



CONTEMPORARY
MUSLIM
FASHIONS

de Young
Legion of Honor
fine arts museums
of san francisco

DELMONICO
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FASHIONS

Edited by JILL D'ALESSANDRO and REINA LEWIS

with ALEX AUBRY, SHIVA BALAGHI, LAURA L. CAMERLENGO, CARLA JONES, SU'AD ABDUL KHABEER,

and DEENA ALJUHANI ABDULAZIZ, REMONA ALY, SARIYA CHERUVALLIL-CONTRACTOR, and SHELINA JANMOHAMED

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FOREWORD

Max Hollein, Director and CEO
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

There are those who believe that there is no fashion among Muslim women, but the opposite is true, with modern, vibrant, and extraordinary modest fashion scenes established around the globe, particularly in many Muslim-majority countries. *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* is a much-needed and overdue exploration of a multifaceted topic largely unexamined by museums. The exhibition features spectacular creations from this dynamic fashion scene as it traverses different regional, religious, and sartorial interpretations—ranging from high-end fashion to streetwear and commissioned couture from emerging and established designers—to consider how Muslims define themselves and are defined by their dress.

The de Young is the ideal venue for an exploration of this subject matter. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco have enjoyed a long history of presenting special exhibitions of fashion, notably of individual designer monographs, which have been among some of the most popular and celebrated shows in the history of the institution. However, unlike some of these previous exhibitions on fashion, *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* is not centered on or connected to one designer or fashion house. Instead, it presents extraordinary garments of immense artistic quality, and it will also shed light on larger political, social, and cultural understandings and misunderstandings.

The Museums also house an encyclopedic collection of artworks from world cultures, especially in its textile arts holdings, which span nearly three millennia and represent cultures from 125 countries. The breadth and depth of this repository allow the Museums to bring textile traditions—such as those that appear in the fashions being made for today’s Muslim consumers—into topical dialogues and spaces.

Building upon the established textile arts program, *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* explores the greater cultural and social implications of dress and examines how Muslim women—those who cover themselves and those who do not—have become arbiters of style within and beyond their communities. During the development of this project we consulted with scholars and representatives from the local and global community, who revealed a thriving fashion scene, full of fresh images and understandings of Muslim identities.

Modest Muslim fashion design has been supported and championed by a dynamic and youthful community of bloggers and social media influencers, so including social media as primary material both in this catalogue and within the exhibition was a necessity. This inclusion allowed us to integrate a wider diversity of Muslim voices, which is especially important in an examination of communities who are frequently scrutinized and spoken for, but are rarely given the chance to speak for themselves.

This exhibition is organized by Jill D’Alessandro, curator in charge of costume and textile arts at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and Laura L. Camerlengo, associate curator, with Reina Lewis, Artscom Centenary Professor of Cultural Studies at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. D’Alessandro and Lewis also served as co-editors of this catalogue, offering essays alongside Camerlengo and our outstanding roster of authors: Deena Aljuhani Abdulaziz, Remona Aly, Alex Aubry, Shiva Balaghi, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, Shelina Janmohamed, Carla Jones, and Su’ad Abdul Khabeer.

We further recognize members of the exhibition’s advisory committee, chaired by Cherine Magrabi, whose insights on this project helped not only in the challenging task of refining the exhibition’s content and narrative, but also in securing important loans for the exhibition. And we are extremely grateful to the many fashion designers and artists from around the world who have generously shared their artworks with the Museums, thus enabling the exploration of the complex and diverse nature of Muslim dress codes worldwide. We are delighted that our exhibition will travel to the Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany, and I thank its director Matthias Wagner K and his staff for their confidence and support in bringing this important show to Europe.

The Museums’ generous donors have enabled us to make this special presentation possible. We express our warmest appreciation to an anonymous presenting sponsor; the William K. Bowes, Jr. Foundation; The Herbst Foundation, Inc.; Sam Hirbod; the Textile Arts Council, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Frances F. Bowes; Stephanie and Jim Marver; and Susan and Jim Swartz. Additional support is provided by Richard and Peggy Greenfield, and Robin Rosa Laub. We are further appreciative of the Museums’ Board of Trustees for its continuing advocacy of all of our programs, and Diane B. Wilsey, president, for her enduring leadership. This catalogue is published with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Endowment for Publications.

