

## TRENDY VEILS: YOUNG JAVANESE WOMEN BETWEEN ISLAM AND MODERNITY

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### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan beberapa aspek tradisi Jawa, nilai-nilai Islami, dan modernitas yang mempengaruhi perempuan muda Jawa dalam memutuskan untuk mengenakan jilbab gaul. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif yang dilakukan pada mahasiswa dari suku Jawa yang mengenakan jilbab gaul dari empat universitas di Surakarta. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui pendistribusian kuesioner dan wawancara dalam diskusi kelompok. Hasil temuan memperlihatkan nilai-nilai budaya yang berasal dari tradisi Jawa, Islam, dan modernitas yang mempengaruhi dan menentukan praktek mengenakan jilbab gaul di kalangan mahasiswa muslim yang berasal dari suku Jawa. Dari perspektif modernitas, ditemukan bahwa praktek mengenakan jilbab gaul di kalangan mahasiswa ini dipengaruhi oleh ide-ide kepraktisan, kebebasan dan otonomi. Sementara nilai-nilai tradisi Jawa seperti etika, hubungan antar manusia dan kehormatan juga memiliki keterkaitan dengan praktek mengenakan jilbab, yang menjadi penentu utama dalam pengambilan keputusan untuk mengenakan jilbab gaul adalah orientasi keislaman, yaitu wujud dari keinginan untuk memperbaiki diri atas dasar syariah.*

**Kata kunci:** *budaya Jawa, Islam, jilbab gaul, keputusan, modernitas, perempuan Jawa*

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe several aspects of Javanese tradition, Islamic values and modernity influencing young Javanese women in taking up trendy veils. This research is a qualitative study conducted on Javanese female students wearing trendy veils from four universities in Surakarta. Data were collected through observations, questionnaires and interviews in focus group discussion. The findings show some cultural values derived from Javanese tradition, Islam, and modernity influencing and determining the practice of wearing trendy veils among female Javanese Muslim students. From the perspective of modernity, it was found that the practice of trendy veiling among these female students is influenced by the idea of practicality, freedom and autonomy. While traditional Javanese values such as etiquette, relationships and honor also find its relevance to their practice of veiling, it is Islamic religious orientation, the intention for self-improvement based on sharia that becomes the determinant factor in the decision of taking up trendy veils.

**Keywords:** *Islam, Javanese culture, Javanese women, modernity, negotiation, trendy veils*

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## INTRODUCTION

The rise of Islam in Indonesia has been considered as a movement in response to modernity. With the onslaught of modernity accelerated by globalization, in recent years the spread of Islam is becoming even more evident. One sign of the revival of Islam can be seen in the increase of Muslim women wearing hijabs, or headscarves, to show that they are Muslims. The Javanese as Indonesians are also experiencing transformation amid these two forces of Islam and modernity. Many Javanese women now wear hijabs. This is clearly different from the phenomenon that occurred in the 1990s when there were only a handful of Javanese women wearing hijabs. In addition, the rise of Islam is also facing the waves of modernization or westernization, which often creates conflicting conditions. These competing forces can also be seen to exist in the practice of Javanese women in wearing the hijab. Some Javanese women appear to take the middle path in fashioning their Muslim attire and wearing their hijabs. It seems that they try to negotiate between the practice of wearing hijabs as prescribed in the Islamic teaching, and the modern look; they wear long veil covering their bosom and at the same time they still try to look modern, dynamic and cool. There are many women who wear short veil, with bright colour, various design and motifs, which often do not cover the bosom, but match with their jeans, shirts and body-hugging attire that often show their curves.

