

**Muslim female clothing practices:  
An exploratory study of ancient and modern perceptions**

**by**

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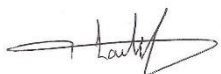
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## Abstract

This research is an exploratory study of ancient and modern perceptions with regard to Muslim female clothing practices. A combination of historical-comparative and social-science research methodology is utilised to determine how female clothing practices, specifically modest clothing, developed over millennia. The research belongs under the broad umbrella of qualitative data collection and analysis.

The study has a socio-historical, cultural, and religious focus and departs from the observation that Muslim female clothing practices imply a complex symbol of many meanings. Female clothing practices are analysed from a historical perspective as a cultural phenomenon with its roots in ancient Mediterranean societies (Chapter 2). These ancient cultural practices are re-applied and re-appropriated in Islamic tradition (Chapter 3) and find expression in modern society via Muslim women's choice to follow traditional clothing practices (Chapter 4). This allows the researcher to also study the phenomenon within the context of the social-sciences (Chapter 5). In this way the researcher approaches Muslim female clothing practices as a complex symbol with many meanings by means of a comprehensive research approach.

The ecological systems theory acts as theoretical framework for the study. Individuals interact within environmental systems. It creates a framework from which scholars can study the relationships between individuals and their communities and the wider society. The research develops in four phases. First, it explores the nature, development, meaning, and cultural significance of female clothing in the ancient Mediterranean world, with a specific focus on the origin of the cultural phenomenon. Second, it investigates wearing the *hijab* as a religious obligation according to Islamic tradition. Third, it investigates the significance of various facets of the *hijab* as it features in contemporary society. Finally, through a qualitative research approach, it explores women's perceptions of their choice to wear the *hijab* in a non-Muslim society.

The researcher concludes that an ancient cultural practice has been re-applied on a religious level in the Islamic context. In spite of many misconceptions and negative stereotyping Muslim women agree that they freely choose to wear the *hijab* because it gives visual expression to their identity as Muslims and protects them against objectification. By using the *hijab* as an opportunity for dialogue, better understanding

of the practice might lead to increased tolerance for diverse cultural and religious practices in contemporary society.

**Key terms:** Clothing practices; clothing as symbol; ancient Near Eastern societies; Islamic tradition; *hijab*; *niqab*; veiling; stereotyping; tolerance; diversity; identity; body; sanctity; privacy.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

“...the veil is a complex symbol of many meanings. Emancipation can be expressed by wearing the veil or by removing it. It can be secular or religious. It can represent tradition or resistance.” (El Guindi, 1999:172)

### 1.1 Introductory remarks

This study is concerned with **female clothing practices**. However, it is not concerned with **fashion**. It focuses on female clothing practices in a very specific socio-cultural and religious context, namely **Muslim female clothing practices**, and is not concerned with the plethora of websites, blogs, and other social media platforms currently available to the “**fashionable**” Muslim. A simple Google search with the key terms “*hijab*” and “fashion” results in more than 2.5 million hits, a clear attestation that “fashion” and “faith” are not necessarily incompatible terms in the global village that our world has become, a notion convincingly argued in a number of contributions in a recently published book titled *Modest fashion: Styling bodies, mediating faith* (Lewis, 2013). The subject matter of the book is fascinating, important, and relevant but falls outside the scope of this study.

This study is about the following: The title of the study, ***Muslim female clothing practices: An exploratory study of ancient and modern perceptions***, already suggests that the study has a socio-historical, cultural, and religious focus. It is concerned with Muslim female clothing practices as “a complex symbol of many meanings” (El Guindi, 1999:172). It departs from the following observation:

Clothing is deeply embedded within social, cultural, and religious contexts... Moreover, clothing visually signifies a multitude of ‘ideas, concepts, and categories’ that ascribe meaning to the body... Given the complexity of these functions, many forms of dress have been subject to considerable debate... Yet few articles of clothing have attracted the same degree of scrutiny as the veil, and by extension the practice of veiling (Feder, 2013:443-444).

In this study it will be argued that traditional clothing practices of Muslim women date back to ancient society (Chapter 2). In a modern and diverse society these traditional clothing practices are often perceived with skepticism, especially in societies where

Muslims are part of a cultural minority (Chapter 4). The researcher is a Muslim female currently residing in a predominantly non-Muslim society (South Africa). She deliberately chooses to wear traditional Muslim female attire. From personal experience she can testify to the skepticism regarding Muslim traditional clothing practices, discrimination against such women, misconceptions regarding the practice, and the restricted and often stereotyped nature of the debate regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly non-Muslim societies.

For Muslim women adhering to traditional clothing practices their deliberate choice to do so holds vast religious importance. Against popular opinion in predominantly non-Muslim societies that the wearing of the *hijab* and the *niqab*<sup>1</sup> diminishes a female's social status, the researcher will argue that, according to Islamic religious and cultural values, it on the contrary emphasises the high status of women (Chapter 3). This research study aims to enhance understanding of and insight into this cultural practice in a diverse society. The researcher will argue that Muslim female clothing practice has its roots in ancient Mediterranean societies (Chapter 2). She will explore the concepts of the *hijab* and the *niqab* with its deeper religious and cultural meaning in Islamic tradition (Chapter 3). She will evaluate traditions regarding Muslim female clothing practices and the current debate on these practices in contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim societies (Chapter 4). Finally, she will explore the way in which Muslim women perceive the wearing of traditional Muslim female clothing in a predominantly non-Muslim cultural context (Chapter 5).

The study provides the researcher with the fairly unique opportunity to **combine a historical and social-sciences research approach**. Female clothing practices are studied from a historical perspective as a cultural phenomenon with its roots in ancient Mediterranean societies. These ancient cultural practices find expression in modern society via Muslim women's choice to follow traditional clothing practices. This phenomenon can be studied within the context of the social-sciences. The study is thus an ***exploratory investigation*** of both ***ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices***.

---

<sup>1</sup> The researcher will use the conventional Anglicized form of the Arabic words حجاب *hijāb* and نقاب *niqāb* throughout the research report.

An important dimension to be attached to the wearing of the traditional clothing is the concepts of modesty, identity, and visual religious symbolism. These concepts determine the deliberate choice of modern Muslim females to adhere to their religious and cultural tradition. Hopefully this study will make a contribution in creating sensitivity to cultural and religious diversity in modern society. It is also to be expected that the study will address the erroneous notion that a symbol has only one single meaning. The researcher will indicate how meanings attached to the *hijab* and the *niqab* changed over time and argue that such symbols might have deeply personal and unique meanings attached to it in every individual case.

The debate on Muslim women's dress code has taken many forms and shapes over the centuries (Aziz, 2010:11). Cultural practices, values, beliefs, and dress codes perceived as "different" by the dominant culture in a given society are often regarded with scepticism and even with hostility. Dirks (2004:206) argues that there is frequent criticism regarding the custom of veiling practised by Muslim women in Western society. This results in a sometimes heated debate regarding the *hijab* and the *niqab*, with the practice being criticised on the one hand and its importance for Muslim communities being emphasised on the other hand. Landorf and Pagan (2005:171) point to the often contradictory perceptions in the "current disputes over the *hijab*" when they emphasise the irony that the *hijab* "is banned by law in public schools in France and required by law in Iran."

Much scholarly attention is currently being paid to the issue of Islamic dress for women. Salem (2013:77-91) provides a critical review of thirteen books on the subject of Islamic dress code for women and the position of women in Islam published between 1970 and 2000. To that list other important studies that have been published in the meantime can be added (El Guindi, 1999; Moghissi, 2005; Kassam, 2010). It falls outside the scope of the current study to review all these publications. Important issues relevant to the theme of the study will be referred to when necessary.

## 1.2 Development of the research project and definitions of key concepts

The study develops in four phases:

- An overview of the **historical development** of women's clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean, specifically in ancient Near Eastern societies (Chapter 2).
- An explanation of **Islam's understanding** of the Qur'ān and Hadith regarding female dress code (Chapter 3).
- An overview of **current views on and practices** of female Muslim dress code in Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Chapter 4).
- A **case-study approach of the perceptions and experiences** of Muslim women choosing to dress in traditional clothing in a predominantly non-Muslim society (Chapter 5).

A brief **explanation of concepts** that will be used repeatedly in this study is important at this point. The following temporal and geographical concepts will be used:

- **Ancient:** For the purposes of this study "ancient" is broadly defined as the era before the formal establishment of Islam in 622 CE.
- **Ancient Mediterranean societies:** It is used as a general term referring to the cultures bordering the Mediterranean, including ancient Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Greece, and Rome. Ancient Mesopotamia (i.e. Assyria, Babylonia, Persia), although not strictly speaking Mediterranean, is also included. The influence of the Assyrian, New Babylonian, and Persian Empires extended well into the Mediterranean sphere. Also included in the ancient Mediterranean area is the rise of early Christianity.
- **Ancient Near Eastern societies:** It is used to refer specifically to the societies inhabiting the so-called "near" East, i.e. ancient Egypt, Syria-Palestine (including the Israelite-Judean society), Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. These societies either were so-called "Semitic" societies or were influenced by "Semitic" culture. Various Arabian tribes in the Arabian Peninsula were part of this cultural context. Islam, in turn, originated in these areas.

The following terms will be used with reference to Muslim female clothing:

- **Hijab:** The *Hijab* (Arabic: حجاب *ḥijāb* “a thing that prevents, veils, protects, because it prevents seeing; partition”) may be basically defined as the modest dress that covers the natural contours and appearance of the body (Siraj 2011:716), “the dress that covers the whole body of a woman including her head, face, hands and feet” (Abdullah, 2006:30). It is sometimes used in a more restricted sense for a head scarf covering the hair, neck and upper torso, sometimes as synonym for *jilbâb* “overgarment” (Abdullah, 2006:9, 27).
- **Niqab:** A *Niqab* (Arabic: نقاب *niqāb*, “veil” or “mask”; also called a “ruband”) is a cloth which covers the face as a part of the *ḥijāb*. It is worn by Muslim women in public areas and in front of non-mahram (stranger) adult males. It is meant to hide the face and hair of a woman, leaving a small slit for the eyes only. It is commonly worn in the Gulf, Yemen, and southern Pakistan.
- **Chador:** The *chador* (Persian *chaddar*) is a large shawl worn especially by Muslim women in Iran that covers them from head to foot, but usually not the face. It comes in different colours (blue, white, or black). Sometimes an additional piece of cloth may be worn which covers the face.
- **Shayla, Al-Amira, Khimar:** The *Shayla* is a rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around the head and pinned in place on the shoulder. The *Al-Amira* is a two-piece veil consisting of a cap or extra-large head band and a tube-like scarf worn over that. The *Khimar* is a long cape-like veil with an opening for the face that falls over the bosom often to the hands. This is commonly worn among women in the Middle-East, Turkey, and Europe and is said to be the mildest form of the *hijab*.
- **Burqa:** The *Burqa* (Persian *purda* “curtain, veil”) is an outer garment worn by Muslim women in especially Afghanistan enveloping the whole body, with a rectangular piece of semi-transparent cloth to completely conceal the face and eyes.



Figure 1 gives a visual representation of the different styles of Muslim female clothing:



Figure 1: Different styles of Muslim female clothing

*Burqa*

*Niqab*

*Chador*

*Khimar*

*Hijab*

(Moaddel, 2013:54)

The *hijab* will be used in this study as a general term for the modest dress that covers the natural contours and appearance of the body. Technical terms, especially with reference to concepts routinely used in the Islamic world such as the *Qur'ān* (the Muslim Holy Book), *ḥadīth* (tradition), *tafsīr* (commentary), and others will be defined and explained in footnotes at relevant points during the course of the study. Such definitions and/or explanations will be especially prevalent in **Chapter 3: Female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition**.

Especially in contexts where it is not appropriate to use technical (Arabic) terminology such as *hijab* and *niqab*, the researcher will often simply refer to a “veil” and the custom of “veiling.” The term “veil” originates from the Latin word *velum* which literally means “sail, curtain, covering, veil.” The noun is defined as “a piece of fine material worn by women to protect or conceal the face; a piece of linen or other fabric forming part of a nun’s headdress, resting on the head and shoulders; a thing that conceals, disguises, or obscures something” (Oxford Dictionaries).<sup>2</sup> The researcher is aware of the fact that the English term does not adequately define all the possible nuances implied by terminology for female clothing practices in other languages. She concurs that in various contexts the veil should be classified “by what the veil reveals, what it conceals, and what it communicates” (El Guindi, 1999:9). Often in the study it will serve as a general, often used English term for female modest dress.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/veil](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/veil); 25/08/2015.

### 1.3 Rationale for the study

The researcher's personal experience as a conservative Muslim woman from Saudi Arabia residing in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, plays an important role in the choice of this research theme. She often experiences strange looks and treatment from people around her because of her conservative outfit. Reciprocally, she also perceives this treatment as strange as she fully and deliberately embraces and appreciates her cultural-religious dress. It affirms her desire to explore perceptions of and meanings behind her cultural-religious dress code.

In non-Muslim contexts stereotyping of Muslim women in cultural-religious dress is commonplace (Wagner et al., 2012:521-541). Wearing the *hijab* is often equated to violent, barbaric, terrorist, and extremist behavior. The end of the cold war and the post 9/11 geo-political context led to the resurfacing of Islamophobia (Carland, 2011:469-473). In addition, current studies tend to focus on the wearing of the *hijab* as the latest trend of fashion for young Muslim women in non-Muslim countries, thus ignoring the real symbolic meaning of the *hijab* (Lewis, 2010:58-90; Ünal & Moors, 2012:308-329). The researcher thus is of the opinion that perceptions regarding the wearing of the *hijab* and controversies regarding the wearing of the *hijab* or not, or the "old" *hijab* versus the "modern" *hijab* need to be addressed from a comprehensive historical and socio-religious and cultural context.

The **primary research question** of this study is the following: What are the ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices and its practical influence upon Muslim women in a predominantly non-Muslim community?

### 1.4 Research approach

This research uses a two-pronged research approach, both belonging under the broad umbrella of **qualitative data collection and analysis**. The first part of the study is of a historical nature and will employ a **historical-comparative research approach**. The purpose of historical comparative research is "to compare entire cultures or societies to learn about macro patterns or long-term trends across decades or a century" (Neuman, 2011:465). It is "a powerful tool for addressing many of the central issues in social theory" (Neuman, 2011:465) and is suitable for addressing "big" questions such as "How did major societal change take place? Why did current social arrangements

take a certain form in some societies but not in others?” (Neuman, 2011:466). The advantage of historical-comparative research is that it “strengthens conceptualization and theory building. By looking at historical events or diverse cultural contexts, we generate new concepts and broaden understanding” (Neuman, 2011:466). **Primary records** (i.e. texts and depictions from the ancient Mediterranean world) and **secondary sources** (the writings of specialist historians) will be utilised to compile and interpret data regarding ancient perceptions of female clothing practices and its interpretation and application in Islam (Chapter 2-4).

The second part of the study will follow an **exploratory qualitative methodology** and a **collective case study**, making use of an **interview** to collect data. Fouché and Delport (2011:64) describe qualitative research as an approach to answer questions from participants’ point of view. The aim in using a qualitative research approach is to understand the subjective and rich reality of the participating women, and represent their way of understanding and personal experience of the *hijab* as dress code (Willig, 2009:172). The qualitative research approach situates the observer in the world of participants. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recording, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64). This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Chapter 5).

## 1.5 Theoretical framework

For the purpose of this study, the researcher departs from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory. This theory identifies five environmental systems in which an individual has to interact, and it creates a framework from which scholars can study the relationships between a person and their communities and the wider society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Each participant that formed part of the collective case study section of this study (Chapter 5) was studied against the background of more universal experiences, processes, and systems that were described in the historical-comparative part of the research (Chapter 2-4). The ecological systems theory

provided a point of entrance to both the ancient and the modern perceptions of Muslim traditional clothing.

The five systems are (Benokraitis, 2011:35-36):

- **Micro-system:** Aspects that affect a person as well as his or her development directly such as family, school, religious institutions, neighbourhood, and peers. In the context of this study, participants' personal and immediate systems and the influence thereof in their decision to wear traditional clothing will be explored.
- **Meso-system:** The relations between the microsystem and its contexts. This system will be explored in light of the nature of each participant's micro-system.
- **Exo-system:** The link between a social setting in which a person does not have an active role and the person's immediate context. In the context of this study, the immediate world over which participants do not have control will be explored. The proposed sample will consist of Muslim women living in a non-Muslim society. Their experiences within this context will be explored.
- **Macro-system:** This includes the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include growing populations, industrialised countries, socio-economic development, financial status, and ethnicity. A child, his or her parent, his or her school, and his or her parent's workplace are all part of a large cultural context. The attitudes and ideologies of the culture affect all other systems, and vice versa. The non-Muslim context paired with the Muslim beliefs and tradition will be explored.
- **Chrono-system:** The course of environmental events and changes over life and socio-historical circumstances has an influence on an individual's current function. The researcher will explore the history and development of traditional female Muslim clothing practices to contextualise modern perceptions.

## 1.6 Goal and objectives

The goal of the research study is to explore ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices.

The objectives formulated to reach the goal are:

- To explore and discuss the nature, development, meaning, and cultural significance of female clothing in the ancient Mediterranean world with a specific focus on the origin of the cultural phenomenon.
- To discuss wearing the *hijab* as a religious obligation according to the interpretation of the Qur'ān by adherents of Islam.
- To explain the significance of various facets of the *hijab* as it features in Muslim communities today.
- To explore, through a qualitative research approach, Muslim women's perceptions of their choice to wear the *hijab* in a non-Muslim society.

## 1.7 Outline of the study

In line with the four phases of the study mentioned above, this thesis is organised into six chapters, which are briefly described below.

**Chapter 1: Introduction and orientation** provides the background to the study. The study departs from the observation that female Muslim clothing practices represent a complex symbol of many meanings. Definitions of key concepts used throughout the study are provided and then the chapter addresses the rationale for the study, the research approach, the theoretical framework, the study's goal and objectives and a brief outline of the study.

In **Chapter 2: Female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies – a lasting heritage** a brief overview of female clothing practices in six different ancient Mediterranean societies is given. The chapter focuses on the following ancient cultures: Ancient Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia); ancient Egypt; Persia; Syria-Palestine; Israelite and early Jewish culture; and early Christianity.

**Chapter 3: Female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition** gives a detailed account of female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition. It looks at

issues of Muslim female clothing practices from the perspective of the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and Tafsīr as well as in the four Sunni Islamic schools of jurisprudence. Translations of Arabic terms in footnotes in this and the following chapter come from Cowan (1976).

**Chapter 4: *The Hijab in contemporary society: controversy, dialogue, and tolerance*** focuses on Muslim female clothing practices in contemporary society. Special attention is paid to perceptions of female clothing practices in Muslim societies, and Western misconceptions of Islamic religious and cultural traditions.

**Chapter 5: *Qualitative research methodology and empirical study*** describes the qualitative research approach and design used in this study. It then describes the data collection method and a thematic discussion of the data collected.

**Chapter 6: *Conclusion and recommendations*** finally explains the results of the study by providing a summary of key findings from the ancient cultural studies section of the research as well the case studies. An answer is provided to the initial research question: *What are the ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices and its practical influence upon Muslim women in a predominantly non-Muslim community?* Some limitations of the current research project as well as recommendations and opportunities for further research are discussed.

## 1.8 Concluding remarks

The researcher emphasises that the research in the following chapters focuses on the issue of Muslim female clothing practices as an historical, social, cultural, and religious phenomenon. Clothing is regarded not as material objects, but as complex symbols deeply embedded within social, cultural, and religious contexts (Feder, 2013:443). The study is contextualised by it being a dissertation in the field of ancient culture studies. It is thus neither a detailed study of the historical development of female clothing practices, nor a detailed study of female clothing practices according to Islamic theology. What the researcher wants to achieve is to create awareness of ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices and its practical influence upon Muslim women in a predominantly non-Muslim community. She hopes that the study can become a foundation for mutual understanding between adherents of different religions, tolerance between people born in different cultures, and dialogue between individuals and communities in a complex and diverse, modern world.

## CHAPTER 2

# FEMALE CLOTHING PRACTICES IN ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETIES – A LASTING HERITAGE

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher explores clothing practices in various ancient Mediterranean societies. The term “ancient Mediterranean societies” is used in a broad sense, referring to the cultures bordering the Mediterranean, including ancient Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Anatolia, Greece, and Rome. Ancient Mesopotamia (i.e. Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia), although not strictly speaking Mediterranean, is also included in this research due to the fact that the influence of the Assyrian, New Babylonian, and Persian Empires extended well into the Mediterranean sphere. Included in the ancient Mediterranean area is also the rise of early Christianity.

The aim of the chapter is to focus upon female dressing practice(s) in these civilisations and in the case of cultures prevailing to this day (e.g. Jewish and Christian culture) to briefly refer to contemporary customs as well. Studying these ancient female clothing practices will highlight the ancient Middle Eastern societies from which Islam and the religion’s associated dress code emanated. The wearing of the veil is not as prevalent in modern times, but it appeared quite often in the ancient civilisations under discussion. It also occurred over the entire region that can be described as the ancient Mediterranean. The study will focus upon female clothing practices and will include discussions of the material used and the different styles women used in the different societies and social contexts to cover and to beautify themselves.

This chapter will illustrate that the wearing of what is called the *hijab* and the *niqab* in Islam was a progressive evolutionary trend extending from the ancient Sumerian society right through to the Islamic period. The prevalence of women “veiling” under specific conditions is clear throughout the history of the ancient Mediterranean in general, and the ancient Near East in particular. Wright (1996:88) argues that specific cultural codes regarding female clothing practices were part and parcel of Egypt’s ancient history. This is also evident for female clothing practices in Mesopotamia (Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia) (Saggs, 1962:157-232) and Greece and Rome (Harden, 1962:103). The exact connotation to be attached to the word “veiling” when

ancient Mediterranean societies are investigated is, however, unclear. Driver and Miles (1935:129) indicate that “veiling” has been used to refer to only a head covering or to women being fully veiled. El Guindi (1999:6) quite rightly argues that “veil” is a Western term which cannot carry all the connotations implied by various Arabic terms for clothing practices and individual items of clothing. The researcher is aware of the fact that the term *veil* “is indiscriminate, monolithic, and ambiguous” (El Guindi, 1999:7) and therefore concurs that in various contexts the veil should be classified “by what the veil reveals, what it conceals, and what it communicates” (El Guindi, 1999:9).

## **2.2 Clothing in ancient Mediterranean societies: A visual expression of core social values**

It falls outside the scope of this study to trace the history of clothing, a unique characteristic of human beings, as it developed through the millennia.<sup>3</sup> The intention of the chapter is very modest. The wearing of some form of *hijab* is arguably the most visible expression of female religious identity in contemporary society. Everyone who encounters a woman wearing the *hijab* probably immediately makes two assumptions: the woman is a Muslim and the *hijab* is a peculiarity of Islam. What this chapter wants to convey is that wearing the *hijab* is not a peculiarity of Islam. The practice for females to “cover” themselves in some way or another in fact has a very long history throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In the next section it will be illustrated by means of a brief overview of female clothing practices in various ancient Mediterranean societies.

What is emphasised in this section is that clothes, which undoubtedly originated for practical reasons like covering nakedness or protection against cold, acquired symbolic value in ancient and modern societies alike. In contemporary society, especially in Western countries, it is important in some circles to follow the latest fashion and wear the correct brand. Arnold (2009:4) argues that the study of fashion is an interdisciplinary field that “reflects its connection to historical, social, political, and economic contexts... as well as to more specific issues, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class.”

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<sup>3</sup> For such a comprehensive overview, cf. Tortora & Eubank (2010).



In ancient Mediterranean societies clothing “was not mere body covering, but indicated one’s role and status, and so it is best viewed in terms of the values of honor and shame” (Neyrey, 1998a:22). *Value* “describes some general quality and *direction of life* that human beings are expected to *embody in their behaviour*” (Pilch & Malina, 1998:xv; researcher’s emphasis). Values become tangible when “humans create and utilize social institutions... to mark the general boundaries within which certain qualities and directions of living must take place” (Pilch & Malina, 1998:xvii). In ancient Mediterranean societies honour and shame were *core values* of such importance that acquiring honour and thus avoiding shame can be described as “the Mediterranean goal or end cultural value” (Pilch & Malina, 1998:xix).

Honour “is a claim to worth that is publically acknowledged” (Plevnik, 1998:106) and shame “is a claim to worth that is publically denied and repudiated” (Plevnik, 1998:107). Honour is a group value. Individual members of a group “inherit honor from their honorable ancestors” and this inherited honour “must be maintained and defended by the current generation, male and female.” Men do it publicly “with strength or wisdom or courage” while women do it “with privacy, reserve and purity.” A woman’s honour is “maintained as a *veil of privacy and of personal and sexual integrity*” (Plevnik, 1998:107; researcher’s emphasis).

In this context clothes and the way clothes are worn become very important. Nudity is one of the ultimate symbols of shame (as can be seen from Assyrian depictions where captives are taken into exile naked) and it is “inextricably linked with sin and ‘shame’” (Neyrey, 1998b:136). In Mediterranean societies women were expected to defend their honour by “their *chastity*” and by being orientated “toward the *private space of the house*,” hence the expectation “that women’s *bodies be clothed as fully as possible*, with the result that loss of clothing was synonymous with loss of virtue” (Neyrey, 1998b:136-137; researcher’s emphasis). Especially the most honourable part of the body, the head, “is honoured by the wearing of appropriate gear” (Neyrey, 1998a:23).

In the light of these general remarks regarding the symbolic value of clothing as an expression of social values, specifically of honour and shame as the end cultural value in Mediterranean societies, the researcher deems it relevant to research the theme of Muslim women’s clothing practices for religious and cultural reasons. In this chapter it

will become clear that current female clothing practices in Muslim communities have a long history and should be evaluated against the cultural background of the end-value system of honour and shame in ancient Mediterranean societies.

### **2.3 Female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies**

In this section the researcher will give a very brief review of female clothing practices in the ancient Mediterranean geographical area. The focus falls upon descriptions and depictions of female attire and the symbolic connotations attached to the clothes. As indicated in the previous section, clothing is related to the core social values of honour and shame, hence some attention will also be paid to the social status of women in ancient Mediterranean societies. In this overview the warning of El Guindi (1999:12) that “a practice that can be called veiling, and that is apparently similar in form and function” can exist in various cultures and yet have differentiated symbolic meanings in different cultural systems.

Because the “first information about clothing and grooming appeared at the end of the fourth millennium BCE with the advent of sculpture and writing” (Nemet-Nejat, 2002:153) the review commences with the advent of Sumerian culture in Mesopotamia during the third millennium BCE, and concludes with the rise of Christianity during the first few centuries CE and the advent of Islam in the sixth century CE. Attention will be paid to the Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians in Mesopotamia and the Hittites in Anatolia. Various cultures in Syria-Palestine, including the Israelite-Jewish culture, will then be discussed as well as the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, and eventually the rise of early Christianity.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the chapter is to show that there are certain common characteristics regarding female clothing practices across all cultures and across time in ancient Mediterranean societies. The chapter will especially illustrate that it was normal for honourable women in these cultures to cover at least their hair and the natural contours of their bodies when they appeared in public. In the light of this broad overview the warning by Nel (2002:60) should be taken seriously: “One must therefore be careful not to project a colonial Western perception of subservience onto all veiled women.”

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the history of the different cultures, cf. De Blois & Van der Spek 1997.

### 2.3.1 Mesopotamia

The researcher concurs with Nemet-Nejat (2002:150) that generally speaking in ancient Mesopotamia women's "social status was *similar* to men's. But women were *never the legal equal* to men" (researcher's emphasis). From 8000 BCE onward there was a development in ancient Mediterranean societies from a nomadic existence to agrarian life. Villages appeared, giving rise to trade. Personal wealth increased and needed to be protected for posterity. Protecting a family's resources became crucial, and with that also female members' sexuality within the family became important. Divisions in society emerged and women were increasingly associated with a home environment and with the bearing of children. The social trend of seclusion of women and defined gender roles, with men playing a larger role in the public sphere and women in the private sphere, began (Dirks, 2004:230).

The **Sumerians** were the first people in Mesopotamia to establish what would be called a civilisation in the modern sense of the word with formal governmental structures, social stratification, the growth of various interdependent industries and technologies, a complex economy, and formal recordkeeping. They were also the first people in history to invent a formal writing system that enabled extensive recordkeeping and eventually the development of various types of literature. The Sumerians arrived in the southern part of Mesopotamia at about 5000 BCE; however, their origin is unknown. No traces of their ancestry have been discovered outside the borders of Iraq. They dominated the south of Mesopotamia for a thousand years, from about 3000 to 2000 BCE. The area became known as Sumer. The Sumerians established the first city states in history, and were responsible for many basic features of Mesopotamian civilisation which survived long after (Crawford, 2004:16-36).

On monuments the Sumerians are depicted as clean-shaven, stocky, broad-headed people. They referred to themselves as "the black-headed people" or "the people of Sumer." In the early dynastic period (ca. 2800 - 2300 BCE) men are depicted with their heads shaven, with bare upper torsos and with long fleecy skirts (Figure 2). Women are depicted with a fleecy toga with one shoulder bared and with their hair pleated, sometimes wearing a bulbous hat (Figure 3). These particular depictions might be of men and women performing religious rituals (Crawford 2004:149). There is some evidence from the Royal Cemetery at Ur (ca. 2600 BCE; Nemet-Nejat, 2002:155) that

court ladies wore “a fine veil, or head covering, beneath their magnificent head dresses decorated with gold ribbon” (Crawford, 2004:148).

Fashions changed in the Old Akkadian period (ca. 2300 - 2200 BCE). Men now wore long robes draped over one shoulder. Women continued to wear the toga-like garment wrapped around the body, but both shoulders were covered. From the Ur III period (ca. 2200-2000 BCE) come the well-known statues of Ensi Gudea of Lagash (Saggs, 1962:183) depicting him as wearing a loose-fitting, ankle-length shawl with an elaborate royal turban as headdress (Figure 4). From the same period comes a statue of a woman with her hair drawn back in a bun and tied with a ribbon or hair tie (Figure 5). The same kind of clothing style seems to have been followed in the Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000 - 1600 BCE; Nemet-Nejat, 2002:154).

During the third and second millennia BCE women played an important role in society. Especially in Sumerian culture goddesses played an important role (Nemet-Nejat, 2002:150) and women consequently seem to have held dominant positions and played active roles in the economy, at the royal courts, and in religious institutions. Women “could acquire land by purchase, inheritance, and royal grant” (Nemet-Nejat, 2002:151) but had less control over commercial life and “had little control over the management of either real estate or slaves” (Nemet-Nejat, 2002:151). In marriage a woman’s most important role “was to bear children, particularly sons, who were preferred as heirs” (Nemet-Nejat, 2002:152). El Guindi claims that women “were *de facto* heads of household with responsibilities in internal and external affairs,” that they “represented the household in the community” and “engaged in income-producing activities.” Especially their “headcover and hair braids” symbolised that in Sumerian society men and women played “*gender complementary*” roles (El Guindi, 1999:14; researcher’s emphasis).



**Figure 2**  
**Sumerian male**  
Early dynastic period  
(2800 - 2330 BCE)<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3**  
**Sumerian female**  
Early dynastic period  
(2800 - 2330 BCE)<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 4**  
**Gudea of Lagash**  
Ur III period  
(2200 - 2000 BCE)<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 5**  
**Sumerian woman**  
Ur III period  
(2200 - 2000 BCE)<sup>8</sup>

A marked change occurred in clothing practices and gender roles during the second half of the second millennium and the first millennium BCE when the **Assyrians** rose to power in Mesopotamia and eventually controlled the whole ancient Near East. Successive Assyrian empires gradually gained control over Mesopotamia (Old Assyria Empire; ca. 1400 - 1200 BCE), the Syrian heartland and coastline (Middle Assyrian Empire; ca. 1200 - 1000 BCE) and in the end also all of Palestine, and for a short period even the north of Egypt (New Assyrian Empire; ca. 1000 - 612 BCE).<sup>9</sup> The Assyrians thus had a huge influence on the social, cultural, and religious life of the ancient Near East.

El Guindi argues that it is with the rise of Assyrian supremacy that the ancient Mediterranean world saw for the first time a connection between female clothing practices and social stratification. In a set of laws known as the Middle Assyrian Law Code, it is stated for the first time “which women *must* and which *could not* veil” (El Guindi, 1999:14).<sup>10</sup> The symbolic value attached to female clothing practices thus became formalised and prescribed. Especially relevant to the current study is the laws

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/un/sumeria/clo.html>; 08/06/15.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/un/sumeria/clo.html>; 08/06/15.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/gudea-prince-lagash-seated-statue-dedicated-god-ningishzida>; 08/06/15.

<sup>8</sup> <http://sumerianshakespeare.com/106901.html>; 08/06/15.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of Assyrian history, cf. Saggs 1984:2-121.

<sup>10</sup> The Middle Assyrian Law Code was discovered in 1903 in Ashur in Iraq. It was promulgated by the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser I (1115 - 1077 BCE; cf. Matthews & Benjamin 1997:114) and translated and published by Driver and Miles (1935).

recorded in paragraphs 40 and 41. There is controversy regarding the interpretation of various words used for different social classes of women as well as the exact connotation to be attached to the Akkadian word that is translated by “veiling.”<sup>11</sup> This technical detail is not important for the purpose of this study, therefore the researcher utilises the much simplified translation by Matthews and Benjamin (1997:119-120). Paragraph 40 begins as follows:

Mothers of households, widows and other free women are to wear veils when they go out of their households. Marriageable women are to wear veils... when they go out of their households. Secondary wives are to wear veils when they go out with the mothers of their households. *Qadiltu* women, who are married priests, are to wear veils when they go out of their households.

Unmarried *qadiltu* women are not to wear veils when they go out of their households. Prostitutes are not to wear veils... Slaves are not to wear veils.

Heavy penalties are prescribed for a prostitute or a slave wearing a veil:

If a citizen sees a prostitute wearing a veil, then she is arrested... and she is charged before the assembly at the palace gate. Her jewellery is not confiscated, but the plaintiff is to confiscate her clothing. She is flogged fifty times with staves, and tar is poured into her hair.

Similarly, if a slave is caught wearing a veil

...she is arrested, charged before the assembly... her ears are cut off and her clothes are confiscated by the plaintiff.

It is compulsory for a “citizen” to report a veiled prostitute or slave. If not, he is himself severely punished. In the case of an unreported veiled prostitute

...he is flogged fifty times with staves, his clothes are confiscated, his ears are pierced and tied with cord behind his head and he is to serve as a slave for the state for one full month.

In the case of an unreported veiled slave

...he is flogged fifty times with staves, his ears are pierced and tied with cord behind his head, his clothes are confiscated and he is to serve as a slave for the state for one full month.

Paragraph 41 begins as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> In some of the earliest studies on the law code the controversies are clearly visible. Jastrow (1921:34) interprets the Akkadian words as if the married woman must have her head covered. The captive woman, married *qadiltu*, and unclean woman were to be fully veiled. The unmarried *qadiltu* was to be with head uncovered, and the slave girl was to be unveiled. Jastrow saw in these distinctions the origin of the bridal veil, and of the veil of the nun as bride of the church. Brooks (1923:188) argues that no Assyrian sculpture displays a fully veiled woman, but does show captive women with their hair covered.

If a citizen wishes to marry a captured woman, then he is to ask five or six of his neighbours to be present and he shall veil her in their presence while swearing: "She is my wife," and she becomes his wife.

It is clear that "women of nobility *had* to veil. Servants... had to veil too, but *only* when accompanying noble women." However, "*common prostitutes and ordinary slave-girls are never permitted to veil publicly*" (El Guindi, 1999:15; emphasis in the source). The laws thus reveal "a highly stratified social system based on class, moral and marital status, and respectability" and also indicate that "ceremonial veiling is a vehicle for mobility" in terms of social status (El Guindi, 1999:15). Jastrow (1921:11) sees in these laws an indication of women's inferior social position: "Wives and daughters are to be veiled or to have their heads covered, or both, to mark them as the property of the husband and father, and as a warning to others to keep their hands off" (cf. also Nel, 2002:57-58). However, Brooks (1923:198) warns against this one-dimensional approach and argues that Laws 40 and 41 should rather be read in the context of social stratification. The laws rather emphasise "the differentiation between 'respectable' women and those who were publicly available" (Ahmed, 1992:15).

A sculpture from the palace of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh dating from the seventh century BCE gives a good indication of Assyrian male and female clothing practices (Figure 6). It depicts the king and queen enjoying a cup of wine after Ashurbanipal's successful campaign against Elam. Both the queen and her female attendants wear short-sleeved, ankle-length tunics. The hair is braided and tied with a ribbon. The male attendants also wear short-sleeved, ankle-length tunics, very similar to those worn by the female figures. They have shoulder-length hair bound with a turban. The male attendants have no beards and are probably eunuchs. The king, however, has the typical Assyrian long, braided beard as well as shoulder-length braided hair (Saggs, 1962:157-232). The scene is obviously private and seemingly takes place in the royal palace; thus the absence of veils is understandable. Taking into account that a disproportionate number of Assyrian sculptures depict male figures, it must be conceded that there are no "conclusive pictorial images of the veil in this period," but that the textual evidence probably indicates that, although "one cannot equate the Assyrian veil with modern veils, one may accept that the lower part of the face was probably covered by the veil" (Nel, 2002:58) when women of high rank ventured into public space.



**Figure 6**  
**King Ashurbanipal and his queen**  
Royal palace in Nineveh  
(7<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>12</sup>

The **Neo-Babylonian Empire** (612 - 538 BCE) succeeded the Assyrians as the dominant world power when they destroyed Nineveh in 612 BCE. It seems that the social position of women remained basically the same. There is no Babylonian sculptural evidence for female veiling. However, the practice seems to have been present there as well. Driver and Miles (1935:133) see some evidence of the wearing of a “veil” in Babylon from a warning in the book of Isaiah that states that Babylonian women would have to remove their “veils.” It is apparently used as an indication that the privileged women of Babylonia will lose their status and be regarded as “low” women. In Isaiah 47:1-2 the prophet warns the important women of Babylon:

"Go down, sit in the dust, Virgin Daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, Daughter of the Babylonians. No more will you be called tender or delicate. Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams.

From the fairly extensive overview of female clothing practices in ancient Mesopotamia the researcher concurs with El Guindi that the symbolic value of female clothing practices developed from that of *gender complementary* during the third and second millennia BCE to that of *class exclusivity* during the first millennium BCE (1999:14-16; researcher's emphasis).

### 2.3.2 Anatolia

During the second millennium BCE the Hittites, a people of Indo-European origin, carved out an empire in the Anatolian mountains that competed and often clashed with the developing city states and empires in Mesopotamia. Around 1700 BCE the Old

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.library.yale.edu/neareast/exhibitions/food/images/H\\_Ashurbanipals\\_garden.jpg](http://www.library.yale.edu/neareast/exhibitions/food/images/H_Ashurbanipals_garden.jpg); 08/06/15.



Hittite Kingdom rose to power and ruled over Syria, but lost its power to the rising Old Babylonian Empire in Mesopotamia. Around 1350 BCE the Hittites restored their power and the New Hittite Empire once again ruled over much of Asia Minor and Syria, and even extended its power into Palestine. The empire collapsed ca. 1200 BCE. The Hittites were influenced by Mesopotamian culture and by local Syrian beliefs and customs.<sup>13</sup>

The social status of women in second-century BCE Anatolia was very similar to those of Sumerian and Old Babylonian women. Hence it can be assumed that the symbolic value of female clothing practices also developed from “gender complementary” (El Guindi, 1999:14) to “class exclusivity” (El Guindi, 1999:14) as in Mesopotamia. Thurkilsen (2014) argues that ordinary women were not male possessions and had identities of their own. Women of high rank such as queens and wise women were influential and played a prominent role in state and society. On monuments Hittite men are depicted with braided beards. Soldiers and war gods are depicted with knee-length tunics while the king is depicted with an ankle-length flowing robe and a cap covering the top of his head (Figure 7). In a domestic scene at a banquet both male and female figures are depicted with loose, ankle-length robes. The male figure’s hair is drawn back in a bun and apparently he wears a tight-fitting cap. The female figure’s hair is long and braided and she also wears a cap covering the top of her head (Figure 8). Some depictions of women suggest that Hittite females of high rank wore head coverings completely covering their hair and falling over their shoulders, as in the stela of the young scribe Tarhunpiyas standing on his mother’s knees, dating from the Neo Hittite Kingdom (Figure 9). Of particular interest to the theme of this study is a depiction on the so-called Bitik terracotta vase dating from the 17th century BCE, currently in the Anatolian Civilizations Museum, Ankara (Figure 10). It apparently depicts a wedding scene. The husband is about to unveil his bride. She wears a scarf completely covering her head and flowing over her shoulders to completely cover her body (Hoffner, 2003:109).

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<sup>13</sup> For a brief discussion of Hittite history cf. Gurney (1975:15-62).



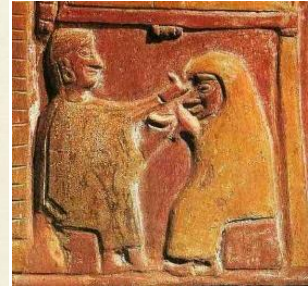
**Figure 7**  
**War god and king**  
Hittite rock relief  
(8<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 8**  
**Male and female banqueters**  
Hittite city of Sinjirli  
(9<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 9**  
**Tarhunpiyas and his mother**  
Marash, Neo-Hittite kingdom  
(8<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 10**  
**Bitik vase**  
Old Hittite kingdom  
(1700 BCE)<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3.3 Syria and Palestine

The geographical area known as Syria-Palestine has a long history with established villages and towns dating back as early as the seventh millennium BCE. Syria comprises the area south of Asia Minor stretching from the Upper-Euphrates region in the east to the Mediterranean coast in the west. The southern border of Syria is more or less where the Orontes River flows into the Mediterranean. Palestine refers to the narrow land bridge between the Mediterranean and the Great Rift Valley. The northern border is where the Orontes flows into the Mediterranean and the southern border the Brook of Egypt (*Wadi El-Arish*), the traditional border between Egypt and Israel. In the third and second millennia BCE Syria was influenced by Mesopotamian and Hittite culture, and Palestine was heavily influenced by Egyptian culture. In the first millennium BCE the dominance of Assyria, Babylonia, and the Persians influenced the area.

