



## Moral Militarisation in the Implementation of Islamic Law in Public Dress Code Raids

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<p><b>Keywords:</b>  Militarisation,  Moral dress code raids,  Moral transformation,  Public spaces,  Respect for citizens' rights</p>	<p>The clothing raids in the implementation of Islamic law reveal a paradox where morality, which should liberate through ethical awareness, is instead militarised into a disciplinary mechanism that subjugates the body and produces compliance in public spaces. This study aims to comprehensively analyse the phenomenon of moral militarisation in the implementation of Islamic law through dress code raids in public spaces, highlighting the mechanisms of control, normative legitimacy, and its impact on social power relations. The study uses a qualitative approach with a critical-interpretative case study design, chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the practice of moral militarisation as a layered, contextual social phenomenon laden with power relations. The results state that clothing raids are not merely a practice of <i>al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar</i> (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil). Still, a form of moral militarisation intertwined with religious populism, image economics, and the compliance industry is often more effective at instilling fear than at promoting public welfare. The critical implication is that a state that makes clothing a moral enemy risks exchanging substantive justice for superficial rituals of control, normalising stigmatisation, and obscuring structural problems that are far more damaging to human dignity. Therefore, the agenda in the future is not merely to reorganise raid procedures, but to shift sharia from a policing project to a social ethics project oriented towards <i>maqāṣid</i>, respect for citizens' rights, and moral transformation born of awareness, not fear.</p>
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## Introduction

The phenomenon of applying Islamic law in public spaces in recent decades has shown increasingly complex dynamics, especially when it is not only a spiritual religious norm but also an instrument of social regulation, realised through formal policies and direct enforcement practices in the field. One prominent manifestation of this is public dress raids, which involve inspecting, reprimanding, or punishing individuals deemed to have failed to meet standards of decency or dress codes under a particular interpretation of sharia.<sup>1</sup> Such raids are often carried out by state officials, civil service police units, official religious institutions, or even civil society groups that have gained social legitimacy. This practice shows that religious morality is not only a private matter but is also militarised through mechanisms of control, surveillance, and coercion that resemble the disciplinary logic of the modern state.

Clothing raids in public spaces have sparked widespread debate because they intersect with religion, law, gender, and human rights.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, dress code policies and enforcement are often framed as efforts to maintain social order, protect society's religious values, and uphold collective moral identity.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, these practices raise critical questions about the limits of state intervention in citizens' bodies, the potential for gender-based discrimination, and the possibility of abuse of authority in enforcing moral norms. This tension becomes even more apparent when dress code raids are not only persuasive in nature but also coercive, repressive, and even intimidating.

Conceptually, moral militarisation can be understood as a process whereby morality no longer works through internalisation of consciousness or normative persuasion, but rather through a logic of enforcement that emphasises discipline, hierarchy, surveillance, and sanctions. In the practice of clothing raids, religious morality is translated into actions that place the individual's body as an object of regulation.<sup>4</sup> This is in line with Michel Foucault's view of biopolitics and body discipline, in which modern power works through the regulation of daily life, including how to dress, behave, and display identity in public spaces. In Islamic law, the application of dress norms is often seen as part *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil). Still, when it is carried out through an apparatus-based, coercive approach, morality is transformed from ethics into an instrument of power.

Studies on the implementation of Islamic law in various regions show that sharia never exists in a vacuum, but is always influenced by political, social, and cultural configurations. Recent studies on sharia in the public sphere emphasise that the application of Islamic law often functions as a symbol of political identity and a tool for legitimising local power.<sup>5</sup> Studies on sharia regulations in Indonesia, for example, show

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<sup>1</sup> Khaled Alzubaidi et al., "The Legal Rules Regulating the Dress Code of Public Employees," in *Frontiers of Human Centrality in the Artificial Intelligence-Driven Society 5.0* (Springer, 2024), 559–71, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73545-5\\_47](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73545-5_47).

<sup>2</sup> Sebghatullah Qazi Zada and Mohd Ziaolhaq Qazi Zada, "The Taliban and Women's Human Rights in Afghanistan: The Way Forward," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 28, no. 10 (2024): 1687–1722, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2024.2369584>.

<sup>3</sup> Candauda Arachchige Saliya, "Dress Codes, Human Rights, Professional Image, and Cultural Identity: A Critical Review with Special Reference to Indigenous and Climate-Appropriate Attire," *Professional Image, and Cultural Identity: A Critical Review with Special Reference to Indigenous and Climate-Appropriate Attire* (August 18, 2025), 2025, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5395733>.

<sup>4</sup> Mahsa Alami Fariman and Ahmadrza Hakiminejad, "Woman, Life, Freedom: Revolting Space Invaders in Iran," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 28, no. 5 (2025): 1319–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494241268101>.

