

**Modest Fashion? Dress, Body, and Space: an ethnographic  
account of Muslim female stakeholders' experiences in the modest  
fashion industry**

By

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## **Abstract**

This PhD is an interdisciplinary study that provides an in-depth ethnographic account of modest fashion's promotional spaces where Muslim female stakeholders expand their career choices towards the corporate fields. The female stakeholders in this research promote modest fashion in systematic fashion events and exhibitions and on the virtual marketing platform Instagram. More specifically, this research focuses on how these Muslim women construct a multitude of cultural and political scenes in the spaces they weave within these branding platforms for their agency display. Significantly, this research offers fresh insights by drawing a holistic understanding of the developing branding techniques in multiple spaces where modest fashion is rapidly growing in the physical world and online leading to newness and a creative staging of fashion items.

This study applies a qualitative approach through ethnography to study the modest fashion culture of more than 150 research participants who have multiple roles within the fashion industry: including businesswomen, designers, bloggers, models, fashion students, and consumers. This multisite research is located in Britain: London, Leicester, and Birmingham, in Istanbul: Zorlu art Centre, and on the online: Instagram. Data is derived through the use of 'ethnographic mosaic' strategy (Blackman, 2010) by applying the multiple qualitative methods: observations, conversational interviews, and visual ethnography, in different locations where diverse voices are accessed from the fieldwork. The ethnographic data are analysed through a grounded theory approach while a semiotic analysis approach was adopted for interpreting Instagrammic visuals. The analysis generates a thick description of the contemporary shifts that created a space for agency and representation, and also brought new perspectives to theoretical concepts.

In terms of findings, this thesis explores how modest fashion produced multiple promotional spaces where the Muslim female stakeholders develop their careers towards global brands while weaving spaces for their agency. Through cultural events, modest fashion is creatively growing a global consumer culture resulting in traces of a global culture industry where physical shopping experiences are key (Lash and Lury, 2007). Amidst these changes, key findings show that Muslim female stakeholders are challenged by stereotypes, modesty shaming online, and by the intrusion of corporates in the modest fashion retail. Yet, Muslim stakeholders had the fashion capital to balance between struggles and representations through their creativity. The thesis concludes that modest fashion carries its stability and value as a vehicle for Muslim women's spatial expressions, creativity, and career suggestive of a feminist

practice in which they perform an empowering act in a branding space offering new insights to agency and being a female.

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I offer my sincere thanks to the young Muslim female participants in my research who without this thesis is impossible. It has been a fun and exciting journey for me every time I met you at the modest fashion events or whenever I had the chance to talk to you online and in person. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, experiences, and time.

Finally, I would like to thank my university teachers at Hassiba Ben Bouali, the department of English, for their profound faith in me and the Algerian government for sponsoring me through this research journey and offering me the chance to expand my insights, my academic knowledge, and experiences.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents, Fatma and Amar, for believing in me and for being so supportive and understanding, to my husband, Hamza, for his patience, emotional support, and reassurance, to my other half, my sister, Nafissa, to my loving brothers, Ahmed, Ismail, and Djamel Eddine, to my precious little nephew Chahine, for being the joy of my life, and to my precious sisters in law, Habiba and Fatima Zahra. I also dedicate this work in memory of my late grandparents Ahmed and Lalia, and to my maternal grandparents, Mhamed and Kheira, who have always had faith in me and have shown endless love and support in this endeavour. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my second family in the UK, my friends, and colleagues, for lifting me up during the hardships of this research.

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## List of Abbreviations

**‘BoPo’:** Body Positivity

**Ads:** Advertisements

**App:** Application

**D.I.Y.:** do-it-yourself

**FAM:** *Fashion As Modest* (a modest fashion brand)

**Insta:** Instagram

**Insta:** Instagram

**MFW:** Modest Fashion Week

**PBUH:** Peace be upon him

**UAL:** University of the Arts London

**UK:** United Kingdom

**US:** United States

**yBas:** Young British Artists

**YTB:** YouTube



## Glossary

**Burqini:** A modest swimwear worn by women (mostly known within the Muslim women community).

**Eid:** An Islamic celebration referring to: Eid El-Fitr and Eid-El-Adha. The first celebration marks the end of fasting the holy month of ‘Ramadan’ and the second festival is in the month of Dhu-El-Hijaa marking the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and the sacrifice of Abraham.

**Fanzine:** “A small-scale amateur pamphlet or magazine associated with a particular topic or interest community” (Hodkinson, 2017: 364).

**Hasham:** ‘shyness’ which also stands for ‘modesty’ and it is a word from Egyptian tribal dialect (Abu-Lughod, 1986:160).

**Hijabi:** it is a term used by women on social media platforms and in Muslim communities in the UK to refer visibly Muslim women.

**Hoojab:** i.e., hijab which is the headcover and it is a term made up by the blogger and businesswoman Amena Khan. She also refers to ‘hoojab’ as a headcover product sold on her website [pearl-daisy.com](http://pearl-daisy.com)

**Pashmina:** a shawl made of light cashmere wool wrapped as a hijab by Muslim women to cover their head.

**Shareá:** often referred to as ‘Islamic teachings’ or ‘Islamic Law’.

**Turban:** Cultural headwear that is wrapped to cover the hair and in modest fashion context, it is a fashionable accessory.

## **Introduction**

This PhD is an interdisciplinary study located in the fields of anthropology, media and cultural studies, sociology, contemporary dress culture studies, and the discipline of women studies. This thesis employs modest fashion as the primary term representing the space, culture, and sartorial practices within the industry and on social media platforms, which emerged as a DIY culture consisting of layering clothing items for a modest look (Salim, 2013) to grow into a niche market (Lewis, 2013; 2015) and then recently developing into being more involved in the global industrial market with the multitude of roles occupied by Muslim female stakeholders. Muslim women in promoting modest fashion undertake a representation of styles to influence modest clothing trends through modest fashion catwalk shows, exhibitions, blogging, and modelling in corporates' campaigns, and they also promote the everyday lifestyle and their small businesses in the process.

This study presents data derived from qualitative research methods incorporating ethnographic approach. Data was collected through a range of diverse qualitative methods to generate different types of data that enabled the thick description and a holistic ethnographic analysis. Despite the diversity of the locations where fieldwork was situated, the focus of this research is to explore the proliferation of modest fashion by analysing the events' interior spatial features and the promotional practices of the Muslim female stakeholders. This was under the aim of examining the spaces these women weave within the modest fashion events and social media platforms for their agentive roles, rather than making a comparative study on the locations of the fashion shows. In addition to the qualitatively collected data from modest fashion events, online visual content was derived by incorporating semiotics as a supportive method. Hence, Visual data was collected through online observation and semiotics were used as a supportive method to analysis the visuals.

This research shares Reina Lewis' claim (2013: 3) that this research has no aim in providing a fixed definition for modest fashion or which styles of clothing are the appropriate forms that represent modesty as the concept's connotation can be 'adopted, rejected, altered' according to the time and place. The conception of modest fashion remains open to various interpretations as it is viewed to be individualistic according to the individual sartorial choices of women in my research; it continues to be used with reference to body covering and promotional spaces. Furthermore, the rapid changes that came with the rise of global fashion events and the marketisation of Instagram make it hard to pin down its definition because these shifts are

associated with the intrusion of other fields, including the digital and the corporate. The broad interest of this PhD is to explore the modest fashion spaces offline and online to examine the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders and their voices in the spaces they weave within the fashion industry.

The title of this PhD is *Modest Fashion? Dress, Body, and Space: an ethnographic account of Muslim female stakeholders' experiences in the modest fashion industry*, which is about: an in-depth investigation of the eventful and marketing spaces where modest fashion is branded, the female bodily practices that are commodified, the modest styles and forms which are appropriated as part of the dress culture in the mainstream industry, and Muslim female stakeholders' voices and 'untold' experiences. The first part of the title 'dress, body, and space' represents the shorthand terms standing for the 'how, why, and where' these Muslim women are taking roles within the fashion industry and expanding their experiences through sartorial practices, bodily representation, and through the use of real-world setting and digital platforms to grow a global modest fashion industry.

The first term 'dress' is associated with the clothing practices and forms investigated for the exploration of the cultural and political meanings and examining the historical accounts of the dress culture of covering and women's experiences with clothing and resistance as alluded to in Fadwa El-Guindi's study (1999) *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance* about her motive to encourage more anthropological research on dress in ethnographic and theoretical accounts. In this PhD, dress is about the modest fashion designed attires, and it can represent a variety of sartorial forms with a high focus on hijab and 'modish'<sup>1</sup> modesty. Dress is significant to this study as the main term because it is an umbrella term for all forms and shapes of clothes that are worn to represent the female stakeholders' modesty. In addition, it represents the items displayed in exhibitions for sale, the attire showcased by models in catwalk shows of modest brands, and a tool for resisting stereotypes and taboos associated with fashion and Muslim women's everyday sartorial activities. As Höpflinger (2014: 177) explains, "clothing can be connected with various meanings and functions: we wear clothes to protect, construct, and form our body, as well as to communicate". In this research, clothes are viewed as central 'objects' and 'images' that are bonded to the body and 'life cycle' (Wilson, 2003) and they carry multiple roles and representational meanings in multiple promotional spaces. At a substantive level, this study focuses on the modest dress that Muslim female stakeholders promote through modest

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<sup>1</sup> A term used to refer to the description – and expression of the modesty of a fashion style (see Lewis 2013 and 2015)

fashion designs creatively displayed in fashion events to represent who they are and construct roles in the mainstream fashion. 'Dress' is regarded as more than a cloth that covers the body; it is about the bodily practices and the changes it has on the social, cultural, and political views and identities. Dress can also be referred to as clothing, attire, satire, or sartorial practice, and these concepts will be used throughout this thesis.

The second term is body. It is a closely associated concept to dress in which the individuality and the control that the participants have on what to wear and what identities they represent by covering through layers of clothing to identify the self with cultural forms are explored. My conception of the term 'body' shares Calefato's (2004: 6) focus, in which he emphasises "bodily coverings, clothes and skin decorations" and how they "'create' the body [and] shap[e] it together with the surrounding world". Bodies and social individuals are highly bonded because of how the individual beings cover their 'bodies' with 'dress' through diverse degrees of covering or sometimes strip layers of covering. Bodies can be tattooed, pierced, and they wrinkle with ageing. They are also projected to aesthetics, such as face and body makeup, and adornments such as accessories including chokers, head covering, bracelets, hats, and other various styles according to individual choices or cultural and religious backgrounds (Wilson, 2003). These bodily practices present 'who we are', 'who we want to be', or the resistant acts against a dominant system. In this PhD, body covering is related to modesty which is derived from 'dress-ing' fashionably and modestly in which modest female bloggers cover their bodies with sartorial products of modest fashion brands, post them on a digital platform and receive payment as part of their promotional content created through their blogging career.

The body in this thesis is also associated with the female bodies on catwalk shows where models showcase modest fashion designs on a runway for the spectacle to have a 'physical experience' of modest fashion. The female bodies of models invite the spectacle's 'gaze' to promote modest fashion's sartorial products. The modest fashion models' bodily projection in a catwalk shows also follow instructions of parading through innovative spatial techniques to create a theme for each modest fashion show. Their bodies act as visual-spatial techniques for the sales mechanism. Moreover, the Muslim female bodies weave spaces for political statements against any acts of 'modesty shaming' online. In this research, the female body is explored through the female spaces, techniques of femininity, and acts of being a female from the lenses of cultural studies (Craik, 1993). The female stakeholders in this research use their female bodies in modest fashion spaces: in modest fashion weeks, festivals, and online on Instagram to promote modest fashion products and mainstream commodities.

The third significant term in the title is space. It refers to the modest fashion spaces, from runways, exhibitions, and Instagram spatial features, allowing the generation of theoretical concepts resulting from the efforts of the modest fashion industry to promote their brands and Muslim female stakeholders securing roles in this industry to develop their careers as designers, businesswomen, bloggers, fashion students, and models. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's ([1974]1991, 85-116) triad on space production wherein it is argued that space is a product and a means of production; it is a "social reality" and "a set of relations and forms". This PhD sees Lefebvre's epistemological ideas on space production as relevant and vital because of the multiple angles and roles of spatial productions critically approached in his study *The Production of Space*. The relevance lies in the diversity of space, the variety of spaces weaved by the Muslim female stakeholders in physical locations at the events and online on Instagram to promote modest fashion. In addition, Lefebvre's (1991: 73) argument that "social space is what permits fresh actions to occur while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" is crucial because of the emergence of spatial concepts explored from a newly constructed perspective. These concepts include 'female-only space', 'domesticity', 'eventscape', 'radical catwalk' wherein a debate on innovative spatial features and sales mechanisms for the growth of the global industry and also a feminist debate on the female body and femininity is taken into spatial context in the empirical chapters. Space as one of the main terms in this PhD is examined throughout the process of the data chapters as it developed as part of the grounded theoretical description when interpreting the findings. Through thick descriptive ethnographic accounts of multiple sites of modest fashion culture, in-depth insight into the social and cultural realities and the spaces developing through the process of exploring the women's experiences, these Muslim female stakeholders weave spaces for their voices.

In summary, dress, body, and space are present throughout the four empirical chapters, and they are interrelated to each other, informing the theoretical understanding of the ethnographic findings, and participating in investigating Muslim women's weaved spaces, voices, and experiences in the process of branding for modest fashion that is growing into a global culture.

This study presents findings derived from applying a qualitative ethnographic approach by incorporating ethnographic methods and visual approaches. The visuals were collected in the form of photographic images in the fieldwork as part of my fieldnotes and through screenshotted visuals from the Participants' Instagram content of their public accounts. They are still and moving images and texts from the descriptive box beneath the Instagrammic visuals interpreted through semiotic analysis. The semiotic analysis is also used for 'the pocket ethnography' or, as referred to in this research, 'pocket goodies' consisting of the flyers,

magazines, material gifts, and cards offered to me by the participants in the exhibitions of the modest fashion events. In terms of ethnographic methods, I employed conversational interviews, participant observation and online observation, in which intensive fieldwork was undertaken from 2018 to 2021 in London, Leicester, Birmingham, Zorlu Art Centre in Istanbul, and on Instagram. The conversational interviews were conducted with brand owners, businesswomen, and designers, at the exhibitions, at cafés, FaceTime, and at their homes. Maintaining contact with the participants for further questions was often carried through Instagram inboxes, emails, or texts. Relying on ethnographic methods for ‘in-depth’ qualitative data is achieved through a description of “[...] the culture and life style of the group of people being studied in a way that is as faithful as possible to the way they see themselves” (McNeil, 1990: 64), which in this case, an in-depth study on Muslim women’s experiences within the fashion industry.

This study aims to explore Muslim female stakeholders’ spaces in the modest fashion spaces and to represent the multitude of roles and voices they construct to resist or, at other times, comply with the norms and stereotypes. The female participants engaging roles are content creators, businesswomen, designers, models, and fashion students, and they often undertake multiple roles. This research, which was carried out through two-years fieldwork, took place in the UK (London, Birmingham, and Leicester), Istanbul (Zorlu Performing Art Centre), and on the social media platform Instagram, where modest fashion culture is highly celebrated and promoted as part of the fashion industry. The ethnographic fieldwork in this doctoral research was conducted through attending nine fashion events consisting of three main modest fashion events and three local charity events, observing the Instagrammic content of the female stakeholders, and through 17 conversational interviews. The main modest fashion events are two-days exhibitions and runways, whereas the local events are one-night exhibitions and runway shows.

The study seeks to break new ground in the representation of young Muslim women by shedding light on their experiences by exploring their feelings, subjectivities, and agency within a spatiality context. The fashion studies need more exploration of Muslim women’s voices through a realistic image of the social and cultural pressures and how they resist through collaborative empowering community weaving their own world within their own space. My research attempts to unveil how and why Muslim women choose modest fashion fields as their ‘battleground’ and aim for mainstream and global inclusion (Lewis, 2015: 267).

Research in the contemporary context across the disciplines mentioned above suggests that Muslim women’s dress practices and sartorial experiences witnessed growing debates and

critics about the visibility of their modest clothing and its influence as a cultural and faith-based practice often aligned or rejected (Lewis, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to travel to the field where modest fashion is promoted and explore what is experienced in this account to better understand the statements the young Muslim women share, which will occur in the later empirical chapters. But the research remained narrow concerning modest fashion events (weeks, festivals, and local charity events). The focus on modest fashion catwalk shows is explored by few researchers, requiring in-depth investigations and a ‘holistic’ understanding.

### **Setting the Scene: conceptualising terms and their issues**

In this section, concepts are reintroduced to revisit their meanings in the multiple contexts in which they have extended through several fields as they were ramified and expanded because of the contemporary promotional techniques of fashion as a product of culture, consumerism, or political use.

**The Anthropology of Dress:** Unlike the ‘superficial realisations of fashion’ (Benedict, 2019), this thesis takes fashion seriously and considers it as a complex field of ‘fast changes’ (Simmel, 1957) and difficulty because of “the fact that the same expressive elements tend to have quite different symbolic references in different areas” (Benedict, 2019: 26). Considering the anthropology of dress, the fashion of dress shifted through history as human experiences with forms of covering varied. Fashion was for the ‘display of status’, ‘the impulse towards decoration’ (Benedict, 2019: 23), the visibility of the class distinction (Simmel, 1957), and ‘an act of resistance’ (Lewis, 2015).

Dress as a concept creates academic research and public debates (Hume, 2013). Following public political debates, the example of France’s elections in Spring 2022 and the debate between President Macron and his opponent Marine Le Pen in which the ban on headscarves worn by Muslim women for faith-based reasons are put in the spotlight (El-Jazeera, 2022). The headscarf as a form of dress is constantly brought up in public speeches, parliaments, and political debates, criticising and attempting to control women's clothing choices. That shows the powerful impact dress has on several fields, including politics. Hence, these impacts lead to the emergence of resisting acts based on dress culture and experiences growing from such

scenes. During the French colonialism in Algeria, the Algerian women adopted ‘Haik’ as a symbol of resistance (Fanon, 1965). In Turkey and Palestine, Muslim women were re-veiled as “an outward expression of their anti-western sentiment” (Hume, 2013: 87). In exploring the experiences of these women, there needs to be an approach to the anthropology of dress to fully understand the depth of their struggles, choices, resistance, and liberation.

Dress as a theoretical concept is a key to the ethnographic descriptions in this PhD contributing to the anthropology of dress in fashion studies. This research seeks to analyse modest fashion spaces and Muslim female stakeholders’ experiences by examining the dress culture associated with modesty adopted for covering, fashion, commerce, taking a political stand, or through many other reasons for adopting a dress culture. And in understanding the forms and spaces of modest fashion as a dress culture, dress anthropology is central, even though there is no straightforward acknowledgement of the term through the thesis. The anthropology of dress is present through the ethnographic accounts exploring modest fashion spaces supporting El-Guindi’s (1999) call for the contribution of more studies of dress in anthropology and ethnographic descriptions of dress.

**Stakeholder:** Stakeholder as a theory was approached across a myriad of studies in management, providing various definitions. Historically, the concept ‘stakeholder’ was first used in 1963 “in the management literature in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute” and it consisted of “shareowners, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, and society” who contributed to the existence of an organisation (Freeman, 1984: 31). For Mitchell and Lee (2019: 53), stakeholders have a role in the economy whereby value is created and distributed. Cragg and Greenbaum’s (2002: 322) study argued that “anyone with a material interest in the proposed project was a stakeholder”.

In this PhD, the stakeholders are the Muslim females contributing to the modest fashion industry through participating in the fashion weeks, festivals, dinner events, and the online market platform, Instagram. These stakeholders consist of: fashion designers, businesswomen, models, fashion students, bloggers, and customers. This study ethnographically explores their experiences and roles by producing modest fashion spaces, promoting their products on catwalks, advertising them on digital platforms, and building online boutiques to join the modest fashion corporate. Due to all these contributions to the modest fashion industry and the value they added to its growth globally, these Muslim females are considered stakeholders in this research and their experiences are deemed socially, culturally, and politically crucial.



**Modest Fashion:** This PhD deems modest fashion as the central subject area and is related to the practices of covering up in fashionably ‘modish’ attire. Modest fashion early adopters were Muslim female designers and bloggers based in the UK (Lewis, 2015) who created web stores for their modest fashion products that they sell for women whose ‘faith is a major motivator’ (Lodi, 2020: ix). Modest fashion began a niche market online with few brands in the UK and was developing into an industry in Turkey in the 1980s. With the radical catwalk by Tekbir in 1992 and the spread of glossy and high-quality catalogues of Tassetur in 2007 and 2008, modest fashion expanded into a global market (Lewis, 2015: 84-87). Another factor for modest wear to grow globally is the rise of YouTube channels owned by hijabi YouTubers posting videos since 2007 on hijab tutorials and tips on how to layer a modest fashionable attire for an everyday look (Moors, 2013: 22). In the proliferation of modest fashion, Muslim female stakeholders had major roles that kept growing with blog forums shifting from ‘amateur’ to paid labour (Hodkinson, 2017), but more importantly, the blogs on styles and fashion. The increasingly dominant factor contributing to the success of modest fashion in the western market platform has been fashion weeks and events introduced in 2011 (Lodi, 2020), but influential since 2017. In conceptualising the new territory, modest fashion weeks were introduced as a concept and an idea by Franka Soeria and Ozlem Sahin in 2015 and celebrated on the runway stage in 2016, hosting the Istanbul Modest Fashion Week as the first event (Lodi, 2020: 45).

Even though the proliferation of modest fashion through the past years created more work opportunities for female stakeholders, they are now challenged by the intrusion of corporates, fashion houses, and market chains taking over the modest wear trend and commodifying it. Big brands in the fashion industry are aware that ‘diversity is a commodity’ (Rosenberg, 2019), which could be one reason why corporates display modest fashion styles on the shops’ shelves, windows, and catwalk shows.

**Headcovering:** This PhD looks at the diverse forms of headcovering in the context of exploring how these practices of covering are promoted as a part of modest fashion retail. It also explores how headcovering identifies the Muslim female stakeholders in the fashion industry as different, resulting in representations or challenges when branding the modest wear in the global market. The headcovering is adopted as an umbrella term referring to veil, hijab, turban, or any other form of covering the hair by women of faith to perform their modesty. Although the headcovering appears as a mere sartorial practice that is only adopted in religious practices and

specific modesty codes, it could be well anticipated for fashionable, political, and economic aims. For instance, headcovering is a part of modest fashion practices (Lodi, 2020), in the resistance in Algeria during the French colonialism (Fanon, 1965), and in Turkey during the political shifts (Lewis, 2015). This PhD recognises the role of the different headscarves as more than a piece of fabric. By tracking such political, economic, and historical happenings influencing the headcovering, the thesis expands the conception of headcovering in the existing studies.

This study acknowledges the significance of the forms of headcovering such as veils and hijabs as more than a cloth, unlike Mernissi's (1991) definition, and more of symbolic domination in which women's covered bodies represent a choice, an agentive act, and a liberation. This thesis locates the understanding of headcovering from the female stakeholders' perspective and how their experiences in the fashion industry are influenced by hijab, for example, as a part of their modest fashionable dress. It is also explored in spaces where companies and corporate brands from the fashion industry aim at promoting headscarves and commodifying them in different forms, textures, and colours as a part of their retail and fashion week events. Since headcovering goes through such cycles of modest wear styling, branding, and commodification, its meaning will be expanded from the various lenses.

**Hijab and Hijabi:** Hijab represents the piece of cloth covering the head, and the word hijabi is derived from hijab which refers to the woman covering her head. The research participants in this study refer to the headcover using different concepts such as veil, turban, headcover, and hijab. The hijab is more than a cloth; it marks historical accounts of women's movements challenging society and culture (Bullock, 2007). Some include events related to the veil that women wore reluctantly or by choice. Putting in mind that hijab has no specific definition but a variety of forms and styles. What matters about this item is the focus on women's dress and other factors affecting the changes in its code. Dress in Egypt revolutionised a movement for women with a particular focus on the Islamic veil. El-Guindi (1999: 58) provided an example of college women who are highly covered and argues that the degree of covering has a role in developing knowledge in Islamic discourses and "the scale of leadership". Discourses rose about women's issues and liberation surrounding the veil. Not only women but men as well had words to dictate. An intense debate about the veils developed in a feminist account by men and women in Egypt, which became later embedded in a feminist approach; for example, magazines and journals which belonged to the press represented women facing struggles on a 'social and

domestic' side (Baron, 1989: 371). As fashion styles changed and marketing rose in new ways in Egypt, Muslim women adopted a peculiar dress different from the 'traditional'. As a result, of these shifts, society criticised women integrated into the sartorial change and men for accepting the situation (Baron, 1989: 374).

**Layering:** Layering is defined by Carrel (2013: 106) as a system of putting layers of “shells, tees, camisoles and long-sleeve or quarter-length-sleeve dresses under immodest off-the-rack clothing”. The sartorial system was adopted by women of Islamic fashion and Hasidic fashion, who combined the fashion trends from mainstream fast fashion. The layering method is mainly adopted by 'hijabi cool' (Lewis, 2015), who locate their modest Islamic fashion within their negotiation of 'the Islamic antifashion' (Tarlo and Moors, 2013). Overall, layering grants women a space for agency and body management despite the regulation that the religiousness of their modesty has on specific parts of the body.

This PhD refers to 'layering' as a descriptive term for the initial stages of modest wear where modest fashion brands were few. This styling method was crucial for modest and fashionable apparel that was DIY-ed from the high street brands. This term also appeared in Lewis' (2015) and Salim's (2013) discussion, wherein the connotations of Islamic fashion looks were explored. In this study, layering stands as an innovative method that is yet existent in modest fashion sartorial practices. Fashion designers of modest styles refer to layering when describing their designs in the conversations I had with them during modest fashion events. All in all, layering presents one of the leading creative techniques within the diverse modest dressing communities that remains a central styling figure within the modest fashion culture.

Layering as a DIY was not sufficiently explored as one of the main tools of modest fashion mediation. According to Hodkinson (2017: 125), the 'identities of more ordinary media fans' within the communities producing DIY media and fan culture were invisible in cultural studies because they only focus on highly active social groups. This PhD explores DIY culture in different spaces and amongst diverse individuals promoting modest fashion with a focus on layering as a persistent technique growing into fields of cosmetics (i.e., makeup)

**Lifestyle:** Lifestyle became a commonly used term in this contemporary digitised and commercialised era, more often by bloggers under their social media shared images to describe their everyday practices. Lifestyle as a term was, however, explored in previous studies by

sociologists in anthropological accounts related to shopping experiences, such as Walter Benjamin (1999) in his books *Society and Economy*. In Simmel's (1957) study on fashion, he employs the terms 'style' and 'styles' to explore fashion in social life while identifying the concepts' meanings through the changes in 'human expressions' to investigate their lifestyle. Modest fashion bloggers highly use the term lifestyle on their Instagram content to identify their cultural affiliation in the blogging community as bloggers of fashion styles and daily activities.

In this thesis, lifestyle is apparent through the four empirical chapters. It stands for the everyday social activities in modest fashion spaces focusing on sartorial practices and more on the commodified everyday interactions between users and bloggers. Lifestyle is becoming an essential concept in contemporary dress culture and marketing discussions. It was adopted in Benjamin's (1999) *Society and Economy* when he examined the bourgeoisie's 'lifestyle' in the nineteenth century's social life based on shopping experiences in arcades and a rise of consumer culture. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the significance of 'lifestyle' in this PhD as a continuously existing term in today's contemporary fashion studies, on shopping and marketing experiences, in which the spaces of commerce extended into the online, including social media such as Instagram becoming a visible marketplace for consumers and companies.

**Exhibition:** This thesis examines the exhibitions as promotional spaces that fashion events decorate and design for brands to display their products, offering a physical experience for potential consumers of modest fashion designs. For Quinn (2002: 442), exhibitions "present a forward-thinking step towards showcasing the type of works designers themselves regard as innovative and cutting edge, decoding the messages of resistance and dissent voiced in their garments". Exhibitions contribute to the progress of fashion industries and promote the brand's identities. According to Goodrum (2004: 103), exhibitions are a 'testimony to the gathering momentum' of fashion events and powerful tools of 'fashion as a culture industry' (McRobbie, 2000). Goodrum (2004: 103) demonstrates how fashion weeks' exhibitions are "a productive interface, a site at—and through—which we find culture and industry in the making".

In this PhD, modest fashion exhibitions have an urban feature that acts as interactive spatial figures to the industrialisation of the modest fashion culture and the growth of consumer culture through the urban interior design and decorations of the eventful exhibitions. The urbanism of the exhibitions offers a contemporary shopping experience for Muslim female shoppers as they browse around the stalls because of how innovative the visual experiences in a modest fashion exhibiting space communicate a sort of familiarity of women and a taste of urban cities. The

modest fashion exhibitions witness a high presence of diverse forms of headscarves displayed on mannequins in a colourful background and innovative wraps to demonstrate the contemporality of modest wear and emphasis on the inclusion of hijabi women. The exhibitions act as a contemporary ‘fashionscape’ allowing the rise of consumer culture within a global spectacle who share conversations as they browse between each brand exhibition the other.

**Catwalk:** This term is central to this thesis and acts as a blanket term for fashion shows, runways, and live representations of fashion designs on a stage. It is a theoretical concept for examining bodily practices in a space of voyeuristic scenes where female bodies are exposed to the spectacle gaze. The contemporary fashion industry developed into projecting themes through catwalk shows creating radical runways and political scenes challenging the spectacles’ expectations (Khan, 2000). According to Calefato (2021: 58), “The trajectory from ‘the catwalk to the street to the society’ had fully generated the ‘mundanity’ of fashion, its ability to become ‘mass fashion’”. That is to say, modest fashion use for catwalk shows contributes to the growth of the modest fashion brands participating in such events and with innovative and radical themes. In this PhD, catwalks act as a creative spatial tool for branding modest fashion publicly and proliferating its sartorial practices into trending cultural forms as the spectacle interacts with products on the show and the photographs recording the scenes.

Catwalks' effect on the progress of modest fashion’s capital is not new. Lewis (2015: 84) explored how Tekbir had its first catwalk show in 1992 and how it was seen as a radical event “meriting heated responses from secularists who derided the clothing as failed fashion and from religionists who deplored the use of nonreligious models and the display of female bodies”. Such heated reactions from the public may appear crippling for the Muslim businesswomen, but it placed them in the spotlight of promotion, and this is one of the aims of catwalks in this study.

**Modest Fashion Weeks and Events:** In this study, there are three types of events: first, we have the modest fashion weeks, that was introduced as a term by The concept of MFW came through the project *Think Fashion* which was founded by Ozlem Sahin and Franka Soeria where “Modest Fashion Weeks vision is to bring all the industry talents together from designers to buyers, from influencers to media and celebrate the diversity of modest fashion while aiming to be the most effective platform for global, sustainable businesses” (modestfashionweeks, 2022). In the process of globalising modest fashion brands, female stakeholders adopted the

idea of fashion weeks to host exhibitions, panel talks, and catwalk shows. Fashion weeks are more common in the Fashion Houses that showcase their designs in a runway show where models parade on a catwalk wearing the designers' new creations. Modest Fashion Weeks have a similar connotation but a different concept about covering the body. Second, we have the dinner fashion events that focus on creating female-only spaces for Muslim women and raising charity for 'forgotten women' and orphans. These events host antithetical concepts to their catwalk shows and host side exhibitions, auctions, and socialising through a three-course meal. These charity-based events are in UK cities, including London, Birmingham, and Leicester, hosted in local venues. Finally, we have the Muslim community's yearly festival, offering shopping experiences to individuals in Olympia London through a sale of diverse food cultures, a live modest fashion show, and a platform for brands to exhibit their products.

In this PhD, modest fashion weeks and events are one of the foremost contemporary innovative tools for promoting modest fashion brands globally and a significant factor in industrialising the culture of modest fashion into a worldwide audience. Moreover, Modest fashion events explored in this thesis provide a 'physical experience' for female clientele seeking fashionable modest wear that they struggle to find in the high streets and mostly interfere within online spaces.

### **Thesis Structure**

This section outlines the structure of this thesis and introduces each chapter. This thesis consists of seven chapters.

**Chapter One:** which is entitled 'Literature Review: fashion, modest fashion, and Muslim women', presents a review of the existing literature and theories as relevant studies to this PhD. Since the research is interdisciplinary, the literature review is located across different disciplines, including fashion studies from sociological and anthropological lenses, media and cultural studies, modest fashion studies, and women studies.

The first part of the chapter addresses the leading studies in fashion and its significance when associated with clothing and social classes. The second part focuses on existing studies on modest fashion studies. The last part reviews the Muslim women and veiling practices from various angles. This chapter aims to identify 'gaps' within the existing theories and approaches

to studying fashion and women's representation in which the new knowledge and the study's contribution are located by highlighting those gaps.

**Chapter Two:** is a methodology chapter. It is devoted to the ethnographic approach adopted in this PhD. It presents the research design, strategies, traditions and influences, data interpretation, and feminist ethnography as a lens to this study. This chapter explains how the multi-method ethnographic approach is employed to incorporate observation, conversational interviews, and visual ethnography. It also explains how a semiotic analysis was adopted to analyse Instagrammic visuals, photographic field notes, catalogues, flyers, magazines, and images displayed on screens. Finally, it provides how this thesis generates thick description in which a theory is developed from the empirical data (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

**Chapter Three:** which is entitled 'Modest Fashion Live': ethnographic accounts of modest fashion spaces, promotional scenes, and consumer culture, is an in-depth investigation of the modest fashion events and their spaces where innovative spatial techniques and choice of capitals and cities participated in promoting the modest fashion into a global industry. This chapter offers a factual journey and explores an 'event culture' (Lash and Lury, 2007) of modest fashion in which creating a 'physical experience' for visitors and developing 'a sense of place' (Qazimi, 2014) is key.

This chapter also focuses on exploring exhibitions as resembling 'arcades' in Benjamin's (1999) sociological study, where technological branding strategies are used to create a factual shopping experience for the visitors of modest fashion.

**Chapter Four** is 'Reflect your own Style': the politics of modest fashion parades and women's representation on the catwalk shows'. This empirical chapter explores the catwalks as spaces for promoting modest fashion products through innovative techniques developed for 'the sales mechanism' and investigates the outstanding political scenes displayed in modest fashion runway shows through 'radial' images that are different to the conventional presentation of models and catwalk themes.

**Chapter Five:** is entitled 'Arrived as a Gentleman, left as a lady!': the continuity of Modest Fashion on Instagram and the female community online. This chapter explores Instagram as a marketing platform involved in providing a space for Muslim female stakeholders to promote modest fashion and secure domestic careers. The focus is on the modest fashion community in sharing content about their business and contributions to the fashion industry. Key findings in this research are domestic entrepreneurship, financial autonomy, and the private and public

space. This chapter represents the continuity of modest fashion online and is weaved from the first empirical chapter.

**Chapter Six:** ‘It’s like a double edge sword’: narratives of female stakeholders’ about the challenges and representations beyond modest fashion promotion’ explores the challenges Muslim women experience in the industry and the stereotyped images associated with their participation in fashion from a faith-based perspective. Also, this chapter provides in-depth insights into the images of ‘modesty shaming’ that Muslim women experiences when promoting modest fashion. The data in this chapter is gathered through interviews and Instagram visuals. The chapter highlights in vivo concepts and statements participants used to describe the stereotypes, norms, and experiences within the industry and when being around their community or family.

**Chapter Seven** is entitled ‘Conclusions’ and combines the key contributions to methodology and existing studies in the multi-disciplines where this study is located. The first section is about methodological contributions that this thesis offers to the field of ethnography, including positionality, ‘ethnographic mosaic’, ‘pocket ethnography’, visual ethnography, and semiotic analysis. The second section consists of the main findings. It finally offers limitations, suggestions for future studies, and a final, personal note.



## **Chapter One: Literature Review: fashion, modest fashion, and Muslim women: studies and debates**

### **1.1.Introduction**

This chapter presents a review of the literature on fashion studies, modest fashion debates, and studies on Muslim women and their experiences within the context of fashion and representation with the aim of locating the gap in this PhD thesis. First, this chapter draws on mapping interdisciplinary debates and theoretical approaches from sociological, anthropological, and historical perspectives, examining fashion and modest fashion as a concept and a practice. From a sociological interpretation by looking at Simmel's (1957) definition of 'fashion' followed by Wilson's (2003, originally published in 1985) arguments on fashion as a popular culture analysed through a feminist lens. Second, the second section of this review of literature focuses on the constructive features of modest fashion by deconstructing the term and reviewing the debates on 'modesty' in anthropology and religious discourse (Abu- Lughod, 1986; El- Guindi, 1999). Then the pioneering debates of modest fashion are presented in terms of the commercialization of modest wear and the development of a modesty fashion industry in the context of Muslim women's roles and experiences within the process. Finally, the third part is on Muslim women's experiences in the context of 'covered dress' practices (Lewis, 2015) with a focal point on veiling, including hijab and face veil in a historical trajectory and fashion studies debating the veil in public and fashion shows. By presenting this selection of literature and locating my theoretical position, the chapter explores the growth of modest fashion into an industrialised culture and how this continues influencing Muslim female stakeholders' representation, which is significantly related to the analysis in my empirical chapters.

### **1.2. What Is Fashion? studies and debates**

In this section, I address how the leading theoretical approaches review the notion of fashion. Fashion, as a term, is ramified into the various fields of sociology and cultural studies. The study of fashion entails a 'denigrated' connotation in which a researcher is justifying the

significance ‘as cultural barometer and as expressive art form’ (Wilson, 2007: 15). My view of this is rooted in the reviewed literature which embarks on the detailed comprehension of fashion as a part of this research which is more complicated than what it seems on the surface. Therefore, the existing accounts on fashion as a concept will track the existing and ongoing discourse. The study of fashion is an interdisciplinary area of research, drawing on contributions and influences from sociology, semiology, social history, culture, and psychology. It is suggested that fashion is widely perceived as a cultural product of sartorial practices, which can be associated with forms of commercialised commodity, and as a concept representing a change in diverse social contexts. It is seen from the literature that a singular and fixed approach to defining fashion is impossible, as fashion can refer to various meanings according to the context. The following sections will present the sociological approach (Simmel, 1957) and the historical, cultural, and feminist approach (Wilson, [1985] 2003)

### **1.2.1. Fashion in Sociology**

There have been key academic contributions to fashion studies; however, the primary standpoints in sociological studies are rooted in Georg Simmel’s (1957) detailed account on fashion. Simmel (1957) developed a study on fashion from a sociological approach in which the main arguments are explored through a comparison of the ‘style’ of the opposing social categories and classes through the use of a dichotomous approach, namely ‘antagonist pairs’. Simmel (1957) employs the terms ‘style’ and ‘styles’ to explore fashion in social life while identifying the concepts’ meaning with the changes in ‘human expressions’.

In defining fashion, Simmel (1957: 545-48) argues that the rapid process of appearing and vanishing is named ‘fashion’ and exploring such a term is associated with “Social forms, apparel, aesthetic judgment, the whole style of human expression” which are constantly changing and transformed. According to Simmel (1957: 557), fashion goes through a circle, and it “is concerned only with change” where the “most economical means” are the contributing endeavours. In the conceptualization of the term fashion, Simmel (1957) examined how fashion is associated with forms of speech, art, and clothing within the context of researching the process of how they become fashionable and how they resulted in social class differentiation and at the same time ‘uniformity’ was adopted by social individuals to identify their class from others.

In including the theoretical concept of ‘change’ when examining fashion, Simmel (1957) suggests another significantly contributing term to the process of fashion which is ‘imitation’ to explain the process of ‘fashion’. Illustrating the social experiences of individuals from the upper class and lower class, Simmel (1957: 556) reveals that there is a “constant” and “rapid” change in fashion because of ‘the upper individuals’ developing other distinctively unique fashions as they seek to be socially advanced compared to the lower classes. In this context, Simmel (1957: 549) illustrates through the representation of ‘the dude’ in fashion describing the characteristics of ‘extreme’ fashion “when pointed shoes are in style, he wears shoes that resemble the prow of a ship” and “when high collars are all the rage, he wears collars that come up to his ears”. In other words, Simmel (1957) emphasises the ‘human expression’ defining fashion and argues that it also has a ‘social tendency’ and ‘power’ over social categories imitating a larger class. Thus, fashion is an important representation of the self in a society, no matter which class is the social individual.

In studying the relationship between women and fashion, Simmel (1957: 551) argues that “in a certain sense fashion gives a woman a compensation for her lack of position in a class based on a calling or profession”. The historical events of women and their journey of looking for a social position that let them exercise some sort of power led them toward seeking ‘conspicuousness’ and ‘individualization’ in apparel as a ‘form of life’ but achieving this ‘individual prominence’ deprived them of other fields (Simmel, 1957: 550). Thereafter, during the historic period of ‘The Renaissance’ women were exerting cultural and social practices which have an individualistic nature and had access to education, but as Simmel (1957: 551) states, it was more present in the upper social classes and in Italy because by then Italian men were less interested in fashion.

Simmel’s (1957) analysis of fashion extend behind the current associations to only sartorial practices. It is the theoretical conceptions defining fashion in his study that open the eyes of the researcher to look behind the clothing practices and more on what contributes to their change of style, to other relevant factors and aspects of social life influencing fashion as a social form, and by examining the communicated ‘distingué’<sup>2</sup> styles between classes, and women role and position in self-expression and individuality through fashion. In my own research, I constantly refer to ‘style’ in the empirical chapters and associate the term with women’s self-expression through ‘fashion styles’ and how this contributes to their social and cultural practices in events

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<sup>2</sup> A French word used by Simmel (1957) in his sociological study on ‘Fashion’ meaning ‘chic’ and ‘distinguished’

and social media platforms where women of the study are using 'style' to define themselves as social individuals.

A scholar who closely agrees with Simmel's (1957) but with more detailed accounts developed by adopting diverse analytical lenses including historical, social, and feminist angles, is Elizabeth Wilson (2003) who explores fashion critically in terms of mass production, classism, female labour, and fashion as feminist. In her book *Adorned in Dreams: fashion and modernity*, Wilson (2003: 12) argues that with the industrial revolution and the beginning of the mass-production, fashion became a tool for 'self-expression' and 'self-enhancement' and constructed a 'democratic' society in which styles are individually chosen by social beings, but fashion also resulted in exploiting the female labour and social classism.

In exploring fashion as a concept, Wilson (2003: 3) reveals that "fashion, in sense is change" and further adds that "fashion became an endless speeded-up spiral" (Wilson, 2003: 50). Both Simmel (1957) and Wilson (2003, 2007) seem to agree on conceptualizing fashion as the 'rapid change'. However, Simmel (1957) attempts to theorize fashion as more than a sartorial notion i.e., dress or clothing. His efforts to conceptualize fashion aim at detaching what is abstract about fashion and what is material. Whereas Wilson's interpretation mainly explores fashion from a sartorial standpoint asserting that "fashion sets the terms of all sartorial behaviour" (2003: 3).

In further accounts, Wilson (2003: 246) argues that "Fashion - a performance art - acts as a vehicle for this ambivalence; the daring of fashion speaks dread as well as desire; the shell of chic, the aura of glamour, always hide a wound". She then adds, "In this sense, ambivalence is an appropriate response to dress; and in this sense 'modernism' is a more adequate response than the 'cult of the authentic', since the latter allows for no ambivalence" (Wilson, 2003: 246). The point is that when considering a fashionable act of performing a social identity, individuals communicate 'social uniqueness' which Simmel (1957) conceptualizes as the upper class dropping a fashion style when the lower class imitates them, they try to differentiate their social position through the act of 'change', and this entire circle of change represent a set of ambivalent social classes and styles. Wilson (2003) perceives ambivalence in fashion as material in which its existence is attached to 'modernity' rather than what is considered 'authentic'. For Wilson (2003), fashion seems to perform as self-expression into the outer world for 'the production of the social self' through clothing and this is also a mutual idea in Simmel's (1957) discussion that I reviewed in earlier paragraphs.

Adopting Simmel's (1957) sociological account of critically investigating fashion as a system contributed to my theoretical understanding of fashion practices, styles, and expressions, and how it creates differentiation between social groups and identifies dress codes for social membership for classes or social groups. However, with the contemporary shifts in social categorisations of various ideologies identifying their memberships in social groups through clothing, I needed to further review Wilson's (2003) views on fashion in which the historical and social scenes are occasionally associated with Simmel's (1957) analysis and also to the empirical accounts of this thesis. For further explorations of fashion as a concept and its origins, I need to review the social groups that Simmel and Wilson were referring to in their research and that requires locating the literature on fashion and clothing in history which will be explored in the coming sections.

### **1.2.2. Fashion of Clothing in History: Romans' dress culture and Bourgeoisie of Paris**

I intend to locate fashion in selected historic periods of the Romans and Bourgeoisie from a sartorial standpoint in this subsection. I first draw on the historical emergence of clothing as fashion within the Roman empire as it existed for knowingly centuries (Wilson, 2003; Croom, 2010). Then, I move to how fashion designs came into existence with the bourgeoisie which Valerie Steele (2017) explored in her book *Paris Fashion: a cultural history*.

From a historical standpoint, Romans have a rich history with the fashion of clothing, pattern, art, and textile as shown by Alexandra Croom (2010). In her research on Roman clothing style, in her book *Roman Fashion and Clothing*, Croom (2010: 1) elicits how for more than 500 years, the Roman Empire existed in the West and longer in the medieval world during the Byzantine Empire celebration of art including textiles and constructing statues. She further depicts how they were interested in portraying everyday life as a part of their art to gain an image and an insight into what lower-class people wore (Croom, 2010: 2). In further historical accounts, Croom (2010: 108) traces the Roman women's wear that was characterised by the tunics, mantles, and other clothing items such as socks where women's clothing is an "indicator of social status [that] can be seen in Roman Law". That is to say, women of different classes had distinct protection by the law, and they were recognized according to their dress codes and styles. This shows that the Roman Empire considered fashion a social form involved in the political discourse of Roman society.

The Roman women, according to Croom (2010: 109), wore a tunic style for a short period of time known as the *stola* which symbolized women's modesty that is still referred to up to these days as a concept though quickly vanished amidst the Roman fashion. The *stola* according to Croom's (2010) descriptions, resembles Wilson's (2003) depiction of Roman fashion as 'draped and sewn', therefore, the tunic seems to cover the entire body and with the draped style, it offers a 'modestly' covered body. The decorations of the tunics were inspired by the Greek Empire which was fond of patterns and bright colours; the Roman women during the first centuries used colour bands and the fabric consisted of silk and wool (Croom, 2010: 115).

Further exploring Wilson's (2003) historical accounts of Roman fashion, she focuses on the clothing style and how it was characterised by 'draped garments' and how the fashion of men and women was closely similar, the differentiation in dress was in fact between 'the draped and the sewn'. These fashion styles fit the description of tunics that the Roman women used to wear that Croom (2010) described in her chapter about Roman women's fashion. From Wilson's (2003) and Croom's (2010) studies, it appears that the clothing styles were consistent and based only on 'draped' tunics and this was for men and women. Though those sustained fashion forms of apparel, the accessories and aesthetics seem to vary: "there was an abundance of different fashions in hairstyles, wigs, and cosmetics" (Wilson, 2003: 17). With the religion of Christianity introduced to the Roman Empire, the perception of the human body changed and the pursuit of art including painting, dancing, and fashion was considered worldly practice (Wilson, 2003: 18). In the same vein, Croom (2010: 117) asserts that "the late third- or early fourth-century catacombs in Rome show a number of Christian women wearing this style of tunics. Most show women in pale coloured dalmatics with dark stripes, although the reverse is occasionally known". Both historical depictions of Roman fashion state that with religion welcomed within the Roman society, a change took place in terms of the shift from bright to settles colour palettes and fashion forms of women.

On other outstanding historic peaks associated with the fashion of clothing, the Bourgeoisie era is to be considered, and in this sense, Sennet (1974: 47-48) argues that "no study of the 18th Century city could possibly avoid an analysis of the urban bourgeoisie, because they were its rulers, administrators, financial support, and a good part of its population". Theorists such as Wilson (2003) and Steele (2017) developed critically historical accounts of the fashion of the Bourgeoisie with a focus on Parisian fashion.

As Steele (2017: 63) notes that the fashion of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century was influenced by the aristocratic 'taste' which was dominated by the bourgeois that was 'the rich

and powerful' ruling class in which the membership into this social category requires more than wealth, it acquires 'savoir-vivre'. 'Savoir-vivre' is about the "elegance of manners and dress, also known as the *je ne sais quoi*, which would distinguish members of the elite" (Steele, 2017: 63). Sennet (1974: 23) suggested that the bourgeoisie identifies their fashion as a part of the sensational experiences and interactions with the public in every social context and place. This explains Steele's idea of how bourgeoisies intend to be recognized in public spaces as a distinguished social group including women who were identified as the main figures of 'elegance'. This 'elegance' that Steele (2017: 75) is bringing into the bourgeoisie context was mostly associated with the 'Parisian Lady' who was the symbol of the 'Parisian elegance' creating a class and a status that separates classes of the modern age. Women of the aristocratic class were dressed according to the event including "a life of soirées, balls, receptions, and visits to the theatre, to see her friends, to promenade" (Steele, 2017: 163) in which each everyday practice had a certain dress code. The variety of clothes for numerous events that Steel (2017) is dictating in her study determines the high financial expenditure of the bourgeoisie during the modern era and also demonstrates that the 'individualist' social life was dominated by the aristocratic class through social practices that defined them as 'different' and 'elite' from the lower classes.

All historical accounts of Croom (2010), Wilson (2003), and Steele (2017) are valuable as they map out the dress culture of two well-known eras including the Roman empire and the Parisian Bourgeoisie by examining the sartorial practices within the society, which cover the dress codes and how social individuals communicate through fashion. As the Roman Empire and the Parisian Bourgeoisie marked historically striking periods of fashion as self-expression and a social form, they are useful in terms of demonstrating the significant role fashion has in society and in the lives of social beings. Fashion also marks their social position and creates a gap between classes through sartorial practices distinguishing between categories. And if a belief or a political or economic system interferes, fashion will also change. This is apparent in my own research in the empirical chapters as the information and technologies extended the social spaces, leading to economic and political shifts, and therefore fashion clothing.

To sum up, both Romans and Bourgeoisies adopted fashion as a system to control the social forms representing a gap between an upper class and a lower class, and this is what Simmel (1957: 555) referred to as 'power of their ego'. But they also contributed to the cycle of fashion that Simmel (1957) theorized in his sociology of 'fashion' in terms of 'imitation' and 'change' and how it is related to how the upper class adopt certain styles of sartorial practices and whenever the lower class imitate these appearances, the upper-class change into a different

look. What is important to consider in the previous sections is that fashion has a significant role in the social system in the way individuals adapt fashion to emphasise what makes them different as a social group and determines their membership through fashion clothing and distinctive styles.

Studies on fashion clothing from an ethnographic and theoretical approach remain narrow and little attention was given to the ‘ethnographic descriptions of dress’ and according to El-Guindi (1999: 49), “whatever ethnographic materials existed remained scattered in records and studies, perhaps because of the relatively secondary significance attached to dress in comparison with other aspects of society and culture”. This PhD agrees with El-Guindi’s argument and will seek to explore dress as a primary theoretical concept to ethnographically examine the sartorial practices in modest fashion spaces and in cultural and social contexts and will investigate the political use of dress by the female stakeholders regarding its significance in women’s representation. And with such primary significance of dress in this thesis, prominent historical accounts of fashion of dress such as the Romans and the Bourgeoisie class and their contribution to dress culture are vital to the understanding of the contemporary changes and developments in dress culture.

### **1.2.3. Consumption in Fashion Spaces: malls and fashion shows**

The present section offers insights on some previous research about consumption in fashion spaces by focusing on malls and publicly accessible fashion events. This section serves the effort of establishing an understanding from the literature on consumption in previous and current studies, then breaks down into two subsections: fashion consumption in malls and consumption in fashion shows.

According to Blue (2017: 266), “the field of the Sociology of Consumption is now well recognized as an important and broad domain of sociological enquiry. It deploys socio-theoretical concepts to study the particularities of consumption, but it also draws on empirical work to develop key sociological theories about consumption”. However, earlier studies of the twentieth century had different arguments on consumption and consumers as the debate developed through the years, some authors had a positive view on consumption, and others criticized it. According to Mica Nava (1991), consumption was condemned by “Marxists and conservative critics during the middle of the twentieth century”, while between 1970 and 1980,



the debate shifted towards embracing and advocating for consumers and their act of consumption.

In explaining the logic of research condemning consumption, such as Marxist theorization, McIntyre (1992: 56) affirms that “Marxian theory is radical in its logic, but its object remains caught in the rationalist anthropological concerns of 19th century bourgeois thought”. Furthermore, as Blue (2017: 265) indicates, pioneers “[...] like Marx and Weber, addressed consumption only indirectly” and the first study with a straightforward use of consumption as a term was *The Theory of the Leisure and Class* (1899) by Veblen. Thereafter, with the ‘cultural turn’ in sociology, scholars started shifting their focus on how ‘mass culture’ is produced. During that period of the 1980s, research directed their interest towards analysing and examining the process of consumption (Blue: 2017: 266).

With the economic recovery during the postwar era, ‘mass consumption’ developed as central to the economy with the variety in production of goods for diverse markets (Cohen, 2004: 236). Walvin (1978) states that the post war years also witnessed changes in many practices, such as ‘leisure’, that was adopted by the working class to make up for what they have missed during war time. These changes were criticized by scholars from the Frankfurt School and the one of the well-known essays was culture industry which was written by Adorno and Horkheimer (1973). These cultural theorists originally wrote the essay in 1944 during their exile and included “detailed references to specific American cultural forms” (Nava, 1991: 158). ‘Culture industry’ as a term refers to “the products and processes of mass culture” that were characterized by ‘homogeneity and predictability’ in which leisure time and work time were organized accordingly (Storey, 2018: 62-65).

In criticizing earlier studies, Nava’s (1991:157) research, as one of the earlier scholarships on consumerism during the last decade of the twentieth century, indicates that “consumerism has become a powerful and evocative symbol of contemporary capitalism and the modern Western world”. She also adds that the debates of the twentieth century that were between the 1950s and the 1980s concealed one of the crucial powers of consumerism which was marked by rise of “Green activism, South African boycotts and other instances of consumer sanction and support” (Nava, 1991: 158). By that, Nava (1991) refers to all scholars including the Theorist from the Frankfurt School. Frankfurt School examined the production of goods and culture and “They considered the abundant new forms of popular entertainment to have been produced by a “culture industry” meant to domesticate, distract, and dupe the masses into accepting capitalist relations of production and the socio-economic inequalities that resulted”

(Blue, 2017: 267). However, the approach of understanding and theorizing consumption by Frankfurt school, failed to notice “the creative potential of mass consumption” (Blue, 2017: 269). In this context, consumption is explored and understood empirically by conducting observations and ethnographic fieldwork to examine how individuals purchase fashion goods, for example, from malls, exhibitions, and fashion events (Douglas, 1996).

As research on consumption moved toward more of a positive approach on consuming good by advocating that it is an act of choice and freedom, they voiced the agency that consumers had when showcasing their lifestyle (Blue, 2017: 269). The sociologist Mike Featherstone (1991:50) was one of the leading scholars researching consumer culture and he refers to an important question on ‘consumer cultural imagery’ and consumption spaces that is associated with ‘emotional pleasure’. In his research paper, Featherstone (1991) provides a positive view on consumption. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer’s studies, Featherstone (1991) shifted towards concepts of autonomy, ‘freedom, and choice’, differentiating his study from previous research of macro-economic phenomena (Blue, 2017: 269).

### **1.2.3.1.Fashion Consumption in Malls**

Researchers such as Warnaby and Medway (2018: 276) note that “Shopping malls come in a variety of shapes and sizes”. They argued that by the end of mid-twentieth century shopping malls were revolutionizing into what Crossick and Jaumain (1999) conceptualized as “cathedrals of consumption” when describing the ninetieth century’s department stores (Warnaby and Medway, 2018: 277-78). Warnaby and Medway (2018) consider the conception of “malls as marketplaces” and study their role as “creative destructors of the consumer marketplace”. They also discussed how the design of malls in the US first began with a focus on “encouraging a back-and-fourth flow of pedestrians across mall space” (Warnaby and Medway, 2018: 277). Malls as spaces for consumption and shopping experiences are widely spread in America, Europe, and Turkey. Studies on malls shows that the idea of the structure of spaces where individuals visit for shopping goods and consumption began with internal-design focus, then moved towards external elements to increase what Warnaby and Medway (2018: 280) contented as “retail consumption”.

Focusing on one of the well-known malls in Instabul, Kuris (2020: 169) ethnographically explores Zeruj Port as a case where “fashion consumption is transformed into a festive

experience alongside variety of recreational activities”. Zoruj Port was built in May 2018 as the new shopping mall for Muslim modest fashion brands (Kuris, 2021: 168). The launch of this modest fashion mall marked the expansion of Muslim consumption space which reintroduced the debates of the 1990s that was concerned with drawing a line between piety and capitalism (Kuris, 2020: 168).

Kuris shows through her study that even malls can ignite debates and discourses through their roles as centres for sales and shopping activities. This happens possibly due to the longstanding debates between Islamists and secularists (Lewis, 2015; Kuris, 2020). With the innovative marketing techniques developed by the managers of Zoruj Port mall, such as including musical events and Muslim female models, the founder Zehra Özkaymaz, and her fellow co-founders, the Muslim fashionistas, were heavily criticized at “Islamic leisure sites” (Kuris, 2020: 169). As explained by Kuris (2020: 168) throughout her article, Zoruj Port mall as an idea was constructed by joined efforts of Zehra, who is a businesswoman, and a group of “designers, fashion consultants, bloggers, models, magazine editors, shop owners and online retailers”. Zehra had a vast experience with festivals, and leisure was key in promoting Zoruj Port as a “commercialized space” where fashion consumption is “an act of leisure and play” (Kuris, 2020: 170).

With Turkey’s magazine offering Muslim women a chance to develop their career in retail and branding, a new generation of tastemakers of Muslim fashionistas and bloggers were growing in Turkey. This is when Zehra and her ‘ZorujTeam’ became aware of the importance of bringing together these female entrepreneurs under the idea of “weekend-long shopping festivals” which aims at supporting these women’s business and making their brands more accessible to consumers in Turkey and globally (Kuris, 2020: 173). Indeed, Zoruj Mall organized festival maintained the success of Muslim fashionistas and was described by Zehra as “a triumph of women’s labour and solidarity” (Kuris, 2020: 174). Besides, it was in this context that the digital retailers of modest fashion developed their ‘global recognition’, such as Modanisa and Sefamerve, who led to the rise of modest fashion week events (Alimen and Kuris, 2020: 136-137).

Thus, the above-mentioned literature showed that malls as fashion consumption landscapes in Turkey celebrate contemporary practices of leisure for the aim of reaching a global recognition. By that their brands flourish and women’s labour opportunities increase allowing them a space for leadership in fashion and festivity in Istanbul.

### 1.2.3.2. Consumption in Fashion Shows

Valeria Pinchera and Diego Rinallo (2021: 479) noted that “fashion shows emerged as an important marketplace element during the second half of the nine-teenth century when the practice of showing clothing on a living person eventually turned into spectacular mannequin parades.” The idea of mannequin parade, as stated by Halliday (2021: 192) was an ‘intimate event’ where fashion creations were presented on models for clients to view. The literature suggests that the idea of fashion shows –or as renowned in the past ‘the mannequin parades’—started with Charles Frederick Worth who introduced the idea of seasonal presentations leading to a rise of ‘bourgeois female clients’ (Ferrero-Regis and Lindquist, 2021: 1; Halliday, 2021: 192).

Through a fieldwork, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) examined London Fashion Week to explore how fashion shows materialized the fashion field. Unlike Ferrero-Regis and Lindquist’s (2021: 1) statement on how fashion shows’ fundamental aim is selling merchandise, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 748) observed that LFW (London Fashion Week) has less to do with sales, and more with promoting ‘the field’s players’. Within the fashion shows, these studies show that attendees need to have knowledge and a background on fashion history and on high-end brands (Lewis, 2015; Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). Their presence as blending members in a fashion event requires more efforts. They also need to display this capital through a mastered habitus they develop throughout their long their long presence in the field (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006:). As Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 746) suggest through their article, one needs economic capital to show their cultural capital in a fashion event. In other words, the attendees seek for exclusive fashionable items from fashion designer houses to mark their ‘cultural capital’. Nevertheless, achieving this sartorial conduct is dependent on possessing the financial assets (i.e., ‘economic capital’). Halliday (2021) also makes a reference to forms of capital in her study on New York Fashion Week claiming that in the fashion show spaces represent a reverse Panopticon where the attendees with most capital are given front row seats and the rest are seated in the back while the latter have a better total view of the runway space.

The tickets of the fashion shows are what Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 741) designate ‘badges of affiliation’ to the fashion field. They mark the insider membership of ‘the field players’ who are in the context of this study the attendees in the fashion show. Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 741) add that tickets are the “[...] material evidence of one’s presence in the field of fashion, a visible sign of belonging for others to see en route to the exclusive space of

the catwalk theatre”. Thus, tickets are a significant part of the fashion show, and they are often difficult to obtain. In the case of the researcher Halliday (2021: 193)—who was conducting a study on New York Fashion Week— she could hardly secure a ticket to the fashion shows, and they were often ‘standing tickets’. Despite the researcher’s effort of sending emails and using her networks within the industry, it was still difficult to gain tickets to the events. In addition to them being markers of ‘affiliation’, these tickets also affirm the hierarchies of the fashion realm (Simmel, 1957). They “mark out and reproduce field positions” (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 741). Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 742) examine how the industry by making people wait, they are asserting their ‘dominant position’ and a control over their customers’ time, by constructing the “socio-temporal structuring of the field as materialized” during the event.

Sandikci and Ger (2002) carried out an ethnographic fieldwork in Turkey where they observed the *tesettur* fashion shows exploring the dynamics of women who were models and attendees gossiping about the event. Sandikci and Ger (2002: 27) state that the first fashion show of *tesettur* was hosted by Tekbir Giyin in 1992 in ‘a five-star hotel’ where the audience wore fashionable attire and accessories. In their researcher paper ‘Constructing and Representing the Islamic Consumer in Turkey’, Sandikci and Ger (2007: 195) describe the show stating that:

The show featured famous Turkish models who normally show underwear, swimwear, and Western-style clothes to the secular upper classes. Fully made-up and as attractive as ever but with heads covered, the models walked down a runway animated by artificial clouds, projecting lights, and music to present the company’s collection of suits, dresses, overcoats, and eveningwear.

With such a controversial shift, critics came. Islamists rejected the idea of fashion show stating that it does not fit within the ethics of modesty, while secularist considered it as unfashionable (Sandikci and Ger, 2007; Lewis, 2015)

Tekbir was the leading company and by organizing fashion shows, media attention was their central interest (Lewis, 2015: 84). The view on *tesettur* that was once a ‘stigmatized practice’ to the secularists became a fashionable style and ‘an ordinary consumption choice’ and fashion show as a part of many other tools contributed to facilitating this shift (Sandikci and Ger, 2000). From Sandikci and Ger (2000) and Lewis’ (2015) research, one can see that Tekbir realized the visibility and recognition in the media, and eventually, growth in the

marketplace through the fashion show. As a result, this led to the increase of their consumer reach.

The literature showed that consumption in the fashion show spaces can be more associated with cultural and social attributes and ‘habitus’, then it is with buying the designs and fashion items. Members of the fashion shows, predominantly in fashion weeks, seek visibility (Tekbir and media attention) and membership through physical appearance, and ‘performative enactments’ to maintain their well-established and constant presence as ‘field participants’ (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 747).

### **1.1.3. Fashion and Catwalks Studies**

Extracted from the previous section on the history of fashion and clothing, studies pointed at the historical source of fashion shows and catwalks (Mendes and De La Haye, 2010) and the influence models had on the change of fashion from high designs to public highstreets (Craik, 1993). A more itemized literature on fashion with regards to dress culture, in which the history of clothing practices of the bourgeoisie of France is primary to the concepts of this section, studies on fashion events investigate the definition of fashion shows and catwalks (Khan, 2000). The theorists in fashion show studies also focus on women’s representation in catwalks’ parades and how it relates to fashion in terms of retail for the industry and the broad understanding of how fashion brands communicate their products to the spectacle through bodily display.

To the best of my knowledge, studies on catwalk shows and runways within the context of theorization appear to be limited; I have selected pertinent works of fashion theorists examining the politics of catwalks and illustrations of events from historical scenes and recent fashion events such as Nathalie Khan (2000) and Patrizia Calefato (2004).

Nathalie Khan (2000) discusses the meaning of catwalks in terms of how fashion designers employ the runway stage to communicate a visual message via ‘a radical catwalk’. In more detail, Khan (2000: 120-121) explains that through catwalks, the fashion designer “translates concepts into design” and “each garment plays a role, in the sense that it functions to elaborate on a particular aspect of the wider theme”. Proceeding with such notions on catwalks, Khan (2000) examines the politics of various fashion shows including Alexander McQueen’s, Hussein Chalayan’s, Martin Margiela’s,

In her theorization, Khan (2000: 123) illustrates the significance of the location hosting the catwalk shows as in 1992, Margiela booked a Salvation Army warehouse in Paris to showcase his collection. By selecting such a venue for the catwalk, the fashion designer is able to project a visual theory of his ideas and concepts which are apparent in Margiela's show through the construction of a "new reality" by giving a new life to second-hand garments (Khan, 2000: 123). Through catwalks, Margiela's objective is to 'reassemble, recycle, and resell' waste products in an 'unusual' fashion show set to the fashion industry (Khan, 2000: 124). What such fashion designers are attempting to globally share is a challenge to the existing traditions of the global fashion industry, but I argue that such differences in catwalk presentations appear to be used to attract the public interest to promote fashion attires and hence the sales of these fashionable items.

Khan (2000: 125-126) also accentuates the positioning of models in catwalk shows and argues that they were given "a powerful position" within the context of "challenging existing conventions", however, with the fashion houses recently looking only for the image of the brand, catwalks are hardly radical as they used to be in the time of McQueen, Chalayan, and Margiela where "the message [was] more important than the product". This means that the roles of the models were hardly powerful, but when it was presented like so, it was to challenge the traditional notions of modelling or repetitive branding strategies of fashion designer houses that objectifies the models on a runway by focusing mainly on how the products are advertised to the audience.

Another study discussing catwalks is presented by Calefato (2004) which also contributes to fashion catwalks and analyses the designer Margiela that Khan (2000) examines in her study on catwalk politics. According to one of the scenes of Margiela's show, Calefato (2004: 38) notes that:

on the catwalk, the hallmark of the designer's style is evident in the obliteration of the model's face. The mask is total and explicit: like the garment covering the body, the bag is a garment covering the face, that part of the body most exposed in western cultures. Dressing the body, including the face, disguising it hyperbolically, is thus an invitation to concentrate on the semiotic status of its impossible nakedness.

By saying so, Calefato (2004) agrees with Khan on how catwalk shows ‘challenge existing conventions’ and, in this illustration, the western culture’s standards of body covering.

Fashion studies exploring fashion runways and catwalks focus mainly on the designer houses or designers at the corporate fashion weeks and shows. There should be more studies on the niche market brands hosting fashion weeks and sometimes local fashion shows of brands owned by fashion designers of a small businesses. This focus may lead to exploring the similarities and differences between the global and the local events and how ‘worldliness’ may exist in both positions. Suppose we discuss the designer fashion houses such as Dior and Channel. In that case, the prices are only available for ‘upper classes’, but that does not mean people of other classes would not seek to imitate the dress culture created by such ‘high end’ companies. It seems that this ‘imitation’ may also be present in fashion shows hosted by a niche brand, but it is hardly researched in cultural and social studies. Therefore, in my research, the first two empirical chapters will focus on the modest fashion weeks and charity events exhibiting their products on catwalk shows, exhibitions, and dinner gatherings for women to promote their business. There are also political modelling scenes in local fashion events in which they challenge the cultural and social conventions, similar to what Khan (2000) explored about the fashion houses shows.

#### **1.1.4. Fashion between Being a Female and Femininity: female bodies and modelling**

Following the previous section of historical accounts on fashion practices and catwalk studies, this part of the literature reviews the concepts of femininity and female space in fashion and cultural studies. Researchers like Jenifer Craik (1993) revisited the techniques of femininity and being a female by locating historical shifts and ideological examination of women and femininity, emphasising the influence of the growing textual media and magazines. Because of the difficulty of conceptualising femininity and femaleness within the sociological construct, for its association with the historical accounts and shifts of meanings over time and space (Krane et al., 2014), I have selected the work of Craik (1993) for its relevance to this research with regards domesticity and its influence on women’s careers. In addition, Craik’s (1993) study provides a critique of women’s representation within the fashion and cultural studies that are both central fields in locating the discipline where this PhD is situated. From that, this section reviews the literature on femininity, how it associates with female bodies, and how its techniques construct a female space in a workplace.



Craik (1993) pointed out that fashion is more than a set of designs sold in a market. She looked beyond the fashion styles and more into women's experiences and representations, such as models' vivid journeys with photographers and magazines. Craik (1993: 46) argued that "fashion has been singled out as a domain of representation and practice in which exploitative relations are central". This is due to how women adopt the western culture to represent their female body and how they are associated with being a female or feminine attribute (Craik, 1993).

In addressing concepts of femininity, Craik (1993: 47) pointed out how, with the rise of the bourgeoisie, classes were reconstructed, and the economic field was increasing, resulting in social shifts regarding gender roles; femininity was attributed to 'a domestic and private sphere', and men were identifying females to the 'world of leisure' and keeping them distant from the task of labour. Thus, while men took over politics and business, women were given the role influenced by their social status via appearances and dresses associating them with decorative ornaments. Craik (1993: 47- 48) indicated that during the bourgeoisie era, women were influenced by a 'moral conduct' of achieving femininity through fashion and clothing and by the "deportment and social etiquette, as well as guides to fertility, family and domestic management".

In further investigation of femininity, Craik (1993: 70) investigated the experiences of models considered icons of femininity during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, wherein consumer culture was intertwined with the sense of being a woman. Craik (1993: 82) revealed that with the beginning of the 1960s and onward, "high fashion was no longer elite and stuffy but was found in high streets", and the new dress culture was inspired by the "the lifestyle of the models". Moving towards the 1970s, models became universal personalities, referred to as supermodels, who received high income and had famous profiles (Craik, 1993: 85)—modelling as a career influenced the changes in the fashion industry and in generating constant new ideas on femininity (Craik, 1993: 90).

All in all, when women were given a social role or offered a space for a career, it was either limited to the domestic space and feminine traits associated with dress and appearances or constructive techniques policing the female body into being the most ideal.

In this PhD, domesticity and the female space are explored within a digitised era and the rise of online marketing and consumerist behaviours, in which new promotional tools are growing. Within these changes, the female body is projecting an image of model-like that Craik (1993) examined. However, the Muslim women in this thesis have a political economy and control

over their own production and body representation through social media platforms, which may lead to an expansion of the conception of ‘domesticity’ and new ideas on women and profession.

In a different study, femininity was examined in the field of women and sport. Such as the research conducted by Krane et al. (2014), which contributes to studies of women athletes’ representation. This research highlights that women’s feminine traits are socially associated with submissiveness and nurturing, domesticity, and beauty, excluding competitiveness that is considered masculine (Krane et al., 2014: 79). However, the findings of Krane et al. (2014) generated that despite such constructive perceptions of women being feminine and not owning competitive traits, females are no longer conforming to such idealist associations of being a female and that gender performance is becoming gradually fluid. Krane et al. (2014: 95) argued that women “are creating fluid and hybrid identities that are personally meaningful yet flexible, reinforcing that femininity is not monolithic and neither is being an athlete”. Their data interpretation mirrors the female roles of the Muslim female stakeholders working from a domestic space, in which varying degrees of femininity are projected with reference to rejecting the social norms and images that working from home is submissive.

As far as I can ascertain, there has been little to no critical assessment of domesticity and Muslim female stakeholders working behind screens from 2018 to 2022. And as far as this thesis is concerned, such concepts of femininity and female space are associated with domestic space and domesticity. For their significance, this study contributes to cultural studies and feminism, by examining Muslim women’s roles in these spaces and how they affect their active participation. Also, how their careers could alter and modify the conventional meanings of femininity by securing dominance in what was traditionally considered a masculine field. Thus, the concept of domesticity will be explored in relation to the Muslim stakeholders’ roles by adopting Craik’s (1993) and Krane et al. (2014) arguments.

### **1.1.5. Fashion as a Culture Industry**

This section adopts a sociological, philosophical, and cultural studies approach to studying mass culture as industry through a selected body of scholarships since the twentieth century. I shall first address the key concepts and critical analyses in relation to Theodor Adorno’s (1991) theoretical framework of culture industry, preceded by the original study that brought the critical theory of society ‘culture industry’ of Adorno and Horkheimer (1947) which is

considered ‘the founding source of cultural studies’ (Lash and Lury, 2007: 3) which to understand fashion cultures arising from the masses. Secondly, to explain how fashion is connected to culture industry, I shall also look at the studies of Scott Lash and Celia Lury (2007) and Storey (2018), which extend to Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of culture industry and focuses on how things have ‘moved on’ and how Lash and Lury (2007) suggested an updated theoretical concept of *Global Culture Industry*. As a final discussion, I will review Angela McRobbie’s (2000) chapter on *Fashion as a Culture Industry*, in which she explored the experiences of freelancer fashion designers in Britain. Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1947) is the foundation of this discussion. In contrast, Lash and Lury (2007), along with McRobbie (2000) will extend the main study on culture industry representing the current cultures and how industrialisation added further changes.

The German Philosophers Adorno and Horkheimer (1947) theoretically explored the ‘mass culture’ in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which they introduced for the first time the word ‘culture industry’ (Adorno, 1991: 85). Adorno (1991:86) revisited his theoretical interpretation of culture industry introduced by him and Horkheimer (1947), who argued that “the culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is gibe and unchangeable”. What Adorno was referring to is that art is commodified and packaged into a consumer product making the masses believe that they are the ‘primary concern’ of the industry, but this is a capitalist mindset of making profits in which whatever sells is considered to be the best option. Further, in the scrutinized discussion, Adorno (1975) argued that ‘the masses are not measure but the ideology of the culture industry’ (Adorno, 2001: 99).

In their essay, ‘The Culture Industry Enlightenment: a mass deception’<sup>3</sup>, the German philosophers, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 136) argue that:

The culture industry can pride itself on having energetically executed the previously clumsy transposition of art into the sphere of consumption, on making this principle, on divesting amusement of its obtrusive naivete and improving the type of commodities. The more absolute it became, the more ruthless it was in forcing every outsider either into bankruptcy or into a syndicate, and it became more refined and elevated [...].

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<sup>3</sup> Originally written in 1944, under the title ‘Dialektik der Aufklärung’, but remained unpublished till 1947 by Adorno, T. W., Horkheimer, M. and later translated by Cumming in 1997.

They further criticised that culture industry market as deeply rooted in the social process and that it is about repetitive 'mass reproduction' but not an innovative system (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 136). That is to say, popular culture is commodified and industrialised in a capitalist society in which products are 'standardized' and therefore the people consuming these standard commodities are standardized as well.

Moreover, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997: 95) argue that the industry is anti-enlightenment and that the reality about the industry is "[...] nothing but business [which] is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce" and it is a 'mass deception'. Furthermore, in his essay, 'The Schema of Mass Culture' Adorno (2001: 99) argues that culture industry controls the construct of art, and this dominance challenges the authentic form of all art works. The focus of Adorno is how the culture industry including magazines, film industry, or design seeks to have an entire dominance of the masses i.e., the societies. Moreover, the culture industry controls culture as an art which challenges the authenticity and creativity of all art forms.

Adorno and Horkheimer's (1947) critics are crucial to my research since modest fashion is considered a 'culture industry' for it is a contemporary culture "spontaneously [arose] from the masses themselves" (Adorno, 1991: 85). These masses are the faith-based females who started modest fashion as a D.I.Y culture through layering mainstream garments of the Highstreets such as Zara and H&M and making them match their dress codes of modesty and fashionability. Building on this theoretical understanding of a culture becoming an industry, Naomi Klein's (2010) political and economic discourse develops a thick critique of what she described as 'corporate obsession with brand identity' in her book 'No Logo'. A common understanding of corporate relates to a large company or a group of companies.

In a critique of Adorno and Horkheimer's (1947) theories, Lash and Lury (2007:5) argued that "Products no longer circulate as identical objects, already fixed, static and discrete, determined by the intentions of their producers. Instead, cultural entities spin out of the control of their makers: in their circulation they move and change through transposition and translation, transformation and transmogrification". This explains what they call 'global culture industry' in which the capitalist production of goods and subjects is no longer 'determined', but 'indetermined' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 5), and the fixed cycle of producing identity shifts into the circulation of 'difference'. Lash and Lury (2007) investigated further changes in the culture industry by revealing the changes in production aspects such as commodity and brand, the

representation, and things in the context of global culture industry of the contemporary era that was rarely present in the traditional age of Adorno and Horkheimer's.

Lash and Lury (2007: 7) argued that “global culture industry’s emergent regime of power results in inequalities, disparities and deception rarely encountered in Horkheimer and Adorno’s classical age”, which is apparent in the relationship between commodity and brand in which the first is produced. The second is the source of production. For Lash and Lury (2007), brands have a history because of the differences; they aim at constructing through the focus on distinctive designs and in an intensive process. They also argued that the value of commodities is in their standard resemblance of reproducing identities, but brands are more concerned with producing differences (Lash and Lury, 2007: 7).

Representation is critically framed in culture industry theorizations and in Lash and Lury’s (2007) discussion in the context of media and how it is progressively ‘thingified’. In culture industry, the art was ‘thingified’ and in global culture industry, it is the mass media that became a thing which means that movies as art, for example, are branded in retail spaces such as departments, stores, and outlets into material objects and in physical branding environments (Lash and Lury, 2007: 8-9). This is the process of industrialisation of culture in which the representation of cultural objects is commodified.

Lash and Lury’s (2007) analysis of the commodity and the brand in the ‘global culture industry’ contribute to the understanding of how they are associated with each other, but they are also different in terms of how they function as part of the production system. And since their theoretical interpretation is based on Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of culture industry, concepts of dominance, brand, commodity, identity, and representation are key to the subject of this thesis. What is relevant in their interpretation of global culture industry is how the cultural representation of mass media and art is being thingified, commodified, and then branded in retail spaces and shops.

A significantly contributing argument that this thesis agrees with is Lash and Lury’s (2007) exploration of brand experiences in branding spaces of a contemporary culture that is highly dependent on ‘event culture’. They argued that:

In global culture industry, not only the mediascape, but also the cityscape takes on intensive qualities. Architecture and urbanism become less a question of objects and volumes. Urban space becomes a space of intensities. These intensities, which are virtual, describe a certain topology. They

describe a space of multimodal experience, not just that of vision, a space of virtualities and intensities that actualize themselves not as objects but as events.

