot sunlight. This is especially true in Saudi Arabia, as the desert sun is extreme, and the air is full of dust. Further, during the COVID-19 crisis, face masks play a significant role in protecting people from the virus. Saudi women did not need to wear a face mask for protection as the *hijab* can do the job and protect women from such viruses and other diseases. Abu-Albaraa explained:

In terms of modesty, a *hijab's* woman covers her pudendum and all of her body, she also covers herself from dust, sunlight, diseases and others, because covering the face protects women from infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and sunlight protects her skin. So, it has no disadvantages, only benefits.

The only benefit of the *hijab* according to most of the participants was providing protection for women. Through the participants' responses, it became obvious that the term protection has different sides. The *hijab* relates to purity and chastity in Saudi Arabia; thus, if a woman does not commit to wearing the *hijab*, it may put her chastity and purity in doubt. For example, Abu-Fares (male, 40 years old) regarded the *hijab* protects women from being hurt by people talking about them; as it is playing a significant role in protecting women from gossip, criticism, contempt and swearing. As Amnah (female, 52 years old) supported Abu-Fares's argument that *hijab* maintains her chastity and protects and preserves herself. She commented: 'protection against any bad such as, annoyance, making people think that I am dressed up, putting makeup, and go out just to draw attention and be attractive'. For Amnah, following the veiling rules protects her purity and chastity from any verbal violation.

The study's participants highlighted another dimension of protection in that the *hijab* was seen as protection for women from being targets of sexual assault and

harassment. The participants explained that the key reason for sexual harassment is that women do not cover their attractive body parts; thus, the *hijab* prevents them from being harassed. Majed (male, 36 years old) believed that the *hijab* protects women from harassment. He explained why the *hijab* is considered protection against assaulting women: 'When a woman does not wear the *hijab*, people will think that she is easy, as she [by not wearing *hijab*] invites men to make unlawful deeds with her'. In his comment, Majed emphasised that the *hijab* protects women from sexual assault, whether verbal or physical. He explained that women are seen as available and easy targets to be approached when they do not wear a *hijab*. Further evidence to support Majed's suggestion can be found in Hanan's (female, 30 years old) comments about her experience, once she was going to the market with three young girls who were wearing pants. She states that '.... whoever came to get near to the girls, once they see me wearing my *hijab*, they go away'. For Hanan, this was one of the situations where she examined the role of her *hijab* in protecting her from being harassed, she continues:

With my full *hijab*, no one can annoy me. They may flirt only with those girls who show approval, but they cannot do so with me, especially with my normal clothes and with me showing them rejection. I once heard someone say to his friend that she will not go soft with you; he knows that, because I was wearing a head *abaya*. I mean that those who wear clothes that are open, embroidered, and tightened to their waists, they implicitly show that they are easy and available to everyone.

What I can draw from Hanan's experience is that the *hijab* provides protection for women by forcing men to respect the *hijab* and its wearer. Hanan also explained that the type of *hijab* she wears is crucial in protecting her. She suggested that not all types of *hijab* can protect women from harassment, emphasising that she is protected 'because I wear the head *abaya*'. This and other types of *hijab* are described in more detail in the next chapter.

For years, women and men have been living in different worlds due to strict segregation systems that excluded women from the public domain, which affected how women are looked at and treated. This makes wearing *hijab* necessary to protect women:

For many years, women used to stay at home in Saudi society, not interact with men, nor go to the street for work or anything else. So, society is not used to dealing with strange

women. Awareness has not yet reached the level where men deal with women in a normal manner without overstepping...so *hijab* is still necessary for awareness has not yet been completed to accept unveiled women and deal with them respectfully (Abu-Muhammed, male, 47 years old).

Society was preserving and protecting women because it was a fundamentally masculine society and lived on this masculinity for a while which made it obstructed which led to rage towards anything feminine (Abu-Abdulaziz, male, 37 years old).

These extracts illuminate that, for Saudi women, wearing the *hijab* is necessary for their protection. For both Abu-Muhammed and Abu-Abdulaziz, due to segregation between women and men and restrictions on engaging women in public sphere and mixing with women in the street, shops and work, society has emerged where men do not know how to treat women appropriately; this creates an uncontrollable sexual frenzy in them when they are near women. Thus, for women, wearing the *hijab* is necessary for this atmosphere to protect them from harm.

Despite the role of *hijab* in protecting women, it may be difficult to claim that it completely eliminates the sexual harassment of women. For example, Haifa (female, 51 years old) said that the *hijab* mitigates rather than eliminates sexual harassment. 'Hijab had a role in protecting women, I do not mean a 100% protection but let's say 50%, from being seductive to the others'. She believes the relationships happen between men and women because of contact between each other. So, *hijab* limits the chances for the woman for being seen, annoyed, or harassed. She confirms that:

I am not saying that we have zero harassment, but Allah has prescribed *hijab*, and it will minimize problems such as harassment and annoying, at least much less than in other societies.

This example highlights that the *hijab* helps in decreasing the percentage of harassment against women. Haifa commented that there are sexual harassment cases in Saudi Arabia, that conflict with the idea of the protection provided by the *hijab*. However, Haifa emphasised women in Saudi Arabia face far fewer sexual issues than those in other countries do. In contrast, Reem (female, 34 years old) believed that the *hijab* plays an important role in protecting women outside rather than inside Saudi Arabia:

Here, people have an absurd idea, that is, because I am veiled and sometimes harassed. By the way, I expect to be harassed even if I were in gloves because in our society it serves no purpose, but outside our society, it plays an important role. I notice, even in their dealings, a great deal of respect for veiled women.

Reem's comment is evidence of the failure of the *hijab* to protect women; even if women cover their whole bodies, they can still be assaulted, which partially agrees with Haifa's point of view. The statement also acknowledges that the role of the *hijab* is obvious outside Saudi Arabia, where women can decide whether to wear it and women in the *hijab* earn respect from men and positive treatment.

The findings suggest that participants men and women expressed that there are five benefits for women from *hijab*. The *hijab* provides women with a sense of happiness and reveals that they adhere to Allah's command. This has been supported in several related studies (Abu-Bakre, 2018; Abu-Hwajj, 2012; Fayyaz and Kamal, 2017; Jackson and Monk-Turner, 2015; Mackay, 2017; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018; Sogolitappah et al., 2017; Utomo et al., 2018;) that outline women's feelings that by wearing *hijab*, they are satisfying Allah, thus giving them a sense of internal peace and happiness as they become close to Allah through *hijab*.

Moreover, *hijab* provides women with a sense of confidence and security. This is supported by Kodžoman (2019), who notes that clothing plays an important role in impacting the feeling of wearers about themselves and that clothing can reflect the identity of a person. Feelings of confidence and security from wearing *hijab* may come from practising women being exposed to *hijab* since birth, particularly women in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, a woman has grown up surrounded by fully covered women, making the idea of giving up the wearing of *hijab* can lead to feelings of lowered confidence and insecurity. For such women, *hijab* in their surrounding environment can positively impact their impressions of *hijab* as positive (Kodžoman, 2019).

Another benefit the female participants mentioned is that the *hijab* reduces women's concerns regarding their appearance. Given the style of Saudi women's *hijab*, which consists of a loose black *abaya* and face cover, women are not concerned about how their bodies, hair, and faces look and feel the freedom to leave the house without spending time on personal grooming. This allows employed women, who are busy taking care of their jobs and family requirements, to limit some of their expenses, both time and financial, by not visiting hairdressers, wearing makeup or buying clothes (Kulenović, 2006). As well, the Saudi *hijab* offers women protection relating to particular health issues. For example, during the present COVID-19 pandemic, Saudi women who cover their faces have not been required to wear additional masks

in places where mask-wearing is compulsory for people in public. Further, the face protection provided by the Saudi *hijab* is similar to that provided by medical face masks, which are common around the world. This was confirmed by (Al-Shamrani et al., 2021; Khamis, 2021), who suggest that the wearing of *niqab* by Muslim women has proven its effective role in decreasing the spread of COVID-19 number of Muslim countries, which Saudi Arabia is one. Moreover, it is evident from participant responses that *hijab* helps women to avoid the harm of sunlight on skin and hair that may increase the risk of skin cancer, especially in Saudi Arabia where temperatures sometimes reach 51 degrees Celsius on summer afternoons (Autier et al., 1998).

The majority of the participants agreed that the *hijab* provides physical and nonphysical protection for women. The *hijab* is linked to a woman's purity and morality and her family, which means that if a woman does not wear *hijab* or does not wear proper *hijab* based on society's rules of veiling, she may be the victim of severe criticism and gossip. This is particularly the case in societies built on similarity in regard to women's appearances, where differences or variation regarding women's clothing is not acceptable. The protection offered by *hijab* is also physical in that it can protect women from harassment. It is believed that without *hijab* or proper *hijab* a woman exposed herself to harassment, especially in Saudi society where segregation between men and women is extreme and impacts the way men and women view each other (Bullock, 2007). This has been supported by a number of previous studies (e.g., Almila, 2014; Arar and Shapira, 2016; Fayyaz and Kamal, 2017; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018) that confirmed the *hijab* is considered to be protection for women from harassment by men and can serve to reduce a woman's attractiveness and thus provide a woman with a sense of piety and religiosity (Hopkins and Greenwood, 2013; Jordan et al., 2020; Kulenović, 2006; Mahmud and Swami, 2010).

I agree with Bullock (2007,p.209) who considers that *hijab* is not 'a magical device' that offers protection to all women who cover themselves. If that were the case, Saudi society would be the safest place for women given that the vast majority of women are covered; instead, the society has a high rate of harassment of women, which is not reported due to social pressures (Al-Subaie and Mohammed, 2020). This argument was supported by two women, although one said she was still subject to harassment despite being fully covered. The *hijab* thus can play a role in protecting women from harm by men, but without law support, it will not work. This was

confirmed by Okaz (2021) who reports that since the implementation of laws criminalising physical, verbal and electronic harassment against women in Saudi Arabia in 2018, the rates of harassment have decreased, despite the changes in women's appearance in Saudi society (see Chapter 8).

#### 5.4.2 *Hijab's benefits for men*

The *hijab* has not only benefited women. Regardless of their demographic characteristics, all of the participants confirmed that the *hijab* has benefits for men. These benefits can be divided into three categories. The first benefit is obvious in the speech of Norah (female, 24 years old) and Abdulrahman (male, 29 years old). They state that the *hijab* has more benefits for men than women because men are relieved from having to lower their gaze or seeing women's attractive physical features. Norah believes that women wearing the *hijab* prevent men from being tempted, which is more beneficial to men than women. She explained that '... it is a shield that protects them from lust and getting tempted when they see a woman's charms'. Thus, wearing the *hijab* by women has religious benefits for men, as it prevents men from sinning by gazing at women. Similarly, Abdulrahman described the *hijab* as a 'major deterrent' to looking at women and committing sin.

Protecting men from falling into sin by lowering their gaze was not the only benefit of the *hijab*. The participants indicated that the *hijab* also helped men to lower their sexual desire. They believed that looking at women's features, such as their legs, hair or breasts, would allow their sexual desire to be provoked easily, helping Satan to mislead them and leading them to sin. However, with the *hijab*, they cannot see women's features, so their sexual desires stay calm. Suhaim (male, 59 years old) explained his experience and feeling inside and outside Saudi Arabia:

At the individual level, as a man, I definitely care a lot about being in a society that abides by *hijab* so that I do not fall victim to sedition. How I could preserve my religion in a society that does not assist me to do so, as unveiled women are everywhere around me. Undoubtedly this increases the burdens and I have gone through this. I mean that I have gone through this outside Saudi Arabia, I felt a kind of disturbance, I mean a lot and the internal control in it is a kind of an emergency. I mean that I should be stronger and so on so that I do not commit a sin.

Suhaim stated that he feels safe in Saudi society as he can control his desire; women wearing the *hijab* protect his religiosity and prevents him from committing sins. He

considered himself a victim of attraction, which reflects that women have power in disrupting men, who are weak against this power. Thus, Abu-Sarah (male, 32 years old) expressed that it is women's duty to help men to protect them:

When a man looks at a woman, he will be attracted to her, so the *hijab* protects the man from looking at the woman and her body and face, because the face may also tempt the man. Women must veil so that men spare themselves from looking at them.

In contrast, Abu-Muhammed (male, 47 years old) believed the *hijab* helps men who cannot control themselves, not all men. He states: 'I think it is beneficial to men who do not have the ability to control themselves and hold their desires. It prevents them from looking at women'. For Abu-Muhammed, the problem is linked to men's awareness of dealing with and behaving toward women. A conscious man does not have a problem with whether a woman is veiled or not, but for unconscious men, this matters. He assumed that a man who is aware controls himself and lowers his gaze when meeting women, regardless of whether they wear the *hijab*.

The third benefit for men is that *hijab* provides protection not only for a man personally but also for his *sharaf*. Six female participants indicated that men feel comfortable and safe as their honour is protected by the *hijab* because their wives, sisters and daughters are protected, and no one can see, touch or reach them. For example, Haya (female, 48 years old) compared men in Saudi Arabia and outside the country regarding the role of *hijab* in protecting a man's honour. She considers a Saudi man feels the blessing of having a wife who is fully exclusive to him, on the contrary to a non-Muslim man. She states that she read a story that someone was crying and wished that his wife would be for him alone, like Saudis, honourable and chaste. She said women in Saudi Arabia are 'decent, no one can come near to them, and if a man sees someone comes near to his wife, he may kill him'. She stated that, by wearing the *hijab*, a woman confirms that she belongs to her husband and without wearing a woman for the *hijab*, a man does not feel confident in her and trustful of his honour. Thus, *hijab* protects men from committing crimes such as killing as their honour is intact. Similarly, Hanan (female, 30 years old) confirmed that *hijab* protects not only men's honour but also the whole family's honour:

..... a man does not accept females in his family to wear like women in Riyadh or Jeddah, as this may lead to a family fight, nothing more. He could beat her, see? Basically, I do not say that he may have her killed, but it could lead to a fight, a family quarrel... This is all

because of the *hijab*, but it is inherent to excessive racism, considering the *hijab* as the basis of the family's *sharaf*.

As Hanan confirmed, the *hijab* is a mark of *sharaf* for men and the family because it protects this *sharaf*; women's failure to commit to wearing the *hijab* can be considered a failure of the man and family to protect their *sharaf*.

Drawing on Mernissi (2011), the *hijab* offers men protection, as men believe they can easily lose control over their sexual desire, distracting them easily from their religion and society. Thus, women wearing the *hijab* protect these men from such destruction. It is evident that the participants, men and women, agree with Mernissi's argument that a man benefits from the *hijab*. The *hijab* protects a man's religiosity. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Quran orders men to lower their gaze when meeting women before the order for women to lower their gaze and express modesty by covering themselves (Al-Aqqād, 2013; Khan, 1998). The data show that a man by covering women to their selves does not need to be practising such religious obligation as Saudi women's *hijab* covers all parts of women's bodies and face, thus, a man has nothing to lower his gaze from. Such a situation put some Saudis men as data shows challenge when they leave the state to other countries where women unveiled or there is a variation of women attire as they used to not practising lowering gaze as they always are protected from that by women *hijab*. This leads to protecting them from provoking their sexual desire considering as explained above the common belief among the participants that a man has weak control over his sexual desire which makes *hijab* protecting for him to avoid falling in sin or committing sexual crime against women. Thus, men's sinning or 'losing control' sexually would be considered women's responsibility. This finding conflict Amin's suggestion (2000), as the *hijab* was not imposed on women to protect men from their desires but to protect women from any harm caused by men. Men who are afraid of sinning or being attracted to women, then, must lower their gaze instead of asking women to cover themselves which confirms the Quranic statement.

Another benefit of the *hijab* for men is the protection of a man's *sharaf*. Six women expressed this benefit, which may reflect their belief in their responsibility to protect men's *sharaf* by committing to wear the *hijab*. In Saudi society, a woman is a man's *sharaf*, and a man is responsible for protecting his *sharaf* by preventing a woman from committing any shameful action (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Kudri, 2014). The *hijab*, as

a piece of clothing, has become a means of measuring the *sharaf* of a woman as well as the man as a guardian. In this case, the *hijab* protects a man's *sharaf*—a man's woman—from anyone who might harass her. The idea of a woman as a man's *sharaf* is rooted in Saudi culture, confirmed by the *Sahwa* discourse, which links the *hijab* to the concept of *sharaf* and is regarded as a sign of protection. This is in line with Al-Tuwayjiri's (2018) suggestion that the *hijab* in Saudi society serves as a mark of purity and piety for women.

#### 5.4.3 *Hijab's benefits for society*

The benefit of *hijab* is not exclusive to protecting men and women but can be expanded to include the whole society. The family is the important building block in society, and based on the participants' responses, the *hijab* plays an important role in protecting marriage and keeping the family strong. Preserving marriage is considered one of the significant benefits of *hijab*. According to nine married women, being a man in society where all women commit to wearing the *hijab* protects marriages because the husband cannot look at any woman except his wife, which allows him to evaluate his wife and her beauty. Abu-Myas (male, 41 years old) explained: '...If a man sees only his wife, then he sees her as the most beautiful creature and knows only his wife. But, if he looks at other women, problems will find their way to his home..'. Abu-Myas highlighted that looking regularly at uncovered women may create a mental comparison in a man's head between his wife and women he does not know, after which, he may no longer consider his wife beautiful. Attracting a man to other women instead of his wife would increase the rate of divorce, Khazna (female, 37 years old) explains:

Now, with women going unveiled, men will start to look and talk about how beautiful this woman's hair, eyes, lips, and/or shoe is, for they now can see these things...I think that the rate of divorce has increased due to these matters. People in our society used to say that their wives do not dress up for them or they are no more attractive to them, and this will lead to many problems, they may even not care about their wives as they were before.....these issues are increasing in our society.

Being in a society where women are uncovered does not just affect marriage negatively, but it may end this marriage based on Khazna's statement.

Protecting society from some social diseases, such as rape, illegal sexual relationships and illegitimate children was also another benefit of the *hijab*. Most

participants, men and women, mentioned that the *hijab* as a tool of preventing free interaction between women and men leads to decreasing these issues and causes them to feel safe towards the future of their society and raising their children so they will become good persons and committed to the religion. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) described the benefit of the *hijab* for society as that it controls people's actions and behaviours, by keeping people away from forbidden and suspicious deeds and protecting them from committing adultery. He believes 'due to that, the *hijab* helps to preserve families from breakdown and not having adulterine children, which are the most prominent problems in societies in which women are not veiled'. Abu-Mohsen linked spreading of social diseases in society with the lack of *hijab* wearing in society and allowing men and women to mix and interact freely. He linked the *hijab* and mixing between sexes by saying that the *hijab* is not enough to protect society, but segregation of the sexes is also needed to let the *hijab* do its job effectively. Increasing rates of rape, illegal sexual relationships and illegitimate children have led to corruption the society, and women are responsible for them. Six women indicated that women are responsible for protecting society by committing to wear the *hijab*. They thought that women are the backbone of society; if women do not carry out their obligations, society will collapse and the rate of social diseases will increase. They thought that the deviation of men is different from women's deviation because a woman can manage her house and raise children on her own, which is considered a massive job for men. They stated that each society is built through building families and raising children, which is a woman's responsibility. Without women wearing the *hijab*, they cannot build society. As Amnah (female, 52 years old) stated: 'If a woman begins going out her home unveiled, will corrupt the society, as if the mother is corrupted, she cannot raise the future generations '. She justifies that a woman who maintains her *hijab* preserves her religion, *sharaf* and reputation. Similarly, Asma (female, 37 years old) confirmed Amnah's statement and believed that women are the root of all corruption on the earth. She explained:

Any corruption on the earth is beginning with a woman committing adultery. If she does not go out, it will be no fornication, and if she does not expose herself, it will be no corruption, because she is the basis. If she preserves herself she preserves the whole society. As for the men, they follow women. Men are the passive part when it comes to corruption and fornication, as they are submissive to women, and will not be the leader, for no woman

can be forced to commit fornication. Men are the victims of women, especially in corruption.

It is obvious from Asma's statement that women are the gate for society's protection in her view. She suggested that women's clothes are the key to protecting society and men, not the opposite, she continues:

You notice that when girls began to uncover and lighten their *abaya*, corruption increased, but it is from the beginning that boys used to wear trousers and shorts and come and go, yet corruption was not as obvious as today. Consequently, women are the basis of corruption, they must control and protect themselves so that society is preserved.

The data suggested that *hijab* benefits the image of Saudi Arabia as the heart of the Islamic world. Two men and one woman indicated that Saudi Arabia as a society has its own privacy. It is the country of Makkah and Al-Madinah, and people from other locations look at Saudi citizens as naturally conservative, growing up with Islamic principles and Arabic traditions. By committing women to wear the *hijab*, Saudi society will maintain its privacy, Islamic identity and holiness. Muhammed (male, 41 years old) explained that the *hijab* reflects a positive image to many countries about Saudi Arabia because it is considered a focal point for Islam. He states 'when a Muslim woman appears in the manner required by Islam, many countries follow us, and when the opposite is true, it is a negative image of Saudi Arabia'.

The *hijab* in Saudi Arabia is not only beneficial for society; it also threatens its security. Two men, who are employed in security jobs, believe that the *hijab* is used to make committing crimes easier. For Bandar (male, 44 years old) the *hijab* may cause security issues due to his experience at work, where someone used it to cover his or her criminal identity and perform shameful and illegal acts. For example, Bandar states: '... Sometimes you enter centres and places in which you can not recognize the person, and we encountered many cases in which people use IDs of other persons as their own IDs...'. Bandar suggests that the *hijab* can easily be used to hide criminals' identities and conceal their movements from one place to another as no one knows the identity of its wearer is a woman or a man. So, he suggests that a woman's identity should be verified so that the *hijab* would not be taken advantage of by those committing illegal actions and crimes such as financial, terrorism and theft.

Based on the above, three participants, two men and one woman, believed that the *hijab* has no role in Saudi Arabia. They believed the idea of *hijab* has a significant

role outside Saudi Arabia, not inside the country. Based on the data, it appeared that turning the *hijab* to become convention in Saudi Arabia prevented it from doing its job. Examples that the participants raised of reasons that prevent the *hijab* from being beneficial in Saudi Arabia are given in the following comments:

*Hijab* will be a source of honour and pride if there is a cultural and moral foundation. Now, the *hijab* serves no purpose as there are no morals. I hope that those who misuse *hijab* take it off because they portray us in the ugliest form and abuse the idea that Allah has ordered this thing (Reem, female, 34 years old).

... People will feel that their society is fair and honest, of course I mean if it is ideal and not a mere habit. If *hijab* is viewed as a habit and if a woman has the chance to take it off she will do. I do not mean this situation, I mean the situation where all members of the society believe that *hijab* is obligatory (Suhaim, male, 59 years old).

Here, Reem and Suhaim believe that *hijab* can play a role in preventing societal issues that may otherwise increase if women were unveiled. However, the majority of women in Saudi Arabia do not wear *hijab* as part of committing to a religious order that requires women to behave and appear in a particular; rather, they wear *hijab* as a part of Saudi society convention. Thus, as soon as women believe in *hijab* as a part of committing to the religion, society will gain from *hijab* benefits.

The findings suggest that society benefits from the *hijab* in that it serves to address particular social issues, such as preserving families from breakdown, preventing illegal sexual relationships and illegitimate children. The *hijab*, based on the data, keeps men from looking at women, which for participants married women, protects families from collapse by spreading divorce in society. The *hijab* is said to help prevent marriage dissolution in that all women are covered, and thus men only see their own wives uncovered; this then leads to men viewing their wives as the most beautiful which reinforces the suggestions made by (Fani et al., 2020; Tarlo, 2010).

Furthermore, it has been argued that *hijab* also protects society by preventing illegal sexual relationships and illegitimate children, which are commonly regarded as social problems. This view was shared by the majority of participants, regardless of gender, education level, location, age, travel experience and marital status. This is in line with the findings of previous studies (Almila, 2014; Fani et al., 2020; Jordan et al., 2020; Mahfoodh, 2008; Tarlo, 2010) that suggested the *hijab* is a tool for protecting society from these social issues. According to these studies, women and their

appearance are gatekeepers of society, responsible for its protection from social diseases, which is also supported by the findings in this research. This research argued that the protection of society cannot be a shared responsibility between men and women regardless of the fact that they share and build society together; instead, it must be the responsibility of women and their clothing. This argument has been supported by a number of studies (Ruby, 2006; Williams and Vashi, 2007). However, this argument has no root in Islam, meaning that it is likely driven by incorrect Islamic interpretations (Zeno, 1994). Protecting and building society is not only a women's responsibility but also men's. Tarlo (2010) argued that men cannot be absolved of the responsibility to protect women, society and themselves.

The literature shows that Saudi women during the *Sahwa* era were regarded as symbols of virtue and religiosity by Saudi society as an Islamic nation (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018; Anishchenkova, 2020). The research findings confirm this argument, as women's adherence to the *hijab* protects the image of Saudi Arabia as a religious country and the centre of the Islamic world. Women eschewing the *hijab* could negatively affect the image of the country to the outside world and the idea of being Saudi Arabia as a model for other Islamic countries. Despite this, the findings suggested that *hijab* has weak benefits for Saudi society, as Saudi women's *hijab* can raise security issues when it is used as coverage to hide the identity of criminals, especially in cheating and forgery crimes, thus taking advantage of women. As confirmed by Amin (2000), many women get married and lose their prosperity without their knowledge; because the women are covered, and their protectors conduct their business matters on their behalf. This is especially true in Saudi Arabia, where identity documents were not issued to female citizens until 2001 (Okaz, 2017).

However, it was also argued that the *hijab* offers no benefits to Saudi society. In Saudi Arabia, the *hijab* has become a part of the social customs, and women have adopted it as a part of their daily habits without understanding its purpose as a religious command. Thus, wearing of *hijab* does not, then, benefit society as women's behaviour contradicts their outer appearance. One explanation for this finding is the *hijab* was imposed on women by force during the *Sahwa* era, and did not allow women to choose whether to wear *hijab*. This prevents the *hijab* from playing a beneficial role in Saudi society.

## 5.5 The *hijab* is not just about religion

The *hijab* is not just about committing to Islamic doctrine; it involves cultural and personal aspects as well. The purpose of this theme is to explore the reasons that Saudi women wear the *hijab*. The female participants were asked about their reason for wearing the *hijab*. Further, the male participants were asked why women wear the *hijab*. Seven different reasons emerged for wearing the *hijab*.

Most of the participants cited religious reasons, including men, who believe that women wear the *hijab* as part of their religion and obey Allah's command. Aishah (female, 41 years old) considered *hijab* as her way of entering heaven, as she believed that a woman's committing to wear the *hijab* will complete the woman's Islamic practice, which also includes praying and fasting. Male participants also noted that women have been raised with the *hijab*. However, Abu-Ali (male, 30 years old) for example, believed that the religious factor is the first and only reason to wear the *hijab*, but this is not why Saudi women wear the *hijab*. He stated: 'In our Saudi society, you can say that it is an act of worship, but it has become a habit ... as customs and the culture of shame prevail over religious rituals'. Abu-Ali's argument illustrates the second reason for wearing the *hijab*.

Wearing the *hijab* as a part of the convention was the second reason for participants to wear *hijab*. As Abu-Ali states above, through years the concept of *hijab* as part of religious practice has changed and become a custom, where women commit to wearing it as a part of their routine. Fatimah (female, 35 years old) agreed with Abu-Ali, and she said:

Before it is a religious act and commitment, when I feel that wearing *hijab* is a habit for me to the extent that I think that I would never take it off one day, because I have become accustomed to it, and then comes to religion, so I need to reach the level that religion comes first.

Fatimah wished she wore the *hijab* for religious reasons but confessed that her main reason for wearing is that it has become a habit for her that she cannot give up. When I asked her how high the chances were that she would give it up, she answered:

There is fear, but I do not know whom I should fear to take off my *hijab*.. is it the people? This is a constant question in my soul, why should I do such and such? But I do not know from where comes the voice. This voice comes and forces me not to make this mistake.

I assume Fatimah's fear of not wearing the *hijab* did not come from concern about opposing Islamic doctrine but rather that the idea of stopping a habit she had practised for more than 20 years seemed difficult. The *hijab* is a custom for women who commit to wearing it in Saudi Arabia but do not wear it outside the country. As Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) states custom comes before religion in terms of *hijab* in Saudi society. He states: 'The religion comes first, then the customs. But, in our society, custom precedes, ...many girls have not the idea that *hijab* is obligatory from a religious perspective'. He believes many Saudi women begin to veil upon dictates from their parents and then comes this idea of veiling out of a religious perspective.

Another reason for wearing a *hijab* is to gain respect. Committing women to wear the traditional form of the *hijab* helps them to gain respect from their community. Haifa (female, 51 years old), for example, was not wearing the acceptable *hijab*, as she did not cover her face, and when she decided to do so, she noticed differences in the level of respect she received:

No one forced me to wear *hijab*, because my husband is open-minded, and if I went out half-naked, he would not object. But I reached the conviction that I must veil because I feel comfortable in it. When I am veiled, men have less contact with me, so the full-covered woman has more respect and prestige, especially if she becomes sober and serious.

Haifa referred to the respect she gained from men by committing to wearing the acceptable *hijab*; however, she also noticed that a woman would gain men's respect if she behaved appropriately.

Increasing the rank of a woman and earning admiration in her surrounding was a further reason for women to wear *hijab*. Kharia (female, 46 years old), covers her whole body, including her eyes, hands and feet as a way of raising her social acceptance. She stated: 'I feel that it gives me prestige among my community which we all live in, a religious community, my friends and neighbours, it gives me prestige and raises my position'. Kharia pointed out that she lives in religious surroundings, and she believed that by covering herself more would put her in a better position in society. She believes the more she commits to her *hijab* and raises her daughters to it, the more Allah raises her position and vice versa. She adds that she does not have respect for those women who used to wear good *hijab* and decent clothes, then they wear unacceptable *hijab* and indecent clothes.

Moreover, avoiding embarrassing a woman's family and protecting her image is another reason for wearing a *hijab*. Two women over 50 years of age were motivated to wear the *hijab* to avoid their families' embarrassment. Amnah (female, 52 years old) admitted that she did not wear the *hijab* for religious reasons, but rather, to express respect to her family: 'I think it is not an act of worship, it is rather an act of respect to my family and my brothers. I will dishonour my family and children if I unveil'. Similarly, Haifa (female, 51 years old) continued wearing her *hijab*, even though she did not want to, to avoid bothering her mother, who has strong opinions regarding *hijab*, as well as to keep from embarrassing her sons:

Honestly, I do not want to cover my face because it is annoying to me. Although, I veil because I do not want to embarrass my sons and my mother, and I say that, Allah willing, she is not mad at me.

For this reason, Haifa does not force her daughter to be covered, but what matters for her is that the hair must never be unveiled. She wants her daughter to wear *hijab* based on religious reasons not because of fear from anyone including her.

Enhancing their level of self-confidence was another reason the women reported for wearing the *hijab*. Two female participants justified their wearing of the *hijab* in that it helped them to feel confident and deal with men freely, without shyness. Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) reflected on her real reason for wearing the *hijab* as follows:

I get shy when I talk with men although I am covered. It is impossible to look at someone's eyes, praise be to Allah that I am veiled so that I can speak with people, as if I am unveiled, my modesty will prevent me from speaking. If I am in a mixed meeting, I can laugh without being noticed, and that is how *hijab* makes me comfortable in mixed meetings.

Here, Um-Naby reflected that *hijab* is her tool for hiding her feelings, such as shyness when she talks to men or fear in some situations that provoke such feelings. She explains that *hijab* helps her during personal interviews in hiding her fear, thus she states, 'If I am revealing, they will not accept me because fear appears on my face'.

Al-Kateeb's (2013) results are somewhat confirmed by the findings here. The majority of participants men and women indicated religious reasons for wearing *hijab*, describing it as a kind of worship that women practise to express their love and surrender their beauty to earn Allah's approval and protect themselves from sinning (Khan, 2009; Ruby, 2006). However, several participants men and women did not

accept the idea of religiosity behind wearing *hijab*, with these women saying they consider *hijab* to be a cultural or social custom in Saudi Arabia. Many Saudi women who practise *hijab* do so not based on religious or ideological thought; rather, they represent a type of conformity with social convention that considers a visible woman to be shameful (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). It can be argued that at the beginning of the *Sahwa* movement, there ensued a wave of religious discourse calling for women to wear *hijab* and cover themselves. Thus, women at that time might wear *hijab* for religious reasons or because they are affected by the cultural discourse. It has been over 30 years since the emergence of the *Sahwa* movement, and the generation that grew up surrounded by women wearing the same pattern of *hijab* has largely adopted the belief that wearing *hijab* is not necessarily religious but is instead a societal obligation. This can be seen through Saudi women who give up wearing *hijab* as soon as they leave the state, wearing it again only when they return.

Women gave other reasons for wearing the *hijab* besides religion or habit, including as a way of gaining respect, increasing social status and avoiding embarrassment for their family. These reasons may reflect the pressure that the *eyb*, or shame culture, subjects women to which, can be a motivator than religion (Ahmed and Roche, 2018; Arar and Shapira, 2016; Fayyaz and Kamal, 2017; Majeed, 2016; Mizel, 2020; Ratiba, 2008; Tariq-Munir, 2014). The *eyb* culture is used to encourage or even force women to adhere to the traditional *hijab* and its associated values (Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). Two women from Abha City said they wear the *hijab* to give them a sense of confidence and reduce their shyness in talking to men. This is probably related to the long-term sex segregation that women have experienced in Saudi Arabia in various institutions, including the imposition of the *hijab* on women, which is considered a continuation of sex segregation in the public sphere. Because of these factors, women have become shy in their dealings with men and may even be hesitant to look them in the eye. This is especially true in Abah City, where the local culture still prohibits contact between women and men in public.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The central aim of this chapter was to clarify how Saudis perceive and understand the concept of the *hijab*. The chapter showed that the majority of participants, regardless of their gender, education, age, location, travel experience, or marital status,

believe that the purpose of the *hijab* is to hide a woman's identity and to cover the whole body. This was clear in the terms *hajib*, *setr* and *ekfa*, all of which refer to covering women, including their faces. Most of the participants believe that women's faces must be covered because they are the source of their beauty. Depending on their demographic characteristics, the participants view the *hijab* and modest behaviour in different ways. Some of them look at it as an ethical belief, while others consider it a piece of clothing. Some see it as both an ethical belief and a piece of clothing. This chapter also showed that the concept of *hijab* relates to women's voices. While the participants rejected the idea of hiding women's voices completely, they said that women should speak without softening their voices.

This chapter attempted to capture the participants' views regarding the purpose of imposing the *hijab* on women. Regardless of their demographic differences, the majority of the participants indicated that a woman's being *fitnah* is the main reason for this compulsion. Women's beauty and strong influence over men through their voice and behaviour make them a source of male temptation. Seven of the women offered another reason for imposing the *hijab* on women: men have stronger sexual desire than women, which is evident in the fact that men look at women whether or not they are wearing the *hijab*. In their views, men are weak when it comes to resisting their desire for women; thus, the *hijab* is imposed on women rather than on men. Moreover, the participants justified the imposition of the *hijab* on women based on traditional gender roles; the role of a man is outside the home, while that of a woman is inside it. Imposing the *hijab* on a man would be an obstacle for him in his work outside the home, whereas imposing the *hijab* on a woman does not conflict with her soft, easy work inside.

This chapter has shown that the participants believe that the *hijab* is beneficial for women, men and society. The participants indicated that wearing the *hijab* benefits women by allowing them to please Allah and avoid falling into sin. It provides women with a sense of security, self-confidence and better social status in society. The *hijab* plays a role in protecting a woman from various illnesses, such as COVID-19, as well as sunlight and dust. It also provides protection against gossiping, contempt as well as sexual harassment. For employed women, the *hijab* allows women to avoid time spent choosing appropriate clothes, doing their hair or putting on makeup. Moreover, this chapter highlighted the view of the participants with regard to the benefits of the *hijab*

for men, as it protects men from sinning by looking at women, helps them to lower their gaze and allows them to avoid their sexual desire. When women wear the *hijab*, men cannot see any part of them, and thus their sexual desire is restrained. Several female participants stated that the *hijab* protects men's *sharaf* in that their female family members are not touchable by other men, and this is a source of pride and dignity for men. The society also benefits from women wearing the *hijab*. The married female participants indicated that the *hijab* provides protection for the family by maintaining and preserving marriage and preventing divorce. The majority of the participants stated their belief in the role of the *hijab* in protecting society from social ailments, such as rape, illegal sexual relationships and illegitimate children. They also believe that wearing the *hijab* plays an essential role in maintaining the image of Saudi Arabia as the heart of the Islamic world. The *hijab* is an aspect of Saudi Arabia's religious identity as a society, and women's commitment to wearing it helps to maintain this identity.

