

THE PRACTICE OF WEARING HIJAB IN A MULTICULTURAL MOSQUE OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the practice of wearing the hijab among Hampton Roads Muslim women of Islamic Center of Tidewater (known as the ODU Mosque) in Norfolk, Virginia. This research asked two main questions: how did Muslim women at the ODU Mosque negotiate the social meanings embedded in the hijab? And, how did the ODU mosque as a cultural institution and as a multicultural space for Muslim women shape their practice of wearing the hijab? This research followed qualitative research method. The observation was primarily conducted during November 2017. For this research, interviews were conducted with five Muslim women who were at least 18 years of age, resided in Norfolk. This research finds that there is a cultural hybridization of the practices of wearing the hijab among Muslim women of this community. Moreover, by using the concept of 'space' by de Certeau, the researchers contend that the mosque has become not only a place of worship but space for them to interact and negotiate their Islamic practices or so-called their Muslimness. The ODU mosque is a space for them to negotiate their practices of Islamic rulings including the hijab.

Keywords: *hijab, cultural hybridity, multicultural space, Muslimness, America's mosque.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayaan Hirsi Ali has said that "Hijab is restrictive (and) terrible symbol," (Khan, 2015). Modern feminist scholarship associates the hijab (veil) with subordination and seclusion of Muslim women and restricting them from leading an independent life separate from their male relatives (Roded, 2010). They consider hijab as a symbol of patriarchal oppression in Islamic societies (Medina, 2014). The social attitude is also increasingly negative. For instance, a study conducted in Norway shows native population frequently has more negative views of Muslim women who wear a hijab (Strabac et al., 2016). However, in many parts of the world, Muslim women use the hijab as a symbol of empowerment (Honkatukia & Keskinen, 2018). The hijab has come to symbolize cultural and religious identity that is embraced as a matter of choice (Ahmed, 2011). Furthermore, according to Lapidus (2002), since 1980s women in Turkey and Egypt and throughout the Muslim world wore the hijab to facilitate their entry into public life. He has stated that "It serves to legitimize and facilitate trips to the *hammam* or public steam bath, beauty salon, school, and work."

Hijab is Muslim women dress based on the interpretation of Islamic rules. They are told by their religion to dress modestly, particularly in public. Their hijab can be a regular headscarf covering their hair, neck, and chest area or something more traditional like an abaya (long, loose robe) or even niqab (face covering). However, hijab is not merely a manifestation of piety. It is also a cultural expression of identity. The way Muslim women wear hijab varies from country to country and it is subject to historical and cultural circumstances (Litchmore & Safdar, 2016). Dressing modestly does

not necessarily mean that Muslim women are not stylish. They have incorporated different styles, fashion accessories, embroidery, etc., to make their hijab more fashionable (Van Roojen, 2011).

The hijab also signifies a contestation of identity. Within the Muslim community, there is a negotiation of the definition of the 'correct' dress (Akou, 2010). This definition is often used as a marker of who is the true or better Muslim (Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010). Wearing the hijab is considered as an obligation in Islam, and it reflects the level of commitment to the religion (Bhowon & Bundhoo, 2016). Externally, the hijab is also being contested in the context of the prevalence of patriarchy oppression and the assimilation of the minority into the liberal and progressive America (Al Wazni, 2015).

The researchers argue that there is a cultural hybridization of the practices of wearing the hijab among Muslim women of this community. There is a process that generates new trans-local forms of difference rather than merely cultural convergence of growing sameness or differentialism or lasting difference. Moreover, following de Certeau (2011), he has contended that the mosque has become not only a place of worship but space for them to interact and negotiate their Islamic practices or so-called their Muslimness. The ODU mosque is a space for them to negotiate their practices of Islamic rulings including the hijab. This place is vital in this hybridization process.

Previous researches on the hijab have focused on how social and cultural circumstances influence the dynamic of wearing the hijab. Tariq-Munir (2014) has examined social of familial factors affecting Muslim women in America to wear the hijab. Van Roojen (2011) has presented a variety of the hijab practices based on its geographical areas. The dominant local culture defines how the religious conjunction of the hijab is being displayed. However, there has been little attention to how the hijab is expressed in a modern and multicultural setting as what people have seen in contemporary America. This research is dedicated to understanding the practice of the hijab within the context of cultural hybridity which is defined as the rhizome of culture as opposed to homogenizing, modernizing, and westernizing processes (Pieterse, 2015).