<sup>5</sup> Zulkarnaini Zulkarnaini, Muhammad Ansor, and Laila Sari Masyhur, "Sharia in Power: Non-Muslims and the Performance of Islamic Politics in Aceh Public Sphere, Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 12, no. 2 (2022): 257–83, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v12i2.257-283>.

how moral regulations such as the obligation to wear the hijab or the prohibition of immodest clothing are often used to demonstrate the religious commitment of local governments while responding to pressure from conservative groups.<sup>6</sup> Other studies in the Middle East and South Asia also show that the enforcement of dress codes is often an arena of negotiation between the state, religious scholars, and civil society, with women's bodies at the centre of moral contestation.<sup>7</sup>

Feminist and gender studies highlight that dress code raids cannot be separated from patriarchal structures that regulate women's bodies as symbols of community honour.<sup>8</sup> Many recent studies reveal that dress codes in Islamic law are often more strictly enforced on women than on men, resulting in inequality and unbalanced control. Dress code raids serve as a mechanism that reproduces gender-based moral standards, positioning women as guardians of public morality. In contrast, violations of dress codes are treated as a social threat.<sup>9</sup>

In the literature on policing morality, researchers explain that modern states often use security forces or regulatory agencies to monitor citizens' behaviour in accordance with dominant norms. Studies of Sharia police in several countries show that such institutions function as guardians of public morality, but are often criticised for their repressive practices and violations of individual rights. Recent studies also note that moral raids often create social fear and narrow the space for civil liberties.

In Indonesia, several studies on Wilāyat al-ḥisbahin Aceh, for example, reveal that the enforcement of sharia, such in clothing raids, creates ambiguity between law enforcement and moralistic actions that can be arbitrary.<sup>10</sup> However, most previous studies focus on the legal-formal aspects of Sharia implementation or its impact on women's rights, without elaborating in depth on the dimension of moral militarisation as an analytical framework for explaining the transformation of morality into coercive practices. Studies on Sharia regulations often emphasise the political context of decentralisation and Islamic identity, while gender studies highlight the implications of patriarchy and discrimination.<sup>11</sup> Studies on policing morality emphasise the role of the authorities, but have not specifically combined the concept of militarisation with the implementation of Islamic law in the context of dress code raids in public spaces.

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<sup>6</sup> Sefriani Sefriani et al., "The Conundrum to Wear Religious Uniform in Indonesia: International Human Rights Law and Islamic Law Perspective," *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 31–62, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.vol9i1.4532>; Delmus Puneri Salim, "Behaviour and Dress," in *The Transnational and the Local in the Politics of Islam: The Case of West Sumatra, Indonesia* (Springer, 2015), 127–54, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15413-8\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-15413-8_6).

<sup>7</sup> Ángeles Ramírez, "Control over Female 'Muslim' Bodies: Culture, Politics and Dress Code Laws in Some Muslim and Non-Muslim Countries," in *Interrogating Intersectionalities, Gendering Mobilities, Racializing Transnationalism* (Routledge, 2018), 37–52, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315226491-3>; Sushil Jain, "The Fabric of Dissent: Muslim Women's Head Coverings and the Struggle for Public Space," *Available at SSRN 5599170*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5599170>.

<sup>8</sup> Yasmine Loza, "Women's Bodies and Lives as Symbols of Patriarchal Codes: Honor Killings," *Social Science Information* 61, no. 4 (2022): 371–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/05390184221129227>.

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Cumming-Potvin, "The Politics of School Dress Codes and Uniform Policies: Towards Gender Diversity and Gender Equity in Schools," *International Journal of Educational Research* 122 (2023): 102239, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102239>.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Izdiyan Muttaqin, Yon Machmudi, and Che Zarrina Binti Sa'ari, "From Law to Order: Wilayatul Hisbah and Satpol PP's Joint Efforts in Sharia Enforcement in Aceh," in *International Conference on Strategic and Global Studies (ICSGS 2024)* (Atlantis Press, 2025), 481–98, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-646-8\\_29](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-646-8_29); Faisal Husen Ismail et al., "Vigilantism among the Community in Aceh Against the Accused of Violating the Shariah Criminal Law," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 17, no. 2 (2022): 531–53, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v17i2.6751>.

<sup>11</sup> Fatima El-Masri, "Muslim LGBTQ+ Identities: Patriarchy, Marxism, Sharia, Anarcho-Islamism, and the Role of Zionism," *Marxism, Sharia, Anarcho-Islamism, and the Role of Zionism* (January 12, 2018), 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5128651>.

This study explicitly positions clothing raids as a practice of moral militarisation in the implementation of Islamic law. Previous studies have not sufficiently explained how militarisation occurs, which actors are involved, how moral legitimacy is constructed, or how citizens experience and respond to these practices.<sup>12</sup> In addition, previous studies tend to separate the analysis of law, gender, and politics, thus failing to produce a holistic understanding of clothing raids as a multidimensional phenomenon that combines religious norms, state power, and social control.<sup>13</sup> Another shortcoming is the lack of a conceptual approach that simultaneously links biopolitical theory, policing morality, and Sharia studies to interpret the phenomenon of clothing raids.

This study offers a new conceptual framework on the militarisation of morality in the implementation of Islamic law, particularly through dress code raids in public spaces. This study will contribute to the theoretical level by combining Foucault's biopolitical perspective, moral policing studies, and contemporary sharia studies to explain how religious morality has been transformed into disciplinary practices. At the conceptual level, this study introduces moral militarisation as a lens for understanding the enforcement of dress codes not merely as sharia regulations, but as a strategy of social control that mimics the logic of security. From a practical standpoint, this study is expected to offer practical recommendations for policymakers to ensure that the implementation of Islamic law does not resort to coercive practices that violate the principles of justice and human rights.