Finally, the chapter showed that the participants understood the reasons motivating women to wear the *hijab*. The majority of men and women shared their belief that religion was the major reason for women to wear the *hijab*. Gaining Allah's satisfaction and entering heaven are the main goals for women in committing to wear the *hijab*. The second reason for wearing the *hijab* is that it is a habit and part of women's lives that they have practised for many years. Several women also said that the *hijab* allowed women to hide their feelings, such as shyness and fear, gain respect, conform to family expectations and avoid causing embarrassment to their families.

The findings in this chapter answer the question of how Saudis understand the concept of the *hijab*, including its purposes, reasons and benefits. The next chapter examines in more detail social collectivist norms of wearing the *hijab* in Saudi culture and the influence of challenging these norms.

## Chapter 6. *Hijab* norms and collectivist culture

### 6.1 Introduction

Given the nature of Saudi Arabia as a collectivist society and its shame-honour culture, studying the *hijab* with consideration of how collectivist values impact the meaning of the *hijab* and discourage individualised values in regard to women's attire is crucial. This aspect of the *hijab* has been neglected in previous research on the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, which obscures a comprehensive understanding of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 2). This chapter intends to fill this gap by analysing the various styles of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia and the differences among them in modesty, religiosity and the meaning and values attached to these forms. It shows how easy it is to change the *hijab*'s styles and investigates the impact of changing the *hijab* norms on men's and women's reputations and how they are judged.

This chapter explores three types of *hijab* that were worn by the female participants: the *Sahwa hijab*, the current generation's *hijab* and the next generation's *hijab*. It discusses why the current generation's *hijab* was the most popular style of *hijab* among the female participants and explains their justifications for this selection. It explains why all participants, regardless of their diversity, believe the *abaya* is the ideal Islamic clothing for Muslim women compared to other options, and why the massive majority of participants of different ages, locations, education levels, and so on reject the idea that the *hijab* should be in another colour rather than black. The chapter also expresses the agreement among all participants about the difficulties in changing *hijab* norms, which is considered a conflict of religious and traditional values. It includes an explanation of the multiple external and internal reasons for the emergence of the phrase 'inside and outside *hijab*'. It explores the theory behind looking at uncovered and covered women and how all participants used the *hijab* to judge women's religiosity and morality. It also demonstrates the use of the *hijab* by all participants to judge men's religiosity and masculinity, and how women's and men's reputations can be enhanced or ruined based on women's *hijabs*.

At the outset, I discuss the different forms of covering among Saudi women and meanings of these styles of *hijab*. I explain the differences that Saudis see between *abaya* and clothes of other Muslim women and the differences between the black colour and other colours of Muslim women's clothes. I then analyse the disapproval of

the Saudi style of *hijab*, which is *abaya* and *niqab*, among men and women. The challenges Saudis face concerning changing the pattern of the *hijab* and the terms of *inside and outside hijab* are also discussed in this chapter. The analogy between a woman as a piece of candy and the *hijab* as the candy wrapper and the repercussions of this perception, i.e., how the *hijab* can be used as a tool to judge women and their guardians and the aspects that make these judgments unfair, the impact of the style of the *hijab* on Saudi men's and women's reputation and the social pressure over Saudis, which is linked to a woman's *hijab*, are also discussed in this chapter.

## 6.2 It is not simply one form or level of covering

The *hijab* style of Saudi women is varied. A black *Abaya* and *niqab* are often considered Saudi's *hijab*, but there is more to it than that. I interviewed twenty-three women who all wore black *Abaya*, and all of them except one participant covered their faces with different types of coverage. Despite that, there are different levels of coverage and shapes in wearing an *abaya* and covering the face, some of which are more modest than others. Female participants' *hijab* can be categorised into three types, as I explain here.

Out of the twenty-three women I interviewed, five from different ages, locations



**Figure 7. Head abaya and arak wla trany niqab.**

and levels of education..etc, wore the most modest type of *hijab*. Four women wore head *abaya*, short *tarrha* or *Shilah*, *arak wla trany niqab* and socks (see figure 7). The head *abaya* is what women consider an Islamic modest dress that must be worn. Head *abaya* starts from over the head and covers the whole body of women except the feet, which is why they wear socks to cover it. Short *tarrha*, or *Shilah*, refers to a headscarf that covers a woman's upper chest, neck, and shoulders. They also wore *arak wla trany niqab*, which roughly translates to 'I can see you and you cannot see me'. It covers women's faces except for a small and tight space around the

eyes for them to see. Their hands are exposed as they cover them with *abaya* sleeves except for one woman from Abha city who wore gloves to cover her hands (see figure 8). One woman who was also from Abha added some details to her *hijab*, which made it a more modest one than those of the other four women, which included the *khimar* and *kata*. This type of *hijab* includes a shoulder *abaya* and short *tarrha* and *khimar*, which starts from overhead and goes down below the knees. *Kata* refers to covering the whole face, including eyes, which differs from *niqab*, which allows a woman to see through a slit



**Figure 8 Head abaya and arak wla trany niqab and gloves.**

for the eyes. She covers her hands with gloves and feet with socks (see figure 9). Despite these types of *hijabs* reflecting different levels of modesty, they also reflect the idea that a woman's body is *awra* and should be entirely covered, including the eyes,



**Figure 9 Khimar and kata.**

hands, and feet. This type of *hijab* was considered to be the second most popular type among women in this research. It can be referred to as the 'Sahwa hijab', as it was the most popular and acceptable *hijab* during the *Sahwa* era.

Seventeen women participants wore modern type of *hijab* than the *Sahwa hijab*. Out of the seventeen women, eleven wore shoulder *abaya*, a short 'Tarrha' and 'opened niqab'. Shoulder *abaya* is a type of *abaya* that starts from the shoulder and conceals the whole body except the hands and feet. They also wore a short headscarf and opened *niqab*, which refers to a *niqab* that

exposes the eyes of women totally (see figure 10). However, six of them wore a type of *hijab* that is considered more modest, as it covers more parts of the women's bodies. The *abaya* starts from the shoulder, as with the previous shape, but replaces the short *tarrha* with a long one and opens the *niqab* with an *arak wla trany niqab*. The long *tarrha* is a wide scarf that covers the chests and backs of women. The *arak wla trany niqab* allows a woman to see, but others cannot see her eyes clearly (see figure 11). These types of *hijabs* were the most popular among the female participants. However, the head *abaya* has been replaced with a shoulder *abaya*, and full coverage of the face and hands has been replaced with partial coverage. Thus, I would consider this form of *hijab* the '*hijab* of the current generation of Saudi women'.



**Figure 10** *Shoulder abaya and opened niqab.*

One female participant, the youngest participant in this research, wore a shoulder *abaya* and short *tarrha* without covering her face, which is a less modest *hijab* compared to the previously mentioned versions (see figure 12). This *hijab* has appeared in Saudi society, especially among young women and teenagers in big cities. It is not as popular among Saudi women today, but it is anticipated to be more popular among the next generation. Thus, I can call this type of *hijab* the '*hijab* of the next generation'.



**Figure 11** *Shoulder abaya, long tarrha and arak wla trany niqab.*

All these aforementioned types of *hijabs* reflect different times in Saudi society. The *Sahwa hijab* mirrored the *hijab* of the previous generation when the *Sahwa* era was in its climax. However, this shape of the *hijab*

imposes difficulty on women due to its uncomfortable style. It limits a woman's sight and movement, her sense of touch, and her ability to feel things using her hands. Kharia (female, 46 years old), for example, is one of the participants who believes all of a woman's body is *awra* from the head to toes. She used to wear a head *abaya*, gloves, and *kata* to cover her whole face. However, she complained that she does not feel comfortable wearing the head *abaya*, especially since she was carrying her baby girl with a bag. This made it difficult for her to manage to balance everything she was carrying while she wore the head *abaya*. What



**Figure 12** *Shoulder abaya, short tarrha without face covered.*

also made it super difficult for her is having a severe visual impairment because a *niqab* was forbidden for women to wear. She would often stumble as she could not see her path, because of a wide, heavy fabric of head *abaya* blocking her vision. Today, Kharia still shares the same opinion that the entire body is *awra*, but she decided to replace the shape of her *hijab*. She replaced the head *abaya* with a shoulder *abaya*, but as she does not believe that such *abaya* is modest enough, she decided to wear a *khimar* over the *abaya*, which makes her life easier than before, as she stated.

The *Sahwa hijab* prevents a woman from enjoying her life. The participants felt it is a kind of torture as its shape does not allow a woman to breathe, see, or move. The *Sahwa hijab* is not considered for those women as an Islamic *hijab* as Allah is more merciful to women than imposing this full coverage. Amnah (female, 52 years old) was one of the participants who rejected a *Sahwa hijab* as she responded with anger:

I will never wear it. I feel like sentencing myself to prison. It is a prison. I cannot wear it and I do not consider it a *hijab* ..... It is surely a *hijab*, but you see it is like a religious man who prays, fasts and worships Allah, but he keeps himself and his wife and children at home without a TV or computer. This *hijab* is like this man.

Amnah likened the *Sahwa hijab* to a prison where a woman was trapped inside it and that prevented her from getting freedom. She compares wearing it as a person who practises worship and prevents his family from enjoying their lives by locking them in

a house and forbidding television and computer. Wearing a *Sahwa hijab* for Amnah means committing worship and seeking Allah's approval by preventing her from enjoying life.

For these reasons, with the beginning of the weakening of *Sahwa* discourse, women started to change the *Sahwa hijab* into a more modest version that eased the issues that women faced with the previous one. The current generation's *hijab* is regarded as a more fashionable and modern form compared to the previous one. Hanan (female, 30 years old), for example, believed that *Sahwa hijab* today is not acceptable and considered as backwards, and any woman wearing it will be seen as strange and incite questions from onlookers. 'It is weird, is this kind of person still existing? Are there people like this? Why? We are shocked by this kind of people, got it?'. Her response reflects the rarity of the existence of *Sahwa hijab* these days. The flexibility that the current generation's *hijab* gives women has eased its spread among Saudi women and raised awareness of the rejection of the *Sahwa hijab* which has become seen as backwards. However, there is another reason that encouraged the rejection of the *Sahwa hijab*, which is its association with fundamentalism. Um-Abdullah (female, 51 years old), emphasised that during the *Sahwa* era, her entire body was covered, including her eyes, hands, and feet, but she change her old *hijab* with the current generation's *hijab*. She rejected wearing *Sahwa hijab* again, she states '...no one wears the *full cover hijab* these days, except the fundamentalist religious..'. By wearing *Sahwa hijab*, Um-Abdullah fears of being suspicious, as such a *hijab* is linked in people's minds to terrorists and extremism, which are stigmas that she wants to avoid.

The participants expressed that the *Sahwa hijab* is not suitable for the role of women today. The *Sahwa* movement restricted the role of women inside their houses and women were forbidden to work outside their homes, except in a few jobs. They were not allowed to be around members of the opposite sex, as women teachers taught in an exclusive girls' school. Today, Saudi women occupy many jobs and reach many spheres, such as hospitals, sales, companies, etc. This makes wearing the *Sahwa hijab* unsuitable for these roles. Hanan (female, 30 years old), for example, has a job that requires lots of effort and movement. She had been wearing a head *abaya*, which she describes as a slippery fabric over her head, which would always fall over her shoulder while she walks. This imposed difficulties while she worked; thus, she

decided to change her *abaya* to a wide shoulder *abaya* and wide *tarrha* to cover her shoulder, back, and chest. Muhammed (male, 41 years old) agrees with this argument and believes the *Sahwa hijab* limits women from doing their jobs freely and comfortably. He asserts:

.....What hinders her from performing her duties is the full coverage of eyes and hands, particularly gloves. I saw a cashier in a store who was wearing a strict *hijab* and leaving her index finger and thumb out of the glove in order to hold papers, count money, take money from customers and hold the bag. So, I see that this strict *hijab* affected her performance at work.

Muhammed suggests that wearing wide head *abaya*, covering the eyes and hands imposes more difficulties on women in dealing with customers in shops. He believes that the *hijab* of moderation that allows women to show their hands and eyes does not prevent women from doing their work except in the medical domain where a woman cannot wear *abaya*, as they have special uniforms to help them work more freely.

However, despite all the negativity associated with the *Sahwa hijab*, the aspects of which do not exist in any way in the current generation's *hijab*, there is some doubt that the current generation's *hijab* fully complies with the Islamic doctrine of the *hijab*. All the women who wore the current generation's *hijab* believed that their style of *hijab* is not an ideal Islamic version for women to wear. They verified that their *hijab* was not the ideal and perfect shape. They wished they had the power to wear *Sahwa hijab* but could not do so due to its various negative associations. They believe the current generation's *hijab* is a satisfying *hijab* for women to wear, but *Sahwa hijab* is the ideal Islamic *hijab*. They believe the eyes, hands, and feet of women are best to be covered. Hanan (female, 30 years old), for example, confirmed that a woman wearing such *hijab* would be a rare sight and would definitely surprise people, as I explained above. However, she confirms that she envies a woman who wears such *hijab*, she explains:

But as many people say that she is weird, there are many who do not. At my work, when I see a fully covered woman, I say: Good for her- may Allah protect her- how could she bear it in front of the society....may Allah guide me to wear it like her before I die, got it? I mean that there is sympathy with this *hijab*; as it is decent and black.

Here Hanan highlights that she envies a woman who has the power to wear such a *hijab* during the scarcity of its existence. The *Sahwa hijab* is believed to be the

accurate shape of the *hijab* that Allah asks women to wear; thus, some women wish to have the power to wear it before death.

Through this theme, I consider the various shapes of the female participants' *hijabs*, which can be classified into three groups: the *Sahwa hijab*, the current generation's *hijab*, and the new generation's *hijab*. Each type of *hijab* expresses some level of modesty and coverage, and some are more modest than others. These various shapes of the *hijab* reflect the social evolution of Saudi society, including religiopolitical changes. Specifically, the *Sahwa hijab* reflects the time when the *Sahwa* movement had overtaken the social scene in Saudi society. The *hijab* form was appropriate for the role of women at that time as wives and mothers, and the view that they should exist in public space only for necessary matters. With time, the *Sahwa* discourse started to weaken, and society started to open to the external world. This led to the rise of a new shape of *hijab* that was more modern and fashionable than the previous one. Despite religious resistance to the new version of the *hijab*, the current generation of *hijabs* has spread in popularity among Saudi women (Le Renard, 2014). However, the findings also showed a rise in the new shape of the *hijab*, which reflects the new image of the *hijab* among the most recent generation of women.

As in Al-Kateeb's study (2013), most women of different ages, levels of education, locations, and so on replaced the *Sahwa hijab* with the current generation's *hijab*. They reject the *Sahwa hijab* style and confirm that it has become rare these days. Participants were not hesitant to discuss their negative views of the *Sahwa hijab*. The *Sahwa hijab* has become a symbol of backward extremism in society. The *Sahwa hijab* came in one shape and fabric, without decorations or qualities that differed between women. The *Sahwa* era was an example of extremism and religious fundamentalism that dominated Saudi society. The wearing of a *Sahwa hijab* was seen to be one of the extremist aspects that *Sahwa* leaders used to impose on women's lives. This shape of the *hijab* became a symbol of that era and a sign of extremism and religious fundamentalism. It was also linked in Saudi thought to a number of terrorist attacks when terrorists wore *Sahwa hijab* to hide their identities (Body-Gendrot, 2007; Hopkins and Greenwood, 2013; Marshall, 2008).

Such a *hijab* was a tool of the *Sahwa* movement to isolate women from their lives and world. They restricted women's roles in their houses, serving husbands and raising children. The *Sahwa hijab* was created to suit these roles, which do not apply to

women these days, especially after the announcement of the Saudi vision, which will be explained later in this thesis. The comfort and free movement that the current generation of *hijab* allows for women makes it the evolution of the *Sahwa hijab* for women today. A poorly shaped fabric of *Sahwa hijab* can be uncomfortable, which makes it difficult to move, snags and easily shows dirt; this leads women to find flexible designs that meet their demands and satisfy society's requirements (DeCoursey, 2017).

### **6.3 *Abaya* vs. other types of the *hijab***

A different style of *hijab* can be seen among Muslims outside Saudi Arabia, which differs from the shape of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. These styles of *hijab* include a scarf, trousers, long blouses, skirts and long jackets. All participants, including men and women, rejected these styles as a type of *hijab*. They believe that wearing these types of clothes is a form of exposing women's adornment, as these clothes resemble adornment themselves. We gave the participants some pictures of different forms of *hijab* among Muslim women outside and inside Saudi Arabia and asked them to give their opinion about it (see figure 13)<sup>7</sup>. Some of them answered as follows:

This is not a *hijab*, it is a skirt and a blouse, but among foreigners, it is a *hijab*. I see it as adornment as it is a skirt, a blouse and a jacket, but she only covered her hair... (Kharia, female, 46 years old).

I do not wear this as it is revealing. For me, it is not a *hijab* because it is a coat, trousers and hair covering. For me, *hijab* is a complete covering for the face and body that does not describe body parts (Nawal, female, 45 years old).

I do not like this, and I do not see it as a *hijab*. This is a jacket, not a *hijab*, and I do not allow my wife to wear it internally or externally because I do not see it as *hijab*, it is a jacket (Abu-Sarah, male, 32 years old).

What the research participants drew through their comments is that *Abaya* and covering the face is the only acceptable shape of the *hijab*. Wearing women for jackets, trousers and skirts, even if they are committed to Islamic principles of *hijab*, is

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/DeejKayy/fancy-hijabi>.

regarded as a violation of the image of *hijab* in Saudi minds. This can be explained as *abaya* is outerwear and normally women wear trousers, skirts and long blouse under it.

The participants rejected to consider A different style of *hijab* worn by Muslim women outside Saudi Arabia as a type of *hijab* but they consider it as a kind of modesty. This is particularly apparent in Safyh's (female, 41 years old) account of the shape of the *hijab* of Muslim women:

This is not for sure. She is covered not wearing a *hijab* ....as she is wearing trousers and a waistband... I do not, even in the future, for example, wear clothing like that. Yes, the woman who wears a coat and jacket is a covered woman, but she is not wearing a *hijab*. The *hijab* is what we wear.

Here, Safyh denied considering any clothes of Muslim women except the *abaya* as Islamic dress or *hijab*. They agree that the *abaya* reflects the meaning of *hijab* in Islam and other kinds of clothes as modesty or just a kind of covering women's bodies. Wearing different forms of the *hijab* rather than the *abaya* turns out to be *fitnah* and a source of temptation, rather than veiling women's charm within society. 'In my society, it is a sin', stated Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) about the various types of *hijabs* outside Saudi society. He suggests that various shapes of Muslim women's *hijab* are considered a *hijab* in other societies, but not in Saudi. He expresses his dissatisfaction with such *hijab*, as they are considered sins in Saudi society. He justified his argument by saying any shape of the *hijab* except the *abaya* grabs the attention of people, which contradicts the idea of the *hijab* distracting people from looking at women.



**Figure 13** Some pictures of different types of hijab among Muslim women were given to the participants.

The participants provided some justification for the spread of different shapes of *hijabs* outside Saudi Arabia. They believed the colonisation of Muslim countries affected the purity of Islamic principles. Various shapes of *hijab* among Islamic countries do not reflect the Islamic doctrine of *hijab* but reflect colonialism liberal values and calling for liberating women from the *hijab*. Abu-Ahmad (male, 58 years old), a participant in the study, highlighted the consideration of various shapes of the *hijab*, not the *hijab*:

This is a normal covering..... For us, it can only be worn at home not outside as we have grown up on the Holy Quran verses, which are attached to our minds. However, we see it in some countries, and it is considered *hijab*. Saudi women do not wear these clothes as here receiving the Holy Quran verses is pure, but many countries have been affected by colonialism.

Abu-Ahmad agreed that the *abaya* is the acceptable *hijab* in Saudi Arabia due to the purity of Islamic texts and the authentic interpretation of these texts. He confirms the existence of various styles of *hijab* among Muslim countries as an influence of Western colonialism on Muslim countries where the prophet's (PBUH) *Hadith* being classified as weak becomes authentic in these countries and interpretation of Islamic texts is impacted by the attitude of colonists.

*Abaya* is considered the main part of *hijab* that is worn by women in Saudi society. All women participants wear *abaya*, and all participants men and women believe that the *hijab* cannot be completed without an *abaya*. Religiously, they believed the *abaya* is the exact *hijab* that Islam refers to as it covers all women's charms. A woman's body in *abaya* cannot be recognised, as no one knows if she was fat or thin. This cannot be found in any type of *hijab*, which makes women's bodies obvious. Given that the *abaya* suits all the conditions that exist in wearing the *hijab*. Culturally, the participants believed the *abaya* is a part of the customs in Saudi society. Saudi women have been wearing it for a long time and people are used to seeing women wearing *abaya* in the public sphere which makes it the acceptable form of *hijab* in society.

Furthermore, all participants showed extreme sensitivities towards any changes in *abaya* that they used to know. An acceptable *abaya* must be made without extra

colour, decoration, tightness, buckles, buttons, and embroidery (see figure 14)<sup>8</sup>. They believe that if an *abaya* contains such things, it cannot be regarded as a *hijab* and it is considered deviating from norms existing in society. Any small changes to the image of *abaya* as plain, black and loose are regarded as a violation of the *hijab* norms. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) shows no admiration for *abaya* that is tight, decorated and has buttons and buckles. ‘I do not like its colours, tightness, shape, buttons, and pockets as they call the attention of people. I do not accept that my wife wears it’. He justified his opinion that such *abaya* grabs people’s attention and expresses a woman’s beauty, which conflicts with the conditions of the *hijab* in Islam. Sumiah (female, 21 years old) agrees with Abu-Mohsen’s argument and regards wearing *abaya* with belt as violating the rules of *hijab* that state that a *hijab* must be loose and does not disclose the shape of a woman’s body.



**Figure 14. Stylish and trendy black abaya.**

Despite the above mentioned, Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old), emphasised the importance of accepting diversity in styles of *hijab*:

Personally, regarding my wife, I do not accept any changes. However, now it is common in society... it is an updated and acceptable form to attract girls as *hijab* experiences a great struggle, and if we cannot accept different types of *hijab*, we may lose it.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://johrh.com>.

Here Abu-Abdulaziz asserts that the *hijab* witnesses great conflict of being or not. He explains that modern types of *hijab* inside and outside Saudi society were created to adapt to the ongoing debate young girls have about wearing a *hijab* in this current generation while trying to enjoy life. He says that rejecting modern styles of *hijab* will only lead to young Muslim girls resenting the *hijab* even more and may refuse to wear it altogether.

Like DeCoursey's (2017) study, the participants in the recent study showed no negative attitudes or feelings toward the *abaya*, as it includes all Islamic requirements in the *hijab*. Also, Saudi women grew up being surrounded by women who all wear *abaya*, and so they continue to wear the *abaya* themselves for years. As they see more and more women in society, the habit of wearing an *abaya* has already become part of everyday life, and they even view the practice as part of their identity. This contradicts a number of studies (e.g., Sobh et al., 2010; Sloan, 2011) as Saudi women wear the *abaya* to conform to customs and traditions, not for legal requirements as they suggested. As discussed in this theme, there is a rejection of all participants men and women of different, ages, locations, levels of education.. etc, for all types of women's clothes except *abaya*. Women wearing jackets, trousers and skirts would violate the social norms of wearing *hijab* in Saudi Arabia as they conflict with its shape and colour. The participants emphasised that wearing such shapes can be regarded as a sin, as it causes *fitnah* and grabs people's attention just as if they were not wearing a *hijab*, which conflicts with the rule of *hijab* that it should not grab the attention of its onlookers. This proves that the meanings of various forms of the *hijab* known among Muslim women outside Saudi Arabia are different in Saudi Arabia. This point is supported by Davis (2013).

As discussed above, the participants justified the rejection of various shapes of Muslim women's *hijab*, as all Muslim countries were colonised by Western countries, which impacted all aspects of Muslim life. One of these aspects was the *hijab's* values and principles, which produced various new shapes of *hijab*. This contradicts Saudi Arabia, which has never been colonised by Western countries and keeps the principles of the *hijab* pure and safe from any corruption; this used to be one of the justifications used by *Sahwa* figures to convince Saudis of all major changes in social life, including women's appearance. However, the participants also show the importance of Saudis accepting the existence of different shapes of the *hijab* among women, considering the

rapid social changes in society. This can be considered a real threat to the existence of the *hijab* in Saudi society, which in turn can be considered a danger to the identity of Saudi Arabia as an Islamic country (Marifatullah, 2018).

As explained above, the *Sahwa hijab* has evolved to become a shoulder *abaya* instead of a head. However, the evaluation of the Saudi *hijab* has not stopped, as several changes have appeared on the shoulder *abaya*; it has gone from being a wide, plain garment that hides the beauty of women to expressing it (Sobh et al., 2010). Today, there are different designs, shapes, styles, fabrics and colours of *abaya* in response to the impact of globalisation and the Western lifestyle. Social media and travelling overseas for tourism and studying have caused this influence (Lindholm, 2010; Shimek, 2012). The current theme shows the sensitivity and rejection of Saudis towards any changes in the pattern of the *abaya*. Extra colour, decorations, tightness, buckles, buttons and embroidery are sins committed against the traditional pattern of *abaya* that distorts the goal of the *hijab*. Such an *abaya* is regarded as a violation of Saudi culture, as the *abaya* is a crucial part of such a culture. Such sensitivity might express the fear of Saudis of losing the black plain *abaya* that was formerly used, especially by all participants who lived during the *Sahwa* era, and which set the principles and rules of Saudi women's *abaya* and Islamic *hijab*. The *abaya* should cover a woman's body from the head until the toes with black plain wide fabric. Any modification of this shape of the *abaya*, even if it meets the principles of the *hijab* in Islam, faces religious resistance and is considered a success for Westerners in Westernising the society (Al-Badah, 2010; Al-Khunaizi, 2012).

#### **6.4 The black colour vs. other colours**

The black colour has been a popular colour for women's *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. As noted in Chapter 2, Islam does not require any specific colour for a woman's *hijab* but gives her the freedom to wear whichever colour she prefers and desires. All female participants are wearers of black *hijab*, two of them have different coloured *hijab* which they wear on special occasions, such as weddings. The majority of participants, including men and women, expressed their rejection of the *hijab* being in colours other than black. The *hijab* must be in black and any colour other than black will not be considered a *hijab*. Kharia (female, 46 years old) is a black *hijab* wearer; she confirmed that she cannot change the colour of her *hijab*. She believes all *abayas* that

appear later in various colours are not *hijab*. She thought the black colour reflects the darkness of night, which reflects calm and obscurity, which makes it suitable for being *hijab's* colour. She admits that she cannot change the black *hijab* since it has been the colour of *hijab* she grew up with and that other colours of *hijab* have only risen as an influence of the western world on Saudi society.

The participants felt that black is the best colour that provides perfect coverage for a woman's body, as it does not divulge the body parts of a woman while she moves or walks. They concur that wearing *hijab* in other colours causes *fitnah* and tempts men. Fatimah (female, 35 years old) thought the black *hijab* was the authentic *hijab*, though she tried changing the colours of her *abaya*, she always returned to choosing a black colour for her *hijab*. She asserts:

I like colours and I love them to death but in the end, I return to wear in black, because it is our *hijab* and modest, but other colours are *fitnah* and people stare at a woman in a different colour and recognise her among other women.

Fatimah avoids wearing the *abaya* in different colours as she does not want to stand out among other women who wear their *abaya* in black, as wearing a different colour would easily catch others' attention and cause *fitnah*.

Five of the women who have differentiated in age, location etc., believed wearing black *hijab* was taking the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a role model and following his guidance. They believe this colour is what the prophet's (PBUH) wives and daughters wear. They justified wearing such colour by evidence from narrated Umm Salamah, the prophet's (PBUH) wife: 'When the verse "That they should cast their outer garments over their persons" was revealed, the women of Ansar came out as if they had crows over their heads by wearing outer garments' (Abi Dawud, 2008: 4090). Haya (female, 48 years old) is one of these women who believe this *Hadith* is evidence that a woman's *hijab* must be in black. She emphasised that if all Saudi women changed the black colour of the *hijab*, she would have never changed it, as she explained:

..... Regarding black colour inside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, even if all women and girls in the Kingdom do not wear it, I will never change it as it is the *hijab* of our mother Aisha [the Prophet's (PBUH) wife] and Fatimah [the Prophet's (PBUH) daughter] and the colour of their *hijab* was black as Umm Salamah may Allah be Pleased with her described it

as black ravens. There is no raven with white colour except when it is little, after that it turns into black when it gets older.

Haya considers wearing a *hijab* in black as following the path of the prophet's (PBUH) wives, daughters and companions.

Ten participants, including eight women and two men, rejected the view that black is a requirement for the Islamic *hijab*. They believed there is no privileged position for the black colour in Islam, and there is no Islamic text that obliges women to wear a *hijab* in black. They believe the black *hijab* has become a part of the customs and habits that used to practise since they started wearing the *hijab*. They explained that women grew up with the idea that the *hijab* is black, and it is the only colour the *hijab* must be. They grow up while they are surrounded by women in black *hijab*; thus, they wear it without consciously thinking about wearing a different colour. 'I do not know...I feel black is the king of colours, I feel if I wore a different colour, I would not feel like *hijab*... I believe my *hijab* must be in black, but I do not know why!'. Amnah ( 52 years old female) feels the *hijab* in black is the authentic colour of the *hijab*, and wearing a different colour prevents her from feeling *hijab*. However, Amnah was uncertain as to why she preferred to wear a black-coloured *hijab*, which could be explained by her being used to wearing black since she started wearing a *hijab*, and it became a habit for her.

Nevertheless, the black colour became one of the rules for wearing a *hijab* in Saudi society. Women who failed to follow these rules would bring criticism to a woman. This has been explained by Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) who believed that there is a social negative perception of a woman who does not commit to wearing black. She emphasised that Saudi society used to see a woman in black and if this blackness had changed even very slightly, it would be viewed as an anomaly. This is confirmed as she shares sitting with some women gossiping and talking badly about some girls who were not wearing their *hijab* in black.

In this research, two women wore black *hijabs* and various different colours (see figure 15)<sup>9</sup>. However, they asserted that there were a number of conditions for them to wear in different colours rather than black. They believed that not all colours were

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<sup>9</sup> <https://johrh.com>.

suitable for the *hijab*, as some could grab people's attention easily. Sumiah (female, 21 years old) explained as follows:

I have *abayas* with many colours ...and I take them whatever their colours are. But I do not tend to a colour that attracts attention. White colour, for example, I do not consider as an attraction of attention, but in our society, I see that it attracts a lot of attention as it is similar to the colour of men's clothing, so any female who wears white, she attracts attention. The bright colours such as yellow attract attention.

Sumiah rejects wearing light and bright colours of the *hijab*. She justified that all these colours can grab attention in contrast to dark colours. Safyh (female, 41 years old), just like Sumiah, also had a *hijab* in different colours and avoided wearing light and bright colours, but she added another condition for wearing different colours of the *hijab*. She emphasised that she could not wear them daily or in every location. She said:

.....I wear each one for a specific place. For example, if I go to the market, it is not reasonable to go there with an embroidered or scented *abaya*. At a wedding, I can wear a coloured one ..... I support that the *abaya* must be decent. I do not care about the colour at all.

Safyh, despite her confirmation that the colour of the *hijab* does not matter, claims that she cannot wear a coloured *hijab* while she does the shopping. She explains that it is useless to wear a coloured or decorated *hijab* while in the market due to the long time that she spends shopping while she communicates with men and crowded people, in contrast to wearing a coloured *hijab* at a wedding where the chances to be seen by men are slim, as the wedding celebration segregates sexes. Safyh confirmed that the black *hijab* was not an obligation for women to wear during the prophet's era. She agrees that the *Sahwa* movement imposed a black colour on women's *hijab*. The black colour of women's *hijab* is a type of tradition which turned to be a part of Islamic *hijab*, she explained:

*Abaya's* black colour is the customs and traditions originating from Najd specifically. Here [in Abha], they were veiled with a yellow bandanna. If the girl is married, she ties it on her forehead, while if the girl is not married, she ties it behind her neck. There was no problem. Black colour had not existed...

Here, Safyh highlights that the black colour of the *hijab* is a consequence of the influence of the Najd region's traditions. She expounded her belief by stating that in the south of Saudi Arabia where she belongs, women did not know black to be the

only colour for the *hijab*. They wore their traditional clothes and wore yellow traditional headscarves.

Like Marifatullah's (2018) study, black is seen as the appropriate colour for the *hijab* for all participants regardless of their diversity. Dark colours also seem to be warmly accepted by two female participants as they see those to be closer to black and do not grab attention as much as bright and loud colours. Thus, women and men were clearly positive about the black colour, which contradicts DeCoursey's (2017) study, which expressed the negativity of Saudi women about the black and dark colour of the *abaya*. The participants confirmed that the *hijab* could not be the ideal Islamic *hijab* if its colour was not black, as some women wore black for religious reasons. Due to its darkness, the black colour does not outline a woman's body and



**Figure 15 Coloured tarrha and abaya.**

size, which prevents women from causing *fitnah* to men and links the colour black to the Islamic *hijab* in the Saudi mind. This benefit of the black colour of the *hijab* was given by *Sahwa* leaders as a justification for dressing in black. Beyond this, the narration of Umm Salamah has also been used as evidence for some women wearing black. This *Hadith* was used by some *Sahwa* figures as evidence for the obligation of wearing a *hijab* in black, which cannot be taken as reliable evidence for the mandatory black colour, as some narrations confirm women wearing different colours during the prophet's (PBUH) time, and there are differences among Islamic scholars concerning the interpretation of Umm Salamah's narration (Shimek, 2012). It can be argued that

the black colour has no religious roots in Islam, as no religious texts give direction to women in regard to their clothing colour. Al-Rasheed (2013) has a different justification for imposing the black colour on women. She believed that *Sahwa* did not permit women to wear another colour except black to prevent any resemblance between women and men, which is not permitted in Islam.

The findings also show rejection among the participants about the religious reason for keeping women wearing black. Women find themselves existing in a world where all women around them dress in black. They wear black for the whole of their lives without being conscious of the reason and justification for wearing such a colour (Al-Wazni, 2015). This can be a normal result of wearing black as a habit and part of society's custom that women practise every day and that is seen all time. However, it has been painted with religiosity as *Sahwa* figures, especially the majority belonging to Najd, were led to imposing the colour of women's clothes in that region on women's attire throughout the state. However, not all women in the state were influenced by women's clothes in Najd; force and coercion during the *Sahwa* era and through its institutions, such as CPVPV, who exposed women to humiliation and punishment if they did not dress in black, also played a significant role. Such institutions were driven by the religiosity of the black colour for women's clothes. Making changes to black colour was considered a violation of religious principles and a threat to the state as an Islamic country (Al-Kateeb, 2013; Al-Rasheed, 2013). Thus, any woman who thinks of wearing a *hijab* in different colours will be perceived as someone who committed a great sin and a violation of culture, and she will be looked upon with bewilderment and suspicion wherever she walks, which means that changing the blackness of the *hijab* is not an easy matter for women (Muthffar, 2011).

## **6.5 Changing the form of *hijab* is not an easy matter**

For years, Saudi women were required to wear a black *abaya* and cover their faces. But lately, women are given more freedom to change such shape to any style of *hijab* or modest clothes. However, all women in this research are still wearing the traditional pattern of *hijab* as well as men's wives, sisters and daughters according to male participants. All participants assert that changing the pattern of the *hijab* is not an easy decision to make, and a person could receive rejection for just making some changes on the *abaya* and face covering, as Abu-Ali (male, 30 years old) described

when he was asked about the possibility of his sisters changing the shape of their *hijab*. Abu-Ali found it difficult in tribal society to change the shape of the *hijab* completely as he struggled to convince his father to allow his sisters to change *Sahwa hijab* into the current generation *hijab*, he explains:

My father made my sisters, at young age, wear the full *abaya* over the head and gloves since they were children as it is forbidden from my father's point of view .....Girls have grown up and society has changed ..... I believe that it is ideal to wear a shoulder *abaya* and *niqab*. I and my father had been disagreeing continuously. Finally, after a long time of disagreement with him, he is convinced.

Here, Abu-Ali's comment reflects how hard it is for Saudis to make simple changes to the *abaya* and face cover rather than replacing them. For him, changing his sisters' *hijab* to make it more fashionable and comfortable for them requires longstanding disagreements and disputes with his father.

