The ethics of *ḥayā'* in contemporary Middle Eastern Salafism: meaning, forms and functions of modesty

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of *ḥayā'* (modesty) in contemporary Salafi discourse, a topic that is often overlooked in academic studies, reducing it to a narrow understanding of shame. In relation to classical Islamic ethics present *ḥayā'* as a multidimensional virtue encompassing dignity, self-restraint, and moral responsibility, this study fills the gap by analysing how modern Salafi thinkers redefine *ḥayā'* as a preventive ethical framework central to Islamic piety and behaviour. The research aims at identifying the meanings, forms, and functions of *ḥayā'* as exemplified in five major Salafi texts from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. It employs a tripartite approach consisting of historical contextualization, close textual analysis, and ethical interpretation to establish contemporary Salafi modesty discourse within the broader Islamic moral tradition. The findings show that Salafi scholars combine classical ḥadith-based definitions with determined Sufi ethical insights to present *ḥayā'* as a comprehensive moral force. They emphasise its role in fostering God-consciousness, discouraging immoral behaviour, and nurturing disciplined conduct, thereby reinforcing both individual virtue and social order. The study demonstrates that Salafi ethics of modesty reflect a hybrid character that remains committed to tradition while adapting to contemporary Muslim contexts. As a result, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Islamic ethics, particularly in clarifying the expanding role of *ḥayā'* in the Salafi discourse.

It also encourages further research to assess how other Islamic schools align or differ from Salafism in their ethical views on *ḥayā'* and related virtues.

Artikel ini mengkaji konsepsi *ḥayā'* (kesopanan, rasa malu) dalam wacana Salafi kontemporer, sebuah topik yang sering direduksi dalam studi akademis ke dalam konsep rasa malu secara sempit. Sementara etika Islam klasik menjelaskan ḥayā' sebagai kebajikan multidimensi yang mencakup martabat, pengendalian diri, dan tanggung jawab moral, studi ini mengisi gap akademik dengan menganalisis bagaimana pemikir Salafi modern mendefinisikan ulang ḥayā' sebagai kerangka etika preventif yang sentral dalam kesalehan dan perilaku Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi makna, bentuk, dan fungsi ḥayā' seperti yang diungkapkan dalam lima teks utama Salafi dari Mesir, Yordania, Lebanon, dan Arab Saudi. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan tripartit yang terdiri dari kontekstualisasi historis, analisis tekstual mendalam, dan interpretasi etis untuk menempatkan wacana kesopanan Salafi kontemporer dalam tradisi moral Islam yang lebih luas. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa sarjana Salafi menggabungkan definisi klasik berbasis hadith dengan wawasan etika Sufi yang spesifik untuk mempresentasikan ḥayā' sebagai kekuatan moral komprehensif. Mereka menekankan perannya dalam menumbuhkan kesadaran akan Tuhan (God-consciousness), mencegah perilaku tidak bermoral, dan membina tindakan disiplin, sehingga memperkuat kebajikan individu maupun tatanan sosial. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa etika kesopanan Salafi mencerminkan karakter hibrid yang tetap berpegang pada tradisi namun dapat beradaptasi dengan konteks Muslim kontemporer. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman yang lebih memiliki nuansa etika Islam, khususnya dalam memperjelas peran ḥayā' yang terus berkembang dalam pemikiran Salafi. Penelitian ini juga mendorong studi lebih lanjut tentang sejauh mana mazhab-mazhab Islam lainnya sejalan atau berbeda dengan Salafisme dalam pandangan etika mereka mengenai ḥayā' dan kebajikan-kebajikan terkait.

Keywords: *Islamic ethics, Hayā', Moral responsibility, Modesty, Shame, Salafism*

Introduction

The popularity of Islamic modesty (*ḥayā'*) literature—more than 150 volumes on the subject published in Arabic between 1961 and 2023 (Aruc, 2023)—has long been disregarded by scholars of Islamic studies. Recently, *ḥayā'* has drawn some scholarly attention. However, this interest has focused on approaching this virtue as shame (Katz, 2014; Andaryani & Fitriani, 2022; Duderija, 2023; Hayes, 2023; Ghazi, 2024) while a much more complex image of *ḥayā'* is painted by a careful analysis of Islamic ethical works, both in medieval and contemporary Islamic ethics. Recent work on the term *ḥayā'* shows that it does not correspond with shame culturally or linguistically and emerges as a gracious virtue that guides individual and cultural human behaviour (Albugami & Bhawuk, 2023). Other scholars highlighted *ḥayā'* as an adaptive sense of moral self (Sawai, Jaafar, Noah & Krauss, 2020).