(Lash and Lury, 2007: 15)

That is to say that the branding of a commodified culture in this contemporary era is currently achieved through the experience with brands' products in events in which the consumers develop 'a sense of place' (Qazimi, 2014) in different events of different brands through a material setting and this is a part of the process of industrialising a culture globally. These arguments are more apparent in the first empirical chapter as branding is dependent on the 'event culture' by creating the modest fashion experience in urban cities and symbolic buildings to create what Lash and Lury (2007) referred to 'sense of object-events'.

In Storey's (2018: 69) analysis of Adorno's argument on culture industry, he partially disagrees with the consumption forms; he asserts that: "Consumption is also changed: from its location in religious ritual to its location in the rituals of aesthetics, consumption is now based on the practice of politics. Culture may have become mass culture, but consumption has not become mass consumption." That is to say, the masses are yet under the dominance of the industries, but consumption is no longer repetitive. It expanded into a range of varied goods and for various tastes of different masses. Mass consumption is more categorized now. Corporate industries and brands are one example, and D.I.Y is the opposing market of what Adorno (2001) refers to culture industry.

In depicting the corporate, Storey (2018, 192- 193) refers to Orientalism<sup>4</sup> and Hollywood as corporate institutions. He argues that:

Although America no longer has 'authority over' Vietnam, it continues to hold authority over Western accounts of America's war in Vietnam. Hollywood as a 'corporate institution' deals with Vietnam 'by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching it'. Hollywood has 'invented' Vietnam as a 'contrasting image' and a 'surrogate and . . . underground self' of America. In this way Hollywood – together with other discursive practices, such as songs, novels, TV serials, etc. – has succeeded in producing a very powerful discourse on Vietnam: telling

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<sup>4</sup> Orientalism: Said, E. (1985) a dominating system of the 'western' perception of the 'East'.

America and the world that what happened there, happened because Vietnam is like that.

Here, Storey (2018) describes the powerful effect of corporate industry dominating the market through abstract ideas and not only concrete manufacturing of products for financial profit.

In a similar vein but with an intensive critique of the industries, Klein (2010:8) argues that the corporates develop ways and recruit individuals to look for every ‘unmarketed landscape’ to feed from its culture by manufacturing it into products for the masses. Klein called these individuals ‘cool hunters’ and described them as ‘the legal stalkers of youth culture’ (2010: 72). In this sense, Klein shares a similar view on big brands looking for what appears for them to be the ‘right people’ to wear their logo (2010: 74). Extending her critiques towards the context of women and the industry, Klein (2010) provided an insight into how the industry approach women as consumers and provided pragmatic examples from famous brands such as The Body Shop and Lush Cosmetics which still exist as companies up to this date and how this is a part of what she conceptualized as ‘lifestyle branding’ (Weber, 1922). However, her critiques and arguments appear to be relevant in sections on DIY culture and Corporates and in other sections, the discussion seems biased, and I refer to such criticism with care while engaging with the changes in branding strategies in a technological age where market spaces and methods of advertising are more digitised.

Angela McRobbie (2000) examined the new government policies in Britain in the 1980s and the new wave of cultural workers studying in art schools and colleges. Unlike the fashion houses already known to the public, these designers had to look for access to affordable promotional strategies. McRobbie (2000: 258) argued that she “was proposing that a sociological and cultural studies approach might be able to offer better insight into fashion as a cultural practice, fashion as something more than the possession of unique insight, vision, talent or even genius”. This study was under the exploration of *Fashion as Culture Industry* in which McRobbie (2000: 256) stated that it was “[...] the radically left-wing GLC which reinvented the term ‘culture industries’ to refer to the small businesses that provided different kinds of cultural expression from those found in the multinationally owned record companies, film and television corporations and big high street fashion retailers”. McRobbie (2000) emphasised the left-wing policies making their aim by creating ‘the Hollywood effect’ that the new Film Council incorporated. Though these policies' positive connotation seems to carry, the truth is

different. The young cultural workers barely received the rightful wage as entrepreneurs, but as their careers are in the fields of media and arts and labelled as ‘glamorous’, ‘on freelance basis’, and ‘portfolio’ jobs (McRobbie, 2000: 257). Moreover, these young creative workers struggle to present their work in the retail spaces, and this especially was more involved in ‘the art school-trained fashion designers’ who were a part of the government policy in the project ‘yBas’ which means ‘young British artists’ in which the “British fashion designers and others have been packaged and exported abroad by the British Council as a sign of the vitality of contemporary culture” (McRobbie, 2000: 255). Regardless of the yBas claiming to support the fashion designers to advertise, collaborate, and host their own fashion shows, McRobbie (2000: 260) claimed that this was never fulfilled with the designers she interviewed, and this is what makes ‘fashion as a culture industry’.

McRobbie’s (2000) research on young cultural workers in the domain of fashion design is relevant to the last empirical chapter which shows how young females in a niche market and studying in the university of art to become designers struggle to join the global market and the mainstream fashion industry. Since they often work as freelancers, this is a challenge to grow their financial savings to start their fashion projects. However, such struggles seem to be changing in the media age with social media platforms growing more into marketing spaces allowing cultural workers to ship worldwide and advertise for their brands and products with low budgets which may allow them to grow quickly into a global brand.

Adopting Adorno and Horkheimer’s theorization of culture industry and how the capital ‘deceives’ the masses by demonstrating a sense of ‘concern’ and representation, I argue that the term ‘determined’ and ‘standardized’ on culture are no longer the fit description for production of popular culture commodities and subjects’ duplication. The production system is standardized in terms of mass production of cultural forms, however, the fashion as popular culture produced spontaneously by the social individuals is creative and diverse. While I extend to the current changes in the capitalist system of production, focusing on Lash and Lury’s (2007) expansion on the theorization of the global culture industry and how there are shifts from the ‘identity to difference’, ‘commodity to brand’, and ‘representation to things. I explore the culture industry within this thesis’ empirical chapter by looking at the various roles and fashion styles created by the small businesses and how corporate attempt to imitate the cultural forms that were once DIYed by the women of faith looking for modest and fashionable apparel.



### **1.1.6. Social Media and its Impacts: women, fashion, and feminism**

Social media is developing its affordances and tools not only for social networking, but also for what the literature refers to as female entrepreneurship that is expanding via blogging practices (Duffy and Hund, 2015) and online businesses (Melissa, Hamidati, Saraswati, and Flor, 2015). Simultaneously, drastic changes were taking place online as social media platforms evolved providing users with a space to claim social justice and advanced approaches to political activism (Kasana, 2014). Along with these changes, social media had profound impacts on women, and fashion, as it unlocked a door for feminism to thrive digitally. Existing research had a thorough exploration on these diverse, yet intertwined, areas which are listed in the following subsections. This section will dive into the body of research that explores social media impacts on women and fashion. I will start by tracing back notions of fashion blogging, female entrepreneurship, and ‘fashion mediatization’ which will be employed throughout the thesis.

The current studies show that social media had influential impacts on women. Melissa, Hamidati, Saraswati, and Flor (2015) state through their research on social media impacts on women that “[it] expanded the social networks of [women] and subsequently increased their social capital”. Social media, as the literature suggests, is medium for networking, online interactions, and a space where women are establishing their careers, and reciprocally, increase their ‘sense of self-worth’ (Melissa, et al., 2015; Rocamora, 2011). Most influential academic studies exploring social media and women are concerned with examining how women are developing online business and blogosphere careers online, mostly focusing on lifestyle, fashion, aesthetics, and everyday practices. Recently, studies proliferated towards creating more understanding of self-actualization, self-branding, networking, and digital challenges by examining women’s presence as active agents in the digital culture (Bagdogan, 2023; Duffy and Hund, 2015; Rocamora, 2018).

Accounting for much of the academic research at that time, Melissa et al. (2015) along with Duffy and Hund (2015) contend that the digital interactions between women increased their business potential with ‘social media entrepreneurship’. This has become crucial when researching the experiences of women to whom social media content productions are deemed as “conduits to financial independence and female empowerment” (Duffy and Hund, 2015: 8) and flexibility in their working hours (Melissa, 2015: 217). Besides these impacts, Melissa, et al. (2015) found out from their research on Indonesian women's entrepreneurship online, that social media as a medium had facilitated women’s networking as a group of individuals with

common interests whether it is in relation to everyday interactions or developing businesses. Their findings displayed how social media offered women a space to share their ‘experiences in entrepreneurial activities’ and to support one another when establishing a new business online (Melissa, Hamidati, Saraswati, and Flor, 2015: 215). But it is not only that. These scholars argue that the value of social media for women who are business owners lies in how it enables them to gain an economic income to support their families which develops ‘a sense of self-worth’ that is referred to as ‘self-actualization’ (Melissa, Hamidati, Saraswati, and Flor, 2015: 215).

The concept of ‘self-actualization’ was used by Melissa et al. (2015: 209-19) to explain how women fulfil their potentials online by building businesses for the sake of growing their self-esteem and gaining a more powerful position in their families and societies, thus, social media “increased their social capital” as cultivated individuals. Social capital, as explained in Bourdieu’s (1986) study, is associated with the network of acquaintances that individuals develop to gain a value of interconnecting with others while being a member in a social networking circle, and it is gradually becoming visible on the internet (Burt, 2000: 346). With that in mind, women with diverse backgrounds and experiences are meeting online and increasing their social capital. In addition to that, women growing businesses online is another apparent impact that social media had on women and that is what Melissa et al. (2015: 219) report from the respondents’ testimonials with reference to their negotiation of equality within ‘the household chores division’ after joining the realm of labour. Therefore, social media contributed to providing women with an opportunity to empower themselves and realize their self-worth as assets in the economic increase and value their contribution to the household finance as they become more ‘self-actualized’ individuals.

Moving towards more literature on women and social media, studies explored how women developed through social media a fashion blogging entrepreneurship wherein female financial autonomy and empowerment are also examined. Duffy and Hund (2015: 2) explore through their article women’s subjectivity as fashion bloggers with flexible labour, skills, and self-branding techniques reinforcing their status within the mainstream market which they coined as ‘enterprising femininity’ (Gray, 2003). “Fashion blogging, in particular, is considered one of the most commercially successful and publicly visible forms of digital cultural production” (Duffy and Hund, 2015: 1). Before delving deeply into the scholarships on fashion blogging and women, the next subsections will explore the literature on social media and fashion to detangle the process of social media impacts on women and fashion.

In the field of social media and fashion, the researcher Agnes Rocamora had a major contribution from exploring how fashion was mediatized to studying personal fashion. With the shift from mass media to media technologies, Rocamora (2017) shows how the fashion field and its practices expanded through mediatization. Her main focus revolves around the process of the mediatized events and fashion designs. For Rocamora (2017: 509- 510), the field of fashion is adopting social media spaces to shape its practices which rely on “the media for their articulation” arguing that they have become “a staple of the shows”. Moving towards further details, Rocamora (2017: 510-11) states that “[t]he mediatization of fashion is also concurrent with the mediatization of fashion design” and that the runway events are “designed with social media in mind; they have become mediatized events”. Traditionally, fashion was more reliant on mass media for its circulation, such as magazines (Wilson, 2003: 170); however, with social media, it is being mediatized.

To further explain, Halliday (2021: 192) states that since the launch of the first fashion show in the mid-1800s and before they became mediatized, “consumers had to wait up to six months after collections’ debut to locate items in stores or access media representations”. But since then, fashion shows underwent many shifts and with the interference of social media, the intimate gatherings of fashion weeks and the unrevealed locations are no longer a thing with the mediatization of fashion shows (Halliday, 2021: 194). With social media digitizing the fashion field, there were changes in the ‘fashion’s industrial hierarchies’, with bloggers invited to attend the fashion weeks, their participation in the event offers them a fashion capital (Halliday, 2021: 195). Sharing a closely similar point of view with Rocamora’s (2017) idea on how fashion shows are bond to social media; Halliday (2021:193) argues that the “fashion weeks have become media-saturated and fashion shows tailored for media, down to the layout of spaces and calculated set and performance elements”. Illustrating an example from her fieldwork on New York Fashion Week, Halliday (2021:198) noted that from the six fashion shows she attended, only two events were ‘live-streamed for the official NYFW site’ leaving the remnant brands were dependent on press and social media influencers to produce and share content as the show went on. With such brands on the edge with the unavailability of ‘live-streaming’, then incorporating other modes to communicate fashion content is the alternative solution. Halliday (2021: 192) articulates that the online resulted in a cultural change in ‘the modes of fashion communication’ and one of them is the integration of fashion blogging to create content on fashion shows on social media.

Reflecting on the above explanations, it is seen that fashion is gradually dependent on fashion blogging for its proliferation as one of its various modes. The existing literature on

fashion blogging explore the experiences of women on social media and their career as bloggers. Rocamora (2011, 2018) delves deeper into the fashion blogging field examining blogs and the various categories of bloggers to explore its authenticity as labour on social media. Rocamora (2011) states that “by bringing together various technologies of the self it argues that the blogs represent a significant space of identity construction”. Through her research, Rocamora established how one the influential impacts social media had in relation to fashion was the rise of blogging, but she also researches deeper layers studying its various angles. She argued that notwithstanding the work opportunities social media brought for bloggers; the challenges of preserving its legitimacy as a recognized work are numerous, mostly by journalists and bloggers themselves (Rocamora, 2018:68- 69).

As social media brought for women financial opportunities and contributed to the increase of their ‘self-actualization’ (Melissa et al., 2015), it also had its challenges and issues. Researchers as Lewis (2015) and Bagdogan (2023) explored how fashion bloggers undergo challenges on social media. According to Rocamora (2018: 65), “Bloggers have encountered a barrage of criticism, to which they regularly respond on their own sites. For blogs are both a platform of expression of the bloggers’ takes on fashion, but also one on which they actively participate in the discursive production of fashion blogging”.

Fashion, for some women, is not only a tool for dressing up to articulate a style, but also a field where social struggles are confronted, and social media platform made both efforts more accessible. In Laura Camerlengo’s (2018: 99) chapter ‘ “My Muslim-ness”: fashion, faith, and social media’, it is argued that “[Muslim modest fashionistas] created accounts to foster dialogue about what it means to be fashionable and a Muslim in the United States as a means to address social issues rather than solely for style inspiration”. Camerlengo (2018) presents three leading female fashionistas in the United States as examples to show that fashion online is more than style-sharing and that that it is a medium for contemporary discourse and ‘social justice’. As a result, social media contributed to expanding fashion beyond dress and style towards fields of rethinking women’s agency and activism. Hoda Katebi, a case study in Camerlengo’s (2018) study, emphasises the role of their presence online referring to re-shaping the commonly constructed images on Muslim women by creating a content on Instagram in relation to fashion, but also feminism. According to the author, Katebi employs fashion as a mean to create debates that scrutinize “the politics and ethics of modern-day production and consumption” (Camerlengo, 2018: 103).

With social media affordances and access to digital platforms, women's relationship with fashion extended towards many changes, such as creating lifestyle and fashion blogs and spaces to share their everyday fashion style and lifestyle with other women. For Seyda Bagdogan (2023: 1), social media is providing marginalized individuals with spaces for voicing their experiences and for 'self-branding' as a tool of 'individual empowerment'. Bagdogan (2023: 3) shares how Muslim women are using social media as safe spaces. In social media, women, as Kasana (2014) states throughout her study, of marginalized voices and struggles with spreading beauty standards, have to stay united and use such spaces to reclaim their identities. The author herself is an activist who motivates other women to speak up for themselves. Kasana (2014: 246) narrates how 'a simple' act of expression on social media, 'a poem', had an impact on many othered bodies, such as Zahra from South Africa. Here, Kasana (2014) reinstates the significance of social media as a tool women use to support one another and 'a network of activism' against repressing systems.

This PhD follows up on the existing research on the growing community of modest fashion online and how it contributes to the globalization of modest fashion industry. It also ethnographically explores agency of Muslim women on Instagram when promoting modest fashion which has received minimal focus from existing research. Another significant point is the continuity of struggles that modest fashion bloggers face digitally when developing their blogging careers on the Instagram platform. Social media as a safe space (Bagdogan, 2023) and a platform for agency offered women to be economically independent and this research critically examine this area. This research attempt to address these gaps in literature where the active roles and agency of Muslim female stakeholders promoting modest fashion on Instagram received minimal interest in the present fashion and social media studies where feminism as a theory is key to understanding the involvement of these women in the growth of the modest fashion market.

## **1.2. Modest Fashion Studies**

This section locates the main studies which are highly relevant to the findings of this PhD in terms of modest fashion practices and Muslim women's roles in branding modest wear in the fashion industry in the real-world market and online. Leading to these social and cultural

studies, I will first deconstruct ‘modest’ and ‘fashion’ as concepts and present a review of literature on modesty, since the discussions on fashion are presented in the previous sections, I will be linking modesty with fashion under the modest fashion debates. I will first pin down the terminology of the broader meaning of what is considered ‘modest’ or ‘modesty’.

### 1.2.3. Modesty

In defining what is modest, scholars had diverse perspectives depending on the context in which the concept of modest and modesty is used. In identifying modesty, Fritz Allhoff (2009: 166) states that “we have fairly solid intuitions about what constitutes instances of immodesty, yet it is hard to extract defining, overarching principles that can be adapted to characterise modesty without being either too broad or too narrow”. What Allhoff (2010) appears to suggest is that people criticise others or things for being immodest, but they fail to offer a definite meaning of what is modest. Critically evaluating written accounts on modesty, studies develop an understanding of the term by referring to a state of being or performing. Both modest and modesty could be viewed in relation to behaviour, religion, satire, cultural backgrounds, or personal preferences. Allhoff’s (2010) work examines modesty on a behavioural level and uses the word ‘virtue’ as an argument. On another account, Reina Lewis’ (2013, 2015) research looks at modesty from a sartorial level and a faith-based focus.

Allhoff (2010: 179) argues that modesty should be characterised as a ‘virtue’ which he considers a behaviour that requires a situation to exist. The virtue of something is when an individual is to be found in a situation that demands ‘the right act’ for ‘the right reason’ (Allhoff, 2010: 180). Putting in mind that virtue is about outstanding temptations and immodesty is temptation itself. It is to show one’s achievements and talents to probably gain a social interest whereas modesty is about fighting back this seducing feeling. As Allhoff asserts that modesty is realizing that one should be “disposed to avoid bragging” (2009: 181). An important point to discuss is that this modesty must be a natural act coming from within and not a deceiving act with hard efforts.

A more encompassing view on modesty is associated with women’s sartorial and behavioural practices, which the anthropologist Abu-Lughod (1986) refers to it as ‘Hasham’<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Hasham: In Abu-Alughod, L. (1986) word from Egyptian tribal dialect meaning ‘shyness’, pp. 160.

The concept of ‘hasham’ is one of the findings in Abu-Lughod’s fieldwork on the Bedouin tribe in which she anthropologically explored women’s stories. Abu-Lughod (1986) argues that the term ‘modesty’ has to be explored through the social structure of the Bedouin tribe rather than through the Islamic context. Following this understanding, Abu-Lughod (1986: 160) explains that her findings demonstrate how the women in the Bedouin tribe negotiate the term ‘hasham’ (modesty) as a representative figure of their hierarchy in their marital community or as a moral code of denying sexual matters. In a further detail, Abu-Lughod (1986) extends the understanding of modesty stating that:

Hasham refers to both an internal state of shyness, embarrassment, or shame and to a set of behaviors conforming to a code of modesty that are thought to grow out of these feelings. The cultural repertoire of such behaviors of self-effacement includes veiling, dressing modestly, aspects of demeanor such as downcast eyes, formal posture, and restraint of eating, smoking, talking, laughing and joking. It also, and very importantly involves chastity—in other words, the denial of sexuality.

This understanding of modesty is derived from the voices that the Bedouin women shared which allows them as individuals to negotiate their identities in ways that are specific to them, which is also a part of who they are. Thus, ‘hasham’ here is seen as a membership figure within the female group of the Bedouin. In that sense, in this PhD, I also aim at voicing the women who are taking roles in the modest fashion realm according to their stories and how they define modesty according to their personal discourse. However, I aim to focus on more than just the social structure and that is according to where they are and what they are doing.

A similar point about ‘shyness’ was expressed in El-Guindi’s study (1999:83) ‘hurma, hishma, sutra, haya’ which “constitute a cultural code of sanctity-reserve-respect”. Referring to Surat Al-A’raf<sup>6</sup>, El-Guindi (1999: 83) argues that in Quran, not only women are asked to be modest in their dress, men as well. It is not women who are asked to cover their genital organs but men. The verse 26 of Al-A’raf from the Quran says:

That they [feminine gender] should not display their beauty and ornaments except what [must ordinarily] appear thereof; that they should draw their khimar [headveil]over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or

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<sup>6</sup> Quranic Verse: Surah Al-A’raf Verse 26

their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or underage children. (24: 31)

Unlike, Abu-Lughod's argument of locating women's modesty through the social structure, El-Guindi seeks to redefine modesty following a religious context. In this sense, El-Guindi (1999: 76) referred to body covering by what it is termed as 'libas' which is religiously speaking a dress mentioned in Quran and for her it means modesty:

O children of Adam! We have bestowed libas (dress) upon you to cover your genitals and serve as protection and adornment. Libas of piety is the best (7: 26)<sup>7</sup>

But the question is what did El-Guindi mean by modesty in this context? She used a verse from the Quran. Libas covers the body, so modesty for this author could be the degree of covering that leads to piety. She delves deep into the concept of modesty and explains why she uses the term modesty in her book title. El-Guindi declares that "Muslims have adopted it to describe the code underlying their practices" and that it is "an ethnocentric imposition on Arabo-Islamic culture" (El-Guindi, 1999: 83). In addition to that, El-Guindi (1999: 83) tries to find equivalent terms for words referring to modesty from English to Arabic and Arabic to English to describe it in its best context. That was after examining them through an etymological, ethnographic, visual, and textual lens.

Debates on modesty as 'piety' in terms of dress culture are also apparent in Saba Mahmood's anthropologist study of the women's mosque movement in Cairo, Egypt. Mahmood (2005) investigated the Islamic revivalist movement of Muslim women of Cairo to rethink the religious subjectivity in relation to their covered dress practices. In this context of modesty, Mahmood's (2005: 160) contribution to studies on modesty is that women in Cairo perceive modesty as a "characteristic of the individual's interiority which is then expressed in bodily form". The findings also generated an argument of how these conceptions of pious self through modest are only representative of Muslim women in Cairo which means that there are diverse views on modesty as an innate trait, a form of covering, or it could be a relationship between both representations.

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<sup>7</sup> Quranic Verse: Surah Al-A'raf Verse 26



The current studies on modesty are more about sartorial fashion. Reina Lewis is one of the leading authors interested in locating modesty and dress within the contemporary fashion community. In her chapter ‘fashion forward and faith-tastic’, Reina Lewis (2013: 1) argues that putting modesty and fashion together creates a contradiction and results in critics and questions. She also points out the existing industry of fashion which considers ‘modest’ and ‘fashion’ as ‘antipathetic’ (Lewis, 2013: 1). Even though Lewis focuses on modesty from a sartorial and religious standpoint, she argues that what is known as the modest fashion sector considers modesty “as a sphere of personal and community activity” (Lewis, 2013: 2). Modest Fashion discourse emerges from a faith-based examination of clothing through the existing ‘secular’ modest dressers. Even so, stakeholders of modest fashion “do not identify religion as their main motivation for how they dress” (Lewis, 2013: 2). In this context, Todosi (2014: 30) declares that modesty is hardly derived from “clearly secular or purely stylistic considerations, as in the case of yearly or seasonal western vogues”. Following these introductory statements by Lewis (2013) and Todosi (2014), the following sections will review the studies exploring modest fashion.

According to G.F. Schueler (1997: 467) “someone whose accomplishments are in fact quite modest may nevertheless be loud in her own praise, never losing a chance to tell others of what she has done”. And fashion is about a progression of ‘short-term trends’ (Easy, 2009:1). Therefore, this means that the created looks’ characteristics are to be noticed, to have attention before shifting to other styles. People look for fashionable items to dress in a way that makes them empathetic. Referring to Schueler’s explanation of modesty, a paradox is deduced between fashion and modesty as concepts. But the fact is that modesty is not just a behaviour, it could be about the way somebody dresses. Allhuff (2010, 166) says that “being modest might as well engender modest dress”.

However, it remains vague to capture an understanding of what is meant by modesty and fashion when attached together. Is it depending on the field? Maybe there is a religious modesty of behaviour or dress, it could be political as well, secular maybe, or probably none of these? Lewis’ (2013: 3) objective from her study on modest fashion is to show that “modesty is a mutable concept that changes over time and is diversely adopted, rejected, altered by or in some cases imposed on different groups of women (and, to a lesser extent, men)”. For these reasons, Lewis could not offer an exact definition of modest fashion.

Modesty is shifting maybe because it is attached to fashion as the latter means a trend that exists in a limited period under specific characteristics and targeted at a certain group of dressers. Sadatmoosavi et al. (2016: 230) argues that “modesty does not belong to any specific culture but today it has become the subject of intense scrutiny in Islamic context”. Current studies claim that Islamic dress which is a part of modest fashion is worth an investigation. This is because as Todosi (2014: 30) mentioned “in the current study of the visual impact of ‘adapted’ Islamic clothing occupies a prominent place, precisely due to the immense range of extant stylistic variations”.

Critically examining the existing literature on modesty, this PhD acknowledges the diversity of context in which the term modesty is used and the various concepts referring to ‘modest’ and ‘modesty’ which are ‘pious self’, ‘piety’, ‘covered dress’ and that is according to the above-mentioned literature. Modesty could be behavioural, sartorial, religious, or both. The current literature from 2013 to 2022, reviewed modesty as a faith-based practice related to the fashion styles and it is often on veiled women from American and European geographies who have a significant role in defining modesty as a part of modest fashion or Muslim/ Islamic fashion (Lewis, 2013; Tarlo and Moors, 2013; Todosi, 2014; Lewis, 2015; Sadatmoosavi 2016).

#### **1.2.4. Studies on Modest Fashion**

In this section, I provide an overview of the literature on the central focus of this research which is ‘modest fashion’. As mentioned in the previous section, modesty is difficult to delimit but can be tracked as a term through social, religious, and anthropological interpretations, however; modest fashion became more of a niche market in the fashion industry (Lewis, 2013) in which visibly religious individuals promote it to celebrate a religious and fashionable identity. In this sense, I list the studies about or related to ‘modesty and fashion’.

Lewis (2013: 2) argued that there are women, whose focus is on modest apparel, who found themselves marginalized in mainstream fashion and in media and this is when they increased their “discourse about modesty into arenas beyond conventional religious organizations or authorities”. In the last three decades, modest fashion evolved amidst the younger population developing a cultural form of modest dressing, however; the youth were ignored and hardly

seen as ‘individuated youthful style seekers’ especially those who are visibly marked by their faith through appearance (Lewis, 2013: 3).

Miller (2013) depicts Jewish women’s sartorial experiences of wearing denim in an ‘ultra-orthodox’ community and how their modest dress would define their religion. She argues that her ethnographies of London explored the adoption of denim clothing ‘jeans’ and resulted in defining the jeans as an ideology associated with a state of ordinariness (Miller, 2013: 131-132). Miller (2013: 134) suggests that ‘blue jeans represent morality’ within material culture. This means that individuals represent themselves as ordinary when wearing jeans which is a material visible item of clothing. Therefore, in understanding why some orthodox communities ban denim which is an ‘immodest exposure of the body’ to them, Miller attempts to associate the materiality of the denim with Judaism as a religion. Miller explains “I think[s] there is a constant tension within Judaism over explicit and implicit adherence to morality” and adds that because Judaism and Islam are religions relying on practice, “material culture is actually much closer to the way these religions operate” (Miller, 2013: 135).

Hafsa Lodi is a journalist and her book ‘Modesty: a fashion paradox’ is more of a detailed guidebook of modest fashion. She narrates precisely how modesty fashion became mainstream and mainly argues that modest fashion is a contradiction. Lodi (2020: 7) dictates that mainstream demand for modesty fashion was minimal, however, now, “[it] is being embraced by millions of women who have no religious affiliations”. As modest fashion is continuously celebrating, many questioning and commentary criticise women promoting for this clothing forms. On this point, Lodi (2020: 188) expresses that:

[M]any critics of the modest fashion movement object to modelling displaying fashion on female figures, posting public images on social media and sharing images of makeup-laden faces. The whole point of the concepts of haya, tziunit and modesty is to encourage a sense of humility, as well as privacy between the genders, and this, they believe, conflicts with the inherent purposes of modelling, blogging and social media, which encourage the worldwide circulation of images.

The research presenting modest fashion and women provides detailed accounts of fashion events and online practices associated with the modest dress or Islamic fashion that Muslim women promote. Even Lodi (2020) shared her thoughts on non-religious women interested in modest styling, yet there still needs more in-depth research to track the current stage of modest fashion in which these Muslim women narrate their experiences and challenges about being a part of the fashion industry, especially with modest fashion rapidly shifting from a niche to a

mainstream market. Moreover, corporate industries are now more inclusive of modest clothing lines. The issue with that is how the corporate dominates any markets that started small and more of a D.I.Y including hijab tutorials and layering to make profits. A more complex role of the corporate mirrors Adorno's argument (2001: 99) that 'culture industry' controls the construct of art and what Storey (2018: 193) says about how this dominance is not only about mass consumption but also about producing images and discourse with a powerful effect on the masses.

These scholarships present detailed literature on modest fashion and the experiences of women from religious and secular perspectives, however, modest fashion continues to grow and as fashion is the fast change (Simmel, 1957), there is a gap in these studies in which the Muslim female stakeholders' experiences require an in-depth examination and voicing as their roles are no longer just reviewers or minor participations in modest fashion companies, their roles shifted into professional careers under the adoption of modest fashion as their symbolic feature in digital platforms that are becoming more of markets than exclusively socially interactive where they have secured outstanding roles such as supermodels for high-end brands and entrepreneurs displaying their niche brand of modest wear in well-known shopping centres and global fashion weeks. All these angles are gaps in the existing literature on modest fashion and Muslim women's experiences. Thereby, this PhD will be an extension of the modest fashion scholarship.

### **1.2.5. Modest Fashion in Turkey**

In this section, I revisit existing research studying modest fashion in Turkey and review the literature on its recent developments. The literature will locate the gap that this PhD covers concerning areas that have been the focus of a small but growing literature.

The academic literature across the social sciences examined the political motives leading to the growth of modest fashion in Turkey, such as Elizabeth Bucar's (2017). Through an ethnographic study, Bucar (2017) observed the diverse modest clothing styles that progressively developed in Istanbul via the *Tesettür* industry and conveyed an account of political events impacting modest fashion. Bucar (2017: 126) reported that by electing Atatürk the president of Turkey, a new ideology of Kemalism developed leading to embracing the Western trends and rejecting the headscarf. During his republic presidency, Turkish women begin to adopt modest dress by "wearing high collars and long sleeves and skirts" for

“professionalism” only (Bucar, 2017: 127). Following the death of Atatürk, the 1980s witnessed bans on the headscarf by the secular military and in universities which were intertwined with the emergence of *tesettür*, a new form of fashionable Islamic dress (Bucar, 2017: 128).

According to Gökarikse and Secor (2010, 118), “[tesettür]is used in Turkish to signify a set of Islamic practices wherein women cover their heads and bodies and avoid contact with unrelated men”. While women in Turkey view tesettür from the holy Quran perspective as “an ideal of women’s modest dress”, companies, such as Tekbir, perceive the term as simply fashion. Prior to Bucar’s research in 2017, Gökarikse and Secor (2010:120-121) reasserted in their research the significant role of Turkey’s secularism since 1923 while Muslims by that time marked the majority of the country. In the 1980s, the economic re-constructions and political ‘repression’ of Islamists happening in Turkey led to the emergence of “Islamic bourgeoisie”, a new class whose taste and style different compared to the Turkish elite rising during the Ataturk regime (Gökarikse and Secor, 2010; Kuris, 2021; Lewis, 2015). According to Gökarikse and Secor (2010: 122), this period of political, economic, and cultural shifts resulted in an “urban and modern style of covering” wherein tesettür was characterized by the boxy coats and muted colours. With politically-oriented events taking place in Turkey, the proliferation of tesettür continued heading towards more colourful palettes and diverse styles with the rise of brands, such as Tekbir and Armine who focused on “glossy catalogues, advertisements, and even fashion shows that send professional models down the runway wearing not only everyday wear but also the impossible concoctions of haute couture” (Gökarikse and Secor (2010: 122).

After the recognizable growth of the tesettür fashion style, there was a development of the Islamic fashion industry in the 1990s which further grew since the 2000s (Kılıçbay and Binark 2002; Navaro-Yashin 2002, Bucar, 2017; Kuris, 2021). Within this context, recent studies in the literature show the changes in the modest fashion field in contemporary Turkey, such as Kütük-Kuriş (2021), who ethnographically explored Muslim fashionistas in contemporary Turkey. Kuris (2021:396) stated that the Islamic industry in Turkey was first dominated by businessmen, then in 2010, things changes as “a new generation of young, bourgeois, fashion-conscious Muslim women” challenged these brands. This new generation was named by Kuris (2021:396) as Muslim fashionistas who became “the new trendsetters”. What characterized these Muslim fashionistas is the diversity of their roles and the trustworthiness of their profile that urban Turkish women pursue for advice on various subjects (Kuris, 2021: 397). These women are the brand owners, designers, fashion advisers, and bloggers.

Throughout the rise of Muslim fashionistas in Turkey, many changes concerning faith and fashion took place as new styles of Islamic modest clothing appeared. These shifts attracted the viewpoint of Muslim intellectuals who criticized the fresh forms affecting the faith-based modesty of Muslim women (Lewis, 2010; Kuris, 2021). As Lewis (2015: 317) points out how the visibility of Muslim women and their involvement in the market has been identified by seculars as defiant to the system of the Turkish Republic and inappropriate to the Islamists' religiousness. Lewis (2015: 297) stated that:

In 2008 a test case by theologians from Ankara University accused tesettur clothing company Tekbir (literally, "God is great"; see chapter 2) of accruing "income by capitalizing on religious convictions and initiating unfair competition by applying a sacred name to a brand name": the case was not concerned with the modesty of the clothes, but with the "predatory association" by which the company attempted to assume a "monopoly over the meaning of religious symbols

Lewis' (2015) example of Tekbir shows the credibility of the challenges that modest Islamic fashion brands had to face while innovatively growing their companies in Turkey. Tesettur companies amidst these controversies on what is moral and ethical were growing their branding tools, i.e. catalogues, to expand their reach to female customers in Turkey and abroad (Lewis, 2015: 85). As a response to those challenges, Lewis (2015: 318) showed that the innovations in the new forms of modest fashion created by young women as part of the "mainstream consumer fashion culture" affirm their membership to the "modern society" of Turkey.

According to Alimen and Kuris (2020: 136), modest fashion in Turkey emerged in 1990 and was led by 'male Muslim entrepreneurs' before 'female Muslim entrepreneurs' took over in 2010 to make their self-made brands (Lewis, 2015; Kuris, 2021). After 2010, there were radical changes in the field of the modest fashion industry in Turkey. Growing companies online, such as *Modanisa* and *Sefamerve*, took the lead as the main modest fashion retailers in Turkey with the launch of modest fashion weeks in 2016 that was organized by the global industry Modanisa (Alimen and Kuris (2020: 137). Within this context, Lodi (2020) shared how modest fashion weeks began in Turkey. She stated that Franka Soeria and Ozlem Sahin were the first entrepreneurs to conceptualize 'Modest Fashion Week' which they released in Istanbul, Turkey (Lodi, 2020: 45).

These studies show how Turkey has a long-lasting history with modest fashion and its evolution into a global industry from the same country. Another important point from this literature is that female entrepreneurs progressively took roles in the leadership of the modest fashion industry that was growing in Turkey and the rest of the modest fashion capitals (London, Jakarta, Dubai). Under the same umbrella, Lodi (2020: 47) noted that the runways in these organized modest fashion weeks are characterized by their resemblance to “major international shows”. The similarities are associated with the fashionable appearances that brands showcase on the runways, however; modesty is key in making it particular compared to the mainstream events.

Supporting Alimen, Kuris, and Lodi’s statements on Turkey as the leading country of the modest fashion industry, Lewis (2015: 4) argued that Turkey was the main location for the “commercial development of Islamic fashion from 1980s” long before modest fashion weeks began. Indeed, the fashion shows began in 1992 when Tekbir, the tesettür brand, hosted its first runway (Gökarikse and Secor, 2010: 119). Since then, fashion shows were seen as indispensable marketing tools for modest fashion wear. According to Bardakcı, Wood, and Kadirov (2021: 44), the first modest fashion week hosted in Istanbul in 2016 contributed to the financial growth of Modanisa, the host of this international event, after bringing together brands, designers, and models involved in promoting and making modest wear. The Istanbul modest fashion week was the leading event pushing modest fashion to be further recognized as a global style by organizing more catwalk shows in various Muslim-majority geographies, such as London, Dubai, and Jakarta, wherein international investors contributed to Modanisa as it was becoming a digital global platform of modest fashion” (Bardakcı, Wood, and Kadirov, 2021; Lodi, 2020). Despite the important discussions and questions that modest fashion weeks bring to fashion studies and the social sciences with its proliferation in the past five years in Istanbul in 2016, London 2017, Dubai 2017 and Istanbul 2019, research has been very limited within this area where Muslim women are key figures (Lewis, 2015; Kuris, 2021; Lodi, 2020).

When reviewing further studies on modest fashion in Turkey, the Islamic style and headscarves are key in the existing debates as modesty is a long-lasting dress code in Turkish Muslim women’s dress culture. Rustem Ertug Altinay (2013) explored the urban Islamic fashion in Turkey by voicing the roles that Sule Yuksel Senler performed during the twentieth century that helped spread the Turkish style ‘Sulebas’. Altinay (2013: 108) demonstrates how during that period, the Turkish style women adopted was identified by “overcoats, jackets, long-

sleeved dresses, trousers, and skirts of various lengths”. Altinay (2013: 108) argued that a new style of covering appeared in Turkey in 1980, namely, ‘tesettur’.

In addition to the Turkish fashion styles, ‘Sulebas’ and ‘Tesettur’, Curtis (2013: 149) argues that modest attires are also for women who do not wear headscarves in Turkey. Curtis (2013) stated that one of the Turkish women in the interfaith activities defined modesty as ‘feeling secure’. By that, she refers to balancing between covering her body with long attire and a ‘short-sleeved T-shirt’ (Curtis, 2013: 149). Modesty in Turkey is associated with veiling fashion, but it was also explored that is for women who wear no headscarves, yet have their own conception of modesty, as noted by Maria Curtis (2013). Curtis dictated (2013: 150) that a category of Turkish women define their modesty through their ‘personality’ by adding to their wardrobes clothing that is ‘looser fit’, “darker colours and longer tuniks and jackets” without having to wear the headscarf.

Moving towards further studies on modest fashion in Turkey, Kuris (2020) explored the famous shopping centre in Istanbul, Zeruj Port, which consists of modest fashion brands.

This section showed that modest fashion in Turkey is diverse due to the political events that the country has undergone and women’s attempts to adopt modesty in their daily activities for various aims. Although modest fashion in Turkey has been explored via numerous contexts and through the analysis of various styling and motives, the efforts to examine the globality of modest fashion in Turkey via fashion weeks are still narrow.

#### **1.2.6. Modest Fashion Online: bloggers**

To enhance the understanding of contemporary debates on modest fashion and women’s role in its online marketing context, it can be helpful to draw upon academic parallels regarding blogging and branding modest wear online by Muslim women (Lewis, 2013, 2015; Lodi, 2020). This literature review is important because it reflects continuity and change in values and practices towards Muslim women’s ‘fashionability’ and religiousness for modest covering which are shaped by their choices and efforts towards surpassing the repressed of promoters in the fashion industry (Lewis, 2015: 77).

A growing body of literature presented through the study of Lewis (2013; 2015) on modest fashion blogging investigated Muslim females’ roles in promoting modest wear and brand



reviewing. From Lewis' (2015) photographic field extracts and interviews with bloggers, blogging appeared to be concerned with digitising the self the online to write about fashion and lifestyle and other roles including promoting and reviewing products for readers. According to Lewis (2015: 253), "the end of 2000s saw an increase in modest blogs of all sorts along with the expansion of designers and entrepreneurs entering the modest market". However, the modest fashion bloggers were facing various challenges when doing promotions for companies in which they "face generic issues about autonomy and impartiality" (Lewis, 2015: 255) and also digital 'backlash' and criticism for their modesty.

Modest fashion blogging was constructed through bloggers' collaboration online and cross-promotions sharing the conception of modesty fashion and this contributed to highlighting modesty as "a recognisable sphere of activity" and attracted the interests of active brands on social media (Lewis, 2015: 257). In addition to collaborating in growing digital modesty, promoting modesty online, Lewis (2015: 257) states that "women mix discussions of styles and textiles with debates about multiple modesty codes, the regulation of female sexuality, and women's role within conventional and "alternative" religions". With the visuality becoming central to social media development and enhancements, Muslim bloggers "adopted and adapted the visual language of the secular fashion industry" (Lewis, 2015: 259) which also meant the growth of modest fashion online and through diverse forms of promotional activities and roles. Blogging about modesty in the last ten years involved in a more visual aspect of blog creation and less on writing and readers are now followers and the visuals are a part of 'personal style blogs' (Rocamora, 2011; Lewis, 2015).

Even though modest fashion increased with women of faith blogging and promotional activities and advising stylist roles, these young females receive an abundant amount of hurtful criticism from inside their community. In this context of modest blogger's challenges, Lewis (2015: 267) argues that "[t]hese commenters do not patrol mainstream media to police female modesty: the modest fashion field is their chosen battleground". Lewis (2015: 267) further compares the act of criticism executed on digital platforms to bullying and misogynistic acts put against famous individuals on the news to modest fashion and concluded that this contributed to the expansion of the modish style movement as the community that challenged them once offline is now following them online. The literature on modesty fashion online contributed to the roles of fashion designers and entrepreneurs as well in accelerating the growth of modest wear through digital platforms.

In recent modest fashion accounts, Hafsa Lodi (2020) as a journalist introduced her book 'Modesty: a fashion paradox' as more of a detailed guidebook of modest fashion. She narrates

precisely how modesty fashion became mainstream and mainly questions if modest fashion is a contradiction or not. Lodi (2020: 7) expressed that mainstream demand for modesty fashion was minimal, however, now, “[it] is being embraced by millions of women who have no religious affiliations”. As modest fashion is continuously celebrated, many questions and commentary criticise women promoting clothing forms. On this point, Lodi (2020: 188) expresses that:

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The research presenting modest fashion and women provides detailed accounts of fashion events and online practices associated with the modest dress or Islamic fashion that Muslim women promote. Even Lodi (2020) shared her thoughts on non-religious women interested in the modest styling. There still needs more in-depth research to track the current stage of modest fashion in which these Muslim women narrate their experiences and challenges about being a part of the fashion industry, especially with modest fashion rapidly shifting from a niche to a mainstream market. Moreover, corporate industries are now more inclusive of modest clothing lines. The issue with that is how the corporate dominates any markets that started small and more of a D.I.Y including hijab tutorials and layering to make profits. A more complex role of the corporate mirrors Adorno’s argument (2001: 99) that ‘culture industry’ controls the construct of art and what Storey (2018: 193) says about how this dominance is not only about mass consumption but also producing images and discourse with a powerful effect on the masses.

My thesis extends to Lewis’ (2015) accounts of women’s participation in commercial and promotional activity of fashion in the mainstream, however, my focus slightly shifts from Lewis’ discussion contextualized in the religious aspect. Expanding on Lewis’ (2015) critical work on the ‘new forms of religious interpretation’ in relation to the increase of fashion online, my own research adds exploration of a digital medium becoming a fully marketing platform whilst considering blogging as officially a professional paid career for Muslim women in which

their religiosity concerns are currently experienced in the corporates. While Lewis (2015) in *Modesty Online* looks at British Muslim entrepreneurs of the South Asian diaspora generation and bloggers using the social media marketing settings and strategies of that period, my thesis' female participants from the online are diverse female stakeholders who are Muslim women with various backgrounds in social, cultural, and fashion experiences to generate a universal understanding of the changes in their professionalism as women who were considered once as unfashionable (Lewis, 2015; Lodi, 2020)

### **1.2.7. Muslim/ Islamic fashion**

This section of the chapter will offer a concise historical social and cultural account of Muslim women's fashion using a critical selection of literature from the political events in Turkey, Europe, and North America through to depictions of Muslim fashion and Islamic fashion to illuminate contemporary accounts of modest fashion development into an industry and the shift in Muslim women's role that informs this thesis.

The literature on Muslim women's clothing practices is conceptualized as 'Muslim fashion' (Lewis, 2015) and 'Islamic fashion' (Tarlo and Moors, 2013) in which the scholars explore the visible. These studies and debates have expanded with political-cultural concerns that Muslim women endured for their dress practices such as head covering. The anthropologists Tarlo and Moors (2013) conceptualized the visibly Islamic dress of Muslim women in Europe and North America as *Islamic Fashion* and in exploring the sartorial practices and representations, the scholars suggested an exploration of the opposing acts of Islamic fashion namely anti-fashion. The chapters on Islamic fashion and anti-fashion explore the tensions of ambivalent perceptions of the modesty of the covered dress, especially with Muslim women's fashion proliferation in America and Europe. Tarlo and Moors (2013: 7) provide an example of modesty expectations and requirements saying that modesty has "be respected in terms of degrees of covering but choices of colours, styles, makeup and accessories may result in highly conspicuous and eye-catching ensembles that some Muslims would consider immodest".

Muslim fashion as a concept is an anthropological study developed by Lewis (2015) through the investigation of a faith-based fashion industry celebrated, promoted, and commodified by women with roles of writing blogs about modesty and style and designers with religious knowledge covering. In this context of modesty, Lewis (2015) presented detailed accounts of

the rise of a fashion capital namely tesseur industry in Turkey through covered women's resistance of a secular political system. Despite the economic prosperity of tesseur industry and the diverse brands such as Tekbir and ... joining the modest fashion companies, Lewis (2015: 238) argues that "[the] most leading brands are male-dominated family businesses with some female participation, many of the British and North American Muslim brands that have sprung up in the last fifteen to twenty years are run by young women".

In Turkish historical events of women and covered dressing, the education of visibly Muslim women and their careers were challenged by the political regulations and were deprived of wearing the headcover (Lewis, 2015: 72: 73). Lewis (2015: 72) states that "in response to the increased visibility of young, veiled women, bans on headscarves in schools and colleges were enforced with unprecedented stringency (causing many to withdraw from education) and while religious education became part of the school curriculum it was subject to state regulation". Therefore, the tesseur industry political incidents and shifts in relation to veiling regulations and constructed what Lewis (2015: 76) refer to as "softer tesseur" which conveys the meaning of "Islamist" look and what appears as more fashionable than the 'longer coats'. With the tesseur industry producing a variety of styles for women with covered dressing, there is a change in the conventional "Islamist" clothing, but this 'new' fashion allowed visibly veiled women in Turkey to practice their social everyday activities and facilitated access to educational spaces. And here, both White (2002) and Lewis (2015: 77) agreed on how having access to a fashion industry that offered Turkish women an 'elite status' may have concealed their religiousness for the sake of "social advancement.

In exploring Muslim fashion's early promoters, Lewis (2015) refers to modest fashion and opened discussions on Muslim women's role from a cultural, political, and religious perspective and in an offline and online space. Lewis (2015: 284) argues that modest fashion bloggers negotiate sartorial practices online in a way that created a religious role of 'interpreters' and 'intermediators'.

Having reviewed the literature on Muslim fashion, Tarlo and Moors (2013) contributed to modest fashion studies by examining what they conceptualized as Islamic fashion along with scholars exploring various angles of Islamic dress in North America and Europe and how it is accepted and promoted as a fashion and rejected by critics under the category of it being anti-fashion. Tarlo and Moors (2013: 7) argue that "[w]hilst some embrace an ever-increasing array of fashionable options and encourage maximum engagement and experimentation with fashion, others are wary that aesthetic and ephemeral concerns may override ethical considerations,

divert attention to trivial concerns or detract from what they see as the primary purpose of covering”.

In this vein, I assert that this PhD extends to Tarlo and Moors’ (2013) and Lewis’ (2015) with a focus on the discourse of the concept of modesty and fashion explored with regard to Muslim fashion and Islamic fashion and how it is associated to Muslim women’s experiences in various geographical places such as Turkey, Britain, and online which are significant to this thesis in contexts of dress culture and fashion. However, my research suggests that their arguments on commentary against Muslim women need further exploration and expansion as the information and communication technologies developed and became more focused on marketing and advertising rather than just social interactions. On the one hand, the social media platforms such as Instagram have currently grown into a marketing setting (D’Alessandro, 2018), and that made Muslim women’s space and sartorial practices go beyond the physical fashion industry. On the other hand, Muslim women are now stakeholders in the fashion industry owning a business, hired as models for mainstream brands, and creatives in fashion design and blogging and this is still narrow in terms of research on dress culture and Muslim women’s roles as fashion creators.

In voicing the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders promoting modest wear as part of Muslim/ Islamic fashion, Tarlo (2013) and Moors (2013) and Lewis (2015) contributed to thick knowledge. Lewis (2015: 238) investigated the commentary and commerce on modest wear by examining Muslim fashion online and how it was introduced in the UK by Muslim female designers and bloggers who were the “early adopters of the Internet for modest fashion”. In Turkey, business was at first led by men and women had minor roles (2015: 238). However, in Salim’s (2013) study, she conversed with Muslim females in Sweden to explore images of what Islamic fashion is through spatial, historical, and economic standpoints. Salim (2013: 223) argues that women in her research “take into consideration dominant imagery alleged to be modern”. She also adds that these Muslim women are constructing a dichotomy of what is modern and what is conventional when associating with images of fashion, and they describe their position in the contemporary fashion realm as ‘superior’ rejecting any form or style that represents their view of ‘far flung past’ (Salim, 2013: 222). A similar view is shared by D’Alessandro (2017: 62) who argued that ‘professional Muslim women’ promoting modest fashion “created not only a platform that suits their own faith-based needs but also a market for stylish modest fashion that serves the needs of a diversity of women”.

This study takes into account these relevant arguments on Muslim women's professional roles in promoting modesty as a fashion and into a global reach. It is also important to highlight that in this PhD, I use 'modest fashion' as an umbrella term for modest wear of faith-based and cultural practices related to modesty while borrowing a few key terms and theoretical concepts from the abovementioned studies which use Muslim fashion and Islamic fashion to demonstrate the capital and globality of the modest wear in which it is not limited to religious conceptions and references. Another significant point is the role of modest fashion bloggers in the last four years from 2019 to 2022 and their shift from simply reviewers and style advisors (Lewis, 2015) to professional content creators. There was not sufficient research on the 'professionalism' of blogging roles accomplished by Muslim women as part of the mainstream and corporates.

#### **1.2.8. Modest Fashion events and Catwalks**

Drawing on the previously mentioned literature of studies and debates theorizing modest fashion events and catwalk shows, this section will draw on those broader conceptions and specified notions and explorations of modest fashion studies to review the existing research of Lewis' (2015) and D'Alessandro and Lewis' (2018).

Lewis' accounts on modest fashion runways were developed in her works of 2015 and 2018 in which she shared the brands' views of modest fashion in Istanbul in the twentieth century and then the proliferation of modest designs globally through modest fashion weeks. Lewis (2015: 85) indicated that the Turkish brand Armine of modest wear considered catwalks as "unsuitable bodily display for covered women". Whereas another Turkish brand Tekbir supported the idea of catwalks and hosted a 'revolutionary' catwalk show in 1992; however, the brand received critics from secularists and people of religion (Lewis, 2015: 84). We can see through these two opposing views of modest fashion brands in the ninetens that despite the fact that Turkey was the capital of the growing modest fashion industry, showcasing the fashion products through women's bodies in a space with an audience was considered unacceptable. This is due to the religious conception of modesty and the secular system attempting to control women's sexuality (D'Alessandro, 2018). With brands such as Tekbir stepping up, challenging the critics, and adopting global strategies of promoting their brands through catwalk shows, in the twenty-first century, modest fashion began to develop further towards a global clientele and towards a more industrialised realm. Lewis (2018: 21) supports such an argument by pointing

out how “a specialist fashion-industry infrastructure has grown globally; now Muslim designers of modest wear have opportunities to show their work at the proliferating number of modest fashion weeks and fairs around the world”. This includes Muslim female creatives collaborating with brands to design new styles with “global fashion brands from luxury to high street who have woken up to the Islamic calendar” (Lewis, 2018: 21).

A more relevant study for my PhD is Lewis and D’Alessandro’s (2018) *Contemporary Muslim Fashion* which covered the modest fashion styles, practices, and events. D’Alessandro (2017: 57) explored the existing Muslim modest fashion styles and how they were becoming global, and on this account, fashion events were cognizant of contributing to globalizing modesty as a fashion to break down the labels and stereotypes associated with Muslim women and Islam. With modest fashions taking a stand in mainstream runways and fashion weeks organized for particularly modest wear lines, “New York Times chief fashion critic Vanessa Friedman recognizes the strategy behind using these fashion events as a political tool that has the potential “to reshape the cultural narrative,” offering “a potential shortcut to global recognition” (D’Alessandro, 2018: 57).

D’Alessandro’s comments on the current modest fashion styles exhibited in events for political representation of Muslim women appear to be relevant to my study and it is relevant to my findings where female stakeholders express their brand ethos through background music, and political signposts, and numerous other political scenes. However, since 2017, modest fashion has expanded into diverse and various events, in multi-sites the offline and the online, and for extended aims of branding modesty as a style which is explored in this PhD by investigating the spaces of the female stakeholders promoting for modest fashion styles through varied roles. I contend with D’Alessandro’s arguments on how fashion events carried modest fashion into a global market as it is existent through the empirical chapters’ process that investigated the modest fashion shows and exhibitions from 2018 to 2022. This area of study remains very narrow and requires an in-depth investigation of what type of events are taking place to promote modest fashion and what happens within these spaces in relation to commercial aspects and Muslim women’s representation and roles and a more specific focus on models’ bodily practices and portrayal in runways.

### **1.3. Reviewing Muslim Women's covering practices: the context of veiling in history, religion, and fashion**

In this section, I will discuss the existing literature on veiling practice in the context of Muslim women in the UK and Turkey. Veiling practices are more complex when used in liberation and legislation context in relation to history and what women had to endure in relation to the control, they experience which limits their sartorial choices in the workplace or their everyday life. And when considering the veiling practice in this research, I refer to the case of Muslim female dress and the politics that follow this sartorial practice. Researchers in modest fashion and Muslim/Islamic fashion, such as Lewis (2013, 2015), Tarlo and Moors (2013), and Bullock (2017) investigated various angles of the veil as a body covering practice and the experience of Muslim women. These scholars discuss concepts of female revivalists.

For many years, visibly Muslim women in western countries and in Turkey were identified as unfashionable by politicians and political parties such as in Turkey and faced legal legislation banning the veil like the French laws and this was displayed in the diverse media sources and channels. However, these women would resist such efforts that challenge their veiling practices and thus their everyday life practices. In this respect, Lewis (2015: 204) notes that “if early French attempts to ban the hijab were uniformly pilloried in Britain (introduction), by mid-2000s this was changing with challenges to accepted UK veiling practices by young women revivalists who tested the sartorial limits of multiculturalism, beginning with the case of Shabina begum”.

In locating the similarities with my study, the young hijabi women in Britain making their way to the fashion industry through their individual and community efforts to become designers, models, and brand owners is challenged by stereotypes and commentary on social media platforms when sharing promotional photos. Therefore, the struggles of Muslim women continue to exist and extend to online platforms and in their communities.

#### **1.3.3. Debate and Studies on Veiling**

In this section, I present different conceptions and locate the relevant interpretation which represents what women wear as ‘a veil’ in this research through various conceptions. The listing of related terms to the veil set the foundation for what is explored within the community of young women promoting modest fashion. Therefore, a contextualized account in historical and



religious discourse is reviewed while referring to cultural and social indications in both subsections. But I will first introduce prominent arguments on why the terminology of the veil varies.

### 1.3.3.1. Veiling: studies on the veil and hijab

Anthropological studies reviewing the meaning of veil and hijab varied through history, cultural studies, and religious context. I will elicit the various explorations of these terms through three pioneering researchers including: El-Guindi (1999), Fatima Mernissi (1991), and Katherine Bullock (2007).

El-Guindi (1999) explored the various concepts referring to the veil in different geographies and for several occasions and across genders and it was about all forms of covering the body, the head, and the face in a social space. In illustrating forms of the veil, El-Guindi (1999: 104) revealed that there were black muslin face veils called *al-qina*<sup>8</sup> worn only by Egyptian ‘women of high rank’ because of their high price tags, not any woman can afford it. Adding more examples, El-Guindi (1999: 99) indicated that Yemeni married women wore veils in their homes when having visitors and outdoors they covered with *sitara* and *sharshaf*. Men were more known for head covering which was famous in Arab countries known as ‘turban’ or ‘*imama* and was mostly embraced by contemporary Rashidi men in the 1920s and commonly come in black or white (El-Guindi, 1999: 106). These veils were for concealing their bodies from ‘the gaze of the public’ (El-Guindi, 1999: 102). From El-Guindi’s ethnographic descriptions and historical accounts, we deduce that veils are for both genders and are used in various forms of covering and for several social situations. From reviewing El-Guindi’s (1999: 97) chapter, we explore that the veil has a feature of having “dynamic flexibility, which allows for spontaneous manipulation and instant changing of form” which is a main property in this PhD as the Muslim female stakeholders adopt various forms of veiling and covering according to the modest fashion spaces and their social situations. The veiling forms will also contribute to the expansion of modest fashion as a dress culture.

As for Fatma Mernissi’s (1991) research *The Veil and the Male Elite: a feminist interpretation of women’s rights in Islam*, the definition of the veil is viewed from one concept compared to El-Guindi’s (1999) broad conceptualization and varied angles and historical and

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<sup>8</sup> Al-qina’: a word in Arabic referring to a face mask.

religious references. Mernissi (1991: 85) defined the hijab as ‘the descent of a cloth’ and ‘a material object’ while supporting her argument with the books of ‘fiqh’<sup>9</sup> and verses from the Quran. Mernissi (1991: 87) examines the interpretation of one of the fuqaha (from the books of fiqh) Al-Tabari who identified hijab as ‘sitr’ which literal meaning is ‘curtain’ in which the establishment of the concept hijab came from an incident of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who had a revelation from God to separate between his private space and where the guests were sitting inside his house as he was ‘public man’ and known for his politeness and therefore this curtain was the only solution then. And this is what Mernissi (1991) meant by when identifying hijab as cloth and that is the separating ‘curtain’. The definition of hijab shared by Mernissi (1991) is important to this study as it showed how the concept of veil or hijab can have multiple connotations through diverse context and timelines. Mernissi (1991) investigates a different approach of studying hijab, but it remains a limited view to the concept ‘cloth’ which makes it a simple concept though its meaning is more complex more particularly in the contemporary era where it became political and gradually economic as it will show through the process of the empirical chapters.

In criticizing Mernissi’s (1991) definition of hijab, Johnson (2017: 13) argued that Mernissi (1991) “dismisses the headscarf as ‘just a cloth’ when it is used interchangeably with hijab, [she] push[es] for a more complex understanding of headscarves as a part of one’s negotiation of different spaces”. Johnson (2017: 13) added that “[...] it is not just hijab that illustrates the way different spaces are negotiated” as Muslim women use a varied styling of headscarves in diverse spaces. This PhD agrees with Johnson’s (2017) argument on exploring the complex understanding of head covering as individuals negotiate a variety of spaces and in this thesis Muslim women in modest spaces experience challenges in the fashion industry and face the critics on their modesty dress codes by women from their community and online because of their headcovering and its attributes as part of their modest dress practices and not directly to the headscarf. This will lead to the politics of body representation of Muslim women which are about how the industries and other women construct an understanding of headscarves in relation to the visibility of the body in public spaces. These experiences that Muslim women endure will lead to either taking a stand for preserving their choices and developing agentive acts in relation to their body representation with regards to their hijab and personal definition of modesty or avoiding negotiating such challenges and commentary. Because of the role Muslim female stakeholders may have in modest fashion spaces, this PhD sees Johnson’s (2017)

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<sup>9</sup>Fiqh: The collective sources of Muslim jurisprudence and the science behind the Sharia’ (Islamic Law).

argument as highly significant, and hijab as more than just a 'cloth' but a political tool for weaving spaces for agency and voices.

Katherine Bullock, who is a convert to Islam, during her PhD Journey started studying the politics of the veil. She avows that her thoughts about the veil were related to Muslim women covering and she says that "like many westerners, I believed that Islam oppressed women and that the veil was a symbol of their oppression" (Bullock, 2007: xxiii). Her aim behind her research is to "break the equation: 'modernity equals unveil'" (bullock, 2007: xxxi). Constructing an idea about how the veil comes from a traditionalist background for Bullock (2007: xxxi) is opposed by the fact that veiling increased with European colonialism of the middle east (1830- 1956). Bullock avoids using the term veil in her writings. According to her argument, she believes that the words veil is a cliché and creates the wrong idea that Muslim women have a single type of 'veil' to wear.

For Bullock (2007: LI), hijab is a concept for covering, headscarf for covering all body but face and hands and this could correspond to hijab in a prevalent Muslim context, niqab indicates the veil covering of the face or pinned to the headscarves. A term that is reappearing continuously when speaking of veil, hijab, or headscarf is covering. The equivalent term for covering in Arabic is '*satr*' which "refers to the veil, curtain and sanctity" (El- Guindi, 1999: 88). El- Guindi (1999: 88) asserts that the dictionary meaning for the word covering in Arabic equals '*hijab, khimar, tarhah, burqu, litham, ghita*' and they all symbolize a dress to cover the body including the head or the face.

From this review of literature, it is seen that the conceptions referring to veil and hijab diversified from various terminologies in relation to body covering according to its function in concealing certain body parts, and in relation to the materiality that Mernissi (1991) dictated in her study. The empirical chapters will employ the various conceptions of head and face covering from El- Guindi's (1999) research according to their relevance to the sartorial practices explored in modest fashion spaces because each concept may refer to the religious, cultural, social, and political use of the veil. And the chapters will also adopt Johnson's argument on how the hijab is a complex term and differs according to the spaces that Muslim women negotiate. In the following section, I will further elaborate on how the veil is viewed from a distinct angle which is historical.

### 1.3.3.2. Historical Snapshots of Veiling

In this subsection, historical accounts researchers made on the veil and how it marked the movements of women challenging a political system. The reviews include events related to the veil that women wore reluctantly or by choice. Putting in mind that the veil has no definite definition. It could be, for example, a head or facing covering or other concepts like hijab. The terminology of the veil is dependent on the context or the term used by women. What matters in this section is the focus which is the dress of women and other factors affecting the changes in its code.

Dress in Egypt revolutionized a movement for women with a particular focus on the Islamic veil. Endless labels are referred to women according to their style of dress. El-Guindi (1999: 58) gave an example about college women who were extremely covered and argues that the degree of covering has a role in developing knowledge in Islamic discourses and “the scale of leadership”. It is important to mention that by the nineteenth century, Egyptian women started presenting their writing orally or published in the mainstream press (El-Guindi, 1999: 60). Discourses rose about women issues and liberation surrounding the veil. Not only women, but men as well had words to dictate. An intense debate about the veils developed in a feminist account by men and women in Egypt which became later embedded in a feminist approach.

El-Guindi (1999) depicted the Islamic activism in Egypt which involved the veil. The onset of political feminism in relation to the veil is marked when Huda Sh’rawi unveiled in 1923 after coming back from a feminist meeting (El-Guindi, 1999:64). However, the veil that is mentioned here is not the hijab that covers the head but the veil covering the face. The state deemed the occurrence as a threat and began to impose regulations with an emphasis on veiling (El-Guindi, 1999: 54).

Egyptian history is filled with stories about women and the veil. There is a considerable amount of literature about practicing the veil or unveiling in Egypt. Magazines and journals which belong to the press represented women facing struggles on a ‘social and domestic’ side (Baron, 1989: 371). “As early as the 1870s and 1880s, before Egyptian organized feminism developed, Egyptian women were publishing their writings and were engaged in public speaking” (El-Guindi, 1999: 60). As fashion styles changed, and marketing rose in new ways in Egypt, Muslim women adopted a peculiar dress which is different from the ‘traditional’. As a result, of these shifts, society criticised women integrated into the sartorial change and men for accepting the situation (Baron, 1989: 374). Baron (1989: 375) narrated that as new styles

appeared, other garments disappeared such as the veil, and social activities for female gender in society reversed. “As women’s mobility and integration into public space increased, the function of the veil as a barrier to social and sexual contact between men and women was challenged” (Baron, 1989: 378). Though women’s covering their faces with the veil, they were still receiving physical and verbal abuse from men in Egypt in the street because they chose to go outside by themselves to spend their daily activities.

History is filled with events about women veiling and unveiling. There are various reasons for these acts of covering or giving up the veil. As discussed before, veils carry different styles of covering and not just the head. In Egypt, the veil was used to cover the face whereas in Algeria was a headscarf or a ‘Haik’ (a piece of cloth that covers all the body and put over the head). But with time, the veil in Egypt created a dispute between two poles, ‘traditionalists’ and ‘modernists’. “It signalled modesty and honor for traditionalist and backwardness for the nation to modernist” (Baron, 1989: 370). Magazines for Egyptian women targeted the styles that were brought by fashion, and they were labelled to ‘western fashions’. “From the late nineteenth century, women had begun to express their views on veiling in growing numbers, creating lively debate” (Baron, 1989: 383). Baron (1989: 382) wrote that Christian and Jewish women unveiled their faces before Muslim ladies and this created transformations in traditional features of fashion and ‘seclusion among elites’. Afterwards, these modifications in fashion styles may resulted in voicing identities for women.

Bullock (2007: 87) indicates that in Algeria, the recurrence of veiling witnessed “the most dramatic re-covering phenomena of the twentieth century”. The veil became a symbol of rebellion and a liberating item. The headcovering which is hijab was increasingly disappearing because it was targeted by the French colonialism (Bullock, 2007: 89). As a reaction, the Algerian women embraced the ‘haik’. Fanon (1965: 34-35) describes haik<sup>10</sup> as a large and square white veil that covers a women’s body and face. This form of Algerian veiling exceeded a fashion taste and defined a protest against colonialism as Bourdieu (1960: 25) elicits from his ethnographic fieldwork in Algeria on how the veil marked an increasing significance during the French colonialism in the early nineteenth century. He asserts that “For a couple of years, one can observe a strong tendency to abandon the veil among girls and young women, a tendency that has been weakened and recurrent since May 13 [1958] – wearing the veil has regained its significance as symbolic negation” (Bourdieu, 1960: 25)

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<sup>10</sup> Frantz Fanon, (1965) “Algeria Unveiled,” in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon, C. pp. 35-36.

In the same vein of viewing the veil as an item for rebellion, Fanon (1965: 62) narrates that “spontaneously and without being told, the Algerian women who had long since dropped the veil once again donned the haik, thus affirming that it was not true that women liberated herself at the invitation of France and of General de Gaulle”. Fanon (1965: 36-37) further adds how she was perceived by the observers as “she who hides behind a veil” and notes that this veil was a resilient ideology in fighting the French colonialism by protecting ‘the people’s originality’ through ‘Haik’. A similar point is made by Bourdieu (1960: 25) as he describes women wearing the veil (haik):

By wearing the veil, the Algerian woman creates a situation of non-reciprocity; she plays an unfair game by seeing without being seen, without allowing herself to be seen. As such, by means of the veil, the ruled society as a whole refuses to reciprocate by seeing, observing and penetrating without allowing itself to be seen, observed and penetrated.

That is to say, for Bourdieu, the veil is more than cloth, it is symbolic domination in which women’s bodies covered refers to a sense of power.

It is through this historical accounting of the role of the veil that we can argue that headcovering can be more than a sartorial item to cover the body, it also refers to a symbol of resistance and power. Both Egyptian and Algerian women embraced the veil as a resisting tool against a political system. Similarly, in this PhD, Muslim women in modest fashion spaces will be resisting the dominance of the industry or the backlash and commentary put against their modesty dress codes. However, the difference lies in the nature of the system which is in this research related to the beauty standards the industry appropriate and the social norms and commentary.

### **1.3.3.3.Veil in Religious Context**

In this subsection, each religion’s interpretation, and conceptualization of what is the veil and its relation to modesty will be discussed. The prescriptions from the holy books are transcribed by translators or interpreters who seek to offer an explanation. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have instructions for headcovering and modest clothing for both men and women. However,

there are still debates and confusion in many interpretations and few boundaries of covering are considered exaggerated or more culturally constructed than religiously.

In Judaism, women and men cover their heads and it is religiously termed 'tzenuit'. According to Saarmoosavi et al. (2016: 241), what is known as tzeniut for the Jewish is a religious command for both genders with distinct outlines though the main aim is to preserve women's 'sexual modesty in the society'. Furthermore, modesty for the practising Jews is at the centre of their religion. The 'ultra-Orthodox' Judaism, as Miller (2013: 120) asserts, bans their community from wearing denim and they consider it as 'immodest'.

In Christianity, Katakephale is the headcovering and it is mentioned in the bible as the holy book addresses women's veiling:

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. ...Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?<sup>11</sup>

However, Saarmoosavi et al. (2016: 245) argue that Paul's 1 Corinthians receives questioning for its 'complexity' by traditional and modern interpreters. They realized from recent research on Christian women headcovering that they should devote to veiling at least during prayers and when being in the church. In addition to that, "in Christianity the head covering is considered as a divine order and a symbol of submission to God's government, especially during times of public worship" (Saarmoosavi, 2016: 250).

In Islam, the term hijab is deliberately used in to refer to different head covering and modest dress. El-Guindi (1999: 135) argues that in the holy book of Islam, women are required to dress modestly:

In the Qur'an (considered the primary and divinely revealed source), but mostly according to the Hadith (a worldly source), evidence suggests that the Prophet Muhammad had paid much attention to a dress code for Muslims in the emerging community, with a specific focus on Muslim men's clothing and bodily modesty during prayer (al-Hajj 1960; al-Bukhari 1996). By comparison, reference to women's body cover is negligible.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 11: 6,13.

Furthermore, the Islamic dress takes various terms when referred to by women. The main notions are Jilbab, Khimar, and Hijab. The word ‘jilbab’ is highlighted in surat Al-Ahzab in the Holy Quran:

O Prophet! Say to your wives and daughters and the believing women that they draw their *jilbab* (outer garments) close to them; so it is more proper that they may be known and not hurt.<sup>12</sup>

An additional reference to the Islamic dress is through the term ‘khumur’ in surat Al-Nur:

Say to the believing women that they cast down their glance and guard their private parts and reveal not their adornment except such as is outward and let them cast their veils (khumur) over their bosoms.<sup>13</sup>

In the Qur’anic verse, God addresses women to throw the veil around their collar and this means that they are already covered by ‘khumur’.

The common term referring to the Islamic dress today is hijab as stated by Saarmoosavi (2016:259), “Today, the term hijab is mostly used in West and specifically in media to express the concept of headdress or scarf-like and sometimes overall clothing of Muslim women”.

While the aforementioned terminologies involve religious integrity in the meaning of the veil, this PhD explores women’s veil using the term ‘hijab’, ‘veil’, and a nuanced reference to ‘turban’ as a part of data, to refer and also investigate religious and fashionable sartorial practices.

#### **1.4. Conclusion**

This chapter focused on three main sections: the first part addressed studies theorizing fashion within the context of sociology, cultural studies, and history from a western perspective; the second part focused on modest fashion and Muslim women’s roles in the cultural, historical, political, religious, and social context of geographical settings of Turkey, Britain, North

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Ahzab 33:59

<sup>13</sup> Al-Nur 24:31.



America, and online; and the last part reviewed the research of Muslim women and veiling practices in anthropological studies, religious debates, historical accounts, and fashion studies. The literature focusing on fashion studies and debates involved various themes and concepts of cultural and theoretical approaches including social difference, change, dress, adornment, lifestyle, catwalk shows, and sartorial practices, my research adopts such theoretical concepts to critically explore and evaluate the modest fashion industry through the fashion events. By revisiting the academic discussions of modest fashion in diverse geographical settings and with a variety of dress codes and political policies, this thesis addresses the role of Muslim women as stakeholders and their experiences in mainstream fashion. And through reviewing the studies on veiling and Muslim women, I explore various understandings and forms of headcovering and locate cultural, social, and historical meanings of the veiling practices and their relation to Muslim women's agency with theoretical terms such as resistance, choice, and modesty.

While academic research on modest fashion and Muslim female stakeholders in various settings is available, its contribution to Muslim women's experiences as models, designers, entrepreneurs, and bloggers in the last four years and on modest fashion catwalk shows and on Instagram as an online space remains narrow. Scholarly studies focused on investigating modest fashion as a niche market and in Muslim/ Islamic dress context of what is considered fashionable and unfashionable. However, there are insufficient examinations of modest fashion events: weeks, festivals, exhibitions, and catwalks, modest fashion promotion on Instagram, Muslim women's agencies in these spaces, and young bloggers' perceptions of modest fashion as a professional field as it is progressively becoming a part of the global creative industry and corporate production.

## **Chapter Two: Methodologies, Data Collection, and Interpretation**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter consists of three sections: the methodological approach design and implications, data collection, and data interpretation. The first part of the chapter is about ethnography and the importance of employing this methodological approach for this PhD. The second is a presentation of the data collection strategies consisting of participant observations, conversational interviews, and a visual ethnographic approach to Instagram using online observation and semiotics in interpreting visuals. The last part focuses on the process of interpreting data through grounded theory analysis and thick description.

In addressing the research design, I begin with research questions, the research aim, the reflexivity of the researcher, and the stages of applying the ethnographic methods in modest fashion events and on Instagram. This section also includes the snowball sampling of the participants in both settings. This research uses a ‘mosaic’ of ethnographic methods (Blackman 2010) and settings for data reliability. As two different data sources were collected and analysed, a visual ethnographic approach was applied to the Instagrammic data by employing online observation to collect visuals and semiotics, which were key in interpreting the images deriving the social and cultural locations. The last part of the chapter focuses on how empirical data is interpreted and refined through the grounded theory analysis (Strauss and Glaser, 1967) and by applying thick description (Geertz, 1973) to generate a theoretical understanding of the data.

### **2.2. Research Design and Procedure**

This section maps out the research design, including research questions, research aims, and fieldwork locations, and the diverse qualitative methods used in this research.

### **2.2.1. Research Questions**

At the outset of this PhD fieldwork, I developed a series of research questions that were derived from the preliminary phase preceding the beginning of data collection to have a sort of instructive guidelines for this study. The research questions helped break down the initial aims and objectives of this research. As I moved toward conducting the study, my research questions were tailored and adjusted to complement the contexts of the research, the emerging findings, and the progressive academic understandings. With a constant reflection on research questions and findings, the ‘gaps’ of the study were identified and located within the field of the study where research contributions are ought to be highlighted (White, 2009)

As described in the previous section, I began my study with a set of questions in which data collection is informed to address the holistic understanding the Muslim female participants’ experiences and challenges in the fashion industry and beyond the explicit promotional acts of modest fashion. Here, it was necessary to adopt a research design with research questions that are fit to the research settings, aims, and the ethnographic focus. As research questions inform data collection that themselves reflect the purpose of the research (Creswell, 2007), it is important to recall the gradually transformed research questions to justify the design of the study:

Therefore, my research questions gradually transformed into the following:

RQ1 How do fashion events, venues, and locations contribute to the globalisation of modest fashion into the mainstream and the corporate?

RQ 2 How are female stakeholders and corporate brands promoting modest fashion on fashion runways and on ‘catwalks’?

RQ3 How has the constant change in Instagram marketing settings affected the female stakeholders’ roles in the modest fashion industry?

RQ4 What are the untold representations, challenges, and experiences of young Muslim females promoting modest fashion in the fashion industry?

### **2.2.2. Review of Aims**

This study aimed to explore the representation of young Muslim females shifting from offline to online platforms and how it affected their status. To achieve this aim, I examined the spaces allowing the construction and reconstruction of identities through analysing aesthetic styles and beyond. My aim in this study was to provide an ethnographic account for modest fashion promotion within UK communities and to explore a space between online and offline where veiled bloggers play a significant role in fashioning bodies. Thus, my ethnographic tracing will also link arguments and evidence about my participants' performance in lifestyle activities. And the findings will present the self-representation, autonomy, and agency practices. Through a grounded theory approach to data analysis, I will aim to generate a language of theoretical designation to help explain the data.

### **2.2.3. Identifying Fieldwork Settings and Locations**

The location of data in the research was quite diverse and in multi sites. My ethnographic journey was a travelling experience as I had to move to the fieldwork around the UK and abroad, including cities in Britain and to Istanbul. I had Amsterdam and Dubai as main locations for modest fashion weeks, but with visa issues emerging because of full appointments (including the premium slots), and the financial challenges, I lost the chance to attend both events, and from there I moved to plan B which was the online observation. In the UK, there were two global events in London: modest fashion week and a shopping festival, and there were three charity-based events: in London, Birmingham, and Leicester. The local fundraising fashion events were celebrated in the evening through a dinner course. The only event I attended outside of Britain was in Turkey. So, the overall number of events I observed was nine shows. The location of data expanded towards the digital platform of Instagram, and I organized my virtual field before starting my direct data collection. The ethnographic conversations and 'chats' happened in areas that suit the participants of my research mostly in London and Leicester, at cafés, the fashion events, and in their workplace (home setting), and on FaceTime. I had to make sure that my timeframe fit with the participants' schedules because it was often a travelling journey to the site of interviews and participant observations.

## **Modest Fashion Shows and the Locations (See full table in Appendix 2)**

- London Modest Fashion Week, Victoria House, February 2018.
- London Shopping Festival, Olympia, April 2019.
- Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, Zorlu Performing Art Centre, Turkey, April 2019.
- The Urban Muslim Woman Show, Marriot Hotel, London, November 2019.
- Ladies Only Charity Fashion Show, Platinum Suite, Leicester, November 2019.
- Lifestyle London Season 2, 116 Pall Mall, London, November 2019.
- Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham, Excalibur Grand, November 2019.

## **Modest Fashion Weeks and ‘Modest Fashion Live’ in Festivals (Two days event)**

- London Modest Fashion Week, Victoria House.
- London Muslim Shopping Festival, Olympia London.
- Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, Zorlu Performing Arts Centre.

## **Local Fashion Events (Charity-based)**

- The Urban Muslim Women Show 2019 (London, Marriot Hotel)
- Ladies only Charity Fashion Show (Leicester, Platinum suit)
- Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham (Birmingham, Excalibur Grand)

### **2.2.4. Research Participants: snowball sampling**

Whilst I had made a list of potential participants from the list of Muslim female bloggers that I already was following on social media, access remained difficult to some of the participants because they were full-time influencers and mothers. Fortunately, I have visited a modest fashion week in London, in 2018, and that turned out as a valuable opportunity to re-connect with people I met in the event who were considered as existing contacts at the outset of the field. Thus, before accessing the offline field of events and social meeting points, individuals I met in London Modest Fashion week became my gatekeepers and have ‘introduced me to others’ (O’Reilly, 2009). Shortly after, I could build more social networking with bloggers, designers, businesswomen, and fashion students through my presence at the nine fashion events and festival. Subsequently, my route into the modest fashion community began with utilising such contacts, which I have made whilst in the fashion events through initiating conversations about their exhibited products. This process of sampling participants for interviewing and observations is snowballing.