However, the practice of veiling in various styles and models has raised much criticism if not polemics from different circles. On the one hand, Muslim scholars knowledgeable in sharia are deeply concerned about the headscarf models which are mostly viewed as not complying with the sharia, but further highlight or accentuate the attractiveness of women's clothes. On the other hand, practitioners of hijab fashion argue that the Qur'an does not prescribe any specific model of headscarf for women. Many models of headscarf worn by many Muslim women now are

not considered as hijab, are not in accordance with Islamic teachings and are being discredited. Many writings have been published criticizing popular headscarves, particularly in terms of fabric, colour and models. An example is a book by Al-Imam Muhammad Al-Albani Nashiruddin entitled *Hijab Al-mar'ah Al-Muslimah fil Kitab wa Sunnah* that has been translated into Indonesian as *Jilbab Wanita Muslimah: Tuntunan Berpakaian yang Syar'i bagi Muslimah* (Muslim Women's Hijabs: Sharia Dressing Guide for Muslim Women). Abu Al-Ghifari also highlighted a similar phenomenon in his book, *Kerudung Gaul: Berjilbab Tapi Telanjang* (Trendy Veils: Veiled but Naked). According to Hamdani, the question concerning the trendy veil is not only a matter of correct understanding of Islamic rules of dressing, but of how this disagreement illustrates the search for a form of Islam in Indonesia (Hamdani, 2007: 73).

Several studies have been done on Javanese women in relation to Islam and the veiling practice. Brenner (1996) highlights the use of hijab among Javanese women in the 1990s. According to Brenner, by wearing hijab, Javanese women are trying to escape from the confines of tradition which is considered to be incompatible with the teachings of Islam, and at the same time expressing their oppositions toward secular modernity. Veiling to the Javanese women is also a manifestation of a personal attempt for the improvement of moral control. Observing the veiling practice about a decade after Brenner, Ridlowati and Rasyidah (2007) investigate the phenomenon of the increasing popularity of hijab among Muslim women, marked by the emergence of trendy veils. They contend that the practice of trendy veiling represents a variety of Islamic experiences in modern Indonesia (Ridlowati & Rasyidah, 2007: 59). In addition, Claudia (2007) in her ethnographic research on the practice of trendy veiling among Gajah Mada University female students in 2005 - 2006 contends that the phenomenon of trendy veil is a form of cultural hybridization resulting from the interaction between local and global cultures.

Concerning the practice of trendy veiling among Javanese women, and the criticism toward the popular practice of trendy veiling, it is necessary to investigate how this practice of veiling plays a role in the life of the Javanese Muslim women in the face of social and cultural changes surrounding them. As they take on the veils, questions arise as to whether and how they negotiate their positions of being Javanese and modern women: Have Muslimness and modernity weakened their sense of belonging to the Javanese culture and practice and Javanese identity? How does the veiling practice reflect Javanese women's negotiation process in the face of Islam, Javanese-ness and modernity?

This study focusses on female Javanese students wearing trendy veils from four universities in Solo: Universitas Sebelas Maret (a public university), Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (an Islamic private university), Institut Agama Islam Negeri Surakarta (a state Institute of Islamic religion), and Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta (a state art institute). The respondents that were selected were female students from Javanese families living in Java and speaking Javanese in their daily lives. And most significantly they identified themselves as Javanese. The data were collected through direct observations, questionnaires and interviews through focus group discussions (FGD). First, we observed female students from their appearance: the clothes and headscarves they wore and the language they spoke in order to select potential respondents. Then we distributed questionnaires to 60 female students from the four universities in Surakarta selected based on the observations. A questionnaire was used to find out their perceptions of some Javanese values in everyday life, and the reason they take on veils, the confidence in their knowledge of Islamic teachings and Islamic practice of veiling, and their daily life styles. To explore deeper data, interviews were conducted to 20 students selected purposively to represent respondents from each university and institute. Questionnaires and interviews were used to determine the relationship between the practice of veiling and the factors that

influence it from the Javanese, Islam and modernity perspectives. It was expected that through guided interviews in FGD sessions, perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the respondents in their veiling practices could be further explored through an intensive discussion. Besides, respondents would feel more comfortable and open in expressing their opinions since they talked among their own peers. The data were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Since the data were tape-recorded, there was a possibility that respondents were more cautious in answering questions and tended to give answers that were expected by the researchers. Therefore, the researchers used indirect questions to obtain different answers such as asking about the veiling practices of friends or people whom they know. Data obtained from the questionnaires were used to design questions in the FGD sessions so that more in-depth data could be obtained and answers given in the questionnaires by the respondents could be verified.