As the following sections will demonstrate, *ḥayā'* in traditionalist discourses emphasises moral restraint that transcends gender and body. Frequently, research is influenced by an anti-traditionalist stance that purports to link this virtue to body shaming and patriarchy. Thus, there is a confusion regarding the nature, applications, and interpretations of this virtue since certain scholars have a tendency to isolate it from the framework of Islamic ethics as a whole and associate it with concepts of shame and guilt. The normative nature of Islamic ethics, in contrast to the positive or symbolic emphasis of social sciences, may be one of the reasons contributing to these trends to disentangle modesty from Islamic ethics. While shame is intrinsic to families and societies, including Muslim ones, some scholars view Islamic ethics as a call to virtue and a theological or pious discourse. As a result, some anthropological perspectives ignore the entire set of moral discourses that constitute modesty and concentrate solely on the modesty code as a sign of a social culture or as a means of conforming to family or community expectations. Dominating anthropological discourses on *ḥayā'*

underline this virtue as respectful behaviour and sexual correctness, internalised by women themselves as a part of a code of honour of kinship that expresses the social status of the family and embodies the moral ideals of men and women in the patrilineal kin group (Abu-Lughod, 2009).

Ḥayā' displays aspects of shame and guilt that are common to all cultures and societies (in reaction to taboos and nudity, for instance), but it also incorporates moral, aesthetic, and religious aspects that do not fit within the shame framework. To properly understand Muslim ethics of *ḥayā'*, it is necessary to apply structural tools in the analysis of this literature. Obtaining more accurate information about the history of *ḥayā'* ethical discourses requires tracing back the emergence of the basic ideas of traditionalist discourses in the hadith literature. On the other hand, any material that traditionalists have written on *ḥayā'* in the present must be carefully reviewed.

In this paper, the traditionalist perspective on *ḥayā'* in hadith compilations is examined briefly in the first section of this article. Next, it provides a description of *ḥayā'*'s corpus of Salafi ethics written in Arabic. After situating modern Muslim discourses on *ḥayā'* in their historical and contextual framework, using a tripartite approach, the study proceeds to analyze *ḥayā'*'s meaning, forms, and functions in these discourses. Five contemporary works on *ḥayā'* are chosen for close examination because they are diverse (drawn from four Arab countries, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, which represent North Africa, the Levant, and the Gulf regions respectively) and relevant. The focus is on discourses that have had a significant impact in the last thirty years based on reprints, online diffusion, and translations.

The selected corpus of study consists of the five following texts: *al-Ḥayā' fī ḍaw' al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-l-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa* by the Jordanian Salafi scholar Salīm al-Hilālī, *Fiqh al-ḥayā'* by the Egyptian Salafi scholar Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Muqaddam, *Tadhkīr al-aḥyā' bi-khuluq al-ḥayā'* by the Lebanese Salafi scholar 'Abd

al-Hādī b. Ḥasan Wahbī, *al-Ḥayā' qarīn al-īmān* by the Saudi female preacher Asmā'ʾ bint Rāshid al-Ruwayshid, and *al-Ḥayā' min Allāh wa-min al-khalq wa-min al-nafs shīmat al-kirām wa-fiṭra insāniyya sawiyya* by the Egyptian Salafi scholar Muḥammad Saʿīd Raslān.

This article uses a three-fold approach to examine and contrast the forms, meanings, and purposes of *ḥayā'* in Salafi Islamic ethics. The main objective of this article is to demonstrate how Salafism adapts *ḥayā'*'s discourses from Sufi, hadith, and other sources to appeal to wider Muslim audiences. The argument made here is that traditionalist Muslim discourses on modesty are significant not only because of the conservative turn that Muslim thought has taken since the 1960s, but also because of the skillful way that traditionalist ethics have been assembled in recent decades.

This context is commonly referred to as the "Islamic awakening," or "re-islamisation," or "ṣaḥwa," which began in Egypt and spread to other parts of the Arab-Muslim world. When confining to the ethical dimension of this Islamic awakening context to Egypt, Saba Mahmood has showed that modesty (*ḥayā'*) in Egypt involved the individual dynamics of agency, gender, and embodiment as well the management of sexual transgressions and the feminine gaze in urban secular contexts (Mahmood, 2005, pp. 100-104 and pp. 155-161). Ellen Anne McLarney has also demonstrated how *ḥayā'* justified the push in the late 1970s and early 1980s toward the return to the Islamic veil (McLarney, 2017, p. 113). Moreover, Fadwa El Guindi and Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, among other anthropologists, examined how political and religious leaders in Egypt's liberalizing society used the ethics of modesty to sway public opinion (El Guindi, 1981). This does not imply that Egyptian women lack the autonomy and freedom to modify Islamic modesty standards to suit their requirements (Haenni, 2003).

The traditionalist stance on *ḥayā' in* the hadith literature

A major source of discourse in contemporary Islamic ethics, and particularly in the *ḥayā'* Islamic literature, is the compilations of hadith. Though Sufism also significantly influenced these developments, these compilations came to define the normative framework of *ḥayā'* for further approaches to this theme in medieval Islamic ethics. *Ḥayā'* is a term that originated in the hadith compilations of the ninth century (although the concept itself can be found in the Quran as *istiḥyā'* in Q. 28:25) and was used to describe acceptable behavior expected of a Muslim who adheres to the Prophet Muḥammad's tradition (*sunna*), abstaining from lust, obscenity, and breaking the law.