<sup>14</sup> <http://museopics.com/on-line-museum/walking-with-the-gods-hittite-art-and-iconography/>; 08/06/15.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.artres.com/C.aspx?VP3=ViewBox\\_VPage&RAQF=1&IT=ZoomImageTemplate01\\_VForm&IID=2UNT WAX77WW&LBID=22SITWC1SWL&PN=9&CT=Search&SF=0](http://www.artres.com/C.aspx?VP3=ViewBox_VPage&RAQF=1&IT=ZoomImageTemplate01_VForm&IID=2UNT WAX77WW&LBID=22SITWC1SWL&PN=9&CT=Search&SF=0); 08/06/15.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/stela-tarhunpiyas>; 08/06/15.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.karakalpak.com/kiymeshek04.html>; 08/06/15.

Due to its geographical nature as a narrow land bridge between the great civilisations that developed along the Nile River in Egypt and between the Euphrates and the Tigris in Mesopotamia, no great empires ever arose in Syria-Palestine. Various important city states inhabited by peoples of Semitic stock existed during the course of the third to first millennia BCE, notably Mari on the banks of the Upper-Euphrates (ca. 3100 - 2000 BCE), Ebla – 55 km southwest of present-day Aleppo (ca. 3500 - 2000 BCE), Ugarit on the northern Mediterranean coast (ca. 1450 - 1200 BCE) and, during the last half of the second and the first millennia BCE, various Phoenician and Aramaic city states in Syria, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Philistine city states, and the kingdoms of Moab and Edom in Palestine.<sup>18</sup>

Israel/Judah and the Jewish culture will receive more attention later in this section. It can be assumed that the social position of women did not differ substantially from that discussed for Mesopotamia and Anatolia and that female clothing practices also have the symbolic value of “gender complementary” (El Guindi, 1999:14) and “class exclusivity” (El Guindi, 1999:14). Women are not often depicted in the art of Syria-Palestine. Of particular interest for the present study are two statuettes from Mari and three from Ebla. They represent social conditions of the third and second millennia BCE and portray Sumerian influence. It can be assumed that El Guindi’s “gender complementary” model (1999:14) is applicable here.

From Mari come two alabaster statuettes. The first (Figure 11) represents Ur-Nanshe, a singer in the temple of Ishtar, the Mesopotamian goddess of love, fertility, and war. She wears a short skirt. Her bare legs are crossed in front of her and her upper body is bare. Her long hair is uncovered and falls down her back. From the same city comes a completely different type of statuette (Figure 12). It depicts a female priestess dedicated to the temple of the goddess Ninni-Zaza. She wears a so-called “polos” headdress and her long robe covers the whole body, including the head.

From Ebla come two female figurines discovered in the same room in the Royal Palace (Figure 13). The figure on the left with the long dress probably represents a deceased queen, now venerated as a goddess. Her long hair is braided and bound on both sides of her head. The figure on the right is probably a living queen engaged in the act of ancestor veneration. She wears a long dress, but one shoulder and breast are bare.

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<sup>18</sup> Brief articles on the history of the various peoples of Syria-Palestine can be found in Wiseman (1973).

Her long hair falls down her back and seems to be bound with a ribbon. The third figurine depicts a women dressed in a completely different fashion (Figure 14). She wears a long dress with a veil covering her head and falling down over her shoulders. It probably depicts a woman of high social status.



**Figure 11**  
**Ur-Nanshe of Mari**  
Alabaster statuette  
(Mari, ca. 3000 BCE)<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 12**  
**Priestess of Mari**  
Alabaster statuette  
(Mari, ca. 3000 BCE)<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 13**  
**Dead and living queen**  
Ebla  
(ca. 2400 BCE)<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 14**  
**Seated woman**  
Ebla  
(ca 2400 BCE)<sup>22</sup>

From a first millennium BCE Phoenician context come several clay figurines of women playing musical instruments or presenting offerings. These women seem to wear ankle-length robes and the hair is covered with a cloth (Figures 15 and 16). It can be assumed that in this first millennium BCE context the strong so-called “Semitic” cultural influence was predominant throughout Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine, and that El Guindi’s “class exclusivity” model (1999:14-16) is applicable here.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.syriatoday.ca/old-syrian-history-ancient-e.htm>; 08/06/15.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.syriatoday.ca/old-syrian-history-ancient-e.htm>; 08/06/15.

<sup>21</sup> <http://archive.archaeology.org/0801/trenches/goddesses.html>; 08/06/15.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.qaraqalpaq.com/kiymeshek04.html>; 08/06/15.



**Figure 15**  
**A woman playing cymbals**  
Phoenician clay figurine  
(7<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>23</sup>



**Figure 16**  
**Women bringing offerings**  
Phoenician clay figurines  
(8<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE)<sup>24</sup>

There is no archaeological evidence for the presence of a face veil in the cultures of Syria and Palestine or any textual evidence suggesting its existence. The researcher concurs with Nel that in the ancient Syrian-Palestinian context “representations of women wearing headdresses and kerchiefs or scarves to cover part of their hair are indicative of their status, rather than linked to sexual policies or patriarchal incrimination” (2002:51).

### 2.3.4 Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt had a long history spanning from the end of the Neolithic period (prior to 3100 BCE) to the demise of the Ptolemaic dynasty when Cleopatra VII died in 30 BCE. Egypt then became a Roman province from 30 BCE to 395 CE. When Christendom was divided in 395 CE between the (western) Roman Catholic Church ruling from Rome and the eastern Roman emperors ruling from Byzantine, Egypt became a Byzantine province, and the Coptic Church became the officially recognised religious institution. In 614 CE Egypt officially became part of the growing Muslim Empire.<sup>25</sup>

In this section the focus falls on clothing practices in ancient Egypt before the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine conquests. El Guindi concurs with the premise accepted by many feminist scholars that “*gender equality*” was a notable feature of ancient

<sup>23</sup> <http://biblelandpictures.com/product-category/archeology/gods-deities-and-figurines/>; 13/06/15.

<sup>24</sup> <http://biblelandpictures.com/product-category/archeology/gods-deities-and-figurines/page/3/>; 13/06/155.

<sup>25</sup> For a brief overview of ancient Egypt’s history, cf. El Shammaa (1997:6-84); Oakes (2010:6-8).

Egyptian society (1999:18; researcher’s emphasis). Several researchers came to the conclusion that the social position of women in Egypt only changed with the Greek and Roman conquests. In ancient Egypt women “were not secluded, nor was their role in society described as primarily reproductive” (El Guindi, 1999:18).

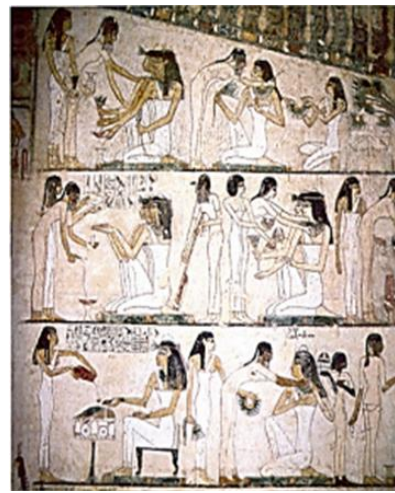
The clothes of ancient Egyptians seem to have changed little over time. The depictions of ordinary people in ancient Egyptian art indicate that ordinary working men wore a simple loin cloth resembling a kilt which left the upper torso bare (Figure 17). Women mostly wore a simple sheath dress called *kalasiris* (Figure 18). The dress had one or two shoulder straps and was ankle-length. In some depictions the upper part of the dress extends to below the chest; in other depictions the dress flows down from the shoulders (Figures 17 and 19). Often women chose to wear shawls, capes or robes over the simple sheath dress. Both the *kalasiris* and the cloak could be pleated as well (Figure 19). Clothes were mostly manufactured of linen, but *haik* (very fine muslin), wool, cotton, and silk were also used. Colourful decorations and accessories were also used to adorn these dresses. Most clothing was not dyed, even though geometric designs would be blended in with colourful thread.



**Figure 17**  
**Ancient Egyptian clothing**  
 Tomb mural  
 (15<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 18**  
**Woman wearing a kalasiris**  
 (ca. 2000 BCE)<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 19**  
**Ancient Egyptian female clothing.**  
 Tomb mural (15<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>28</sup>

It seems that women of higher social status often covered their hair with wigs (Aziz, 2010:38) and also wore a pleated shawl covering the body from the shoulders to the ankles. It seems that the shawls were semi-transparent because the outlines of the

<sup>26</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing\\_in\\_ancient\\_Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing_in_ancient_Egypt); 08/06/15.

<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing\\_in\\_ancient\\_Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing_in_ancient_Egypt); 08/06/15.

<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing\\_in\\_ancient\\_Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing_in_ancient_Egypt); 08/06/15.

body can be seen through the shawl. Under the shawl the traditional *kalasiris* is often visible (Figure 20). There is, however, no evidence that any laws existed in ancient Egypt which prescribed that women should be veiled under certain conditions (Nel, 2002:52). Ahmed (1992:32) comes to the same conclusion.



**Figure 20**  
**Egyptian women wearing wigs and shawls**  
Tomb mural  
(ca. 1450 BCE)<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3.5 Israelite and Judean Culture

Israelite and Judean culture had much in common with Syrian-Palestinian customs, especially with the so-called Canaanite culture. The history of Israel can be traced back to the early second millennium BCE when the so-called patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, roamed the area later known as “Israel” as semi-nomads. A group of their descendants became slaves in Egypt, but Moses led them from their bondage; they eventually settled in Canaan and established a kingdom with David and his son Solomon as the most successful kings (ca. 1000 - 930 BCE). Solomon is well known as the builder of the so-called First Temple in Jerusalem. Shortly after his death the united Israelite kingdom split into a northern kingdom (Israel) and a southern kingdom (Judah). Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, and Judah in 586 BCE by the Neo-Babylonians. Influential members of the social elite in Jerusalem were exiled to Babylon. In 538 BCE the first king of the Persian Achaemenid Empire allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. The so-called post-exilic period saw the birth of what later became full-fledged Judaism and Jewish culture. The lasting

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.arce.org/events/arceevents/2012/04/u535/LECTURE-The-Art-of-Interior-Design-for-the-Afterlife-The-Private-Tomb-of-Menna-on-the-West-Bank-of-Luxor>; 08/06/15.

heritage of the Jewish people is the birth of monotheism, the belief in but one God, Creator and Sustainer of all things.<sup>30</sup> In this section the emphasis falls on ancient Israelite and Judean culture. The emerging Judaism of the first centuries CE will be discussed together with the rise of early Christianity. It will be argued that both had by that time been influenced by Greek and Roman culture.

Most information about ancient Israel can be found in the Hebrew Bible. Information about clothing is too scarce and cryptic to form a complete picture of male and female clothing practices. Linen in particular was used in the manufacture of clothing, but animal skins, wool, and for the more affluent people – silk, were also used. The most common clothing item was the linen “under-garment” or “shirt-like tunic” (*ketonet*, from a root meaning, to cover) worn by both men and women. Joseph’s multi-coloured coat was called a *ketonet* (Genesis 37:3), as was the cloak of Tamar, David’s daughter (2 Samuel 13:18). Such robes were drawn up when working or running (1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29). Women’s garments were probably longer than men’s (Isaiah 47:2; Jeremiah 13:22, 26; Nahum 3:5) had sleeves (2 Samuel 13:19) and presumably the colours were brighter and also may have been of finer material. Over the *ketonet* both men (Isaiah 3:6-7) and women (Ruth 3:3) wore an “outer garment” or “mantle” (*simplah*), in essence a square linen cloth draped over the body. At night it could be used as a blanket (Exodus 22:26). Evidently there was a recognisable difference between a male and female’s *simplah* (Deuteronomy 22:5). Apparently also worn by women was a *sadin*, a linen undergarment (Isaiah 3:23, Proverbs 22:24).<sup>31</sup>

There is evidence of the wearing of a “veil” by women in the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 24:65 Rebekah used the “veil” to cover her when Isaac came out to meet her for the first time. Tamar used the “veil” as a means of concealing her face in order to trick Judah (Gen 38:1-30). In both cases the Hebrew word used is *tsha’if* “wrapper, shawl.” Song of Songs refers to the wearing of a “veil” (Song of Songs 4:1; 4:3; 6:7), there apparently understood as being a thin see-through face cover. The Hebrew word used is *tsammah* “face-veil.” In Ezekiel 13:18-21 false female prophets of Judah are warned that their “veils” (*mispachah* “scarf, head covering”) will be ripped off, an indication that they will lose their social status. In Ruth 3:15 and Isaiah 3:22 mention is made of a

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<sup>30</sup> For a brief overview of Israelite, Judean and early Jewish history, cf. Schwantes (1974:156-175).

<sup>31</sup> Valuable information of clothing practices in ancient Israel is available under the heading “Costume” in the Jewish Encyclopedia (1906), <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4699-costume>; 08/06/15 (cf. Singer 1906 in the bibliography).



woman's "veil" (*mitpachat* "mantle, wrapper"). The exact nature of and difference between the various Hebrew words is uncertain. In the case of Rebekah and Tamar the concealing of the face seems to be of importance in that specific context. There is no direct evidence that women's faces were veiled (Nel 2002:50).

The few depictions of Israelite and Judean women that exist support this conclusion. A number of female clay figurines (seemingly tambourine players) associated with an Israelite context and dated between the tenth and eighth centuries BCE show women with scarfs covering their hair. From the ancient Israelite city of Ta'anach comes a clay figurine of a tambourine player with an elaborate hair style and a cape draped over the top of her head and shoulders (Figure 21). From Megiddo come very similar depictions of two tambourine players (Figure 22). The Ta'anach figurine can be dated to the tenth century BCE and the Megiddo figurines to between 800 and 700 BCE.



**Figure 21**  
**Woman clutching tambourine**  
Ta'anach (10<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 22**  
**Women with tambourines**  
Megiddo (800 - 700 BCE)<sup>33</sup>

The Assyrian king Sennacherib depicted his conquest of the Judean city of Lachish on reliefs in a room of his palace at Nineveh (Ussishkin, 1982). In these reliefs the captive Judean women and female children are depicted with a scarf covering their hair and flowing back over their shoulders down to their ankles. They also wear ankle-length robes (Figure 23).

<sup>32</sup> <http://biblelandpictures.com/product-category/archeology/gods-deities-and-figurines/>; 13/06/15.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.lessingimages.com/viewimage.asp?i=08050252+&cr=505&cl=1>; 15/06/15.



**Figure 23**  
**Judean captives, Lachish**  
Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh  
(6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>34</sup>

With regard to ancient Israelite and Judean culture, Nel (2002:52) concludes: “The textual and pictorial evidence is not conclusive as to the real nature of the veil and its associated customs. If the illustrations referred to serve as evidence of real customs of veiling, it can be concluded that veiling did not imply the concealment of the entire face.” It can be assumed that in this context, as was the case for Assyria of the second and first millennia BCE, the Syrian-Palestinian context, El Guindi’s “class exclusivity” model (1999:14-16) can be applied, and that women of high social rank or special privilege covered at least their hair with a scarf when they appeared in public.

### 2.3.6 The Persian Empire

The Persians rose to power in the mid-sixth century BCE when Cyrus the Great founded the Achaemenid Empire and defeated the Neo-Babylonians in 538 BCE. Cyrus and his successors established a huge empire, but it was conquered by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE. The Greeks ruled over the former Persian Empire until 244 BCE. People of Persian stock then defeated the Greeks in Iran, and first the Parthian Empire (247 BCE - 224 CE) and then the Sassanid Empire (224 - 651 CE) carried the Persian heritage, albeit on a much reduced scale and with notable Greek influence in what is today known as Iran, until Islam overran the Persians in 651 CE.<sup>35</sup>

When the Achaemenid dynasty was founded in the sixth century BCE, they adopted Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian fashion into their culture but developed their own

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.bible-history.com/assyria\\_archaeology/archaeology\\_of\\_ancient\\_assyria\\_archaeological\\_discoveries.html](http://www.bible-history.com/assyria_archaeology/archaeology_of_ancient_assyria_archaeological_discoveries.html); 08/06/15.

<sup>35</sup> For an overview of Persian history, cf. Wiesehöfer (2011).

styles as well. Achaemenid kings seem to have modelled the administration of their huge empire upon the example of the Assyrian kings. Persian garments, at the beginning of the Persian Empire, were modest and did not show much difference between men's and women's garments.<sup>36</sup> The typical Persian clothing style for men was a flowing knee-length tunic over a pair of trousers, sometimes accompanied by a mantle. It is referred to as the "cavalry dress" (Figure 24). The Persian king and his noblemen are mostly depicted with ankle-length tunics and richly decorated mantles. It is referred to as the "court dress" (Figure 25).



**Figure 24**  
**Men in cavalry dress**  
Persepolis  
(6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 25**  
**Xerxes in court dress**  
Persepolis  
(6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>38</sup>

No females are depicted on Achaemenid monuments, but from depictions elsewhere in the empire it seems that women also wore a tunic, in their case ankle-length, often also accompanied by a long mantle. Of particular importance for the current field of study are depictions of queens (Figure 26), a lady on horseback (Figure 27) and a noble woman at a banquet (Figure 28), all wearing scarfs completely covering their hair. It suggests a custom for honourable females to "veil" themselves in public.

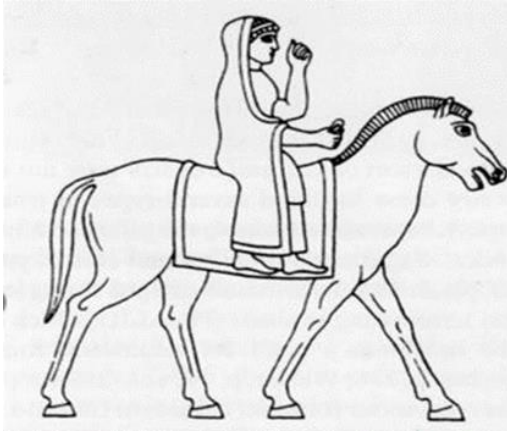
<sup>36</sup> Valuable information of clothing practices in ancient Persia is available under the heading "Clothing" in the Encyclopaedia Iranica (1985 - present), <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-index>; 14/06/15 (cf. Yarshater 1985 - present in the bibliography).

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-ii>; 15/06/15.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-ii>; 15/06/15.



**Figure 26**  
**Royal ladies with attendants**  
Pazyryk  
(6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>39</sup>



**Figure 27**  
**Lady on horseback**  
Ergili  
(6<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 28**  
**Banquet scene from "Satrap sarcophagus"**  
Sidon  
(5<sup>th</sup> century BCE)

The absence of depictions of women from official Persian monuments and remarks by ancient Greek authors "of the negative influence of women of the royal household and of life at court" (Wiesehöfer, 2011:79) led some scholars to the conclusion that Persian women led a life of seclusion, completely absent from the public eye (Brosius, 1991:81-82). However, Wiesehöfer (2011:83) claims that these stories "reflect the misogynistic tendency of some of the Greek literature of the fifth and fourth centuries, which perceived women as a threatening element to the political world of men." The Persepolis tablets sketch a completely different picture of Persian women: "All the

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-ii>; 15/06/15.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/clothing-ii>; 15/06/15.

women of the royal house... appear as positively active, enterprising and resolute. They participate in royal festivities and banquets or organize their own feasts. They travel across the country and issue instructions, they watch over their estates and manpower” (Wiesehöfer, 2011:85). Many occasions certainly required the presence of royal women, such as “campaigns, hunts, and generally the court’s seasonal moves between capitals” (Brosius, 1991:84). The researcher therefore concurs with El Guindi that her “class exclusivity” model (1999:14-16) is also applicable to the Persian Empire. Under the influence of the Greeks the situation might have been different and the social position of women less positive during the Parthian and Sassanid Empires, and El Guindi’s “gender hierarchy” model (1999:16-18) might have become more applicable.

### **2.3.7 Greece and Rome**

During the fifth and fourth centuries BCE the Greeks rose to power in the western Mediterranean geographical area. Under Alexander the Great Greece established a vast world empire after he defeated the Persians in 331 BCE. After his unexpected death in 323 BCE and various succession intrigues and battles, Seleucus established a Greek kingdom in Asia in 301 BCE, occupying most of the area of Persia and Babylonia with the Parthian Empire on the Iranian plateau as its main (Persian) rivals to the east, and the competing Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt as its main rival in the south and west. In the meantime a community on the banks of the Tiber in Italy established a centre of power that was to become the next world empire, the Roman Empire. From 262 - 133 BCE the Romans in various wars conquered the whole of the Mediterranean. In 27 BCE Octavianus was recognised as the first emperor of Rome and henceforth called Caesar Augustus. For the next 500 years the Roman Empire would dominate the Mediterranean geographical area. Constantine the Great (306 - 337 CE) became the first Roman emperor to accept Christianity, and he declared it the official religion of the Roman Empire. He also moved the capital of the empire from Rome to Byzantium, which was renamed Constantinople in his honour. In 395 CE the Roman Empire split in two. The Western Roman Empire fell in 476 CE under the onslaught of Germanic tribes. The Eastern Roman Empire, then known as the Byzantine Empire, survived until 1453 CE when it fell to the Ottoman Turks.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For an overview of Greek and Roman history, cf. Caldwell and Giles (1966:171-587).

Both males and females in ancient Greece and Rome wore an “undergarment” or “tunic” (*chiton* or *peplos* in Greek; *tunica* in Latin), a simple rectangle sewn into a tube and pinned around the shoulders (*chiton* – worn mostly by men), or a longer tube folded back at the shoulders and bound around the waist with a girdle (*peplos* – worn mostly by women). For men the *chiton/tunica* would normally be knee-length and for women ankle-length. It was manufactured of linen (especially for men doing outdoor work) or wool (especially for women) (Figure 29). Over the *chiton/peplos/tunica* both men and women could wear a “mantle” (*himation* in Greek; *palla* in Latin), a shawl of an oblong piece of material (usually wool) draped over the left shoulder, then under the right arm and folded over the left arm (Figure 30). Roman women often draped a *stola*, a rectangular segment of cloth, usually linen, around the shoulders, allowing it to drape freely in front of the wearer (Figure 31). Roman men draped a similar garment called a *toga* over their shoulders (Figure 32) (Garland 2009:134-141).



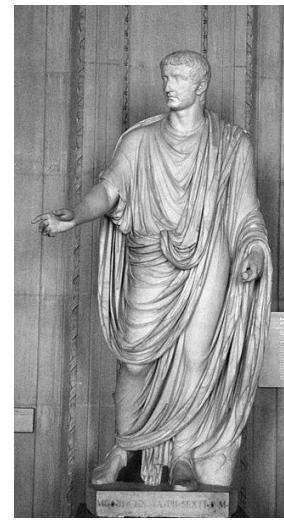
**Figure 29**  
**Woman with *peplos***  
Athens  
(4<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>42</sup>



**Figure 30**  
**Woman with *palla***  
Rome  
(1<sup>st</sup> century CE)<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 31**  
**Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus with *stola***  
Rome(1<sup>st</sup> century CE)<sup>44</sup>



**Figure 32**  
**Tiberius with *toga***  
Rome  
(1<sup>st</sup> century CE)<sup>45</sup>

Of particular interest to this study is the social position of women in Greek and Roman culture, especially in terms of women in private and public space. El Guindi (1999:16-18) argues that from the fourth century BCE onwards Greek (and eventually Roman)

<sup>42</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing\\_in\\_ancient\\_Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing_in_ancient_Greece); 15/06/15.

<sup>43</sup> <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/2b/88/9d/2b889d3ad425abd4ed1b2949d9116b6e.jpg>; 15/06/15.

<sup>44</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Stola>; 15/06/15.

<sup>45</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing\\_in\\_ancient\\_Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing_in_ancient_Rome); 15/06/15.

culture has been influenced by philosophers such as Aristotle (384 - 322 BCE) and others who, through their works, “codified social values and practices of Greek society” that became “woven into a cultural construct of gender” (El Guindi, 1999:17) that “conceptualized women not merely as *subordinate by social necessity* but also as *innately and biologically inferior* in both *mental* and *physical* capacities” (Ahmed, 1992:29; researcher’s emphasis) to men. Hence, women are “*intended* for their *subservient* position by ‘*nature*’ with *defective bodies* which render them ‘*impotent males*’ whose contribution to conception is that of matter not soul, and hence *inferior*” (Ahmed, 1992:29; researcher’s emphasis). El Guindi calls this the Hellenic model of “gender hierarchy” (1999:16).

In his essay *Coniugalia Praecepta* (“Advice to Bride and Groom”) as it appears in his *Moralia* (“Morals”) the Greek historian and essayist Plutarch (46 - 120 CE) eloquently expresses the gender hierarchy ideology of Hellenistic Greek culture. The researcher quotes paragraph 142 D in full and adds her own emphasis:

30 The women of Egypt, by inherited custom, were not allowed to wear shoes, so that they should *stay at home all day*; and most women, if you take from them gold-embroidered shoes, bracelets, anklets, purple, and pearls, *stay indoors*.

31 Theano, in putting her cloak about her, exposed her arm. Somebody exclaimed, “A lovely arm.” “But not for the public,” said she. Not only the arm of the *virtuous woman*, but her *speech* as well, ought to be *not for the public*, and she ought to be *modest* and *guarded* about saying anything in the hearing of outsiders, since it is an exposure of herself; for in her talk can be seen her feelings, character, and disposition.

32 Pheidias made the Aphrodite of the Eleans with *one foot on a tortoise*, to typify for *womankind keeping at home and keeping silence*. For a woman ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband, and she should not feel aggrieved if, like the flute-player, she makes a more impressive sound through a tongue not her own.

33 Rich men and princes by conferring honours on philosophers adorn both themselves and the philosophers; but, on the other hand, philosophers by paying court to the rich do not enhance the repute of the rich but lower their own. So is it with women also; *if they subordinate themselves to their husbands, they are commended*, but if they want to have control, they cut a sorrier figure than the subjects of their control. And *control ought to be exercised by the man over the woman*, not as the owner has control over a piece of property, but, as the soul colonists the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her through goodwill. As, therefore, it is possible to exercise care over the body without being a slave to its pleasures and desires, so *it is possible to govern a wife, and at the same time to delight and gratify her*.<sup>46</sup>

It is clear that in Plutarch’s view women should stay indoors, keep silent in front of strangers, subordinate themselves to their husbands, and allow their husbands to

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<sup>46</sup> The translation is available online at [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Coniugalia\\_praecepta\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Coniugalia_praecepta*.html); 15/06/06. It is the online version of the English translation originally published in Volume II of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1928:323, 325 (cf. Babbit 1928 in the bibliography).

exercise control over them. Yet Plutarch does not regard married women as slaves. He argues that it is possible to govern a wife and yet at the same time to delight and gratify her. Papanek (1973:294) argues for two sources of female seclusion: the segregation of living spaces from outsiders, and the covering of the face and body with a veil, signifying that the veil is a “logical supplement” to the use of enclosed living spaces.

Llewellyn-Jones (2007:251) indicates that in ancient Greek culture “there is clearly a subconscious connection between the protective elements that help to create a civilised life: housing and clothing.” Plutarch’s metaphor of the “house as tortoise” illustrates “the notion of the shared connection between the covering created by clothes and the covering created by a house: the tortoise’s shell, he suggests, is at one and the same time her house and her dress” (Llewellyn-Jones, 2007:251). A woman’s clothing became an extension of her living space. In this context the popularity of the *tegidion* as part of female apparel during the fourth to the first centuries BCE becomes significant. *Tegidion* is a diminutive of the noun *tegus* “roof” – thus a “little roof.” In many depictions of Greek women of the period they wore a headdress that is in essence “a face-veil composed by cutting eye-holes into a single rectangular cloth, ...it is bound around the head... and is often fastened over the forehead with (what appears to be) a brooch. Unfortunately it is rarely shown in the position for which it was designed (and no doubt worn in daily life), that is, hanging down over the face like the style of the Islamic veil known as the *niqab*” (Llewellyn-Jones, 2007:252, see the illustrations by Llewellyn-Jones (2007:253). The *tegidion* “protects” the woman as a roof protects a house. It can be quickly drawn down to conceal the face should a stranger suddenly enter the woman’s private quarters. Llewellyn-Jones also argues that the custom of creating two courtyards for Greek houses, the “man’s quarters” and the “woman’s quarters” coincide with the popularity of the *tegidion* in the Greek world, thus confirming the close relationship between housing and clothing (Llewellyn-Jones, 2007:255-256).

Apart from the *tegidion* women are also depicted with shawls covering their heads and faces with only the eyes showing. There are many such depictions, but the researcher provides only two examples (Figures 33 and 34).





**Figure 33**  
**Fully veiled woman**  
Tanagra, Boeotia  
(400 - 350 BCE)<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 34**  
**Fully veiled dancer**  
Hellenistic Greece  
(3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE)<sup>48</sup>

El Guindi (1999:17) argues that the Greek ideology of gender hierarchy “took root in Christianity as it developed into the Byzantine empire;” “penetrated medieval Arabic, Muslim and Jewish thought” and influenced “Western thought and society” as well. However, Llewellyn-Jones (2007:257) emphasises the irony of the concept of veiling in Greek and Roman culture. On the one hand it emphasises the “gender-hierarchy” and men’s control over women. On the other hand the veil becomes a vehicle for women to enter public space unrecognised but also unhindered. The very symbol that “undoubtedly had the effect of rendering a woman a ‘non-person’ beneath layers of clothes” can be interpreted as “another device to control the autonomy of Hellenistic women,” in reality “could actually have allowed women more freedom to participate in public society.” Modern researchers should carefully consider the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional symbolic meanings of the custom of “veiling”.

### 2.3.8 Emerging Judaism and early Christianity

The emergence of Judaism and the early Christian Church are both fields of study of such a vast scope that the present study can do no more than try to elucidate some aspects of female dressing practices in the two monotheistic religious communities. It should be noted that both Judaism and early Christianity have their roots in the pre-

<sup>47</sup> [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veiled\\_dancer\\_Louvre\\_MNB495.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veiled_dancer_Louvre_MNB495.jpg); 15/06/15.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.pinterest.com/PetrosVouris/the-greek-veil/>; 15/06/15.

exilic, exilic and post-exilic experiences of Israel/Judah and the Persian province of Yehud. In spite of shared beginnings, both developed their own traditions in the first centuries CE, traditions that are still in practice in Jewish and Christian communities to this day. Both religious traditions developed during the time when Hellenistic culture was predominant all over the ancient Mediterranean geographical area and both have naturally been influenced by it (El Guindi, 1999:17).

Jeremias (1969:359-360) argues that the social position of Jewish women in the first century CE did not differ substantially from those of other “Eastern women.” Like other women of the Roman Empire women took “no part in public life... When the Jewess of Jerusalem left her house, her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet with ribbons and knots, so that her features could not be recognized... Any woman who went out without this headdress, i.e., without her face being hidden, committed such an offence against good taste that her husband had the right – and indeed the duty – to put her away from him, and was under no obligation to pay the sum of money to which, on divorce, the wife had a right by virtue of the marriage contract.”

Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 50 CE) regarded the female head covering as a *symbol* of modesty. When a woman is accused of adultery but the evidence against her is inconclusive, a priest should do the following:

And the priest shall take the barley and offer it to the woman, and shall *take away from her the headdress on her head*, that she may be *judged with her head bare*, and *deprived of the symbol of modesty*, which all those women are accustomed to wear who are *completely blameless*; and there shall not be any oil used, nor any frankincense, as in the case of other sacrifices, because the sacrifice now offered is to be accomplished on no joyful occasion, but on one which is very grievous (Philo Judaeus, *The Special Laws III*, 56).<sup>49</sup>

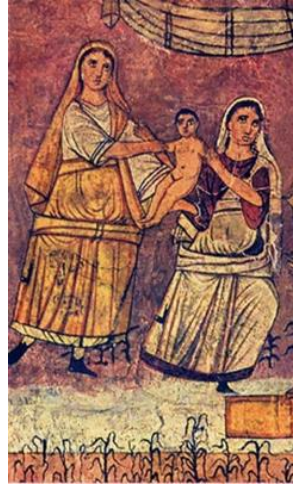
Depictions of Jews from the first centuries CE are extremely rare due to the prohibition in the Hebrew Bible against the making of images. An exception is the frescos on the walls of an ancient Jewish synagogue in Dura Europos, Syria (middle of the third century CE). Men are depicted bare-headed, as in the scene of Samuel anointing David (Figure 35); women have head coverings, as in the scene depicting the infant Moses' rescue (Figure 36).

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/yonge/book29.html>; 16/06/15.



**Figure 35**  
**Samuel anointing David**  
Dura Europos  
(3<sup>rd</sup> century CE)<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 36**  
**Moses' rescue**  
Dura Europos  
(3<sup>rd</sup> century CE)<sup>51</sup>

At the heart of Jewish customs regarding dress and general conduct lies the principle of *tzniut*, “modesty, privacy, humility.” It also applies to Jewish dress code. A Jewish male should not dress conspicuously. For male and female it means covering the elbows and knees. For a female it implies wearing blouses with sleeves below the elbow, collars covering the collarbone, and skirts that cover the knees. Jewish law requires a married woman to cover her hair – a precept that, according to the Talmud (Ketubot 72a), comes from Moses (Figure 37). Jewish men, married or not, are traditionally required to cover their heads with a “skull cap” (Hebrew *kippah*; Yiddish *yarmulke*) (Figure 38).



**Figure 37**  
**Jewish women with head coverings**



**Figure 38**  
**Jewish male with kippah**  
Contemporary<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.studyblue.com/notes/n/late-antiquity/deck/6245076>; 15/06/15.

<sup>51</sup> <http://study.com/academy/lesson/who-was-moses-story-history-quiz.html>; 15/06/15.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.momsteam.com/religious-headwear-is-permanent-rules-exemption-the-answer>; 15/06/15.

Contemporary<sup>52</sup>

A well-known passage from the New Testament suggests that also in **early Christianity** it was regarded improper for a woman to appear in public, and especially to participate in public religious practices, with an uncovered head. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-6 Paul urges Christian women not to pray or prophesy “without a covering on her head.” To do so would be a shameful act. The exact cultural context of this precept is not known, but it is clear that Paul regards a properly “covered” woman in public as the appropriate conduct for honourable Christian women. In other New Testament contexts women are urged to dress modestly. In 1 Timothy. 2:9-10 Christian women are urged: “*I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*” Similarly, in 1 Peter 3:3-4 Christian women are urged: “*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.*”

El Guindi (1999:19) argues that from these general precepts urging Christians to be modest and humble, there developed in the early church, and especially in the Byzantine society, an ideology towards female clothing practices and general conduct that can best be described as “seclusion.” She indicates that this is significant in the study of female clothing practices “because of historical encounter and contact between the Byzantines and the Persians in the region that is now the Middle East, establishing traditions that flowed into what became Islamic civilization, creating continuities and discontinuities” (El Guindi, 1999:19). There developed in early Christianity “the practice of permanent sexual renunciation – continence, celibacy, life-long virginity – that developed among men and women in Christian circles in the period from a little before the missionary journeys of Saint Paul, in the 40s and 50s AD, to a little after the death of St Augustine” (i.e. 490 CE) (El Guindi, 1999:19).

The “historical encounter and contact between the Byzantines and the Persians” is nowhere better illustrated than in the tractate of the Church father Tertullian of Cartage

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<sup>52</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzniut6>; 15/06/15.

(155 - 240 CE) “On the Veiling of Virgins.”<sup>54</sup> It clearly reflects the ideal of early Christianity to be chaste, pure, and humble. Tertullian passionately urges women to veil themselves. The following quote comes from Chapter XVI of the tractate, with the researcher’s emphasis:

I pray you, be you mother, or sister, or virgin-daughter – let me address you according to the names proper to your years – *veil your head*: if a mother, for your sons’ sakes; if a sister, for your brothers’ sakes; if a daughter for your fathers’ sakes. *All ages are periled in your person*. Put on the *panoply of modesty*; surround yourself with the stockade of *bashfulness*; rear a *rampart for your sex*, which must neither allow your own eyes egress nor ingress to other people’s. Wear the full garb of woman, to preserve the standing of *virgin*. Belie somewhat of your inward consciousness, in order to exhibit the truth to God alone. And yet you do not belie yourself in appearing as a bride. For wedded you are to Christ: to Him you have surrendered your flesh; to Him you have espoused your maturity.

In this context Tertullian gives the following advice to married women in Chapter XVII, again with the researcher’s emphasis:

The region of the *veil* is co-extensive with the *space covered by the hair when unbound*; in order *that the necks too may be encircled*. For it is they which must be subjected, for the sake of which “power” ought to be “had on the head:” *the veil is their yoke*. ***Arabia’s heathen females will be your judges, who cover not only the head, but the face also, so entirely, that they are content, with one eye free, to enjoy rather half the light than to prostitute the entire face.*** A female would rather see than be seen.

A scene carved from the Semitic city of Palmyra in Syria dated to ca. 32 CE aptly illustrates what Tertullian had in mind when he referred to “Arabia’s heathen females... who cover not only the head, but the face also... with one eye free.” Three women are depicted with their entire bodies covered in a voluminous shawl (Figure 39).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The translation of the Latin document is available online at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/terullian28.html>; 16/06/15.

<sup>55</sup> The ancient city of Palmyra existed from as early as the beginning of the second millennium BCE and had its heydays in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. At that stage its population consisted of a mix of people from Semitic stock – Aramaeans, Arabs and a Jewish minority (cf. “Site of Palmyra” on <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/23>; accessed 17/06/15).



**Figure 39**  
**Women from Palmyra**  
Palmyra, Syria  
(1<sup>st</sup> century CE)

## 2.4 Clothing in the foundation documents of the three Book Religions

The researcher concludes her overview of female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies with the observation that clothes play an important role in the foundation literature of the three so-called “Religions of the Book” (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).<sup>56</sup> For adherents of the “Religions of the Book” it can be argued that the wearing of the *hijab*<sup>57</sup> dates back to the period when mankind was created. After the creation of Adam and Eve they broke the divine law and then *“the eyes of them both were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together, and made coverings for themselves”* (Genesis 3:7).<sup>58</sup> Thereafter the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife in order to clothe them and to cover their nakedness (Genesis 3:21). Similarly, in Islamic tradition the Qur’ān illustrates the point: When Adam (A.S.) and his wife Hawwa (R.A.) tasted of the tree and disobeyed Allah (S.W.T.) *“their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden to cover their bodies”* (Surah 7:22; cf. Aziz, 2010:31).

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<sup>56</sup> With the term “foundation literature” the researcher refers to the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible (the Old and New Testament) and the Qur’ān. In all three monotheistic faiths a “book” serves as source for all religious beliefs and practices, hence Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are referred to as the three “Book Religions.” In fact, in the Qur’an adherents of the three so-called “Abrahamic” faiths are called “the People of the Book” (in Arabic أهل الكتاب ‘Ahl al-Kitāb; cf. for instance Surah 3:110, 113, 199).

<sup>57</sup> For the moment *hijab* is used as a broad term for “covering the natural contours of the body.”

<sup>58</sup> All quotes from the Bible in this study come from the New International Version of the Holy Bible © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society.

In all three Religions of the Book (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) the tradition prevails that people have taken to covering their bodies with clothes to cover shamefulness and to express modesty. The Christian Bible further extends the covering of a woman's head as a sign of honouring women: "*But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head – it is just as though her head were shaved*" (1 Corinthians 11:5). In 1 Corinthians 11:13-15 we read: "<sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, <sup>15</sup> but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair has been given her as a covering."

Furthermore, the Qur'ān commands Muslims, male or female, to cover up in a modest way: "*Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest*" (Surah 24:30). In Surah 24:30-31, we find an elaborate explanation that enforces the way females should dress, that they should drop their veils down enough to cover their chests: "*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 veil over their breasts and not display their beauty except to their husband, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their (Muslim) women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments*" (Qur'ān 24:31).

In another verse, Prophet Muḥammad's (ﷺ) wives are clearly told to wear garments upon leaving the household just to differentiate themselves from the rest of the women and to avoid getting into trouble or being harassed. Surah 33:59 reads: "*Those who harass believing men and believing women undeservedly, bear (on themselves) a calumny and a grievous sin. O Prophet! Enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of true believers that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient, that they may be distinguished and not be harassed*" (Qur'ān 33:58-59).

The foundation literature from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim contexts reveals that the purpose of clothing is not only for covering nakedness, as protection against weather conditions, or simply because it is practical. On the contrary, clothing has cultural implications. It serves as a visible symbol of one's status in society. For all three Book Religions clothing is closely connected to the core social value of honour with the accompanying values of modesty, humility, respect, and privacy as important pillars for upholding an individual's honour.