## **VEILING PRACTICE AND THE JAVANESE VALUES**

The data gathered from the questionnaires distributed to 60 respondents show that a majority of the respondents (53 respondents) state that they are proud of being Javanese. A majority of the respondents (53 respondents) also recognize some Javanese values such as '*tata krama*' (manners) and being gentle in speaking and acting as a norm for Javanese women, and they admit that they apply these values in their daily lives. A majority of the respondents also agree to the notion that women should be able to cook (44 respondents) and dress up just for the sake of their husbands (35 respondents). Regarding the interaction with the opposite sex, 44 respondents feel that it is necessary to put some limitations in their interaction with the opposite sex. While 46 respondents state that they still actively use Javanese in their daily communications, 14 respondents admit that they only sometimes use Javanese. A majority of the respondents (55 respondents) claim to have some

knowledge of the Javanese tradition and culture and practice it in their daily lives, such as *puasa weton*, (fasting on birthday based on the Javanese calendar), *minum jamu* (drinking Javanese herbal medicine), the women's habit of waking up early in the morning, and even the Javanese concept of inheritance *sepikul sagendongan* (the Javanese traditional rule on the allocation of inheritance in which the son receives 2 portions and the daughter 1 portion of the inherited property).

The data presented above give a picture of the importance of the Javanese culture to young Javanese Muslim women, which continues to be part of their authentic identities. Despite the common saying "*Orang Jawa sudah kehilangan Jawanya*" (the Javanese has lost their Javanese-ness, to refer to the fact that many Javanese have abandoned their Javanese tradition and practices), it cannot be denied that the respondents' claim as being Javanese must have its own important bearing on their identity constructions and perceptions. Their statements that they are proud of being Javanese indicate that in certain respects they center their identity on their ethnicity rather than on Indonesian nationality which is constructed along with modernity.

The data collected from the interview reveals some consistency between Javanese attitudes and veiling practice. There are some Javanese cultural factors that support the decision to take on veils. The majority of the respondents (57 respondents) agree that wearing headscarves give them a sense of safety and comfort. Intan's statement, for example, suggests a consistency between wearing a headscarf and some values of conduct upheld in Javanese culture. Intan's account on her veiling experience implies this relevance:

"At this point I feel safe when wearing the hijab, I think I could control my attitude, I try not to harm or disturb other people. So I feel safe because I don't cause any harm or trouble to others. And I also feel safe from the unwanted gaze of the opposite sex when they look [at me]. It cannot be denied that the way my friends treat me, especially male friends, now is different from the way they treat the

opposite sex who don't wear hijab yet."

Intan narrates that she feels safe when she is wearing headscarf. She admits that it helps her to control her attitude and conduct as not to be offensive or troublesome to others; thus it makes her feel safe. Her statement "*saya berusaha tidak menyakiti orang lain*" (I try not to offend others) reverberates the Javanese ways of behaving in which *tepa selira* (tolerance, being emphatic) and *rasa* (feeling) play a very important role.

Respondents also consider that wearing veils is part of protecting or guarding the body from the public. In Javanese culture there is a saying relating dress to dignity, "*Ajining diri saka pucuking lathi, ajining raga saka busana*" (The dignity of the self is on the tongue, the dignity of one's body is on the dress). Like Intan who admits that she feels safe from the gaze of the opposite sex, in fact many respondents also state that one of the reasons for taking on veiling is to cover the *aurat* and to prevent the opposite sex from teasing and enticing them due to the way women dress and women's appearance that invite temptations. Most of the respondents claim that their decision to wear veils is based on the intention to protect themselves from the gaze of the opposite sex. This indicates that veiling practice becomes an integral part of their respectability. Melati relates her veiling practice with the safety and respectability she earns from strangers:

"When we meet new people, or just get to know them for the first time, they tend to pay us more respect. When we walk alone, we won't be teased because we are wearing veils. Wearing hijab makes me feel comfortable, protected, and peaceful."