This traditionalist shaping of the discourse on *ḥayā'*, happened before Sufi treatises and philosophical reflections developed on *ḥayā'* in Islamic thought. Thus, *ḥayā'* is the subject of two chapters in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:* a chapter on *al-ḥayā' min al-īmān* (modesty is part of faith) (Al-Bukhārī, 2002, p. 16)*,* and a chapter on *al-ḥayā' fi 'l-ʿilm* (modesty in the pursuit of knowledge) (Al-Bukhārī, 2002, p. 45) *ḥayā'* is also the subject of a chapter in *al-Adab al-mufrad* by al-Bukhārī (Al-Bukhārī, 1955, pp. 156-158). Muslim, Mālik b. Anas, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Māja, among others, also dedicated chapters to *ḥayā'* in their compilations*,* which suggests that this ethical theme became established in Sunni ethics in the 8th/9th centuries. It is safe to say that even though *ḥayā'* has been discussed later in *fiqh* compilations, Sufi writings, and works of Islamic philosophy (Benkheira, 2008; Katz, 2014; Marino, 2023), Islamic ethics owes the establishment of *ḥayā',* as a fundamental virtue to hadith compilations. This virtue is not always associated with female behaviour, but rather with the control one should exercise in speech, appearance, and behaviour. More than 53 accounts included in early hadith collections demonstrate how important a role this virtue played in the moral framework that Sunni traditionalism built.

According to compilations of Sunni hadith, a person who does not believe in God commits the first act of immodesty since they are required to demonstrate modesty, first and foremost, in front of God by believing in him. This is why modesty, or *ḥayā'*, is an aspect of faith. The same sources report that the Prophet Muḥammad was as modest as a virgin concealed beneath her veil. He would not discuss anything that upset him; the scars of it on his blessed face are seen (Al-Tibrīzī, 1810, p. 672). Another tradition affirms that "Every religion has a distinctive virtue, and the distinctive virtue of Islam is modesty" (Ibn al-Bāghandī, 1977, p. 178).

Thus, in the hadith literature, *ḥayā'* stands for the concept of moral restraint, or the capacity to refrain from acting contrary to what is thought to be appropriate behaviour in Islam. It is neither shame nor guilt, although it can comprise these emotions in particular situations. As such, it cannot be likened to the Aristotelian concept of *aidōs*. As argued by Marion Holmes Katz, *aidōs* is a transient, rather than permanent, shame-related emotion with a distinct physiological signature. There is an obvious distinction between *ḥayā'* in early Islamic literature and *aidōs*, namely that *ḥayā'* is an anticipatory virtue instead of involving an instantaneous physiological reaction to an "antecedent event" (Katz, 2014, p. 144). Sunni traditionalists perceived *ḥayā'* as more than just the fear of social rejection that keeps people from acting in a way that would bring them "shame."

Early traditionalist accounts had a different perspective on *ḥayā'*, dissociated from shame and the impurity of the soul, a theme found in later Islamic ethics, influenced by Sufi and philosophical views (Hayes, 2023 p. 60), which grew to highlight these concepts. While some legal and ethical discourses (particularly works of philosophy and *adab*) that emerged in later Islam (from the 11th century onward) can associate *ḥayā'* with patriarchal dominance or female dress and privacy (Marino, 2023; Duderija, 2023; Foehr-Janssens, Naef &

Schlaepfer, 2015; Le Guen-Formenti, 2015; Naamane-Guessous, 1992; Zeghidour, 1992), the picture that emerges from the *hadith* collections associates *ḥayā'* with a virtue of moral control in speech, acts, and attire rather than with gender or shame; it is a regard for one's reputation both before God and within the community.

As a result of approaching *ḥayā'* from the standpoint of anthropological notions of shame and guilt, many researchers in Islamic studies overemphasised shame when studying *ḥayā'* and were unable to appreciate the nuanced and unique perspective that Islamic ethics offers on modesty. Furthermore, many could not understand why modern traditionalist *ḥayā'* discourses remain popular and relevant among a broad spectrum of Muslims. It is possible that *ḥayā'* is seen as more than just the moral obligation to respect oneself, others, and be ashamed after sinning, which are all elements that are shared by *ḥayā'* and the Greek *aidōs*, as well as with other cultures, while also includes some key religious aspects such as piety before God and the aesthetics of being modest. One could argue that early traditionalist discourses of *ḥayā'* emphasised the positive aspects of appearing and being pious, while later Islamic developments, especially under the influence of Sufism, cast a rather negative light on the human soul by associating modesty with shame and the impurity of the soul.