The objective of this study is to comprehensively analyse the phenomenon of moral militarisation in the implementation of Islamic law through clothing raids in public spaces, highlighting the mechanisms of control, normative legitimacy, and its impact on social power relations. This study also aims to enrich the body of contemporary Islamic law studies by incorporating critical perspectives on moral policing and biopolitics. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of how Islamic law in public spaces can operate not only as a religious norm but also as a disciplinary instrument that can create tension between collective morality and individual rights.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a critical-interpretative case study design, chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the practice of moral militarisation as a layered, contextual social phenomenon laden with power relations. The focus of the study is operationally defined as the process of institutionalising and operationalising Islamic dress norms through coercive enforcement mechanisms in public spaces, which includes enforcement actors, the basis of normative legitimacy, forms of raids, and their implications for citizens' bodies and freedoms. The study population includes public spaces where raids occur, as well as the documents and institutional practices that regulate them, with the unit of analysis determined purposively based on the intensity and significance of raiding practices. The research instruments consist of structured observation guidelines, document analysis sheets, and a conceptual categorisation framework developed from the latest literature review and

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<sup>12</sup> Rachel Massey and Thom Tyerman, "Remaining 'in-between' the Divides? Conceptual, Methodological, and Ethical Political Dilemmas of Engaged Research in Critical Military Studies," *Critical Studies on Security* 11, no. 2 (2023): 64–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2023.2194503>.

<sup>13</sup> John N Robinson III, Spencer Headworth, and Shai Karp, "Performing Social Control: Poverty Governance, Public Finance, and the Politics of Visibility," *Sociological Theory* 42, no. 1 (2024): 23–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07352751231222476>.

tested through expert judgement to ensure conceptual accuracy and analytical consistency.

Data collection was carried out in stages through non-participatory observation of clothing raids in public spaces, and through tracing and analysis of legal documents, policies, operational standards, and media reports that represent official and public discourse on the raids. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, persistent observation, and an audit trail that systematically and reflectively documented the entire analysis process.<sup>14</sup> Data analysis was conducted using critical thematic and discourse analyses, which enabled the unravelling of patterns of moral militarisation, legitimisation strategies, and power relations at work in the implementation of Islamic law. These techniques were chosen because they were in line with the research objective of constructing a deep and argumentative theoretical understanding of clothing raids as a moral-disciplinary practice, rather than merely a formal legal policy.

## Result and Discussion

### Clothing Raids as Moral Militarisation and the Production of Compliance through Security Logic

Clothing raids in public spaces are among the most prominent phenomena in the landscape of contemporary Islamic law enforcement, as they clearly demonstrate how norms of piety, originally conceived as a realm of ethical guidance and religious advice, have shifted into practices of coercive control. In this framework, dress code raids cannot be understood merely as ordinary moral actions, but rather as a form of moral militarisation, namely a process whereby morality is produced and enforced through security logic, order operations, and disciplinary mechanisms that resemble modern security apparatus. This shift marks an important transformation in the character of Islamic law's implementation, moving from a normative apparatus that relies on religious awareness to a governance technology that emphasises surveillance, symbolic intimidation, and deterrence as the main instruments of compliance. In practice, routine patrols often accompany clothing raids, direct inspections of citizens' bodies and clothing, identity checks, temporary detentions, and the publication of violations as a form of social control that works through shame and fear.

In the classical tradition, Islamic dress norms were understood as part of the ethics of modesty and honour, instilled through moral education, preaching, and the internalisation of values.<sup>15</sup> *Al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, as a normative principle, was positioned as a collective obligation to encourage good and prevent evil. Still, its ideal implementation relied on persuasion, exemplary behaviour, and social guidance. However, in the modern context, especially when sharia is institutionalised through formal policies and dress codes, they are no longer merely individual ethical guidelines but have become legal categories that the authorities can enforce. This is where an epistemological shift occurs: morality no longer works primarily through consciousness but through control and enforcement procedures. Fashion raids are a manifestation of this change, as they transfer the ethics of dress from the private religious sphere to the public political sphere monitored by the state.

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<sup>14</sup> Amjad Almusaed, Asaad Almssad, and Ibrahim Yitmen, "Qualitative Data Collection and Management," in *Practice of Research Methodology in Civil Engineering and Architecture: A Comprehensive Guide* (Springer, 2025), 417-54, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-97393-2\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-97393-2_13).

<sup>15</sup> Diauddin Ismail et al., "Revitalization of the Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Internalizing the Values of Islamic Dress Among Female Students," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 7, no. 3 (2025): 260-79, <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v7i3.7934>.

The militarisation of morality in clothing raids can be interpreted as a form of securitisation, in which behaviour deemed to deviate from norms of decency is treated as a threat to social order and collective identity. In the logic of securitisation, an issue is constructed as an existential danger that requires extraordinary measures and the legitimisation of coercive force.<sup>16</sup> When clothing is considered a source of immorality or a threat to public morality, policy enforcers are justified in acting like security forces by conducting patrols, raids, arrests, and even symbolic punishments. Morality is then treated as a security threat that must be neutralised, rather than simply as an ethical issue that can be negotiated through education and social dialogue.

