

Performing Muslim identities through embodiment- self-representing through fashion, aesthetics, and style

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Abstract

Modesty is practiced by people regardless of their class, sexuality, gender, race, or religion. However, there is an association between modesty, Islam, and the Islamic veil (or hijab). Hijab is an Islamic garment that is meant for Muslim women to wear if they choose to do so. Vast interpretations of Islamic texts produce variability in the definitions and understandings surrounding modesty. Veiled Muslim women practice modesty by concealing their hair, skin, and body. The veil is a signifier of their religious affiliation and modest lifestyle. This paper is a study of performance and visual enactment within the photos and videos posted by a sample of veiled Muslim women influencers, which include Nawal Sari and Rawdah Mohamed. Hijabi influencers, or hijabistas, are veiled Muslim women who are consistent with fashion trends and hijab styles in an online context. This article uses visual rhetorical analysis to examine the captions and the clothing, pose, background, symbols, colours and textures present in the photos and videos. By doing this, this paper seeks to examine how hijabi influencers define Islamic modesty through the photos and videos uploaded on their visual social media platforms. Theoretical frameworks, such as post-colonial feminism, orientalism, and creative labour support the interpretation of the data. This research demonstrates that the definition of Islamic modesty can be understood beyond a binary perspective.

Keywords

Hijabi influencers, female identities, modesty, visual rhetoric, identity politics, fashion



Introduction

There is immense variability in the interpretations of the hijab, which illustrates the versatility of clothing in terms of the social, cultural, religious, and political significance that it perpetuates (Hoodfar, 1993; Shirazi, 2020). However, two main discourses are pervasive in Western society when discussing the veil: it is seen as either a signifier of oppression or liberation (Fayyaza & Kamal, 2014). Veiling is associated with being submissive to and controlled by a patriarchal order (Hoodfar, 1993). Many women in Middle Eastern countries are forced by patriarchal regimes to dress modestly and to veil; therefore, they do not find beauty or liberation in modesty (Lodi, 2020). Moreover, competing discourses attempt to negatively define veiled Muslim women and the veil becomes a signifier of gender oppression and as a barbaric – or radical – religious practice (Droogsma, 2017; Ternikar 2009). However, veiling is also seen as a way for Muslim women to resist patriarchy (Hoodfar, 1993). For instance, Muslim women situated in the West believe that modesty is liberating (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Lodi, 2020). Lodi (2020) claims that many women who dress modestly for Islamic purposes believe that their “portrayal of modesty is inherently liberating” (p. 238). Veiled Muslim women, who are also social media influencers, demonstrate this liberation through the exploration of different styles, such as streetwear and unique poses (Lodi, 2020). This liberation is also achieved as Muslim women believe their veil is an escape from a “hyper-sexualized society” (Lodi, 2020, p. 240).

Clothing is a form of identity expression that facilitates an association between individuals and a social group (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Hassan & Harun, 2016; Shirazi, 2020). Therefore, veiled Muslim women publicly identify themselves as participants in Islam (Droogsma, 2007; Hassan & Harun, 2016; Shirazi, 2020). Shirazi (2020) claims that the veiled Muslim women in her study are the same as other women in the sense that “they are interested in how they look and the clothes they wear” (p. 412), meaning that they are fashion conscious (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Fashion consciousness is defined as a “person’s awareness to fashion and the ability to pick, dress similarly or imitate and be responsive to fashion” (Hassan & Harun, 2016, p. 480). Veiled women creatively style and wear their hijab by following fashion trends (Hassan & Harun, 2016; Shirazi, 2020); therefore, they are being fashion conscious by exploring and consuming hijab fashion as an attempt to identify, or associate, with images of Muslims (Hassan & Harun, 2016). These women are referred as hijabistas, which are veiled women who engage in fashionable lifestyles and accentuate

themselves through stylish hijab practices (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Hassan & Harun, 2016). In their study, Hassan and Harun (2016) discover that hijabistas aim to dress by following trends and maintain their pious image simultaneously. However, in Iran, particularly, women who explore fashion through clothing and style their hijab in different ways are often viewed negatively by hardliners (Shirazi, 2020). These women are labelled as “Westernized” as they do not follow the traditional or proper ways of wearing the hijab (Shirazi, 2020). The Iranian government that makes the hijab compulsory believes that a “proper” hijab is black and simple (Shirazi, 2020). Therefore, veiled Muslim women living in Iran may face harsh consequences, such as tickets, when they are wearing the hijab in an “improper” way (Shirazi, 2020). This indicates that much like the hijab, modest fashion is subjective as it holds multiple meanings depending on “culture, class, ethnicity and generation” (Lodi, 2020, p. 19).

