

Muslim Women's Views on Religious Clothing

Excerpt Collection One

*'The day I walk out of my house without this scarf would not be a day to be celebrated'*¹

Toqa Badran

I wear this scarf because when I was a child I was socialized to be embarrassed, even ashamed, of my religion and my culture. I was told that to be a Muslim was to be a terrorist and that to be outwardly Muslim was to endorse violence and oppression. I was told that I had more in common with the violent men on tv than with the other children in my second grade class. I understood that I would be unwelcome as long as I wore symbols of my heritage and chose to, in however modern a way, embrace my ancestors. I was told that to manifest my faith in this way, to dress like my mother as many young girls want to do, was to spit in the faces of "real Americans." The day I walk out of my house without this scarf would not be a day to be celebrated. It would be the day that I decide that to be proud of myself is too much of a liability and that shame of my faith, my family and my heritage are easier to swallow than the dirty stares, abuse, misunderstanding and sense of alienation from those around me who do not and will not care enough about me or women who look like me to help alleviate it.

Muna Jama, Former Miss Universe contestant, a model and humanitarian campaigner²

Throughout my career, I have used Islam to guide me but have chosen not to wear the hijab. Instead, I've embraced faith through my conversations, my behaviour and the way I dress.

[...]

When the media focuses so much on those who wear the hijab, they can forget the diversity of thought among Muslim women. I love wearing a headscarf on certain days and, at other times, practise my modesty entirely differently. That may be wearing a kaftan, owning the catwalk at Modest Fashion Weeks around the world or simply by being a considerate and compassionate person.

True beauty is defined by our behaviour towards one another and should not be measured by what we wear. The hijab is a wonderful way to practise the Islamic faith but not the only way.

¹ Toqa Badran, *'The day I walk out of my house without this scarf would not be a day to be celebrated'*, *World Hijab Day*, 8 February 2018.

² Bianca London, *'As France votes to ban the hijab for under-18s, these Muslim women reveal why they choose to wear - or not wear - the hijab in today's society'*, *Glamour*, 6 April 2021.

Khadija Mahamud, Digital content creator³

To me, the hijab is more than just a piece of cloth; it's a symbol of my faith that represents a part of me to the world. I started wearing the hijab full-time when I was 15. I was fortunate enough that my mum taught me about the reasons for wearing it and she encouraged me to research its importance. It's never enough of a reason to do something just because someone else tells you to. In short, it's because of this that I was able to see the beauty of, and essentially the empowerment of, choosing to cover up. In a world where women are often sexualised, there's something extremely powerful about knowing people won't judge you based on what you're wearing.

People often assume there are limitations to wearing the hijab. For me, it does the opposite; it allows me to be unapologetically myself both as a feminist and as a Muslim woman. The media fuels the way people perceive Muslim women; good and bad. We're either breaking news because we're breaking boundaries or, somehow, we need to be saved. It seems as though it's time to accept, Muslim women aren't so different from other women.

'I'm Muslim but don't wear a headscarf. Stop using hijabs as a tool for 'solidarity''⁴

Eman Quotah

I am a Muslim woman. I do not wear a headscarf. And I urge those who want to ally themselves with Muslims to do so in a way that includes many Muslim women who choose not to cover (including 42% of U.S. Muslim women) and acknowledges Muslims' healthy internal debate over many issues, including modesty.

Many of my Muslim sisters, like Rep. Ilhan Omar, view wearing a scarf on their heads as a religious obligation, a personally empowering choice or meaningful cultural practice. I stand up for their right to practice Islam as they see fit, no matter where they live, and I respect their point of view. But I don't share it.

[...]

God might not have granted me a belief that I should cover myself, but he has given me other convictions. I abstain from alcohol. I do not eat pork. I believe in the oneness of God. My decision to eschew a hijab is not due to spiritual laziness, ignorance or lack of faith. I strongly believe that Muslim women should not have to wear it.

Even so, I would never stand in the way of those women who do. No government or its proxies – police, religious authorities, schools and other public institutions – and no father, brother, mother, husband, boss, fellow student or random stranger should demand that a woman wear or not wear a hijab.

³ Bianca London, *'As France votes to ban the hijab for under-18s, these Muslim women reveal why they choose to wear – or not wear – the hijab in today's society'*, *Glamour*, 6 April 2021.