Thus, I adopted ‘snowballing’ sampling to gain access to the multi-sited fieldwork to study the community and this sampling technique has the “ability to uncover aspects of social experience” often embedded or hidden from the researcher’s view (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). As a result of snowballing, I was able to conduct diverse fieldwork opportunities in multiple sites of fashion events in the UK and Istanbul and with several brands and female stakeholders’ workplaces. Despite the obstruction that the pandemic Coronavirus brought into research, I still could conduct FaceTime interviews and online observations of Instagram profiles because of the usefulness of snowball sampling that allows the ethnographer to access ‘private spaces’ and ‘hidden populations’ (O’Reilly, 2009; Atkinson and Flint, 2001). I interviewed seventeen women and the conversations I had with my participants were mostly in the fashion shows and others suggested meeting them outside, or in their workplace (homes) to have an in-depth conversation about their journey and experiences in the modest fashion industry (see full table in Appendix 3).

### **Ethnographic Conversations: interviewees and locations**

- *Rena Jawad*, Olympia, London, 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- *Four Her*, Olympia, London, 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- *The Modest Me Collection*, Olympia, London, 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- *Veil and Virtue*, Olympia, London 2019.
- *Threads*, Olympia, London, 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- *Fashion As Modest*, Olympia, London, 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- *Sri Munwwarah Design*, Marriot Hotel, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2019.
- *ASH Dress to Empress UK*, Marriot Hotel, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2019.
- *Hum Hum London*, Pret a Manger, 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2019.
- *Sa-orsa*, Madison Café, Leicester, 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2019.
- Memunatu, Costa Café, London, 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2019.

### **Video Call Interview: FaceTime**

- Aminah, FaceTime video call, 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2019.

### **Filmed Conversations**

- Memunatu, University of the Arts London, 9<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- Jaqar, Zorlu Performing Arts Centre, Istanbul, Turkey, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.

### **Informal Conversations**

- Amira and Sanaa, Olympia, London, 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- Ela, Zorlu Performing Arts Centre, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.
- Nur, Zorlu Performing Arts Centre, 21<sup>st</sup> of April 2019.
- Hafsa, Zorlu Performing Arts Centre, 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2019.

### **2.2.5. Ethical Considerations**

I applied for the university ethics committee's ethical review and secured acceptance to carry out my research on young Muslim women in the UK in modest fashion events and the public virtual community. I followed the ethical guidelines on my consent by a written permission for accessing the informants' social life. Some informants preferred verbal consent while others asked for an email fill-in ethics form. I used the real names of brands, designers, and bloggers to identify them because using pseudonyms would make my findings vague and unclear for readers. However, my data is saved on my computer and a USB drive with a password so only I or my supervisor can have access to them. The accounts of the participants on the digital platform of Instagram and YouTube are public and the events are open to everyone.

### **2.2.5. Key Data Collection methods and Fieldwork Journey**

This section involves the ethnographic methods and qualitative strategies adopted to investigate modest fashion, followed by a detailed explanation of how data was collected, and how were participants recruited. In this section, I will explain how I used these tools to collect data, including observation, participant observation, fieldwork diary, interviews, and a final section on visual ethnography as a supporting method to the study's approach. This research uses this range of qualitative research methods, including ethnography, alongside observations, field diary, interviews, and visuals as a basis to develop a 'thick ethnography'. Therefore, I use the term 'holistic ethnographic analysis' with regards to the wider qualitative methods.

#### **2.2.5.1. Observation**

Researchers at the University of Chicago School of Sociology under Park and Burgess were the first to systematise observational studies in urban contexts of leisure, as shown through the work of Cressey in the Taxi Dance Hall (1932). Palmer (1928: 162- 63) argues that observation has to be learned and alerts the researchers from the "tendency to project into our observations those aspects which were most familiar". Palmer highlighted the tension within what she called the 'personal equation' of the observer in terms of scientific observation in a 'disinterested' manner and the demand for 'a sympathetic interpretation'. She suggested that the observer

should have ‘no axe to grind’ only to ‘secure an accurate account’. Here we see a contradiction where the aim of the observation for the Chicago School detachment was also showing commitment. What attracted me to the Chicago School approach was an emerged awareness with reflexivity and their focus on the biographic relevance of the researcher who is studying cultures (Blackman, 2010).

Through the cycle of fieldwork in both locations (online and offline)—when I started establishing my research questions—the initial observations were more descriptive than analytic. This was the threshold to a ‘focused observation’. Spradley (1980: 33) constructed a process of how observation shifts in-between fieldwork data collection and analysis. He suggested that there are three types: Descriptive observations, then focused observations, and finally selective observations. My initial data collection was first recorded from the online public accounts of the participants. I made descriptive notes about what aesthetics they shared on their feed, their everyday life, and the presence of modest fashion. Then, my preliminary analysis was based on a focused observation of a major phenomenon in the society I am researching. The observations on the digital media (Instagram and YouTube) led me to the natural setting where modest fashion weeks and local events in the UK were taking place; then the collected data led me back to the online to observe the visuals for their inclusion in the participants’ actions and behaviours to modest fashion promotion. I also gained more knowledge about the participants. The final step of selective observations was related to participant observations online and offline. Hence, the descriptive and interactive features remained present through the entire collection and analysis process on an ethnographic and critical level of writing. Holliday (2007: 123) emphasises being creative in the production of writing because the way a researcher presents data ‘brings credibility’, but he also urges us not to “take [our]selves too seriously, nor exude an image of privileged power in what they do” (Holliday, 2016: 144).

#### **2.2.5.2. Participant Observation: reflections on fieldwork**

For Dewalt and Dewalt (2001: 2), Participant observation as conducted by researcher is seen as the “foundation method of ethnographic research” and “[it] includes the use of information gained from participating and observing through explicit recording and analysis”. Participant observation in this research began online before stepping into my first direct fieldwork event.



Contact was undertaken by emailing the managers of the events to ask for access as a researcher. Then, after securing access, I searched on google maps for the area, the building of the show, and what it would be like. When in the field, a continuous reflection on the place and people raised questions with participants' observation and an analysis of the field data, the questions constructed the focus of the research with time as observation continued. Hence, this research enquiry changed with the time spent in the field to allow the study to focus on specific levels according to the behaviours and social experiences of research participants and my interaction with them.

My role in the field was what Siegel (2018: 2) calls a 'moderate participation', which is "when the researcher is between a passive outsider and an active member of the social group in the context. The researcher occasionally joins the social activities and events while also observing the phenomena and taking observation notes at the site". Participating in the field involved hanging around with consumers and chatting with stakeholders about their products. I am interested in dressing modestly through my own interpretation, so the participants felt the urge to always ask me about my clothes during the fashion events. Communicating during the fashion events where we set at dinner tables, and I built relationships with the research participants to have access to knowledge.

It was important to identify my role in the fieldwork as a method of gaining access to conduct my observations. To the best of my knowledge, I could hardly draw a distinction between my insider-outsider roles as in my first entrance to the field, I was a visibly young Muslim woman for Muslim fashion students and models, listening to their modest fashion experiences. These roles constructed an identity the female participants were associating with in terms of religious phrases and dress codes. However, my outsider role was being Algerian, while the female participants were British or Turkish Muslims with a career in the fashion industry. Therefore, I believe that I was partially an insider-observer since there seemed to be a fine line between insider and outsider roles in the fieldwork and my gender as 'a woman' contributing to what Merton (1972) refers to as 'socialization'. In this context, Merton (1972: 15) notes that socializing in the participants' lived experiences is a step towards becoming aware of "[the groups'] symbolisms and socially shared realities; only so one understands the fine-grained meanings of behaviour, feelings, and values; only so can one decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and nuances of cultural idiom". Being partially an insider when conducting participant observation helped me recognize the 'familiar' and detect the 'strange'

in the fieldwork while comparing and this was a part of being actively reflexive through this stage of data collection.

In the ethnographic fieldwork, I aimed to learn from participants' experiences by observing and participating in their everyday life, and asked questions concerning what we observed and what we went through during the study. The researcher needs to first gain access and maintain her presence in the group of people by learning how to be involved so that they can be open to her. To achieve that, the ethnographer needed to learn to communicate and how to behave around participants. Researchers also must retain "mental and actual notes as we go along" (O'Reilly, 2012: 84). During fieldwork, I kept track of the events' spectrum and what behaviours, or actions were taking place. After spending a long period in the field, the 'strange' became 'familiar', and the notes were a reminder and a tracker for every detail from day one. This is the essence of ethnography to be a part of the society, but still have a critical eye. According to O'Reilly (2012: 97), "[...] a participant observer needs to observe details in different settings, at different settings, at different times. It may be that you have to be at every gathering and every event and be the last to leave and the first to arrive, to be unobtrusive and yet ask questions, to join in and yet remain an outsider".

Access was key to participant observation. It was a daunting mission to meet strangers to gain participants, but my presence at the fashion events and the conversations with stakeholders and visitors in the shows paved my way to know more people. In London Modest Fashion Week on the 18th of February 2018, which was the first show I attended, I met a fashion student at UAL who asked me to take photos of her and her friend and other pictures together while waiting in the queue. We set together watching the catwalk and asked me to follow each other on Instagram. With time, our relationship became more open, and I asked her for a conversation about modest fashion. After a while meeting each other and spending a few days together, I asked her if she knew any fashion designers or bloggers interested in promoting modest fashion. And this was where she posted on her Instagram story about my research and if anybody was interested in taking an interview with a researcher on modest fashion. Therefore, she was my first interviewee and the gatekeeper in my study, and this shows how I employed snowball sampling as an effective method to recruit research participants. I also gained access to more participants through scrolling on social media, YouTube, and Instagram, and watching content related to modest fashion and making screenshots of active participants. I contacted them on Instagram and sent emails asking them to participate. Some of them accepted to take part in my

research. However, access is an ongoing process, you may have the keys to the door but what will happen once you are in the room with these people.

The ethnographer needs to access their experiences and what is in their minds while making links to their behaviours, actions, and reactions. Gatekeepers have a role in facilitating access and broadening the network of getting to know more people. They are “like a fairy godmother to help the forlorn ethnographer” (Rock, 2001: 34). I also received an invitation to Amsterdam Modest Fashion Show through email as an official document for my visa, but I faced a problem in finding an appointment for a visa application and this deprived me of having access to the event (See appendix 2). The fashion events were held between April and November. The local events in the UK where young Muslim women met occurred at unexpected times during the year to fundraise for charity purposes. Therefore, sometimes controlling time was not in the ethnographer’s hand; it depended on the studied community. As O’Reilly (2012: 93) puts it, “Obviously, spending a year is not an option nor even necessary for all research using participant observation, but how a culture divides up its time is important”.

The camera was a vital tool in creating interactions with stakeholders in the show. I first brought it to document field notes using photographic captions of catwalks, products, exhibition stalls, the buildings, and the decoration of places. “In ethnography images are as inevitable as sounds, smells, textures and tastes, words or any other aspect of culture and society” (Pink, 2006: 21). When approaching the designers at their stalls, the first thing they looked at was my camera hanging from my neck and asked me to take some photos and share them on my Instagram page while tagging their brand name below the post. They also asked me to send them the pictures through emails and WhatsApp. A designer of modest garments for weddings and evening occasions stated that she would have an interview with me, but only on the condition of sending her the videos and photos I took for her show. Thereby, the camera contributed to constructing the ethnography of research with various roles including being an access tool, a screen for photographic data which are ‘timeless ethnographic photograph’ (Abu-Lughod, 2000: 263), and taking part in building relationships with research participants which became a part of fieldwork data collection.

Another vital factor in participant observation was the process from strange to familiar, where the ethnographer was wholly immersed within the community when she digested the norms and customs of the people, and this required time. In the fashion shows, I had to style my clothes with accessories that I saw on-trend via social media accounts of these young female designers and bloggers and put on glamorous makeup looks just like the rest of the people in

the events. Each one of them had her way of dressing up and I had to express my style to 'fit in'. I once wore a traditional Algerian Jacket called 'Karako'<sup>14</sup> in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week in which I interacted with many young female students from a college of fashion who asked me about my jacket and if they could take a photo of it (See Appendix 4). In such fieldwork situations, I felt that my familiarity with the dress codes and fashion language increased in each fashion week. The participants took time to become familiar with a stranger in the community and feel at ease talking naturally and the main part of the fieldwork where participant observation took place varied.

In the fashion shows, I made sure to dress according to the event's dress code to engage in the social environment and immerse myself in a culture (Silverman, 2017: 104) and this was the first step of learning about the sartorial practices related to modesty from the female stakeholders' cultural experiences. During the first phase, I was 'partially' a stranger to the fashion 'catwalks' and interacted with women with a business background and interests. However, when I became immersed in the fieldwork by constructing conversations and trying to communicate with research participants and familiarizing myself with their everyday language, behaviour, and lifestyle; I had pre-assumptions about how the field may appear 'strange' to me as an Algerian researcher in the UK, but I also had ways to familiarise myself with it. These methods included carrying a notebook and my mobile to write the field notes of my observations. My mobile was a more accessible device for recording my analytical ideas and reflections on concepts and themes which refer to my research questions and initial interpretive ideas. Notes' app on my phone was an effective tool to write down any observable thoughts and I sometimes recorded myself when it was possible. The black notebook was the best tool for the fashion 'catwalks' and exhibition stalls as I was sitting between the spectacles and doing my participant observation and writing down my fieldnotes or recording the observations via photographs with a professional camera.

The value of participant observation consists of it being "a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of people being studied" Dewalt and Dewalt (2001: 2). As a qualitative method, it facilitates the researcher's aim in developing 'an insider view' and allows them to "witness and capture naturally accruing events" (Parker, 2017:350). As an ethnographer, it was important to me to attend the fashion events and integrate within the spatial settings of the exhibitions and catwalks to observe while recording the cultural events and practices of the female participants.

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<sup>14</sup> **Karako**: An Algerian traditional dress worn by women in weddings and cultural events.

As Emerson et al. (2001:352) indicate participant observation consists of more than the ethnographers' access to and emersion into 'new social worlds'; this strategy is significantly involved with the recorded written accounts and descriptive notes. These written narratives resulting from participant observations start as field notes and they act as the 'foundational moments of ethnographic representation' (Emerson, et al., 2001: 352) and they consist of 'reflections and analytical thoughts' on potential meanings of those observations (Punch, 2012: 90). Observation and note taking are bond to each other when in a field and this includes recording the researcher's feelings, concerns, and reflects on their behaviours in the field and 'how others responded to them'. This allowed me, as a researcher, to use 'the act of reflective diarising' as a mean to manage my own reflexivity (Parker, 2017: 347).

### **2.2.5.3. Fieldnotes: photographs, videos, 'pocket ethnography', and a notebook**

Field notes, as states above, provide complementary data at the same time they flag central methodological limits of the research. Opposite, field diaries are similar to 'memoirs' (Maxwell et al., 2016). They are intrinsically related to our identities and personal experiences in the field. The role of fieldnotes, for Emerson, et al. (2001: 353), is providing "*descriptive* accounts of people, scenes and dialogue, as well as personal experiences and reactions" and they involve "active processes of interpretation and sense-making". During my fieldwork, I recorded scribbled notes about my observations in my mobile memo and I carried a black notebook for my fieldnotes for each event. O'Reilly (2012: 98) states the process of fieldnotes and that "the point is eventually to have written down all information that you think may or may not be relevant to your research". I began taking notes from the first field trip to London Modest Fashion Week. This had kept me motivated to collect 'thick data' and stay focused because the journey to the fieldwork location was long.

I carried a camera to the field to take photographs and videos, considering these visuals as field notes. The camera captures physical moments taking place in fashion events. Because of the diversity of the sites and activities, photographed data maintained my aim for a thick ethnographic account. Moreover, the camera records fieldnotes and it was a visual observational tool keeping a record of photographic fieldnotes from the fashion events in which culture was constructed or performed. In fashion events, many practices were going on: models on the runway, exhibitions, people walking around and chatting, the media, it was a chaos of activities. Thereby, my camera was a photographic diary of my visual field notes that I referred to when

writing up my ethnography and where I presented reliable accounts of all details for the readers. From the fieldwork, I found that photographs would be key to the process. Photos conveyed “the subjective voice” of young female stakeholders promoting modest fashion in its socio-cultural context which offered a thick description (MacDougall, 1998: 25).

‘Pocket ethnography’ represents the concrete items offered in the field by participants and they are shared personal belongings given through their own will. This study extended to the existing research such as Hey’s (1997:50), who referred to the note cards shared between female friends as ‘pocket ethnography’, Blackman (2007: 707) and Doherty (2017: 116) who referred to it as ‘pocket prohibition’ where similar cards were offered to the researcher, and in this thesis, I refer to it as ‘pocket goodies’. The ‘pocket goodies’ were flyers, gift bags, and discount coupons and they were pocket data. The conceptualization of ‘pocket goodies’ was an in vivo term derived from what the participants referred to as ‘goodie bags’. ‘Pocket goodies’ gave me access to the participants to start a conversation or build a relationship for future conversational interviews. The ‘pocket ethnography’ also demonstrated the status of the modest fashion economy and how it is becoming more of a mainstream market, which had a role in representing these young female stakeholders.

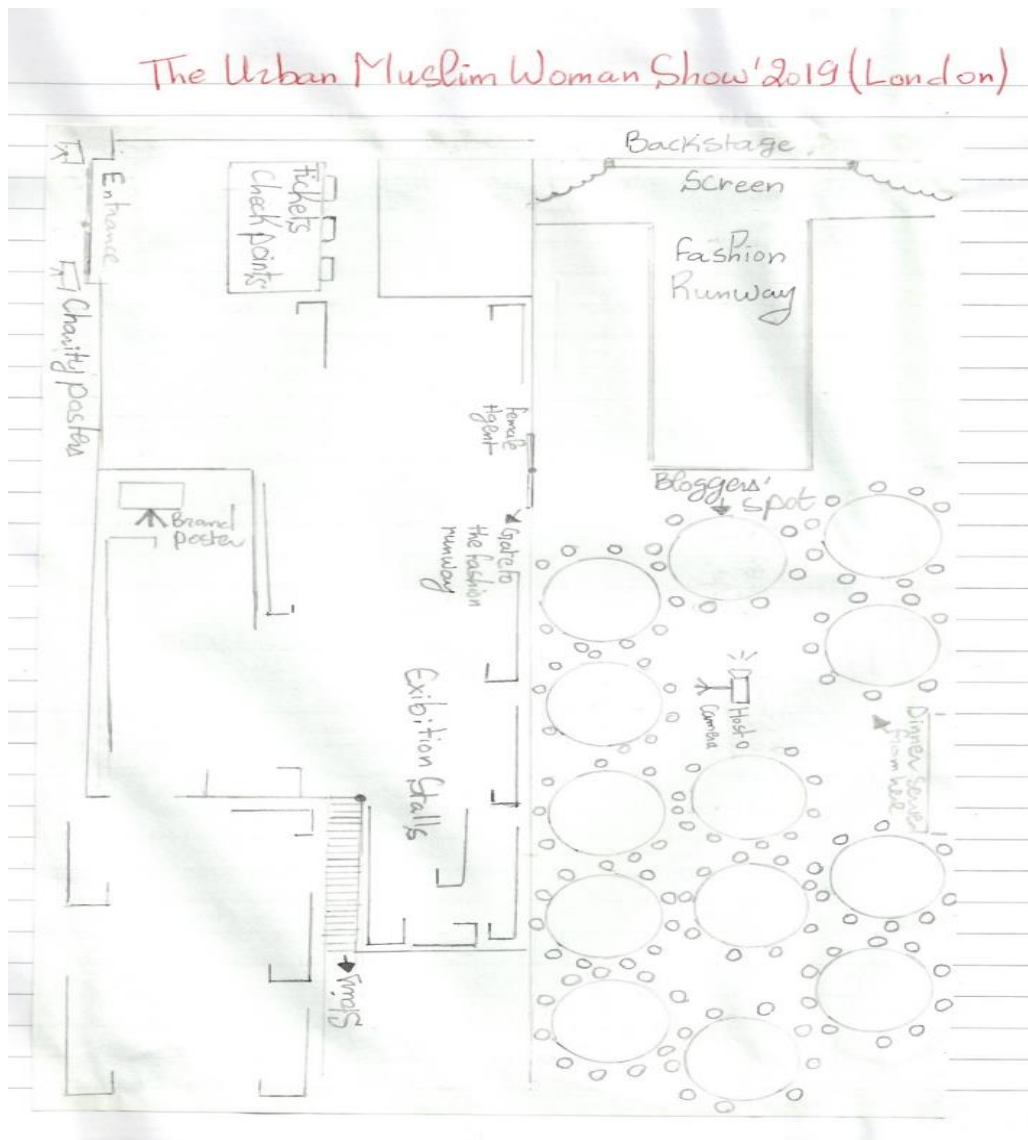


**Figure 1.** ‘Pocket Ethnography’, look books and catalogues (Photo taken by A.B)

#### 2.2.5.4. Fieldwork Diary

A field diary is central to conducting ethnographic research and “[...] contribute in producing fieldwork archives (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), meaning they help recounting observations, informal talks and anecdotes” (Fort, 2022: 350). Researchers from the Chicago School celebrated the use of diaries and other written materials, such as Thomas and Znaniecki (1927) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* as ‘a written life history’ analysing social problems. The field diary as a document, “may be of value in stimulating analytic ideas”, “generic concepts”, details about the settings, and “they may provide important corroboration, or may challenge, information received from informants or from observation” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 122).

After leaving the fashion event, I made sure to walk straight back to where I was staying and stitched together the fieldwork notes into extensive narratives of every detail that I could possibly write on the event. As I write, the fieldnotes that I have recorded “accumulate[d] set-by-set over time into a larger *corpus*”, that is field diary. The field diary is drafted into thickly descriptive accounts of each modest fashion event using my sensory visualisation and my camera to look back at photographs and videos and remember the spatial structure and overarching practices. This allowed me to draw detailed descriptions of the events’ spatial structure and placement of exhibition stalls and fashion runways (See the example below extracted from the field diary) to pin down the adequate cultural, social, and economic patterns and structures as research participants participated in these fashion events.



**Example.** Spatial structure of *The Urban Muslim Women Show 2019*

Writing the field diary began when I returned to a hotel or when I was staying at a friend's place. I developed detailed descriptive pages of written narratives on the events (before, during, and after). The method of handwritten accounts was useful at the first stages, and then I noticed how it was time-consuming as the quantity of data was intensive as it was progressively generating from participant observations and ethnographic observations. Therefore, I decided to transfer my fieldwork diary to my laptop and recorded my field diary in the Word Office document instead. Each fashion event was considered as a chapter with a title of the show (e.g., Ladies-Only Charity Fashion Show), and I added the date on top of the document. These virtually documented field diaries are thickly descriptive accounts on places, spatial decorations, women's attire and practices, experiences, cultural patterns, and social situations.



The overwhelming process of recording research data is common amongst ethnographers. This includes researchers questioning the relevance of data or if they asked enough questions to the informants before writing about their voices and experiences. Punch (2010: 89) shares her experience saying that:

I worry that the quality of the information is not good enough. I mean, I'm getting lots of descriptive data about what people have done and when, but I really want to get at how they feel about the choices they've made and how they understand and evaluate the alternatives available to them.

For Punch (2010: 89), the fieldwork diary may sometimes seem too descriptive. At the first stages of my fieldwork, I shared a similar experience when processing writing an account after leaving the show. It sometimes appeared that the diary was too descriptive and needed to be polished into more critical accounts. Nonetheless, detailed description is key in the field diary. It is a record of descriptive observational fieldnotes' and theoretical concepts (Newbury, 2001).

The practice of transparency of the emotional reflections in the diary also facilitated the understanding of areas in the study like the locations, the space, or the participants' experiences. As Fort (2022: 349) articulates, "field diaries may have a more personal dimension when used to report our emotions and the way we deal with our multiple identities in the field". Despite the existing literature on the usefulness and value of field diaries, the practical side of it in conducting research in an event was narrowly addressed. Thus, when commencing my fieldwork, there were studies emphasising the significance of recording field notes and having a diary at hand at all times, but there were limited practical guidance and critical implications on how to record notes in an extremely busy event— such as the fashion weeks and the charity dinner- events in this study. Yet, field diaries remain "particularly insightful in capturing the social interactions between the researcher and the informants, which inevitably impact fieldwork, data collection and the research results" (Fort, 2022: 349). Hence, the field diary was a central tool to conducting an ethnographic study on modest fashion practices to voice the Muslim female stakeholders' experiences, achievements, and challenges by keeping a record of my observational notes and reflections.

As a researcher, I acknowledge the presence of emotions in the field diary that I experienced as I go to the field, when in the events, or as I leave. After all, "a field diary is a personal document that we use to let off steam about some of the difficulties and emotions we

are facing at the time” (Punch, 2012: 91). For instance, I once had missed the first show of Istanbul Modest Fashion Week and I felt the need to instantly write about it in the field diary. This was important because of how it reflects on how I felt as an attendee, and what I have observed as I was joining other sad attendees who missed the first catwalk and what this occurrence means for brand owners in stalls. After all, most people in the event considered me as an equal attendee until I said something to approach them as research participants. Hence, such incidents in the field allowed me to also draft the emotional reactions of attendees who missed the show and the spatial descriptions on what happens in stalls as runways were taking a place, and details on the dress culture in queues.

Stitching together the details from the show and being transparent about ones’ feelings as incidents taking place was important for how the field diary represented ‘memoirs’ (Fort, 2022; Maxwell, et al., 2016) of each fashion event, the locations (cities and buildings), the activities, which go through change in the future and by going back to these diaries, the researcher can extract the shifts, whether they are economic, gender-related issues, social structures, and other important factors influencing these females participants’ agency as they contribute to modest fashion.

The presence of the emotional aspects of the relations between the researcher and research is another area that also helped collect legitimate data and construct trust with the informants. Conversations and interactions with the research participants during the events were also written down in the field diaries. They marked details on how research participants interacted with me as a Muslim female researcher trying to follow the dress codes of the modest fashion events by wearing a festive dress or an Algerian Karako Jacket (See appendix 4) to make them feel as if I belong to their membership and community and gain their trust (O’Reilly, 2009). Blackman (2007: 699) argues that a qualitative researcher needs to be honest and open in all explanations of how they collected data and built research relationships with participants to avoid what is described as the ‘hidden ethnography’. This is important, as a diary “also has an analytic function, alerting us to feelings and emotions that participants in the field may well share” (O’Reilly, 2009: 75). Thence, one role that a field diary has is to allow the flow of the immersion of the self in the centre of ethnographic research. It was attained through contact between the researcher and the researched (the setting and the participants). In the process of writing the field diary, I also found my voice alongside that of the research participants; it became a tool of involvement and reflection. For instance, the efforts that female attendees

make with regards to the fashionability of their attire to gain a cultural and social membership to these events.

Blackman's (2007: 699) account on hidden ethnography prepared me for what I would expect in the field, but living the experience made me further reflect on other researchers' transparency about the emotions they had in their diaries. Within ethnographic research, there was a slow growth in revealing the hidden struggles in fieldwork. When Malinowski's (1967) *The Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* emerged, it struggled to increase transparency within fieldwork, and it was regarded as a mistake or betrayal, warning of the dangers of showing feelings and emotion in the field diary. Only more recently, Malinowski's revelations had been understood as the first significant work that addressed emotional reflection in research (Blackman, 2016: 66-67). What is valuable about including those emotions and my identity as a researcher in a field diary is the fact that it allowed me to reflexively explore and voice the experiences of these Muslim women.

#### **2.2.5.5. Conversational Interviews**

During the fieldwork, I conducted about 17 interviews. There were ten conversational interviews during the ethnographic observations at the fashion events (the exhibitions), and in-depth interviews as a supporting qualitative method to the ethnographic approach with four research participants I met during the fashion shows. The interviews were recorded on a recorder and mobile registering mode, and after the conversation, I made notes about the striking observations, practices, or conceptions. Then, they were kept on a USB stick in a confidential and secured space in my home and on my computer using a password to preserve my participants' confidentiality.

The participants in my research, especially those engaged in fashion events, were often busy because they put all their focus on promoting their business and performing in the promotional activities as an ongoing process. Therefore, the suitable way for reaching to my participants was trying to have a short chat in their stalls at the exhibitions as I was conducting my participant observation. Hey (1997: 43), in her ethnography of girl's friendship, supported this approach, stating that "Most of [her] data on the older middle-class girls came from informal interviews and their personal talk as well as [their] 'conversations'".

In my ethnographic study, I kept constant contact with participants during the event and because they were busy with customers, they sometimes ask me to schedule a meeting at the beginning of the event journey by requesting a time slot from the female stakeholders for when they have some spare time. Hence, whenever I saw that one of the female stakeholders' stalls was empty, I walk to them and ask questions about their participation in the event, and they start to openly describe what their brands were about. This type of interviews generates data supporting my field notes from the participant observations and they are what Karen O'Reilly (2012: 112) name as 'opportunistic chats'. Amidst the busy Runways and Exhibitions, my initial access to conducting interviews was through the modest fashion events in which the participants, designers, models, and bloggers, were very busy promoting products and attire. This created a struggle for me to have an in-depth conversation with the participants. However, the 3-7 minutes of conversational interviews were also sufficient to gain access to the participants for further interviews and to collect more ethnographic data about the meaning of modesty for the businesswomen. Moreover, the conversational interviews also contributed to collecting data on the cultural and political meaning of the clothing practices that Muslim women commodified through the sartorial products and promoted through diverse roles.

In my interview with *Jaqar* in Istanbul, language was a struggle to communicate with the brands. Even though the modest fashion industry in Istanbul is global, there was a language barrier which I overcame through looking for someone to translate the conversation. I interacted with a Turkish model who masters English and was standing next to the huge poster of *Jaqar* while dressed up in one of their designs, a white wedding dress. It was the model's suggestion to translate the questions to the designer and the designer would reply to my questions.

#### **2.2.5.6. In-depth Interviews**

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002: 170), an interview is "an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interests and experiences". Therefore, this study adopted in-depth interviews as a supporting method to draw a further understanding of the Muslim female stakeholders' experiences as they progressively became a part of the fashion industry. This method was required to follow-up from the short conversational interviews that constructed contacts with potential informants and explored partial data on, for example, their contribution to the runway and a brief background of their brand. As this research aims towards an understanding of their experiences and with the Covid-

19 interrupting the modest fashion events, in-depth interviews were key in developing thickly descriptive accounts on at least two female stakeholders.

In-depth interviews, according to Hammarberg, Kirkman<sup>1</sup>, and Lacey (2015: 499), are used to “understand a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective [...] to learn about distributed or private knowledge”. Such methods help explore, for instance, the untold stories on these Muslim female stakeholders’ attempts to have a crucial role in the industry is not always embraced by their family members. These women face stereotypes and stigmas as part of the social structure on fashion within a Muslim community. Also, these female stakeholders challenge these constraints through their choice and agentive roles by going against the constructed structures. These understandings are only possible through conducting the method of in-depth interviews that derive in-depth accounts on these women’s lives by listening to them and asking spontaneous open-ended questions.

The in-depth interviews, as supporting qualitative methods, were conducted on two modest fashion designers at cafes (the owners of ‘Sa-orsa ‘Chanez and Ayesha’ and Hum Hum London ‘Soumaya’), a FaceTime interview during the Covid period with the blogger and fashion student ‘Aminah’, and an interview with the blogger and fashion student ‘Memunatu’. The initial plan for interviews was to take a chance during the fashion events and interview the female stakeholders (including models, businesswomen, consumers, designers, and brand owners), but the field was too busy to undertake prolonged interviews with the informants and derive an understanding of their experiences and roles. And with the pandemic of Covid-19, this point became more complicated as events were cancelled. Therefore, the solution was follow-up interviews for the conversations. I met again with few participants that I could successfully convince for a meeting that I developed a contact with during the fieldwork and, agreeing on a time and place, and have a spontaneous conversation. I made a list of open-ended questions of what I may ask the interviewees just as a guide through the interview, but it was far from being a structured rigid list. Meeting with the participants was not always an easy journey. I had once to travel to London to meet the owner of Hum Hum London brand and another time to Leicester to meet with Sa-orsa designers.

In-depth interviews are important methods for data generation. They are vital for the unobservable data that a researcher cannot attain through observation only. For example, the past lived events and experiences of people are unattainable unless we open a deep conversation with them. Interviews, as qualitative methods, help gain data about the informants’ “subjective understanding” of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006: 11). In this research, interviews are

used to do exactly that, to explore how Muslim female stakeholders are promoting modest fashion as active agents and examine the space they weave within the fashion events and online for their agentive roles.

The in-depth interviews were used to go deeper beyond these promotional practices and see the past events and experiences of these Muslim women joining the mainstream industry and explore deeper insight into their lived experiences. Compared to the conversational interviews, these interviews are a series of prolonged conversations taking place in a specific time and setting that the researcher and the participant agree on. This type of interviews is valuable for it generates ‘thick descriptions’ for understanding what happens to these women and what they experience as they try to be a part of the fashion industry.

#### **2.2.5.7. Visual Ethnography: online observations and semiotic analysis**

This section will briefly highlight the significance of visuals in the ethnographic research and discuss the process of collecting and analysing the visuals from Instagram, the digital fieldwork. This section has two parts: the first is about applying online observation to Instagram, and the second in about adopting the semiotic analysis as a method to interpret the visual data.

Visual anthropology was introduced through pioneering researchers who used photographic images in ethnographic research. Researchers such as Bronislaw Malinowski produced an ethnography based on photographic fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands between 1914 to 1918, and the findings generated anthropological monographs contributing to the modern field of anthropology. Bateson and Mead (1942) also had a major contribution to the visual ethnographic fieldwork. These researchers investigated the cultural practices in Bali through a thick photographic data collection and a photographic analysis approach resulting in an in-depth ethnographic representation using visual ethnography in their research *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*. These anthropological studies conducted visual methods to ethnographic research to demonstrate how ethnography produces authentic accounts of the experiences of a society to provide a written reconstructed account. In this regard, Sarah Pink (2021:5) suggests that visual ethnography is about “theoretical understandings of the meaning and potentials of images and media [...]” and argues that:

[Ethnographers] use (increasingly digital) media in doing ethnographic research, we seek to develop understandings of the meanings and experiences that images and visual and media practices have in other people's lives, our very fieldwork sites may cross online and offline contexts. In these roles visual and digital media are part of the ways we constitute ethnographic knowledge, as well as being used to create representations of ethnographic knowledge. (Pink, 2021: 1-2)

Thus, ethnographic fieldwork is increasingly becoming saturated with visuals and is overlapped with the digital spaces that extend to the physical realm where people's experiences happen. Visual ethnography as an approach is required to conduct visual methods that investigate images and cultural practices across these spaces.

The use of visual methods varied from producing a photographic ethnography to studying a still and moving photographic platform as the communities started moving towards a digital space of webs and social media platforms. In locating the communities, David Machin (2002: 128) emphasises that as researchers, we should "[locate] people's behaviour into the environment they live and into the broader cultural framework that they use to make sense of the world". Therefore, anthropological studies continuously expand visual methods tailored for the continuity of authentic representation of culture by developing a visual research approach to ethnography to study a visual online platform. Sarah Pink (2016: 160) referred to these approaches through the concept 'unorthodox', describing how they paved the way for various fields to collaborate. Thus, it may help expand ongoing conversations with participants while linking to other fields like politics. The most important part we need to build on recent innovations in visual anthropology's techniques of inquiry is integrating the full range of contemporary visual media into our practices of investigation, analysis, and representation in the pursuit of more reflexive, open-ended and collaborative styles of inquiry.

In this PhD, photography was key to collecting field notes from the events and had a significant role in keeping track of cultural and social practices and in tracing the spatial features of the fashion shows' venues which contribute to the production of the authenticity of this study on modest fashion as a culture. My camera was a tool for collecting photographic field notes that helped me write my field diary when I was back at a hotel after the event. However, in applying the visual ethnographic approach to this thesis, I conduct the visual method of online observation on Instagram, the social media platform, focusing on modest fashion promotion and the cultural, social, and political practices executed by the Muslim female stakeholders.

### **2.2.5.7.1. Online Observation**

Due to the continuity of modest fashion experiences on the digital platforms of Instagram, my fieldwork extended through an online observation of still and moving visuals shared by the participants. Skageby (2011: 414) defines online observation as “the researcher’s concurrent use of, and data collection through, the services or applications utilized in the studied online practice.” In the case of my research, it was my role as an ethnographer to use Instagram application while tracking the daily experiences and activities with key terms and practices related to modest fashion and simultaneously documenting field notes. Miller and Slater (2000: 5) insisted on deeming “Internet media as continuous [and] embedded in other social spaces.” Allowing the thickly developed account representing the stakeholders promoting modest fashion on ‘multi-sited’ platforms required investigating the numerous individual users behind screens advertising and making personal efforts to speed up the process. In discussing the significance of multiple sites in ethnography, Marcus (1995: 96) states that this has “shift[ed] out of the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space”.

There were no fixed strategies in the existing research for collecting and analysing visuals from the digital, and I believe this was due to the fast changes happening in social media platforms. Technological features, like hashtags and filters, were added and modified at a fast pace, and Airoidi (2018: 662) argues that these changes created a ‘meta-field’ with metadata archived in the digital platform creating a ‘field made of fields’ changing over time. In his research on the identity of Erasmus students, Airoidi (2018: 667-69) considers his ethnographic study as ‘a multi-sited and user-centred contextual fieldwork’ which follows ‘the people, the thing, the life’ in multiple social situations for a thicker account (Geertz, 1973). I had to find an ethnographic method for documenting the visual data that links to the offline data while preserving the credibility of the experiences and voices of my participants. Spencer (2011: 42) suggests that there are four types of fieldwork image forms, and the one I saw as reliable for my research is the ‘researcher-found visual data’. My initial curiosity to study modest fashion promoters started from the online visuals on the digital platform of Instagram and YouTube, which I came across when scrolling on users’ accounts. The users created fashion styles for modest wearers and extended their aims to aesthetics such as makeup and lifestyles such as eating habits and house decorations. Therefore, the visual data was found by the researcher’s



curiosity on her social media accounts and with a vision beyond the images; I noticed a continuity of modest fashion practices from online to real-world fashion events and experiences.

The visuals I recorded in my field notes belonged to modest fashion bloggers, businesswomen, models who were visibly ‘stylish’ Muslim women or referred to as dressing modestly fashionable. In my online data collection, I also focused on specific criteria, yet not ‘too specific’, of shared content on the images and videos. My first attempts of collecting data from Instagram and YouTube focused mainly on modest fashion shows catwalk images and very few veiled bloggers, then once I noticed that the contemporary culture of modesty transcends fashion towards business, lifestyles, and politics for an international audience, I broadened my focus. This was a significant step involved in the credibility of my ethnographic depiction. To illustrate, I screenshotted any visuals shared by the female participants as I observed images empowering other women, opposing social norms and beauty standards, promoting and advertising for modest brands, displayed a lifestyle of a woman who believes that she is creative in her private space, and anything related to creative production and achievements of young women supporting modest wear. This diversity in modest fashion online aimed at contributing to the thickness of the overall data.

The researchers’ roles involve observing the shared pictures and videos through detailed fieldwork notes of a selection of reflective representations of modesty. “Ethnographers can produce field notes using screenshots” (Airoldi, 2018: 666). Therefore, through the screenshotting technique, I saved images on my gallery. Then, I moved them to my computer and renamed each visual with the user’s name preceded by ‘@’, added a code of what I thought the visual may represent, the date I screenshotted the post, and whether it is withdrawn from Instagram and YouTube using the abbreviation ‘Insta’, ‘YTB’ consecutively. For example, the naming could be ‘@radia.Pr. Artistic Makeup, February 2020, Insta’. After renaming and coding each visual, I placed each selection under a category that had identical meanings and served an approximately similar purpose. For example, there was a title of a category called ‘Oppositional Aesthetics’. The collected materials and the categories were initially recorded in the researcher’s personal app within the Instagram space ‘saved’ option and later they were screenshotted and put in confidential files using NVivo and Word documents.

The participants created the visual materials collected in this research and they were digital photographs and videos expressing various corners of these young women’s lives. The shared photo or video contained a ‘promotional’ self-portrait, a photo of a living room or a tour of the

house, it could also be a family photo or an intimate moment between husband and wife. The visuals mirror the lifestyle and social experience of everyday life. The content of these still and moving images represented various meanings after applying a semiotic analysis to the visuals.

Because of the thickness of data, I decided to focus only on a single digital platform, Instagram, due to the high presence of modest fashion stakeholders and scenes in this space. When collecting the Instagrammic visuals, I asked the following questions: What do the backgrounds and decorative items in the visuals signify? What are the main colours in the photo and what do they represent? Are there any filters? What do they stand for and why? What is the user trying to communicate? If the female users are in the images, how are they positioned in the photographed visual, are there any other people, and what is their relationship with them? And I also had to focus on the stages of publishing the visuals on Instagram, with viewers behind the screen, there are three stages to observe in addition to screenshotting a relevant image in a modest fashion: Before publishing the visual, the visual shared, after sharing the visual and how the audience communicate with the visual content.

The lists below display the participants whom I observed their Instagram accounts in my fieldwork online, they are content creators, models, fashion students, brands, and companies. The number of participants was 33 (See Appendix 6 for more details):

### **Modest Fashion Bloggers**

- Nabiila, @nabiilabee, digital creator.
- Amenah Khan, @amenahkhan, digital creator.
- Halima Aden, @halima, supermodel.
- Aminah, @amxnahali, design and fashion student and model.
- Memunatu, @memuna2barrie, design and fashion student and model.
- Ikram, @ikramabdi, model.
- Rawdis, @rawdis, fashion editor and model.
- Nawal Sari, @nawalsari, digital creator and model.
- Dr. Fatumina, @drfatumina, entrepreneur and model.
- Amina Bham, @aminabhram, digital creator.
- Sebinaah, @sebinaah, digital creator of fashion and lifestyle.
- Urgalsal, @urgalsal, digital creator and makeup artist.
- Saima, @simasmileslike, digital creator.
- Salma Masrour, @salma.masrour, content creator and model.
- Baraa Bolat, @baraabolat, content creator.
- Mouna, @mounabaah, digital creator.
- Dina Torkia, @dinatokio, digital creator.
- Aba, @abacadabraaa, fashion student and model.
- Sidrah, @lotustreee, digital creator.

- Neelam, @neelam\_, Singer and digital creator.
- Mariah Idrissi, @Mariahidrissi, model and filmmaker.
- Habiba Da Silva, @lifelongpercussion, model and makeup artist.
- Billy Marsal, @billy\_marsal, model.
- FIO, @fiotestore, digital creator.
- Johar, @jullarii, fashion designer and content creator.
- Tuma, @tumaaa\_, modal.
- Shazia, @\_shazfit, fitness trainer.
- Hayaati, @hayaatithehijabi, model.
- Ashaa, @just.ashaa, model.
- Eniyah Rana, @modest\_street, digital creator.
- Juju, @j.ghaz, digital creator.
- Manal, @chinutay, digital creator.

### **Brand Owners and CEOs**

- *Bee*, Nabiila Bee
- *Dian Pelangi*
- *Al Sheikha Abaya*
- *Malak London Official*
- *Lyra Swim*
- *Till We Cover*
- *Madiha*
- *ANNAQA & Co*
- *Haute Hijab*
- *Al Akhawat*
- *Chinutay & Co*

### **Agencies and Communities**

- Umma Models
- Bame Model Agency
- Modest Visions
- Redefining Concepts
- Surviving Hijab
- Muslims of the World
- Modest Fashion Weeks

### **Corporate Companies**

- *Modanisa*
- *Nike Women*
- *Puma Women*
- *Adidas Women*
- *Burberry*
- *Fenty Beauty*

### 2.2.5.7.2. Semiotics

This section demonstrates how the visual data was collected from Instagram and how semiotics was vital in the process of collecting and deriving the meaning of the shared images. In examining Instagrammic visuals semiotically, Cara (2019: 350) argues that there should be an investigation of ‘emotional and cultural aspects’ rather than focusing only on the structure of imagery. This thesis’ technique in collecting and interpreting Instagrammic data as semiotic resources also relied on theories and digital spatial changes to derive social and cultural meaning from the signs in the visuals. Therefore, when analysing the visual data, I examined Instagram as a space and highlighted the semiotic features (hashtags, filters, emojis ...), then I collected the visuals that share visual content promoting modest fashion, then I listed the visuals in a word document and NVivo, to begin semiotic analysis. In this regard, the space, the visual content produced, and its cultural-social context was central to interpreting the Instagrammic visual data. In employing semiotics, I privileged the polysemic angle in which a single visual can have various meanings and not only an individual meaning. In applying these steps, this PhD sought to investigate the cultural, social, and sometimes political layers in branding modest fashion by Muslim female stakeholders and corporates by semiotically analysing the visuals from Instagram feed and the constantly changing nature of the platform and the gradual shift into a digital marketing industry.

Semiotics originally was introduced by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1867- 1914), and this discipline developed a structural approach of looking at a language as signs (Penn, 2000: 228). Bruce Curtis and Cate Curtis (2011:245) note that “Semiotic analysis is the study of signs and their meaning relating to the social world and social processes”. Semiotics expanded with mass media and with the digitalization of spaces and introduced visually based applications that resulted in social and cultural practices moving to the digital and through visual expression. Machin (2007:3), in his ‘Introduction to Multimodal Analysis’ (2007:3) explains that “just as words can be combined in sentences and texts so we can think about visual signs being combined to make visual statements”. Given the exclusivity of visuality and the mobility of this social media application, Instagram was the first to introduce the predominant still and moving images feature expressing everyday life (Cara, 2019: 334).

Hodge and Kress (1988: 1) argue that “everything in a culture can be seen as a form of communication” including visuals on the Instagram platform. Kress (2010: 27) in his book,

*Multimodality: a social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*, indicates that “the new, participative sites of appearance and sites of dissemination of messages and knowledge [...] are associated with specific characteristics of distribution of power and agency in communication” and that they contribute to the production of knowledge. Therefore, studies have to describe this world and “attempt to articulate and theorize its practices both in terms of continuities and changes” (Kress, 2010: 27). Therefore, it is important for this research to derive the cultural, social, and political meanings from the Instagrammic visuals to examine Muslim female stakeholders’ experiences as they continue from the offline to the online platform of Instagram.

In conducting studies on Instagrammic visuals and applying semiotics, researchers such as Highfield and Leaver (2016), and Manovich (2016) introduced understandings of the structure, the imagery, and embedded cultural meanings within the Instagrammic visual content. When observing the semiotics of Instagrammic images, these researchers argued that the production, editing and sharing of visual content are a part of the ‘synthesis of images’ and it should be referred to as ‘Instagrammatics’ and ‘Instagrammism’ (Highfield and Leaver, 2016; Manovich, 2016).

Cara (2019: 335) notes that ‘Instagrammatics’ “define[s] a singular structure of image (in connection with texts and other meaningful elements), becoming a kind of grammatical system that emerges through Instagram”. The other meaningful elements could be the used filters, hashtags, instant editing options of moving images, emojis in texts, and further features that are changing with constant updates of this visual app of Instagram. These researchers investigate such elements to study the social meaning of Instagrammic activity by extracting the ‘semiotic connection’ between the visual and ‘the generated meaning’ of the physical realm (Cara, 2019: 335). Overall, these semiotic elements contribute to generating social meanings from a polysemic angle. Instagrammism, however, is referred to by Manovich (2016: 3) who argues that it is about ‘sensibility’, ‘attitude, or ‘tonality’. This research focused on the Instagrammatics and Instagrammism of the images (Highfield and Leaver, 2016; Manovich 2016) as they were equally important to examine the social meaning of visual semiotics.

This thesis adopted semiotics as a method to analyse the visual content shared by modest fashion female stakeholders on the Instagram platform. This method helped in investigating the continuity of modest fashion promotion practices through an online platform in still images, which leads to cultural and social meanings embedded in the layers of the visual content.

### **2.3. Ethnography, Data Analysis, and Interpretation**

This section maps out ethnography as a methodological approach preceded by the presentations of the founding traditions that the study is based upon, the studies that influenced the choice of such methodological principles, and how visuals were integrated into this ethnographic study. Then, I acknowledge my positionality and how I have been reflexive through the choice of my methodology and throughout this research process. And in the final subsection, I demonstrate how the data interpretation followed a grounded theory approach for analysis and thick description in writing the ethnographic accounts.

#### **2.3.5. Ethnography: traditions, foundations, and influences**

One can only explore ethnography as an anthropological approach by addressing its legitimacy, traditions, and intellectual heritage as a methodological approach to studying societies, cultural practices, values (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) and women's experiences (Stacey, 1988). The ethnographic heritage can be traced back to the Chicago School of sociology, which had influential roles in the social sciences (O'Reilly, 2009: 29). Ethnography has its root in the nineteenth century as Western anthropologists produced 'a descriptive account of a community and a culture' of 'non-western cultures' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 1). In the early twentieth century, students at the Chicago School of Sociology turned to explore the social life in a 'natural laboratory' of the urban societies within cities to study villages and towns in the US and Europe (Deegan, 2001; O'Reilly, 2009). Ethnographic origins can also be traced to Malinowski's fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands in Melanesia in 1914 and his work is considered the foundation for the contemporary ethnographic fieldwork (O'Reilly, 2009: 138).

Park and Burgess were the pioneering researchers leading the young researchers between 1917 and 1942 at the University of Chicago who explored the everyday life in urban cities with "an openness to people, data, places, and theory" (Deegan, 2001: 11). Park was impressed with George Simmel's approach of 'formalism' in which he studied forms of social life that were later translated by Park in the *American Journal of Sociology* (O'Reilly, 2009: 29). Park and Burgess as the Chicago sociologists developed a rich ethnographic heritage in which their theoretical and methodological lenses were the foundation of the 'urban ecology'. This ethnographic heritage of the Chicago School consists of a selection of classical studies in which

I argue that they resulted in the emergence of sociological concepts including voice, agency, space and place, and social life experiences that were explored in studies such as *The Polish Peasant*, 1927; *The Taxi-Dance Hall*, 1932; and *The Jack Roller*, 1930.

In addition to these influential ethnographers, Malinowski's contribution to ethnographic research is as important to this thesis. Malinowski contributed to founding the functionalist school of anthropology with an inclusion of his 'holistic perspective frames' and he was the first to systematically record the fieldwork (O'Reilly, 2009: 139). Malinowski (1922) argued that 'immersion' is key when conducting ethnographic research for the researcher to become a member of the studied group and hence the research is not interrupted, and he also insisted on language (Hart, 2010). Drawing on the methodological and theoretical contributions, I adopt Malinowski's arguments on 'immersion' by travelling to 'meet, experience, and learn' about the females in my study (O'Reilly, 2009), and by adhering to the dress codes of the modest fashion events by wearing a festive dress or an Algerian Karako Jacket to make the participants feel as if I belong to their membership and community. I am also a young and visibly Muslim female with a constant passion for styling my modest lookbooks and sharing ideas on hijab styles and makeup tips and that makes me an 'insider' (Merton, 1972). In terms of language, the conversations, and posters in both the UK and Istanbul were in English which is my third language; and language can also refer to the camera as a tool for communicating with the female participants since visuality is central to their sartorial practices. My previous experience with social media publications on YouTube promoting modest fashion and Muslim fashion by female bloggers and designers enhanced the understanding of key concepts shared between the studied groups and my intensive fieldwork in fashion shows from 2018 to 2022 in various cities in the UK, Turkey, on Instagram and YouTube, and browsing in the Highstreets of Oxford London with some of my female participants. My immersion in the field helped me explore the rise of modest fashion as a 'culture industry' globally, the experiences and the challenges those modest female stakeholders lived as they promote modest fashion through diverse roles.

Moreover, in integrating visuality and ethnography, Malinowski's studies generated ethnographic monographs and photographic data of "persons, items of material culture and without persons, symbolic items, unusual events such as rituals and ceremonies, commonplace activities, and culture as the embodiment of abstract theories" which was a part of the fieldwork and was referred to as 'mechanical transcriptions of the transparent facts' (2001). This was relevant to my research as visuals were a part of my empirical data through photographic images that were photographed by the researcher and the Instagrammic images collected from digital spaces where the participants were experiencing modest fashion promotion. I considered

Malinowski's arguments essential to this PhD because of how he considered everything as data including the photographic fieldnotes and also the relevance of his studies in contemporary ethnographies' reflexivity and in the progression of exploring 'multi-sited and mobile ethnographies' through his ethnographic principles of doing fieldwork (O'Reilly, 2009).

In addition to the classical studies of The Chicago School and Malinowski's contributions, I recognize the anthropological studies led by women where I identified with the methodological and theoretical visions to prioritise the female stakeholders' voices, weaved spaces, and lived experiences, and I as well acknowledged their contribution to ethnography such as Abbott, 1906; Stacey, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 1990; El-Guindi, 1999; Skeggs, 2001; and Mahmood, 2001. In illustrating the significance of these women's work and their relevance to ethnography, I draw upon a selection of female researchers with influential research by women and on women (O'Reilly, 2009).

The anthropologist El-Guindi (1999) depicted the Islamic activism in Egypt which involved the veil narrating that "as early as the 1870s and 1880s before Egyptian organized feminism developed, Egyptian women were publishing their writings and were engaged in public speaking" (El-Guindi, 1999: 60). The onset of political feminism in relation to the veil is marked when Huda Sh'rawi unveiled in 1923 after coming back from a feminist meeting (El-Guindi, 1999:64). However, the veil that is mentioned here is not the hijab that covers the head but the veil covering the face. The state deemed the occurrence a threat and began to impose regulations with an emphasis on veiling (El-Guindi, 1999: 54).

In another account, Lila Abu-Lughod's ethnographic investigation of Muslim women's experiences and feelings made her question the existence and the arising of what she believed to be a 'western common sense'. She calls what she does "writing against culture" (Abu-Lughod, 1991) in which she opposes the mainstream claims of agency. The complexity of culture, the individuality of lives, and social dynamics, in her view, challenge the generalization of culture and call for an anthropological understanding of the experiences and feelings of the individuals. She immersed herself for years in Egypt amidst the Bedouin tribe studying gender and women's rights. Recording the statements of women, she researched and interpreted their vivid experiences and feelings to challenge the feminist representations supporting 'a mission to rescue [Muslim women] from their cultures' (Abu-Lughod, 2015: 6-7) in the name of solving women's 'global issues'.

Similarly, scholars like Mahmood (2005) argue that the non-Muslim feminists depicting Muslim women's lives when it comes to questions of oppression, agency, and liberation create more complexities. She adds that there are "multiple ways in which one 'inhabits' norms"



(Mahmood, 2005: 15). That is why a researcher must consider the social positioning of culture and social structure to define women's 'agentic' status. She calls for detaching agency from 'resistance to make a critical understanding of women's move towards 'liberation' or away from 'liberating'.

Female ethnographers such as El-Guindi (1999), Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) contributed to ethnography through feminist studies on women and their reflections on reflexivity in ethnography. Skeggs (2001: 430) argued that feminist ethnography provides a valuable methodology for research focusing on "the experience and the words, voice, and the lives of the participants". Instead of analysing the patriarchal oppression women face, the poststructuralist critics suggested that feminists focus on women's resistance (Schrock, 2013: 58). However, they should consider what power they are analysing. What it really means, as researchers in the field, we should analyse power to embody how resisters and dominators' social and cultural interaction's function. Therefore, looking into these women's work broadened my understanding of agency and liberation when researching the lived experiences of women and their sartorial practices in various geographies and how important it was to 'listen' to what the female participants have to communicate with the researcher.

From the traditions and influences of the Chicago School, Malinowski's fieldwork, and female researchers' ethnographies, I reflexively adopted my ethnographic approach to this thesis and that is through a 'mosaic of ethnography' (Blackman, 2010). Blackman (2010: 211) critically reviewed Palmer, Shaw, and Thrasher's methods in contemporary reflexive sociological interpretation and argued that the Chicago School approach was about the 'ethnographic mosaic' to produce a 'holistic understanding of culture' and this will be discussed with further details in the upcoming section on the approach I used to collect my data from a 'multi-sited' settings and through a 'mosaic' of ethnography following Blackman's argument on combining various research tools.

### **2.3.6. The Ethnographic Approach of this Research**

Ethnographic researchers in contemporary research find themselves in unexpected settings and around people of alternative cultures that they may be slightly or completely foreign to (Malinowski, 1972). In my research, the females I was studying shift in-between dual settings to perform their modesty through their everyday lifestyle. There were extensive activities and behaviours in different settings, such as hijab and turban tutorials on YouTube, Instagram, live

fashion events and live modest fashion catwalks in the offline settings and modest fashion hauls on digital platforms, and many other practices. So, collecting data from the field was challenging which resulted in the 'mosaic' approach of collecting diverse ethnographic data.

According to Holliday (2007: 20), the significance of using the right method relies on "the overall understanding of the nature of the social world as socially and ideologically constructed and how we, therefore, research it, which should influence all methods we use". That is why I chose the qualitative approach. I selected the methodology after initially observing the society that I was researching and because I aimed at developing a 'meaningful story' (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 161) of modest fashion diffusion in a contemporary era in the UK, the ethnographic methods were the most reliable methods at offering a deep understanding of a culture.

An advantage for me in the selection of the qualitative ethnographic approach was because of the ambivalent nature of the fieldwork setting. Hine (2015: 170) argues in this matter that "Ethnographers are adaptive people who develop their methods in response to the settings that they find themselves in, and each study is thus unique". Outlining convenient strategies was required to help the ethnographer constructed a methodological framework that helped them clarify the contemporary social interactions that emerged from the internet and then connected it to the offline or vice versa. In the case of my study, the participants launched their creativity of modest styling online and then shifted to the real-world setting with a concurrent visual presence of moving towards a modest lifestyle online. There were shifts in-between the settings for one aim of promoting modesty. In this case, the researcher needed to consider methods that would help her at immersing herself within the society of young Muslim women interested in modest dressing to offer thickly descriptive accounts. Ethnographic methods, therefore, were best at the collection of 'in-depth' qualitative data for a faithful and factual representation of Muslim women and the modest fashion movement. "The Purpose of such research is to describe the culture and life style of the group of people being studied in a way that is as faithful as possible to the way they see themselves" (McNeil, 1990: 64).

In this PhD fieldwork, I applied observation, participant observation, fieldwork diary, ethnographic conversations, and online observation to study the social everyday life construction of young Muslim women living in the UK who reached a mainstream level in the fashion industry with the inclusion of modesty as a concept and a style to the market. Through observing online modesty, I collected visual- textual data to support my fundamental findings from the offline setting which partially made me a visual ethnographer. I believed that the

visuals would offer additional in-depth exploration of the collected material through observation and ethnographic conversations. In this sense, Spencer (2011: 43) argues that the interpretation of research data might show a different perspective when analysing images as complementary data. Featuring visuals from the digital in this research shifted into certainly being more than additional. The study itself was bound to two interrelated social settings. The events of modest fashion had a link to the everyday representation and promotion of the modesty lifestyle on Instagram and YouTube through a bridge of performances where various aesthetical acts took place. In this sense, I was engaged in collecting and interpreting visuals for the validity of the research since for some individuals the digital is ‘a prime social reality’ and ‘a major source of identity’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:138). This visual aspect of my research demonstrated how the ethnographic approach allowed adapting other methods to structure an adequate framework for the settings and participants and Kozinets (2011: 62) argues that adjusting the methodology to new cases and conditions is “one of the key elements explaining ethnography’s success as a method”.

### **2.3.7. Reflexivity of the Research: positionality**

For Gary and Holmes (2020: 4), “producing a good positionality statement takes time, considerable thought, and critical reflection”. This is apparent in Savin-Baden and Major’s (2013: 71) account of how positionality is when a researcher acknowledges her position in the study which relates to three: “the subject, the participants, and research context and process”. And identifying such a statement of positionality “[...] can be useful in communicating the level to which the research was undertaken honestly, plausibly and effectively” (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 73). And by acknowledging my positionality in this research, I developed my reflexive thinking throughout the fieldwork and adopted reflexive choices in selecting the methodological approach and strategies to explore the spaces of Muslim female stakeholders in which modest fashion is promoted.

From these personal life experiences, I drew a wider context on the complexities of what was happening in the modest fashion space, essentially, Muslim women’s experiences and how convoluted the space was, compared to how it appeared on the surface. My personal interest and understanding of what is modest and experimenting with layering stemmed from the historical, social, and religious structures. I believed that I have been reflexive in this research in different ways. In this research, my ‘insider’ role is being a young Algerian woman who is

in her mid-20s and has a lifelong interest in women's fashion, style, and clothing. Since I started wearing the veil, I used to surf Instagram and YouTube to look at the various trends of modest dressing to adapt them to my everyday outfits. I initially was in the field of what I named modesty before even stepping into the PhD journey. My experience with modest fashion commenced during social situations of finding myself dressed in garments I styled from clothes I had in my locker before starting to wear a headcover to make myself look modest and trendy according to my personal terms, but I always ended up feeling uncomfortable and immodest. By 'immodest', I refer to the conceptualization of my Algerian society of Muslim women covering practices and if less of their body is covered, then they would assume that it is 'immodest'. In experiencing such incidents, I looked up ways how to make them 'adequate' to me while appealing to the social norms. I daily struggled with dressing up in contemporary yet modest attire that reflects who I am as a Muslim woman. For me, the solution was social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. I searched on YouTube for 'Hijab tutorials' and 'Get Ready with Me', 'DIYs' and 'Modest Lookbooks' while on Instagram I followed users who create content of veiled females dressing in clothes that reflected who they are, and I felt represented by a category of young women. I eventually became inspired and creatively picked ideas on how to style the pieces I associated as being 'immodest' to create a modest dress. After moving to study in the UK, I had access to online purchases of ready-made modest clothing from online industries like '*Modanisa*' which makes modest clothing for women. Moreover, I witnessed the evolution of modest fashion from a mere bricolage of clothes from brands such as H&M to a whole step towards a mainstream industry for modest women (*Modanisa*) then becoming a part of the corporates through the inclusion of the concept 'modesty' in global fashion events, brands, and Fashion Houses.

Therefore, my positionality in this research is being a young Algerian woman and visibly Muslim. I am interested in expressing myself through a dress culture that represents my Islamism and my 'modish modesty' (Lewis, 2013: 3) of mainstream fashion. As an Algerian, I also identify myself through traditional Algerian clothing such as Karako which I wore to Istanbul Modest Fashion Week 2019. Acknowledging my positionality contributed to being reflexive in the fieldwork when drawing the unfamiliarity and understanding of cultural, social, or political acts of the Muslim female stakeholders in my research. My reflexivity was also present when collecting visual images. Pink (2021: 151) argues that "we also cannot avoid bringing to these meanings our personal experiences, memories, and imaginations. This contingency of meaning is inevitable".

Most of the choices I made in my research process were through my reflexive thinking as a researcher following Abu-Lughod's (1990) approach to writing about women and Atkinson's (2007) statement on how ethnography refers to the interaction of the ethnographer with the social world. This was also apparent in Mills' (1959: 5-7) 'sociological imagination' and his argument on "the awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society". Another important approach to consider in being reflexive is Holliday's (2007:21) of 'holding up everything for scrutiny'. Being an ethnographer, these accounts of my insider position supported my critical thinking and reflective actions when interpreting cultural meanings in this PhD. With all the complex social and cultural structures in my study, reflexivity was key in approaching the empirical data of the community.

The relationship between 'us', the ethnographers, and the researched has been a consistent issue for feminist cultural studies research (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Skeggs, 2001). But if we highlight the role of the term feminism and femininity in ethnography, it can be seen that "[it] is used to signify the political stance that motivates and brings the practice of ethnography to life and to our attention" (Skeggs, 2007: 426). That signifies the relevance of my positionality that contributes to the reflexive nature of this research in understanding the experiences of Muslim women and apprehending their feelings, subjectivity, and struggles taking place in specific time and space in which I reflexively explore where and when these practices and experiences came from. Abu-Lughod (1990: 10) argues that "if, as anthropologists, we know what we know through emotionally complicated and communicatively ambiguous social encounters in the field, then certainly objectivity is out of the question and anthropology is not to be likened to science". This means that anthropology has always been about 'spatialized understanding of communities' (Escobar, 1991: 380) and producing cultural accounts. Thereby, this PhD's main focus is to investigate the weaved spaces of young Muslim females promoting modest fashion in the fashion industry and to produce ethnographic accounts about these women. In writing about women, Abu-Lughod (2000: 262) argued that she has reflected on feminist critiques, used her field notes, and ethnographic studies in which people are not presented as "object-like" to write about culture. In earlier studies, Abu-Lughod (1991: 468) had also emphasized the insider position and argues that anthropologists were always in "a definite relation with the other of the study" and my positionality was key in my reflexive thinking when producing cultural accounts of this research.

By aligning myself with the research participants, the female fashion students, Amina and Memunatu, who continuously questioned me 'You know what I mean? Do you get it?', I had to reflect on my autobiographical background and how I was in my early 20s and what I

experienced as a Muslim woman dressing modestly. By using the glossary of modest styling, dressing up, and using language, the female participants were familiar and comfortable when conversing with me. What made the female informants different was that modest fashion for them was more than just a passion for fashion, they made a career out of it. Rosenberg (2019: 286) points out that a generation of Muslim women is stepping into the labour market and “making history in politics, fashion design, and on the catwalk”. Therefore, this research supported reflexivity when exploring the agency of these young Muslim women in promoting a modest fashion industry to the mainstream and extending the discourse of modesty through multiple interpretations. The female bloggers and designers represent aesthetics of the everyday lifestyle and fashion, and this has to do with their construction and re-construction of their identities in a real-world setting and then online.” This favours Lewis’ argument about how Muslim women as “designers, cultural intermediaries, and consumers” use dress to “create and communicate a range of modern identities to disparate viewers and communities” (Lewis, 2015: 318) which was something I associated with. There were shifts in negotiating the spatial and bodily presence of these Muslim women in a UK society through expressing femininity and a sense of sexuality sometimes through identification of modest fashion as a tool to represent their experience and style daily.

### **2.3.8. Thick Description**

In social anthropological studies, the starting point is a deep understanding of what we are doing as researchers. Ethnographers aim at voicing the experiences of people’s lives in a detailed account while making the cultural patterns and social relationships evident. Geertz (1973: 6) argues that these contexts of ethnographic representations of cultures are explicit once using “thick descriptions” which is a term initially introduced by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1949). We can distinguish a thick description from a thin description by understanding the context of social actions and discourses.

Within this PhD, thick description was crucial as indicated by Holliday (2007) in which he provided pragmatic stages of the researcher’s journey in stitching a ‘creative rhetoric’<sup>15</sup>. Holliday (2007: 140) dictates that five voices make ‘a complex of voices’ in which a researcher reads and reflects on multiplicities of complex data to build “thick description [...] from all the

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Creative rhetoric’ in Postmodern thinking, pp. 127, Holliday, A. (2007) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*.

data in Voices 1 through 3; and it is the Voice 4 that speaks the description”. This stage is more about the critical representation of thickly described data. This is also apparent in Blackman and Commane’s (2012: 229) argument that Geertz’s thick description is an aim and commitment to the researched and for the research to avoid being stuck within what Holliday conceptualized as ‘a complex of voices’. In this sense, thick description enabled both the imagination and interpretation to rigorously explore the data for meaning. Looking at the thick package of data and the duality of the spaces, online and offline, I had to make constant links and comparisons between the experiences of the subjects in the two different settings while tracking the participants’ voices and thickly describing them

In his account, Denzin (1989: 116) suggests that “the capturing of meaningful events is done through the triangulated use of the several methods of recording and capturing life experiences”. The numerous research methods indeed resulted in thick data but led to multiple meanings and complexities in which the ethnographer faced a knot that was difficult to interpret at that time. In solving that case, the ethnographer distanced herself from the data and thought with a critical eye about the data. This included making comparisons of any possible meanings under a variety of contexts and attempting to make links between the data for valid findings while using her ‘imagination’ to be in touch with the participants’ lives (Geertz, 1973: 16). Hence, the ethnographic accounts produced would have an authentic report of people’s construction of culture.

Therefore, within this PhD, thick description was central for the use of triangulation where a multitude of thick data are collected, and ‘knotted conceptual structures’ were constructed through an ‘ethnographic mosaic’ (Blackman, 2010). Following a process of analysing thick ethnographic data, I immersed myself in the fashion events field on multiple sites in the real-world setting and on Instagram for an initial analysis starting from the field. Then, I transcribed the interviews and field data and then progressively contextualized s cultural meaning. Interpretation of thick data requires thick reading and re-reading of data while comparing and highlighting the outstanding concepts, this stage familiarized me with my data, and it is what Geertz (1973: 10) calls ‘to grasp’. ‘To render’ data is to explore meaning from the themes and concepts resulting from data analysis and thickly present them to the reader to make them experience the journey as if they were in the field.

### 2.3.9. Grounded Theory

From an ethnographic account on the experience of dying in the San Francisco Bay area (1965) to the Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967), Strauss and Glaser constructed a systematic articulation of theory through rigorous, yet flexible methodological principles. They suggested a “systematic discovery of the theory from the data of social research” under an inductive process by which it is generated (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 3).

The construction of the theoretical perspective of research was guided by a grounded theory approach which was inspired by a pragmatic and constructivist approach for Charmaz and Mitchel (2001). Charmaz and Mitchell (2001: 161) argue that in ethnography we aim to offer a complete account and ‘meaningful story’.

Our approach to grounded theory builds upon a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective and constructivist methods that assume the existence of multiple realities, the mutual creation of knowledge by researchers and research participants and aims to provide interpretive understanding of the studied world.

(Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 2)

Timmermans and Tavory (2007:498) argue that in ethnography, there is creativity and openness which is captured by the grounded theory approach towards ‘interactions’. The use of the concept of interaction refers to how behaviour is constructed under an order depending on the setting, bodies, or emotions. Strauss and Corbin (1990: 5) show that grounded theory’s background is pragmatics and symbolic interactionist and that there are two principles under which it is built following “an important component of the method is to build change, through the process, into the method. The second principle pertains to a clear stand on the issue of “determinism”.

The Complexities of social lives challenge the legitimate representation of any studied phenomenon in qualitative research. As a result, to that, some researchers look for innovative frameworks and means for the investigation of knowledge. Building on Strauss’s work, Clarke (2003) updated the grounded theory approach for a new framework for a ‘situational analysis’. She suggested that,



Situational analyses can deeply situate the research individually, collectively, social organizationally and institutionally, temporally, geographically, materially, culturally, symbolically, visually, and discursively. Their outcomes should be “thick analyses” paralleling Geertz’s (1973) “Thick Descriptions”.

(Clarke, 2003: 554)

Ethnographic studies are more than a representation of social reality. They add factual visions of how the theory is used in the real-world setting and how it reflects on people’s experiences. This is due to the depth of the interpretation of the actions and behaviours of participants just as they experience their social activities. For me, the immersion of the ethnographer in the fieldwork leads to the extensive amount of collected data but the question remained: does the quantity and quality of the data described paint a reliable picture of the researched society. Grounded theory strategies allow ethnographers “[to gain] a more complete picture of the whole setting than the former approach common in earlier ethnographic work” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 161). The open-ending feature of grounded theory made the ethnographic study more flexible for different social realities but under systematic characteristics for the collection and analysis framework. The process that grounded theory adds to ethnography prevents the researcher from “1 ‘going native’ 2 lengthy unfocused forays into the field setting; 3 superficial, random data collection; 4 reliance on disciplinary stock categories” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 162) because she will go back to the field after reading the data and analysing to fill any missing piece in the puzzle to construct the theoretical framework of the research. Here, reflexivity has a high role. As for my research, the visuals collected from the online observation are analysed under a grounded theory approach which eventually strengthens rather than weakens the discussion of why the latter is applied to this research. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990: 5) in grounded theory, data are from ‘various sources’ and “each of these sources can be coded in the same way as interviews or observations”.

Charmaz and Mitchell demonstrate how the first sample of the grounded theory developed ‘open-ended guidelines’. The broad openness makes it hard to understand which steps to follow and they emphasise how the “Guidelines have become prescriptive procedures –and there are more of them” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 160). They suggested an outlined process of how to collect and analyse data in ethnographic research following a grounded theory approach:

Collect data on what happens in the research setting. • Code data line-by-line to show action and process. • Compare data with data in memos. • Raise

significant codes to categories. • Compare data with category in memos. • Check and fill out categories through theoretical sampling. • Compare category to category. • Integrate categories into a theoretical framework. • Write the first draft. • Identify gaps and refine concepts. • Conduct a comprehensive literature review. • Rework the entire piece.

(Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001:162)

When going to the field, I always reminded myself how modest fashion has a prior existence by a group of stakeholders. I knew that there was something out there lacking exploration independently from my will. This motivated me to collect more data until I reached the saturation point.

The steps I followed in interpreting the data are as follows:

### **Coding**

I derived selective coding from my grounded theory and that was from the concepts that emerged from the analysis rather than earlier works (Charmaz, 2001: 165). In this case, Charmaz and Mitchell (2001: 167) stated that “these focused codes not only serve to synthesize large amounts of data but also to organize earlier codes into a coherent framework”. Through the process of coding, I also used ‘in vivo’ codes from the participants’ words that represented the most reliable concepts portraying their experiences.

The first step was “open coding” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp.101–121), in which I read and re-read the transcripts of the conversations I had with the designers and bloggers and the fieldwork diary of my participant observations. Then I highlighted the emerging concepts in different colours, such as re-defining modesty (orange) and individuality of modesty (blue) etc. Then, I attached the concepts to the relevant photographs I took in the fashion shows to create links between the offline data and visuals.

### **Conceptualizing**

During this stage I made links between codes to write relevant concepts as they were expressions, in vivo codes, descriptive phrases, and so on. In this stage, I was also allocating ‘selective codes’. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 103), the concept is “an abstract representation of an event, object, or action / interaction that a researcher identifies as being

significant in the data”. Grounded data analysis included the “conceptualization of emergent social patterns” which was “the core category of Grounded Theory (GT)” (Glaser, 2002: 23).

### **Categorizing**

After naming the codes with concepts, I put them under categories in tables with the initial codes and classified them in a table. I then added all the coded data recurring from the grounded analysis under the existing categories where data fit (Strauss and Glaser, 1967: 105). This was the first step into generating a theoretical understanding and a close reading of the data for meanings.

### **Comparisons between Emerging Categories**

Comparing the emerging patterns helped at generating creatively the theory through flexibility (Strauss and Glaser, 1967: 103). “Making explicit comparisons helps ethnographers discern patterns and establish variations from which they can outline theoretical relationships” and lead to making ‘selective coding’ (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2007: 167). After placing the categories, I compared an experience, a location, and an event with another to draw the shared similarities and differences. During this stage, I made sure to record memos when I first started the analysis and it was before visiting the fieldwork and continued to this stage of grounded theory analysis.

### **Memo-ing**

The process of memo making included a written account on a diary or an electronic device of any thoughts, or questions, and a continuous act of seeking a clear understanding of any vagueness in the preliminary stage of analysis. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001: 167) noted that “These memos may stand as private conversations with self in which researchers record ideas and information and state confirmed facts and conjectures”. However, Strauss and Glaser (1967: 107) consider this step as a rule of the comparative method and explained how it is “designed to tap the initial freshness of the analyst’s theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in his thoughts”.

During my fieldwork online observing Instagram and YouTube, I used to have conversations with myself about the meanings of specific images and descriptive texts and if any relevant idea, theoretical understanding, or vagueness comes to my mind, I wrote it down as a memo in my mobile notes or my fieldwork diary on the memo section. This procedure of memo-writing

was a threshold of possible codes while collecting data. Moreover, an ethnographer would have an early construction of relations between the behaviours and their context. This approach developed potential connections with theoretical reflection and ultimately the creation of arguments in the analytical section.

### **2.3.10. Writing up the Ethnography**

In this stage, the ethnographer used the art of stitching categories together into a descriptive account using a ‘creative imagination’ of the fieldwork experiences to deliver the whole story about the events, the audience, the material, and the aim. There needed to be a life beating in the written account so that the readers could live the experience with the researcher. Blackman and Commane (2012: 232) described the entire process from fieldwork to text through Barthes’ (1977) expression of ‘birth of the reader’ and this ideally refers to how it felt when describing what happened within the setting through flashbacks of realistic scenes and experiences to diverse readers of this field. In this stage, the research was represented, and this required a reflexive ethnographer. This was the second instance of reflexivity according to Blackman and Commane’s (2012) argument of how reflexivity is not present solely in the fieldwork but in writing-up as well. The conception of this duality is ‘double reflexivity’ (Blackman and Commane, 2012: 242). Following Geertz’s ‘Thick Description’ and Charmaz’s method of writing under a grounded theory approach, I developed the ethnographic accounts by identifying and describing the category, then I developed comparisons throughout the analysis. I made sure that the category was ‘visible’ by placing the emerging features. Adopting such an approach, I moved “from description into the analysis of a theoretical category” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 171).

## **2.4. Revisiting debates on structure/agency, feminism, and stakeholders**

This section develops into three subsections that revisit the existing debates and discussions on structure/ agency relationship, feminism, women, and agency, in addition to studies on the stakeholder concept in the theoretical literature to indicate how these theoretical areas are closely crucial to studying the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders promoting modest fashion into a global industry.

#### **2.4.1. Structure/Agency Debates: revisiting feminism, and Muslim women's agency**

The relationship between agency and structure, as Rafiee et al. (2014: 141) argue is “one of the many unresolved core enigmas in social sciences and social theory” which was developed against the past theories dismissing individuals' ability to negotiate and influence the social structures, such as functionalism. Karim Knio (2013: 857) states that “While 'older' debates about structure-agency seemed to hover between structure-led (structuralism) and agency-led (intentionalism) types of analyses, more contemporary treatments of this topic insist on the mutual constitutiveness”. Social scientists like Anthony Giddens, (1993[1976]) and Margaret Archer (1996) considered the structure-agency ontological question as a prominent issue to address within ‘the human sciences’ (McAnulla, 2002).

For McAnulla (2002: 271), “agency refers to individual or group abilities (intentional or otherwise) to affect their environment”, while “structure usually refers to context; to the material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors”. More specifically, “structure refers to large-scale social institutions and realities which frame individual experience; in short, structure refers to society, though it may imply stronger and more static organizational patterns. And agency is specifically used to refer to the powers of independent individuals” (Rafiee et al., 2014: 142). In simple words, structure is the reproduced pattern which affect or limit the scope of choices and opportunities, while agency represents the ability and the independence in individuals making their own choices. To understand this relationship of structure-agency, I revisit previous theoretical literature analysing these concepts by focusing on Bourdieu, Giddens, and Archer.