By analyzing visual artifacts produced and shared by Nawal Sari and Rawdah Mohamed, this work examines the ways in which hijabi influencers perform their values and beliefs surrounding Islamic modesty through content creation. Influenced by Foss & Foss’ (2020) work, “An Explication of Visual Enactment in *Advanced Style*: Fashioning a Challenge to the Ideology of Old Age”, this paper uses a visual rhetorical approach to analyze visual enactment. There will be ongoing interrogation between the elements within each image/video which will assist in identifying emerging meanings and interpretations. This is done through an analysis of the ideological meanings performed through elements such as attire, body language, symbols, and the background/location.

Nawal Sari is an Arab-Australian hijabi influencer based in Sydney, Australia. Sari is highly integrated within the Western fashion industry and collaborates with and models for high-fashion brands, like Gucci. She has a large following on her platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, and is a verified user on Instagram. The second influencer, Rawdah Mohamed, is also verified on Instagram. Mohamed models for many high-fashion brands and tends to wear bold outfits. She has been featured in fashion magazines, like Vogue Arabia, and is an editor for Vogue Scandinavia. She is a Somali-Norwegian content creator based in Oslo, Norway. These influencers were chosen to be included in this study based on both their online practices surrounding modesty and Islam, their immense popularity, and presence online. Photos and videos of these influencers

will be examined through a visual rhetorical lens, which will assist in revealing patterns or inconsistencies in definitions of modesty.

Method

The method of analysis that this research follows is visual rhetoric. Visual rhetoric is a method that primarily focuses on “the symbolic or communicative aspects” of visual texts (Foss, 2005, p. 145), such as images or videos. According to rhetorical scholar Sonja Foss (2005) the use of visual rhetoric has grown considering that the method “provides access to a range of human experience not always available through the study of discourse” (p. 143). Studying visual imagery offers an alternative lens to human interaction and experience that is analyzed through “non-discursive symbols” (Foss, 2005, p. 143).

Visual rhetoric focuses on the symbolic meanings of an artifact and how ideologies are performed (Foss, 2005). Using visual rhetoric, I analyze the ways these influencers are engaging in the rhetorical strategy of visual enactment. Essentially, I will examine the ways they embody, or enact, their ideologies and meanings surrounding the veil and modest fashion. Through the elements present within each artifact, I develop an understanding of how these influencers perform their ideologies surrounding their identities. I examine how meanings are conveyed through different elements in the artifact, like clothing, body language, facial expression, symbols, and backgrounds. By doing this, I will reveal potential meanings and agendas that are being conveyed (Foss & Foss, 2020). These visual components constitute a performance (Foss & Foss, 2020). Individuals or groups of people can deliver and subvert hegemonic meaning regarding a particular topic through visual performances (Gries, 2020). Visual rhetoric studies how persuasion arises from symbolic action (Gries, 2020) that is “virtually limitless” (Foss, 2005, p. 145). Essentially, the meanings are dependent on how the researcher views and analyzes the image.

The goal of visual rhetoric is to understand how a visual artifact “operates rhetorically in contemporary culture” (Foss, 2005, p. 151). It is important to note that “not every visual artifact is visual rhetoric” (Foss, 2005, p. 144). A visual object must comply with three main characteristics to be studied under the lens of visual rhetoric. These three characteristics are: symbolic action, human interaction, and presence of an audience (Foss, 2005). Foss (2005) explains that the visual artifact must communicate meaning through a system of signs (symbolic action), involve human action “either in the process of creation or in the process of interpretation” (human interaction),

and communicate with an audience (presence of an audience) (p. 144). The visual artifacts that I analyze fit into these characteristics. The images/videos included in this study produce rhetorical meanings through their symbols and signs, incorporate human intervention as the influencers are featured in each image, and are uploaded to social media platforms intended to be viewed by a large audience.

