

Research Paper

Zehra Ahmad

Professor Dicky Yangzom

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New York City College of Technology

Often Islamic women are viewed as oppressed, so they negotiate their identity by blending in with modern society through fashion.

Islamic women have faced many obstacles over the past few years. At first, they were seen as oppressed as a result of the long history of Islamic countries' strict policies on veils. Shortly after 9/11, these women faced difficult times because Muslims were perceived negatively by society; often deemed as terroristic threats based solely on their manner of dress. Islamic women were further subjected to more negativity because they were easy to identify by their hijabs worn in public. As many women wanted to remain true to their religions and selves, they often refused to remove their hijabs. As Islamic women became more and more aware of their situation, they fought, vowing to become accepted by society. Islamic women took the initiative and started to dress in a more modern way; incorporating more fashionable trends with their traditional garments. This was the perfect balance between being "current", but also remaining "modest" as Muslim women are known to be.

What is the Hijab?

The word "hijab" varies from culture to culture. In the Christian West, the term "veil" is used to mean a covering of the face, but in Arabic the term "hijab" refers to a barrier or curtain (Shaheed 2008, 295). As defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the hijab is "the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women". The Qur'an gives various meanings to the term "hijab", including: "a thing that prevents, hinders, debars, or precludes; a thing that veils, conceals, hides, covers, or protects, because it prevents seeing, or beholding...a partition, a bar, a barrier, or an obstacle" (Ruby, 2006). According to the Islamic faith, the hijab signifies things other than a headscarf. As well as simply being a headscarf, the hijab also represents modest clothing and modest behavior (Ruby, 2006). In this research, I will be using

the Merriam Webster dictionary definition when I use the word hijab. There are other forms of veiling as well that cover the body more than the hijab. Most prominent of those is the burqa and the niqab. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the burqa is “a long piece of clothing that covers the face and body and that is worn by some Muslim women in public places” and the niqab is “a veil for covering the hair and face except for the eyes that is worn by some Muslim women”.

While the burqa or niqab are more synonymous with the oppressive stereotype of the Muslim faith, the hijab is more prevalent in America. Therefore, many people impose negative stereotypes on the 3 women who wear that visible marker of faith. While veiling is rooted in national heritage and place of residence (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003), people embrace the hijab more readily in non-Muslim countries than their home country (Ruby, 2006). Some women have a “static” view of their country of origin and are surprised to find that the women there are relaxing their dress code in a way that is improper (Ruby, 2006). As a result of this, these women find it is important to act as “guardian of Muslim standards” in the country they are living because people “back home” are careless in maintaining this image (Ruby 2006).

These women wear the hijab for themselves and their faith in God. Like the women who choose to wear the hijab, those who choose not to wear the hijab do so for a variety of reasons. For example, many women removed their hijabs due to discrimination. But dressing modern and modestly helped them slowly merge their identities with today’s society.

What Does the Qur’an Say About Veiling?

These are the two verses typically cited about a woman’s dress code by the Qur’an:

1) And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty...And that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments.

2) O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when a broad): this is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is oft forgiving, most merciful. (Ruby, 2006).

Reading these two verses of the Quran show how vague the Quran is for the clothing requirements are for women. This also depends on how one interprets the Quran in their own way and attitude toward veiling based on that interpretation. This proves they are not oppressed as others view they are. They have a choice to wear what and how they want. Back in the day others viewed Islamic women to veil themselves completely because they were below in society. The Qur'an asks for modesty by both males and females. The men are required to divert their eyes from women entirely, and women need to wear modest dress (Droogsma, 2007). But if men are not allowed to look at women, why do Islamic women cover themselves to avoid the sexual gaze of men? Because, not every man follows this and in America, Islamic women have women have communications with men who are non-Muslim as well.

Why Islamic Women Were Viewed Negatively and Oppressed?

In countries outside of the United States, women are viewed very differently. They are told what to wear and how to wear it. For example, other countries even ban girls for wearing a

burka or hijab. Burkas are not easily accepted outside of Islamic countries. According to YouGov's latest research shows that opinions toward the burqa ban vary significantly on either side of the Atlantic. (Figure 2). While 62% of Germans support a ban on burqas and niqabs, only 27% of Americans support one. 59% of Americans oppose a burqa ban (Moore, 2016).