Conflicting the norms of wearing the *hijab* by making changes in the form of *hijab* is not easy even if these changes are right from a religious perspective, from a societal perspective, they are perceived as wrong. Changing the form of *hijab* for some people in society is evidence that a woman has deviated from the societal norm. Asma (female, 37 years old) states that changing the form of her *hijab* would have a negative influence on her relationship with her brothers and sisters. She said all relatives would cut their relationship with her and may lock her inside the home and not allow her to go out. Asma usually wears an opened *niqab*, but when she goes with her relatives, she wears a more modest *niqab*, which is the *arak wla trany niqab*, as her relatives criticises the opened *niqab* and asks her to cover her eyes. By wearing such a *niqab*, Asma shows more modesty and religiosity for her relatives especially since she is divorced and as she explained her culture questioned divorced women's behaviour. Asma's argument reflects how it is difficult for women in Saudi society to make any changes to their *hijabs*, even if they are simple, as it could draw criticism and raise questions about their behaviour and intentions. However, these criticisms are not only related to women but also to the men who are associated with them. Suhaim (male, 59 years old), despite his belief that the Islamic *hijab* has no prescribed colour or shape and that the *niqab* is not a mandatory part of the Islamic *hijab*, commands his wife not to wear a different shape of the *hijab* compared to what other women in society wear. He explains the reason for that:

Surely, for a customary reason... I'm convinced that if she covered her body with exception of her face and hands, she obeys Allah. The difference in people's perceptions is what motivates me to move and act in this way. I am just a gear in a machine; and so as not to expose myself to sadness, I mean, because of how people perceive me.

Suhaim admits that he can become quite a hypocrite as he practises and does things he does not believe, are imposed by the traditions and norms of society. Committing to wearing a *hijab* in a specific pattern is one of these things that he imposes on his wife without his belief. He adds that the hypocrisy among Saudi men and women in practising *hijab* can be evident when they leave the state as they give up wearing 'Saudi *hijab*' and start to wear different types of *hijab* that are similar or not similar at all to their *hijab*.

### **6.5.1 Inside and outside *hijab***

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, all participants, including men and women believe that the Saudi *hijab* is the only shape of the *hijab* that is acceptable inside Saudi society, while other forms of *hijab* that Muslim women wear are not *hijab*. However, through conversing with the participants about the option to change the form of the *hijab*, the wearing of the *hijab* inside and outside Saudi was raised. The participants thought that some forms of *hijab* that are rejected inside Saudi Arabia may be considered *hijab* outside the state. The majority of participants confirm that the form of *hijab* cannot be easily changed inside Saudi society, but as soon as they leave the country, they can change it. The participants were asked about their reasons behind this belief, and they gave several justifications.

Eight participants justified changing the form of *hijab* outside the state due to fear of being suspected of terrorism. They fear that in Western countries, the black colour of *hijab* and *niqab* might be linked to terrorism and extremism. Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) thought outsider societies consider black as a colour of terrorism. Thus, when she went outside Saudi Arabia to the USA, she changed the black colour to blue. She described this changing process as 'I force myself to wear in dark blue', as she used to wear a *hijab* in black for the whole of her life. She believes in the USA people tend to be quite apprehensive towards black colour, a huge contrast to when she went to South Korea wearing black, which did not garner any negative looks from Koreans. Um-Naby was afraid of being a target for harm in the black *hijab*, as black is a symbol of terrorism that drove her to change her *hijab* outside the state.

Fear of racism and discrimination is another justification for changing the form of *hijab* outside Saudi Arabia. The black *abaya* and *niqab* have become a part of Saudi culture and women's identity. The participants were informed that their nationality can be known through the form of their *hijab*. Albandry (female, 33 years old) and Haifa (female, 51 years old) agree that they change their *hijab* to avoid any kind of discrimination against them as Saudis when they go shopping, as most people would treat them differently, sometimes increasing the prices of goods as they believe in the stereotype that all Saudis are rich. Also, they may expose themselves to discrimination based on political differences between Saudis and other countries, Haifa explains:

I have never worn the *abaya*. I wear long clothes and trousers; however, *abaya* is very comfortable and better than changing my clothes. But I do that in order not to attract their attention to my nationality as a Saudi, as there are people who hate Saudis and some of them are racists. If we are covered, they may inappropriately treat us with racism and superiority.

Haifa changes her form of *hijab* to avoid any discrimination against her as a Saudi national. She confirms that when she is known as Saudi through her *hijab*, she can receive bad treatment.

Avoiding grabbing people's attention is another justification given by participants for changing the *hijab* outside Saudi Arabia. The participants believe the *hijab* should not conflict with other societies' cultures. Wearing 'Saudi *hijab*' can easily grab the attention of people outside Saudi Arabia and makes them stare at the *hijab* wearer, especially in cultures that conflict with Saudi culture, such as Europeans. Emad (male, 37 years old), for example, emphasises that in Islamic and Gulf Arabic countries, his wife's *hijab* does not change either colour or shape as people in these societies accept such a *hijab*. However, in Western societies, his wife's *hijab* changed in colour and shape as his wife discovered her face and replaced the *abaya* with a long jacket, so as not to grab attention.

Avoiding conflict of the law in some countries was also another justification for changing women's *hijab* outside Saudi Arabia. Some participants believe that the *hijab* style changes based on the laws of the countries they go to. Several countries around the world ban covering a woman's face and participants believe their *hijab* should correspond with the law in such countries. They believe wearing Saudi *hijab* may cause many troubles due to conflicts with the law in these countries. Albandry (female, 33 years old) described her visit to France as follows:

At Paris Airport, I was wearing a grey *abaya* and *niqab* and one of the staff pointed out at me and said the last one comes for physical inspection and told me to remove the *niqab*. There was also an old woman with me and she was wearing a mask as she was ill and the staff told her to remove it too.

Despite all the justifications given by the participants for not accepting other forms of the *hijab* as inside *hijabs*, but instead accepting them as outside *hijabs*, some participants believed that changing one's *hijab* outside Saudi society is not for external reasons but for internal reasons. They believe conflicting the social norms of wearing a *hijab* can draw great criticism towards women and their guardians, which prevents them from practising what they believe inside the state. Abdullhadi (male, 28 years old) believes the *hijab* become a habit for the majority of Saudi women who believe that there is no need to wear it outside Saudi Arabia because no one knows them. He explains:

I expect that the majority i.e., 99% consider the *hijab* abroad unnecessary – pardon me– it is unnecessary as there is no one there who recognises them... Frankly, I expect that, currently, wearing *hijab* has become a habit and culture, I mean, I see the majority do that when I travel abroad.

For Abdullhadi, women wearing *hijab* and men committing their wives and sisters to wear *hijab* are due to conforming to social norms and avoiding criticisms from society. As long as they are far from the eyes of society, they are released from the rules of wearing the *hijab*. Another justification given by the participants was the way men look at women in society in general and women who violate the social norms related to the *hijab* in particular. Safyh (female, 41 years old) for example, confirms that a woman can change the form of *hijab* outside Saudi Arabia as there is coexistence with women, but the culture inside the state looks lustfully at women. She believes women are respected and treated very well outside the state whatever they wear, but inside Saudi Arabia, the looks from men at women are dirty. Safyh experienced that look when she went to Bosnia, she did not wear her inside *hijab*– black *abaya* and *niqab*. In Bosnia, she said: 'There, you wear a *hijab* or not, no one cares as everyone is preoccupied with oneself. But here, you feel that women are objects and men attempt to attack them'.

However, twelve participants disagreed with the concept of inside and outside *hijab*. They believe the *hijab* they wear inside Saudi Arabia is the same *hijab* one must

wear outside. These participants believe that Allah is one inside and outside Saudi Arabia. He watches them and their deeds and accounts them on the day of judgment. For example, Abdulrahman (male, 29 years old) emphasised that his wife has never replaced the black *abaya* and *niqab*, as her *hijab* inside the state is the same outside it. He justified this by saying he fears and loves Allah and changing the *hijab* conflicts with this principle.

This theme highlights that changing the *hijab* inside Saudi Arabia is not an easy matter, especially in a tribal, collectivist society. The culture of Saudi Arabia is collectivist, and each participant belongs to a group. Saudis look to conform to the opinions and beliefs of their group and other groups (Bohnet et al., 2010). The findings show that Saudis have two types of personalities: the public self, which satisfies social and cultural desires, and the private self, which may conflict with social desires that are obvious in creating the terms of the inside and outside *hijab* (Hawamdeh and Raigangar, 2014). For years, exposing some parts of women's bodies, such as their faces, hands and feet, was forbidden by the *Sahwa*, which made black *abaya* and face coverings become part of the picture of conformity to the collectivist traditional values in Saudi society that Saudis should respect and adhere to (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). This is evidenced by the participants, including men and women, regardless of their diversity, who agree that changing this pattern would bring criticism to a woman, her guardian and her family, which makes it difficult to make any changes to the *hijab* style but it can be changed outside the state.

The data show that there are external reasons for changing the pattern of the *hijab* outside the state. The black *hijab* of Muslim women has been linked to terrorist activities in Western society. Some countries around the world, such as France and Sri Lanka, have banned wearing *niqab* or face coverings to confront the perceived security threat, especially after several terrorist attacks committed by Islamic extremists (Body-Gendrot, 2007; Marshall, 2008). Women in Western society who wear *hijab* and *niqab* have experienced and suffered from various forms of discrimination and abuse due to the impact of terrorism (ODIHR, 2014). Fear of being targeted for any abuse or discrimination on religious or national grounds makes Saudis change the *hijab* when they leave the state. The black *abaya* and *niqab* are not just marks of religious identity but also national identity (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Lindholm, 2010; Marifatullah, 2018; Shimek, 2012), which may cause racism and discrimination against them based

on religious or political differences or inaccurate stereotypes about Saudis. Moreover, respecting the laws, self-protection from conflict with the laws of these countries, avoiding getting the attention of people in this society and showing respect for them are the main reasons for changing the shape of the Saudi *hijab*, as confirmed by Marifatullah's study (2018).

Despite the external reasons for changing women's *hijab* outside Saudi society, the data show that there are internal reasons for changing the pattern of the *hijab* outside the state. The societal pressures related to the *hijab* forced some participants to wear a *hijab* that they do not believe in to conform to the norms and customs of society, to avoid any criticism or shame and to appear socially desirable (Al-Yami, 2015). Moreover, the way men look at women is one of the difficulties that participants face in changing the *hijab* inside the state. Positive looks at women outside the state and the coexistence of men with women outside the country can make it easier to change the pattern of the *hijab* outside. Bullock (2007) suggests that extreme segregation impacts both men and women negatively, as it prevents them from creating a healthy, normal relationship and prevents the chance to exchange insights, visions and views between sexes. Bullock's argument was supported by the finding of this study, as extreme segregation caused an increase in desire towards women. Saudi men and women lack the way they treat or look at each other, considering the long-term segregation and a long discourse of *Sahwa* warning about any connections between men and women and calling both sexes to avoid each other. This was justified by men being full of desire and a lack of self-control, while women are full of temptation and easy to be reached by men, which makes the *hijab* a tool to provide protection to women. Given the difficulties that Saudis face inside Saudi society in changing the *hijab* or making other changes, forcing them to change the pattern of the *hijab* as soon as they leave the state creates the chance for them to express their individual values far away from the pressure of collectivist values (Sampson, 1977). This supports the argument of Montemurro and Gillen (2013) that women's rejection of clothes they want or desire is because they are fearful about the reaction and possible behaviours of people around them, as they look at themselves through the eyes of others.

## 6.6 Wrapped and unwrapped candy

A clear theme within some participants' oral accounts, without exception, was comparing a woman who covers herself and her face to wrapped candy, while unwrapped candy refers to a woman without *hijab* or with an uncovered face. The participants used this similarity to explain the extent to which they reject the idea of discovering a woman herself and her face and justification for this rejection. For example, some participants drew upon society's acceptance of wrapped candy and disgust towards unwrapped candy. This is evident in Abu-Myas's (male, 41 years old) reflection:

There is uncovered and covered candy, the uncovered one is thrown on the ground and ants are gathered on it, while the covered one, there are no ants on it. Ants did not know the value of the covered candy until it was opened, and they tried it. The society here is either good or bad. The good one is clear and the bad one is clear. You can recognise her from her *hijab*.

Abu-Myas relates a woman without a cover to dirty unwrapped candy which lays on the floor and draws insects to it. No one desires or wants to eat this candy, in contradiction with covered candy or a woman who is clean and can be trusted to be eaten and tested. Abu-Myas explains his view that it can be known by her cover, like candy, if a woman is clean or not. He emphasised that this is the way society looks at women; 'Society's view of uncovered woman is like a candy, even when a man wants to marry a girl, it is impossible for him to choose the uncovered candy'. Abu-Mayas suggested that a man cannot marry an unwrapped candy or a woman with an uncovered body or face, as she becomes dirty from men looking at her, which makes her undesirable to be 'eaten' or be married.

The theory of judging the cleanliness of candy based on its external appearance was used by all participants regarding how women should be judged based on their *hijabs*. All participants, including both men and women, believed that the *hijab* gave them an impression about its wearer, and they used it to judge women. The majority of participants thought that *hijab* gives them an initial impression of the religiosity of women who wear it. A woman who covered herself well gives the impression that she is religious and has a good manner. Albandry (female, 33 years old) explains that a woman cannot wear a *niqab* and *abaya* if there is no good in her heart or no fear of Allah. Contrary to a woman who uncovers her face and body and reflects a lack of

religiosity and piety, this reality drives Albandry to feel sympathy for such a woman. She emphasised that when she sees a woman who discovered her face, they pray that Allah shows her the righteous path and guides her to correct thoughts. Albandry justified that such a woman deserves mercy and pity as she commits sin and loses her path by uncovering her face. Abu-Kahled (male, 53 years old) confirms Albandry's view, as he believes his religion told him that a *hijab* is a woman's title, thus, he can judge her based on its shape. Abu-Kahled states:

I do not like to see a woman who wears inappropriate clothing saying that she is religious. If she was really religious, she would have covered her face, hands and legs, and worn a loose or closed *abaya*. She would not have worn a shoulder *abaya*, imitated men, or worn new colours of *hijab*.

Abu-Kahled confirms any change in *hijab* pattern refers to a lack of religiosity and modesty even if that change was simple, such as discovering hands or wearing a shoulder *abaya*.

The participants emphasised that for a woman who does not cover herself properly, there is much gossip about her *sharaf*, and people will talk badly behind her back. The participants confirm that the reputation of a woman can affect badly by gossip and talks. The reputation of a woman is like 'glass', and anything even small could scratch it and this scratch cannot be removed. Abdulrahman (male, 29 years old) described the woman's reputation as 'glass' to explain how extent it is sensitive. He states:

... We are in a society which has customs, traditions and tribes. If a woman goes out uncovered her face or body, people say why?! where are we!! Where do we live!! ...It's a woman's *sharaf*, if she went out without *hijab* it offends her *sharaf* and it becomes a scandal.

Abdullrahman explains that the *hijab* and any change in its form such as giving up wearing the *niqab* can be the way a woman's reputation and *sharaf* are harmed. This harm cannot be healed especially in such a tribal society. Reem (female, 34 years old) supports Abdulrahman's argument as she emphasises that her *hijab* is linked to her reputation, as she explains:

I think that my *hijab* affects my reputation, and whenever I change my *hijab* or wear make-up, they would have a bad idea about me and that I have purposes and intentions. Even if you just like to feel good about yourself and look at your appearance with admiration, they

think that you need to be flirted with by strangers. They have perception that whenever you remove or change your *hijab*, you become a prostitute. It is very abusive.....

Reem confirms that changing the *hijab* or giving up wearing a *niqab* can negatively affect her *sharaf* and reputation. The Saudi culture considers changing in *hijab* they expect as a sign of a woman's deviation.

Dismissing marrying unwrapped candy, or an uncovered woman is often raised through participants' speech. The participants including men and women believe that an uncovered woman has difficulties getting married as men reject a questionable woman. Abdullhadi (male, 28 years old) explains why he rejects marriage to an uncovered woman. He states when he sees wrapped and unwrapped candy, he psychologically feels more relief eating wrapped candy. However, he emphasises that it is not always true that a wrapped candy is better than an unwrapped one, but wrapped candy would be beneficial and healthier for him and he can feel comfort and trust that it can be eaten. Abdullhadi suggested that this is not just his point of view but that of society. Hanan (female, 30 years old) confirmed Abdullhadi's speech, as she said when a man thinks of getting married, he will think of a pious and righteous woman 'Religious woman is the one who does not listen to songs or talk with men, as they say, a woman with full *hijab*. She is also the one who does not go outside...'. Hanan said this is what men in her community asked for before choosing a future wife. Hanan highlights that her two female cousins reached thirteen without marriage. She said they are pious and righteous girls, but because they wear *lathmh*—a garment that covers a woman's nose and mouth and exposes the eyes and forehead—and leave home often due to their jobs as doctors, no one thinks to marry them.

The participants above 40 years old and who were married confirmed that their children have to marry to wrapped candy, and that they should not marry unwrapped candy. They believed the first question people ask when they want to propose to a girl in any family is about the girl's *hijab*. Um-Abdullah (female, 51 years old) a mother of three boys, confirms that if she intends to propose to a girl to her sons, she will not think to choose a woman who uncovered her body or face for people to see her; she emphasised that she would choose a covered woman no one sees. She justified that an uncovered woman cannot be a good mother for her children, as children need a righteous example to follow, which an uncovered woman cannot set. Muhammed (male, 41 years old) agrees with Um-Abdullah's argument, as he thought a covered

woman gives the impression that she follows Islamic principles and Saudi traditions. She gives the impression that she can be a good wife, good mother and righteous woman. He highlights that by discovering a woman's face or body, she gives the impression that she does not follow the path of righteousness, which led a man to fear getting married to such a woman and having children with her. He justified that 'the tradition still suppresses discovering a woman's body or face and supports covering it'.

Though eleven participants used the *hijab* to judge women, they admitted that their judgement was not always right and did not reflect the reality of women. They stated that the *hijab* should be 'a woman's title', which refers to her religiosity and morality, but this is not the case in Saudi society. Abu-Muhammed (male, 47 years old) and Bandar (male, 44 years old) explain that in Saudi society *hijab* cannot reflect the reality of its wearer. It is normal in Saudi society to see a woman who covered the whole of her body and wears gloves and a head *abaya*, and her morality is far from that. They explained that this is a result of the *hijab* is not a personal decision, but it is a family one. A woman is forced to wear a *hijab* without conviction for the sake of her family and their reputation. A fully covered *hijab* is not necessary as evidence of a woman's religiosity and morality but can be used as a cover for shameful and criminal acts; thus, it is not fair to judge women based on their *hijab*. Sumiah (female, 21 years old) supports this argument as she had an experience when she was a student in a Quranic school that taught her that judging a woman from her *hijab* is not always right. Sumiah explains:

I saw a lot of contradictions in the school of Quran memorisation... They were wearing head *abayas*, but I saw their hypocrisy and bad morals. I also participated in volunteering campaigns and there were girls who do not comply with the Islamic *hijab* but they were committed to performing their prayers even more than I and to the extent that I even envy them because of their commitment.

The *hijab*, as a measure of a woman's religiosity and morality, is not just as Sumiah explains, head *abaya* which refers to the most modest type of *abaya* does not hide religious or moral girls as stereotype believes. Despite that, Sumiah believes that the *hijab* gives her initial impression of women.

Wrapped and unwrapped candy was a famous theory spread among citizens during the *Sahwa* era. This similarity was used to describe women who covered or uncovered themselves. A woman is sweet as candy for a man who wants to fully enjoy such

candy, and he must assure it is suitable to be eaten. Wrapping is a mark of clean and suitable compared to unwrapping candy, which attracts flies and insects. Thus, no one can enjoy it as it lacks cleanliness. Such a theory was raised in society and among people from time to time when a video was published by social media users about an incident of harassing a woman. This theory is used as a justification for why women must wear the *hijab* and justify any harassment women receive from men based on personal opinion and touching people's emotions without any reliable evidence (Al-Albani, 2001).

The findings show that the participants regardless of their diversity still believe in such a theory and use it in judging covered and uncovered women's religiosity and *sharaf*. Women who wear a *hijab* that conflicts with the social requirements and collectivist values in regard to *hijab*—that they should be in a black plain *abaya* and face covering—automatically become suspect in their religiosity and assumptions about their morality and purity, as confirmed by Ingham and Lindisfarne-Tapper (1997) that morality and purity can be reflected through individual clothes. As in Damhorst's study (1990), a woman's *hijab* helps participants create the first impression of a woman's religiosity and morality. The *hijab* that covers the whole body is regarded as more religious and moral than those who do not. This reinforces Montemurro and Gillen's (2013) argument that a woman who wears clothes that reveal some parts of her body or a toned body is usually judged negatively, as she wants to be desirable, which puts her reputation at risk. Looking at sexual relationships or being harassed are examples of assumptions about the intentions of women whose *hijab* reveals parts of their bodies or faces. The thought of a woman who makes some changes in her *hijab* which may as a consequence of the long years that society devoted to the relationship between men and women does not cross the sexual desire and cannot go far than body satisfaction which affects the way men and women look at each other (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). Such judgment can reflect on the reputation of a woman in society. The participants regardless of their diversity, believe that a woman's reputation can be more sensitive to bad gossip related to the shape of her *hijab* than men. '*A woman as glass*' is what participants similar the reputation of women to. Such similarity explains the reputation of women when it is affected by critics and gossip cannot be fixed, like glass when it is broken cannot back to its previous shape.

An uncovered woman or unwrapped candy causes a lack of men's desire to try it in their search for a wife. The participants expressed that men are always searching for wrapped candy, as they can trust and feel comfortable about it, as this is a sign of a righteous woman. Being a good wife and mother requires wearing a *hijab*. The participants showed that a woman who uncovers her face or body cannot gain the trust of her husband, as her righteousness is questionable, and cannot be trusted to raise children, as uncovering the face, some participants thought, contradicts Islamic principles. Thus, she cannot raise her children on such principles when she lacks a covering of the face, a sign of the religiosity and purity of women. This explains the findings of studies (Al-Kateeb, 2013; Hafida, 2014; Utomo et al., 2018) that women who wear the *hijab* increase the chance of getting married, as the *hijab* is a sign of the purity and morality of women, and is used, as Shimek (2012) states, to identify a woman as a good Muslim, wife and mother, as they are obliged to fill traditional gender roles.

The above findings show that the *hijab* sends powerful signals to people about the identity of the wearer and what she intended to display, and any changes in that piece of clothing on a woman's body have a social meaning that connects to its wearer (Kodžoman, 2019). However, the *hijab* is used by all participants to judge women, Unlike Naumann et al. (2009), the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia cannot be used to reflect the accurate religiosity and morality of women. Saudi women did not choose the *hijab* to wear based on religious principles but on the force of social changes after controlling the *Sahwa* movement in all social aspects. Similarly, judging the morality of women using a *hijab* can be difficult. A woman's morality and *sharaf* are hidden things that cannot be expressed by clothes. This finding reinforces the argument of (Rahman et al., 2016; Schwarz, 2000) that the *hijab* may provide some information about a woman, but it cannot tell the whole story; observers' views do not always accurately reflect someone's intentions and do not require evidence, which can impact the accuracy of their judgement.

### **6.7 The *hijab* as a tool to judge a man**

The majority of participants regardless of their diversity believe that a *hijab* cannot just be used to judge a woman but also her guardian. The participants thought that a woman's guardian is judged based on the *hijab* of the woman. The participants

believe, in Saudi society, a man's religiosity is questionable when a woman's *hijab* who he is responsible for does not meet society's requirements. Nawal (female, 45 years old) and Abu-Kahled (male, 53 years old) use the *hijab* to judge men's conservativeness and religiosity. They thought any man allows his wife or sister to discover a part of her body, they consider him liberal and having moral degeneracy. They believe revealing a woman's parts of her body is basically a man's fault, as he allows her to wear an immodest *hijab*. Abu-Kahled described when he sees a man walking with an uncovered woman: '... I despise him as it is impossible that this man is religious. If he is religious, he would have covered his wife who is looked at by all people'. Abu-Kahled despises a man who allows his wife to not cover herself and believes this is evidence that he has no religiosity. He suggests that a religious man cannot let his woman be available for all men to look at.

Judging a man's religiosity could be too intense when a man is religious or has a religious role. Three female participants believe that their responsibility is to reflect the religiosity of a man through their *hijab*, especially in such a conservative society. They believe criticism for a religious man is much stronger because a *hijab* must reflect a man's religiosity. A religious man can lose his self-trust and pride in his wife due to the strong pressure of society over him. Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) gives an example of her father, who is a mosque's *imam*. She wears an acceptable *hijab* and covers her face with *arak wla trany niqab*, but her community does not accept it, as the *hijab* does not reflect the religious role of her father. She explains:

.....My father is an *imam* of a mosque, but I do not cover my hands or eyes, and my *abaya* is not a head *abaya*. It is not concerning anyone, but society yes, they connect it to my father. For example, sometimes they say, see, he advises people and look at his daughter's *hijab*. I heard them saying that about my father.....

This is further evident when Sumiah's (female, 21 years old) father, who is religious and a lecturer in a university, was being judged and bothered by his nephews because of her *hijab*'s shape. She said:

My cousins saw me uncovering my face in a market. They went to my father and told him why she is uncovering her face!! and it is forbidden. My father told me 'in places where you know that there are your cousins, you should not uncover your face'. They verbally offend my father.

Sumiah's father is a target of other religious advice due to allowing his daughter to discover her face. Sumiah should avoid discovering her face in places where her cousins are to protect her father from being bothered.

The participants used the *hijab* also to judge a woman's guardian's manhood. They believe the real man walks in the street with a woman who covers herself from head to toe. A man who allows his wife to be seen by others lacks manhood. Norah (female, 24 years old) for example, hates wearing *niqab* and wish if her husband allows her to give up wearing it. Norah believes that her husband is afraid of being judged by his family, relatives, friends and tribe members. She believes that:

If a wife wears *hijab*, they say his wife wears *hijab* and she is very decent and I swear this is a sufficient reason lead my husband prevents me from uncovering my face! Because if people who know him saw my face, they will blame him not me.

A real man keeps his wife covered. Norah confirms that anyone who knows her husband and sees her will not judge her but her husband. She explains that the more a man covers his wife, the more compliments he gets from his community. Asma (female, 37 years old) also, believes a man's manhood is linked to the *hijab*. She explains her feeling when she sees a man who allows his wife to discover her face or wear an inappropriate *abaya*:

I think his manhood is not complete. Why he is not jealous over her! Why do all people see her? She belongs to him only and he should not allow another person to see her. I get so angry, why he did not force and tell her to get covered and wear *hijab*? Only a man is able to impose that on her.

Asma judges the manhood of a man based on a woman's *hijab*, as she believes he decides what his wife wears. She believes a man who allows his wife to discover her face or wear a coloured *abaya* is not a real man, as manhood requires a man to have control over his wife.

The participants agree with Asma and Norah argument and justified that a man has power and control over women. They believe a woman has no certainty concerning her opinion or behaviour; thus, a man has the power to help a woman make the right choice. A man has *qwamma* over a woman and has responsibility for her, so, the participants judge him quicker than a woman. Souad (female, 68 years old) and Haifa (female, 51 years old) explained that a woman is a '*blind flower*' – if her husband tells her to cover or not cover herself, she will. They believe a woman easily follows her

husband's opinions and listens to him and seeks his satisfaction. They blame a man and judge his manhood and personality as a woman follows his orders blindly. Haifa gives an example for herself: 'If my husband allowed me, I would have done it, but I am covered because of my husband and children. However, at this age, my husband allowed me, but I cannot do it'. Haifa confirms that she wears a *hijab* for the sake of her husband and sons. She wears a *hijab* due to her husband's request. She emphasises that she does not like to upset him by discovering her face. When Haifa gets older, her husband gives her more freedom, but she cannot discover her face due to her age and her sons.

Based on the above mentioned, a man's image and reputation in society can be affected by a woman's *hijab*. The participants emphasise that a man's reputation can be impacted negatively and positively by a woman's *hijab*. 'A woman is a man's mirror' by these participants linked *hijab* to a man's image and reputation in society. They believe the *hijab* of a woman cannot be separated from a man. *Hijab* of a woman can raise the status of a man in his community and can do the opposite. It reflects how much a man is able to protect his woman and control her as evidence of his manhood. This matter becomes crucial when a man and woman come from tribal backgrounds as a man may lose his community. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) suggests that culture plant this idea in people's heads. He believes many things he can do and practise outside Saudi society, but he cannot do them inside it. The way people look at him and the gossip he heard from people around him force him to hide his desire and pretend to be the ideal man in society's view or otherwise he will lose his community and their respect for him. Abu-Abdulaziz confirms that it must take into his account the way society and culture look at a man who allows his wife or daughter to change her *hijab* from the pattern that society used to allow.

A man can experience loss of connection to his community and its respect for him due to his failure to protect his *erd*, which raises doubts about his manhood. A woman as a wife, sister, or daughter is to be protected by a man, and this is one of the necessities in Islam and Saudi culture. Exceeding the limit that society sets for an acceptable *hijab* is considered a violation of his responsibility as a protector of his *sharaf*. As much as a man keeps his woman covered, he also complements and pays tribute to her. A lack of manhood and jealousy are shameful descriptions that a man could be stigmatised with if he allows his wife to change the pattern of wearing an

acceptable *hijab*. A man should have control over his wife and other female relatives, as this is evidence of his manhood. Emad (male, 37 years old) express disgust for a man who allows his wife not to wear an acceptable *hijab* or discover her face. He said ‘So, I look at him with non-acceptance, I do not even try to look at him’, not committing women to wear the acceptable *hijab* causes a man to disconnect his link to his community and cause him troubles which can he avoid by wearing his wife to the acceptable *hijab*.

Twelve participants denied that the *hijab* can be used by them to judge men. They believe that the traditional relationship between husband and wife, brother and sister, father and daughter has changed. Women have been given more freedom than before and, these days, can wear what they want without a man’s agreement. Halimah (female, 58 years old) does not judge a man by his woman *hijab*. She said especially in this era where women have been given freedom and rights and their husbands, brothers and fathers have no control over them and their behaviour. She believes that women these days do what they want and wear whatever they wish. Ali (male, 33 years old) supports Halimah's argument that *hijab* does not reflect a man's religiosity, morality and manhood, he explains:

..... Some men, today and because of changes, may be exposed to pressure because of these matters, and you have two options, either to lose your wife and this is a negative option or to allow some irregularities even if you are not satisfied with them.....

Ali as a man confesses of social pressure on men regarding the shape of the *hijab*, which may conflict with women’s desire for their *hijab*. This may put a man in front of two choices, all of which are negative. Ali states judging a man based on a woman’s *hijab* is wrong, as the *hijab* style may not reflect a man’s attitude but could be reflective of saving a man for his family life.

The clothing and attire of individuals have importance in people’s lives, as through them they can explain themselves and send messages to others (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). It is regarded as a channel in which personality is demonstrated and individuals discover some aspect of a person’s personality (Naumann et al., 2009). The findings show how important the *hijab* is in judging a man positively and negatively as the observers do not require evidence, which can impact the trustworthiness or accuracy of judgement (Adotey et al., 2016). By using *hijab* to judge men, society attempts to assure continuing women to wear *hijab* and follow the rules of the *hijab*

(Al-Kateeb, 2013; Mackay, 2017). This theme shows that, by using the *hijab* as a tool to judge a man, his reputation can be enhanced or damaged (Oderberg, 2013).

As claimed in the literature, Saudi Arabia is considered a collectivistic society that expects their member to act according to its norms and tradition and where individuals avoid any behaviour or actions that could bring shame or bad reputation for themselves or their in-group (Al-Yami, 2015; Ourfali, 2015). *Hijab* is one of the values that in-group expects its members to adhere to. The findings in this study emphasised that there is social pressure on women in relation to *hijab* and the pressure could be more on men than women. The majority of participants regardless of their diversity in gender, age, locations .etc, confirmed that a man can be judged by a woman's *hijab*, as a *hijab* is no single decision to make but a collective one. A man's religiosity and manhood can be judged, and judgement would be severe if a man was religious. The data show that most participants judge men quicker than women, as they believe that a man has power and control over a woman as the protector of *sharaf* and responsible for her. Having a man of *qwamma* rights obligates a man to be the leader of a woman so that he is responsible for and protects her. The *hijab* of a woman can impact a man's reputation negatively and positively. Saudi men believe they must protect their and women's *sharaf*. Religiously and culturally, the man is the protector of his honour from anything that could harm it. Collectivist society expects both genders to act based on the expectation of society and group. A man should act as the requirement of his role, one of these requirements is to confirm his manhood. One of the things that a man can do to prove his manhood is protecting his *sharaf* and being jealous by assuring his woman to act based on society and in-grouping values. Failing to do so would cause him to lose respect from his group and hurt his confidence (Figure 16)<sup>10</sup>. This is supported by Al-Tuwayjiri (2018), who states that women in Saudi collectivist society are used among men as a symbol of *sharaf*. Thus, revealing parts of a woman's body or face is considered a shameful deed, as keeping a woman covered is crucial in keeping men proud by keeping a woman away from men's gazes.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tumgir.com/tag/saudiculture>

Despite of above argument, the *hijab* cannot reflect the relation of a man with Allah or reflect his manhood. The extent of a man's success in following traditional and social norms is expressed through a woman's *hijab*. Judging a man's manhood by a woman *hijab's* can be inaccurate, as men's control over women has been affected due to certain freedoms and rights that women have recently gained. This finding may be supported by a previous study, as judging includes shortcomings and often gets it wrong based on individuals' information (Schwarz, 2000).



**Figure 16.** ‘The man can be known by his women abaya, and who cannot cover her in front of people, cannot control her at home...’. A saying was written on girls’ schools wall for years, which associates manhood with authority over women’s hijab.

## 6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the various shapes of Saudi women’s *hijabs* and their levels of modesty. The female participants’ *hijab* shapes can be divided into three types: the *Sahwa hijab*, the current generation’s *hijab*, and the next generation’s *hijab*. The most modest of these types was the *Sahwa hijab*, which the majority of female participants had given up. Limiting the freedom of women and linking it to fundamentalism was considered backwards, and the difficulties that are imposed on women and the *hijab's* role in determining women’s roles were all explained in this chapter as reasons for giving up the *Sahwa hijab*. However, despite expressing comfort in having replaced the *Sahwa hijab*, some female participants believed it was still the

right form of the *hijab*. This chapter shows no differences in the shapes of the female participants' *hijabs* based on their diversity of locations, education, and so on, except that the next generation's *hijab* was worn by the youngest female participants in this research.

This chapter has explained the participants' views of the *abaya* and other clothing of Muslim women outside Saudi Arabia. Regardless of the participants' diversity, all believed that the *abaya* is the ideal Islamic clothing for Muslim women compared to other Muslim women's clothes. Jackets, trousers, and skirts were rejected by the participants as not conforming with the Islamic *hijab*, especially inside Saudi Arabia, as such attire grabs attention. Furthermore, while black colour has been the most popular colour of Saudi women's *hijabs*, the massive majority of participants of different ages, education levels, and so on rejected the idea that the *hijab* could not be in another colour rather than black, as the colour does not describe the woman's body, and by wearing the *hijab* in black, they follow the path of the Prophet's (PBUH) wives and daughters. However, some participants thought wearing black *hijab* was part of customary practice. The participants explained that changing the black colour is not an easy matter, as people have been used to seeing women in black *hijabs* for a long time, and any changes may bring criticism to the woman and her guardian.

This chapter also showed that, in general, changing the Saudi *hijab* is not an easy matter. Regardless of the diversity among the participants, all participants, including men and women, felt that changing the *hijab's* shape was considered a violation of religious and traditional values. Criticism and severing relationships between relevant in-group members are a consequence of making any change without appropriate support. The majority of participants described two types of *hijabs*: inside and outside. The participants gave several external and internal reasons for changing their *hijabs* outside the country: fear of being linked to terrorism, fear of racism and discrimination against Saudis, enjoying tourism activities, avoiding the attention of people outside the state, avoiding conflicts with bans in some countries, social pressure, and lack of respect for women inside Saudi society.

This chapter has indicated that a particular theory is used by some participants, including both men and women, to describe uncovered and covered women. This theory refers to a woman as a 'candy' and a man as a 'fly', and what protects this candy from dirt and flies is its wrapper. Applying this theory to women, a covered woman is

more protected and trustworthy than an uncovered woman, and a *hijab* can give an impression about its wearer and lead to subsequent judgement. The *hijab* for all participants, whether they were men or women, and regardless of their diversity, was thought to be a tool that is used to judge a woman. The participants felt that the *hijab* gave them an initial impression of its wearer and expressed the piety and morality of women. Thus, the participants believed that the *hijab* could positively and negatively affect women's reputations. Furthermore, the participants believed that a covered woman was more desirable than an uncovered one, which was indicated by the desire to get married to a woman who is covered. The participants believed that a woman in a full-cover *hijab* was more religious and familiar with Allah and Islam; thus, she could be trusted as a wife and mother. Though all participants judged women based on their *hijabs*, some admitted that the *hijab* does not always reflect the reality of women, as some women use the *hijab* to cover their shameful reality as a religious cover.