While using visual rhetoric, the researcher aims to understand the rhetorical response of an image (Foss, 2005). Developing a rhetorical response involves attributing meaning to the elements of an image, such as body language, colours, and textures (Foss, 2005). Moreover, visual artifacts can perform ideological meanings (Gries, 2020). Individuals or groups of people can deliver and subvert hegemonic meaning regarding a particular topic through visual performances (Gries, 2020).

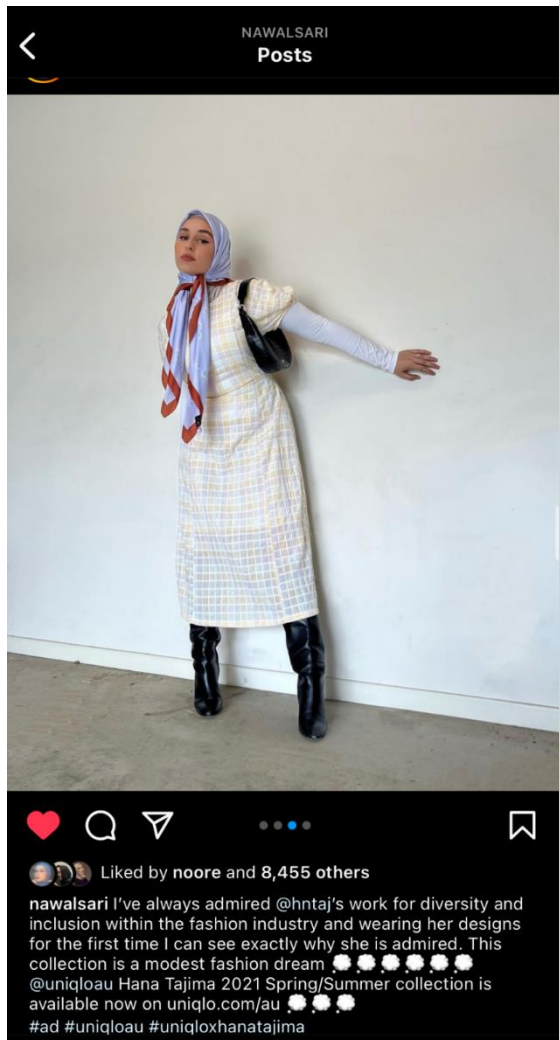
Veiled Muslim women influencers communicate meaning through their online performances. According to Foss & Foss (2020), “performance is a major aspect of how visibility is made” (p. 141). A core concept in this study is ‘visual enactment,’ which Foss & Foss (2020) define as “the way in which a challenge to an existing belief system and the presentation of an alternative are performed in some detail for viewers, primarily via the dimension of visibility” (p. 141). A focus on performance or visual enactment requires the examination of how “individuals enact the part” (Foss & Foss, 2020, p. 125). This reveals the “ideological meanings”, or “social agendas” conveyed through the artifact (Foss & Foss, 2020, p. 127).

My analysis will focus on both the performance and “sensory aspects of the image”, such as colour and texture (Foss, 2005, p. 145). This research aims to find out how the images/videos uploaded by hijabi influencers constitute an online performance and contribute to the definitions of Islamic modesty. In my analysis, the focus is placed on the hijabi influencers’ attire (colour, texture, fabric, patterns, etc.), body language (eye contact, placement of hands, and pose), symbols, and the background/location of the artifact. Clothing can influence social change by resisting hegemonic “rhetorical code or syntax of dress” (Foss & Foss, 2020, p. 127). Hijabi influencers engage in visual enactment as they embody ideologies through clothing and style. In addition to a focus on visual enactment I will consider the captions of images and videos as framing the performance of modesty in each case.

Performing Through Photographs

Figure 1

Screenshot of Nawal Sari's Instagram photo



Note. (Sari, 2021a).