It should be noted that there are subtle differences in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an's version of the origin of human beings and their clothing. In the Hebrew Bible, especially as the incident has been interpreted in early Christianity, the female carries the blame for the condemnation of humankind. The male "sees her as having led him to fall and sin" (El Guindi, 1999:71). In the Qur'an "both members of the primordial pair are equally responsible" (El Guindi, 1999:71). The Qur'an maintains that the "primordial humans had been created and formed as a pair. It is the simultaneous creation of both sexes" (El Guindi, 1999:73). It leads El Guindi (1999:74) to the following important conclusion: "In the sacred Islamic imagination there is no shame in sexuality and no gender primacy communicated in the story of creation." This will become important in the next two chapters where the researcher investigates Islam's perceptions on female clothing practices and modern perceptions of and misconceptions about Muslim female clothing practices. The next two chapters should be read with the following in mind: For Islam clothing "is a symbol of interdependence between the sexes, gender mutuality, and a cultural notion of 'respect' and privacy" (El Guindi, 1999:76).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter the researcher explored clothing practices in various ancient Mediterranean societies. The aim of the chapter was to focus upon female dressing practice(s) in these civilisations. Studying these ancient female clothing practices highlighted the cultural context of the ancient Middle Eastern societies from which Islam and the religion's associated dress code emanated. The broad overview of ancient Mediterranean societies brings the researcher to a number of important conclusions:



First, the study highlighted the fact that clothing might have originated in human society for practical reasons such as covering nakedness or protection against cold, but that clothing soon acquired a more important value. It became laden with symbolic value. It indicated one's role and status and should especially be evaluated against the ancient Mediterranean core values of honour and shame (Neyrey, 1998a:22). In these societies a woman's honour is "maintained as a veil of privacy and of personal and sexual integrity" (Plevnik, 1998:107).

Second, the research clearly indicated that one should guard against an over-simplified interpretation of what female clothing practices actually symbolise in different social contexts. Following El Guindi (1999:13-22) the researcher came to the conclusion that the practice of "veiling" in ancient Mediterranean societies indeed had different "meanings" over time and might have more than one meaning at the same time. The ideological model of Sumerian gender complementarity, the Assyrian/Persian model of class exclusivity, the Hellenic model of gender hierarchy, the Egyptian model of gender equality, and the Byzantine model of seclusion all played a role in ancient Mediterranean societies. Contrary to modern perceptions, one single model cannot "explain" the prevalence of veiling in ancient Mediterranean societies nor its manifestation in contemporary Islam. As Llewellyn-Jones (2007:257) clearly indicated there might even be more than one meaning attached to the symbol of "veiling" within the same model. What was perceived in the Hellenistic culture's perception of veiling as a gender hierarchy emphasising men's control over women, at the same time for women became a vehicle to enter public space unrecognised but also unhindered. The researcher reiterates her remark that modern researchers should carefully consider the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional symbolic meanings of the custom of "veiling."

Third, the research showed that, contrary to popular opinion, Persia and Islam did not "invent" the veil. Veiling has a long history in the ancient Near East as well as in Mediterranean cultures, and predates Islam by several centuries. Assyrian kings already introduced the seclusion of women in the royal harem and the veil. Beyond the Near East, the practice of living veiled, isolated lives appeared in classical Greece, in Persia, and in the Byzantine Christian world. The researcher concurs with Adawood (2008:18-19) that the most important deduction to be made regarding female apparel in ancient Mediterranean societies is that modesty is a universal practice. All the

archaeological evidence referred to in this chapter, the foundation documents of the three Book Religions, namely the Hebrew Bible, the Christian New Testament, and the Holy Qur'ān are unanimous in their assertion that the symbolic value of clothing in general, and female apparel in particular, is closely associated with the core social values of honour and shame and the associative values of humility, modesty, respect, and privacy. Ancient Mediterranean societies might have been patriarchal, they might even offend the sensitivities of modern feminist scholars of women's studies (El Guindi, 1999:10-12), but female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies were not intended to degrade women. On the contrary, these practices have many nuances and primarily symbolise women's honour and dignity, albeit in their own cultural context.<sup>59</sup>

This chapter indicated that the practice of veiling is not something that should be “attacked, ignored, dismissed, transcended, trivialized or defended” (El Guindi, 1999:xi). It should rather be studied as “a rich and nuanced phenomenon” that “occupies center stage as symbol of both identity and resistance” (El Guindi, 1999:xii). This is what is to be explored in the following three chapters.

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<sup>59</sup> For a feminist reading of gender and the representations of the male and female body in ancient Mesopotamia cf. Bahrani (2001). She focuses on representations of female nudity and concludes that “the Mesopotamian imagery confirms a common and simplistic binary divide where woman is the sign of gender – the sexualised other – while man transcends his sex to represent humanity” (Bahrani 2001:68). Seibert (1974) reads ancient Near Eastern texts and images through the lens of current ideology on the role of women in society and concludes: “The pages of this book have frequently had to report that the woman had no rights equal to those enjoyed by men. She was thought of lesser value, her position was weaker, in the family as well as in society” (Seibert 1974:52).

## CHAPTER 3

# FEMALE CLOTHING PRACTICES ACCORDING TO ISLAMIC TRADITION

### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher traced practices regarding female dress code through space and time. In terms of space, a large geographical area has been covered, namely the entire area that can be called the ancient Mediterranean. In terms of time, a long time span has been covered, namely from roughly 3500 BCE to the advent of Islam in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE. Female dress codes in various civilisation have been addressed, namely ancient Mesopotamia (Sumer, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia), Syria-Palestine, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Israel-Judean female clothing practices as well as clothing practices in emerging Judaism and early Christianity have been discussed as well. The researcher concluded that no single ideological model can explain the variety of reasons why women of stature are often depicted in texts and images as being “veiled.” In all these societies notions of honour and shame as core values in the ancient Mediterranean as well as the supporting values of humility, modesty, respect, and privacy undoubtedly played a role in the perceptions and practices of male and female dress codes.

In this chapter the focus moves to female clothing practices in Islamic tradition. The researcher will provide a brief background regarding the early history of Islam and will indicate what constitutes “Islamic tradition.” She will elaborate upon references to clothing in general and female clothing practices in particular in the Qur’ān and its exposition in the Ḥadīth and in various Tafsīr. Different perspectives on clothing practices according to the views of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the consensus of these schools pertaining to the *hijab* will then be discussed. Finally, this chapter will provide an interpretation of the clothing practices in Islam. In the final analysis the chapter answers a single question: What, according to Islamic tradition, constitutes the requirements for an acceptable female dress code?

### 3.2 Islam: A brief historical overview<sup>60</sup>

Islam was established in the North Arabian kingdom of *Al-Hijāz* on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. The century before the emergence of Islam is known in the Muslim world as the *jāhiliyah* period, literally the “time of ignorance” or the “time of barbarism” because the Arabs had “no dispensation, no inspired prophet, no revealed book” (Hitti, 1970:87). The term appears in the Qur’ān in Surah 3:148; 5:55; 33:33; 48:26 to refer to Arabia’s pre-Islamic, pre-monotheistic period.

Muslims regard Islam as the last and final message from Allah (God) to the Prophet Muḥammad ibn Abdullah (ﷺ).<sup>61</sup> Muḥammad (ﷺ) “was the last and greatest of the Apostles of God, sent as the Seal of Prophecy to bring the final revelation of God’s word to mankind” (Lewis, 1970:47). It should be noted that the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) never regarded himself as the founder of a “new” religion, but rather as a religious reformer. Esposito (1998:12) states:

Muḥammad maintained that he did not bring a new message from a new God but called people back to the one, true God and to a way of life that most of his contemporaries had forgotten or deviated from. Worship of Allah was not the evolutionary emergence of monotheism from polytheism but a return to a forgotten past, to the faith of the first monotheist, Abraham.

Muḥammad (ﷺ) called this “faith of the first monotheist” *Islam*, i.e. “submission” to the will of Allah (Hamidullah 1957:9).<sup>62</sup> The term occurs in Surah 5:5; 6:125; 49:14. Hitti (1970:129) remarks that the “submission of Abraham and his son in the supreme test, the attempted sacrifice by the father, expressed in the verb *aslamā* (sūr. 37:103), was evidently the act that provided Muḥammad (ﷺ) with the name for the new faith.”

The Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was born in 569-570 CE as a member of the *Banū Hāshim* clan of the Quraysh tribe – an important merchant tribe that controlled Mecca and its *Ka’ba* shrine.<sup>63</sup> His father, ‘Abdullāh, died before the baby’s birth and his

<sup>60</sup> The researcher by no means intends to provide any detailed discussion of the history of Islam. She takes into account that her study focuses upon ancient Mediterranean cultural issues and that readers might not be familiar with Islam and its institutions. Hence sections 3.2 and 3.3 should be seen as broad and brief introductions to Islam’s early history and religious institutions and traditions. It serves as background for the discussion of female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition.

<sup>61</sup> In Arabic the Prophet’s (ﷺ) full name is أبو القاسم محمد ابن عبد الله ابن عبد المطلب ابن هاشم ‘Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim.”

<sup>62</sup> In Arabic الإسلام *al-’Islām* “the submission.” The noun (actually an infinitive used nominally) is related to the Semitic root سلم which has the connotations of “wholeness, safeness, peace.” For Muslims the word indicates the total and voluntary submission to the will of Allah. An adherent of الإسلام is called a مسلم *Muslim*, the active participle of the same verbal root, i.e. someone who voluntarily submits to the will of Allah.

<sup>63</sup> In Arabic الكعبة *al-Ka’bah*, “the Cube.”

mother, Āminah when he was about six years old. He was raised first by his grandfather, ‘Abd-al-Muṭṭalib, and upon his death by his paternal uncle, Abū Ṭālib (Hitti, 1970:111). From a young age Muḥammad (ﷺ) was involved in Mecca’s well-developed and thriving caravan trade. At the age of about 25 he was employed by a wealthy widow, Khadījah, as a steward for her trade caravans. He subsequently married her. The couple had five children. Three daughters survived beyond infancy. Two were married to one of the Prophet’s (ﷺ) earliest followers, ‘Uthmān, who would become the third Caliph after Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) death. The third daughter, the well-known Fāṭimah, married ‘Alī, who was to become the fourth Caliph after Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) death (Esposito, 1998:6).

Muḥammad (ﷺ) was often noticed where he secluded himself in a cave (*ghār*) on a hill outside Mecca called *Hirā’*. During one of these periods towards the end of the month of Ramadan in August of 610 CE when Muḥammad (ﷺ) was about forty years old, he experienced his first revelation (*waḥy*) when the archangel Gabriel revealed to him the words of Surah 96:1-5 (Hitti, 1970:112; Esposito, 1998:6), accepted as “the first direct Revelation to the holy Prophet” (Yusuf Ali, 1967:1760):

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (١) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (٢) اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ (٣) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (٤) عَلَّمَ  
 الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (٥)<sup>64</sup>

(1) Proclaim in the Name of your Lord who created, (2) He created man from a clot of blood. (3) Proclaim! And your Lord is most generous – (4) He who taught by the pen, (5) taught man what he knew not.

The hill is known as the *Jabal an-Nur* (the mountain of light) and the night of the first revelation as the *laylat al-qadr* (the night of power) (Hamidullah, 1957:7). That was the beginning of Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) public office as a prophet in Mecca. Among the first converts to his message of absolute monotheism was his wife Khadījah and his cousin ‘Alī, later to become the fourth Caliph (Lewis, 1970:39).

After the initial revelation a period of about three years passed during which the Prophet (ﷺ) devoted himself to prayer and spiritual enrichment. He also had to endure the scorn of some of his fellow tribesmen who heard about the revelation he received in *Ghār Hirā’*. As revelations to Muḥammad (ﷺ) returned and increased and he turned towards more aggressive proclamation of his monotheistic message, so

<sup>64</sup> The Arabic text of the Qur’ān used throughout this study is available online at <http://tanzil.net>; 02/07/2015.

opposition against him and his followers grew. Some followers of the Prophet (ﷺ) moved to Abyssinia in 615 CE. Muḥammad (ﷺ) fearlessly continued his preaching in Mecca, but at the same time prepared for him and his followers to leave the city as opposition against his teaching and persecution of his followers increased (Hamidullah, 1957:8-9).

During the three years before he left Mecca three important incidents occurred in the Prophet's (ﷺ) life. First his beloved wife Khadījah died, then his uncle, protector, and leader of the Banū Hāshim, Abū Ṭālib, also died. In this period also falls “the dramatic *isrā'*, that nocturnal journey in which the Prophet (ﷺ) is said to have been instantly transported from al Ka'bah to Jerusalem preliminary to his ascent (*mi'rāj*) to the seventh heaven” (Hitti, 1970:114). Around 620 CE some tribes from Yathrib (al-Madīnah) met the Prophet (ﷺ) and showed interest in his message. In 622 CE a delegation from Yathrib invited him to relocate to their city. Preceded first by about two hundred of his followers, the Prophet (ﷺ) finally arrived in al-Madīnah on 24 September 622 CE – the official birth date of Islam (Hitti, 1970:116). The *hijrah* “migration” introduced a new era in Muḥammad's (ﷺ) prophetic activity. He became leader of a community which he could govern according to the principles he initially preached in Mecca (Lewis, 1970:41).

Enmity between the Prophet's (ﷺ) followers in al-Madīnah and his kinsmen in Mecca continued to exist. In March 624 CE / 2 A.H. three hundred Muslims under Muḥammad's (ﷺ) leadership attacked a Meccan caravan at Badr. In the spring of 627 / 5 A.H. a Meccan army besieged al-Madīnah, but soon had to withdraw. In the spring of 628 / 6 A.H. Muḥammad (ﷺ) led an army against Mecca. The initially hostile expedition soon became a peaceful pilgrimage. Negotiations ensued and the Muslims were granted the right of pilgrimage to the Ka'bah once a year and to stay in Mecca for three days. After more tension between the two cities Mecca was finally subdued in January 630 CE / 8 A.H. The mission of the Prophet (ﷺ) was now virtually fulfilled. Little is known about his activities in the final years of his life. After a short illness he died on 8 June 632 CE / 10 A.H. (Lewis, 1970:45-47).

Upon the death of Muḥammad (ﷺ) the Near and Middle East were divided between the Christian Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Persian Empire. Within the next century the so-called “wars of conquest” led to the demise of these empires and the

establishment of a new empire. Hitti (1970:121) states: “From al-Madīnah the Islamic theocracy spread all over Arabia and later encompassed the larger part of Western Asia and North Africa.”

There was no tradition of hereditary leadership among the Arabian tribes at the time of Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) death. Hence the question of who should be Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) successor led to a crisis that was resolved by three of Muhammed’s oldest friends and closest companions, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and Abū ‘Ubaida. They appointed Abū Bakr “as sole successor of the Prophet” (Lewis, 1970:51). Abū Bakr was given the title of *Khalīfa* “deputy, successor” of the Prophet (ﷺ). It is rendered as “Caliph” in English. Abū Bakr’s election “marks the inauguration of the great historic institution of the Caliphate” (Lewis, 1970:51).

With Abū Bakr’s reign in 632 CE / 10 A.H. commenced the period of the four “Orthodox, Righteous, Rightly Guided” Caliphs (*ar-Rāshidūn*).<sup>65</sup> The period of their reign is known as the period of *aṣ-ṣaḥābah* (literally, the companions)<sup>66</sup> when Islam was led and influenced by people who knew the Prophet (ﷺ) personally and were his friends and family. The four *ar-Rāshidūn* lead the fledgling Islamic movement from 632-661 / 10-40 A.H. as follows: Abū Bakr (632-634 / 10-12 A.H.); ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (634-644 / 12-23 A.H.); Uthmān (644-656 / 23-36 A.H.); ‘Alī (656-661 / 36-41 A.H.). The period saw the writing down and finalisation of the Qur’ān, the growth of Islamic tradition, and the spread of Islam through the entire Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Iraq, Persia, and North Africa.<sup>67</sup>

Some historical detail of the period is of importance for the present study. After the Prophet’s (ﷺ) death tension arose between different groups of the early Islamic movement regarding who should be his legitimate successor. The *muhājirūn* (emigrants) who mainly belonged to the tribe of the Prophet (ﷺ) and emigrated with him from Mecca to al-Madīnah argued that it should be one of their party. The Madīnese *anṣār* (supporters) argued that they supported and protected the Prophet (ﷺ) in his time of need and that one of their group should succeed him. The two groups later combined their efforts and became known as the *Ṣaḥābah* (the

<sup>65</sup> In Arabic الخلفاء الراشدون *al-Khulafā’u ar-Rāshidūn* “the Rightly Guided Caliphs.”

<sup>66</sup> In Arabic الصحابة *aṣ-ṣaḥābah* “the Companions.”

<sup>67</sup> For the purpose of this study the historical detail is not important. Cf. Hitti, 1970:139-186 for a detailed discussion.

companions) of the Prophet (ﷺ) and through the intervention of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and Abū 'Ubaida and their appointment of Abū Bakr as the first Caliph it became the norm that the Caliph should be appointed from this group. Adherents of this group came to be known as the *Sunni* (traditionalists, orthodox).

Not everyone agreed. The so-called *aṣḥāb an-naṣṣ w-at-ta'yīn* (literally, the owners of the designation and the appointment, also called the legitimists) argued “that Allah and Muḥammad (ﷺ) could not have left the community of believers to the chances and whims of an electorate, and therefore must have made clear provision for its leadership by designating some particular person to succeed Muḥammad (ﷺ). 'Alī, the paternal cousin of the Prophet (ﷺ), the husband of his only surviving daughter... was the one thus designated and the only legitimate successor” (Hitti, 1970:140). This led to a schism in the Muslim community that is prevalent to this day.<sup>68</sup> The researcher's interpretation of female clothing practices in Islamic tradition in the following sections of this chapter will reflect the *Sunni* point of view.

A final group with a claim to leadership of Islam was “the aristocracy of Quraysh, the Umayyads, who held the reins of authority, power, and wealth in the pre-Islamic days (but who were the last to profess Islam) and who later asserted their right to successorship” (Hitti, 1970:140).

When the third of the *ar-Rāshidūn* (Uthman) was murdered in 656 CE these underlying tensions in the Muslim community reached breaking point. 'Alī was proclaimed Caliph in the Prophet's (ﷺ) mosque in al-Madīnah, but was opposed by two members of the Maccan party, Ṭalḥah and al-Zubayr. With support from followers in al-Ḥijāz and al-'Irāq they refused to recognise 'Alī as legitimate leader. The uprising was defeated outside al-Baṣrah in December 656 CE / 36 A.H. The new Caliph moved his capital from al-Madīnah to al-Kūfah in present-day Iraq. The governor of Syria, a kinsman of the deposed Caliph Uthman, Mu'āwiyah ibn-Abī-Sufyān, set out to revenge Uthman's murder. The Syrian and Iraqi armies finally met on the plain of Ṣiffīn on 28 July 657 / 37 A.H. When 'Alī's forces were on the point of victory, Mu'āwiyah through a ruse

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<sup>68</sup> Literature on the different schools of thought in Islam is vast. For a comprehensive discussion of divisions in the early Islamic community, cf. Watt (1973). For a brief overview of different Muslim groups, cf. Nigosian (2004:44-64).



enforced arbitration between him and 'Alī. 'Alī lost face and in the end was murdered on 24 January 661 CE / 41 A.H.

Mu'āwiyah the Umayyad founded a dynasty, the so-called Umayyad caliphate with its capital at Damascus (661-750 CE / 41-132 A.H.). The dynasty was defeated by the 'Abbāsīd caliphate with its capital at Baghdād (750-1258 CE / 132-656 A.H.). The so-called Fāṭimid caliphate ruled in Egypt from 909-1171 CE / 296-566 A.H. Another Umayyad caliphate ruled from Cordova in Spain from 929-1031 CE / 317-422 A.H. The last Islamic caliphate was non-Arab, that of the Ottoman Turks in Constantinople (1517-1924 / 923-1342 A.H.) (Hitti, 1970:179-184; Lewis, 1970:64-130).

The following quote from Hamidullah (1957:16) aptly summarises the Prophet (ﷺ) and Islam's contribution to the world:

He bequeathed to posterity, a religion of pure monotheism; he created a well-disciplined State out of existent chaos and gave peace in place of the war of everybody against everybody else; he established a harmonious equilibrium between the spiritual and the temporal, between the mosque and the citadel; he left a new system of law, which dispensed impartial justice, in which the head of State was as much subject to it as any commoner, and in which religious tolerance was so great that non-Muslim inhabitants of Muslim countries enjoyed complete juridical, judicial and cultural autonomy.

### 3.3 Islam: Sources, beliefs, obligations, and practices

#### 3.3.1 Introductory remarks

In the following sections the researcher will turn to female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition. In this section it becomes important to define that tradition and answer the questions: What exactly is meant by Islamic tradition and what are the sources for that tradition? It is a vast subject and cannot be addressed fully in this study? What will be discussed briefly is the core beliefs of *Sunni* Muslim theology. Nigosian (2004:45) claims that “the term Sunni indicates the traditional way of the consolidated majority of the Islamic community as opposed to the Shi'i (partisan) dissenters.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sunni is derived from the Arabic noun سنة *sunnah* “well-trodden path, custom, practice.” The noun refers in the first place to the example that “the prophet Muḥammad laid down either by word, deed, or tacit approval” (Nigosian, 2004:45) as it is recorded in the tradition (*hadith*). Adherents of this example are known as أهل السنة والجماعة “people of the tradition (of Muḥammad) and the consensus (of the *Ummah*).” The *Ummah* (Arabic أمة) refers to the broader Muslim community.

### 3.3.2 Sources

Probably the best starting point in the discussion of Islamic tradition is to elucidate the **sources** that are used to define this tradition. These sources are fourfold, the first two are primary sources and the last two secondary. The **primary sources** are the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna* (practice) of the Prophet (ﷺ) as it finds expression in the *Ḥadīth* literature. The **secondary sources** are *Ijmā'* (consensus) and *Qiyās* (deductive analogy) (Ahmed, 2005:18).

Prime position belongs to the **Qur'ān**,<sup>70</sup> for Muslims the “eternal, uncreated, literal word of God sent down from heaven, revealed one final time to the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) as a guide for humankind (2:185)” through the agency of the archangel Gabriel (Hamidullah, 1957:17). It was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) gradually over a period of roughly 23 years, from the initial revelation in August of 610 CE until his death in 632 CE / 11 A.H.

The Qur'ān consists of 114 *Surahs* “chapters,”<sup>71</sup> each in turn subdivided into a number of *āyāt* “verses” (literally, signs).<sup>72</sup> Each *Surah* has a name or title taken from a prominent or unusual word in the *Surah*. With one exception (*Surah* 9) each *Surah* commences with the *Bismillah*, i.e. the phrase “In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”<sup>73</sup> The first *Surah*, *al-Fatiḥah* “the Opening” is a short prayer. The last two *Surahs*, *al-Falaq* “the Dawn” (*Surah* 113) and *al-Nās* “the Mankind” (*Surah* 114) are short prayers promising God’s help against human and spiritual onslaughts. The remaining 111 *Surahs* are arranged roughly according to length, from *Surah* 2 with its 286 *āyāt* to *Surah* 112 containing only four *āyāt* (Watt, 1970:58). *Surahs* thus do not appear in the chronological order in which they have been revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ). It is generally accepted that the shorter *Surahs* appearing in mainly the latter part of the Qur'ān belong to the earlier (Meccan) period of the Prophet’s (ﷺ) mission, while the longer *Surahs* in the first part belong to the

<sup>70</sup> In Arabic القرآن *al-qur'ān*, literally meaning “the recitation.” The word is a verbal noun of the Arabic verb قرأ *qara'a* “he read, he recited.”

<sup>71</sup> In Arabic سورة *sūrah*, plural سور *suwar*. It should be noted that “chapter” is not an exact rendition of the way the word is used in the Qur'ān itself (cf. *Surah* 10:38; 11:13; 28:49). In the Qur'ān the word is used in the sense of “revelation” or “Scripture” (Watt, 1970:58).

<sup>72</sup> In Arabic آية *āyah*; plural آيات *āyāt*.

<sup>73</sup> In Arabic بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. “in the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.”

Medinan phase of his mission (Watt 1970:108-109). In traditional Muslim scholarship 86 Surah's are assigned to the Meccan period and 28 to the Medinan period.<sup>74</sup>

In general it can be said that “the verses revealed prior to the *Hijrah* concentrated on *Aqīdah* (theology and doctrine) establishing the existence of Allah and responding to the non-Muslims and reaffirming the finality of the prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in the hearts of the believers.” After the establishment of the Muslim community in al-Madīnah “more and more of the laws were revealed in order to govern the affairs and lives of the individuals and the community and the newly founded Islamic State” (Ahmed, 2005:18).

The second primary source is the ***Sunnah*** which contains “the statements, actions, acknowledgements and descriptions of the Prophet Muḥammad” (Ahmed, 2005:19), and sometimes wider anecdotes from his companions as well (Hitti, 1970:242).<sup>75</sup> The process of relating and recording the *sunnah* of the Prophet (ﷺ) already commenced in his lifetime, and increased steadily after his death as those who were eyewitnesses of his *sunnah* documented it in order to preserve it for posterity. This documentation came to be known as the ***Ḥadīth literature***.<sup>76</sup> Characteristically a *ḥadīth* consists of two parts: (1) a chain of authorities (*isnād*) who could attest to the historical reliability of the *ḥadīth* and could ultimately be traced back to an eyewitness of the Prophet's (ﷺ) *sunnah* and (2) the text of the *ḥadīth* in question (*matn*) (Hitti, 1970:394).<sup>77</sup> In the third Muslim century the vast number of *aḥadīth* had eventually been compiled “into six books which have since become standard” (Hitti, 1970:395). The most authoritative of these is the *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (the genuine collection) of Muḥammad ibn-Ismā'īl al-Bukhāri

<sup>74</sup> According to the traditional Muslim view the Meccan Surahs in chronological order are: 96, 68, 73, 74, 1, 111, 81, 87, 92, 89, 93, 94, 103, 100, 108, 102, 107, 109, 105, 113, 114, 112, 53, 80, 97, 91, 85, 95, 106, 101, 75, 104, 77, 50, 90, 86, 54, 38, 7, 72, 36, 25, 35, 19, 20, 56, 26, 27, 28, 17, 10, 11, 12, 15, 6, 37, 31, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 88, 18, 16, 71, 14, 21, 23, 32, 52, 67, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 84, 30, 29, 83. The Medinan Surahs in chronological order are: 2, 8, 3, 33, 60, 4, 99, 57, 47, 13, 55, 76, 65, 98, 59, 24, 22, 63, 58, 49, 66, 64, 61, 62, 48, 5, 9, 110. Cf. in this regard four articles by 'Allamah Abū 'Abd Allah al-Zajani originally published in Persian in the journal *Al-Tawḥīd* 4/3 (1407 A.H. = 1987) and 5/1-3 (1408 A.H. = 1988) under the title “The history of the Qur'an Part 1-4.” It was translated into English by Mahliqa Qara'i and is available online as a single PDF document at <http://www.tanzil.net/pub/ebooks/History-of-Quran.pdf>. Accessed 2016/07/06.

<sup>75</sup> Arabic سنة *sunnah* “well-trodden path, custom, practice.”

<sup>76</sup> In Arabic حديث *ḥadīth*, plural أحاديث *aḥādīth* “report, account, narrative.”

<sup>77</sup> Literally thousands of *aḥādīth* circulated in the first two or three centuries after the death of the Prophet (ﷺ), some reliable eye-witness reports of Companions of the Prophet, others fabrications of people who never met the Prophet or his Companions. Consequently the “science of *Ḥadīth*” developed to test and confirm the reliability of every single *Ḥadīth*. In a “perfect” *ḥadīth* the “chain” of witnesses ultimately lead back to the Prophet (ﷺ). *Aḥādīth* are classified according to their reliability as صحيح *ṣaḥīḥ* “sound,” حسن *ḥasan* “good,” ضعيف *ḍa'if* “weak” or موضوع *maudū'* “fabricated, forged” (Hitti, 1970:393-396; Ahmed, 2005:21). For a summary of the “Science of *Ḥadīth*” cf. <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Hadith/Ulum/hadsciences.html>; 01/08/2015.

(810-870 / 194-256 A.H.) who arranged his *aḥādīth* according to subject matter (Hitti, 1970:395). Also highly valued are the *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim ibn-al-Ḥajjāj (815-875 / 199-261 A.H.), the *Sunan* (customs) of Abū Dāwūd of al-Baṣrah (d. 888 / 275 A.H.), the *Jāmiʿ* (summary) of at-Tirmidhi (d. 892 / 279 A.H.), the *Sunan* of ibn-Mājah of Qazwin (d. 886 / 273 A.H.) and the *Sunan* of al-Nasāʿi (d. 915 / 302 A.H.; Hitti, 1970:395).<sup>78</sup>

Related to the *Ḥadīth* literature are various *tafsīr* (interpretation, commentary)<sup>79</sup> on the Qurʾān. A *Tafsīr* explains the content of the Qurʾān, provides additional information such as places and times not given in the Qurʾān, and often engages in discussions of different views and opinions of scholars. Of importance in the context of this study are the following commentaries: the *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* by Muḥammad ibn-Jarīr al-Ṭabari (838-923 / 223-311 A.H.), the *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* by Ismail ibn Kathir (1300-1373 / 699-775 A.H.), and the *Tafsīr al-Jalaylan* (the two “Jalals”), i.e. Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 1459 / 863 A.H.), and his pupil Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505 / 911 A.H.) (Hitti, 1970:390-391).<sup>80</sup>

The two **secondary sources**, namely *Ijmāʿ* (consensus) and *Qiyās* (deductive analogy) became important in the context of the rapidly growing Islamic Umayyad and Abbasid Empires. The Qurʾān contains more than six thousand verses. Only about two hundred verses, especially in the Medinan Surahs 2 and 4, “may be classed as strictly legislative. It soon became evident that these statutes were not sufficient to cover all cases – civil, criminal, political, financial – which might and did arise under new conditions and varied situations encountered in Syria, al-ʿIraq and other conquered territories” (Hitti, 1970:397; cf. also Ahmed, 2005:18). It made the science of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) indispensable and *Fiqh* in turn becomes “probably one of the most important aspects in the life of a Muslim, because it provides the individual with rulings for the practical aspects of his daily life” (Ahmed, 2005:7).<sup>81</sup> *Fiqh* “was based on the Koran and the sunnah (i.e. ḥadīth), styled *uṣūl* (roots, fundamental

<sup>78</sup> The Arabic text and an English translation of all six these sources are available online at <http://sunnah.com/> under the title “The Hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم) at your fingertips.” The researcher made extensive use of this online source in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

<sup>79</sup> In Arabic تفسیر *tafsīr* “interpretation,” the Arabic word for exegesis.

<sup>80</sup> The Tafsir Ibn Kathir is available online in Arabic with English translation at <http://qtafsir.com/> under the title Quran Tafsir Ibn Kathir. The Tafsir al-Jalalayn is available online in Arabic with English translation at <http://www.altafsir.com/> together with several other Tafsirs. In sections 3.4 and 3.5 the researcher made extensive use of these two online resources.

<sup>81</sup> In Arabic فقه *fiqh* “deep understanding, full comprehension.” In Modern Standard Arabic it is the technical term for “jurisprudence.”

principles)... *Fiqh* was the science through which the canon law of Islam (*sharī'ah*), the totality of Allah's commandments as revealed in the Koran and elaborated in the ḥadīth, was communicated to later generations" (Hitti, 1970:396; Ahmed, 2005:23-25). These secondary principles or sources for *Fiqh* thus already arose in the Prophet's (ﷺ) time and following his example came to full fruition in the time after his death (Ahmed, 2005:18).<sup>82</sup> The first, *al-Ijmā'* "consensus," "is defined as the agreement and consensus of the *Mujtahids* of the Muslim community after the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in a particular era on a specific ruling" (Ahmed, 2005:23). The second, *Qiyās* "analogical reasoning", occurs "when we apply the ruling of a former issue to a new issue because of a common reason or factor" (Ahmed, 2005:23). *Al-Ijmā'* and *Qiyās* in turn gave rise to different schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*).<sup>83</sup> For the purposes of this study a complete discussion of the subject is impossible.<sup>84</sup> The researcher briefly refers to the four Sunni *madhāhib*.<sup>85</sup>

- **The Ḥanīfites:** The founder of this *madhhab* was Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān ibn-Thābit (699-767 / 80-150 A.H.) of Persian descent. He was influential in al-Kūfah and Baghdād in al-Irāq. He imparted his teachings orally to his followers. One of them, Abū-Yūsuf (d. 798 / 182 A.H.), preserved his master's teachings in his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*. The Hanīfite *madhhab* emphasised the importance of analogical deduction and is regarded as the most moderate school of jurisprudence. In contemporary Islam its followers can be found in Turkey, the Balkans, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, China and Egypt (Hitti, 2007:397-398).
- **The Mālikites:** The founder of this *madhhab* was Mālik ibn-Anas (715-795 / 96-179 A.H.). He was influential in al-Madīnah. His *al-Muwatta'* (the levelled path) contains the oldest existing corpus of Muslim law. This school emphasises the importance of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth as sources for jurisprudence and is more conservative in application of the law

<sup>82</sup> Ahmed identifies four stages in the development of *Fiqh*. The first stage is the period of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) and can be classified as the developmental and foundational stage (2005:18-36). The second stage is from the death of the Prophet (ﷺ) until the end of the second century AH (2005:37-68). The third stage can be called the period of maturity from 300-400 AH (2005:69-88). The final stage is from the beginning of the fifth century AH until the present (2005:89-111).

<sup>83</sup> In Arabic مذهب *madhhab*; pl. مذاهب *madhāhib* "doctrine."

<sup>84</sup> Ahmed (2005) meticulously traced the development of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) from the period of the Prophet (ﷺ) until the present. The four Sunni schools of jurisprudence emerged in the so-called Third Stage (The Period of Maturity) in the development of Islamic jurisprudence (i.e. in the period 300-400 A.H.; Ahmed, 2005:69-88). It was preceded by the Foundational Phase established by the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) (Ahmed, 2005:18-36) and the Second Stage (from the death of the Prophet (ﷺ) until the end of the second century A.H.; Ahmed, 2005:37-68). In the Fourth Stage (the period of 'degeneration,' i.e. 500 A.H. to the present; Ahmed, 2005:89-111) the developed into full-fledged schools of thought.

<sup>85</sup> In an article published online titled المذاهب والأئمة الأربعة "The Doctrines/Schools (*madhāhib*) and the Four Imams" Sheikh Hamza Bilal provides an overview of the development and basic interpretational principles of the four Sunni *madhāhib*, cf. <http://alkeltawia.com/site2/pkg09/index.php?page=show&ex=2&dir=dpages&cat=1117; 23/07/2015>.

than the Ḥanīfites. It prevails today in North Africa, West Africa and several of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf (Hitti, 1970:398).

- **The Shāfi'ites:** The founder of this *madhhab* was Muḥammad ibn-Idrīs al-Shāfi'i (767-820 / 150-205 A.H.). He belonged to the Quraysh family and was influential in Baghdād and Cairo. In application of Islamic law it is less moderate than the Hanīfites, but also less conservative than the Mālikites. Today its followers can be found in Kurdistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, East Africa, Yemen, Somalia and the southern parts of India (Hitti, 1970:398).
- **The Ḥanbalites:** The founder of this *madhhab* was Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal (d. 855 / 241 A.H.), a student of al-Shāfi'i. He was uncompromising in his adherence to the letter of the Ḥadīth and was especially influential in Baghdād. This school strongly emphasises the prevalence of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth as sources for jurisprudence and is regarded as the most conservative of the *madhāhib*. Today it is the prevalent school in Saudi Arabia (Hitti, 1970:399).

### 3.3.3 Beliefs, obligations, and practices

Islamic tradition developed based upon the sources discussed above. The researcher uses “tradition” in a very broad sense of the word as “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom).”<sup>86</sup> What should be more carefully defined now is what is meant by “Islamic” tradition.

In spite of clear links with the other two monotheistic religions (Judaism and Christianity) Islam has “an independent and distinct system of belief” (Hitti, 1970:128). Departing from the words in Surah 3:19 *إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ* (verily, the religion with Allah is Islam) Muslims believe that Islam is **the religion** (*dīn*) intended by Allah for the whole of humankind. For Muslims their religion comprises three aspects: *īmān* (religious belief), *'ibādah* (acts of worship, religious duty) and *iḥsān* (right-doing).

*īmān* (religious belief)<sup>87</sup> comprises **six fundamental doctrines**<sup>88</sup> that are included in the *'Aqīdah* (Creed)<sup>89</sup> universally accepted by all Muslims. The *'Aqīdah* is based upon the Qur'ān. In Surah 2:177 it is said: *وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ* “But this is righteousness: to believe in Allah, and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers.” In Surah 2:285 the confession of faith is repeated: *مَنْ الرُّسُولِ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلُّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ* “The Apostle believed in what

<sup>86</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tradition>; 07/07/2015.

<sup>87</sup> In Arabic الإيمان *al-īmān* “the faith.”

<sup>88</sup> In Arabic أركان الإيمان *arkān al-īmān* “Pillars of Faith.”

<sup>89</sup> In Arabic عقيدة *'aqīdah*, plural عقائد *'aqā'id* “creed.” The noun is derived from the root اقد “to tie, knot.”

has been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith. Each one believed in Allah, his angels, his books, and his apostles.” In the Ḥadīth-literature the ‘*Aqīdah* is repeated. One example will suffice. In the *Forty Ḥadīths* by Imam Nawawi (1234–1277)<sup>90</sup> it is told on authority of ‘Umar that a man (later revealed to be the angel *Jibrīl* [Gabriel]) once sat down in the company of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the following conversation took place:

قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِيمَانِ  
 قَالَ: أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ، وَتُؤْمِنَ بِالْقَدَرِ خَيْرِهِ  
 قَالَ: صَدَقْتَ

He went on to say, “Inform me about *Iman* (faith).”

He (the Prophet) answered, “It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in fate (*qadar*), both in its good and in its evil aspects.”

He said, “You have spoken the truth.”

The six fundamental doctrines are:

- The first and most important dogma is that **Allah is the one and only God**. There is no god whatsoever but Allah. The phrase *lā ilāha ’illā-llāh* “there is no god but Allah” expresses the concept of *tawḥīd* “the oneness” of God and communicates Islam’s belief in absolute monotheism. Hitti (1970:129) states: “In this uncompromising monotheism, with its simple, enthusiastic faith in the supreme role of a transcendent being, lies the chief strength of Islam.”
- The second dogma is that **Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the Messenger of Allah**. The phrase *Muḥammad rasūlu-llāh* “Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the Messenger of Allah” expresses the belief that Muḥammad (ﷺ) is the last and most important of a long line of prophets. He is the “seal” of the prophets (Surah 33:40; Hitti, 1970:129).
- The third dogma is that **the Qur’ān is the Word of Allah** (*kalām*, cf. Surah 9:6; 48:15). The Qur’ān contains Allah’s final revelation to humankind (Surah 17:107-108; 97:1; 44:2; 28:51; 46:11), it is uncreated, the greatest of all miracles, impossible to repeat or recreate (Hitti, 1970:129).

<sup>90</sup> In Arabic الأربعون النووية *al-arba‘īn al-nawawīyya*, a collection of forty-two fundamental *ahādīth*, mainly compiled from Sahih Muslim and Sahih al-Bukhari. <http://sunnah.com/nawawi40/2>; 07/07/2015.

- The fourth dogma demands **belief in Allah’s angels** with the archangel *Jibrīl* (Gabriel), the bearer of Allah’s revelation (Surah 2:91), as the most important angel (Hitti, 1970:130).
- The fifth dogma demands **belief in the Day of Judgment and in the Resurrection** (life after death). Surah 75 in its entirety is devoted to the Resurrection (*al-qiyāmah*) while terms such as the “day of judgement” (Surah 15:35-36; 82:17-18), the “day of resurrection” (Surah 22:5; 30:56), the “day” (Surah 24:24-25; 31:32), and the “hour” (Surah 15:85; 18:20) constitute an important theme in the Qur’ān (Hitti, 1970:130).
- The final dogma is “the **belief in the divine decree of good and evil** (Surah 9:51; 3:139; 23:2)” (Hitti, 1970:138), i.e. in destiny or fate.

**‘Ibādah** (acts of worship, religious duty)<sup>91</sup> has a general aspect – to constantly work towards living a better life in this world. However, it centres primarily on the so-called five pillars of Islam (أركان الإسلام *arkān al-Islām*), i.e. the religious duties considered mandatory for all believers and the foundation of Muslim life. These duties are neatly summarised in the *Forty Ḥadīths* by Imam Nawawi (1234–1277) referred to above. Again it is told on authority of ‘Umar that a man (actually the angel *Jibrīl* [Gabriel]) had the following conversation with the Prophet (ﷺ):

وَقَالَ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ أَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِسْلَامِ  
 فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْإِسْلَامُ أَنْ تَشْهَدَ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَتُقِيمَ  
 الصَّلَاةَ، وَتُؤْتِيَ الزَّكَاةَ، وَتَصُومَ رَمَضَانَ، وَتَحُجَّ الْبَيْتَ إِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا  
 قَالَ: صَدَقْتَ

And he said: “O Muḥammad! Inform me about *Islam*.”

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) replied: “Islam is that you should testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Muḥammad is His Messenger, that you should perform *salah* (ritual prayer), pay the *zakah*, fast during Ramadan, and perform *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to the House (the *Ka’bah* at Makkah), if you can find a way to it (or find the means for making the journey to it).”

He said: “You have spoken the truth.”

The five pillars of Islam can be summarised as follows:

- **Shahādah** (profession of faith): It is the fundamental double testimony:  
 لا إله إلا الله محمد رسول الله *lā ‘ilāha ‘illā-llāh muḥammad rasūlu-llāh*  
 “There is no god but Allah, Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.”

<sup>91</sup> In Arabic عيادة *‘ibāda*, a noun related to the root عبد “to work, toil, slave.”



- **Salat** (prayer): It is the ritual prayer five times a day where every faithful Muslim turns his/her face towards Mecca and engages the prescribed prayer.
- **Sawm** (fasting): It refers to the fasting and self-control exercised during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Hajj** (pilgrimage): It refers to the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if one is able to do so.
- **Zakat** (alms): It refers to the giving of one's savings to the poor and needy as a voluntary act of love.