This research examines the practice of wearing the hijab among Hampton Roads Muslim women of Islamic Center of Tidewater (also commonly known as the ODU Mosque) in Norfolk, Virginia. This research asks two main questions; how do Muslim women at the ODU Mosque negotiate the social meanings embedded in the hijab? And furthermore, how does the ODU mosque as a cultural institution and as a multicultural space for Muslim women shape their practice of wearing the hijab?

METHODS

The design of this research follows qualitative research methodology. The primary goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture to gain a holistic view and depth of understanding, rather than merely collect numbers and run a regression. The participatory observation was used to understand the different styles of Hijab practiced by the object of the research. The interview was utilized to dig a deeper understanding of personal and processes among Muslim women in this mosque. Lastly, documents and informal rules created were assessed to decipher how the mosque as social space influence the way the Muslim women dress.

The observation was primarily conducted during November 2017. For this research, the researchers interviewed five Muslim women who were at least 18 years of age, resided in Norfolk, Virginia. All the participants were actively involved in the activities in the mosque. Mostly, women came to the ODU mosque on Friday afternoon for congregational prayer, Friday night, or weekend

during the Sunday school. On Friday night, they had fellowship where they discussed Quran and general religious matter and also contemporary issues such as the problem in public school, halal groceries, finding headscarf, etc. This research collected the data through an informal conversation based on an unplanned set of questions more than an interview. This strategy was used because in many cases, the researchers cannot gain more in-depth and personal information when the respondents are situated in a formal setting. Moreover, the researchers also observed their interaction in the social media within the mosque network. The researchers elaborated on their experiences of wearing the hijab and their transformation of the hijab as a result of their social interaction with other fellow Muslim women in the ODU mosque.

In what follows, the researchers present the observation result on how the practice of the hijab by Muslim women of ODU mosque. The researchers discuss this finding within the frameworks provided by de Certeau (2011) on space and Pieterse (2015) on hybridity to understand the practice of the hijab in the context of hybrid space such as ODU mosque. It is started by elaborating the significance of ODU mosque as space and then discussing how the Muslim women in this space articulate their experiences of change in the societies through their creative processes of wearing the hijab. The practice of wearing the hijab is a result of a dynamic process between the pressures of modernity, traditional values, and also demands social transformations with modern circumstances.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The ODU mosque is located on the Old Dominion University (ODU) campus, but the students of ODU do not exclusively use it. Muslims who live in the area come from many parts of the world and also from a different type of Muslim societies. Furthermore, there is not only Muslims who come from abroad, but there are also a significant number of local Muslims especially African American Muslims who also use the mosque as their regular place of worship. The ODU mosque has the vital role as the key site where Muslim women in this area negotiate their practice of wearing the hijab. Based on the researchers' observation, the ODU mosque is a single place, but with multiple spaces. The term spaces here do not mean physical spaces or rooms within the mosque, but social spaces where members' activities and interactions give meaning to the place. This mosque is not simply a male-dominated sacred space. The women use different activities to assert their role (and leadership) within the community. It has no significant differences as a place with other mosques across the US or even mosques in Pakistan, Morocco, or Saudi Arabia, or other Muslim majority countries. However, it is in its social practice which makes the ODU mosque unique.

De Certeau (2011) has distinguished the term of place and space. He has explained that a place is an order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence; a place is thus "An instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability." When the outsiders look at an unfamiliar building from afar, such as through a photograph of its exterior, they see a seemingly stable, concretely distinguishable 'place'. Based on this notion, the ODU mosque is a place which is located in a specific location which is 1442 W 49 Street, Norfolk, Virginia. It is a Muslim worship place that holds several rooms, including men's prayer room, women's prayer room, office, and playroom for children, kitchen, bathroom, and a multi-purpose hall.

Mosque as a place has some functions such as a place of worship and to organize Islamic activities. It has various departments conducting different programs. These diverse elements of the site are consciously designed to assist with the functioning of the worship activities in this place. Mosque has specific rules that must be obeyed by its members. For instance, it needs to wear proper attire when entering the mosque, should not hold commercial activities, and should not conduct activities that are contrary to Islamic values, etc.