However, When Americans are asked about the discrimination Muslims face, 47% say that they face a lot of discrimination in the United States while 34% say that they do not. (See figure 3). 55% said that Muslims face a lot of discrimination. While 50% aren't sure enough to compare to Europe, 20% of Americans say that Muslims face more discrimination here while 30% say they face more in Western Europe (Moore, 2016).

The terrorist attacks and destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 had a tremendous negative impact on views toward Islam by the American people. Because the hijab is a prominent indicator of the Islamic faith, it is a visible indicator of being Muslim, and women who wore the veil post 9/11 were treated with less respect (Droogsma, 2007). It became a symbol of oppression and violence of Islamic belief The Bush administration launched a campaign that stressed the need to mobilize armed forces to liberate the Muslim women in Afghanistan from their degrading conditions. The Americans did this by “liberating” the Muslim women in Afghanistan from wearing the burqa. While the Taliban enforced the rule requiring women to wear the burqa, it is actually a centuries old tradition that had been around long before the Taliban came along.

The images of the women wearing the burqa left a negative impact on the American people and the perception of Islam as an oppressive faith. Muslim wanted to change that vision that Americans had them. They wanted to be accepted and be a part of society. So, after seeing

that the way they dress they started to modernize the way they dress but still remain modest as well.

The Modernization of Islamic Women

With time, Islamic women started to take over the fashion world. They are seen on blogs, runaways, television, and fashion brands worldwide. After being viewed negatively for so long they are now seen in a positive light due to the fashion world. They are overcoming their previously given identity and exchanging that into a new and “improved” identity. Islamic women became a part of society by blending in with fashion, which in turn, gave them a huge acceptance. Society generally now sees them and acknowledges that they are not oppressed, but instead, have the choice on what they can wear and how they can wear it.

The dress style of an individual is an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body. (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, in press). People often judge people by their choice of dress, however, that is simply a way of making an assumption. Assumptions such as these can often be damaging; resulting in things ranging from chastising to physical harm. Dress is also another way how people differentiate themselves from others. Similarly, Islamic women are identified by the way they dress modestly. However, some women would hide their identity by removing the hijab. These women chose to do this so they could conceal their Muslim identities. In *Invisible Men?* Shaun Cole talks about men earlier in the century took great pains to conceal their sexual identity. Dress for these gay men broadly followed conventions of fashion: they wore “dark suits, three pieces, very quiet shirts” that would not elicit comment or notice from outsiders (Cole, 2000). They try to blend in with the crowd by wearing clothes that everyone else is wearing. In other words, they try to fit in society and look similar to others by their apparel. They followed the normative dress code to conceal their sexual identity. Cole talks

about how gay men were known for using traditional non-masculine-associated colors to reflect their sexuality. For example, pink was one of the colors. As a result, nobody wore pink shirts because if they did then it gave the signal that you were gay (Cole, 2000). The importance of dress choice to the formation of sexual identity is highlighted, as is gay influence on punk and the fashion industry as a whole. The rise of new dress choices in the wake of gay liberation is analyzed with particular emphasis on the masculinization of gay dress.

Islamic women started to follow the latest fashion trends. They created their own fashion that is modest and stylish. Some Islamic women have removed their hijab to hide their Islamic identity. But other women felt that they should be accepted regardless for who they are not for how they look, with a hijab or no hijab. However, Islamic women decided to change their appearance and fit into society, yet they continue to dress modestly. They believed dressing more fashionable and wearing articles of clothing that were in trend and fashionable but worn in a modest way would help give them a positive look into society.

Islamic women choose to be modest because it makes them feel stronger. Following fashionable trends and creating outfits that stylish and modest helps Islamic women be seen in a positive light. As the modesty movement started to rise, so did the acceptance of Islamic women. You see fashion designers and bloggers openly wearing their hijab with no fear. Brands such as Nike made the Pro Hijab was big deal. This shows that brands like Nike are accepting and acknowledging all kinds of women of every faith. They are creating fashion pieces for Islamic women that are athletes. Seeing big brands such as Nike accepting Islamic women wearing the hijab will make society slowly accept Islamic women. In Nike Pro Hijab, for figure skater Zahra Lari, the Pro Hijab is a symbol of empowerment. "It's a reminder to us Muslim women that we

can achieve anything in the world," she says. "What Nike has done for Muslim athletes is a dream that we never thought would happen." (n.n, 2017).