There is a level of confidence that Sari embodies from the way she is dressed to the way she is posing and staring directly at the camera. Her pose is striking as she is standing up against a wall and holding up one of her hands against the wall. Sari's head is lifted upward, and she holds a straight face. Her pose alone demonstrates confidence and agency. The background consists of a white wall and concrete floor, which acts as a perfect canvas for Sari to show off her outfit. She is wearing a short-sleeved calf-length dress. The dress has a checkered pattern which entails different shades of yellow. Under the dress is a tight long-sleeve top that is white in colour which

allows for modesty but does not take away from the detailing of the dress, such as the puffed sleeves. Since the dress is not long enough to conceal the skin on Sari's ankles and calves, she wears long leather boots. The pointed toe, loose-fit, and length of the boot adds dimension to her outfit while offering more modesty. The shape of her body is completely covered as the dress and boots are loose. By doing this, Sari demonstrates to her audience that she is staying consistent with the modest practices of Islam while also being trendy. The lilac purple and fire red hijab add a pop of colour to the neutral outfit. Sari ties it in a way that allows the hijab to fall in the front which works to conceal her chest. The black, leather shoulder bag matches perfectly with her boots as they share the same material and colour.

Through her performance, Sari is experimenting with alternative ways of tying her hijab to develop a more stylish look. This indicates that she is exploring hijab fashion through clothing and styling as many hijabistas do (El-Bassiouny, 2018; Hassan & Harun, 2016). This often equates to being labelled as "Westernized" by other Muslims since the traditional wearing of the hijab is not being practiced (Shirazi, 2020). Rather than wearing plain attire and a simple black hijab, Sari experiments with different patterns and textures. From a leather bag and boots to a checkered yellow dress and purple hijab, Sari's performance entails levels of integration within the Western fashion industry while still following the Islamic rulings of modesty. She is following mainstream fashion brands and selecting pieces that are unique and modest. Sari covers her hair, neck, chest and ears while also concealing the shape of her body (Al-Saji, 2010; Droogsmas, 2007; Fayyaza & Kamal, 2014; Najmabadi, 2005). Through the pose, outfit, and caption of her photograph, it can be inferred that Sari holds agency.

The caption of this photograph states that it is an advertisement for Hana Tajima's 2021 Spring and Summer collection. Sari expresses her interest and appreciation for this collection and Hana Tajima's ability to maintain diversity and inclusivity in the mainstream fashion industry. Sari says that "this collection is a modest fashion dream" within the caption of her image. This demonstrates that the mainstream fashion industry and veiled Muslim women are in conversation with one another. This is consistent with Ahmed's (2000) new framework that calls for Westerners to establish dialogue with strangers (p. 61). Essentially, when Islamic modesty is understood in a broader context, brands can incorporate modesty and develop ongoing dialogue. There is more agency in the representations of veiled women as they are in control of the performative aspects

of advertisements, for example, Sari uses her platform to model a fashion brand's new collection that contains modest styles. She uses her voice to express appreciation for the integration of modesty within the industry. This indicates that Sari, who is part of a group of women that has historically been considered as subalterns, has the agency to speak on her own behalf and use her voice and fashion skills to integrate herself within high fashion. Finally, as Sari is wearing clothing from a high fashion brand and promoting it through her photograph, she is engaging in creative labour. Although Sari is gaining economic wealth through this labour, she is also engaging in self-exploitation. This may take away from her agency as her body, fashion sense, and modest lifestyle is being commodified through her labour practices.

Figure 2

Screenshot of Rawdah Mohamed's Instagram photo



Note. (Mohamed, 2022a).

In *Figure 2* Mohamed is wearing a completely red outfit. Rawdah is not looking directly at the camera. Instead, she is looking to the side and her eyes are covered by large sunglasses. The sunglasses reflect the sun, sky, and trees that she is gazing at in the distance. With one foot in front of the other, Mohamed stands effortlessly in the snow. This directs all attention toward her outfit and how it is styled. The background contrasts with her outfit in multiple ways. For one, the bright red colours that make up her outfit stand out against the white snow and blue sky. The winter snow and weather typically call for cozy outfits like puffer jackets and oversized sweaters; however, Mohamed is wearing a fashionable outfit despite the location. She is experimenting with bold colours and statement pieces while being in the wilderness, which demonstrates uniqueness and fashion consciousness (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Fashion conscious individuals often wear unusual clothing to adhere to a unique fashion style that enhances their self-representation (Hassan & Harun, 2016, p. 483). Mohamed is playful in her fashion choices. Even though red is already a bold colour, she is completely covered in it. Through this, Mohamed challenges the traditional expectations of veiled Muslim women and how they should wear plain attire to ensure there is no attention drawn to them (Fayyaza & Kamal, 2014; Shirazi, 2020).