Corpus and context of contemporary ethics of *ḥayā'*

The Arab Union Catalogue lists around 150 Arabic monographs on *ḥayā'* published between 1961 and 2023. The 1990s saw a significant rise in publications on modesty, with over 35 books published throughout that decade. An average of two books each year have been published since 2000, which shows that, despite minimal content or methodological changes over the years, this literature has now established itself as a standard Muslim ethical discourse. In terms of publishing countries, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait top the list of the 22 Arab

countries with 70, 38, and 26 books about modesty, respectively (Aruc, 2023). Approximately thirty publications focus on the Islamic ethics of *ḥayā'*, emphasising the norms of modesty in Muslim scripture and early Muslim society, with a notable traditionalist attitude endorsing a normative approach. The information obtained from the Arab Union Catalogue presents a picture that highlights the preponderance of Salafi writers along with a traditionalist stance on ethics (that favour arguments of authority) and the adoption of idealized Muslim Sunni ethical norms taken from hadith literature and Muslim traditionalist accounts of *ḥayā'* by later Ḥanbalite writers such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350).

Muslim religious and scholarly interest in *ḥayā'* increased in the 1990s amidst the debates on gender, women and family, culminating in the Islamic resistance to the 1994 Cairo-based International Conference on Population and Development. In addition, following the 1989 French debate on the issue of the veil and Muslim women in the West, the conflict between Islamic and liberal Western values became more intense. The growth of this literature is indicative of the conservative shift that has been taking place in Egypt and the Gulf since the 1970s, but which was contested in the 1990s by pressure from the West and the secularisation of Muslim societies (Bowen, 1997). Considering that the majority of works on *ḥayā'* belong to the period of re-traditionalization in the Muslim world, it is safe to assume that the approach to *ḥayā'* privileges tradition as the cornerstone of Muslim ethics, embodied by the Quran and Sunna.

Meaning of modesty (*ḥayā'*)

The discussion begins with the Jordanian scholar Salīm al-Hilālī, whose 1988 publication, *al-Ḥayā' fī ḍaw' al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-l-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥa*, rose to

prominence in the *ḥayā'* literary canon.[1] Al-Hilālī associates modesty with transformation, shattering, and constriction that overtake the human soul because of the dread of anything it may be embarrassed about if it were discovered. According to him, Islamic ethics consider modesty as a highly esteemed moral behaviour that inspires people to give up harmful things; this keeps people from sinning and being complacent, as well as from being careless with their rights (Al-Hilālī 1988, pp. 7-9). Thus, in defining *ḥayā'*, al-Hilālī emphasises moral responsibility, dignity and a sense of guilt. Additionally, he views modesty as a defence against evil, much as moral conscience serves to deter people from committing immoral or illegal acts.

The Egyptian Salafi scholar al-Muqaddam dealt with modesty in various works on women and ethics. However, he published his first work entirely dedicated to modesty, entitled *al-Ḥayā' khuluq al-Islām,* in 1993. He then elaborated on this short book in his book *Fiqh al-ḥayā',* which is much more detailed and was published in 2006. [2]

According to al-Muqaddam, modesty (*ḥayā'*) is a state of mind that arises from remorse, but in its linguistic sense, it should be associated with vigour and life. Additionally, he distinguishes between innate and acquired modesty,

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[1] He was born in 1957 in Hebron (Palestine) and migrated with his family in 1967 to Jordan. He holds university degrees in science, Arabic and Islamic studies. He studied notably with Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī in Damascus as well as with Saudi and Pakistani traditionalist scholars. Through the review *al-Aṣāla* and his numerous works he is a leading voice in Salafism in the Levant and beyond.

[2] Al-Muqaddam is an Egyptian Salafist scholar, widely known in Salafist circles in the Arab world and beyond, doctor specializing in psychiatry and preacher based in Alexandria, Egypt. He was born in Alexandria in 1952 and graduated in Medicine and Surgery from the Faculty of Medicine, Alexandria University, and in Mental Health from the Higher Institute of Public Health, Alexandria University. He also holds a degree in Islamic Law from Al-Azhar University. He has received a parallel Islamic education in the pietistic Salafist group Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiya in Alexandria since 1965. He founded the 'Salafist School' in Alexandria in 1977 and was able to mobilize the major Salafist figures in Alexandria around this project. His reputation as a popular lecturer and preacher is particularly strong in Egypt. He has recorded more than 1,500 cassettes of his sermons, which are then redistributed on the internet. His books are also widely known and translated to several languages.

highlighting the importance of modesty as the life of the heart (following a belief among Arabs before Islam) and underlining that a lack of it is a sign of the death of the soul and the heart. For al-Muqaddam, modesty is primarily innate and contributes to the moral life of the human spirit since it causes one to shy away from activities that bring about guilt. It deters misconduct and guards against carelessness (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, pp. 5-8). Moreover, he believes that modesty is ingrained in human nature and is instinctive, innermost, and spiritual. Although it is not initially acquired, piety can make one modest out of habit. Human modesty that emerges from nudity illustrates the intrinsic and natural character of modesty (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 13). The knowledge of God, His proximity to His servants, and His awareness of human behaviour—particularly deceit— are the sources of acquired modesty. Because of its fear of God, the believer is prevented from committing „unfaithful" acts and thus acquires the virtue of modesty; if a person practices diligently acquired modesty, it may even become instinctive (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 13).