From the perspective of modern governance theory, the practice of clothing raids can be understood as part of governmentality, namely, the state's management of the population through the regulation of daily life. Michel Foucault explains that modern power works not only through laws and direct violence, but also through the discipline of the body and the normalisation of behaviour.<sup>17</sup> Clothing raids are a concrete example of how the body becomes a political arena, as individuals' clothing, appearance, and gestures are monitored and assessed against certain moral standards.<sup>18</sup> The authorities not only enforce rules, but also shape citizens' subjectivity through mechanisms of shame, fear, and internalisation of norms. This discipline of the body creates obedience not solely because of religious beliefs, but because of social pressure and the threat of sanctions. In other words, morality becomes a technology of government that works through the regulation of the body in public spaces.

The militaristic character of the dress code raids is evident in their operational form, which resembles security strategies. Routine patrols on the streets, sudden checks in crowded centres, raids in places considered prone to immorality, and the recording of violators show that the enforcement of dress codes has adopted a policing model. In fact, temporary detention or forced guidance are often used as disciplinary mechanisms. This practice creates an atmosphere of permanent surveillance, where citizens feel they are always subject to inspection and judgment. The publication of violations through the media or official announcements also reinforces the deterrent effect, as violations are not only processed administratively but also displayed as a collective moral warning. In this context, dress code raids serve to enforce compliance through fear and symbolic control.

This change in the character of Islamic law enforcement has sparked deep controversy. The main question that arises is whether dress code raids are a legitimate implementation of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil) to maintain public morals, or rather a form of expansion of the coercive power of the state and semi-state apparatus that violates human dignity and the principle of due process. This debate highlights the clash between collective moral legitimacy and the principle of individual rights in the modern state. Those who support clothing raids often emphasise the social mandate of the majority, namely that a religious society has the right to protect public spaces from behaviour that is considered deviant. They argue that clothing raids are a form of prevention against immorality and a means of protecting the younger generation from moral degradation. From this perspective, clothing norms are not merely a personal choice, but a symbol of public piety that must be maintained for the sake of social order.

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<sup>16</sup> Timo Kivimäki, "Is Securitisation a Natural and Useful Response to Existential Threats? Introducing the Idea of Peacification," *Social Sciences* 14, no. 1 (2025): 43, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14010043>.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea C Westlund, "Pre-Modern and Modern Power: Foucault and the Case of Domestic Violence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24, no. 4 (1999): 1045-66, <https://doi.org/10.1086/495402>.

<sup>18</sup> Katharine J Hamerton, "Fashion on the Brain: The Visible and Invisible Bonds of the Imagination in Malebranche," *French Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2022): 415-49, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-9746587>.

Supporters of clothing raids often link them to the local legitimacy of sharia policy. In the context of regional autonomy or the application of Islamic law in certain areas, raids are seen as an expression of the religious identity of the community and a form of moral sovereignty. They consider that this policy is a response to the demands of a society that wants public spaces to be in accordance with Islamic values. Thus, clothing raids are positioned as a collective instrument to enforce agreed social norms. This argument is often reinforced by the claim that individual freedom must be limited for the sake of the common moral good, and that violations of clothing norms can trigger immoral behaviour and social unrest.<sup>19</sup> However, critics of dress code raids emphasise that this practice often violates citizens' constitutional rights, including freedom of expression, the right to dignity, and protection from degrading treatment. They view dress code raids as a form of discriminatory body control, especially against women, as dress standards are often applied unevenly.

From a human rights perspective, dress code raids create an exclusive public space within which individuals are forced to conform to a particular moral interpretation. This criticism also highlights that raids are often carried out without clear legal procedures, thereby violating the principle of due process and opening up opportunities for abuse of power. Criticism of the securitisation of morality emphasises that when morality is treated as a security threat, the state tends to resort to repressive measures that erode civil liberties.<sup>20</sup> This kind of moral policing can create a culture of fear and false compliance, where citizens obey norms not out of conviction but out of fear of sanctions. In the long term, this can undermine the meaning of morality itself, as piety is reduced to formal compliance with dress codes.

This controversy also reflects the epistemological tension between morality as ethics and morality as law. In the Islamic ethical tradition, piety should arise from intention and spiritual awareness, not from external coercion.<sup>21</sup> However, when dress codes are enforced through raids, piety becomes something that is produced administratively and disciplinarily. This raises questions about moral authenticity: can compliance achieved through symbolic intimidation be considered a success in *al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, or does it instead indicate a failure of true moral guidance? In this context, clothing raids symbolise the transformation of morality into an instrument of power.

Clothing raids also serve as a symbolic practice that establishes social boundaries between those considered pious and those not. The publication of violations and the recording of offenders creates social categories that stigmatise certain individuals as moral threats. This mechanism reinforces social control through collective shame, while creating a moral hierarchy within society. From a sociological perspective, dress code raids can be understood as a ritual of norm affirmation, in which officials act as moral guardians who determine standards of decency.<sup>22</sup> However, this ritual also contains symbolic violence because individuals' bodies are treated as objects of public scrutiny.