The mosque is open every day, especially during the five daily prayer times. *Fajr* prayer is usually done before sunrise, *Dhuhr* prayer during the midday, *Asr* prayer in the afternoon, *Maghrib* prayer in the early evening, and *Isha* prayer at night. In every prayer time, there are approximately 10-15 men who worship together led by an *Imam*. Sometimes there are also female worshipers, but it is usually less than five people. The majority of community members come every Friday for weekly service. There are approximately 200 men and 30 women who attend the service. It starts with a sermon for about 45 minutes and continues with 15 minutes congregation prayer. The variety of skin color and race of worshipers symbolizes the varied background of the members of this community.

There is a particular women's room in the ODU mosque. It is a big hall at the back side of the mosque. During the Friday service, this hall becomes the women's prayer room. This hall is also the main venue for many of the mosque's events. The issue of separation of male and female in the mosque is often asked by non-Muslim visitors who come to the mosque. In one of the interviews, the ODU mosque leader argues that the orthodox understanding of Islam suggests a separation of males and females during prayer but its implementation varies across culture. During the prayer, the *Imam* leads in the front followed by the male rows, then children rows, and lastly the women rows. Some mosques use a rigorous separation by having a wall or a different floor for each sex, while other mosques just use simple line or marker to differentiate male and female rows. In general, separation happens only during prayer. Male and female can interact with other activities or events.

The use of divider has increased across America. According to a survey conducted Bagby (2012), between 1994 and 2000, "The percentage of mosques in America that used curtains or dividers to distinguish women's spaces increased from 52% to 66%. In 2011, there was no change in that figure, with about two thirds, or 66% of mosques reporting the use of a divider." The ODU mosque uses curtain and partition in the main prayer room and also provides a separate room for women in the mosque.

During Friday night, there are Quran class and gathering in the ODU mosque. Around 15 kids join with Quran class under a teacher who is initially from Libya. While waiting for the kids to finish the class, about 10 Muslim women gather for Islamic studies, chat, or do other fun activities like eating, eat cookies, and have a tea party. In certain days, usually weekend, there is Muslim family potluck. Around 20-50 men, women, and children come to the mosque, bring food to share and eat together. They set the table into two groups, for men located in the front hall near the men's prayer area and the table for women is arranged in the back hall. Children can choose to join the men's or women's banquet table.

Moreover, this mosque does not specify its particular Islamic 'sect' or legal school. This mosque is entirely inclusive of Muslims from Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi, or other groups, who are welcome to come and attend the services. However, the administration of the mosque is predominantly Sunni, which makes Sunni practices become the standard for the religious services here. The mosque does not enforce any particular teaching, but its policy is to maintain harmony among a very diverse membership. The mosque tends to avoid any practices or activities which are controversial according to the majority mosque members. Sunni practices are presented as the one which can accommodate this purpose. Altogether, it can be said that the ODU mosque is not different to other mosques in the country. It is a place where Islamic religious activities are being carried out. Likewise, the majority of the mosques, the role of the woman is very limited or even not visible within religious space. The women are merely suggested to occupy the separate place and follow the service provided. If they have a particular task in the religious service, this function can be considered as insignificant. However, the ODU mosque is not merely a spiritual space. It is also a civic space where the interfaith discussion is organized, and program for refugees is planned and conducted. It is also a learning space where children and teenager are being thought in the Islamic Sunday school. Surprisingly, this is where the Muslim women take the lead.

Contrary to place, de Certeau (2011) has explained that a “Space is composed of intersections of mobile elements.” Moreover, he has said, “space is a practiced place.” On any given day ODU mosque is a space. It is composed of worshipers who are praying, people who are reading Quran, the kids who are running and playing, or volunteers who are packing donation for the refugees. Although the mosque is designed as a place of worship, it is not only what occurs inside the building. Jamila, one of the volunteers of the refugee program, addresses visitors; male and female, from the nearby churches. She encourages people to be involved in the program as refugee helpers. The refugees need help to get their driver license, to do their laundry, and buy groceries, etc. Jamila does it at the same place where the males usually pray and at the same spot where the Imam typically lead the prayer. The interfaith dialogue where women are actively involved is also conducted in the very same place.

