

“ THE EDITORS' ENTHUSIASM IS PALPABLE; THEY CONSISTENTLY PROVIDE A LIVELY HOME FOR WRITING WORTH READING. ”

-AMY HEMPEL

“ POST ROAD IS A JEWEL IN A BUCKET OF STONES. ”

-BARRY GIFFORD

“ UNPRETENTIOUS, ACCESSIBLE, BUT STILL SMART, POST ROAD FEELS LIKE IT IS PUT OUT BY ACTUAL PEOPLE. BECAUSE THEY ARE GOOD PEOPLE. THAT'S A COMPLIMENT. AND YES, I AM ON THEIR PAYROLL. ”

-NEAL POLLACK

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Photographs by the Lebanese-born, Brookline-based Rania Matar visually explore some of the dichotomies this issue raises: tradition and modernity, insider and outsider, separation and protection, liberation and oppression, defiance and compliance, public and private space. Close study of these hauntingly beautiful pictures will surely inspire viewers to reflect further on what veiling means and why it continues to arouse such controversy. ✧



























## Rania Matar - Photographs

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## Why Veiling?

Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom

**D**uring the last two centuries, and especially in the last two decades, the question of female veiling has become one of the most contentious subjects of debate both among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims. The roots of the debate reach back to the foundations of the Muslim community and the revelation of the Qur'an in seventh-century Arabia. The Qur'an has various things to say about the subject. It enjoins women (and men) to behave modestly. It instructs women to cover themselves and conceal their "adornments," except from their husbands and fathers, but gives no precise prescriptions as to how they should do so. It also says that the Prophet's wives were to be secluded from public gaze because of their special status.

In the ensuing centuries, experts in Prophetic traditions and legal scholars debated the subject further. Mainly they discussed what parts of the body should be covered rather than the nature of the covering. Sometimes they also singled out the Qur'anic verses that were addressed to the Prophet's wives, arguing variously that what was appropriate for them should be extended to all female believers, or on the contrary, that it was precisely because those women were privileged that they should therefore be separated. In short, religious literature contains a wide diversity of opinion about the exact nature and context of female veiling.

Even the terminology for veiling has changed. Today the veil is most commonly known as hijab. Literally meaning "screen" or "curtain," this Arabic noun occurs seven times in the Qur'an and indicates separation that not always—or even often—means the separation between sexes. It sometimes carries metaphorical associations such as that which separates truth from falsehood or light from dark. Over time, the meaning of the term hijab has shifted to become synonymous with the various forms of clothing that a Muslim woman wears to cover her hair, her hair and face, or her full body when in public or in the company of those outside close kinship bonds. These types of modest clothing are epitomized by the headscarf, a feature that has become a potent religious and political symbol.

The veil can thus carry different and often contradictory associations. It can be a reaffirmation of religious devotion, designating adherence to the spirit of the Qur'an, if not to the literal prescriptions in it, and an acknowledgement of the lengthy discussion of veiling in the associated traditions and juridical literature. It can be seen as liberation from the expectations and demands of modern fashion. As men and women are increasingly integrated in school and workplace, it can also be seen as a method of denoting physical separation outside the world of domesticity.