From a legal-political perspective, dress code raids demonstrate how Islamic law in the modern context often functions not only as a religious norm but also as a tool for

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<sup>19</sup> Andi Luhur Prianto et al., "Hijacking of State Power on Religious Freedom by Community Organizations in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (2024): 348-67, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.17916>.

<sup>20</sup> Rita Floyd et al., "The Morality of Security: A Theory of Just Securitisation," *European Journal of International Security* 7, no. 2 (2022): 248-82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2022.3>.

<sup>21</sup> Hijriatu Sakinah, Arsy Shakila Putri, and Ainur Rofiq, "Islamic Ethical Analysis of Deepfakes and Religious Image Manipulation," *Jurnal Lentera Insani* 1, no. 2 (2025): 141-56, <https://doi.org/10.65586/jli.v1i2.28>.

<sup>22</sup> David Crockett and Melanie Wallendorf, "Sociological Perspectives on Imposed School Dress Codes: Consumption as Attempted Suppression of Class and Group Symbolism," *Journal of Macromarketing* 18, no. 2 (1998): 115-31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/027614679801800204>.

legitimising power. The enforcement of dress code norms can be a means for local governments or certain groups to demonstrate moral authority and gain political support. In this situation, sharia could be reduced to a symbol of political identity. At the same time, the practice of raids becomes a performative stage for officials to display their religious commitment. The production of compliance through the logic of security also has significant psychological and social implications. Individuals who are targeted by raids often experience fear, trauma, or a loss of security in public spaces. Public spaces, which should be arenas of civil liberty, become spaces of moral surveillance. This restricts mobility, especially for women, who may feel they must constantly adjust their appearance to avoid raids. In the long term, clothing raids can reinforce gender inequality and limit the social participation of certain groups.

### Gender Politics, Body Control, and Selectivity in Enforcement in Dress Code Raids

Dress code raids in public spaces are one of the most significant practices in the discourse on the application of contemporary Islamic law because they reveal how the body, especially the bodies of women and young people, have become a political battleground through moral regulation. In the practice of raids, clothing is no longer merely a cultural expression or personal choice.<sup>23</sup> Still, it is constructed as a moral indicator that can be quickly monitored, assessed, and punished. This phenomenon marks an important shift in the relationship between religion, the state, and citizens, in which public piety is reduced to a visible display of the body. Dress code raids operate through a logic of surveillance that positions the body as an object of regulation, presenting Islamic law not only as an ethical norm but also as a disciplinary device that produces compliance through control over appearance. In this context, the body becomes a space where morality is at stake, and gender politics operates intensely through standards of modesty that are not neutral.<sup>24</sup>

Theoretically, the body in modern society is a locus of power produced through mechanisms of discipline and normalisation. Michel Foucault explains that power does not work solely through legal prohibitions, but through the regulation of the body and everyday behaviour.<sup>25</sup> Fashion raids are a concrete example of how biopolitics operates: the state or semi-state apparatus intervenes in citizens' bodies under the pretext of maintaining public morality. However, this intervention is not uniform. It is often selective, targeting women and young people in particular, revealing how women's bodies are positioned as symbols of community honour and points of vulnerability for moral panic. Women's clothing becomes a field of control because it is considered capable of inciting slander or immorality, while men's bodies often escape equivalent scrutiny.

Gender inequality in clothing raids is evident in the way women's bodies are made the main object of moral regulation.<sup>26</sup> In many cases, women are treated as guardians of public morality, so that clothing violations are considered a serious social threat. This phenomenon is evident in Aceh, Indonesia, where *wilāyat al-ḥisbah* routinely conducts

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<sup>23</sup> Otto von Busch, "What Is to Be Sustained?: Perpetuating Systemic Injustices through Sustainable Fashion," *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 18, no. 1 (2022): 400–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2022.2069996>.

<sup>24</sup> Ihyani Malik et al., "Gender Analysis in the Islamic Law-Based Ecofeminism Movement for Ecosystem Protection," *El-Mashlahah* 15, no. 1 (2025): 101–24, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v15i1.9040>.

<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, "Power/Knowledge," in *The New Social Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2020), 73–79, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003060963-10>.

<sup>26</sup> Päivi Honkatukia and Suvi Keskinen, "The Social Control of Young Women's Clothing and Bodies: A Perspective of Differences on Racialization and Sexualization," *Ethnicities* 18, no. 1 (2018): 142–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796817701773>.

dress code raids and reprimands or temporarily detains women who are deemed not to comply with the standards of wearing a hijab or loose clothing.<sup>27</sup> This practice shows that the application of sharia is often more strictly directed at women's bodies than men's, creating double standards in the enforcement of morality. Similar cases have been found in Iran, where the morality police (*Gasht-e Ershad*) patrol to ensure women's compliance with hijab rules, which has sparked widespread controversy and a wave of public protests.<sup>28</sup> Both examples show how dress raids have become a gendered political instrument that links piety with control over women's bodies.<sup>29</sup>

The core issue highlighted in this phenomenon is how the application of Islamic law through clothing raids objectifies the body as an object of state regulation. The body is treated not as a dignified subject but as a surface that must conform to certain moral standards. From a feminist perspective, control over women's bodies is always linked to patriarchal power relations, in which women's bodies are used as symbols of the honour of the family, community, or state.<sup>30</sup> Clothing raids reinforce this relationship because they place women as the main targets of public surveillance, creating social stigma and limiting women's movement in public spaces.<sup>31</sup> The resulting compliance is not spiritual but disciplinary, born of fear of sanctions and humiliation.