With nearly 250,000 Muslims living in the six counties surrounding the city of San Francisco, the Museums are situated in an area with one of the largest Muslim populations in the United States. We are thankful to the many members of the Bay Area’s diverse Muslim communities who joined the curatorial team for conversations about this program, and it is our honor to now share an aspect of their rich culture with our audiences.

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The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco are grateful to the donors and lenders to our exhibition.

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CURATORIAL REFLECTIONS

Jill D'Alessandro, Reina Lewis, and Laura L. Camerlengo

Contemporary Muslim Fashions is the first major museum exhibition to explore a range of contemporary Muslim women's dress codes around the world, focusing especially, but not exclusively, on those responding to interpretations of modesty. With 1.8 billion practitioners worldwide, comprising 24 percent of the global population,¹ Islam is a multiethnic religion shaped by Muslims' diverse and changing national, regional, and local cultures. Muslims' styles of dress are distinguished by enormous variety and creativity, marked by generational distinctions, and responsive to world events, economic shifts, as well as, of course, to the trends of multiple fashion systems. These systems include "mainstream" fashion and regional dress (the garments and styles that express group or community identity), both of which undergo constant change.

Organizing an exhibition on such a wide-reaching and yet highly nuanced subject is not without its challenges. Perhaps the most difficult was defining and refining the scope of our study. The variety and changeability of Muslim women's engagement with fashion, modesty, global trends, and local cultures could never be captured in one overview. Instead, we have created a snapshot of Muslim women and fashion now, spotlighting key themes, locations, and garments, and focusing on select areas around the world where designers are creating—and consumers are wearing—highly fashionable garments that adhere to concerns for modesty and related Muslim religious cultures. By connecting global fashion styles with selected local clothing trends, this exhibition endeavors to showcase regional specialties and spotlight the commonalities found in dress codes across the Muslim faith. For many Muslim women this includes the desire to dress in a visibly Islamic and highly fashionable manner, often as a way to promote positive awareness of Muslims amid ongoing prejudice. For this exhibition and its catalogue, the parameters of modesty—the way the body is dressed and presented as "modest"—are defined by the individual.

Contemporary Muslim Fashions expands on simultaneous explorations of the intersections between religion and fashion, as seen in large-scale exhibitions, such as *Veiled Meanings: Fashioning Jewish Dress, from the Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem* at the Jewish Museum, New York (2017), and the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2018); and *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2018); as well as recent exhibitions on Muslim women's fashion, including *Faith, Fashion, Fusion: Muslim Women's Style in Australia* at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (2012).

The exhibition's narrative has been shaped by extensive scholarly and qualitative research; by dialogue with designers, artists, photographers, activists, and style arbiters, many of whom are

having their work shown in a museum setting for the first time; and by discussions in contemporary fashion, news, and social media. Indeed, widespread media interest in Muslim modest fashion—as well as the rise of design talent, modest fashion weeks, and overall increased energy and developments in this sector—made this an especially exciting time in which to organize this project. Additionally, the exhibition, its catalogue, and related programming have also been informed by conversations with members of the San Francisco Bay Area's Muslim communities, including participants from local community groups, colleges and universities, and mosques, whose generosity of spirit and openness to dialogue and deliberation greatly enriched our process of curation and the resultant exhibition.²

The essays in this volume attest to the diversity of the dress codes among Muslim women around the world. Lead essays by Reina Lewis and Jill D'Alessandro set up the foundational contexts and narratives. In hers, Lewis offers an overview of the development of the Muslim modest fashion market—which is expected to reach \$368 billion USD in consumer spending by 2021³—and addresses the current opportunities and challenges within this sector. D'Alessandro's chapter situates the rise of Muslim modest fashion amid a larger sartorial shift toward more covered clothing styles, and examines it as a tool to break down cultural barriers. In the essay that follows, Alex Aubry journeys through two centuries of Muslim patronage of Parisian haute couture, offering historical context for more recent developments.

Several essays address the idiosyncrasies of modest dressing and styling around the world. Over the past two decades, the fastest growing and perhaps most vibrant segment of Indonesian fashion has focused on modest and stylish dressing for Muslim women. As Carla Jones details in her chapter, for today's Indonesian designers and consumers, pious fashion is a visible, cosmopolitan, and confident source of Islamic ethics. And, while ethical fashion is often represented as a recent phenomenon, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor's essay explores the long-standing moral positions that underpin ethical Islamic fashion and the young fashion movement that is shaping it today.