In the essay, "*Eating the other: Desire and Resistance*", Bell Hooks says, "The world of fashion (the beauty industry, as well) has come to understand that selling products is heightened by the sale of Otherness" (Hooks, 1992). Hooks is saying that the fashion world now will make more money if they sell products for other people, such Islamic women that need clothes that are modest. The industry is also doing it to make money and open their range to all. For example, in the article, *Dolce & Gabbana's Embellished Hijabs and Abayas Are Great News for Muslim Women—When Will Other Brands Follow Suit?* Steff Yotka discusses that Dolce & Gabbana produced a collection of hijabs and abayas that is for Muslim. The garments are engineered for modesty and you see the little jewel-encrusted details that is known to Dolce & Gabbana. To Muslim women with a taste for luxury fashion, this collection is an exciting development (Yotka, 2016). This proves that Islamic women are being more accepted by modernizing in their fashion with a brand such as Dolce & Gabbana.

In the article, *7 Muslim Women Speak Openly About Faith, Fashion and Modesty*, Asma Karimi states that "I decided to wear the hijab solely based on my own personal choice. It was a huge step for me as an adolescent who was discovering her identity. When I first began wearing the hijab, I was not too comfortable in it since I was not familiar with incorporating it in my everyday wardrobe. However, over the years I began to grow a huge interest in fashion, which helped me develop my sense of style. I am proud to say that my hijab has impacted my life in a very positive way and has played a huge part in shaping my identity growing up, into the individual that I am today. By wearing the hijab, I am not conforming to the societal beauty standards that are set for me to follow as a young woman. Rather, it is my way of resisting the

negative social and political backlash as well as the societal expectations of how I should look or dress as a woman. In fact, wearing the hijab makes me feel beautiful, confident and resilient. Especially with the rise of modest fashion, I feel empowered and inspired by Muslim women fashion designers and bloggers such as, Dina Tokio and Dian Pelangi, who are sharing their unique personal styles on social media. This is critical in our ever-changing global society, as the fashion industry needs to be more representative of our current society. As a modest fashion blogger, I love sharing and showcasing my personal style on my Instagram account in order to make hijab wearing Muslim women more visible in the fashion world." (Greaves, 2017).

The rise of Islamic women dressing modern and modest gave the confidence to wear the Hijab in the fashion world. The fashion world is very powerful and is very influential. People will see fashion brands have women in the Hijab model and it creates an acceptance to society.

In the Article, More Is More: The Rise of the Modest Fashion Movement, 9-year-old Halima Aden made history when she became the first contestant to wear a hijab and burkini while competing in the Miss Minnesota U.S.A. pageant. According to Minneapolis NBC affiliate KARE-11, Aden was 1 of 45 women to compete in the pageant, and officials embraced her decision to wear a hijab during all pageant rounds, as well as to remain fully covered during the swimsuit portion of the event. Aden's modest choices are indicative of a larger movement that's been happening in fashion for a while. During New York Fashion Week in September, those who closely follow the style world may have noticed several looks featuring longer lengths, higher cuts, and looser fits. Boxy tunics continue to replace crop tops, and culottes seem to be photographed just as often as form-fitting skirts. But the biggest surprise of all came from Indonesian designer Anniesa Hasibuan, who made history as the first designer to feature every model on her runway wearing a hijab. Her show was a sign that the modest fashion movement is

becoming more mainstream, and it doesn't look like it'll be leaving anytime soon. The term "modest fashion" often comes with a stigma, as it is usually associated with oppression and Muslim women dressed head to toe in black garbs. But the industry is quickly growing. According to the most recent State of the Islamic Economy Report, Muslims alone spent \$230 billion on fashion this past year. Thanks to social media, young followers of faith have been able to show just how stylish they are. (Valenjad, 2017).