(Hitti, 1970:130-136).

**Ihsān** (right-doing)<sup>92</sup> refers to the obligation upon every Muslim to display one's inner faith (*īmān*) in outward deeds and actions. It emphasises a sense of social responsibility borne from religious convictions. It urges a Muslim to do "beautiful" things, to serve Allah as if they see him in the conviction that He who cannot be seen, is indeed constantly watching over them (Hitti, 1970:138). In the same *Forty Hadīths* by Imam Nawawi (1234-1277) referred to above the following conversation took place between *Jibrīl* and the Prophet (ﷺ):

قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِحْسَانِ  
 قَالَ: أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

Then he (the man) said, "Inform me about *Ihsan*."

He (the Prophet) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet He sees you."

The source goes on to state the following:

ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ، فَلَبِثْتُ مَلِيًّا،  
 ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا عُمَرُ أَتَدْرِي مَنْ السَّائِلُ؟  
 قُلْتُ: اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ  
 قَالَ: فَإِنَّهُ جِبْرِيلُ أَتَاكُمْ يُعَلِّمُكُمْ دِينَكُمْ

Thereupon the man went off. I waited a while,  
 and then he (the Prophet) said, "O 'Umar, do you know who that questioner was?"  
 I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know better."  
 He said, "That was *Jibrīl*. He came to teach you your religion."

The researcher hopes that the brief overview of Islam's origins, beliefs, obligations and practices created the necessary context to better understand views on female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition that will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

<sup>92</sup> Arabic إحسان *ihsān* "perfection, excellence."

## 3.4 Female clothing practices according to the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and Tafsīr

### 3.4.1 General orientation

#### 3.4.1.1 *Introductory remarks*

It has already been mentioned that at the advent of Islam there was a well-established social custom for honourable, free women to appear in public “veiled” and that this practice had many nuances, but primarily symbolised women’s honour and dignity, albeit in their own cultural context. The cultural custom of “veiling” also became an integral part of female dress code in Islamic tradition. In the remainder of this chapter the researcher will argue that a well-known and well-established cultural custom received new meaning in Islam. In Islamic tradition it becomes impossible to discuss the *hijab* and not mention its intimate relationship with religion. The discussion in the previous section should constantly be kept in mind when female clothing practices in Islam are discussed. For a Muslim religion **is** Islam and **Islam** is more than a theoretical or philosophical belief system; Islam encompasses the totality of human existence and finds expression in *īmān* (religious belief), *‘ibādah* (acts of worship, religious duty) and *iḥsān* (right-doing).

The researcher uses the *hijab* in this chapter in the broad sense indicated in Chapter 1 as the modest dress that covers the natural contours and appearance of the body (Siraj, 2011:716). It is not her intention to trace the use of the root حجب *ḥjb* “to hide” and nouns related to it in the Qur’ān. It has been done in detail by Aziz (2010:70-97). Aziz discusses the meaning of the term in Surah 7:46; 33:53; 38:32; 41:5; 42:51; 17:45-46; 19:17; and 83:15 and concludes that the term “is used as a visible or invisible barrier between two spaces. The groups in each space are not allowed to mix. There is a definite physical, mystical or psychological reason for this separation” (Aziz, 2010:88).

#### 3.4.1.2 *Hijab as marker of sacred space: Surah 33:53*

The researcher deems it necessary to briefly refer to one *āyah* where the root حجب *ḥjb* “to hide” occurs, and that is the so called “*āyah* of *Hijab*” (Surah 33:53) because it is

directly related to the issue of interaction between the Prophet's (ﷺ) wives and people from outside his household:<sup>93</sup>

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤَدِّنَ لَكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ غَيْرَ نَاطِرِينَ إِنَاهُ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤَدِّي النَّبِيُّ فَيَسْتَجِيبُ مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تَنْكِحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا

O, you who have believed, do not enter the houses of the Prophet except when you are permitted for a meal, without awaiting its readiness. But when you are invited, then enter; and when you have eaten, disperse without seeking to remain for conversation. Indeed, that [behaviour] was troubling the the Prophet, and he is shy of [dismissing] you. But Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And it is not [conceivable or lawful] for you to harm the Messenger of Allah or to marry his wives after him, ever. Indeed, that would be in the sight of Allah an enormity.

Relevant in the present context is the remark **وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ** “And when you ask [his wives] for something, ask them from behind a partition. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts.” On this phrase the Tafsir al-Jalalayn<sup>94</sup> remarks:

**And when you ask anything of [his] womenfolk**, in other words, the wives of the Prophet, **ask them from behind a screen**, a curtain. **That is purer for your hearts and their hearts**, than [entertaining] sinful thoughts.<sup>95</sup>

In his Tafsir, Ibn Kathir<sup>96</sup> explains this verb under the theme **The Etiquette of entering the Houses of the Prophet** and the **Command of Hijab**. He remarks: “This is the *āyah* of *Hijab*, which includes several legislative rulings and points of etiquette.” According to Ibn Kathir the *āyah* was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) under the following circumstances:

Al-Bukhari recorded that Anas ibn Malik said: “Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, both righteous and immoral people enter upon you, so why not instruct the Mothers of the believers to observe *Hijab*?’ Then Allah revealed the *āyah* of *Hijab*.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that the researcher extensively quotes from the Qur’an, Hadith-literature, and various Tafsir (in translation) in this chapter. It is done deliberately because the literature is largely unknown outside Muslim circles. Taking into account that this is a study in Ancient Culture Studies and that the intended readers include non-Muslims as well, the researcher deemed it essential to introduce her religious and interpretative tradition in such a way that all readers will be able to follow her argument.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=33&tAyahNo=53&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2; 23/07/2015>.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

<sup>97</sup> [http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1836&Itemid=89; 23/07/2015](http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1836&Itemid=89; 23/07/2015).

Ibn Kathir explains the phrase *وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ* “And when you ask (his wives) for anything you want, ask them from behind a screen” as follows:

Just as it is forbidden for you to enter upon them, it is forbidden for you to look at them at all. If anyone of you has any need to take anything from them, he should not look at them, but he should ask for whatever he needs from behind a screen.<sup>98</sup>

Al-Ghazali (2005:460) states that the rulings in this *āyah* became a necessity “because, unlike palaces of kings or other rulers, with reception facilities and several wings, the Prophet’s home consisted of a limited number of small rooms attached to a mosque.” Aziz (2010:76) describes the significance of the phrase as follows: “There is a physical separation of the noble ladies from the common folk, by a barrier that could not be seen through. It secludes the Prophet’s (ﷺ) wives by giving them privacy and is simultaneously a symbol of their high status and dignity. The context of this *hijab* is the separation of two spaces that are not to intermingle.”

It confirms the observation by El Guindi (1999:69) that any discussion of the “veil” as part of the Muslim female dress code should recognise that it does not only function on a physical level, but also on the level of the symbolic. In this *āyah* the notion of sacred privacy and sanctuary is clearly present. It is suggested by the fact that this *āyah*, originally intended as command for the interaction between the Prophet’s (ﷺ) wives and outsiders, has in Muslim tradition been applied to all believing women in their interaction with non-*maḥram*<sup>99</sup> men. In the Sunan Ibn Majah<sup>100</sup> (Book 33: Etiquette; Hadith 95) the *hijab*, for instance, is interpreted as a “veil” between a believing woman and Allah:

It was narrated from Abū Maliḥ al-Hudhaliyya that some women from the people of Hims asked permission to enter upon ‘Ā’ishah. She said: “Perhaps you are among those (women) who enter bathhouses? I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: ‘Any woman who takes off her clothes anywhere but in her husband’s house, has torn the screen between her and Allah.’”<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> [http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1836&Itemid=89](http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1836&Itemid=89); 23/07/2015.

<sup>99</sup> In Muslim tradition a *maḥram* is a close relative with whom a woman can never marry (cf. the discussion of Surah 24:30-31 in sub-section 3.4.2.2 below). In Arabic: محرم *maḥram*; pl. محارم *maḥārim* “Something forbidden, inviolable, taboo; someone unmarriageable, being in a degree of consanguinity precluding marriage according to Islamic law.” The noun is derived from the root حرم *ḥrm* “to be forbidden, prohibited, unlawful.”

<sup>100</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

<sup>101</sup> <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/33/95>; 23/07/2015. It is classified as *ḥasan* “good” (Darussalam). A similar hadith is narrated by Abū Dawud in his Sunan, Book 33: Hot Baths (Kitab al-Hamman); Hadith 2; <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/33/2>. Accessed 23/07/2015. It is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* “sound” (Al-Albani).

Muslim female dress code thus becomes an issue not only of proper cultural conduct and social etiquette, but also of highly significant religious implication directly influencing the relationship between a female Muslim and Allah.

### 3.4.1.3 Hijab as marker of private space: Surah 33:32-33

Linked to the notion of حجب *hjb* “to hide” as it is used in Surah 33:53 is another passage in the same Surah, namely 33:32-33. It reads as follows:

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ لَسْنُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ ۚ إِن تَقِيْنُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا (٣٢) وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۚ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا (٣٣)

(32) O wives of the Prophet, you are not like anyone among women. If you fear Allah, then do not be soft in speech [to men], lest he in whose heart is disease should covet, but speak with appropriate speech. (33) And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification.

From the context it is clear that these words are addressed in the first place to the “wives of the Prophet” as women in a special position “not like anyone among women” (33:32). The wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) should take care to behave with proper restraint towards other men so that they do not entice them. They should “abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance” (33:33) precisely because of their special obligation towards the Prophet (ﷺ) and the newly established principles of Islam. Ibn Kathir makes the following remarks regarding this passage in his Tafsir:

This *āyah* is addressed to the wives of the Prophet who chose Allah and His Messenger and the Home of the Hereafter, and remained married to the Messenger of Allah. Thus it was befitting that there should be rulings which applied only to them, and not to other women, in the event that any of them should commit open Fahishah. Ibn ‘Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said: “This means Nushuz (rebellion) and a bad attitude.” Whatever the case, this is a conditional phrase and it does not imply that what is referred to would actually happen... Because their status is so high, it is appropriate to state that the sin, if they were to commit it, would be so much worse, so as to protect them and their *Hijab*.

These are the good manners which Allah enjoined upon the wives of the Prophet so that they would be an example for the women of the Ummah to follow. Allah said, addressing the wives of the Prophet that they should fear Allah as He commanded them, and that no other woman is like them or can be their equal in virtue and status.

“But speak in an honourable manner.” Ibn Zayd said: “Decent and honourable talk that is known to be good.” This means that she should address non-Mahram men in a manner in which there is no softness, i.e., a woman should not address a non-Mahram man in the same way that she addresses her husband.

“And stay in your houses,” means, stay in your houses and do not come out except for a purpose. One of the purposes mentioned in Shari`ah is prayer in the Masjid, so long as the conditions are fulfilled, as the Messenger of Allah said: “Do not prevent the female servants of Allah from the Masjids of Allah, but have them go out without wearing fragrance.” According to another report: “even though their houses are better for them.”

“and do not Tabarruj yourselves like the Tabarruj of the times of ignorance.” Mujahid said: “Women used to go out walking in front of men, and this was the Tabarruj of Jahiliyyah.” Qatadah said: “‘and do not Tabarruj yourselves like the Tabarruj of the times of ignorance,’ when they go out of their homes walking in a shameless and flirtatious manner, and Allah, may He be exalted, forbade that.” Muqatil bin Hayyan said: “‘and do not Tabarruj yourselves like the Tabarruj of the times of ignorance,’ Tabarruj is when a woman puts a Khimar on her head but does not tie it properly.” So her necklaces, earrings and neck, and all of that can be seen. This is Tabarruj, and Allah addresses all the women of the believers with regard to Tabarruj.

“and perform the Salah, and give Zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger:” Allah first forbids them from evil, then He enjoins them to do good by establishing regular prayer, which means worshipping Allah alone with no partner or associate, and paying Zakah, which means doing good to other people.

“and obey Allah and His Messenger:” This is an instance of something specific being followed by something general.

“Allah wishes only to remove Ar-Rijs from you, O members of the family, and to purify you with a thorough purification:” This is a clear statement that the wives of the Prophet are included among the members of his family (Ahl Al-Bayt) here, because they are the reason why this āyah was revealed, and the scholars are unanimously agreed that they were the reason for revelation in this case, whether this was the only reason for revelation or there was also another reason, which is the correct view. Ibn Jarir recorded that `Ikrimah used to call out in the marketplace: “Allah wishes only to remove Ar-Rijs from you, O members of the family, and to purify you with a thorough purification” This was revealed solely concerning the wives of the Prophet.” Ibn Abī Hatim recorded that Ibn `Abbas said concerning the āyah: “‘Allah wishes only to remove Ar-Rijs from you, O members of the family:’ It was revealed solely concerning the wives of the Prophet.” `Ikrimah said: “Whoever disagrees with me that it was revealed solely concerning the wives of the Prophet, I am prepared to meet with him and pray and invoke the curse of Allah upon those who are lying.” So they alone were the reason for revelation, but others may be included by way of generalization.

When the question of the nature of female clothing practices in Muslim tradition is considered, these *āyāt* raise two important questions: (1) Are the admonitions in these *āyāt* applicable only to the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ)? (2) Should these admonitions be understood as indicative of the **seclusion** of Muslim women?

The Tafsir Ibn Kathir throws light on the first question. In Muslim tradition it is understood as first and foremost directed to the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ). They were regarded as members of his household and as such they, even more than any other Muslim woman, carried the responsibility of ensuring proper conduct both in and outside their homes. By way of generalisation this principle can then be applied to all Muslim women.

The second question then becomes important. Does the admonition “abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance” (Surah 33:33) then imply the **seclusion** of **all** Muslim women? Is a woman’s place at home and should she preferably never be seen in public? Again the Tafsir Ibn Kathir throws light on the subject when it states “and do not come out except for a purpose.” No doubt this admonition emphasises the responsibility of every Muslim woman to ensure “a pure atmosphere at home so that she can perform her household duties properly and contribute to improve the whole society” (Abdullah, 1990:30).

However, the researcher concurs with El Guindi (1999:82-83) that gender seclusion is not characteristic of Arabo-Islamic culture but rather of early Christian culture as embodied in the Byzantine Empire. Gender seclusion defies the “logic” of the *hijab*. The *hijab* broadly defined symbolises “Arab privacy” (El Guindi, 1999:82) and it, in turn, entails “two core spheres – women and the family.” In this regard El Guindi (1999:82) states:

For both, privacy is sacred and carefully guarded. For women it is both a right and an exclusive privilege, and is reflected in dress, space, architecture and proxemics behaviour. Their economic and marital autonomous identity is not connected to domesticity. A woman is guardian of the sanctity that is fundamental to the community.

The “logic” of the *hijab* is precisely its ability to allow any Muslim woman to instantly construct her own private space. El Guindi (1999:77-78) argues that it is distinctive of the Islamic construction of space

...how it turns a public area into private space, without the entry of a stranger. It enables ordinary Muslims temporarily to convert any worldly place (street, shop, aircraft aisle) into a sacred space set apart, simply by marking it and occupying it in a ritually pure state facing Makka.

If this happens every time a Muslim prays, it can be argued that it also happens every time a Muslim woman dons her *hijab* and enters the “outside” world. She is, so to

speak, enshrined in her sacred space and as such she is the “guardian of the sanctity that is fundamental to the community” (El Guindi, 1999:82).

#### **3.4.1.4 Broadening the horizons: hijab and libas**

Aziz maintains that the term *حجب* *hjb* “to hide” as it is used in the Qur’ān “does not assist in defining the specific dress code for Muslims, so we need to look at other words and verses in the Qur’an for further understanding of this concept” (Aziz, 2010:89). The researcher concurs with this conclusion.<sup>102</sup> In section 3.4.2 she will do exactly what Aziz suggested and “look at other words and verses in the Qur’an for further understanding of this concept.” The researcher links this suggestion with a remark by El Guindi (1999:69) that more attention should be paid to the use of the term *لباس* *libās* (dress, garment) in the Qur’ān. El Guindi argues that *libās* shares with the English word “dress” the “qualities of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness” and that it has been used “since the pre-Islamic era in a general, comprehensive, and inclusive way.” El Guindi also proposes that *libās* should be looked at not only from a “socio-cultural framework that treats dress as a *material phenomenon* with meaning communicated at the *social and cultural level*,” but especially as a representation of the “realm of the *invisible, intangible sacred domain*, in which ideas and concepts can be made observable by *symbolic analysis*” (El Guindi, 1999:69; researcher’s emphasis).

#### **3.4.2 Clothing and clothes in the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and Tafsīr**

Two broad themes will be discussed in section 3.4.2. In sub-section 3.4.2.1 the researcher will briefly mention three groups of *āyāt*. First, *āyāt* referring to *لباس* *libās* “dress; garment,” Surah 2:187; 7:26, 27; 22:23; 35:33; 25:47; 78:10); second, *āyāt* referring to its counterpart, the stripping of clothes to reveal nakedness (سوات, Surah 7:20, 22, 26, 27; 20:21 or فروج, Surah 23:5; 24:30, 31; 33:35; 50:6; 70:29); third, *āyāt* referring to specific items of female clothing (خمر, Surah 24:31 and جلابيب, Surah 33:59). In sub-section 3.4.2.2 *āyāt* in four Surahs where these terminology intersect, namely 2:187; 7:26-27; 24:30-31; 33:59, will be discussed in more detail. In the discussion attention will also be paid to expositions of relevant *āyāt* in the Ḥadīth and Tafsīr. Some

<sup>102</sup> The researcher is of the opinion that the notion of the *hijab* as “a visible or invisible barrier” as it is used in the Qur’ān and the *hijab* as it is used in modern Islam as a general term for female dress code deserves further investigation. Linked with the notion of “boundaries” it can become a viable future research area.



ahadith addressing the issue of female clothing will also be discussed briefly. It will be used as a basis to determine Qur'ānic principles for female (and male) clothing practices.

### 3.4.2.1 *Clothing, nakedness, and female dress in the Qur'ān: An overview*

Forms related to the root لَبَسَ *lbs* occur 22 times in the Qur'ān. Essentially the root means “to cover.” It has the following connotations:

- *Put on / take off clothes*: 7:26 (2X), 27.
- *Wear special clothes in Paradise*: 18:31; 22:23; 35:33; 44:53.
- *Wear ornaments extracted from the sea*: 16:14; 35:12.
- *Husband and wife as clothing for each other*: 2:187.
- *Cover truth with falsehood*: 2:42; 3:71.
- *Cover belief with injustice*: 6:82 (2X).
- *Be enveloped with confusion*: 6:9 (2X); 6:65; 6:137; 50:15.
- *Be enveloped with fear or hunger*: 16:112.
- *Be enveloped by the darkness of night*: 25:47; 78:10.

In the context of this study the Surahs concerned with the putting on or taking off of clothes (7:26, 27) as well as the metaphorical use of لَبَسَ to describe the relationship between husband and wife (2:187) are of special importance and will be discussed in detail in sub-section 3.4.2.2.

Two words are used in the Qur'ān to denote “nakedness,” namely سَوْءَةٌ *saw'ah* “shame, disgrace, private part” and فَجْرٌ *farj* “opening, gap, breach, (female) private part.” سَوْءَةٌ is derived from the root سَوَّءَ *sw'* “to be bad, wicked, evil, to torment, offend, displease.” The root occurs 167 times in 151 *āyāt*, most of the time in the sense of “evil” (e.g. 2:81, 169; 3:30); “torment” (2:49); “misdeed” (2:271); “distress” (3:120); “harm” (3:120). In five instances the noun سَوْءَةٌ occurs with the sense “nakedness, private parts,” namely in 7:20, 22, 26, 27 and 20:121. In both Surahs the word occurs in a context where the first human beings, Adam and his wife, are misled by Satan and “by deceit he brought about their fall” (7:22). Their سَوْءَةٌ was then exposed to them (7:20, 22; 20:121). In these contexts the emphasis falls upon the human pair's shame because they transgressed Allah's command. Allah's reaction – providing them with لَبَسَ “clothing” to cover their

سوءة “shame” is prominently emphasised in 7:26-27 and will be discussed in more detail in sub-section 3.4.2.2.<sup>103</sup>

The second word to denote “nakedness” is فرج *farj*, plural فروج *furūj*. It is derived from the root فرج *frj* “to open, separate, cleave, breach.” The root occurs only nine times in the Qur’ān. In two cases (Surah 50:6; 77:9) the term refers to heaven as being structured and adorned by Allah without فُرُوجٍ “rift, cleft,” but on the “Day of Sorting out” (77:13) it will be فُرِجَتْ “cleft asunder” by Allah. In the other seven instances the term refers to “private parts,” i.e. male or female genitals. Surah 21:91 and 66:12 refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who guarded فَرْجَهَا “her chastity.” Surah 23:5 and 70:29 describe as true Believers those who guard لِفُرُوجِهِمْ “their private parts” in the sense of refraining from illicit sexual relations. Surah 33:35 lists the virtues of Muslim men and women, amongst them the guarding of فُرُوجَهُمْ “their private parts.” Especially important in the context of this study is the command to believing men to lower their gaze and guard رُوجَهُمْ “their private parts” in Surah 24:30 and the same command to believing women to guard فُرُوجَهُنَّ “their private parts” in 24:31. These two *āyāt* will be discussed in sub-section 3.4.2.2.

Twice in the Qur’ān references to specific items of female clothing appear. In Surah 24:31 female believers are urged “to wrap [a portion of] their head covers (بِخُمُرِهِنَّ) over their chests (جُنُوبِهِنَّ)” and in Surah 33:59 the Prophet’s (صلى الله عليه وسلم) wives and daughters and the women of the believers are commanded “to bring down over themselves (يُنزِلْنَ عَلَيْنَهُنَّ) [part] of their outer garments (مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ).” These two *āyāt* will be discussed in detail in sub-section 3.4.2.2.

### **3.4.2.2 Clothing, nakedness, and female dress: Surah 2:187; 7:26; 24:30-31; 33:59 and selected Ahadith**

El Guindi (1999:70) makes the following important observations regarding the use of the term لبس *lbs* in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth:

<sup>103</sup> The researcher differs from El Guindi (1999:74) who remarks that according to the narrative regarding the sacred origin of humanity in the Qur’ān (Surah 7:20, 22; 20:121) it is Satan who made the human pair slip (Surah 2:36), but that “*saw’at* (pl. for *saw’ah*) does not mean nakedness or sex or sexuality. It means genitals. No “shame” is linked in these passages to Islamic human beginnings.” The overview of the use of the term سوء *sw’* in the Qur’ān clearly indicates that the term is inextricably linked with the notion of “shame.” There is no “shame” in the origins of humanity, but in the human pair’s disobedience and the subsequent exposure of their nakedness. Hence the researcher regards the wilful and public display of human nakedness as “shameful” as is illustrated by the first human pair’s frantic attempt “to cover their bodies with leaves from the Garden” (7:21).

[I]ts usage not only denotes material forms of clothing and ornament for women and men, but also includes diverse forms of the veil and veiling... it embodies an invisible, intangible realm of the sacred in which cultural ideas are relationally embedded.

In this section the researcher will illustrate how references to clothing, nakedness and female dress interact in the Qur'ān to embody “an invisible, intangible realm of the sacred” and how Islam re-interpreted existing cultural ideas regarding female clothing practices and re-applied it to a new religious context.

### (a) Surah 2:187

جَلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَىٰ نِسَائِكُمْ ۚ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ ۗ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ ۖ فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ ۗ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَبْيُنَ لَكُمْ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ۖ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ ۗ وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ ۗ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرُبُوهَا ۗ كَذَلِكَ يَبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ

It has been made permissible for you the night preceding fasting to go to your wives [for sexual relations]. They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you. So now, have relations with them and seek that which Allah has decreed for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset. And do not have relations with them as long as you are staying for worship in the mosques. These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them. Thus does Allah make clear His ordinances to the people that they may become righteous.

Surah 2:187 appears in the context of 2:183-188 which contains precepts regarding the fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Of importance for the current study is the remark in 2:187 that *“they (female gender) are clothing for you (masculine gender) and you (masculine gender) are clothing for them (female gender).”* This remark confirms an observation by El Guindi (1999:74) regarding the Qur'ān's representation of the male and female as a pair:

The emphasis is on gender mutuality and the completeness of a heterosexual pair that reproduces humankind. In the sacred Islamic imagination there is no shame in sexuality and no gender primacy communicated in the story of creation.

The symbolic nature of clothing in the remark in Surah 2:187 should be recognised. The researcher concurs in this regard with El Guindi (1999:74) when she says: “In the Islamic construction, dress, in addition to its material connotation, links in metaphoric terms notions of gender, sexuality, sanctuary, and sacred privacy.” When Surah 2:187 describes husband and wife as *لباس libās* to each other it confirms the symbolic value of “clothing” as an act of mutual care and the fulfilling of mutual needs and obligations.

According to the Tafsīr al-Jalalayn the phrase is “a metaphor for their embraces or their need for one another.”<sup>104</sup> In his Tafsīr on this *āyah* Ibn Kathir remarks:

Ibn ‘Abbas, Mujahid, Sa’id ibn Jubayr, Al-Hasan, Qatadah, As-Suddi and Muqatil ibn Hayyan said that this *āyah* means, “Your wives are a resort for you and you for them.” Ar-Rabī’ ibn Anas said, “They are your cover and you are their cover.” In short, the wife and the husband are intimate and have sexual intercourse with each other, and this is why they were permitted to have sexual activity during the nights of Ramadan, so that matters are made easier for them.<sup>105</sup>

**(b) Surah 7:26**

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُؤَارِي سَوَاتِكُمْ وَرِيثًا وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ

O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember.

The Tafsīr al-Jalalayn expounds this *āyah* as follows:

**O Children of Adam! We have sent down on you a garment**, that is, We have created it for you, **to conceal**, to cover up, **your shameful parts, and feathers**, meaning all that one adorns oneself with of garments, and **the garment of God-fearing**, righteous deeds and virtuous traits (read as *libāsa 'l-taqwā*, ‘the garment of God-fearing’, as a supplement to the preceding *libāsan*, ‘a garment’; or read as *libāsu 'l-tawqā* as the subject, the predicate of which is the [following] sentence) **that is best; that is one of God’s signs**, the proofs of His power; **perhaps they will remember**, and believe (the address shifts from the second [to the third] person).<sup>106</sup>

With regard to this *āyah* Ibn Kathir says:

Allah reminds His servants that He has given them *Libas* and *Rish*. Libas refers to the clothes that are used to cover the private parts, while *Rish* refers to the outer adornments used for purposes of beautification. Therefore, the first type is essential while the second type is complimentary. Ibn Jarir said that *Rish* includes furniture and outer clothes. ‘Abdur-Rahman ibn Zayd ibn Aslam commented on the *āyah*, وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ “and the *Libās* (raiment) of Taqwa...” “When one fears Allah, Allah covers his errors. Hence the ‘Libas of Taqwa’ (that the *āyah* mentions).”<sup>107</sup>

Reverence of Allah and righteous behaviour, knowing that Allah is watching everyone, are basic rules for the dress code in the Qur’ān. The *āyah* maintains that any human being knows what is decent and acceptable, what is revealing and unacceptable. Significantly Allah’s bestowment of clothes upon humankind is linked to righteous

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=2&tAyahNo=187&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&Languageld=2; 20/07/2015>.

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AIQuran-tafsir/TIK/2/187; 20/07/2015>.

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=7&tAyahNo=26&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&Languageld=2; 20/07/2015>.

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AIQuran-tafsir/TIK/7/26; 20/07/2015>.

behaviour and to a “sign” of Allah that will be remembered and believed. It is a visible expression of an invisible principle, that “clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment” is a gift from Allah to Believers specifically intended to conceal سَوَاتِكُمْ, which – in the light of the discussion in section 3.4.2.1 – might be translated as “your shame.” It confirms El Guindi’s (1999:74) observation that *libās* carries connotations linked to notions of “gender, sexuality, sanctuary, and sacred privacy.”

**(c) Surah 24:30-31**

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; surely Allah is aware of what they do.

The Tafsīr al-Jalalayn expounds this verse as follows:

**Tell believing men to lower their gaze**, from what is unlawful for them to look at (*min* [of *min absārihim*, ‘their gaze’] is extra) **and to guard their private parts**, from doing with them what is unlawful [for them to do]. **That is purer**, in other words, better, **for them**. **Truly God is aware of what they do**, with their gazes and private parts, and He will require them for it.<sup>108</sup>

Ibn Kathir has a lengthy explanation for this verse:

This is a command from Allah to His believing servants, to lower their gaze from looking at things that have been prohibited for them. They should look only at what is permissible for them to look at, and lower their gaze from forbidden things. If it so happens that a person’s gaze unintentionally falls upon something forbidden, he should quickly look away.

Muslim recorded in his Sahih<sup>109</sup> that Jarir ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Bajali, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “I asked the Prophet about the sudden glance, and he commanded me to turn my gaze away.” In the Sahih it is narrated that Abū Sa’id said that the Messenger of Allah said:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالْجُلُوسَ عَلَى الطَّرِيقَاتِ “Beware of sitting in the streets.”

They said, “O Messenger of Allah, we have no alternative but to sit in the streets to converse with one another.” The Messenger of Allah said:

إِنْ أَتَيْتُمْ فَأَعْطُوا الطَّرِيقَ حَقَّهُ “If you insist, then give the street its rights.”

They asked, “What are the rights of the street, O Messenger of Allah?” He said:

غَضُّ الْبَصَرِ،

وَكَفُّ الْأَذَى،

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=24&tAyahNo=30&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>; 20/07/2015.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

وَرَزَدُ السَّلَامِ، وَالْأَمْرُ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ،

وَالنَّهْيُ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

“Lower your gaze,

return the greeting of Salam,

enjoin what is good

and forbid what is evil.”

Abū Al-Qasim Al-Baghawi recorded that Abū Umamah said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah say:

اَكْفُوا لِي سِتًّا أَكْفُلُ لَكُمْ بِالْحَيَّةِ:

إِذَا حَدَّثَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلَا يُكْذِبْ،

وَإِذَا اتَّمَعْتَ فَلَا يَخُنْ،

وَإِذَا وَعَدَ فَلَا يُخْلِفْ،

وَعَضُّوا أَبْصَارَكُمْ،

وَكُفُّوا أَيْدِيَكُمْ،

وَاحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَكُمْ

“Guarantee me six things and I will guarantee you Paradise:

when any one of you speaks, he should not lie;

if he is entrusted with something, he should not betray that trust;

if he makes a promise, he should not break it;

lower your gaze;

restrain your hands;

and protect your private parts.”

Since looking provokes the heart to evil, Allah commanded (the believers) to protect their private parts just as he commanded them to protect their gaze which can lead to that. So he said: *قُلْ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ*: “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze, and protect their private parts.” Sometimes protecting the private parts may involve keeping them from committing Zina,<sup>110</sup> as Allah says: *وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَفْوَاجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ* “And those who guard their chastity” (23:5). Sometimes it may involve not looking at certain things, as in the *ḥadīth* in Musnad Aḥmad<sup>111</sup> and the Sunan:<sup>112</sup>

احْفَظْ عَوْرَتَكَ إِلَّا مِنْ زَوْجَتِكَ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ يَمِينُكَ

“Guard your private parts except from your wife and those whom your right hands possess.”

That is purer for them,” means it is purer for their hearts and better for their commitment to religion, as it was said: Whoever protects his gaze, Allah will illuminate his understanding, or his heart. *إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ*. “Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do.”

<sup>110</sup> Arabic *zina* زنا “adultery, fornication.” The noun is derived from the root *znj* “to commit adultery, fornicate, whore.”

<sup>111</sup> The Musnad Aḥmad refers to a collection of *Ḥadīth* collected by Aḥmad ibn-Ḥanbal († 855), the Sunni scholar to whom the Ḥanbali *madhhab* is attributed, cf. section 3.3.2.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

This is like the *āyah*: *يَعْلَمُ خَائِنَةَ الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَا تُخْفِي الصُّدُورُ* “Allah knows the fraud of the eyes and all that the breasts conceal” (40:19).

In the Sahih it is recorded that Abū Hurayrah, may Allah be pleased with him, said that the Messenger of Allah said:

كُتِبَ عَلَى ابْنِ آدَمَ حَطُّهُ مِنَ الزُّنَا  
 أَتْرَكَ ذَلِكَ لَا مَحَالَةَ،  
 فَرْنَا الْعَيْنَيْنِ النَّظْرُ،  
 وَرْنَا اللِّسَانَ النُّطْقُ،  
 وَرْنَا الْأُذُنَيْنِ الْأَسْتِمَاعُ،  
 وَرْنَا اليَدَيْنِ التَّبَطُّشُ،  
 وَرْنَا الرِّجْلَيْنِ الرَّجُلُوتُ،  
 وَالنَّفْسُ تَمْنَى وَتَشْتَهِي،  
 وَالْفَرْجُ يُصَدِّقُ ذَلِكَ أَوْ يُكْفِيهِ

*“The son of Adam has his share of Zina decreed for him,  
 and he will commit that which has been decreed.*

*The Zina of the eyes is looking;  
 the Zina of the tongue is speaking;  
 the Zina of the ears is listening;  
 the Zina of the hands is striking;  
 and the Zina of the feet is walking.  
 The soul wishes and desires,  
 and the private parts confirm or deny that.”*

It was recorded by Al-Bukhari without a complete chain. Muslim recorded a similar report with a different chain of narration. Many of the Salaf<sup>113</sup> said, “They used to forbid men from staring at beardless handsome boys.”<sup>114</sup>

This *āyah* prescribes that Muslim men should look only at what is permissible for them to look at, and lower their gaze from forbidden things. If it so happens that a person's gaze unintentionally falls upon something forbidden, he should quickly look away. The rule for Islamic dress code that can be deduced from this *āyah* is modesty, decency, and respecting one's own and the privacy of others.

In the next *āyah* (24:31) the same behavior is prescribed to Muslim women, but in more detail:

<sup>113</sup> Arabic سلف *salaf* اسلاف Pl. *as/āf* “predecessors, forebears, ancestors, forefathers.” In the context above it refers to the first two or three generations of Muslims.

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AIQuran-tafsir/TIK/24/30>; 20/07/2015.

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ بَعْضُنَّ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ  
 بِخُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ  
 بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ  
 أُولِي الإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا  
 يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head coverings<sup>115</sup> over their bosoms,<sup>116</sup> and not display their ornaments<sup>117</sup> except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! So that you may be successful.

Tafsīr al-Jalalayn expounds this verse as follows:

**And tell believing women to lower their gaze**, away from what is not lawful for them to look at, **and to guard their private parts**, from what is not lawful for them to do with them, **and not to display their adornment except for what is apparent**, namely, the face and the hands, which may be seen by a stranger, when there is no danger of [either or both falling into] temptation — this being one of two opinions. The second [of these] is that [even] this is forbidden because there is a presumption that these [parts] will cause temptation — and this is the preferred opinion, if one must settle this topic [with a definitive opinion]; **and let them draw their veils over their bosoms**, that is, let them cover up their heads, necks and chests with veils, and not reveal their, hidden, adornment, namely, all that is other than the face and the hands, **except to their husbands** (*bu'ūl* is the plural form of *ba'ī*, 'male spouse') **or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or what their right hands own**, all of whom are permitted to look thereat, except for the part from the navel down to the knees, which is unlawful for any other than their husbands to see; **'their women'**, however, excludes disbelieving women, for it is not permitted for Muslim women to reveal themselves to these; **'what their right hands own'** comprises slaves; or such men who are dependant, on what food may be left over, not (*ghayri*, read as an adjective, or read *ghayra* as an exceptive) possessing any sexual desire, [not] those men who are in [sexual] need of women, so for example those whose male member cannot become erect; or children who are not yet aware of women's private parts, in [the context of] sexual intercourse, and so to these they may reveal themselves except for that part from the navel to the knees. **And do not let them thump with their feet to make known their hidden ornaments**, as in a rattling anklet [and the like]. **And rally to God** in repentance, **O believers**, [repenting] of the occasions on which you may have looked at what is forbidden [to look at] of such [parts] and otherwise, **so that you might be prosperous**, [so that you might] be saved from such [sinful acts] when your repentance thereof is accepted — in this verse the prevalent address is to males over females.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Arabic خمر *khumur*, plural of خمار *khimār* "veil covering head and face of a woman."

<sup>116</sup> Arabic جيب *juyūb*, plural of جيب *jaib* "breast, bosom, heart."

<sup>117</sup> Arabic زينة *zīnah* "embellishment, adornment, decoration, clothes, attire, finery," cf. زين *zāna* "to decorate, adorn."

<sup>118</sup> <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafsir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=24&tAyahNo=31&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2;> 20/07/2015.



Ibn Kathir explains the verse with several references to ahadith in his discussion of two topics, namely “The Rulings of *Hijab*” and “The Etiquette of Women Walking in the Street.”

**The Rulings of *Hijab*:** This is a command from Allah to the believing women, and jealousy on His part over the wives of His believing servants. It is also to distinguish the believing women from the women of the Jahiliyyah<sup>119</sup> and the deeds of the pagan women. The reason for the revelation of this *āyah* was mentioned by Muqatil ibn Hayyan, when he said: “We heard -- and Allah knows best -- that Jabīr ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Ansari narrated that Asma’ bint Murshidah was in a house of hers in Bani Harithah, and the women started coming in to her without lower garments so that the anklets on their feet could be seen, along with their chests and forelocks. Asma’ said: ‘How ugly this is!’ Then Allah revealed: *وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ*” (24:31). And Allah says: *وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَرِهِنَّ* “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze,” meaning from that which Allah has forbidden them to look at, apart from their husbands. Some scholars said that it is permissible for women to look at non-mahram men without desire, as it was recorded in the Sahih that the Messenger of Allah was watching the Ethiopians playing with spears in the Masjid on the day of ‘Īd, and ‘Ā’ishah the Mother of the believers was watching them from behind him and he was concealing her from them, until she got bored and went away.

*وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ* “and protect their private parts:” Sa’id ibn Jubayr said: “From immoral actions.” Abū Al-‘Aliyah said: “Every *āyah* of the Qur’ān in which protecting the private parts is mentioned means protecting them from Zina, except for this *āyah* – *وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ* – “and protect their private parts” – which means protecting them from being seen by anybody.”

*وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا* “and not to show off their adornment except that which is apparent,” means they should not show anything of their adornment to non-mahram men except for whatever is impossible to hide. Ibn Mas’ud said: “Such as clothes and outer garments,” meaning what the Arab women used to wear of the veil which covered their clothes and whatever showed from underneath the outer garment. There is no blame on her for this, because this is something that she cannot conceal. Similar to that is what appears of her lower garment and what she cannot conceal. Al-Hasan, Ibn Sirin, Abū Al-Jawza’, Ibrahim An-Nakha’i and others also had the same view as Ibn Mas’ud.

*وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ* “and to draw their veils all over their Juyub,” means that they should wear the outer garment in such a way as to cover their chests and ribs, so that they will be different from the women of the Jahiliyyah, who did not do that but would pass in front of men with their chests completely uncovered, and with their necks, forelocks, hair and earrings uncovered. So Allah commanded the believing women to cover themselves, as He says: *يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزُوجِكُمْ وَبَنَاتِكُمْ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلْبِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ* “O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks all over their bodies. That will be better, that they should be known, so as not to be annoyed” (33:59). And in this noble *āyah* He said: *وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ* “and to draw their (Khumur) veils all over their Juyuibn” Khumur (veils) is the plural of Khimar, which means something that covers, and is what is used to cover the head. This is what is known among the people as a veil. Sa’id ibn Jubayr said: *وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ* “and to draw” means to pull it around and tie it securely.

<sup>119</sup> *Jahiliyyah* refers to the pre-Islamic era, cf. section 3.2.

بِخُمْرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ “their veils all over their Juyub” means, over their necks and chests so that nothing can be seen of them. Al-Bukhari recorded that ‘Ā’ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, said: “May Allah have mercy on the women of the early emigrants. When Allah revealed the *āyah*: وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ “and to draw their veils all over their Juyub,” they tore their aprons and covered themselves<sup>120</sup> with them.” He also narrated from Safiyyah bint Shaybah that ‘Ā’ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, used to say: “When this *āyah*: وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ “and to draw their veils all over their Juyub” was revealed, they took their Izars (waistsheets)<sup>121</sup> and tore them at the edges, and covered themselves with them.”

وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ “and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or their husband’s fathers, or their sons, or their husband’s sons, or their brothers or their brother’s sons, or their sister’s sons,” all of these are a woman’s close relatives whom she can never marry (mahram) and it is permissible for her to show her adornments to them, but without making a wanton display of herself. Ibn Al-Mundhir recorded that ‘Ikrimah commented on this *āyah*, وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ, “the paternal uncle and maternal uncle are not mentioned here, because they may describe a woman to their sons, so a woman should not remove her Khimar in front of her paternal or maternal uncle.” With regard to the husband, all of this is for his sake, so she should try her best when adorning herself for him, unlike the way she should appear in front of others.

أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ “or their women,” this means that she may also wear her adornment in front of other Muslim women, but not in front of the women of Ahl Adh-Dhimmah (Jewish and Christian women), lest they describe her to their husbands. This is prohibited for all women, but more so in the case of the women of Ahl Adh-Dhimmah, because there is nothing to prevent them from doing that, but Muslim women know that it is unlawful and so, would be deterred from doing it. The Messenger of Allah said:

*لَا تُبَايِرِ الْمَرْأَةُ الْمَرْأَةَ فَتَتَعَنَّا لِرُؤُوسِهَا كَأَنَّهُ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهَا*

*No woman should describe another woman to her husband so that it is as if he is looking at her.*

It was recorded in the Two Sahihs from Ibn Mas'ud.

أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ “or their right hand possessions.” Ibn Jarir said, “This means from among the women of the idolaters. It is permissible for a Muslim woman to reveal her adornment before such a woman, even if she is an idolatress, because she is her slave-girl.” This was also the view of Sa’id ibn Al-Musayyib Allah says: أَوْ التَّبَعِينَ غَيْرَ أَوْلَى الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرَّجَالِ “or *Tabi’in* among men who do not have desire,” such as hired servants and followers who are not at the same level as the woman and are feeble-minded and have no interest in or desire for women. Ibn ‘Abbas said, “This is the kind of person who has no desire.” ‘Ikrimah said, “This is the hermaphrodite, who does not experience erections.” This was also the view of others among the Salaf. It was narrated in the Sahih from ‘Ā’ishah that a hermaphrodite used to enter upon the family of the Messenger of Allah and they used to consider him as one of those who do not have desire, but then the Messenger of Allah came in when he was describing a woman with four rolls of fat in front and eight behind. The Messenger of Allah said:

<sup>120</sup> The verb used in the original is derived from the root *خمر* “to cover, hide, conceal,” the same root involved in the noun *khimar*, pl. *khumur* “veil covering head and face of a woman.”

<sup>121</sup> Arabic *izar*, pl. *uzur* “loincloth, wrap, shawl, wrapper, covering.”

أَلَا أَرَى هَذَا يَعْلَمُ مَا هُنَا لَا يَخْطُلُ عَلَيْكُمْ

*Lo! I think this person knows what is they are; he should never enter upon you.*

He expelled him, and he stayed in Al-Bayda' and only came on Fridays to get food.

“or children who are not aware of the nakedness of women.” Because they are so young they do not understand anything about women or their 'Awrah or their soft speech or their enticing ways of walking and moving. If a child is small and does not understand that, there is nothing wrong with him entering upon women, but if he is an adolescent or approaching adolescence, so that he knows and understands these things, and can make a distinction between who is beautiful and who is not, then he should not enter upon women.

It was recorded in the Two Sahihs<sup>122</sup> that the Messenger of Allah said:

إِيَّاكُمْ وَالنُّحُولَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ

*Avoid entering upon women.*

It was said, “O Messenger of Allah, what do you think about the male in-laws?” He said:

الْحَمُومُ: الْمَوْتُ

*The male in-law is death.*

**The Etiquette of Women walking in the Street:** Allah's saying: “وَلَا يَصْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ” “And let them not stamp their feet...” During Jahiliyyah, when women walked in the street wearing anklets and no one could hear them, they would stamp their feet so that men could hear their anklets ringing. Allah forbade the believing women to do this. By the same token, if there is any other kind of adornment that is hidden, women are forbidden to make any movements that would reveal what is hidden, because Allah says: “وَلَا يَصْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ” “And let them not stamp their feet...” From that, women are also prohibited from wearing scent and perfume when they are going outside the home, lest men should smell their perfume. Abū 'Isa at-Tirmidhi recorded that Abū Musa, may Allah be pleased with him, said that the Prophet said:

كُلُّ عَيْنٍ زَانِيَةٌ،

وَالْمَرْأَةُ إِذَا اسْتَعْطَرَتْ فَمَرَّتْ بِالْمَجْلِسِ فِيهِ كَذَا وَكَذَا

*Every eye commits fornication and adultery,*

*and when a woman puts on perfume and passes through a gathering, she is such and such*

– meaning an adulteress. He said, “And there is a similar report from Abū Hurayrah, and this is Hasan Sahih.” It was also recorded by Abū Dawud and An-Nasa'i.

By the same token, women are also forbidden to walk in the middle of the street, because of what this involves of wanton display. Abū Dawud recorded that Abū Usayd Al-Ansari said that he heard the Messenger of Allah, as he was coming out of the Masjid and men and women were mixing in the street, telling the women:

اسْتَأْخِرْنَ فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ لَكُنَّ أَنْ تَحْفَقْنَ الطَّرِيقَ، عَلَيْكُنَّ بِحَافَاتِ الطَّرِيقِ

*Keep back, for you have no right to walk in the middle of the street. You should keep to the sides of the road.*

<sup>122</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

The women used to cling to the walls so much that their clothes would catch on the walls.

“And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful” means, practice what you are commanded in these beautiful manners and praiseworthy characteristics, and give up the evil ways of the people of Jahiliyyah, for the greatest success is to be found in doing what Allah and His Messenger command and avoiding what He forbids. And Allah is the source of strength.<sup>123</sup>

According to this *āyah* a woman’s *khimar* should also cover their bosoms. The Arabic word *khimar* means “cover.” Any cover can be called a *khimar*, such as a curtain, or a dress. In the *ḥadith* the *ḥijāb* is equated to the word *khimar* and interpreted as a head-covering. Apparently in pre-Islamic Medina women used to tuck their *khimars*’ two ends behind their heads and bind it there, thus exposing their ears and neck. By saying “place the *khumur* over the bosoms,” God ordered the women to let the two ends of their headgear extend onto their bosoms so that they conceal their ears, the neck, and the upper part of the bosom as well (Abdullah, 2006:10-11). Women should “not display their ornaments except what appears thereof” and then “only to their husbands or their fathers...” The Arabic word *zinat* refers to natural beauty and artificial ornaments – in this context the first meaning in particular applies. In short, the principle that can be deduced for proper dress code from this *āyah* is that women should not display in public the parts of their body which might carry any sexual connotations.

#### (d) *Surah 33:59*

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَرْوِجَكِ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ  
 وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا - لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ وَالْمُرْجِفُونَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ لَنُغْرِيَنَّكَ  
 بِهِمْ ثُمَّ لَا يُجَاوِرُونَكَ فِيهَا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا - مَلْعُونِينَ أَيْمًا تُقْفُوا أَخْدُوا وَقْتَلُوا تَقْتِيلًا - سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ فِي الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ  
 قَبْلُ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves<sup>124</sup> [part] of their *Jalābīb*.<sup>125</sup> That will be better that they should be known so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (*Surah 3:59*).

<sup>123</sup> <http://www.alim.org/library/quran/AlQuran-tafsir/TIK/24/31; 20/07/2015>.

<sup>124</sup> In Arabic يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ “they shall draw over themselves.” يُدْنِينَ imperf. 3 fem. pl. of دَنُو “to be near, be close, to draw near, to bring something close to.”

<sup>125</sup> In Arabic مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ “of their *Jalābīb*.” The preposition مِنْ implies that part of the *jalābīb* should be drawn over them in such a way that they are recognised as Muslim women and properly screened so that they will not be inappropriately approached by strangers. جَلْبَابِهِنَّ “their *Jalābīb*” is the genitive masc. pl. of the noun *jilbāb*; pl. جلابيب *jalābīb* “garment, dress, gown, woman’s dress.” The noun is derived from the root جليب *jlibb* “to clothe, to be clothed.”

In The Sunan Abū Dawud, Book 34: Clothing; Hadith 82, the following hadith regarding this *āyah* is related:

Narrated Umm Salamah, Ummul Mu'minin: When the verse "That they should cast their outer garments over their persons" was revealed, the women of Ansar came out as if they had crows over their heads because of the outer garment<sup>126, 127</sup>

On this *āyah* the Tafsīr al-Jalalayn remarks as follows:

**O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks closely over themselves** (*jalābīb* is the plural of *jilbāb*, which is a wrap that covers a woman totally) — in other words, let them pull part of it [also] over their faces, leaving one eye [visible], when they need to leave [the house] for something. That makes it likelier that they will be known, to be free women, **and not be molested**, by being approached. In contrast, slave girls did not use to cover their faces and so the disbelievers used to pester them. **And God is Forgiving**, of any occasion in the past when they may have neglected to cover themselves, **Merciful**, to them in His veiling them.<sup>128</sup>

Ibn Kathir explains the verse under the topic “The Command of *Hijab*”

Here Allah tells His Messenger to command the believing women -- especially his wives and daughters, because of their position of honor -- to draw their *Jilbabs* over their bodies, so that they will be distinct in their appearance from the women of the Jahiliyyah and from slave women. The *Jilbāb* is a *Ridā'*,<sup>129</sup> worn over the Khimar. This was the view of Ibn Mas'ud, 'Ubaydah, Qatadah, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Ibrahim An-Nakha'i, 'Ata' Al-Khurasani and others. It is like the Izar used today. Al-Jawhari said: “The *Jilbāb* is the outer wrapper.” 'Alī ibn Abī Talhah reported that Ibn 'Abbas said that Allah commanded the believing women, when they went out of their houses for some need, to cover their faces from above their heads with the *Jilbāb*, leaving only one eye showing. Muḥammad ibn Sirin said, “I asked 'Ubaydah As-Salmani about the *āyah*: يُذَيِّنَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ ‘to draw their *Jalābīb* over their bodies.’ He covered his face and head, with just his left eye showing.”

ذَلِكَ أَذْنَى أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ “That will be better that they should be known so as not to be annoyed” means, if they do that, it will be known that they are free, and that they are not servants or whores.

وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُوراً رَحِيماً “And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” means, with regard to what happened previously during the days of Jahiliyyah, when they did not have any knowledge about this.

The Prophet's (ﷺ) wives, due to their special position in the emerging Islamic community, are encouraged in this *āyah* to act as models for practising the proper dress code (Ahmed, 1992:55). The basic principle that can be deduced from this *āyah*

<sup>126</sup> In Arabic مِنَ الْأَكْسِيَةِ “from the outer garment.” الْأَكْسِيَةُ is the gen. masc. pl. of the noun كِسَاءٌ *kisā'*; pl. اكْسِيَةٌ *aksīyah* “garment, dress.”

<sup>127</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/34/82>; 24/07/2015.

<sup>128</sup> <http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=0&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=33&tAyahNo=59&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>; 22/07/2015.

<sup>129</sup> In Arabic: رِدَاءٌ *ridā'*; pl. اَرْدِيَّةٌ *ardiyah* “loose outer garment, cloak, robe.”

regarding proper dress code is that the *hijab* becomes a visible symbol of religious identity and protection. Since that time until now Islamic women respect that dress code.

### **(e) Ahadith clarifying issues of female clothing practice**

After scrutinising references in the Qur'ān to the use of *libas* and specific references to female clothing there might still be some questions regarding exactly which parts of the female body should be screened from non-*mahram* men (Surah 24:30-31) and when appearing in public (Surah 33:59). The researcher is of the opinion that a number of ahadith will clarify these issues.

First the researcher refers to a number of ahadith forbidding women in *iḥrām* (the state of ritual consecration)<sup>130</sup> to wear a face veil and gloves. In the Sunan Abū Dawud, Book 11: The Rites of Hajj; Hadith 106, it is said:

Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) as saying: A woman in *iḥrām* (wearing *iḥrām*, i.e. the sacred state) must not be veiled<sup>131</sup> or wear gloves<sup>132, 133</sup>.

Confirming this custom Abū Dawud relates another ḥadīth in his Sunan, Chapter 11: The Rites of Hajj; Hadith 113:

Narrated 'Ā'ishah, Ummul Mu'minin: Riders would pass us when we accompanied the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) while we were in the sacred state (wearing *iḥrām*). When they came by us, each one of us would let down<sup>134</sup> her outer garment<sup>135</sup> from her head over her face, and when they had passed on, we would raise it<sup>136, 137</sup>.

A ḥadīth is transmitted in the Muwatta Malik, Book 20: Hajj; Hadith 725, which seems to contradict the abovementioned custom:

<sup>130</sup> In Arabic: إحرām *iḥrām*, from the root حرم *ḥrm* "to be forbidden, prohibited, unlawful; to enter into the state of ritual consecration (especially for a Meccan pilgrimage)." In Islam tradition it refers to the sacred state which a Muslim must enter in order to perform the major pilgrimage (*Hajj*) or the minor pilgrimage (*Umrah*).

<sup>131</sup> In Arabic: لا تَنْقُبُ "she must not put on a veil," the Jussive 3 fem. sing. of the verb نَقَبَ VIII "to put on a veil, veil one's face." The noun نِقَاب *niqāb*; pl. نِقَاب *nuqub* "veil" is derived from this root.

<sup>132</sup> In Arabic: وَلا تَلْبَسُ الْقَفَازَيْنِ "and she must not wear (لبس) two gloves." The noun قَفَازَيْنِ is the accusative dual of قَفَاز *quffāz* "glove."

<sup>133</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/11/106>; 29/07/2015. The ḥadīth is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* "sound" (Al-Albani). The hadith also occurs in the same source as Hadith 105 and Hadith 107; <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/11/105>; <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/11/107>. A similar hadith is transmitted in the Muwatta Malik, Book 20: Hajj; Hadith 724; <http://sunnah.com/urn/407310>; 29/07/2015.

<sup>134</sup> سَدَلَتْ "she let down," perf. 3 fem. sing. of سَدَلَ "to let something hang down, fall down, to let down, drop, lower."

<sup>135</sup> In Arabic: جَلَبَابَهَا "her *jilbāb*," cf. footnote 66.

<sup>136</sup> In Arabic: كَشَفْنَا "we would raise it," from the root كَشَفَ "to pull away, remove, take off, raise."

<sup>137</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/11/113>; 29/07/2015. The ḥadīth is classified as *ḍa'īf* "weak" (Al-Albani). A similar hadith is transmitted in the Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 25, Hadith 3047; <http://sunnah.com/urn/1279650>.

Yahya related to me from Malik from Hisham ibn Urwa that Fatima bint al-Mundhir said, “We used to conceal our faces<sup>138</sup> when we were in *iḥram* in the company of Asma bint Abī Bakr as-Siddiq.”<sup>139</sup>

The ḥadīth is classified as *ḍaʿīf* “weak” in Muslim tradition, the main reason being that this is the only ḥadīth expressing the view that women went veiled **while in iḥrām**. It nevertheless confirms the custom of veiling amongst the first generation of Muslim women.

These aḥādīth make it reasonable to assume that **outside iḥrām** Muslim women from the Prophet’s (ﷺ) time – at least since the revelation of the *āyah* of the *ḥijāb* – covered their faces and hands in front of non-*maḥram* men or when they appeared in public.

In his Sunan, Book 34: Clothing; Hadith 85, Abū Dawud relates a ḥadīth which seems to contradict the abovementioned assumption:

Narrated ‘Ā’ishah, Ummul Mu’minin: Asma’, daughter of Abū Bakr, entered upon the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) wearing thin clothes. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) turned his attention from her. He said: O Asma’, when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this, and he pointed to his face and hands.

Abū Dawud said: This is a *mursal* tradition (i.e. the narrator who transmitted it from ‘Ā’ishah is missing) Khalid ibn Duraik did not see ‘Ā’ishah.<sup>140</sup>

Abū Dawud himself indicates that this is a *mursal* tradition<sup>141</sup>. It implies that the “chain” to the ultimate source that can be traced back to the Prophet (ﷺ) (in this case his wife, ‘Ā’ishah) is not sound because there is a broken link. In spite of the fact that the ḥadīth is classified as *ṣaḥīḥ* “sound” and used in some circles to argue that a Muslim woman does not need to cover her face and hands, other *aḥādīth* confirm the assumption made above.

In Book 2: Prayer; Hadith 249, Abū Dawud relates the following:

<sup>138</sup> In Arabic نَكَمَرُ وَجُوهَنَا “we used to conceal our faces.” نَكَمَرُ is an imperf. 1 pl. of خَمَرَ II “to cover, hide, conceal.” وَجُوهَنَا is the acc. masc. pl. of the noun وَجْهٌ وَجُوهُ *wajh* pl. *wujūh* “face, countenance, front.”

<sup>139</sup> <http://sunnah.com/urn/407320>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>140</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/34/85>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>141</sup> In Arabic مرسَل *mursal* “hurried.”

Zaid ibn Qunfudh said that his mother asked Umm Salamah: In how many clothes should a woman pray? She replied: she would pray wearing a veil<sup>142</sup> and a long shirt<sup>143</sup> which covers the surface of her feet.<sup>144</sup>

In the *Muwatta Malik*, Book 8: Prayer in Congregation; Hadith 326, it is stated:

Yahya related to me from Malik from Muḥammad ibn Zayd ibn Qunfudh that his mother asked Umm Salama, the wife of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, "What clothes can a woman wear in prayer?" She said, "She can pray in a shift<sup>145</sup> that reaches down and covers the top of her feet."<sup>146</sup>

In the *Riyad as-Salihin* by Al-Nanawi,<sup>147</sup> Book 4: The Book of Dress; Hadith 23, it is stated:

Ibn 'Umar (May Allah be pleased with them) reported: Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "On the Day of Resurrection, Allah will not look at the one who trails his lower garment out of arrogance." Umm Salamah (May Allah be pleased with her) asked: "What should women do with the hem of their clothes?" He (ﷺ) said, "They might lower them a hand's span." She said: "But their feet would still remain exposed." He said: "Let them lower those equal to arm's length but not more than that."<sup>148</sup>

In the *Riyad as-Salihin* by Al-Nawari, Book 18: The Book of Prohibited Actions; Hadith 123, it is stated:

Abū Hurairah (May Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "There are two types of people who will be punished in Hell and whom I have not seen: men having whips like the tails of cows and they will be beating people with them, and, women who will be dressed but appear to be naked, inviting to evil; and they themselves will be inclined to it. Their heads will appear like the humps of the Bactrian camel inclined to one side. They will not enter Jannah and they will not smell its fragrance which is perceptible from such and such a distance."<sup>149</sup>

In the *Saḥiḥ Bukhari*, Book 10: Call to Prayers; Hadith 258, this hadith is transmitted:

<sup>142</sup> In Arabic الخمار, cf. footnote 61.

<sup>143</sup> In Arabic الذرع السائب. The noun درع *dir'* occurs often in a military context and refers to a "coat of mail, hauberk." When it refers to female clothing it is usually translated with "chemise, shirt." When the adjective سائب *sābiḥ* refers to clothing, it can be translated with "long and loose fitting."

<sup>144</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/2/249>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>145</sup> In Arabic الخمار, cf. footnote 61.

<sup>146</sup> <http://sunnah.com/malik/8/37>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>147</sup> Arabic رياض الصالحين *Riyādh as-Sālihin* "The Gardens of the Righteous," a compilation of verses from the Qur'ān and hadith by Abū Zakaria Muhiy ad-Din Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (1233–1277), a Sunni Muslim author on Fiqh and Hadith.

<sup>148</sup> <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/4/23>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>149</sup> <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/18/123>; 23/07/2015. A similar hadith is transmitted in the *Saḥiḥ Bukhari*, Book 37: The Book of Clothes and Adornment; Hadith 190; <http://sunnah.com/muslim/37/190>; Book 53: The Book of Paradise, its Description, its Bounties and its Inhabitants; Hadith 63; <http://sunnah.com/muslim/53/63>.



Narrated 'Ā'ishah: When Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) finished the Fajr prayer, the women would leave covered in their sheets<sup>150</sup> and were not recognized owing to the darkness.<sup>151</sup>

A similar hadith is related in Book 8: Prayers; Hadith 84:

Narrated 'Ā'ishah: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) used to offer the Fajr prayer and some believing women covered with their veiling sheets<sup>152</sup> used to attend the Fajr prayer with him and then they would return to their homes unrecognized.<sup>153</sup>

Bukhari relates a similar hadith in Book 9: Times of Prayers; Hadith 54:

Narrated 'Ā'ishah: The believing women covered with their veiling sheets<sup>154</sup> used to attend the Fajr prayer with Allah's Apostle, and after finishing the prayer they would return to their home and nobody could recognize them because of darkness.<sup>155</sup>

In the Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 1: The Book of Purification and its Sunnah; Hadith 699, it is stated:

It was narrated from 'Ā'ishah that the Prophet said: "Allah does not accept the prayer of a woman who menstruates (i.e., an adult woman) except with a head cover"<sup>156, 157</sup>

In his Sunan, Book 34: Clothing; Hadith 81, Abū Dawud relates the following:

Safiyah, daughter of Shaybah, said that 'Ā'ishah mentioned the women of Ansar, praised them and said good words about them. She then said: When Surat an-Nur came down, they took the curtains, tore them and made head covers (veils) of them<sup>158, 159</sup>.

It is clear from this overview that in these *aḥādīth* Muslim women are expected to cover themselves from head to the top of the feet when they appear in public. The clothes should not be transparent and should not reveal the natural contours of the body. El Guindi's (1999:74) observation that *libās* in Muslim tradition is linked to notions of "gender, sexuality, sanctuary, and sacred privacy" is confirmed not only by the Surahs discussed above, but also by *aḥādīth* related to female clothing practices.

<sup>150</sup> In Arabic بِمُرُوطِهِنَّ "in their (woollen) cloaks." The noun مرط *marṭ*; pl. مروط *murūṭ* refers to a "cloak, shawl" woven from wool.

<sup>151</sup> <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/10/258>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>152</sup> In Arabic بِمُرُوطِهِنَّ, cf. footnote 91.

<sup>153</sup> <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/8/24>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>154</sup> In Arabic بِمُرُوطِهِنَّ, cf. footnote 91.

<sup>155</sup> <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/9/54>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>156</sup> In Arabic بِخِمَارٍ, cf. footnote 61.

<sup>157</sup> <http://sunnah.com/urn/1256540>; 03/08/2015.

<sup>158</sup> In Arabic خُمْرًا, cf. footnote 61.

<sup>159</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/34/81>; 23/07/2015.

### 3.4.3 Concluding remarks

At this point the researcher wishes to emphasise again that the practice of “veiling” was not introduced into the Arab world by Muḥammad (ﷺ). The practice already existed in some social classes in the ancient Mediterranean geographical area for a very long time, as has been argued in Chapter 2. The question can indeed be asked what perspective(s) could have been added to an existing cultural practice by Islam. Byng (2010:110) argues that Islam re-interpreted an existing cultural practice through the lens of **religious** values, attitudes, and identity. For believing women the *hijab* becomes the visible symbol of these values and attitudes and especially of their identity as **Islamic** women. In Islam an existing cultural practice is reinterpreted on a religious level. “Veiling” becomes a symbol for modesty, privacy, identity, and visual religious expression. It has practical value as a form of protection when women appear in the public sphere.

## 3.5 Female clothing practices in the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence

### 3.5.1 Introductory remarks

The researcher has already referred to the role of the four Sunni schools (*madhāhib*) in the development of the canon law of Islamic jurisprudence (*sharīah*) in this chapter, namely the *Ḥanīfites*, *Mālikites*, *Shāfi'ites* and *Ḥanbalites* (cf. section 3.3.2). The aim of the present section is to briefly indicate what role these schools played in the development of a consensus opinion regarding Islamic female dress code. The subject is broad and the sources available are numerous volumes of *sharīah*-law collected and developed over centuries by a great number of Islamic scholars. Most of the sources are available only in Arabic and will be intelligible only for specialists in the field. In the context of this study the researcher will only give examples of scholarly opinions on Islamic female dress code by representatives of the four schools. She will focus on one particular aspect, namely which part(s) of the female body is regarded as عورة *'awrah* “nakedness” according to representatives of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence.<sup>160</sup> The researcher concurs with El Guindi (1999:142) when she argues

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<sup>160</sup> Arabic عورة *'awrah*, pl. عورات *'awrāt* “defectiveness, deficiency, imperfection; pl. pudendum, genitals, weakness, weak spot: is derived from the root عور | “to lose an eye;” II to damage, mar, spoil.” An underlying notion present in all the translation possibilities proposed for the word, is that of “vulnerability.” A common English translation for the term is “nakedness.” In Muslim tradition it became the technical term for the part(s) of the male and female body

that *'awrah* (nakedness) implies “protection, safety, vulnerability, security, and privacy with regard to a home.” عورة *'awrah* (nakedness) is not a negative word (blemish), but rather carries positive connotations (inviolable vulnerability). Two themes will be addressed in this section. In sub-section 3.5.2 it will be argued that the existence of four Sunni schools of jurisprudence is not indicative of the formation of “sects” in the *Ummah*, but rather of the rich diversity in the application of Islamic principles in different contexts. In sub-section 3.5.3 a brief discussion of representative opinions on female dress code in the four schools will follow.

### 3.5.2 Four Sunni schools of jurisprudence: dividing sectarianism or sound diversity?

It should be acknowledged that adherents of the different Sunni *madhāhib* are often defensive about their own particular interpretation of Islamic tradition and quickly accuse followers of another school as being on the wrong road or following a false version of Islam.<sup>161</sup> Ahmed (2005:112) argues that there are in the Muslim community some who are “even inclined to refer to these schools as ‘sects’ or something that can be and should be eradicated from the Muslim society.” The researcher is of the opinion that the existence of the four Sunni *madhāhib* is **not a sign of the splitting of the one religion into sects but rather a manifestation of diversity** in the application of *sharī'ah* in different times and contexts.<sup>162</sup> On the basic principles at the root of *sharī'ah* there are no contradictions between the founders of the Sunni *madhāhib* (Ahmed, 2005:112).

*Ḥanīfites*, *Mālikites*, *Shāfi'ites*, and *Ḥanbalites* unanimously **agree** about the four legislative sources, namely the Holy Qur'ān, the Sunna of the Prophet (ﷺ), *Ijmā'*

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that should not be exposed in public. It is then often translated with “private parts” or “intimate parts,” but it should be noted that not only the genitals as such is included in the term. Detail will be discussed in the remainder of the chapter, but in general it can be said that for a male Believer the part of the body between the navel and the knees is *'awrah*, while for a female Believer the whole body is regarded as *'awrah*.

<sup>161</sup> This is a cause of lively discussion in current religious discourse in the Muslim *Ummah*, also in the social media. For interesting perspectives on the issue cf. the blog entry by Mohamed Ghilian, “My Ummah Will Split Into 73 Sects... & That's It!” posted on 10 November 2011; <http://mohamedghilan.com/2011/11/10/my-ummah-will-split-into-73-sects-thats-it/>; 23/07/2015.

<sup>162</sup> In an online article (in Arabic) titled *المذاهب والأئمة الأربعة* “The Doctrines/Schools (*madhāhib*) and the Four Imams” Sheikh Hamza Bilal identified six factors which led to the development of Islamic jurisprudence during the third and fourth phases: (1) the active support provided by the Caliphs to scholars of jurisprudence; (2) freedom of opinion for every eligible and qualified scholar; (3) the availability of extensive databases of ahadith and other legal sources based on the Qur'ān and Sunnah; (4) a variety of unique everyday situations due to the spread of Islam; (5) the influence of other nations' unique cultures and sciences; (6) the recording of material which facilitated the pursuit of knowledge and provided access to various issues, branches, opinions and judgments in a short time; <http://alkeltawia.com/site2/pkg09/index.php?page=show&ex=2&dir=dpages&cat=1117>; 23/07/2015.

(consensus) and *Qiyās* (deductive analogy).<sup>163</sup> Each Imam of the different *madhāhib*, however, had his own requirements regarding approval of the transmission of the Sunna, consensus, and deductive analogy, hence the differences between them. Moreover, other sources are recognised by the different *madhāhib*, but not in equal measure and not necessarily by all the *madhābib*. These sources are: discretion, abiding by other revealed injunctions, reclamation of public good, common convention, a doctrine of a companion, legislations of previous religions, and preferences of the people of Medina. The variety of opinions between scholars of the various *madhāhib* should not become a source of division and strife in Islam, but should be embraced as a necessity as Islamic jurisprudence interacts with various aspects of practical life in different parts of the world under different circumstances and at different times (Ahmed, 2005:113-119).

In this regard the words of Allah in Surah 33:52-53 should be taken to heart:

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ (٥٢) فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ (٥٣)

(52) And indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so fear Me. (53) But the people divided their religion among them into sects - each faction, in what it has, rejoicing.

The warning against dividing the one religion of Islam into various sects is repeated by the Prophet (ﷺ), according to numerous ahadith. The researcher mentions a number of examples:

In the Sunan of Abū Dawud, Book 42: Model Behaviour of the Prophet; Hadith 1, it is stated:

Narrated Abū Hurayrah: The Prophet (ﷺ) said: The Jews were split up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects; and the Christians were split up into seventy one or seventy-two sects; and my community will be split up into seventy-three sects.<sup>164</sup>

From the same book Hadith 2 adds:

Abū `Amir al-Hawdhani said: Mu`awiyah ibn Abī Sufiyan stood among us and said: Beware! The Apostle of Allah (ﷺ) stood among us and said: Beware! The people of the Book before were split up into seventy two sects, and this community will be split into

<sup>163</sup> Cf. section 3.3.2.

<sup>164</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/42/1>; 26/07/2015. A similar hadith is narrated in Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Book 40: The Book on Faith; Hadith 35; <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/40/35>; 26/07/2015.

seventy three: seventy two of them will go to Hell and one of them will go to Paradise, and it is the majority group.<sup>165</sup>

In *Jāmi'* at-Tirmidhi, Book 40: The Book on Faith; Hadith 36, a similar hadith explains the Prophet's (ﷺ) words in more detail:

Narrated 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr: that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "What befell the children of Isra'il will befall my Ummah, step by step, such that if there was one who had intercourse with his mother in the open, then there would be someone from my Ummah who would do that. Indeed the children of Isra'il split into seventy-two sects, and my Ummah will split into seventy-three sects. All of them are in the Fire Except one sect." He said: "And which is it O Messenger of Allah?" He said: "What I am upon and my Companions."<sup>166</sup>

In the Sunan Ibn Majah, Book 36: Tribulations; Hadith 67, the following Hadith occurs:

It was narrated from 'Awf ibn Malik that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "The Jews split into seventy-one sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy in Hell. The Christians split into seventy-two sects, seventy-one of which will be in Hell and one in Paradise. I swear by the One Whose Hand is the soul of Muḥammad, my nation will split into seventy-three sects, one of which will be in Paradise and seventy-two in Hell." It was said: "O Messenger of Allah, who are they?" He said: "The main body."<sup>167</sup>

It should be clear that this narration of the Prophet (ﷺ) cannot be used to attack the following of any particular *madhhab*. Such a notion implies the fallacious use of the words of the Prophet (ﷺ). In another often repeated narration the Prophet (ﷺ) clearly indicated what he regarded as the Sunnah, the well-trodden path of Muslim custom and practice. In a hadith transmitted in the Sunan Abū Dawud, Book 42: Model Behaviour of the Prophet; Hadith 12, a man is said to have asked the Prophet (ﷺ) one day when he gave an exhortation: "Messenger of Allah... what injunction do you give us?" The Prophet (ﷺ) answered:

أُوصِيكُمْ بِتَقْوَى اللَّهِ وَالسَّمْعِ وَالطَّاعَةِ وَإِنْ عَبْدًا حَبَشِيًّا فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ يَعِشْ مِنْكُمْ بَعْدِي فَسِيرَیْ اِخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا فَعَلَيْكُمْ بِسُنَّتِي  
 وَسُنَّةِ الْخُلَفَاءِ الْمُهَيَّبِينَ الرَّاشِدِينَ تَمَسَّكُوا بِهَا وَعَضُّوا عَلَيْهَا بِالنَّوَاجِذِ وَإِنَّاكُمْ وَمُحَدَّثَاتِ الْأُمُورِ فَإِنَّ كُلَّ مُحَدَّثَةٍ بَدْعَةٌ  
 وَكُلُّ بَدْعَةٍ ضَلَالَةٌ

I enjoin you to fear Allah, and to hear and obey even if it be an Abyssinian slave, for those of you who live after me will see great disagreement. You must then follow my sunnah and that of the rightly-guided caliphs. Hold to it and stick fast to it. Avoid novelties, for every novelty is an innovation, and every innovation is an error.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>165</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/42/2>; 26/07/2015.

<sup>166</sup> <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/40/36>; 26/07/2015.

<sup>167</sup> <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/67>; 26/07/2015. A similar narration occurs in the immediately following hadith, cf. <http://sunnah.com/ibnmajah/36/68>.

<sup>168</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/42/12>; 26/07/2015.

The researcher concurs with Ahmed (2005:123) when he says:

The four schools of jurisprudence are not a negative aspect in our religion. Instead, they are healthy because these schools provide us with a wealth of literature. They assist us in situations when a single school failed to provide an adequate solution for a problem. When this happened then scholars and jurists from one school looked towards one of the other schools.

### 3.5.3 Female dress code according to the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence

#### 3.5.3.1 'Aurah "nakedness" in the Qur'ān and Hadith

The question of exactly what encompasses a female Muslim's عورة 'awrah "nakedness, private parts, intimate parts" has been answered similarly, but at the same time diversely, by adherents of the four Sunni *madhāhib*. This sub-section will briefly indicate how the term is used in the Qur'ān and Hadith. In sub-section 3.5.3.2 voices from the four schools on the subject will be heard. In sub-section 3.5.3.3 the researcher will give a summary of the consensus opinion regarding female dress code as expressed in the four Sunni *madhāhib*.

The root عور *'wr* occurs only four times in the Qur'ān in three *āyāt*, every time as the noun عورة 'awrah. In Surah 24:31 the noun occurs in the context of a command to believing women "to wrap [a portion of] their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornment" except to close family members and household servants who can be classified as *maḥram*. Amongst the *maḥram* are الطُّفْلُ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُظْهِرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ "children who are not yet aware of the private parts of women." Here the plural of the noun عورة 'awrah refers to the female genital area.

The notion of not exposing the 'awrah to others and hence display behaviour characteristic of modesty and respect for fellow human beings' privacy is repeated in a number of ahadith and is applied to both male and female Believers in their relations to each other and amongst Believers of the same gender as well. In the Saḥīḥ Muslim, Book 3: Book of Menstruation; Hadith 91 the following hadith occurs:

This hadith has been narrated by Ibn Abu Fudaik and Dabbik ibn 'Uthman with the same chain of transmitters and they observed: The place of 'awrah – (it is) the nudity of the man and the nudity of the woman.<sup>169</sup>

<sup>169</sup> <http://sunnah.com/muslim/3/91>; 03/08/2015.

Of interest in the present context is the phrase *مَكَانَ عَوْرَةٍ - عُرْيَةَ الرَّجُلِ وَعُرْيَةَ الْمَرْأَةِ* “the place of ‘*awrah* – (it is) the nudity of the man and the nudity of the woman.” Noteworthy is the word play between the nouns *عورة* ‘*awrah* “nakedness, private parts, intimate parts”<sup>170</sup> and *عريّة* “nakedness, nudity,” respectively derived from the roots *عور* “to lose an eye;” *إل* to damage, mar, spoil” and *عرى* “to be naked, nude, undress.” If the observation made earlier that the underlying notion associated with *عور* “vulnerability” is valid, then this hadith implies that any human being’s vulnerability lies in his or her nudity, hence it needs to be covered. Against this background the often repeated ḥadīth that the Prophet (ﷺ) said of the male human body that “the thigh is ‘*awrah*,”<sup>171</sup> but of the female human body that “the woman is *Awrah*, so when she goes out, the Shaitan seeks to tempt her”<sup>172</sup> emphasise the importance of modesty and privacy in Muslim tradition. The same is true of the admonition that “a man should not see the private parts of another man, and a woman should not see the private parts of another woman,” repeated in a number of ahadith.<sup>173</sup> In a number of hadith women are admonished not to look up when men prostrate themselves in prayer “lest they should see the private parts of men.”<sup>174</sup>

In Surah 24:58 the noun occurs in the context of a command to believers that even a *maḥram* who is allowed to see a woman without “their head covers over their chests” (24:31) should ask permission before entering in a Muslim’s private quarters at three times during a day: “before the dawn prayer and when you put aside your clothing [for rest] at noon and after the night prayer.” These are the three times of day an adult Muslim will be most likely to not be fully clothed. The *āyah* continues: *ثَلَاثُ عَوْرَاتٍ لَكُمْ* “[These are] three times of privacy for you.” Here the plural of the noun *عورة* ‘*awrah* refers to the possibility that the “private parts” might be exposed and the emphasis is on privacy.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. the discussion in footnote 101.

<sup>171</sup> For instance in *Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi*, Book 43: Chapters on Manners; Hadith 3025-3028; <http://sunnah.com/urn/730190>, .../730200, .../730210, .../730220. Similarly in the *Sunan Abū Dawud*, Book 33: Hot Baths; Hadith 6; <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/33/6>; 03/08/2015.

<sup>172</sup> *Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi*, Book 12: The Book on Suckling; Hadith 28; <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/12/28>; 03/08/2015.

<sup>173</sup> For instance in the *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 3: Book of Menstruation; Hadith 90; <http://sunnah.com/muslim/3/90>; 03/08/2015. Similarly in *Riyad aṣ-Ṣalāḥin*, Book 18: The Book of Prohibited Actions; Hadith 117; <http://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/18/117>; *Sunan ibn Majah*, Book 1: The Book of Purification and its Sunnah; Hadith 706; <http://sunnah.com/urn/1307050>; *Jāmi’ at-Tirmidhi*, Book 43: Chapters on Manners; Hadith 3023; <http://sunnah.com/urn/730170>.

<sup>174</sup> *Sunan Abū Dawud*, Book 2: Prayer; Hadith 461; <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/2/461>; 04/08/2015. A similar hadith is transmitted in the same source in Hadith 195; <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/2/195>.

The importance of the principle of sacred privacy in Islamic thought is illustrated by several references to this *āyah* in the Ḥadīth-literature. Especially insightful in this regard is a fairly lengthy ḥadīth transmitted in the Sunan Abū Dawud, Book 43: General Behaviour; Ḥadīth 420:

Narrated Abdullah ibn Abbas: Ikrimah said: A group of people from Iraq said: Ibn Abbas, what is your opinion about the verse in which we have been commanded whatever we have been commanded, but no one acts upon it? The word of Allah, Most High, reads: “O ye who believe! Let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you, who have not come of age, ask your permission (before) they enter your presence on three occasions: before morning prayer, while you are undressing for the noonday heat, and after late-night prayer. These are your three times of undress; outside those times it is not wrong for you or for them to move about.”

Al-Qa'nabi recited the verse up to “full of knowledge and wisdom.”

Ibn Abbas said: Allah is Most Clement and Most Merciful to the believers. He loves concealment. The people had neither curtains nor curtained canopies in their houses. Sometimes a servant, a child or a female orphan of a man entered while the man was having sexual intercourse with his wife. So Allah commanded them to ask permission in those times of undress. Then Allah brought them curtains and all good things. But I did not see anyone following it after that.

Abu Dawud said: The tradition of 'Ubaid Allah and of 'Ata, weakens this tradition.<sup>175</sup>

The ḥadīth implies that asking permission to enter out of respect for the privacy of others and thus to avoid accidentally looking at their *'awrah* is important because Allah “loves concealment” and He ensures it by bringing to Believers “curtains and all good things.”

Finally, in Surah 33:13 the noun occurs twice in the singular. The Surah is read in the context of a Meccan-led attack against the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers in al-Madīnah in 5 A.H. A party among the people of al-Madīnah was hesitant to fight on the Prophet's (ﷺ) behalf and encouraged their people not to fight: “O people of Yathrib, there is no stability for you [here], so return [home].” Some implored the Prophet (ﷺ) to allow them to go home. They said: إِنَّ بُيُوتَنَا عَوْرَةٌ: “Indeed, our houses are unprotected!” In fact it happened وَمَا هِيَ بِعَوْرَةٍ “while they were not exposed.” In both cases *'awrah* implies vulnerability.

<sup>175</sup> <http://sunnah.com/abudawud/43/420>; 03/08/2015. Similar ahadith have been transmitted in Jāmi' at-Tirmidhi, Book 42: Chapters on Seeking Permission; Hadith 20; <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/42/20>; Al-Adab al-Mufrad, Book 42: Asking Permission to Enter; Hadith 2 and Hadith 13; <http://sunnah.com/adab/43/2> and : <http://sunnah.com/adab/43/13>.



### 3.5.3.2 'Awwrah "nakedness" according to the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence

The researcher emphasises again that the brief overview of statements by adherents of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence regarding a woman's 'awrah is by no means complete. In the context of this study it would have been impossible to provide an overview of the literally thousands of available sources. It would indeed also have been undesirable as these sources are mainly available in Arabic and would be unintelligible to non-Muslim readers. Consequently the researcher focuses on well-known representatives of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence and relies mainly on quotes regarding a woman's 'awrah available in the public domain.<sup>176</sup>

#### (a) 'Awwrah according to the the Ḥanīfi school

Abū Ikhlas Hasan ibn 'Ammar ibn 'Alī al Shurunbulalī al Wafa'i (994-1069 / 384-461 A.H.), a major Hanafi *imam*, said in his book *Nur al-Idah* (The Light of Clarification): "The whole body of a free woman is 'awrah except her face, hands and feet; meaning the palms and back of the hands and the top of the feet and underneath are permitted to uncover and both sides of her hands (the palm and the back). This constitutes the most correct opinion and the preferable one as well."<sup>177</sup>

Abū Ja'far Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī (853-933 / 239-321 A.H.), a famous Sunni Islamic scholar who followed the Hanafi *madhhab*, said: "a girl is to hide her face only for the fear of temptation not because it is an 'awrah." Damad Efendi Shaykhizadeh (d. 1667 / 1078 A.H.) said in his *Majma' al-Anhar*, a commentary on Ibrahim al-Halābī's (d. 1549 / 956 A.H.) *Multaqa al-Abhur*: "a girl is to hide her face to prevent temptation. However, in our time it is a fundamental practice or even obligatory for the high probability of temptation. 'Ā'ishah narrated that the whole body of a free woman is (awrah) except for one of her eyes, a provision driven by necessity because 'if she finds no escape from walking on the road, then it is necessary that she opens her eye to see the road, so it is permissible for her to uncover one of her eyes due to this

<sup>176</sup> Enlightening in this regard are the following two sources: Sheikh Hamza Bilal, المذاهب والأئمة الأربعة "The Doctrines/Schools (*madhāhib*) and the Four Imams;" <http://alkeltawia.com/site2/pkg09/index.php?page=show&ex=2&dir=dpages&cat=1117>; 23/07/2015; Mufti Muhammad Taqi, "The *Hijab* of Women and its Boundaries" (translated by Zameelur Rahman), <http://www.deoband.org/2010/06/hadith/hadith-commentary/the-hijab-of-women-and-its-boundaries/>; 01/08/2015.