Fashion often serves as a mediator for individual and group identity—and sometimes both—and Muslim modest fashion is no exception. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's exploration of the long history of self-fashioning in black Muslim communities in the United States belies a mainstream narrative that depicts being fashionable as something new and inserts the style innovation of black Muslims back into current understandings of the genealogy of contemporary American Muslim style. As a rapidly evolving consumer sector, Muslim modest fashion is now widely discussed in today's fashion and style news, and by fashion bloggers and social media content producers whose profiles have now reached

sufficient critical mass to gain mainstream media and industry notice. However, as Laura L. Camerlengo discusses through interviews with three Muslim bloggers in the United States, modest fashion bloggers are likely to find that their role as fashion intermediaries extends into explorations of individual identity framed as part of wider discussions of contemporary religious concerns and social injustices.

The fast-growing Muslim fashion world has sparked much dialogue and has also given rise to new professional opportunities. Remona Aly explains that as designer visions diversify and retail choices expand in the Muslim fashion market, consumers are increasingly turning to professional stylists for guidance, promoting style, business, and creativity for all concerned. The increased diversity in the modest fashion marketplace is also evidenced by the recent rise of Muslim female athletes and modest sportswear. In her essay, Shelina Janmohamed details the development of this segment of the modest fashion industry and notes the many young Muslim women who see participation in sports as a right and as a religious duty to stay healthy.

The catalogue's conversations about the nexus of fashion, art, and the politics of representation culminate in Shiva Balaghi's essay, which explores the artist—Iranian-born Shirin Neshat—as fashion icon, representative of a hybrid approach to fashion (another modality of Muslim dress). This volume concludes with an essay by Deena Aljuhani Abdulaziz in which she offers her astute observations of the increasingly blurred lines between so-called Muslim dress and modest dress and how female independence and autonomy have shaped, and will continue to shape, these areas of the fashion industry.

We hope this project will serve as the foundation for future explorations of modest dress and as an enduring testament to the impact of Muslim style cultures—and the designers, artists, and style arbiters who have helped to form them—on contemporary fashion at this moment.

- 1 Michael Lipka, "Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. and Around the World," Pew Research Center, August 9, 2017, updated November 14, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/09/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/>.
- 2 Among others, members of the following Bay Area organizations and institutions were consulted for this project: California College of the Arts; Consul General of Indonesia; Council on American-Islamic Relations; Evergreen Islamic Center, San Jose; Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California; Islamic Networks Group; Karam Foundation; Muslim Community Association; San Francisco State University; University of California, Berkeley; University of San Francisco; and Zaytuna College.
- 3 Hammaad Chaudry and Paul Cochrane, eds., *State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2016/17*, (Toronto: Thomson Reuters, 2016), 105.

ESSAYS

MUSLIMS AND FASHION NOW, AND THEN

REINA LEWIS

As I write this essay and as we prepare this exhibition in the year leading up to fall 2018, the style media all agree that modest fashion is having a moment. For the many Muslim women—and those from other faith communities—who want to dress modestly because of religious teachings, community convention, or political conviction, shopping it seems just got a whole lot easier.

Or did it?

How well does the mainstream fashion industry really understand the wardrobe needs of women for whom religious cultures are a factor in personal styling, and why now are Muslims especially being regarded as a valuable global consumer segment?

MUSLIMS AND FASHION: FROM AVERSION TO ASSET

Of course, Muslims have always shopped for clothes. But for many years—especially after the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001—the fashion industry was deeply averse to being publicly associated with Muslims, whether as designers, models, consumers, or fashion influencers. That Muslim clients from the newly rich petro-economies of the Gulf provided essential support to European couture houses from the middle of the last century was insider knowledge only—not something that brands, or their clients, wanted to broadcast in the press.¹ Fast-forward to the second decade of the twenty-first century, and a connection to Muslims is seen as an asset.



Global fashion brands from luxury to high street have woken up to the Islamic calendar. Around the world, brands run fashion promotions for *Ramadan* and *Eid*—the “new Christmas.” In London, luxury retailers gear up for the “Harrods Hajj,” a seasonal pre-Ramadan influx of affluent Gulf shoppers.²

1 “Noir, the New Black” fashion feature in the British Muslim lifestyle magazine *emel*, issue 17, February 2006