Under Bourdieu's (1984) perspective, structure and agency's relationship is ought to be restored. Dowding (2008:28) points out that Bourdieu is considered as a ‘deep structuralist’ for developing not as many writings on the “autonomous side of agency” and for his thought on how “agency cannot be directly observed but can only be experienced in practice or through habitus”. Habitus, as Sewell (1992: 15) explains, refers to “the mutual reproduction of schemas and resources” that shape the structures. That is to say, habitus constitutes the social action Resulting in a “system of circular relations that unite structures and practices, objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn tend to reproduce objective structure” (Bourdieu, 1977: 83). Despite Bourdieu's

intensified focus in structure and practice, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 736) contend that his field theory is deeply embedded in a structuralist analysis that he overlooks how “fields are reproduced through the enactments of agents in daily practice and localized settings”.

For Giddens (1993 [1976]: 27), structures are “both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems”. This means that structure constitute individuals’ practices that ultimately reproduce structures (people shape structure, but structure determines what people do). By that, Giddens emphasises his argument that structures have to be considered as ‘dual’ (Giddens, 1993 [1976]: 129). Dowding (2008: 29-30), in his critic of Giddens state that:

In fact I suggest that, despite his grand claims, Giddens does not offer much more of an analysis of the agency-structure ‘dualism’ than those who had gone before. For his illustrations of the dualism of free will and determinism, he examines the habits of routine action(constraint) and the opportunities allowed by structural facilitation. Not only do the illustrations not transcend the dualism, but also they do not provide insight into when one occurs and the other does not (Archer 1984, p. 459) and they certainly do not provide any insights into free will and determinism”

Dowding’s (2008) suggests that Giddens has put so much focus explaining how structure and agency are both “constraining and enabling” (Giddens, 1984: 169) in their relationship that he failed to see what happens when these concepts are set apart independently. Giddens recognizes the macro and micro that are, respectively, structure and agency “as an instrument to explore how these two levels of social life feed into one another” (Rooyen, 2013: 496). For Giddens (1984:19, 9), structure is “structuring properties” while agency refers to the ability, or the power of agents to exert things or simply to their actions. The main concept of his theory is ‘system’ that represent what is known as structure. Giddens (1979: 66) explains that the “reproduced relations between actors or collectivities organized as regular social practices”. These social practices, as Rooyen (2013: 498) indicates, are the social systems that “exhibit the structural properties” since they “do not have structures”. Regardless of the thorough explanation Giddens develops, Archer also criticized his theorem of structure-agency relationship by rejecting the full integration of structure and agency. Archer (1982, 2010) develops ‘morphogenesis’ to represent a system as ‘an end- product’ compared to Giddens’ ‘structuration’ of social system as a ‘visible pattern’ (Rooyen, 2013).

From a critical realist perspective, the relationship between structure and agency is viewed by the English sociologist, Margaret Archer, through what she modelled as a ‘morphogenetic’ cycle consisting of a three-part cycle of change over time. Archer’s (1996) morphogenetic

theory is based on a belief that there are three primary causal powers in society: structure, culture and agency. She defines 'Morphogenesis' as "[...] a process, referring to the complex interchanges that produce change in a system's given form, structure or state (morphostasis being the reverse), but it has an end-product, structural elaboration" (Archer, 2010: 228). Archer (1982, 2010) develops a comparison between 'structuration' of Giddens and her 'morphostasis'. (2010: 227) argues "Giddens completely ignores existing efforts to perform the same task of re-uniting structure and action from within general systems theory".

#### **2.4.2. Revisiting feminism and Women's Agency**

Feminist studies in theorising agency look at the possibility and the efforts in which women exhibit to reach their true goals within a male-dominated society and against social and political structures (such as in Kasana, 2014). For most feminist philosophers, women's agency is dependent on their ability to act against oppression. Tracy Isaacs (2002: 129) recognizes "feminist agency as women's ability to be effective agents against their own oppression". Isaacs (2002: 130) rejects the traditional literature which calls for the individuality with regards to 'moral agency' and calls for "our relations to others". Her idea suggests that constructing relations with others is significant to address women's oppression. In her research paper, Isaacs (2002: 132) redirects the conception of 'self-in- relation' claiming that for its individualistic features, it fails to identify the oppressive social structures.

Following the traces of traditional literature, Isaacs (2002: 132) states that the patriarchal social structures restrain women's agency through 'literal barriers' and 'feminine socialization' leading to women's dependence on men as passive individuals who are involved in their own subjection. Isaacs (2002: 132) argues that women have to be "active participants against [their] own subordination" for the efficiency of their agency when standing against women's oppression. She also calls women to identify patterns of oppressive practices where they (as a group of women) collectively share similar experiences despite the difference in the context and act against this social structure (Isaacs, 2002: 138- 141).

Within women's agency debates, authors had different definitions of what is agency and Saba Mahmood (2005, 2006) had an exclusive approach of viewing Egyptian women's experiences. The anthropologist, Mahmood (2006: 31), refers to feminism as "an analytical and politically prescriptive project" which focuses on analysing "the situation of women in different

historical and cultural locations” while changing “their conditions of subjugation”. Mahmood (2006) had a different perspective on agency that she examined through an ethnographic fieldwork exploring Muslim women in Egypt who were actively involved in the Islamic revival movement through the mosque movement. This movement gathered women of various classes and social backgrounds to help each other learn about “Islamic scriptures, social practices, and forms of bodily comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self” (Mahmood, 2006 32). Mahmood’s (2006) focus in her study on is wrapped around notions of ‘self, moral agency, embodiment’ that supports those practices of what she conceptualizes as a ‘nonliberal movement’. This study contributes to the feminist scholarship through a different approach used to analyse women’s agency. Thus, Mahmood (2006) explains that within the context of her research “agency not as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create”. By that, Mahmood challenges the liberal views about agency and develops from her book *Politics of Piety* (2005), her perception on agency according to the lived experiences of the Egyptian Muslim women in her study as active agents in the mosque movements.

At the outset of the fieldwork, voicing women’s experiences through a feminist approach was not a thought until I was immersed in the fieldwork where I began to recognize theoretical concepts requiring a feminist epistemology, ontology, and theories to transform an understanding of their meaning and to produce a feminist ethnography as an approach to this PhD. O’Reilly (2009: 67) states that adopting feminism as an approach to ethnography is about the epistemology of the study in which the researcher worked towards making sense of the lived experiences and in this case of Muslim female stakeholders in the industry. Like the feminist ethnographers (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Mahmood, 2004; Skeggs, 2001; Mead, 1942; Stacey, 1988), this PhD suggests that when in the field, “the voice was to be that of a women ethnographer listening to other women’s voices” (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 22). At this point, I recognized the importance of presenting more than thickly descriptive accounts of women’s lived experiences, I had to be ‘involved in’ and produce knowledge that challenged what we may think we know about the women in the research (O’Reilly, 2009:66; Skeggs, 2001: 437).

Both Skeggs (2001: 430) and Schrock (2013: 48) argue that feminist ethnography provides a valuable methodology for research focusing on ‘the experience and the words, voice, and the lives of the participants. Thereby, by adopting the feminist epistemology and theories to this ethnography, the grounded theory analysis was fulfilled as an approach by attempting to understand the everyday sartorial bodily practices of Muslim women through the grounded



theory contextualized in the fieldwork. In doing so, I had to recognize that the existing bodily practices in my PhD were about modesty which is about covering the body and often on a religious term of Islamically covering the head. In this context, Mahmood (2005: 1) notes that feminists and Islam as a religion share a 'vexing relationship' because of the historical events between Islamic societies and what is known as 'the west'. Whilst the Muslim women in my study were from Muslim communities, most of them live in what Mahmood (2005) referred to as 'the west'. I have drawn upon a range of feminist theorists supporting the research findings in which they understood the Muslim women's histories and political experiences and a feminist epistemology that conformed to the grounded theory approach and not a prior selection of specific feminist theoretical framework.

Expanding on feminists and their views of religious practices, Grami (2013: 104) argues that they believed that "Islam is a religious doctrine, while feminism is an international, legal, civil movement that rejects the incorporation of religion into movements of struggles". Despite the feminist arguments, the histories of women's acts and experiences in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa critically depict otherwise. Egypt revolutionized various movements by women with a particular focus on the Islamic veil and the Islamic teachings relating to women. In the nineteenth century, as fashion styles changed, and marketing rose in new ways in Egypt, Muslim women adopted a peculiar dress that is different from the 'traditional' (Baron, 1989). As a result of these shifts, society criticised women's involvement into the sartorial change and men's acceptance of the situation (Baron, 1989: 374). Egyptian women resisted these patriarchal acts and "were publishing their writings and were engaged in public speaking" (El-Guindi, 1999: 60) representing who they are though remaining modest on their own terms. These Egyptian women's choice of bodily practices was challenged by society and culture which led women to resist. This existing literature shows that Muslim women are agentive and that despite the claims against the modest dress being "a sign of submission and oppression" (Wilson, 2013: 166).

Discourses on women's veiling and body covering practices is apparent in the anthropologist studies of El-Guindi, 1999; Mahmood, 2005; Abu-Lughod, 1986; and the Moroccan feminist Mernissi, 1992, which precisely revolved around Muslim women's lived experiences. By adopting this range of feminist theories, I came to recognize the various social realities in women's experiences and that of their agency as individuals practising their daily body covering. In contextualizing agency, Mahmood (2005: 4) challenged the liberal views of agency and she highlighted that despite the religiousness of the Muslim women in mosque movements,

there was still a presence of activism. Relying on some of her ideas, I believe that understanding the experiences of women in my study was derived from their commitment to protecting and promoting their individual liberties and by privileging their creativeness, feelings, their subjectivity, and individuality in the fashion industry.

In addition to adopting a range of feminist theories, I ensured implying theories on space and feminism as the bodily practices were executed in-between a physical setting and an online platform and they were a part of the fashion industry. This was grounded in the research findings. Observing their practised experiences moving towards two platforms required theorists to understand the difference between private and public space and how that related to Muslim women's representation, innovativeness, feelings, emotions, beliefs, and individuality. Moreover, there was a further requirement to look at theorists' critical essays on culture and the industry to see how individuals experience aesthetics and bodily practices, and if there were any systematic control or exploitation of these Muslim females' efforts and voices. Therefore, concepts of femininity, agency, and individuality have been emphasised as part of the grounded theories in the research findings. For Abu-Lughod (1990b: 27):

Feminist ethnographies, ethnographies that try to bring to life what it means to be a woman in other places and under different conditions, ethnographies that explore what work, marriage, motherhood, sexuality, education, poetry, television, poverty, or illness mean to other women, can offer feminists a way of replacing their presumptions of a female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences.

This coincided with what these women performed in the fieldwork including working positions: modelling, businesswomen, designers, or fashion students, their role at home as mothers, and their representation of sexuality on the fashion exhibitions and runways. Looking at their roles from various feminist lenses to analyse the differences and similarities contributed to interpreting implicit feminist representations within women's experiences that lie beyond the modest fashion promotion as will be seen in chapters five and six.

As for representing the multitude of voices in the various spaces where the female participants were engaged with modest fashion practices, I was inspired by Mulvey (1975) and Blackman (2005) in terms of what characterised the challenging dressing style and the 'sexual fetishism' (Blackman, 2005: 208). Looking into young women's female space, Blackman (2005: 222) explored how the New Wave Girls defined themselves socially and culturally as a

group of resistant females using the feminist theory. Females' bodily 'integrity', which is defined as "the socially genderised female physicality", challenges the patriarchal hierarchy of male power in different spatial settings. Their open portrayal of the female body and sexuality is a sign of self-control, resistance, and autonomy. The reflecting aspect is demonstrating their cultural activities without omitting or adding physical parts but the whole body as a source of resistance (Blackman, 2005: 223). Their individual entities represented the rest of the females including the Muslim females that were projected to 'gaze' and 'voyeurism' (Mulvey, 1975) on the fashion runways and on Instagrammic field. In this context, one of Blackman's (2005: 208) correlating findings concerning the New Wave Girls was how they were characterised by the challenging dressing style and the 'sexual fetishism'. Inspired by these feminist analyses and Blackman's use of 'verbatim', I voiced the Muslim females' experiences as stakeholders in the fashion industry in an authentic and factual voice of Muslim women using their body, daily lifestyle, fashion, and sexuality to overcome what they were exposed to by creating their own space within the fashion industry and online.

### **2.4.3. Muslim females as Stakeholders**

Historically, the concept 'stakeholder' was at first widely embraced in research when used in 1963 "in the management literature in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute" and it consisted of "shareowners, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders, and society" who contributed to the existence of an organisation (Freeman, 1984: 31). Whilst in recent studies, the Scandinavian roots of the term were explored (Strand and Freeman, 2013; Pedersen, et al., 2017). For Mitchell and Lee (2019: 53), stakeholders have a role in the economy whereby value is created and distributed. Cragg and Greenbaum's (2002: 322) study argues that "anyone with a material interest in the proposed project was a stakeholder". Defining the term 'stakeholder' can take various forms. A broader definition Freeman et al. (2010: 26) provide is "[...] the idea that any business, large or small, is about creating value for "those groups without whose support, the business would cease to be viable" [and] a stakeholder is any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realization of an organization's purpose".

Freeman et al. (2010: xv) indicate in their book *Stakeholder Theory: the state of the art* that "[f]or the past thirty years a group of scholars has developed the idea that a business has stakeholders – that is, there are groups and individuals who have a stake in the success or failure

of a business” and claim that there are various approaches to understanding the concept of stakeholder and constantly developing the stakeholder theory. The existing literature points out that stakeholders have ‘high levels of engagement’ within companies and that is achieved through communication (Alonso-Cañadas, et al., 2018: 4). After all, stakeholders are individuals with concrete presence in the real world and names (Freeman and Velamuri, 2006). The communication of stakeholders with fashion companies per se is crucial for their reputations and that is why “[...] fashion companies increasingly focus on social and environmental responsibility to meet stakeholder demands” (Pedersen et al., 2017: 267).

Therefore, given the definition of the term stakeholder in the literature, using it as a concept combines together the various roles of Muslim women actively involved in the modest fashion sphere—From designers to customers who have an interest and a part in the promotional and financial growth happening within the modest fashion industry. In the current research on modest fashion and in cultural studies, the term ‘stakeholders’ is hardly used but there are numerous alternatives are used interchangeably, such as ‘tastemakers’ to refer to designers, fashion bloggers, Instagram influencers, local designers (Alimen and Kuris, 2020: 136; Lewis, 2015: 14, 197).

Muslim female designers as suppliers of modest fashion products, the more they grow within the modest fashion industry and the more diverse Muslim businesswomen joining the field are, the proliferation of modest fashion as a corporate grows. This makes these Muslim women as primary stakeholders in the modest fashion industry. Magness (2008: 178) indicates that “primary stakeholders are those with an economic stake in the company” and consist of “creditors and shareholders, as well as employees” as well as “long-time suppliers and customers”. Recognizing through the existing literature on Muslim women as ‘tastemakers’ and crucial members in the fast-growing modest fashion industry (Lewis, 2013, 2015; Kuris, 2021; Alimen and Kuris, 2020; Lewis, 2018) who are adding economic value as asserts helping build a global industry out of modest fashion that was once a niche market.

Since the Muslim females in this PhD are highly engaged within the modest fashion industry, also in the mainstream fashion corporates and fashion houses, with their active involvement and the value they add to these companies through their diverse roles – including being designers, models, fashion bloggers, businesswomen, and consumers— Stakeholder as a concept is the most adequate notion representing their engagement and economic value to the industry. The Muslim female stakeholders’ careers and active roles contributed to constructing their powerful position within the fashion industry and it is important to join the diversity of their role under one term ‘stakeholders’.

With the post 9/11 “politically created dichotomy of good, moderate Muslims versus bad, extremist Muslims” in the UK (Lewis, 2015:7) and modest dress is discriminated and seen as a sign of oppression (Rosenberg, 2019; Wilson, 2013), one could argue that Muslim women were marginalized stakeholders whose background in British, Turkey, or within the fashion industry was not appealing. Nonetheless, through their decisive actions of weaving a space in fashion as bloggers, designers, models, businesswomen, and customers, they succeeded in making a statement through their agentive acts as ‘tastemakers’ (Alimen and Kuris, 2020) and contemporarily fashionable women recognized through the mainstream fashion shows, and on social media platforms (Lodi, 2020; Lewis, 2015). Achieving such a shift in their situation required an active engagement in the fashion industry, starting up with the niche market of modest fashion (Lewis, 2013) and progressively moving to Muslim females modelling for corporate fashion brands, such as Halima Aden as the first hijabi star of Milan Fashion Week (Rosenberg, 2019: 2). Engagement is a feature that stakeholders have as an objective to create a communication with the company, i.e., the fashion industry for Muslim women’s case. Thus, as Taylor and Kent (2014) point out calling for engagement led to the construction of relationships and results in human capital.

With the diversity of Muslim female stakeholders’ roles comes different levels of agency in the modest fashion industry, including the fashion spaces explored in this thesis, such as the festivals, catwalk shows, charity-events, and within the corporate companies. For fashion events to succeed as creative shows with innovativeness and ‘technical affordances’, Halliday (2021: 193) argues that they require “the decisions of planners and stakeholders”. Such as in the modest fashion shows, Muslim females make such events happen and evolve. As previously mentioned, Muslim females were hardly considered as ‘stakeholders’ and women with recognized agency, or even fashionable. Wilson (2013: 166) asserts that despite Muslim women’s equal efforts to Western feminists in standing against “the fashion and beauty industries for proposing and even enforcing narrow and stereotyped ideals of female beauty (particularly slenderness), which oversexualise women”, modest dress is viewed as ‘oppressive’ and ‘submissive’. Not only Muslim women’s veiling was stigmatized in the ‘Western mind-set’, but also banned in some countries where the population is mostly Muslim, such as in Turkey when Secularism was at its peak (Sandikci and Ger, 2010: 16).

Despite the importance that the theoretical concept ‘stakeholder’ adds to the role of Muslim females contributing to the globalization of modest fashion and the increase in their economic value (Freeman, 2010: 47), and as far as this research is concerned and to the best of my knowledge, no research used a straightforward conceptualization of stakeholders to refer to

these actively involved Muslim women. There was one reference in Lewis' (2015: 132) study on Muslim Fashion Contemporary Style Cultures wherein one of her informants, Sarah Joseph (an editor at *Emel's* magazine) who use the term 'stakeholders' to refer to herself along with other women contributing to "the global dialogue" on modesty. The Muslim female stakeholders in this PhD reproduce certain actions in the fashion events and on social media as structures contributing to developing their promotional acts of modest fashion and in the fashion industry. Within these fields of fashion, they weave a space for their agency by reproducing the promotional acts such as blogging practices on Instagram and the front rows seating positions in catwalk shows (Entwisle and Rocamora, 2006).

With the Muslim women progressively gaining recognition as fashionable and agentive members of the fashion industry through the various roles of blogging, designing, and other careers of business and modelling, their challenges continue to exist within the fashion realm. Hence, this PhD contribute to the existing theoretical literature on women and agency by conducting an ethnographic study in fashion events and on Instagram to explore the lived experiences of the Muslim female stakeholders.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

The qualitative methodological procedure and strategies were key to conducting this research in the physical field and the digital platform of Instagram. This chapter covered the application of ethnographic methodology from the collection of empirical data to generate a thick description and interpret the findings. Through these stages, reflexivity and criticality were key to the credibility of the study.

This PhD employed the 'ethnographic mosaic' (Blackman, 2010) to the ethnographic methodological strategies including observations, participant observations, conversational interviews for the modest fashion events in the physical world, and the visual ethnographic approach to examine modest fashion on the Instagram platform by conducting an online observation and semiotics. The social and cultural practices of modest fashion female stakeholders, their experiences, feelings, and spaces, and the industrial changes in this culture, were investigated from 2018 to 2021, in which the researcher attended the modest fashion events in London, Birmingham, Leicester, and Zorlu Centre in Istanbul, and by being a 24-hour observer of modest fashion Instagrammic activities virtually. Participants from both settings, the events and Instagram, were recruited through a snowball sampling and access to the field was gained through the attendance of London Modest Fashion Week 2018 in which I made

friendly fieldwork relations and I met my gatekeepers. In the fieldwork, the researcher was offered 'goodies bags', material documents, and gifts which were considered 'pocket ethnography' (Hey, 1997; Blackman, 2007; Doherty, 2017) and referred to as 'pocket goodies'.

This thesis resulted in thick descriptive accounts that were generated from the findings in which theoretical understanding, meanings, and values were derived. The interpretation of data was through grounded theory analysis (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001; Strauss and Glaser, 1967) by following a process of coding, conceptualizing, constant comparison, categorizing, and memoing to extract themes. In maintaining a critical and theoretical understanding of empirical data, relevant literature was informed in discussing the findings. The interpretation of data was grounded in the findings in which multiple voices emerged from the physical and digital fields.

## Chapter Three

### **‘Modest Fashion Live’: ethnographic accounts of modest fashion spaces, promotional scenes, and consumer culture**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents an ethnography of the multiple spaces and locations where the modest fashion industry is expanding its consumer culture. By adopting the event culture as an approach, modest fashion witnessed rapid commercialisation of its products in the international market. This chapter focuses on the centrality of space in modest fashion promotional practices and seeks to clarify the embedded practices of Muslim female stakeholders amidst the spatial decorations and designs where agentive acts emerge from the fieldwork.

This empirical chapter is presented in three parts investigating the organised events of modest fashion by exploring of the locations, buildings, interior design, and decorations wherein fashion weeks, festivals, and charity dinners are primary ‘eventscapes’ for the global commercialisation of modest fashion. The first part develops ethnographic accounts of the eventful spaces of two modest fashion weeks in London and Istanbul and a Muslim shopping festival in Olympia to analyse the spatial changes by adopting Brown’s (2020) concept of ‘eventscapes’. It also examines the charity fashion shows in the UK: London, Birmingham, and Leicester where ‘female-only space’ emerges as a concept negotiating Muslim women’s agency in a commercial space. The second part adopts Benjamin’s (1999) idea of ‘arcade’ to investigate the exhibitions as urban spaces for physical shopping experiences (Lash and Lury, 2007) and a ‘sense of place’ (Qazimi, 2014). The third part is about the newly emerging form of consumer culture ‘pocket goodies’ that developed from the material culture of the eventful space of modest fashion.



### **3.2. An Ethnography of Modest Fashion Eventful Spaces: fashion weeks, festival, and charity dinners**

The first part of this empirical chapter examines the organised events of modest fashion through the exploration of the eventful spaces, including locations, buildings, interior design, and decorations, wherein fashion weeks, festivals, and charity dinners are crucial for the global commercialisation of modest fashion and the rise of consumer culture with innovative materiality and design. Ferrero-Regis and Lindquist (2021: 1) argue that “within this systematic presentation of fashion, space became instrumental to the creation of the modern fashion moment, the perception and pleasure of being in the act of discovering newness”. Likewise, modest fashion stakeholders developed a set of global events using creativity to produce a space with new innovative ideas and promotional tools for exhibiting the fashion items on a branding stage. Hence, space is central to increasing merchandise sales in this ‘systematic presentation’ of modest fashion.

In the fieldwork, the fashion shows were categorized according to the name of the event, the significance of the location, and its consumerist global or local reach resulting in three columns (see table 1): global fashion weeks that take place in London and Istanbul, the shopping festival in Olympia, London, and local fashion events organized yearly for charity-based purposes, in London, Leicester, and Birmingham. The table below demonstrates the global events (fashion weeks and a festival) and the charity dinners hosting modest fashion live. The researcher attended the following shows and conducted in-depth fieldwork through participant observation and conversational interviews.

<b>Modest Fashion Weeks (Two days events): global</b>	<b>Shopping Festival: global</b>	<b>Charity-based dinner events: Local</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London Modest Fashion Week (Victoria House)</li> <li>• Istanbul Modest Fashion Week (Zorlu Performing Arts Centre)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London Muslim Shopping Festival (Olympia London)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 (London, Marriot Hotel)</li> <li>• Ladies only Charity Fashion Show (Leicester, Platinum suit)</li> <li>• Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham (Birmingham, Excalibur Grand)</li> </ul>

**Table 1.** The Fashion Events the Researcher Attended for fieldwork (field diary extract)

From the fieldwork, it is argued that the modest fashion weeks, festivals, and charity events were spaces produced to create a physical experience for consumers. In this context, I adopt Lash and Lury’s (2007: 9) argument that “[...] the physical environment is the setting of immersion in a highly mediated brand experience; very concretely, it is the installation of sensation”. And this is what Qazimi (2014) referred to as the ‘sense of place’. The clientele of modest fashion develops a brand experience in catwalk shows and exhibitions which contribute to building a connection with modest wear in retail spaces through cultural objects associated with modesty and Muslim women, such as *Modanisa* hijabs and skincare products in gift bags. Such commercial items demonstrated that modest fashion is also growing into a global industry, and Muslim women as consumers would feel like belonging to the global consumer culture, which leads to representations and modesty as a fashion culture being industrialized. This will be explored ethnographically to examine the spatial-economic developments through thickly descriptive accounts in the coming sections.

For a commodity to grow and circulate in this contemporary era, the ethnographic fieldwork investigated that ‘event culture’ was key (Lash and Lury, 2007). By growing the cultural events within modest fashion, the consumers could experience the physical environment of modest fashion. This chapter explores these spaces through ethnographic accounts of the venues, buildings, locations, interior design, and decorations to generate a

theoretical understanding of these spatial branding experiences. The mediation of modest fashion culture through event culture revealed traces of the global culture industry that Lash and Lury (2007) discussed in their critical account of football, the branding of cultural events that developed a ‘global communication platform’. Their description of the cultural events is reminiscent of the findings on modest fashion events in the following sections.

### **3.2.1. An Ethnographic Description of Modest Fashion Weeks Locations and Interior Designs**

In this section, I will examine the interior decoration and interior design and significance of the three buildings where the Modest fashion Weeks and the London Shopping Muslim *Festival* took place. Each territory was an interactive space for Muslim female stakeholders and their audience. At the same time, it also functioned as a constitutive space for socio-economic events in a place where the ‘physical experience’ of modest fashion emerged and was negotiated through various meanings to leading modesty to a global resonance.

#### **3.2.1.1. London Modest Fashion Week: Victoria House, Bloomsbury Square**

This was my first fieldwork visit from the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2018 to London Modest Fashion Week. I stood outside in the queue, fascinated by the spectacular grade II structure. Previously known as the head office of the Liverpool and Victoria Friendly Society with a posh neo-classic Georgian London design. It is situated in the crowded area of Bloomsbury square facing the road. Jumping out of the bus, the stop was right across the vast rectangular building in white. Outdoors, the queue was very long. It mainly consisted of women who covered their heads and had ongoing conversations about what they wore to this event, complementing each others’ style. The entrance had two robust men in dark suits, one on the left and the other on the right. The gate was made of glass with a transparent signboard in bold black letters ‘London Modest Fashion Week’ with a pink illuminating reflection in the background.

Inside the building, the entry was a small room with a white desk where the three women stood in front of the white walls and ceiling. We were given bracelets showing which access we had during the two-day event. Taking the stairs to the ground floor, a huge signboard in white with the founder of the event name in pink *Haute-Elan.com* and the sponsor *TRESemme*

(a brand for hair products) in a rectangular black box. *Haute Elan* is a London-based modest fashion firm owned by the female entrepreneur Romanna Bint-Abubaker, but it was later purchased by Hijub, the Indonesian company during the event. The hashtag of both companies captivates attention and calls for individual power ‘#BeYourOwnPro’ (See figure 2). On the right hand, there were exhibitions of modest brands presenting their designs of abayas and dresses. On the left hand, there was an entry to the catwalk with a black arrow on the wall (see figure 3) which was a central space in modest fashion events where stakeholders were given a stage to promote their designs and perform the inspiring themes of their brands to the audience with a focus on the clothing line.

When interpreting the photographic field notes from the field diary, the building of Victoria House stands as an iconic landmark. As observed on *Buildington* website (2022), it was designed by Charles William, and it was a workplace. During the fashion week, the outset design and the interior decoration of space at Victoria House prepared for the event of London Modest Fashion Week. The visual and light design by *Light Motif* company inside the venue complemented the colour palettes of brands on the runways as it was a plain white space allowing the fashion designs on models to pierce through the purplish brightness of the space. I observed that the ‘simplicity’ of the space and the one-colour method for designing the interior of the runway produced an atmosphere for the attendees so that they focus on the products parading on the runway. The choice of this interior design increased the visitors’ admiration of the modest fashion space leading to a growth in consumer reach. In addition, the ongoing spatial and socio-economic interactions between attendees and the production of an eventful space of modest fashion indicated the emergence of two of the multiple promotional tools: choice of building and interior design and decorations.

In these events, there were guidelines for where to stand outside and inside in ‘the queue’. Also, paper bracelets were given to the attendees to allow access to specific areas according to the colour codes. These structural guidelines are associated with bracelets with a price tag to them. The pink bracelet was for individuals who paid more money to have access to the exhibition stalls and the catwalk. Controlling attendees access was according to their ‘social capital’ with regards to the event (Bourdieu, 1995). In exploring space and events’ structural guidelines for the spectacle, Sack (1993: 326) argued that “territorial rules about what is in or out of place pervade and structure lives and provide specific examples of how place has power”. He adds that space and society are bound and ‘constitutive’, which means there is a power controlling behaviour (Sack, 1993). This shows that modest fashion events as ‘cultural fields’

(Bourdieu, 1996) are structured and have ‘their own internal rules’ (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 737) that they ‘structure the position’ of attendees within the modest fashion spaces and this is what Bourdieu (1995: 72) conceptualize as ‘structured spaces of positions’.

This ‘structure of positions’ is usually present in fashion weeks that receive global audience, such as, in the London Fashion Week wherein a fieldwork was conducted by Entwistle and Rocamora (2006). These researchers explored the “visible boundaries, relational positions, capital and habitus” in the field of London fashion week. Likewise, London Modest Fashion Week imitates the global industries’ patterns of fashion shows on how they stand as powerful fields of fashion through their yearly fashion weeks in famous venues with ‘structured spaces of positions’ (Bourdieu, 1995: 72). Hence, modest fashion weeks seem to follow similar spatial characteristics, such as the structured access to the event via a mechanism of colour-coded bracelets which marks the position of the attendees in the show (Bourdieu, 1995). Like the limited access to catwalks and stalls, the seating positions of the attendees were slightly under control. The bloggers were placed in a particular visible location to the left where nobody can take a seat and we were asked to sit in the second row. The front row seats were left for well-known attendees, like the American actress, Lindsay Lohan who was wearing a headscarf and sunglasses while facing me on the other side of the runway.

Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) also examined the seating structures during the London Fashion Week. The visibility as a feature of catwalks (Khan, 2000) establishes a relationship between the audience as they sit facing each other in the stage. Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 744) argue that “[t]he staging of the catwalk show is a staging of the gaze; the gaze of the participants sitting in the audience”. Likewise, the spectacle know that they are gazed at in the London Modest Fashion Week catwalk, such as in the case of Lindsay Lohan who covered her face with big glasses and a headscarf. She is a well-know person amidst the global audience, but I only came to recognize the actress amidst the busy fieldwork and her accessories (the large sunglasses and headscarf) when one of the attendees pointed at her. With such famous individuals (bloggers and actors) placed in front row seats, the data generated that “the seating plan maps out the power relation between players in the field” with the fashion bloggers and the actor as ‘powerful bodies’ and ‘the most visible’ in a catwalk space (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 744). These power relations within the spectacle of the modest fashion week in London were far from equal. Hence, they represented that the spectacle has different levels of capital within the field of London Modest Fashion Week according to the structured access and the seating plans as markers of power amidst the attendees.

From the fieldwork, it was also observed that London Modest Fashion Week promotes a movement under the concept of modesty. The Victoria House is the place for hosting events. The venue is a busy spot with an appealing signboard on the top of the gate to capture almost everyone's attention. It is a concrete, natural setting constructing 'a social power and meaning' (Sack, 1993: 328). The spatial interaction between things dwelling in a particular area holds power 'especially the distances, among things' (Sack, 1993: 327). In London Modest Fashion Week's illustration, separating the check-in desk, catwalks' spaces' and exhibitions' location to provide a factual experience of modest fashion in which visitors go through a procedure of registering, walking around the space, sitting, and viewing the brands contribute to the branding procedure, but also have a powerful effect on visitors in which they circulate around the modest fashion products. This is just a preliminary phase of modesty labelling with the event before it started. An analysis of the exhibition along with the catwalk and how they both display a powerful representation is a significant part of this research. Bearing in mind that fashion is central in the events and the items designed by modest brands and how they are distributed and consumed to the target audience, there is a relationship existing in-between. It will be explored in further details in the next chapter.



**Figure 2.** The signboard in London Modest Fashion Week (photo taken by A.B)



**Figure 3.** The catwalk's indication sign at London Modest Fashion Week (photo taken by A.B)

### **3.2.1.2. Istanbul Modest Fashion Week: Beşiktaş, Zorlu Performing Arts Centre**

Istanbul Modest Fashion Week was an event hosted by *Modanisa* in 2019 and took place in Zorlu Performing Arts Centre in Istanbul. *Modanisa* is the Turkish company mentioned in the earlier section as the corporate of modesty. It is a corporation based in Turkey binding global brands of modest wear with their own space in *Modanisa*. It seeks to promote modest fashion by setting yearly exhibitions, catwalks, and panel talks in organized global fashion events. As described in field diaries, Turkey is a centre of attraction and tourism known for its architectural design of buildings and therefore visited by worldwide tourists. The modest fashion in Istanbul has a long-lasting history with shifts in modest wear (Lewis, 2015; Sandikci and Ger, 2002, 2007). Comparing the changes to what was observed in the shopping centres of Istanbul along with the modest fashion week and the literature on the assumptions and perceptions on modest fashion in the past, we can see that modest fashion growth marked a huge shift with the diverse brands who are reaching more global consumers through these events. This is because of the various brands packed in, for example, *Zeruj Port* the shopping centre of modest fashion, where the founding Muslim fashion industries (e.g., Tekbir) rose in the twentieth century, initiating the proliferation of modest wear in Turkey (Lewis, 2015).

Fashion weeks in this research demonstrate the fact that they are useful promotional tools and emerged as an ‘important marketplace’ (Pinchera and Rinaldo, 2021: 479) for the modest fashion industry. However, they hardly had a positive view in the past as they were criticized by Islamists and Secularists from Turkey (Sandikci and Ger, 2007, 2002; Lewis, 2015). With Tekbir’s first fashion show in 1992, critics on its ethicality and fashionability took place against the promotion of *tesettur* through such marketing practices that involves women bodies under display and adoption of Western styles (Sandikci and Ger, 2007). Comparing the past events to the field notes on Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, views have changed, and fashion shows are more embraced by a global spectacle who do their best to be in the event. One of the attendees, the Moroccan student temporarily living in Turkey, Hafsa, had to take a day off from her studies to be in the fashion show as noted in the field diary when I informally conversed with her. What is important about this discussion is how women in Turkey always had the passion to grow as female stakeholders by using fashion as a spatial field to increase their economic capital while challenging political and religious structures.

With regards to the spatial features where Istanbul Modest Fashion Week took place, the Zorlu centre was explored through the ethnographic observations as a vast diagonal building surrounded by luxurious restaurants, brands (*Chanel, YSL, Burberry*), a hotel, and an infrastructure with supermarket chains and transportation. It is an immensely modern space joining corporates around the entire building, and the underground is right beneath the centre (See figure 5). The field diary notes that discovering the location where modest fashion events took place has an existing powerful ‘sense of place’ with its ownership of shopping arcades. The show was celebrated in Zorlu building because it is a centre of art and shows, which was discovered when taking a different entry, a day before the event to check the place, and I was given a leaflet for the art shows taking place this week in Zorlu Centre. It is situated on top of the underground of Beşiktaş, which led to high-end brands like *Burberry* and *Chanel*. What is significant about this ethnographic description is the emergence of modest fashion as a marketplace in the shopping centres establishing a growth of ‘Muslim consumptionscapes’ within larger consumption platforms through the idea of ‘festivity’ (Lewis, 2015; Kuris, 2020).

The female chair, Zehra, in the executive team of Zeruj Port, with the joined efforts of her fellow ‘Muslim fashionistas’ largely contributed to expanding ‘Muslim consumptionscape’ in May 2018 through the idea of festive culture (Kuris, 2020: 168). This ‘commercialized space’ is the hallmark of modest fashion consumption, but also a “legitimate form of entertainment” (Kuris, 2020: 170). The launch of this modest fashion mall that led to the expansion of Muslim



consumptionspace reintroduced the debates of the 1990s that was concerned with drawing a line between piety and capitalism (Kuris, 2020: 168). This literature is re-introduced to highlight, first, the fact that Muslim women were always the stakeholders of modest fashion, or as referred by Kuris (2015), the tastemakers. Despite the political and the religious structures, these female stakeholders thrive towards the aim of growing a career within modest fashion while increasing spaces for other women to shop fashionable modest attire and enjoy festive events.

Arriving at Zorlu Centre a day before the show, the security agents allowed me to view the place. Inside the dedicated space for the event, there were colourful chairs (Green, blue, purple, orange, black, and yellow) made of leather, immense plasmas, and slots for brands exhibiting their designed apparel for visitors (See figure 4). The workers were holding glass boards and sticking them together. Viewing the field before the complete makeover emphasises, once more, the relationship between the visitors and the spatial design of the event that modest fashion weeks adopted to create ‘sense of place’ and offered visitors a space for social interactions with the modest fashion brands during the event. A creation of such a physical space for a spatial experience could only be factual through “the energy that is deployed within it” which is the efforts of the technical and designer crew (Lefebvre, 1991:13).



**Figure 4.** Istanbul Modest Fashion Week Preparation for the setting a Day before the Show  
(Photo taken by AB)



**Figure 5.** Zorlu Centre (Photo taken by AB)

On the first day of the initial event, the exhibition slots were set at Meydan Fuaye downstairs on the Zorlu Centre's first floor, and the stakeholders of modest brands adjusted the clothes on the rails. There was a table with business cards in every spot, a booklet of *Modanisa* products displayed in glossy photos, and bags of 'goodies' containing face hydrating creams and samples of perfume, foundation, and tinted sunscreen, in small pouches. These were gifts for visitors who might have been interested in the brand and for bloggers who promoted them through their social media accounts on an Instagram story. The place appeared different from yesterday's visit; it had a vivid atmosphere as more than a thousand visitors seemed to join the event. There was a crowd of young hijabi women at the entry at the registration desk next to a huge signboard of Istanbul Modest Fashion Event sponsoring brands including: *M.A.C Cosmetics*, Hair by *Mehmet Tatli*, *Ups*, and the media of *Halal Focus*, and *Modest Russia*. These sponsors are well-known companies and developed globally.

The sponsoring media *Halal Focus* is a group of advisors who provide marketing services for companies to grow their interest and sales. On Halal Focus' website and under the section of 'About Us', they pointed at their aim, stating that:

The goal is to keep people up to date with its growth globally to help move it forward to become mainstream, while it is still struggling to achieve its full potential. Halal Focus is a shared online filing cabinet of news, opinion, research papers, statistics, reports...anything we find useful...and now also including ethical issues that are relevant to the changing world today. SDGs must be recognised and worked towards urgently, especially in the African countries and their work in agriculture. It was created as a useful contribution to following the growing Halal market movements around the world. There are now well over 7,000 articles in 70 categories, and it is updated regularly.

*Modanisa* seemed to be one of these companies that relied on Halal focus to grow their industry globally. As mentioned in the previous statement, they aim to ensure that the trending sales methods of the companies they sponsor are updated to keep up with the global growth. This also appears to be one of *Modanisa*'s strategies in preserving its leading position in the modest fashion industry, where globally known brands and advising companies were advertised on a massive signboard. Next to it, visitors were taking photos and promoting those images on social media accounts for the world to view and observe how *Modanisa* as an industry was sharing spaces with global industries, making the company equally significant. *Modanisa* strategically selected these sponsoring brands for economic relationships to grow in the global market simultaneously with these brands and also made sure to employ their names on a poster as a spatial strategy to expand in other cosmetic industries, shipping companies, and media marketing fields.

Alongside these spatial strategies, the fieldwork shows that at the *Modanisa* fashion event, the organizers set the runway shows on a different floor to the exhibition stalls. The shows were located upstairs at Zorlu centre in Sky Lounge, and the spectacle ascended to the runway through escalators. The outstanding scenery at Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, when sitting amidst the spectacle, was the placement of the modest fashion bloggers on the front row while wearing *Saiqa London*'s dresses, as stated in my field diary:

I sit in the third line at the back where I have a better view of what is going on. I am facing bloggers who are at the first line on the other side. They sit with people and use their phones to take photos or go live, probably. These modest fashion bloggers are a main part of the space in the runways, and they are placed in the front seats wearing the brands designed wear to provide a further 'sense of place' and a realistic experience to the spectacle. The young Turkish female students from fashion schools were naming each blogger as we were sitting in the opposite front rows on the second day event.

This fieldnote displays how social structures in a modest fashion field are recurrent. This is through the way seating positions of modest fashion bloggers who are placed in the front row as similarly explored in the London Modest Fashion Week wherein bloggers and the famous actor had a seating plan that marked their social and fashion status in the field of fashion (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). Herein, the modest fashion bloggers are placed where the audience's gaze is openly facing them. I was sitting in a spot next to other female attendees where I was also gazing at the familiar faces of bloggers, such the hijabi fashionista Omayya Zein. This reproduced act of front row placement associated with bloggers adds a further layer of emphasis on the social structure that marks the hierarchy within the field of modest fashion. As Rafiee et al. (2014: 143) indicate, the actions (intentional or unintentional) "undertaken by agents necessarily reproduce the structure". There are different levels of power relationships. The modest fashion bloggers as 'the most visible' bodies in the runway field are considered as the 'powerful bodies' in the modest fashion space compared to other Muslim female stakeholders including the spectacle.

In both of London Modest Fashion Week and Istanbul Fashion Week, power relations varies and the female stakeholders with more visibility have more agency than others because of the circle of structures that are reproduced by the fashion industry (Bourdieu, 1984). This emphasises Bourdieu's, Entwistle and Rocamora's arguments on how the integral function of fashion fields is to 'produce and reproduce' the positions of individuals within the fashion show spaces.

For fashion students in Istanbul to have such a knowledge of modest fashion bloggers from the different countries, such as the UK and the US, and to observe how they admired their presence by constantly staring at them and naming each one of them indicated the globality of these bloggers behind the screen of social media platforms. This also demonstrates how modest fashion is emerging as a global culture and an industry in which creative females adopt branding roles through their female bodies and in multiple spaces, including the Istanbul Modest Fashion Week fashion event. Thus, their career expanded from Instagram platforms to physical spaces of modest fashion weeks by presenting sartorial products on their female bodies.

In addition to bloggers, my field diary notes the presence of a large group of fashion students in the show. On the first day of the fashion week, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, I met Nur, a fashion student at Istanbul college who was a young hijabi female wearing a knee-length black jacket

from her own designs and sewing (See figure 6). Standing next to Nur was Ela, who wore a black legging and high-neck sweater styled with a short fur coat. She had a bag around her shoulder and wore large hoop earrings. As we were waiting in line, Ela pointed at her hand and arm, showing me her tattoos that had emotional significance to her (See figure 7). Both Nur and Ela's sartorial practices displayed how the spaces of modest fashion weeks were diverse for a global audience and how having a fashion capital is vital for 'their membership' (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). For these female fashion students, to be in a space where fashion is an art allows freedom of expression through the diversity of clothing aesthetics. The festive space of modest fashion give women a sense of agency where they have the autonomy to express themselves through their fashions styles.

Lewis (2015) along with Alimen and Kuris (2020) revealed that fashion brands in Istanbul were once criticised by the religious stream and the secularists for being, either too bold, for example in displaying visible images on catalogues, or for hosting 'revolutionary' catwalk shows. However, now, modest fashion in Istanbul surpassed such obstructions and is more concerned with diversity and advertises for several sartorial choices. With such diversities interacting in the modest fashion weeks, and the contribution of Muslim female stakeholders as the majority of organizers and supporters of modest fashion events in a physical setting, for a concrete female communities meeting together, they are demonstrating a powerful image of their status as women with a capital within the industry.



**Figure 6.** The Fashion Student ‘Nur’ Wearing her Self-made Coat (Fieldnote extract)



**Figure 7.** The Tattoos on Ela’s hand and arm (Pocket Ethnography)

A significant promotional spatial feature at Istanbul Modest Fashion Week was securing a place at the Meydan Fuaye for panel discussions in which female experts in modest fashion were joined in an interactive discussion between the panel and the spectacle. In Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, one of the panel discussions was entitled: *Modest Fashion- Perceptions and Reality through the lens of the media* and it was presented by Professor Reina Lewis, who is a leading academic in fashion studies, Nada Kabbani, who is an editor-in-chief at *Elle Arabia* magazine, and the style reporter Hafsa Lodi. Such panel talks in modest fashion weeks were crucial as they illuminated the emergence, popularity, and growth of modest wear in the fashion industry and remind the audience why such events started in the first place. This contributed to sharing knowledge on modest fashion in the socio-economic framework and women's representation in the context of growing their careers in the fashion industry. Spreading awareness on modest fashion and business for a female-majority audience is a crucial point. It represents the true value that these women as stakeholders are adding to the modest fashion industry. After all, stakeholders have a role in the economy whereby value is created and distributed (Mitchell and Lee, 2019: 53). These female speakers have abundant knowledge on modest fashion and by sharing it with other females, they are opening their eyes for fast growing business that they could be a part of whether as brand owners, designers, or consumers. This eventually contribute to a further expansion of 'Muslim consumptionscape'.

Also, the emergence of these spatial structures in the Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, including exhibitions, catwalk shows, modest fashion bloggers as spatial figures, and panel talks, are innovative features contributing to the modest fashion spatial structures aiming at promoting the designed products and at moving modest wear as a culture towards a global consumer. These methods appear similar to the Fashion Houses' strategies of promoting their recently ready-made fashion designs through a seasonal fashion week that takes place yearly.

### **3.2.1.3. Muslim Shopping Festival London: United Kingdom, London, Olympia**

Alongside the modest fashion weeks in London and Istanbul in 2018 and 2019, Muslim Shopping Festival London hosted an exhibition for modest fashion brands and a modest fashion live show in the spring of 2019. The event was located facing the bus stop *West Kensington* in Olympia, London, where the visitors were crowded outside the gate to the festival. Olympia is a venue for exhibitions, trade, and consumerism, according to their website

*London.olympia/exhibiting*. The place is located a few feet from Hilton's Hotel, which was collaborating with the event executives by allowing visitors of the show to spend a night in a double bedroom. This proposition was available for a selection of tickets only. These tickets provided access to all exhibitions, including a VIP front seat at the modest fashion live when paying two hundred pounds with a discount for 'early bird' purchase. The entrance gates have a black and long thin screen in a rectangular shape on the top with three categories of access for the visitors: Gold/Platinum/Diamond, Silver and Press Pass, Bronze and Ticket Sale (See Figure 8).

It was noted on the field diaries that London Muslim Shopping Festival's staff created lists of prices with limited access to particular shows combined with accommodation services in a hotel. The tickets were under symbolised categories: bronze, silver, gold, platinum, and diamond, referring to the ticket's value with the money visitors paid. The access to the 'modest fashion live' starts from the 'GOLD ticket' option to have a reserved seat for a runway show of modest fashion brands. With gold as a luxurious metal referring to a specific type of ticket marked by its high price compared to the other types. This shows a commercial value and marks a social difference between visitors because not all can pay the high-priced tickets that allow them to access 'modest fashion live'. Moreover, designing such tickets and handing them to visitors with limited access according to their 'trademark', the precious metals, demonstrate the high standards the modest fashion stakeholders constructed through such branding methods. They are enhancing the characteristics of their niche market in front of a global clientele and symbolising the high quality of their fashion designs. Still, with such highly priced tickets and fashion items, the modest fashion shows and exhibited modest wear appear to be accessible only by the social middle class.

Despite the significance of this economic change, the tickets of the Muslim Shopping Festival create "material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors" (McAnulla, 2002: 271). These material conditions are related to spatial control of modest fashion consumers as stakeholders and display how ticket mark a material structure for spectacle's access to the show (McAnulla, 2002). That is reminiscent of Entwistle and Rocamora's (2006) experience as ethnographers accessing the London Fashion Week with tickets. When they were on their way to access a show stating that a ticket is:

[O]ne of the main badges of affiliation within this field. By brandishing a ticket for a show, one indicates insider status: it is the material evidence of



one's presence in the field of fashion, a visible sign of belonging for others to see en route to the exclusive space of the catwalk theatre. The invitations themselves convey this sense of exclusivity in their design and materiality; at once a passport to the elite event of the show but also trophies to display – they are usually highly visible. Often of a large size, too big to be kept in a small bag, some are of high quality, with a design that aims to convey the mood of the collections. (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 741)

Likewise, the tickets and invitations to these modest fashion shows display a social badge and a passport to the Muslim Shopping Festival event (see appendix 1 for more details). They display the 'uniqueness' of each modest fashion event, but they also categorize individuals into categories and creates hierarchy between 'the field players' (Bourdieu, 1995). For instance, in the fieldwork for Urban Woman Fashion Show 2019, the tickets were small glossy, colourful cards with details on the event at the back and a number for the sitting table. The quality of the tickets echoed the high standards of the exhibitions and catwalks of the modest fashion brands in this event and access to the event was equal and not categorized.



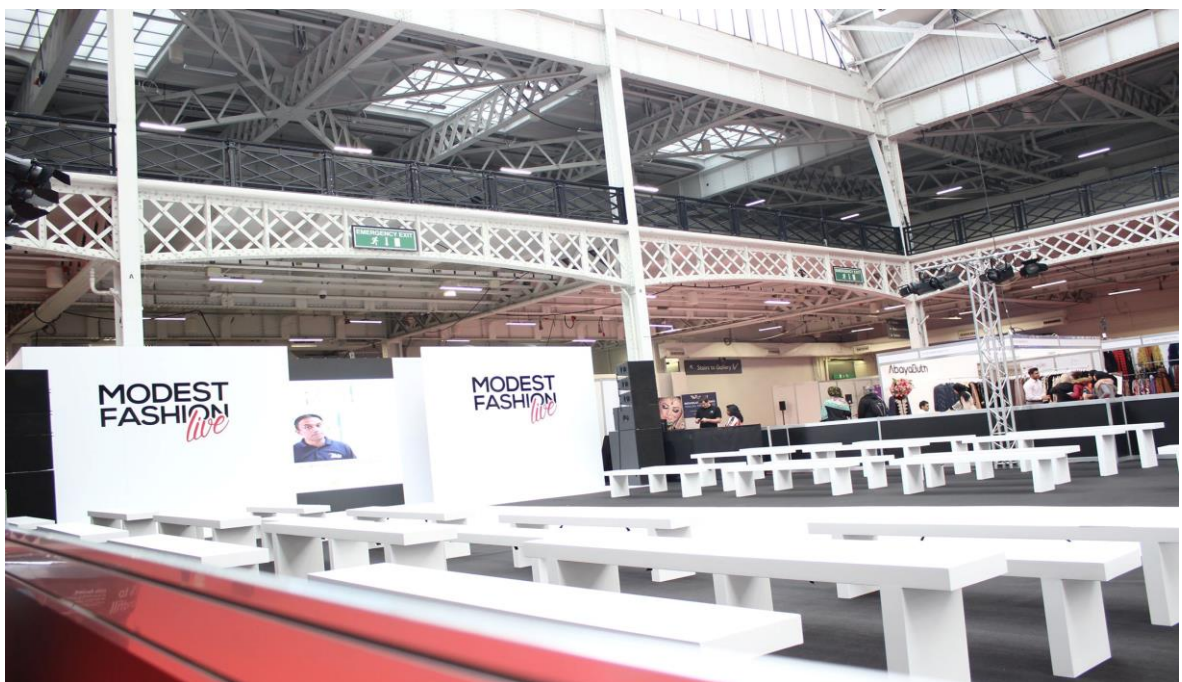
**Figure 8.** The Gate of Olympia London (Photo taken by the AB)

The field diary examined the presence of male security agents in black suits inside the building who were checking visitors' bags as they approached the entrance. In contrast, the

female agents in casual red t-shirts and black trousers behind a desk checked the tickets and the hand-coded bracelets for accessing the event spaces according to the ticket type. The two steps stairs took to an immense space where small stalls of varied brands of food exhibitions, live cooking sessions and live modest fashion shows were on the other end of the venue. There was a playground next to the fashion show space for kids who came along with their families. The area was crowded with stalls, and the number of women exceeds the men's, particularly at the halal eyebrow tint counters and the modest fashion area, when it was about time for the show to begin. The 'Modest Fashion Live' was showcased in an open space with limited seats. Access was for VIPs or press only (VIP pays a higher price for the ticket to gain access to all activities, including modest fashion live shows). The flooring of the fashion show was carpeted in grey. Inside this space were white benches paralleled on both sides and separated by a long red carpet. At the top right of the runway stage and by a corner next to the backstage, there was a male DJ that I could barely see. The music played by the DJ was picked from famous the trending music of 2019, such as Cardi B, Bad Bunny, and J Balvin's 2018 'I like it'. The facing screen in the middle of the backstage walls displayed videos of the event's sponsor *Wahed* and showcased the names of brands of the modest fashion shows as they were about to begin. The white walls covering the backstage on both sides are in white with a bold phrase consisting of 'Modest Fashion' in black and 'live' in red (See figure 9). There was a low black fence placed around the space of 'Modest Fashion Live' to allow access to visitors with 'Gold/Platinum/Diamond tickets' and allow others with 'Silver and Press Pass, Bronze, and Ticket Sale' to only watch the fashion show from outside the fence. The separation between the visitors according to the material value of the tickets created a gap between the social individuals in the show. This gap marks what Simmel (1957: 547) referred to as "a desire for differentiation" which is a crucial part of fashion practices, such as the tickets produced for "uniqueness" to the spatial design and representing the high value of modest fashion shows according to the elevated paid access.

Muslim women's presence in the Muslim festival of Olympia was high in brands' stalls and the Modest Fashion Live show, including the spectacle, female stakeholders, such as designers and models on the runway. Though the limited access to seats, women stood outside the short barrier and watched the runway. Seeing how women with different styles of dress and age range, from eighteens to fifties, interact with each other as they were entertained by the fashion show, and whispering about the modest attires on the runways represents how such fashion week events join them together in a female space where they can be themselves and enjoy their modest sartorial practices. There were various roles that women performed in the London Muslim Shopping Event by were either working backstage or at the checkpoints: the

models, the makeup artists group, the agent at the gate of the Modest Fashion Live, and the cook on the live show. These women occupied authoritative positions that I just indicated, which make them in control and represent their agency in a space that they weaved in a world where modest fashion is extended to be associated with other fields such as the food industry and cosmetic industry. Davies (1991: 50) claims that taking such occupations by subjects represents agency in which those “who take up the act of authorship, of speaking and writing in ways that are disruptive of current discourses, that invert, invent and break old bonds, that create new subject positions”.



**Figure 9.** The space for Modest Fashion live (Photo taken by AB)

### **3.2.2. An Ethnographic Account of Charity Fashion Shows: ‘the contemporary Muslim consumptionscape’**

In this section, I will investigate the spaces of the charity-based events that were located in the UK’s big cities such as London, Leicester, and Birmingham where women are invited to purchase the event tickets to attend a dinner-themed event with fashion shows, music and

exhibitions. Unlike the fashion weeks which were open to both genders, these events were a 'female-only space' and highly represented a contemporary Muslim 'consumptionscape' (Lewis, 2015; Sandıkcı and Ger, 2002; Kuris, 2020).

### **3.2.2.1. Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019: United Kingdom, London, Marriot Hotel Regent Park**

It was autumn of 2019 when Saverah, the the London-based events' company, organized a dinner event in Marriot Hotel by hosting modest fashion exhibitions, and catwalk shows for charity purposes under the name of 'Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019'. The hotel's surrounding area was dark because there were few streetlights. It was, however, only a 6-minute walk from the underground of Finchley Road Station to the fashion event. The path from the tube to the hotel was empty, and only light rays permeated the area. Arriving at the location and accessing the inside of the building, there was a hall and an entry to the event venue to the far right, where posters on Forgotten Women were placed at the door facing the corridor where exhibitions were taking place. Towards the left of this exhibition space was a gate leading to a large hall for the modest fashion shows guarded by a female security agent checking the tickets. The corridor lights were more radiant than the small white lamps hanging from the chandelier and decorating the dining room to create a settled atmosphere for the attendees. The dining lounge had tables and chairs with a royal-like layout and engravings. The tables were numbered, and the instruction for the seat was marked on the event ticket regarding finding the group we should join when the dinner show was about to begin. The tables are round and large, and the chairs are comfortable and covered with suede material. Each table carried about ten people, about the thirteenth of them. In the middle of each table, a lit candle was placed in a glass vase and decorated with little roses, a bottle of Coca-Cola, a vessel of grape juice, and menu leaflets. There were knives, spoons, forks, glasses, handkerchiefs, and plates in white for every attendee (See Figure 10). Overall, the table was well-organized, and the attendees had easy access because of such spatial organization and guidelines. The hall accommodating the modest fashion shows was immense and carried around two-hundred fifty female visitors and stakeholders. In the hall's centre, there was a single camera standing on a tripod controlled by a woman photographer. Ahead, there was a small stage with a large white screen showing information about each modest fashion brand and speaker (See figure 11). The ceiling was decorated with many massive chandeliers consisting of small lamps. The light in the hall was

faint to present a cosy space in the venue with a relaxed atmosphere for women attending the event. This cosiness was interrupted by illuminating the stage with spotlights on female speakers who were sharing their inspiring stories about their careers. The spotlights were also used in this space to illuminate the modest fashion brands showcasing their fashion designs to the female audience.



**Figure 10.** The Dining table at the Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019' (Photo taken by AB)



**Figure 11.** The backdrop of the Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 (Photo taken by AB)

The event of Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 displayed a female space with the presence of female attendees only, female stakeholders, and waitresses. The roles occupied by the female stakeholders were modelling, exhibiting, DJs, press, waitresses, bloggers, and fashion designers. Their presence was performed through showcasing clothes, speeches, entertaining, serving the food, and interacting with the female attendees. These female stakeholders weaved this female-only space to promote their modest fashion business and provide entertainment space for Muslim women who support separation from men as part of their modesty (El-Guindi, 1999). Also, it allows Muslim female stakeholders to construct their own space and perform their agentive roles as women with a business for women interested in purchasing such products. The ethnographic observations of this female space suggest that these Muslim females make their own show, excluding male support. At this dinner event, there were live performances of catwalk shows, auctions of modest fashion products, and speeches of working women about their successful careers in front of a female spectacle. By developing self-presentation techniques and sharing their agentive roles in a modest fashion, the Muslim female stakeholders revealed how empowering this female-only space was with a substantial motif of influencing the female attendees to define their goals and improve their agency while acting on them.

In examining this female space, this chapter refers to Craik's (1993) study that positions fashion in cultural studies and examines the techniques of femininity fashioning women to explore the female-only space where Muslim female stakeholders were fashioning the concept of being a female through their agentive roles. Craik's (1993) views apropos female roles are interconnected with female constructive positions of being a female and of adopting feminine techniques in cultural practices in the fashion industry, which is examined within the concept of 'female space' in the context of this study. The female space relates to the Muslim female stakeholders' roles in being a female by adopting feminine techniques in modest fashion spaces at fashion events promoting modest fashion products, eventful practices, and a 'sense of place' (Qazimi, 2014). To Craik (1993: 46), "women are constrained by representational codes which position them as passive vehicles of display and the object of the look", but the Muslim women in this study share more active roles of being a female than passive feminine traits and with the absence of 'male gaze', Craik's (1993) argument is only applicable to a particular situation and space. The field diaries of the Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 explored that the central theme was promoting women's agentive roles. The fashion practices representing feminine

techniques in the show identify with Craik's (1993) argument on 'the object of the look' which will be investigated in the coming section ethnographically describing the female visitors' fashionable attire.

In the same vein of exploring the 'feminine techniques', the field diary states:

After conversing with a few women participants around the tables, I realized that they all were Muslim women and living in London, the urban city, just as the title of the show says, 'Urban Muslim Woman Show'. The female attendees dressed in glamorous attire for parties and put on visible face makeup. For example, the Muslim women sitting around the dinner table wore colourful Pakistani sparkly dresses in red and purple and pashmina hijabs while the one next to me wore a short tight dress with black and gold straps.

This extract from the field diary is reminiscent of Lewis' (2015) and Sandıkcı and Ger's (2010) findings on how contemporary Muslim women's style is unlike the critics they received for their clothing styles as being 'backwards' and 'un-fashionable'. The attendees were in fashionable wear adorned with accessories and makeup looks. The makeup was defined by contouring the face using a different shade from the skin tone to give the face more visible features, red and purple lipsticks, heavy-done eyes with eye shadows, eyeliner, and fake lashes. The Muslim female attendees' bodily adornments and sartorial practices fit the current contemporary fashion styles and makeup looks with a touch of cultural heritage. Moreover, these Muslim females' "[...] bodies are fashioned through clothes, make-up and demeanour constitute identity, sexuality and social position. In other words, clothed bodies are tools of self-management" (Craik, 1993: 46). Therefore, by following Craik's (1993) statement, we can see that these Muslim women constitute their 'identity' by wearing fashion items representing their cultural heritage and their modesty by a full covering of the body to conceal their 'sexuality'. Their presence in such a show at night-time and, as mentioned in field diary, travelling by themselves to the location represent their 'social position' as 'urban women' living in London. Their choices of these fashion styles and modest sartorial practices represent their 'self-management' of their clothed bodies (Craik, 1993). These Muslim females also "produce particular ways of seeing feminine body" (Betterton, 1987: 9) that Craik (1993) referred to as 'object of the look' through feminine techniques such as adornments and makeup looks and glamorous attire because of the eventful occasion, however, the concept of 'female-only space' overpowers that argument because as argued in the earlier section, this space is weaved by

women for the main aim of performing agentive roles of being female stakeholders, visitors with self-control over their sexuality, and the choice of travelling alone or through female groups to the event.

This PhD sees ‘the female-only space’ of Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 as a significant spatial feature empowering Muslim women’s agentive role, which eventually led to the increase of modest fashion locally based business in a female-weaved space. Hence, Muslim women who struggled to take their UK-based small businesses to the mainstream fashion industry constructed their own retail space consisting of females-only. This ‘female-only space’ illuminates the emergence of a different ‘sense of place’ compared to the modest fashion weeks and festival events.

The charity-based events emerged as different in their focus on the theme of dinner and on women’s representation in terms of how women act as a community interacting with the stage activities, from catwalk shows to speeches about women’s success stories of helping other women. Thus, such charity events have more support for the concept of ‘female-only space’ as an empowering space for both: the Muslim female stakeholders and the attendees. However, they remained similar regarding creating a ‘physical environment’ for modest fashion in a live setting where models paraded for the modest fashion designs. This was important to the Muslim female stakeholders in global and local events to grow their consumer reach and for the female attendees to enjoy their time and perceive the quality of the fashion apparel live. Organizing such events and following a studied procedure for interior decoration and organization solely for women allows the small business owned by young Muslim women to flourish, circulate more in the UK, and reach the target consumers. Muslim women stakeholders, such as the female models, develop their modelling careers through these promotional events of modest fashion, and Muslim female photographers have more opportunities for job experiences.

To sum up, Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 was a ‘female-only space’ and offered an empowering and promotional space for start-up modest fashion brands and female stakeholders and contributed to raising charity and awareness for women suffering worldwide.



### **3.2.2.2.Ladies-Only Charity Fashion Show 2019: United Kingdom, Leicester, Platinum Suit**

The second charity-based event also occurred in the autumn of 2019 in Leicester, Platinum Suit, and was called ‘Ladies Only Charity Fashion Show’. In exploring this event, the field diary shows that at first sight of the white building, it was observed that the outside space was plain. The inside of the building is an immense scape with more than twenty-five tables for dining. I opened the glass door, and on the right hand, there was a table with two women handing tickets. The round tables were covered in a white mat, and the chairs were wooden. There were plates, glasses, a knife on the left, a fork on the right, and a spoon in front of every person on the table. In front of each attendee, a black paper napkin and a skincare product were placed on top as a gift. In the middle of the table is an enormous martini glass decorated with black linen inside (see figure 12). In the hall's centre, the stage for hosting and modelling the fashion shows was decorated with white led lights lined along the edges. There was a long catwalk space (about twelve meters) and a rectangular stage. The stage has two circled white signposts; on the left, it was written ‘Fashion Show 2019’ and on the right ‘In Aid of IKCA and Yemen’.

The first spatial feature to notice as this event began ‘auctions’ where the speakers Nadia and Sima introduced the Ladies Only Fashion Show 2019 as a fashion show, but more importantly, a charity focused event, as it was explored in the field diary:

Two women get out to the stage under applause and whistles of the audience followed by music at the back (Nadia and Sima). One of them is wearing a blue evening dress with sparkly textile on the top and mermaid shape tulle for the lower part. She puts a turban on her head and circle earrings and heels on her feet. The other lady wears a white and black suit of wide trousers and a top. She ties her headcover to the back. It looks like the hijab style I saw in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week. They tell the ladies attending the show that no food is served unless they are generous to give enough money donation for the auctions they are having now.

As seen in the diary extract, the auction in this event brought women together in a fashion space to raise charity, help people in need, and promote the Muslim female stakeholders’ business based in Leicester. The several types of products being auctioned were women-owned, including female bakers, female fashion designers, female chefs, female choreographers, and

female cosmetologists. Like the Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019, the roles of female stakeholders and their success stories are shared through the process of this auction. The promotion of the brands was achieved through the speakers' emphasis on the quality of the products and female stakeholders praising their products as the auctions were led, as shown in the field diary:

'The second auction is a decent meal with Chef Zeinab', says Sima. Zeinab is the woman at the same table. The speakers say that her food is so amazing, and her sister screamed, "check her Instagram!". Chef Zeinab is dressed in a crop top and a tulle see-through dress with little red flowers at the top. She screams after a while of price rising, "Come on you guys, ninety pounds, the best meal you've ever eaten". From 95, they want to reach a 100. At last, they reached 110 pounds, stretched to 120, then to 130 pounds. In addition to all the other auctions, Z Fit also participated in the donation auction, Sima says who wants to be "sizzling?". Many hands are rising for this gym session for fitness. The auction is running quickly for fitness.

This excerpt demonstrates auctions as promotional spatial features for Muslim women joined in a female-only space to grow their business to more consumers. These female stakeholders were making efforts to publicise their work. Moreover, auctions, according to this event, are innovative promotional methods women with small businesses use to offer the potential customers a physical experience of what their business makes.

In addition to auctions, another spatial feature was apparent in the fieldwork, which was the female-only space. Since this event was exclusively for female visitors, fashion designers, models, waitresses, and organizers, the space was for females only. The femaleness of this eventful space was also apparent in the title 'Ladies Only Fashion Show 2019', which implicates a connotation of the term 'ladies' or 'lady' that was criticised in feminist studies (Boyd, 2012; Craik, 1993). In criticising the term 'lady', Boyd (2012: 36) indicated that it is "a courtesy title, one conferred by tradition, not by right". Adding to Boyd's (2012) statement, I refer to Craik (1993), who examines 'the social etiquette' referred to women and how it refers to 'being a lady' by addressing concepts of femininity. Craik (1993: 46-47) pointed out how with the rise of the bourgeoisie class; femininity was associated with women's gender 'in terms of a domestic and private sphere', contributing to the rise of the economic field and social reputation of men who were identifying females to the 'world of leisure' and keeping them distant from the task of labour. In encouraging women to be feminine, their gender was attributed to femininity that is associated with 'leisure and ornament' and influencing them by

a ‘moral conduct’ of achieving femininity through “clothing conduct and fashion, deportment and social etiquette, as well as guides to fertility, family and domestic management” (Craik, 1993: 47-48). Despite the traditional images associating women as ‘ladies’ and their femininity as passive, this research revealed that femininity could also be used in a context where women have agentive roles through their active roles in the modest fashion industry, as observed in this charity event.



**Figure 12.** The table set for Leicester event ‘Ladies Only Charity Fashion Show’ (Photo taken by AB)

In exploring the in-depth understanding of the female-only space of this event, I examine the feminine techniques and the acts of being a female through the field diary of the event. When looking around the tables, the women dressed in the most glamorous apparel representing their culture with modern touches and most of them had visible face makeup. Once the music was on, they all started screaming and dancing. There was a first show guided by a female coach who invited women attendees to join her on the stage and dance following her steps. Women were climbing the edges of the stage instead of using the stairs, throwing away their heels,

making voices of excitement and imitating the coach. They were producing a different effect of the term ‘ladies’ by adding performances to “make reference to that very use” (Butler, 1997: 99), opposing the feminine concept in the title ‘Ladies-only’ and emphasising their dynamic behaviour on stage. Shaping a distinct feminine experience in a female space through an oppositional use of the term ‘lady’ emphasises how women can use aesthetics, decoration, and performance to challenge traditional stereotypes by bringing back a label and changing its representation by adopting opposing practices. These findings reinforce Boyd’s (2012: 40) argument that the connotation of the word lady by women today functions as an irony.

This section suggests that the Muslim women in this event only referred to the concept ‘ladies’ in the title to identify the fashion show dinner as a ‘female-only space’. They also sought to identify feminine techniques and leisure as useful tools associated with ‘achieving femininity’ for the ‘rise in the economic field’ in a space where sharing styles and showcasing products of modest fashion brands are growing their small business to a more extensive clientele.

### **3.2.2.3. Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham 2019: United Kingdom, Birmingham, Excalibur Grand**

The third charity-based event was Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham. It was in November 2019 at Excalibur Grand’s Hall. Accompanied by a former colleague living in Birmingham, I arrived at the location. Through the glass front door, it was observed that a bright lighting allowed me to view the inside of the venue, while the first thing that captured my attention was the pink bows on the chairs. We entered the event after a woman at the reception stepped forward and opened the door for us. This woman was a young Muslim woman wearing a pink Pakistani dress styled with a wrapped hijab. She sat in a chair and had a small table in front of her with the names of women attending the event, which she ticked every time a woman checked in. A young woman took us to our table, and I asked if it would be ok to take photos of the place, the fashion show, and the exhibited modest fashion products of each brand.

Sitting at the table, I viewed the main room, a square average hall with white walls and a roof and had pillars in the middle with ornamentations in wooden brown that also decorated the walls in the back of the hall. The tables were large and covered with a white runner. Each table had about eight chairs. The chairs were decorated in big pink bows made of tulle. There were

two white plates on the table, a small and larger one, a glass, a spoon and knife on the right, and a fork on the left (see figure 13). The stage was small compared to the previous events' venues, but it had captivating decorations. The back of the stage was decorated with shades of pink roses. On the right and left sides of the flowery wall, there were two small golden chandeliers reflecting the roof of the stage that was decorated with pink light spots and two substantial golden chandeliers (See figure 14). The stage flooring was white and had a bold black and golden signpost in the front, 'Excalibur Grand'. Excalibur Grand was the name of the building that was hosting the 'Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham' event.

In the middle of the table were white paper bags with a white round sticker written on them 'SKT Welfare'. SKT Welfare was one of the event's sponsors, raising donations to support vulnerable children in more than 30 countries. SKT Welfare placed these bags, referred to by the female participants as 'goodie bags' and had business cards and samples inside them from a selection of the brands participating in this event. Next to the entrance, there was a huge mirror, and in front of it, there was a long table decorated with plates of sweets and cakes. The products displayed on that table looked expensive, such as 'les éclaires' the French pastries. Facing the luxurious table of pastries was a wagon of tea and biscuits served to the attendees.

For the music in the event, the show organisers brought a female DJ sitting behind a white curtain. Next to the DJ, there was the backstage covered in plain white curtains and at the other corner of the hall. Facing the catwalk stage, approximately 150 women were watching the fashion runway shows of modest fashion brands.

What was striking about these ethnographic observations is the promotional spatial features integrated amidst the event's overwhelming decorations. These tools included feminine techniques, 'goodie bags', and dance shows. The feminine techniques in this Birmingham event were highly present, such as the pink-themed decorations that made the venue prevail with pink bows on chairs and flowers on the backstage walls, embodying images of barbies with tulle skirts and gender-reveal parties where they blow a balloon to know the gender. The feminine techniques were used in the show to symbolize the female-only space with an emphasis on feminine and hyper-feminine features (Craik, 1993). As for 'goodie bags', they were material items offered to the attendees to enjoy a 'sense of place' (Qazimi, 2014) and to feel 'hospitality' in the event; created by the modest fashion brands showcasing their products on the runway shows, such as *Modest Wear Safeera*, *Ayma Amori Brand*, *Murr de Murr*, and *SNP London*. The event also displayed dance shows as spatial techniques for entertainment. They contributed

significantly to the event because the audience was captivated by the performance each time it was on stage, showing their reactions, applauding, screaming, whistling, and dancing along.

Amidst these promotional spatial features, the feminine techniques were central to the focus of this study. In exploring its significance to modest fashion spaces, this section re-visits further arguments in Craik's (1993) research in which she explored the roles of the magazine industry and women in the changing meaning of femininity to further explore the concept in the context of this event. Femininity, at first, was associated with the domestic roles of females. The Lady's Magazine published articles on household management, cookery recipes, medical advice, and other instructions related to marital and motherhood qualities (Craik, 1993: 48). However, there was a shift in the definition of femininity through the change in the domestic ideology, with women dividing into two groups, an opposing team calling for emancipation and the right to work, and the dependent wives and mothers upholding their domestic roles (Craik, 1993: 48-49). Thence, the magazine's readerships shifted their focus toward 'women's labour and achievements' (Craik, 1993: 49).

From Craik's (1993) narratives, it is seen that magazines as an industry were balancing their articles according to the changes in the term 'femininity', and by the late nineteenth century, femininity in magazines was associated with the 'spending power' as advertisement, cosmetics, and visuality became central in magazine articles (Craik, 1993: 49). Similarly, this research explored that the Fashion and Lifestyle Birmingham 2019, as a branding event of modest fashion, created a female space through femininity and feminine techniques. This was achieved by making the space for females only, using the pink-themed decoration, gifting skincare products in a 'goodie bag', and offering 'leisure' through dance performances, food, and sales exhibition where women have a close-up 'physical experience' with the modest fashion attire. Thus, the bodily presence of these women in such an event encourages social interactions in a public space, unlike the magazines that were calling for domestic roles only. These feminine techniques create a female space for Muslim female stakeholders to showcase their fashion designs and grow their business, and that is a distinct conception of femininity emerging from the fieldwork and identifying with 'women's labour and achievements' (Craik, 1993: 49).

The findings in this section argue that Fashion and Lifestyle Birmingham 2019 offered a powerful image of how techniques of femininity can be adopted and altered to create a female space where female attendees were associating with the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders, empowering concepts of female carriers while in a space decorated with feminine ornaments, decorations, and leisure.



**Figure 13.** The Dining Tables Decoration at Fashion and Style Show in Birmingham (Photo taken by AB)



**Figure 14.** The Rosy background for the Fashion Show (Photo taken by AB)

To sum up, drawing from an ‘ethnographic mosaic’ (Blackman, 2010), the ethnographic observations, field diaries, and photographic fieldnotes, these sections explored a ‘holistic understanding’ of modest fashion culture and spaces of worldwide and charity-based promotional events. It has been examined through the ethnographic accounts in the previous sections that the modest fashion shows were deliberately organized in the capitals of Turkey, Istanbul, Britain, London and the UK cities with high Muslim populations. Turkey as a country

has a long history with modest wear in a political and economic context where modest fashion industries emerged, such as *Tessetur*, that were exporting products to European countries with a Muslim majority (Lewis, 2015: 40).

Extending on Lewis' (2015) study, the findings of this chapter revealed how modest fashion continued to evolve as a global industry and circulated its sartorial products by organizing fashion weeks, exhibitions, and catwalk shows, to expand the marketing spaces and hence allow more job opportunities for Muslim women. Also, to grow the branding spaces for modest fashion small businesses and define it to the global audience. According to the field diary, this was achieved by creating what Lash and Lury (2007) refer to as 'physical experience' and through a 'sense of place' (Qazimi, 2014). The Muslim female stakeholders showcased their products in places known for accommodating global events. One of them is London, the city where the Fashion Houses, *Burberry* and *Gucci*, have their fashion weeks yearly in the autumn season. Hence, 'event culture' already existed in the Fashion Houses' branding methods. Still, it is adopted as well by niche markets like modest fashion, as shown through the process of this research through the ethnographic accounts of the 'eventscapes' (Brown, 2020) interior designs and decorations along with the choice of famous venues and big cities.

Overall, the interior design of the venues and the architecture of the buildings accommodating these modest fashion events represent the spatial features contributing to attracting more visitors to the fashion shows and thus marketing this dress culture. The places and spaces transform the experience for the potential visitors. That is why a large group of professional managers and designers work together to accurately choose an eventful city and an attractive building to host an event. The interior space designers focus on relevant adornment to modest fashion to construct an atmosphere for attendees and help them interact with the brands. In facilitating such interactions in the eventscapes, the modest fashion events generated concepts of lifestyle, femininity, and 'female-only space' where the circulation of the products in exhibition stalls is always accompanied by food culture and cosmetic branding and other practices of styling hijab, which represent the everyday life activities. Integrating such practices with women's dress culture resulted in promoting lifestyle practices and empowering women images as part of branding modest fashion into the global retail. Adopting the female-only spaces was a feminine tool to reach a larger number of Muslim females to grow the consumer community of modest fashion in the UK. The essential aim of female-only space, however, was the representation of agentive acts of independent females who were inspiring more Muslim women to join, sometimes support, the modest fashion small business in the UK.



### **3.3. At the Exhibitions: the appropriation of modest fashion into a global consumer culture**

This section explores the innovative branding strategies employed at modest fashion exhibitions to promote modest dress culture to a global consumer. I first compare the browsing experience at the exhibitions to Benjamin's (1999) 'the arcade' due to the similarities between both shopping experiences. Secondly, I investigate the promotional strategies integrated into the modest fashion spaces leading to the construction of global consumer culture, including 'pocket goodies', 'layering' as DIY culture, and brands' approach to growing 'the sense of inclusion' to the consumers by identifying modest fashion as a choice and as 'individual'. This section will explore how modest fashion is expanding into a global culture industry through field diaries and photographic data.

Exhibitions in this research have a resonance far behind a simple display of clothes on racks and show how high-quality the fashion designs are. It is associated with advertising, press coverage, and parties as field observations explored through modest fashion weeks in London and overseas, yearly charity events and Muslim shopping festivals hosting live modest fashion shows. I suggest through the process of this section that the exhibition is a spatial tool to promote modest fashion cultural practices and to promote these cultural products through the innovative placement of stalls where 'publicity' is central for modest fashion companies to reach industrial growth. Goodrum (2004: 103) posits a similar suggestion in a study of New Zealand Fashion Week, where she explored through her field of study that exhibition is a "productive interface, a site at—and through—which we find culture and industry in the making". The exhibition presents "a forward-thinking step towards showcasing the type of works designers themselves regard as innovative and cutting edge, decoding the messages of resistance and dissent voiced in their garments" (Quinn, 2002: 442).