The practice of dress code raids often ignores the complexity of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, the main objectives of sharia, which include the protection of human dignity, security, and social welfare. In *maqāṣid* theory, Islamic law should be directed towards protecting religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, as well as ensuring humanity and justice. However, when dress code raids are carried out with a coercive approach and humiliate individuals in public spaces, the protection of dignity (*ḥifẓ al-ird*) is threatened. The practice of recording violators, publishing violations, or temporary detention can create trauma and stigma, which contradicts the principle of public interest.

The main controversy in this discourse arises from the claim that dress codes are a universal standard of public piety. Supporters of dress code raids often emphasise that sharia requires the covering of the aurat and the maintenance of modesty, so the state has a responsibility to enforce the rules to prevent immorality. They argue that dress code raids are a form of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil) necessary to maintain the morality of public spaces. The concept of preventing slander is often used to justify surveillance of women's bodies, with the assumption that certain clothing can trigger sexual desire and moral decay. In this framework, the state is seen as the guardian of collective decency, and raids are considered an effort at social protection.

Criticism of clothing raids emphasises that this practice reduces religion to a concern with appearance, thereby narrowing piety to mere visual symbols. Clothing raids create moral panic, which is an excessive social panic over certain moral threats, causing society

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<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Barokah Lajuna, Yuni Roslaili, and Yusnaidi Yusnaidi, "Law Enforcement Efforts in Addressing Online Prostitution in Banda Aceh City: A Study of the Role of Satpol PP and Wilayatul Hisbah," *MAQASIDI: Jurnal Syariah Dan Hukum*, 2025, 336–48, <https://doi.org/10.47498/maqasidi.v5i2.5255>.

<sup>28</sup> Atefeh Batyari, "Everyday Resistance Against the Mandatory Hijab and the Lack of Collective Solidarity in Iran," *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence* 10, no. 4 (2025): 3, <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2025.10.04.03>.

<sup>29</sup> Suud Sarim Karimullah and Siti Rutbatul Aliyah, "Feminist Criticism of Traditional Understanding of Women's Roles in Islam," *An-Nisa': Journal of Gender Studies* 16, no. 2 (2023): 195–214, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v16i2.177>.

<sup>30</sup> Bhakti Wiranti et al., "Political Feminism and Women's Representation in Public Policy in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pelita Raya* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.65586/jpr.v1i1.11>.

<sup>31</sup> Nazia Hussein, "Asian Muslim Women's Struggle to Gain Value: The Labour behind Performative Visibility as Everyday Politics in Britain," in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 100 (Elsevier, 2023), 102802, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102802>.

to focus on clothing as the source of the problem.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, structural issues such as poverty, domestic violence, corruption, or economic injustice are obscured. In this context, dress code raids can serve as a political distraction, whereby the state displays its moral commitment through the surveillance of women's bodies, while ignoring more fundamental social problems. This criticism emphasises that piety cannot be reduced to dress code compliance, as Islam also emphasises social justice, protection of the weak, and eradication of structural injustice.

Feminist perspectives reinforce this criticism by highlighting that control over women's bodies is a form of symbolic and institutional violence.<sup>33</sup> When women's bodies are made the object of raids, women lose autonomy over themselves and are forced to conform to a particular moral interpretation. This practice creates inequality among citizens, as women are treated as objects of stricter regulation. Furthermore, dress code raids often involve public humiliation, harsh reprimands, or coercion, which contradict the principles of equality and human dignity. From a human rights perspective, dress code raids can violate freedom of expression and the prohibition on degrading treatment.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, criticism also comes from the fiqh tradition, which rejects coercion in matters of personal morality. Several scholars emphasise that *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil) has ethical conditions, including refraining from causing greater harm and from violating privacy. The concept of *tajassus* (spying) in Islam is prohibited because it violates individual dignity. Dress code raids conducted through patrols and sudden inspections can be seen as a form of *tajassus*, as officials excessively monitor citizens' bodies. In addition, public humiliation of violators contradicts the principle of covering shame (*satr al-'ayb*) emphasised in Islamic ethics.

The selectivity of enforcement in dress raids is also an important issue. Raids often target certain groups, especially young women, the working class, or marginalised communities, while the elite or those with access to power often escape scrutiny. This shows that dress raids are not only a moral issue, but also a political issue of class and power. In many cases, officials use their discretion to determine who is considered in violation, creating opportunities for discrimination and abuse of authority. This selectivity reinforces the criticism that dress code raids are more an instrument of social control than the implementation of fair Sharia law.