These activities are not the primary purpose when the community set up the mosque. The mosque is set up to serve the religious need of the community. However, to ignore these activities as non-religious is also not correct. By using the same tool provided by de Certeau, Woodhead (in Jeldtoft et al., 2013) offers a robust approach to understand these practices. Woodhead helpfully shows that the everyday lived religion means in the volume by using the vocabulary of ‘tactical versus strategic’. Strategic religion refers to official or proper religion (i.e., church or mosque), “Whereas tactical religion refers to religion lived by ordinary people, who do not have power but operate within the space that is created by the elite (strategic religion).” She uses the example of how Muslim pupils in Danish public schools use tactical religion while interacting with their non-Muslim school environment. Similarly, Muslim women of the America mosques including the ODU mosque create new spaces for them to assert their role within the limited religious space (Wang, 2017).

The researchers argue that these spaces are real and not merely a symbolic expression. The same survey by Bagby (2012) that finds that, “Mosques that are open to involvement in American society through activities such as interfaith and community service tend to be more women-friendly.” This space is often created outside the formal mosque structure. This phenomenon also happens at the ODU mosque. The reason is existing structures and interpretations are more resistant to change. Because of the institutional traditionalism, many women leaders have occasionally preferred to start off with new organizational structures as an avenue to public engagement, rather than integrating themselves into existing organizational forms and seeking change from within the system.

In the case of the ODU mosque, the women start the various programs from a face-to-face meeting at the mosque, and then this contact continues into multiple interactions including through virtual world of social media. The interaction can be in a simple communication of sharing food recipes, sharing information about schools, groceries, etc. The mosque is the crucial site for the interaction, but it is not the only one. Their interactions are not confined only within the wall of the Mosque or during weekly services. Muslims setting foot in the mosque will be immediately connected with various social networks within the community. There are Muslim Students Association (MSA) ODU with its student activities, Al-Iman Islamic Sunday School where parents and children interact within a ‘school setting’, Facebook groups where they get the latest news concerning the community and also a site for informal buying and selling activities, weekly *halaqah* (fellowship), and other friendship networks. ODU mosque is both a physical building and spaces that contains all social interaction between members of the community. Following de Certeau (2011), the researchers have contend that the mosque has become not only a place of worship or religious place but multiple spaces for particularly the Muslim women to navigate their way around local circumstances and conventional religious boundaries and assert their role.

The modern feminists use a certain category of freedom to criticize the practice of hijab. Because the women are not allowed to wear as they please in public. The feminists argue that there are subordination and seclusion within the Muslim societies. This argument fails to address the complexity of the social process. Society is able to function when there are rules or agreement among

the individuals. The restriction of a certain behavior does not necessarily mean subordination. Likewise, someone is not allowed to enter a particular restaurant without wearing suit and tie. Moreover, this argument neglects the recent survey from the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research conducted in seven Muslim-majority countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) that finds most people prefer that a woman completely cover her hair, but not necessarily her face (Moaddel, 2013). The indicator is whether there is a space for negotiation related to certain rules within the society. It addresses the question of how the Muslim women negotiate their practice of wearing the hijab within the ODU mosque space.

ODU mosque plays the vital role in the women's practice of wearing the hijab. Moreover, the role is not in merely forcing these women to obey their religion but also enabling them to give new meaning to the practice. The hijab practice is not a sign of returning to medieval tradition but a creative process of interpreting the tradition. It is hybridization where the need of personal actualization and social acceptance, the longing for religious meaning, and a respond toward political circumstance shape the way these Muslim women dress.

The Muslim women of ODU mosque come with their own cultures including how they wear the hijab. In their own particular culture where the hijab is a common practice, they never question why and how they should dress this specific cloth. But by interacting with different people in a multicultural space such as ODU mosque, they have begun to reflect on their hijab practices. They receive various references for how to wear the hijab, for instance from their interaction with international friends. Some change their color preference of the hijab. Black or dark was the color of their hijab, but now they use a brighter color of the hijab. There is a transition of meaning from dark color which is associated with modesty and invisibility to brighter color which signifies assertiveness and visibility. Some even change in their overall hijab style from abaya (long dress) to a more flexible and stylish hijab. They combine it with long sleeve shirt, long skirt or pant, or coat but by still considering the basic religious precepts of covering their head and bosom.