<sup>177</sup> <https://archive.org/stream/NurAl-idah-TheLightOfClarification/Nur-al-IdahArabic-english#page/n135/mode/2up/search/face> accessed 23/07/2015. 28/07/2015.

necessity, and what is established by necessity should not go beyond the scope of the necessity’.”

Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Sahl Abū Bakr al-Sarakhsi (d. 1096 / 489 A.H.), traditionally known as *Shams al-A'imma* (the sun of the leaders), a Persian scholar of the Hanafi school, argued in *al-Mabsut* that “It is permissible to look at the area of apparent adornment of women and not the hidden [adornment]” (with reference to Surah 24:31). He indicated that the Hanifis agree with ‘Ali and Ibn ‘Abbas’ view that “what appears thereof is kohl and the ring.” Because “the face is the site of kohl and the hand is the site of the ring” and because of the fact that “there is no doubt that it is permissible to look at her garment, and fear of temptation is not considered in this... looking at her face and hands is the same.” However, Shams al-A'imma indicates that all of this is only applicable “when looking is not with desire (*shahwah*). If one knows that if he looks, he will become desirous, then it is not permissible for him to look at any part of her.”

#### **(b) 'Awrah according to the Māliki school**

Mālik ibn Anas ibn Mālik ibn Abī 'Āmir al-Asbahī (711–795 / 92-179 A.H.), simply known as “Imam Malik,” and founder of the Māliki *madhhab*, refers in his *Al-Muwatta* to the following hadith: “Hisham ibn Urwa narrated from Fatima bint Al Mundhir that she said: “We used to veil our faces when we were in *iḥrām* (a state of ritual consecration) in the company of Asma bint Abī Bakr as-Siddiq.” He adds: “a woman in the state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*) may cover her face to keep it hidden from the eyes while she shall do so if temptation is certain or of a high probability or people tempted to look at her for the pleasure of the sight.” This is confirmed by the narration of 'Ā'ishah who said: “We were with the Prophet, peace be upon him, and we were in *iḥrām*. When a rider met us we would lower our garments from the top of our heads, and when he has gone, we would lift them up again.”

Muḥammad Abū 'Abd Allah ibn Muḥammad at-Tarabūlsi al-Hattab al-Ru'yani (1497–1547 / 902-954 A.H.), commonly referred to in Islamic scholarship as al-Hattab or Imam al-Hattab, states in his book *Mawahib al-Jalil*, a major commentary on Khalil's *Mukhtassar*: “If temptation is expected, a woman shall hide her face and hands.” Similarly, 'Abd al-Baqi ibn Yusuf al-Zarqani (d. 1710 / 1122 A.H.) said in his commentary on al-Khalil's *Mukhtasar*: “*'awrah* of a free woman in front of a

marriageable Muslim man is her whole body except for the face and the hands. Therefore, this Muslim man may see the face and both sides of the hands (palm and back) without any justified reason like witnessing or medical purposes unless there is a fear of temptation or pleasure of the sight, then it is prohibited on him.”

**(c) 'Awwrah according to the the Shāfi'i school**

Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (767-820 / 150-205 A.H.), often referred to as “Shaykh al-Islām” or “Imam al-Shafi'i,” founder of Shafi'i *madhhab*, said in his *Kitab al-Umm*: “The man and the woman must not pray unless their 'awrah is fully covered.” He continues: “The man's 'awrah is from the navel to the knees although the navel and the knees themselves are not from his 'awrah. And the woman in prayer has to cover all her body except her face and hands.” Thus according to al-Shafi'i a woman's face and hands are not 'awrah or else she would have to cover them when praying.

Abū Zakaria Muhiy ad-Din Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (1233–1277 / 630-676 A.H.) said in his *Kitab al-Nikah* on the issue of a man looking at a woman: “It is forbidden to look at her 'awrah, and to her face and hands if he fears *fitna*. If he does not fear *fitna* there are two views: Most of the associates (i.e. the Shafi'i), especially the earlier ones, say it is not forbidden because of the saying of Allah: “They do not show their adornment (*zina*) except that which is apparent” and this is understood to mean the face and hands. But it is disliked, as stated by Shaykh Abū Hamid [al-Ghazali] and others. The second [view]: it is forbidden. Al-Istakhiri and Abū Ali al-Tabari stated it, and Shaykh Abū Muḥammad and al-Imam preferred it. The author of al-Muhadhdhab (al-Shirazi) and al-Rawayani declared it certain.” Thus al-Nawawi concludes: “It is prohibited for a mature male to look at the 'awrah of a mature foreign free woman, and similarly [it is prohibited to look at] her face and hands when one fears temptation, and also when safe from temptation according to the correct opinion.”

**(d) 'Awwrah according to the the Ḥanbali school**

Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Shaybānī (780-855 / 163-241 A.H.), founder of the Ḥanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, said – according to Imam 'Abdur-Rahman ibn Al-Jawzi Al-Bakri (d. 1200 / 596 A.H.) in his *Zad ul-Masir Fi 'Ilm it-Tafsir* (The Provision of the One Who is Going to Study the Knowledge of Tafsir): “Everything, including any part of the free woman even nails, is 'awrah.”

Imam Mawaffaq ad-Din ‘Abdullah ibn Aḥmad ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi (d. 1223 / 620 A.H.) states in *al-Mughni*: “As for men looking at a foreign woman without a reason, it is prohibited entirely according to the apparent statement of Aḥmad.” Yusuf ibn ‘Abd Al Hadi Al Maqdisi Al Hanbali (d. 1503 / 909 A.H.) said in his *Mughni dhawil afham*: “A man shall not look at a marriageable woman except for the old women and the youngsters that are not normally seditious. If seen, a man shall avert his eyes, and a woman shall cover her face if she reaches places with marriageable men.”

Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr (also known as Ibn al-Qayyim or Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah; d. 1350 / 751 A.H.) said in his *I'laam ul Muwaqqi'een 'an Rabb il 'Aalameen* (Information for Those who Write on Behalf of the Lord of the Worlds): “The ‘*awrah* is of two types: an ‘*awrah* in the *Salāh* (prayer) and an ‘*awrah* in looking (*‘awratu fin-nathr*). So, as for the free woman, it is (allowed) for her to pray while her hands and face are uncovered, and it is not (allowed) for her to go out in the markets and gatherings of people like that (i.e. it is not allowed for her to go out without the face and hands covered).”

### **3.5.3.3 The consensus of the four schools of jurisprudence pertaining to hijab**

When the positions of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence pertaining to the *hijab* are considered, it becomes clear that they all agree on the prohibition of looking at the face of a woman with the intention of desire or when there is possibility of temptation. Hanifis and Malikis tend to lift the prohibition when there is no intention of desire or danger of temptation. Shafi’is and Hanbalis agree that the prohibition is not valid during prayer – then a woman need not cover her face and hands. However, meeting the condition of safety from desire or temptation is so difficult, especially in the modern era with all its influences and temptation, that Shafi’is and Hanbalis tend to absolutely prohibit the uncovering of any part of the female body in public.

Figure 40 visually expresses what Islamic female dress code entails in Muslim societies where the Hanifi and Maliki point of view is dominant. Figure 41, on the other hand, illustrates what the dress code entails in societies where the Shafi’i and Hanbali point of view is dominant.



**Figure 40**  
Female dress code according to the  
Ḥanīfites and Mālikites  
Contemporary<sup>178</sup>



**Figure 41**  
Female dress code according to the  
Shāfi'ites and Ḥanbalites  
Contemporary<sup>179</sup>

The researcher is of the opinion that taking into consideration the time that we live in and the high probability of temptation and sedition all four schools of Sunni jurisprudence are unanimous in their views on the obligation of covering the face and hands and the prohibition of revealing them.

### 3.6 Female dress code according to Islamic tradition: A synthesis

In the light of the preceding discussion a synthesis can now be given of what proper female dress code entails according to Islamic tradition. It is not the researcher's intention at this point to provide a detailed description of Muslim female dress code in the light of this tradition. It has been done elsewhere. Abdullah (1999) provides a detailed analysis that needs not to be repeated here. The researcher will rather focus on some principles and general definitions.

Āyāt from five Surahs have been discussed in detail in this chapter. From these āyāt the following general principles for a proper female dress code have been determined. With reference to Surah 33:53 the researcher has argued that the *hijab* marks a **sacred space**, hence the wearing of the *hijab* should not be interpreted only as proper cultural conduct and social etiquette in its historical context as has been argued in Chapter 2. For a Muslim woman the *hijab* becomes a religious symbol of her relationship with Allah. Surah 33:32-33 suggests that this religious connotation also implies that the *hijab* marks sacred, **private space**. Donning the *hijab* symbolises that the Muslim woman's body becomes a sanctuary, a private space to be respected. Surah 2:187 provides an important perspective on this sacred, private space. Although

<sup>178</sup> <http://veil.unc.edu/religions/islam/law/>; 30/07/15.

<sup>179</sup> <http://veil.unc.edu/religions/islam/law/>; 30/07/15.

a woman is different from a man, notions of **gender mutuality** in this *āyah* imply that a woman is not inferior to a man. Motivated by reverence for Allah, the ultimate provider of *libās* “dress” (Surah 7:26) both man and woman are admonished to be **modest** and to **respect the sacred privacy** that is dear to Allah (Surah 24:30-31). Surah 33:59 emphasises that the dress code prescribed in the Qur’ān enables the female Believer to publicly and **visually portray her identity** as a Muslim and becomes a **mechanism of protection** against harassment when she has to venture into the public domain.

In the light of these Qur’ānic principles and its application in the Hadith literature and in the development of Islamic jurisprudence, Aziz (2010:127) summarises the basic minimum requirement for a dress code that will probably be supported by all Sunni Muslims as follows: “the basic requirement for a woman’s dress is that she should have a loose, non-transparent outer covering and a proper head-covering.” As indicated in section 3.5 for some adherents of the Ḥanifi and Maliki *madhāhib* this definition would be sufficient. El Guindi (1999:143) defines this interpretation of the *hijab* as follows:

*A muhajjaba* (a woman wearing *hijab*) wore *al-jilbab* – an unfitted, long-sleeved, ankle-length gown in austere solid colors and thick opaque fabric – and *al-khimar*, a headcover that covers the hair and extends low to the forehead, comes under the chin to conceal the neck, and falls down over the chest and back.

For adherents of the Shafi’i and Ḥanbali *madhāhib* this definition is not sufficient. To the above description they would, again following El Guindi (1999:144), add the following:

*A munaqqabah* (a woman wearing the *niqab* or face veil) more conservatively adds *al-niqab*, which covers the entire face except for the eye slits; at the most extreme, she would also wear gloves and opaque socks to cover her hands and feet.

Abdullah (1999:30) regards this definition of the *hijab* as the most appropriate in the light of the Qur’ān and Islamic tradition and describes the *hijab* as “the dress that covers the whole body of the woman including her head, face, hands and feet. It should be long, loose and plain not defining her shape.” Abdullah (1999:30) argues that the basic rationale behind this dress code “is to safeguard women from the biased looks of men and to provide her a pure atmosphere at home so that she can perform her household duties properly and contribute to improve the whole society” (Surah 33:59).

From the perspective of Muslim tradition the strict interpretation of the *hijab* provided by Abdullah above is not a sign that the female is a “lesser” human being. On the contrary, the veil entitles the woman to a respectable position and protects her from sexual harassment.

The proper dress code for a Muslim female can thus be summarised as follows: She should wear an outer garment that should be long, loose, and opaque. It should hide the woman’s entire body, including her head, hair, face, hands, bosom, and the rest of the body down to her feet. She should not wear anklets and bracelets whose tinkling can attract men’s attention. The outer garment should be plain and undecorated so as not to attract unnecessary attention to the woman (Abdullah, 1990:32).

In Muslim society this dress code is regarded as advantageous for several reasons. It protects a Muslim woman from wicked eyes and visually identifies the woman as a Muslim. It emphasises her honoured position in her society and acts as a barrier between men and women to keep both sexes from sinning. It ensures a woman’s chastity and acts as a reminder of Allah’s provision for humankind. It teaches men to respect women and to protect them. It finally symbolises the high morals and social values of Muslim society (Abdullah, 1999:33-34).

On the other hand there are clear disadvantages in unveiling. Apart from it being a violation of the Qur’ān and Hadith, it also sends the wrong message to society. It implies that the Muslim woman is weak in faith, and available. Unveiling becomes a temptation for both men and women and brings into question a woman’s modesty, which is an integral element of Islamic faith. It subjects a woman to harassment and diminishes her dignity as a faithful Muslim (Abdullah, 1999:34).

### 3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher paid attention to female dress code according to Islamic tradition. She provided a brief historical overview of the development of Islam and summarised the sources at the very foundation of Islam and Islam’s beliefs, obligations, and practices. From a number of *āyāt* in the Qur’ān (Surah 33:53; 33:32-33; 2:187; 7:26; 24:30-31; and 33:59) as well as its expansion in the Hadith and its interpretation in the Tafsir, the researcher established the following basic principles for female dress code in Islamic tradition: The *hijab* is a marker of **sacred and private**

**space** that symbolises **gender mutuality**, **modesty** and **respect** for the **sacred privacy** that is dear to Allah. It is a **public** and **visual** symbol of **female Muslim identity** (Surah 24:30-31). Surah 33:59 emphasises that the dress code prescribed in the Qur'ān enables the female Believer to publicly and **visually portray her identity** as a Muslim and an **effective shield of protection** against harassment when a female Muslim has to venture into the public domain. The researcher briefly indicated how these principles were applied and interpreted in the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence. Finally, she made a synthesis of all the information and concurred with Abdullah (1999:32) that, according to Muslim tradition, a female should wear an outer garment that should be long, loose, and opaque. It should hide the woman's entire body, including her head, hair, face, hands, bosom, and the rest of the body down to her feet. She should not wear anklets and bracelets whose tinkling can attract men's attention. The outer garment should be plain and undecorated so as not to attract unnecessary attention to the woman. The scene is now set for a discussion of conceptions and misconceptions of the *hijab* in contemporary society.



## CHAPTER 4

# THE *HIJAB* IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: CONTROVERSY, DIALOGUE, AND TOLERANCE

### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 the researcher argued that the concept of “veiling” was an integral part of the female dress code in virtually all ancient Mediterranean societies since at least the third millennium BCE. She further argued that the symbolic value of clothing in general, and female apparel in particular, is closely associated with the core social values of honour and shame and the associative values of humility, modesty, respect, and privacy. No single ideological model can explain the social practice of “veiling,” as it had different “meanings” over time and might have had more than one meaning at the same time. Sumerian gender complementarity, Assyrian/Persian, Hellenic gender hierarchy, Egyptian gender equality, and Byzantine gender seclusion all played a role in determining female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies.

In Chapter 3 the researcher investigated the specific application and re-interpretation of this cultural phenomenon in Islamic tradition. Evidence from primary sources, i.e. the Qu’rān and Sunna as it found expression in the Hadith and Tasfir, as well as from secondary sources, i.e. consensus and deductive analogy as it found expression in the development of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, indicated the following: “Veiling” as an existing socio-cultural practice has been re-interpreted and re-applied in Islamic tradition on a religious level. In Islam the *hijab* became a marker of sacred and private space. It symbolises gender mutuality, modesty, and respect for the sacred privacy that is dear to Allah. It is a public and visual symbol of female Muslim identity, and it is an effective “shield” against harassment when a female Muslim ventures into the public domain.

In this chapter the focus shifts to the role of the *hijab* in contemporary society. The researcher believes that a brief overview of perceptions of and misconceptions about the *hijab* in contemporary society is important for a number of reasons:<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> The researcher uses the words “a brief overview of perceptions of and misconceptions about the *hijab* in contemporary society” on purpose. The chapter does not contain a representative overview of existing literature on the place of women in Islam. Aziz (2010:126-159) provides a discussion of contemporary Muslim scholars’

- First, it provides the researcher with the rare opportunity to study a social custom that can be traced back as far as the fourth century BCE and still remains operative and relevant to this day.
- Second, it illustrates the relevance of a comprehensive study of ancient Mediterranean cultural and religious practices for the understanding and interpretation of cultural and religious phenomena in the modern world. Intensive study of ancient cultures becomes an indispensable tool in the dialogue between diverse cultures and religions in the global village that our society has become.
- Third, it illustrates how preconceived and unfounded perceptions and misconceptions can lead to one-sided and negative conclusions regarding the intentions of people who “differ” from the dominant culture in a specific society.
- Fourth, understanding the *hijab* in its historical, cultural, and religious context might open avenues for inter-religious dialogue and create opportunities to apply principles such as respect, tolerance, dignity, freedom of choice, freedom of association, and sensitivity to diversity in practice.

The custom of “veiling” is an established socio-religious custom in all three Religions of the Book, to this day. In contemporary Judaism the wearing of a headscarf is regarded as the accepted norm for Hasidic women. In Christianity it is taken for granted that nuns don their “habit” when they take the vows, and the custom of veiling is practised in some form by the majority of Muslim women (Feder, 2013:443-459). However, the practice “is most closely identified with the issue of women’s status in a politicized Islam” (Borneman, 2009:2745) and has “only been applied to Muslim women’s dress” (Feder, 2013:444). In contemporary society it is often portrayed “as a problem in need of a solution” (Borneman, 2009:2745). The principles of respect, tolerance, dignity, freedom of choice, freedom of association, and sensitivity to

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views on the social status of women. Salem (2013:77-91) critically reviews no less than fourteen books on the social status of women in Islam published since 1970 by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. The contributions in Kassam (2010) give a representative perspective on the social status of Muslim women in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. The contributions in Moghissi (2005) provide a comprehensive overview of Muslim women’s social conditions, obstacles and prospects in contemporary society. The researcher cannot possibly review the multitude of opinions on women and Islam available on the internet. Akou (2010:331-346) provides an overview that at least makes readers aware that for “many Muslims as well as non-Muslims, *hijab* is a flash point in debates over feminism, neo-colonialism, and the secular state – debates that have quickly expanded into cyberspace” (Akou, 2010:332). The modest intention of the researcher is to create awareness that “veiling is a rich and nuanced phenomenon” (El Guindi, 1999:xii) that elicits different and often contradictory reactions in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

diversity are taught and propagated by all three Religions of the Book, but rarely applied in inter-religious and cross-religious interaction (Shukri, 2008:27-34). The researcher concurs with Khaleel (2008:75) when he says:

All three subscribe to the belief in a God who, in supposed inimitable wisdom, justice, and love, created everything, then placed contumacious humans as custodians of this cosmos. In the course of history, adherents of these three religions have constructed a concept of “the other” to indicate – in varying degrees of distancing – that which is mistaken, misled, and basically different, distinct from a righteous, correct “us.”

Unfortunately, in the post 9/11 world, there is growing tension between and mutual intolerance of religious symbols and practices in countries where adherents of the three Religions of the Book live alongside each other. In a recent study of Christian-Muslim relations in contemporary Bulgaria, traditionally a country where the two religious groups interacted in harmony, Ghodsee (2008:105-125) argued that in the context of the developing “New Europe” there is growing tension between the Christian/secular (Bulgarian) majority and the Muslim (Turkish) minority:

For the ethnic Bulgarian and Bulgarian Orthodox majority, the Islamic headscarf on women represented Bulgaria’s troubled past under the domination of the Ottoman Empire, which many Bulgarians blamed for their delayed integration with Europe and the West... Thus, a woman or girl in a headscarf or Islamic gown was never simply making a fashion statement, but embodied the “backwardness” of the East and its supposed subjugation of Muslim women. On the other side, to the newly devout Muslims, the Bulgarian women in miniskirts and visible thong underwear represented all that was morally decadent and corrupt about the West (Ghodsee, 2008:107).

The aim of the chapter is not to address Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations in contemporary society. It is rather quite modest. On the one hand, the researcher will highlight two contradictory **misconceptions** regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly Western societies, namely that a woman choosing to wear the *hijab* should be feared or pitied. On the other hand, she will highlight two equally contradictory **perceptions** regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly Muslim societies, namely that women should be emancipated from the *hijab* to be able to take their rightful place contemporary society or that they should proudly don the *hijab* to express their resistance to perceived Western prejudice and discrimination, and claim their rightful identity as Muslim women. The researcher will then argue that for many Muslim women wearing the *hijab* is a **voluntary act** with deep personal and symbolic meaning. In such a context wearing the *hijab* can create opportunities for meaningful **dialogue** between adherents of the three Religions of the

Book. She concludes the chapter with a number of **real-life examples** of Muslim women wearing the *hijab* and explains its value for them in their personal capacity and in their communities.

It is the researcher's hope that the present study of the socio-cultural and religious significance of the *hijab* and the way(s) it finds expression in contemporary society will make a contribution towards a deeper understanding of and appreciation for an ancient symbol of female dignity and worth.

## 4.2 The *hijab*: a controversial custom

### 4.2.1 Introductory remarks

Without doubt wearing the *hijab* has become a controversial issue in contemporary society. Fundamental to this issue is the way human beings construct identity and how they perceive themselves in the construction of their social space(s). How do human beings decide who is part of their "in-group" and who stands "outside"? How and why are human beings constantly engaged in a process of categorising others in terms of "us" or "them"? How do human beings perceive real and/or imagined social and personal boundaries, and what are the conditions allowing one to cross boundaries? In this regard Furseth (2011:366) remarks: "Symbolic boundaries are fundamental to social life as they define the perimeter of a given group and draw internal distinctions within the group and serve to mark identities." These are fundamental questions that deserve further research, but they fall outside the scope of this study.<sup>181</sup> For the purpose of the present study it is sufficient to depart from the following observation:

Wearing the veil makes apparent an "otherness," causing those who wear it to be viewed, not as women, but as foreigners (Racco, 2014:83).

Borneman (2009:2745) summarises the controversy regarding the *hijab* as follows:

We are fascinated by the veiling of women. From Morocco to Iran to Indonesia, as well as in Europe and North America, veiling has come to signify unbreachable differences between the West and Islam, achieving the status of an icon similar to the Christian cross or the national flag.

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<sup>181</sup> The researcher indicated her intention in section 3.4.1.4 to investigate as a future research project the notion of the *hijab* as "a visible or invisible barrier" as it is used in the Qur'an and the *hijab* as it is used in modern Islam as a general term for female dress code. She intends to link this with the notions of "boundaries" and "othering."

In this section the researcher will argue that the *hijab* and the controversy regarding its meanings and implications do not only involve a cross-cultural and inter-religious conflict between a predominantly Western world with its Judeo-Christian heritage on the one hand and a predominantly Muslim world with its Arab-Islamic heritage on the other hand, but also cause controversy in each of the two traditions. The controversy is often expressed in contradictory terms. In Chapter 2 it has already been argued that clothes have a symbolic meaning far beyond their practical value. The irony is that the “veil” as symbol “is used as a political, social, and cultural expression of Islam by different groups, both inside and outside the religion” (Landorf & Pagan, 2005:171) to such an extent that the “practice of modesty or ‘covering’ known as *hijab*... has become one of the most visible and controversial elements of Islamic practice in the twenty-first century” (Akou, 2010:332). Borneman (2009:2745) rightly argues:

In the post-Cold War imagination, the veil stands for so many things in so many different cultural contexts—Muslims, women’s rights, women’s oppression, tradition, beauty—that it has become a classic social fact, simultaneously indexing economic, political, cultural, and religious currents.

#### 4.2.2 The *hijab*: Western perspectives

In this section the researcher will focus upon two contradictory perceptions of the *hijab* in Western imagination. She labels the perceptions **fear** and **pity**, following Wagner et al. (2012:521) when they state that “the dominant view in non-Muslim countries in the West” is that “the female scarf is primarily... a symbol of religious fundamentalism and patriarchal oppression.”

On the one hand, the *hijab* elicits **fear** in non-Muslim societies. It is often associated in western imagination with extremist Islamic groups. Fuelled by images of human rights violations committed in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, South-Yemen, Tunisia, Libya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Nigeria and elsewhere, broadcasted worldwide by the modern mass media and carried by the massive growth of social media platforms to virtually every household, the perception exists that **the *hijab* equals terrorism**. “Veiling” is a custom that should not only be forbidden, but preferably be eradicated in cities like New York, London, and Paris. **Islamophobia** is rampant in the western world (Carland, 2011:469-473). A Muslim woman in the *hijab* causes fear of loss of freedom, which ironically leads to Muslim women in predominantly western social contexts losing their freedom (Carland, 2011:469). Many examples of this phenomenon can be

enumerated. The researcher will limit her discussion to one well-known example, namely the banning of headscarves (and other religious symbols) in French public schools in 2004, and the subsequent banning of the burqa in 2010 (Carland, 2011:469).

Western countries have increasingly become so-called secular democracies where the “the issue of religious symbols in the public space has given rise to widespread debate on the scope of freedom of religion and of the State’s neutrality” (Rorive, 2009:2669). The “general legislative ban on any conspicuous religious signs in public schools since 2004” (Rorive, 2009:2700) in France is an ironic example of a secular European democracy’s application of a key provision in the European Convention on Human Rights, supported by all member states of the European Union. Article 9 of the Convention, with the title “Freedom of thought, conscience and religion” states:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.<sup>182</sup>

The second provision of this article has become the guideline to prevent the implementation of the first. What is deemed to be justifiable limitations “prescribed by law” and thus “necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others” are used to prevent the implementation of “the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” and “to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.”

The researcher grants that there are intricate legal issues involved in the interpretation of and balance between the two clauses (Rorive, 2009:2676-2688).<sup>183</sup> However, it

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<sup>182</sup> European Convention on Human Rights, Article 9; [http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf); 10/08/2015.

<sup>183</sup> Rorive discusses real examples of cases before the European Court of Human Rights since 2005 to indicate the complexities of balancing the issue of freedom of religion and religious expression on the one hand and limitations prescribed by law and of necessity in a democratic society. She concludes: “What is striking in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights concerning religious symbols is that the issue of discrimination, when brought to the review of the Court, is usually undermined as the Court considers that “no separate question” arose in this respect” (Rorive, 2005:2688).

remains ironic that the mechanisms put in place and enforced by the European Court of Human Rights, among them “the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the general protection of rights enshrined in the Convention without discrimination on the basis of religion (or any other grounds), as well as the obligation for member States to respect the religious convictions and philosophical convictions of parents in the exercise of any functions which member States assume in relation to education and teaching” (Rorive, 2009:2671) are undermined by the French decision. Carland (2011:470) indicates that European human rights groups quite rightly argue that the French general burqa ban leads to “an increase in general discrimination against adult women who cover their heads.” By being “visible Muslims” Muslim women living in a non-Muslim society can quite legitimately “fear the loss of their own freedom to choose to cover their hair for religious reasons without worrying about being attacked, or even killed, for it” (Carland, 2011:471).

On the other hand, in non-Muslim societies the wearing of Muslim traditional clothing by women elicits **pity**. The *hijab* is often perceived as the visible proof that Muslim women are regarded as inferior human beings, subjected to male dominance, and therefore to be pitied. El Guindi (1999:3) calls this the *veil-harem-eunuchs-seclusion-polygamy* stereotype that has been projected upon the Muslim world by Western society since the colonial era. Timmerman (2000:22) states: “Western images of women’s place in Muslim societies have been very negative indeed for several decades: they are regarded as stupid, repressed and pitiful.” This perception of “the precarious position of women in Muslim societies should in part be seen as an instrument for justifying European colonialism and Western hegemony” (Timmerman, 2000:22). Feder (2013:446) adds that “Western discourse has frequently cast the veil as an oppressive patriarchal symbol that reflects the backwardness and inferiority of Muslim cultures, and, ultimately, justifies Western colonization.”

In current Western perception, especially post 9/11, the practice of “veiling” is regarded with growing suspicion. It is stereotyped as oppressive and abusive and judged against the background of deep-rooted prejudice and bias. Carland (2011:470) reports that the French President Sarkozy said the following in a session of parliament on the ban of religious symbols in public in 2009:

The burka is not a sign of religion; it is a sign of subservience. It will not be welcome on the territory of the French republic. We cannot accept to have in our country women who are prisoners behind netting, cut off from all social life, deprived of identity.

Carland (2011:469) further remarks that “the ‘feminist hawks’ of today... openly state that they advocate the use of force to liberate Muslim women from persecution and burkas.” She refers to a columnist arguing in the British newspaper *The Daily Express* that the burqa “is a direct and explicit criticism of our Western values and belief in the equality of men and women” (Carland, 2011:470). Carland (2011:470) concludes:

Thus, it appears that the proposal and support for banning the burqa springs from a belief not just that the sight of women wearing it is confrontational, but that the presence of the burqa is threatening to the very fabric of the society – hence the perception that it is a ‘direct and explicit criticism of our Western values’ and something that is incompatible with the French republic. The mere presence of the burqa is seen as a genuine threat to Western values – freedom (or *liberté*) being one of the most championed.

The researcher acknowledges that the donning of the *hijab* is not always a matter of freedom of choice. It is certainly important “to recognize that some women are compelled to take up veiling practices under serious threats of both state-sanctioned and community-based penalties (and violence)” (Feder, 2013:444).<sup>184</sup> However, the indiscriminate stereotyping of Muslim women wearing the *hijab* seems grossly unfair in a world that is supposed to be global and accepting. Such stereotyping is dangerous, as is argued by Wagner et al. (2012:538):

Cultural stereotyping and projecting an unjustified uniformity are a potent and dangerous mix, which can lead to violence and, above all, help sustain a bigoted form of religion. Banning the veil as contemplated in the West is likely to be a futile exercise and may well create the ghost it is supposed to adjure.

While the *hijab* is basically identical to the clothing depicted in traditional Christian representations of Mary and every nun who has sought to emulate her since, as well as Hasidic Jewish women (Feder, 2013:446), the *hijab* alone is singled out as a sign of extremism and the supposedly inferior status of Muslim women (Wagner et al., 2012:521).

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<sup>184</sup> It falls outside the scope of this study to discuss cultural practices prevalent in some Muslim societies that are gross violations of human rights, such as so-called “honour killings.” These cultural practices reflect old patriarchal customs and traditions not authenticated in the Qur’ān and are certainly a contradiction of the basic and vital Islamic teachings (Salhi 2013:65). The researcher acknowledges the need to attain a new basis for reforming laws that discriminate against women and to find a foundation that maintain their rights as human beings which basic Islamic teaching preserves for them (Salhi 2013:74). In this regard it should be noted that Islamic perspectives on human rights are universal and inclusive (al-Sheha, 2013) and hold that “men and women are created equal in their basic humanity, and all have the shared lineage and dignity of Allah’s creation” (al-Sheha, 2013:11).



Carland (2011:472) summarises the result of Western stereotyping of Muslim women wearing the *hijab* as follows:

While the government claims to act in order to protect Muslim women who are being forced to cover and to protect the secular values of their society, and the vigilantes act purely out of hatred, the result for the Muslim woman who wants to cover is the same – loss of freedom. Arguably brought on, either directly or indirectly, by Islamophobia.

#### 4.2.3 The *hijab*: Islamic perspectives

In this section the researcher will focus upon two contradictory roles that have been attached to the *hijab* in Islamic perception. She labels the two roles **emancipation** and **identity**.

On the one hand, under the influence of the growing popularity of feminist movements in the Western world during the first half of the twentieth century, some Muslim women regarded the *hijab* as a symbol of female oppression and patriarchy and strived to be **emancipated** from its perceived shackles. In 1899 the Egyptian lawyer Qassim Amin published his *Tahrir al Mar'a* (The Liberation of Women). It was followed in 1900 by the publication of *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman). In both booklets he expressed the view that the veil is a symbol of repression and the embodiment of a “backward” society that needs to be emancipated along the lines of Western society’s “liberation” of women. Both booklets have been published in a single volume in English (Amin, 2001). Amin’s work sparked a debate regarding feminism in Egypt (Timmerman, 2000:22). Amin’s “contempt for Islamic Egyptian culture... confirmed the colonial view of the veil as a symbol of repression” (Timmerman, 2000:22) and “the rearticulation in native voice of the colonial thesis of inferiority of the native and Muslim and the superiority of the European” (Ahmed, 1992:162).

Following this trend some Muslim countries discouraged the practice of “veiling,” first under force of the colonial masters (Ahmed, 1992:243), and often even long after their colonial masters departed. Four examples will be mentioned.

Baron (1989:370) states: “In early twentieth-century Egypt positions on the veil were becoming more polarized in a lively and widespread debate over *al-hijab* (veiling) versus *al-sufur* (unveiling).” Scholars point to “the dramatic unveiling of Huda Sha'rawi, a feminist leader who discarded her face cover upon returning to Egypt from a women’s meeting in Rome in 1923, as the signal for the end of the harem system and

subsequent unveiling of Egyptian women” (Baron, 1989:371). Deliberate unveiling gradually became more prevalent during the first half of the twentieth century. Baron (1989:383) states:

Unveiling not only mirrored the fundamental transformations taking place in women’s lives, it also reflected the changes occurring at deep levels of Egyptian society. Increased unveiling indicated that in the first decades of the twentieth century the elites were moving away from traditional practices toward ones perceived as more modern, pointing toward a new direction for Egyptian society.

A similar development took place in Turkey (Timmerman, 2000:23):

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, women were for the first time appearing in public without a veil. But the real turnabout came with the Turkish War of Independence (1920-3), in which women actively participated. During the republican era (1923-46) the veil and the *carsaf* were officially replaced with western attire. ‘Islamic’ dress (in this case it referred to covering the head with a headscarf) was banned from public institutions and buildings. Gradually, the veil lost all political significance.

In Iran “the participation of women in public life increased dramatically during the Pahlavi era (1926-78). Reza Shah Pahlavi and his son ḥ Reza Shah Pahlavi wanted to make Iran a ‘modern’ nation, following the example of what Atatürk did for Turkey... Iranian women achieved suffrage in 1963” (Timmerman, 2000:16). Parallel to this development in the social position of Iranian women negative sentiment against the *hijab* increased. Veiling “was briefly abolished by Reza Shah in 1936” (Borneman, 2009:2745). Begolo (2008:42) describes the ban as follows:

On January 17th, 1936 - a day that Reza Shah later named Women’s Emancipation Day - he issued the *Kashj-e Hejab*, making it illegal for women to wear the veil in public. Reza Shah’s regime stressed the emancipatory value of unveiling; women were instructed to work in order to serve their country and the economy as their Western sisters did. Opposition to the veiling edict was crushed violently and mercilessly under the banner of modernization - as was opposition of any sort during the Pahlavi years.

Probably the best-known example of forced unveiling took place in Algeria during the time of French colonisation (1830-1962). Fanon (1969:163-164) quotes the colonial administration’s political doctrine as follows: “If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men hide them from sight.” Boariu (2002:187) summarises the reality of Algerian women under French rule as follows:

Under the French, veiled women were the concrete manifestation of the Algerian resistance. The desire to unveil them became the colonizers’ political doctrine in Algeria.

Under these circumstances, the potential of the veil to acquire a political meaning was very powerful. From a religious symbol, the veil became increasingly charged with political meaning. Because of the dispute around it, the veil acquired new meanings. It represented a commitment to a different religion and culture than the one of colonizers', an explicit form of opposing French authority. The battle for the veil put Algerian women in the center of French colonization.

Under these influences some Muslim women, notably where they are part of a minority group in Western societies, take a relativist approach to the *hijab*. They believe that the commandment to maintain modesty must be interpreted with regard to the surrounding society. What is considered modest or daring in one society might not be considered so in another. Although they acknowledge the importance for believers to wear clothing that communicates modesty and reserve, they argue that head covering should not be compulsory in Islam because the veil predates the revelation of the Qur'ān (Furseth, 2011:377-379). Head-covering was introduced into Arabia long before Muḥammad's (ﷺ) mission, primarily through Arab contacts with Syria and Iran, where the *hijab* was a sign of social status. After all, only a woman who need not work in the fields could afford to remain secluded and veiled (Ahmed, 1992:166).

Many testimonies of Muslim women who chose to unveil and their reasons for doing so are available on the Internet. The researcher refers to just one example. Journalist Asma Khalid (2011) published an online article titled "Lifting the veil: Muslim women explain their choice." She interviewed a number of Muslim women who chose to unveil, amongst others because the visual identification as a Muslim in American society became "a huge responsibility," or simply "longing for change," or because of verbal abuse in the post 9/11 atmosphere. For some women "the scarf became a heavy burden to carry — one that affected the way strangers perceived them, the way colleagues treated them, and even the way fellow Muslims expected them to behave."<sup>185</sup>

On the other hand, the *hijab* elicits exactly the opposite reaction in contemporary Islam. For many believing women in both Muslim and non-Muslim contexts the *hijab* becomes a symbol of **resistance** against Western discourse and prejudice as well as a symbol of dignity and the upholding of Islamic traditions and values. Muslim female dress code is strongly linked with the values, attitudes, and religious **identity** of Islamic women (Byng, 2010:110). It is interesting to note that in exactly the same contexts

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<sup>185</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/21/135523680/lifting-the-veil-muslim-women-explain-their-choice>; 26/08/2015.

mentioned above, resistance against forced unveiling led to an increasing number of women defying the pressure to unveil and deliberately choosing to veil. El Guindi (1999:129) points to the fact that in current society “the veil becomes a movement” and this movement is often “part of a grass-roots activist movement.”

In Egypt in the 1970’s the veil made a strong re-appearance that was “bewildering even to the local people.” El Guindi (1999:161) describes the phenomenon as follows:

This was the strong, visible and growing presence of a new Egyptian woman, with an appearance unfamiliar to contemporary urban Egypt and to her own parents. The new woman was a young urban college student completely “veiled” from head to toe, including the face. Confused at the thought of a future “veiled” doctor, engineer or pharmacist, many observers speculated as to the cause of this development. Was this an identity crisis, *our* version of America’s hippie movement, a fad, youth protest, or ideological vacuum? An individual psychic disturbance, life-crisis, social dislocation, or protest against authority?

In Turkey there was also growing resistance against the government’s insistence upon unveiling (Timmerman, 2000:23):

In Turkey, the first ‘headscarf incident’ occurred in 1968 when Neslihan Bulayci became the first student to wear a headscarf on campus. Later they became increasingly common at university, until 1998 when the vice-chancellor of *Istanbul Universitesi* issued a circular letter formally banning the wearing of a headscarf. The ban provoked a fierce response, including a lot of demonstrations.

In Iran women were in the forefront of demonstrations against the Pahlevi regime. Begolo (2008:43) describes their role in the Islamic revolution:

During the Shi’a festivals that took place in December, the sacred month of Moharram, some two million people poured onto the streets of Tehran. They included thousands of women wearing black chadors as an act of solidarity with the Islamic movement shouting ‘death to the shah, death to Satan USA.’ Before long, the sight of chador-clad women had become the norm. When Khomeini returned to Iran in February 1979 to take up the mantle of revolutionary leadership, he proclaimed that women should wear the chador to work, a move that was made mandatory in 1980. Three years later it became obligatory for all women.

In Algeria’s struggle for independence women and their veils played a crucial role. Women became extremely effective guerrilla fighters – with or without their veils. Fanon (1969:185) says:

In the beginning, the veil was a mechanism of resistance, but its value for the social group remained very strong. The veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier *was bent on unveiling Algeria*. In a second phase, the mutation occurred in connection with the Revolution and under special circumstances. The veil was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological offenses of the occupier became a means, an

instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle.

These examples illustrate that Muslim women are aligned with their **identity** as Muslim and therefore appreciate the importance of the *hijab* in bonding them to other Muslims and appreciate the visual association to the **religion** (Furseth, 2011:370-372). The researcher concurs with El Guindi (1999:xii) when she says: “In movements of Islamic activism, the veil occupies center stage as symbol of both identity and resistance.” There are many examples in contemporary society of this kind of “Islamic activism” explained in scientific publications. Ali (2005:526) argues that second generation Muslims in the United States of America are increasingly donning the *hijab*: “They understand this to be Allah’s will, they see it as proper Islamic behavior, and many feel it deflects unwanted male attention.” In the post 9/11 context this phenomenon is on the increase:

...the trend toward multiculturalism in this country, with ethnicity becoming a valued and acceptable public form of expression, has created a space where *hijab* and *jilbab*, as expressions of an Islamic identity, can flourish. Further, the attitudes of Muslims themselves towards engaging in civic society are changing. They are reevaluating what it means to be Muslim after the first Persian Gulf War and the World Trade Center’s destruction and all that these events symbolize. Also, there has been a redefinition by younger Muslims of Islam and how they learn it. These factors all contribute to the increased wearing of *hijab* and *jilbab* by second-generation immigrant Muslim women.

According to Williams and Vashi (2007:285), this phenomenon is also an expression of American Muslim women’s “autonomous selves.”

American society puts great emphasis on equality, independence, and the establishment of autonomous personal identity. We argue that the decision to wear *hijab* can work in just this way for many second-generation American Muslim women. They are creating cultural space for the development of autonomous selves through the use of this potent religious symbol. It emphasizes their Muslim identity and gives them some measure of autonomy... Wearing *hijab* is, for them, a practical and useful response to living as young women in a nexus between two cultures and as members of a minority faith. They are able to carve out some autonomous cultural space with a public symbol that visibly repudiates the overly individualized culture of dominant American society and that gives them some room to feel at home and to prosper in both worlds.