Cases in several countries show similar patterns. In Saudi Arabia, before the social reforms of recent years, the religious police (*mutawa*) were known to conduct strict moral raids on women's clothing and public socialising, which then drew international criticism for violating citizens' rights. In Iran, hijab patrols sparked major controversy, especially after cases of death or violence in detention triggered widespread protests. In Indonesia, Aceh is a clear example of how clothing raids are institutionalised in the regional legal system, but also raise debates about women's rights, dignity, and the effectiveness of sharia. These examples show that clothing raids are a global phenomenon in countries that enforce religion-based moral policing.

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<sup>32</sup> Christie Barron and Dany Lacombe, "Moral Panic and the Nasty Girl," *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 42, no. 1 (2005): 51–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2005.tb00790.x>.

<sup>33</sup> Angela J Hattery, "Feminist Lecture:(Re) Imagining Gender-Based Violence as a Strategy for Enforcing Institutional Segregation and Reproducing Structural Inequalities," *Gender & Society* 36, no. 6 (2022): 789–812, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432221128665>.

<sup>34</sup> Faizah Abdullah Latif, Moh Dahhur, and Sasi Sabila Musakinah Ramadhany, "Protection of Freedom of Religion in Islamic Law in Secular Turkey and Its Relevance for Indonesia," *Insani: Jurnal Pranata Sosial Hukum Islam* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.65586/insani.v1i1.1>.

## Moral Economy, Religious Populism, and the Compliance Industry Growing Out of Fashion Raids

Fashion raids in public spaces cannot be understood solely as acts of enforcing modesty norms or of implementing Islamic law. They must be placed within a broader socio-political ecosystem, namely, religious populism and a moral economy that arises from the need for symbols of order.<sup>35</sup> In various countries that have adopted religion-based moral policing policies, such as Indonesia (Aceh), Iran, Saudi Arabia during the dominance of the religious police, or Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, clothing raids have often been part of a government strategy that displays moral assertiveness as proof of religious legitimacy. In this context, raids are not only aimed at regulating clothing but also at producing a spectacle of enforcement that is easily understood by the public, presenting a concrete moral enemy and symbolising effective, swift action. Clothing serves as a visible indicator of morality, so state and semi-state actors use things raids as a highly productive political stage to demonstrate that they are working to maintain public piety.

This phenomenon is closely related to the logic of religious populism, a form of political mobilisation that claims to represent the pious majority against groups that are considered deviant or threatening to the value system. Religious populism requires a simple moral narrative and an easily identifiable enemy, making clothing a highly strategic medium.<sup>36</sup> In clothing raids, the individual body is constructed as a locus of moral threat, so that enforcement becomes a symbol of the righteous community's victory over immorality. This practice not only promotes compliance but also fosters a collective identity based on moral opposition: those who comply are considered part of a dignified community. At the same time, those who violate the rules are positioned as a social threat.

Within the framework of moral economics, clothing raids can be understood as a symbolic exchange between the state and society: the state displays moral assertiveness, while society provides social and electoral support. The concept of moral economics, originally used to explain the relationship between social norms and the legitimacy of power, is relevant for understanding how moral policies produce political exchange value. When officials conduct dress code raids, they are not only enforcing rules but also sending a message that the state is present as the guardian of morality. This message can increase public moral satisfaction, especially among conservative groups, while strengthening the political position of actors who promote the Sharia agenda.

The moral economy of dress code raids also opens up space for certain actors to gain religious legitimacy and social benefits. Sharia enforcement officials, vigilante groups, or local moral institutions can increase their authority through their role as guardians of religion. In some cases, such as in Aceh with *wilāyat al-ḥisbah* or in Iran with the morality police, these institutions obtain state resources, institutional support, and high social status. Outside the state, certain civil society groups can use clothing raids to strengthen their bargaining position as moral representatives of the people. This shows that dress code raids not only result in compliance but also generate a compliance industry, as a network of actors derive material and symbolic benefits from the production and enforcement of morality.

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<sup>35</sup> Rizal Al Hamid et al., "Political Conflict between Islamic Law and National Law in Indonesia," *Insani: Jurnal Pranata Sosial Hukum Islam* 1, no. 1 (2025): 48–62, <https://doi.org/10.65586/insani.v1i1.4>.

<sup>36</sup> Nadia Marzouki, "Populism and Religion," in *The Populism Interviews* (Routledge, 2022), 152–58, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003250388-29>.

This compliance industry is evident in the development of socio-economic mechanisms that support certain dress norms, such as the market for sharia-compliant clothing, public piety campaigns, and moral education institutions linked to enforcement policies. When dress code raids become routine, compliance with certain dress standards is no longer merely a religious choice, but a social necessity to avoid sanctions.<sup>37</sup> This creates demand for products and symbols of piety that comply with the authorities' standards. From an economic sociology perspective, morality becomes a commodity because clothing is not only apparel, but also a sign of compliance that has social value. However, the main controversy centres on whether dress code raids actually reduce moral violations or are merely political rituals that are effective in terms of image but fail in substance.