These women want to be recognized for who they are not for what they look like or for what they wear or not wear. The Modesty Movement empowers women that dress modestly. This helps give a positive look on Islamic women. Since this movement occurred, a big global brand such as H&M have featured Muslim women in hijabs to model for them. In the article, What H&M's Hijab-Wearing Model Means for Muslim Women, Melanie Elturk, The CEO of Haute Hijab, gives her take on H&M's latest campaign. Elturk talks about the modesty movement and it's currently picking up speed. At the forefront of this movement are often times Muslim women who don the hijab or headscarf—and for good reason. The hijab has become the symbol of modesty in dress. She gasped at the fact that a Muslim hijab-wearing model in a mainstream fashion ad. Elturk mentions Instagram pages of Ascia AKF, Dian Pelangi, and Dina Tokio, to name a few. These influencers are huge, amassing millions of followers. These bloggers and designers including herself are impacting a whole new generation of women around the world by reclaiming the narrative via social media and illustrating what a veiled Muslim woman looks like in the present. As a Muslim blogger, she is glad that brands are taking note of what Elturk has been supporting in the fashion brand Haute Hijab that Muslim women are a thriving, fully-functioning and active segment of society who deserve to be acknowledged and heard. Melanie also mentions that the hijab is not a fashion statement. It's a religious garment with deep and

profound significance that has roots going back to the Virgin Mary. Wearing this piece of cloth means, "I respect my body and guard my modesty out of devotion to God" (Elturk, 2015). It makes some people uncomfortable, because to wear it is to reject the notion that women need to wear less in order to be liberated. The concept of hijab in fact turns that contention on its head—arguing that to cover up is the real liberation from society's ingrained perception that a woman's value is reduced to her sexual allure. Melanie Elturk states “The significance of Mariah Idrissi wearing hijab in the H&M campaign is noteworthy for a number of reasons, not the least of which being that she's fiercely stylish in her hijab. Mariah represents the millions of hijab-wearing women who have a voice, who are pumping with intellect and enthusiasm and who possess a very real need to find appropriate, modest clothing. Mariah is another gleaming reference point along the modest fashion continuum that will inevitably continue because confident Muslim women who wear hijab with pride are here to stay” (Elturk, 2015). With a global brand as H&M feature Islamic women dressing modestly, this shows how they modernized their fashion to be featured in a fast-fashion brand that is always on top of the trends.

Muslim fashion blogger, Hoda Katebi is in charge of politically charged fashion blog Joojoo Azad. She is a Muslim-Iranian creative and community organizer.” The site frequently casts a spotlight on reductive media representations of hijab-wearing Muslim women and the environmental implications of, say, patterned rompers. “The power of how you dress and submit your body to public consumption really informs the way people engage with you,” she said (Hawgood, 2018).

As a result of maneuvering the culture, Islamic women, who were viewed as oppressed, ended up negotiating their identity by blending in with modern society through fashion and many readily available forms of media. Not only have they changed the perception of themselves to the

“Westernized” world, but they have also begun bringing about change to the traditional views of themselves as well. Something once seen as inappropriate, such as jeans or leggings, have taken to the forefront as fashionable accessories for any Muslim woman’s outfit. With time, they have come from being harassed due to their clothing, to fashion icons. This demonstrates that is it possible to turn your hindrances into aids, and further your acceptance with the help of a common theme, which is fashion.

Images

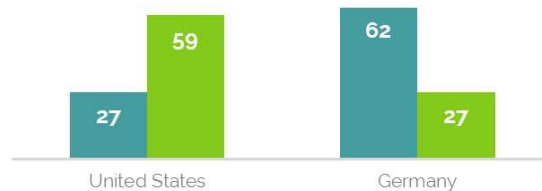


(Figure 1: Headgear Worn by Muslim Women, LibGuides)

Burqa Ban: America and Germany

Burqas and niqabs are outfits which some women use to cover their body and face. Usually, they are worn by Muslim women when they are out in public. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? %

- A law against wearing a full body and face veil should be introduced
- People should be allowed to decide for themselves what to wear (including burqas and niqabs)



YouGov | yougov.com

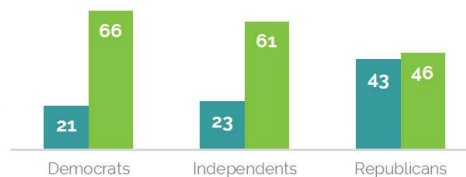
August 5-29, 2016

(Figure 2: Burqa Ban: America and Germany)

Limited support for American burqa ban

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YouGov | yougov.com

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(Figure 3: Limited Support for American Burqa Ban)

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