⁴ Eman Quotah, *'I'm Muslim but don't wear a headscarf. Stop using hijabs as a tool for "solidarity"'*, *USA Today*, 24 April 2019

Muslim Women's Views on Religious Clothing

Excerpt Collection Two

*'I am a Muslim woman and I am proud to be recognised as one'*¹

Anonymous

We live in a materialistic society where people are very shallow and conscious about their appearance. I choose to dress this way because it gives me freedom. I don't have to worry about strange men looking at my figure, desiring me in a sexual way or people commenting on the way I look and judging my looks or talking about my clothes.

I adhere to the Islamic dress code which is called a jilbab. It consists of a garment covering you from head to toe that exposes only your hands and face. Dressing in such a way is a commandment from Allah. I am a Muslim woman and I am proud to be recognised as one, regardless of what people think.

People react in many different ways depending on what's happening around the world. Some people say I should go back to my country but three generations of my family were born here in London, so that makes me more British than half the people who say this to me.

[...]

We live in a multicultural society. Nuns dress like Muslims and so do Orthodox Jewish women – yet there is no uproar about the way they dress.

*'The first question I'm asked is "Why don't you wear hijab?"'*²

Farrah, 40, freelance PR, Birmingham

"My relationship with the hijab hasn't been a straight path, but then neither was my journey to Islam. I don't wear a headscarf and I'm not easily identifiable as Muslim. People I work with only discover I'm Muslim when I mention I need to go and pray or when I am fasting. Most people are surprised and the first question I'm asked is 'Why don't you wear hijab?'

My first experience with the hijab was at 12 or 13 when I was instructed by my father to wear a headscarf. I rebelled because it was completely foreign to me. I went to a Catholic school, had boyband posters on my bedroom wall and had never even had a discussion about Islam or the hijab. Wearing it just didn't feel right.

I discovered Islam myself in my 20s. Growth takes time and it is important to me to build solid foundations. The last thing I want to do is be quick to put the hijab on and then just as quick to take it off. After all, hijab has a broader meaning in Islam; it's not only defined by modest attire, it encompasses behaviour for both men and women."

¹ Carmen Fishwick and Guardian readers, *'Why we wear the burkini: five women on dressing modestly at the beach'*, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2016, accessed 6 March 2023.

² Zeynab Mohamed, *'World Hijab Day: 5 Muslim women explain what the headscarf means to them in 2022'*, *Stylist*, 1 February 2022, accessed 6 March 2023.

'[The hijab] establishes a connection even between strangers'³

Fatima, 29, founder of The Que Scarf, Manchester

"I can't remember a time not wearing the hijab. It is such a huge part of my identity and one that is deeply rooted in religious practice and an extension of my faith.

The hijab has impacted my life in so many ways, from the way I dress and how I conduct myself to inspiring my business – a silk scarf accessories brand that celebrates and normalises the beauty of headscarfs, marrying religion and fashion without excluding Muslim women who are at the forefront of modest fashion trends.

Contrary to common beliefs, I feel safest in my hijab and a part of something bigger than myself. For a lot of hijab-wearing Muslim women, it's a common ground and establishes a connection even between strangers. That's a beautiful thing."

'As Muslim women, we actually ask you not to wear the hijab in the name of interfaith solidarity'⁴

Asra Q. Nomani and Hala Arafa

Born in the 1960s into conservative but open-minded families (Hala in Egypt and Asra in India), we grew up without an edict that we had to cover our hair. But, starting in the 1980s, following the 1979 Iranian revolution of the minority Shiite sect and the rise of well-funded Saudi clerics from the majority Sunni sect, we have been bullied in an attempt to get us to cover our hair from men and boys.

[...]

To us, the "hijab" is a symbol of an interpretation of Islam we reject that believes that women are a sexual distraction to men, who are weak, and thus must not be tempted by the sight of our hair. We don't buy it. This ideology promotes a social attitude that absolves men of sexually harassing women and puts the onus on the victim to protect herself by covering up.

[...]

Today, in the 21st century, most mosques around the world, including in the United States, deny us, as Muslim women, our Islamic right to pray without a headscarf, discriminating against us by refusing us entry if we don't cover our hair. Like the Catholic Church after the Vatican II reforms of 1965 removed a requirement that women enter churches with head covers, mosques should become headscarf-optional, if they truly want to make their places of worship "women-friendly."

³ Zeynab Mohamed, *'World Hijab Day: 5 Muslim women explain what the headscarf means to them in 2022'*, *Stylist*, 1 February 2022, accessed 6 March 2023.

⁴ Asra Q. Nomani and Hala Arafa, *'As Muslim women, we actually ask you not to wear the hijab in the name of interfaith solidarity'*, *The Washington Post*, 21 December 2015, accessed 6 March 2023.