Sometimes, fashion brands create a capsule collection from their existing range. DKNY led with a Ramadan campaign in their Gulf stores in 2014. Sometimes, brands work with Muslim designers to create new styles. A front-runner here was Japanese casual wear brand Uniqlo, whose ongoing collaboration with British Muslim designer Hana Tajima began in 2015. A specialist fashion-industry infrastructure has grown globally; now Muslim designers of modest wear have opportunities to show their work at the proliferating number of modest fashion weeks and fairs around the world (see D’Alessandro, this volume). Increasingly, these events include non-Muslim designers and brands whose collections feature garments appealing to covered style. In the mainstream luxury sector, online portal Net-a-Porter forged ahead with an Eid edit in 2015. By 2017, new Dubai-based modest e-retailer The Modist showed sufficient confidence in a Muslim market to persuade high-end designers such as London-based Mary Katrantzou to produce exclusive modest designs (see pl. 47). Adaptations of seasonal hits from global designers are featured online alongside selections from Muslim designers who are already creating for the niche modest market (see D’Alessandro, this volume).

Fashion imagery changed, too. In 2005, several modest fashion brands and print magazines avoided showing faces or the human form at all in deference to some interpretations of Islamic teaching (see fig. 1; see also Aly, this volume).³ Ten years later, Muslim models who wear the headscarf, or *hijab*, were starring in ad campaigns and on the catwalk. In 2015, a video from H&M featuring hijab-wearing Londoner Mariah Idrissi went viral. Two years later Somali American Halima Aden was walking for Max Mara and Kanye West’s Yeezy in Spring 2017 and scoring magazine covers around the world. In 2018, both *hijabis* were picked by Rihanna to feature in ad campaigns for her racially inclusive Fenty Beauty cosmetic line.



Visible religious diversity isn't happening in a vacuum; it is being incorporated into fashion imagery as part of the industry's belated wake up to its lack of ethnic and racial diversity, as well as to body size and to gender and sexual identities. This follows long campaigns by black supermodels such as Iman and Naomi Campbell, who criticized luxury fashion and cosmetics brands for rarely casting black and minority ethnic models (Iman having launched her own makeup line in 1994).⁴ In the mass market, some brands have used marketing campaigns to communicate their commitment to diversity. Cosmetics company CoverGirl, for example, paved the way on racial and sexual diversity with brand ambassadors from Queen Latifah to Ellen DeGeneres. Now, religion is being melded into the mix with CoverGirl's appointment in January 2017 of American hijabi beauty blogger Nura Afia. Sephora too showed hijabis in cosmetics marketing; their Fall 2017 campaign was cast from store employees and featured Moroccan college student Chaimae Boulayad, who works in one of Sephora's San Francisco stores while studying business in the United States. Given that Islam is not an ethnicity, the diversity of the Muslim population offers a double win for brands seeking to make visible their commitment to all forms of social diversity.

Not only are more Muslims finding ways to break into the fashion industry, but industry professionals already established in their careers are also finding circumstances in which they want to be more "out" about their Muslim heritage. Supermodel sisters Gigi and Bella Hadid (fig. 2) have associated themselves publicly with Muslim causes. Bella identified herself as Muslim to *Porter* magazine in April 2017, speaking of their father's encouragement that they should be proud of their dual heritage: their father, Mohamed Hadid, a Palestinian Muslim, arrived in the United States as a refugee, and their mother,

2 Gigi and Bella Hadid, Los Angeles, April 23, 2018

reality TV star Yolanda Hadid, is Dutch American.⁵ Sister Gigi, a “proud” Palestinian,⁶ has not to date spoken publicly about her religion; instead, she has shared on social media her cultural participation in Muslim festivals such as Eid with her then-boyfriend, British Muslim pop star Zayn Malik.

The supermodel duo foregrounds the religious component of their cultural background at a time in the United States when many in the creative industries have been using their profiles for social activism, whether to champion employment rights in the globalized fashion industry after the disaster at Rana Plaza in Bangladesh in 2013, or to lobby against sexual harassment in the modeling industry after the Harvey Weinstein exposé in summer 2017. The Hadid sisters used their celebrity status and Muslim identity to speak out against the perceived anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric of the Trump presidential campaign and the legislative efforts to curb immigration and travel from Muslim-majority countries that marked the early months of the Trump presidency. In making themselves visible as Muslims, the Hadids—whose personal styling and professional modeling assignments do not associate them with modest dressing—immediately widened the perception of what a Muslim woman looks like. This kind of visibility may be challenging for coreligionists and external observers alike.

THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF VEILING AND FASHION

Often, what is perceived to be the most identifiable element of Muslim women’s dress is the veil, or headscarf.⁷ In the United States the number of Muslim women who wear a head covering all the time in public has remained at about forty percent for the past decade, consistently lower than in other Muslim-minority nations.⁸ Although many Muslim women do not cover their hair and although women from other religious backgrounds do cover,⁹ the veil has come to be popularly understood by non-Muslims as a sign of Islam. For many Muslims, too, the veil serves as an indicator of Muslim identity and of a woman’s personal piety.

In fact, the veil is pre-Islamic in origin and was worn by women of many different religious and ethnic cultures in the Middle East, where Islam originated. Rather than an expression of individual spirituality, the veil often signaled social status; more urban than rural women wore the veil, as did more elite and free women than enslaved women. In societies where legislation and convention deriving from Islam formed the dominant culture,¹⁰ the veil provided a mobile continuation of the harem household system that separated women from men to whom they were not closely related. Once outside, as Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi explains, it was cloth that ensured “protection” from contact with men and from being seen by them.¹¹

For the West, the veiled and unveiled harem woman became the pivot of Orientalist fantasies.¹²

Unable to enter the harem, early male travelers to the Middle East and Asia created a rich vein of Orientalist fantasy, rendering the harem less a home and more a sexual prison or brothel. When taken up in art, music, and literature, this fantasy centered on the stereotypical and sexualized image of the odalisque¹³ (female harem inmate). A highly recognizable trope, the odalisque reclined on cushions in semi-transparent clothing or naked in the *haman* (bath), figuring simultaneously as an innocent victim of Oriental despotism in need of Western rescue and as a titillating sexual predator driven to perversion



by the absence of men. The depiction of the odalisque with pale skin and Caucasian features reinforced Western imperial hierarchies of racialized beauty and Orientalist ideas of civilizational Western superiority.¹⁴ That the harem was a social space in which women and children lived, enlivened by visits from female entertainers and traders (including seamstresses), was an unwelcome affront to cherished male fantasies.

Women's accounts—and fantasies—of the harem were in wider circulation by the second half of the nineteenth century. A market opened for harem literature and Orientalist paintings by Western women on the presumption that their privileged female access to the segregated domain would bring insider knowledge. By the early twentieth century, women who had grown up within the segregating societies of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, and North Africa were also penning accounts in European languages for publication abroad.¹⁵ An account of a visit to a harem was central to Western renditions in print and in paint; though as Annie Jane Tennant Harvey was warning by 1871, “every year it is more difficult for passing travellers to gain admittance to the harems.”¹⁶

Fashion was central to women's intercultural harem encounters. In the absence of a shared language, observing and trying on each other's clothes was a common icebreaker. The description of attire and interior decor became a key element in Western women's ethnographic writing.¹⁷ Details of consumer culture also featured in accounts by Middle Eastern women—often as a riposte to presumptions that fashion was a property only of the West.

3 *Yashmak and Mantle (Feradjé)* from *A Turkish Woman's European Impressions* by Zayneb Hanoum, 1913



At the turn of the twentieth century, Musbah Haidar, from the royal line of the Sharifs of Mecca, was offended when she discovered that Western visitors of lower social status (here, the wife of a representative of the US government) appeared astonished to find her family using an “exquisite Sèvres tea service.”¹⁸ Her 1944 memoir details her childhood in Istanbul (Constantinople) and rails against the hospitality obligations of her royal mother:

In their abysmal ignorance these foreigners did not realise that many of the veiled ladies of the Harems were better born, better read, spoke several languages and dressed with greater chic than some of their own most famous society women.¹⁹

Many Muslim women today are plagued by the same presumptions that Muslims are separate from modernity. Less often in books, more often through social media, Muslim women now use contemporary cultural forms to demonstrate Muslims’ participation in global fashion cultures. On their bodies, in the streets, at work, at school, Muslim individuals use style to communicate nonverbally their participation in contemporary “Western” life, visually countering slurs that Muslim and ethnic cultures are “primitive” or lower down the evolutionary scale.²⁰

This participation has a long history, and a long history of being ignored, misrecognized, or judged. As Haidar’s examples illustrate, multiple modernities were being forged in the nineteenth century among the empires and nations of the “Muslim world” in the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia. Individuating fashion practices played a part, just as in the West. From Iran to India, regimes and individuals had long been engaging with modern technologies and commodities, often selectively adapting rather than straightforwardly adopting Western goods and the behaviors that accompanied them.²¹

4 L. Sabbatier, *Elegant Young Turkish Women*, published in *L'illustration*, February 21, 1912



When it came to fashion, the adaption of local garments was often not visible to Western observers; when noticed, such changes were often derided as vulgar imitations. Westerners, immersed in forms of imperial nostalgia,²² bewailed the loss of what they took to be authentic “traditions” in Oriental dress and interiors at the same time as they disparaged Oriental society as less evolved than the modern West.