Thus, this research sees modest fashion exhibitions as a public space to present fashion designs, adornment accessories, prestige, and glamour of high designs, but also acknowledges the primary role that is located in the fashion industry that places the culture of aesthetics and fashion in an explicit manner of allowing the visitors to have 'a physical experience' (Lash and Lury, 2007), however, implicitly it is about the industrializing of modest fashion culture and producing commodities to promote them through the modest fashion exhibitions by adopting innovative branding tools such as offering vouchers with 'discount codes', culturally associated

drinks and food, and accessories as gifts. Brands at exhibitions contribute to the ‘physical experience’, allowing a delightful shopping experience between the stalls of fashion design that resembles the arcade experience explored by Benjamin (1999).

### **3.3.1. Towards the Exhibition Stalls: ‘arcade’ shopping experience and the urbanity of modest fashion**

The exhibitions as experiences resemble urban features of ‘arcades’ and carry a connotation of industrialization of modest fashion through the voyeuristic aesthetics of the exhibiting space. The ‘arcade’ notion also represents the emergence of modest fashion culture as an industry in more urban cities and environments. This section considers the ethnographic observations of events sharing these urban features and refers to the resemblance of the shopping experience in ‘arcades’ to browsing in exhibition stalls. The spatial relevance of the ethnographic fieldwork is the glass mirrored and structured roofs, the glass materiality of doors and walls, and the large mirrors used for decoration. Being in the exhibition, the experience of viewing the glass walls at the back of the stalls and the large mirrors placed in the fashion design stalls of many brands reflects the ‘arcade’ experience that Walter Benjamin (1999) depicted.

‘Arcade’ is a contributing concept to the theoretical framework of Walter Benjamin’s study *Passagenwerk* or *Arcades Project*, written between 1927 and 1940 but only published in 1999 as an unfinished work. *Arcade project* represents a critique of the 19th- century bourgeois’ history and experiences in which Benjamin critically explored Paris as the ‘dream city’ and generated a theory of progress. Amidst the thickness of *Arcade Project*, the ethnographic data identifies with Benjamin’s (1999: 537) perceptions of the consumption practices in the Paris shopping Arcades as described in his study ‘the city of mirrors’ of the nineteenth century. He had a profound vision into the arcades’ featuring qualities considering the ‘perfection’ of the space when associated with consumerism. Benjamin (1999) attempted to locate the shift to a modern era where the commodification of things was central to the economy of the nineteenth century. To illustrate, by using ‘mirrors’, Benjamin shared a thick account describing the urbanism of the landscape and the spatial experience effect on the commodity consumption through observing the social individuals and their interaction with the space when browsing in the arcades and reflecting on their ambitions as they were passing by through glass metallic structures and mirrors. Here, the communication between social beings through the urban space

and the placement of products represent an endless pattern of conformity to the consumerist experience in the modest fashion exhibitions. Benjamin (1999) suggested that things have deeper critical effects than what we think, and this is what the field diaries examined through the process of browsing the fashion designers' stalls in the exhibitions.

Benjamin (1999: 542) argued that: "For although this mirror world may have many aspects, indeed infinitely many, it remains ambiguous, double-edged. It blinks: it is always this one-and never nothing out of which another immediately arises. The space that transforms itself does so in the bosom of nothingness" (Benjamin, 1999: 542). What Benjamin's section of 'Mirrors' signifies compared to my research is the produced image of modest fashion culture given in exhibitions resembling what Wilson (2003: 246) describes "as a vehicle for fantasy". By that, I aim for a positive description of the efforts and atmosphere worked hard on to achieve a deep conception of modesty in a contemporary era. Looking at what the producers in modest fashion focus on in order to provide the spectacle with goods and how the process of making it is part of contemporary culture and how is it consumed. The targeted spectacles are Muslim women and producers who broaden the endeavour of promoting modesty to a global consumer through an urban interior structure of exhibiting stalls.

In Zorlu Art Centre in Istanbul, the brand *Minel Aşk* placed the rail of evening dresses in front of a reflective dark wall and visitors can see a reflection of their shapes and slight colourful reflections of their silhouettes. The reflective wall appeared to be a part of the interior design since the venue was made of thick see-through glass and the contemporary interior aesthetics seems to be based on glass and mirrors as similarly shared in several videos trending on the Instagram platform about modern home architecture and decorations. Despite the fact that Benjamin's (1999) study was written about the urban society of the nineteenth century that was characterised by the mirrored design of shopping arcades, these spatial features are yet existent in the fashion events' exhibitions. This is part of the modest fashion event culture where visitors have a 'physical experience' through an industrial 'sense of place', attracting consumers through innovative urban landscapes and interior decorations based on glass and reflective mirrored materials. The connection between the present modest fashion venues and the past 'arcade' experiences is the spatial means that the modest fashion industry uses to create a contemporary shopping experience. Hence, this is one of the steps of including modest fashion culture in the corporates and the global industries' retail through the use of the contemporary and industrial-like interior design.

A crucial resemblance of the urban landscape of Benjamin's (1999) 'arcades' is the Olympia building where the London Muslim Shopping Festival was happening. In comparing the extracted figure 16 to the photographic fieldnote of the interior architectural structure (figure 15), both spaces have two floors attached with a curved roof constructed with glass and structured with metal poles offering an urban characteristic of the nineteenth century that is still existent as seen in this exhibiting venue. The shops in Benjamin's (1999) portrayal of the arcade are made of glass shop windows and products are displayed on the glass along with the brands' names. The exhibiting stalls in this event, however, were made of joined precast walls with metal poles and they were displaying their products on metal rails and hanging the brand logo on top of the stall for the visitors to view (see appendix 10 of Modest Madam London Exhibition at London Muslim Shopping Festival). Such shopping spaces of exhibitions in modest fashion events embraced the urban spatial features and added few modern changes as the lights were placed in the middle of the glass roofs and by the edges. The lighting seems to be the new contributing urban feature. This ethnographic data showed how modest fashion spaces are also adopting urban landscapes for hosting their fashion weeks and festivals which will led to their development into a global corporate representing hundreds of modest fashion brands internationally. Shift of industrial economy into technological features applied to urban landscapes as central to the increase of production and consumption.



**Figure 15.** the photographic image of the shopping 'arcade' in Walter Benjamin's ([www.bardcityblog.files.wordpress.com](http://www.bardcityblog.files.wordpress.com))



**Figure 16.** The interior design of the building of Olympia, London (Photo by A.B)

Though the similarities between Benjamin's (1999) arcades' shopping spaces and modest fashion exhibitions, there remains a developing urban characteristic emerging in the contemporary event spaces that didn't exist the nineteenth century and that is the use of 'screens'. The field diaries investigate the use of giant screens that were common in the modest fashion weeks, the charity events, and the festival. I suggest that these screens act as the contemporary format of mirrors that Benjamin (1999) examined, and they project the emergence of a new urban form in the modest fashion space. Primasari and Lubis (2013: 135) stated that "urban screens are various new digital display technologies that are being introduced into the urban landscape" and "integrated into architectural façade structures" change the visual appearance and experience of the city". That is to say, screens are essential to the urban environments, and they create an interaction between the social individuals and the 'dynamic field' (Krajina, 2009: 410). This social interaction will further lead to what Mattelart (1991: 169) revealed by describing the screen as a 'black box' for a consumer. Therefore, modest fashion events relied on urban screens to create a contemporary media space fitting the criteria of the current urban landscapes so that the visitors can communicate with the urban environment, and this will contribute to growing the consumer culture of modest fashion products.

According to the ethnographic observations, screens were more utilized in the London Muslim Shopping Festival in the middle of the exhibitions where modest fashion is performed

live. The screen constantly displayed an advertising video of the sponsor *Wahed* that is an online investment platform. The screen also showed the names of each fashion brand when a catwalk show is running so that the audience can identify the names and logos of the fashion designs parading on the runway. Furthermore, the screen closed the event by sharing the name of the makeup artist team as the field diary stated:

When the show is over, credits are demonstrated on the screen. Hair and makeup by Saima Kiran, Choreography by Sumaire Tahir, and show producer by Samya Tahir. It appears like so many efforts are put there.

From these ethnographic observations, it has been explored that the screens act as promotional billboards for the sponsor of the event *Wahed*, the fashion designers, the makeup artist, and the choreographer. What is interesting about these screens is how their technological features help in shifting from the moving and colourful visual into a dark background with a brand logo and name placed in the middle of a screen. Here, the thesis showed that screens as electronic devices act as contributing spatial features emphasising the urbanity of the modest fashion spaces like Benjamin's (1999) mirrors at the urban arcade shopping spaces. More significantly, screens are the contemporary means of growing modest fashion into a global consumer culture by allowing the visitors to have a 'physical experience' in an urban space the urban city of London.

According to Lewis (2015: 158), urbanism was not always a tolerable concept in Turkish society when modest fashion brands owned by Muslim women promote their fashion styles in magazines, such as *Tesettur* adopting an 'urban street style'. Lewis (2015: 159) argues that "the innovativeness of these straight-ups here does not rest on the discovery of new fashion cities or edgy urban locations but on the attribution of fashion capital to covered bodies in the already iconic spaces of Turkish urbanity, with shoots in quarters of Istanbul and major regional cities rather than in the conservative heartlands of the Islamic bourgeoisie".

The ethnographic field observations accord with Lewis' (2015) statements on how contemporary modest fashion inclination towards urban styles and urban spaces as seen in the previous sections on the interior designs and their similarity to 'arcades' urbanism. Nonetheless, I add that in addition to looking for urban locations, the Muslim female stakeholders participate in modest fashion events where decorations of the interior space of follows urban features, and this reflects a concept of 'urbanity' to their fashion designs. Another ethnographic data to consider in relation to urbanity is how the female stakeholders dress in designer heels and

broaches when attending the exhibitions, which led to the continuity of urbanity through such an inclusion of high-end items that only upper-class women can afford. The photographic fieldnote examining this scene analysed the dress culture of the Turkish Hijabi bloggers Hilal who was wearing *YSL*<sup>16</sup> heels that cost 1000 £. This ethnographic data suggest that luxurious designer products integrated with modest fashion styling in such a global event shows that Muslim female stakeholders are attempting to make modest fashion known in fashion houses and thus contributing to its globality and urban lifestyle. In this context, Lewis (2015: 158-159) stated that “modestly dressed women are everywhere, while the up-to-the-minuteness of their styling confirms them as participants in (producers of) a vibrant fashionscape encompassing secular global and modest local commercial fashion provision”.

This section revealed that modest fashion exhibitions had an urban feature of mirrors, glass doors, and giant screens that act as communicating spatial figures to the industrialisation of the modest fashion culture and the growth of consumer culture through an urban interior design and decorations of the eventful exhibitions. The urbanism of the exhibitions offers a contemporary shopping experience for Muslim female shoppers as they browse around the stalls because of how visual experiences in a modest fashion space communicate the familiarity of women with urban cities. There was also an integration of fashion houses’ products to modest fashion styles by Muslim female stakeholders to create a contemporary ‘fashionscape’ for the globality of modest wear culture. The next section will provide further spatial and promotional tools in modest fashion that contribute to the emergence of consumer culture in the exhibiting spaces.

### **3.3.2. The Promotion of a Consumer Culture: ‘pocket goodies’**

The fashion events’ thrilling moments for the visitors were the small gifts offered in the exhibitions or the runways, the attire of the models parading on a stage with music and light effects, the makeup, and accessories, and watching bloggers walking by at exhibitions and catwalk’s front rows. Whenever a brand was distributing a few bags or boxes, a crowd was gathered to grab a ‘goodie’, and the eyes were mesmerized by the artistic walk-in modest aesthetics. The term ‘goodie’ is used by the influencers on social media to refer to the products

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<sup>16</sup> YSL Heels Name of the Website: *OPYUM SANDALS IN PATENT LEATHER WITH GOLD-TONE HEEL*

gifted by brands or companies when visiting events that they organised in order to acquaint them with the new commodity then they try it out and review it to the audience and this is the nowadays' advertisement. The ethnographic observations explored the material objects at the exhibitions and runway spaces leading to a presence of a material culture to examine the goods and commodity products to investigate how modest fashion culture is evolving as an industry (Lash and Lury, 2007). Following that, Lury (2011:16) discusses the role of goods and argue how they “can act as markers or performers of social identity, that they can act as carriers of interpersonal influence; and that their meaning is movable, that is, that it may be changed as goods circulate”.

Initiating with a re-introduction of how consumption and culture were attached as a notion referring to consumer culture, Paterson (2006: 8) suggests that consumption has a simultaneous meaning of “destroying (using up) and creating (bringing to fulfilment)”. Lury (2011: 10) takes a divergent view from consumption as a culture meaning ‘destruction’ or ‘using up’ and argues that “consumer culture as an example of material culture enables consumption to be seen in terms of appropriation and transformation”. She also states that consumer culture is a part of material culture in which “the first half of the term ‘material’ – points to the significance of stuff, of things in everyday practices, while the second half— ‘culture’ – indicates that this attention to the materials of everyday life is combined with a concern with the cultural, with norms, values, and practices” (Lury, 2011: 9). Accordingly, consumerism and cultural attributes are highly bound to each other, and they participate to what Marx (1992: 430) termed as “the commodity circulation”.

From my observations in the exhibitions, catwalks, and online, I deduced the process of consumption in the contemporary culture in which modesty fashion is head of the chain of constructions. On the process of appropriating modest styles and aesthetics, there are identity shifts, especially with creativity present in every stage to marketize the ideas and products. Female entrepreneurs from designers to bloggers are creative in their designs, advertising, artistic catwalk and exhibition shows, and in communicating with the audience through material and abstract ideas of lifestyles. The audience have the choice to distinguish themselves as modest dressers when connecting with the styles. Seeing women with diverse interests in the fashion industry working together to promote a cultural movement with fashionable dress palettes display a level of agency and resistance.

The following extract (see the map below) from the field diaries demonstrates an overall mapping of modest fashion promotion according to the ethnographic observations of the study



summarizing the examined vital promotional tools in modest fashion spaces and the branding strategies in exhibitions and catwalk shows including: ‘goodie bags’, glossy catalogues, and discount vouchers. The promotion of modest fashion seemed to also focus on brands’ sponsorship and collaborations with modest fashion bloggers who create visual content as a paid advertisement. It was also explored that the DIY culture of layering continues to promote modest fashion and contribute to “forging new forms of Muslim taste” (Lewis, 2015: 181). Layering or ‘layerability’ (Salim, 2013) was one of the initial dress culture practices that led to the growth of modest fashion in western countries and in “diverse modest dressing communities” (Carrel, 2013: 106). Furthermore, panel talks were recently introduced in modest fashion weeks as a tool for spreading knowledge on the modest fashion culture and discussing women’s representation.

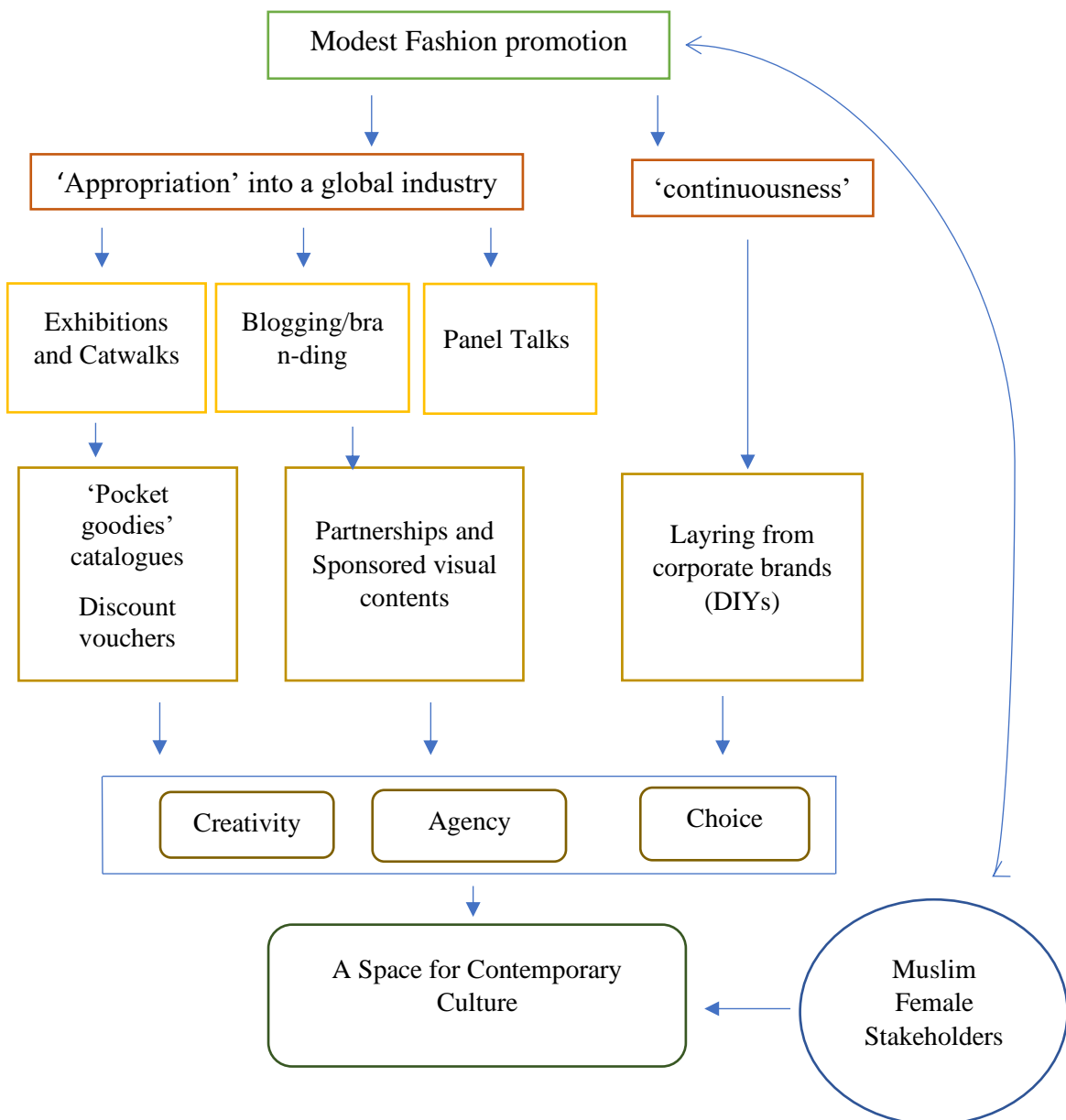
From the ethnographic field, it is argued that there are specific stages in the way modest fashion is consumed by the spectacle who are in first row young females. There is an appropriation of modesty by young women reunited in a female space they constructed to design and promote modest aesthetics. Then, there is a transformation of ideas about modesty as a lifestyle and a fashion to the audience, cultural sharing between designers, and the corporate firms trying to take a share of the gap. The final phase fills the space in-between appropriation and transformation in which consumer identities are produced through modest fashion. Emphasizing on how female consumers are not just the audience, but the designers, and corporate industries as well since I am using terms as ‘appropriation’ and ‘transmission’ to refer to the consumption of culture. The flow of actions of modest clothes parading, the attire and accessories sound when visitors feel them, the music, the models steps and expressions, the bloggers running around in brands’ goods, the noise of queues filled with the diversity of styles, the clicks of cameras with the poster of sponsors name, the intertwined ensemble of spectacular expressions of identities and cultural values in a space dominated by females playing a role in making a contemporary culture and using (consuming) concomitantly is a powerful signal of young women ‘on the move’.

These emerging branding strategies contributed to the expansion of modest fashion spaces into a contemporary culture allowing Muslim female stakeholders to weave their own spaces within modest fashion to share their creativity, agency, and voice their individual choices in modest fashion styles. Along this process, a consumer culture grew within modest fashion culture as more advertising items are introduced in the modest fashion events through the material gifts offers to visitors and live promotional performances on ‘how to layer modest

looks'. It is then when modest fashion as a commercial product and as a set of styling ideas was becoming commodified and sold to the global modest dress community.

In the upcoming sections, the examination of branding strategies and tools continues with a further focus what is gifted to the female visitors at the events. There is also an investigation of the contribution of the branding tools to the growth of consumer culture which are explored in further detail to further examine the spaces of modest fashion and women's roles and representations amidst the process of promotion.

**A Map.** A space for the industrialization of the contemporary modest fashion culture (fieldwork diary extract)



### **3.3.2.1. 'Pocket Goodies' and Modest Fashion Mediation: 'Goodie bags', catalogues, and discount vouchers**

'Pocket goodies' are the diverse commercial items gifted by brands at the exhibitions, placed on the runway seats, or on the dinner tables at charity events. Pocket goodies includes: 'goodie bags' with samples of brands' products, glossy discount vouchers and catalogues visualising their commodities including garments and accessories. Lewis (2015: 82-83) refers to this act of offering gifts and catalogues to consumers as "professionalized fashion mediation techniques" and argues that achieving these branding strategies "requires the existing professional expertise of secular aesthetic service providers (fashion models, graphic designers, stylists, and photographers) and creates opportunities for Islamist participants (often women) to develop professional-level skills in fashion mediation". Thus, the roles that 'pocket goodies' in this research were seen as new marketing materials contributing to building the commercial identities of brands.

Combining the creative industry that is expert in creating tools of advertising such as 'pocket goodies' for the modest fashion industry in which they exist in distinct market spaces, carry different kinds of products, and associate with different trademarks and histories, yet they paired to develop 'cultural objects' standing for the distinctiveness of modest fashion as a marketized culture (Lash and Lury, 2007). Because 'pocket goodies' carry a variety of sample products and printed visual objects of the different brands contributing somehow to the event (sponsor, catwalk, exhibition, media), they offer the visitors of the event to experience the different products. As these samples were identified by the logo of the companies in a bag that is distinguished by the title of the fashion show, the visitors associate the information on the 'pocket goodies' frontage with the printed title or brand names in the bags. Lash and Lury (2007: 198) revealed that "structural couplings of objects with their environments or social imaginaries [...] intensive features of the object take on very strong associations with actual products in these social imaginaries".

From the fieldwork, it was observed that modest fashion as a dress culture is now being associated with cosmetic brands, media industries, and finance and investments companies. As they are becoming sponsors participating amidst the event space and time by offering gifts and samples, catalogues describing their offers and business, and by highlighting their names on signboards, posters, and screens. All of the mentioned promotional objects were explored earlier apart from the vital branding items which are pocket goodies. 'Promote-ing brand value'

(Lash and Lury, 2007) through samples with the name of the brands on them as it was investigated in the Istanbul Modest Fashion Week where *Farmasi* the Turkish cosmetic company participated by sending samples of their perfumes, BB and CC creams, and hydrating face creams, there was also a scarf from *Modanisa* and a glossy catalogue of *Modanisa*.

The modest fashion designers contributing to the fashion events and the managers were very creative in interacting with the audience capturing their attention through personalized bags and small gifts. Their intentions are deeper to what we see on the surface of these objects to the extent of modest fashion marketing purposes for the circulation of products. The bags or boxes carry the names of the brands which is an easy and cheaper way towards advertisement as the attendees who came from all over the world of show carry them outside in public. More importantly, I suggest that the exploration of these things as gifts in depth show how they are markers of culture and in this case the properties of modesty as a contemporary culture. The individuals visiting the modest fashion show visualize what is given to them and interact with the design of the gift, what is inside it, and what does it represent them when used. Lury (2011: 14) indicates from an anthropological point view that “material goods are not only used to do things, but they also have a meaning, and act as meaningful markers of social relations. It is in acquiring, using and exchanging things that individuals come to have social lives”. In this sense, I will use extracts from the fieldwork diary to show how gifts have a high presence and establish a connection to social identities.

In Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, under the seat in the fashion runway, the organizers designed a silver bag with *Modanisa* Istanbul Modest Fashion Week on one side and a slogan of ‘Reflect your own Style’ on the opposite side in black (see figure 17). It is a method of advertising for their modest fashion show through a material item. Moreover, the material object is probably used to communicate with the visitors as well. The use of bright colours, such as silver, and the choice of words contribute to the construction of ideas for attendees. ‘Own’ as a term shows possession and individuality. The idea supports the inclusion of differences in modest fashion in a world where one can have control over a cultural meaning of their own clothing style. Referring the individuality that the slogan of ‘Reflect your own style’ represent, *Modanisa* as a sponsor printed on the bag communicate a membership of a social group aiming for the promotion of modesty as a concept carrying a variety of dress codes.



**Figure 17.** The Bags from Istanbul Modest Fashion Catwalk (Photo taken by AB).

In another field diary extract representing ‘pocket goodies’, we can see that the female audience filled their plates and seemed to like the cakes made by *the Doughnut Shop* as the signboard describes in figure 18. Thus, what was important in this ethnographic observation is how a cultural food product is marketed in conjunction with modest fashion sartorial products. And since *the Doughnut Shop*’s products are handmade and a small business, there seems a collaboration between brands owned by newly built female business supporting each other. But to do so, these females thought of providing food samples along with the perfume and skincare samples that were in the small white bags as a branding tool offering the female audience a taste of their products.

The question is whether these gifts are a need or just a luxury. To see through this questioning, I first emphasis on how many products became a part of our daily ‘lifestyles’ as consumption and advertising is changing and second on how the consumers in the case of the modest fashion events are young women interested in accessories, skincare, and a nice dinner out with friends, as what I am conceptualizing as ‘desired luxurious lifestyle’. The managers of the events are very creative in attracting and communicating with the attendees’ beauty products they have in their daily lifestyle. Paterson (2006: 44) argues that “lifestyles are systematic products of habitus, that is, habitus is a system through which we surround ourselves with, and desire, certain objects according to our perceptions of the social world”.



**Figure 18.** The Open Free cakes at the fashion Show in Birmingham.

Another feature representing brand communication strategies is the use of luxurious samples for a product display on a table in a decorative way in Leicester, at Platinum suit dinner fashion event. A given example is in (figure 19) of *My Henna Box*. The box is in black with rose golden letters wrapped in a pink ribbon. The colour itself may represent femininity and the packaging shows how significant it is for female consumers to draw their sense of being. This sense being is equal to the practices of lifestyle. Henna is found everywhere in cheaper prices but low packaging. Henna became a trend in the western countries according to my observations of the modest fashion shows. In Istanbul they offer a free round of Henna embellishment on hands, in The Muslim Shopping Festival and Ladies Only Charity show of Birmingham, they showcase and sell luxurious henna boxes. The providers can make it as simple as what is available in the everyday market, but the design of boxes and the ‘easy-to-use-by-yourself’ pouch make it appealing to women as they believe them to be interested in aesthetics and adornments as a part of their lifestyle. This consumption of specific goods over others is part of ‘the aestheticization of the everyday life’ and Paterson (2006: 44) discusses these lifestyles as “systematic products of habitus, that is, habitus is a system through which we surround ourselves with, and desire, certain objects according to our perceptions of the social world”. That is to say, the stakeholders of modest fashion show provide exactly what all the female visitors desire though their different cultural and ethnic backgrounds through the appropriation of packaging design of the everyday products according to what combines them together under one cultural meaning which could be the luxurious box or a trendy colour of the mostly used thing by all females in the modest social realm.



**Figure 19.** One of the Samples Brands Put in Stalls for Publicity (Photo taken by AB).

This creativity in presenting goods in modest fashion showed how not only clothes are a part of fashion, but also the everyday cultural lifestyles of the visitors. In addition, the inclusion of creativity within modest fashion commercialisation displayed the control these young modest females have as stakeholders and consumers in reconstructing the mainstream by adding cultural alternatives to sartorial practices which support the everyday habits of the Muslim females in their social space. Wilson argues that “fashion is one among many forms of aesthetic creativity which make possible the exploration of alternatives. After all, fashion is more than a game, it is an art form and a symbolic social system”. Therefore, not only modest fashion allows women to have their space of consumerism in the mainstream, but also afford creative aesthetics of the daily life using unique ideas to promote products with social significance and cultural meanings. After all, Henna has an ethnic quality, but sharing it in a diverse community of women in the fashion events is an appropriation within further social groups.

### 3.4. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter unpacked the accumulation of numerous modest fashion events in multiple locations, globally and locally, addressing a holistic understanding via diverse data sources and spaces in spatial, economic, social, and cultural contexts. The findings of this chapter revealed a massive shift in the consumer culture that was years ago dependent on webstores (Moors, 2013). Now, modest fashion developed the idea of event culture by producing material spaces to accommodate fashion weeks, Muslim festivals, and charity dinners for growing a contemporary style of consumerism and increase its economic capital.

This chapter has examined two different types of modest fashion events. The first type was the fashion weeks in London and Istanbul and the Muslim shopping festival in Olympia London wherein the spatial analysis of the interior design and the locations have shown the globality of modest fashion retail. The second represented a spatial interpretation of the charity dinner events based in the UK cities: London, Birmingham, and Leicester, in which the events focused on creating promotional spaces for women where a theoretical concept of ‘female-only space’ was generated. Drawing from Craik’s (1993) theorisation of feminine techniques, this chapter illuminated the different representations that the emerging concept of ‘female-only space’ provide to the Muslim female stakeholders. It was evidenced that the presence of feminine leisure through the idea of dinner parties and the feminine techniques adopted to decorate the space were rather empowering for: first for its spatial aim of bringing successful women together to share their career experiences and calling for agentive acts; second, there were more job opportunities for women who were taking part in the technical crew, such as photographers and interior designers.

This chapter has discussed that exhibitions resemble ‘arcades’ (Benjamin, 1999) in terms of the architectural design and urban features. As a result, this chapter drew theoretical references from studies on urban spaces demonstrating that the giant technological screens are the newly developed tools for the urbanism of the modest fashion eventful spaces. The use of screens in the ‘eventscapes’ displayed an urban image to modest fashion consumer culture and created a ‘dynamic field’ (Krajina, 2009) for visitors to socially interact with the space and the exhibited fashion designs. The contemporary approaches of consumer culture also identified Muslim female stakeholders as creative individuals producing ‘pocket goodies’ to promote modest fashion globally. As a result to this globalisation, traces of global culture industry in the modest fashion spaces were present.



## Chapter Four

### **‘Reflect your own Style’: catwalks’ promotional mechanism and radical parades**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines catwalks as promotional spaces and visual presentations of modest fashion designs where existing and newly emerging technological tools were incorporated into the interior design. It explores the catwalk shows representing particular themes while establishing social interactions with the spectacle through political scenes, the creative revival of cultural objects, and breaking conventional feminine images.

The first part of this data chapter focuses on highlighting the roles of spatial techniques developed by the technical expert crew who designed the stage of modest fashion catwalk with a focus on the newly emerging promotional mechanism. The fieldwork revealed that innovative tools, including light devices, visual simulations of sceneries, popular music, bloggers and models as promotional faces, and live-streaming of catwalks, were developed to increase the sales mechanism of the newly-made designs.

In the second part, this chapter adopts the ideas of radial catwalk from Khan’s (2000) perspective, where the revolutionary scenes from catwalk shows carry political and cultural messages. The ethnographic observations identified the emerging themes: body positivity, the revival of tribal adornments, feminist scene, and breaking conventional parades, wherein the creativity of Muslim female stakeholders is emphasised. This part employs Bourdieu’s (1986) theoretical concept of ‘bodily capital’ to examine how models use their bodies and experiences to deliver the theme of the catwalk to the modest fashion spectacle.

The last section of this chapter focuses on the veil’s significance through the exploration of the various meanings negotiated by female stakeholders, which contributes to the commercialisation of modest fashion in global retail.

#### **4.2. Catwalks and Sales: newly emerged innovative spatial strategies promoting modest fashion designs**

This section studies the catwalk as a branding space in modest fashion events by examining the spatial features and techniques incorporated to create a stage for brands to promote their fashion designs. The spatial features are interpreted by drawing from the definitions and theoretical influences of catwalk as a promotional space incorporating techniques for branding the fashion designs. ‘A catwalk’, as Skov, Skjold, Moeran, Larsen, and Csaba (2009: 2) define it, is “a sales promotion mechanism in the clothing industry and a widely recognized cultural event”; thus, it is “a biannual presentation of a new clothing collection on moving bodies for an audience”.

According to the photographic fieldwork data and the previous authors’ definition, the catwalks prioritise the quality of the visuality of the shows by using spatial devices that shape the communication between the spectacle and the displayed fashion costumes in the space of the show. Ferrero- Regis and Lindquist (2021: 15) note that there are “spatial designers in collaboration with the creative director and technical crew” who produce a catwalk space for the fashion shows. The devices in the modest fashion shows were innovative spatial techniques, including lighting tools, smoke effects, music, famous female bloggers, and models as promotional faces. By incorporating these innovative techniques, the ethnographic observations revealed that catwalks were promotional spaces with calculated placements of spatial tools to increase the interaction between the audience and newly-made designs, likely leading to high sales in modest fashion retail.

Through analysing ethnographic observations and photographic field notes of the innovative spatial techniques that the modest fashion industry developed, this section addresses creating an eventful space through selective techniques projecting the themes of the fashion shows organised by the modest fashion brands. By incorporating music, specific lighting edits of spotting and fading into darkness, smoke effects devices, and arrangement of bloggers and models’ placement during a runway. Such spatial features are vital for promoting themed parades and creating an entertaining atmosphere for the spectacle to be enchanted by the modest fashion brands’ catwalk and their designer collections. The embodiment of such themed catwalks correlates with Brown’s (2020: 12) argument on ‘eventscapes’ in which he indicated that “Consumption and entertainment became increasingly indistinguishable”. And with that, Kuris’ argument (2020) on how festivity has a role on expanding Muslim consumptionscapes is emphasised. In other words, the modest fashion industry relies on sources that creatively

produce entertainment (music, lights, and smoke-effect) to perform what appears as an artistic catwalk to the spectacle.

Additionally, these innovative sources created a meaningful physical experience and increased the consumer reach for higher sales of modest fashion products. For instance, the fieldwork had scenes of hijabi models dancing while parading to establish a tone, and thereafter, contact with the spectacle's feelings, excitement, and taste of music was established, showing how the industry followed technological and artistic sources compatible with the ideology of the spectacle (Adorno, 2001). As a result, it was revealed in this chapter that the Muslim female stakeholders had the knowledge of how to run a creative catwalk show which is considered in fashion studies as a 'fashion capital' (Lewis, 2015: 199). This knowledge contributed to the success of the modest fashion catwalks as economically effective tools for the global commercialisation of modest fashion culture and the rise of Muslim female stakeholders as active agents having the capital and the knowledge on how to actively combine the fashion shows and festivity.

#### **4.2.1. Artificial Light and Smoke: the visual stimulation illuminating the fashion designs on catwalks**

This subsection examines the various light sources creating 'a light situation' and smoke effects in the runways, creating a physical experience for the spectacle to interact with the modest fashion designs and associate with brand identities according to the atmosphere produced by these spatial strategies. My fieldwork observations suggest multiple technical designs and placements of lights in each fashion event. Focusing on London Modest Fashion Week's purple 'light situation' and Istanbul Modest Fashion Week's light design and placement, followed by the analysis of the smoke effect, this study investigates how these technical designs act as promotional tools for modest fashion commodities.

Brown (2020: 190) referred to the task of light production as 'light situation', which was previously conceptualised by Bach and Degenring (2014: 61) by pointing out how 'lighting situations' are connected to social "relationships, atmospheres, moods, and characters". From the fieldwork, it was observed that the lighting sources in fashion runways were projected through shifts of light spotting, and sometimes, there was a shadowing of the atmosphere at the start of each brand's catwalk. The experts concerned with the light design of fashion venues,

such as *Light Motif* in London Modest Fashion Week 2018, created 'light situations' by experimenting with purple lighting, illuminating and darkening the whiteness of the runway's venue. This is reminiscent of what Jawalkar and Bhamkar (2022: 166) contend, "the stage designers can dramatically change the audience's perception of the space [...] through the art of stage design". Therefore, the setup of the stage is essential to the spectacle's feelings and social and cultural associations with each fashion design.

As the *Light Motif* experts conceal the runway of London Modest Fashion Week with a gloomy atmosphere to later direct the lighting on the parading models on the runway, the models as female stakeholders gain visibility in the field of catwalk. As the audience gaze back at them, their visibility makes up a crucial part of their power (Bourdieu, 1986: 24). However, their visibility is associated with the display of the modest fashion designs. The brands participated in this fashion show to 'to be noticed' by a further audience and more consumers (Khan, 2000: 117). This makes the Muslim female designers as stakeholders in a higher position compared to the models in the catwalk, as the visibility is for the models under the 'light situation', but the main focus consists of drawing the spectacle's gaze to the designed items. Thus, the material spatial structures, such as the lights are continuously used in the fashion events to promote for the newly-made designs, and on the process they contribute to creating different levels of agency between the models and the designers in the field of London Modest Fashion Week. Models had the agency as key players in the catwalk whose career is dependent on the designers' sartorial creations and their attempt to promote it.

The photographic data also explored that the lighting in the multiple events remained natural, such as in 'modest fashion live' showcased in London Muslim Shopping Festival 2019. Occasionally, the space was illuminated through monolithic colours to offer a clean appearance to the clothing collections of the modest fashion designs. In 'modest fashion live' of Olympia, London, it was examined that the bright cool lights created a relationship between the audience and the parading garment as the view of the fashion designs was so clear because of the massive light projectors facing the runway. In the same context, Calefato (2001: 491) suggests that light is "the means through which signs are pervaded by sensorial receptivity, which is above all synaesthesia, the senses' ability to interact, combine with, or even substitute one another". Hence, in the 'modest fashion live' runways, the illumination of the catwalk space through strategic techniques of emphasising the colours and structures of each designed item as models paraded on the runway. As a result, the audiences' mood, senses of excitement, joy, and entertainment built the physical experience when they interacted with the neutral themes each

modest fashion brand was trying to communicate to the spectacle of London Muslim Shopping Festival through the simple white lighting.

Furthermore, the bright lights of the ‘modest fashion live’ in Muslim Shopping Festival also encouraged the relationship and interaction between the spectacle as they gaze at each other. Before the show began, and as I was sitting in the floor facing the runway and holding my camera to take photographs, other photographers start gazing at each other and at the spectacle while attempting to make contact with each other. Also, the fashion designers were gazing at photographers as one of them approached me and asked if I could share the photos of her fashion designs that were displayed in the runway. These interactions were possible due to the bright light used in the ‘modest fashion live’. The visibility that they offer to the stakeholders, from photographers of modest fashion to the fashion designers, produce a sense of recognition. Hence, fashion designers along with other stakeholders are there ‘to be seen’. With more visibility, comes more power and a presence of agency (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). As I attended the different events, I was recognized by the same fashion designers, such as Sa-orsa, that I met in the Muslim Shopping Festival in London, and in the Ladies-only Fashion Show in Leicester. This re-appearing recognition is significant for the modest fashion brands’ visibility as it intensifies their membership to the modest fashion industry and increases their chances to more sales.

Moreover, the ethnographic observations suggest that the modest fashion designers were the ones who decided on the theme of their catwalk show. Behind the scenes, experts (the stage designers) controlled the lighting features through electronic devices, which belong to the creative industry of IT (information technologies) and designs. To construct a ‘light situation’, the modest fashion industry seemed to collaborate with the creative industry to produce an entertaining physical experience for consumers who would interact with the displayed fashion designs through the created atmosphere. Such technological features of light sources and other setups are also found in mainstream fashion weeks, in the high street department stores, and in fashion houses to create a shopping experience for customers by illuminating the aisles where clothes are placed on clothing rails. For instance, the fashion house Dior initiated a virtual boutique to allow consumers “imaginative shopping experiences” (Sina and Wu, 2022: 1).

In the context of this chapter, the female stakeholders of modest fashion events and the creative industries worked together. They aimed to provide a visual art experience to the spectacle that would later associate with the celebrated themes on catwalks, leading to increased sales. What this refers to is the female stakeholders, such as the founders of the concept, Sahin

and Soeria, and other fellow Muslim women, who are the leaders of the modest fashion weeks have the knowledge on how to run a show that meets the standards of the fashion houses who are at the highly ranked status in the fashion industry. Thus, they have the assets, the cultural and the social capital to successfully organize a global event.

Another important point about the innovative use of light in the modest fashion event is the lighting inside the venues and buildings. The fieldwork observed that the catwalks were separated from exhibitions by a wall or accommodated on a different floor where the audience used escalators to attend, such as in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week. During the two modest fashion weeks (In London and Istanbul) and the Muslim shopping festival (Olympia, London), catwalks were hosted in broad daylight inside popular buildings (Victoria House, Zorlu Art Centre, Olympia) located in crowded touristic cities. Zorlu Centre, in Turkey, was surrounded by transparent glass walls allowing the daylight to travel inside the venue as a natural lighting source; it offered a clear view into the inside of the venue. Yet, when the fashion events were about to end, it became gradually dark inside, and artificial lights were used to illuminate the space.

In London Modest Fashion Week, there was a signboard on the top of the glass door of Victoria House (as described in chapter three). It had a bold black phrase *London Modest Fashion Week* which can be seen as the broad daylight illuminating the words taped to the glass head of the door leading to the fashion event (see figure 20). However, during nighttime, the street of Bloomsbury square, where the London Modest Fashion Week was happening, was too dark for people to see the signboard unless artificial lights were designed. There were coloured reflective lights consisting of pink led lights projected to the title of the fashion show ‘London Modest Fashion Week’ so that pedestrians crossing the road could see it and probably attend the second day of the event. This revealed the innovativeness and the role such technological tools played in promoting the event culture of modest fashion shows and contributing to growing the visibility of the venues where the events were taking place.



**Figure 20.** Photo taken by AB of the London Modest Fashion Week signboard.

Moving to further promotional tools, the visual simulation of smoke was creatively integrated into the set design of Istanbul Modest Fashion Week's runway. During the ethnographic fieldwork of Istanbul, the *Sherpa* catwalk space was dark, and the attendees could barely see each other. Smoke lingered on the stage, and a man in a neutral-coloured attire gradually appeared from the subsiding fog-like simulating as he was playing the flute. Then the lights progressively illuminated the catwalk as models began to walk out of the backstage. Their bodies walked through what looked like smoke and towards the lighted front of the stage and were more identifiable to the audience. The brand *Sherpa* used the visual simulation of smoke to project a scenery of fog, inviting the spectacle's imagination to visualize the presence of natural landscape on the stage. This innovative trick was created by *Sherpa* to further invite the spectacle's gaze to the accessories instead of the models' clothes and bodies because they are retailers of body adornments (necklaces, rings, pendants ...). The models walked barefooted and wore white and beige dresses. The attraction on their bodies was the adorned the neck of the models with accessories such as necklaces made of what seemed as natural stones according to the pendant I was gifted by the owners of *Sherpa* as a part of the 'pocket goodies' (pocket ethnography). I was offered a charm in a small white tulle pouch and placed in a box.

Following up on this ethnographic observation of smoke as a tool for scenery projection affirms the arguments of Jawalkar and Bhamkar (2002: 166) and Calefato (2001: 491)

combined together on how the use of innovative tools for stage design prevails the ‘sensorial receptivity’ of the modest fashion spectacle. The mysterious aura produced using visual stimulation of smoke looked like a natural phenomenon of fog which influenced the spectacle’s feelings and social interactions with the parading and naturally sourced adornments of *Sherpa*. As a result, this is one of many spatial techniques and devices adopted in the modest fashion catwalks to bring focus to the designs and adornments on runways leading to stimulating the senses and the constructed relationships of the spectacle with material garments, which eventually prompt the sales of the modest fashion brands.

It was suggested from these ethnographic data that since the main goal of modest fashion shows is promoting the concept of modesty to a diverse audience and helping them interact with a variety of clothing styles and accessories, the use of spatial tools contribute to the staging of social contact between the audience and the physical environment. The visuality of the catwalk seems to be constructed by the female models on the move on a runway displaying garments on their bodies, and the attendees were gazing at the models. In figure 21, the photographic extract from the field diary represents a factual scene of the audience ‘gazing’ at the model on the runway of Istanbul Modest Fashion Week. From the semiotic reading of the photographic data, the eyes of the audience are on a diagonal lining gazing at the model and the garments she wears. Moreover, the photographic data emphasised the high illuminance of the models as they paraded through the catwalk. What the fieldwork data identified is that fashion catwalks are more than what Khan (2000) discussed; the visuality of runways came alive through innovative technologies such as the light and smoke effects to increase the notion of ‘gazing’ at models’ bodies and therefore promote the modest fashion products and increase the sales in the modest fashion industry.





**Figure 21.** An extract from Istanbul Modest Fashion Week Catwalk (Photo taken by AB)

In short, this section provided insights into a field of innovativeness in catwalk shows of modest fashion events that are hardly researched in fashion and cultural studies. The creativity of using techniques and tools that interact with the audience and produce scenery for 'sensorial receptivity' (Calefato, 2001) in a catwalk space was examined as a part of a promotional mechanism in modest fashion shows. The latter was also evidence that the Muslim female designers' choice of such tools to project a theme for their brands' catwalk presented them as creative stakeholders.

#### **4.2.2. Popular Music and Modest Fashion Shows**

Popular music and fashion have consistently been bonded through symbolic and material interrelations in historical and cultural contexts (Miller, 2011). Craik (2009: 255-56) reported that "popular music has been a fashion force for most of the twentieth century" and that youth fashion mirrored the celebrities' style. In supporting this argument of fashion and music's relation to style, Calefato (2001: 495) states that "we use common expressions like 'he/she's got style', 'it's a matter of style', 'you can recognize that person by their style', or 'it's his/ her style'. In each case, the term 'style' immediately evinces its semiotic status". Calefato (2001) explains that fashion and music are languages standing for self-expression of the way we look and dress.

Moreover, fashion and music go through the cycle of change, illusion, and innovation that Simmel (1957) referred to in his essay to create something new and original. Still, most creations are inspired by past clothing styles and music tastes. It is a cycle from the past to the present. The cycle influences the sustainable relationship between music and fashion and continuity in "drawing on a common sensibility which translates into taste" (Calefato, 2001: 493). In this PhD, the ethnographic observation of the multiple catwalk shows revealed the bond between popular music and the modest fashion promotion on a runway. The bond is strengthened through the 'sensorial element' whereby the relationship between the spectacle and the parading brands was established via the music taste, the models' pace, and the audience's reaction (applause, whistling, screaming...).

In the ethnographic fieldwork, music was a source of entertainment and a political tool in the modest fashion catwalks. It was central to the various events as a spatial tool for increasing the consumer culture. In Fashion and Lifestyle Birmingham, the music played was trending in 2019. It was from diverse languages, French, English, Indian and Pakistani. A musical soundtrack played by the DJ was Beyoncé's 2009 'Single Ladies'. That was when all the young women stood up from their dinner table, climbed onto the stage, and started dancing, imitating the choreography in the video clip, and sometimes making funny movements. These ethnographic accounts displayed that in addition to 'being in a fashion space', 'being up-to-date' with the trending styles and music tastes was crucial for interacting with consumers who possessed knowledge about popular music. This popular music, as a tool for spatial production, constructed a utopian atmosphere for the young women in the shows because it showed in the way they happily danced to Beyoncé's music. The observational data demonstrated that music is central to creating entertainment on the catwalk stage, and this was one of its numerous roles in modest fashion shows.

In each fieldwork, it was observed that every 'catwalk' of a modest fashion brand was accompanied by a piece of music in the background while the female models paraded to the track. The female models exhibited bodily practices on the runway to promote the brands' clothing styles while parading on particular musical pieces chosen by the brand owner to match their taste with the created sartorial line so that the audience interacted with the performance. There seems to be a powerful bond between fashion styles and music as a taste, as stated by Calefato (2001:493) on how they are "intimately connected"; and adds that fashion and music are "two social practices that go hand in hand, sustaining one another in the medium of mass communication and drawing on a common sensibility which translates into taste. The sensibility that Calefato (2001) refers to in his interpretation is via concepts of 'sense', 'sensation', 'sense machines' to explain how fashion and music are languages sharing these terms on common grounds and putting them together leads to creativity. This creativity is associated with the Muslim female stakeholders.

From a semiotic point of view and with reference to Calefato's (2001) analysis of music and fashion, I examine the fashion runway of *Dian Pelangi* in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week. Drake's 2018 'Kiki Do You Love Me?' is modern pop music referring to a romantic relationship between a man and a woman in which there is sexual content in the rhetoric of this music. Notwithstanding the importance of the rhetoric, there is a more important aspect to Drake's 2018 Pop song of 'Kiki', which is the popular visual cultural performance associated

with it as a trend. Globally performed video of individuals playing the music on their cars' radio and stepping out of their car seats to perform to the song with specific bodily dancing moves. Its relevance to the fieldwork is when one of the models of *Dian Pelangi* brand danced to 'Kiki Do You Love Me?' imitating the moves from the popular videos on TikTok. The spectacle reacted to her performance with applause and cheers. Hauser (1982: 490) and Skov, Skjold, Moeran, Larsen, and Csaba (2009: 20) identify the spectacle in fashion runways applauding the modelled collection as an act of conviction and satisfaction with the collection, which is also a sentiment that the audience felt for *Dian Pelangi*'s sportswear collection in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week 2019 as the female model danced to the 'trending' song of Drake. Thereby, the observations of *Dian Pelangi*'s dancing scene on the catwalk revealed the connection between fashion styles and music tastes, wherein creative subcultural dance moves were brought to the stage spontaneously by a veiled stakeholder (the model) to communicate the theme of the brand with the spectacle.

In another catwalk scene in Ladies-Only Charity Fashion Show, music was used to create a political theme. Cohen (1995: 444) indicates that "music has a symbolic representation of place, and the social production of place is always a political and contested process". The field diary noted that the models wearing *Sa-orsa*'s garments were parading to Angele's 2019 'Balance ton Quoi?'. Like *Dian Pelangi*'s catwalk, in *Sa-orsa*'s, the spectacle reacted with applause to show admiration and communicated with the music in the background, whistling and screaming as the models performed their choreography. Since the song is in French and the audience is more familiar with English in Birmingham, they lacked an understanding of the words of the music and hence, the political meaning of the rhetoric.

Women on the move through popular music along with lights played on their movement on a stage have a role in the transmission of contemporary culture to the spectacle who react to it and make a connection with modest fashion. From the fieldwork observations, it is argued that the choice of popular music and its combination with lights effects engage in the spectacle's consumption of a contemporary culture. That is to say, there is a production of a culture – that is modest fashion – using the choice of whatever it takes including artistic features to create a 'perfect' atmosphere. It is also worth mentioning that in the charity fashion events in Birmingham, Leicester, and London, the DJ is a female, and that music is mostly American production.

#### 4.2.3. 'Soft Focus': modest fashion bloggers and models as promotional faces

The use of familiar faces of bloggers and famous models on the catwalk shows is becoming a promotional technique by stakeholders. Rocamora (2016: 6) indicated that fashion bloggers placed in the front rows of the show present a key moment. The presence of bloggers and models marks the catwalk space as particular for the visitors who had physical contact with the fashion bloggers, the content creators of fashionable looks that they admire. Space as 'experienced and lived' via spatial patterns was conceptualized by Lefebvre (1991) as 'space of representations' in which the social significance of space is important. And in this section, the spectacle enjoys a direct social interaction with bloggers and supermodels whom they follow on social media (Instagram).

'Soft Focus' is a concept contextualized in Craik's (1993) study of fashion in cultural studies in which she explores the relationship between techniques of fashion photography and techniques of femininity. I borrow the term in this section because in the field diaries of modest fashion events the modest fashion bloggers and models adopt feminine traits of wearing modest brands' designs and sitting in the front rows of catwalk shows where they are visible to the spectacle. They also stand in front of brands' signboards acting as promotional figures and mannequins and focusing on displaying their femininity by standing still to be 'gazed-at' by the visitors and to be admired according to the designs they are wearing. Hence, the modest brands focus on selecting these women for their feminine traits and digital profiles, i.e., 'soft focus' (Craik, 1993).

From Turkey's fieldwork, the exhibition of *Jaqar* brand (A modest Bridal line) in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week used an idea of presenting their bridal dresses on a model standing next to the stall. The brand owner emphasized on how the brand comes of a family firm business that existed for many years. Therefore, the owner seemed to have a profound experience in exhibiting ideas because she that was the only brand hiring a mode revealed in one of their silky long bridal dresses. Seeing the model standing there captures the attention of women. They have a moving image of how the dress look like on a body (See figure 22). The model speaks in English unlike the stakeholder and translates to foreign visitors who cannot speak Turkish language, and this is a bonus. This is the only striking feature amidst the similarities of exhibitions in all the modest fashion shows.

In the same modest fashion event, the supermodel Halima Aden was a main figure in the catwalk shows of most brands in the catwalk. Halima is known for being the first hijab

supermodel contributing to Fashion Houses' catwalk shows in fashion weeks. For modest fashion brands in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, to have such a known figure and a supermodel participating in their catwalks increases their chances for expanding globally in terms of how modest fashion is growing in Turkey as a mainstream culture. In the field diary of Istanbul, the spectacle cheers for Halima every time she parades on the catwalk stage, and she smiles back to them. Because most of the audience are covered Muslim women and who are apparently interested in looking fashionable, they view Halima as an icon of modest fashion and admire her success in a higher career at the fashion industry. The field diary demonstrates that Halima represents modest fashion in the corporates because she is a hijabi women that fashionable Muslim women associate with her success and therefore for them, she is the face of Muslim modest fashion. Modest fashion is important to these Muslim women stakeholders because it is a part of who they are as females in a contemporary era living in urban cities and doing their daily activities including work where they want to look modest and fashionable. That is why having icons as the hijabi supermodel Halima in a modest fashion catwalk is a promotional face for brands who want to sell their designs to the women who admire Halima and similar known faces.



**Figure 22.** The model at *Jaqar* Exhibition Wearing One of their Dresses (Photo taken by the AB)

Different activities of exhibiting, panel talks, and runways are placed in distinct platforms. Exhibitions are stalls with brand names on a signboard and symbolised by a rail of clothes on a side and a desk carrying cards of details next to some samples and goodie bags. The clothes take most of the space and are motionless on a hanger. The spot is limited and small for each brand. A catwalk, on the other hand; is a stage for moving attire on bodies. The models walk up and down the runway to perform in a limited space in the ‘frontstage’ (Goffman, 1959). There is an audience on both sides of the catwalk watching the apparels. In all the fashion events I attended, there are always chairs provided for the crowd to sit and watch the show. Some events have a screen at the back introducing the names of the brands as they are about to enter the stage while others do not. Screens have a role in identifying the specific brands to disguise the designs from others and have an idea about who is the creator of what. They are placed at the back of the catwalk where the models come out. The lights’ function is varied. The shared

role of it is to shed attention on the runway when it starts and conceals the stage when it is not in or it could be vice versa. Playing with lights has a relation with the audience communication with the show as the atmosphere shifts with the lights. There is as well a place for fashion press on the facing centre spot of the fashion show in the lead of the catwalk. The Music genre of pop, rap, (From the American industry), such as and live instrumental show filling the room where the fashion show going interfere in the atmosphere as well.

The seating structure in fashion shows became also strategic and focuses more with time on who to place in the front rows which seem to give an image of the brands' worth through the fame of the attending celebrities sitting in the front seats. In Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, the multi-brand company *Modanisa* placed the well-known Muslim female bloggers in front rows in one side of the parallel rows. In this sense, Lewis (2013: 50-51) argued that:

positioned initially as marginal or renegade voices, key bloggers have by now accrued cultural and political capital equivalent to their established print media counterparts [...] many other bloggers now seated front row for the catwalk shows and featuring in the print and online editions of established fashion magazines.

In addition to modest fashion bloggers shifting the narratives from marginalizing to gaining a position in the industry with their culturally different capital, their fame appears to be acting as a spatial strategy to increase the sales of the branded clothing products on modest fashion runways and their fame also place a value on the paraded dress of every brand. Thus, this PhD investigated that, if using the modest fashion female bloggers as sales' strategies may objectify them, but these women see blogging and front-row-positioning as a 'paid job'. From the Instagram field diary, it is observed that these women seek for further recognition and view being in 'Vogue' magazine as a step forward towards 'fame' which they also appear to see as a financial increase for their capital.

In addition, the modest fashion bloggers performing live hijab tutorials in-between fashion shows are also significantly showcased in the middle front of the runway. The study's field diary of London Muslim Shopping Festival and of Birmingham Fashion Show 2019, a blogger is given a stage in each show to perform a live styling of the headcover. Meher Malik is a blogger who styles a turban on a female model with her Instagram page shed on the wall. The model wears a mini skirt and a black turtle-neck shirt which means she is not 'a hijabi' (Hijabi women wear ankle-length trousers or skirts to cover the lower part of the body). The style of

the turban is an everyday look for all women. The bloggers could have chosen a Muslim woman model who conceals her head with a hair band and then placing a scarf and wrapping it to share her turban styling. In a different show, in the other show in Excalibur Grand, in Birmingham, the blogger Uruj Zahid shows the women attendees how to style ‘a hijab’ for events and used an accessory to decorate the front of the veil by pinning it on the sides (figure 23). The styling of the headcover on the modest fashion events is a persistent act adding to the veil a meaningful image of being.

The veil as a part of modest fashion garments in the growing industry extends the female space through a modern vision. Lewis (2013: 44) claims that in history, there are ways “in which women’s forms of modest dress are enabled and constrained by social, cultural and economic contexts includ[ing] the range and availability of garments from which women can choose”, however with modest fashion inclusion of diverse women, the styles are self-controlled through individual choices and not socially or culturally.



**Figure 23.** Uruj Zahid Live Hijab Tutorial (Photo taken by AB)

These discussion supports the argument of Salim (2013: 210) that:

young hijab-wearing women are fashion literate and have interesting ways of making a wide range of fashion images relevant to themselves even in cases



where the images might at first seem far removed from their lives or even demeaning. In discussing these issues, I also consider the hierarchies embedded in the fashion system and how young hijabi women try to subvert these hierarchies.

My findings add to the studies on modest fashion, Muslim fashion, and the veil but on a socio-economic level related to fashion promotion that the veil is a part of the modest fashion mainstream industry and the changes of style and forms in dresses mirror the shift in veil trending and this results in empowering women to have bodily control and take part in the fashion industry.

From the Modest Fashion Weeks, there is the modest runway in London Muslim Shopping festival, and in the charity-based fashion shows, the Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019 (London), Women models in the entire parades followed a traditional runway and choreography. There are performances, however; in London Modest Fashion Week, Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, Ladies only Charity Fashion Show, and Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham which challenged the dominant systems. There were unusual in the choreography, stage use, and aesthetics on their faces. It is true that the ultimate goal of some catwalks is attraction of an audience and media for fame and profits. Nevertheless, ‘the manner’ these styles are put into motion has to be questioned because “fashion can only be radical when it demonstrates the ability to challenge its own systems and structure” (Khan, 2000: 116). The modest fashion show aim is to represent clothes with a concept of ‘modesty’ on a catwalk. The concept itself is controversial from one brand to another, from a consumer in the audience to the fashion press. ‘The manner’ it is showcased and represented on models and space will be explored because there is an inclusion of a veil which is labelled to Muslim women modest dressers. The striking catwalks selected from each fashion show mirror an imagery of ‘being bold and self-assured’ and a level of ‘confidence’ (Khan, 2000: 218).

#### **4.2.4. Live-Streaming Catwalks on Instagram: ‘crisis response strategy’**

In addition to the innovative spatial techniques, the visual data from Instagram tracked a new tool consisting of hosting catwalks online during the outbreak of coronavirus to ensure the continuity of modest fashion promotions by using the live streaming on Instagram. This new tool was a response to external and internal crises in fashion retail whereby Muslim female

stakeholders, emphasising models and businesswomen, needed to look for an alteration of the physical fashion shows. During the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual fashion shows were integrated, not only in modest fashion spaces but also in the global fashion industries. As examined by Kim and Woo (2021:2), global fashion retailers during the pandemic had to deal with the combined issues: social crisis (external) and brand crisis (internal) and thought of building “the appropriate crisis response strategies”.

The expansion of the field of modest fashion through social media leads to fresh practices of displaying fashion shows and new distribution tools for produced designs. For Rocamora (2016: 9) the “mediatization” of fashion production, such as the live-streaming of catwalk shows through Instagram in this research, is affecting the fashion retail, including consumption and fashion events designed according to social media properties and affordances. In this research, Instagram live option contributed to the expansion of promotional space and continuity of catwalk shows during a crisis. This expansion also contributed to associating modest fashion with global retail because this method of live streaming is not new. Fashion houses like Burberry adopted the “mediatization” for their spring-summer 2016 designed collections, turning the digital into “legitimate spaces of diffusion of the collections” (Rocamora, 2016: 6). The effectiveness of live-streaming, therefore, was long known by corporates and it was the fit solution during the Coronavirus pandemic for the continuity of modest fashion catwalk shows representing a ‘crisis response strategy’.

Here, the online fieldwork explored how modest fashion catwalks’ continuity through the digital platforms during the outbreak of coronavirus in 2020 was a ‘crisis response strategy’. The affordance of the digital in transforming the reality of the lived life offline through a screen resulted in the continuity and the increase of blurring the boundaries between the online and real (Kress, 2009: 88). In the field diaries, it was found that the spaces where modest fashion promotional practices continued through the pandemic from 2020 to 2022 on the Instagram platform. It was reported in *Drapers* magazine that Istanbul Modest Fashion Week was expecting more than 7000 visitors, but it had to be rescheduled because of a coronavirus outbreak. Nonetheless, these efforts failed because the outbreak lasted longer than expected and grew into a global pandemic. Therefore, the adequate call for replacing the physical show of modest fashion week with a digital catwalk using the ‘Live’ option on Instagram online platform.

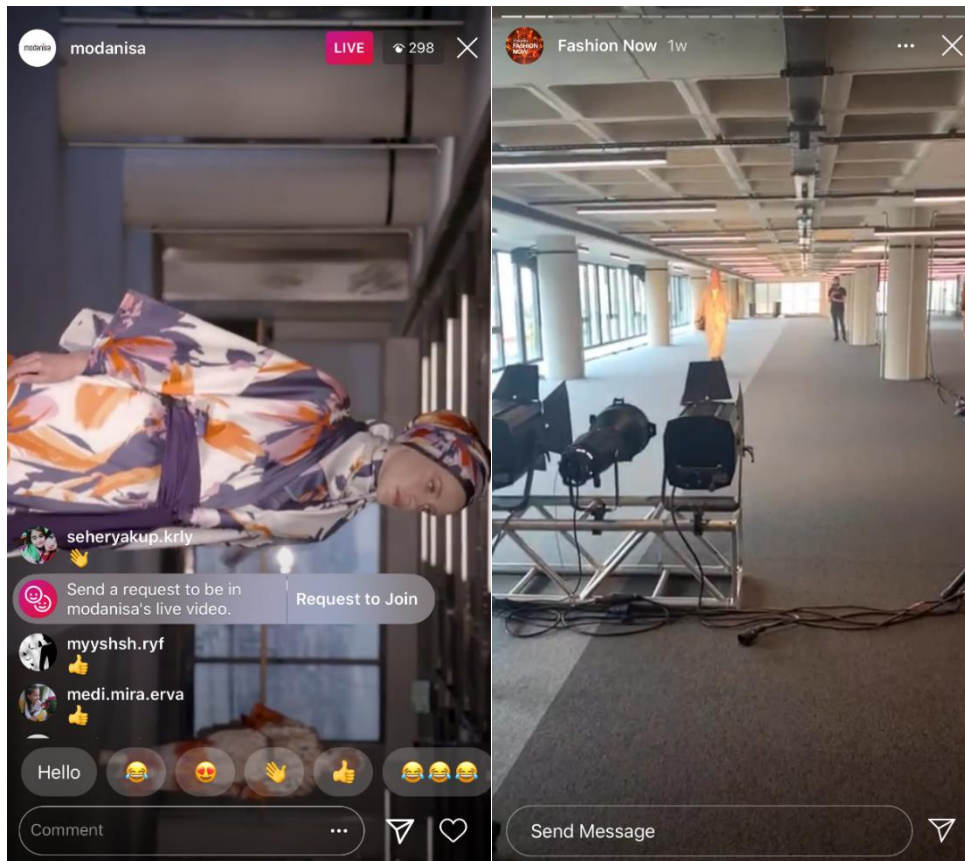
From the online observations of Instagram, the @modestfashionweeks account which is managed by ‘Think Fashion’, the industry of Franka Soeria and Ozlem Sahin that introduced

the modest fashion weeks' theme, launched live catwalk shows in an empty warehouse where models were parading up and down the flat stages. Through this Instagram live, I examine the surrounding space of the catwalk where I see large glass windows.

From the website of *Modest Fashion Week by Think Fashion*, and in the section about MFW, the founder Ozlem Sahin stated that:

Modest Fashion is a global style where the clothes are covering the body more. Loose cuts and long cuts are the key style element of modest fashion however hijab is optional. Modest fashion come with a new proposal of beauty that refuses 1 type of fashion and beauty standards. It stands for inclusivity and welcoming different body types, lifestyles, cultures and faiths.

*Modanisa* is of the corporate company of modest fashion which delivers to the worldwide. They sponsor Muslim women from the UK to advertise for their modest products through sharing visuals on Instagram while tagging them. In 2020, Covid-19 made everyone in the world go under a lockdown, and all events were cancelled, including modest fashion weeks. *Modanisa* organized a fashion week for 2020 in Istanbul, which was postponed. As a result of the virus, *Modanisa* decided to host the modest fashion catwalk on Instagram live (see figure 24). The live displays how Instagram is an attached platform to the offline world and secured a space for modesty promotions to continue digitally just as in the real world. Thus, these live catwalks during the lockdown became a digital tool for the continuity of modest fashion through the lockdown where social contact was isolated.



**Figure 24.** *Modanisa*'s fashion runway on Instagram live

### **4.3. Radical Catwalks: political scenes, activism, and bodily capital**

This section foregrounds the radical catwalk shows in the modest fashion events where notions of 'body positivity', 'activism', and 'bodily capital' were celebrated amidst the display of fashion apparel. The radical catwalks, according to Khan (2000: 125), "play an integral role in conveying an underlying social or political message". Just as in the fieldwork, models were hired to parade in radical catwalk shows to project political and cultural scenes and manage the correct presentation of catwalk themes.

#### 4.3.1. ‘#MYGYAL IS Beautiful’: *Shathletics Uk*’s parade of ‘body positivity’

The sportswear catwalk by Shazfit (the owner of *Shathletic UK*) displayed young female models parading while carrying a poster of #MyGyalisBeautiful. This catwalk show demonstrated a powerful walk on the stage where women of colour from diverse sizes and heights fiercely looked at the audience. This ethnographic data suggest that these female models were looking to break the traditional catwalks of slim women and the associated labels of femininity (Craik, 1993).

The designer Shaz was hosting her first and only show in a fashion event with an artistic performance of an unusual show. A walk of glory is the adequate phrase for their performance. Shaz walked ahead while carrying on her shoulder a metal chain for combats embodying an outstanding image of women and power. The models walked behind her, carrying a large white cloth handwritten on it #MY GYAL IS Beautiful (See figure 27). This sportswear niche brand contributed to London modest fashion week to promote her clothing brand by creating the message behind developing her fashion collection. This representation of veiled bodies opposing the ‘conventional’ catwalk of ‘parading up and down’ the runway stood against the traditional bodily criteria of ‘slim and tall’ female models (see figure 25), calling for ‘body positivity’ movement. ‘Body Positivity movement or ‘BoPo’ is highly spread on social media platforms, and it is about “growing societal awareness of the dangers of unrealistic body ideals”(Simon and Hurst, 2021: 125). ‘BoPo’ is about the message of self-acceptance and factual images of women of various body shapes and sizes (Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John, and Slater, 2019).

The catwalk of *Shathletics UK* displayed models of different colours and diverse sizes wearing tracksuits and drawing symbols in white ink around their eyes which presented ‘tribal’ belonging and an ethnic tradition of face painting. Carrying a metal chain for athletes on her shoulders, Shaz closes her show along with the other models who are behind like an army carrying a large white cloth with the slogan of #MY GYAL IS Beautiful. These ethnographic observations indicate that these veiled models represented the voice of women who are ignored in the fashion industry because of their appearance. The fashion designer, Shaz, sent a message of body positivity to the audience that all women of colour, of different sizes, shapes, and looks are beautiful and called for inclusion and diversity in the industry.

Moreover, by launching this modest sportswear for diverse women and focusing on Muslim women practising sport as the first target of consumers seeking a higher coverage of the body,

*Shathletics UK* assigned value to what Muslim females are dealing with in the everyday life, such as the challenge of finding the modest attire to practice sport. Here, there was further inclusivity and representation of another category of women who were the covered females balancing their religiousness and everyday practices.



**Figure 25.** Instagram visual of *Shathletics UK* in London Modest Fashion Week Parade (fieldnote extract)

#### 4.3.2. ‘Green Vibes Only’: climate action in Refka’s runway

With the climate crisis, strikes against fashion production and campaigns of raising awareness within social spaces were taking place. Therefore, brands like *Rabia Z* in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week 2019 adopted posters on sustainability and recyclability to share their knowledge

of the climate crisis and the solutions they are developing to face this environmental change to share with the audience.

A study by Han and Ahn (2020) on global climate change noted the emergence of youth as leading figures in the global climate movements from 2018 to 2019 in the US and Hong Kong. Also, in *Louis Vuitton's* fashion Week in Paris, in an article published by *France 24* in 2021, young women carrying posters of “overconsumption = extinction” in the Louvre art gallery where the event was happening. Jumping into the catwalk stage, the youth group of ‘Amis de la Terre’ protested against this runway show calling for a reduction in fashion production. Climate change reached a global voice through this activism of young people that resulted in “enlisting broad societal endorsement and prompting incremental policy changes” (Han and Ahn, 2021: 17). For catwalk shows to incorporate closely similar acts of climate change awareness and activism demonstrates their fashion capital that relies on employing their knowledge of political incidents and actions. By doing so, the modest fashion brands pleased the consumers’ interests and delivered a theme in a catwalk show that fits their interests.

From the fieldwork, it was observed that fashion weeks carried on creating catwalk shows and reacted to such activism by making them feel heard through carrying similar posts sharing their awareness and listening to these young activists. Whether this approach is sincere or not, these methods seemed to work as the audience admired *Rabia Z's* catwalk theme and pointed at the posters with positive reactions, such as applause and the favourable feedback in the overheard conversations of the audience. As a result, catwalk shows are becoming the venues for non-verbal dialogues with advocates of climate activism. Just as in *Rabia Z*, the Muslim female stakeholders found the key to pleasing these movements via plain green posters with written messages on them representing images of activism

The fashion designer, *Rabia Z*, came from Dubai to present a catwalk at Zorlu Centre in Istanbul under the concept of ethical modest fashion and sustainability. Models walked on the stage carrying posters with slogans, such as in (figure 26) ‘Green Vibes Only’. The posters had a leaf at the bottom with the statement ‘Ethical is the new normal’. Amidst the large number of brands participating in the modest fashion show, this was the only brand celebrating sustainability in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week. But why would she include it on a catwalk? *Rabia Z* targeted the inclusion of modesty in the global market, where brands were already creating products with themes supporting sustainability. In other words, the Muslim female designers are becoming more aware of moral values activists have been attempting to voice

since 2018 and modest fashion is expanding according to the global changes in the social and political incidents that increase the economy of their industry.



**Figure 26.** A model from Rabia Z catwalk at Istanbul Modest Fashion Week Carrying a poster about sustainability.



### **4.3.3. Veiled Models' Bodily Capital on a Catwalk: El-Sheikha's reviving tribal face masks**

The fieldwork examined radical catwalks that were produced by the moving bodies of models in a space using clothing and spatial tools as 'markers' of political, cultural, and social meanings. These models are also considered stakeholders in this research and delivered these themed catwalks to the spectacle through managing bodily capital. Evidence for bodily capital emerged from the ethnographic observations of catwalk shows and the photographic data of models within the fieldwork. In terms of bodily capital within the catwalk space visualising modest fashion designs, this chapter shows how the models on the runway negotiate, resist, and manage the body representations of women and the audience's perception. To further invite the critical thinking of the spectacle, the catwalks also included a revival of ethnic and tribal adornments in a modern image. This section examines how models on modest fashion catwalks managed bodily capital.

'Bodily capital' was first coined in Bourdieu's (1978: 830) study *Sport and Social Class* using the concept 'physical capital', then later revisited in his social critique of the judgement of taste and forms of capital. Bourdieu (1984: 207) explained that individuals invest time, wealth, and efforts so that their bodily capacity is recognized and "reflected in the reactions of others". The 'bodily capital' was developed by more researchers by drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'capital' – the assets, the material, and immaterial possessions that defines the power and a status of social agents – in how boxers manage their bodies when preparing to a fight (e.g., training and monitoring their weight) (Wacquant, 1995), and how "a model requires the careful management of bodily capital and the performance of emotional labor" (Mears and Finlay, 2005: 318). Webb (2002: 23) argues that the level of capital owned by a social individual determines how much power she has and that this power enables her to control what is "authentic" capital.

In this section, it is argued that it is the bodily capital of models presented the fashion designers as experts. The fashion designers were admired for their creativity in producing apparel because models used their choreographic moves, experiences, and 'emotional labour' (Mears and Finlay, 2005) to create a new space for creativity in catwalk shows of modest fashion. This bodily capital projected by the models displaying the modest fashion brands via their bodies created a positive relationship between the fashion designers and the audience. As

Huston's findings (2013) suggest, the "body" is your "business card". In this research, the model's "body" was "the business card" of the fashion designers.

In the field diary of Istanbul Modest Fashion Week, it was observed that *Al-Sheikha* catwalk had an exceptional performance with an adorned face cover and head accessories. The models paraded in abayas culturally originating from the Middle East and Dubai but with a modern pattern and styling twist. The head and face adornments are used on models at the catwalk of Al-Sheikha for cultural-artistic performance. It includes a headpiece made of little feathers on the top attached to a statement piece of pearls, a loose face burka made of golden chains covering everything but the blue eyes of the model (see figure 28), and an eye mask made of short dangling golden chains. Face covering is known as niqab in Muslim communities, where women cover their faces with a veil. It sometimes refers to concealing the entire face; at other times, the eyes are excluded. With the emphasis on how models wear a headcover representing the Islamic headwear and the performance, a sense of traditional femininity was represented by styling looks using adornments. These adornments made the female models resemble the ornaments on house furniture; a passive object put on a corner at home. These females represent a traditional label to femininity where women belong to the domestic life and are things identified by the fascination derived from a human body to be 'looked at' (Mulvey (1999: 836).

In interpreting such face coverings, Calefato (2004: 38) analyses a catwalk scene of Martin Margiela's fashion show in which the models' face was masked, stating that:

The mask is total and explicit: like the garment covering the body, the bag is a garment covering the face, that part of the body most exposed in western cultures. Dressing the body, including the face, disguising it hyperbolically, is thus an invitation to concentrate on the semiotic status of its impossible nakedness.

Through this semiotic reading of Margiela's catwalk show, there is a similarity to El-Sheikha's styling models' faces with masks to revisit Orientalist images and invite 'Orientalist gaze' (Lewis, 2015: 20). However, the distinctiveness is that these face masks are accessories with historical, cultural, and sometimes tribal references and values (See figure 27). The designer El-Sheikha was certainly focused on the face adornments presenting embellished 'niqabs' to create a connection between the abayas and the accessories that their birthplace are UAE,

Oman, and Qatar. This face cover is also conceptualized as ‘Al-Burghu’ or ‘Al-Batulah’ (El-Guindi, 1999).

As discussed by Khan (2000) on Margiela’s catwalks, El-Sheikha appears to share similar interests in re-creating ‘a new reality’ from the past and in the designer’s context, it is about reviving the conventional modesty garments with a focus on face veils to attract the attention of the audience, and they draw a link with her products. I see that El-Sheikha as a designer, presented a ‘radical catwalk’ in which she challenged conventional forms of aesthetics through a modernised image of women wearing cultural embellished ‘niqabs’. Through displaying the modernisation of a cultural accessory on covered models, the bodily capital of the women parading is turned into economic capital.



**Figure 27.** Baluchi woman. Vintage postcard from Oman. The Fouad Debbas Collection. 1901 (available at: <https://thezay.org/the-story-behind-the-mask/>)



**Figure 28.** A Model Wearing burka at Al-Sheikha Abaya Catwalk in IMFW 2019 (fieldnote extract)

#### 4.3.4. Lady Etiquette? *Sa-orsa*'s catwalk with a feminist content

Using the French music of Angèle's 2019 'Balance ton Quoi?' which delivers a pro-feminist message through the lyrics and video. The music video on YouTube reached more than a 100 million views and it consists expressive semiotic signs through the use of words (anti-sexism, communication, and mental charge) and via symbolic acts (men acting hysteric). Also, the music video addresses the male gaze of females' bodies and how they label a good-looking women and lingerie to a sexual desire. The singer depicts an opposing image as well of how men are hysterical and not women. With this feminist content at the background of the catwalk show, *Sa-orsa*'s models performed a choreography on the stage of Ladies-Only Charity Show via opposing images of lady-like moves. The models set on chairs with legs crossed on one another facing the audience. When the music started, they paraded to the front of the catwalk in confidence rising their heads up (See figure 29). The choreography was a fusion of hyperfeminine and feminist dichotomy in a fashion space.

The models in Sa-orsa catwalk shows were performing their choreography to the audience and expressing hyperfeminine acts on the process, such as the repetitive act of crossing their legs as they set on chairs. This resembles the lady-like etiquette on how to sit-like-a lady that are associated with domesticity, traditional images of women (Boyd, 2012), and objectification of women through rigid ‘social etiquette’ (Craik, 1993). Despite the feminist content of the music, models performed these hyperfeminine acts to share confrontational scenes against the past objectification of women. The fashion designer’s theme represented the name of the brand, as mentioned in the first part of this chapter, a Scottish concept meaning freedom and autonomy. The production of this creatively feminist scene rejecting the traditional images of women by mocking the social etiquette was only possible because of the models’ bodily capital (experiences, body, choreography) and ‘emotional labour’ (Mears and Finlay: 2005).

The name of the brand *Sa-orsa* as stated in the preceding section is a Scottish word and it means ‘freedom’ as stated in the conversation with the designers. This fusion of feminism performance introduces an additional incorporation between modesty and liberation. That is to say, modest women who cover more parts of their bodies are also autonomous and support feminism. As stated in my interview with Shanez and Ayesha, the name of her brand means ‘freedom’. An excerpt of the conversational interview with the owners of *Sa-orsa* stated that:

**Researcher:** [...] I have another question which is, is modest fashion affecting women’s position in western society?

Shanez: Not really, no.

**Researcher:** Like us as Muslim women, is it affecting our representation? Do we look like we’re stronger?

**Shanez:** It is showing us that we are more liberating. Now we can think for ourselves and dress a bit more, not like, how you know how I said the black cloak anymore, because now when I was doing my research, like wearing big like sacks of clothing, but many many years ago, women used to wear like colourful clothes as well and when I was doing my research.

**Ayesha:** The name of our brand Saorsa, it means liberty and freedom.

**Researcher:** In which language?

Both Ayesha and Shanez: It’s Scottish

**Ayesha:** my mom’s background is from Scotland and that’s where she started sewing and designing.

**Researcher:** So, it means liberating

**Ayesha:** Liberty and freedom. So that's how we want women to feel when they wear our clothes, so we want them to feel confident, beautiful, and who they are and what they were.

**Shanez:** You don't have to be oppressed, do you? Because we know what media thinks. We know when you're a Muslim, you are oppressed, isn't it?