Supporters of dress code raids often emphasise their deterrent effect, which they believe prevents immorality and maintains social stability.<sup>38</sup> In this argument, raids are considered necessary because without strict enforcement, dress codes will be ignored, public spaces will become permissive, and moral degradation will increase. They see public moral satisfaction as an indicator of success because people feel safe and comfortable when public spaces are regulated in accordance with dominant religious values. In this view, dress code raids are a form of social protection that creates order and reduces the potential for slander. However, critics emphasise that the effectiveness of dress code raids is often not supported by evidence-based policies.

There is no guarantee that clothing regulations directly correlate with a decrease in immoral behaviour or an increase in society's moral quality. This criticism highlights that dress code raids are more of a political performance than a substantive solution. Raids give the impression of swift action, but they do not address the root causes of social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, corruption, or structural inequalities that are far more damaging to public morals. In this context, clothing raids become a kind of moral shortcut, an easy way to show firmness without facing the complexities of social reform.

Fashion raids can encourage false compliance and social hypocrisy. Individuals may comply with dress codes in public spaces for fear of sanctions, but they do not internalise moral values. Compliance becomes formalistic rather than spiritual. In many cases, raids actually encourage the transfer of practices to hidden spaces because behaviour considered deviant does not disappear.<sup>39</sup> It simply moves to private spaces or areas that are not monitored. This demonstrates the paradoxical effect of moral policing because the stricter the surveillance, the more creative people become in finding loopholes to avoid control. From a legal anthropology perspective, dress code raids can create a fragile and unsustainable culture of superficial compliance.

Another boomerang effect is the stigmatisation and normalisation of social persecution. Dress code raids often target specific groups, such as young women, the

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<sup>37</sup> Kristin Aune, Reina Lewis, and Lina Molokotos-Liederman, "Modest Dress at Work as Lived Religion: Women's Dress in Religious Work Contexts in Saudi Arabia and the UK," *Sociology of Religion* 84, no. 1 (2023): 42-71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srac020>.

<sup>38</sup> Sukiyawati Sukiyawati, Achmad Amin Majid, and Sajida Himanirah, "The Protection of Social Harmony: A Critical Study on the Prohibition of Cohabitation in Islamic Law and the Criminal Code (KUHP)," *SHAHIH: Journal of Islamicate Multidisciplinary* 10, no. 2 (2025): 129-52, <https://doi.org/10.22515/shahih.v10i2.11602>.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Bell, Aaron Kinzel, and Yoo Akakpo, "Continuity of the 'Code': A Review of the Subcultures and Informal Social Norms in Prisons, Streets, and Schools," *Sociology Compass* 16, no. 8 (2022): e13010, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13010>.

working class, or cultural minorities, thereby reinforcing social inequality.<sup>40</sup> The publicisation of violations creates shame and stigma that can damage an individual's dignity. In the long term, this practice normalises the idea that citizens can be humiliated or punished in public spaces based on their appearance, which has the potential to extend the culture of persecution to other groups.

Religious populism reinforces this dynamic because it requires constant political rituals to maintain support. Dress code raids provide such rituals: spectacular actions that can be showcased through the media, presenting the state or authorities as moral guardians. In the context of Iran, hijab patrols have become a symbol of state ideology, despite triggering widespread resistance. In Aceh, dress raids are often highlighted by national and international media, showing how sharia is practised in the form of policing. In Afghanistan, the Taliban's dress policy shows how control over women's bodies has become a symbol of moral-political domination. These cases confirm that dress raids often function more as symbols of power than as effective moral mechanisms.

### Conclusion

The enforcement of dress codes in public spaces, as part in the implementation of Islamic law, demonstrates a fundamental shift from religious ethical norms to governance through moral militarisation, namely the enforcement of piety through the logic of security, bodily discipline, and symbolic intimidation. This practice not only produces formal compliance, but also shapes selective and layered power relations, especially towards women's bodies and young people, thereby giving rise to gender inequality, moral panic, and a reduction of *maqāṣid al-shariah*, which should emphasise the protection of dignity and social welfare. The dress code raids are not merely a sharia policy, but rather an arena of political-moral contestation that produces an industry of compliance, legitimacy rents, and rituals of control that are effective in image but problematic in substance.

The theoretical implications broaden the understanding of shariah as a non-neutral socio-political practice. In contrast, the practical and policy implications demand a critical evaluation of enforcement models that potentially violate due process, normalise persecution, and encourage false compliance. This study has limitations in the scope of cases and access to direct subject experiences, so further studies should deepen the cross-country comparative dimension, explore citizen resistance, and test the effectiveness of evidence-based policies against coercive approaches. In the future, practices in the field require a reorientation of Islamic law enforcement that is more in line with *maqāṣid*, based on education and social justice, so that morality is no longer treated as a security threat, but rather as a collective ethic that humanises and substantively builds public welfare.

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In the interests of transparency, the authors formally declare that no competing interests or conflicts of interest are associated with the submission and publication of this manuscript.

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<sup>40</sup> Suyahman Suyahman, Suud Sarim Karimullah, and Muh Akbar Fhad Syahril, "Intersectionality in Social Justice: Unpacking the Complexity of Oppression," *Jambura Law Review* 7, no. 1 (2025): 275–308, <https://doi.org/10.33756/jlr.v7i1.27828>.

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