5 Spread from the sales catalogue for the Turkish brand Armine (Autumn/Winter 2009–2010)

These commentators were likely unaware that Muslim women in the Middle East, especially in the modernizing metropolises of Istanbul, Alexandria, Damascus, and Tehran, had been reading imported Western fashion magazines since the middle of the nineteenth century.²³ Designs thus seen might be acquired as direct imports from European fashion houses or as copies and interpretations from local seamstresses (see Aubry, this volume).²⁴ In addition, local garments were adapted to accommodate the influx of corsets and changes to the fashionable ideal of body shape and posture.

The outerwear sported by Muslim women changed in response to regional trends in modern fashion and the different ways in which social—as well as pious—status was distinguished. In Istanbul, elite women in the 1890s might have favored the *çarşaf*, a one-piece cape (worn with a face veil) that cascaded from head to feet, because it accommodated the wide sleeves of Western Belle Époque fashions. By the early 1900s, when their hairstyles had changed to Edwardian bouffants, heads and faces might instead be covered by a voluminous, gauzy *yaşmak*, worn with a long front-fastening *ferace* (see fig. 3).²⁵ Then again, by the 1920s, the *çarşaf* was back in favor, with the cape worn tight over the forehead to reflect the silhouette of flapper-inspired close-cut coiffures and the *çarşaf* itself adapted into a two-piece ensemble of waist-length cape and skirt. Sometimes the cape shrank to above the elbow, worn with long gloves and now narrow wrap coat (see fig. 4).²⁶



As always in fashion, what goes around comes around; a century later the term *feraçe* was making a comeback in the contemporary Turkish modest fashion sector.²⁷ In the 2010s, the new-look *feraçe* provided an alternative to the raincoat-style garment that had since the 1980s typified the Turkish *tesettür* (pious fashion) industry (fig. 5). Sometimes following the lines of the Arab *abaya* as an unlined front-fastening coverall or designed with Japanese-inspired volume (as seen at Turkish brand Kayra), the *feraçe* can provide younger fashion-conscious modest dressers with a discernibly different silhouette to the raincoat-style *trench* worn by their mothers or grandmothers.²⁸

6 Rabia Z, duster, 2009

At the same time that Turkish consumers were buying looser-fitting *feraçes*, the vogue for volume was being developed through a related sartorial language in the Gulf: Dubai designer Rabia Z was reinterpreting the locally definitive *abaya* as a *duster* (fig. 6). Regional versions of the *duster*—a North American casual cover-up—were on trend with the retro revival in mainstream global fashion of recent seasons. Across the span of a century, regional style interactions saw modest Muslim fashion being forged in relation to—and itself influencing—local, international, and, now, global trends.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women with financial means or sewing skills were producing what we might now call fusion fashion. Along with fashion and textiles traded in the harem, by the 1850s accommodations were being made for women with sufficient social status to shop outside the harem. Princesses of Sultan Abdülmecid's household visited Istanbul's Grand Bazaar,

where secluded shopping arrangements in the mosque sequestered them from public gaze—preserving their status as royals and as women.²⁹ As consumer culture spread globally, respectable female consumption was fostered by the new leisure spaces of the department store.³⁰

Signaling modernity through consumption required some regional adjustments. In Alexandria in the 1890s, the young Huda Shaarawi, later a leading Egyptian nationalist and feminist, was permitted after much pleading to visit the new department store—with a large retinue and her eunuch, who “brusquely demanded the place for the harem.”³¹ Mortified at being secluded behind “hastily erected” screens, Shaarawi eventually persuaded her mother to join her, after which both women enjoyed the autonomy of “modern” unchaperoned shopping.³²

VEILING AND UNVEILING: FASHION POLITICS PAST AND PRESENT

The progressive elites of the Muslim world in the late nineteenth century were aware that stereotypes of veiled women shored up visions of the West as civilizationally superior and the Orient as primitive and outside the time of Western modernity. In the decolonizing struggles of the twentieth century and the early years of the nation-states that succeeded Ottoman and Western rule in the region, and in Iran, the images of the unveiled and veiled woman stood as emblematic for all sides in the debate about nation, modernity, religion, and cultural authenticity.