Clearly Melati experiences the relative peace, comfort and safety when she put on her veils in the public space. As seen in her narration, it protects her from the naughts and annoyances of some males who like teasing women on the streets or other public spaces. She also feels more respected when dealing with the opposite sex, which makes her feel safe and comfortable (being able to avoid any harassment from naughty males). Likewise,

Farida also approves the respectability from the opposite sex that Melati has experienced by wearing a headscarf. She said that men do not like teasing and harassing women wearing veils, which they probably would do to women not wearing veils. Farida observes her male friends' different attitude after she took on veiling:

“They [men] would feel bad [improper] ... They pay us more respect, it's just like that. So, it is them who think that way, as for us, we don't think they have to change [e.g. put some limits on their friendship], we think that it [wearing hijab] is just usual.”

Similarly Pipin also emphasizes the advantage of wearing hijab in preventing the opposite sex from looking and gazing at parts of women's body that should be covered (*aurat*) in line with Islamic teaching. Interestingly Pipin quotes the Javanese aphorism related to dressing to support her reason for wearing hijab:

“For me, personally, wearing hijab is appreciating ourselves. Javanese used to say *aji ning rogo dumuning saka busono* [the dignity of one's body is on the clothes it wears]. It means that by wearing hijab (covering our body) we women appreciate ourselves by not showing our body around to everybody to see or enjoy.”

Pipin states that by taking care of her *aurat*, or safe guarding her body from the male gaze, she is respecting her body and self. She contends that veiled women deserve to be respected and appreciated since they take care of their own bodies and should be distinguished from other women who indulge themselves in showing off their bodies. Pipin implies that women who like to easily show off their bodies are easy women, and identical with women of no uprightness. She interpretes this principle in accordance with the Javanese saying “*ajining rogo dumunung in busana*” (the dignity of one's body is on the clothes that it wears). Pipin seems to understand the Javanese value in dressing as inseparable from the concept of one's respectability and dignity, and dressing properly is the first step in building the dignity because one has to be able to appreciate or respect herself or himself

first before other people could show any respect to him or her.

Rohmah's veiling experience also illustrates how veiling practices are perceived as a significant marker of women's respectability and uprightness. Rohmah, a student at the Institute Seni Indonesia majoring in dancing art, used to wear a headscarf consistently when she was in highschool. But since the dancing practice often requires her to put on dancing costumes, often she has no much choice except taking off her headscarf to conform to the requirement in the dancing-art teaching and learning process she is involved. However, whenever she has to go out until late at night for different reasons, she prefers not to wear her veils because she considers it is not acceptable for a veiled Muslim girl to hang out until late at night. She explains her experiences as follows:

“I often go out with my friends until late, 11 to 12 o'clock or so, but if I go out until that late, I don't bring my headscarf with me. So it may be because of the influences from my friends too [that I often take off my headscarf] ... Actually I shouldn't do that, and be consistent in wearing hijab, but I just don't know... the important thing is that I don't do crazy things. I don't bring my hijab so that people won't get annoyed when they see me, “oh that's okay [to go out late] they're just ordinary girls.” But if you are wearing hijab and go out late, people who see you would say “what the hell! She is wearing hijab, what on earth is she doing here late at this?”

Rohmah's statement underlines the notion that hijab should represent proper behaviors. Thus she prefers not to put on her hijab when going out late.