The red theme that Mohamed integrates within her performance appears to be purposeful. This inference is made through her caption as she says “on some red tings” with red exclamation marks and a red stop sign. These emojis are used to show excitement. The term ‘*tings*’ is slang for “things”. The caption allows for viewers to directly look at Mohamed’s outfit and observe the unique qualities of it. Mohamed wears red, baggy pants with white stripes on the sides of them and tucks them into white snow boots. She pairs these pants with a red asymmetrical long dress-like top. The short side exposes one side of the red pants, and the long side conceals shorter one until the knee. She wears a metallic red jacket on top and finalizes the outfit with a red hijab. This offers modesty as everything is covered including skin, body shape, and hair. Mohamed embodies her Islamic beliefs through the wearing of modest clothes. Rather than perpetuating the hegemonic understandings of the veil, such as it being oppressive and backward, Mohamed engages in a playful performance surrounding modesty and the Islamic veil (Droogsma, 2007). This playful performance is demonstrated through the bright colours she is wearing. Red is not a traditionally accepted colour for the veil. Black has traditionally been the accepted colour for veils. The combination of different materials, such as metallic and matte red, demonstrates that Mohamed can fully represent her fashion interests and creatively style her hijab (Hassan & Harun, 2016;

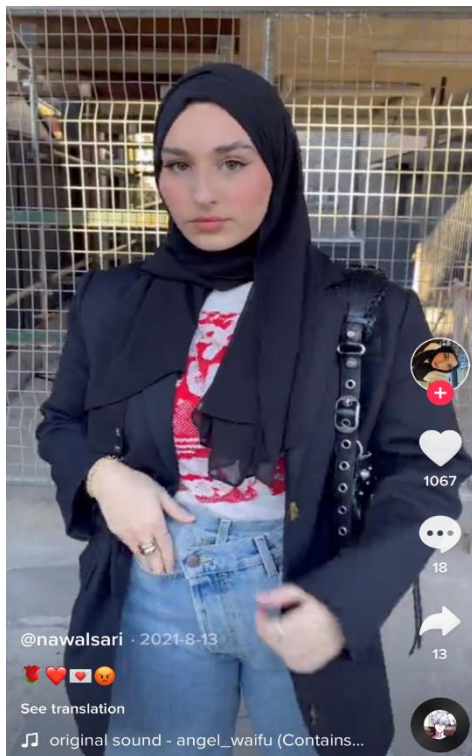
Shirazi, 2020). This resists the dominant stereotypical beliefs that that Islam limits women through the veil.

Mohamed’s performance entails bold attire, fashion experimentation, and a confident pose. This performance maintains the idea that modest fashion can be practiced through bold fashion statements and by being integrated within the mainstream fashion industry. This demonstrates that Mohamed is culturally translating Western fashion and showing its potential to accommodate modesty. Mohamed holds agency through her ability to choose what to wear, how to wear it, and whom to share it with. She engages in re-representation of veiled women through her boldness and high levels of agency, which complicates the belief of veiled women as a “single monolithic subject” (Mohanty, 1984).

Performing Through Videos

Figure 3

Screenshot of a TikTok video produced by Nawal Sari TikTok



Note. (Sari, 2021b).

By putting a series of short clips together and experimenting with different poses and angles, Sari creates a playful TikTok video to showcase a trendy outfit. The caption of the video is 4 red emoticons (emoji), which includes a rose, heart, letter with a heart on it, and an angry face. These emojis seem to add stylistic features to Sari's performance rather than ideological meanings. Behind her is a metal gate that completely encloses the area behind it. This is a simple background for Sari to showcase her outfit, while also adding mysterious elements to the video. The song she uses for this video is called 'What You Waiting For' by Gwen Stefani. It is popular on TikTok as it is loud and repetitive, which makes it catchier. The loud qualities of Gwen Stefani's voice and the beat within the song contrasts with modesty as it brings attention to Sari and engages users. This song adds to Sari's performance as she is negotiating the meaning of modesty by introducing "untraditional" music for veiled women while posing to show off her fashion look. This music is defined as untraditional as it explores louder vocal and instrumental sounds. Through both the music and the exploration of metals and textures, Sari is capturing grunge aesthetics in her performance. This performance is an alternative to the hyper-femininity often associated with veiled Muslim women.