Although women were often spoken for, feminists and female nationalists used their bodies—and their writing and visual arts—to advocate for their vision of emancipation. If Western observers celebrated every sign of unveiling as an indicator of liberation from religious obscurantism, they often misread the detail. When Ottoman-Turkish feminist and nationalist Halide Edib “unveiled” in Istanbul at a rally at the American College for Girls in 1912, the international press coverage failed to note that it was her *peçe* (face veil) that she threw back; she retained her headscarf when in Turkey for much of her life.³³ When she fought against the British at the end of World War I, Edib crafted a uniform for “Corporal Halidé” (fig. 7) that melded practicality for rough terrain with modest femininity suitable for moving among the troops:

I put on a gray suit consisting of an ample skirt which buttoned both front and back (all my skirts were made that way for riding), a Russian blouse with a leather belt, and a long gray veil which covered my hair and fell in folds, leaving my face exposed. I then felt like an ordinary civilized woman in spite of my high boots.³⁴

Similarly, when Huda Shaarawi removed her “veil” in 1923 at a nationalist demonstration in Cairo, it was only her face that she revealed (see Aubry, this volume).³⁵ The shift away from face veils had been on the rise among women in progressive circles across the region; now unveiling was being publicly deployed for political purpose.³⁶ The (mostly elite) women of the Middle East who unveiled included Jewish and Druze women, too. As Leila Ahmed explains, women were using visible dress change to challenge Western presumptions of regional civilizational inferiority as much as to challenge local religious or social patriarchies.³⁷



MAJOR TEWFIK, CORPORAL HALIDÉ, MAJOR TAHISIN, AND GALIB BEY

Halide Edib was in self-imposed exile in Europe by the time Mustafa Kemal Atatürk banned the headscarf in 1928. Whereas the male fez was forcibly replaced with brimmed Western-style hats, the headscarf was initially only discouraged.³⁸ The image of the unveiled Turkish woman was used by the new republic to promote an image of modernity to its population and to the outside world.³⁹ Young female teachers were sent to schools across the country in modern hats over hair styled into the short bob, or shingle cut, that signified the era's modern woman from Paris to Hollywood.⁴⁰

⁷ Major Tewfik, Corporal Halidé, Major Tahsin, and Galib Bey from *The Turkish Ordeal: Being the Further Memoirs of Halidé Edib* by Halide Adivar Edib, 1928

Across the region, in anti-colonial struggles and new nation-states, the bodies of covered and uncovered women were used to signal alternative visions for the new nation by all political factions.⁴¹ Top-down reforms mandated changes to women's (and men's) dress, often paying little attention to the impact on individuals' sense of themselves. State reforms did, however, often operate in relation to wider norms of contemporary international fashion. Atatürk's Hat Law banned headscarves but not head *covering*: women, like men, were required to wear Western-style hats. As Muslim women around the world today struggle with bans on headscarves and face veils, it is worth remembering that not so long ago hats for men and women were an indispensable part of everyday dress in both East and West.

While welcomed by many women (often of the educated, progressive elites), the regime-led reforms of Atatürk in Turkey—as also Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran, whose ban on all forms of headscarf and face veil in 1936 was revoked by his son in 1941—caused misery to many others. In addition to impinging on women's sense of personal propriety, enforced unveiling often compounded social inequality, reducing women's ability to travel, work, and visit outside the home if they were seen to be flouting conventions of family honor or clan propriety.

A similar inability to recognize the personal, religious, social, and political reasons why women might continue to cover was demonstrated in George W. Bush's war on terror in Afghanistan after the events of September 11, 2001. National and international support for a military response was built through a public relations "feminist" campaign to "liberate" Afghan women from their (presumed Taliban-imposed) *burqas*.⁴² Republicans and their allies were bewildered by the persistence of this iconic garment in postwar Afghanistan (disregarding also the war-induced changes that brought new dangers to women).⁴³

Today, for the many Muslim women in the United States and around the world who have taken up the veil, understanding local context and protecting individual choice is often of paramount importance.