The Lebanese Salafi scholar 'Abd al-Hādī b. Ḥasan Wahbī published his *Tadhkīr al-aḥyā' bi-khuluq al-ḥayā'* in 2011.[3] Wahbī emphasises that *ḥayā'* has a preventive quality because it keeps people from committing sins, acting improperly, or speaking improperly. Furthermore, since *ḥayā'* is a heavenly gift from God to humans, it inspires them to do good deeds (Wahbī, 2011, pp. 4-5).

As for the Egyptian Salafi scholar Muḥammad Saʿīd Raslān,[4] he contends that since *ḥayā'* refers to giving up something for a certain reason, it inherently entails refraining from doing certain things. Specifically, it encourages people to

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[3] Wahbī was born in Beirut in 1958 and graduated in Sunna studies in Saudi Arabia in 1985. He then returned to Beirut and established the influential Islamic association al-Sirāj al-munīr in 1986. His works and many of his sermons focus on moral psychology, piety and reform of the heart.

[4] Raslān was born in al-Manūfiya in Egypt in 1955. He graduated in medicine and Islamic studies from al-Azhar University. He is a preacher and prolific author, focusing on theology and ethics-

refrain from transgressions and keeps them from abdicating their moral obligations (Raslān, 1955, p. 10).

Finally, the well-known Saudi sociologist and female Salafi preacher Asmā' bint Rāshid al-Ruwayshid has also contributed to the *ḥayā'* genre.[5] She argues that modesty is a symbol of the goodness of one's spirit, indicating the depth of one's morality and beliefs (al-Ruwayshid, n.d, p. 5). She asserts that if a person feels revulsion and embarrassment at doing something wrong, it is the result of having good moral qualities because modesty and faith require in the first place abandoning bad deeds. She adds that modesty encourages people to do good deeds and give up on bad ones and turning away from evil is one of the attributes of a refined character (al-Ruwayshid, n.d, p. 5).

In sum, the five texts on *ḥayā'* depict modesty as a trait that discourages or restrains someone from acting immorally or abdicating their moral obligations in accordance with Islamic norms. In terms of moral psychology, modesty can be defined as a moral conscience acting as a cognitive process that determines if a particular act is morally proper or wrong and causes an individual to react uneasily when it is about to perform or has already committed a morally incorrect act. In Islamic ethics, internal deterrents known as a w*āzi'*, *zājir*, or *māni'* can keep someone from engaging in a particular wrong action. Thus, *ḥayā'* unveils the Islamic ethical tradition as preventive ethics, together with *taqwā*, or piety, in that they stop the believer from committing sins and disobeying the rules. Modesty and piety emphasise how moral conscience is crucial to the Muslim tradition.

It is also intriguing to note how these authors—especially al-Muqaddam and Raslān—build on the idea of *fiṭra* in Islamic ethics to argue that modesty is a natural human trait. Even before these discourses develop the religious case for

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[5] Al-Ruwayshid holds a PhD in sociology (Columbus State University, the USA) and a university degree in Islamic studies. She leads several Saudi Islamic associations which deal with family, education and women's issues. She also delivered sermons and authored many books on Islamic belief and piety.

modesty, they endorse a type of reasoning by human temperament that naturalises ethics, making it more appealing in the eyes of the Muslim audience.

To define what is outside the purview of *ḥayā'*, al-Hilālī, al-Muqaddam and Wahbī use *via negativa* as well (to exclude cases in which modesty is irrelevant). Thus, al-Hilālī asserts that modesty is blameworthy in case people do not speak the truth in front of tyrants, and in the case of the pursuit of knowledge (Al-Hilālī, 1988, pp. 29-30). Al-Muqaddam himself restricts the major areas in which modesty is undesirable to education and the commanding of right and forbidding of wrong. However, he adds some cases in which modesty should be observed, especially the financial transactions in which, for example, a person lends money to someone else but he or she is too embarrassed to request that the debt be recorded (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, pp. 132-140). In addition to banning modesty in the cases of pursuit of knowledge and enjoining good and forbidding evil, Wahbī mentions the case of behaving immorally toward others due to shyness, such as shaking hands with a woman in order to avoid making her feel uncomfortable (Wahbī, 2011, pp. 39-40).

Al-Ruwayshid also lists various instances of a lack of modesty in women's society, providing counterexamples to define modesty's parameters. These include the following cases: some women would talk to third parties about private issues that occurred between her and her husband; some women converse with strangers like salespeople or soften their tone in order to get a better deal on the prices; some women resemble men in terms of attire, hairstyles, clothes and movement; and finally, clothing that is either very tight and sticky or transparent (al-Ruwayshid, n.d, pp. 21-22). Regarding Raslān, he makes a distinction between the praiseworthy modesty—a quality that promotes doing good and giving up evil—and the weakness, incapacity, shyness, incompetence, or humiliation that result in disregard for the rights of God and people (Raslān, n.d, pp.11-12).