Veiling practices has also been considered as agreeing with the Javanese cultural values of *sopan santun* and *tata karma*, (politeness, and ethical, courteous manners). The use of headscarf along with body covering clothes is interpreted as reflecting politeness by the respondents. Explaining Javanese cultural concepts, Purwadi states that a Javanese woman is supposed to understand the essence of life as guidance, a life knowledge which is perpetuated and taught through the

Javanese oral culture such as the stories of Panji. A Javanese woman should be devout (*berbakti*), caring (*gemati*), refined (*halus*) and supple (*luwes*) (2009:76). One of the informants, Fadhila, relates the veiling practices with the idea of Javanese refinements and politeness that she is proud of. When asked to express her identity, she underlined the point of being a Javanese:

“I am just a student. And I am proud to be a muslima who still holds Javanese ethics. Javanese people have refined ethics. I have a friend who studies in Malang, [she/he] said that [she/he] wants to go back to Solo, to Java. ‘Why is that?’ I asked [her/him]. ‘People there are hard’ which mean they are egoistic. Many of them are outsiders, and do not care. They don’t have refined behavior. So, he/ she should become a Javanese whose ethics is refined, non-Javanese also like Javanese people whose speech is refined.”

Fadhila points out that refinement in behavior and speech is an important marker of Javanese identity. Similarly, Deliana expresses her view on *tata karma* and *tepa saliro* as an important aspect of the Javanese ways:

“Perhaps when compared to the Jakartans, who are more open and spoken out, Javanese people are more careful, and less frontal. We, Javanese, still consider the status of the person we are talking to, Javanese seems to be more able to make adjustment. When we talk to people we must decide when to use *ngoko*, *karma* or *krama inggil*. There are levels of speech.”

Several respondent also views Javanese culture as not in conflict with Islamic teaching. When asked as a Muslim about her view on Javanese culture, of which traditions and ritual are sometimes viewed as superstitious and contradict Muslim practices, Farida expressed:

“Actually Islam is not too contradictory to Javanese culture. There are lots of thing in our religion which are not in contrast [to Javanese culture], [Javanese culture] is similar to religious teaching, for example tolerance, refined speech.”

While Faridha points out the essential conformity of Javanese’s tradition of tolerance and politeness

in speech to Islamic teaching, Rokmah (from East Java), sees no contradiction between Javanese rituals to religion. Even though at the beginning she was surprised by the number of rituals performed in her new environment, some of which she had to get involved in due to her Javanese dance study, Rokmah perceives the rituals as having a similar end to that of Islamic religious worship. She narrates:

“There are differences, in here, in Java [Solo], since I study here there are many such rituals, it’s compulsory for me, eventhough I know that there is no such things in Islam. But after I found out, I learned why we must do that [the rituals] I found out that those rituals mostly have the same end, that is God; the difference is only in the way. So, perhaps, it is only because people don’t understand it that they say it is idolatry. In fact, the purpose is the same; their spiritual value is sometimes even higher.”

Similarly, Kartika also mentions *nyadran* (the ritual of visiting and cleaning the grave of the deceased ancestors and relatives during the month preceding Ramadhan), as relevant to Islamic teaching of sending prayers for the deads. She states:

“About rituals, such as *nyadran* for example, in fact there is no such thing in Islam, but in Java it is a tradition, we have family gathering, but seen from Islamic perspective it means we pray to God for the deads. So if I have to choose between Islam and Java, I prefer to consider myself as a Javanese Muslim.”

Purwadi (2009:76) states that in Javanese teaching, a Javanese woman should strive to be virtuous and keeps her prayers in order to obtain God’s grace. Thus the necessity in Javanese culture for a woman to be pious is in line with religious teaching of observing God’s rule and command for the sake of His mercy. This can be interpreted that Javanese women should observe religious duties, and the practice of veiling as an expression of religious duty can be considered as in tune with Javanese ethics of women.

Javanese culture is often characterized a very flexible and open culture. Therefore, the Islamic culture and modernity that came later has become

part of the Javanese community today. Furthermore, the phenomenon of veiling practice also reflects the openness and flexibility of the Java community in the face of social changes along with the Islamic movement and modernity. In this case it can be seen that Javanese women wearing trendy veils reflect a form of negotiation between their understanding of their Javanese identity and the challenges of modernity that had become part of their social lives.