Sari stares directly into the camera at the start of her video while adjusting her jeans and placing her hand, which is covered in big, gold rings, in her front pocket. She looks to the side briefly, then back at the camera with her initial pose. While fixing her bag, she looks to the side again. She poses to emphasize the front of her outfit and her side profile. For face makeup, Sari wears natural-looking makeup and brightens her cheeks with pink blush. She does the 'soapy' brow look, where gel is used to brush the eyebrows in an upward motion. She wears lipstick and eyeshadow that are different shades of pink to keep her makeup subtle and neutral. Unlike most jeans, the pair that Sari is wearing has a 'crisscross' quality to them. Rather than zipping up straight, the buttons are sewn diagonally on. This makes a simple jean appear classier and adds dimension to the outfit. Paired with the blue, baggy jeans there is a graphic tee that is mainly white with red detailing. The red detailing of the shirt matches the pink tones in Sari's makeup look. To complete the look, the influencer wears an oversized black blazer that has gold buttons. She keeps the blazer open to show the 'crisscross' on her jeans and the pop of colour from her graphic tee. Her hijab is simply black, which matches well with the blazer and bag. Sari, who wears a straight face at the beginning of the video, starts to smile when she shows the back of her outfit and the detailing of her shoulder purse, which is black leather and much metal detailing, like zippers and

buckles. The amount of metal on her purse, thick rings, oversized black blazer, and asymmetrical jeans offers a grungy look. These aspects of her outfit, along with the song used, provides an edge to the outfit. Throughout the video, Sari is showing her outfit and makeup at multiple angles. Near the end of the video, Sari's back is completely facing the camera. She slightly turns around and while looking over her shoulder, she does a "duck face" by pressing her lips together and pouting.

The loud characteristics of the outfit, like the leather and metal features of the purse, crisscross jean, hints of red colour, and song, add emphasis to the overall performance. There is a level of experimentation associated with the way Sari is dressed, how she stares as intimidated by the camera in the beginning, and the song attached to the video. She also engages in playfulness through certain poses and facial expressions. There is ease in her movements. This is seen through her ability to act natural in her performance while clearly posing and trying to look good. Her smile and pout demonstrate that she is engaging in a leisure experience. This allows Sari to embody the experience of being a liberated Muslim woman, which is contrary to many discourses. The liberation achieved through her appearance is a sign of detachment from popular beliefs surrounding veiled women, such as hyper-femininity and traditional clothing (black abaya and black hijab). She demonstrates this to her rhetorical audience (Foss, 2005), which are her TikTok followers and anyone who sees this video on their 'for you page (FYP)'. She engages in visual enactment (Foss & Foss, 2020) through the performative aspects of the video. In this sense, she is challenging the notions that veiled Muslim women cannot be playful or creative in their appearances and behaviour. Moreover, she is wearing a black hijab, which is a colour that has oppressive connotations attached to it when referring to hijabi women (Droogsma, 2017; Shirazi, 2020; Ternikar 2009). However, while she wears it, she does not demonstrate that she is oppressed. Her performance indicates that the colour black is used mainly for fashion purposes, such as matching colours, and to add to her edgy look. This illustrates that Sari is negotiating the understandings of modesty. This is contrary to the dichotomy between the East and West that is discussed in the theoretical framework (Mohanty, 1984; Said, 1978). Rather than completely practicing the Islamic traditions of modesty or integrating within the West, Sari finds her own way of maintaining piety and fashion.

Figure 4

Screenshot of an Instagram video uploaded by Rawdah Mohamed



Note. (Mohamed, 2022b).

Mohamed is walking across a street, in what appears to be a French city based on the sign that is written in French that reads ‘Rue Sainte-Cécile’ and translates to ‘Sainte-Cecile Road’. Mohamed edits this video into slow-motion, which acts as a form of dramatization. This is because the action of walking across the street appears dramatized as her body movements are slowed down and we can see slight movements of her clothing, like the blazer and skirt, which are caused by the wind. The audio that Mohamed uses for her video has one lyric, “it’s a look”, which is a phrase repeated throughout the song. The beat to the audio sounds like something that is used in a fashion show, which fits the video perfectly as Mohamed is strutting across a street in a fashionable way. Through her performance, Mohamed uses the aesthetic streets and neutral background as a fashion runway to emphasize the uniqueness of her outfit.