Moreover, many Muslim women feel the need to express their "Muslimness" outwardly in the face of Islamophobia (i.e., that the rise of Islamophobia has emboldened many Muslim women to wear their hijab where previously they might have resisted it). For them wearing the hijab is a political act, for instance in the case of *EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc.* A case from the United States Supreme Court, which involved a Muslim plaintiff, held that religious practices are to be given favored treatment by employers in the workplace (Chioco, 2017). Therefore, this practice of the hijab cannot merely be defined within the current stable manifestations of Islam, Americanism, or other dominant cultures. It is an identity which is continuously reshaped by collective practices of Muslim women within their specific space. According to Bouvier (2016), Muslim women use their hijab fashion to communicate a number of different discourses simultaneously. These include modesty, religious identity and tradition, on the one hand, and freedom, confidence, and modernity.

Muslim women who frequent the ODU mosque come from many countries. They are from Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries such as Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Some come from African countries, such as Senegal. Others are Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indonesian, and Thais. They are also a significant number of white Americans and African American Muslim women too. These women are the backbone of the community. They are the one who organizes many vital events such as the annual Women Day, Mosque visit, Eid holiday celebration, Ramadan breakfasting, and also various informal activities such as cooking class, Friday fellowship, and occasional potluck dinner.

Many Muslim women who recently came to the US cannot communicate in English fluently. Therefore, sometimes it can be seen a gathering of people from the same country or the same language background. For instance, the Saudis, Libyans, Lebanese, Sudanese, and Egyptians meet regularly in the mosque and converse in Arabic. The Urdu speaking women also have their group. Nonetheless,

most of the time, they interact with each other using English, especially during a formal meeting or activities. The existence of ODU mosque as space enables these women from different cultures to interact as shown by various experiences of our respondents below.

Mustafa, Muslim women from Kurdistan, came to the US five years ago. Even though she was born as a Muslim, she did not wear hijab. In ODU mosque, she makes friends with many people from different background. She also comes every Friday for *Jumah* prayer. Mustafa said, "Once upon a time, Sheikh Ahmad who was leading prayer talk in his sermon about the importance of wearing hijab for Muslim women. It moved my feeling to wear hijab. Since 2013, I decided to wear hijab forever." She added, "The other thing which was touching my heart is the fact that many convert Muslim women -usually American ladies- wearing hijab a minute after they took *shahada*. The *shahada* is the Muslim profession of faith, expressing the two simple, fundamental beliefs that make one a Muslim. Then I told myself, why I am not wearing it, even though I was born as a Muslim?" For Mustafa, hijab is symbolizing of obedience to God. She did not have this perspective before because, in Kurdistan, she saw many women did not wear hijab as well, even though Muslim is the majority religion there. The way Muslim in the US, especially people in ODU mosque express themselves as a Muslim community changed her mind. Now, she is wearing hijab proudly and happily. Hijab is not only representing her obedience to God but also declaring that she is a Muslim woman.

Aisha who is originally from Lebanese has a quite similar experience with Mustafa. She comes from a secular family. Both of her parents are Muslim, but they do not practice Islam. When she lived in Lebanon, she attended Christian school until moved to the US 20 years ago. She knows that Muslim women should cover their body, but because her Mom does not do that and many Lebanese do not as well, so she thought it was not significant. Even she has an entirely different view about hijab. "I know that our religion obliges us to wear hijab. But actually, I am always wondering why we should do that. Is it because we are not supposed to attract men? Maybe hijab works in some places such as the Muslim majority countries. For example, almost every woman wears the hijab in the Middle East, and if you are not wearing it, you will look different from others. On the contrary here, in the US, the majority of the people do not wear the hijab. You will draw the attention to men when you are wearing the hijab and not when you are not wearing it," said Aisha. Interestingly, even though she questioned the rules of hijab for Muslim women, she is still wearing the scarf sometimes, especially when she visits the mosque and attends Islamic events.