**Researcher:** especially if you are wearing the veil?

**Shanez:** They think, oh, poor you, you have to cover your hair.

From Ayesha and Shanez statements, we can see the reason why they made what appeared to be a statement of 'freedom' and 'liberty' associated with Muslim women in their fashion show in Leicester, at the event of 'Ladies Only Charity Fashion Show'. Through a musical track semiotically referring to women's agency in relation to their bodies, *Sa-orsa* combined music with fashion to make a feminist statement. In this context, Strähle and Kriegel (2018: 15) describe the relationship between music and fashion arguing that music as a product is a way of 'making a fashion statement'. And that field diary extract on *Sa-orsa* fashion show and the interview demonstrate how the use a feminist song expresses a powerful statement on women's representation and individuality. Therefore, in addition to being a source of entertainment, music can also be a tool for self-expression.



**Figure 29.** The Catwalk Choreography of *Sa-orsa* ‘Angèle - Balance Ton Quoi Music’ (Photo taken by AB)

#### **4.3.5. ‘Kiki, Do You Love Me?’ Dian Pelangi’s Hijabi models break conventional parades**

‘Kiki do you love me?’ is a passage from Drake’s 2018 ‘In My Feelings’ music. The song knew a wide fame during a long period between 2018 and 2019. There are celebrities on social media who launched a challenge of dancing moves while car moving to Drake’s. It was played for Dian Pelangi catwalk in which a sport line inspired for hijabi women is presented, but this is with an everyday casual touch. The models are engaging with the musical beats of the track and one particular model wearing massive sleeves walks out and starts waving with them picturing black wings. Her moves show that she can actually dance in a way that made the audience go crazy. An unexpected move in a settled atmosphere. The critical side of the performance though is about the choice of the music compared to the background of the brand. ‘In my Feelings’ by Drake has off-colour language to it that were played on the back of the catwalk while the creator of the brand is a Muslim. There is a re-definition of the concept of modesty to the audience through the performance that was on stage and the choice of music with such words. The

attendees watching this catwalk will draw a relation to Dian Pelangi brand by feeling the fame because of 'In my feelings' popularity between celebrities. They adopted an image of how famous they will look when wearing from *Dian Pelangi* modest line.

*Dian Pelangi* uses *Adidas* trainers, bags, and clutches on the runway (See figure 30). *Adidas* is a corporate industry, and the presence of such items is significant in the representation of the brand and Muslim women in general. The designer uses her name on the silky headcovers and belts which are in black and white printed on the front or the middle of the pieces. The design reminds me of Luis Vuitton printed initials on rectangular shawls, bags, and belts. This description shows an inclusion of corporate brands and how they are attempting to have their initial share from the growing modest fashion as a first step. The brand of Dian Pelangi uses a mechanism of attracting consumerism by adding corporate brands products to the attire as *Adidas* trainers and clutches. In addition to that, *Adidas* as a corporate collaborates with famous brands (Strähle and Kriegel, 2018: 14).

On another sartorial perspective, the models walking for Dian Pelangi wore garments which had an image of loose comfortable attire for work and everyday meetings. The garments were decorated with belts that chains the upper part of the female bodies from walking, such as the tight belts around their waist and arms, with prints of 'New York' and others with the brand name 'Pelangi'. The designer's choice of this representation shows how veiled women wearing modest attire still seek to express themselves through distinct conceptions of modesty using various colour palettes, types of fabrics, and style though the struggles and backlash received from the social commentary from the offline setting to social media. There are findings from interviews with veiled Muslim females, as in Lewis' (2015: 267) showing how both men and women on social media "seek to police the new practices of modest fashion through sustained attacks on the comments function of others' sites", these regulations that these women faced offline is expanded to digital platforms, that is why "the modest fashion field is their chosen battleground". The runway for Dian Pelangi is 'the battlefield' in which an oppositional picture of stylish modest garments and belts depriving women to walk freely on a stage. The designer is opposing the backlash and commentary put to 'regulate' the dress codes of women offline and online.





**Figure 30.** Dian Pelangi catwalk in Istanbul Modest Fashion Week.

#### **4.3.6. Good Girl Gang: clothing with a message**

In a similar context to performing on a runway as Dian Pelangi models, the charity-based event of Leicester, had a brand of ‘Good Girl Gang’ dancing to K.I.G’s 2009 ‘Head, Shoulders, Kneez, and Toez’. The difference between the two parades is that Dian Pelangi is a mainstream brand, and ‘Good Girl Gang’ is a small business. There seems to be an emerging trend of breaking the conventional parading of catwalks that usually follows a straight line towards the end of the path (In the event of Good Girl Gang, there were only Muslim women who were invited to celebrate a fashion show and a dinner for charity and to super and promote small businesses owned by Muslim women. Good Girl Gang is one of volunteers for performing a runway of her own hand printed items. She has a line of t-shirts with a picture or a written phrase or word with a reference to a signification. One t-shirt in white had the ‘Halal’ certificate at the back and ‘halal’ in Arabic at the side front. ‘Halal’ is a word written in Arabic and it

means religiously permitted. The models are women of different colours, heights, and sizes. There is an awareness of the current social norms objectifying ‘other’ women’. The performance is a dancing catwalk on K.I.G’s 2009 ‘Head, Shoulders, Kneez and Toez’ (See figure 31).

The *BeatPortal* webpage of electronic music stated that K.I.G’s 2009 ‘Head, Shoulders, Kneez and Toez’ was a UK funky music genre. UK funky is a type of electronic dance music originated from Central London and was known in British clubs (Will Gulseven, 2021). This genre reached a peak in the late 2009, then slowly faded after making its way into the mainstream culture. The relation between this music genre and the brand is that they are both subcultural products and D.I.Y cultural practices. According to the field diary, the *Good Girl Gang*’s identify as slow fashion, sustainable, small business based in the UK that produces hand printed t-shirts, hoodies, and carrier bags. On their *ASOS* marketplace, *Good Girl Gang* emphasis their aim to represent “the under represented through clothing with a message”. By displaying their ‘tees’ (t-shirts) in the catwalk show of Ladies-Only Charity Show 2019, this small-business brand of a small-scale consumer circle aimed at expanding their reach into more customers.

Therefore, Good Girl Gang produced a space for nostalgia within the catwalk, as designated by Lefebvre (1991: 73) space “subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity”. Within this space, this sustainable brand created a relationship between the audience, DIY t-shirts, and the space by using the UK funky music which was once a popular music in the UK. Through such interactions, Good Girl Gang delivered the theme of their show that is about the artists from subcultural fields. Höpflinger (2014:177-80) argues that clothing and space have a complementary relationship resulting in multiple interpretations of how individuals interact with space through clothing. In this section, the clothing is the fashion design displayed in a fashion space, namely a catwalk, combined along with other spatial tools (music as a promotional tool)<sup>17</sup> to produce radical themes. Communicating these themes.

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<sup>17</sup> As discussed in the first part of this data chapter: 4.2.2. Popular Music and Modest Fashion Shows



**Figure 31.** Model dancing on the Fashion Runway, ‘Good Girl Gang’ (Photo taken by AB)

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Within this chapter, I have examined the spatial features and tools incorporated in the catwalk space by the stage designers to create an atmosphere where the spectacle’s feelings and social interactions are key to the growth of the sales mechanism. By analysing ‘the lighter situation’ and the visual simulation of sceneries, this chapter argues that catwalks are visual art experiences influencing the ‘sensorial receptivity’ of the spectacle (Calefato, 2001) and increasing the presence of ‘gaze’. The influence of these innovative spatial tools extends to creating a relationship between the audience and the modest fashion designs parading on the stage because each catwalk show seeks to transmit aura to the spectacle’s senses. To reinforce these spatial technologies, the Muslim female stakeholders hired promotional faces. I have demonstrated the presence of famous fashion bloggers and models in strategic spots on the catwalk, creating a familiar atmosphere for the audience. This technique was referred to as ‘soft focus’, a theoretical concept in Craik’s (1993) study, wherein the economic capital of bloggers and models was hired for promotional scenes that later increased sales.

In relation to radical catwalks in modest fashion events, the Muslim female stakeholders creatively presented themes that communicated the gaps in global fashion shows, such as ‘body

positivity' and 'climate action', sharing their fashion capital on a stage to earn the spectacle's trust. This was found true, especially with the increasing awareness of climate change and activism within the youth population. Furthermore, this chapter argued that the 'bodily capital' (Bourdieu, 1984; Wacquant, 1995) and the 'emotional labor' (Mears and Finlay, 2005: 318) of models in a modest fashion catwalk is 'a business card' (Huston, 2013) to the fashion designers because of their experiences and management of choreographies on a catwalk stage.

Within this context of radical themes, my data found that the Muslim female designers sought a revival of tribal adornments and UK Funky music genre in a modern image and embodied a dichotomous scene on feminism and traditional lady-like etiquette on catwalk shows. Significantly, these radical scenes affirm the innovativeness that these Muslim female stakeholders own and how they are critically engaged with the globalisation of modest fashion, but on the other hand, most of the creative themes were performed in charity events where the spectacle is local. Still, these women strategically negotiate and seek promotional spaces for a global reach, as will be seen in the upcoming chapter about the online continuity of modest fashion promotion.

## Chapter Five

### **‘#modestfashion’: the community of female stakeholders expanding modest fashion on Instagram**

#### **5.1.Introduction**

This chapter further explores the promotional spaces of modest fashion by focusing on the digital platform Instagram. This chapter employs a semiotic analysis approach to read the visual data collected from the Instagram accounts of the female participants.

The chapter consists of two sections. The first section examines the continuously developing editing tools and the newly emerging video features of Instagram, including ‘Reels’. This section suggests that Instagram is shifting into a marketing place, offering brands and corporates a space to advertise their products with quicker access to visibility and users who are potential customers. This section addresses the commodification of everyday life and the rise of professional careers on Instagram with a focus on paid labour known as ‘blogging’. The digitisation of the markets on Instagram led to the reappearance of ‘cool hunters’ (Klein, 2000; Hodkinson, 2017).

The second section focuses on the modest fashion community online, where Muslim female stakeholders were constructing a career in the global market by working with corporates. This section employs William’s ([1979]: 2015) conception of ‘community’ in industrial societies to examine the Muslim female stakeholders as a community, and this has generated theoretical concepts like ‘online boutique’, ‘domesticity’, and ‘agency’. This section examines the experiences of modest fashion bloggers, businesswomen, and hijabi models, focusing on the corporate intrusion into the modest fashion community.

#### **5.2.The Follow-up Space of Modest Fashion: Instagram**

Through a semiotic reading of the Instagram platform from 2019 to 2022, the Instagrammic visual data and the online ethnographic observations investigated the changes in the spatial and

structural facilities of Instagram, allowing marketing and advertising to further expand. Therefore, this section will look at these changes and marketing characteristics on Instagram that allowed modest fashion to grow into a global industry. Through the process of this section, there will be an examination of the modest fashion community in a female-dominant space within this online platform that shares marketing and advertising activities through paid labour. These women are modest fashion bloggers, models, businesswomen, designers, and followers.

### **5.2.1. Instagram as an Online Market: the commodification of the everyday**

As a social media platform, Instagram is expanding its marketing features to be more tangible and visible with the spatial structures of the application. This visibility of the marketing tools on Instagram offered brands more spaces to grow their commerce and consumer potential. For Hodkinson (2017: 222), the potency of the social media environment attracts brands who seek to construct their ‘corporate identity’, and the advertising industries aim at using the users’ everyday online activities of shares and likes to build ‘the commercial potential’ through the ideas of ‘coolness’. The ‘coolness’ here is what Klein (2000: 72) examined in her account on ‘cool hunters’ who chase after the ‘cutting-edge lifestyle’ of popular cultures in the society to commodify them into advertising videos and sell them to consumers. The ethnographic data suggests that the effectiveness of Instagram is now more focused on its commercialisation when companies track ‘cool users’ to hire them as paid labours who advertise their products through Instagrammic content. Thus, the ‘cool hunters’ are yet tracking down popular cultural activities in media spaces for profit-making interests, including the modest fashion community.

The fast change on the Instagram platform was notable in the ethnographic fieldwork. It is seen that the measured features and imagery characteristics are constant and on speedy developments allowing users to share content, but also advertisement companies to expand their hunt and build their ‘corporate identity’. This led to what was explored semiotically, to an emergence of a focus on marketing features on Instagram embedded in the social interactions allowing Muslim female stakeholders to grow their modest fashion business and roles within the social media market.

Hence, with the speedy spread of imagery and texts on Instagram and the “well-rehearsed digital self-portraits” (Marwick, 2015: 138), the process is becoming easier for corporates to

grow their consumer diversified targets by tracking down popular cultures on Instagram and other social media platforms.

Through a semiotic reading of Instagram, data from the online fieldwork explored the current infrastructures and resilient features that emerged since 2019. It was observed that Instagram puts visual content first and textual second in the small section beneath the shared still or moving images. Each user has their own space to share their photographs and videos on a page. There is also an option of story chronicles of images and sometimes short videos with editing features using filters to change face shape or facial aesthetics. The users can also add emojis, text, music, hashtags, or location to the pictures and the short videos shared on stories. Instagram also provided with time more options of going live through a phone camera and talking to a virtual audience, or two users can go live while the others communicate with them through written comments automatically appearing from below. Unlike other social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook, “Instagram is an all-in-one package” (Lee, Lee, Moon, and Sung, 2015: 552) with the editing features of images and videos, and it is witnessing tremendous changes in only one year. Therefore, these spatial features allowed a rise of paid labour known as ‘bloggers’ or ‘influencers’ who are Instagram-based and use these Instagrammic tools and characteristics to interact with other users through a visual content that advertises for their everyday lifestyle and in-between these activities; there are paid brands’ advertisements.

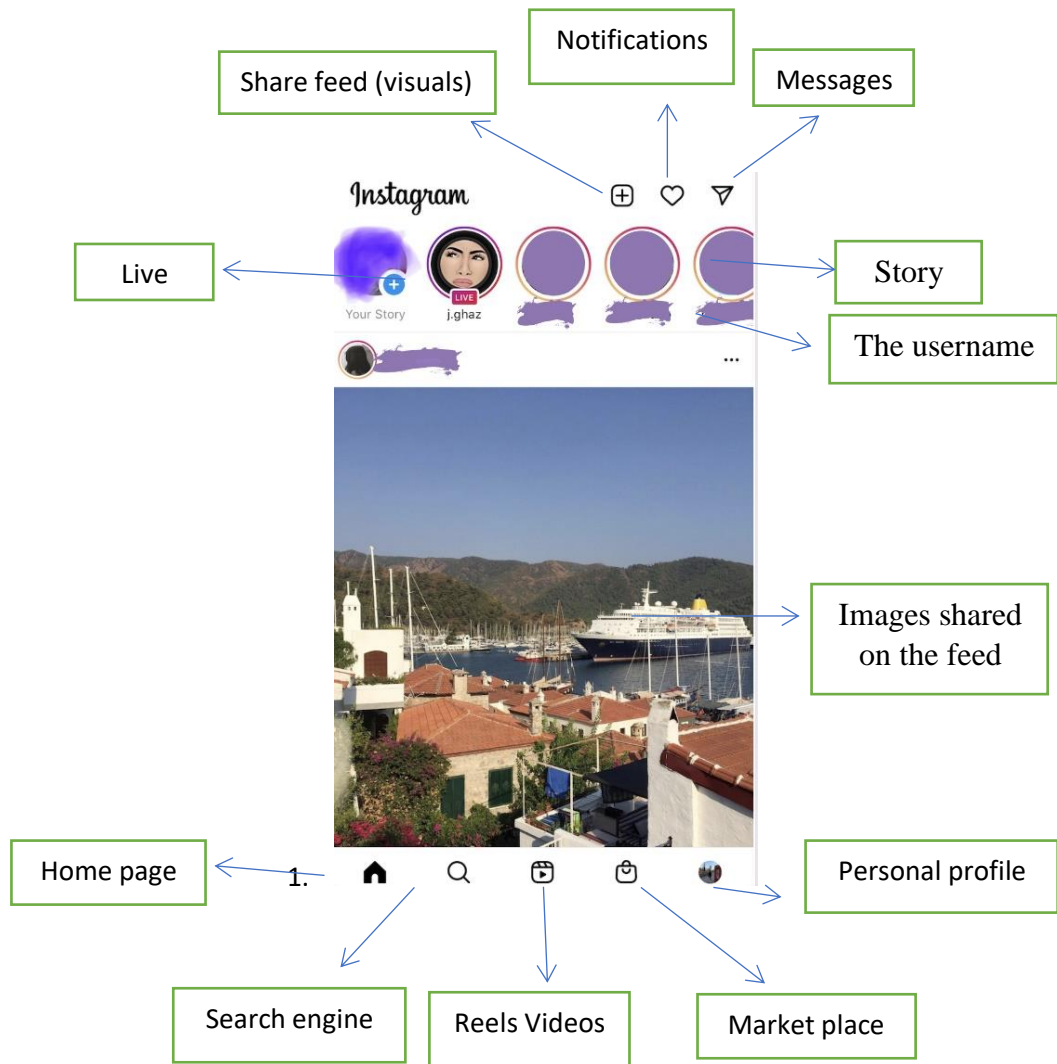
The Muslim female stakeholders promote modest wear and lifestyle on Instagram because of the high visual option it affords: the editing features and the growing marketing space to grow their modelling career, business, and blogging. The modest fashion bloggers have more access to express themselves and control their income which ranges between £20,000 to £30,000 annually, with £54,000 top earners, according to the recruitment website *Indeed*. Their work on Instagram is in a home setting through branding and advertising for their lifestyle and eventually attracting other brands for sponsorships and mutual collaboration. Corporate brands enjoy the affordance of Instagram’s marketplace by sharing photos and videos of their products and hiring bloggers for partnerships and collaborations or modelling campaigns to diversify their consumer target. Thence, as will be discussed in the coming sections, brands are aware that ‘diversity is a commodity’ such as corporates reaching for modest fashion bloggers to advertise for their newly launched products or to be a part of advertising photographed campaign that includes the hijab ‘to signify diversity’ (Rosenberg, 2019: 3). Therefore, it can be suggested that Instagram is not only offering brands a cheaper advertising space and ‘a digital footprint’ of their potential consumers, but also facilitating the access of ‘cool hunters’

in spaces of popular cultures to seek for diverse users, commodify their cultural practices (Adorno, 1991), and signify diversity to expand sales.

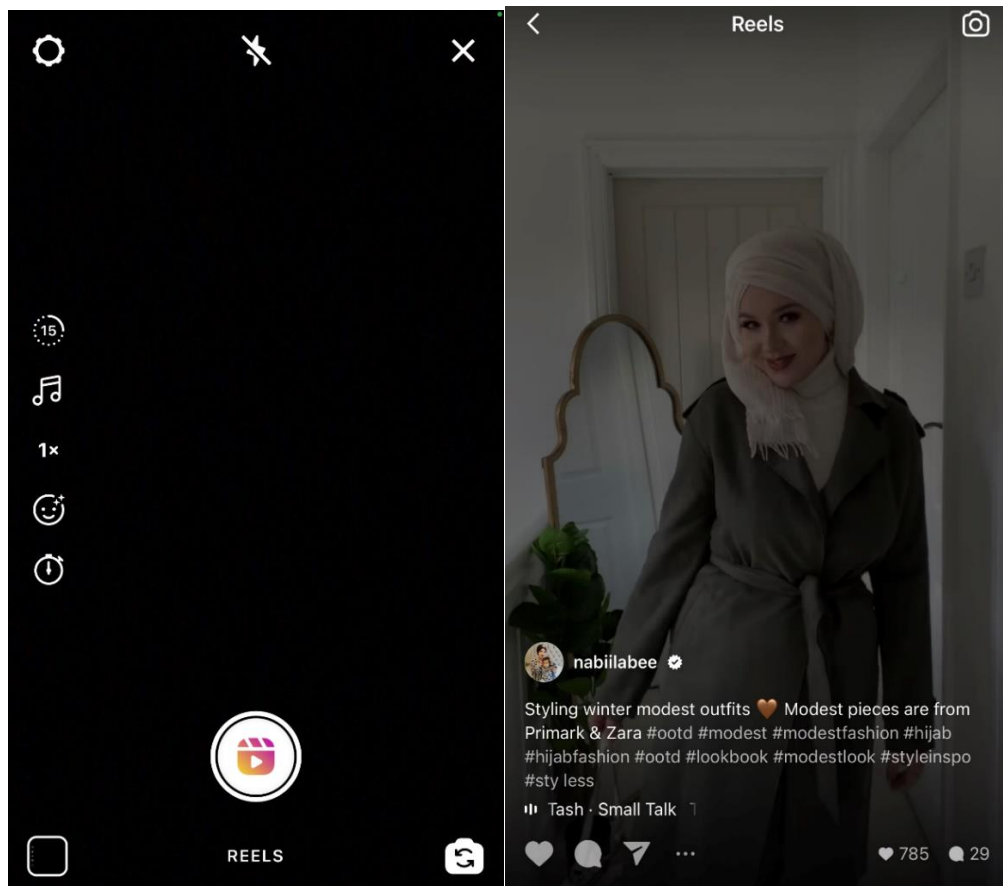
Observing Instagram for two years, fieldwork emphasises how visuality is the main feature of how the Instagram app functions and is developing and multiplying every three months. Recently, there was a release of IG TV and Reel videos. IG TV videos allow Instagram users to upload longer videos than the initial option of sixty seconds when Instagram upgraded to moving visuals. At the same time, Reel videos have more creative editing options of slow motion, musical background, filter effects, and time control without using other apps to edit videos before uploading them. And that makes the app a creative space for social media users with ‘all-in-one app’. Unlike the occasional presence of these Muslim women on YouTube, Instagram affords easy daily access to their fashion and lifestyle activities.

Figure 32 is the current structure of Instagram and the features enabling users, including the Muslim female stakeholders, to make a business of the social media interactions. A basket icon below is for browsing the online shops and viewing products with their price tags. Reel videos allow modest fashion bloggers to make creative short videos for advertising goals. @Nabiilabee’s reel video in figure 33 is a screenshotted fieldnote, and I noted that she received 785 reactions and 29 comments in only five hours. The content is about a modest #ootd (outfit of the day) from *Primark* and *Zara*. Through a semiotic reading of the text below the visual, a symbol of AD (advertisement) is commonly attached to bloggers’ images. AD is added to the descriptive text beneath the Instagrammic visual content when the blogger advertises for a fashion or cosmetics brand. It is placed ahead of the rest of a thrilling statement and a list of hashtags. On the left of figure 33 of the captured image of the Reels, we have the editing characteristics that users click on to control length, audio, video speed, effects, and timer.





**Figure 32.** Instagram structural characteristics that users communicate with online (1)

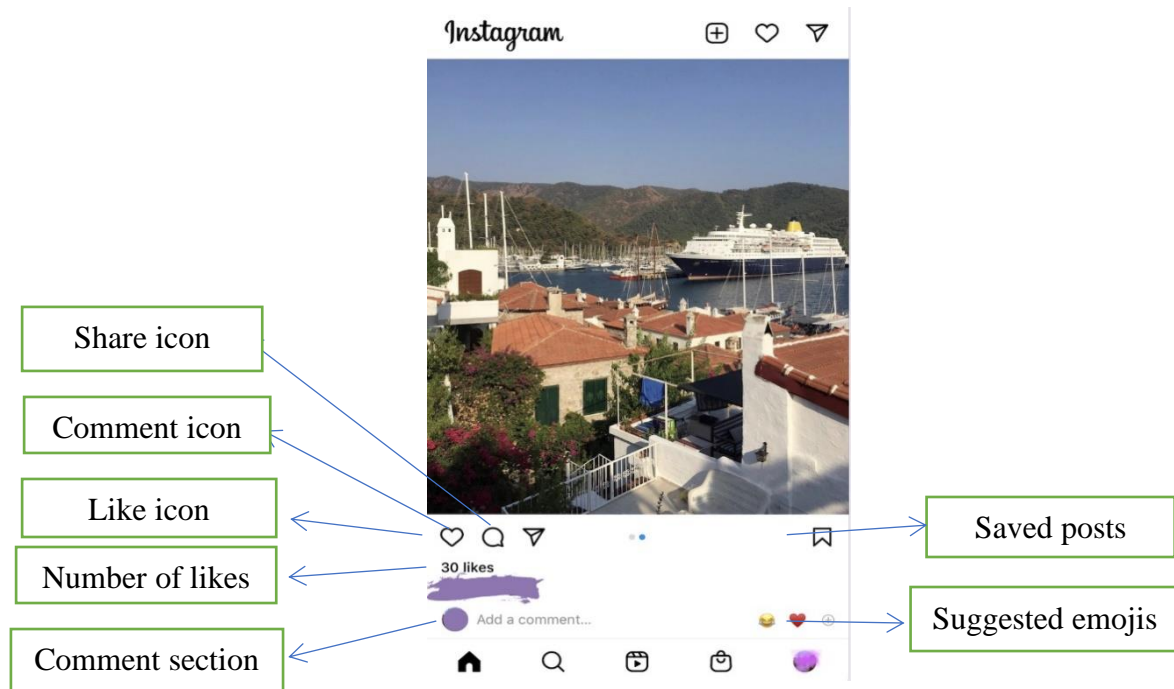


**Figure 33.** Reels editing features and Nabillabee’s video screenshot as a sample

From a semiotic point of view, figure 34 highlights the striking Instagrammic features which increase the status of bloggers if they have thousands of interactions through them. The algorithm of Instagram is like pay checks for females who make a career from blogging. When modest fashion bloggers receive Instagrammic views, likes, shares, or saves of their visual posts, they push their content towards the top of the Instagram activity, where they receive more views and, therefore, more visibility of their content to the viewers. Blogging advertising photos cost £500 to £5k per post by the sponsoring brand (information collected from Shopify.co.uk). As indicated by Hodkinson (2017: 230), “our everyday interactions, shares and likes are being commodified – put to commercial use”.

Furthermore, Instagram is offering users who are artists and content creators, such as the blogger @Nabillabee, a verified badge which is a blue tick next to their usernames on their Instagram profiles. The verified badge means that “Instagram has confirmed that an account is the authentic presence of the public figure, celebrity or brand it represents” (collected from the Instagram help centre, 2022). This verification appears to relate to the ‘copyrights’ of the owner

of a product or an art. For such Instagrammic changes, the representation of users on Instagram is now associated with professionalism offering a stage for individuals to become professionals through freelancing behind a screen.



**Figure 34.** Instagram Structural Characteristics for Sharing Content (2)

According to these ethnographic observations on features and tools expanding the Instagrammic space into a marketplace, the commodification and commercialisation as concepts are highly present with the constant fast changes in the marketing setting of Instagram. This contributed to the commodification of editing features into marketing tools, and thus, the companies expanded their consumer reach through online ‘cool hunting’ of diverse bloggers and models to advertise for their products. These changes also opened doors for the professionalisation of freelancing, including Muslim female stakeholders growing their business in a modest fashion and broadening their careers into more global brands with a steady income which will be explored in further detail in the upcoming sections.

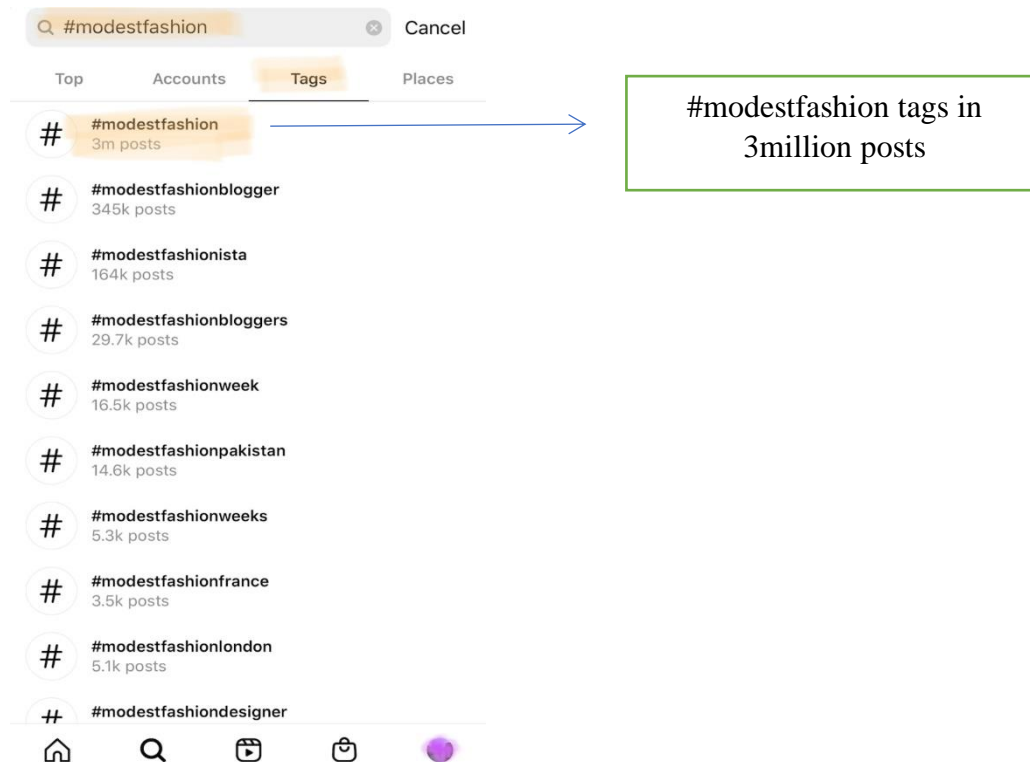
### 5.2.2. Locating Modest Fashion on Instagram: The Modest fashion community

The presence of modest fashion online is not something new; according to Lewis (2015: 238), “Muslim designers and bloggers from the UK were early adopters of the Internet for modest fashion” and contributed to the virtual network of “modest discourse characterized by interfaith and faith/ secular connectivity. With the effectiveness of the web and the construction of a ‘virtual presence’ that led to the rise of businesses and organizations online (Hodkinson, 2017), modest fashion gained further popularity and global interests of Muslim women who increasingly joined a community on Instagram to grow their career through modesty online. Through the semiotic reading of the Instagrammic data, the visual exploring the presence of modest fashion through the searching engine of Instagram displayed over 3 million posts using the hashtag #modest fashion in 2021, which rose to 4.4 million in 2022 (see figure 35). Compared to the style reporter Lodi (2020) who recorded one million tags of the #modestfashion hashtag two years before the publication of her work; this chapter has examined that modest fashion online is growing rapidly and gradually extending into a larger community attracting the corporates and niche market brands to invest in this field.

The previous web platforms where Muslim female stakeholders had modest fashion business were Islamic fashion webstores, and these “are the oldest popular online format, dating back to at least 1997”, but the online business was hardly steady. The only stores that were open for more than five years are: “Shukr (2002), Al-Hannah (2000), Islamic Design House (2006), Jelbab (2001), The Hijab Shop (2004), Artizara (2003) and Islamic Boutique (2002)” (Tarlo, 2013: 21). However, compared to the ethnographic data of this thesis, the proliferation of modest fashion is rapid and continuously growing through the global fashion industry and within the current platform of Instagram through diverse brands (such as *Hum Hum London*, *Saiqa London*, *Lyra Swim*) and the corporates (*Modanisa* and *Nike*), and through various careers associated to the digital and the physical settings (blogging, fashion design, modelling).

Focusing on how Instagram’s rapid changes into a marketing platform offered Muslim women an online setting to weave a space to grow their career and business in the fashion industry through the construction of a modest fashion community, this section focuses on the changes that took place from 2019 to 2022 with regards to their representation and growth in their roles. As the above sections indicate, Instagram became a central platform for marketing and advertising, and Muslim women sought the opportunity of such changes integrated with

their passion for modest wear to promote their business and career behind a screen. Therefore, I will explore the online roles of these Muslim women who are a part of the modest fashion community, including bloggers, models, and businesswomen.



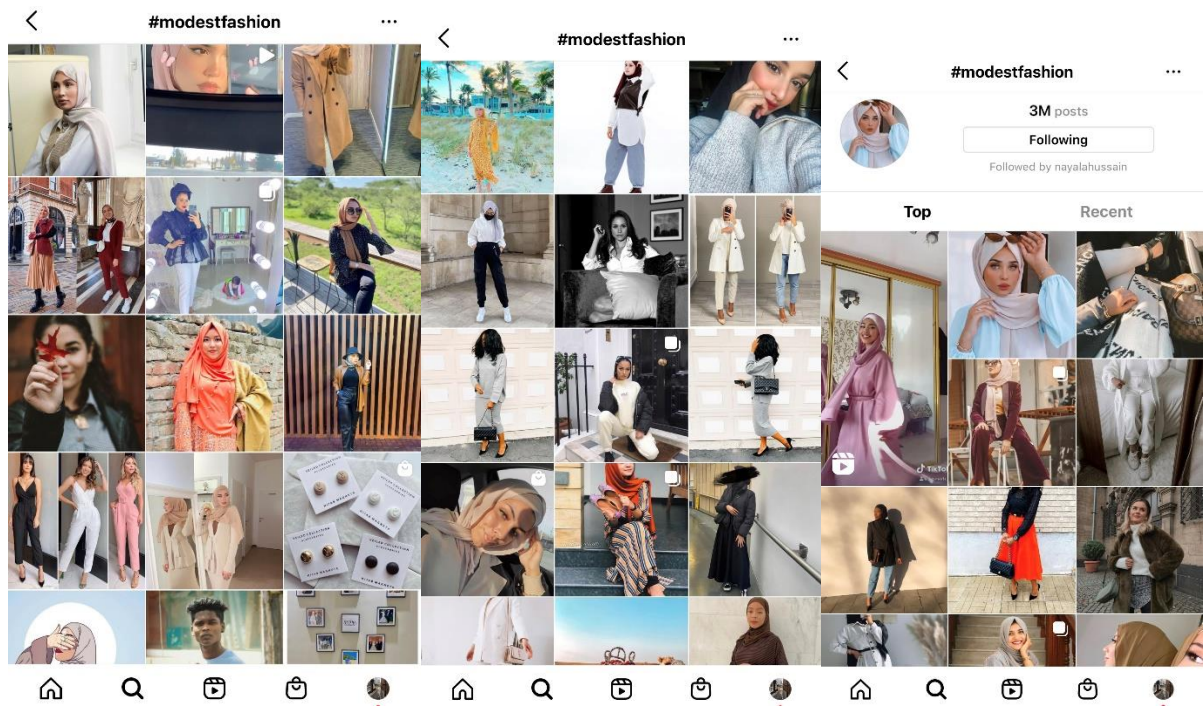
**Figure 35.** The 3 million hashtags of modest fashion tagged by Instagram users

The sense of belonging and identification involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has ‘a place’ in a community, a feeling of acceptance by a group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group. The role of identification must be emphasized here. It may be represented in the reciprocal statements “It is my group” and “I am part of the group” (McMillan and Chavis, 1986: 10). To identify with a community is to “share a set of values, interests and experiences” while feeling “a sense of affiliation” (Hodkinson, 2017: 361). From a sociological perspective, Raymond Williams’s ([1976] 2015: 39-40) definition of ‘community’ as it was used in the nineteenth century in the industrial societies indicated that it is about expressing “particular kinds of social relations”, to differentiate between the direct and the formal relationships, between state and societies’ relationships of a capitalist or a modern

society. Muslim female stakeholders shared a particular fashion interest in modest wear and personal experiences with being perceived as ‘oppressed’ (Tarlo, 2010; Wilson, 2013), the political journey of ‘politicized bodily aesthetics’ (Lewis, 2015), and faith-based values of covering. Instagram as an online space offered Muslim women an opportunity to come along as a community and stand together in the space they weaved to grow modest fashion as a platform for their careers and internal debates.

These Muslim female stakeholders promoting modest fashion on Instagram come along as a community of females constructing a space online where they develop a career of blogging, modelling, and business from home and behind a screen. I use the term community to refer to these women because they share a culture and claim the same dress code and modesty, but on different levels. The visible feature connecting them is the visibly religious trait, the headcover. Searching for the tag of #modestfashion or #modestfashionblogger on Instagram tags and accounts results in images and videos of women wearing the headcover in different styles. The headcover represents a religious identity but also modesty. Community refers to standing together as one and not as individuals; therefore, these women come together with one voice to represent their modesty on a visual platform. The promoters and followers make the community of modest fashion. In figure 36, we see a sample of the community under the hashtag #modestfashion, with more than 3 million tags under the images and videos shared on Instagram. Modest fashion is what brings them together in one space which is for mostly females only.

This section will investigate the experiences of each working category associating with the modest fashion community, starting with modest fashion bloggers becoming professional reviewers, then Muslim businesswomen on Instagram, and finally, hijabi models working with corporates.



**Figure 36.** Samples of modest Fashion Community (More than 3 million tags in 2020)

### 5.2.2.1. Modest Fashion Bloggers: from brand giveaways to professional reviewers

Before the emergence of media forums and web blogs on fashion and styles, for Hodkinson (2017), the substantial pre-media forms that contributed to constructing communities of ‘participative culture’ was known as fanzines or zines. Fanzines are identified as being a ‘crucial communicative space for the subculture’ where communities are constituted in spaces for sharing discourse about events and fashion and distributing DIY products without making profits (Hodkinson, 2017). They were forms of DIY (do-it-yourself) bringing a community of youth together and were ‘largely ignored by the commercial music press’ (Hodkinson, 2017). However, with the digital media affordance, “many of those who may in the past have contributed to fanzines are today editing or submitting content to websites, blogs, forums, and other online spaces” (Hodkinson, 2017: 273). With such shifts, communities’ identification tends towards ‘narrow interests’ and emphasises a ‘sense of difference from other groups’ (Lievrouw, 2001: 22), such as the modest fashion bloggers community in this thesis.

In terms of modest fashion blogging, this research suggests that the Muslim female bloggers as pro-bloggers of modest blogosphere in a fashion blogging community are gradually recognized as professional advertisers and reviewers for corporates, though their previous

struggles in the ‘monetized sphere’ of ‘pro-blogging’ that associates their modesty with their ‘religiousness’ that is seen as uncreative to the sphere (Lewis, 2015: 251). Fashion blogging is when “bloggers post pictures of themselves [while] documenting their style” with a background setting at home “featured in their bedroom, their Livingroom, or their back garden” (Rocamora, 2011: 407, 410). Rocamora (2011) pointed out that there are corporate fashion blogs run by the big brands in the industry and personal fashion blogs run by individuals such as modest fashion bloggers in this study. From the field diary, it is seen that modest fashion bloggers on Instagram profiles describe their work with various titles, as stated in the following extract:

Written in sheer font under their Instagram profile photo and username, women who promote modest fashion refer to themselves as: ‘public figure’ like Salma Masrour, ‘digital creator’ used by Nabiila Bee, ‘blogger’, or ‘artist’ as Marium Jeelani. I observe their bios, posts, and their stories today, when sharing their availability with brands that are interested to collaborate with them. When attaching such roles to define themselves, these women are labelling the concepts to describe who they are.

(Extract from journal)

From the field diary extract, we see that modest fashion bloggers' biographies have grown into concepts related to ‘stars’ such as ‘public figure’ and ‘artist’. And since the biography in an Instagram account for bloggers is essential in terms of identifying the self for any potential collaborations with brands who seek to contact the bloggers for advertisements or collaborations, it represents a tool for displaying ‘professionalism’ and the identity of the modest fashion blogger. Safitri (2017: 71) argues that fashion bloggers identify themselves with such personal branding statements “to differentiate themselves from everybody else” and to “meet the target market’s expectations” (Parmentier, Fischer, and Rebecca, 2012).

In addition, one cannot explore modest fashion blogging without referring to hijabi bloggers and how the commonly known hijabi females in this community were once well-known YouTubers for their content on DIY videos, hijab tutorials, GRWM videos (Get ready with me), and Everyday Lookbooks. This is to track the timeline of how modest fashion blogging started with ‘amateur’ content creation from a home setting through a bedroom culture (Lincoln, 2013: 341-347) and grew through the same space into a professional career. The existing studies on the first steps towards modest fashion blogging explored modest wear and styles growing into a niche market that was also proliferating through web blogs of Islamic



fashion brands such as *Shukr* with a ‘sophisticated online presence’. Researchers also explored the YouTube videos created by hijabi women on how to tie a hijab and wear a headscarf (Moors, 2013), and studies on ‘layer-ability’ as one of the main cultural practices of modest wear (Salim, 2013). But I argue that as far as this study is concerned, it was found that few cultural practices adopted by Muslim women to create modest wear, such as ‘layer-ability’, which continue to exist as a modest fashion technique was hardly critically examined and we can say it is a part of a DIY culture. It is important to track such relevant techniques in modest fashion to pin down the shifts in Muslim female blogging from ‘fun’ to ‘professional’ paid labour. With that being said, this study investigated the shift from blogging for non-profit to a professional paid career in modest fashion blogging by examining the branding techniques of fashion and style used when sharing Instagrammic visuals with the followers which contain advertisements for brands. Acknowledging the professionalisation in these women’s roles as bloggers asserts the rapid and major change in the public perception of modesty within the fashion and the media industry and the expansion of the Muslim female stakeholders’ spaces where they voice their creativity and commodify it to make an income out of their sartorial practices. This will be discussed in further detail within the context of the upcoming sections.

I pointed out in chapter three how modest fashion bloggers are the central figures in modest fashion events and are the first to conceptualise modesty through website blogs (Tarlo, 2013; Lewis, 2015). But there is a more detailed background to their famous status, according to what the ethnographic data explored regarding their professionalism in a domestic career with a high steady income equal to £50,000 or more as mentioned in the earlier sections. Thereby, this section presents the field diary, and the visual Instagrammic field notes extract on key female bloggers to explore the shifts in their roles from reviewing ‘brand giveaways’ (Lewis, 2015) to professional reviewers of modest fashion brands and corporate industries of cosmetics, fashion, and other commodities as home furniture and decorations. Extending to Lewis’ (2015) account on modest fashion bloggers’ experiences with reviewing products, I shall be looking at their journey as ‘pro-bloggers’ who are professional paid content creators working in a domestic space.

Initial data of online observations shed a tracked and scrutinized portrayal of modest fashion bloggers, and I observed that blogging became a career for women behind a screen and in a domestic place which is ‘home’. They combined their passion for fashion with marketing and consumerism. They receive products to try and advertise for by giving their point of view for those items. They advertise by creating visual content of them consuming the product, which I

refer to as ‘branding the self’. Through a semiotic reading of the two following Instagrammic visuals (see figure 37), we can see that both bloggers @Nabiilabee and @amenakhan are indoors, in their homes. Nabiila is sitting in her living room, leaning on the arm of the sofa, dressed in her streetstyle modest attire and one side lifted leather backpack while covering her headscarf with a hoodie, and her head is facing the camera from a low angle, slightly bending her face diagonally. She is also wearing her trainers in her living room while placing one side of her feet on the edge sofa. In the descriptive box below the image, Nabiila encourages her followers to watch her vlog that is in her YouTube channel while advertising the ‘outfits’ and *Jimmy Choo* trainers that were put together by @styledbyfat. Amena Khan, on the other Instagrammic image, is standing in her bright white kitchen holding a white plate while posing in a full stand and looking diagonally into the camera. Amena is wearing bright red trousers with statement layers and a tunic with long fringes on the sleeves, and below the waist, her red scarf is tied into a turban and accessorised with long dangling golden earrings. Her face is defined with a contour (creamy or powdery makeup product to define the face features) and red lipstick. Her red attire is accompanied by what seems golden heels that are hardly showing through the length of the large, layered trousers.



**Figure 37.** @nabilabee and @amenakhan working as bloggers from home (field extract)

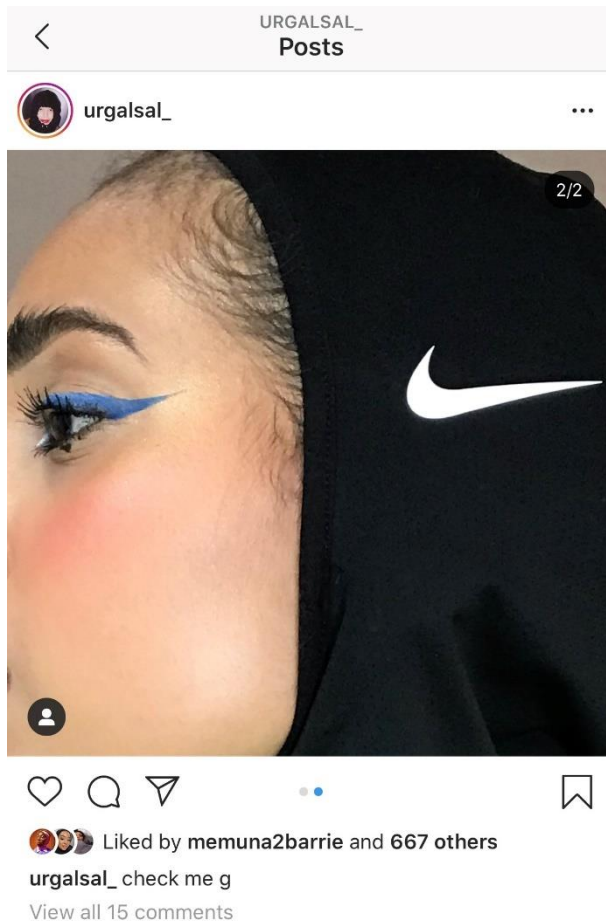
These Instagrammic data explored how modest fashion bloggers live in a house with modern and urban decorations, including the living room of Nabiila and the kitchen of Amena in which their work takes place. The houses are their private space, and it is shared with the public, and this shows how the boundaries between both spaces are blurred (Boyd, 2014). By blurring these boundaries, these modest fashion bloggers are advertising not only for fashion styles, but also for home decoration and the urban interior decoration they are putting together for their followers. The partnerships and collaborations these bloggers are posting on their Instagram accounts are a form of expert advertising, and with Fashion Houses as Jimmy Choo involved in the modest fashion community, it shows that modest fashion blogging is gradually growing within the mainstream fashion into a professional fashion career with corporates and that means the income will also increase according to the standards the big brands have with advertisements and the high financial expenditure on advertisements. Moreover, the effort that Nabiila and Amena were putting into the creation of Instagrammic content is visible through high quality of the photos taken which means that pricy photographic tools and lighting which

affirm the focus of the modest fashion bloggers on hiring fashion experts and photographers to build a professional career online. The background in the image indicates the shift from the simple bedroom background that was once on Hijab tutorials and DIY YouTube videos into a more decorated and furnished background with trending colours of interior designs and decorations like Nabiila's indoor plants on the other side of the room to soften the look in the space and a large mirror reflecting the back of the sofa. These shifts demonstrate that modest fashion blogging is becoming more immersed in the pro-blogging sphere.

Unlike Tilburg's (2012: 4) argument of fashion bloggers "becoming a fashion expert is so vague", this chapter argues that Muslim female bloggers who promote modesty had a motif to start with. This motif emerged in the earlier section through the trending home decorations and hiring experts when building Instagram content. Another key ethnographic observation of the online is bloggers' focus on promoting 'lifestyle' by taking the followers through house decorations, skincare routines, and healthy meals of the day. The modest fashion blogger, Leena (@withloveleena), shares her everyday activities through Instagram photographs, IGTVS, and reels, that are shot and edited by her husband, who is, according to what she shared on her Instagram stories, an expert in visual art. In one of Leena's IGTV videos, she shows the followers a snapshot of how she prepares the food table for Ramadan and how she sets the decorations. The video implicates Leena torching the long white candles placed in the middle of the white crumbled table runner; then, she was holding a vlogging camera and speaking to the mirror, and finally showing vegetables in the supermarket. The background voice was muted and replaced with musical composition. Through these ethnographic descriptions of Leena's visual content, it appears that Instagram paved the way for young women who are 'style-conscious' bloggers to share their personal fashion style and lifestyle activities by affording editing features to create quality content and facilitate their journey towards 'pro-blogging'.

Another point to consider when looking into modest fashion bloggers' roles is their collaboration with the corporates through advertising photographs and videos shared on Instagram. From the semiotic reading of Instagrammic data, it was explored that this is dependent on the interaction of female followers with the visuals of modest fashion bloggers. The sponsoring brands pay the bloggers according to the number of followers they have and according to the views. The female followers are essential for the continuity of modest fashion blogging activity, making promotion proceed and the income increase. The female followers are inspired by the looks and tips the modest bloggers create. They watch their Instagram posts

online and ask bloggers in the comment section about the links for the clothes or the names and references of the makeup used on certain photos they admired. Other times the products are already tagged below the photos or videos. In the following Instagram post of @urgalsal, we can see the Nike victory hijab identified according to the logo on the veil (see figure 38)



**Figure 38.** @urgalsal blogging about her matching eyeliner with her *Nike* victory hijab.

From a semiotic point of view, @urgalsal positions the upper side of her face to the camera screen to emphasise the *Nike* logo that matches her sharp blue eyeliner's shape. This *Nike* victory hijab was introduced in 2017 as a sportswear product for Muslim women who cover their heads. With modest fashion bloggers such as @urgalsal visual and artistic advertisement for corporate products, the followers will be influenced by such Instagrammic posts on these big brands, and they ought to purchase the item because it makes them look 'cool'. In a similar example, Hodkinson (2017: 223) shares an illustration of 'Coke Mentos experiments' going viral through social media videos; he stated that with the 'user-generated content' and the fast

spread of imagery on digital platforms such as Instagram, there is an ‘ongoing attempts to associate brands with ‘coolness’, such as in @urgalsal case on *Nike* hijab victory and matching creative makeup look. Moreover, the Nike hijab victory data resembles also what Klein (2000: 72) criticized with regards the insider marketing referring to this method as ‘cool-hunting’ and ‘legal stalkers’ where these cool-hunters “would search out pockets of cutting-edge lifestyle, capture them on video-tape and return to clients”. However, now this seems to have extended to ‘re-posting’ the Instagram visuals that already exist in modest fashion bloggers’ content to create an imagery of ‘coolness’ for women who follow these female bloggers and are influenced by their fashion styles so they then purchase the brands’ items and replicate the trending modest aesthetics and styles.

Through these ethnographic data, it was explored that modest fashion bloggers are now producing pro-blogging content that is advertising for corporates who are still hunting ‘coolness’ within the modest fashion culture by tracking down Muslim females who are modest fashion bloggers and hiring them to collaborate and sponsor their products (Hodkinson, 2017; Klein, 2000). Modest fashion blogging became a fashion expert career in a home setting that will be further discussed in terms of domesticity in the section of female space and agency from Craik’s (1993) perspective.

#### **5.2.2.2. Businesswomen in Modest Fashion: ‘online boutiques’**

‘Boutique’, a concept originating from the French language, was occasionally used in modest fashion studies. Lewis (2015) refers to diverse shops using the term ‘boutique’, such as the retail chain *Swarovski* or independent brands as ‘independent boutiques’. It was also coined in the brand names Moors (2013) explored in her research *Discover the Beauty of Modesty*, such as listing the webstore *Islamic boutique* of 2002. Through both studies, the boutique concept appears to be used to refer to small shops that sell clothing and accessories. In this research, the term is adopted to refer to ‘online boutiques’, the online shops of the businesswomen in the modest fashion industry. In her Instagram stories, Amena khan had always referred to her ‘hoojab’<sup>18</sup> items as available in her ‘online boutique’, Pearl Daisy. Similar use of the term

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<sup>18</sup> Hoojab: i.e., hijab. A concept made up by Amena khan and sold on her website pearl-daisy.com as ‘hoojab’ referring to hijab.

‘online boutique’ is apparent in my interview with Soumaya when she narrates the process of selecting a name for her brand:

To be absolutely honest, we started with quite few initial ideas, so we wanted one time to call it *Love Boutique*, or *Fashion Boutique*, or *Hayaa Boutique*, and then with the love one, when the girl goes to the parent, to the father, can I have some money to spend on the *Love Boutique*? (laughs) it’s not gonna sound good. Then, we came up with *Fashion Boutique*, and then we actually settled for *Hayaa*. So, we had our bags made [...]

(Soumaya: interview extract)

According to Soumaya and Amena, the concept of a boutique is commonly used by Muslim businesswomen giving a name to their small businesses. Therefore, these women often use the online boutique when referring to or naming their brands. Their shop is often available digitally rather than in the physical market because it is a small business built with a small budget.

A boutique represents women’s ownership of a brand that they developed independently through their own efforts in which they can create and sell their designs to female customers. Given that Muslim women were not always considered as fashionable by, for example, secularist in Turkey (Kuris, 2020). They also had various experiences with being excluded from the fashion industry as stakeholders. With all of these struggles and the unavailability of the modest fashion in stores, there was a motive pushing their actions towards constructing a business that supports other fellow Muslim women. This act is crucial because it marks their first step as becoming members of the industry. It displays Soumaya’s ability to take action to represent women of her modest fashion community and pave her way to a financially independent life. Thus, Muslim women’s boutiques are a sign of financial liberation and agency, a step ahead amidst the socio-economic structures within the industry, and the capacity to find solutions to issues and challenges related to their identity as Muslim women in the UK. This agentive act is reproduced with more Muslim women joining the modest fashion field. Since before, it was the “Muslim brands that have led the way in the development of the niche market in modest clothing, online and offline” (Lewis, 2013: 43). This, however, does not mean that it is without challenges and social and economic structures.

In this chapter, it was explored that there are three types of businesses promoting modest fashion online. First, we have the side-business owned by modest fashion bloggers, which

usually consists of plain t-shirts and hoodies with a slogan in the front middle of the tops or prayer gowns. Second, there is the small business of Muslim women who started building their boutiques online. They began with creating a blog, then a website, securing money from sales, and making casual attire and glamorous eventful dresses. And third of all, there are brands of modest wear that are progressive and at the lead of the modest fashion industry.

The illustration for the first type of modest fashion brand is *Chinutay&Co* (@chinutayco on Instagram), owned by the hijabi blogger Manal (@chinutay on Instagram). This brand promotes being ‘ethically produced’ and ‘black owned’. This brand advertised three-piece prayer gowns and was highly active in Ramadhan of 2020. These prayer gowns are made of silk, consisting of a prayer dress, a built-in underscarf, and a hijab secured with a magnetic embedded attachment. The cost of these three pieces together is £110. Each prayer gown is given Arabic names such as *Malaika, Firdaus, Hawa, Asiya, Reema, Isra, Parisa*. Adding such an Arabic notion to each piece seems to be the new trend among small businesses owned by Muslim women in which they try to advertise creatively for their products. Since *Chinutay&Co*’s potential clientele is the young Muslim women, the brand innovatively communicated the religiousness of the Arabic language, also known as the language of the holy book *Quran*. Using these Arabic females’ names, Manal, as a businesswoman, wished to distinguish each of the designed items from other brands’ products.

The second type of Muslim women-owned business was hardly seen making it out of the niche market and moving towards the mainstream. Brands from the ethnographic data were examined as slowly growing towards joining the global industries. *Sa-orsa*, the mother and daughter’s owned business, seemed to have great potential when observed in the charity-based fashion events in Leicester and Birmingham in 2019. Still, it was barely active on the Instagram account in the last two years. These businesswomen are known to start with their pocket money and their savings. *Sa-orsa* mentioned that she learnt fashion design from Rabia Z, the owner of the global brand *Refka* displayed on *Modanisa*, Rabia Z. They were also asked to join *Modanisa*, the corporate of modest wear in Turkey. The mother, Shanez, stated that:

She wants to get ours to *Modanisa*. She said they needed a collection of thirty items. We would show them a collection of thirty clothing styles. That’s what Rabia Z said to us. They need a collection; they would sit there and see thirty pieces, and normally we do six or seven or eight, and then they take permission. We would have to do special pieces for them. We would like to give them our unique pieces that are on our website. You would have to do quite separate ones.



These Muslim fashion designers are finding it hard to keep up in the market with a low budget. The economic structures are slowing their business down. They also need to meet certain conditions to grow their business within a corporate space. The hierarchies between corporates and start-up create a gap for women where they do not have the assets, the economic capital, to join a big company. The challenge Muslim businesswomen face in the global market, emphasising female designers in the UK, is the dominance of such corporates who mass produce modest fashion products. The target of the corporates is the same clientele of the small businesses creating a modest fashion for a community of women who look for diverse forms and cuts, colours and fabric textures, then package and post the merchandise around the world. In doing so, they made it extremely hard for the small businesses in the UK to grow their brand identity and consumer community.

The field diaries of Istanbul Modest Fashion Week 2019 noted that *Modanisa* had more than 1000 companies selling diverse modest fits for global women. Its dominance in the online modest fashion market makes it a powerful owner of ‘fashion as a culture industry’ (McRobbie, 2000). In exploring similar hardships of young women, McRobbie (2000: 260) argued that “the culture of the fashion design sector, in particular its resistance to opening itself up to self-scrutiny and to promoting wider debate about its internal politics and organization, made it more difficult for them to succeed”. For example, with fashion designers from the corporate millionaire, *Modanisa*, requesting businesswomen such as Sa-orsa owners to join the industries towards global marketing means that they have to sell their ‘14 designs’ and connect with the current globalised brands. Selling their ‘unique designs’, as Shanez refers to them, resembles selling the name of their brand that they worked hard to build for a corporate. These are conditions set by ‘a high-powered [modest] fashion leaders’ (McRobbie, 2000). Here, it is not to argue that *Modanisa* is not representing women who cover nor to avoid the fact that Muslim businesswomen have a space in a global market through this company. Still, the ethnographic data explored angles we should consider, such as how these start-up brands struggle to take the lead in the modest fashion with corporate dominance because of the difference in power relations.

Emphasising the suggestion directed to Sa-orsa by their fashion design mentor Rabia Z represents ‘the networking’ the Muslim businesswomen construct, so their brand evolves. Moreover, as fashion designers, both Shanez and Ayesha informed me that they sought to connect with a famous blogger on Instagram; her name is Zukreat (@zukreat). She has more

than 500k followers on her platforms and a blue tick (verified badge of a public figure). They stated in the interview that:

**Shanez:** You know, by gifting a lot of bloggers, you know bloggers! We have got more sales. [...] they promote it, and they have like so many followers, and then when they wear it, they get like so many people! Shocked! And that's how we get our name out there as well [...]

**Shanez:** you saw Zukreat? That model, that makeup artist, you know Zukreat? She launched makeup brand. [...]

**Researcher:** Did she contact you?

Ayesha: No, we contacted her.

**Shanez:** She came to the London show. Yeah, she came to our store.

**Ayesha:** She came to that one and hum ... She took some pictures in front of our products and stuff like that [...]

**Researcher:** Do you think bloggers would help in advertising and promoting?

**Ayesha:** as soon as she wore it, the followers also wanted a bit more. We had few interests, like, oh! How do we purchase it, how do we do this, so it is making it more out there, yeah!

Shanez shares how they use promotional strategies, such as connecting with bloggers to 'get [their] name out there'. The bloggers (such as the Zukreat) promote the brands of the Muslim businesswomen in fashion events through Instagram images and stories and share them with many followers on their accounts. Through such promotional tools of 'networking' and attracting the attention of bloggers, the Muslim businesswomen gradually build their online stores, but the growth is slow, risking their bankruptcy. 'Networking', as argued by Kasana (2014: 237), is a method of raising voices of women 'for each other on a plethora of issues'.

By interviewing Sa-orsa and other businesswomen, they shared their experiences about how they may close any time through the year because they were using their 'personal money', a small budget, and were not gaining any profits from the sales. These women had the vision to grow their business, market their names, and move toward the global business platform. However, with corporate intrusion, it was challenging.

According to a semiotic reading of the Instagrammic data, the third type of Muslim women-owned business is the one that is thriving and has a global consumer. The success of these businesswomen relies on the promotional techniques of hiring paid reviewers and advertisers from the modest fashion bloggers community. An example of these brands is *Lyra Swim*,

launched in December 2016 by its founder Ikram Zein with more than 400k followers on its Instagram page, posting diversified images of women who wear hijab or choose to cover their bodies. This modest fashion brand reposts photos of famous bloggers, such as Habiba Da Silva (@lifelongpercussion), in their swimwear pieces on their Instagram feed. Such Instagram posts are for users to view and maybe eventually admire and purchase these modest swimwear products known as burqinis. As explored through the *Lyra Swim*'s Instagram account, the brand (see figure 39) uses empowering concepts 'Girls compete' and 'Lyra empowers', referring to how the products give modest women a voice, an agency, and representation. The Lyra Swim Burqinis price range is £84,99 to £89,00 for the swimsuit, including the top tunic and the bottom leggings without the swim caps. The swimming accessories consist of swim caps, hijabs, and turbans with a price tag of £16,99 to £22,99 per item.

According to Pia Karlsson Minganti (2013: 43), "the burqini gives its wearers an air of being sporty and cool, 'modestly active'—an appellation that has now turned into an important trademark for Islamic swimwear in Britain and beyond". Regardless of such affordance, Minganti (2013) critically indicated that Muslim women were sceptical of burqinis. The Muslim women living in the 'west' had predicted that the creation of Burqini would lead to 'commercialisation and the 'westernization' of the Islamic dress. In contrast, other groups of women had sought access to public presence through the 'commercialisation' of this modest swimwear (Minganti, 2013: 43). Further to that, Minganti (2013: 44) emphasised that "the burqinis have been restricted, prohibited and contrasted to '[their] European value system' in negative ways". To illustrate, the incident in Nice, France, where a woman was fined for lying in the beach while covering her head and body. At the French news agency AFP, it was claimed that her modest dress was not fit for 'good morals and secularism' (*The Guardian*, 2016). Even though the 'western' perceptions were not in favour of burqinis, they were yet still spreading in European countries (Minganti, 2013). In the last five years, 'the commodification' that Muslim women foresaw was increasing.

From the ethnographic data, it was observed that corporates, such as *Nike*, are re-creating their version of burqini and associating it with a different concept, '*Victory Swim*'. Through such re-creation, the corporates attach their logos and the statements of women's agencies already adopted by activewear brands owned by Muslim women, such as the representations in the Olympics and the empowering phrases in the advertising videos that challenge the global market is intense. That is because the corporates already have their names associated with globality (Klein, 2000). Additionally, the burqini as a modest swimsuit was associated with the

Islamic dress trademark when initially created by Muslim women seeking access to the public presence (Minganti, 2013: 43). A more detailed account of this challenge is given in the following section exploring the online ethnographic observations comparing *Nike* and *Lyra Swim*.

When comparing the ethnographic observations on *Lyra Swim* with the data on Nike, the corporate sportswear industry, it was found that *Nike* was late to the modest fashion brands in launching a burqini line. Promoting their brand logo within the modest fashion community, Nike launched their modest swimsuit on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2020 in the UK market. Nike referred to the release as the *Victory Swim* instead of its familiar concept ‘burqini’, which is highly common in the Muslim female community. The creative team shooting the advertising video for the new *Victory Swim* was: the creative director Bennie Jarvis and the photographer Paola Kudakci. The post-production team consisted of the company of Studio Private. *Nike* hired hijabi models known on Instagram amidst the large modest fashion community. These women were: the figure skater Zahra Lari, the diver Nouf Alosaimi, and the two models, Ikram Abdi Omar and Arinna Erin Wira (see figure 40). The creation of this design was associated with the story of the fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad who won the bronze medal as the first hijabi woman to win the Olympics in 2016. *Nike*, according to Muhammad, offered her a space to share her ‘agentive act’ as an athlete Muslim-American woman wearing the hijab and competing in sports games. Promoting concepts of choices and agency and attempting to appropriate the performance of Muslim women in the Olympics, Nike seems to take the lead in the Muslim women's sportswear. And this presents a corporate dominance in the modest activewear market and challenges for the modest fashion brands (*Lyra Swim*) who already had their products in the global market. In this context, there is a contradiction between the past views on burqinis that have been, according to Minganti (2013: 44), “restricted, prohibited and contrasted to ‘[the] European value system’ in negative ways”, and the current creation of modest dress for the inclusion of visibly Muslim women to the corporates’ clientele. The wearers of burqinis were once seen as outsiders to the ‘European value system’. Such a jump means that the research in this stage became “a work of sociological demystification” (McRobbie, 2000: 259).

Lash and Lury (2007: 122) tracked down the growth of Nike from the 1980s to the 1991s; it was its “recognition of the relevance of fashion to product development”. Nike’s promotional tools were sponsoring ‘global superstars’ and “arrangements with summer basketball camps to use Nike products” (Lash and Lury, 2007: 123). It appears that Nike always had an eye for promoting through celebrities, such as the known hijabi athletes mentioned above (the figure

skater Zahra Lari, the diver Nouf Alosaimi, and the two models Ikram Abdi Omar and Arinna Erin, and the face of the design, the fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad). This marketing technique is about creating an ‘emotional relation’ with the consumers and is identified by Lash and Lury (2007: 124) as ‘personification’<sup>19</sup>.

Therefore, the fieldwork data suggests that not only *Nike* is associating their brand logo with women from the sports realm, but also attempting to grow its brand identity within the hijabi fashion by collaborating with hijabi women as the face of its swimwear campaigns. By doing so, they are reaching out to a diverse modest dress community by using diverse faces of modesty as a currency to increase their sales. From here, we can reflect on another struggle businesswomen go through in protecting their brand value and identity as corporates ‘hunt’ every cultural object from the niche market brands (Klein, 2000; Lash and Lury, 2007).



**Figure 39.** *Lyra Swim* sportswear product displayed on their Instagram business account

<sup>19</sup> ‘personification’: Defined by Lash and Lury (2007: 124), “in which the properties of a product or series of products are associated with the characteristics of a person”.



**Figure 40.** *Nike Victory Swim Collection* shared on their Instagram Marketing account

### 5.2.2.3. Hijabi Models: modelling for fashion houses and magazines

With the proliferation of modest fashion in the last five years, hijabi models were receiving more attention from the fashion houses (Burberry and Gucci) and the global magazines, such as *Vogue*, *Bazaar*, and *The Observer*. The question is, why the fashion intellectuals of such big industries delayed the inclusion of women who cover into their brand image. The efforts of the fashion houses and the long-standing magazines demonstrate a professional transformation in their visual image. That is especially true with social media (such as Instagram) shifting towards marketizing digital practices. Moreover, the ethnographic data explored that Instagram is accessed by diversified modest wear communities, interacting with the visual content of hijabi bloggers. In this context, I argue that the fashion houses aim at what Lewis (2019: 256) explains as “visible ethnic diversity into the fashion media” and focus on “the visual self-imaging” of the famous hijabi bloggers within the community of Muslim women online. In the same way, Craik (1993: 85) argued that “although models emphasise their individual attractions, they are usually chosen for jobs depending on whether they are ‘the right type’ for the client and the clothes”. It is, therefore, significant to examine how the hijabi models are mined by the big

industries and displayed on the billboard of *Burberry*, in *Bazaar* and the *Observer* magazines, and on shared photoshoots of *Gucci* were visualised through the promotional images.

Regarding hijabi bloggers who were the first to receive the mainstream brands' positive attention, Mariah Idrissi was approached by H&M in 2015 for a fashion campaign video. According to a semiotic reading of Mariah's Instagram profile, she has a verified badge of a public figure on Instagram, followed by 93.7 thousand followers (collected in 2021). She has over 464 photos and videos shared on her content page. Mariah often shares textual enquiries with her followers on her Instagram posts about hijab and modest fashion and whether visibly Muslim women on catwalks 'empower' or 'drive unnecessary attention to the bodies'. According to the Instagrammic data, Mariah's goals were always directed toward the inclusivity of hijabi women in the industry. To illustrate, in *Grazia* magazine, Mariah stated that her aim was "to simply see a visible Muslim woman in the media wasn't common so [her] focus was directed in promoting more diversity in the industry"<sup>20</sup>. It is important to note that Mariah is Grazia Girl Gang Ambassador for modesty for the online magazine *Grazia: Middle East*. The title of girl gang ambassador describes famous women's roles in representing their community in a particular field. In this research, Mariah is a model representing hijabi women in the field of modesty.

There are two concepts in the previous phrase worth investigating: gang ambassador and modesty. It was found that the concept of 'gang' is mentioned as an example in McMillan and Chavis's article (1986: 10) when discussing the boundaries that a community is created to preserve their safety and security. As the magazine representative, Mariah is referred to with the term 'gang ambassador' to suggest an empowering sense to her role. Because a gang is a community with boundaries and security, Mariah is the head of the hijabi women who promote their modesty and preserve it. For now, Mariah focuses on charity, volunteering for Somalia's campaigns, and fashion sustainability. Her profile as a hijabi woman with several roles within modest fashion and beyond is empowering for the image of Muslim women who were once considered 'oppressed'. This is also evidenced in the observational data collected from *Grazia* magazine in an interview with Mariah Idrissi. She stated that:

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<sup>20</sup> Savanna Smith, 'Mariah Idrissi: As a Muslim, I feel Great Responsibility to Do my Part in Taking Care of the Planet', *Grazia Magazine: the Frazia Girl Gang ambassador for modesty reveals why it's time for a rethink*, *Grazia Magazine*, 2022.

In 2020, the State of the Global Islamic Economy predicts that the Modest Fashion market could be worth more than £226bn. These figures are something we are often proud of. It demonstrates our spending power as a community as well as the influence we have in this space as more and more brands are tapping into what's called "the Muslim pound". However, on the flip side, how does all this consumption affect our planet especially when we take into consideration fashion consumption globally?

[...]

As a Muslim, I feel a great responsibility to do my part in taking care of our planet especially considering I am a part of an industry that causes it great harm.

What this quote implies is that by taking similar roles in fashion sustainability and spreading awareness of the significance of the environment and the planet, Mariah as a hijabi model and ambassador of modesty in this magazine, develops a positive image of modest fashion and shares a powerful image on Muslim females' community.

This section also peruses the iconic representation of Muslim female stakeholders in the fashion houses' campaigns and fashion weeks along with their contributions to mainstream magazines. Their progressive affiliation to the fashion houses was semiotically analysed using their Instagrammic photos from their accounts to extract the cultural, social, and economic meanings from the visuals. A selection of highly involved women with at least one major influence in the fashion houses was identified through the visual data and they are Ikram Abdi, Rawdis, and Nawal Sari. The study will demonstrate how the Instagrammic visuals shared by these Muslim women were created by motivated rhetors (Kress 2010:26) that are visual rhetoric, (e.g., bodily appearance or posture), may be used to convey certain social, political, and fashion-based messages.

Moving on with exploring modelling for fashion houses, Ikram Abdi Omar (@ikramabdi) is a Muslim hijabi blogger who was the face of *Burberry* in 2019, a luxurious high-end brand (see figure 41). Through a semiotic reading of the image that Ikram shared on her Instagram, she had an entirely black suit with silky buttons, a collar, and the jettied flap pockets. Ikram had a pullover top with fringe on the wrist, a basic turtleneck sweater underneath it, a black turban tied back, and simple statement earrings in her ears. The hijabi model makes a diagonal face posture with the camera while carrying a baby on her right side. The baby wears a basic black set and has direct eye contact with the viewers. With regards to the background, there is a contrasting lighter colour to the black attires that the models are wearing. These descriptive



features seem to focus on the *Burberry* fashion ‘hallmark’ (Calefato, 2004: 38) as displayed in this campaign.

Furthermore, Ikram’s emotions in the photo appear enigmatic to the viewer as the right side of her face is highlighted more than the left, which is hidden through the posture. In the Instagrammic visual, Ikram’s gaze is distant from the baby she carries, but the face remains directed to the side where she is holding the baby. Remarkably, her posture from the first sight seems to represent the concept of ‘mother and child’ and ‘maternal love’. However, close-up observation of the visual adds to the viewer’s perception a signifying image of traditional models who do not emphasis facial expressions (e.g., smiles) (Craik, 1993) so that the focus is on the fashion designs rather than the women on the catwalk or in Ikram’s case photograph.



**Figure 41.** Ikram Abdi in *Burberry* advertising campaign

Kress (2010: 26) argues that assessing “the social environment”, “the social relations”, and “the resources available” that shape “the communication encounter” are crucial. In the case of the data in this section, ‘The social environment’ within the Instagrammic visuals and the virtual

one between the Muslim female stakeholders and their followers are both important for their shaping of “‘the inner’ semiotic resources” (Kress, 2010: 27). What is happening within the photos from cultural to economic, and sometimes political interactions with their audience as they convey meanings and communicate ‘knowledge’ that is attached to their representation and agency. Kress (2010: 27) proclaims that “[m]akers of representations are shapers of knowledge” and that this “knowledge production is part of the socio-semiotic process”. With Instagram as a new site for “dissemination of messages and knowledge” and an “integral part of the new media landscape”, this app has “specific characteristics of distributions of power and agency in communication” while taking a role in the “process of knowledge production” (Kress, 2010: 27).

Therefore, as Ikram Abdi shares the visual rhetoric of her taking a representative part in *Burberry’s* campaign as the first Hijabi model and a Muslim female stakeholder, she is celebrating her success in representing Muslim women within the fashion houses as they experienced constant exclusion from these designer brands. This practice stands for an agentic act since it demonstrates Ikram’s ability to break through the structures and boundaries of the fashion industry that continue to reproduce hierarchies within its system. Thus, Muslim female stakeholders are gaining further powerful positions within the structure of the fashion industry though the constructed boundaries and challenges. The produced knowledge (Kress, 2010) that Ikram was communicating is that Muslim women have the capacity and agency to join the fashion houses’ higher status within the economic system.

It would be argued that the Burberry’s annual festive season campaign reflects Ikram Abdi’s experience as the first hijabi model participating to this fashion house. A semiotic analysis of her Instagram account showed that Ikram’s modelling career is more directed toward the big brands with high end products displayed on her visuals. She was recently attending the Cannes Film Festival 2022 after receiving an invitation for the red carpet. There were only few, if none, hijabi females displayed. Ikram Abdi as the face of the fashion house was invited to this type of global festival shifting the position of hijabi women within the field of the fashion houses.

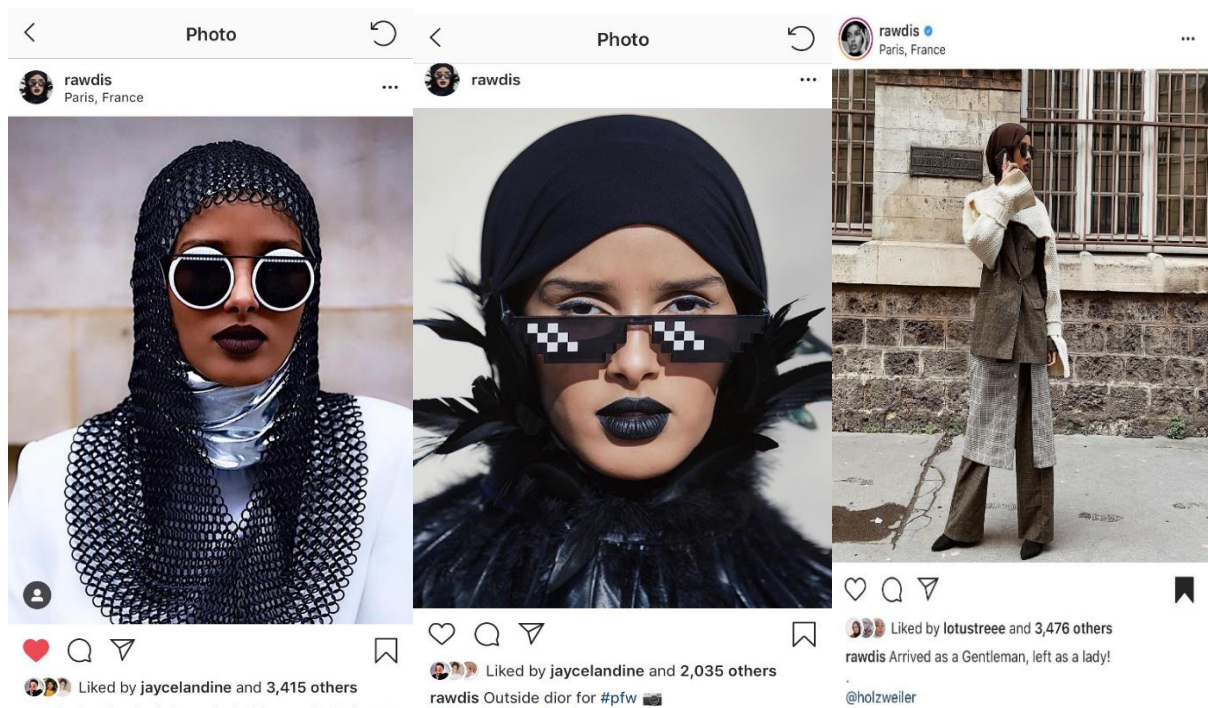
Another hijabi model who is a known face in the fashion houses is Rawdis. She is an active blogger on Instagram and shares her stories about the styling of her clothing in those events. From the online observational data, Rawdis posts photographs and videos on her Instagram account sharing her fashion attire in the fashion weeks in Paris. Her fashion looks are often displayed in layered styling combining feminine and masculine features, and sometimes gothic looks. From a semiotic point of view, the three main visuals of Rawdis in figure 42 are marked

as highly expressive and feminist. Rawdis often poses in a direct eye contact with the camera manifesting an image of 'self-confidence'. When her posture is diagonal, or her face is away from the camera that means Rawdis is delivering a message to the viewers. For example, in the description box below the Instagrammic post (figure 46), on the right, Rawdis write 'Arrived as a Gentleman, left as a lady!' while tagging the Norway-based brand *Holzweiler* (@holzweiler). *Holzweiler* is an Oslo-based fashion house founded in 2012, and in 2014 they took their designs to the next level by creating a ready-to-wear line for both gender, men and women. As a reference to the contemporary unisex style and neutral colours of the leading retailer, *Holzweiler*, Rawdis makes such a comment beneath the photo to show what brand she is wearing and how the attire makes her feel.

Drawing from the visual analysis of her online images, Rawdis' fashion fits are always unique. On the right, she wears a layered suit with a long underneath clothe and a pullover knitted top. The accessories such as the glasses body adornments perform the prime representation of Rawdis clothing signature. Her 'pixelated glasses' which are commonly known to stand for hip hop culture and refers to achieving success in life and being resilient against 'segregation' and 'inequality'. The black feather around the neck resembles an inspirational portrayal of Maleficent. Maleficent (2014) is a dark film character of a female whose heart is broken by a man she loved when he cuts her wings. She turns into a wicked woman with black sharp big horns on her head (described from the movie scenes). The story represents an empowering image of women and a feminist view about females' rebellion. From the mischievous resilient character to a futuristic knight look on the left. Rawdis seems to intentionally perform powerful visual fashion looks and styles. She shares her voice and stance against any cliché of hijabi women being 'oppressed' (Wilson, 2013: 166). It is therefore important to argue that Rawdis' cultural and feminist representations of Muslim women in the field of fashion houses affirms Kress' (2010: 27) argument on how "[m]akers of representations are shapers of knowledge". That is to say, that Rawdis contributed to shifting the narratives on Muslim women in the fashion industry as oppressed for wearing the veil through her creative performative appearance and by sharing the visual rhetoric with her Instagram followers.