Moreover, this chapter shows that the majority of participants, regardless of their diversity, used the *hijab* to judge women's guardians. The participants believed that the *hijab* is also a tool to judge a man's religiosity, and the criticism of a man may become intense if he is considered to be religious. The participants also used the *hijab* to judge a man's masculinity, as one aspect of manhood was to have control over women and protect them. Thus, a woman's guardian's reputation could be affected by the *hijab*, as a woman is the mirror of a man. A woman wearing the appropriate *hijab* is evidence of a man protecting a woman or his *sharaf*. The participants felt that a man's failure to protect his *sharaf* predisposes him to disrespect from his community. However, several participants of diverse ages, locations, genders and so on denied that the *hijab* could be used to judge men. They believed that the traditional relationship of power between men and women has changed, as women have gained more freedom, and men have lost their authority over women.

The findings in this chapter answer the question regarding the collectivist social norms regulating the wearing of the *hijab* and the consequences of challenging these norms for Saudi men and women. The next chapter examines the attitude of Saudis towards the negative stigmas that have been attached to *hijab*, and their understanding of the concepts of female oppression, female freedom, and male dominance.

## Chapter 7. The *hijab*: Oppression, freedom and control

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with examining the link between the *hijab* and some stigmas from the point of view of the participants. Oppression, lack of freedom, and male dominance are stigmas associated with Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. Through my reading of the existing literature, I noticed countless studies concerning these stigmas among Muslim women, but just one study investigated oppression from the Saudi women's point of view. However, the concept of oppression cannot be understood without neglecting freedom and control when drawing a comprehensive picture of how the Saudi participants understood these stigmas.

This chapter explains why all the research participants, both male and female, and regardless of their diversity, rejected the idea that the *hijab* is oppressive, and why the majority of them agreed that some men use the *hijab* to oppress women by forcing them to wear extreme forms. The chapter demonstrates the multiple views of the participants from diverse genders, locations, educational backgrounds, and so on concerning women's freedom of choice, specifically with respect to the participants' attitudes that give women their freedom of choice and the ones who limit such freedom. It explores the multiple reasons for the majority of female participants feeling that they are not forced to wear the *niqab*, and that they are able to change the *hijab* colour and wear trendy *abaya*. It also demonstrates why all male participants and the majority of women from various backgrounds confirmed that men have the right to interfere in choosing the *hijab* of women by explaining the religious, cultural, and personal reasons for such beliefs.

I begin by presenting the participants' views of the *hijab* and its association with oppression, and present their justifications and explanations for their respective positions. I attempt to examine the idea of men using the *hijab* as a way to oppress women and whether the participants agreed with this. I then go on to challenge the meaning of women's freedom of choice in Saudi thought. The participants' perspectives on giving women the right to choose their *hijab* and the limitations and conditions of this freedom are discussed. The chapter then explores whether the female participants enjoyed the right to choose the *hijab* and whether the men gave their wives and sisters the right to choose. Finally, I discuss male dominance over

women's appearance. The participants' understandings and justifications for this control and interference in women's *hijab* selection were investigated. The aim is to, by the end of the chapter, answer one of the central research questions regarding the attitude of Saudis towards the negative stigmas that have been attached to *hijab*, and their understanding of the concepts of female oppression, female freedom, and male dominance.

## 7.2 The *hijab* and oppression

The literature in Chapter 2 claimed that the oppression of Muslim women has been linked to patriarchal religious values, according to which the wearing of a *hijab* by a Muslim woman confirms such values. In this theme, I aim to challenge this point of view. Regardless of the diversity among the participants, all participants in this study, both men and women, believed that the *hijab* was not a symbol of female oppression.

'A woman is like a diamond or jewellery box' was one explanation given by most participants in response to the statement that women are oppressed by the *hijab*. Such justifications were used by the figures of the *Sahwa* movement to convince women to cover themselves during that time, which echoes the analogy of a woman and a diamond. The participants suggest that the *hijab* does not oppress a woman. It is an assurance that she is priceless, but uncovering a woman's body makes her less valuable. Amnah (female, 52 years old) described the following:

I think it preserves a woman's dignity and her femininity and it is not oppression. A woman is like a jewellery box, which everyone desires to open, but once it is opened, it becomes a worthless and normal thing. In other words, as long as it is closed, everyone wants to see it. However, if it is opened, all who wanted to see what is concealed within it did so.

A covered woman is like a closed jewellery box that everyone desires to open. As soon as a woman uncovers herself, she loses her value. For Amnah, the *hijab* is not oppressive because it gives her value and protection. Emad (male, 37 years old) supported Amnah's argument that a woman is precious and that everyone has something priceless that they want to cover and protect from damage or handling. He provided the example of international brands of rare and expensive objects that are always covered and kept safe. Emad emphasised that the *hijab* is not a tool for

oppressing women but a tool for protecting women from the sight, touch or harm of strange men.

Suspicious of the intentions of anti-*hijab* feminists were also obvious through the concerns of three women from Abha regarding the purpose of focusing on Muslim women's *hijabs* and neglecting non-Muslim and Western women. The participants suggested that non-Muslim women in Western society are oppressed for various reasons. They wondered why they suffered oppression although they did not wear the *hijab*. They believed that Western women suffer harassment and physical or verbal harm. Aishah (female, 41 years old) said that she believed women in Western societies suffered more than Muslim women. She said that they were always bothered by the way men looked at them. They suffered harassment and abuse all the time, and Muslim women who wore the *hijab* suffered less. She said that they allowed everyone to look at their bodies because they did not cover themselves as Muslim women wearing the *hijab* did. Aishah considered that feminists did not focus on the oppression of Western women and they instead attack the *hijab* and Muslim women's beliefs.

Three male participants also reported their suspicions of anti-*hijab* feminist intentions by linking the *hijab* to women's oppression. They believe wearing the *hijab* had been practised by not only Muslim women but also Christian and Jewish women. They believed that no one had judged them because they considered that wearing the *hijab* was personal freedom, in contrast to Muslim women who saw the practice of such worship as a type of oppression. Abdulrahman (male, 29 years old) said that:

..... You see veiled women in other non-Muslim countries such as Jews and there are veiled nuns in Christian churches, so why concentration is on the Islamic community in general and Saudi society in particular... I see that it is targeting Islam in its homeland.

Abdulrahman linked the *hijab* to female oppression as an attack on Islam. He said that the *hijab* has been known in other religions. By focusing on Muslim women who wear the *hijab* as oppressed and deprived, he suggested that Western and feminist scholars aim to change the thought of Muslim women and weaken Islam by attacking one of its principles.

The idea of linking Muslim women's oppression to the *hijab* as a conspiracy against Islam was raised by Abdulrahman and was further supported by two women and one man who had different backgrounds. They believe that anti-*hijab* feminists

who claimed that the *hijab* is oppressive are the real enemies of Muslim women, not the defenders of Muslim women's rights. These feminists pretended to be the protector of Muslim women while they aimed to deny women the value of the *hijab*. Reem (female, 34 years old), for example, agreed that liberal feminists believed that they aimed to liberate women from the oppression imposed on them by wearing the *hijab*, but they aimed to steal their freedom and attacked their beliefs. She compared feminists' oppression of women who wore the *hijab* with the leaders of the *Sahwa* movement, who oppressed Saudi women in the name of religion. By attacking the *hijab*, such feminists practised a kind of oppression on women in the name of liberating them. Reem emphasised that feminists should focus on their own liberty and respect what Muslim women believe and think and how they want to appear.

This attack on Islam through the stigmatisation of the *hijab* had succeeded in affecting some young women, which had become obvious in their selection of *hijabs* and other clothes. Um-Kahled (female, 47 years old) explained that her teenage daughters did not believe in wearing the *hijab*, and she was struggling to convince them of the opposite. She explained the following:

.....My daughters are convinced of this by those women on social media, but I make them aware that they should not listen to those people. They hear that *hijab* is not obligatory, diminishes their freedom and obstacles everything. I tell my daughters that many veiled women obtain high academic degrees. The *hijab* is not what prevents you from achieving your dreams. I think that the two things have nothing to do with each other.

Um-Kahled's account reflected her concerns that her daughters were influenced by the idea that wearing the *hijab* would oppress them through feminists on social media. She said that she had tried to change their thoughts by giving them examples of women who achieved their dreams while remaining committed to wearing the *hijab*. It is evident that Um-Kahled does not believe that the times have changed, and her daughters noticed the changes in society concerning the new *hijab* and the traditional *hijab* that covered the woman's body and face. Specifically, they noted that the latter started to be abandoned by the new generation of women.

Through Um-Kahled's speech, it is clear that the *hijab* would be oppressive if it prevented women from achieving their dreams and prevented them from enjoying life. This view was supported by five participants from different backgrounds. The participants suggested that oppressed women who were imprisoned in their homes

could not leave for any reason, such as study, work, medical care, or shopping. Thus, as a woman has the power to leave her home in the *hijab* and is able to work, study, go to the hospital, shop, and enjoy her life, one is not oppressed. For example, Bandar (male, 44 years old) explained:

This is backwardness, for many years, we have been hearing this and attacked through this thing as it is proven that there are girls studying, working and residing abroad while committed to wearing their *hijab*.

Linking the *hijab* to oppression was a backward attitude of those who attacked it. He said that the *hijab* could not be an obstacle in the road for women to achieve all their goals. Salha (female, 57 years old), also, supported this view that oppression was not related to the *hijab* but could be related to culture and a woman's family who practice oppression on women. She believed that the *hijab* did not limit a woman from practising her religion as her family did:

..... What suppresses a woman, and her freedom is her family and society. Some families pressurise their daughters up to bursting. In other words, they tell their daughters not to go anywhere and everything is not allowed, which leads to bursting. This is suppression of freedom while going out wearing my *hijab* and doing what I need to do is not suppression of freedom. Therefore, it has nothing to do with *hijab* .....

Salha said that the oppression of women was not linked to the *hijab* but to the family and society because the strict rules imposed on women by them limited the roles of women and the way they lived.

Three participants, a man and two women from Riyadh city, expressed that liberal and anti-*hijab* feminists are misleading in regard to the *hijab* and Muslim women. They suggested that the *hijab* is not a problem or even a big issue among Muslim women compared with matters such as violence, abuse and harassment of women. Thus, they suggested that these feminists should live as Muslim women live and believe as they do to understand the value of the *hijab* before they judge it. Fatimah (female, 35 years old) suggested that feminists did not care about Muslim women or focused on what Muslim women needed. She said, 'I enjoy everything in my life.... I go to my work, gym and restaurants anywhere.... the *hijab* does not prevent me from doing anything...'. Fatimah believed that feminists who attacked the *hijab* and linked it to the oppression of Muslim women were misleading and did not understand how Muslim women think and believe. She believes the *hijab* is a part of her identity and

modesty. Another participant, Khazna (female, 37 years old), who was a PhD student working as a lecturer at university, said that she wished to reach the highest level on the employment ladder while continuing to wear her *hijab*. She confirmed that the view that the *hijab* is a symbol of oppression is based on misleading information, suggesting that the *hijab* has not been an obstacle for her, and she confirmed that if she had the chance to occupy a high position in the state, she would wear *abaya* and *niqab* to represent women who wore it to send the message to the world that they were not oppressed.

Through this theme, I attempted to investigate the points of view of Saudi men and women about such accusations. Unlike (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 2011), all participants men and women in the study rejected the stigmatisation of the *hijab* and linked it to oppression, as they saw that wearing it protected women's dignity. This finding confirmed previous findings (Al-Wazni, 2015; Baniani, 2019; Bullock, 2007; Roald, 2003) that conflicted with the stereotype of stigma, which has been linked to the *hijab* by Western organisations, media and anti-*hijab* feminists. The participants gave several justifications for their beliefs. According to the majority of participants, men and women, regardless of their differences, women are priceless goods or things that should be protected by a *hijab*. However, despite the meaning that the participants intended to deliver, I argue that such comparisons devalue women. During the *Sahwa* era, such comparisons (see 6.6 wrapped and unwrapped candy) were popularly used to explain the value of women and the purpose of the *hijab*: sensible men must secure such precious goods from others by isolating her from other men and covering and hiding her from their sight. The participants, conditioned by several years of such a discourse, believe that comparing a woman to a diamond is a sign of respect toward her. However, upon closely examining this comparison, I can see that it dehumanises a woman, relegating her to a man's property, property that he must protect, rendering her powerless and incapable of protecting herself, leaving her at the mercy of the man who can sell her, hide her, or neglect her. In short, such comparisons are products of patriarchal thinking and only value women superficially.

The findings showed that nine participants from various backgrounds demonised anti-*hijab* feminists. They suggested that anti-*hijab* feminists were attempting to destroy Islam by linking the *hijab* to oppression. The participants gave three pieces of evidence for their beliefs; they suggested that compared with the oppression that non-

Muslim women suffer, Muslim women in the *hijab* are much safer because their bodies are protected from others as confirmed by Ruby (2006). Many non-Muslim women who expose parts of their bodies are considered more oppressed than Muslim women who wear the *hijab* because they are conditioned to spend large amounts of money to reach an ideal of beauty. Thus, neglecting the oppression of non-Muslim women was the first piece of evidence of the true intentions of anti-*hijab* feminists to destroy Islam. The second piece of evidence used by the participants to demonstrate the real intentions of anti-*hijab* feminists was that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are similar in some respects, including the *hijab*, but women may enjoy more rights in some religions than in others (Al-Badah, 2010; Tariq-Munir, 2014). However, the criticism of Muslim women and their oppression is widespread, especially in Western society, even though the oppression of women in Judaism and Christianity is exist (Al-Saadawi,1982). The third piece of evidence was that anti-*hijab* feminists attempted to prevent Muslim women from embracing the values of the *hijab* by calling to free them. Their call to free women from the *hijab* can curtail the freedom of those who actually believe in and want to wear the *hijab* (Bullock, 2007). Thus, anti-*hijab* feminists practice another type of oppression by preventing women from choosing to wear a *hijab*. In the eyes of the participants, the claim against the *hijab* is an attack on Islam itself, which is evident in the neglect of anti-*hijab* feminists regarding the aforementioned aspects. The participants' belief reflects the negative attitude toward feminists in general and anti-*hijab* feminists in particular. This can be explained by the term feminism being a Western concept, and the idea that in Saudi thought, Western discourse and theories were linked during the *Sahwa* era to conspiracies against Muslims and the destruction of the Islamic nation (Al-Ghathami, 2015; Lacroix, 2011).

Eight participants including men and women, the claims of anti-*hijab* feminists reflect a misunderstanding of the meaning of the *hijab*. The *hijab* is regarded as a symbol of a woman's preciousness and the protection of her value. It is a symbol of a woman's Islamic identity and modesty (Fondren, 2019; Pazhoohi and Hosseinchari, 2014; Simorangkir and Pamungkas, 2018; Wagner et al., 2012). The misunderstanding extends to the meaning of oppression from the point of view of the participants. The findings reflected the meaning of an oppressed woman in Saudi thought. An oppressed woman is a prisoner in her home. She cannot enjoy her life,

leave home, study, work, or achieve her dreams. This meaning of oppression reflects the simplicity of the definition of the complex concept. Leaving the home for work or study in the *hijab* was enough evidence for the participants that women are not oppressed. Thus, the participants believed a woman is not prevented from enjoying her rights because of the *hijab* as Ahmed (1992) argued, but because of society and her family who enforce oppressive rules in the name of tradition or religion. According to the participants, anti-*hijab* feminists lack knowledge about Saudi culture and society. Some of its subcultures are built on the oppression of women and consider women only as men's followers. Compared to the problem of the *hijab*, the problems of these women, according to the participants, are of a greater magnitude, problems the anti-*hijab* feminists do not focus on; instead, they equate women's freedom with not wearing a *hijab*.

### **7.2.1 Is the *hijab* a tool used by men to oppress women?**

As demonstrated above, all participants despite their diversity expressed that the *hijab* is not a symbol of oppression and they denied that the *hijab* was responsible for any type of female oppression. However, when they were asked whether the *hijab* was used by men to oppress women, not all participants denied that some men did. Interestingly, all the women in this research, except two above 50 years old, believed that the *hijab* was used by some men to oppress women and limit their freedom. The majority of the men in this research, except for seven, denied that some men used the *hijab* to oppress women.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the majority of female participants in the current generation are wearing the shoulder *abaya* and the *niqab* instead of the *Sahwa hijab*. The female participants believed that some men force women to return to wearing the *Sahwa hijab* which is imposing difficulties on women by wearing the head *abaya*, covering their hands and eyes, and preventing them from communicating with other men. Khazna (female, 37 years old) explained that her brother had a tall and overweight wife who used to wear the current generation's *hijab*, but her *hijab* was modest and covered her entire body. As soon as she married Khazna's brother, he forced her to change her *hijab* to the *Sahwa hijab*. Khazna said she pitied her sister-in-law because her attire was not acceptable:

Sorry, this is backwardness. Imposing authority is not like that, if you are a man, then you are responsible for your wife and disciplining her as you want... Poor her! She wore a tight

head *abaya* and o Allah it is unfit for her as she is significantly fat ... For me, the *hijab*'s aim and purpose are coverage, rather than forcing her to wear a specific type of *abaya* and preventing her. To be frank, this is oppression.

Khazna believed that imposing a form of the *hijab* that was not suitable for women to wear due to its shape or style, such as the *Sahwa hijab*, was a kind of practice that proved the authority of a man over a woman in the form of oppression.

Based on the participants' responses, not all men used the *hijab* to force their authority or show their power over women. They believed that the men who use the *hijab* to oppress women usually do so for specific reasons. Four women and two men participants agreed that a man who used the *hijab* to oppress and torture a woman is usually depraved or he used to be and had sexual relations with many women, which led him to suspect the fidelity of all women. Thus, such a man would use the *hijab* to oppress his wife to make sure she did not cheat him. In his work as a detective in public prosecution, Abu-Ali (male, 30 years old) had experienced some individual cases that involved such crimes. For example, a man who was a drug dealer was involved in illegal sexual relationships with other women, but he did not allow his wife to uncover even a fingernail. Abu-Ali stated the following: 'Man oppresses his wife by forcing her to wear a cover of two or three layers. she says that she cannot see, however you find that man is a criminal man'.

Three male and three women participants, despite their diversity, agreed that some men used the *hijab* to prove their authority over their wives. Confirming authority over a woman is one aspect of manhood in Saudi culture. A man may use the *hijab* to ensure that his wife follows his instructions and obeys his orders. The female participants believed those men were bossy, and they forced women to wear an extreme form of the *hijab* just to solidify their authority and to prove their manhood to women and the rest of society. Sumiah (female, 21 years old) for example, believed that 'Men believe that woman must be fully covered, so they force her to be fully covered as they think that they are more powerful than her and concerned with her religion than she is'. Sumiah believed those men pretended to be perfect in front of their wives, while in reality, they were imperfect and had no knowledge more than their wives. However, the male participants admitted that a man expresses the power of his manhood over women by using the *hijab*, not due to being bossy but to avoid negative attitudes towards him, so he displayed his authority over his wife in front of

his community and relatives. Muhammed (male, 41 years old) believed that social pressure forced him to practise oppression that he does not believe in:

Oppression of women with *hijab* exists and is hard to be denied. I practise it sometimes as ...  
I mean I force my wife in matters related to traditions while I do not believe in them at all....  
due to society's pressures on us particularly regarding *hijab*.

Muhammed admitted that the pressure exerted by their community and culture, especially regarding the *hijab*, had led him to suppress his wife's wearing of *hijab* she likes.

Though two female and three male participants agreed that men who use the *hijab* to oppress women do not exist today, they agreed that was popular in Saudi society during the *Sahwa* era. They believed that such phenomena in the past were anomalous and confined to individual cases. However, they stated that a man could reach this point in his behaviour after having tried to change his wife or daughter's attitudes towards wearing the *hijab*. They considered religion and norms responsible for causing reaching a man to this point. Souad (female, 68 years old) supported this thought about the declining percentage of men who practised female oppression by forcing them to wear the *hijab*. She explained that the new generation is used to seeing women without their faces covered or without a *hijab*. Thus, they cannot have their fathers' attitudes toward the *hijab*. However, Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) contradicted this argument, explaining that he believed the oppression of women by men to wear the *hijab* clearly existed, but both men and women could not see it. He explained:

Men use *hijab* as means of oppression. However, they do not see that they practise it because they were raised with this thought. I think it is a phenomenon, as it does not stem from a personal perspective. Rather, it stems from a societal perspective. In my society, which is a highly male-dominated society, if there is a difference in it for example women's society and comparisons between women and men, feeling of injustice and oppression of women become obvious.

Abu-Abdulaziz expressed that men did not feel that they oppressed a woman, and women did not feel oppressed by a man regarding the *hijab*. He said that because Saudi society is patriarchal, all values were masculine. Thus, all women were treated the same, which did not allow them to make comparisons and feel oppressed. Based on Abu-Abdulaziz's argument that giving women their rights and becoming equal to

men would lead women to compare themselves with other women as well as men in society.

The stereotype that the *hijab* is a symbol of oppression is based on the perception that all Muslim women who wear the *hijab* comprise an oppressed group who were forced to do so (Zempi, 2014). In this study, the participants denied that all Muslim women belonged to a homogenised group. The *hijab* was not considered to oppress all Muslim women, including those who participated in this study. However, the *hijab* could be used by some as a tool of female oppression. This contradicts Fondren's (2019) argument that using the *hijab* to oppress women was a myth, and it should be eliminated, all female participants in this research, except two women above 50 years old believed that the *hijab* was used by some men to oppress women and limit their freedom. The majority of men in this research, except for seven, denied that some men used the *hijab* for this reason.

According to Hussain (2016), the *hijab* was innocent of any oppression of women. If it did, it was due to the power and authority of men in some Muslim communities where the rules are drawn and enforced by men. The majority of women and few men agree with Hussain's argument. They confirmed that some men oppressed their wives, sisters or daughters by forcing them to change the shape of their *hijab* or cover their face, but not by wearing the *hijab* itself. The current generation's *hijab*, as explained in Chapter 6, is freer and gives a woman a chance to represent her beauty and gain some freedom to see clearly by exposing her eyes and feel things by exposing her hands. Men can force a woman to wear the *Sahwa hijab*, which is considered old-fashioned in Saudi society. Forcing a woman to wear this *hijab* is regarded as oppression, as it covers the entire body of a woman and does not allow her to see, feel or walk freely. The participants suggested that men who oppress women are usually those who are not religious and have illegal sexual relationships with other women, which makes them suspect the loyalty of their wives or daughters. By covering his woman, he ensures that she is protected, and no man can take advantage of her. Especially in a society where the concept of *sharaf* is related to a woman and her external attire (Al-Saadawi, 2017).

The fear that his manhood would be censured is another reason suggested by three men and three women that causes a man to force a woman to wear the *hijab*, even though he does not like it. Thus, men strive to keep the women in their families

invisible; this is a point of pride and a way of protecting their *sharaf* and manhood (Al-Munajjed, 1997; Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). Society considers a man who allows his wife to wear a *hijab* that conflicts with its rules as a *dayooth*, which is a pejorative term that Saudi men try to avoid. *Dayooth* refers to a person who permits his woman to display her beauty and engage in illegal relations with other men; hence, he is forbidden from entering heaven based on the Prophet's (PBUH) sayings (Al-Dawood, 2008). Such descriptions are used today by some people to describe a man who allows his wife or daughter to uncover her face or mix with strange men. Such a word is used to urge a man to keep control over a woman's appearance, as a man's manhood is directly proportional to a woman's modesty.

Today, Saudi women have rights that they were prevented from enjoying for years in the name of Islam and *eyb* or shame. A woman has been considered as responsible and qualified as a man, which has created a generation that respects women and the law that sets rules to protect women from any form of oppression. Thus, according to two females over the age of fifty and three male participants from various backgrounds, using the *hijab* to oppress women has become increasingly less common. Despite this belief, it can be argued that using the *hijab* as a tool of oppression will not disappear completely because men and women practise it unconsciously and do not perceive it as oppression (Billaud and Castro, 2013). This can be explained as Saudi women grow up with the idea that they need a male protector to survive in this life and that it is their religious duty to obey their husband, father and brother. Because of such cultural norms, women are unaware of the extent of the abuse and injustice that has been inflicted on their Islamic rights by male-dominated societies in the name of Islam (Al-Hibri, 2012; Hassan, 1991).

### **7.3 Freedom to choose: The Saudis' view**

This section analyses the views of the participants regarding whether a woman should be free to decide to wear the *hijab* or not. It also explores the participants' views about giving a woman the freedom of choice to wear the *hijab* and their justifications for related matters. The participants' responses were divided into two sections: First, those who saw a woman as absolutely free to decide which *hijab* she wears. Second, those who did not accept the idea of a woman being free and supported the idea of coercing a woman to wear the *hijab*.

A few participants, four men who live in Riyadh and have high education and five women from diverse backgrounds, considered that a woman should have the freedom to make her own decisions about herself, equal to a man. They believed that a woman should control herself, her actions, and the consequences of her actions. Thus, she must have the freedom to wear or not wear a *hijab*. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old), for example, confirmed this statement and considered that it was in line with Islam. He believed that wearing a *hijab* must not be coerced and must reflect a woman's degree of religiosity. Abu-Abdulaziz argued that society and its norms did not accept the idea of a woman's freedom of a woman, although Islam guarantees it. Like a man, a woman is commanded by Allah; therefore, coercing her to wear the *hijab* has no Islamic roots. He explained:

Because she is ordered like you are, and she commits sinful deeds as you do. Forcing a woman is not right because compulsion is not allowed as Allah says "So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller" these verses were said to the Prophet (PBUH), the first preacher, not to force when it is related to faith and unbelief, so what do you think about sinful deeds.

Abu-Abdulaziz suggested that Islam is based on freedom, as a person is free to choose to convert to Islam or not. The *hijab* is a part of Islam doctrine, in which a woman should be allowed to choose whether to wear it or not. Reem (female, 34 years old) supported Abu-Abdulaziz's argument and explained why she believed in a woman's freedom:

A woman will be judged alone on the day of judgment and a man as well. So, the woman has the right to represent her thoughts in herself whether the other party accepted them or not. Why does man have the authority to move on in his life and woman does not?

Reem attacked the idea of allowing a man to decide about his life but preventing a woman from even deciding what she wears. Reem considered that forcing women to wear the *hijab* or a particular shape of the *hijab* pushed them to take revenge against the *hijab* and those who coerced them. A woman's revenge against the *hijab* is obvious through shameful behaviours that contradict the *hijab* she wears.

The coercion of women to wear the *hijab* is unjust and unfair. A woman should be raised to wear the *hijab* and learn its value based on belief, not coercion. Forcing a woman to wear a *hijab* that she does not believe in is, as Sumiah (female, 21 years old) argued:

It is psychological and religious oppression because even when she is wearing it, she will not be rewarded as long as she does not believe in it. It is also the oppression of her will. As long as she wants this thing, it is unfair to force her to do another thing.

Forcing a woman for Sumiah is a kind of psychological and religious oppression. This oppression does not create a normal person but a woman with two characters. Asma (female, 37 years old) explained that one character would seek to satisfy a person who forced her to wear the *hijab* and another character would seek to satisfy her desire when she was away from the eyes of her coercer. Asma confirmed that nowadays there were many such women, who entered a mall wearing a specific shape of *abaya* and left it wearing a trendy modern *abaya*, which was a response to the coercion to wear a specific style of *hijab*, did not like.

Most participants did not agree with giving a woman complete freedom, and they did not consider that forcing a woman was a type of injustice. Their justifications were various. Eight participants, six women and two men, despite their diversity, agreed that a woman has not complete freedom but a conditional one. These participants rejected the idea of a woman being free to do what she wanted, but they accepted it as long as she did not transgress social and cultural norms. Safyh (female, 41 years old) for example, agreed with the condition that a woman could be given the freedom to wear the *hijab* she preferred if it were an approved shape. She explained:

Yes, yet a specific *hijab* is not any *hijab*. Our community, in the south, is conservative and you are not covering your face, it is hard to accept it. However, I keep saying that I do not want to lose my life and remain in problems, there should be understanding and discussion in order to solve the problems.

A condition of Safyh's acceptance of the freedom of a woman to wear the style of the *hijab* she preferred was that the *hijab* should not be a source of temptation for men. She believed that society and its norms should be respected in allowing a woman to enjoy her freedom. Safyh described another condition that the woman should be mature and rational. If a woman had been raised based on trust between her and her family, and she was not repressed in her family, she could have complete freedom. Safyh believed that such women rarely make bad decisions, and they have strong control over themselves. She suggested that such women are obvious because their behaviour reflects their maturity and responsibility.

The majority of participants believed that women should not have freedom, whether conditionally or unconditionally, for two reasons. The first reason was that giving a woman the absolute freedom to choose contradicts religious and cultural values. Despite their diversity, eight men and five women agreed that women have never been free to decide how they live and what they do. They agreed with limiting the freedom of a woman inside her home and bedroom, but outside of these places, she is not free to do what she wanted. Religion is responsible for the limits on women's freedom. A woman is not free under the umbrella of Islam, as it sets lines that Muslims should not cross. They believed that the traditions and customs in Saudi society supported religion in limiting a woman's freedom; thus, a woman should commit to Islamic principles and social norms. Hence, the idea of giving women freedom is an attack on Saudi Muslim women, as Kharia (female, 46 years old) explained:

These are secularists talk who want to get to Saudi women from all directions. They do not know where they can get to them, so they say freedom and a woman has to be free and go everywhere. What kind of freedom is it? The freedom to leave Islam is what they want. They want her to go out and no one says anything to her. Allah has created us to worship him not for freedom which is not known by anyone.

Kharia suggested that those who called for women's freedom were secular, and they aimed to exclude a woman from her religion. Kharia agreed that Islam contradicts the idea of women's freedom and that giving women this right is an attack on Islam.

The second reason for supporting limitations on women's freedom was given by 15 participants from both sexes with diverse backgrounds. The participants frequently used the claim that 'a mistake made by a man is not the same as a woman' as a reason for not giving a woman the same level of freedom as a man. They explained that a man's mistake would eventually be accepted and forgotten, in contrast to the scandal caused by a woman's mistake, as a woman has more to lose than a man has. Salha (female, 57 years old) for example, a mother of two daughters and two sons, explained that she rejected the idea of the freedom of woman. In her view, the idea that a woman was equal to a man was unjust. She explained:

I would be treating my son and daughter unfairly if I equated them, e.g. if I told him that he is responsible for washing the dishes and bathrooms like his sister because I would be

eliminating his manhood completely. However, when promoting the idea in him of being the supporter and helper of his sister, then there is no problem cleaning with her.

Salha believed that by treating her son and daughter as equal, she would damage his manhood, as a man should not do what a woman does. She suggested that a man should be raised to protect and support a woman, not to be equal to her. Salha said that the roles that society assigns to men and women are that they work inside the home, such as cleaning it, while men work outside the home. Salha also did not accept a woman being free, as she has something much more precious:

.... The girl, from my care for her, as she has a precious thing other than boy, which is hymen and pregnancy. I mean there are things that I have to take into account more regarding her. You see, some of them do not know that they can be pregnant even if their hymen did not break and they may lose their reputation.....

Salha highlighted that giving freedom to her daughter means losing control over her and could cause her to lose her *sharaf* and become pregnant, which would be avoided by limiting her freedom. For these reasons, society governs women at all times.

Allah made it clear in the Quran that a man and a woman are equal in terms of humanity and rights. The claim of privilege of a man over woman does not exist in the Quran except in places that are not related to their humanity. The Quran applies to both men and women, and they will be judged equally by Allah (Al-Ghazali et al., 1991; Al-Rahbi, 2014). Islam confirms the freedom of a woman in economic, political, social, educational matters and in all her affairs. The exceptional privilege of a man is to earn a living for a woman and fulfil her needs, such as food, clothing and so on (Madani, 2011). Giving a woman the freedom to choose the *hijab* she wears is not exceptional. A minority of participants, including four highly educated men from Riyadh and five women from various backgrounds, agreed that a woman has the basic right to freely choose the *hijab* she prefers without the control of others. The *hijab* is a form of worship, and women have the religious right to practice it in the way they believe. However, society and culture conflict with a woman's freedom to choose the *hijab* she wears. A society that controls women uses various justifications to segregate men and women in the matter of their freedom to act and choose. *Sahwa's* discourse includes the rules that a woman is not equal to a man, and she cannot be allowed to make her own choice without a man's permission. Any voice that advocates giving a woman some of her rights or some freedom can be regarded as conspiring against

Islam and deceiving it by calling for the liberation and uncovering of women (Abu-AlKhail, 2017).

Thus, the majority of participants rejected giving women freedom of choice, but they were divided into two groups. Eight participants, including six women and two men, said that a woman should not flout social and cultural norms concerning her *hijab*'s shape. Thus, if a woman violates the cultural norms of veiling, then she should lose her freedom of choice. This belief stemmed from the idea that limiting women's freedom is a religious instruction supported by Saudi culture. These participants based their beliefs on the *Sahwa* discourse concerning women, which was built on a cultural reading of Islamic texts. The cultural reading of the Quran is obvious in the Quran verses that describe equality between men and women, for example, in receiving punishments and rewards for their actions, as in the case of "the thief, the male and the female..." (5: 38), and "the [unmarried] woman or [unmarried] man found guilty of sexual intercourse..." (24: 2). These verses indicate that a man is equal to a woman, but in the cultural interpretation, the blame is placed on women, not men. This same idea can also be applied to freedom of choice between men and women.

A man's fault, in the eyes of fifteen of the participants, is unlike that of a woman's, who can, unlike a man, get pregnant. If a man commits a shameful deed, society forgives him, but when a woman does the same, society punishes her, destroying her personal and family reputation (Al-Saadawi, 2017). In Saudi society, a woman is a symbol of *sharaf*, not a man because he does not become pregnant. Therefore, in Saudi society, a woman interacts according to values and norms that protect her *sharaf* and that of her family. Because of the success of these norms and values, society has constructed rules to ensure that women interact according to its values (Al-Mannai, 2006). According to Al-Saadawi (2018), defining *sharaf* is problematic in Arabic societies, including Saudi society. According to the concept of *sharaf*, a woman's character is based on the existence of her hymen. However, 30% of women are born without a hymen. Thus, she suggested that *sharaf* should be linked to the thoughts and principles of both men and women.

### **7.3.1 Wearing *hijab*: Force or choice?**

One theme that emerged from the participants' responses is that most thought that the idea of women's freedom had not been widely accepted. The female participants were asked whether they had been forced to wear the *hijab*. The male participants

were asked the same questions regarding whether their wives and sisters were forced to wear the *hijab*. Twenty-six participants, including eight men and eighteen women, argued that women have no free choice, in terms of covering their faces, changing colours and donning trendy *abaya*.

As explained in Chapter 6, the social norms of wearing the *hijab* and the collective cultural pressure on women and men to meet their expectations were confirmed by 11 female and eight male participants from various backgrounds as evidence that women are not forced to choose a *hijab* that they do not desire. However, because of people's expectations and the way they look at a woman in a differently shaped *hijab*, women still feel forced to wear a *hijab* that they do not prefer. Reem (female, 34 years old) for example, admitted that she is forced by her community to wear *hijab* that she does not choose. She states that she could not ignore her community and the people surrounding them. Reem believed that uncovering her face is absolutely a personal decision, but it would negatively affect her family. She could not bear the way that people would look at her father and husband. Thus, she waived her desire to uncover her face to protect her family. Reem also said that she is afraid of the way people looked at her. She explained:

I do not think that I have the freedom to choose. I think society's view affects me and I cannot overcome it. Society's perception of unveiled women is negative, and I cannot overcome it. I am free as an independent person even if other people around me are opposing that, but I am under the pressure of society's view because I take it into account.

Reem was not just concerned about her husband and father, but she also was afraid of the negative responses of society to an uncovered face which forces her to cover her face.

Seven women, regardless of their diversity, agreed that they were forced by their family members to wear the shape of the *hijab* they did not desire. Parents were identified as the reasons for female participants of 20 years of age in this research to wear the shape of a *hijab* that they did not prefer. Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) and Sumiah (female, 21 years old) remembered struggling to convince their parents to change the shape of their *hijab*. Um-Naby described her experience with her father and mother wearing a *hijab*. She confirmed that she wore *Kata* covering her eyes throughout intermediate and high school. But during her college studies, she started wearing an opened *niqab*, and her parents got cross as they believe the *niqab* is a

source of temptation and grabs men's attention. Thus, she replaced her opened *niqab* with *arak wla trany niqab which she does not desire*. Similarly, Sumiah explained that she was forced to wear *niqab* by her mother even after she had decided to uncover her face; her mother is still unsatisfied. She explained:

I was forced by my mother and she is still unsatisfied, but I could not. I tried but I could not, and I do not want to be a liar by going out in one form and coming back with another. I discussed that with my father. I went to him while he was sitting alone, closed the door, and discussed with him rationally and said that I do not want to cover my face...I tried many times to satisfy my mother but religiously, I believe in uncovering my face. He told me "okay as you wish". At the beginning he was upset but afterwards, he accepted it.