CHOICE: RELIGION, CULTURE, RESPECT

As Leila Ahmed elaborates, much of the current uptake in veiling in America and other Muslim-minority contexts dates back to the championing of the veil in the Islamic Revival movements of Egypt in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In a postcolonial state where many women, or their mothers, had moved away from the veil as a sign of nationalist modernity—not necessarily as a sign of secularity—Islamists advocated a return to piety as part of a political campaign for social change. Saba Mahmood notes that for some women in the early piety movements, wearing modest dress did more than merely cover an already pious self; the daily process of putting on modest clothing actively helped to cultivate a pious disposition.⁴⁴ With some opposed to "Western" consumer culture, the 1970s saw a distinctively modern and more egalitarian-looking form of modest dress.

By the 1980s, head covering had become normalized, spreading beyond early adopters to greater numbers of Egyptian women who covered for a variety of personal, social, and political reasons.⁴⁵

As the veil began to be positioned as an indicator of female piety, women past and present whose hair was on display often came to be regarded as less pious or as secular, even though this is not how they saw themselves.⁴⁶ Sherifa Zuhur reported the frustration of self-consciously pious women who considered that their behavior rather than their dress should be the test and manifestation of their Islamic values.⁴⁷ Many Muslim women—those who cover and those who don't—say the same today: that wearing a headscarf should not "become a litmus test" of female piety or cultural identity.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the headscarf, in all its forms, is today most often understood as a sign that the wearer is Muslim. When Muslims face prejudice in the United States and in other Muslim-minority countries, women wearing headscarves experience increased prejudice, discrimination, and attack. In such circumstances, religious and community leaders have advised women to uncover their heads to avoid danger. The context-specific stigmatization of hijab is another reason why some women *start* wearing it: to reclaim it as a sign of religious and cultural pride.⁴⁹

In other words, women who wear a hijab do not always do so for reasons of personal spirituality (just as now and in the past many women who are consciously pious have not considered it necessary to cover their hair). For some who cover, the hijab serves as a social alibi, reassuring parents or relatives that they will abide by community convention when leaving home for college or work.

For others, the hijab is a political assertion of minority identity and rights. Women who choose to wear a hijab for some parts of their life may stop at others or wear the hijab in some places at some times and not others.

Whatever the reason for wearing the hijab or other forms of modest dress, a defense of women's right to choose if and how to cover is central to what some see as a cross-faith modest fashion "movement." For women raised with the values of Western liberalism, covering is authentic only if it is freely chosen. While many women around the world have little control over where and how they must cover, there is a growing cohort of young and youngish women (now roughly under age forty-five) who are choosing to cover and choosing to do so through participation in mainstream consumer cultures. In the United States and elsewhere, this generation of women (and now their daughters) assert religious rights as human rights: calling on their heritage of civil rights and feminism, they support individual women's choices about if and how to cover—or not cover.

For these generations, fashion has provided a conduit for style *and* politics. Online modest fashion brands, accompanied by a lively blogosphere and social media, have fostered cross-faith dialogue, bringing women together across divides of religion and secularity (see Camerlengo, this volume). Designers, social media influencers, and consumers share an ideal of respecting other women's decisions to cover, to uncover, or not to cover. Within this ethos, it is just as wrong for state and regional law to force a woman to uncover in France, Quebec, or Germany as it is to force her to cover in Saudi Arabia, Iran, or ISIS-controlled territories.

In contrast to the widespread majority presumption that women are forced in hijab by parents, elders, or conservative imams, many young women in Muslim-minority contexts in North America, Europe, and Australia are wearing hijab against parental norms.⁵⁰ Study of religious texts with groups of peers, or via new online religious authorities, has created new routes to religious knowledge and, with that, to new interpretations of religious cultures and practice. On the premise that while religious requirements may be sacrosanct, it is acceptable to change cultural practices, a move to "de-ethnicize" Islam has seen young women and men use their personal knowledge of the holy texts to challenge community conventions.⁵¹ This might mean demanding a greater say in choosing marital partners or reversing ideas that modesty can only be ensured by wearing clothing conventional to particular communities.⁵²

Parental generations may have seen consumer culture as antithetical to religious values and cultural authenticity. For their children or grandchildren, it is a generational norm to regard the commodities and services of consumer cultures as tools in the creation and expression of identity. Having grown up with world music, world food, and world fashion, they see no inherent contradiction in using the fashion industry to craft religious and cultural expression. Liberal values of individual choice meld with the consumer ethos of neoliberal capitalism.

The flexibility and variety of fashion proves that young women are making their own religious and cultural decisions. Youth subcultures have emerged, and modest fashion designers and social media