Following Hudge and Kress' (1988: 1) argument, on how "everything in a culture can be seen as a form of communication, organized in way akin to verbal language", it was semiotically explored that Rawdis is communicating her affiliation to the fashion weeks through Instagram by sharing photos on her performative presence in the fashion weeks to mark her fashion capital. Through the Instagrammic visuals in figure 42, along with a series of shared

photographs on her Instagram, Rawdis is communicating a powerful statement of her cultural and fashionable membership to the mainstream fashion weeks and the fashion houses. It is not only that she demonstrates her presence in the fashion weeks, but also celebrates her fashion capital by creatively putting a combined attire to make the spectacle gaze back, and thereafter, she is reproducing through her innovative appearance in every fashion week she attends a ‘conformity to the group’s ideal truth’ (Bourdieu, 198: 142). In other words, Rawdis is demonstrating an ‘insider position’ because, as Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) indicate, bodies show our belonging to a field and as Muslim women move inside the fashion weeks through their creative fashionable appearance, they become the reproduced “key players whose careers depend upon it”. By doing so, Muslim women will receive more opportunities in higher positions within the fashion industry and that is the fashion houses. Thence, the ethnographic data and semiotic analysis in the coming sections will assert these findings on how Muslim female stakeholders are gradually weaving a space for their representation within the fashion houses.



**Figure 42.** Rawdis’ resilient styling of modest fashion shared on Instagram

Compared to the images of resilience hijabi models displayed on Instagram, Nawal Sari represented a soft feminine model in her collaboration with Gucci (see figure 43). Following a semiotic reading of these Instagram images, the model featured an unharmed ‘lady’ in her floral print dress, a vintage-looking *Gucci* bag, and silk ballerina loafers embellished with silver gemstones. The model projects an innocent little woman whose face is shying away from the camera, looking dreamy, and modest shots are in a horizontal angle. She lays her head and arm in a feminine manner on the couch. In the first image on the left, Nawel’s portrait is an extreme close-up of half of her profile, inviting the viewer to emulate her hijab and winged eyeliner and the richness of *Gucci*’s floral touch. These ethnographic descriptions explored how corporates blend their brand identity with Muslim women’s visualized religiousness. For instance, the ‘floweriness’ of Gucci with the hijabi women. Further scrutinization showed that she is placed in a home-like background decorated with antiquated furniture symbolising women as house objects. Thus, it was examined that these photoshoots represented a hyperfeminine image of hijabi women displayed by corporates.

McKelvie and Gold (1994: 219-220) referred to the term ‘hyperfeminine’ as a label for women “who present an extreme version of the traditional female gender role”, which are “positive characteristics, such as warm, gentleness, empathy, and generosity”. By indicating that hyperfemininity is about utmost femininity, Nawel’s femaleness was hyperfeminine regarding the softness projected through her submissive postures inviting the viewers’ gaze to admire her attire. Yet, there could be an aspirational representation of hijabi women because the photoshoots are for advertising purposes that will later be posted on their website and billboards of the shop appealing to high-end fashion consumers, with a higher focus on Muslim women.

The data suggest that hijabi models became the face of several fashion houses through their agentive acts and enthusiasm to join festive photoshoots and worldwide fashion weeks, diversifying the fashion industry. Each of these hijabi models: Mariah, Ikram, Rawdis, and Nawel, represent Muslim women who were once absent from the fashion houses’ advertising campaigns. By including the ‘hijabistas’<sup>21</sup> and making them models for corporates, other Muslim women would be influenced by such aesthetics and fashion garments which means more sales of corporate products to the faith-based female communities.

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<sup>21</sup> Hijabistas: a term used by the hijabi women in my research referring to their stylish fashion looks combined with their visible Islamic dress.



**Figure 43.** Nawal Sari collaboration with *Gucci*.

### **5.3. Alternative Positioning of Domesticity: working from home**

An emergent theoretical theme regarding the Muslim female stakeholder's career from home was how domesticity and femaleness contributed as empowering factors in influencing women's agency. The female participants described their Instagram content with concepts of 'fashion and lifestyle', 'a designer', 'bloggers', 'a mom of 2' (see appendix 7), which entailed the domestic roles of being a female by sharing digital content on their private family life, lifestyle, and political views with regards to their identity through a screen.

The content creation of these women on Instagram is for a female audience who seeks various photographic and video displays on aesthetics, everyday fashion, and lifestyle. This mirrors the work of Mulvey ([1989]1999) and Rocamora (2011), who have explored women's control of their image, which associate with the alternative positioning of the term domesticity in this study, that is, Muslim women's self-presentation and portrayal of their own visuals on Instagram for female viewers, wherein they attract 'female gaze' and not 'male gaze'. Rocamora (2011: 420) argued that the digital media are usually male-dominated, but in the case of modest fashion content, "they support women's representation". The Muslim women in this chapter defy the conventional principles of 'the ruling ideology' and 'the psychological structures' that Mulvey (1999) criticised in the context of 'sexual imbalance', whereby the female participants in this study are 'the protagonists', 'the bearers of the look', and the 'main controlling figures with whom the [female] spectators can identify' (Mulvey, 1999: 838).

As seen in the previous subsections, the female bloggers have a voice and control over their Instagram platform and a well-paid career in a domestic space (as mentioned in the above section on modest fashion bloggers) as opposed to the traditional feminine ideals. This form of domestic career expands the meaning of domesticity in the feminist context. Because the content Muslim women create is directed for female viewers and is contextualized in challenging the dominant visions on females, this research argues that domesticity can also offer a power of representation. Another significant point is that the private space (domestic space/home) is open to the public, wherein other women are being supported. Through this gap between the private and public space, the female participants were weaving their space to voice their everyday fashion and lifestyle practices while sharing more content on their political views and issues with the hijab images displayed by the corporates in fashion shows.

With access to technology, the constraints of traditional feminine roles in the nineteenth century's magazines that promoted images of women behind houses' walls (Craik, 1993) are

replaced by an extension to the public space in which women control their own production (Rocamora, 2011). As explored through the online observations, social media is taking a role in the society and constantly developing features of marketing, working in a domestic space extended to the public space by sharing visuals through a screen by producing content for the public audience (The followers could be in their homes or a different setting like outdoors). Thence, fashion bloggers' professions prolonged towards public spaces.

In this study, blogging is a career from home (private space) but also interferes with outside (public space). According to the observations of the background in the visuals and the products advertised in forefront, the furniture, makeup, and clothing stand for highly priced items and projects blogging as a well-paid job with a salary that varies between 30.000 \$ to 200.000 \$ a year according to occupation type, if it is part-time or full-time, or whether the female blogger is caring mom or single. Female bloggers on Instagram were experiencing working from home as self-employed transformed women's position in a household as empowering rather than oppressing. The domestic setting can be oppressive for women because the dependence is usually on the breadwinner male of the house (Barret, 2004: 269). However, bloggers have the material independence and the autonomy to control their own income and the choice to publish bodily visuals of the self.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to explore the continuity of modest fashion on Instagram by examining the experiences of the modest fashion community. With Instagram's complex spatial features that were rapidly developing, this necessitated an ethnographic observation online, followed by a semiotic reading of Instagrammic and Instagrammism (Manovich, 2016; Highfield and Leaver, 2016). This goes in line with what was discussed in chapter two regarding generating social meanings from a polysemic angle, scrutinising it to the context within which it occurs.

This chapter revealed that modest fashion is rapidly growing on Instagram through a community of Muslim female stakeholders. It highlighted the importance of the spatial structures defining the marketisation of Instagram platform to the shift of Muslim female stakeholders' roles in the corporate market. These spatial changes of Instagram from a social to an economic context led to the rise of a field of pro-blogging among the modest fashion



community, who are now recognized as professional advertisers. Further semiotic readings of the modest fashion blogging activity uncovered a new perception of domesticity of how it could offer an empowering representation. It also suggested that bloggers' use of Instagrammatics (e.g., filters, hashtags) result in 'digital prints' that the corporates use to hunt 'coolness' (Hodkinson, 2017; Klein, 2000) to expand their consumer reach into the modest fashion community.

The findings in this chapter revealed that the Muslim female stakeholders identify as a modest fashion community, for they share the same political journey in an industrial society (Williams, 1976). With regards to the experiences of the Muslim businesswomen, this chapter found that they are challenged by the corporate's intrusion into the modest fashion market who are targeting the same consumers. It was examined that the corporates use a marketing technique identified as 'personification' (Lash and Lury, 2007). This marked the assertive rise of 'global culture industry' within the modest fashion global market, which is a theoretical concept developed by Lash and Lury (2007), expressing the corporates' aim for diversity as a commodity (Rosenberg, 2019). The findings reported that the corporates' intrusion had a polysemic effect: While the Muslim female stakeholders, such as hijabi models in this research, expanding their careers to the corporate field; the fashion designers' business is challenged by the long-lasting history of the corporates' brand identity in the global market.

## Chapter Six

### **‘It’s like a double edge sword’: challenges and representations beyond modest fashion promotion**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter investigates the experiences of fashion students considered members of the Muslim female stakeholders who promote modest fashion with a different approach. This empirical chapter focuses on a weaved space beyond the typical promotional spaces of modest fashion. It looks at their efforts and challenges by analysing data collected through the ‘ethnographic mosaic’, including conversational interviews, online observation, and participant observations.

This chapter sets out to discuss four major sections. The first and the second sections are about female fashion students’ statements about their challenges with the stereotyped images like identifying fashion industry as ‘oversexualising’ Muslim women. Using Perkin’s (1979) theorising of stereotypes, I uncover whether these stereotypes carry a negative characteristic, or they have an element of truth. This is to explore their representations and modest fashion experiences in-between the industry and society. The Third account addresses how modesty codes of body covering are criticised by the community online or ‘misrepresented’ by the industry on catwalks—the final section affiliates with the politics of hijab. To address my participants’ experiences, I needed to investigate beyond the industry of modesty fashion by asking them to share their feelings and vivid experiences and by examining Instagrammic data of their daily activities. To support their statements, I compare their views with the findings on corporates’ commodification of hijab during religious events.

Focusing on young Muslim women who wear hijab and on the process of constructing/ already built their careers in the fashion industry as stakeholders, this chapter examines the taboos, stereotypes, assumptions, and the criticism these women experience as they occupy their roles in the fashion realm. During the period of this fieldwork, the female interviewees in this chapter were in their final year of fashion at the University of Arts London while growing their careers in fashion through modelling and building their business in fashion design retail and blogging. This chapter will demonstrate how among these steps of promoting modest fashion to build a

fashion career, the young Muslim stakeholders were challenged by their society and the fashion industry.

## **6.2. The Experiences of Young Hijabi Stakeholders from UAL**

The accounts of the young Muslim women from the conversational interviews corroborate an argument that Dwyer (1998) indicated in her chapter ‘Contested Identities: challenging dominant representations of young British Muslim women’. Dwyer (1998: 53) argued that “for young Muslim women, the construction of their own identities is produced through a challenge to dominant representations of ‘Muslim women’”. In this chapter, the young females on their educational path of becoming young fashion designers and artists narrated their experiences in the fashion industry and within society. They face different challenges but resist in their individual ways to describe what is empowering in their modest fashion journey.

### **6.2.1. ‘It’s very much of a taboo’: or is it? Experiences of Muslim fashion students**

The young Muslim fashion students of UAL are also considered female stakeholders of modest fashion in this study. Through an ethnographic interview, they narrated how they constructed their ways towards joining the fashion industry by creating their unique content and making a community with shared interests. The fieldwork showed that these Muslim females’ path toward the industry appears to be packed with struggles, including fashion being ‘a taboo’ within their social surroundings, ‘the stereotypes’ they face in the mainstream industry, and ‘the misrepresentation’ of their ‘modesty’. Nevertheless, these stereotypes and taboos might have been one of the many reasons mentioned earlier for modest fashion to prosper as these young female students used them as an endeavour to weave their space for what they see as ‘fashion’ and made their path towards being a part of the mainstream. This means that stereotypes and taboos had influential impacts on the young females’ perception and construction of what they thought to be fashionable according to their personal terms and employed the expectations of the mainstream to take visible roles in the creative and the fashion industry.

The term ‘stereotypes’ can be traced back to Tessa Perkins (1979), who stated that our attempts to understand stereotypes are associated with a list of assumptions and a short circle of critical thinking. Perkins (1979: 80) argues that when we think of stereotypes, “we will unthinkingly be involved in adopting the point of view from which certain characteristics are seen to be ‘bad’, rather than asking (when appropriate) why these characteristics are ‘bad’”. By being open to stereotypes being simplistic and sometimes complex (Perkins, 1979), a theoretical understanding would be made out of this young Muslim females’ perception of the stereotypes. Using Perkins’ theorisation of stereotypes, I identified the various uses of stereotypes as women in the fieldwork connote in their statements when referring to their attempts to join or have a minor role in the fashion industry. Furthermore, Lewis’ (2013) and Moor’s (2013) conceptions of stereotyped experiences of young Muslim females promoting modesty highlighted examples of negative attributes associated with the stereotyped images of Muslim women. Lewis (2013: 6) argues that “Muslim bloggers and brands emphatically avoid being perceived as making claims to Islamic authority”. That is one of the many ways Muslim female stakeholders use to overcome a ‘stereotyped’ image and deny the assumptions made about them.

Another view shared by Wilson (2013: 166) builds an argument on a stereotype associated with Muslim women dressing modestly by stating that “modest dress is not necessarily a sign of submission and oppression”. Wilson (2013: 166) offers further critical discussion on stereotyped images of women by making a comparison between the Islamic veil as “a sign of liberation and agency” and “western fashions and western stereotypes of femininity”. Wilson’s (2013: 166) comparison appears to draw on Perkins’ (1979) criticality of stereotypes by stating that one cannot assume that Muslim women are oppressed because of a veil as they have also contributed to western feminists’ efforts in opposing the “oversexualized women” and the “stereotyped ideals of female beauty”. Using Wilson’s argument, I theorize the stereotypes that the Muslim female mentioned when sharing their families’ points of view on joining the fashion industry by describing their reaction to their choices as ‘a stereotype’ or ‘a taboo’ and their fear could relate to what Wilson (2013) conceptualized as “oversexualized women”.

Expressing one of the reasons behind the underrepresentation of hijabi women in the fashion industry, Aminah states:

it’s very much of a taboo where a lot of people are not talking about it. They’ll feel like their daughters shouldn’t be part of that industry because of the stereotype that comes with it.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

The first part of the quote conveys the word ‘taboo’ acting as a constraint on young people. Aminah calls for open discussions among her Pakistani Muslim society to revisit the stereotypes related to the industry. But what is a taboo? The source of taboos from an anthropological perspective is the ‘cultural experience’. They are regarded as ‘strong social norms’ in which “[e]very time an individual's behavior diverges from a norm, this act impacts on the other members of society, who then punish the deviant individual” (Fershtman, Gneezy, and Hoffman, 2008: 3). In this context, joining the fashion industry is a taboo which becomes ‘a deviant’ act if the young hijabi females put into action, including Aminah, i.e., join modelling.

Aminah seems to believe that the stereotypes that her family may refer to is what Wilson (2013: 166) describes as “oversexualized women” and in the Muslim women's context, this relates to their veiled identity being at risk of disappearing as they are exposed to “stereotyped ideals of female beauty” in the fashion industry. This stereotype that Aminah refers to is more complex than it explicitly seems. The family have a stereotyped image of women in the industry, which may be realistic as women in the fashion industry do not choose to be treated as “sexual beings” (Wilson, 2013). They are indirectly presented as such, making Aminah’s social surroundings think of joining fashion as ‘a taboo’.

Aminah deconstructed the stereotype of considering Muslim women in the fashion industry as having ‘bad characteristics’ (Perkins, 1979: 80) and attempts to understand the source of these assumptions:

I think for my mom as well, that was her fear, knowing that I’m gonna study fashion and I’m doing this, I’m modelling for example. Her biggest fear was modelling, like ‘you’re modelling you’re gonna change, you’re gonna take your scarf off, something is gonna happen’. It’s just the stereotype.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview)

The family fears are related to the stereotyped image of modelling in the fashion industry. Their social beliefs reflect their concerns about the female representations in the industry. Their fears are associated with images of their daughter’s divergence and deviance from being a Muslim woman. Aminah’s family are protective of their religiousness and social morals. Her parent represents the sample of women who are knowledgeable of the ‘ideological hegemony’, which

she fears that it may reinforce specific standards on women's bodies and exploits their cultural values and the elements associated with the religious identity.

Supporting this statement, Aminah shares a further example of her grandma's belief that joining the industry would affect the modesty of young Muslim women:

Even my grandma, my grandma is like show me your pictures, I wanna see you have any without the scarf? And I said no, I kept my scarf throughout all my pictures. So, her fears have to do with modelling, you're wearing, you're naked, you're not wearing clothes. You know what I mean? Because that's what it is back home and that's what it is the stereotypical thing.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

Both family instances, among many upcoming lines, share the fear of the industry interfering in young Muslim women's ideological representations. This is due to the "lack of social capital" and the "external prejudice" that the parents of these Muslim female creatives experienced as migrants in the UK (Lewis, 2015: 206) and their social backgrounds that built such perceptions of fashion and visibly Muslim women.

In this sense, Aminah's reference to deviant culture is in the context hijabi modelling. Hijabi women have modest dress codes which promote modest fashion practices. Thus, Blackman (2010: 202, 2014:3) associates 'a deviant culture' with the construction of 'counter anomie', "where symbols, rituals and meaning promote social cohesion". The fear of deviance and divergence of Muslim females in the fashion industry as stereotypes can be looked at from Fershtman, Gneezy, and Hoffman's (2008) perspective, in which they refer to the one who challenges the standards as 'a deviant individual'. That is to say that their set of behaviours and actions represent 'a deviant culture'.

The stereotyped image that Aminah's social surroundings had of women and the fashion industry did not prevent Aminah from achieving a career role as a model or pursuing her studies in fashion. Aminah challenged the 'bad' connotations that came with women and fashion and used them as a motive by bringing a community of creative women together to change those assumptions about women's image. Using her interests in fashion, Aminah decided to study textile and design at UAL. Based on the Instagrammic field diary and her conversational statements, together with her other friends, they created a community of young people supporting the marginalized hijabis and to resist against the stereotypes.

### 6.2.2. ‘Tick the diversity’: representing the hijabi community in the fashion industry

Based on the conversation with Aminah, her quest to join the industry was mainly to call for diversity in the name of hijabi women who were absent from the fashion industry. She shared a sample of concrete episodes of being in mainstream fashion events where she was the only hijabi in the scene. In 2018, Aminah was invited to London Fashion Week, which takes place annually. Corporate brands like *Gucci* and *Dolce & Gabbana* participate by hosting fashion shows. And that is when she noticed:

[...] I was the only Hijabi there. So, because I was the only hijabi there, I felt like I look different because there weren't many people that wore the scarf. So, when you come out and you're gonna go to the show, there's photographers taking pictures of you because they haven't seen a hijabi before. So, they think this is fashion.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

The Hijab would be considered less odd if the surrounding journalists had already seen a hijabi in these mainstream events. Moreover, seeing hijab in fashion houses' runways is an anomaly because of the underrepresentation of hijabi women in the mainstream industry. This is what Aminah is trying to express. In this case, she endeavoured to create a community of creative young people who would voice their existence through their work and fill the gap of diversity in the industry. Within this confine of diversity in the industry, Aminah was asked a question in a panel talk at Fashion Focus in UAL, London, where she studies:

“how do you feel knowing that you are a hijabi model because they needed to tick the diversity and all?”

Aminah answered that if there weren't any of them in the industry, nobody would be there to represent her community of hijabi women. Being in the mainstream is more than about an individual representation. She aims to support the diversity of her community, even if it is at the expense of working hard to alter the stereotypes imposed by her society. Also, one of Aminah's aims as a Muslim woman is to face the industry's standards for potential female models for photoshoots or modelling on runways.

The representation came with a cost. As Aminah retraces the series of what and who was missing in the industry and what brought the process of including modest fashion to the

mainstream, she described the misconception of the hijab and the redefinition of modest fashion through dress codes that Muslim women do not advocate. She compares her experience with the *Adidas* campaign, in which the absolute autonomy was offered to her to pick from any clothes she liked, and with other photoshoots that interfered with her choice of modesty:

Whereas I've been to shoots and they tried to change the way you dress. They're like no this looks nice and that looks nice. Hum, but I think we need to... we need to... educate a lot of people in the industry because they try to... they try to define modest fashion for you not knowing what it is. Do you know what I mean?

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

Whether it is a lack of knowledge about modest fashion for young Muslim women, or other reasons interfering in women's control of what to wear echoes a misrepresentation of who they want to be, and, in a way, it is 'a hegemony'. It is clear that mainstream brands want to appropriate their trends for the consumers through these shoots by hiring models, but women will have to endure control over their choice and autonomy. The challenge of representation expands on a vital piece of modesty Muslim women wear on their heads to cover their hair which is hijab. Hijab is an Islamic dress worn by women to conceal their sexuality. Because of the styles promoted through the industry in the name of modest fashion, Aminah said that it was losing its essence and 'becoming more of an accessory'. She added that it could be because of the confusion between the cultural covering and the Islamic hijab. Aminah explains:

But I think it could lead to misconceptions because of the manner or styles of the way different people are wearing it. And I'm not saying it could be wrong. Some people wear it like that culturally because in the middle east people wear it like that. I don't think people's intention were to be like ok I want to make this into an accessory. It comes down to culture as well. So, some people... it derives from culture. I have a friend, she's from Libya and she wears the turban all the time and that's because back home they wear turban, they don't wear a scarf.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

With the modest fashion influencers joining the mainstream and receiving more attention (as examined in chapter five), a battle between the offered amount of money and preserving identity took place. Aminah said it is hard to protect your identity as an influencer. She asserts:



And I think that's the battle a lot of influencers go through. They're thinking ok, is this worth the money or if it's more who I am as a person. So, a lot of people, they're very quick to change themselves for the industry. And it's very very hard for some people to stay true to themselves. So, from the beginning to the end, you see that a lot of people have changed. Change the style, change the way they style, take their hijab off. Hum... but I think it's very very difficult to stay true to yourself.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

This extract indicates that when women who cover through hijab join the industry, it may lead to a loss in the value of the initial motif associated with modesty and hijab inclusion, and it becomes more about material profits. Aminah suggested that it may even lead to Muslim women taking off their hijab which is an essential part of their identity. Thus, Aminah's statement affirms some elements of truth in the stereotyped image that the migrant parents drew on hijabi women joining the fashion industry, which was associated with the indirect influence of fashion on the hijabi identity.

In contrast to these influencers, Aminah is protective of her hijabi identity and produces creative content by incorporating urban features with vintage fashion styles, such as the revival of 98s fits. The fieldwork online explored the idea of 98s fits which started with spontaneous 'fit checks' when Aminah and her close friend coincidentally dressed in similar colours. They sometimes create content for Instagram through photoshoots reviving the 90s lookbooks from their mothers' closets. Aminah and her friend selectively choose a space for the shoots in the underground stations of London in which they wear red coloured faux leather jackets and black scarves projecting an urban image of a Muslim woman. Their creativity demonstrated evidence that the previous generations of Muslim women were fashionable, unlike the stereotypical images projected by the media (Lewis, 2013).

To preserve the identity of hijabis from the first generations of their migrant parents, Aminah and her friend restored a sense of agency to hijabi women in the fashion industry by combining the 98s style of Muslim women with the contemporary urban spaces. This was achieved through creative content and ideas producing contemporary images on hijabi women. In addition, Aminah emphasised on freelancing, "...I'm doing my freelancing" focusing on similar photoshoots through self-presentation online that highlights the significance of hijab to these women in every fashion style incorporated to their visible hijabi identity.

In the same context, McRobbie (2016: 41) argues that young British artists endure "[...] struggles and contemporary tensions that exists within and across the space of the new culture industries" in which, for example, "daughters of working-class mothers dream of becoming

fashion designers, or documentary film-makers, while simultaneously remembering and memorializing the experiences of their parents”. In this PhD, these women revisit their parents’ experiences through a creative manner of producing a hybrid fashion style of the past and the present to promote contemporary images of hijabi women making their way to the fashion industry.

### **6.2.3. A Challenging Journey of a ‘Black Muslimah’**

Memunatu met me in Costa coffee, next to Green Park, London. In her most colourful attire, she approached to salute me before entering the café. Memunatu carried a bag she designed which was made of circles of blue, pink, orange and green and below a dark skin young woman wearing glasses and a blue hijab (see figure 44, extract from journal). She stated that her bag was painted by reflecting an image of herself in the front. Memunatu likes to design her own clothes and is fond of colourful attire.

Like Aminah, Memunatu studies fashion at UAL. I met her at London Modest Fashion Week in 2018 when I started the first fieldwork. Her interests in fashion are about textile design through the revival of her West-African culture via patterns and colours. Sharing her journey through fashion, one of the outstanding thoughts Memunatu implied was how modest fashion is becoming more of ‘a double edge sword’. She expresses the two oppositions saying:

[...] it’s... it’s like a double edge sword. Like we’re getting what we need, more representation and everything. Things for girls who want to cover up, there’s something for them but at the same time, the reason big brands are picking it up, because there’s money in it, not because they care in the representation. That’s problematic but at least it’s out there.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)



**Figure 44.** (Extract from Journal) Memunatu celebrating her West-African identity in her self-made bag and trouser (Photo taken by A.B)

Memunatu's comment supports the statement that Aminah made about young hijabi' battle with money and identity while mainstream companies are making profits from modest fashion as a cultural idea arising from the masses (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947). In this context, McRobbie (2000: 257) examined fashion as culture industry in Britain and suggests that such jobs which are "close to media and arts and thus sharing in glamour and limelight" and are on a on "freelance basis".

Memunatu initiated the conversation by expressing her conception of modesty and how it is different from the 'Islamic' modesty, which she thought to be the adequate dress code and requirements for being modest. However, she sought ways to balance her modesty and her West-African identity. (Fluidity in her identity)

Given that she had lived in two different countries, Memunatu experimented with various apparel codes in various settings where societies' attitudes towards her modesty were

approached differently by distinct social groups. She was born in Holland, and that is where she spent her childhood; then she moved to Britain as she was growing up as a young Muslim female. As a child, Memunatu recalled her childhood memories in Holland and how she experienced racism within the community as a person of colour. Notwithstanding that, according to her, this feeling of marginalization only gave her tougher skin to face what she was about to face in the UK. She narrated a couple of stories about the Islamophobic situations referring to how her modest dress represents a symbol of Islamism and ‘belonging’ to the community. Yet, Muslim women doubt her Islamic identity because of her dark skin:

But I think because I am black, sometimes even if I am wearing abaya, people asking me are you Muslim? Even if I am in the mosque, they’re like are you Muslim? Recently I went to my friend’s house she’s from Bangladesh and her sister has two children. She was raised in the UK. So, she asked me where are you from? So, I said to her that I am from west Africa. She said wait so that means you’re black! (Laughs) I said yeah! I was like hum yes! And she was like you can’t be black and Muslim! And she was confused!

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

She adds:

It’s crazy! It’s so crazy and when I wear a hijab and abaya and I’m in the mosque and you are still asking me! (About being Muslim or not) At school, people used to say prove it, prove it! they used to make me read surat al-fatiha to prove that I’m being serious.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

Even amidst her seemingly challenging journey, Memunatu still found a way of laughing at these comments. Hence, it appears that the modesty of Muslim women is not convincing enough for their ideological belonging to their Muslim community, even though the hijab is the first symbol of being visibly Muslim. This type of marginalising of a person of colour seems to exist among many other aspects related to modesty fashion. When I asked Memunatu about the change that modest fashion is bringing for women and their representation, her response was:

[...] I can find that same abaya nearly everywhere, like literally every place does the same silhouette and I feel like it’s for the same customer. For example, for me, as someone who is west-African and Muslim, if I wanted something which combined the two. It will be very hard for me to find

something which is culturally representative as well as modest, if that makes sense.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview)

For Memunatu, there is still a lack of representation in modest fashion brands, which requires a further inclusion of cultural styles associated with the identities of African Muslim women. Here, Memunatu locates herself and her colourful fashion designs that reflect her West African identity combined with her visibility as a hijabi woman.

In trying to fully understand the bigger picture of what Memunatu had been through and her thoughts about modest fashion, I asked her if the proliferation of social media highlights the underrepresentation of women of colour and will there be a change in the modest fashion industry with regards to diversity. She then replied:

There were a lot of bloggers, Muslim bloggers, hijabi bloggers, getting invited too, but there was a lack of black Muslimahs and it's really bad because there's a lot of black Muslimahs. They get many less recognitions than other hijabis. Like big ones I know like Yusuf, she lives in Holland and than another one Basma K.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

I believe Memunatu's lines meant that if modest fashion wants to be a part of the mainstream, they need to be more inclusive. There is still a lack of representation of women of colour, even though in London Modest Fashion Show 2018, there were many dark skin models, as seen in the journal extract below (see figure 45). Still, the missing piece is the 'Black Muslimahs' who are influencers in the front rows. Memunatu seems to point at the bloggers because she is quite aware of their influence and voice to the audience and how they have a significant role in the representation.



**Figure 45.** (Extract from Journal) London Modest Fashion Week Catwalk, 2018.

As for the stereotypes created by the industry, Memunatu expressed how patriarchal is the industrial field. She explained through her experience that men are the leaders in the industry and that they make these assumptions about Muslim women being oppressed for their modesty. Stating that:

**Memunatu:** So, that was my choice! But I feel like in the same way that people tell us we're oppressed, because they think we are forced to cover, or they feel we're forced to cover. It's like you're trying to force us to take off our clothes, it's the same thing! You are not allowing us to make the choice for ourselves. If a woman is feeling more empowered by dressing what is defined as not modest or normal because I feel that's considered normal fashion and that's why. Because that's considered normal and modest fashion is a contrast to that. It's not considered fashionable! But I think that I feel in the same way if it's not a choice then we're oppressed either way. So, I think modest fashion is in concise.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

The statement of Memunatu represents a feminist stance and awareness of the industry's intentions. Her efforts are not only related to representing her cultural background but also call for women's autonomy and individual choices in the fashion industry.

### **6.3. 'Changing the Dynamics': making a change in the industry and families' perception**

Female participants shared the challenges of being in the fashion realm that are related to the stereotypes and the norms in and about the industry. Nevertheless, these female stakeholders rejected the underrepresentation and the stereotypes by critically locating the issues and creatively producing practices to face them. They shared how they resisted and worked hard to weave a space for their voices and reflect on their ideological presence in the industry. This section first shares Aminah's resilient story with the construction of a community of young people, and second Memunatu's constant safeguarding of her West-African identity along with her Islamic modesty.

#### **6.3.1. 'Redefining concepts': a community of young creatives**

Aminah shared a photo of her and other young people in September 2017 on Instagram standing in a green field with a chain of trees in the background. They were a group of fourteen, seven females and six males carrying a bouquet in their hands or as a crown. The photo shared is edited with two bold yellow lines from the top and bottom to orchestrate the yellowness of the image's details. What is interesting about it is the use of the phrase 'a tribe of creatives' in the description box and on the published photo. Through a white font, the phrase 'a tribe of creatives' was added as a collage on the photo six times on the front of the yellow strips. This is to say that Aminah thought out of the modest fashion box. She sought ways to face the social stereotypes about fashion and the industry's standards for models by creating a community of diverse young people. She repeatedly states the two concepts, creative and diverse, in our conversation and on her Instagram page. Also, the concept of community and young people are often attached to both expressions. Hence, the excerpt from the Insta-journal refers to how

Aminah's resisting acts were to construct communities of diverse young people who will change the statics in the industry and their societies.

In this context, Aminah stated:

But we're changing the dynamics and you're changing the viewpoint of it when you can actually be yourself and I think that's the most empowering thing about it is that you're not changing for anyone and you're able to be yourself. And the industry... you're the person who's making the industry so diverse.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

The comments she made about 'changing the dynamics' and 'changing the viewpoint' for what de facto represents them seemed to indicate a call for voicing the agency of young people, i.e., the hijabi women community. She also seemed to believe that the industry lacks diversity. An Instagram journal extract shows that Aminah refers to the circle of friends she made as a gang, tribe, and community. In the conversation, she mentions the concept of 'community' three times. A community share common beliefs, rituals, and codes; as Williams (2015: 40) notes, it involves "particular kinds of social relations"

Aminah narrated a list of achievements she had before and after joining UAL and how she felt about it. The first step she made was to target the industry stereotypes by helping herself and other young hijabi women construct a community of creative young females. The idea started with 'Redefining Concept' project on Instagram with her friend Sadia before starting university to pave her way through the fashion industry. Since she did not find any network among hijabi young women, she made her own community by bringing them together through a photoshoot with a concept. The aim of Redefining Concepts echoes what Aminah said about 'changing the dynamics' for 'yourself', and these are the actions she took:

Let's start a page and the page would focus on conceptions. So, getting a lot of young people involved, young photographers involved, models, people that want to connect with other young people because we realized there weren't many diverse students who work on our own universities. So, making this community will help us find people like our selves.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)



She then adds:

[...] so, we did that photoshoot and after that we decided to name it redefining concepts because we want to come with a concept, redefine it and make it our own through the visuals and stuff.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

Once they came up with the idea of 'Redefining Concepts', they opened up with a photoshoot with their fellow friend Mia in Riad and launched their first event in 2018. The interesting part about the event is how Aminah and Sadia had no income, but with the bit of pocket money they had, they started their own project and invited about 300 young people in Soho, Oxford Street. Bringing young individuals to their show included hosting performances and an exhibition of the photoshoot. Aminah explained how the *Redefining Concept* platform brought other young people with creative hijabis together for the first time because, according to her words, the young people in her team had never spoken to a hijabi before. She stated:

And then redefining concepts was a platform that bring the both together. And then we have a team. And some of the people in my team. They've never ever spoken to a hijabi before. So, this is the first time they've spoken to a hijabi and they've actually seen a hijabi creative and it changed their whole perspective of the young hijabis because in their heads, it's like 'oh yeah! A hijabi'. They're not... we don't know them, they don't look like creative, they just like to stay at home.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

Aminah already highlighted at the beginning of our conversation that she wanted to show that hijabi women can be creative and defy the stereotypes. She seemed to seek an understanding of their absence from the industry. Then, she concluded that they need to share the knowledge about hijab by visualizing their creativity which seems to come into place through a growing community of creative hijabis, and by constructing a path toward the industry. Aminah emphasised that this would only happen if they were doing their best to be who they are and not change for the industry. This was the main aim of her platform of 'Redefining Concepts'.

Aminah always wanted to represent herself, and she emphasized earlier how changing the dynamics means not changing for anyone, not even the industry. That is why she had an issue with joining an agency as a representative for her as a model. Because Aminah felt that they would control her choices and limit her independence, she had always been freelancing, but with the pandemic of Coronavirus, she had to accept the offers of two agencies: *Modest Visions* agency for hijabi women and *Bames* for models from diverse backgrounds. She preferred freelancing because of the freedom it offers her to represent herself for who she is:

So, I've always been against being with an agency, I think when you're with an agency, it changes the whole perspective because I just don't feel like myself, I feel like I'm just a model.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

Here, Aminah emphasizes how her role in the fashion industry is more than just modelling. Her resilience seems to show how it is more about representing her identity as a fashionable hijabi woman promoting modesty by herself. She creatively illuminates her difference from other women in the industry as a token of being and rejects any source that may interfere in changing who she truly was. Moreover, the lines referred to how she wants to take control of her career and have free will and choice in representing her agency.

*Modest Vision* is the first agency she joined because it gave her independence. So, the young women in this agency represent the agency, not vice versa. *Bames* modelling agency is against traditional beauty standards, and Aminah said they have so much respect for hijabi women and have a line of modest fashion for them. There is a community of modest models in the agency. I believe that Aminah made it clear since the beginning of our conversation that her main goal is to change the concepts; therefore, these agencies think in the same way that she did, which is by creating a platform for young people to be represented. This platform would bring a community of marginalized young people together who will make a change in the industry.

Aminah's choice of the two agencies was pragmatic. She supported the construction of a community for young people to make their way into the industry, and so did the agencies. The following extract describes the chain of tangible changes when a community comes together:

So, getting a lot of young people involved, young photographers involved, models, people that want to connect with other young people because we realized there weren't many diverse students who work on our own

universities. So, making this community will help us find people like our selves. And then, we, so we did that photoshoot and after that we decided to name it redefining concepts because we want to come with a concept, redefine it and make it our own through the visuals and stuff.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

Her construction of community is also prevalent on her Instagram profile. Extracts from Insta-journal indicate the numerous repetitions of the concept community or the equivalent words such as ‘tribe’, ‘gang’, or concepts mirroring membership to a community, like ‘together’ or ‘collab’. The following is an extract from my diary that describes what Aminah’s Instagram page expressed:

Browsing in Aminah’s page, I go back into her bio where I look for @RedefiningConcepts which is her first project. I enter the account and I noticed that the name changed to ‘Creative Community’ and below is a statement: “R (reversed)C is a creative youth platform championing inclusivity through fashion and culture”. Then, I slide back to her Instagram page and scroll down to older posts and I see that September 2017, she attached the sentence of ‘a tribe of creatives’ in the description box. In January 2018, Aminah published about a project named ‘CREATIVE COLLAB’ with two young male friends that she tagged. They helped her at editing the photo she shared on Instagram. In the description box, she says “Bringing together likeminded individuals and creating something big”.

(Excerpt from Insta-journal)

By using the term ‘creative’ so many times, Aminah tried to validate the change these young people are capable of because of the diversity that brought them together.

### **6.3.2. ‘Colourful and loud’: the resilience of a hijabi fashion creative**

In celebrating her West-African identity, Memunatu creates her modest fashion designs and adds a trait of who-she-is in her daily outfits. Memunatu narrated how her previous style did not represent her cultural identity; thence, she incorporated colours to feel attached to who she is. Yet, she believes that colours are not modest because, to her, they attract people's attention in public. In this regard, she stated:

The only aspect in which I feel like maybe my dressing is not modest is the fact that it's very colourful and loud and Islamically I don't feel like this falls into Islam and that's something I'm working on but I really like colour

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

Here, there is a negotiation of her Islamic identity and fashionable style of colourful modest look. A space for creativity is produced when creating a balance between what is Islamic and what is fashionable in relation to the visibility of Muslim women's bodies in public spaces.

Speaking of creativity, Memunatu makes her own wax-printed textile and sews her own modest apparel (see figure 46). Memunatu seemed to represent herself as independent from the big brands who care more about profits and not the representation of women in the industry. She represented resilience just as Aminah. They both support women's free choice to be who they are.



**Figure 46.** (Extract from Insta- journal) Memunatu's self-made jacket with a West-African pattern

Both Aminah and Memunatu are advancing empowering statements. Aminah, for example, shared how she is proud of herself as a hijabi and had never felt inferior. The reason for that is her activities outside the university, where she was a minority. She is empowered by her thoughts and actions to be who she is and overpasses the marginality of hijabis in the industry. She said in this context:

I didn't feel any type of weigh being there and being a hijabi because I was... I was doing so much outside of the university that it never ever affected me. I know some people that felt so uncomfortable that being in that space because there weren't many people like them. So, I think I understand why they feel a bit shy and stuff because they feel like... you know... the industry is so fast pace, there's... it's very demanding, there's so many people. But if there weren't any people like us in the industry there wouldn't be any of us.

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

The concept of community is also empowering. Aminah knew that working as a community would bring more results because of the shared rituals and resemblance of their experiences.

The tremendous change that modest fashion seems to have brought to young women is its diversity and fluidity; wherein Muslim female stakeholders create fashion styles that represent their cultural background and religiousness. It also emphasises the role of shifting the stereotypes explored in the first part of this chapter. Sharing feedback from her experience, Aminah indicates how modest fashion is empowering:

I think it is empowering because... I've just seen... In my head, I think if I was not a hijabi and I was doing what I was doing, I just be like any other person trying to get into the industry, what makes me different is the fact that I am a hijabi and I'm trying to do something different, but it isn't the norm to many hijabis. So, even when my mom talks about it. Hum... her friends and they say, "oh my daughter is in fashion". For them it's like "what is your daughter is doing in fashion?", other people are like "wow! I have never come across anyone that's on fashion, how did you let your daughter do something like that?".

(Aminah, model and content creator, Interview extract)

If the social norms take a different angle in viewing something that was used as a taboo, then the participants have reached their goal. They constructed different paths and ways to overcome the underrepresentation and the challenges of joining the industry. But their target was to be

represented while keeping their ideological being as Memunatu referred to her character as having a 'tougher skin' due to the racism she faced in her childhood. Modest fashion gave her a choice to create a fluid identity between having a colourful attire palette while staying modest on the Islamic scale. Dissimilar to the standard views about the liberation of women, Memunatu seemed to have a different perspective within the borders of modest fashion; she stated:

**Researcher:** would you expect that fashion to liberate women?

**Memunatu:** I think in the fashion industry there are women who are being discriminated against or treated wrongly or poorly, so fashion in general is something which is very... there's a lot of conflicts in it and a lot of things which are problematic. Hum... in terms of modest fashion, I feel like anything which a woman can do to make herself feel empowered. If it's her choice, it should and will empower her. So, if a woman has a choice to want to dress modestly and there's something out there for her which helps provide that, I think it's empowering.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

I asked Memunatu what first thoughts came to her mind when she defined modest fashion on a personal level are were, and she answered saying that:

Modest fashion is a fashion where women can feel empowered without necessarily having to expose their skin. Because I feel like mainstream definition of fashion or the mainstream aesthetic of fashion is ... or the idea of liberation is to be able to expose your skin, hum... which if that is empowering to some women, that's good for them but it doesn't apply for everyone. Especially women that are coming from background or social groups or environments where they are expected to be more modest or cover up. For example, not even just talking about Muslim women, Jewish women, they are expected to be modest and that's how they can socialise. And even if you are not coming from a religion.

(Memunatu, Content creator and model, Interview extract)

Memunatu's argument emphasizes the idea of liberation, and she attempted to decolonize the feminist thought, which did not seem inclusive to other women. She wanted to deliver a message that modesty can also be liberating. Abu- Lughod argument coincides Memunatu's statement. The feminist ethnographer argues that women choose to be who they are.

Memunatu, as a modest fashion content creator and a fashion student, makes sure to use her ideological beings to express herself differently on Instagram. In addition to her unique

colourful fashion palette and patterns, she adds collage and art using the program called Bazaar for editing (See figure 47). She said that despite social media's creativity, “it can be really shallow”. She made the size of her head bigger to refer to “the inflation of ego” which represent the colloquial East London phrase of “don’t gas me” that is communicated on Instagram when users receive validation through comments on social media on their own photos. The wallpaper and the frames are used to match her modest, fashionable attire. From the collage she made, her expression of a serious facial look says I don’t need anybody’s admission for my looks; she is attached to who she is, and that includes what she wears.



**Figure 47.** (Extract from Insta- journal) Memunatu’s sarcastic Instagram photo of seeking validation

#### **6.4. ‘Take it off!’: the female audience’s criticism of hijabi bloggers’ modesty**

In uncovering further social challenges of stakeholders, the online fieldwork examined the hijabi bloggers’ digital experiences beyond branding practices of modest fashion. This section explores the overt forms of commentary the hijabi modest fashion bloggers face when sharing their everyday fashion styles with the audience on their Instagram pages. The commentary in

this investigation is negative criticism and an attitude of women from the same community pointing at the modesty dress codes of the Muslim female bloggers. This internal act of criticism is in the context of attempting to control the Muslim females' public 'visibility' and their negotiation of personal space. When exploring the commentary, the Instagrammic data showed that the hijabi bloggers would stand against what seems to be 'unfair' treatment from women of the same community and reject all sorts of 'modesty shaming' and refuse to comply to the society's expectations of how a 'visibly' Muslim woman is supposed to 'look' like.

From the Instagrammic field notes, it was explored that modest fashion bloggers are yet confronting "vociferous criticism if their visuals transgress presumed community codes of dress and visual representation" (Lewis, 2015: 258). And I deliberately borrow the term 'commentary' to refer to the online ethnographic observations on modest fashion bloggers' experiences focusing on the backlash on their visibility from women of the same community. This is due to the long-going struggle with this 'vociferous' commentary that directly affects these women's bodily practices internally and externally (the surveillance of the community members and the fashion industry). Muslim women's quest for a fair representation is yet taking place, facing the political tendencies to criticise and police their choices and spaces of negotiating their bodies.

This thesis aims to emphasise that the perception of visibility differs from one Muslim woman to another according to the sartorial practices she chooses to embrace and her 'comfort' with her body. My argument is what Johnson (2017: 45) revealed in her research about 'comfort' in which she stated that "this is done whilst recognising how such visibility can be attached to processes of stigmatisation". Unlike the participant Sally in Johnson's (2017) study, who has embraced these dress codes for membership, the modest fashion bloggers in this thesis refuse to adhere to these community regulations publicly through Instagram and carry on embracing their modest individualistic styles and dress codes according to their own terms. In expressing a similar view, Johnson (2017: 45) stated that "the wider point here is that we find ways to get comfortable when negotiating the visibility of our bodies across different spaces".

'Shaming' women were often critically examined regarding women's visibility through female bodily practices. Muslim female stakeholders are challenged with the critics and commentary they are projected to when being in public spaces with adorned bodies. The study by Wolf (2002: 274) critically explored the beauty myth and argued that "the trouble with any debate about the beauty myth is the sophisticated reflex it uses: It punishes virtually any woman who tries to raise these issues by scrutinizing her appearance".



What I want to highlight here is not purely how modest codes are a myth as Wolf (2002) refers to beauty myth, but to address the constructive systems of ideas attempting to control and limit women's choices and free wills. Also, to examine how other women in the modest fashion community emotionally attack visibly Muslim bloggers resulting in public political discourse. Wolf (2002) encouraged women to face misogynistic acts in a public space, such as Muslim women facing others on Instagram. Such spaces of social media where modest fashion are key to their content allowed women to weave their personal political space to communicate their views on styles but, most notably, publicly advocate their identities as women and their religiosity as visibly Muslim according to their own terms.

The female stakeholders' journey within the industry continues online on Instagram with more challenges and commentary on their modesty, whether it is the attire or the hijab they wear. The viewers criticize the degree of modesty of the young women according to their religious and social beliefs. The community of hijabi women nicknamed them 'haram<sup>22</sup> police' because of how they judged them from day one of wearing the hijab. The statement was used by Baraa Bolat, on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, when she shared a video on her Instagram page impersonating a hijabi woman running away from 'haram police' who would judge her for her Islamic dress. She conveyed her thoughts through a sarcastic video expressing her words and saying:

“Girl starts wearing Hijab... Haram Police, telling you everything that you do is Haram. Society, telling you go to your country or take off your hijab.”

(Extract from Insta-journal, Baraa bolat)

The commentary is often filled with a backlash that makes these women urged to repost it on their stories and share it with their followers. With these people aiming at policing the dress codes of these young women's modesty, they are interfering in their choices and their control of bodily representations. However, these young stakeholders share efforts to resist the backlash and preserve their identity.

The comments below the photos or videos shared on Instagram allow viewers to react to the visuals. When it is about the fashion bloggers, the comment section is about compliments which Memunatu quoted as 'gasing' or sometimes users of Instagram comment through shaming the

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<sup>22</sup> Translation: Haram (Arabic word) meaning religiously prohibited

young women for how they are dressed. Salma Masrour, a modest fashion blogger, shared a photo of her daily looks in a street in London and received a comment saying:

“What kind of hijab is this? (Crying emoji)”

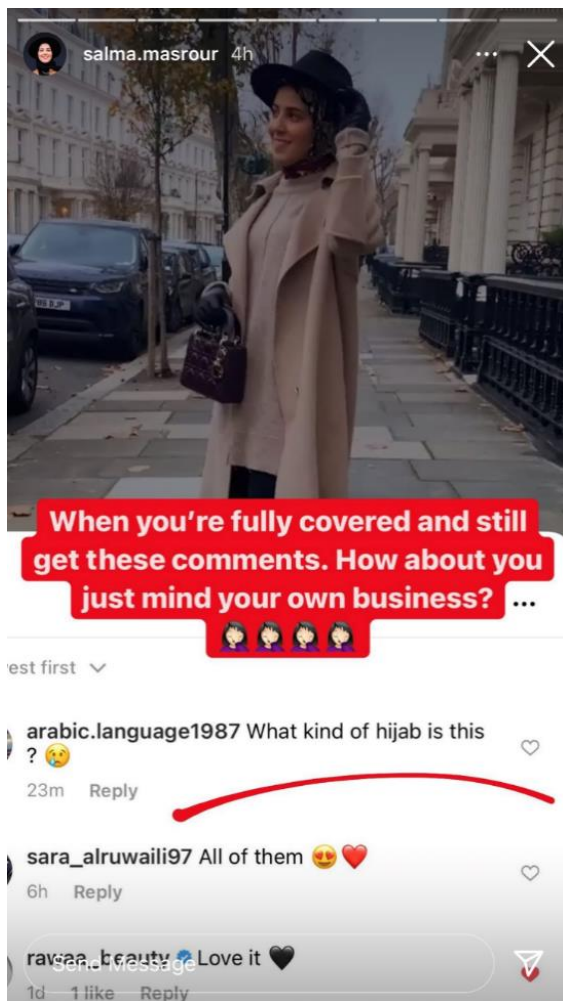
Salma shared the comment on her story (see figure 48) and stated:

“When you’re fully covered and still get these comments. How about you just mind your own business? (Emoji showing a person pouting)”

These women seem to face this daily challenge of what they appear to refer ‘haram police’<sup>23</sup> trying to control their bodily representation and interfere in their choices. However, as seen in Salma’s post as seen in the extract from the Insta-journal 1., she addressed the situation and shared it with the audience on her stories where anybody can see it as it is public. Her act seemed to show public resistance to a women’s criticism. She could have ignored it, but she made a choice to take this publicly through a political stand and stopped others from interfering in her modesty dress codes. And this is what Wolf (2002) encouraged women to do, which is “summon[ing] the courage to talk about the myth in public by keeping in mind that attacks on or flattery of our appearance in public are never at fault” and in this case, myth equals modesty codes by Instagram female commentators.

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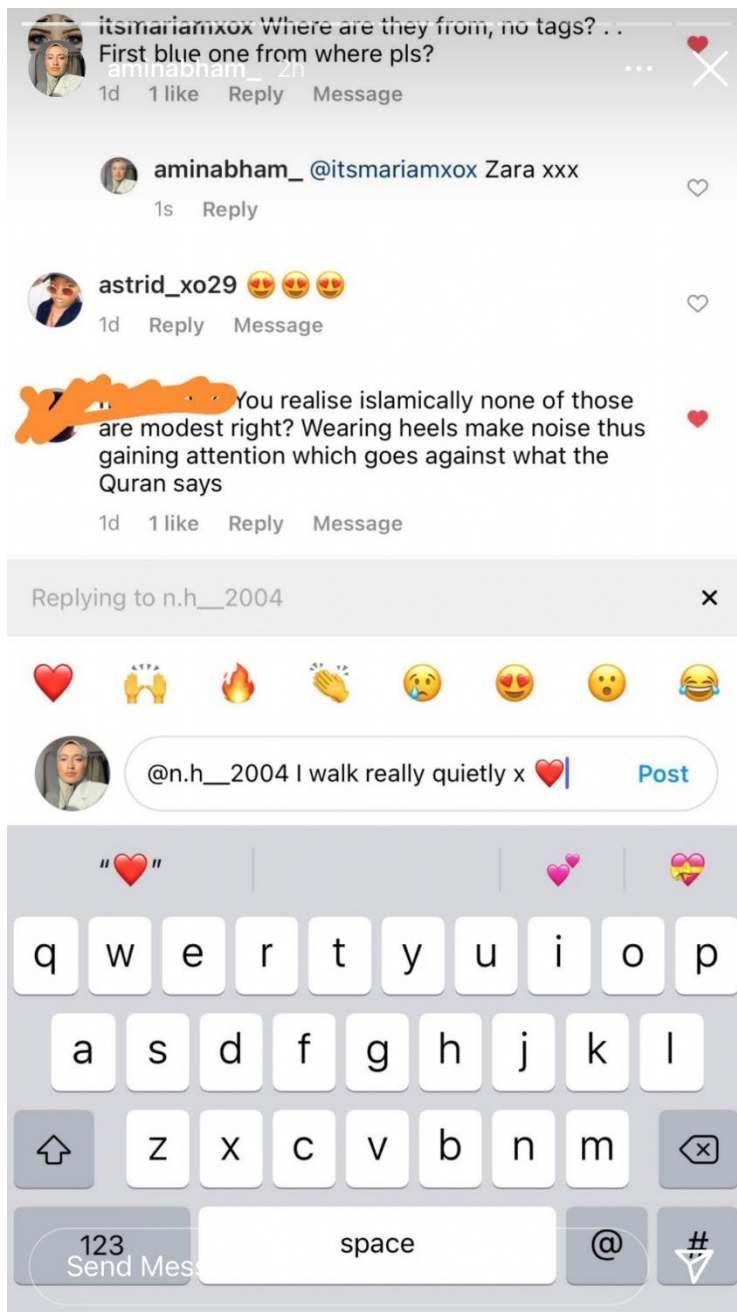
<sup>23</sup> Haram Police: A phrase used by the modest fashion bloggers when an Instagram user attempts to criticize their visibility or modesty.



**Figure 48.** (Extract from Insta-Journal) Salma’s struggle with ‘haram police’

Amina is another sample of a young woman promoting modesty as a digital content creator on Instagram who received a comment shaming her for lack of modesty. The commentary this time inserted a religious argument about how ‘Islamically’ it is wrong to make a noise while walking with heels. As seen in the extract of the Insta-journal (see figure 49), Amina wanted to reply in a sarcastic way, saying:

“I walk really quietly x (heart emoji)”



**Figure 49.** (Extract from Insta-journal) The commentary on Amina’s Instagram Post

Her sarcasm appeared to represent her pre-existing knowledge about Islamic teachings and indirectly turned off any interference in her modesty. She seemed to joke about how this individual had the bravery to tell a woman to be submissive.

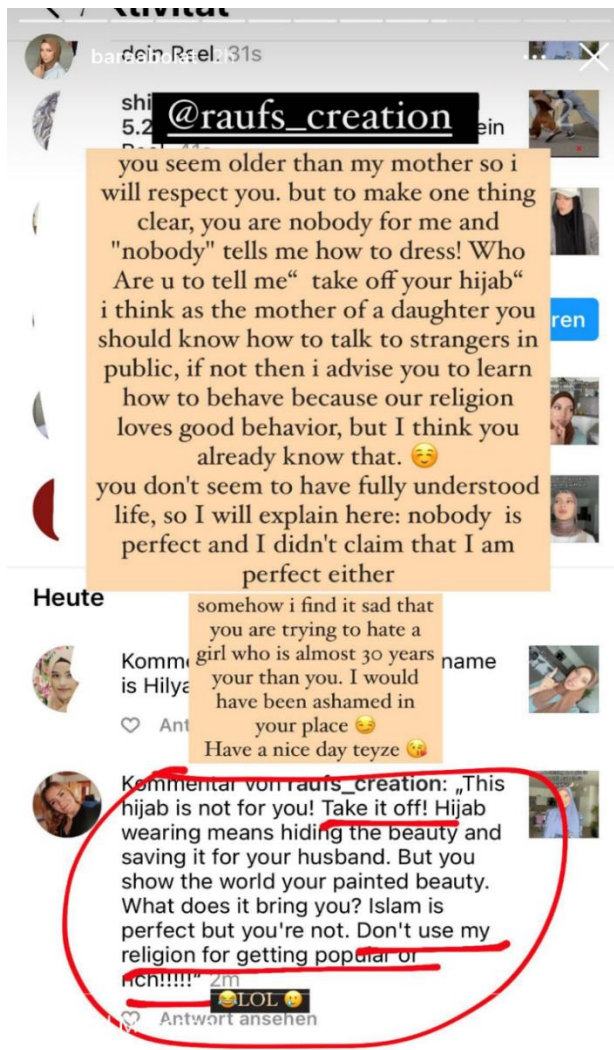
In a similar experience, Baraa, the blogger who proclaimed the expression of ‘haram police’, is also a modest fashion blogger with a twist of humour content with a concept through photos and videos on Instagram. She received a notification from a Muslim woman who criticized her covering by commenting:

“This hijab is not for you! Take it off! Hijab wearing means hiding the beauty and saving it for your husband. But you show the world your painted beauty. What does it bring you? Islam is perfect but you’re not. Don’t use my religion for getting popular [...]”

As seen in the comment that is displayed on the following extract (see figure 50), this individual seemed to share a ‘hate comment’ because she clearly stated, ‘take it off!’ referring to Baraa’s hijab which is a part of her ideological values as shown in her Instagram story when she replied:

[...] “nobody” tells me how to dress! Who are u to tell me “take off your hijab”

Being shamed for the individual modesty on the comment section seems to represent an online backlash that aims to unconsciously or consciously undervalue these women's bodily control. Notwithstanding the fact that the commentators are from the same community as these women, they use Islamic teachings as an argument.



**Figure 50.** (Extract from Insta-Journal) Shaming Commentary on Baraa’s Video on Instagram

The ethnographic data demonstrated that women have always struggled with society trying to shame them for their bodies and attempt to politicise their dress codes, objectifying them and controlling their choices and independence. Sadatmoosavi et al. (2016: 230) argued that “modesty does not belong to any specific culture, but today it has become the subject of intense scrutiny in Islamic context”. Thus, in the above experiences of women dressing modestly, there seems to be a sort of resistance and rejection of any interference in their ideological representation. They opened discussions on feminist views and seemingly redefined agency and liberation on their own terms. A Muslim women’s agency is different from other women and is associated with covering the body as a feminist stance. Instagram, as a platform, offered Muslim women to defend their identity while standing as one community of modest fashion. Hodkinson

(2017: 69) argued that “such norm-maintenance also acted as a means through which groups ‘vigorously and successfully defend their electronic boundaries’”

### **6.5. ‘there’s money in it’: the commodification of hijab**

With the hijab being more represented within the industry as seen on the shop windows and through the hijabi models and bloggers hired for advertising or shooting campaigns, ‘non-Muslims’ may lack knowledge about hijab. And suppose this group of people is a part of a big brand with a significant influence. In that case, they may fall into the misconception of hijab, which will make the community of hijabi women frustrated as it is an essential item of their ideological representation.

Memunatu believed that hijab definition is always misinterpreted:

[...] they misinterpret headscarf for hijab. That’s like the literal only definition for hijab. I don’t think that’s what hijab is. I cover all of my skin, so it does not expose, except for my face and my hands following Islam.

(Memunatu, student and content creator, interview extract)

For her, hijab means covering the entire body apart from the hands and face. Memunatu also pointed out in another statement that this is her personal belief, which is in the Islamic transcription.

On another occasion, Memunatu expressed her views on modest fashion influencers for misleading young women who followed them after they took off their hijab and how one of them insulted the hijabi community by calling them ‘a cult’. What she stated is not for judging the blogger, but she said, that it is not about the personal choice but more about what she used to share with them as ‘fatwa’:

The only place where I feel like I care is because I know she has a lot of young followers and even if they’re not young, people who look up to her. I think partially, you can’t blame the people because she’s just a human being. You can’t expect her to be perfect or take her as an example for everything. Just because she takes off her hijab, it doesn’t mean you should take it off now.

But at the same time, she does have influence over people, she knew this from the beginning, that's how she got most of her fans and that's how she got recognized outside of the sphere of where just women following her. Hum and my big issue with her is you know when she says things like she gives 'fatwa'<sup>24</sup>. Yeah, when she often speaks down to the community as well which I don't like. You know she said once hum in her story when she took off her hijab 'the hijabi community is becoming a cult'. That's what she said a cult.

(Memunatu, student and content creator, interview extract)

What Memunatu stated in both views shows the misconception of hijab and what appears as one of the reasons resulting in this misinterpretation which is modest fashion influencers offering what seems like the negative image of a woman wearing a hijab. Memunatu seemed to rarely disapprove of what other Muslim women do; she often precedes her sentences with terms such as 'personal' and 'subjective', but she disagrees with the influence taking the wrong turn, especially young females are involved. She emphasizes 'fatwa', which is about the teachings and religious beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes.

In addition to Memunatu's thought of the misleading conception of hijab, Aminah also expressed her thoughts on why hijab is often misinterpreted. For Aminah, hijab is central to her identity, and it showed more through her efforts to grow a hijabi community in the mainstream. From her experience, she shared a story from London Fashion Week of 2018 in which a photographer took many photos of her as he was very interested in what he saw as new, she narrated the incident:

[...] there's photographers taking pictures of you because they haven't seen a hijabi before. So, they think this is fashion.

(Aminah, student and model, interview extract)

Aminah believed that the lack of hijabi women's contribution to mainstream fashion resulted in the lack of knowledge about hijab which led to people thinking of it as a fashion item rather than a religious symbol of Muslim women's visibility.

On a different page, she highlighted that:

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<sup>24</sup> 'Fatwa' (Arabic word) translated: Islamic teachings



I was probably the only one in the whole campus that was a hijabi!

(Aminah, student and model, interview extract)

Aminah appears to be calling for hijabi women to be more active in society by joining institutions and industries to appropriate their identity into the mainstream.

In more detail, Aminah referred to how people should differentiate between the cultural and the religious headcovering:

**Aminah:** hum... I think it's becoming more of an accessory because of the amount of different styles of ways people are wearing it. People are... obviously hijab means cover pretty much everything, like your neck and stuff and... because so many people are wearing it in different ways. It's becoming... people are looking at it and be like "oh this is just an accessory in your head". Do you know what I mean? As long as it covers your hair, it's fine. But that's not hijab is, what hijab is to cover up your neck, to cover up your hair, to cover up everything. But I think it could lead to misconceptions because of the manner or styles of the way different people are wearing it. And I'm not saying it could be wrong. Some people wear it like that culturally because in the middle east people wear it like that. I don't think people's intention were to be like ok I want to make this into an accessory. It comes down to culture as well. So, some people... it derives from culture. I have a friend, she's from Libya and she wears the turban all the time and that's because back home they wear turban, they don't wear a scarf.

**Researcher:** So, it's cultural?

**Aminah:** it's yeah, it can be a cultural thing as well but for someone who doesn't know much about Islam and stuff. It could be a bit confusing for them. Because they're like "oh you have to cover your hair, but...your wearing hijab and it's like this". Some people ask me why don't you wear a turban? Some people that aren't Muslim ask "why aren't you wearing a turban, your friends are wearing it, why don't you wear it.

(Aminah, student and model, interview extract)

Participants' seemingly populist views aimed at finding the causes of the misconceptions because hijab seems to make their Muslim identity visible, and they appear to want it to be visible. Nonetheless, they seek to protect this visibility that came with a misconception when it is labelled to 'hijab'. Hijab seems also as a membership into the hijabi community. And if it does, then they will try to protect their community as hijab appear to clear implicate their Muslimness.

On a hectic experience of what Halima Aden referred to as ‘abuse’ of the hijab by the industry, the supermodel Halima Aden shared in December 2020 that she is quitting modelling because her experience in runways was misrepresenting her Muslim identity by attempts of hiding her hijab in photoshoots by different items and she gave the example of ‘jeans’ placed on her head. She felt that her hijab is blurred between the photoshoots and the styling of her veil received less care from the directors of the runways. She stated that they only provide professional stylists for models’ hair but not for hijab styling. Halima insists on how her modest dress codes consist of dresses and skirts, and she never had to wear jeans before joining the modelling in the mainstream.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has covered the experiences of female stakeholders who are aiming to be a part of the fashion industry, but because of ideological, cultural, and social challenges, it was ‘ladder’ process to reach their goal. In this chapter, I have discussed what is happening beyond the appropriation of modest fashion into the mainstream industry. While the niche market of modesty progressively made it into the mainstream industry, young Muslim female stakeholders had a journey filled with experiences and feelings of marginalization and stereotypes. Their stories shared a vivid example of the challenge that Muslim women with a growing business or modelling career face today in attempts of controlling their body covering choices as a condition to join the industry, family social norms, and what seemed to be the social belief of hijabis being ‘non-creatives. Nevertheless, these young women resisted and showed resilience through their actions by joining the industry through various roles of modelling and content creation while making sure to construct powerful communities voicing their experiences and upholding who they wanted to be as women in the industry.

This chapter has also reported that with hijab presence in the industry, opinions varied with stakeholders supporting this inclusion that recognises the significance of hijab. In contrast, others fear the mediation of incorrect knowledge on veiling. Still, corporates are rapidly commodifying hijab on the front of the commercial pages, especially during religious events. These findings revealed that hijab inclusion delivers positive images of visible Muslim women, but with increased commodification, it may lose one of its core values within societies, and that is religiousness.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusions**

### **implications, reflections, further research, and final thoughts**

#### **7.1. Introduction**

This research began with the idea of producing an in-depth ethnographic account of the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders promoting modest fashion. When visiting the field, it was found that it was only possible by conducting a qualitative examination of the eventful spaces and digital content promoting modest fashion practices because promotional practices were spreading rapidly and in multiple locations. This PhD adopted the Chicago School approach by adopting the ‘ethnographic mosaic’ (Blackman, 2010) to generate a holistic understanding of the multi-sited data that allowed the emergence of themes placed under the three umbrella terms: dress, body, and space.

This chapter draws together the key findings emerging from the analysis of the empirical data and the key contributions to the methodological approaches. During the analytical process, this thesis has adopted existing literature and theories to produce a qualitative investigation within the disciplines of sociology, cultural studies, fashion studies, modest fashion studies, and feminist debates. This study unpacked the complexities layered within the multiple spaces of modest fashion to extract the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders and expand the existing studies on modest fashion.

This final chapter of conclusions is divided into three sections: Part one is about the key contributions of the research findings. Part two highlights the main implications of methodological contributions and reflections on the ethnographic approach applied to conduct this PhD. Finally, I discuss the limitations, recommend future research, and share a final personal note for my resonance on my modest fashion journey.

## **7.2. Research Findings: key contributions**

The findings of this PhD contribute to the existing and ongoing research and debates within the modest fashion studies, culture and media studies, sociology, and feminist ethnographies. Throughout this thesis, the gaps in literature were identified, and new knowledge was generated from the findings of this ethnographic study contributing to the previously mentioned fields.

### **7.2.1. The Centrality of Space to Modest Fashion Global Proliferation**

Space emerged as central to the thesis through the ongoing process of collecting and analysing empirical data. This PhD revealed that space was essential to the construction of modest fashion eventful spaces, weaved spaces for agency, and digitally mediated promotional practices. Examining the multiple layers of space in the multiple locations of fashion events and Instagram, this research generated theoretical understandings by critically approaching spatial productions associated with the Muslim female stakeholders' roles. The findings are reminiscent to Lefebvre (1991: 73) arguments on how space allows "fresh actions to occur" in which this research uncovered to track the growth of a consumer culture and spatial concepts with a new perspective.

From chapter three, the thickly descriptive accounts of the spatial characteristics and venues' locations and interior designs revealed that the modest fashion brands selectively choose strategic landmarks and technical crews for interior designs to create physical experiences and a sense of place for the visitors (Lash and Lury, 2007; Qazimi, 2014). With a scrutinized interpretation of the usefulness of spatial decorations and designs, this study unpacked that these were material objects produced creatively to expand the consumer culture of modest fashion. In the same vein, materiality was vital in producing a social space for the visitors of modest fashion weeks and the Muslim shopping festivals (Lefebvre, 1991), where tickets and 'pocket goodies' represented "sense of exclusivity in their design and materiality" and a "passport to the elite event" (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 741). Thus, modest fashion weeks, festivals, and charity dinners as promotional spaces were crucial to the mediation of global consumer culture to modest fashion retail.

Furthermore, a thorough examination of charity events' spaces revealed a new perspective on 'female-only spaces' that were associated in feminist research with domesticity and negative connotations of femaleness (Craik, 1993). It was found that 'female-only space' illuminates the emergence of a different 'sense of place' compared to the modest fashion weeks and festival events. In this PhD, the female-only space was weaved by female stakeholders in the charity dinner events located in the UK to share empowering images and agentive roles with the female attendees. That was by bringing successful Muslim businesswomen together to share their journeys with other women and prompt them towards starting their 'independent' careers and brands. Another aim was to emphasize the feminine techniques and leisure as feminine tools for the rise of economic field of local fashion brands in the UK that is women-owned business. Drawing from a key finding, the female stakeholders produced a distinct connotation by the term 'lady' through irony. They referred to the show title as 'ladies-only' which in feminist research stands for traditional images of women (Boyd, 2012), and objectification of women through rigid 'social etiquette' (Craik, 1993). However, women opposed these feminine attributes by performing dynamic behaviours on stage (Butler, 1997), such as auctions that were managed by female hosts who successfully presented the auctioned items and advertised for the women-owned business resulting in an active vivid interaction between the audience and stakeholders.

At this stage, the ethnographic findings moved to focus on the main spatial areas where fashion designs were portrayed, focusing on exhibitions in chapter three and catwalks in chapter four. This thesis has argued that exhibitions resembled the shopping experiences of 'arcades' in Benjamin's (1999) sociological study that focuses on the description of mirrors. In this eventful space, however, the study interpreted screens as the contemporary form of mirrors Benjamin's (1999) representing the urbanism of modest fashion spaces and acting as advertising billboards where images of modest fashion products are displayed. By producing such urban landscapes, visitors feel a sense of 'belonging' (Williams, [1976] 2015) which leads to more spatial tools contributing to the growth of the consumer culture in modest fashion.

Moving to catwalk shows, these promotional spaces had a major role in illuminating the innovativeness of modest fashion and the increase of sales mechanisms. The findings uncovered new spatial tools adopted in fashion runways to promote modest fashion designs, which included the visual simulation creating sceneries, live streaming as a 'crisis response strategy' during the Coronavirus pandemic, and 'soft focus' by hiring pro-bloggers and supermodels in close contact with the spectacle. Such creative tools established visual art experiences that

influenced the ‘sensorial receptivity’ of the spectacle (Calefato, 2001), and this was how catwalks expanded the sales mechanism of modest fashion. Catwalks were crucial for providing the fashion designers with a space to project radical scenes and express their brands’ identities through themes (Khan, 2000). Further exploration of catwalks as a central space for the proliferation of modest fashion in the contemporary context, this PhD showed that the radical scenes were involved in the environmental activism and feminist simulation to share with the spectacle that the female stakeholders have awareness and extended their fashion capital to political fields of their potential consumers.

In terms of chapter five, the examination of the multiple spaces of modest fashion revealed that Instagram is considered one of the main digital promotional spaces. By exploring Instagram, the ethnographic data unpacked the spatial features and structures representing the rapid marketisation of this online platform. This was when the analysis emphasised the visual tools of Reels and marketized icons on posted images showing how they contribute to the proliferation of modest fashion globally. These spatial structures also allowed the modest fashion community to grow their ‘online boutiques’ and hijabi models to upgrade their career to the corporate realm. The scrutinised analysis of Instagram as a space revealed the shift in the roles and experiences of Muslim female stakeholders in the fashion industry in which their careers are now more associated with the corporates.

### **7.2.2. Moving Beyond Representations: global culture industry and modest fashion**

This PhD explored promotional practices of modest fashion in multiple social spaces where branding and commodification are key to increasing the sale of modest fashion merchandise. Modest fashion, as a field of cultural and economic mediation, is increasingly growing via several spatial forms, catwalks and exhibitions in fashion weeks, female-only charity events, magazines, and Instagram. Such spatial promotions led to the global marketisation of modest fashion that reached a presence in fashion houses’ runways and corporate inclusion of modest attire to their brand identity. Thus, the representation of modest wear became globally embraced by high-end fashion retail. Through an ‘ethnographic mosaic’, this research’s fieldwork in multiple sites and spaces contributed to the emergence of traces of the global culture industry where corporates are progressively commodifying modest fashion dress culture and appropriating it as part of their brand identity.

In chapter three, the ethnographic accounts of the eventful spaces and cultural events of modest fashion weeks, the Muslim shopping festival, and charity dinner events revealed that modest fashion as a culture industry has become global. From the intensive fieldwork, it was found that modest fashion has changed since the idea of fashion weeks was introduced by the founders Franka Soeria and Ozlem Sahin whose aim to expand ‘a traveling event’ creating communication with stakeholders with their self-funded projects was successful. This PhD asserts the arguments of Lash and Lury (2007: 39-64) on the globalisation of culture. It is more about creating the difference through cultural objects like producing a ‘brandscape’ through the ‘cultural events’ for the audience in which a large part of culture is gradually becoming less representational. In this study, it was revealed that each fashion event brings a difference in its branding strategy. For instance, the ‘soft focus’ technique in which pro-bloggers sit in the front rows of catwalks used as part of the ‘eventscape’ to create a physical experience for the spectacle. It was more about designing the space with famous faces from the creative industry to create a ‘culture-industry space’ (Lash and Lury, 2007: 195).

While the ethnographic findings are reminiscent to Lash and Lury’s (2007) with regards to ‘cultural objects’, the difference appertains to the type of industry and the identification of stakeholders that are both associated with the field of branding fashion items. The growth of modest fashion into global cultural events expanded the promotional spaces for Muslim female stakeholders to grow their business, but with its association with multiple industries, its core ‘use-value’ is at risk and this shift may lead to concealing the initial aims of modest wear for women of faith in between the numerous branding spaces and events. It becomes more about the cultural objects and profits than representation of a culture that was once a DIY practice rising from the masses of women of faith who were facing the social and political challenges and still.

Throughout this PhD, it was explored that the inclusion of modest fashion in the international market created job offers for Muslim women who visibly identify as hijabis, such as modelling in mainstream fashion shows and western festival events. Critically reviewing this representation and reflecting on the female participants’ experiences within the fashion industry displayed an embedded fact amidst this act of inclusion which Rosenberg (2019) referred to as ‘diversity as a commodity’. By interpreting empirical data on corporates’ continuous creation of modest designs, it was found that this high appropriation signified the brands’ awareness that diversity could be a currency. Hence, they made efforts to associate modest fashion with their

brand identity. With such marketing awareness, the corporates began designing, producing, and then selling modest attires in which Muslim women were their main target. Brands like Nike created headcovering accessories and full modest dresses, such as hijabs and burqinis. However, when referring to these sartorial items on their websites and billboards, they replaced the original terminology of the dress with a distinctive concept or statement attaching them to the corporates' brand identity. This procedure is critically investigated by Lash and Lury (2007) and identified as part of 'global culture industry'.

Moreover, global culture industry emerged from the empirical chapters as a theoretical concept referring to the corporates' "personification" (Lash and Lury, 2007). The findings demonstrated that through the last five years, modest fashion stakeholders had been challenged by corporates' creation and marketisation of modest fashion products often associated with Islamic dress (such as burqinis and hijabs). The corporates imitate the modest fashion brands by re-creating their modest attire and accessories and adopting similar promotional slogans and statements, such as concepts of women empowerment, inclusion, and comfort. In chapter five, the findings argued that not only *Nike* is associating its brand logo (signifier) with athlete women, but also attempting to grow its brand identity within the hijabi dress, within the modest fashion niche, by collaborating with hijabi women. They create this association between *Nike* and modesty as a (signified) to their trademark (Lash and Lury, 2007: 197), increasing 'the social imaginary' of potential Muslim female consumers. By doing so, they are reaching out to a diverse modest dress community by using diverse faces from the Muslim female stakeholders as a currency to increase their sales.

The empirical data have shown that Muslim female stakeholders struggle to protect their brand value, distinctiveness, and identity in this digitised era, because of how corporates 'hunt' the 'uniqueness' of a fashion culture rising from the masses and conceals the 'representativeness' of a modest fashion brand by creating a dress of similar function and 'informational' background and associate it to their brand identity (Lash and Lury, 2007). The emergence of the global culture industry was also evident in chapter six. The fashion students, Aminah and Memunatu, who were already taking roles in the fashion industry, shared their worries that whilst there is an interest in representing modest fashion wearers, their aim grows higher for making profits. The female participants as models are battling between preserving their identities and taking a modelling opportunity in corporates' campaigns. It is becoming more of what Memunatu expressed as 'a double edge sword' in which the capitalist interest is coated in the so-called representation.



While this thesis agrees that representation is vital to Muslim women's global image and the expansion of career opportunities, as researchers, we should constantly scrutinise the embedded issues and challenges within the layers of cultural experiences and social spaces. Through the 'ethnographic mosaic' and my reflexive thinking, I observed that there was more beyond modest fashion proliferation. However, this PhD did not neglect other vital themes emerging from the event culture and the modest fashion sites where Muslim females weaved their space for agency and creativity. Thus, this study also contributed to the existing research on modest fashion global mediation (Lewis, 2013; Lodi, 2020; Tarlo, 2013; Moors, 2013) and generated knowledge on how modest fashion is yet growing globally through new innovative mechanisms and strategies from 2018 to 2022.

### **7.2.3. Revisiting Agency of Muslim Female Stakeholders**

This thesis adopted a feminist lens to investigate the weaved spaces where Muslim female stakeholders express a sense of autonomy, signs of resistance, and expanded careers in the multiple promotional spaces of modest fashion. Such examination yielded themes emerging from the findings to show the different levels of agency displayed by fashion designers, models, bloggers, and fashion students on diverse occasions. These stakeholders, as Muslim females, were often labelled as lacking agency for their choice of covering the body, which is considered 'oppressing' (Bullock, 2007; Wilson, 2013). This PhD, however, prioritises and revisits the Muslim females' agency through the emerging themes associated with the active roles of weaving spaces and practices within the fashion industry and the creative realm.

In reviewing literature in contexts like the ethnography of Egyptian women's display of agency through piety movements, Mahmood (2002) challenged the liberal views by revealing how religiousness can carry a sort of activism. Such studies as I have shown focus on cultural politics and are mainly based on the religiousness and bodily forms (veiling parts of the body) in issues of liberalism, while in the contemporary debates, they are located in multiple disciplines of fashion, politics, and space...etc. This is because Muslim females negotiate their body presentation across different places (Johnson, 2017). Therefore, the implication of agentive roles that can be derived from my study is through diverse acts in different spaces in events and on Instagram, which call for revisiting the Muslim stakeholders' agency. Eventually, the findings revealed that the female participants exhibited agentive roles through emerging themes such as stakeholder roles, alternative positioning of female-only space and domesticity,

radical catwalks, bodily capital, and expanding careers in fashion houses to emphasise their visibility and challenge the stereotypical images of Muslim women.

The first relevant point is associated with the theoretical meaning of the concept ‘stakeholder’. According to the ethnographic data, stakeholders exhibit the positions that the Muslim women undertake in the modest fashion spaces, which affirms the definition of Mitchell and Lee (2019: 53) on the roles of stakeholders in the economy whereby value is created and distributed. This PhD argues that the Muslim female stakeholders are key to the globalisation of modest fashion through the multitude of roles they constructed in the mainstream and the expansion of their careers towards the corporate market. Two of the main stakeholders contributing to this global shift are the founders, Franka Soeria and Ozlem Sahin, who organise modest fashion weeks in five capitals (London, Paris, Amsterdam, Dubai, and Jakarta). These female entrepreneurs identified a gap and constructed an eventful space for women to advertise their fashion designs and interact with a global audience through creativity via a self-funded projects. This research revealed that these stakeholders have the fashion capital and knowledge of Islamic fashion and hijab fashion that they joined together along with the efforts of designers, models, and bloggers to weave a space for diverse women promoting ‘modest fashion’, which represents a set of agentive acts in a fashion space and through fashion items.