Sumiah, despite her success in changing her *hijab* shape contrary to Um-Naby's orders, still complains about not having her mother accept her *hijab* changes. At the time of her interview, she complained that her mother still tried to force her to wear a *niqab*.

Two married women under the age of 40 admitted that they have been forced by their husbands to wear the *hijab* that they do not like it. Norah (female, 24 years old) for example, admitted that she wears a *niqab* against her will. However, Norah's husband did not agree with the idea of covering his wife's face. Norah justified her husband's attitude, as he was afraid of his family and it was relevant to him. Thus, he allowed her to uncover her face outside the state or in public places where his family members or relatives were absent. Norah denied her freedom to choose the shape of her *hijab* although she believed her husband had no right to be involved because she is a human who should have the freedom to decide what she needs. Eman (female, 33 years old), contrary to Norah, complained about her husband's strict rules about her *hijab*, especially the *abaya*. Eman's husband insisted that her *abaya* should be a head black *abaya* of plain fabric that she does not like. She wears a head *abaya* that is not acceptable to her and she has never worn it before. She explained her feelings when her husband told her how to wear her *abaya*: 'It was like he told me a great thing. I do not know how to wear it! But I decided to try it because of him. I tried it once and twice, but I could not as it made me tired'. However, Eman continues to wear the style of *hijab* her husband wants. She pointed out that when she went shopping to buy a new *abaya*, she remembered her husband's rules. She explained: 'I choose what I know that is being allowed to me. I mean currently, I cannot wear an embroidered

*abaya* and go out. So, when I go to the market, I know what to buy'. Eman despite her admitting to wearing the *hijab* does not like it, she does not feel any type of coercion from her husband but she feels 'normal'.

Furthermore, three female participants over 40 years old who were married and had children, feel compelled by their children to wear a specific style of *hijab*. They believed that they did not involve their husbands in choosing their *hijab*, as they felt free to wear what they wanted. However, they pointed out that there was one aspect of their *hijab* that they were not completely free to decide. Their sons were bothered when they uncovered their faces, or wear an inappropriate shape of *abaya*. Thus, they did not want to embarrass their sons in front of other people and among their community. Salha (female, 57 years old) for example, said that she and her daughters were forced by her sons, not her husband, to cover their eyes. She said:

You know who interferes! It is not my husband but my sons. They are very jealous and do not want their sisters to go out and show their eyes...I swear that I fear my sons more than their father.

Salha understood and justified her sons' attitudes towards her and her daughters' *hijab*. She said that jealousy was a natural instinct, and she had raised them to be like that.

As I explained in Chapter 5 and 6, Saudi women adopt the *hijab* for different reasons, such as committing to religion, continuing a habit and conforming to family attitudes. In Saudi Arabia, collectivist cultural pressure can be considered a major reason that women wear the *hijab*. A woman wears a *hijab* that does not like-or does not even take off -because of pressure from the social groups around her, such as family, friends, schoolmates and colleagues (Ali, 2005). The twenty-six participants confirmed that women could not choose the *hijab's* colour or the shape of the *abaya* and *niqab* for different reasons. Religion and social norms deny women freedom in choosing what they want to wear. The former exerts less pressure than the latter, as women are more pressurised to wear the *hijab* by their parents, husbands, and male children. According to the women in this study, they silence their desires to gain the approval of their husbands, parents, and children. In the eyes of society, a good woman is one who sacrifices her desires for her family, whose actions do not bring shame to them – not wearing the appropriate *hijab* is one such action (see Chapter 6). Using unreliable Islamic texts, society justifies lack of woman's freedom in choosing

what they wear by claiming that a woman can thus gain Allah's approval. As part from loving herself, a woman is interested in looking after her attire and clothes. However, the culture demands that she sacrifice this kind of love towards herself for the sake of her husband and family. This pressure exerted on women to wear the *hijab* is not linked to individuals but to social rules (Al-Saadawi, 2017). Harkness (2019) supports this, arguing that parents, husbands, and male children are not mainly why a woman is denied her right to choose what she wears. Parents, husbands, and male children are conditioned by the principles of gender inequality produced by patriarchal social institutions, principles that they grow up believing in.

All women should have the right to make their own decisions about the way they appear in public. The freedom to choose is essential for women because it gives them the opportunity to live all aspects of life as they want (Markus and Schwartz, 2010). Controlling a woman's choice reflects the lack of her empowerment in society. Women should have the power to do what they choose (Khader, 2018). Some female participants in this study expressed that they were pushed to choose among options that were set by their family. Even if they enjoyed freedom among their family, they were not free in society. In seeking to achieve empowerment in society, Saudi women should have the ability to control their choices in all things, even the shape and colour of their *hijabs*.

#### **7.4 A man's right to control a woman's *hijab***

This theme is important for understanding the view of Saudi men and women concerning the men's domain over women. In this regard, male and female participants were asked different questions; the male participants were asked if they believed they had the right to control and interfere with the choice of their wives, sisters, and daughters regarding their preferred *hijab*. Despite the diversity in gender, age, education, location, and so on, all the male and female participants, except for six women, believed that men had the right to interfere in and control the way women covered themselves.

The participants believed that the control of men over women's *hijab* started from the beginning before buying it. Fifteen men agreed that their interference in choosing and buying a *hijab* is through the advice they give to the woman to choose an acceptable and modest *hijab*. They agreed that a *hijab* must be modest and free from any decoration or embellishment. Furthermore, it must not conflict with Islamic *hijab*

requirements. For example, if the shape of the *hijab* does not meet the requirements, a man should interfere. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) stated that he objects to his wife wearing a *hijab* or *abaya* that is tight or embellished in any way. He confirmed that he would not accept such a choice and that his wife must obey him and wear a *hijab* that meets his requirements.

The participants gave several justifications for men having the right to control women's appearances. Fifteen men and one woman believed that control and attention are the responsibility of men, which men have adopted through the socialisation process. Hanan (female, 30 years old) explained that as men see that is their right to choose or decide what a woman can wear: '...we have been raised with that when the boy grows up, preserve your *sharaf*, pay attention to your sister.... and the boy gets used to this thing.' For Hanan, a man interfering in a woman's *hijab* is a consequence of the socialisation of the family institution.

The responsibility of men over women's *hijabs*, according to eight women and four men from various backgrounds, is a religious obligation. The prophet's (PBUH) *Hadith*: 'All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock.' was used by the participants as evidence that a man is responsible for a woman's affairs. Also, *qwamma* is a privilege given by Allah to all men in which they are obliged to be responsible for the well-being of women. The participants saw *qwamma* as an order from Allah to a man to control a woman by being the woman's guardian and guiding her away from anything that could cause her harm. One of these potential harms is finery, which a woman may think is her choice, but which a man should protect her from. Haya (female, 48 years old) noted that a man who is a protector and is responsible for a woman follows Allah's orders and avoids his punishment. A man giving orders to a woman is a religious duty that helps him avoid entering hell, she explained:

So, man must be responsible because he will be burnt in hell on the day of judgment. He will be the first one to be burned in hell. I mean, do not lead your family to hell because your silence is what leads them to the abyss and allowing them is as if you say I am satisfied with your action.

She justified this by stating that by giving a woman freedom to decide what she wears, the man is leading them both into hell. Haya considers such control as a way to save a

woman from evil. Such control, Haya believes, makes a woman a queen, which is something all women in Western societies wish to be.

According to the participants, Allah will not just judge a man due to his authority over a woman; a woman will also be judged by Allah based on her obedience to this authority. Three men and three women believed that obedience to one's husband was another religious obligation. A woman must listen to her husband and obey him, as Allah orders her to do so. Thus, coercion of a woman by a man is seen by the participants as a man's duty which a woman must accept and obey. Salha (female, 57 years old) believes that a man has the absolute right to coerce a woman to wear the *hijab* he wants. She confirmed her husband's right to force her to wear the *hijab* style he wants:

..... It is his right to protect me and I do not have to uncover it. I mean that I am under his guardianship, he is my guardian. If he told me not to uncover, should I engage in discussions, arguments and problems and resort to courts, not to mention breaking up the family! No, why should not I obey him! Because I want people to like me outside!! No, I want nothing but him to like me.

She believes her husband has the right to keep and protect her as protector and guardian, and this obliges her to follow his instructions. Salha admitted that she obeys her husband's instructions and respects his interference in her choice of *hijab*. However, for Kharia (female, 46 years old), the control was over far more than the *hijab*, as it also extended to controlling her clothes in private spaces. She confessed that her husband interferes not just in her *hijab* but also in the clothes she wears in the presence of other women and at home with her children. She explains:

In the beginning, yes, when we got married, he was interfering with my dress in front of women, I mean, he was saying, "do not wear pants and blouses" then thankfully I obeyed him ..... I allow my husband to interfere because he is my husband and I should not say no to him in anything. I also do not like to disappoint him by saying no because Allah has ordered me.

Despite being 46 years old, Kharia's husband still interferes in her choice of *hijab* and clothing. She is bothered by her husband's involvement, as she feels she is older and wiser than she was at the start of their marriage. However, she forces herself to follow her husband's requirements in regard to her *hijab* and clothes, as she believes that she

is following Allah's orders. Kharia, by following her husband's instructions, seeks to satisfy Allah and avoid his punishment.

Control over women's *hijabs*, as in the case of Salha and Kharia's husbands, was justified by four married female participants as a way for men to show their jealousy and love for women. They believe that the control of their husbands over their *hijab* is the way their husbands express their care, love and possessiveness of them. Aishah (female, 41 years old) sided with Salha's argument. She expressed that her husband's control of her *hijab* reflects his desire to have her belong to him only, as she is not even shared with a simple look. Aishah considers herself to be a 'diamond' in her husband's hands, and by controlling her *hijab*, he is protecting the diamond. She emphasised that she loves and respects her husband and believes he should be responsible for her *hijab*. Thus, she follows his advice. She explained:

Once, I went out while henna is applied on my hands. I got into the car and he said to me "May Allah not forgive you if you do not cover your hands". I prefer a jealous man, so I felt that he feels me and was jealous ..... My husband also interferes with my *hijab*. Once, I went out without socks, he told me not to go out again without socks. I swear I was happy and felt that he is jealous.

Aishah did not express any irritation or anger about her husband's involvement in her *hijab*; she sees it as evidence of his care and love. Her husband's control makes her happy, as she believes when a husband does not love, care about or feel possessive of his wife, he does not control or get involved in her *hijab*. Aishah gave an example of her husband's involvement in her *hijab*.

Twelve men and seven women from diverse backgrounds justified their support for men's control over women's *hijabs* for what was considered a good purpose, which was for a woman's own sake and benefits. The participants suggested that a woman needs guidance and that a man is always looking out for her, even if he goes against what she wants. A man's coercion and command for a woman to cover herself from people's eyes will bring her close to Allah and earn his approval. Coercing a woman was construed as a means of protecting her dignity and reputation. Thus, the participants believed that a man has the right to guide women and set the rules for them, as they are not able to guide themselves, and they are not aware of the benefit of such guidance. 'A woman is weak, emotional, and irrational' were words that were frequently used by the participants to justify a woman's need for a man's guidance

regarding the *hijab*. Abu-Albaraa (male, 49 years old) rejected the idea that a woman can be responsible for herself and for choosing her *hijab* without involving her guardian. He stated:

..... Women are delicate and more emotional, so they can easily commit mortal sins. If you leave them to their will, she will drift with the flow or with colleagues. Therefore, you have to be with her by guarding, watching and guiding her to good deeds as she is not responsible.

According to Abu-Albaraa a woman cannot be left to decide what style of *hijab* she will wear; she needs to be watched over and advised at all times to make sure she does not get lost on her path. Thus, he believed a woman is not fully responsible for herself as she follows her emotions and feelings and is therefore not rational. Abu-Albaraa's view was supported by Haifa (female, 51 years old) made it clear that choosing a *hijab* is a man's responsibility, not a woman's. She believes men always have sanity, unlike women who follow their emotions. She noted that a woman always thinks with her heart, while a man thinks with his mind. She stated:

Man is always strong and a decision maker. Indeed, there are strong girls, but the decision is always made by men. His answer is always correct. We are also used to that head of the family is responsible for the family. When there is a defect, who is affected and failed one! The father, whether it is caused by his wife or daughters.

Haifa here explains a man's strength is shown through his decisions, which are always right in contradiction to a woman. She also regards any issues or embarrassing behaviour from a woman as the biggest harm to the man of the family, as a woman is his own and his *sharaf*. Thus, she believes that in order for a woman to be considered wise and rational, she must have a man who is responsible for her.

Regardless of their diversity, six women who participated in this research agreed that they rejected the idea of a man controlling and interfering in a woman's *hijab* choice, but accepted interference as a father, not a husband. Fatimah (female, 35 years old) for example, suggested that her husband has no business in deciding her *hijab* and has no right to impose anything on her. Fatimah justified her views by noting that it is a man's responsibility to choose a wife who shares his same beliefs. She stated that choosing a woman who has a different attitude and forcing her to change it to meet his after getting married is not acceptable. Fatimah gave an example of her personal

experience. Her husband used to interfere in her *hijab* and impose on her a *hijab* style that his sisters did not wear. She stated:

When I got married to my husband, I was wearing a shoulder *abaya* and *niqab* and his family is open-minded. Suddenly, he told me to wear a head *abaya*, I told him that I do not recommend wearing it. He said “why! I want to see you” However, I tried it on, wore it and went out. When we came back, he told me not to wear it as he did not like my appearance and it was not good at all. I mean, I am short, and I made him choose the *abaya* and it was tight and reviled some features. Therefore, he said, “keep wearing a normal *abaya* without colours”.

Fatimah reached an agreement with her husband that she would wear black, as they both like this colour, but they did not reach an agreement on his choosing the shape and design, as she does not accept his belief that he should interfere in choosing her *hijab*, and she believes he has poor taste when it comes to such things. Despite that Fatimah objected to the interference of a man in a wife’s *hijab* but accept interference when it comes to a daughter’s *hijab*. Um-Kahled (female, 47 years old) agreed and explained Fatimah’s point. She is a wife and mother of five children and objects to her husband controlling the way she dresses. She considers herself to be a responsible person and equal to her husband; she is mature and the same age as her husband; thus, she feels her husband’s interference in choosing her *hijab* is not justifiable. However, she emphasised the importance of a father’s involvement in his daughter’s *hijab*, as she believes a father should strictly control his daughter’s *hijab* as if he does ‘We do not see these abnormal and strange looks in our society from adornment and religious immoderation’. Thus, a man must be responsible for his daughter’s *hijab* and make decisions in such cases. Daughters, especially before becoming mature, need guidance and discipline until they become mature or get married.

Saudi women have suffered from male guardians controlling their movement, marriage, work and education for decades. Such control is the result of *Sahwa* leaders and their *fatwa* about women and their affairs (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Based on the findings of this research, men’s control of women and their appearance in public and in front of other women was considered justifiable and acceptable by all men and all women who participated in this study, except for six, despite the diversity among them in terms of levels of education, ages, locations, travel experience, and marital status. All aspects of life in Saudi society are controlled by *Sahwa* principles. Family,

mosque education, etc. are controlled by specific patriarchal rules that dictate the subordination of women and the obsession of men (Al-Rasheed, 2013). All participants of the study were raised in this environment, which explains the justifications of the participants of a man's right to control a woman's *hijab*. Saudi women grow up in a society where there are no options regarding a different type of lifestyle. This is because their lifestyle is dictated by the government, religion and family, all of which support men's obsession (Khader, 2018; Harkness, 2019).

Tribes in Saudi Arabia were built on patriarchal principles that support men's control over women (Al-Rasheed, 2013), which means that the personality of growing young men is shaped by an atmosphere that demands them to be in control of women – in fact, in such cultures, the measure of manhood is closely tied to having power over women (see Chapter 6). Women demanding any kind of equality threatens this manhood, and the man who gives his wife some equality in making decisions might be regarded as not a 'true man'. One of the ways through which men try to affirm their manhood is by demanding their wives to wear the *hijab*, a demand that the wives, who have grown up in the same patriarchal atmosphere as the men, have no right to reject (Al-Saadawi, 2017). A Saudi male is raised on the idea that he is a man, and, as a man, he must be responsible for the protection of his mother and sisters. When he gets married, he continues in this role with his wife and daughters. In contrast, a female is raised in a culture that celebrates woman who gives birth to boys instead of girls, and after they grow up, a woman must get married to protect her *sharaf*, as she is not able to protect herself or her honour without having a man in her life (Salem, 2001). A female is raised on the idea that a man is her protector, a person who looks out for her and someone that she cannot survive without. A female raised under these family and tribal beliefs should live by these beliefs throughout her lifetime.

In mosques and schools, Saudi society is taught that a woman must obey her husband and that he has absolute authority over her mind, body and actions, as she is religiously and physiologically unequal to a man. This argument was confirmed by eighteen participants who have diverse backgrounds. They believed men should control and women should accept this control as Allah has given men the *qwamma*. This gives men the right of guardianship because they are responsible for family finances due to their nature and physical ability, which gives them the responsibility of

working and earning money (Al-Ghazali et al., 1991). A woman who does not obey her husband and accept his control over her is thought to deserve punishment from Allah, and the same is true for a man who does not protect his wife. This kind of religious discourse justifies controlling women by suggesting that men are adhering to Allah's order. I argue that the *qwamma* does not grant men the right to control women's lives. Instead, the *qwamma* makes men responsible for women, which means taking care and looking after them – and not controlling her life and denying her freedom, which Allah guarantees. A man and woman are partners in a relationship built on mutual understanding. Allah has created a woman as equal to a man and made her responsible for herself.

Some married women in this research have justified controlling women's lives as a sign of a man's interest in women, as a sign of his love and jealousy. This is confirmed by Fischer (1993), who stated that by controlling a woman, a man can express his love and jealousy, as a man finds it difficult to express his feelings and love verbally. However, I agree with Al-Saadawi's (2017) argument that controlling women's lives is an expression of love is the patriarchal culture's way of trying to convince women to accept male dominance. Controlling all aspects of their wives' lives, Al-Saadawi believes, is men's way of proving their manhood to their culture. Day by day, a man becomes a 'dictator' who cannot accept his wife's breaking of any small rule he has set for her, which can include, as revealed by some female participants in this research, the clothes a woman must wear in front of other women and private spaces.

A woman is considered more emotional and lacks wisdom, so it is important that a man chooses her *hijab*, as she can lose her faith easily according to nineteen participants from both sexes. This idea is the product of some Islamic scholars' prejudiced interpretations of the prophet's *Hadith* (PBUH), the authenticity of which is unconfirmed, as it contradicts Quranic texts. The *Hadith* informs women that they lack wisdom and religion (Roald, 2003). This interpretation of this *Hadith* has been used to prove that equality between men and women is impossible due to a lack of wisdom and faith in religion, and does not think rationally or possess the mental capability of a man (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Women are thus controlled in the name of Allah and Islam, and this is obvious when examining the discourse of some religious and *Sahwa* figures, such as Al-Fawzan (2013), according to whom women are crazy

and lack intelligence, or Al-Bader (no date), according to whom Satan's influence is stronger on women than on men (see Chapter 3). However, it is a stereotype that a woman is more emotional than a man and that a man is more rational than a woman. Wisdom and emotions are not related to gender differences. A man and a woman react emotionally in the same way; however, a woman has the ability to express her emotions more freely than a man. This can be a result of the roles and expectations that society sets for each gender which are explained above (Fischer, 1993; Sprecher and Sedikides, 1993).

## 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the link between the *hijab* and the stigmas of oppression, limited freedom, and men's control. All the research participants, both male and female regardless of their diversity, rejected the idea that the *hijab* is oppressive. The participants believed that being a woman is seen as being a precious diamond, and a *hijab* serves to protect that diamond, which is more evidence that contradicts the idea of oppression, as all things of value must be protected from harm. They were suspicious about the intentions of anti-*hijab* feminists, as they believed their aim was not to help oppressed Muslim women but to attack Islam itself. Specifically, they saw such efforts as an attempt to weaken Islam by attacking one of its symbols. The participants suggested that this was obvious concerning the fact that the *hijab* is not only worn by Muslim women, but also by Christian and Jewish women. However, the attack against the Muslim *hijab* and its link to oppression does not exist in other religions. They believed that anti-*hijab* feminists neglected non-Muslim Western women's experiences of oppression in their own societies and attempted to prevent Muslim women from adhering to the values of the *hijab*. Furthermore, the participants argued that the *hijab* is not responsible for the oppression of women, but society and family limit a woman's freedom. The oppressed women for the participants who cannot leave their homes, study or even work, which conflicts with the reality of women in *hijab* who practise such things. The participants show censure to feminists who attack the *hijab* as they focus on silly women's issues and ignore the serious ones. They commented that feminists should understand Muslim women's beliefs and values before they judge their *hijab*.

However, when asked if the *hijab* is used by men to oppress women, the majority of participants from both sexes and diverse backgrounds agreed that some men force women to wear *Sahwa hijab* that they do not like. They felt such oppression comes from men who have no religious principles but are obsessed with sexual infidelity and are suspicious of all women, including their wives; therefore, these men make sure that their wives are under their control. The participants also noted that some men force women to wear *hijab* that they do not like because they think they take the woman's faith more seriously than she does, whereas others practise such oppression to conform to the societal norms of manhood. The participants indicated that oppression over women and their *hijab* used to be popular during the *Sahwa* era but that it has lessened in society as a result of the younger generation seeing things differently from the previous generation.

This chapter attempted to investigate the view of Saudis for women's freedom of choice when it comes to the *hijab*. The participants' responses can be divided into two groups. The first group consisted of four highly educated men and five women from diverse backgrounds, who believed a woman is absolutely free to decide what she wears. They believe that a woman is responsible for her actions and decisions and that she burdens herself with the consequences of such actions. This group suggested that Islam supports this and teaches that a woman and a man make their own decisions, and each will be judged on the day of judgment, which makes forcing a woman to do something against her will an injustice. They agreed that a woman should be raised on *hijab*, not forced into wearing it; forcing a woman who does not desire to wear a *hijab* creates a woman with two characteristics: one that is covered while in the presence of her enforcer and one that is uncovered when she is far away from him. The second group consisted of the majority of participants, including both sexes from diverse backgrounds, who objected to giving a woman the freedom to choose her *hijab*. The participants accepted the idea of giving women the freedom to choose, under certain conditions. Specifically, a woman has the right to choose the *hijab* she wants, but it should be modest and should not grab the attention of men. Furthermore, a woman must not cross the lines drawn by family, men, and society. They believe that a woman and a man are not free under the umbrella of Islam and customs. They also believe that a woman has many things to lose, such as her virginity and reputation, which makes a woman's mistake graver than a man's.

After examining Saudi views about the idea of a woman's freedom to choose her *hijab*, this chapter challenged whether women who participated in the study are forced to do so. Despite the diversity among them, the majority of female participants stated that they are not forced to wear the *niqab* and changing the *hijab* colour and wearing trendy *abaya* might be dictated by what society, their guardian and their families like. The participants agreed that losing their choice to choose the *hijab* they want is due to tradition more than religion. Some women who participated in this study noted that they are being forced by their parents, husbands and sons not to reveal their eyes or faces and to continue wearing black.

This chapter questioned whether a man has the right to interfere in choosing a woman's *hijab*. All male participants and the majority of women from various backgrounds confirmed that men have the right to interfere in choosing the *hijab* of women and be sure that the *hijab* must be modest and unadorned. The participants believed that men are raised to believe that interfering is their right and that they are responsible for women, while women are raised to believe that a man should be their protector and that they must listen to him. The participants gave religious evidence that justified their points of view. They noted that they believe a woman must obey her husband just as Allah orders her to do. *Qwamma* is more religious evidence proving that Allah has ordered a man to be responsible for a woman, her attire and her affairs. The participants also noted that a man has the right to control a woman's *hijab* because women are weak, emotional and irrational. For this reason, they felt a woman must be guided when choosing a *hijab*. Jealousy and love were other justifications given by the participants. The participants state that controlling a woman's *hijab* is considered proof of love and care for that woman; however, a few married female participants stated that it is justifiable for a man to control his daughter's *hijab* because the daughter is under his authority and this does not apply to the man's wife.

The findings in this chapter reveal Saudis' attitudes towards the negative stigmas associated with the *hijab* and how well they understand the concept of women's freedom and men's dominance. The next chapter examines how Saudis view the latest government regulations following the announcement of Vision 2030 and their implications for changing Saudi women's *hijab*.

## Chapter 8. The *hijab* and the latest social reforms in the state

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to investigate how the participants perceive some of the reforms that followed the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030 and their perspectives of the influence these reforms have had on the recent shifts in women's clothing and comportment in public. As I explained at the beginning of this research after several years of the *Sahwa* dominating the religiopolitical scene in Saudi Arabia, the new monumental social changes at all levels took place after the announcement of Vision 2030. These changes include changes concerning women, their attire and gender reforms as a whole, which I cannot ignore in this study.

Drawing from that data, I explore the variations in the participants' perceptions of these social changes and the latest reforms, classifying them into three categories: those who are accepting of the changes, those who oppose the changes, and those who are in between. I then examine the points of agreement among participants, despite their diversity, on the significant changes in the norms around wearing *hijab* and the growing negative attitude towards face coverings. I consider some decrees and reforms which I argue have influenced *hijab* norms. I explain why the majority of the participants—of both sexes—are against repealing the mandatory wearing of *hijab*, and how that decree has negatively impacted Saudi society. Also discussed is the rationale given by all the male participants and the majority of women for rejecting the weakening of the male guardianship system and the influence this has had on *hijab* norms. Furthermore, I discuss the support for the stripping away of the power of the CPVPV by the majority of the participants—all with varied backgrounds—and their consensus on the influence this change has had on recent changes to women's *hijab*. My primary objective in this chapter is to explore the rejection of the new Islamic discourse by the majority of the participants and their understanding and interpretations of the new *fatwas* backing the current social changes.

In this chapter, I present study participants' descriptions of life during the *Sahwa* era and the restrictions imposed on them, focusing on the strict regulations on women's *hijab*. Subsequently, the reception of Saudis to these changes and their attitudes towards the *Sahwa* era is described. I examine the participants' views of the recent changes in the *hijab* norms and the attitude towards the face veil. The lifting of

the mandatory overhead *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, the attitude towards this decision, and the ensuing changes in women's *hijab* are also discussed. I then analyse the weakening of male guardianship over women, the Saudi perception of the practice, and their thoughts on its effect on women's attire in public. Furthermore, the restriction of powers imposed on the CPVPV, how Saudis are adapting to these changes, and its influence on women's attire in public. Finally, the transformations in religious discourse, the acclimatising of Saudis to these changes, and the Saudi justification for the new discourse are explained.

## **8.2 After *Sahwa*: How did Saudis receive the new changes in Society?**

After years of recession that affected all aspects of Saudi life, there was a momentous announcement of Saudi Vision 2030, which changed the face of Saudi society and altered the lifestyles to which Saudis had grown accustomed. Several procedures and declarations followed the announcement, such as the repealing of the mandatory wearing of *hijab*, the CPVPV being stripped of its authority, the repealing of mandatory permission from a guardian, and the transforming of the religious discourse (see Chapter 3). This theme is critical to understanding the reception of Saudis to these changes, especially because the reforms were significant, fast, and consecutive. The stance of the participants in this study varied from resistance and outright rejection, on the one hand, to joy and optimism, on the other hand, with caution and fear somewhere in between.

Despite the diversity among the participants, the majority of the participants—of both sexes—agree that the significant changes following the announcement of Vision 2030 are a disaster. They believe that regardless of all the adverse effects of the *Sahwa* movement on the Saudi people and Saudi society, it has innumerable benefits. The *Sahwa* successfully installed Islamic values in Saudi society. It played a role in refuting all norms that conflict with Islam, including women's rights—some of which are at variance with the nature of a woman. They admitted that there were issues and problems with the *Sahwa*, as everything Western was *haram* in that era. Television, satellite TV, music, cinema, and mixing between sexes in work and education are examples of things that were forbidden for people. *Sahwa* also forced its principles and beliefs on people without giving them a choice. This coercion came from people who

passionately wanted to project a pristine and fantastic image of the Muslims. The participants also stated that during the *Sahwa* era, people suffered minor degrees of extremism incomparable to the current levels of extremism. For them, the earlier extremism during the *Sahwa* era was acceptable, and people were able to live with it. However, they indicated that people now experience extremism that is more adverse than what they were experiencing previously. The participants feel that the latest changes in Saudi society represent a rejection of all the values—especially Islamic values—instilled during the *Sahwa* era and that the way these changes were imposed as a transition process created shock and resistance among some Saudi citizens towards the reforms. Muhammed (male, 47 years old) for example, argued that Saudis have been unable to assimilate or even understand the social changes. What makes absorption difficult with such changes is the nature of the changes, being something to which Saudi society has never been accustomed. For four decades, Saudis grew accustomed to seeing women work only in the education sector and appear in public only rarely. However, women are now being seen in public without a face covering or even a *hijab*, and women now work in all sectors and drive cars, all of which were previously religiously forbidden.

While Muhammed explained the rejection and shock of the Saudi people as stemming from the fact that the recent social changes conflict with the religious principles people are used to, Safyh (female, 41 years old), in contrast, does not subscribe to explanations based on religion but to Saudi norms. As a citizen from the south of Saudi Arabia, she observes that traditions and norms influence the south of the nation more than in other regions, which makes the southern people's reacting with shock and rejection understandable. She argues that rejection by the people and difficulty assimilating such changes are due to the society not being an open society, which makes any form of change problematic, even when they are simple. She mentioned satellite TV and the camera phone as examples of some problematic changes that were shocking to people and had produced much debate. She mentioned that in the past, most people never visited a home that had a satellite TV dish on its roof. She also recalls a visit during which her family became aware that a member of the host family owned a camera phone. They immediately ended the visit and left. For Safyh, these examples highlight that even minor changes initially elicit such rejection

for a long time before Saudi society accepts it. Thus, rejection and shock are justifiable reactions to changes that alter the face of the nation.

The participants also justified their shock and rejection of the way the new social changes were imposed on Saudi society so rapidly. They concur that the changes are not simple: they are monumental, and no one expected or anticipated any of them. Aishah (female, 41 years old) for example, was one of the participants who rejected the recent changes. She concurred that these changes are disastrous for Saudi society and its people. She argued that ‘Our society has experienced so many changes at the same time. Yet, all of them have made us sad. Sometimes, I wish that I would die in order not to see more of such bad things..’. Aishah expressed sadness regarding all the changes that have occurred in Saudi society, which reflects her inability to assimilate all the changes as they occurred simultaneously. She prays to die before she notices more changes. Because of these changes, Aishah now dislikes going to public places, especially the big malls, as it hurts her soul and makes her sad. She mentioned that she never imagined that Saudi society would sink to such levels of ‘degeneration’.

Five female participants from different backgrounds disagreed with the notion that the recent changes in Saudi society are disastrous, but they agreed that these changes support women’s rights. For example, Nawal (female, 45 years old) and Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) agreed that a woman now enjoys her rights more than before. Nawal acknowledged that a woman’s voice is now heard, especially in the courts. In the past, a woman could stand in front of a judge to present her case and herself, but he would ignore her, refuse to listen to her, and order her to leave. Nawal shares that the situation has changed, and if a woman files a case against her husband, the court receives her evidence against him (e.g., documents, or video recordings). This reflects that the law is now on the side of women. For Um-Naby, as a master's student, she noticed the changes that benefit women in the university setting. She identifies one of these changes as the recognition that a woman is as qualified and equal to a man:

Concerning the university, I can go out and get back with my University ID card. Yet, previously, you have to get permission and a letter from your father or husband, and the driver must have authorisation from them. You should not get out of the university after half-past nine, but the situation has become more comfortable for us than before.

Before the recent changes in Saudi Arabia, Um-Naby could not leave the university campus before 1 pm. Still, if she wanted to leave before that time, she could not do so without written consent from her guardian if he was to pick her up. However, if she is to be picked up by a driver, he must have power of attorney to do so from her father. Allowing a woman to leave the university campus at any time she wishes, in Um-Naby's opinion, grants a woman part of her rights as an independent person.

While some of the study participants were either pessimistic or optimistic about the latest changes, few participants from various backgrounds took an in-between stance. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old), for example, agreed that through the latest changes, society started to 'change his skin clearly'. However, he cannot appraise these changes as negative or positive, although he perceives them as harbingers of the future. He believes Saudi society is an open society in a closed environment. With social media platforms on which people interact in a virtual world different from the reality in which they live, the recent changes via the Saudi Vision 2030 reflect the awareness of the politicians of the shifting trends in Saudi society—especially the younger generations.

In a continuously changing social world, individuals differ in their acceptance of social changes (Kazlauskas and Zelviene, 2017). The findings of this study suggest that the majority of participants from different levels of education, age, sex, travelling experience, and marital status are not willing to receive or accept the changes following the announcement of the Saudi Vision 2030 and perceived them as disastrous. The extended period during which the Saudis lived under the *Sahwa* principles and the sudden implementation of the new changes made some participants unaccepting of the new dispensation. Individuals resist changes to their lifestyles, which is a normal emotional reaction to imposed changes as they seek to return to their previous lifestyles (Oreg, 2003). The participants used to live in a culture that had all its aspects legitimised by its religion. Replacing that culture, changing some aspect of it, or questioning its foundational religious perceptions elicits a certain resistance from individuals in that culture. For example, women were religiously forbidden from driving cars because allowing a woman to drive would destroy Islam, undermine the castle of Islam, and proliferate Western values; thus, those who advocated for such rights were regarded as not being Muslims or Saudis (Al-Enazy, 2017). Such religious opinions explain the resistance of some participants to the new social changes, as

changes regarding religion, culture, and gender are typically difficult for individuals to accept and may require time (Al-Qahtani, 2020). Oreg (2006) acknowledged that social changes encourage feelings of anxiety and anger in some individuals, which may be reflected in their behaviour as they begin to persuade others that the changes are negative and that they must resist.

However, such social changes—especially regarding Saudi women’s rights—have high acceptance, especially among some female participants in this study who have various backgrounds and felt the reflection of these changes on their lives. Saudi women have been prioritised by the Saudi government, with a focus on the role of women in the economy, politics, and social development (Naseem and Dhruva, 2017). After years of negative perceptions and treatment of women in a patriarchal society, women are now treated as humans with self-determination (Al-Qahtani, 2020). However, according to some previous studies (e.g., Damanhour, 2017; Haykel et al., 2015; Naseem and Dhruva, 2017), the rights of women in Saudi Arabia are not satisfactory, as they do not enjoy the same rights as women in other countries, and such reforms concerning women’s rights was on the economic base not to liberate women, which makes these changes are insufficient, and thus more efforts are necessary. Despite this argument, the reforms that have helped women get some rights cannot be ignored—after years of oppression, these reforms can be regarded as the first step on the path toward progress (Al-Hussein, 2014). Additionally, the findings of this research highlight the need for caution, as it is difficult to determine the stance of the entire society from the standpoint of only a few Saudis regarding the most recent social changes. In essence, because these changes are new and were implemented quickly, some time is required for a few participants to assimilate and understand the changes before they can determine their stance.

### **8.3 Recent changes in the *hijab* norms**

Despite the participants’ diversity, all of them, both men and women, agree that there are changes in the social norms around wearing *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. Based on the participants’ views, these changes became obvious only after the social reforms to Saudi society. The participants believe that these changes were the result of the mistaken assumption that changing the traditional style of the *hijab* reflects the current modernity and state of openness of the country. As recounted by the participants, who

pointed out that the princesses of the royal family had previously always concealed their faces and withheld their photos and identity from the public. However, after the social changes in society, the princesses began releasing photos of themselves with and without *hijab* on social media platforms, without fear of criticism. The participants explained that the changes in *hijab* were not exclusive to the women of the royal family but also included public women. Anyone who observes the attire of Saudi women today would easily notice the differences between their current attire and that of the prior era. The participants confirmed that the traditional style of *hijab* in Saudi society had changed and these changes include all parts of the traditional *hijab*, *abaya*, *niqab*, and even the headscarf. This is highlighted in the following extracts:

It is a terrible openness, unfortunately, women take off their *hijab* completely. They are deliberately showing their beauty, putting on full makeup, combing their hair, and deliberately extending it. They put on eyelashes, wear colourful clothes that attract people's attention to them and apply fake nails as well (Haifa, female, 51 years old).

There are so many varieties of clothes right now. Some women do not wear *abaya* and wear long cardigans. Others do not cover their hair and wear tight clothes. I saw many women wearing trousers without *abaya* (Norah, female, 24 years old).

I think that society has experienced some variations than it was in the past. Such variations existed for a long time ago, but when the pressures ceased to be applied to women, they start to wear transparent dresses. They also wear decorated, coloured, and eye-catching *abaya*. Moreover, they do not wear the *hijab* (Abu-Albaraa, male, 49 years old).