“Islamic activism” is also prevalent on the Internet. The researcher provides just one example. In an article posted online, Huma Mohibullah (2012) explains the

phenomenon that many female American Muslims deliberately decided to don the veil in the post 9/11 era:<sup>186</sup>

In the current post-9/11 setting, with many Arab Americans and Muslims facing backlash, some *hijabi* women offer an emerging interpretation of the headscarf: It is a marker of Islamic and American ideals, of modesty and religious freedom... For many post-9/11 Muslims, there has been an increasing sense of fear and discomfort due to their communities experiencing varieties of intolerance and/or violent hate crimes, and also from living under a near constant gaze of suspicion, frequently anticipating further backlash and hurt. Putting on a *hijab* in this context (especially for those who began wearing it after 9/11) has been some Muslim women's empowering response to fear... While many American Muslim women certainly wear the *hijab* to practice the standards of modesty in Islam, some also see it as an opportunity to identify themselves as part of a larger Muslim group, one that cuts across ethnic boundaries to create a more cohesive Muslim-American community. For these women, the *hijab* serves as a marker of their unabashed membership in the American Muslim community, providing strength and solidarity during a time of political tension.

#### 4.2.4 Concluding remarks

In this section the researcher indicated that the *hijab* is a controversial subject that elicits contradictory responses in different contexts. She concurs with El Guindi (1999:172) that "...the veil is a complex symbol of many meanings. Emancipation can be expressed by wearing the veil or by removing it. It can be secular or religious. It can represent tradition or resistance."

This section focused on "global" issues, issues of religion and politics, of opposing world views and clashing cultures, of dominance and resistance. Two broad themes emerged from this discussion. First, the researcher indicated that many **misconceptions** regarding the *hijab* exist and that it often leads to unfounded and undeserved stereotyping of the "other." Clothing becomes a divisive symbol in contemporary society – the "veil" for Western society a symbol of Muslim extremism and patriarchy, the "miniskirt" for Muslim society a symbol of individualism, materialism and lax sexual mores (Williams & Vashi, 2007:269). Second, the researcher argued that the "veil" is intrinsically linked to the issue of **Muslim female identity**. For Muslim women who are serious about their religion and tradition, the "veil" is a visible symbol of their devotion to God. Under threat that symbol becomes "a vehicle for resistance" and "symbolizes an element of power and autonomy" (El Guindi, 1999:xvii).

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<sup>186</sup> <http://www.rolereboot.org/culture-and-politics/details/2012-03-the-hijab-in-post-911-america-a-womans-crown;28/08/2015>.

In the remainder of the chapter the focus will shift to the personal and the private – to what the *hijab* means for those female Muslims who consciously, deliberately, and freely choose to wear it. From this it will become clear that the *hijab* need not be a source of tension between and within cultures and religions, but a catalyst for dialogue. Real-life experiences of women who donned the *hijab* will hopefully create a context where it will become possible to regard the “other” with empathy, acceptance, and tolerance.

### 4.3 The *hijab*: freedom to choose

Outside the sphere of nation states and global politics, diverse cultures and world religions, there also exists for each individual a “private space” filled with deeply personal experiences and unique meanings. The researcher will focus on that space when she discusses the phenomenon that the *hijab* symbolises for many Muslim women the freedom to choose how they want to appear in public and the meanings they attach to that choice.

El Guindi (1999:77-78) points to the ability every Muslim is afforded by his/her religion to instantly turn “a public area into private space.” By marking space sacred space with a prayer carpet and occupying it “in a ritually pure state facing Makka” every ordinary Muslim is allowed “temporarily to convert any worldly place (street, shop, aircraft aisle) into a sacred space set apart.” It is a “distinctive quality of the Islamic construction of space” and affords men and women the ability “to enjoy privacy and be in public.” Through “dress code, cleansing by *wudu*’,<sup>187</sup> facing Makka, and performing prescribed rites of worship” a Muslim is “stripped temporarily of worldly identity” and is “in a sacred state.”

El Guindi (1999:81) “proposes ‘privacy’ as the notion that, in its transformational fluid form, embraces the Arab cultural construction of space that connects space to time and gender.” This becomes an important concept in understanding a Muslim woman’s choice to wear the *hijab* when she appears in public. The *hijab* draws a symbolic boundary between public and private space (Furseth, 2011:373). “Arab privacy” does not connote the “personal,” the secret,” or the “individuated space” typically associated with the term in Western culture (El Guindi, 1999:82). Privacy “concerns two core

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<sup>187</sup> Arabic: الوضوء *al-wuḍūʿ*. It refers to the Islamic procedure for washing parts of the body using water in preparation for formal prayers and before handling and reading the Qurʾān.

spheres – women and the family. For both, privacy is sacred and carefully guarded. For women it is both a right and an exclusive privilege, and is reflected in dress, space, architecture and proxemics behavior” (El Guindi, 1999:82). Women “are central to the social and moral order in the Middle East. Women appear to be the perfect embodiment of the dignity and authenticity of the Islamic nation. This carries with it a great responsibility, as any immoral or indecent behavior on the part of women is seen to reflect badly on society” (Timmerman, 2000:22).

Seen against this background El Guindi (1999:83) then contends “that the modesty-based code – modesty-shame-seclusion – represents an ethnocentric imposition on Arabo-Islamic culture.” The cultural code appropriate to Arabo-Islamic culture is rather “sanctity-reserve-respect.” “Sanctity” (حرمة *ḥurmah*, related to the verb حرم *ḥrm* “prohibit”) is a key concept in this respect (El Guindi, 1999:84). The verb denotes “all that is prohibited by divine authority.” The noun *harim* refers to “the part of the home in which women are both privileged and protected from encounters with non-*mahram* men” (El Guindi, 1999:85). “Reserve” (سترة *sutrah*, related to the verb ستر “to shield, cover, protect, veil”) is linked to “sanctity,” indicating that it is something that should be protected and treasured (El Guindi, 1999:88). “Respect” (حشمة *hishmah* “polite reserve, self-restraint, good judgement, respect”) is especially associated with the protection of group reputation and identity (El Guindi, 1999:88).

El Guindi (1999:88) observes that “the quality *hurma* (which centers womenhood and home in the culture) embodies a pervasive complex of values that identifies primary social and religious spheres as sanctuaries – sacred and inviolable.” Thus there is a “link between dress, women and the sanctity of space” that is also “reflected in the Islamic rituals of ‘dressing’ the *Ka’bah*, the center of the holy site of pilgrimage in Makka” (El Guindi, 1999:95). Therefore El Guindi, 1999:96) concludes:

The veil, veiling patterns and veiling behaviour are therefore, according to my analysis of Arab culture, about sacred privacy, sanctity and the rhythmic interweaving of patterns of worldly and sacred life, linking women as the guardians of family sanctuaries and the realm of the sacred in this world... Dress in general, but particularly veiling, is privacy’s visual metaphor.

The implication of the discussion above is important. In contemporary society the first impulse is to emphasise the “otherness” of a veiled woman and regard her as a



“foreigner” instead of attempting to understand and accept her in her context. The researcher concurs with Salem (2013:80):

Instead of taking a step back and judging women in the Middle East according to their history, values, beliefs, cultures, and the politics of the region, it has been assumed they are weak because they do not live like women in the U.S. and Europe.

A Muslim woman appearing in public space wearing the *hijab* is making a profound statement. She is “creating” her own private space in public. She is aligning her behaviour with her religious beliefs and values. The *hijab* constantly reminds the woman to control and guard her behaviour and to set an example as Muslim woman. The *hijab* becomes a tool providing a woman with greater control over her body. The *hijab* helps preserve and protect intimate relationships, in marriage and in family. Ultimately the *hijab* allows a woman to share beauty with only one person – allowing only her husband to see every aspect of her person as a whole person. Droogsma (2007:294-319) argues that Muslim women wearing the *hijab* feel empowered by their choice to veil, not only as individuals but also as a group.

The practical benefits for a Muslim woman consciously choosing to wear the *hijab* should not be underestimated. Timmerman (2000:24) summarises the benefits as follows:

It is cheaper than western clothing and it protects women against male harassment. Moreover, it gives young women a greater degree of social freedom: it makes it easier for them to interact with male colleagues or fellow students without being branded as an ‘immoral’ person. Through this style of dress, they are able to claim their own legitimate place in society outside the confines of the family. Women also use the headscarf as a means to enter, without recriminations, into the public domain.

Muslim women may decide to veil for the practical reasons mentioned above. In a predominantly Muslim society like Indonesia veiling is sometimes regarded as a convenient and practical custom and less associated with issues of identity (Wagner et al., 2012:528). In a predominantly non-Muslim society like India, veiling has become a symbol of Muslim identity (Wagner et al., 2012:528), in other words, something to be valued, to be respected and to be done properly. Despite all the negative connotations associated with this religious dress code, these Muslim women wear the veil, stating that it gives them a sense of self-confidence and they use it as a symbol of asserting their Muslim identity.

Muslim women who deliberately choose to wear the *hijab* testify that they do so without any coercion or compulsion. These women are confident in their own identity as Muslim women and in their relationship with God. They understand their family ties and their roles within the family. For these women there is no oppression in valuing their religion and adhering to the values they share that promote society and kinship over individualism. This study is not an appropriate forum to engage in the ongoing debate in feminist circles on the social position of Muslim women. However, it is important to realise that “Western feminism focuses on the individual whereas Islam advocates the molding of individual goals to the welfare and interests of the larger group or family” (Al Faruqi, 1988:25). A Muslim woman who chooses to wear the *hijab* is aware of that responsibility.

A Muslim woman who chooses to wear the *hijab* is also acutely aware that a distinction should be made between **religious obligations** and **cultural practices**. Several female authors have in recent years argued that the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in essence envisioned an egalitarian society with equal opportunities for male and female. It is often pointed out that women played a crucial role in the foundational phase of Islam. Women were poets, transmitters of *ḥadīth*, and warriors. They participated in debates on political and religious matters. Many, including the Prophet’s (ﷺ) first wife, *Khadījah*, were businesswomen (Mernissi, 1991a:184-187). While the differences between the sexes and their different roles in society are acknowledged and recognised as “of the essence of creation, part of God’s wisdom as he provided for balance and harmony in life” (Smith, 1980:65), these authors insist that Islam was inherently egalitarian (Mernissi, 1991a:11) and that there “are no Islamic laws preventing women from working, holding political office, or seeking education” (Salem, 2013:81). Mernissi (1975:11-25) emphasises the importance of distinguishing between the “official” law and practice of Islam in contemporary Muslim countries and the underlying “ideology” of Islam. In this ideology, men and women are equal. Mernissi (1991b:191) argues that the insistence that Muslim women who appear in the public sphere in *al-Madinah* should be “covered” was a practical measure giving expression to the Prophet Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) dream “of a society where women could move around freely because of the faith of the Muslims” (Aziz, 2010:137).

In the final analysis, Borneman (2009:2748) is correct in his assessment that essentially “the veil is about women’s dress in public.” Women who deliberately

choose to veil “do so in order to enter the public sphere on particular terms.” The veil of necessity alters the vision of both the onlooker and the veiled woman. Veiled women “illuminate one part of the face by setting it in relief to the part they conceal”, therefore one “sees the veiled woman, in public, and the veil frames how she is seen” (Borneman, 2009:2749). The intelligibility of a veiled woman “is initially determined by the dynamics of vision alone” (Borneman, 2009:2750). By wearing the veil “women seek to remove themselves from the public gaze, especially from an economy of objectification and exchange controlled by men” (Borneman, 2009:2751). In spite of Borneman’s reservations whether the outcome of this practice is always successful, amongst others because very few individual decisions can ever be made without being influenced by the individual’s immediate or broader social context (e.g. family, kin, society, religious institutions, state institutions), he concedes that the deliberate decision to veil is linked with Muslim women’s wish “to assert their autonomy” (Borneman, 2009:2757; also Williams & Vashi, 2007:271).

On the Internet many examples are available of Muslim women’s reasons for and experiences of their decisions to veil. Any objective outsider would immediately realise that the accounts of these women’s reasons for and experiences of veiling are subjective and personal. The accounts can also not be judged objectively and therefore the complex personal and societal influences that might have influenced the women’s decisions cannot be verified. Nevertheless, for each woman her reasons and her experiences are real and valid. The British newspaper *The Telegraph* published a report by Keith Perry on 23 September 2014 that a 16-year-old female Muslim pupil “is understood to have been barred from Camden School for Girls in north London by the headmistress... if she insists on wearing the niqab, which shows only the eyes, as it goes against school rules” (Perry, 2014).<sup>188</sup> In the wake of the ensuing debate regarding the incident, journalist Radhika Sanghani published an article in *The Telegraph* on 24 September 2014 where “Reddit<sup>189</sup> users, who say they are Muslim women, candidly explain why they wear the veil” (Sanghani, 2014).<sup>190</sup> Amongst the reasons provided are:

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<sup>188</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/11116482/School-bars-Muslim-pupil-16-in-row-over-face-veil.html>; 28/08/2015.

<sup>189</sup> Reddit is an online social media platform; cf. [https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/2hbl8v/muslim\\_women\\_of\\_reddit\\_what\\_are\\_your\\_opinions\\_on/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/2hbl8v/muslim_women_of_reddit_what_are_your_opinions_on/); 28/08/2015.

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11120588/Muslim-women-reveal-why-they-wear-the-veil-burqa-school-debate.html>; 28/08/2015.

- I wear it to promote feminism.
- I feel like men respect me more.
- It is part of being a Muslim.
- I throw on a burqa when I don't feel like changing.
- People deal with me as an individual.
- I must do what God tells me.
- It's a beautiful, religious fashion statement.

The researcher concludes her discussion of this section by quoting a poem posted on Facebook on 24 November 2006 by a young Muslim woman called Jenn Zaghloul. It eloquently addresses the issue of the constant “othering” of Muslim women wearing the veil and is in the end a plea for tolerance and understanding.<sup>191</sup>

I am a Muslim woman

Feel free to ask me why

When I walk,  
I walk with dignity  
When I speak  
I do not lie

I am a Muslim woman  
Not all of me you'll see  
But what you should appreciate  
Is that the choice I make is free

I'm not plagued with depression  
I'm neither cheated nor abused  
I don't envy other women  
And I'm certainly not confused

Note, I speak perfect English  
Et un petit peu de Francais aussi  
I'm majoring in Linguistics  
So you need not speak slowly

I run my own small business  
Every cent I earn is mine  
I drive my Chevy to school & work  
And no, that's not a crime!

You often stare as I walk by  
You don't understand my veil  
But peace and power I have found

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<sup>191</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/notes/wake-up-muslims/i-am-a-muslim-woman-by-jenn-zaghloul-3-3-3-188450681337>; 28/08/2015.

As I am equal to any male!

I am a Muslim woman  
So please don't pity me  
For God has guided me to truth  
And now I'm finally free!

#### 4.4 The *hijab*: opportunities for dialogue

In section 4.1 the researcher already argued that the custom of “veiling” is an established socio-religious custom in all three Religions of the Book. She also highlighted the irony that the practice is mainly associated with “Muslim women’s dress” (Feder, 2013, 444). In this section she will argue that the familiarity with the dress code in all three Religions of the Book might open interesting and unexpected opportunities for dialogue between adherents of the three Religions of the Book. Feder (2013:444) argues that the positive attitudes associated with the custom of “veiling” in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity suggests common ground that deserves to be explored because “there is room for further discussion about veiling practices across different religious contexts” (Feder, 2013:455). She further argues that “it is key that this conversation can continue to challenge limited colonial understandings of the veil. Such dialogue will also help (re)envision shifting meanings to come” (Feder, 2013:455).

Feder (2013:444) indicates that “the themes of resistance, subverting sexual objectification, and gaining access to the public sphere” constitute “key similarities between the main three monotheistic religions.” By comparing attitudes towards veiling in all three monotheistic religions the prevailing misconception that the practice is to be solely associated with Islam can be challenged. This is not only desirable, but in fact essential in order to, as Feder (2013:445) states:

...challenge “colonial” narratives that predominantly single out Islamic headscarves and treat them as if they are “static and unchanging,” while ignoring other practices of women’s head-coverings in Jewish and Christian communities.

Feder (2013:446) indicates that Hasidic Jewish women report that they see the wearing of a head-covering “as an act of resistance against the threat of secular society.” Similarly, there are many examples of Catholic nuns who used their habit as a means of resistance, especially in contexts where Catholics have been persecuted. Muslim women have also “used different variations of head scarves to challenge

oppressive regimes” (2013:448), as in Algeria during the country’s fight for independence from France, or in Iran during the 1979 revolution.

In Hasidic Jewish, Roman Catholic and Islamic societies, women indicate that they wear a head covering as a form of protection against “sexual exploitation by ensuring that they are not over-characterized by their physical appearance” (Feder, 2013:449). For devout women in the three monotheistic religions the head covering symbolises modesty and humility and also acts “as a source of liberation from Western beauty norms” (2013:450). In this way, and contrary to the stereotyped perception that veiling symbolizes the oppression of women, for women in the monotheistic religions the act of veiling symbolizes “an empowering way to reclaim their bodies from objectification and sexual exploitation” (2013:451).

For a long time in the previous century work outside the home for women was regarded as temporary and exceptional (Feder, 2013:452). However, due to many factors such as increased access to education and the job market and for economic reasons, more and more women began to play a prominent role in the public sphere. Especially in cultures where the “norm” has been for men to dominate the public sphere, while women played a prominent role in the public sphere, women wearing head coverings reported that this cultural and religious practice allowed them to enter the public sphere without prejudice or sanction from their own communities. The practice of veiling facilitates “their entrance into the public sphere” (2013:454). To these women the act of veiling sends a message to their families and communities that they retain their religious and cultural mores and values.

The researcher is of the opinion that these shared opinions can act as a catalyst for intensifying dialogue, which would in turn lead to increased understanding of each other’s traditions, cultures, and customs. In contemporary society the rapid growth of the Internet created an unexpected platform for exactly such dialogue and the sharing of ideas. Lewis (2013:20) indicates that the internet makes it easier to develop and introduce more participation and interactivity platforms, web-stores, and fashion blogs to explore multiple types of images, videos, and texts concerning fashion and styles. This is also true of Islamic fashion. Quite a number of websites portray the *hijab* as fashionable and beautiful (Lewis, 2013:22). The researcher has her misgivings about this trend. It defies the shared themes of resistance against the pressure of secular

society and the subverting of sexual objectification mentioned above. However, it does indicate that in the mind of ordinary people the *hijab* can attain positive connotations.

Islamic fashion blogs have become very popular. They often portray styles of dress that originated from the Muslim majority, but also provide information about how to put together an outfit by combining items of dress not specifically marketed for Muslim women (Lewis, 2013:25). Again, the researcher has her misgivings about the content of these blogs as they often do not portray the actual symbolism behind the choice to wear the *hijab*. Nevertheless, it does expose especially female Internet users to the styles and creative ideas of fashion designers from different cultures. Fashion blogs on modest clothing often emphasise that modest fashion does not necessarily imply conservative clothing (Lewis, 2013:48).

Lewis (2013:61) indicates that the era of mass communication revolutionises the sharing of religious ideas. It enables adherents of different religious traditions to share ideas and debate issues online. New forms of online religious dialogue are developing and many educated Muslims see it as an opportunity to develop and spread ideas. Across the boundaries of faith and creed, the electronic and digital media expose users to a diversity of opinions. In this context female style mediators are constructing pioneering forms of religious conversation online, creating cross-faith interactions via blogs, YouTube videos, and other social media platforms. This kind of religious discourse often challenges traditional religious explanations. Religions are by nature conservative and dependent upon hierarchical structures for “official” interpretations of their foundational documents. Social media platforms are exceptionally well positioned to challenge such “official” points of view and sometimes replace the hierarchical message with modern, participatory networks which often reflect different ideas and concepts growing from the grass-root level in communities.

It is evident that Jewish and Muslim women share ideas regarding modest fashion via YouTube videos or other media platforms. They desire to share fashion images with fellow online members, and debate issues regarding the articulation and understanding of modest dress – an issue relevant for all three monotheistic faiths (Lewis, 2013:67). As argued in section 4.3 for Muslim women the *hijab* symbolises a range of ideas and practices regarding modesty, privacy, sanctity, reserve, and respect. The same is true for Jewish women, especially those adhering to Hasidic

views. As indicated in section 2.3.8, the principle of *tzniut* (modesty, privacy, humility) also implies a range of ideas concerning modesty, dignity, and privacy. Both religions show similar ideas on dress and its understanding of how it can be put into practice (Lewis, 2013:74). There is remarkable agreement between orthodox Jewish and Muslim websites regarding modest clothing. Females of the two religious communities regard modest dress as an expression of gender distinctiveness, attaining feminine privacy, realising sexuality within a respectful relationship and as a confirming of female spirituality.

With reference to the importance of dialogue between faithful communities all over the world, the initiatives of the late King Abdullah of Saudi-Arabia to promote such interfaith dialogue should be noted (Alhomoudi, 2010:288-295). These initiatives (the “Mecca Declaration” addressed to Muslim religious leaders in June 2008; the “Madrid World Conference on Dialogue” addressed to religious leaders from all over the world in July 2008; the King Abdullah Interfaith Dialogue Initiative in New York where the king addressed political leaders from around the world in November 2008) “set a clear distinction between religious and political dialogue and provided a strong precedent for the country internationally as well as domestically” (Alhomoudi, 2010:288).

In the Mecca Declaration the King “emphasised the importance of dialogue in Islam and reminded the participants that the revealed messages have all been given for the good of humankind, preserving human dignity and enhancing the values of ethics and truthfulness” (Alhomoudi, 2010:290). Participants in the event agreed to the following (Alhomoudi, 2010:290):

The most important objective is that dialogue helps us acquaint ourselves with people of other faiths and cultures and establishes with them common principles that achieve peaceful coexistence and security of human society. We should cooperate with each other in spreading ethical values, truth, benevolence, and peace, and challenging hegemony, exploitation, injustice, moral deviation, family breakdown, and other evils that threaten societies.

Alhomoudi (2010:295) argues that in spite of many challenges in the current political climate in the global world, these attempts at meaningful dialogue need support. He states:

By empowering religious and political leaders in their unique roles, we can both further King Abdullah's quest for common values and respect for differences, and foster pluralism both inside Saudi Arabia and around the world.



In “a world gone religiously awry,” Burrell (2010:414) has argued that

...interfaith dialogue can enlarge perspectives of the interlocutors, and in doing so, bring each to some humility with regard to their grasp of their own tradition, which ought to facilitate their learning from others who can bring another faith perspective. Recognition of this mutual need for others' contribution to help us appropriate our own tradition might be counted as the genuine religious development of our time (Burrell, 2010:423).

The researcher hopes that in some small way this study that traces the practice of veiling through millennia will contribute towards a dialogue that “helps us acquaint ourselves with people of other faiths and cultures and establishes with them common principles that achieve peaceful coexistence and security of human society” that bolster the “quest for common values and respect for differences, and foster pluralism,” and that “can enlarge perspectives of the interlocutors, and in doing so, bring each to some humility with regard to their grasp of their own tradition, which ought to facilitate their learning from others who can bring another faith perspective.” The feminine perspective shared in current online resources indicates that mutual understanding and tolerance of different religious traditions can be attained. Studies such as these might address common misconceptions regarding traditional female Muslim dress code.

#### **4.5 The *hijab*: real-life experiences**

Viewed in the light of the fact that this chapter is mainly concerned with views on the practice of veiling in contemporary society, the researcher deems it relevant to conclude the chapter with some real-life examples of women who wear the *hijab* and how their experiences are related on social media platforms. This implies by no means any critical or scientific analysis of the sources available in the public domain. The researcher acknowledges that the stories are told from each individual's own and subjective point of view. However, it illustrates a number of points made in the brief literature review above. First, it illustrates the bias experienced by some Muslim women in a Western context when they move about in the public sphere (section 4.2). Second, it illustrates the point made in section 4.3 that women who wear the *hijab* attest to the fact that they experience the practice in a positive light. Moreover, it emphasises the possibilities mentioned in section 4.4 the *hijab* holds for dialogue between adherents of the three monotheistic religions when issues of prejudice and stereotyping can be addressed.

In this section, the researcher departs from the ironic sketch in al-Dāwūd (2008:57). The author provides an extensive overview of female dress code in the history of civilisation, and summarises it in the following picture (Figure 42):



المودة ل حلقة مفردة

Figure 42

The evolvement of female dress code through the ages  
(al-Dāwūd, 2008:57)

The sketch implies that female dress code evolved over centuries from women wearing very little, through different stages of more extensive covering, to virtually nothing again in contemporary society – indeed a vicious cycle!

In his book, al-Dāwūd indicates that the custom of modest female dressing was at some stage in history a common practice. It remained a practice in all three the monotheistic religious traditions, but due to secularisation and other factors it has become a strange phenomenon in predominantly Western countries. In contemporary society the liberation of women has become a crucial issue. Apparently the public display of the female body is in some way linked to women’s liberation.

The researcher deems it important to keep the material discussed in Chapter 2 in mind. There she indicates that in ancient societies it was the slaves and females of lower social status that appeared in the public sphere wearing little. From the perspective of Islam it should be asked if it is fair for society to display women in this way for its own benefit. It should also be asked if those who choose to cover up for religious and/or personal reasons should not be allowed the freedom to do so and if they should not enjoy the same rights as those who choose not to do so.

The researcher is of the opinion that the following video clips on the one hand testifies to the fact that the *hijab*, although a controversial practice in contemporary society, can have a positive effect for women who choose to wear it when they venture into the public sphere. On the other hand, it also illustrates the misconceptions, bias, and stereotyping Muslim women are confronted by when they enter the public sphere in predominantly non-Muslim societies. The videos illustrate that “the veil is attacked, ignored, dismissed, transcended, trivialized or defended” (El Guindi, 1999:xi) in contemporary society and that “the veil is a complex symbol of many meanings” (El Guindi, 1999:172).

**Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeiRwldbuA0>**

This video depicts a very unpleasant scene filmed in an Australian urban context. A film crew engages in a social “experiment” when women wearing the *hijab* and *niqab* are filmed in different locations such as banks and stores to illustrate their experiences in public spaces. The scene in the YouTube video mentioned above illustrates how women who veil can be exposed to prejudice and stereotyping. A male becomes aggressive and even violent when confronted by a number of veiled persons outside a bank. He demands that the veiled persons should immediately remove the clothing because Australia is a free country and nobody should enforce their religious and/or cultural bias upon his perceived “open” society. He cites countries like Afghanistan and Iraq as “proof” of Islam’s so-called “violent” character. The confrontation becomes so heated that security personnel need to intervene.

The irony of the situation cannot escape any viewer who watches the video with an open mind. The man protests against the perceived violent nature of Islam by becoming violent. He wants to remove his perceived “enforcement” of another culture upon his free, open, and democratic society by force. Someone who cannot accept any other point of view but his own does not realise that he is as prejudiced and biased as he accuses people from another culture to be! It is in accordance with the literature review discussed in section 4.2.2.

**Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwJgQPRVtW0>**

This video contains an “experiment” where a young female is walking about in different areas in New York, first for five hours wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and cardigan. The video

illustrates how some men made crude remarks and “hit” upon the woman. They do not respect her privacy or her right to move about freely in the streets of a city. The disrespect with which she is treated is evident in the footage. One man is so persistent in forcing his attentions upon the women that the producers of the video clip had to intervene to rid her of his unwanted attention. The situation when she again walks for five hours through different areas of the city wearing the *hijab* is quite different. Now she moves about unmolested. Her privacy is respected and she is constantly treated with respect.

One can argue that the command in Surah 24:30 that men should lower their gaze and not encroach upon a woman’s sacred privacy (section 3.4.2.2) comes naturally when the woman wears the *hijab*. This is in accordance with the literature reviewed in sections 4.3 and 4.4. The *hijab* acts as deterrent against sexual objectification, and facilitates the woman’s free movement in the public sphere.

**Video 3:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwJgQPRVtW0>

This video illustrates the value of communication and the possibility dialogue holds for creating tolerance and understanding. It is set against an American urban background. A Muslim woman wearing the *hijab* and *niqab* interviews people from all walks of life, even small children, about their perceptions of Muslim women in traditional modest dress. The interesting aspect of this video is that all the people, once confronted by the Muslim woman, indicate that the sight of her does not create any feelings of fear and that they do not experience the face veil as a barrier to communication.

The researcher is of the opinion that the video illustrates what the literature in section 4.4 also revealed. Once opportunities for communication are created and once dialogue ensues, people from all walks of life and from different backgrounds can come to mutual understanding.

## 4.6 Conclusions

In this chapter the researcher focused on the *hijab* in contemporary society. The theme linked up with the material discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 because it affords researchers the rare opportunity to trace an ancient socio-cultural practice, namely modest female dress, as it developed from the third millennium BCE (Chapter 2), as it

has been appropriated by Islam not only as a cultural symbol, but also as a symbol with deep religious significance (Chapter 3), to its application and its diverse meanings in contemporary society (Chapter 4).

The researcher argued that the custom of “veiling” is an established socio-religious custom in all three Religions of the Book. It is therefore a pity that the practice is currently “most closely identified with the issue of women’s status in a politicized Islam” (Borneman, 2009:2745). It has become “a problem in need of a solution” (Borneman, 2009:2745). The principles of respect, tolerance, dignity, freedom of choice, freedom of association, and sensitivity to diversity are taught and propagated by all three Religions of the Book, but rarely applied in inter-religious and cross-religious interaction (Shukri, 2008:27-34). There is growing tension between and mutual intolerance of religious symbols and practices in countries where adherents of the three Religions of the Book live alongside each other.

The researcher highlighted two contradictory misconceptions regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly Western societies, namely that a woman choosing to wear the *hijab* should be feared or pitied. On the other hand, she highlighted two equally contradictory perceptions regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly Muslim societies, namely that women should be emancipated from the *hijab* to be able to take their rightful place in contemporary society or that they should proudly don the *hijab* to express their resistance against perceived Western prejudice and discrimination and claim their rightful identity as Muslim women.

The researcher then argued that for many Muslim women wearing the *hijab* is a voluntary act with deep personal and symbolic meaning. In such a context wearing the *hijab* can create opportunities for meaningful dialogue between adherents of the three Religions of the Book. She concluded the chapter with a number of real-life examples of Muslim women wearing the *hijab* and explaining its value for them in their personal capacity and in their communities.

In Chapter 5 the focus will now shift to the real-life experiences of female Muslims living in South Africa. By means of a semi-structured interview schedule the researcher will assess the perceptions and experiences of female Muslims who choose to wear the *hijab* in one form or another in a predominantly non-Muslim society.

## CHAPTER 5

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL STUDY

### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore ancient and modern perspectives of traditional female Muslim clothing. In the preceding chapters, the researcher explored and discussed the perspectives from different ancient cultures (Chapter 2), from the perspective of Islamic tradition (Chapter 3), and in the context of contemporary society (Chapter 4). This chapter will now focus on the qualitative research done to explore modern perspectives of traditional female Muslim clothing.

The question this study aims to answer is what the ancient and modern perceptions of traditional female Muslim clothing are. This research question transpired from the goal of the study, namely to explore and describe these perceptions. For the purpose of the qualitative research, the researcher conducted semi-structured one-to-one interviews with Muslim women to obtain rich and in-depth data on modern perceptions of the traditional clothing practices.

In the representation of the data an attempt will be made to link the responses of the participants with the literature review in Chapters 2-4. The researcher concurs with El Guindi (1999:xvii-xviii) when she argues that a complex concept with many meanings such as the “veil” cannot be studied by means of a one-dimensional methodological approach. “Many cultural domains and methodological tools” are needed to analyse the phenomenon of veiling, amongst others “Islamic textual sources, visual analysis, linguistic analysis, cultural analysis and the ethnographic analysis of historical materials.” The researcher is of the opinion that her research approach belonging under the broad umbrella of qualitative data collection and analysis with its historical-comparative focus on the one hand (Chapters 2 to 4) and her exploratory qualitative methodology on the other hand allowed her to comprehensively analyse an ancient cultural and religious practice.

## 5.2 Research approach

The study used a two-pronged research approach, both belonging under the broad umbrella of qualitative data collection and analysis. The first part of the study is of a historical nature and employs a historical-comparative research approach. The purpose of historical comparative research is “to compare entire cultures or societies to learn about macro patterns or long-term trends across decades or a century” (Neuman, 2011:465). It is “a powerful tool for addressing many of the central issues in social theory” (Neuman, 2011:465) and is suitable for addressing “big” questions such as “How did major societal change take place? Why did current social arrangements take a certain form in some societies but not in others?” (Neuman, 2011:466). The advantage of historical-comparative research is that it “strengthens conceptualization and theory building. By looking at historical events or diverse cultural contexts, we generate new concepts and broaden understanding” (Neuman, 2011:466). Primary records (i.e. texts and depictions from the ancient Mediterranean world) and secondary sources (the writings of specialist historians) were utilized to compile and interpret data regarding ancient perceptions of female clothing practices and its interpretation and application in Islam.

The second part of the study follows an exploratory qualitative methodology, and a collective case study making use of an interview to collect data. Fouché and Delport (2011:64) describe qualitative research as an approach to answer questions from participants’ point of view. The aim in using a qualitative research approach is to understand the subjective and rich reality of the participating women and represent their way of understanding and personal perceptions of the *hijab* as the dress code (Willig, 2009:172). The qualitative research approach situates the observer in the world of participants. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recording, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64). This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

### **5.3 Type of research**

Applied research is original research undertaken to acquire new knowledge directed towards a specific aim or objective (Furlong & Oancea, 2005:6). Applied research is considered as practice based research as it aims to practically acquire new knowledge through a research-informed practice which is conducted for practice (Furlong & Oancea, 2005:7). The purpose of the proposed study is to generate new knowledge through an informed-based practice in order to add new information to an existing knowledge base regarding Muslim women's clothing practices.

### **5.4 Research design**

A case study research design is used. A case study involves a systemic investigation of a present-day phenomenon in order to describe it and involves a "bounded system of action" (Creswell et al., 2010:75). Creswell et al. (2010:76) explain that making use of a case study research design enables a researcher to obtain greater insight and understanding of a specific phenomenon. In the present study, it would be the personal experiences of Islamic women wearing the *hijab*.

The researcher ensured that data collection is appropriate in order to maintain validity and gather reliable data. A case study research design provided the opportunity to obtain an in-depth understanding of individual Islamic women in a comprehensive manner using interviews as data collection technique (Creswell et al., 2010:76). As Flick (2009:134) states, "Case studies can capture the process under study in a very detailed and exact way". There is however, a limitation in using the case study, such as the problem of generalizing from one case to other populations (Flick, 2009:133). This disadvantage can be rectified by doing a series of studies (Flick, 2009:134). In the case of this research study, the aim is not to generalise but to provide a foundation of Muslim women's experiences with the aim to conduct further research.

### **5.5 Research methodology**

#### **5.5.1 Study population and sampling**

The population for the study is Muslim women wearing different forms of the traditional clothing. The method of sampling employed is purposive sampling, since the women involved are characterised by the fact that they are Muslim and they share the *hijab*



as a dress code. As the groups of Islamic women fulfil the criteria the researcher expected that they would possess “the necessary knowledge and experience for answering the questions” (Flick, 2009:123). The researcher selected fifteen Muslim women purposefully to form the sample for this research study. The sample was based entirely on the judgement of the researcher to select cases where she will be able to collect the richest data (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). The researcher used the following criteria to select participants to form the sample for the study:

- adult Muslim women aged 18 years and older;
- wearing some form of traditional Muslim clothing;
- living in South Africa and specifically in the Gauteng Province;
- willing to participate in the research study voluntarily.

### **5.5.2 Data collection**

The researcher utilized the semi-structured interview as a method of collecting data. According to Creswell et al. (2010:87), researchers commonly use this method to corroborate data emerging from other data sources. However, in this research it served as a primary method of collecting data. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to probe participants for richer and in-depth data (Creswell et al., 2010:87). The researcher used an interview schedule with questions to guide the interview process. With the permission of the participants, the researcher digitally recorded the interviews to enable data analysis to take place. The interview schedule is attached as **Addendum 1**.

### **5.5.3 Qualitative data analysis**

For the purpose of the study, the researcher used the spiral process for qualitative data analysis. According to Creswell et al. (2010:298), the first step to qualitative data analysis is the immersion of the researcher within the data in order to become familiar with the information gathered during the research. As the initial step to data analysis, the researcher transcribed the information gathered during the interviews in the form of recordings into written text and listened over and over again to the digital recordings as many times as possible until she was familiar with the collected data.

Creswell et al. (2010:298) further state that the next step to data analysis would be to focus on the participants' subjective experiences. There is a need to evaluate key words, meanings, themes and messages obtained from the data collected. An analysis of observations and fields notes obtained was conducted.

Dependability is an approach of determining consistency across the research (Babbie, 2011:415). In ensuring dependability in this research, the researcher made use of peer debriefing and discussed the research data with her research supervisors to emphasise a deliberate awareness of the researcher's own values and preferences.

For exploring modern perspectives of traditional Muslim clothing, the researcher used the qualitative research approach. The data analysis involves seven steps (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:404). The steps of data analysis are as follows: planning for recording of data, data collection and preliminary analysis the twofold approach, managing the data, reading and writing memos, generating categories and coding the data, testing emergent understanding and searching for alternative explanation and interpreting and developing typologies.

The researcher discusses the data analysis steps in relation to the research study.

1. **Planning for recording of data:** The initial data analysis step according to Schurink et al. (2011:404) is planning for recording and documenting the data. There was a need to plan for the individual interviews with the female participants. In preparation for recording of data, participants gave permission in the letter of informed consent that the researcher could record the interviews.
2. **Data collection and preliminary analysis: the twofold approach:** The second step according to Schurink et al. (2011:405) is data collection and preliminary analysis. Within the second part of the twofold approach in the research study, data was collected in the form of face-to-face interviews, with the researcher acutely involved in conducting the data. During data collection and documentation, the researcher was attentive to the research participants and their words and ways of expression. Data was also recorded for transcription purposes and to analyse (Schurink et al., 2011:407).
3. **Managing the data:** The third step to qualitative data analysis is managing the data (Boeije, 2010:73). Throughout the data collection and documentation

phase, the researcher labelled the interview recordings as a way of identifying and managing the data. The researcher insured that the recordings were kept safely acknowledging the ethical aspects in keeping data collected and documented (Schurink et al., 2011:409).

4. **Reading and writing memos:** In the fourth step of analysing data, one reads and writes memos (Schurink et al., 2011:409). The researcher transcribed all the face-to-face interviews of the 15 female participants and read the data repeatedly in order to familiarize herself with the data. During the reading process, the researcher made notes in the form of memos in order to later code and connect the memos to the data (Schurink et al., 2011:410).
5. **Generating categories and coding the data:** After reading and writing memos, the fifth steps in data analysis is generating categories and coding the data (Schurink et al., 2011:410). The researcher categorized and coded the documented data in relation to the primary research question. During the process, categories were identified as they emerged (Schurink et al., 2011:413). The transcripts were labelled, similar concepts were grouped together and memos for categories were formulated. Coding of the data was applied and themes were identified (Schurink et al., 2011:414).
6. **Testing emerging understanding and searching for alternative explanations:** In testing the emergent understandings, the researcher had to think critically, look for alternate explanations and challenge the patterns that seemed obvious. The researcher evaluated how portions that were not in the data could be important for analysis. Negative effects of the researcher's preconceived ideas or unconscious and conscious non-reporting were taken into account.
7. **Interpreting and developing typologies:** The last step of qualitative data analysis is interpreting and developing typologies (Schurink et al., 2011:417). This step involved a thorough interpretation of the data documented. Interpretation of the data is discussed in chapter 5. The researcher will give a detailed account of the emerging interpretations and examples and direct quotations in participants' words are provided.

## **5.6 Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of data for this study was ensured in several ways. Firstly through reflexivity, the researcher clarified researcher bias by reflecting upon her own subjectivity. Lietz, Langer and Furman (2006:449-450, 451, 453) state that important strategies to ensure trustworthiness of data include peer debriefing, member checking and the use of an audit trail. The use of an audit trail involved that the researcher kept a written account throughout the data analysis process that clearly described the research decisions and the reasons for these decisions. The researcher could follow her own research procedures consistently and the audit trail is open to critique by the research community.

Peer debriefing was utilised where the researcher had supervision sessions with her research supervisors, Prof. G.T.M. Prinsloo and Prof. C.E. Prinsloo who confirmed that the findings, presented as verbatim examples, were a true reflection of the research participants' experiences (Lietz et al., 2006:444). This minimised the effects of reactivity and bias. Member checking was utilised where the findings from the data analysis was discussed with and available to participants in order to confirm or challenge the accuracy of the work. Participants were able to identify areas that have been missed or misinterpreted (Lietz et al., 2006:449-450, 451, 453).

## **5.7 Pilot study**

In qualitative research, the pilot study is normally informal and few respondents who have the same characteristics as those in the main investigation can be involved in such study. According to Strydom and Delpont (2011:394), in qualitative research the pilot study is usually informal, and a few respondents possessing the same characteristics as those of the main investigation can be involved. In this research study, the researcher interviewed one participant to test the interview schedule (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:395).

## **5.8 Ethical issues**

Doing research with human participants always carries ethical responsibilities and obligations for the researcher. The researcher took special care to ensure that she

abided by ethical principles and identifies the following aspects as important for the research study.

### **5.8.1 Avoidance of harm**

In conducting the research, the researcher ensured that the research participants would not be harmed (Litchman, 2010:54). She ensured this by not revealing any personal information that could potentially distort participants' characters. Avoiding harm to participants is an important ethical principle in social research. The researcher took all the necessary precautions to ensure that the study did not pose any harm to the participants by explaining the goal and objectives of the research project to present an opportunity to participants to take an informed decision to participate in the study.

### **5.8.2 Voluntary participation**

Participants freely chose to participate in the research study and conditions to withdraw were explained to them. This therefore implies that the researcher did not coerce any participants into participation and they had the right to withdraw from participating in the research at any point of the research (Neuman, 2011:149).