As she walks across the street, Mohamed looks ahead of her and slowly glances to the side. Covering her eyes are a pair of black sunglasses which are tucked into a black hijab. For a clean look, her hijab sits tightly around her head, and is tucked into her red blazer. In her caption, Mohamed gives credit to the person who seems to have designed the “magnificent blazer” (2022). The red blazer is unique in every aspect. Firstly, it has intricate details where white lines are sewn on in a specific pattern. There is a white line that goes upwards and two lines on each side that are sewn on diagonally. This pattern is all over the blazer, and on both sides which develops symmetry. The blazer also has padded shoulders and big collars, which gives it a bolder look. The blazer is cropped, and Mohamed closed it with the two medium sized buttons at the bottom. The sleeve of the blazer falls just above the knees, which covers Mohamed’s entire arm. The design is purposely supposed to be oversized and hide the arms of the wearer. Although this is the style of the blazer, there is a functional feature where the inner sleeve has slit for the arms to escape. While wearing a pair of straight-leg leather pants, Mohamed layers it with a skirt with a large open slit in the front. The skirt could be buttoned but Mohamed only keeps one button enclosed at the very top of the skirt. To complete the entire look, she wears square-toe leather boots. By wearing black leather on black leather with a bold, red blazer, Mohamed demonstrates the versatility of clothing. She also wears black lipstick on the outer areas of her lips, leaving the middle of her lips a natural colour.

Since Mohamed explores fashion through bold statements, layering, textures, and patterns, she performs the idea that unique fashion can be worn with the hijab. Mohamed’s performance indicates that she is fashion conscious (Hassan & Harun, 2016). This fashion consciousness is presented through the pairing of different pieces of garments and responding to fashion trends through bold statements. Moreover, she is interested in her appearance through the carefully planned outfit (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Mohamed wears original clothing that enhances her individuality and acts as a method of self-representation. This awareness influences their decision to wear bold colours and explore a variety of fashion styles (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Her outfit is mostly all black, excluding her blazer. However, her use of black is liberating through the unique textures and styling methods. By being fashion conscious, Mohamed holds a level of agency. She can represent herself and her hijab in an alternative way. This can be described using Benjamin’s (1923) theory of cultural translation as Mohamed reveals the limitations within the original definitions of modesty. She uses bold fashion to demonstrate that modesty can be playful. To do this, she wears fashion garments from luxury brands and styles it with the hijab. This reveals that

Islamic modesty and fashion is not limited and develops deeper meanings that are not present in the original. She seems to subvert the tensions surrounding the veil and Muslim women by being loud in her fashion decisions. The first thing that the viewer may notice about Mohamed's performance is the clothing and the last noticeable feature would be the veil. This blends the differences between the veiled woman and the West. The West tends to identify these differences to make 'the stranger' recognizable (Ahmed, 2000). Mohamed performs the idea that all veiled Muslim women embody different experiences and represent themselves through fashion. Therefore, they do not hold homogenous experiences (Mohanty, 1984).

This analysis demonstrates that there are similarities in how these two veiled Muslim women define Islamic modesty. Islamic modesty can be explored through different aesthetics, such as grunge and feminine styles. The analysis indicates that the different aesthetics can be incorporated into Islamic modesty and hijab practices without taking away from the overall purpose of the veil. However, at the same time, these hijabi influencers negotiate the meanings of the veil as they are not practicing Islamic modesty exactly how it is outlined in the Qur'an. The Qur'an outlines that modesty is achieved through veiling everything except the face, hands, and feet. Fares and Zein reveal their ankles. The Qur'an also mentions that Muslim women should conceal, or hide, their adornments, removing any attention from one's body by avoiding bold accessories, jewelry, make-up, and colours wearing outfits allows for greater modesty. Each of the influencers wear statement pieces, whether it is a purse or blazer, and eye-catching colour schemes. Although this is not entirely consistent with the Islamic rulings of modesty, their hair, skin, and body shape are completely covered. These veiled women are also practicing Islamic modesty in a way that resists and challenges dominant views, which suggest that the hijab oppresses women and veiled women only wear black, simple attire (Droogsma, 2007; Shirazi, 2020). Instead, these hijabi influencers explore fashion and trends through their clothing.