In the above extracts, it is obvious that the changes were unfortunate, as the traditional attire has been exposed to tremendous alterations. Saudi women are now free to uncover their faces, wear makeup, and expose their hair in different hairstyles. Those who choose to wear the *abaya* have the *abaya* designed in various colours and decorative patterns, making it a means of grabbing attention, while those who reject the *abaya* replace it with tops and trousers.

In addition to changing the clothing and comportment of women in public, with respect to the *abaya* and face coverings, the participants feel that the negative societal attitude against face coverings has heightened. They believe that in the past, the societal attitude was accepting of the style of *hijab* that concealed the face, but that there is now a growing acceptance for unveiling the face and doing away with face coverings and the way people look at women without a *niqab* has changed. For example, Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old) confirmed that six years ago when he

saw a woman without a *niqab* or face covering, he thought that she must not be Saudi. He said, 'I think she has a non-Saudi nature as a doctrinal concept is different'. Abu-Abdulaziz explains a change in his religious thought between now and six years ago, as there was just one jurisdictional line in Saudi Arabia, which has now changed, and various Islamic views do not forbid discovering a woman's face have been spread among the people. From Abu-Abdulaziz's argument, the attitude favouring unveiling the face and accepting this practice religiously has strengthened in Saudi society. However, this notion of permitting women to unveil their faces has fuelled the spread of the rejection of face coverings. The *niqab* and its wearers face rejection and contempt among some classes and in some places, further evident in the interview with Haifa (female, 51 years old) who described herself as a high middle class with connections with people in high classes. Haifa confirms the *niqab* faces rejection from people in high classes, she said:

.....Today for some high classes it is not appropriate to cover your face, so I do not wear *niqab* in these events, I just wear a *tarrha* and cover my face with it. I do not dare to uncover my face unless I go to some people from high classes... because if I wear the *niqab*, they will wonder, where am I coming from!!?

Haifa is a *niqab* wearer and confirmed in the interview that she wishes she could give up wearing it but it is to please her sons and mother, and she does not have encouragement because of her age, so she will not do it. However, Haifa emphasised that she may discover her face partially by wearing *lathmh* when she attends an event of high-class people. She justified that there is contempt for *niqab* wearers among such classes, as the *niqab* becomes old-fashioned and a symbol of backwardness.

The rejection of veiling the face is not exclusive to the upper class but is a stance also held by public and private institutions. The participants feel that women in *niqabs* face discrimination in the job market. The *niqab* and women who wear it are often rejected by companies that require female employees who do not wear the *niqab*. Ali (male, 33 years old) and Bandar (male, 44 years old) confirmed this through anecdotes of what they had observed at their workplaces. Ali works in a company, and he states his company's job requires that a female candidate must not be in a *niqab*. Ali thought this is not acceptable as the company tries to press women to give up wearing a *niqab* to obtain a job. He believes wearing a *niqab* is a private and personal matter and companies should not interfere in such matters. As justification for such a requirement,

Bandar emphasises that the state created new jobs that require women without *niqab* to represent the new face of the kingdom to external delegations. He states today, in the VIP terminal in the international airport in Riyadh, all women who work there wear a uniform with or without a headscarf, and women in *niqab* are not acceptable in such jobs.

However, some participants from various backgrounds argued that women who change their *hijab* significantly or stop wearing *hijab* are not Saudi women with tribal backgrounds. They agree that they did not consider women who changed their *hijab* as 'genuine Saudis'. They suggest that such behaviour cannot be exhibited by women who have a Saudi tribal background but could be exhibited by those who do not have Saudi tribal roots. For example, Abu-Kahled (male, 53 years old) is one of those participants who acknowledge the changes in the Saudi female *hijab*, but he refuses to consider a woman who wears a different *hijab* as Saudi. He stated that: 'If you think about this issue, you'll find that neither the mother nor the father of those women is Saudis. However, they still say that they are Saudis'. For the participants, the black *abaya* and face covering are a symbol of Saudi national identity that is exclusive to the Saudi woman, and it distinguishes genuine Saudis from those who are not. Thus, the participants believe that foreigners and non-Saudi women are taking advantage of the easing off of the pressure to wear *hijab* and have consequently portrayed Saudi society and Saudi women in a negative light, Reem (female, 34 years old) explained:

They took advantage of the communities by appearing in their ugliest form and doing a disservice to society. There is a Public Decency Law here, which they should not outrage. Those who will outrage it should be punished. They have the right to wear modest clothes even if they do not wear the *abaya*. Since foreigners go out wearing trousers and short clothes, they have to be banned from going out wearing this, and they should wear modest clothes and should have a respectful look, regardless of the type of clothing. Anyone who looks at them would believe they are Saudi women but they are not.

This quote highlights that Reem was displeased with foreign and non-Saudi women who wear inappropriate clothing in public. Their behaviour is an offence to Saudi women, as anyone who looks at Saudi society would think that these immodest women are Saudi, whereas they are not. Thus, Reem recommends that strict laws be imposed on the attire of these women by the state to safeguard public modesty.

All participants in this research noticed the changes in women's *hijab* recently. Such changes were noticed by presenting the government for some royal ladies (e.g., Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, who was appointed ambassador to the United States), as the first women from the House of Saud to officially represent the nation outside its borders, and shared their identity with the public with various forms of clothes. Furthermore, the government uses social media platforms to spread the concept of diversity in women's attire in society by publishing photos of uncovered women walking in Riyadh and Jeddah (see figure 17)<sup>11</sup>.



**Figure 17. Saudi woman walks through a mall without hijab.**

As the participants' responses prove, the direct and indirect efforts of the government to change women's attire in the state have been successful. The trend of women wearing colourful, decorated, and varied *hijab* have been spreading, with greater prevalence in big cities. Today, many Saudi women have replaced their black *abaya*, *niqab*, and headscarf with sporty jumpsuits, dresses, and trousers (Abdulaziz, 2019). The attitude towards *niqab* and its wearers has changed, in contrast to the past era, and women who do not cover their faces have become more acceptable, especially in the private sector, as covering the face has become old-fashioned and associated with the *Sahwa* era people, the era whose principles conflict with the principles of the current era in the state. The traditional form of *hijab* has become an

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news>

obstacle to the participation of Saudi women in various work settings. Certainly, these changes have not been easy for people to receive and understand.

Saudi culture expects the Saudi woman to protect her identity as a Saudi by continuing to wear the *hijab* and being modest despite the state legislation. A woman acting contrary to this expectation raises suspicions about her national identity. Some participants use the *hijab* as an indication of those who truly represent Saudi woman and those who do not. Women who give up wearing the *hijab* make their nationality suspect or suggest that they are not pure-blooded Saudis, reflecting the notion that not all persons with Saudi nationality are regarded as Saudis with tribal roots. Saudis denounce foreign women who pretend to be Saudis—and portray the culture in a bad light—for destroying the image of Saudi women as respectable and modest individuals. The adoption of this notion among some participants that women who do not wear the *hijab* or modify it in public are not Saudi is a contemporary example of the role of cultural codes (e.g., clothing) as identifiers of individuals who are tribal members in any nation (Armstrong, 1982). This argument corroborates the argument of Al-Tuwayjiri (2018), in that women’s adherence to national identity through cultural codes of veiling and clothing determines those who are true Saudis, regardless of whether these are legal injunctions.

#### **8.4 Lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab***

‘The decision is entirely left for women to decide what type of decent and respectful attire she chooses to wear’ (60 minutes, 2018). As I discussed in Chapter 3, these are the words of prince crown Mohammed bin Salman in his interview with CBS News, which formed a significant declaration impacting the attire of Saudi and non-Saudi women who live in Saudi Arabia. This statement generated heated debate on social media among individuals with opposing views on the issue. I tried to table this debate before the participants in this study. The study participants were asked for their opinions on the declaration lifting the mandatory female overhead *hijab* and the shifting of the decision—to wear the *hijab*—to the individual. The participants were divided into two camps: those who were against it and those who were empathic.

The majority of the participants have different levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status, were unaccepting of the declaration. They suggested several justifications for their perspectives. The participants confirmed that

they had grown accustomed to seeing all women wear the *hijab*, and there was nothing wrong with this, as women wearing the *hijab* and *niqab* did not prevent them from going about their lives. The Saudi form of the *hijab* is considered by the participants as an element of Saudi societal traditions and customs. Thus, lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* can be a threat to Saudi norms. Albandry (female, 33 years old) one of the participants who suggests that the black *abaya* and *niqab* are symbols of Saudi tradition. A Muslim woman's nationality can be deduced through her *hijab*, e.g., the *Klush abaya* and the *lathmh* in Kuwait, and the long *burqa* in Qatar and the UAE. For Albandry, lifting the mandatory wearing of the traditional Saudi *hijab* translates to losing part of their tradition and society's identity. Abdulrahman (male, 29 years old) agrees with Albandry, as Saudis should preserve their culture and norms. He shared that when he visits countries around the world, he respects their culture and adopts their clothing during his visit. Thus, he believes Saudis should preserve their culture and implores those who visit Saudi Arabia to respect Saudi customs and wear clothing that fits the Saudi culture.

Regarding the repealing of the mandatory *hijab*, the participants raised the issue of the right of women to choose what they wear (see Chapter 7). They justified their displeasure with the decree repealing the mandatory *hijab* and the implication that women are not free to decide what they wear. The participants expressed their liking for the idea of all women being obligated to wear *hijab*, and even if they do not want to do so, the government should protect Saudi society by making it mandatory that women be covered. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) supports maintaining the mandatory overhead *hijab*, as it is the government's responsibility to protect virtue in society by 'closing all the windows of evil'. He believes that forcing women to wear a modest *hijab* is not based on human principles but on the principles of Allah. The wearing *hijab* rules should thus remain as it were to keep society safe from Allah's anger. Abu-Mohsen's argument was supported by Um-Kahled (female, 47 years old). Though she does not support women being obliged to wear a specific type of *hijab*, she does not support shifting the decision entirely to the woman. She explained that:

I do agree that women should not be obliged to do certain things. However, the most important thing is that women should protect their modesty. But I do not agree that they dress up like that. Some parents are not strict as expected, and they do not know what is

going on outside. Thus, the government should be a deterrent to those women, since it gave them some powers, but they used them for negative things.

For Um-Kahled, lifting the mandatory overhead *hijab* can be exploited negatively and unwisely by women, especially in the absence of family care with a woman's *hijab* and giving up watching and observing her. Thus, the government should maintain its regulation of the overhead *hijab* as mandatory.

When the study participants were asked if they agreed that involving the government in deciding what women should wear was a violation of their rights? They disagreed that lifting the mandatory overhead *hijab* can be regarded as giving women freedom. They believe women's rights have no relation to such a decision, as women have all their rights. As Abdulrahman (male, 29 years old) said:

The rights of all Saudi women are guaranteed, our women are treated delicately and considered to be like queens. Rather, I see that this is a sort of denying woman's rights because in this way she is insulted and deprived of being treated like a queen.

For Abdulrahman, lifting the mandatory overhead *hijab* humiliates women and violates their rights, as controlling the attire of women is necessary to protect them. Abdulrahman used the word 'queen' to refer to a modest and protected woman who may now lose this grace with the repealing of the mandatory over-the-head *hijab*. Giving women the freedom to wear whatever they like is not a basic right for women as Sharifa (female, 47 years old) confirmed. Sharifa has divorced twice and believes that the declaration is not related to a woman's *hijab*. She said:

If I wish to give the woman her rights, I will give her the right to be responsible for her kids if she got divorced, and not to deprive her of them, I would also provide her with a place to live in. But I have to prevent her from wearing such kinds of clothes because it will lead to the seduction of men. There are more important things that are the main priority.

Apparently, Sharifa's view is that giving a woman the right to decide what she wears is not a real or necessary women's right compared to the rights of divorced women, which she experiences. She believes that the decision could cause harm to Saudi society.

Conspiracy theories have influenced the way the participants perceive the declaration and the ensuing changes to the *hijab*. They interpreted these changes as the result of heinous campaigns aimed at the Saudi female *hijab*. The participants suggest that this declaration will lead to loose Islamic values in the state by devaluing the *hijab*.

They expect that shortly, the wearing of the *hijab* would have died out in Saudi Arabia. They view the current changes in *hijab* as the beginning of the devil's work, which women will unconsciously continue until no woman in Saudi society wears the *hijab* anymore. This will lead to losing the country its Islamic identity as the glory of Saudi Arabia comes from Islam and performing its acts of worship, of which the *hijab* is one. However, with the changes in the female *hijab*, the country would be losing some of the things it was proud of. This argument was supported by Haifa (female, 51 years old), who indicated that these changes were undesirable to non-Saudi Muslims. She explained that 'I saw foreigners who did not like what happened in Saudi Arabia because it was a spiritual and religious refuge for them, but now it has become like their countries'. Haifa mentions being in Saudi Arabia because Makkah and Al-Madinah are located in, women wearing the *hijab* were a symbol of the religiosity of the country, which makes losing that privilege a danger to the religiosity of the state.

An element of evidence surfaced that some Saudis believe there is a conspiracy against Saudi Arabia—being an Islamic society—and against the Saudi woman's *hijab*. The participants expressed the belief that Islam's enemies have succeeded in their goal of undermining Saudi society, as levels of corruption have begun to rise as a consequence of the repealing of the mandatory over-the-head of *hijab*. The participants feel that there has been an increase in the number of harassment, kidnapping, and adultery cases in Saudi society, and they attribute this to women being permitted to wear whatever they choose. Ali (male, 33 years old) confirmed this viewpoint, as the contemporary attire of women is more attractive to men than previously. In the past, the *hijab* was plain and black, which was unattractive and did not grab the attention of men easily. However, uncovered women who wear coloured and decorated *hijab* garments now catch male attention easily and enable Satan to control men to do things that they do not want to do. Similarly, Khazna (female, 37 years old) said that with the lifting of the mandatory overhead *hijab*, an ethical crisis would spread across the country. She indicated that currently, there are social issues that she had not heard of before, such as kidnapping, adultery, and harassment. In the past, such issues happened only rarely, and they are now heard of every day. She added that the issue of foundlings has increased as contemporary social institutions that look after children were established only recently and were non-existent four to five years ago. She highlighted the differences between the past and

the present as ‘the woman was wearing the *hijab*, she can only see her *mahrams*. However, issues have become more difficult, and things are left unchecked’.

Ten participants with different levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status were empathic towards the repealing of the mandatory over-the-head *hijab* and the changes to the female clothing and conduct and comportment that have followed the decree. Regarding the decree repealing the mandatory wearing of *hijab*, participants expressed an understanding of the reason behind it. They assert that the Saudi government was forced to make such a decision due to rumours and accusations by Western societies and some Muslim countries against Saudi Arabia, claiming that Saudi women were oppressed and forced to wear the *hijab*. Thus, the government made it clear that a Saudi woman is not forced by governmental institutions to wear a specific type of *hijab* and that she is free to wear what she wants. Bandar (male, 44 years old) understood the decision and considered it necessary, especially in the face of attacks on Saudi Arabia over women and the *hijab*. He explained that:

Many international anti-Islamic organisations exploited the negative image of women and the *hijab*, claiming that women are oppressed and being closely supervised by the state. Nonetheless, the state permits them now and allowed veiled and non-veiled women to involve in society and bring out real things that people are convinced with their clothes and that the state does not prevent those clothes.

Bander’s explanation highlights that the Saudi woman and her *hijab* had been used by some international organisations as the subject of attacks against the nation in the name of women’s freedom which made lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* justifiable.

Furthermore, the participants defended the decree by the government repealing the mandatory over-the-head *hijab*. They expressed an understanding that this edict is necessary to attract tourists and foreigners. The participants believe the declaration was directed at foreign women who work in Saudi Arabia and those who want to visit. Before the declaration, they were required to wear the *abaya*, and face cover. The declaration gives these women the freedom to dress modestly without having to wear the *abaya* or *hijab*. The participants feel that the decree does not ask Saudi women to change their *hijab*, nor does it permit them to be immodest in their dressing. Rather, it asserts that modesty is an indispensable feature of female clothing; however, all the

unfortunate changes to women's *hijab* are due to a misunderstanding of the words of the decree. They suggested that some women split the declaration and focus on one part of it while ignoring the other. Aishah (female, 41 years old) concur that women misinterpret the declaration, as they concentrate on there is no obligation for women to wear a specific type of *hijab* and ignore the aspects of the declaration stipulating that a woman should be modest and respectable in her dressing. The declaration states that a woman can wear any clothes she wants if it is modest. However, women wear trousers, jeans, and tight clothes, which raises issues of violating the criteria for women's appearance in public.

The participants welcomed lifting the mandatory overhead *hijab*. They agreed that the declaration gives a woman the freedom to decide what she wears and that Islam gives her the same right. The declaration was one of several decisions that guaranteed a woman her freedom and considered her a qualified human capable of choosing what she wants. Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old), one of the participants who believe the declaration was necessary to give a woman the freedom to choose her own *hijab*, expressed his conviction that requiring women to wear a black *hijab* in a hot and sunny environment is wrong, and the decision must be left to the woman, as stipulated in the declaration. Abu-Abdulaziz pointed out that in any society that operates continuously under restrictive laws for more than 30 years, people would be afraid to violate those laws or challenge them. Thus, the declaration removes unfairness from flawed rules. He explained that:

This decision allowed women to behave boldly....The existence of such a decision encourages many independent women who do not believe in this idea [the idea of the *hijab*] to talk about it, so the idea began to spread among the rising generation. The older generation began to struggle with the rising one, and a new structure begins.

This indicates that the declaration can be the first step towards changing the entire society, paving the way for other changes. It gives women who do not believe in the *hijab* the liberty to speak about their beliefs and practise it, which helps spread that belief to other girls through assimilation, creating a new face of the society that is different from the previous one.

The participants view the declaration positively because it rescues Saudi society from the hypocrisy that marked it for an era. They believe that before the declaration, women did not wear the *hijab* out of conviction in *hijab*, but wore it while they were

in the country and took it off as soon as they left. The declaration is thus necessary to transform Saudi society into an ideal environment for those who believe. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) supports lifting the mandatory to wear the *hijab*, he said that:

So that Allah may distinguish the wicked from the good .... The good person who is committed to the commands of Allah and his messenger appears now. There are neither entities that can prevent women from doing such deeds nor parents who treat them severely. Women are free now whether to wear the *hijab* or not.

Abu-Mohsen believes that before the declaration, all women were viewed as the same. However, no one could tell the difference between those who were modest and those who were immodest, but the declaration has paved the way for such discernment.

Furthermore, the participants gave an interesting reason for being in support of the declaration of lifting the mandatory of wearing *hijab*. They believe that the declaration is immensely beneficial for Saudi society, particularly for marriage and decreases harassment. Before the declaration, there was no way for a man to see a woman just through *alnadrah alshariyah*, and he could not get to know her until after signing the marriage contract. However, after the declaration, and with all the ensuing changes in society, a man and a woman can now see each other and get to know each other before they decide to get married. Also, lifting the mandatory overhead *hijab* would help reduce the rate of harassment, as having some women give up the *hijab* would reduce men's desire and excitement to discover what the *hijab* conceals. As men get used to seeing both covered and uncovered women, the rate of harassment would reduce. Nawal (female, 45 years old) explained this argument:

My husband is happy that women start to uncover their faces and do not wear *niqab*. He believes that it is normal for women to uncover their faces as eyes are women's most prominent feature and mesmerising for men. So, when a man sees a woman's eyes, he gets fascinated. But he says that "If she uncovered her face, I might not be attracted or tempted by her and I might not look at her." ... and I agree with him that there are girls who mesmerise men with their eyes, but when you see their faces, you find them not beautiful.

Recalling what she was told by her husband, Nawal said that wearing a *niqab* encourages a man's desire to discover what is under that *niqab* because the *niqab* shows a woman's beauty by allowing her eyes to be seen. Exposing the most beautiful

feature of a woman and then covering the rest of her face encourages men to seek more of her beauty. Thus, her husband was happy, as changing the styling of the traditional Saudi *hijab* after the repealing of the mandatory wearing of *hijab* would discourage the desire of men from looking at women and reduce harassment cases.

What I deduce from this theme is that the crown prince's speech laid down a verbal law for a new religiopolitical scene in Saudi Arabia and women's appearance. Imposing the idea of diversity in women's attire did not come through a written law but through a declaration during an interview, which is similar to the manner in which the *Sahwa hijab* was imposed. There was no written law in that regard either, but institutions such as the police and courts were authorised to arrest defaulting women, thus criminalising their actions. Today, the verbal declaration of the crown prince was received as a law that gives women the right to wear what they want and empowers them to practise *hijab* or wear what they desire without harassment or bother—physical or verbal.

The majority of participants from different backgrounds perceived the words of the crown prince negatively. The black *hijab* is a symbol of the piety and religiosity of the nation. Women giving up wearing the black *hijab* can be regarded as a violation of religious principles and a threat to the state (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Thus, the black *abaya* is used to distinguish those who are truly religious and pious from others. This supports what the participants indicate, presenting the lifting of the mandatory overhead *hijab* as a success for the West, who have been trying to westernise Saudi Arabia, and interpreting the changes relating to the *hijab* as a victory for this westernisation effort. Al-Besher (1994) suggests that westernising the Muslim woman is part of a grand conspiracy of the West to westernise the entire world. The proliferation of adornment among Muslim women and copying of Western women are signs of westernisation in the Islamic world. Challenging the black *hijab* should be considered as challenging Islam itself, which seeks to discipline women to a specific type of *hijab*—being a symbol of the religiosity and piety of the society. Yuval-Davis (1997) proposes that a woman is regarded as a protector and carrier of tradition rather than a symbol of changes or trends. While Yuval-Davis' argument is flawed in that the woman in Saudi Arabia is evidently a symbol of the changing trends and an example of the tremendous changes happening in the nation, it is still evident that the Saudi woman is regarded as a protector of the traditions and Islamic identity of the state.

This corroborates the findings of Al-Tuwayjiri (2018) that Saudis view women who challenge the culture and customs as naive women who have become victims of Western plots to destroy *the castle of Islam*.

Not all Saudis perceive this declaration negatively, as it has positives for both men and women. The declaration and visual messaging come at a time when women's rights issues have been the subject of international scrutiny and criticism and attacks levelled against Saudi Arabia, which remains a lingering issue (Blanchard, 2010). The declaration was part of the messaging that the new government used to signal on the international scene that Saudi Arabia has made progress in women's rights, with one of these rights being that a woman has control over her appearance. The declaration was critical to achieving the Saudi Vision 2030, as it gave women, including Saudis and non-Saudis, the right to decide what they wear. It encourages foreign investment inflow into Saudi Arabia, as foreigners want to invest and work in a country where their families can practise their beliefs. As the data shows, the declaration was not obvious, with many women misunderstanding it, thinking it applied only to foreign women. Lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* gives women the right of freedom in choosing what they wear. It helps Saudi society become a normal one, where people have normal differences and can make diverse choices about their lives. Before, the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* made people hypocritical, making them follow what they did not believe in. If I consider the *hijab* as a continuation of the *Sahwa* era extreme segregation system, then lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab* normalises the relationship between men and women, without them being strictly segregated in public. Moreover, it can, as suggested by the data, reduce the rate of harassment: since women can now be seen, it reduces men's desire for fully covered women (Amin, 2000). It can also facilitate healthy relationships between men and women, where they can share their perspectives and get to know each other in an atmosphere without any negative suspicion of each other (Bullock, 2007).

## **8.5 The *hijab* and the weakening of the male guardianship**

As explained in Chapter 3, all government agencies were ordered to allow women access to government services, even when they do not have consent from a male guardian. Following this announcement, women over the age of 21 were allowed to hold their own passports and could travel abroad without their guardian's

permission. All male participants and the majority of female participants not willingly accepted these changes, as it would mean that men would lose a right—the right to control women—to which they had become accustomed. This finding supports the view of the participants regarding men's right to control women's affairs which was discussed in (Chapter 7). As it relates to the present study only six women from diverse backgrounds supported ending male guardianship over women because they believed such control to be tyrannical in nature.

The few female participants who supported ending the male guardianship over women described feeling happy and relieved when they heard the news. They wanted all men to know that women under their authority are because of their own free will, not because they need to have their guardian's permission. The participants confirmed that many women's lives and futures were wasted in the name of guardianship. Haifa (female, 51 years old), whose anger was evident in her voice, states that even though her husband was angry that women were given this new liberty, she was happy to no longer need to beg for his approval for anything she wants to do. Haifa went on to suggest that weakening male guardianship could change the nature of the relationship between men and women:

Men are afraid of women nowadays...In the past, men used to treat women severely, and if she complained to her father and brothers, they dragged her and returned her to her husband. However, nowadays, women can ask for the help of the police.... In the past, men used to control the destiny of women, to the extent that some women were leaving their jobs and education for their sake.

Here, Haifa explained the change in relations, from when a woman was afraid of a man to the opposite. She confirmed that in the past, a woman's husband, family and government institutions were against her; all of this changed, however, and all parties have come to support the law. In the past, a woman whose guardian treated her unjustly may have been made to renounce her studying and employment in order to please him; some of these men were likely sociopaths who manipulated and abused their wives. Nawal (female, 45 years old) described:

My friend is a very oppressed woman, and her husband is a sociopath. She cannot open the door if he is outside the house. Her relatives were living far from her and she was an orphan... He treated her harshly until she had a psychological disorder and was admitted to the hospital. Yet, she was able to escape with another woman and went to the police, and

she filed a complaint in court.... Thank Allah, the freedom that women enjoyed now, has given us the power to stand against men.

According to Nawal, such an announcement would be seen as a great victory for a woman with no friends or family to ask about her and protect her; she confirmed that her friend would not have escaped from the hospital if the law had not changed, unlike past cases when a woman would have been forced by her family, the police or the CPVPV to return to her oppressive husband.

All male and the majority of female participants of this study were not happy that male guardianship had been weakened because they felt that women need to be controlled by men if they behave in a nonsensical fashion and need to be put back on the right path. The participants raised several issues which they believed is justifications for the unacceptance of the declarations. They asserted that a majority of Saudi women today do not have jobs and are thus unable to gain their independence without financial resources, which is seen as a responsibility of Saudi men. The participants emphasised the need for women for men's consultation and guidance as a reason for rejecting these changes. Women are partners of men, so whenever women tried to be independent of them, they will eventually return to men. Muhammed (male, 41 years old) for example, as opposed to weakened male guardianship, felt that guardianship needed to be a man's responsibility because women are weak and unwise. Muhammed stated, 'If a woman does not care about her husband or father, does not have great respect for him, or she is not afraid of him, she can do anything that comes to her mind'. According to him, due to women's inherent nature, such as weakness and lack of wisdom, these new freedoms could potentially enable them to behave in a nonsensical manner, such as going out without their husband's permission, asking for a divorce and wearing whatever they want. Such disagreement was not exclusive to men but also women agreed with this view. Kharia (female, 46 years old) seemed to demonstrate more aggression than Muhammed's view. Specifically, she believed that a woman's ability to remain rational and memory are not the same as a man's: 'Women should be guided to the right path. If she has no one to guide her, then Satan will be her guide'. She further stated that a woman needs to have a man guide her and show her the right path, and that without guardianship, women would become involved in adultery and ethical issues.

When the participants were asked whether they believed that the lifting of restrictions imposed by male guardianship had an impact on changing of norms of wearing the *hijab*. The vast majority of participants—except nine participants from both gender and diverse backgrounds—agreed that current changes related to the *hijab* were partly a result of men losing their authority over women. The participants believe the traditional full-covering *hijab* is the product of a patriarchal society. Due to the weakening of patriarchal authority, some women took advantage of the development and either changed their style of *hijab* or stopped wearing it altogether. They suggested that since the traditional Saudi *hijab* had been designed and imposed on women by men, by changing their *hijab* to one of their choosing, women were symbolically removing the guardianship over them. Um-Naby (female, 25 years old) confirmed this argument when she claimed that changes in the male guardianship system gave women the freedom to choose what they wore:

The social changes that have occurred made us free to choose whether to wear the *hijab* or not. This is our conviction because everything is based on it and the ideas we have. Due to the pressures that took place, we may see liberal and open societies where women can go everywhere while they are not wearing the *hijab*... or because of the ideas that indicate that man is responsible for me, so it is he who imposed the *hijab* on me.

In addition to weaker male guardianship, she also believed changing women's style of *hijab* because as she saw it, women link between freedom and taking off the *hijab*, which is seen in societies where women can enjoy their freedom when they are uncovered. She also suggested a correlation between the style of a woman's *hijab* and the restrictions that have been imposed by men, and that changing their *hijab* reflects removing male authority over them.

The participants explained why they believe that lifting restrictions imposed by male guardianship had an impact on changing of norms of wearing the *hijab*. They asserted that because women are no longer as 'afraid' of men as they had once been; if a man were to do anything that negatively affected a woman's wellbeing, she could easily complain to the police or the courts and they would support her. Asma (female, 37 years old) and Eman (female, 33 years old) both agreed that in the past, some women wore *hijab* out of fear of their guardians, but now the men could do nothing. They suggested that while some men may have forced women to wear the *hijab*, they could no longer do this because a man will go to prison for abusing a woman; for this

reason, many felt that allowing a breakdown over women's *hijab* is better than going to prison. They confirmed that women took advantage of their newfound freedom by wearing clothes that they should not wear; some women now threaten men that they will complain if they are prevented from making their own decisions, and that the law leans in favour of women. Male participants in this study felt the same in regard to the influence of weakening the male guardianship over women's *hijab*. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) and Ali (male, 33 years old) For example, stated that the weakening influence of the male guardianship system on women wearing the *hijab* was undeniable. They believed that a woman was obliged to obey her guardian and that stripping a man of this power led to unpleasant changes in *hijab* of women; especially women who wore the *hijab* for traditional, not religious, reasons. They felt certain that if the guardianship system were reinstated, the tradition of women wearing the *hijab* would go back to the way it was before these changes.

The participants' mothers expressed their powerlessness and that of their husbands with respect to controlling their daughters' *hijab*. They believe it was normal in the past to pressurise girls to wear a style of *hijab* that their parents approved of, but now girls know their parents have no authority over their affairs. Halimah (female, 58 years old) is a mother of five girls, and two of her daughters stopped wearing a modest *hijab*, instead opting to uncover their faces and wear attractive *abayas*, which she found unsatisfactory. She is bothered by the termination of the guardianship because 'I am a mother of five grown-up girls, thank Allah, I have raised them well, but I feel that they had taken the opportunity from this field, and had power over me and their father'. She saw weakening male guardianship as a loss of authority over her daughters and whether or not they wore *hijab*. Um-Kahled (female, 47 years old) is also a mother of two girls, whom she was struggling to teach about *hijab*, especially because of the loss of authority that their father had over them. She stated that every time she advised or ordered them to do anything they did not like, they would tell her, 'After we reach the age of 21 years, you have no authority over us'. As a mother, any time she heard these words, she was afraid her daughter complain about her or their father to the police or leave the home or, even worse, travel outside the state, which she considered to be scandalous. Furthermore, she believed that the changes that were made to guardianships weakened her and her husband's authority to even talk about *hijab* with their daughters. As such, any time her daughters were angry or

upset about interference or orders, she and her husband would explain that everything they did was for their daughters' sake.

Ending the male guardianship system is regarded as a significant step toward empowering Saudi women, and reform in this area was considered to be a victory for oppressed women which is supported by only six women in this research. According to those participants who are familiar with women who have been oppressed in the name of guardianship, lifting it offers a chance for those women to live the life they deserve and choose. According to Alsahi (2018), the guardianship system placed women at the whim of their male guardian, even if he was younger, addicted to drugs or alcohol or behaved like a sociopath. For years, men made decisions on behalf of women related to travelling, being released from a shelter or prison, attaining an education, seeking employment, and so forth, and this sometimes led them to treat women as less-than-human or second-class citizens who needed every aspect of their lives to be controlled by men. Resolving such situations not only successfully amplified the voices of women and their demands for equality, but also provided a long overdue response to lengthy pressure from international organisations to end the guardianship system over women (Blanchard, 2010; Nuruzzaman, 2018). Moreover, Saudi Arabia cannot achieve the economic goals of the Saudi Vision 2030 plan without involving the other half of society that had been hidden behind male authority (Shebaro, 2017); granting women the freedom to determine their future and to make their own decisions related to their education, career and travel plans will allow them to engage in the country's economy, which will, in turn, contribute to achieving these objectives. This helps Saudi women earn income and attain financial independence from men, which, in turn, helps them escape the authority of men—being financially dependent on men is one of the reasons for women accepting their oppression (Al-Saadawi, 2017).

Considering Saudi thought regarding women's freedom and the authority of men over women, as explained in Chapter 7, I was not surprised to find that a majority of participants in this study are not happy with these reforms, and that their beliefs negatively affected their opinions of women and the *hijab*. Women are unwise, weak, powerless to make a living for themselves, and are always in need of guidance—these are some of the anticipated and justifiable reasons the participants offered for rejecting any changes to the power of men. In the Islamic discourse during the *Sahwa* era, such

justifications were continuously used to justify men's authority over women and caution against any changes to this freeing women from men's authority is considered the goal of Islam's enemy to destroy the state. According to Al-Khunaizi (2012), religious men and some women rejected any reforms to the traditional rules related to women for years, because they assumed that any changes would lead to corruption and destroy society. The *Sahwa* movement insisted that freedom for women would ultimately end the Islamic nation, because Satan exists where women exist. When women believe they should be under the control of a guardian and obey him, society is protected and there is no reason for moral corruption to spread. However, women's awareness that men have lost the authority entrenched in the male guardianship system has been the cause of unfortunate changes in society, with *hijab* norms being one of them.

The majority of participants considered the weakening of male guardianship as being one of the reasons for changes in women's *hijab*, because according to *qwamma*, controlling women's *hijabs* was the responsibility of men. Thus, losing the power to control a woman's attire explains the changes that are currently being seen in observed in the attire of Saudi women in public. Besides lifting the guardianship system, the government established rules to protect women from men, which penalise—one year—and fine—five thousand SAR—for any man who harms a woman physically, psychologically, or sexually (Public Prosecution, 2020). This penalty, the participants believed, is a reason that forces some guardians to accept changes in women's appearance. After men lose some of their authority over women and their choice of *hijab*, they feel powerless and become fearful of legal punishment. Consequently, women feel supported by the law, which encourages them to make their own choices regarding their lives and the way they want to appear in public. Permitting women to decide whether they want to wear *hijab* challenges the value of the male guardianship system. The contemporary changes to wearing the *hijab* can be considered women's expression of themselves and their rejection of patriarchal authority (Al-Qasimi, 2010; Harkness, 2019; Shimek, 2012). Moreover, these changes also reflect the changing gender–power relationship in Saudi Arabia (Al-Tuwayjiri, 2018). However, I argue that patriarchal authority still exists despite the new government reforms. Importantly, allowing a woman access to education and the workplace and giving her authority over herself after age 21 does not necessarily mean

that she supports abolishing guardianship (Bianchi, 2017)—the majority of the women in this research rejected the lifting of men’s authority over them.

## **8.6 The *hijab* and stripping the power of the CPVPV**

As explained in Chapter 3, the CPVPV is a formal institution that aims to control the religiosity and morality of Saudi society. However, on April 11, 2016, the Saudi Council of Ministers announced a regulation that would restrict the power of the CPVPV by preventing them from arresting people. Despite their diversity, the minority of study participants defended the role of the committee as it relates to controlling society and reducing crime, and stated that they wished that the council would retract the decision because Saudi society needed the CPVPV. The participants believed that the CPVPV had protected Saudi society from adultery and alcohol. They confirmed that all accusations against them were little more than a conspiracy to destroy the institution. They distinguished that those in the committee who shouted at, harmed and beat people were not true members, as real members of the CPVPV were polite and acted without aggression; rather, they were criminals and ex-convicts who were pretending to be CPVPV members, and their goal was to destroy the reputation of the institution. Khazna (female, 37 years old) for example, believed that society still needed the committee, especially when men were found to have blackmailed girls. While she conceded that some of the committee members were unqualified to be in their positions, and others had destroyed the reputation of the institution by beating and yelling at people and illegally searching people and taking their belongings; she insisted that such behaviours blighted the otherwise beautiful goals of the institution, such as closing shops during prayers times and reminding women to cover themselves. She stated that she would like to see a return of the CPVPV, but only after its members received the necessary training to be qualified to deal with people.

The participants feel that the security in Saudi society was much higher compared to the current situation following the stripping away of the powers of certain religious institutions. They believe when Saudi society was under the control of the CPVPV, there was a sense of security in the public domain. Aishah (female, 41 years old) remembered that when members of the committee were seen throughout the country, she felt safe because she knew no one would harm her in the presence of the

officials. When I asked her if she was satisfied with how CPVPV members treated women in public, she stated:

We used to see members of CPVPV observing women in the streets, they might beat her or give her instructions even if she does an ordinary action... I saw a woman who was beaten by a stick, just because she bent down to pick something from the ground. He beat her in front of me and said to her: "Be careful, do not do that" ..Yes, that is a discipline in the end.