Aisha's family moved to the US because they followed the father who got a job in the US. She spent almost all of her life in California until she married a NAVY personnel two years ago and then moved to Norfolk. Since she lives here, she has been coming to ODU mosque quite often. She said Norfolk is so different from California. It is a small city, quiet, and does not have many interesting places to visit. The only thing she loves about Norfolk is its Muslim community in the ODU mosque. "Everyone in the mosque is a nice and good person. They practice Islam very well and care for other Muslims as well. When I lived in California, everyone was busy with their work to earn money. The living cost there was really expensive, so we cannot have a decent living if we do not work hard. But here, everyday life goes slowly and everybody -who I had known- has strong interpersonal relationships. I do not have this kind of community in California," said Aisha.

Since she comes to ODU mosque often, she starts using hijab more. Every woman covers their body when they come to mosque even though there is no strict rule about it. Besides, women who come to the mosque will do prayer which required them to cover all their body except face and palm, so it will be more comfortable if they put hijab already so they can perform prayer directly without changed into prayer cloth. "This community has a high influence on me. I met many sincere and honest Muslim women here. We just know each other less than a year, but we turn to be a good sister already. They never questioned me why I do not wear hijab outside the mosque that makes me considered to wear hijab every day because I think it is the Muslim women should be," said Aisha.

Several months ago, Aisha gave birth to her first daughter. As a result, she decided to quit her work to be a stay home as a housewife and full-time mother. Aisha worked before in one Lebanese-American restaurant in downtown Norfolk. As she stays at home right now, she often invites her friend to come and to have lunch together. She also spends most of her time shopping and hanging out with other Muslim women in the community which resulted in her decision to wear hijab every day. “Now I am wearing the hijab every day because I want to become closer to God. I want to be a better Muslim by covering my body. God has been nice to me for the whole of my life, so why don't I try to fulfill His will?”, she asked rhetorically.

The only time she does not cover her body with the hijab is when she feels insecure, for instance when she has to walk alone by herself in public. The rise of Islamophobia in the US makes her afraid to show her hijab in public. However, most of the time she is always wearing her hijab. This transformation of hijab is not considered a painful process for her. She has been using the modest dress for most of her time. The only thing she did not do was cover her hair with a headscarf. She prefers to have ‘American style’ of the hijab with pants, jeans, or long skirts combined with long sleeve shirt and headscarf rather than abaya or any Middle Eastern style of hijab. Moreover, she has full support from her husband in her decision of wearing hijab.

The ODU mosque plays a vital role in their hijab ‘strategies’. As a religious space, the mosque enforces certain rules or standard for them. A pious Muslim woman should wear the hijab. The hijab is a sign of obedience to God. Although Aisha questioned the reasoning of the hijab particularly its social benefit, she did not argue the validity of hijab as one of the religious categories. The same thing happened to Mustafa. Nevertheless, they follow a version of hijab that does not take the culture (i.e., abaya) as a part of the religion but seek to ‘purify’ it from cultural elements (Cevik, 2016). This strategy gives them flexibility. In this, they add new meaning to the hijab including its appearance. Mustafa comes from the country which was on travel ban list. She confidently joined many advocacy programs on her campus to support international students responding to the travel ban. She was intentionally using her hijab as a marker for her identity, and at the same time, she was questioning the existence of American values of freedom, equality, and justice within the travel ban policy. Aisha's preference of ‘American style’ can be understood as her strategy to accommodate conventional religious boundaries with her circumstances. According to Pieterse (2015), hybridity cannot be free from its historical context. A new cultural manifestation has still had the connection with original culture, although they cannot be considered as the same as they were.

The other respondents are Hana, Sara, and Alaya. Hana who is originally from India shared her experience when she came here, four years ago, she felt so lonely. Hana could not speak any English at all and did not know anyone in this city. Moreover, wherever she went, she felt people stared at her. Hana believed it was because of her *niqab*. She covered her face just like how the majority Muslim women in her community in India cover their face. But it changed the first day Hana entered ODU mosque. “When I came to this mosque, I felt like I'm home,” Hana said. “Everyone is nice and friendly even though I can't speak English well and we just got to know each other,” added Hana. Later on, she noticed that many Muslim women have a different style of hijab. It is something new for her because usually, she sees almost all women wear the same hijab style in her hometown.