### **5.8.3 Informed consent**

Participants received a letter of informed consent to request their voluntary participation. In conducting the research, the researcher made sure that research participants were informed in detail about the nature of the research study and providing consent was clearly explained to them before they signed the letter of informed consent (Babbie, 2011:480; Neuman, 2011:149). During the informed written consent process, the researcher explained participants' expected roles, activities and risks involved in participating in the research. The informed consent letter included the objectives of the study, the rationale of the study, the procedure followed and the duration of the study. Participants knew that they were at liberty to withdraw from participation at any stage. The researcher informed participants that she would use an audio recorder for capturing the interviewing process. The letter of informed consent is attached as **Addendum 2**.

#### **5.8.4 Deception of participants**

During the process of conducting research, the researcher did not deceive participants in any way. The researcher verbally and in the letter of informed consent discussed the true nature of the research study and did not deceive participants in any way.

#### **5.8.5 Debriefing**

To ensure that participants have not experienced any harm due to their participation in the research project, the researcher did debriefing interviews after the data collection interviews (Babbie, 2011:486). Although the researcher did everything possible to prevent any form of damage, the topic was sensitive. Through debriefing, participants learned more about the benefits of the research to themselves and to society in general, and the researcher had the opportunity to alleviate any discomfort participants may have. During debriefing, the researcher tried to bring participants back to the same state of mind they were in before they engaged in the study. If any participants were to experience harm, the researcher would have referred them to the Muslim World League in Johannesburg for counselling. It was, however, not necessary as no participants indicated that they had experienced harm.

#### **5.8.6 Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality**

Due to the nature of the study and the one-to-one interviews, the researcher cannot guarantee anonymity. She however, ensures that the participants are guaranteed privacy and no identifying information about individuals is revealed in written or other means of communication (Litchman, 2010:54). The researcher treated all information relevant to the research in a confidential manner (Litchman, 2010:55). This implies that no information given by the participants will be given to anyone else. In order to maintain confidentiality, the researcher removed names and used numbers to ensure that data gained cannot be traced back to the individual participants (Merriam, 2009:84).

#### **5.8.7 Release or publication of the findings**

All participants were informed that the research report would be published and data would be stored in the Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, for a

period of 15 years. The researcher explained to the participants that the final report remained the property of the University of Pretoria.

## 5.9 Presentation of empirical data

The researcher presents the qualitative research data in line with the data analysis process as outlined by Schurink, Fouché & De Vos (2011:403-417). The biographical information about the participants is presented first by means of a table and then the findings of the semi-structured interviews are discussed according to specific themes and sub-themes. The biographical profile of the respondents who participated in the interviews reflects their age and the form of traditional Muslim clothing that they wear. Fifteen Muslim women participated in the study. The participants were between the ages of nineteen to fifty-one (19-51) years. The biographical information of the participants is summarized in **Table 1** below.

**Table 1: Biographical information**

Participant	Nationality	Age	Type of Muslim female clothing
1	South African	46	Full <i>hijab</i> (niqab)
2	South African (Indian)	50	Head scarf
3	South African (Indian)	24	Head scarf with abaya
4	South African (Indian)	31	Sometimes head scarf sometimes without
5	Kuwait	50	Head scarf
6	Egyptian	46	Head scarf
7	Egyptian	34	Head scarf
8	South African (Indian)	20	Head scarf with abaya
9	South African	50	Head scarf
10	South African (Indian)	42	Full <i>hijab</i>
11	South African (Indian)	50	Head scarf
12	Egyptian	19	Without
13	South African (Indian)	47	Head scarf
14	South African	23	Sometimes head scarf sometimes without
15	South African (Indian)	19	Head scarf
16	South African (Malay)	51	Head scarf

## 5.10 Discussion of themes and sub-themes

Through thematic analysis of the respondent's answers upon the semi-structured interview schedule themes and sub-themes were identified. Direct citations from the participants' responses during the interviews sustain each of these themes. In presenting the findings during data analysis, the researcher will start with the presentation of the views of the participants, followed by the opinions of the researcher and a brief look at the literature to support the participants' and researcher's views. The themes and sub-themes are summarised in **Table 2** below.

The themes that emerged from the transcripts were as follows:

### 5.10.1 Main theme 1: challenges faced by Muslim women in a western context

#### 5.10.1.1 Theme 1: Muslim women experience discrimination and judgement

##### (a) Sub-theme 1: participants experience challenges on an international level

The participants' experiences of challenges faced on international level were expressed in the following responses:

- *“Before 9/11 there were no challenges, Alhamdulillah (الحمد لله Praise be to God). People accepted you for who you were. After 9/11 it became quite difficult, all over the world.”*
- *“They face stereotyping as well as judgment. Usually, the western communities, under the influence of media, they say that Islam is terrorism, so they are very exposed to judgment as well as stereotyping.”*
- *“I would say when we go London, America – all those other parts of the west, we feel a little scared that, you know, what they're going to say because we're wearing the niqab and the head scarf. Because of the terrorists' act that has come about from 9/11, since then it's like people fear wearing the hijab.”*



**Table 2: Identified themes and sub-themes**

<b>MAIN THEMES</b>	<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUB-THEMES</b>
<b>MAIN THEME 1</b> Challenges faced by Muslim women in a Western context	<b>THEME 1.1</b> <i>Muslim women experience discrimination and judgement</i>	a. Participants experience challenges on an international level
		b. Participants experience challenges as Muslim women
	<b>THEME 1.2</b> <i>Muslim women do not experience discrimination and judgement in the South African context</i>	
	<b>THEME 1.3</b> <i>The media has an influence on perceptions</i>	a. The media has an influence on Muslim women's perception of their identity b. The media portrays incorrect information about Muslim women's clothing
<b>MAIN THEME 2</b> Perceptions of the religious meaning of the outfit	<b>THEME 2.1</b> <i>Muslim women wear the traditional clothing because their religion prescribes it</i>	
	<b>THEME 2.2</b> <i>Muslim women wear the traditional clothing because they should be protected</i>	
	<b>THEME 2.3</b> <i>Muslim women wear the traditional clothing because they choose to do so</i>	
<b>MAIN THEME 3</b> Muslim women's experiences of non-Muslim communities' perception of the traditional Muslim woman's outfit	<b>THEME 3.1</b> <i>Non-Muslim communities respect Muslim women for wearing the traditional clothing</i>	
<b>MAIN THEME 4</b> Perceptions of wearing the hijab among non-Muslim people in public spaces	<b>THEME 4.1</b> <i>Muslim women wear the traditional clothing with pride</i>	
	<b>THEME 4.2</b> <i>Muslim women perceive that non-Muslim people do not have knowledge of the reasons for wearing the traditional clothing</i>	

- *“I would say when we go overseas we’re interrogated at the customs, more so because we’re wearing the head gear. They would search us thoroughly and they would ask us questions, why we’re coming to their country, and that’s where the problem stays in the non-Muslim world, it’s when we get to the airport where they would question us and they would interrogate us, just to scare us off, to see why we really come into their country, are we terrorists or are we normal people coming to make a holiday of their country.”*

These responses correspond to the literature review discussed in section 4.2.2. Women in Islam are often stereotyped. In Muslim countries it is the norm for Muslim women to wear the veil or cover themselves. Yet, it may be problematic in the western world because of the 9/11 events. Muslim women are now often stigmatised and considered as terrorists. Islamophobia became rampant in the West (Carland, 2011:469-473). The remark by one respondent that custom officials wonder whether Muslim women are “normal” people also confirms the stereotyping that such women are to be pitied because they are “stupid, repressed and pitiful” (Timmerman, 2000:22). Participants thus experience challenges on an international level. This relates to the remark by Wagner (2015:523) that people fear Muslim women because of their wearing the *hijab* and the veil.

### **(b) Sub-theme 2: participants experience challenges as Muslim women**

A general theme expressed by participants is that they, as women, experience challenges related to the traditional clothing practices. The following excerpts illustrate this theme.

- *“I think that **Muslim women** have to prove always that they are not terrorists, that they are well educated, that they can manage their lives, and that they can face any problem and deal with it without any concerns.”*
- *“They are misinformed by media and social network and all of that. They are misinformed about people, about **Muslim women** wearing hijab and they say, like, women are forced to.”*
- *“Well, the most challenging for women in the western context is her outfit, because she is always looked at and pointed at when she’s covering her head*

*with hijab, and also wearing long dresses or long sleeved T-shirts, long trousers, so I think this is the **most challenging for the women.***”

- *“I think our main challenge is the judgments that are passed against us. The way that people perceive Muslims to be, and the way that people perceive **Muslim women** to be is more of an oppressed. So people expect us to be oppressed and they think that we are forced, we are compelled to wear this, and they do not understand the beauty of it. I think it’s challenging to try to explain to a non-Muslim the beauty of wearing the hijab.”*
- *“I think **Muslim women**, because everything is so westernised they kind of like feel that sometimes they need to fit in, so they might feel that those that don’t want to wear the hijab might feel like they need to dress up and be part of western women’s culture. So, those don’t realise that they themselves do not need to just wear the kind of clothing that the western women wear, that if they do dress up they can look beautiful; that they can show what they are about, even with the their hijab on. They don’t need to feel that people will look at them differently and not respecting of appreciating the way they are dressed.”*

Again these responses correspond to the literature review in section 4.2.2. It is common to find that women wearing the *hijab* are not considered to have minds of their own (Droogsmas, 2007:294-319). The responses clearly address the phenomenon of stereotyping faced by Muslim women in a western context, and that they are to be feared (Carland, 2011:469-473) or pitied (Feder, 2013:446).

#### **5.10.1.2 Theme 2: Muslim women do not experience discrimination and judgement in the South African context**

- *“But in South Africa, because we’ve got the multi-cultural, multi-racial – the Muslims used to help with the fight against apartheid. We just amalgamated, like we all came together. So there was a lot of respect for Muslim”*
- *“Well, in a western context, actually in South Africa, we don’t have any problems with regard to the hijab and people’s attitude towards it or having negative connotations towards it”*
- *“In South Africa, the people or the non-Muslims are more open to it; they don’t judge as much as overseas”*

In a study by Aziz (2010:68-70), she confirms that Muslim women in South Africa do not experience judgement since the South African Constitution allows freedom of religion and promotes an attitude of non-discriminatory practice (Aziz, 2010:125-144). This is also in accordance with the literature review in section 4.4. In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society such as South Africa there are naturally many opportunities for dialogue and to discover common ground between adherents of different cultural practices (Feder, 2013:444).

### **5.10.1.3 Theme 3: the media has an influence on perceptions**

#### **(a) Sub-theme 1: the media has an influence on Muslim women's perception of their identity**

- *“My personal opinion is that western society is a **media-based society**. So, it's about magazines, they prescribe to us how women should look, what a beautiful woman is all about. The other thing is, when I said media-based, it's the TV. It is a big influence on how we perceive ourselves, not only us as developed people, but it's also the challenge of like how we're portrayed as Muslim women. So the **media** forms other people's perception of us, and that is sometimes not positive. And also it holds up for us what ideal, modern, developed women should be like. And on both fronts, as Muslims, we have to make choices. So it's difficult for us, when you're bombarded by images that don't fit in with how traditional Islam is taught to us. So it's a difficult process of, you know it's like, it's for every person a challenge, and it's a process of choice-making to come to a realisation that, you know, as a Muslim, to get comfortable as a Muslim with your identity as a woman.”*
- *“I think the most difficult thing is the stereotypes of being a Muslim woman, so when you do wear, for example, a hijab or you are covered, they don't actually understand the reason behind it, and because of the way the **media** portrays us, and the way they've been brought up, they don't understand the actual reason. So what starts to happen is you start to get mocked and you would basically not, it's less easy for you to get where you would like to be in the western world.”*

The responses indicate the media's vision of what the “ideal” women should look like and wear (Lewis, 2013:22) as well as the stereotyped portrayal of Islam in the western

media as a violent religion influence Muslim women's perceptions of their identity. As indicated in the discussion of Video 1 in section 4.5, wearing the *hijab* might elicit hostile, even violent, reactions. Constant bombardment by these images and misinformation imply that Muslim women are constantly confronted by the irony, as argued in section 4.2.2, that a Muslim woman in the *hijab* causes fear of loss of freedom, which leads to Muslim women in predominantly western social contexts losing their freedom (Carland, 2011:469). It is clearly illustrated by the remark in one of the responses above that for a Muslim woman *"it's less easy for you to get where you would like to be in the western world."*

***(b) Sub-theme 2: the media portrays incorrect information about Muslim women's clothing***

- *"A lot of people are curious about what is the hijab, why are you dressed like this. So, what I think is that they don't understand it completely because they're not really informed, and the media is informing them incorrectly about it."*

The media often portrays Muslim women as being oppressed. However, this is not the same for other religions where women also cover themselves (Lewis, 2013:41). As much as the Internet is a useful tool for the sharing of information (Lewis, 2013:20), it also provides a biased environment where subjective information is provided. It assists in many of the misconceptions regarding the nature of Islam and the reason for modest dressing by Muslim females, and thus continues the phenomenon that veiling currently has *"only been applied to Muslim women's dress"* (Feder, 2013, 444).

**5.10.2 Main theme 2: perceptions of the religious meaning of the outfit**

***5.10.2.1 Theme 1: Muslim women wear the traditional clothing because their religion prescribes it***

- *"Well, it states in the Qur'an that this is the way women should dress, and I think if we are true to ourselves and we believe that this is what is expected of us, that that is exactly what we should be doing, and nothing else."*
- *"I think that the tradition and prescription come from the Qur'an, which is our Holy Scripture, and the prophet, Alaihi al salatu wal salam, his lifestyle and his advices to the women, for their own benefit, to protect themselves."*

- *“It comes from the Qur’an as well. It has been revealed from the Almighty into the Qur’an, and it is in the texts of the Qur’an to say that we should be covered from head to toe. Our body shape shouldn’t show. We should wear a loose item where we don’t the shape of our body.”*
- *“For me the meaning of my clothes comes from Allah’s Book. It is what he has ordained for us. He has said modesty, dress modestly. Don’t entice by the way you dress.”*

The respondents’ remarks regarding the *hijab* indicate that they are well aware of the Islamic basis for the practice as described in section 3.4. The commands in Surah 33:53 (section 3.4.1.2); 33:32-33 (section 3.4.1.3); 2:187; 7:26; 24:30-31; 33:59; (section 3.4.2.2); as well as the explanation of these passages in the Hadith and Tafsir all confirm the participants’ conviction that their religion prescribes the custom. Abdullah (1999:38) emphasises statements from leading imams and great scholars of Islam that indicate that it is obligatory for the woman to cover all of her body in the presence of non-Mahram men. As indicated in section 3.7, the *hijab* ultimately is a marker of sacred and private space that symbolises gender mutuality, modesty, and respect for the sacred privacy that is dear to Allah. It is a public and visual symbol of female Muslim identity (Surah 24:30-31) that enables the female Believer to publicly and visually portray her identity as a Muslim (Surah 33:59).

#### **5.10.2.2 Theme 2: Muslim women wear the traditional clothing because they should be protected**

- *“We should be covering up, and I think there’s a reason behind that because I think our Creator has made it so that women are protected.”*

The theme of the *hijab* as a barrier that protects has been addressed in Chapters 3 and 4. The remark that *“our Creator has made it so that women are protected”* illustrates awareness of Surah 33:59 (section 3.4.2.2) which clearly states that the Prophet (ﷺ) should “tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their Jalabīb. That will be better that they should be known so as not to be annoyed.” It is also in accordance with the discussion in section 4.3. Timmerman (2000:24) argued that the *hijab* “protects women against male harassment.” As indicated in section 4.3, Sanghani (2014) reports that

Muslim women indicated that the *hijab* causes men to respect a woman more. In section 4.5 it is practically illustrated in the discussion of Video 2.

### **5.10.2.3 Theme 3: Muslim women wear the traditional clothing because they choose to do so**

- *“I think having decided that this is what I want to do, I think it’s made me a little bit more confident. I feel closer to my Creator; I feel closer to Him, that I’ve now fulfilled one of the most, one of the main pillars of Islam of performing hudj, and that this is exactly how I should be and I should be dressing.”*
- *“The truth of the matter is that hijab is meant to purify you from within. So, hijab is something that women learn the beauty of and we implement it ourselves, whether you’re married, whether you’re not married, from when you’re mature you wear your hijab and it your crown, it is your pride.”*
- *“I find the hijab to be my identity; it’s who I am; it defines me.”*

The respondents’ remarks are in accordance with the discussion in 4.3. None of the women indicated that they regarded the wearing of the *hijab* as a matter of force. On the contrary, they choose to wear it as it defines who they are. The observation by Droogsma (2007:294-319) that Muslim women wearing the *hijab* feel empowered by their choice to veil, not only as individuals but also as a group, is affirmed by the respondents’ remarks. It illustrates that they are confident in their own identity as Muslim women and in their relationship with God. A Muslim woman’s deliberate decision to veil is an expression of her autonomy (Borneman, 2009:2757; also Williams & Vashi, 2007:271), an illustration that she found “peace and power” and that she is “finally free” (Zaghloul, 2006).

### **5.10.3 Main theme 3: Muslim women’s experiences of non-Muslim communities’ perceptions of the traditional Muslim woman’s outfit**

#### **5.10.3.1 Theme 1: non-Muslim communities respect Muslim women for wearing the traditional clothing**

- *“...because I think – and from what I’ve now experienced since I’m wearing a hijab – is that I get a lot of respect from people, non-Muslim people. I mean, they look at you and they don’t treat you less like a person, like a human being. They really do appreciate and respect the way you are and the way you look, because*

*it's actually a command, I think – that is how I can put it – that we should be dressing up in our hijab.”*

- *“And another thing with the non-Muslims, I would say they respect you a lot. They give you more respect because they see you’re covered.”*

In spite of all the negative misconceptions regarding the *hijab* and the stereotyping of Muslims in the Western media, it is amazing that the respondents report that they are respected by non-Muslims for their choice to wear the *hijab*. It illustrates the point made in section 4.4 that the *hijab* can become a catalyst for dialogue between religious people all over the world. Instinctively, when actually confronted by a woman wearing the *hijab*, familiarity with the custom of “veiling” in Islam, Judaism and Christianity suggests common ground that deserves to be explored because “there is room for further discussion about veiling practices across different religious contexts” (Feder, 2013:455). Mutual understanding and tolerance of different religious traditions can be attained. The observation is aptly illustrated in the discussion of Video 3 in section 4.5.

#### **5.10.4 Main theme 4: perceptions of wearing the *hijab* among non-Muslim people in public spaces**

##### **5.10.4.1 Theme 1: Muslim women wear the traditional clothing with pride**

- *“...that if they do dress up they can look beautiful; that they can show what they are about, even with their hijab on.”*
- *“So we can dress ourselves up, but the people out there still see us, and kind of like the hijab brings out all that goodness that we have in us in that. And we are really respected. I find that I’ve had people that I’ve met comment on the way the scarf looks; how nice it’s dressed in; how nice it’s draped, and it kind of like makes you feel that you are doing the right thing by covering up yourself.”*

In section 4.3 the researcher argued that Muslim women wearing the *hijab* feel empowered by their choice to veil (Droogsma, 2007:294-319). The *hijab* symbolises sanctity, reserve and respect (El Guindi, 1999:84) and Muslim women wearing the *hijab* reports that they are mostly treated with respect. It is also illustrated in the discussion of Video 1 in section 4.5.



#### **5.10.4.2 Theme 2: Muslim women perceive that non-Muslim people do not have knowledge of the reasons for wearing the traditional clothing**

- *“I think a lot of people have asked me actually, ah shame, I’m so sorry, would your husband beat you up if you don’t wear the outfit? Are you married? Is that why you’re wearing the hijab? I thought only married young Muslims wear it. So, a lot of people, they pity us. They look down on us. They say, shame, you know, the men are evil and the women are helpless. They believe that in Islam women don’t have rights or they don’t have freedom of expression.”*
- *“They don’t understand, ... so first of all they think that it’s something that forced on us, and they don’t understand the reason behind it, because they’re either thinking that it’s forced, not understanding that it’s to show modesty and to be judged for any physical features but rather for what we are on the inside. So they use that and they ridicule and judge and they are very biased and a lot of people actually.”*
- *“... a lot of confusion, but a lot of questions. They ask me questions. They say why do you dress like that. What are you hiding? Do you always dress like that? So, there’s a lot of interest in the way I dress, particularly in terms of Ramadan because I work shorter hours. And the fasting, they want to know where that comes from, so for me that encourages a lot of dialogue; it encourages conversation. People ask me questions.”*

The respondents’ answers on the one hand confirm the observations in section 4.2.2 that there are many misconceptions in predominantly Western communities regarding the *hijab*. On the other hand, as argued in section 4.2.3, it is often not appreciated that Muslim women are aligned with their identity as Muslims. Therefore, they appreciate the importance of the *hijab* in bonding them to other Muslims, and they also appreciate the visual association to the religion (Furseth, 2011:370-372). It also illustrates the point made in section 4.4 that the *hijab* can create opportunities for dialogue and facilitate a better understanding of different religious traditions in a culturally diverse context.

## 5.11 Conclusion

In this chapter modern perspectives of traditional female Muslim clothing have been explored by means of qualitative research. The researcher conducted semi-structured one-to-one interviews with Muslim women to obtain rich and in-depth data on modern perceptions of the traditional clothing practices.

In the representation of the data an attempt has been made to link the responses of the participants with the literature review in Chapters 2 to 4. Under the broad umbrella of qualitative data collection and analysis the researcher comprehensively engaged with the issue of Muslim female clothing practices in this study. By means of historical-comparative analysis on the one hand (Chapters 2 to 4), and an exploratory qualitative methodology on the other hand (Chapter 5), she comprehensively analysed an ancient cultural and religious practice.

The researcher has found that the responses to her semi-structured interview schedule were in accordance with the literature review conducted in Chapters 2 to 4. An ancient cultural practice (Chapter 2) has been re-applied on a religious level in the Islamic context (Chapter 3). In spite of many misconceptions and negative stereotyping Muslim women agree that they freely choose to wear the *hijab* because it gives visual expression to their identity as Muslims and protects them against objectification. By using the *hijab* as an opportunity for dialogue, better understanding of the practice might lead to increased tolerance of diverse cultural and religious practices in contemporary society (Chapter 4).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this study the focus fell on **female clothing practices** in a very specific socio-cultural and religious context, namely ***Muslim female clothing practices***. The study was explicitly intended to be ***an exploratory study of ancient and modern perceptions*** on Muslim female clothing practices. The study had a socio-historical, cultural, and religious focus and departed from the observation that Muslim female clothing practices imply “a complex symbol of many meanings” (El Guindi, 1999:172). **Clothing practices** in the title of this study should thus be interpreted not in the sense of **fashion**, but as a **symbol** “deeply embedded within social, cultural, and religious contexts,” signifying “a multitude of ‘ideas, concepts, and categories’ that ascribe meaning to the body” (Feder, 2013:443).

The study provided the researcher with the opportunity to **combine a historical-comparative and social-sciences research approach**. Female clothing practices were studied from a historical perspective as a cultural phenomenon with its roots in ancient Mediterranean societies (Chapter 2). These ancient cultural practices were re-applied and re-appropriated in Islamic tradition (Chapter 3) and found expression in modern society via Muslim women’s choice to follow traditional clothing practices (Chapter 4). This, in turn, allowed the researcher to also study the phenomenon within the context of the social-sciences (Chapter 5). In this way the researcher endeavored to approach Muslim female clothing practices as a complex symbol with many meanings by means of a comprehensive research approach. The researcher indicated that the ecological systems theory (Bronfenner, 1979) provided the broad theoretical framework for her study. She studied the phenomenon of Muslim female clothing practices against the five environmental systems in which an individual has to interact, namely the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-system (Benokraitis, 2011:35-36).

The researcher is of the opinion that her study made a small contribution in creating sensitivity to cultural and religious diversity in modern society. The study addressed the erroneous notion that a symbol has only one single meaning and indicated how

meanings attached to the *hijab* and the *niqab* changed over time. The researcher argued that female clothing practices have deeply personal and unique meanings attached to it in every individual case. She hopes that the study can become a foundation for mutual understanding between adherents of different religions, tolerance between people born in different cultures, and dialogue between individuals and communities in a complex and diverse, modern world.

## 6.2 Overview of the preceding chapters

The researcher's personal experience as a conservative Muslim woman from Saudi Arabia residing in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, played an important role in the choice of this research theme. In non-Muslim contexts stereotyping of Muslim women in cultural-religious dress is commonplace (Wagner et al., 2012:521-541). Moreover, Muslim women in non-Muslim countries are often encouraged to follow the latest fashion trends and they tend to be ignorant about the real symbolic meaning of the *hijab* (Lewis, 2010:58-90). Thus the **primary research question** of this study was the following: What are the ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices and its practical influence upon Muslim women in a predominantly non-Muslim community?

To address this question the researcher explored the nature, development, meaning, and cultural significance of female clothing in the ancient Mediterranean world with a specific focus on the origin of the cultural phenomenon (Chapter 2); discussed wearing the *hijab* as a religious obligation according to the interpretation of the Qur'ān by adherents of Islam (Chapter 3); explored misconceptions regarding the *hijab* and conceptions of the *hijab* in contemporary society and explained the significance of various facets of the *hijab* as it features in Muslim communities today; explored, through a qualitative research approach, Muslim women's perceptions of their choice to wear the *hijab* in a non-Muslim society.

The research study consisted of five chapters:

**Chapter 1: Introduction and orientation** provided the background to the study. Definitions of key concepts used throughout the study were provided. The chapter addressed the rationale for the study, the research approach, the theoretical framework and the study's goal and objectives.

In **Chapter 2: Female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies – a lasting heritage** the researcher argued that the concept of “veiling” was an intricate part of the female dress code in virtually all ancient Mediterranean societies since at least the third millennium BCE. She further argued that that the symbolic value of clothing in general, and female apparel in particular, is closely associated with the core social values of honour and shame and the associative values of humility, modesty, respect, and privacy. No single ideological model can explain the social practice of “veiling,” it had different “meanings” over time and might have had more than one meaning at the same time. Sumerian gender complementarity, Assyrian/Persian, Hellenic gender hierarchy, Egyptian gender equality, and Byzantine gender seclusion all played a role in determining female clothing practices in ancient Mediterranean societies.

In **Chapter 3: Female clothing practices according to Islamic tradition** the researcher investigated the specific application and re-interpretation of this cultural phenomenon in Islamic tradition. Evidence from primary sources, i.e. the Qu’rān and Sunna as it found expression in the Hadith and Tasfir, as well as from secondary sources, i.e. consensus and deductive analogy as it found expression in the development of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, indicated the following: “Veiling” as an existing socio-cultural practice has been re-interpreted and re-applied in Islamic tradition on a religious level. In Islam the *hijab* became a marker of sacred and private space. It symbolises gender mutuality, modesty, and respect for the sacred privacy that is dear to Allah. It is a public and visual symbol of female Muslim identity and it is an effective “shield” against harassment when a female Muslim ventures into the public domain.

In **Chapter 4: The hijab in contemporary society: controversy, dialogue, and tolerance**, the researcher investigated the role of the *hijab* in contemporary society. The theme afforded her the rare opportunity to trace an ancient socio-cultural practice, namely modest female dress, as it developed from the third millennium BCE (Chapter 2), as it has been appropriated by Islam not only as a cultural symbol, but also as a symbol with deep religious significance (Chapter 3), to its application and its diverse meanings in contemporary society (Chapter 4). The researcher argued that the custom of “veiling” is an established socio-religious custom in all three Religions of the Book. The principles of respect, tolerance, dignity, freedom of choice, freedom of

association, and sensitivity to diversity are taught and propagated by all three Religions of the Book, but rarely applied in inter-religious and cross-religious interaction. It is ironic that the custom of veiling as practiced in Islamic tradition is singled out as a problem that needs to be fixed. The researcher highlighted two contradictory misconceptions regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly Western societies, namely that a woman choosing to wear the *hijab* should be feared or pitied. She highlighted two equally contradictory perceptions regarding Muslim female clothing practices in predominantly Muslim societies, namely that women should be emancipated from the *hijab* to be able to take their rightful place in contemporary society or that they should proudly don the *hijab* to express their resistance against perceived Western prejudice and discrimination and claim their rightful identity as Muslim women. The researcher then argued that for many Muslim women wearing the *hijab* is a voluntary act with deep personal and symbolic meaning. In such a context wearing the *hijab* can create opportunities for meaningful dialogue between adherents of the three Religions of the Book. She concluded the chapter with a number of real-life examples of Muslim women wearing the *hijab* and explaining its value for them in their personal capacity and in their communities.

In **Chapter 5: Qualitative research methodology and empirical study**, the researcher investigated modern perspectives of traditional female Muslim clothing by means of qualitative research. The researcher conducted semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with Muslim women to obtain rich and in-depth data on modern perceptions of the traditional clothing practices. In the representation of the data the responses of the participants have been linked with the literature review in Chapters 2 to 4. The researcher found that the responses to her semi-structured interview schedule were in accordance with the literature review conducted in Chapters 2 to 4. An ancient cultural practice (Chapter 2) has been re-applied on a religious level in the Islamic context (Chapter 3). In spite of many misconceptions and negative stereotyping Muslim women agree that they freely choose to wear the *hijab* because it gives visual expression to their identity as Muslims and protects them against objectification. By using the *hijab* as an opportunity for dialogue, better understanding of the practice might lead to increased tolerance for diverse cultural and religious practices in contemporary society (Chapter 4).

### 6.3 Key findings and contributions of the study

Each chapter contributed in a unique way to the key findings of the study:

- Chapter 1 indicated that a creative combination of a historical-comparative and social-sciences research approach under the broad umbrella of qualitative research can shed interesting light upon cultural and religious practices in contemporary society.
- Chapter 2 indicated that “veiling” is a cultural practice with a long history. Female clothing practices were closely associated with the core social values of honour and shame and the associative values of humility, modesty, respect, and privacy. No single ideological model can explain the social practice of “veiling,” it had different “meanings” over time and might have had more than one meaning at the same time.
- Chapter 3 indicated that the existing cultural practice of “veiling” was re-applied and re-interpreted in Islamic tradition as a religious symbol, especially as a marker of sacred space. The *hijab* symbolises gender mutuality, modesty, and respect for the sacred privacy. It is confirmed by the primary sources (the Qu’rān, Hadith, and Tasfir) and the secondary sources (consensus and deductive analogy) as it found expression in the development of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence.
- Chapter 4 indicated that the ancient custom of modest female dress, an accepted custom in all three monotheistic religions, became closely associated with Islam in contemporary society. It is a controversial symbol, for Westerners a symbol of Islam’s perceived violent nature and thus to be feared, or of Muslim women’s oppression, hence they should be pitied and freed from oppression. Some Muslims want to be emancipated from the ancient practice; others embrace it as a symbol of resistance against the influence of Western culture and of their unique religious identity. To Muslim women who deliberately choose to wear the *hijab*, the act carries deep symbolic meaning as an expression of sanctity, reserve and respect. Continuous dialogue between adherents of different customs and religions can enhance mutual understanding and tolerance of each other’s customs.

- Chapter 5 indicated that in spite of many misconceptions and negative stereotyping, Muslim women agree that they freely choose to wear the *hijab* because it gives visual expression to their identity as Muslims and protects them against objectification.

Overall, the current research study adds value to the existing literature on the perceptions of female Muslim clothing practices. It traces the development of an ancient social practice through millennia and confirms the importance and relevance of studying ancient cultures for contemporary society. It contributes towards a better understanding of an ancient cultural practice as it finds expression in a contemporary religious tradition. It relates first-hand experiences of Muslim women wearing the *hijab*. As such the study becomes a source of information regarding cultural and religious practices that can also be utilised in future research.

#### **6.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

The limits set for a research MA dissertation of necessity imply that a theme of limited scope should be investigated. The researcher acknowledges the limits of her theme as well as of her approach. She deliberately limited her research to Sunni interpretations of the Islamic tradition. She is well aware that Islam, as was the case with her interpretation of the veil, is a complex “symbol” of many meanings. She acknowledges that other branches of the faith can, and indeed do, look at her chosen field of study from other perspectives.

Even within the Sunni tradition the researcher emphasised interpretations leaning towards “full” veiling, in other words to the *hijab* that includes the *niqab*. As a Saudi-Arabian female, it reflects her culture and custom. She is well aware that within Sunni tradition interpretations exist which do not require “full” cover. The researcher deliberately did not engage in these controversies. The simple point she wanted to make is that the *hijab*, whether it includes the face veil or not, is an ancient cultural symbol with a deeply religious and personal connotation for those who choose to wear it.

The current research opened several avenues for research that can be explored in future. Some possibilities are:



- Current research on Muslim female clothing practices tend to focus on misconceptions regarding the custom and stereotyping of Muslim females in the Western press and social media. The researcher is of the opinion that much still needs to be done to contextualise these practices in terms of ancient culture studies and in terms of the three monotheistic religions' shared heritage and customs. This might act as catalyst for dialogue and create opportunities to share experiences and enhance mutual understanding in the diverse society that the world has become.
- Critical and longitudinal analysis of the media's impact upon perceptions regarding female clothing practices in general, and Muslim female clothing practices in particular, seems to be imperative. In a world of growing tensions and polarisation, the influence of the media upon perceptions and misconceptions, both within specific communities and between diverse communities, should not be underestimated.
- It is clear that the unfamiliarity in Muslim circles regarding Western academic literature on cultural and religious matters, and the unfamiliarity in Western circles regarding literature in the Arab language, create an obstacle for meaningful dialogue. The researcher's experience as an Arab woman who studied at a Western university in the Department of Ancient Languages and Cultures indicated that the common ground between religious traditions might be greater than commonly perceived.
- Current research in the historical and social sciences focuses on issues such as space, borders and boundaries, the body as space, the body in space. In this regard much has been done in terms of Hebrew and/or Christian religious documents (cf. for instance Prinsloo & Meier, 2014). Very little, however, has been done in this regard in Islamic studies. The researcher is of the opinion that the concept of the *hijab* as a border and boundary and how it defines the female body in space as well as the role it plays in the "othering" of both Muslims and non-Muslims would be a viable and interesting field of study. She intends to pursue it in a future study project.

## 6.5 Concluding remarks

The **primary research question** of this study was the following: What are the ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices and its practical influence upon Muslim women in a predominantly non-Muslim community?

The researcher concludes that an ancient cultural practice (Chapter 2) has been re-applied on a religious level in the Islamic context (Chapter 3). In spite of many misconceptions and negative stereotyping Muslim women agree that they freely choose to wear the *hijab* because it gives visual expression to their identity as Muslims and protects them against objectification. By using the *hijab* as an opportunity for dialogue, better understanding of the practice might lead to increased tolerance for diverse cultural and religious practices in contemporary society (Chapter 4).

An interesting observation emerged from the semi-structured interviews conducted with female Muslims in the South African context. As reported in Chapter 5, Muslim women wearing some form of the *hijab* in the City of Tshwane indicated that they face many challenges regarding stereotyping and negative perceptions in an international context. However, locally they experience that they are respected for their choice to wear the *hijab*. They also indicated that people are generally tolerant.

The researcher is of the opinion that in a culturally very diverse country such as South Africa, people tend to be more accepting and tolerant. It confirms the observation made in Chapters 4 and 5 that exposure to differences, knowledge of various religious traditions, and dialogue may enhance mutual understanding and eradicate myths regarding Islam and Muslim women's choice to wear the *hijab*.

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### List of websites utilised in the study

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|---|--|
| <a href="http://alkeltawia.com">http://alkeltawia.com</a>               | <a href="http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com">www.jewishencyclopedia.com</a> |
| <a href="http://commons.wikimedia.org">http://commons.wikimedia.org</a> | <a href="http://www.karakalpak.com">www.karakalpak.com</a>                 |
| <a href="http://mohamedghilan.com">http://mohamedghilan.com</a>         | <a href="http://www.lessingimages.com">www.lessingimages.com</a>           |
| <a href="http://penelope.uchicago.edu">http://penelope.uchicago.edu</a> | <a href="http://www.library.yale.edu">www.library.yale.edu</a>             |
| <a href="http://study.com">http://study.com</a>                         | <a href="http://www.louvre.fr">www.louvre.fr</a>                           |
| <a href="http://sunnah.com">http://sunnah.com</a>                       | <a href="http://www.merriam-webster.com">www.merriam-webster.com</a>       |
| <a href="http://tanzil.net">http://tanzil.net</a>                       | <a href="http://www.momsteam.com">www.momsteam.com</a>                     |
| <a href="http://veil.unc.edu">http://veil.unc.edu</a>                   | <a href="http://www.museopics.com">www.museopics.com</a>                   |

<http://whc.unesco.org>

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org>

<https://archive.org>

<https://en.wikipedia.org>

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com>

[www.alim.org](http://www.alim.org)

[www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com)

[www.angelfire.com](http://www.angelfire.com)

[www.arce.org](http://www.arce.org)

[www.archaeology.org](http://www.archaeology.org)

[www.artres.com](http://www.artres.com)

[www.bible-history.com](http://www.bible-history.com)

[www.biblelandpictures.com](http://www.biblelandpictures.com)

[www.deoband.org](http://www.deoband.org)

[www.earlychristianwritings.com](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com)

[www.echr.coe.int](http://www.echr.coe.int)

[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

[www.iranicaonline.org](http://www.iranicaonline.org)

[www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

[www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)

[www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

[www.qaraqalpaq.com](http://www.qaraqalpaq.com)

[www.qtafsir.com](http://www.qtafsir.com)

[www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)

[www.rolereboot.org](http://www.rolereboot.org)

[www.studyblue.com](http://www.studyblue.com)

[www.sumerianshakespeare.com](http://www.sumerianshakespeare.com)

[www.syriatoday.ca](http://www.syriatoday.ca)

[www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk)

### **List of YouTube video clips utilised in the study**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeiRwldbuA0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeiRwldbuA0)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwJgQPRVtW0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwJgQPRVtW0)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwJgQPRVtW0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwJgQPRVtW0)

## **ADDENDUM 1: Semi-structured interview schedule**

1. What challenges do Muslim women face in a Western context?
2. What challenges do Muslim women face in the South African context?
3. What is the religious meaning of the outfit? Where does this tradition and prescription for dressing come from? (To explore if the Muslim woman herself understands the origin in order to address other people's misconceptions)
4. What is your view/perception in relation to non-Muslim communities in your social life and at work?
5. From your interaction with non-Muslim communities what is your experiences of their perceptions of the conservative Muslim woman's outfit?
6. How do you feel when wearing the Hijab among non-Muslim people in public spaces?



**ADDENDUM 2: Letter of informed consent**



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Ancient Languages

13/01/2015

**INFORMED CONSENT**

**1. NAME OF RESEARCHER**

**Name:** Latifah Bin Nafisah

**2. NAME OF UNIVERSITY**

Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002

**Contact person:** Prof GTM Prinsloo

**3. RESEARCH TITLE**

Muslim female clothing practices: An exploratory study of ancient and modern perceptions.

**4. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore ancient and modern perceptions of Muslim female clothing practices.

**5. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT**

The research is an exploratory study of ancient and modern studies with specific regards to Muslim female clothing practices. Various sources of literature, from research on both ancient and modern practices will be explored and discussed to reach the guiding objectives. This research study will use historical-comparative research and an exploratory qualitative methodology, and a collective case study making use of an interview to collect data. A qualitative research approach situates the observer in the world of participants. This type of research will be applied research, which aims to practically acquire new knowledge through a research-informed practice.

The sample population will be Muslim women above the age of eighteen that share the main characteristic of the hijab as a dress code. Purposeful sampling will be conducted and Muslim women that meet specific criteria will form part of the research.

The researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with an interview schedule for the collection of data. The researcher will digitally record the data with your permission. Thematic analysis will be conducted as a qualitative data analysis procedure. The following ethical issues will be considered throughout the research process: informed written consent, non-deception to participants, debriefing and no violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality.

## **6. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**

The researcher will use snowball and volunteer sampling to purposively select ten to fifteen (10-15) Muslim women who are willing to participate in the research study. The researcher will identify Muslim women through the contact with a religious educational institution in Laudium. Participants will be selected according to the following criteria within purposive sampling:

- Adult Muslim women aged 18 years and older
- Wearing some form of traditional Muslim clothing
- Living in South Africa and specifically in the Gauteng Province
- Be willing to participate in the research study voluntarily.

## **7. RISKS INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Participants may recall negative experiences with regard to Muslim women wearing traditional clothing. There is a possibility that the interview may trigger unresolved emotional issues in a participant. The researcher will conduct basic debriefing with all participants after the interview and if a participant has been particularly negatively impacted, they will be referred to the Muslim World League in Johannesburg for counselling.

## **8. BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Because of stigmatization, lack of information and sensitivity of wearing the traditional Muslim clothing, people do not always openly discuss perceptions and experiences. This research study will provide an opportunity to talk about the perceptions and experiences and may be beneficial to participants.

## **9. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Please note that this study is voluntary. Your participation would be greatly appreciated as through the research, we aim to explore modern perceptions of traditional Muslim female clothing practices. However, you have a choice to participate in the research or not. Upon initial contact, if you are interested in the study, a request

for your permission to participate will be made. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without any negative consequences

## **10. RECORDS OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH**

Once the research has been published it is a mandate that the research is safely stored at the Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria for a period of fifteen years for purposes of further research and archiving. Research results will be published in the form of a Masters dissertation.

### **AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY**

My signature indicates that I have read, or listened to, the information provided above and that I received answers to my questions. I have freely decided to participate in this research and I know I have not given up any of my legal rights.

Please print your name next to signature if you approve to participate in this study.

**I hereby freely give my permission to participate in this research project.**

This document was signed at \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2015.

**NAME:** .....

**SIGNATURE:** .....

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER:** .....

**MS. Latifah Bin-Nafisah**