She justified this behaviour because she saw it as an effort to protect women, not to humiliate them; and she believed that the committee had succeeded in ensuring a level of fairness among people that she felt was now lacking.

Given previous harmful actions and aggression against Saudi citizens by members of the committee, it was not surprising that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the restriction of powers of the organisation. Sumiah (female, 21 years old) expressed her delight with the decision, and she maintained that members abused their positions in order to control and impose their authority over the citizenry, even if the person being penalised had not done anything wrong:

I am pleased with this decision. Every person has become free to do what they want. My sister was wearing the *hijab* and the face cover as well. Once they caught her because she wore nail polish. Thus, I think that they were not fair enough and abused people's authority. After they were gone, everyone is free to do what they want.

This behaviour not only damaged the image of the CPVPV, but also that of religious people. Abu-Ali (male, 30 years old) explained that most committee members were neither qualified nor properly educated to order women to cover themselves; as an example, he described an incident where a woman was penalised for wearing a *niqab* because the committee believed that wearing *niqab* was religiously forbidden and that women must cover their eyes. Thus, he concluded, stripping them of this power gave women the freedom to wear what they want.

When I asked if restricting the power of the committee influenced women's *hijab* and the way that they appeared in public, the majority of study participants from various backgrounds, agreed that this was the case. The participants confirmed that women were fear of the power that the committee had. The CPVPV had authority over women's *hijab* and all women wore the *hijab*. They stated that when the CPVPV had control over women's *hijab*, when a woman was not properly wearing her *hijab*, the members could have her removed from the premises, and if she refused

to leave, they could summon the police and have her placed in custody; knowing that this could happen helped to strengthen women's commitment to wearing *hijab*. Since their power was restricted, noticeable changes related to women's *hijab* in public places, malls and parks had come about. They believed that this prevented corruption from spreading in society and among women, but now women wear what they want as they lose their power. Abu-Mohsen (male, 44 years old) asserted that women who were afraid of the CPVPV were simply not committed to wearing proper *hijab*:

I know that the CPVPV members used to remind women about the *hijab*. However, women were wearing the *hijab* when they saw them, as they know they were affiliated with a governmental organisation, which has power. This affected the shape of the *hijab* because Allah fixes the wrong deeds with the authority of power.

Abu-Mohsen confirmed that restricting the power of the CPVPV did not affect the attire of all Saudi women only those who were forced to wear *hijab*. The committee as a governmental institution had power that women were afraid of. Norah (female, 24 years old) had experience with the CPVPV which described it as horrific. 'Once, I was sitting putting a leg over the other and revelling my eyes. He ordered me to sit properly and cover my eyes. They were horrific..'. Norah confirmed that the committee was an abuser of women. She believed that she was more cautious about how she appeared and behaved in public because she knew that committee members would be caught for a simple mistake which would have been seen as a scandal and would destroy women's reputations. Norah believed 'If they still work until now, we will never see these changes that took place concerning the *hijab*. Because they have the power to prevent anything'.

Furthermore, the participants believe women were not just afraid of the authority of the CPVPV and the implications of that power, but also of embarrassment. They confirmed that the very presence of the committee's members instilled a certain sense of fear of humiliation that prevented women from misbehaving in public. They remembered that when women saw the committee enter a place, women would properly cover themselves to avoid being shouted at; this stopped happening when the committee lost the authority to order women about their *hijab*. Eman (female, 33 years old) agreed that restrictions on the CPVPV led to obvious, negative changes in women's appearance:

They usually followed you in the markets, asking you to cover. They were embarrassing you. Women were wearing the *hijab* because they were afraid of them. However, women do not think about them at all now.

In this example, Eman confirmed that women covered themselves to avoid being criticised, shouted at or chased by committee members; despite this scary atmosphere, she still asserted that she wished she could go back to these times:

I was never happy about the withdrawal of their authority because sometimes, I like their existence.... I mean I want to be in a society where women are wearing the *hijab*, even if they wear it because they are afraid of the CPVPV members and not just afraid of Allah. I support the *hijab*, and I feel that we were in grace when this entity was present.

She emphasised that she believed the CPVPV was a blessing to Saudi society, because there were women who did not fear Allah, but wore *hijab* because of the committee. She concluded by stating her wish to live in a society where all women wear *hijab*, whether for religious reasons or otherwise.

The absence of CPVPV members places the onus of responsibility for observing and controlling women's public appearances onto her family, rather than the institution. The participants agreed that the situation for girls and women had changed and that family was now responsible for their daughter's *hijab*. They wondered why the CPVPV needed to be the protector of girls and to police the way they were dressed in public spaces; and they emphasised that women's attire and behaviour were their responsibility, not that of the committee members. The participants explained that in the past, families were not worried about their girls or their *hijab*, because that was the CPVPV's responsibility; today, however, women are free to wear what they want, and parents—especially parents who force their daughters to wear *hijab*—have become increasingly concerned that their girls might be influenced by other women to wear *hijab* that they find unacceptable. Abu-Husam (male, 33 years old) as a father, views the committee as a crucial element in Muslim society. He confirmed that when institution members had exerted authority in public spaces, he would drop his daughters off at the shopping mall and return when they had finished their purchases; at that time, he was not concerned about their appearance, their safety, or whether they were harassed by men, since he knew that the CPVPV would advise women to cover themselves and would ensure that men stayed away from them.

Seven of the study participants, from various backgrounds, however, did not associate changes in *hijab* practises with the restricted powers of the CPVPV. They stated that the effect of the restrictions can be seen in the current increasing rate of harassment among men and women; in the past, the committee played an important role in protecting women from harassment and making an example of any man who engaged in this behaviour. Abu-Sarah (male, 32 years old) was one of the participants who denied that changes in women's *hijab* were a consequence of the absence of the CPVPV, but rather were the result of scholarship programs and foreign tourism; he suggested that when women studied abroad, they returned home with different opinions than those they espoused before leaving, and that issues related to removing the *hijab* were influenced by other values, especially western ideals, that were practised in the countries to which they had travelled.

I would argue that the committee's power was superior to all aspects of society, even that of the security forces. Unfortunately, this powerful authority allowed committee members to oppress people of both sexes. The present study confirmed that the majority of participants were happy with the government regulation that stripped CPVPV of their power and reorganised the institution. They believed that they had violated people's privacy and abused their power to oppress citizens and control their lives. Like Al Ghatami's (2015) argument, the participants' experience confirmed that the actions of committee members were not premised on Islamic jurisprudence but were rather based on the opinions and perspectives of individual committee members and practised power that was based on self-authority and execution; while anyone could disagree with their thoughts or principles, they were mandated to obey their commands. The participants state that the committee became a cover for criminals and ex-convicts who had become religious because of their appearance; anyone with a long beard and a short *thoub* could officially or unofficially become a member. Committee members have attempted to improve their social image by presenting themselves as pious and trustworthy, and as defenders of society's virtue, in the hope that Saudi society will forget their shameful behaviours. That this new image is being actively projected was confirmed by a small fraction of the participants who believed that the committee members were the virtue protectors and that their absence from public spaces is a part of the conspiracy against Muslim society and the institution itself as would lead to the corruption of society. They feel that all

previous crimes have been excused as accidental and therefore require forgiveness (Al-Ghathami, 2015).

The *hijab* and women's attire were once a primary focus of the committee members. When they caught and yelled at some women in front of other people, the women had to obey what the committee member said, regardless of whether it was right or wrong. In fact, if a woman did not wear a *hijab* or wore an inappropriate garment from the perspective of a committee member, she could be jailed or punished. For the female participants, being imprisoned by the CPVPV and being seen in the committee car were considered scandalous and would cause them to lose their reputation, since the general belief was that the majority of cases investigated by this organisation were related to sexual crimes or alcoholism (Alenazy, 2017). The participants confirmed that fear of the authority of the CPVPV was not the only reason that women kept wearing their *hijab* during that time, but as confirmed by (Al-Kateeb, 2013; Grace, 2002), who asserted that fear of humiliation and punishment by members of the CPVPV strongly influenced women to always wear *hijab* and maintain strict control over their behaviour and attire when in public.

Thus, the participants believed that stripping the CPVPV of its power affected the attire of women in public. Anyone who spends any amount of time in public spaces these days will notice that women's appearances are no longer a CPVPV priority, and that they have been limited to calling for prayers and compared to the past, they are rarely seen in public spaces. I would argue that the institution has lost its authority of controlling women in public, which contradicts Detrick (2017), who insisted that despite the limited influence of the committee, it continues to be an effective formal institution of societal control. By stripping the CPVPV's power, women are free to wear what they want. I would further argue that changes in women's *hijab* can be regarded as a celebration of the committee's loss of power and the absence of their authority over women.

The current diversity of women's appearances in public may also be a way to confirm their existence in public spaces where they used to be restricted. The committee was essentially a continuation of a patriarchal system that insisted the right place for a woman was in her home with her children, and she should only appear in public when it was absolutely necessary and needed to be kept under governance the entire time (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). With this understanding, the findings of the present

study suggest that the absence of the CPVPV shifts the burden of this supervision and ensures that women's public attire and behaviour meet societal expectations of women's families; this, in turn, reflects the ongoing patriarchy in Saudi society, which still insists that women should always be under the control and authority by men.

### **8.7 Transformation of religious discourse about the *hijab***

Traditional religious discourse in Saudi Arabia has been regarded as an obstacle to fully realising the Saudi Vision 2030 plan. As was explained in Chapter 3, traditional religious discourse conflicts to modernise Saudi society, which is the primary aim of Vision 2030, as it is premised on an anti-science posture and is anti-women and against their existence in the public domain. For this reason, modernisation and a renewal of the religious discourse became a priority of the Saudi government; this is evident because of the number of *fatwas*, especially for women. Some of these rulings were related to women's attire in public, specifically allowing women to wear something other than black *abaya*, since this was not seen as being crucial in Islam, and legislation that allowed women to uncover their faces because of differing opinions among Islamic scholars in such regard. The participants were asked about their view of modern religious *fatwas* on women's *hijab*. The majority of the participants in this study, despite their diversity, reject the new *fatwas* related to women's *hijab*.

The study participants disagree with the new religious discourse, as they believe it is not founded on Islamic precepts and is not coming from trusted religious leaders. The participants stated that they did not consider modern religious discourse to be Islamic, since they had been taught for their entire lives that a woman must cover her face and wear *abaya*. They believed that the new *fatwas* conflicted with the Quran as no evidence in it can support the new discourse. They insisted that anyone who voiced such an opinion was 'intellectually perverted' and should not be considered a religious man. The participants suggested that those religious *muftis* have weak religious faith which has been reflected in their *fatwas*. The participants argue that the religious men issuing new *fatwas* are attempting to implement an external agenda on Muslim women and not Islamic precepts. As Abu-Kahled (male, 53 years old) explained, 'Some outer groups want to spoil our lives. They saw us protecting our wives and daughters and they do not like that. Those groups want our daughters to fall into sin'. He went on to suggest that those who issued such *fatwas* did not have

knowledge of Islam, and he emphatically stated that he would not accept a *fatwa* about his *erd* from anyone. Abu-Kahled is suspicious of the intention of the sources of the new *fatwas* and their overarching objective, which is reflective of the issue of conspiracy theories in current Saudi thinking. This suspicion of a conspiracy was obvious in Fatimah's (female, 35 years old) statement, who rejected the implementation of such *fatwas* and had no intention to change their *hijab* after years of wearing it:

I am not convinced by anybody's opinion regarding the *hijab*. I always follow my heart and search in the Quran and Sunnah, I usually follow my heart. Those groups have appeared after so many years. Why did not they speak about this before? Why did they speak after freedom started and I have to listen to what they say?

For her, the *fatwas* of these religious leaders were not seen as trustworthy because they were issued after several years in which such things were forbidden; rather, she stated that she trusts what was written in the Quran, the prophet's (PBUH) *Hadith* and what her heart tells her is true. Fatimah believed that covering women's faces was discussed in the Quranic verses that commanded women to cover their faces with *hijab*; regarding the *abaya*, she insisted that no item of clothing could cover a woman's body as well as an *abaya*.

The participants agreed that a changing attitude in the government would justify a transformation in religious discourse. At one time, the Saudi government supported the traditional religious discourse regarding *hijab* and anyone who engaged in such discourse was acting under the protection of the government. When the government reveals its new face, a new discourse has appeared. According to Abu-Abdulaziz (male, 37 years old):

Religious facilitation and fanaticism are based on political will. If the political will considers religious fanaticism, so society will go towards it, and if it wants facilitation, it will go to facilitation.

He argued that religious discourse has historically followed the attitudes of government, and this tradition continues today. The government gave religious institutions the right to spread the ideology of one religious sect, as long as it did not conflict with their political authority. Under some circumstances, the government decided to replace the old religious discourse with a new one that was better-suited to the recent changes and respected all religions and doctrines. The government's

changing attitude essentially forced the religious discourse to change. According to Eman (female, 33 years old), religious institutions are forced to change their *fatwas*, which has caused losing people trust in the new religious discourse:

In the past, religion was correct, they began to analyse the songs nowadays, so what do you think they would do with the *hijab*? They say it is normal to uncover the face and to appear without a *hijab*. The most important thing is to wear modest clothes. Bit by bit, they will say do not wear the *hijab*. So, as you see, nobody dares to say that religion is correct. The *Sheikhs* do not say the truth, because there were forbidden issues, so why do you permit them now? What is forbidden and what is permitted is clear to all people.

She added that a changing society requires a change in religious discourse to support the government's vision and ease the implementation of the societal changes.

Just eight participants from different backgrounds confirmed their acceptance of the new discourse about women's *hijab*. The participants believed that a black *abaya* and covering a woman's face are not mandatory and that a woman will not be a sinner if she does not practise the Saudi form of *hijab* because is not an Islamic requirement. Hanan (female, 30 years old) explained:

The more time changes, the more the *fatwa* changes...I think that is true. If you go back to *fatwas* now, you will find that they are the same ones in the era of the Prophet (PBUH). The cloak was not defined to cover the head, and this *hijab* was not the basic one. The most important thing for the dress is to be loose, covering the body, and not showing the ornaments, and body parts.

Hanan asserted that *fatwa* is changeable and that the new religious discourse conflicts with the idea of the rightness of one style of *hijab* comprised of the *abaya* and *niqab*, which did not exist in the original Islamic precepts on *hijab*. Thus, new religious discourse gave women the right to choose the form that they desire based on Islamic rules. Abu-Ali (male, 30 years old) however, stated that:

Now people are discussing the things they took for granted. No one spoke about them, such as women and the *hijab*. This has changed my point of view, so that I can express my opinion now explicitly, saying that it is normal to marry a woman who is wearing the *hijab* and not wearing the face cover. So, I can search about this issue and sometimes we listen to provocative words about the issue of the *hijab*. Again, I search and read in the Islamic schools of *fiqh*.

Abu-Ali explained that for years only one religious attitude controlled the entire religious discourse, which disallowed any other religious discourse to reach the

people. Such discourse forbade any Islamic attitude that conflicted with what they believed, and this was further justified as ‘Prohibition of what may lead to committing sins’. In this way, women were prohibited from uncovering their faces and black *abaya* was imposed on all women. During *Sahwa* era, Abu–Ali admitted that he was powerless to discuss issues surrounding women and their *hijab* in order to avoid criticism from others; after the religious discourse surrounding women and the *hijab* this was changed.

However, the changing religious discourse has given Abu–Ali the confidence and liberty to discuss controversial issues regarding *hijab*, whereas it stirred a feeling of anger for other participants. Reem (female, 34 years old) explained:

It is this strange contradiction that let people feel angry about them after they discover that there are so many contradictions. However, according to the clear and well–established doctrinal study that has been imposed for a long time, everyone has the right to follow the *fatwas* and the available guidelines. But to follow one path, in which we discovered the flaw of the *muftis*, and of course, that undermined people's confidence.

Reem argued that some *muftis* issued *fatwas* without conducting proper jurisprudential research. This angers people who believe in these *fatwas* as the only right Islamic *fatwas* on *hijab* and thus lose confidence in the *muftis* and their *fatwas*. However, today, the new religious discourse gives people the liberty to choose between various Islamic *fatwas* and interpretations.

These participants accept changes in religious discourse as a result of the openness of society. Changing *fatwas* is normal, because every period has its *fatwa* and there are certain times when *fatwas* must meet the needs of the times. They went on to suggest that changing religious discourse can be linked to specific changes in the state where women have their rights and people’s awareness has changed. The participants believed people read and learn about their religion from sources other than those that are local, they often compare their *fatwas* and other Islamic *fatwas* and discover that they have been oppressed for years by the religious groups that issued the decrees. This in turn leads to suspicions about what led the religious institution to announce various Islamic *fatwas* and opinions about various subjects, among them the *hijab*. Muhammed (male, 41 years old) states:

During the past forty years, we have studied only one curriculum and one doctrine. There was not any other doctrine included in our references and curricula, and when knowledge

became available, especially after the use of the Internet, the sayings of scholars and other schools of *fiqh* became available to all people. Consequently, many of those who used to follow one curriculum, or one thought retreated from such sayings, and they are satisfied with the sayings of other doctrines.

The changing in the relationship between religious elite and public has changed. The participants believe that there were problems communicating with the religious elite because those who controlled *fatwas* were extremists and they reached out to people about what they wanted. Such disconnection between the religious elite and the people created the possibility for an extremist to fill it with *fatwas* that were not associated with religion but reflected the thoughts of extremist *mufitis*. However, today the relationship has changed and the public is able to communicate with the religious elite. Nawal (female, 45 years old) explains:

We were not able to discuss such issues in the past, maybe this is because most of the issues have become clearer now. There were some issues nobody could discuss; however, these have become open to debate, including the *hijab*. Furthermore, the generations and the reform movements may differ. Different generations are discussing these views with the *Sheikhs*. So, what is the pretext upon which you said these words and where is your evidence?

According to Nawal, in the past, certain religious statements and topics were not allowed to be discussed in public. She made it clear that *hijab* was one of the subjects that was a forbidden topic of conversation and any perspective that contradicted that of the religious leaders was disallowed. With the ongoing reform movement, however, the situation has changed and, 'now, these issues have become open to debate. Some of the radical *mufitis* are locked up because their statements have nothing to do with religion'.

In the past, *hijab* was a part of significant matters for women, and I would assert that religious leaders were obsessed with every aspect of this garment; this is evident from the variety of *fatwas* and Islamic opinions that have been issued on design, form, colour and fabric. The *fatwas* about *hijab* exemplify this unidirectional attitude and were once thought to be the right and authentic *fatwas* about this garment; these decrees were not presented as the personal opinion of a member of the religious institutions, but rather as the opinion of Islam itself and understood by the audience to be the Islamic point of view that cannot be questioned. For example, *fatwa* No. 21352 was issued on the PCSRI, which was about women wearing *abaya* on their shoulders

with a decoration. The committee denied that the item was an Islamic *abaya*, because *abaya* needed to be thick, cover the entire body and the head and have no decorations; otherwise, it could not be considered an Islamic *hijab*. They also explained that *abaya* reflected the word *jilbab*, which was described in the Quran as a garment with which women could cover themselves (Addwesh, 2006). In another *fatwa*, No. 5168, religious leaders decreed that it was mandatory for all Muslim women to cover their hands and faces (Addwesh, 2006). For years such *fatwas* were the only decrees that existed in television, radio, newspapers and the educational system.

The government decided to replace the old, dogmatic religious discourse with new, modern religious concepts that will facilitate political, economic and societal reforms and help the citizenry to absorb these changes (Al-Hamad, 2019). After Saudi women and men as their guardians had believed and practised certain *fatwas* for years as the ideal Islamic *hijab*, members of the PCSRI released *fatwas* that conflicted with the previous edicts and change the *hijab* norms in society (see Chapter 3). The majority of participants were not happy about these *fatwas*, and they rejected the modern religious discourse. The changing *fatwas* aroused suspicions—not about the Islamic principles of *hijab*, but about all the *fatwas* that they had believed and practised throughout their lifetimes. The participants' resistance to the new discourse was understandable, because this change was happening to one of the main elements upon which Saudi society was built: Religious institutions and the principles thereof (Al-Sadhan, 2010). Considering that the participants view *fatwas* that are not based on Islamic text as a way to defend the principles that they have practised for so long, and moreover, that people are creatures of habit, *fatwas* are a source of worry to many, as are the consequences of such *fatwas* on women and men lives, since *fatwas* have the power to change the *hijab* and alter the attire of women in Saudi society (Godbole, 2017).

The participants who rejected and doubted the new *fatwas* related to *hijab* undoubtedly did so because of the time in history in which these *fatwas* were released. They likely found themselves asking all manner of questions: Why did these *muftis* wait until now to release these *fatwas*? Why did they not issue a statement about this a long time ago? How could these *fatwas* change what was once considered *haram*, to *hala*? Even though many participants deny that *fatwas* are founded on Islamic principles, they consider them as being the result of internal political pressure imposed

upon them in the form of changes and the current sense of openness with which Saudi society has been living (Marghich, 2018). Since the moment when Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman first announced the Saudi Vision 2030 plan and indicated there would be a change in the Islamic discourse and destruction of extremist discourse and routing out of those who embrace these ideals and practises (see Chapter 3), a noticeable transformation of Islamic discourse has unfolded; in the course of this societal shift, many extremist *mufitis* and radical religious leaders have been imprisoned (Al-Otaiby, 2020). The action that the government has taken against extremists and some members of the religious institutions serve as examples for others who would reject this renewed discourse and consider other religious sects and religions. Changing religious discourse permits the government to release itself and its citizens from the authority of the religious institution and its members (Al-Khunaizi, 2012).

Traditional Islamic discourse in Saudi society was built on fear of freedom or changes; the religious institutions once strenuously fought against any type of freedom of thought or materials that could eventually lead to the corruption of society, because they were afraid that these kinds of freedoms would cause the people to question their *fatwas* and the manner in which they behaved (Al-Khunaizi, 2012). For years Saudis have believed that ‘*Ulama* flesh is poisoned’ as *Sahwa* then used this decree to avoid any criticism against them or their *fatwas* (Al-Ghathami, 2015, p.130). Today, as confirmed by the participants in this study, none of the members of religious institutions are immune from criticism, and people question their *fatwas*, which has opened the door to different religious opinions about *hijab* and all matters of women lives. What I can conclude at this point and what few of the participants in this research agreed with, is that Saudis are in serious need of a new Islamic discourse that is founded on authentic Islamic principles and a modern interpretation of Islamic texts. Times have changed and so have people as well, and they no longer need to live a life of *Salf*. This innovative discourse should maintain Islamic principles and produce its own jurisprudence that will meet everyone’s needs, especially in a time of tremendous social changes. According to Al-Janahi (2020), it is acceptable from a religious point-of-view to change *fatwas* when cultural norms, customs, religiosity rates and other elements within a society have changed or new developments have been made which is implied in Saudi society.

## 8.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the participants' views on recent changes in Saudi Arabia and the ways in which these are linked to women's changing *hijab* practices. Regarding the participants' views on the latest changes in the country, the participants' perspectives are divided into three groups: The majority of the participants, despite their diversity in levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status, agree on their rejection and unhappiness with the latest reforms in society. This group justified their rejection of the reforms based on the latest changes conflicting with all the religious principles upon which *Sahwa* was founded over several years. The participants feel the changes are quite significant and that they were all enacted at the same time, which shocked them. Furthermore, these changes are related to aspects of crucial society; for example, women's rights, which religious institutions had once deemed forbidden because it conflicts with cultural and societal norms. However, the second group, comprised of a few female participants from various backgrounds, viewed these developments favourably, especially because the reforms ensure that women will be able to exercise their rights to a greater degree than before. As can be expected, some of the participants, despite their diversity, fell in between these two assessments. Even though they may not be keen on the changes, they understood that the reforms were necessary because of the influence of social media on people's lives, especially the younger generation.

All participants in this study, of both sexes and from diverse backgrounds, agree that there are changes in the clothing and comportment of women in public, such as black *abayas* being replaced with colourful varieties and some women choosing not to wear their *hijab* altogether in favour of dress trousers, jeans, and attractive tops. Furthermore, the participants feel that the negative attitude towards the face veil has grown significantly among the upper class and female jobseekers. However, some participants still believe that women who alter their *hijab* today are not genuine Saudis. These alterations to the *hijab* have been linked to some reforms in Saudi society. Regarding the repealing of the mandatory wearing of *hijab* and giving women the liberty to decide whether or not to wear an *abaya*, i.e., the decision is entirely hers to make, participants were asked for their views of this decree. The participants were divided into two camps: those who are against the decree and those who are empathic. The majority of the participants, with varying levels of education, gender,

ages, travel experience, and marital status, were unhappy with this decree because the *hijab* has been an integral part of Saudi culture and traditions. Furthermore, the participants believe that women should not have the freedom they had been granted and that the government needs to continue protecting virtue in society and controlling women's clothing. They object to giving a woman the right to decide what she wants to wear, and they insist that Saudi women already have rights, and even if there were some liberties that women had not been granted, there were more important rights that should be the point of focus. Conspiracy theories influenced the way that the participants viewed this announcement and other changes that were enacted at the same time. They believed that it was heinous campaign to undermine Islam and destroy women's *hijab* practises, and they predicted that it would spell the end of the *hijab* in Saudi society. They further cautioned that the changes that followed would lead to a loss of Islamic identity in Saudi Arabia, of which the *hijab* is considered to be a symbol. The participants anticipated that such a momentous decision would lead to the corruption of Saudi society in the form of increased rates of harassment, unsolicited fondling, rape, adultery, and kidnappings.

The second group of participants, who were from various gender, age, and social backgrounds, were more accepting and understanding of the decree. They believe that repealing the mandatory wearing of *hijab* was necessary. Because Saudi Arabia had long been criticised regarding its stance on women's rights, the government decided to promulgate this edict to begin repairing its reputation. The participants seem to understand the decree repealing the mandatory wearing of *hijab* as applying only to foreign women and not Saudi women. Furthermore, even those Saudis who chose to discontinue wearing *hijab* after the decree simply misunderstood what the decree meant, because they were so focused on women having the liberty to decide what they wear that they missed when the decree also stated that Muslim women are still to wear decent, respectful clothing. Some of the participants suggest that repealing the mandatory wearing of *hijab* restores women's right to choose their clothing and comportment, as is guaranteed by Islam. They believe the decree revealed the hypocrites in Saudi society and offered people the opportunity to practise what they believe and respect what they did not believe. The reform encouraged women to truly examine their beliefs and ascertain whether they wore the garment for religious or cultural reasons. Interestingly, some participants believe that the decree had played

a role in reducing instances of harassment and had eased the manner in which people choose their partners and marry. This contrasts with the increase in the prevalence of harassment predicted by many of the study participants.

This chapter explained in some detail how the weakening of male guardianship in Saudi Arabia led to major changes and undeniable progress in the rights of women. In the context of this research, only six women from various backgrounds supported the reforms that had been enacted in the male guardianship system; they believed that some men used their guardianship roles to oppress and control the lives, dreams and future of women. While these reforms were regarded as a victory for Saudi women because the law was more supportive of women, a majority of the participants from different backgrounds were unhappy because they felt that a woman could not survive without a man upon whom she could depend for financial matters and every aspect of her life. They insisted that guardianship should remain in men's hands because men are wiser and more intelligent than women, whose lack of intelligence and wisdom can cause them to lose their way. Despite their diversity, the majority of the participants also agreed that these changes caused men to lose their authority over women, which in turn had a negative impact on *hijab* practices. The participants suggested that Saudi *hijab* practises are a remnant of a patriarchal society that was devised and imposed by men; by releasing some of the restrictions on women that are the result of male guardianship, women are now free to remove their *hijab* if they so desire. They felt that women currently have the right to complain about any oppression that they feel they have experienced over their *hijab*, travelling or working, and men are afraid of what the consequences of that complaint would be. Not only are men losing their authority over women, but parents are also afraid to force their daughters to wear *hijab* if they do not want to. Some mothers who participated in this study feel that they lack authority over their daughters—not only over their appearance, but also over their day-to-day affairs; parental authority ends when a child turns 21 years old, and many parents hope their daughters will avoid leaving home or travelling abroad because of undue influence from other cultures.

The chapter also described the manner in which the power of the CPVPV was restricted and the impact that this had on women's *hijab* practises. The minority of Saudis despite their diversity stated that they regretted that the committee was stripped of power, because they believed that the organisation played an important role in

societal control, reduced crime rates and protected society from moral corruption. They conceded that the reputation of the institution was destroyed by the actions of unqualified committee members, but they argued that the committee was necessary to provide security and protection to Saudi society. Countless harmful actions by CPVPV members against the citizenry resulted in a negative image of the organisation among the majority of the participants. They felt that the committee members, many of whom were uneducated ex-convicts, abused the power and control that they had over people; specifically, they forced men and women to change their behaviour and their attire based on the personal opinions of the members, not on religious principles. On the other hand, the majority of the participants, with varying levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status, believed that stripping the CPVPV of its power affected the women's attire in public because, in the past, they forced women to wear and behave in specific ways that were contrary to what some women believed. They felt that it was possible to control women's appearances because the women were afraid of being in conflict with committee members and being yelled at in public. The participants agreed that the absence of CPVPV members from public spaces shifted the responsibility of supervising females in public spaces onto their families. Few participants from various backgrounds, however, did not feel that stripping the CPVPV of power influenced the *hijab* practises of women who wore the *hijab* of their own free will.

Finally, the chapter detailed the participants' views on the transformation of religious discourse related to the *hijab* and which the participants accepted the new dialogue. The majority of participants from both genders and backgrounds, rejected the new *fâtwas* that addressed *hijab*, because they believed that the decrees were not founded on Islamic principles. The participants are opposed to the implementation of such *fâtwas* because they believe that specific Quran verses and *Hadith* directly void *fâtwas* from untrustworthy *mufitis*. They suggest that these changes in *fâtwas* were the result of the government's changed attitude literally forcing the religious discourse to change. However, a few participants, despite their diversity, showed some level of understanding and support for the new *fâtwas*. However, they are opposed to *fâtwas* that insist women should wear a specific style of *hijab* because there is no Quranic evidence to support such *fâtwas*. The participants stated that the so-called "new" religious discourse is not actually new, but was a return to Islamic principles during the

time of the prophet (PBUH) and his companions. They agreed in the past, religious discourse in Saudi Arabia was only supportive in one direction, which forbade everything and did not allow people to choose from among the *fâtwas* or doctrines. The openness of society was seen by the participants as another justification for the transformation of religious discourse as people opened up to other doctrines and *fâtwas*, which in turn increased the importance of issuing *fâtwas* that meet the challenges of the present time and the younger generations.

The findings in this chapter answer the question regarding Saudis receiving the latest government regulations following the announcement of Vision 2030 and their implications in changing the *hijab* of Saudi women. In the next chapter, I present my conclusion on this research, summarise the research findings, its contributions and limitations, and offer suggestions for further research on *hijab* and women in Saudi Arabia.

## Chapter 9. Conclusion

### 9.1 Introduction

This research has aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia by exploring the concept of the *hijab* in Saudi thought, the social norms underpinning the wearing of the *hijab* within collectivist Saudi culture and the consequences of challenging these norms, and the views of Saudis on several stigmas linked to the *hijab* and the impact of specific declarations following the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030 on women's *hijab*. In Chapter 1, I noted that it is incontrovertible that there has been extensive research on the *hijab* conducted by both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers, with Muslim and non-Muslim women as participants, and in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. However, there have only been a few studies with Saudi women as research participants, and these have focused only on the superficial aspects of the *hijab*. The existing studies have ignored some critical aspects of the *hijab*, which underpin issues that cannot be ignored when researching *hijab* in Saudi society, such as the norms of the *hijab*, the influence exerted by collectivist Saudi culture, censure and the meaning of women's freedom and men's authority in Saudi society. These studies also ignore the small but highly significant perspective of males in the *hijab*, which might be presumed to be unimportant in other regions of the world but is vital in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, all of these studies were conducted before the significant reforms impacting women and their public attire in Saudi Arabia following the Vision 2030 announcement.

Hence, My motivation for conducting this research is that I felt there was a contribution to make in terms of the *hijab* body of knowledge in general and the *hijab* in Saudi society in particular. I felt there are significant gaps in the knowledge of *hijab* in Saudi Arabia and understanding of the tradition is limited which needs to be filled. I have attempted to provide a comprehensive perspective of *hijab* from the viewpoint of Saudi women and men, by filling what I felt was a gap in exploring Saudi understanding of the concept of *hijab* by analysing its meaning, benefits, purpose and rationale. My intention also has been to try to determine the core social collectivist norms behind wearing *hijab* in Saudi culture and the effects of challenging these norms. I have attempted to explain how Saudis understand the negative stigmas related to *hijab* and how they perceive the ideas of female freedom and male

dominance. Furthermore, as Saudi society becomes more open with the announcement of the Saudi Vision 2030 and there is a lessening of the pressure on women through the regulation of how women dress in public, this research attempted to fill the gap by exploring how Saudis men and women perceive some of the reforms following the announcement of Vision 2030 and whether these changes have impacted the practice of *hijab*.

This research is a qualitative study in which the data was collected from forty-six individuals, including twenty-three men and twenty-three women living in two Saudi cities, Riyadh and Abha. The research was conducted to explore the thoughts on the *hijab*, as articulated by Saudi men and women, in answering questions: What is the understanding of the concept of *hijab* held by Saudi men and women? What are the collectivist social norms regulating the wearing of the *hijab*? What are the consequences of challenging these norms for Saudi men and women? What is the attitude of Saudis towards the negative stigmas that have been attached to *hijab*, and what is their understanding of the concepts of female oppression, female freedom, and male dominance? How do Saudis perceive the latest government regulations following the announcement of Vision 2030 and the implications of changing the style of *hijab* for Saudi women? In this chapter, I review and summarise the findings reached by analysing the research data. I review the key research findings and outline how I address the research questions. The chapter begins with answers to each question in the research questions, followed by an explanation of the contributions of this research to knowledge on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of the limitations of the research and recommendations for further research.

## **9.2 Summary of the research findings**

Based on the data generated from the research participants, this study uses the answers to four main questions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the *hijab*. A summary of my research findings is provided in four parts perceived.

### **9.2.1 The concept of *hijab***

This section addresses the answer to the first research question exploring Saudi understanding of the concept of *hijab* by analysing its meaning, benefits, purpose and rationale. The Saudi research participants defined the *hijab* by focusing on describing female clothing and the literal meaning of the word *hijab* by using the words *ektâ*,

*seter* and *hajib* as synonyms for the word *hijab*. The research findings indicated that there was not a range of different views among the vast majority of the participants—both men and women—who agreed that *hijab* refers to hidden a woman's identity. It includes covering a woman's body, head and face and the idea that a woman must not be seen. This finding was not surprising, as most participants—regardless of their diversity—believe that a woman's face is *awra* because it is the primary source of temptation and beauty in a woman, which should not be seen, except through *Alnadrak alshariyah* which is cited alongside *Hanbali* doctrine by participants as grounds for the mandatory covering of women's faces. However, the findings of this study reveal a sense of uncertainty among a few research participants from various gender, ages and backgrounds regarding the mandatory covering of the face because compelling evidence for the legitimacy of uncovering the face has been raised among Saudis lately and is displacing the idea of mandatory covering of women's faces. Moreover, the research findings reveal that there was a range of different views among the participants on whether the *hijab* is an ethical belief or a piece of clothing. The participants' views— from diverse ages, gender and backgrounds—are divided into three categories: those who considered *hijab* is merely a piece of loose modest clothing, those who believed a woman wearing *hijab* cannot be considered to comply with *hijab* without also showing respect for her *hijab* and her identity as a Muslim who believes in *hijab*, and those who believed that *hijab* as a piece of clothing and respectful behaviour cannot be separated as a woman outer appearance is important as her modest behaviour. Regarding a woman's voice as a component of *hijab*, all participants from both gender—excluding one male participant—rejected the idea that a woman's voice is *awra* because it conflicts with women's contemporary roles.

Considering the purpose of *hijab*, the research findings indicate that the majority of participants from both genders, various ages and backgrounds felt a woman's beauty (as distinct from that of a man) and its impact on men is behind the imposition of *hijab* on women. The participants believed that women are considered responsible for causing *fitnah* in men, as their power over men is significant, as embodied in a woman's figure, demeanour and voice. My findings also indicate that the participants felt that *hijab* is imposed on women in affirmation of the natural role of a woman, which situates her primary vocation within the home. In contrast, a man's natural role situates his vocation outside the home, and a man wearing a *hijab* would be

impractical in such a role. Furthermore, few female participants from various ages and backgrounds agreed that imposing *hijab* is for the protection of men, as men have a stronger sexual desire than women and more easily lose control over themselves, which, according to those participants, is obvious in the way they stare at women.