Forms of modesty

The *ḥayāʾ* typology proposed by Salīm al-Hilālī is more conservative. He sees only three kinds of modesty: humility toward God, modesty toward others, and shame toward oneself. Thus, although the Sufi self-bashing is evident here, especially in the third kind of modesty, it is less emphasised than in al-Muqaddam's discourse (as will be discussed later). According to al-Hilālī, modesty before God boils down to piety and faith—that is, submission to him and refraining from disobeying his directives. His typology of *ḥayāʾ* in public is also more traditional; it covers the modesty of a child before its parents, a wife in front of her husband, an ignorant person before a scholar, a younger person in front of an older person, and the restraint of a virgin girl from expressing desire in marriage. As for shame toward oneself, he contends that those with lofty, elevated, and dignified hearts are dissatisfied with lowness, lack, and embarrassment, and thus experience shame (Al-Hilālī 1988, pp. 19-21). Consequently, even though al-Hilālī's typology can be primarily associated with the classical meaning of *ḥayāʾ* as moral restraint, he still interprets it as shame depending on the moral situation at stake.

Al-Muqaddam, following Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (n.d, vol. 2, p. 272), divides *ḥayāʾ* into ten types: *ḥayāʾ jināya* (shame caused by committing a crime), *ḥayāʾ taqṣīr* (the shame of moral deficiency), *ḥayāʾ ijlāl* (the modesty concerning the magnificence of God), *ḥayāʾ karam* (modesty in showing hospitality), *ḥayāʾ ḥishma* (shyness in matters of the heart), *ḥayāʾ istiḥqār al-lnafs* (modesty as humility of the self), *ḥayāʾ maḥabba* (bashfulness of love), *ḥayāʾ ʿubūdiyya* (shyness in worship), *ḥayāʾ sharaf wa ʿizza* (being morally responsible because of one's dignity and honor), and *ḥayāʾ al-nafs* (being ashamed of one's self) (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 25).

Despite being a traditionalist Ḥanbalite, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya derived his material on *ḥayāʾ* from a Sufi source (*Manāzil al-sāʾirīn* by Ismāʿīl al-Harawī). This

suggests that traditionalism has evolved to incorporate non-hadith content to strengthen its ethical framework. Later traditionalism views *ḥayā'* as more dynamic and multifaceted, and the result of specific behaviours that make one feel ashamed of something, whereas 9th-century traditionalism emphasises *ḥayā'* as a static and given character. The Sufi influence makes shame and remorse more apparent in Islamic ethics of *ḥayā'*, whereas the primary message of hadith literature was moral restraint from committing transgressions. This typology of *ḥayā'* holds the individual accountable for shame and guilt, demonstrating the moral scrupulousness associated with Sufi ethics. Overall, Sufism devotes great attention to the self as the main source of one's shame and guilt. Nevertheless, while being a Salafi scholar, al-Muqaddam embraces this Sufi material on modesty, using it to emphasize the moral rigor he wants to draw attention to.

As for Wahbī, he takes the most traditionalist approach of all the authors examined here, acknowledging only one form of modesty, that of moral restraint in front of God, by avoiding all unlawful acts, speech, and thinking about death and judgment day (Wahbī, 2011, p. 17). Raslān, on the other hand, adopts a minimal typology of two forms of *ḥayā'*: natural and acquired *ḥayā'*. The first kind is innate, albeit some people are not born with it. Regarding the second kind, it comes from knowing God and realising how near he is to people, as well as His awareness of their dishonesty and the things their hearts might conceal (Raslān, n.d, p. pp. 10-11). Raslān, thus, incorporates the form of humility before God (seen with al-Hilālī and al-Muqaddam) within the category of acquired *ḥayā'*.

In regard to al-Ruwayshid, she presents a typology of four forms of *ḥayā'*: modesty in front of God, in front of angels, in front of others, and concerning oneself. It is essentially a typology that adds shame in front of angels to the one established by al-Hilālī. Apart from this, though, al-Ruwayshid, under the influence of Sufism, incorporates some shameful behaviours (such as being ashamed of being nude in front of God while alone) in the first category of

modesty before God. Her content is strikingly similar to that of al-Muqaddam as well. Her original contribution remains in the category of shame before angels. Al-Ruwayshid argues that „it is a known fact that God has assigned angels to accompany us during the night and throughout the day, angels accompany individuals who follow God, including those who venture out to seek knowledge, assemble for religious sermons, visit the ill, and more" (Al-Ruwayshid, n.d, pp. 18-19). She adds that „there are also angels who never leave our side. They are the bookkeepers and the scribes. We need to be embarrassed by the angels as a result. This is accomplished by abstaining from sin and transgressions and protecting them from unethical meetings, offensive speech, and disgusting behaviour" (al-Ruwayshid, n.d, p. 19). So, if the person thinks about sinning, the angels ought to make them feel guilty.