Hana comes from a pious Indian Muslim family. She started to wear hijab when she was 13 years old because at that time she went to Islamic school and the institution required her to cover her body. “Later I understood that Islam ordered mature women to cover their body,” she said.

When Hana moved here, she found American culture was very different from her own. According to her, Americans were more respectful toward women, including a woman with *niqab*/chador like her. It is true that at the beginning she felt very alienated from this society. People were staring at her abaya and her *niqab*. But after some time, she managed to interact with more people and got to know them better. From her interaction with Americans, she admitted that the

majority of Americans she knows are friendly and respect her. If they ask a question about her dress, it is mostly out of curiosity. "They never met any women in niqab," Hana said. The interaction with any other Muslim women in ODU mosque also enriched her perspective about hijab. She often asked her friend where she can find the type of hijab they use. Sometimes she learns from other to put the different style of scarf. The new references to hijab style and her interaction with American culture make her change in the way she wears her hijab. She used to wear only dark color before, but she has been using bright color dresses recently, including her *niqab*. She makes her dress with a more fit size but not too tight. She changes her long Indian scarf to Asian style scarf. It is not big and long scarf but smaller in size. She uses it to cover her hair, neck, and chest then combine it with *niqab*. "Since I change my hijab style I feel like people do not stare at me anymore," she said.

Sara, a Libyan Muslim woman, moved to the US 5 years ago. She had a slightly different experience to Hana. During her first three years, she spent most of her time at home with her two children. Sometimes, she visited her Libyan friend's apartment next door. One thing that entertained her was her visit to ODU mosque. At the mosque, she could meet and chat with other Muslim friends. "I like to learn about other culture, but I often lost my confidence to start the conversation. I know it because my English was not quite good. I always want to go to an English class, but right now, my youngest kid is still under four years old. It means I need to stay home with most of her anytime. My husband is a Ph.D. student at ODU, and he is always busy with his study," said Sara. Like Hana, Sara was always seen in her traditional black abaya every time the researchers met her at the mosque. One time, the researchers met her in the Norfolk public library. Interestingly, she was wearing jeans combined with a long knee coat. I knew that she never wore it before when she visited ODU mosque or during previous Islamic event. I assume she adjusts her hijab according to different places and circumstances.

The hijab practices that have discussed are a hybrid process. It is hard to define and differentiate their hijab based on its geographical origin. There are some elements of the hijab of Middle East, the hijab of Africa, or the hijab of Asia, but it is not the same as before. There are no lasting differences between styles of nowadays hijab. The hijab mixes many components from different sources. Moreover, it is a continuous mixing in its physical manifestation and also in its meaning as shown by Hana and Sara's experiences.

The case of Alaya shows an exciting negotiation between religiosity and modernity (Bouvier, 2016). Alaya is from Thailand. She became Muslim 17 years ago when she was a student at ODU. Initially, she used the element of Middle Eastern hijab for her dress because that was how she saw the majority of Muslim women dress style. She used to wear long black abaya covering her body. She used it because this dress not only covered her body but also covered her body shape. Later on, after she joined ODU mosque Muslim women community, she saw many Muslim women using different style hijab. It made her think about the fundamental element of hijab. She concluded that the main aspects of the hijab are the clothes that cover the head, neck, and chest. According to her, Muslim women can use any style of dress as long as it follows the basic rules and it is not tight. Alaya expresses her personality through her hijab. Wearing the hijab is not only to obey religious ruling but also part of her expression. As she like branded kinds of stuff and fashion, she incorporates those modern elements into her practice of the hijab. It can be seen now that she wears a branded dress, skirt, combined with the long gown, long sleeve tops or tight pants, or jeans with a long coat. She is a fashionable person who uses her hijab as a locus of her personality.

