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**“Hijab and its Religious Grounds: Looking through a
Dialogue between Two Egyptian Advisors”**

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The purpose of this study is to examine the religious grounds of veiling, or the *hijab*, in contemporary Egypt. The main sources used here are the articles in a secular weekly-magazine, *Ruḥ al-Yusuf*, published in June 1994, in which two Egyptian “advisors” discuss whether the hijab is obligatory in Islam or not. The one who began the discussion was Judge Muhammad Sa‘id al-Ashmawi (1932), a legal advisor, or *mustashar*, with his article titled “Hijab is not an Obligation in Islam!” in which he examined three revelations of the Qur’an [33:53, 24:31, 33:59] and two famous traditions, or Hadith. Referring to a Qur’anic exegesis written by a famous medieval scholar al-Qurtubi, and various sources used as grounds to his discussion, al-Ashmawi reached the conclusion: the hijab of today is not a religious obligation. Two weeks later, the same magazine carried another article; it was a refutation to al-Ashmawi by Sheikh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (1928), who was at that time, the *Mufti* of the Republic, or the head advisor in religious law in Egypt. While using almost exactly the same sources, Tantawi’s article “Nay, Hijab is an Obligation in Islam” reached the very opposite conclusion. The first part of this paper presents the analysis of their discussion and reveals the strategy that the two parties used to persuade the readers. Then, it is followed by an examination of the word “hijab,” its meaning and its relation to the Islamic sources, to clarify the foundation on which contemporary discussions surrounding the *hijab* are based.