In summary, modern Salafi scholars have appropriated Sufi themes of *ḥayā'* as shame and remorse or even theological-philosophical ideas of acquired and natural modesty, while maintaining the core of *ḥayā'* as moral restraint following the hadith literature. The probable reason behind this hybrid character of Salafi ethics on *ḥayā'* is that contemporary Salafi theologians and preachers are considerably more concerned with function insofar as the role that a certain ethical standard could or should play in controlling behavior and individuals than with the source of the material they are using. Salafi authors hope that a broader system of *ḥayā'* that employs different arguments and appeals to a variety of audiences could result in significantly more conscientious behavior, as will be seen in the function section that follows.

Functions of modesty

Al-Hilālī emphasises only two functions of *ḥayā'*: the moral and religious ones. While the religious function of *ḥayā'* is privileged (compared to the moral one), he completely ignores the aesthetic function of modesty. He ascribes an

eschatological element to the religious function of *ḥayā'*, namely that it leads the believer to heaven (*al-ḥayā' yaqūd ilā l-janna*). Only the morally upright believer is expected to enter heaven since faith is associated with modesty and serves as a deterrent against sin. This shows yet again al-Hilālī's adherence to the traditionalist framework of *ḥayā'* which wishes to preach rather than meet the expectations of contemporary Muslim audiences, which albeit highly regard the virtue of modesty they are less open to rigid ethics.

On his part, al-Muqaddam gives modesty three purposes: moral, religious and aesthetic. First, he contends that modesty is the key to all goodness (*al-ḥayā' miftāḥ kull khayr*), meaning that it is a moral obligation that makes room for other virtues like generosity, honesty, and the like, because it deters wrongdoing and encourages goodness (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 39). Second, modesty and faith are associated (*al-ḥayā' īmān*) because they both work together to keep believers from committing sins (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 45). When modesty is lacking, faith is also lacking. However, he concedes that since non-Muslims might possess the virtue of natural modesty, the ideal kind of modesty is the one that follows the tenets of Islamic belief and law (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 53). Third, modesty is given an aesthetic role by al-Muqaddam, who claims that modesty is the most beautiful adornment (*al-ḥayā' abhā zīna*) (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 57). He argues that modesty preserves the face like a vessel concealing the essence; nothing more brilliant or exquisite than modesty to make someone beautiful (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, p. 57). It is noteworthy that al-Muqaddam expects modesty from both men and women, quoting examples from the lives of the Prophet and the pious ancestors, men and women, and highlighting the aesthetic dimension of *ḥayā'*. However, he believes that the modesty of women is more beautiful and that modesty is the most beautiful ornament a woman would ever wear (Al-Muqaddam, 2006, pp. 95-96.).

Raslān also emphasises the religious function of *ḥayā'*, arguing that Islam upholds the virtue of *ḥayā'* because "it is a religion of purity—both internally and externally. God therefore demands that people's bodies, souls, and spirits be kept pure, as well as their places, clothes, and attire. Islam is a religion of chastity opposes immorality and closes the doors that lead to it" (Raslān, n.d, p. 6). With comparable terminology, Wahbī provides the same tripartite functions (moral, religious, and aesthetic) as al-Muqaddam (Raslān, n.d, pp. 5-6). Nonetheless, he prioritizes the religious function of modesty, which he links to faith, the love of God and his reward in paradise, as well as Islam and the law of earlier prophets. Furthermore, he does not maintain a balance between the three functions. Last but not least, al-Ruwayshid emphasises modesty as a companion to faith (*al-ḥayā' qarīn al-īmān*), albeit she elaborates on its moral function in preserving the body, mind, sight, ear, and speech from immorality in a second tier (al-Ruwayshid, n.d, pp. 13-14).

Thus, among the five Salafi authors, al-Muqaddam and Wahbī discuss the aesthetic role of *ḥayā'* beside its religious and moral functions, whereas al-Hilālī, Raslān, and al-Ruwayshid (despite the fact that she is a woman) disregard the aesthetic dimension. For all authors, the religious role of modesty is central, and moral responsibility is either associated with or subordinated to it.

Traditionalist Islamic ethics envision modesty as a way to uphold or preserve public morality in a conservative society. In other words, the Salafi authors studied here highlight the role of modesty as a barrier to immoral acts, assisted by piety and as moral beauty, all to achieve one main goal: creating a morally responsible Muslim society by abstaining from moral transgressions (in speech or dress), daily interactions (taking advantage of others), and gender ethics, which have challenged traditional roles of men and women in contemporary Muslim societies.

Probably, the most effective way to comprehend this *ḥayā'* literature and its popularity in the Muslim world is to approach it from a different angle than that of shame **and** guilt. Beyond shame, this literature encourages dignified behaviour under Islamic rules and a spirituality of devotion to Allah in addition to formulating social critique of liberal ethics imported from the West. Above all, these pious discourses emphasise modesty as the primary Islamic virtue that guards against immorality and controls behaviour, a natural virtue of self-control linked to moral vitality and faith that affects, men and women, the elites and the common people. This ethical framework comprises but is not limited in any way to themes of shame, guilt, or the hijab.