Pieterse (2015) defines hybridity as the rhizome of culture where brings a more complex identity as oppose to homogenizing, modernizing, and westernizing processes. Moreover, he argues that there are only three perspectives on the cultural difference; cultural differentialism or lasting difference, cultural convergence or growing sameness, and cultural hybridization or ongoing mixing. He has said that each of these positions involves particular theoretical precepts, and as such they are paradigms. Each represents a particular politics of difference—as lasting and immutable, as erasable

and being erased, and as mixing and in the process generating new translocal forms of difference. Each involves different subjectivities and larger perspectives. The first view, according to which cultural difference is immutable, may be the oldest perspective on cultural difference. The second, the thesis of cultural convergence, is as old as the earliest forms of universalism, as in the world religions. Both have been revived and renewed as varieties of modernism, respectively in its romantic and Enlightenment versions, while the third perspective, hybridization, refers to a postmodern sensibility of traveling culture. The third perspective seems to be the most suitable to understand the practice of Hijab in this research. This practice of hijab cannot merely be defined within the current stable manifestations of Islam, Americanism, or other dominant cultures. It is an identity which is reshaped continuously by collective practices of Muslim women within their specific space.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of women in Muslim societies including the practice of the hijab is one of the most challenging issues. It is more complicated than is implied in the simple concepts of male dominance and social segregation. In many occasions, this point has been used to justify and legitimize certain idea. It is used to attack different culture as backward and validate its dominion. As shown in this research, the practice of the hijab in the Muslim women is more complicated than that. There are a constant struggle and negotiation of their identity, their role through their hijab expression. The mosque itself has a significant role in it. The ODU mosque is not only a religious space which enforces specific criteria of the hijab, but it is also multiple spaces where women assert their roles. The ODU mosque is a place and also space. As a multicultural place, it enables people from different cultures to meet and interact. Later on, their interactions transform this place into various meaningful spaces which are significant in the hybridity of their hijab practice.

The respondents transform their hijab styles from dark color into more colorful hijab color. They do not use abaya which is associated with certain traditional hijab culture. To the contrary, they creatively combine the different elements of fashion to their hijab. One respondent uses a slimmer cloth, while other adjusts her style according to social circumstances. In the mosque, she uses the same hijab as many of her fellow countrywomen, but she uses different hijab when she goes to other public places. Two of them affirm that their decision of wearing the hijab is due to the suggestion from the Imam of the ODU mosque during one of his sermons. They chose to wear the hijab because it is an essential part of their religious identity. The changes in the appearances are signifying modifications in meaning too. In many Muslim majority countries, wearing hijab is a 'normal state'. Muslim women in those places do not question the way they dress. Since they were young, the family and society promote to wear the hijab. Wearing hijab is not only a religious but also social necessity. Therefore, they will be socially nurtured to wear the hijab when they grow up.

All in all, the hijab does not only represent piety or seclusion or subordination but also represents aesthetic elements of fashion and creativity. In the context of America, it is also a tool to express individuality and demand for social change as shown in the previous case of Aisha and Mustafa. The hijab is an expression of Muslim women to be more involved in the public sphere and be more socially accepted as the case of Hana. The expression of piety is still attached to the hijab. Nevertheless, hijab is not only about piety or modesty. The hijab has entered the realm of aesthetic (and commerce) by having the element of fashion. It is an expression of style, trends, and progress as seen through the creative process of Sara and Alaya. Muslim women are negotiating different meanings through their hijab. The influence of fashion industry can also be seen from their social media activities. Muslim women of ODU mosque set up a Facebook page for them to do commercial activities. Some of them constantly offer new trend of hijab to the community. The latest trend of hijab

cannot easily classify into a traditional or regional style of hijab. They mix many elements with more cosmopolitan features that suit the most recent need of modern women.

The limitation of this research is on its small number of interview respondents. All of them come from countries outside of the US, and most of them just lived in this country less than five years. The ODU mosque is also located in a certain unique neighborhood which is campus community. It can be considered as a bubble which is relatively distant from many of problems that faced by Americans. For instance, this mosque does not deal with many issues of crime, drugs, or gentrification of many inner cities in America, even for the issue of Islamophobia. Although our respondents feel being disturbed by the rise of Islamophobia, they do not get direct impact from it. They are international students or family of students with certain privileges. Nevertheless, this case study has a contribution to the discussion of gender, fashion, and Islam. This case study shows the importance of the mosque in this process. These Muslim women do not merely passive in obeying standards provided by the mosque as a religious space, but they create strategies to assert their role. Moreover, the ODU mosque provides a site for these women to influence, to be influenced, to negotiate with others to transform their practice of wearing the hijab both in its appearance and its meaning.

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