The other influential stakeholders are the fashion students in the UK who promote modest fashion on their Instagram feeds through modelling for mainstream brands, DIY photoshoots, and DIY practices. This thesis examined the experiences and challenges of two hijabi students at UAL and revealed that these females affronted the associated taboos and stereotypes by joining the fashion industry. Chapter five revealed that the fashion students as stakeholders challenged the ‘bad characteristics’ (Perkins, 1979) associated with the fashion industry by their families and societies by creating communities of young creatives to expand knowledge on hijabi women and their innovativeness. The ability of Muslim female stakeholders to make their own decisions and face the social issues instead of hiding from them represented a level of agency.

Furthermore, chapter four showed that the models presenting the fashion designs of the radical catwalks had access to bodily capital and shared levels of agency. Their bodily capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986) – assets that define power and status— was managed through their experiences, choreographic performance, and ‘emotional labour’ (Mears and Finlay, 2005). The themes would only be transmitted to the spectacle on the radical catwalks if models had the bodily capital. In *El-Sheikha*’s scene, the revival of tribal adornments associated with

the designed abaya's Arabism as a theme was received by the audience through the pace of models, their body movements, and management of the catwalk stage; also, in how they attracted the audience's gaze. The models' talent in transmitting visual art marked their agentive roles.

In chapter five, domesticity as a key finding emerged from exploring the Instagrammic promotional practices of modest fashion pro-bloggers who work from home in a domestic setting. In this PhD, domesticity was experienced as different in contrast to what previous studies generated. As shown in the literature review, domesticity was examined by feminists as a "central site of women's oppression" (Barret, 2014). In contrast, in chapter five, it emerged as shifting the image of the traditional feminine roles. With digital access and the rapid shift of Instagram into a marketing platform, working from home extended to the public space and became a full-time professional career with high wages. With the material independence, control over their own income, and creativity in visual content production (Rocamora, 2011), there is "a redivision of the labour responsibilities" (Barret, 2014) whereby the modest fashion bloggers maintain their roles. The empowering characteristic of domesticity in this research is how the female bloggers occupy a domestic space that has an association with 'oppression' and turn it into a powerful workspace developing a consumer culture of modest fashion and collaborating with high-end brands. These active acts of building a career through domesticity displayed levels of agency.

#### **7.2.4. Hijab Presence in the Fashion Industry**

In the existing studies, hijab as a veil was explored in various debates via multiple lenses, including anthropological studies, political and cultural studies, historical background (El-Guindi, 1999; Fanon, 1965; Bullock, 2007), dress culture, and fashion studies (Lewis, 2015; Wilson, 2013) to uncover the various conceptions associated with their functions according to the body representation. In this PhD, hijab or forms of veiling were explored in a contemporary context of dress, space, body, and agency in which Muslim female stakeholders had numerous motives for covering most parts of their body to illuminate their visibility in public spaces. For instance, with the globalisation of modest fashion through Instagram, hijabi models who were once absent from the mainstream fashion shows' spaces are now consistently approached by fashion houses for photoshoots or inviting them for fashion weeks. This research revealed that

this is a progressive act by the corporates who seek to tick the diversity column of their brand identity, but it also expands the recognition of Muslim women as part of the global retail and broadens their careers reach.

This PhD revealed that Muslim females in the fashion industry believe that modest fashion bloggers have a crucial role in influencing the image of hijab. This was revealed through the conversational interviews with the fashion students and the semiotic analysis of Instagram visuals of hijabi bloggers promoting modest fashion. With hijabi creatives joining the industry, such as fashion students of UAL, the findings suggested a proliferation of ‘correct’ knowledge on the various contexts in which hijab is used, such as religiousness, fashion, and culture. The research participants emphasised the importance of hiring hijabi women to shift the misconceptions linking the females who cover to being ‘oppressed’ or ‘invisible’. However, the presence of hijabi women in the industry was challenging for some, especially for the supermodel ‘Halima’. This PhD reported that Halima, a well-known Muslim female stakeholder, experienced marginality in the modelling industry where other models were offered professional hair stylists, but not Halima. She expected a hijab stylist, which was not provided for the possible reason that research participants indicated: the lack of awareness and knowledge of the veil and its significance for hijabi women.

Furthermore, this study reported that with modest fashion reaching a global market, corporates were sharing advertising images of their products on social media pages with a focus on hijabi women at the forefront whenever a religious event was approaching. This was interpreted according to Rosenberg’s (2019) argument that ‘diversity is a commodity’. The inclusion of hijab on their commercial pages was their awareness of how diversity is becoming the new currency in this contemporary era. Focusing on diversity as a commodity and the brands’ alignment with profits rather than representation may challenge their efforts to gain more knowledge on items like hijab that carry a significant value to its wearer risking a loss of a large community of consumers. Still, the representation of hijab in the mainstream remains of great importance, especially with the political practices of secular governments persisting with concealing its relation to choice and the liberation of Muslim women. This PhD revealed that hijabi women are protective of their identity and are creative with reviving their mothers’ hijabi fashion styles in a contemporary urban context, such as Aminah, who produced content on 98s fit to redefine concepts associated with hijabi women.

In another account, this thesis revealed that hijabi women are represented in the fashion industry and hired by fashion houses for fashion weeks’ modelling and yearly festive

photoshoots. The findings from online observation were evidence that Muslim women's visibility on social media platforms corrected the stereotyped images of hijab, and their creativity was vital to joining the fashion industry. This thesis noted a high presence of various forms of hijab in the modest fashion catwalk shows and exhibitions. In the modest fashion weeks, turbans were displayed, emphasising an artistic background that visitors could hardly ignore. This strengthened the importance of hijab and its forms in Istanbul's event. More evidence showed that hijabs were offered as 'pocket goodies' for the audience in the *Modanisa* silver bag and black boxes gifted by the fashion designers participating in the fashion week. These findings stressed the central role that the eventful spaces of modest fashion offer to the visitors: a physical experience with sartorial practices of cultural and religious values, including veiling items.

### **7.3. Methodological Reflections and Contributions**

This PhD has adopted a multi-method qualitative approach of ethnography consisting of conversational interviews, participant observations, and a visual ethnography to conduct an online observation and as an approach to collect visual field notes from the field. This section revisits the key methodological contributions and reflects on their value and challenges when investigating Muslim female stakeholders' social and cultural experiences in the diverse spaces of modest fashion. This research explored the spaces of the modest fashion events by adopting the Chicago School approach.

#### **7.3.1. Research Positionality: reflexivity**

The methodological approaches of this thesis are derived from my reflexive research positionality as an 'insider researcher' (Merton, 1957). According to my background, I am a young Algerian Muslim female who veils and dress in what I perceive as modest fashion. I had experiences with layering my attire due to the lack of fashionable modest garments in Algeria, and in my previous experiences, I DIYed skirts and tops by recycling my closet and using my mother's traditional sewing machine or by hand because I was a middle-class female student without any income. Growing up through the fast changes in technologies and witnessing the

rise of digital platforms and forums offering access to the blogosphere and YouTube videos boosted my enthusiasm for learning more tips on how to style and pin my hijab or DIY a pleated skirt. It was here that I learnt more about concepts such as hijabi fashion, Muslim fashion, Islamic fashion, and modesty. With the proliferation of faith-based videos fashioning the Islamic dress, I became more interested in fashion and watched YouTube videos on a daily basis. With the rise of Instagram and the development of mobiles into touch screens, I was keen on watching visuals on this platform and style my fashion looks accordingly. Fast changes were happening with regards to the visuality of Instagram, and hashtags were introduced. It was then that I noticed the early stages of #modestfashion being shared along with the images.

Thus, my insider position provided me with initial knowledge about modest fashion and how it expanded. And with such a position, I had the vocabulary of fashion and modesty amidst the Muslim female community that when I attended an event, I could easily build contact and start a conversation because I had the research capital. But my nationality and social background is different to the Muslim women living in Britain and Turkey, and my lack of knowledge about professional roles such as modelling, blogging, and fashion designs have enabled me to critically and reflexively engage with examined cultural, economic, and social phenomena through immersion. Being from a distant country with a different language, traditions, social, and cultural background enabled me to engage with the research participants critically and reflexively and to interpret my fieldwork data with a critical eye. Also, my access to fashion events, exhibitions, and Highstreet brands such as 'H&M' and 'Zara' was very low. This contributed to avoiding any potentially biased interpretations of collected data which could be influenced by my 'subjectivity' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) as such spaces are strange for a woman like me, but as I am interested in modesty and fashion, I was eager to explore the eventful spaces and fashion experiences to investigate the different layers where sartorial images of modest dress were promoted.

### **7.3.2. 'Ethnographic Mosaic': between and within the physical and the digital**

Due to the multiplicity of the fieldwork sites and the locations of participants, from the fashion venues, catwalks, and exhibitions to home as a workplace, to the online presence on Instagram, and in the market chains and department stores; 'the ethnographic mosaic' was an umbrella term for the triangulation of methods and data sources in which a holistic approach to culture is adopted from the Chicago School of Sociology (Blackman, 2010). The value of ethnographic

mosaic was apparent through the progressive chapters of this PhD, in terms of using a variety of methods, including observations and interviews, visual ethnographic, and semiotic analysis approaches, to better understand the social and cultural experiences of the Muslim female stakeholders beyond the sociological mystification (Blackman, 2010). The ethnographic mosaic generated multiple facts on the experiences of Muslim women, wherein I explored through the process of the fieldwork that there is more to challenges and issues that were not sufficiently examined compared to the representations.

In this PhD, the fluidity of the multi-method ethnographic approach (Hodkinson: 2002) contributed to the thickness of the data and allowed me to gain access to diverse roles the females performed and the voices of Muslim women existing inside the fashion industry, in the real-world setting and on Instagram marketing platform, and outside, within the acts of resisting the stereotypes amidst their families and the female communities, constructing an ethnographic mosaic. Moreover, in adopting the ‘ethnographic mosaic’ strategy, I had access to fully explore the cultural and social complexities beyond the promotion of modest fashion, such as in chapter six in which a distinct angle of corporates participation in modest fashion’s globality was examined to demonstrate their intrusion in such a niche market as part of the global culture industry that Lash and Lury developed in a closely similar context.

The ‘ethnographic mosaic’ corroborated the incorporation of a visual ethnographic approach to collect photographic data from the multiple fieldwork sites, consisting of catwalks, exhibitions, homes as a workplace, London high streets, and Instagrammic visuals from the participant’s profiles. The diversity of those sites and the voices that were accessed through the fieldwork would not have been possible if it was not for the ‘ethnographic mosaic’, as, through this strategy, this thesis generated a ‘thick description’ of prominent insights into modest fashion promotional sceneries, in which the progressive grounded theory analysis took place by means of the empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

### **7.3.3. ‘Pocket goodies’: ‘pocket ethnography’ from the field**

Expanding the concept of ‘pocket ethnography’ (Hey, 1997; Blackman, 2007; Blackman and Doherty, 2015), which refers to the material items of female stakeholders shared with the researcher, the term ‘pocket goodies’ have been developed in this thesis to identify the advertising objects created by Muslim female stakeholders to promote for their modest fashion

business. ‘Pocket goodies’ reinforced my insider research position by allowing me to establish relationships with the research participants, whereby I initiate conversations by accepting the ‘goodies’ I am given during a modest fashion event. They have also been valuable in terms of their contribution to the richness of data and providing more facts and interpretations of the consumer culture in modest fashion spaces. When recognising the importance of ‘pocket goodies’ as fieldwork data, I had a deeper insight into the commercial changes and transitions that modest fashion reached when developing their brands in a contemporary era through material marketing tools.

#### **7.3.4. Semiotic Readings of Instagrammic Visuals**

This thesis adopted semiotics to examine the visuals collected from Instagram through the online observation of the research participants’ accounts. The semiotic reading of these Instagrammic visuals has been valuable to this study. They acted as a vehicle to examine meaning in social and cultural contexts. Through the empirical chapters, it was explored that high-quality photographs and videos shared through the Instagram screens act as means of transforming various forms of messages when semiotically analysed, leading to the construction of selves (Rocamora, 2011). Hence, the semiotics examined the background, posture, shapes, colours, and representations in cultural, social, economic, and sometimes historical or feminist contexts. The use of Instagrammic visuals in this PhD contributed to what Pink (2021: 151) explained as ‘an in-depth reflexive understanding’ of how the shared images produce ethnographic understandings. This thesis sought to examine the modest fashion community online and to explore how their Instagrammic activities were vital to the globalisation and mediation of modesty fashion. More importantly, the semiotic analysis located the representations that have been taking place beyond the promotion of modest fashion. For instance, as in chapter five, it was explored that hijabi women are semiotically represented as aspirational in the corporates’ fashion campaigns, though they were once seen as ‘oppressed’ (Wilson, 2013: 163).



#### **7.4. Limitations and Challenges: visa appointments and financial issues**

Due to how limited the research on modest fashion in the middle eastern countries from the ‘event culture’ perspective, my PhD was aimed to explore a modest fashion week in an Arab country, such as Dubai, but because I spent from my personal budget to book for the fashion events to proceed with my fieldwork, I had financial issues, and thus I could not attend Dubai Modest Fashion Week 2019.

In addition to the financial issues, another possible limitation of this research is the challenge faced by ethnographers who travel long distances to the field and need visa appointments to extend their journey for data collection. To illustrate, in 2019, I experienced some challenges associated with booking a visa to travel to the fieldwork at Amsterdam Modest Fashion Week. I have received an invitation from the event’s managers as an official document for my visa documents (see appendix 1, 4. Invitation to Amsterdam Modest Fashion Week). However, I missed the show because of the accumulation of the standard and also the VIP appointments at Amsterdam’s Consulate in London. It appears that it is hard to book an appointment by the end of the year because most people look forward to applying to celebrate the new year in a different country. To avoid such challenges, I would advise researchers to consider applying as early as possible when travelling abroad to a different country that requires a visa document, as access is easier for researchers with a European passport. Another suggestion is the solution that I have adopted for this PhD which is to divert their research toward another setting and search for other ethnographic sites such as investigating if the phenomenon takes a primary role in the digital platforms, such as Instagram as a space for modest fashion continuity.

#### **7.5. Directions and Implications for Future Research**

Whilst the earlier sections foregrounded the key contributions of this thesis; this study also inspires several suggestions for future research. Much of this PhD has been oriented toward an examination of modest fashion practices and experiences in fashion events in the UK, Istanbul, and online through Instagram, within social, cultural, and commercialisation contexts. In addition, this thesis has addressed the value of using ‘a mosaic of ethnography’ and the visuality in ethnographic research from using photographic field notes, to ‘pocket ethnography’, and online observation of the social media platform ‘Instagram’ while collecting Instagrammic data. This helped in unfolding the complexities within layers of modest fashion promotion and the

experiences and feelings that are deeply embedded in this phenomenon. The PhD has presented various thick descriptive accounts of shopping experiences in exhibitions in fashion events and female's body representation in runways' parades; also, the commercialisation of dress culture on the digital platform of Instagram through 'online boutiques' selling products in the name of modesty and modest fashion. For example, in chapters three and four, I critically addressed and interpreted 'female-only space', 'hyper- femininity' and 'feminist parades' by adopting a feminist approach using feminist concepts to voice the experiences of Muslim female stakeholders in spaces where modest fashion was branded. It is, therefore, important to suggest more research is required on the continuously growing practices of modest fashion within the contemporary and technological era whereby marketing tools are digitised and offered to female stakeholders, such as bloggers, to use in advertising.

Another important matter is considering the significance of 'pocket ethnography' (Hey, 1997; Blackman, 2007), which was referred to in this research as 'pocket goodies', as vital ethnographic data. As suggested in this study, 'pocket goodies' represented the contemporary consumer culture, and the spatial tools Muslim female stakeholders are dependent on to promote their business, and they acted as material items creating an interaction between brands and potential clientele. I would encourage future studies in different contexts that may use an ethnographic approach to focus more deeply on the surroundings and decorations within the space; and also treat everything as data because using multiple methods and sources of data is part of the strategy 'ethnographic mosaic' (Blackman, 2010). Following such a suggestion, thick data will be generated, and there will be a holistic understanding of the cultural experiences and diverse voices. Thus, future ethnographic studies should take 'pocket ethnography' more seriously. The studies that considered 'pocket ethnography' as vital findings in ethnographies were Hey's (1997), Blackman's (2007), and Doherty (2017), wherein the last two researchers conceptualised it as 'pocket prohibitions' in which they carry a significant representation of the cultural practices of the participants. By exploring 'pocket prohibitions', Blackman (2007) and Doherty (2017) explored spaces and times where cultural practices had controversial meanings to what they actually stand for, and this interpretation was generated through collecting this sort of concrete ethnographic data.

By centring the locations of Muslim female stakeholders, this research has expanded the exploration of weaved spaces in a modest fashion by looking at their homes, that are, their warehouses, catwalk and exhibitions, and charity-based events. Notwithstanding the importance of such contributions, there should be more considerations regarding Muslim

women's experiences within further modest fashion spaces other than the European or Asian countries. I suggest that modest fashion fieldwork should expand towards North African countries where modest fashion is emerging as a global culture. North African countries have a long history with modest wear that is evolving and growing into the modest fashion industry, and this deserves a focus from ethnographers to explore how it is developing into a global industry and women's roles amidst such spaces and changes. Such as Algeria, which is a Muslim-majority country with a long-standing history in relation to dress culture and modesty. In the past few years, I have observed the evolving modest fashion attires on shop windows and the covered women in the public spaces and events, who seem to be gradually growing as fashion elites. However, these cultural scenes are hardly represented in anthropological studies in an Algerian context. What is significant about this possible direction to a further study is the rise of modest fashion brands in Algeria as observed on Instagram, each year, more than ten women were noticed to move from selling their products in 'online boutiques' to opening their physical shops in the shopping centres and department stores in cities such as the capital Algiers, and in Oran, Setif, and Chlef. While this PhD has built an understanding of Muslim female stakeholders' experiences with branding and, on other occasions, struggles in industries, it should also be expanded to further explorations of more spaces in diverse communities and different countries moving towards the North African regions.

#### **7.6. Final Personal Notes: my resonance on my modest fashion journey in this research**

As a final note to this section, I can say that my modest fashion journey made me feel empowered as a Muslim woman and boosted my feelings of belonging when in fashion events. I observed many veiled women represented in mainstream runways, big brands, magazines, and on billboards inside shops and on high streets in big cities. But being in the field also showed me that it is not always about representation.

With the fast changes altering the structure of spaces we live in and the commodification of diverse cultures, there could be innovations, representations, and exploitation of our daily activities. In the field, I could associate with some of what Klein (2000) actively criticised when I left an event. What is different about me is that I still wear some products from corporates, such as the *Nike victory hijab*, because I need it for exercising in public gyms. I find them indeed comfortable and breathable, as they claim. Yet, I know for a fact that I purchase these

items not because of what they advertise but because of a single item I need. I am now more thoughtful of my overconsumption, and I can say that my research grew a sort of guilt in me, and every time I buy something, I think twice about its usefulness. There is much to say about how this research resonated with critical ideas and notions of who I am as an ethnographer and a woman, but I am only stating the key points.

At the outset of the field and during my previous life experiences, I hardly thought about what I was wearing as a young Muslim woman who covers for faith-based reasons and fashionable looks. I hardly separated my modesty and my fashionability in a physical world. It was a familiar sartorial practice for everyday activities. As I move forward, I reflect on the shops on the high streets of my hometown, which are crowded with local clothing boutiques but never like the ones in the UK. In Algeria, to visit a market chain like Zara and H&M, I either go to the capital, Algiers, or Oran, to the department store and the shopping centre

Once I entered the field of study, through the long journey with my participants and the modest fashion spaces, my perception widely changed concerning why social groups dress in a certain way and how it associates with the corporates and ‘frenzy’ wave of fashion styles or any other related cultural practices. My view of the shop windows and the festivals and events has also shifted, I used to label them as aesthetics, entertainment, and fun only, but now I realise there is more to strategic branding and techniques for sales than ‘fun’. Notwithstanding the aims of creating a physical environment for social individuals to spend their time in a fun space, we should always look beyond what we see in front of us.

Through this PhD, I observed that the struggles of Muslim women are worsened by governmental policies imposing dress codes and bringing the hijab into political debates, such as the French debates in public shows and TV channels. The main topics in these debates are associated with how a burqini is a symbol of an Islamic dress and how it opposes the governmental system ‘Laique’. The recent French elections centralised hijab in their presidential speeches and promised to ban any visible dress Muslim women adopt in everyday activities. These are policies Muslim women in France have to go through quite often, even with the spread of modest fashion globally and modest fashion weeks taking France as one of the main capitals to host their catwalks and exhibitions. As simple as the fashion events may seem for social individuals, I have seen through this research that they are indeed innovative spatial tools that contribute to enhancing Muslim women’s representation. Also, these events are in major cities where a platform for Muslim women is constructed for them to weave a space for their voices.

In the modest fashion events, the female stakeholders innovatively created images of their fashionability and religiousness, using them against the stigmatised labels on body shaming, faith-based sartorial practices, and gender representation. This is why it is important to seal this PhD by sharing what I most resonated with when studying the spaces of Muslim female stakeholders. I conclude with a quote from Marianne Williamson, stating that “our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure”. And the visibly Muslim women in the UK and Istanbul faced their fears that had been building up since the 9/11 incidents (Lewis, 2013); and they built brands in the niche market of modest fashion, then expanded the market into global retail, realising that beyond those fears something big could happen and that is a space for their voices to be heard.

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## List of Appendices

### Appendix 1 Fashion Shows Tickets and Invitations

#### 1. Ticket to London Modest Fashion Week 2018



#### 2. Ticket to London Muslim Shopping Festival 2019



#### Thank you for your order

Thank you for the order you recently placed for tickets  
London Muslim Shopping Festival 2019

#### Your e-ticket



3. Wristband silicone bracelets for the identification of the types of the ticket for London Muslim Shopping Festival



4. Invitation to Amsterdam Modest Fashion Week



5. Ticket to The Urban Muslim Woman Show' 2019 and sitting table number



6. Advertising leaflet of Ladies Only Charity Fashion Show 2019

LADIES ONLY CHARITY  
**FASHION  
SHOW 2019**

All proceeds will go to  
**YEMEN** &  **IKCA**  
IMRAN KHAN CANCER APPEAL

Exhibiting

Performance by Spoken Word Poet  
**SHAREEFA ENERGY**

Auction, live entertainment and shopping  
spree

Including 3 course meal

Platinum Suite  
Cobden Street, Leicester, LE2 2LB

**SATURDAY 16TH NOVEMBER 2019**

Doors open at 5.00 pm  
Programme starts at 6.00 pm

**TICKETS £20**

To purchase tickets contact  
Nasreen 07973 352 803 Shirin 07944 936 738

**Appendix 2**  
**Modest Fashion Shows and their Locations: researcher's timetable**

The Show	The Location	The Dates and Times	The Researcher Presence
London Modest Fashion Week	Victoria House, London	17- 18 February 2018	Attended both days
London Muslim Shopping Festival	Olympia, London	13- 14 April 2019	Attended both days
Istanbul Modest Fashion Week	Zorlu Performing Art Centre, Istanbul	19- 20 April 2019	Attended both days
The Urban Muslim Woman Show 2019	Marriot Hotel, London	2 November 2019	Attended the event
Ladies Only Charity Fashion Show	Platinum Suite, Cobden Street, Leicester	16 November 2019	Attended the event
Lifestyle London Season 2	116 Pall Mall, London	23- 24 November 2019	Attended the first day only to have an access for an interview
Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham	Excalibur Grand, Birmingham	30 November 2019	Attended the event
Amsterdam Modest Fashion Show	Passenger Terminal Amsterdam	14-15-16 December 2019	I had an access for it as a photographer and a researcher and I was sent

			an invitation document for my visa. However, I couldn't attend the event because of the unavailability of visa appointment.
London Muslim Shopping Festival	Olympia, London	18- 19 April 2020	This event was cancelled because of Pandemic.

**Appendix 3**  
**The Interviewees, their Role, and Interview Location**

<b>The Interview</b>	<b>The Interviewees</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Location, Date, and Time</b>
<b>Ethnographic Conversations</b>	Amira and Sanaa	Attendees	Olympia, London Date: 13/04/2019 Time: 00:06: 28
	Rena Jawad	Businesswoman	Olympia, London Date: 14/04/2019 Time: 00:04:01
	Four Her	Three young businesswomen (Sisters)	Olympia, London Date: 14/04/2019 Time: 00:05:05
	The Modest Me Collection	Businesswoman	Olympia, London Date: 14/04/2019 Time: 00:04:47
	Veil and Virtue	Businesswoman	Olympia, London Date: 14/04/ 2019 Time: 00:03:31
	Threads	Businesswoman	Olympia, London



			Date: 14/04/2019 Time: 00:07:50
	Fashion As Modest	Businesswoman	Olympia, London Date: 19/11/2019 Time: 00:05:23
	Sri Munwwarah Design	Businesswoman (The daughters of the owner)	Marriot Hotel Date: 02/11/2019 Time: 00:04:01
	ASH Dress to Empress UK	Businesswoman	Marriot Hotel, London Date: 02/11/2019 Time: 02:20:00
<b>Interviews</b>	Hum Hum London	Businesswoman	Pret A Manger (Next to 116 Pall wall) Date : 23/11/2019 Time: 01:03:49
	Sa-orsa	Businesswoman	Madison Café Date: 19/11/2019 Time: 00:50
	Memunatu	Fashion and textile Student, content creator, and model	Costa Café, Regent Street Date: 09/09/2019 Time: 00:37: 24
<b>Video Call Interviews (FaceTime)</b>	Aminah	Fashion Student, content creator, and model	FaceTime (Video Call Interview) Date: 29/09/2020 Time: 00:59:42
<b>Filmed Conversations</b>	Memunatu	Fashion Student	In front of UAL, London, John Prince's St Date: 09/04/2019 Time: 00:09: 10

	Jaqar 'Fatma Karakullukcu'	Businesswoman	Zorlu Performance Centre, Istanbul Date: 20/04/2019 Time: 00:03:36

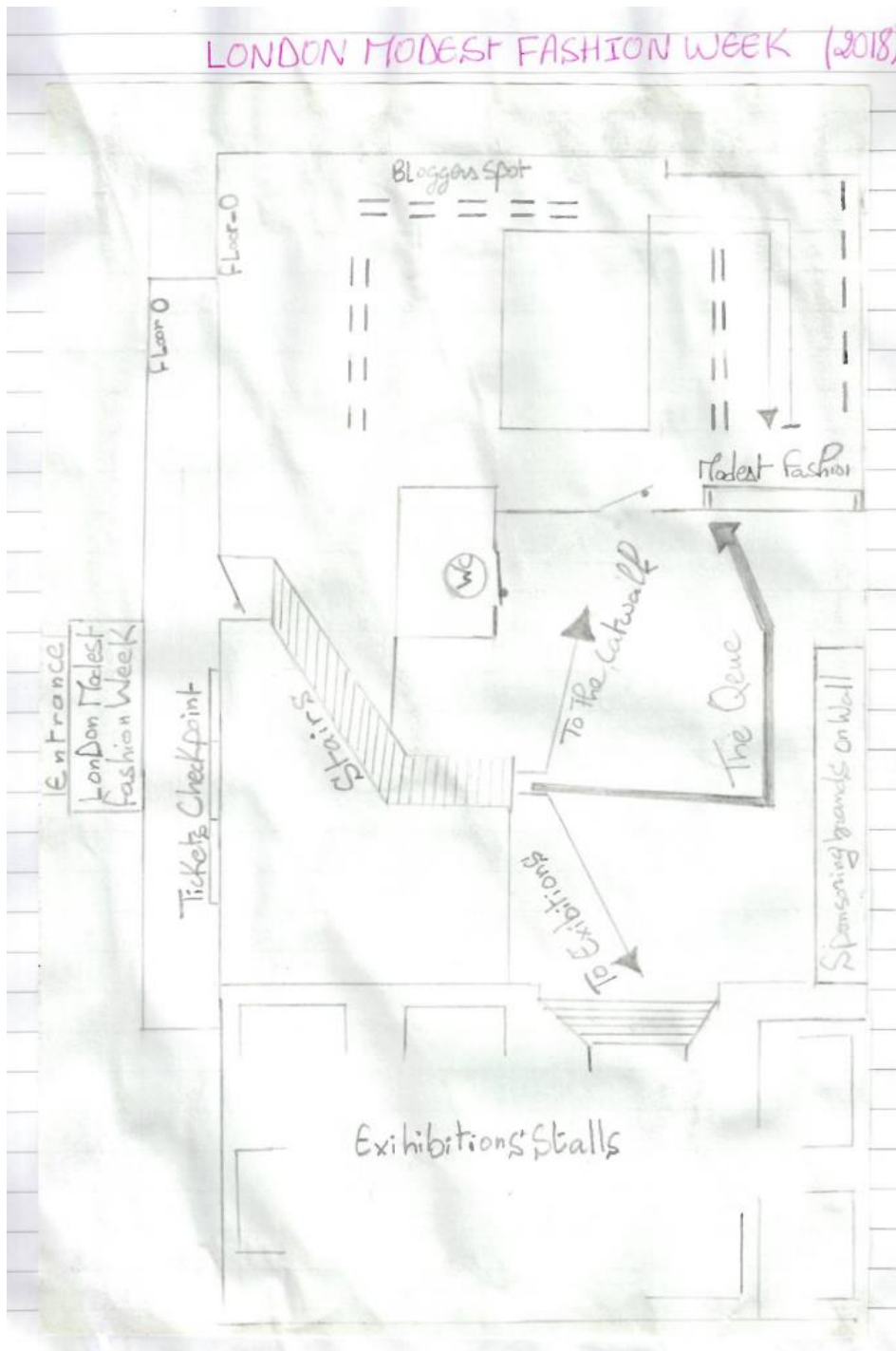
#### Appendix 4

The ethnographer in the Algerian traditional jacket 'Karako' in the fieldwork

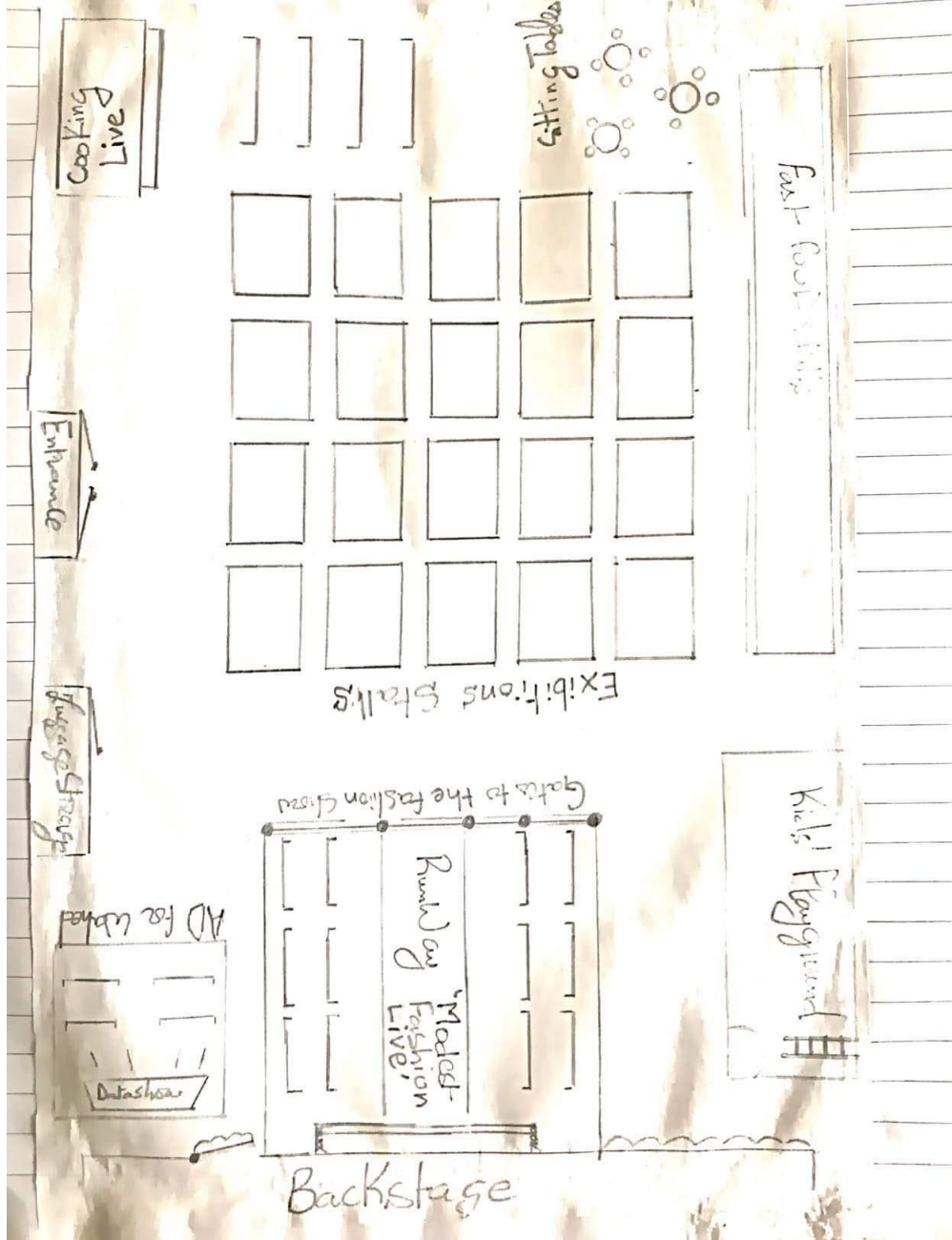


Appendix 5

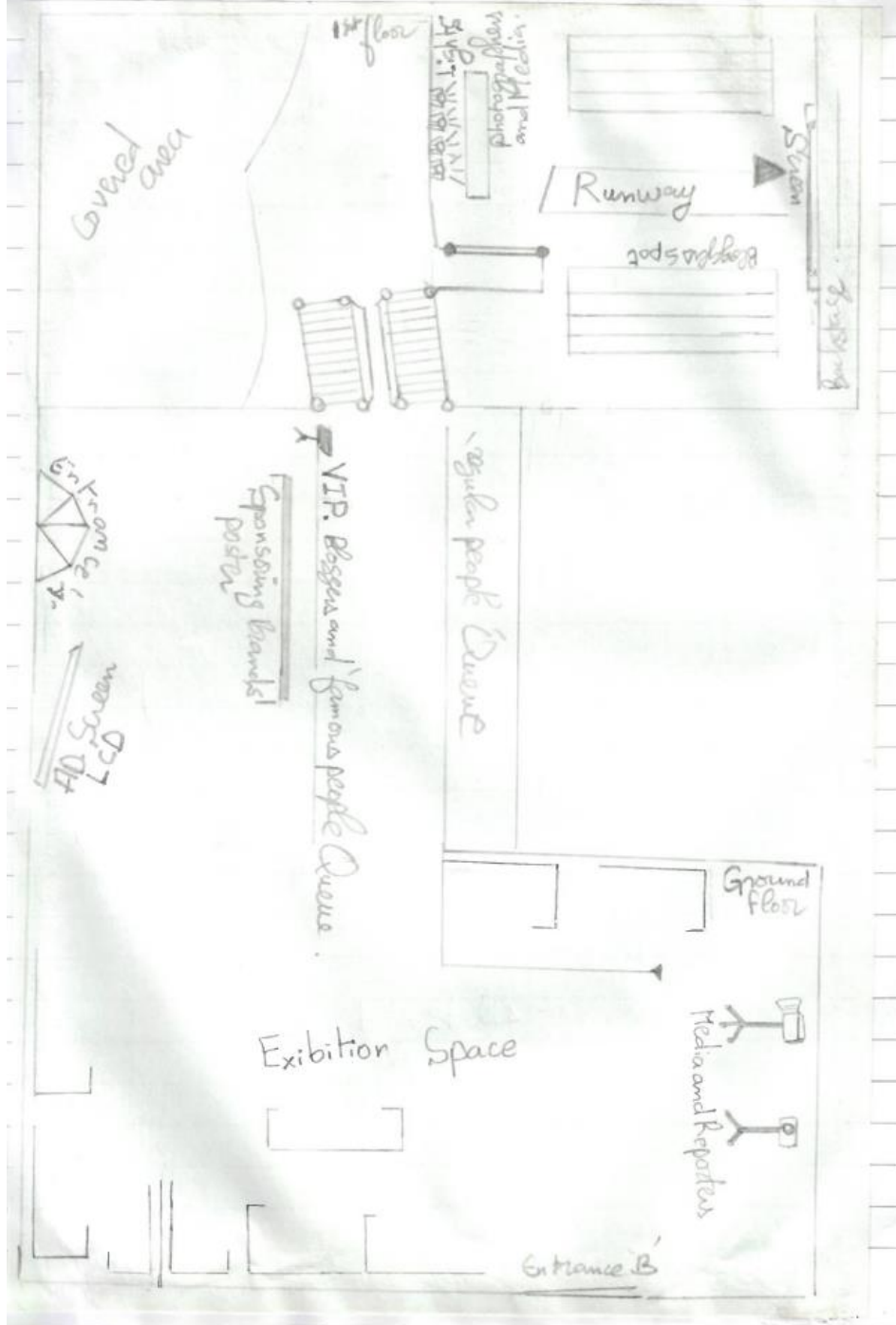
Mapping of the Modest Fashion Venues (Extract from the field diary, by A.B)



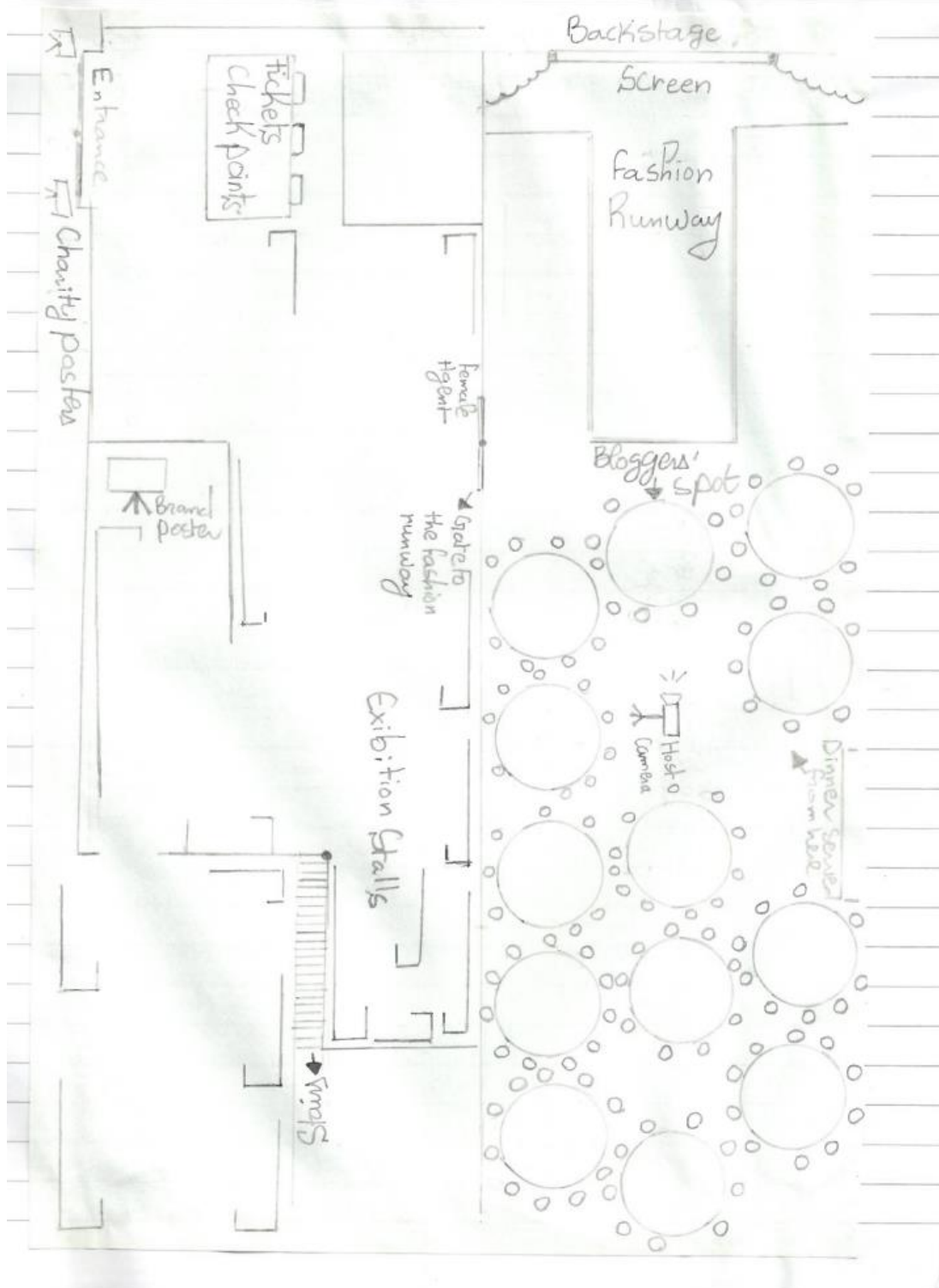
# LONDON MUSLIM SHOPPING FESTIVAL



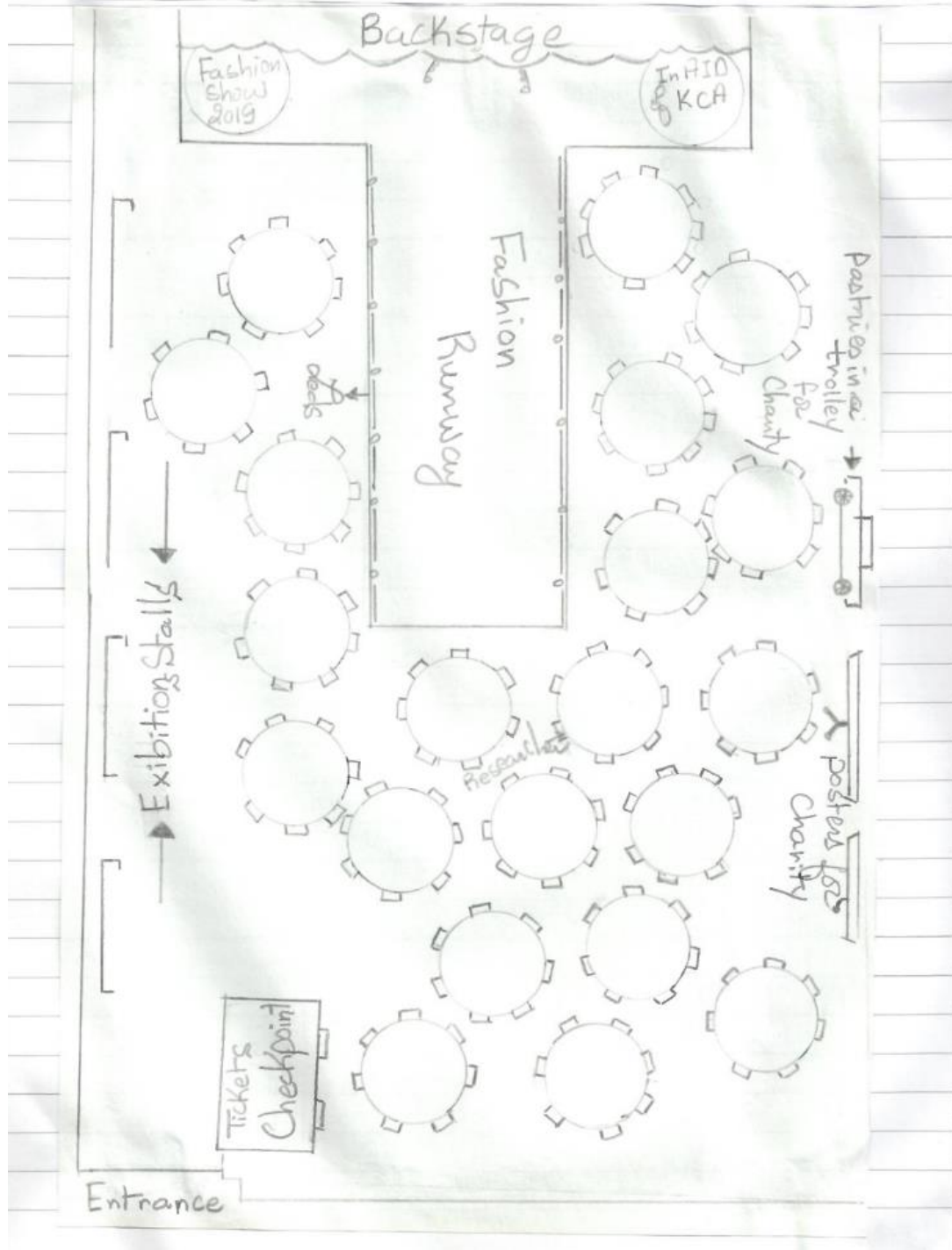
# ISTANBUL MODEST FASHION WEEK



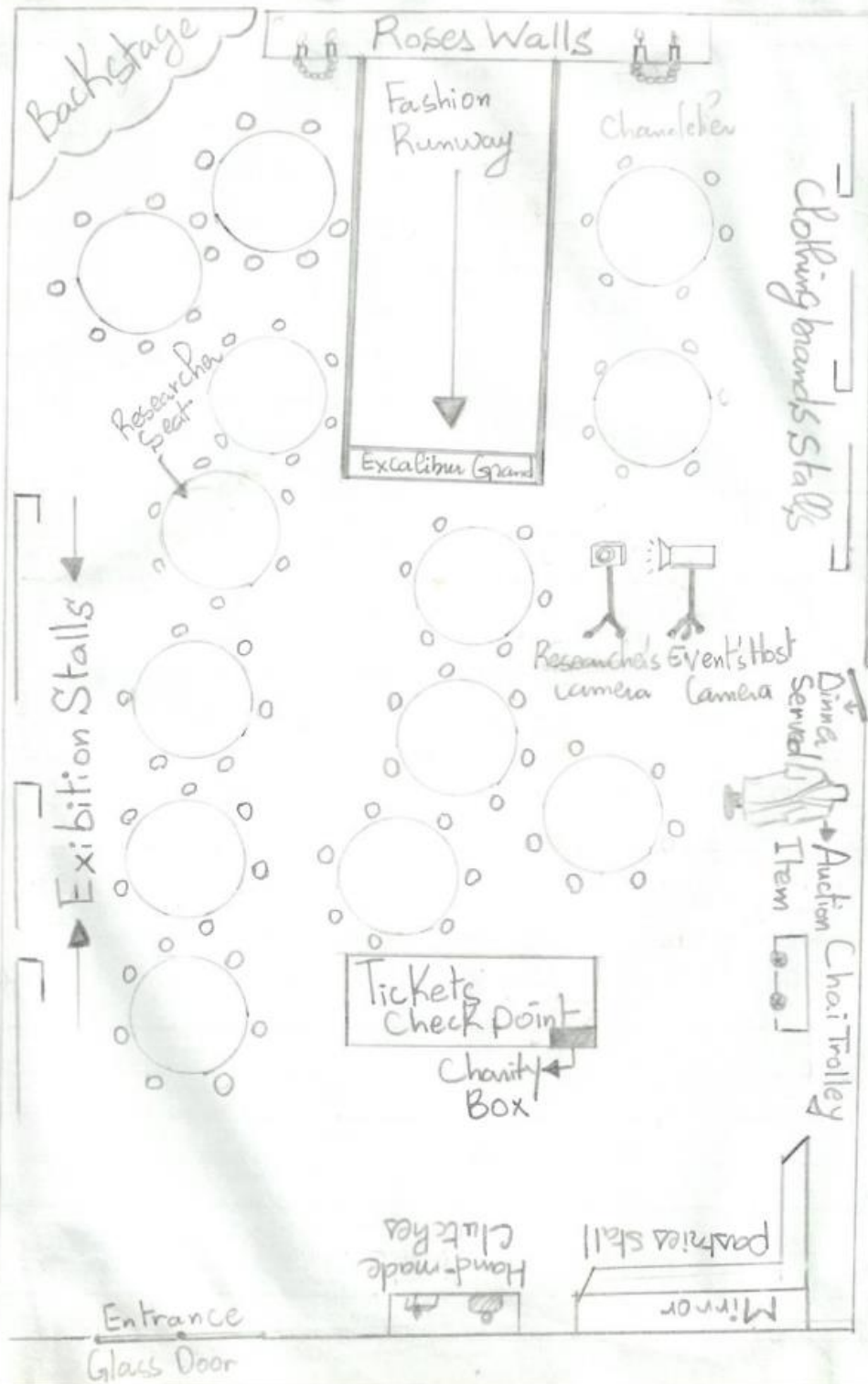
# The Urban Muslim Woman Show '2019 (London)



# Ladies Only Fashion Show (Leicester)



# Fashion and Lifestyle Show Birmingham





## Appendix 6 'Pocket Goodies'

Below is a list of items collected from the fieldwork as gifts, 'goodie bags', shopping bags with presents inside, and sometimes they are just flyers or discount codes coupons offered in the exhibitions:





**LONDON MUSLIM SHOPPING FESTIVAL 2019**

USE CODES  
**RJLMSF2019**

TO GET  
**15% OFF**

**RENA JAWAD**

www.renajawad.com  
@renajawadFashion  
@renajawadFashion  
renajawad@renajawad.com

TO CLAIM THE OFFER AN ORDER MUST BE PLACED IN ORDER TO CLAIM YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO BOOK A CONSULTATION APPOINTMENT ON THE EXHIBITION DAYS WITH AVONIA FROM 10:00 AM TO 10:00 PM. WHEN AN ORDER IS PLACED ON THE EXHIBITION DAYS A CONSULTATION APPOINTMENT TO FURTHER DISCUSS YOUR REQUIREMENTS DESIGN FOR YOUR ORDER IS REQUIRED. PLEASE NOTE THAT THE CONSULTATION APPOINTMENT IS ONLY FOR PERSONS WHO CHOOSE TO DO SO. THE FULL COST OF THE ORDER MUST BE PAID FOR AT THE APPOINTMENT DATE. PLEASE SEE THE FULL LIST OF THE EXHIBITION VENDORS THAT WILL BE DETERMINED POST THE CONSULTATION AND IS SUBJECT TO THE AFORESAID DESIGN.

# HELLO

*from Veil & Virtue*

**ENJOY 15% OFF ONLINE**

WITH CODE  
**EXP1815**

+ FREE UK SHIPPING

(VALID FOR TWO MONTHS AFTER ISSUE)

ABAYAS | MAXI DRESSES | KNITWEAR | HIJABS | ACCESSORIES





**Appendix 7**  
**Female Participants of Instagram**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Instagram Username</b>	<b>How they label themselves</b>
<b>Modest fashion bloggers and models</b>		
They share content about daily sartorial fashion looks, home decor, experiences, and lifestyle		
Nabiila	@nabiilabee	Digital Creator
Amenah Khan	@amenahkhan	Digital Creator
Halima Aden	@halima	First hijabi Supermodel
Aminah	@amxnahali	Design and Fashion (Student and model)
Memunatu Barrie	@memuna2barrie	Designer (Student and model)
Ikram Abdi	@ikramabdi	Fashion Model
Rawdis	@rawdis	Fashion editor and Vogue Scandinavia
Nawal Sari	@nawalsari	Digital creator
Dr Fatumina	@drfatumina	Entrepreneur
Amina Bham	@aminabham_	Digital creator
Sebinaah	@sebinaah	Beauty/Fashion/ Lifestyle
Urgalsal	@urgalsal_	Partnerships + collabs
Saima	@saimasmileslike	She/her/they/them Digital creator
Salma Masrour	@salma.masrour	Public Figure
Baraa Bolat	@baraabolat	Public Figure

Mounabaah	@mounabaah	Digital creator
Dina Torkia	@dinatokio	Digital creator Designer, Blogger & Mom of 2
Aba	@abacadabraaa	She/Her Personal blog, creative
Sidrah Bint Riaz	@lotustreee	Love Activism
Neelam	@neelam_	Art 'Fully independent'
Mariah Idrissi	@mariahidrissi	Public figure Model Filmmaker
Habiba DaSilva	@lifelongpercussion	Public figure
Billy Marsal	@billy_marsal	model
FIO	@fiotestore	Video creator Fashion, Family, & Lifestyle
Johar	@jullarii	Designer
Tuma	@tumaaa_	Just For Fun 'Rep by UMMA MODALS'
Shazia	@_shazfit	Fitness Trainer
Hayaati	@hayaatithehijabi	Model
Ashaa	@just.ashaa	Fashion Model
Eniyah Rana	@modest_street	Digital Creator
Juju	@j.ghaz	Bame Creator and Advocate Content Creator CEO

Manal	@chinutay	Video Creator
<b>Brands owners and CEOs</b>		
Bee	@thebee.brand	'Modest Fashion with Statement'
Dian Pelangi	@dianpelangicom	Entrepreneur
Al Sheikha Abaya	@sheikha_tr	Clothing (Brand)
Malak London Official	@_malak_london_official	Clothing (Brand)
Lyra Swim	@lyraswim	'Revolutionising Modest Swimwear'
Till We Cover	@tillwecover	Clothing (Brand) 'Ethical & Inclusive Fashion'
Madiha	@madihaofficial	Brand 'Contemporary Modest Wear/ UK' 'Premium Quality'
ANNAQA & Co	@anaaqa.co	Clothing (Brand) 'Elegant Modest Fashion For Women' 'Luxury Hijabs'
Haute Hijab	@hautehijab	'The world's best hijabs for the world's modest powerful women'
Al Akhawat	@alakhawat	Fashion Designer
Chinutay & Co	@chinutayco	Shopping and Retail 'Drape yourself in beauty' 'luxury Prayer Gowns'
<b>Agencies and Communities Supporting Women</b>		
They offer women chances and opportunities to work together in modelling or photoshoots with brands and campaigns		

Umma Models/ Modesty	@ummamodels	Modelling Agency 'United Modest Modelling Agency'
Bame Model Agency	@bameagency	Modelling Agency 'Diversity/Unity/ love'
Modest Visions	@modestvisions	Social Media Agency 'The first global agency representing Millennial Muslim Creators'
Redefining Concepts	@redefiningconcepts	Creative Community Community 'RC IS A CREATIVE YOUTH PLATFORM CHAMPINIONG INCLUSIVITY THROUGH FASHION & CULTURE'
Surviving Hijab	@survivinghijab	Community 'World's Largest Hijabi Community on Facebook' 'Fighting Stereotypes' 'Reinventing the Hijababe'
Muslims of the world	@muslimsoftheworld	Non-profit Organization 'Showing the beauty of Muslims and Islam'
Modest fashion Weeks	@modestfashionweeks	Event 'The Original #ModestFashionWeeks Event by @thinkfashionco/ Istanbul16- London17- Dubai17- Jakarta- Dubai19- Amsterdam19'

<b>Corporate Companies</b>		
Big brands making modest fashion lines/ hiring 'hijabi' models for their photoshoots.		
Modanisa  (The Corporate Industry representing Modest Fashion situated in Istanbul)	@modanisa_uk	United Kingdom
	@modanisa	Turkey
	@modanisa_ar	Middle East
	@modanisa_maghreb	Maghreb
	@modanisa_fr	France
	@modanisamy	Malaysia
	@modanisaid	Indonesia
	@modanisa_usa	USA
Nike Women	@nikewomen	'Just Do It'
Puma Women	@pumawomen	'Clothing (Brand)'
Adidas Women	@adidaswomen	'Through Sport, we Have the power to change lives'
Burberry	@burberry	Clothing (brand)
Fenty Beauty	@fentybeauty	Us #Fentybeauty #crueltyfree



## **Appendix 8**

### **The Interview Questions Sample**

I introduce my research topic, remind the interviewee of their right to withhold information at any time. It is important to note that these questions are just samples and not fixed because the method I used is more like chatting which is an ethnographic conversation where the interviewees can lead the interview and the researcher is just guiding the flow towards the focus of the study. Then finally, I express my appreciation for their time and contribution.

#### **The Interview Questions for Bloggers**

- a. When did you decide or how did you come with the idea of being a part of fashion and style community?
- b. What are you interested at as a fashion and style creator?
- c. As a social media user, how and when did you start creating a content on the online platform?
- d. How do you describe your content creation? (probing)
- e. Do you feel that the contributions you have achieved so far represent who you are as a person?  
How?
- f. What criteria do you rely on when sharing your posts, if there are any? (why?)
- g. Do you consider yourself as a social influencer? If yes, who is an influencer?
- h. Who are your audience and how is your relationship with them online and offline?
- i. What is your conception of Instagram as a photo-sharing platform?
- j. How does this platform contribute to developing your online activities?
- k. Did you ever think that your experiences through the years with fashion and style have any changes on you as a person?
- l. Is it one of your ambitions or aims to have a role in changing the representation of women in the UK? If yes, how?
- m. How important is the imagery communication on social media in relation to women's representation?

- n. Do you receive any sort of negative feedback about your content? How do you deal with this?
- o. How do you find being a woman in the marketing industry?
- p. Is modesty a key word in what you do?
- q. Is it important to define and represent modesty? Why?
- r. From your personal perspective, what does modesty mean to you?
- s. What are the challenges you face in doing what you like?
- t. What do you think of the future of modest fashion in the UK specifically and the worldwide broadly?

### **The Conversational Interviews with Stakeholders of Modest Fashion**

- a. How did you think of starting your brand?
- b. Was there a gap in the market? And what was it?
- c. What are the standards you follow in making your attire?
- d. How would you describe the style of your apparels?
- e. How do you pick models for your brand photoshoot when releasing a new collection? (Body size, colour, ethnicity, and religion)
- f. If modesty is one concept involved in your designs, how would you identify its meaning from your perspective?
- g. Modest and modesty are progressively taking part of the mainstream fashion in the UK, what is your perception about this?
- h. Do you see that modest fashion in one way or another is affecting Muslim women agency in UK's societies?
- i. Muslim women entrepreneur in the UK are taking the fashion style to a whole new level as mainstream brands are adding modesty to their shopping list; do you think this will be challenging for modest fashion independent brand? How would you deal with the situation?
- j. Social media platform is having a role in almost everything including the fashion industry. What do you think of this?

k. Which social media platform help you most at promoting for your business? How do you find it?

l. Do you think that organizing fashion events would involve in manifesting women's voices? How?

## **Appendix 9**

### **Excerpt from an interview transcript**

I introduce my research topic, remind the interviewee of their right to withhold information at any time and assure them that their participation will not affect their grade in any way. I express my appreciation for their time and contribution.

[...]

**Researcher:** So, umm! Yeah, I am here today with Soumaya, an owner of Hum Hum brand, a modest brand, Soumiya, please tell me How did you think of starting your brand? How did the idea come to your mind?

**Soumaya:** Ah... I think it's been over a long time, hum, didn't just suddenly come, and it just as I got older, and then hum, (humming some words) teacher, I was telling my students 'oh it's good to do business', and we also know from the Sunnah, that business is, it is good to do business, and then, hum, I think obviously sometimes I think Muslims are afraid and especially women to make money, but then you need money to do Hadj, you need money to do sadaqa, you need money to do Omrah, you need money to do Qorba 'aani , you need money! And then if you look at the people around the prophet (PBH) you have very wealthy people who had the code of Islam. So, hum, then, I started thinking and thinking and telling my students, then I think I thought when, then I started (sign as she thinks) to learn about, obviously in the UK, about companies, and umm, who have, hum, what, they are very unethical, not in terms of just producing the product, I was really shocked they were using the revenues to, hum, to exploit vulnerable people, and even more sad is that they're actually causing wars those companies and those people are so powerful now, then thought why not start something because then, I wanted to buy my products killed-free. I didn't want to feel guilty. And I always like to designing clothes, and then it's some of those skills that general skills that my mom had her shop, had very, I know the material, the quality of material. Umm I used to tailor as well, I know some tailoring as well. And I thought why not start, while I'm preaching 'why don't I start this?' and

then I think (mumming) also I realized that I will have to start from scratch, although I have some generational skills. There are obviously in this behind time you'll need a lots of marketing skills and you'll need to how to sell your products, and how to make to the whole chain...

**Researcher:** Advertising...

**Soumaya:** Advertising. And to be honest, initially, when we started, (hum) what I am wearing at the moment, we had thirty, made, sixty! Made. We thought oh it will be quite easy; it won't be difficult. We have taken into account all these, the need of (aaaah) people who to wear modest clothes. So basically, our company is not just for Muslim women, it's for women who want to be respected for who they are, because sometimes...

**Researcher:** Dress modestly in a way ...

**Soumaya:** Yes, absolutely. So, it doesn't have to be. I mean even the monotectic or monistic religions, the women do cover their head, even Jewish and Christian women, they covered their head, they were, wore long dresses, very modest. So, even up 1960s, even in the UK, the women who wore dress very modestly...

**Researcher:** The Victorian era and the Victorian dresses and so on. That's... (Interrupted by Soumaya)

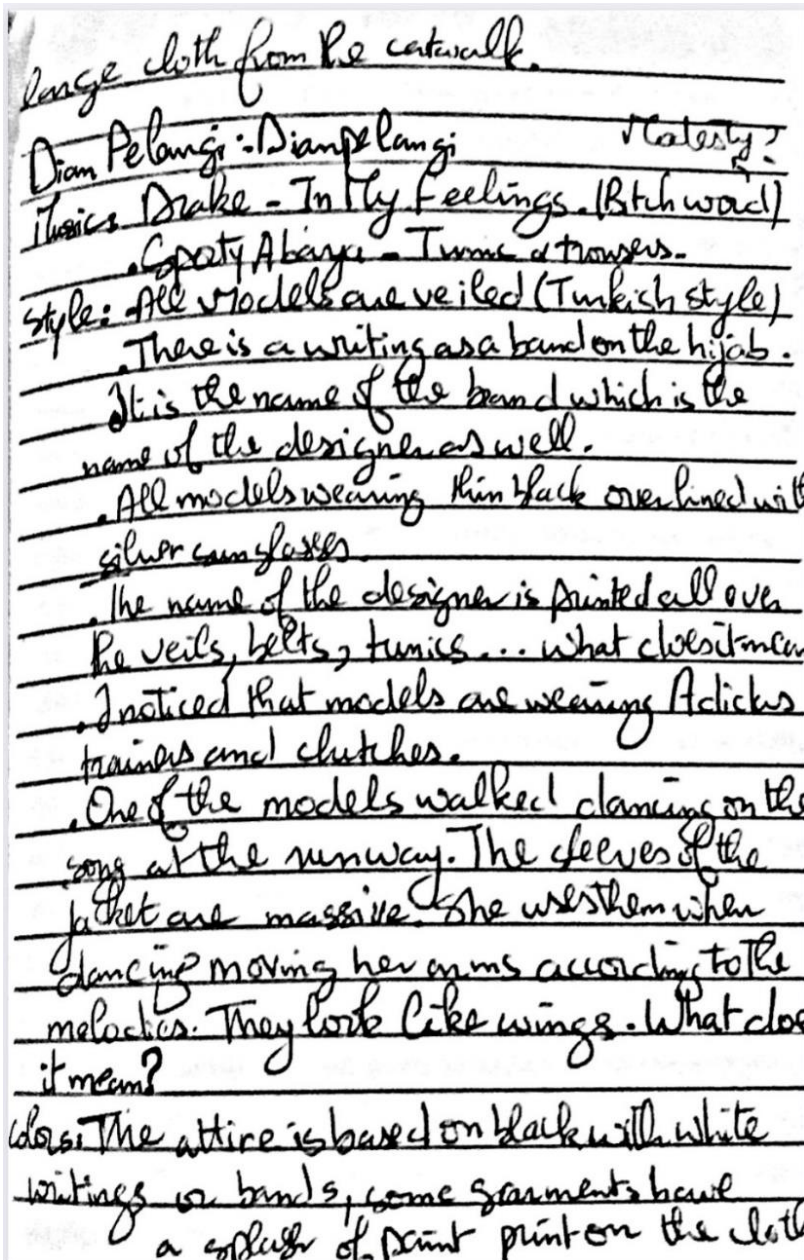
**Soumaya:** Yes, abs... absolutely. It was only with their introduction like the music and other things in the 1960s and the whole society started changing. But even now you would find people from other faith, other cultures, that do want to dress modestly. So, our clothes are not particularly for certain women, but they are at the same time not fast fashion either.

[...]

**Appendix 10**  
**Extract from field diary: examples of field notes and diaries**

In this PhD, I recorded my field notes and diaries in notebooks, in word documents saved on my laptop and USB stick, through my camera, my Mobile app of Note, and in my Messenger personal inbox.

**Field Note Extract: my notebook**



range cloth from the catwalk.

Dian Pelangi: Diampelangi      | Category?

Thesis Drake - In My Feelings. (Bitch word)

• Sparty Abaya - Tunics & trousers.

style: All models are veiled (Turkish style)

• There is a writing as a band on the hijab.

• It is the name of the brand which is the name of the designer as well.

• All models wearing thin black over lined with silver sunglasses

• The name of the designer is printed all over the veils, belts, tunics... what does it mean

• I noticed that models are wearing Adickers trainers and clutches.

• One of the models walked dancing on the song at the runway. The sleeves of the jacket are massive. She uses them when dancing moving her arms according to the melodies. They look like wings. What does it mean?

• Also: The attire is based on black with white writings or bands, some garments have a collage of print print on the cloth

### • British Muslim Magazine

This wasn't a brand for clothing but I wondered if they have any thing in relation to modest fashion for Muslim women. There was a page where they mentioned & empowering women to empower a nation.

### • Shukr Islamic clothing.

A woman, her husband, and daughter, selling veils & Islamic men's hats. From the pictures put on walls of women & men models wearing them in this I deduced that it's for both genders. They were giving people plastic bags with brand name & flyers for discounts. I entered their Instagram and found that there are more than just veils, dresses & long's hijabs. The price, however, are really high (Not for all people). \$129 / \$49 / £179.

### • Modest Maclan. (shop's professional)

• The shop (space for exhibition)

Frames of models wearing brand attire with pink framing & white background.

On the white wall around frames of a Black

Modest Maclan (big & thick)

There is a big picture for the brand name & photos of models wearing brand dresses, and contact details.

### **Field Diary Extract: from Word Documents**

I instantly aim at the exhibition seeking for conversations with the designers and women entrepreneurs. I take off my jacket because it is warm inside the hotel. I roll it inside and bring out my camera and recover in hand. I see a display of clothing items, Halal candy, law company, perfumes, and fund raising for charity. The first exhibitor is ‘Salayfa’ brand. They have their online website and a boutique in London according to what the lady sitting behind the desk says. I visited their clothing blog on Instagram and at Salayfa.com to read about them. It is mentioned that the brand is owned by a mother and her four daughters. It was launched in 2017 which means it is recent. Their “aim is to help provide women with stylish and flattering clothing without the need to compromise on her personal ethics and beliefs. Something we totally believe is that modest fashion is not just for the Muslim woman, but for women of all faiths and backgrounds!” (Salayfa, 2017). The mother was wearing a long faux leather kimono, a black shawl covering her head, a red lipstick and kohl in her eyes’ water line, a trouser, and a black ballerina. I asked her if she is the brand owner, she replied that her two daughters are the designers and they will come back soon. The clothing items they presented in the event are mostly black. I notice black abayas in a cape design with a black or silver pearl on both sides of shoulder, long kimonos in faux leather and floral textile. I pick a business card of Salayfa and I carry on observing the rest.

People are still placing and organizing their products on tables for visitors. As I walk along a lady calls me to grab a bag, but she did not introduce what she is doing till I asked her about what they are presenting today. She said in short sentences that this is a law company which existed since a long time and it belongs to a family business. The woman wears a black headcover, a short khaki kimono and trousers. I thanked her and passed to the corridor on the left. There is a lady selling Oud perfumes and ‘Bakhoor’ (An Arabic word standing for burning charcoal with a pleasant scent in an engraved pot to aromatize the house or attire). This lady is

dressed in a long loose dress and a shawl on her head. I look ahead now, and right in front of me is a high mirror, a rack of knee length colourful tunics with embroidery on the top or sleeve sides. There is a poster of the brand next to these attires. A table facing me with very large veils in various colours and different sizes, painted boxes in different shapes and varnish. The veils have embroidery as well. I approached the women behind the table and questioned her about their exhibition. She said that those veils, boxes, and tunics are made by women from Kashmir (see figure 4). She added that they are handmade and emphasized that the profit out of this business is to provide a better living especially in this political disorder in the country. They are two sisters traveling from Kashmir with these products to sell in exhibitions or on social media 'Instagram' for the sake of saving women from the hardship of life there. They are both covering their heads with veils, wearing kimonos, and trousers. They spoke very gently and treated buyers in an attracting manner of kindness while demonstrating the primary objective which is helping women in need.



(Extract from photographic fieldnotes, taken by A.B) Handmade Attire by Women in Kashmir. On the left hand, there is a small room for five exhibitors with a variety of products. I observe initially the items they are presenting and what they look like. The first group belongs to Malaysian designer, but they only had pins and headcovers on their table. They say that they only brought the items for the modest fashion show because they did not have enough space for the rest in their luggage. They acknowledged that it is a family business. It started in 1992 when






their grandmother could not find the right pieces for her daughter who started wearing the ‘hijab’. By the right pieces they meant fashionable yet modest. I insist on what they really intended from using the term ‘modest’, a young girl who is the niece of the brand owner replies that it is about loose dresses not showing details of the body. She then adds that, business wise, there are more modest fashion stores and brands growing in the world, it is becoming competitive (Mentioning this point here, I am thinking of how corporate brands are adding modest dressing codes which meet Muslim women needs and hiring Muslim models who cover their head).

### Digital Field Note and Memo-ing Extract: Note mobile app and Messenger digital diary

< Notes ⋮

So many people are attending the show,  
 different ages, elderly and adults, young adults  
 Really catchy purple lighting on the poster at  
 the front door with big white heading  
 In the que sm ppl r wearing abayas n others  
 westerns style  
 Some girls look just like bloggers the way they  
 dress guve me a hint of a reflection of photos  
 ai habe seen on instagram n other social  
 medias  
 Even so many non veiled women are here  
 Even male  
 A lot of sporty shoes

- There were cameras and people were asked to talk infront of it
- Some declined n hid their faces because they think that this is not related to modesty showing their faces online n on websites or bbc news
- Majority wearing turbans and a lot of makeup
- Some are not wearing hijabs but still dressed so modest
- Many were wearing cameras
- They way they stand is similar to

    
 fashion  
 So many fancy trousers

< 1  Amina Boudjella

 0:09

it expands to reflection on my Algerian female community

and how modest fashion is growing in Algeria. listening to my fellow Algerian female colleagues and even Algeria males sometimes, I see that modest also play a huge role as the fashion industry of modesty and wear reached a global consumerist aim.

This lead to to readings about the Algerian women's modest dress and the reasoning behind wearing it. There was a section on Hayek and how it was a symbol of resistance. There were narratives by my grandma and female neighbors who were 'al âjaar' which is a triangular face cover embroidered, women wear outside for 'hishma' because they are shy and they don't want to be recognized. The interesting part about this is more than just



< 1  Amina Boudjella

recognized. The interesting part about this is more than just covering and modesty, it is about how they added embroidery to this face accessory if I can call it that way.

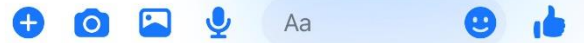
it is some how a part of fashion industry or maybe just culture. This remains open to research and an ethnographic immersion within the Algerian community while listening to women stories and their modest attire. How did this dress change over time because of the culture industry and how it even reached a country that is in Africa and with low living conditions as it appears.

JAN 19, 19:38

 1:00

 0:07

JAN 19, 19:36



**Photographic field notes: extracts from the journal**



**Memunatu in London (Extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**



**Birmingham Fashion Show, Sa-orsas brand product for charity auction (Extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**



**Birmingham Fashion Show, Miraal exhibition for their products (Extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**



**London Muslim Shopping Festival live modest fashion runway (Extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**



**Modest Madam London Exhibition at London Muslim Shopping Festival (extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**



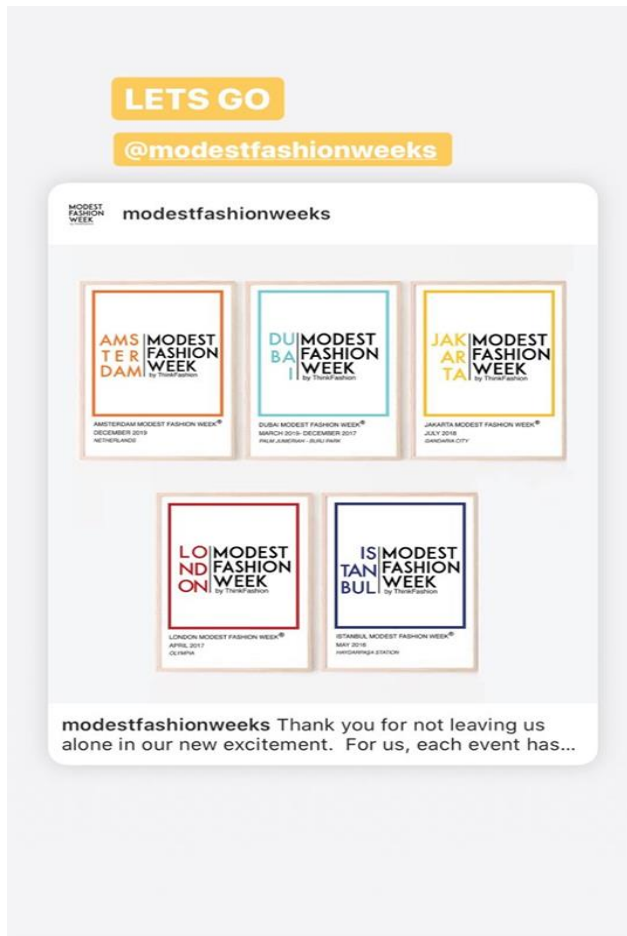
**Display screen at the entry of Istanbul Modest Fashion Week (extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**



**The 'Pay-for-Charity' cake stall in Leicester Fashion Show (extract from journal, photo taken by A.B)**

## Appendix 11 Extract of Instagrammic data

A post shared on *modestfashionweeks* Instagram Account for the five main locations of Modest Fashion Weeks (extract from Insta-journal)



@ikramabdi promoting for Louis Vuitton face mask on her Instagram page (extract from Insta-journal)



ikramabdi  · Following

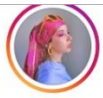


6,969 likes

ikramabdi Mask on

Artistic and expressive styling of a modest fashion look by @jullarij (extract from Instajournal)





jullarii · Following



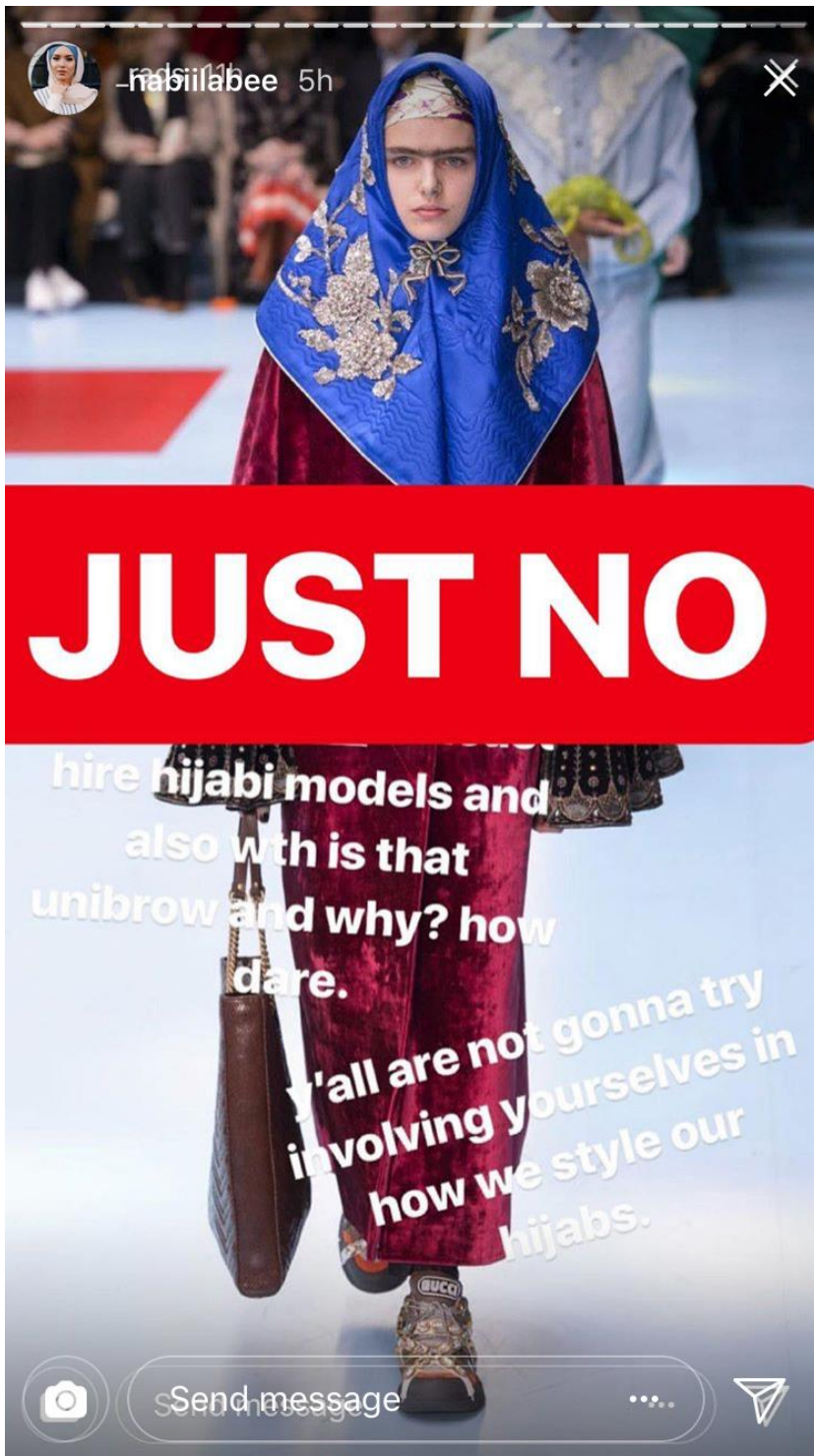
201 likes

jullarii I keep crossing between two worlds. One i feel free in and the other is too dark i dont see in.

**Cosmetic brands re-posting modest fashion bloggers' makeup looks on their Instagram account (extract from Insta-journal)**



**Bloggers' reaction to the presence of veils in fashion houses' runways (extract from Insta journal)**



The hijabi supermodel Halima Aden sharing her display on the cover of *the Observer Magazine UK* (extract from Insta journal)



The hijabi blogger's, Saima, DIY anime-inspired makeup look (extract from Insta journal)



**saimasmileslike** · Following  
Birmingham, United Kingdom



**Amena Khan's Post Sharing an Empowering Quote with Women (extract from Insta-Journal)**



AMENAKHAN  
Posts



amenakhan

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Liked by [aisha.zena](#) and 2,155 others