In the modern Sunni tradition, the five Salafi figures' contribution to the *ḥayā'* discourse is significant on two levels: epistemologically and ethically. Epistemologically, the Salafi literature incorporates sources from Arabic literature, Sufism, and Muslim philosophers in addition to **hadith** literature. Regarding *ḥayā'* and ethics in general, Salafi discourse is more diverse in its sources of knowledge and tools of thought, and thus displays a somewhat wider scope of view. Ethically, their discourse on *ḥayā'* and ethics may counter other Salafi discourses that are more theologically inflexible and legalistic. Through ethics, Salafism connects to other Muslim schools of thought, and this explains why Salafi publications on ethics are more widely read beyond their direct audiences. Discources on modesty might thus assist in the ethical shift in Salafism and Islamic thought generally by reinterpreting the entire theological and legal traditions in the context of ethical principles.

Ḥayā' and gender

This final section expands the analysis of how *ḥayā'* functions differently for men and women, including gender perspectives, to enrich the discussion and provide a broader view of Islamic debates on modesty beyond Salafism. The viewpoints

from modernist Islamic schools of thought, including feminist or liberal perspectives, will be incorporated.

Following Abu-Lughod, one can identify four paradigms of addressing the issue of modesty in Muslim societies (Abu-Lughod, 2009). The first paradigm argues that modesty is a *system of meaning*. It consists of a respectful behaviour and sexual correctness, as part of a code of honour of kinship which expresses the social status of the family and embodies the moral ideals of men and women (Abu Lughod, 1986). A second paradigm, *functionalism*, perceives in modesty a way to preserve the patrilineal kin group. For this purpose, it excludes women from interfering in decision-making over property and marriage alliances and "outcastes," marginal social groups (Meneley, 1996). Obviously, Abu Lughod's approach is to a great extent *functionalist* as well. A third approach that could be labeled *internalized modesty* maintains that the ideals and discourses of modesty are experienced, learned, or cultivated by women themselves. The assertion of modesty as a moral ideal and the feelings of shame or embarrassment that women experience in situations when they find themselves inappropriately dressed (Hossain, 2013). That is to say, internalised modesty provides a system of meaning for the "modest" women. A fourth paradigm, that of *piety as a vehicle of political Islam,* perceives modesty to be integral to the modern realisation of "closeness to God" following the new wave of piety promoted by political Islam (Mahmood, 2001, pp. 202-236).

Some anthropologists contest the use of the concept of modesty to describe the moral code underlying Muslim practices in contemporary Islam. For instance, Fadwa El Guindi, in her *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance*, argues that the modesty-based code – modesty–shame–seclusion – represents an ethnocentric imposition on Arab-Islamic culture. It makes more sense in Christian Mediterranean societies and the Hindu-based societies of South Asia. This cluster of concepts is inaccurately ethnocentric, but, more importantly, it obscures the nuanced difference that is characteristic of Arab-Islamic culture.

The "modesty–honour" gendered opposition is equally inappropriate (El Guindi, 1999, p. 83)

El Guindi suggests sanctity–reserve–respect to read this moral code rather than modesty-shame-seclusion, with evidence, primarily from Islamic law, relying especially on the notion of *ḥurma* (Krawietz, 1991), which she renders as sanctity, and which she claims to be close to the notion of privacy (El Guindi, 1999, p. 85). She contends that „the quality of *ḥurma* (which centres womanhood and home in the culture) embodies a pervasive complex of values that identifies primary social and religious spheres as sanctuaries – sacred and inviolable" (El Guindi, 1999, p. 88). The whole argument of El Guindi is based on a denial of the physiological dimension of Islamic moral discourse on women. That is to say, she does not find in the Muslim moral tradition any evidence that considers women's bodies to be shameful.

Conclusion

The virtue of *ḥayā'* was defined by early Sunni traditionalist sources as dignity, self-control, and moral duty, going beyond feelings of shame and remorse. Sufi ideas of *ḥayā'*, which translate to guilt and shame, were incorporated into later medieval Islamic ethics. All these components have been joined by contemporary Salafi discourses to reinterpret *ḥayā'* as a preventive code of ethics that shields believers from transgression. They have also concluded that *ḥayā'* is multifaceted and dynamic, encompassing actions directed toward God, the community, and self-awareness. Last but not least, Salafi writers assign *ḥayā'* religious, moral, and artistic purposes, helping to create a convincing narrative about modesty that has gained widespread traction in the Muslim world in recent years. Accordingly, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Islamic ethics, particularly in clarifying the evolving role of *ḥayā'* in modern Salafi thought.

Building on these findings, this research has demonstrated that Salafism articulates a concept of modesty rooted in moral control. It advances the field of Islamic ethics in that it shows how traditionalism becomes converging and flexible when it comes to ethics. For this reason, more work needs to be done on other Islamic schools of thought on *ḥayaʾ* and other Islamic virtues to establish whether they converge or diverge on ethics with Salafism.

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