### **VEILING PRACTICE AND ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY**

The result of the questionnaire related to the decision of wearing veils shows that there are 47 respondents who claim to decide on wearing veils on their own, 16 respondents admit deciding to wear veils due to suggestions from the family and friends, the rest because of school and boarding school rules for female students to wear headscarfs. There are 16 respondents who have taken on veils since they were in Junior High School and 16 respondents since they were in High School, while 23 respondents have worn them ever since they joined the university. Regarding religious knowledge and education, it was found that most respondents (41 respondents) state that they get religious knowledge from Islamic religion subject at schools. The majority of the respondents also gained religious knowledge by joining religious forum (36 respondents) and reading religious books (32 respondents). There are only 11 respondents who used to study in the Islamic boarding school, while another 20 respondents gained much religious knowledge from discussions with parents, friends, or other sources. There are only 11 respondents who are involved as activists in Islamic or Muslim organizations. 30 respondents claim themselves as quite religious, while the remaining 28 respondents said they are not religious. 33 respondents believe that they have had adequate knowledge of Islam; while the remaining 25 states that their knowledge of Islam is still inadequate. A total of 54 respondents feels that they are complete as Muslim women by wearing veils and only 9 respondents admit that they wear veil only on certain occasions

such as when attending classes at campus, or particular events. A total of 53 respondents admit that they possess the knowledge of the Islamic dress code which is in accordance with the *syaria*. There are 18 respondents who state to know about verse 31 of Surah an-Nur in the Quran that contains the command to the faithful women to cover certain body parts (*aurat*) and to control the gaze. There are only 14 respondents who know about verse 59 of Surah Al-Ahzab in the Quran which summons Muslim women to lengthen their headscarfs so that they can be easily recognized (as Muslim) and would not be teased or harassed.

Regarding the knowledge related to the definition of *aurat* in Islam, the majority of respondents (49) claim that they have knowledge of part of women's body considered as *aurat* in Islam and the rest 11 claim that they know little about the definition of *aurat*. Besides, there are 53 respondents who state they have knowledge on the definition of Islamic dress code, while 7 respondents state that they only have a little knowledge about it. To the question on whether their veiling styles have already conformed the rules of Islamic dressing, the majority of respondents (43) agree that the kind and style of veil they are wearing now has not yet met the characteristic of *syaria*-based style of veiling, and only 17 respondent agree that their veiling style has met the requirement of the *syaria*. And to the question on whether they expect that in the future they will dress their veils based on *syaria*, 34 respondents respond "yes," one respondent say "no," 11 respondents "do not know" and 14 respondents are abstained.

Most respondents state that they take on veiling on their own will which is based on their faith in the teachings of Islam. Many of the respondents feel that they have sufficient knowledge of the religion and wearing the hijab is a complement to their commitment to the teachings of Islam. One of the respondents, Rizka, reveals her view in the following statement:

"The decision of wearing veil came from me [my own willingness]. Why? First, because Quran clearly state that it's a must for

women to cover our *aurat* [parts of body that should be covered]. Next, it is because of my environment. I started wearing veil when I studied in UMS [Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta]. As an Islamic university, it is a rule for female students to put on veils. At first I saw it only as a university rule, which meant that we [female students] were obliged to wear hijab only when we were at campus, and not when we were outside. But I found many female students who actually wore them as a part of their everyday clothes seemed to enjoy wearing them. So I firmly decided to wear it seriously. So, first it's a kind of my responsibility as a Muslim and second, is my environment which indirectly also supports me in wearing veil."

They also state that they are wearing veil because it makes them feel complete as Muslim women, as expressed by the following respondent, Fitri:

"I grew up in a family of which all female members wore veil. So my grandmother, my mom, my aunt, all of them wear veil. I have worn hijab since I was in elementary school. I wasn't really that serious in wearing it when I was in elementary school. But when I was in Junior High it was a school rule and I started to realize that it was also a Muslim obligation. I feel that it is a sin if I don't wear veil. When we take our hijab off, those men who are not our *muhrim* can see us, as if we were naked. And that's a big sin. So I finally decided to wear it since our religion asks us to do so."