All the influencers engage in a form of creative labour, which becomes integrated within their daily lives (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Although this labour allows for self-representation and self-actualization, it contributes to the commodification and exoticization of veiled Muslim women. As these influencers pose for the camera, wear stylish clothing, and advertise for different brands, they negotiate their modest lifestyles. Modesty is maintained through clothing and refraining from practices that bring high levels of attention to oneself. The influencers may believe that their

practices are revealing a level of agency and inspiring other modest/veiled women, which is true to an extent. However, their agency is also being compromised and they are further exoticizing their veiled and modest lifestyles through self-exploitative practices.

Conclusion

Nawal Sari and Rawdah Mohamed explore modest fashion, Islamic modesty, and fashion trends on their platforms. The bulk of their online content is related to modest fashion. This analysis offered insight on how visual elements of an artifact, like clothing, pose, background, and logos, can communicate meaning. This thesis demonstrates that veiled Muslim women engage in visual enactment, where they perform their beliefs and ideological views through visual components of their performance (Foss & Foss, 2020). They are also continually negotiating the definitions of Islamic modesty. This is because their practices contrast with dominant views of veils and modesty and do not completely align with the Islamic doctrines of modesty.

There are multiple similarities and differences in how hijabi influencers define modesty in Islam. For one, each influencer appears to be integrated within the mainstream fashion industry in a certain way. They wear luxury, or extraordinary clothing, and work in the fashion industry. By building an association with corporate fashion these influencers demonstrate knowledge and experimentation in fashion, as well as economic wealth/power. Moreover, each of these influencers demonstrate the versatility of clothing by taking an immodest garment and modifying it in a way that maintains modesty. This demonstrates creativity and the idea that veiled Muslim women are not limited to certain brands or types of clothing, like traditional dresses (abayas) and simple, black hijabs. This constitutes cultural translation to an extent though the notion does not fully capture the fact that most influencers were born and/or live in the West and the fashion codes they are translating are not entirely foreign to them. Moreover, these influencers experiment with different aesthetics. For instance, Sari embodies some features of grunge-aesthetics through the buckles on her purse and experimentation with the colour black in contrast to red, white and blue. Mohamed has a unique sense of fashion. She explores fashion statement pieces that are separate from trendy attire. Through their unique styles, these fashion influencers define Islamic modesty as something that can be practiced within Western societies through incorporation of different styles, trends, and high-fashion brands.

These influencers engage in creative labour, which is a form of labour comprised of activities that depart from traditional notions of work (Gill & Pratt, 2008). They blend their work with their everyday work, which means that they are continually engaging in self-exploitation (Gill & Pratt, 2008). In return, they make profit and gain notoriety. However, this form of labour objectifies their performances by rendering them into content to be consumed by global audiences, and, in turn, facilitating the future commodification of modesty.

The codes of modesty in Islam are simultaneously practiced and compromised in the influencers' visual performances. This is demonstrated through the apparent distance from traditional notions of Islamic modesty, like wearing simple attire. Instead, the adornments of the hijabi influencers' outfits attract attention and illustrate that modesty can result from stylish performances. This paper reveals that the influencers contribute to complicate mainstream views of veiled Muslim women and their modest fashion practices. The visual performances analyzed in this thesis show that neither are veiled women oppressed by their male counterparts (Byng, 2010; Satiti, 2017; Zine, 2002), nor modesty is a homogenous set of practices that grant veiled Muslim women's autonomy. Instead, veiled Muslim women resist aspects of the Islamic doctrine and completely challenge Western beliefs toward the veil. There is a range of modest practices and understandings in Islam. The analysis shows that the hijabi influencers conceal their bodies, hair and skin the way that Islam outlines. However, the way that these influencers approach modesty differs. On one side of the spectrum, there is extravagant high-fashion clothing that is worn to turn heads. The last noticeable feature while wearing such bold pieces of clothing is the hijab. Mohamed resides on this end of the spectrum as she wears monochromatic and layered, bold outfits. On the other side of the spectrum, there is fashionable and trendy attire that is more typically modest. This attire is trendy and explores ways of incorporating different types of garments, modest or immodest, into their every-day attire. Even by doing this, modesty is still achieved.

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