The research findings indicate that *hijab* benefits women, men and society. The majority of participants from both sexes, various ages and backgrounds believe that women derive five benefits from the *hijab*, including the obvious benefit of providing a woman with a sense of happiness and fulfilment that comes from obeying Allah's command. They suggest that *hijab* also provides women with a feeling of security and self-confidence and decreases a woman's concern about her appearance, including body shape, facial beauty and hairstyle. They assert that it can also protect women from health issues caused by overexposure to sunlight air pollution, and pathogens (the COVID-19 virus). They believed the *hijab* protects women physically (e.g., from physical harassment and rape) and nonphysically (e.g., from gossip and criticism). The research findings also indicate that men also benefit from *hijab*, and the research identifies two benefits that the participants suggest men derive from *hijab*. The participants believe that *hijab* protects men's religiosity, and they do not need to lower their gaze as women are covered. They believe it also protects their *sharaf*, as a man's *sharaf* is connected to women, thus, when women are covered, a man's *sharaf* is protected. Furthermore, the participants agreed that society benefits from *hijab*. By preventing interactions between men and women that may lead to adultery, the *hijab* also protects society from several social issues, such as illegitimate children and the breakdown of families.

The research findings indicate that the majority of women and men of various ages and backgrounds believe that women wear *hijab* as a religious commitment and for religious reasons to avoid Allah's punishment. However, another reason given by the research participants was wearing a *hijab* to follow convention. This was the second chief reason after religion given by participants for Saudi women wearing a *hijab*, even when they are against the tradition. Some women of various ages and backgrounds among the research participants also mentioned gaining confidence, earning enormous respect, gaining high social status and avoiding embarrassing their families and themselves by not doing so were other reasons for wearing the *hijab*.

### 9.2.2 The *hijab* in a collectivist culture

In this section, the second research question is addressed and I discuss the analysis of collectivist social norms regulating the wearing of the *hijab* and the consequences of challenging these norms. The research findings indicate that all the women who participated in this research wore *hijab*. However, there were three forms of *hijab* worn by the female research participants: the *Sahwa hijab*, the current generation's *hijab*, and the new generation's *hijab*. These three styles of *hijab* are not considered to project the same levels of modesty and religiosity, as each form has a distinct set of values attached to it. The *Sahwa hijab* projects the highest levels of modesty and religiosity compared to other forms. However, it has not been widely accepted among the majority of female participants because in Saudi thought such *hijab* reflects backwardness, extremism, and *Sahwa* era fundamentalism towards women. The research results indicate a higher level of acceptance among female participants for the current generation's *hijab*, despite its being perceived as less religious and modest than the *Sahwa hijab*. This is because of the range of motion and flexibility of movement it allows, and because it permits expression of a woman's beauty through visibility of her hands and eyes, which is not obtainable in the previous old vision of *hijab*. The findings also indicate to raise of a new style of *hijab* which is the next generation's *hijab* which was worn by one young female participant.

The research findings also show that there is no negativity towards the *abaya*. Regardless of the participants' diversity, all believed that the *abaya* is the ideal Islamic clothing for Muslim women. This makes it a symbol of women's identity and conformity to the collectivist values of their society. The research participants had a negative perception of the other types of *hijab* found in other Muslim societies. This was primarily because they consider those types of *hijab* as sin and contrary to the essence of *hijab* in Saudi thought, and even in Islamic thought, as most of these Islamic countries were once colonised by a Western nation, which negatively impacted the purity of their Islamic principles, of which the *hijab* is one. The data also indicates a high level of sensitivity among the participants, both men and women, and rejection of change in any aspect of the Saudi style of the *hijab*, considering it a violation of the concept of *hijab* and collectivist values. Furthermore, this research offers insight into how Saudis participants perceive the black colour of the *hijab*. The data shows that there is a warm acceptance of the colour black among the participants; the massive

majority of them, men and women, from different ages and backgrounds rejected the idea that the *hijab* could not be in another colour rather than black. They view black as an appropriate colour that does not grab attention, making it suitable as the colour of women's clothes. The participants provided various justifications for the root of the practice of Muslim women being clad in black rather than any other colour, including cultural and religious justifications. However, some participants explained that wearing black *hijabs* is part of customs as people have been used to seeing women in black *hijabs* for a long time, and any changes may bring criticism to the woman and her guardian.

Changing the *hijab* in Saudi society is no simple matter, as such a decision is not seen as one to be taken on an individual level but is a collectivist decision that impacts the wearer and her family members. Regardless of the diversity among the participants, all participants, including men and women, felt that changing the *hijab's* style was considered a violation of religious and traditional values. This situation has resulted in the creation of two types of *hijab*: inside *hijab* and outside *hijab*. The participants gave several justifications for changing *hijabs* outside the country; wearing a different type or style of *hijab* within Saudi Arabia invites criticism from both men and women, and a lack of respect for women who conflict with the *hijab's* norms inside Saudi society forces some participants to maintain the Saudi *hijab* pattern while within the country, but they could then switch to satisfy their personal preferences as soon as they leave the country. Furthermore, avoiding being associated with terrorism, avoiding discrimination and abuse, and respecting the laws and cultures in other countries were all elements behind the invention of the outside *hijab*.

The allegory of 'unwrapped and wrapped candy' was similarly used by *Sahwa* figures to justify restrictions regarding women's *hijab*. This expression was used by many of the research participants, men and women, to justify their belief that a woman must cover her entire body and face. 'Unwrapped candy' symbolises a woman without a *hijab* who is considered exposed to harassment and harm from 'flies' (which represent men), making her purity and righteousness questionable. The findings show that all participants, whether they were men or women, and regardless of their diversity, used this theory in making an impression and judging women. The participants felt that the *hijab* gave them an initial impression of its wearer and expressed the piety and morality of women. They believe a covered woman is more

protected and trustworthy than an uncovered woman. Consequently, unwrapped candy or uncovered women have lower chances of getting married, as men do not consider questionable women for marriage and the raising of their children. Furthermore, the participants indicate that the *hijab* projects an impression about not only the woman but also her guardian. The participants believe that the women's *hijabs* reflect the manhood and religiosity of men. As such, censure may damage men's and women's reputations or put them at risk, especially concerning the woman's morality and her guardian's *sharaf*, which constitutes severe social harm, considering the tribal and collectivist culture in Saudi society. In the participants' views, a man's reputation can also be damaged by censure, as manhood is something in which men take pride in a collectivist culture, and losing control over a female who does not comply with *hijab* makes such pride questionable.

### 9.2.3 The *hijab* and stigma

In this section, I address the answer to the third research question investigate the participants' views of the link between *hijab* and the stigma of oppression, limitations to freedom, and male dominance, and through this lens, it also investigates the participants' understanding of the concepts of freedom, oppression and male dominance. The research findings indicated that there was an agreement among the participants as all participants were opposed to the notion that the *hijab* is related to oppression. They believed *hijab* is not a form of oppression, it symbolises that being a woman is to be valuable, much like a priceless diamond, and not an invaluable person to be objectified by having men stare at her body as an object of lust. The participants criticised the attack on the *hijab* by some anti-*hijab* feminists, highlighting that the *hijab* is not exclusive to Muslim women but is also known to be worn by Christian and Jewish women; yet, there is no attack against these Christian and Jewish women. This precipitated the thought among the research participants that these media outlets and feminists are indeed attacking Islam and merely using the *hijab* as its symbol. Furthermore, The research participants reflected that there has been a misconstruction of the dynamics between the *hijab* and Saudi culture by these Western elements. This misunderstanding is obvious in their linking the oppression of some Saudis to the *hijab*. The participants felt that an oppressed woman is a woman who is confined to her home and cannot leave it to study, work or even visit her relatives while many Muslim women reach a high level of education and professional achievement while

proudly wearing their *hijab*. Thus, *hijab* itself is not oppression, but it is another aspect of culture and society that has oppressed women. However, the data shows that the majority of participants, both men and women of various ages and backgrounds indicated that the *hijab* can be used to oppress women by some men. They felt such oppression was prevalent during the *Shawa* era, when the prevailing beliefs were anti-women, however, they state *hijab* is still used to facilitate such oppression. The participants believed some men force women to wear the extreme *hijab* style, i.e., the *Sahwa hijab*, which imposes severe restrictions on a woman's movement. They felt men who oppress women using *hijab* are trying to validate their authority and manhood over women in the eyes of their community, which associates manhood with authority over women.

The many calls for freedom for Saudi women need to investigate the Saudi view of freedom in general and *hijab* specifically. The majority of the research participants, including both men and women, are opposed to giving each woman licence to wear whatever she wants. They believe that granting a woman's demand for the freedom to choose their *hijab* under the condition that what they choose does not conflict with the rules of society or bring shame to herself and her family. They believe women under Islamic law are not free, which is similar to men who believe that Islam rejects the idea of women being free. In their view, culturally, women cannot be as free as men because a woman has plenty to lose, unlike a man; getting pregnant and the hymen getting broken outside of the marriage institution is regarded as shameful. However, few participants, including four male highly educated and five women, support giving a woman her freedom, as Islam supports this, but they admit that society and its norms conflict with such an idea. Notwithstanding, all female participants agree that they choose the *hijab* and they do not feel forced in this regard. However, with regard to the *niqab*, the colour and style of the *abaya* are not their choices, with some of the participants stating that religion and norms compel them to wear a specific style and colour to avoid Allah's anger and society's reproach. Some women refrain from not wearing the *niqab* or altering the style or colour of the *abaya* to avoid disapproving glances and negatively impacting their families. To avoid upsetting parents, husbands and children, some female participants find themselves compelled to forgo wearing the *hijab* they want.

From the research findings, all male participants and the majority of women from various backgrounds confirmed that men have the right to interfere in choosing the *hijab* of women and be sure that the *hijab* must be modest and unadorned. The participants believed that men are raised to believe that interfering is their right and that they are responsible for women, while women are raised to believe that a man should be their protector and that they must listen to him. The participants perceive interference from men in women's choice of *hijab* as a religious duty because men have *qwamma*, which is their duty to guide women and protect them, and a woman's religious duty is to obey the man as Allah has commanded. They felt controlling women and how they dress is a way of expressing love and protection from men towards women. In the participants' views, women are weak, emotional and irrational is another justification presented for men exercising control over women and how they dress. They believe women can easily lose their path and faith due to their lack of intelligence, which demands that a man, who has full intelligence, should control and guide her behaviour. However, a few married female participants opposed the idea of a husband interfering in a wife's choice of *hijab* because they believe that a woman is responsible for how she dresses, but this does not apply to the father who has the right to control his daughter's *hijab* because the daughter is under his authority and this does not apply to the man's wife.

#### **9.2.4 The *hijab* and the new era**

In this section, I address the answers to the fourth research question. As discussed in Chapter 8, answering this question demanded an exploration of the Saudi participants' views of the monumental social changes following the *Sahwa* era, and the changes in *hijab* that accompanied that shift. This research found that there was a range of different views among the participants in regard to their perceptions of the new social changes. The majority of participants with different levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status show foremost reactions to these new changes are resistance and outright rejection. They believe that *Sahwa* has a role in setting the authentic principles of Islam but that it was amiss in stripping people of authority over themselves. They also believe that the changes following the announcement are a repeat of the same mistake made by *Sahwa*. They felt changes are extreme, imposed on the people in a shocking manner, and conflict with major principles the people have embraced for years. These research participants criticise the

way these changes were implemented in a manner that was sudden and shocking and did not give the people time to understand the changes, especially regarding matters that had been religiously forbidden for years, such as men's authority over the *hijab* and women driving cars. However, a few female participants from different ages and backgrounds support the changes, especially those changes impacting women's rights. A woman's voice is now heard and the traditional absolute male authority over her has been removed, with laws and courts now recognising women's rights. The third group of research participants contains both men and women of different ages and backgrounds chose not to judge social changes or explain their position, but they agree that the changes are necessary, as the younger generation differs from the old face of society, which made the new social changes crucial.

The data indicate that all participants, both men and women, agreed that *hijab* norms have started to change in Saudi society. They believe this change began with the release of photos of some princesses without a *hijab*, along with the circulation—on social media—of photos of several famous Saudi females walking along streets without a *hijab*. The data shows that the research participants agree that there are women today who appear in public without a *hijab*. They felt changes in the attitude towards the face veil among Saudis. Face covering or *niqab* is now spurned and considered backwards in some high-class social cycles, with *niqab* wearers now being refused specific jobs and denied employment at some companies. However, some participants, both men and women, from different ages and backgrounds denied that the women who have recently been appearing without a *hijab* are genuine Saudis. They believe that most of them are foreigners and non-Saudis, with some people outside Saudi Arabia believing they are real Saudis, whereas they are not.

The research findings also show how Saudi participants view the lifting of the mandatory over-the-head style of the *hijab*. The majority of the research participants, despite their diversity, are opposed to the lifting of the mandatory over-the-head *hijab* and easing of the restrictions on how women dress in public. In their view, this edict conflicts with Saudi culture and norms, as the *hijab* is a crucial part of Saudi identity. Further, women are not free to wear whatever they want, and the government must recognise what women wear in public as a component of social norms that protect the virtues of Saudi society. They believe lifting the mandatory over-the-head *hijab* is not considered a part of giving women their rights. Rather, it conflicts with the view that

controlling how women dress in public is integral to protecting women. The findings show that the conspiracy theory has influenced the way the participants view the lifting of the mandatory *hijab*. They perceive it as a success for enemies of Islam looking to change the principles of the Muslim society in which Makkah and AL-Madinah are located. The expected consequences of this edict include an increase in rates of harassment, adultery and illegitimate children. However, some research participants with different levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status, were empathic towards the repealing of the mandatory over-the-head *hijab*. These participants understand the edict differently and regard it as necessary, especially since the country has been under attack from international organisations regarding women's rights in the kingdom. They believe that the speech delivered by the crown prince has been misunderstood as some women—whose focus is on giving women licence to decide what they want to wear—are ignoring the parts of his speech about women's clothes being modest and respectable. They pointed out that the part of the crown prince's speech on *hijab* was not directed at Saudi women but to foreigners who live and work in the country. These participants considered the new edict as a reinstatement of the tenet of Islam that everyone is free and responsible for their actions. Furthermore, the participants felt that the edict may effectively reduce the rate of harassment, and it creates opportunities for men and women to get married based on love and attraction between sexes rather than the old way of getting married.

The research findings also show how Saudi participants view the easing of the authority men hold over women and how this impacts *hijab*. There were only six women among the research participants who support a complete lifting of men's authority over women, as such authority was the reason behind women being oppressed for years, with violations of their rights in terms of education and work. All male and the majority of female participants are opposed to the idea of men losing their control over women. This is not surprising, based on how Saudis perceive the idea of men exercising control over women, as discussed in Chapter 7. The participants believe a woman needs to be under men's dominance because she is financially dependent, and needs to be guided, as she is unwise and weak. The majority of the participants agree that weakening the authority of men over women by ending guardianship over women impacts *hijab*, as women would no longer be 'afraid' of men like they used to. They felt now men have lost their right to

guardianship and men would become afraid of forcing women to do what the man deems right. They believe women are now feeling more powerful than before, and some women are changing their *hijab* as an act of revenge against having had male authority imposed on them.

Stripping away the power of the CPVPV is another monumental change announced by the crown prince, and this study investigates how the research participants perceive the change and its impact on the *hijab* tradition. A few participants, regardless of their diversity, regret that the committee was stripped of its power. They affirm the role of the committee in protecting Saudi society and preserving the virtues of its culture. In their view, all that happened to CPVPV is part of a conspiracy to destroy the reputation of the committee, and what has been described as misbehaviour on the part of the committee was done for the protection of Saudi society. However, considering the harmful actions and aggression against people acted out by the CPVPV, it was no surprise that the majority of the research participants, both men and women, were happy with the edict stripping the committee of its powers, as its behaviour damaged the perceptions of religious people and religious institutions held by the general public. The participants believe stripping the CPVPV of its power has affected women and *hijab*, as women were previously forced by CPVPV members to cover their hands and eyes. In the participants' view, women were compelled to comply with *hijab* by the CPVPV out of fear of humiliation, being shouted at by CPVPV members, or being embraced in public against their will. However, they state that stripping the committee of its power has no impact on the dressing of all women, but only on those who wore the *hijab* out of fear of the committee. Going forward, the new edict puts the onus of monitoring women's *hijab* in public on families rather than on a committee.

Another monumental change in Saudi Arabia concerns a transformation in the traditional religious discourse in general and the discourse on *hijab* in particular. The majority of the research participants with different levels of education, gender, ages, travel experience, and marital status are opposed to the changes in the Islamic discourse because the new discourse is not founded on authentic Islamic principles and those proposing new *fatwas* on *hijab* cannot be regarded as trustworthy religious men, particularly, new *fatwas* come after years of practising *fatwas* that say the opposite. The participants hold that a change in the attitude of the government is behind the current

changes in the religious discourse. They believe that the *muftis* were forced by the government to change their *fatwas* to facilitate changes that the government aims to implement in the country. However, few research participants are accepting of this change and perceive it as a return to the original Islamic principles, without extremism, as Islam does not impose any specific form of *hijab* on Muslim women. They believe that changing the *fatwas* on *hijab* was justifiable as society has changed and people are now able to judge *fatwa* and independently reach a different Islamic opinion on *hijab*. In their opinion, the new *fatwas* give people a chance to consider the *hijab* from a different perspective, giving individuals a chance to choose what suits them.

### **9.3 The context and sample in this research: who are represented in this work**

The primary objective of this research is to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of how the *hijab* is perceived by men and women residing in two different sites within Saudi society. In this section, I argue that there are limitations to the claims I have made in this research that need to be identified. In Chapter 4, I explain that judgemental sampling was used to select the sites and the sample studied in this research. The two sites selected for this study, Riyadh and Abha, are different in nature, history, culture, population size, socioeconomic status and geographical location. My hypothesis was that the differences in the predominant nature, culture, geography and lifestyles of these two cities would influence the thoughts and views of the participants regarding the *hijab*, which I believed has been validated by the findings of this research. Riyadh is the capital of Saudi Arabia and is located on desert land with a dry and hot climate. It is considered the largest city in Saudi Arabia by size and population and is the seat of government, ministries and embassies. Furthermore, various vital educational, financial, medical and commercial organisations are situated in Riyadh, which has led to it becoming the most modern and developed city in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, citizens from various areas, backgrounds, tribes and cultures in the country are attracted to and in-migrate to Riyadh. Thus, Riyadh is home to many of the subcultures of the kingdom, with diverse customs and traditions of varying backgrounds. Furthermore, based on my observations regarding changes related to female attire, various types of *hijabs* are in use in Riyadh, from extreme to liberal

styles. In contrast, Abha is a small city located in the heart of the agricultural region of Saudi Arabia. It sits on mountainous terrain and enjoys a moderate climate with heavy rainfall all year round. Given its long history, it has a rich culture that distinguishes it from other places in the kingdom. The majority of the citizens of Abha share similar cultures and norms as they belong to the same region despite belonging to different tribes. Based on my observations, I can affirm that the changes in female attire in the city of Abha have not been rapid—compared to Riyadh—especially after the law obligating women to cover themselves was lifted. I propose that the differences between these two sites significantly influenced the perspectives of the participants in the study. Participants in Riyadh of both sexes had a less restrictive view than the participants in Abha regarding their perspectives on the *hijab*. The difference in the restrictiveness of the perspective of the *hijab* held by participants from the two cities may be indicative of the nature of each site. In Riyadh, a big city, its population being modern and large with varying backgrounds may impact acceptance of changes to *hijab* and its relaxed perspective of *hijab*. In contrast, in Abha, a small, not-so-modern population with similar cultures and backgrounds made accepting changes regarding *hijab* and women more difficult to accept. This research proposes that the sites under study are atypical, and the same can be said of other sites in Saudi society. The physical structure, socioeconomic structure and patterns of daily living vary across the country; thus, the perspectives held by participants from the two sites in this study cannot be considered as reflective of Saudi citizens in other sites. However, the findings can be used to understand how participants in these two sites view *hijab*.

Regarding the participants in this research, I used a purposive criterion strategy for my sampling. My purpose was to gain a diverse view of *hijab* from various participants. As explained in Chapter 4, there were four criteria against which participants were selected: age, education, marital status and international travelling experience. The age of the participants in this study varied between 21 and 68 years old. The level of education varied between standard education and postsecondary education. The marital status of the participants also varied between married and single. The participants also comprised individuals with and without international travel experience. I hypothesised that the variations in the characteristics of the participants would be reflected in their views of *hijab*. However, the responses of the participants to the survey questions in this study indicate that the differences in the

participants' characteristics are not reflected in the perspectives and understanding of the *hijab* expressed by the participants. The influence of participant characteristics was evident in the views held by participants regarding some limited aspects of *hijab*. For instance, a few highly-educated men supported giving women their freedom concerning wearing the *hijab*. Another example is a perspective that varied with marital status, such that there were a significant number of married women who believed that the *hijab* protects the family, supports marriage and protects men's *sharaf*. However, age and international travel experience were not reflected in the thoughts expressed by participants regarding *hijab*. What is evidenced by the findings is that tribal affiliations and religious education are the central characteristics of the participants and these have a significant impact on the views held by the participants regarding *hijab*. All participants in this study, regardless of their sex, exhibited ethnic identity, regardless of whether their tribes have rural, urban or Bedouin backgrounds. This was evident in their responses concerning respecting the collectivist tribal norms around *hijab* and taking a conservative stance towards challenging those norms. This is apparent in chapters 6 and 7, in which I report on participants expressing support for the traditional form of *hijab* and their agreement on the difficulties inherent in challenging the collectivist norms that regulate the wearing of the *hijab*. This is also evident in their views on women's freedom and the societal status of women vis-à-vis that of men.

In addition, religious education was one of the key characteristics of the participants, especially the *Sahwa* religious discourse, which was apparently instrumental in shaping the thoughts of the participants regarding the principles underpinning *hijab* and its norms—a thread that runs through all aspects of the findings of this study. For years, the participants studied at educational institutions that taught only one Islamic perspective of *hijab* because the *Sahwa* movement dictated the curriculum at all levels of education. This religious education continued after school through mosques, *fatwas* and the media, all of which presented the same religious stance. The influence of religious education was evident in the understanding of the concept of *hijab* expressed by the participants and in their stance on the changes to religious elements and the societal status of women. This influence is critical to the similarity in the views and responses of the participants and the justifications they marshalled in explaining their views. However, as I explained in Chapter 3, the role of

the broad political context and a post-oil economy in which Vision 2030 has sought to change the social scene in Saudi society, where women's affairs were a significant aspect. The findings of this study demonstrate the success of the Saudi state in ending the mandatory wearing of the traditional *hijab* and changing the Islamic discourse concerning the *hijab*, which precipitated a challenging of the old social order, establishing a new social order that is accepting of various new norms around women's attire, and changing the prescribed role of men in gender relations. However, the study findings affirm that there is resistance to change among the participants, regardless of their location or other characteristics. The vast majority of the participants of both sexes rejected the changes in the roles and affairs of women and any reforms that may change or impact the role of women as prescribed during the *Sahwa* era. Take for instance, lifting the mandatory wearing of the *hijab*, repealing the male guardian system, and transforming the religious discourse regarding *hijab*; the majority of men and women participants rejected these reforms because they were directed at women and they will change the image of women as modest, veiled individuals who need guardians to guide and protect them. However, the vast majority of participants were in support of stripping the CPVPV of its authority because this reform impacted not only women but men as well, as the CPVPV imposed restrictions on both sexes and not just on women. The study findings highlight characteristics of participants in the research sample who are traditional, conservative and support the *Sahwa*. Regardless of the variations among the participants linked to characteristics such as age, education, marital status, and travel experience, the majority of responses reflect the deep roots of the *Sahwa* ideology in the way the participants view the societal changes concerning the role of women and women's attire. The justifications given by the participants reflect the *Sahwa* thought regarding any social change. The conspiracy theory and the destruction of the castle of Islam were explanations given by the *Sahwa* movement to justify its rejection and fear of any change in society. This same notion was present in the responses of the participants regarding their resistance to the latest changes concerning women. This can be attributed to all the participants in this research having lived during the *Sahwa* era and been exposed to its discourse in mosques, schools and media; it is difficult for them to free themselves from these ideologies.

## 9.4 Contributions of this research

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the knowledge of *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. As indicated in the introduction, many studies have investigated Saudi women's being obligated by law to wear a *hijab*, which furnishes researchers with an opportunity to expound—to the world and other researchers as well—on how the Saudi collectivist culture is more powerful than laws by explaining how Saudis perceive the *hijab* and how *hijab* (as a tradition) impacts the lives of men and women through an investigation of the *hijab's* links to reputation and censure. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia and on the various social aspects linked to *hijab*. Therefore, this research makes a significant contribution to the literature on the *hijab*. In addition, by investigating men's views on a topic strongly debated by feminists, this study contributes significantly to the body of knowledge on *hijab* in Saudi Arabia as it expounds on how men perceive *hijab* and its impact on their lives.

This research adopted the Islamic feminist's framework to provide an opportunity for Saudi women who live in a particular society to have their voices heard. The findings show that mistakes were made in the interpretation of Islamic texts on women and how they dress in public, which have been regarded for years as reasons for oppressing women in Islamic societies, and this is considered as the basis for Islamic feminism theories. In addition, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on investigated gender issues and liberal feminist views. This study provides a different perspective from that of Western and liberal feminists regarding the relations and power dynamics between the genders and the meaning of oppression, women's freedom, and male dominance from the viewpoint of Saudi culture, which conflicts with previous views. This is instructive in theory formulation in this field, as it shows that women should not be viewed as a homogeneous group, and the differences between the context of Saudi culture and that of Western cultures should always be considered when making cultural inferences.

This research also deepens our understanding of the *hijab* tradition and the changes to that tradition in Saudi society during one of the most monumental phases of social change in the country since the discovery of oil and *Sahwa* dominance over the kingdom. This study provides information on new changes in women's position

in Saudi society and changes to the power dynamics between men and women and *hijab*, along with fresh insights into how Saudis perceive these changes.

## 9.5 Limitations of the study

Despite the strengths and the enormous contributions of this research—considering it provides deep and rich knowledge of *hijab* from the perspective of Saudi men and women—there are several limitations to the study. The first limitation concerns the data collection method and sample size. Using a qualitative data collection method was considered a strong approach, given the nature of the subject of the study and the research questions, which require rich and in-depth answers. However, the sample size was small, though the sampling covered two cities in Saudi Arabia and included forty-six participants (both men and women). These participants were selected using judgement sampling to ensure that detailed, in-depth information could be obtained to gain a deep understanding of the subject. However, there were challenges with access to women representative of the new generation and of those who do not wear *hijab*, as well as men whose wives or sisters do not wear *hijab*. Access to such participants and data would have enhanced the findings of this research, as all participants in this research comply with *hijab*. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the entire Saudi population, which is a limitation. Hence, the findings of this study succeed at providing a rich understanding of *hijab*, but the specifics cannot be said to be the same for all Saudi men and women in all governorates of Saudi Arabia, as the prevalence of the various perspectives vary from one region to the next.

The second limitation concerns male research assistants, which was mentioned in Chapter 4, and was necessary to obtain the view of men and ensure their voices were heard equally to women. Meeting the necessity of recruiting male research assistants is considered a strength of this research because the gender similarity between researcher and participant produced a relaxed ambience, which contributed to ensuring that we obtained genuine data. Furthermore, without male research assistants, accessing Saudi Arabian men to obtain research data would have been impractical due to cultural restrictions. However, the male research assistants may also be considered a limitation for this research because the research assistant asked some questions that were not included in the interview guide, which interfered with obtaining rich information on

the research topic from the men who participated in the study. We tried to overcome this limitation by asking the male research assistant to reinterview some of the male participants with a specific number of questions. Despite this adjustment, the information obtained from the men is of lower quality than that obtained from the women, with the information from the women having more depth than that from the men, in addition to being richer.

The data generated by this research was obtained from the research participants in Arabic, which is considered a strong aspect of this study because it is the main language of the participants and the researchers, thus ensuring there was no language barrier between participants and researchers. This facilitated gaining a full understanding of each word spoken by the participants. However, the collected data has presented in English and the process of translation negatively impacted the nuance and the meaning of some words and native phrases used by the participants. Even with my efforts to reduce the impact of translation issues on the data by procuring the services of a professional translator, the absence of English synonyms for some words in Arabic might still negatively impact the communication of the data.

## **9.6 Recommendations for further research**

This research provides comprehensive insights into the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia. However, while conducting the research and analysing the data, it became evident that there is a need for further research on *hijab* and other aspects of Saudi woman's life. Saudi Arabia has been undergoing considerable changes that impact all aspects of social life, and women's societal roles have been significantly influenced by these changes. This research presents perspectives that will alter the way the private sector views women in *niqab* and the discrimination these women encounter in some jobs and at some workplaces. The findings of this study highlight the need for more research investigating the types of discrimination and challenges faced women who wear a *niqab* and work in the private sector. In addition, studies explore the views of men who work in the same sector on working with women who do not wear a *niqab*.

This study investigates the concept of *hijab* and how it is linked to a collectivist culture. It also investigates the research participants' perspectives on *hijab* in the past during the *Sahwa* era and with the recent changes in Saudi social life. However, this study approaches the research topic from a *Sunnah* viewpoint and does not include the

perspectives of the *Shia*, which is a minority group in Saudi Arabia. Hence, there is a need for more research investigating the *Shia* perspectives on *hijab* and how the new social changes impact their views on the *hijab* and its impact on the daily lives of men and women.

The research findings also indicate that the concept of *hijab* has changed among high-class women who now regard it as backwards, unlike in the past, when it was considered a symbol that distinguished high-class women from women in other social strata (Al-Kateeb, 2013). This should be investigated to develop a deeper understanding of the new view of the *hijab* among high-class women and the changes that precipitated their new perspective, especially considering the recent wave of social changes sweeping across the country.

As reported in this study, due to the recent monumental social changes in Saudi Arabia, which significantly influenced the *hijab*, changes in the practice of *hijab* have been noticed. This study has only one participant who does not cover her face in response to these new social changes. Thus, there is a need for further research exploring the voice of the new generation of Saudi women and their families to examine the perspective of members of the younger generation who have stopped practising *hijab* on the heels of the recent social changes and to compare their views on the recent changes in *hijab* to the views of their parents—who witnessed the *Sahwa* era and the recent social changes.

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## Appendix A

School of sociology and social policy



### Information sheet

#### Research project: The *hijab* between men and women in Saudi society – Information Sheet (men)

You are being invited to take part in the above research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please ask me. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. As you already know from previous conversations, my name is Ibtisam Alamri and I am a PHD student at the University of Leeds School of Sociology and Social Policy.

The aim of the study is to understand the concept of *hijab* in thought of Saudi men and women. Many studies by international organisations and non-Saudi researchers conclude that all Saudi women are forced to wear the *hijab*. This can now be questioned, particularly since the social changes and declarations that have followed the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030. One of these changes removes the requirement to wear the *hijab*. However, most Saudi women still wear their traditional *hijabs*. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the use and role of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia is needed, especially in light of the monumental social reforms that have taken place in recent years. Furthermore, a complete understanding of the role of the *hijab* in Saudi society cannot neglect men's views of the *hijab*, as Saudi culture is patriarchal and collective. The study explores the concept of the *hijab* in Saudi thought and the role of the *hijab* in Saudi society. The *hijab's* impact on the lives of men and women is explored in the light of the collectivist nature of Saudi culture. The study also explores the views of Saudis on some concepts that are linked to the *hijab*, including oppression, freedom and patriarchal control. It also investigates the impact of some declarations that followed the announcement of Vision 2030 on women's *hijab* and on participants' opinions about the *hijab*.

The study will be taken in form of in-depth interviews, and it will run from January 2020 to the end of February 2020. You are asked to participate because you are Saudi and living in Riyadh/ Abha. All together 40 men and women will be interviewed for the study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. However, the withdraw from the research will not possible at the end of March 2020. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed by *Mohammed* who is

my research assistant; he graduated at the social science school at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University. You also will be interviewed alone, and the interview will last approximately one hour to an hour and a quarter. The interview will include number of open-ended questions about the *hijab*. The interview will be recorded in order for me to remember our conversation and for data analysis. During the interview, you are free to do not answer any questions that may find it sensitive to answer without given any reasons. At any time and anything you have said to me in the interview, you have the rights to ask for it to be deleted and not used as part of the data set.

You will not directly benefit from this study, but the outcomes of the study will be beneficial for understanding the thought of men and women about the *hijab* in Saudi society. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. No names will be connected to interview material just your fake name. The data will be kept securely in electronic form for the period of two years and ten months after completing collecting the data. The results of the study will be used for my doctoral dissertation, which will be published in late 2022. This research would not cause any harm or imposed you to risk in your reputation, dignity or privacy. It is my responsibility to present and explain the data respectfully and in a way that does not harm you or your interest in any way. Anything you tell or disclosure during interview will not be passed on to anyone. Any information you disclose which leads to believe that it can be used against you will not be passed on or revealed. You need to be aware that my research assistant will not access any data of research after hand it over to me; his job will be limited in conducting the interview. In case you have any questions, or you would like to withdraw from the research, or if you want a copy of transcript for your responses or you would like to offer any comment or explanation. I will be happy to communicate with you either through email [ssiaa@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ssiaa@leeds.ac.uk). You may also contact my supervisors Dr Yasmin Hussain via email at [Y.Hussain@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:Y.Hussain@leeds.ac.uk), and Dr Katy Wright via email at [K.J.Wright@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:K.J.Wright@leeds.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Ibtisam Alamri

## Appendix B

School of sociology and social policy



### Information sheet

#### Research project: The *hijab* between men and women in Saudi society – Information Sheet (women)

You are being invited to take part in the above research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please ask me. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. As you already know from previous conversations, my name is Ibtisam Alamri and I am a PHD student at the University of Leeds School of Sociology and Social Policy.

The aim of the study is to understand the concept of *hijab* in thought of Saudi men and women. Many studies by international organisations and non-Saudi researchers conclude that all Saudi women are forced to wear the *hijab*. This can now be questioned, particularly since the social changes and declarations that have followed the announcement of Saudi Vision 2030. One of these changes removes the requirement to wear the *hijab*. However, most Saudi women still wear their traditional *hijabs*. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the use and role of the *hijab* in Saudi Arabia is needed, especially in light of the monumental social reforms that have taken place in recent years. Furthermore, a complete understanding of the role of the *hijab* in Saudi society cannot neglect men's views of the *hijab*, as Saudi culture is patriarchal and collective. The study explores the concept of the *hijab* in Saudi thought and the role of the *hijab* in Saudi society. The *hijab's* impact on the lives of men and women is explored in the light of the collectivist nature of Saudi culture. The study also explores the views of Saudis on some concepts that are linked to the *hijab*, including oppression, freedom and patriarchal control. It also investigates the impact of some declarations that followed the announcement of Vision 2030 on women's *hijab* and on participants' opinions about the *hijab*.

The study will be taken in form of in-depth interviews, and it will run from January 2020 to the end of February 2020. You are asked to participate because you are Saudi and living in Riyadh/ Abha. All together 40 men and women will be interviewed for the study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. However, the withdraw from the research will not possible at the end of March 2020. You also will be interviewed alone, and the interview will last approximately one hour to

an hour and a quarter. The interview will include number of open-ended questions about the *hijab*. The interview will be recorded in order for me to remember our conversation and for data analysis. During the interview, you are free to do not answer any questions that may find it sensitive to answer without given any reasons. At any time and anything you have said to me in the interview, you have the rights to ask for it to be deleted and not used as part of the data set.

You will not directly benefit from this study, but the outcomes of the study will be beneficial for understanding the thought of men and women about the *hijab* in Saudi society. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. No names will be connected to interview material just your fake name. The data will be kept securely in electronic form for the period of two years and ten months after completing collecting the data. The results of the study will be used for my doctoral dissertation, which will be published in late 2022. This research would not cause any harm or imposed you to risk in your reputation, dignity or privacy. It is my responsibility to present and explain the data respectfully and in a way that does not harm you or your interest in any way. Anything you tell or disclosure during interview will not be passed on to anyone. Any information you disclose which leads to believe that it can be used against you will not be passed on or revealed. In case you have any questions, or you would like to withdraw from the research, or if you want a copy of transcript for your responses or you would like to offer any comment or explanation. I will be happy to communicate with you either through email [ssiaa@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ssiaa@leeds.ac.uk). You may also contact my supervisors Dr Yasmin Hussain via email at [Y.Hussain@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:Y.Hussain@leeds.ac.uk), and Dr Katy Wright via email at [K.J.Wright@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:K.J.Wright@leeds.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely  
Ibtisam Alamri

## Appendix C

### Participant consent form

Consent to take part in the <i>hijab</i> between men and women in Saudi society.	Add your initials next to the statement if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet provided explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason until 30/ 3/ 2020 and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. If I do want to withdraw from the research project, I will let the researcher know by email: <a href="mailto:ssiaa@leeds.ac.uk">ssiaa@leeds.ac.uk</a> .	
I understand that members of the research team may have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.	
I understand that the data collected from me may be stored and used in relevant future research in an anonymised form.	
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	