Though at the beginning they admit that they had worn veil simply to follow the rule at school and at home, Fitri and Rizki admit that they finally acknowledge the necessity of veiling practice for Muslim women and accept the practice as inseparable from being a Muslim.

Interestingly, despite the fact that most respondents claim to have sufficient knowledge about parts of the body that should be properly covered as well as how to cover them properly based on syariah, most of them admit that the ways in which they dress their veils is not yet in accordance with the veiling practices prescribed by Islamic *syaria*. Yet, most respondents also express a hope that in the future they will be able

to wear the kind of veiling that really conforms to the *syaria* that is the *syar'i jilbab*. They agree that the appropriate Islamic headscarf is the kind that is large in size and thick enough in fabric so that when it is worn it will cover the bosom. Thus they consider and call the type of veil that they practice now as simply 'common' or 'ordinary' veil. They also appreciate Muslim women who readily wear large veil. Kartika, for example, thinks that Muslim women wearing long or large veils are "cool", but admits that such practice is beyond her ability at the moment: "but I'm still unable to practice it, even though I know that is the right way." Similarly Rokmah also "admire" those Muslim women who wear large veil, while Aisha feels "ashamed" about not being able yet to wear the long veils whenever she is in the presence of women wearing long veil.

Smith - Hefner who conducted a study in the mid 2000s toward headscarf wearers in Yogyakarta states that new hijab reflects a complex and ambiguous effort of young women to reconcile freedom of choice and autonomy offered by modern education with a commitment to Islamic values. Therefore, wearing veil cannot be separated from an ongoing transformation process (Smith-Hefner in Hamdani, 2007:17). Rokmah confirms this view when expressing her opinion:

"My knowledge about religion and *syaria*' is not really that much. And I'm not really sure yet of my attitude whether it's in accordance with Islamic teaching or not. I'm not ready if one day somebody says that I wear hijab only for my appearance. For me a willing to wear a *syaria*' veil should be started with the correct attitude. After I feel that I fit to be a real acceptable muslim woman I'll wear a *syaria*' veil. It's true that I haven't worn *syari*' veil but I am willing to wear it someday, maybe after I become more mature and have less activities" (Rokmah).

Rokmah considers that the kind of veil she currently wears is adequate enough because it can accommodate both her need to veil as Muslim woman and her need to get involved in numerous different activities. The present veil style allowed her to move freely. In line with Rokmah, Fadhila

considers the fact that she does not have much or deep knowledge of Islam and has not practiced a lot of Islam, so at present she does not feel it necessary to wear the large veil:

“Well, actually I’m at a learning stage. I know that according to *syariah* concept of *aurat* we should cover all parts of our body except for our face and palms. But sometimes I still wear clothes that not fully long sleeve and I also wear tight jeans/trousers. So my knowledge (of Islamic teaching) is still moderate, not really that much. Those who have much (a high level of Islamic teaching) knowledge will wear long and big hijab. Yes, I’m still learning” (Fadhila).

Farida relates the model of the veil she wears, which does not fit fully to the Islamic dress code based on *syaria*, to the level of her Islamic religious knowledge. Since she considers that her own knowledge of Islam is meager, it is excusable to wear her present kind of dress and veil.

Likewise, Erna also understands that the correct Islamic headscarf should be in accordance with Shari’a. She said that she has worn veils for a year, and that she needed to learn about Islam, that was why she has not worn veil in accordance with the *syaria*: “I’ve worn veil for a year. Yes, I wear trendy veil. I want to learn to wear the correct Islamic headscarf gradually.” Other respondents also connect large veil with a full commitment to the practice and teaching of Islam, so they feel they are not ready to wear the large veil which is often considered as the *syar’i* veil. Bintang, for example said: “One of my senior wear modest clothes with large veil, and she looks beautiful and elegant. Actually I want to be just like her, but I’m not ready.” On another point, other respondent, Desi even views that one needs guidance and enlightenment directly from God, or an open heart, in order to be able to wear large veil, as she implicitly stated: “If I could get God’s guidance, I would probably wear large veil and skirt. But for now I prefer to wear this (trendy) veil.” Hence Desi believes that it takes God’s intervention for someone to take on veiling practice; it is not simply human decision and choice. In this case, Desi’s opinion also seems to reflect the view of a more

traditional Javanese person, who views that men destiny is in the hand of God, not in their own hands.

From the statement above it can be concluded that even though the respondents realize that they are wearing the veils which are not fully in accordance with the one prescribed by Islamic law, they maintain that their choice of the models of the veils they wear now could serve as the middle ground between the demands of free activities and the awareness of Islamic values they must uphold. Some phrases used by respondents such as “my heart is not ready yet,” “I wear this model/style (trendy veil) first” supports Hefner’s idea which contends that veiling practice is an attempt to reconcile Islam and freedom offered by modernity, of which process is ambiguous and unfinished. The choice of the veiling style which is based on their sense of being “unprepared” for a greater commitment toward Islamic teaching and practice also reflects a reformist outlook of the headscarf as a sign of commitment to righteous ways of life.

## VEILING PRACTICE AND MODERNITY

Trendy veils which are often identified with a short veil that does not cover the bosom and worn with matching t-shirts and (tight) jeans is a form of negotiation of young Muslim women over Islamic ideology and modernity. It is interesting to find out the reasons why they wear trendy veils. We asked a few questions in the questionnaire related to veiling and modernity. The following are the results of the questionnaire.

What is interesting is that 50 respondents agree to the statement that veil model is supposed to be in accordance with Islamic law and at the same time make them look attractive and only 9 people who do not agree with the statement. A total of 42 respondents also believe that Muslim women are free to express themselves through the way they dress, while 17 respondents do not agree with freedom of expression in the dressing. 47 respondents admitted that they choose the model of the veil they wear because they like

it, 10 respondents said because the model is in trend and 17 respondents because it is convenient. Regarding Muslim fashion, 45 respondents said they only occasionally follow the development of Muslim fashion in the media, 17 respondents often and 2 respondents never kept informed with Muslim fashion. About the various model of veil they collected, 35 respondent said they have collected up to 5 models, 10 respondents more than 5 models, and 14 respondents claimed that they do not collect different models. Concerning the seller from which they buy veil products, the majority of respondent (44) state that they bought headscarf or hijab in Muslim clothing and specialty stores, 35 respondents in the market, and 8 respondents in boutiques. A total of 48 respondents also said to wear accessories in their hijab. Asked to name the model of the veil they wear among three categories -- large veil, common veil, and trendy veil -- 53 respondents claimed that the hijab they wore belong to the common one and 8 respondents to trendy veil.

From the focus group discussion sessions, it was found that there are in fact some diverse reasons underlying the respondents' choice of the models of the veils. The most common reason is practicality. Erna, for example, stated that: *"I love to wear this scarf (common veil) because it's so easy to wear. If you're in a rush you can put it on quickly. It will take a lot of time to wear certain model with some accessories applied on it."*

Fenty also mentioned the same reason: *"I personally don't like complicated model. I like the simple ones. They are quickly to apply."* The common veil is preferred and becomes an option for the respondents because as young students they have many activities that require them to move freely. A simple ordinary veil seems to accommodate that need and condition, unlike the large veil or the proper Islamic dress which oblige the wearer to wear the kind of skirt which they see as limiting their movement. Moreover, the ordinary veil is also more practical compared to the complicated and decorative ones. Such view was expressed by Ervin who had once studied at a pesantren, as follows:

*"I used to study in a pesantren which forbid me*

*[as a Muslim woman] to wear trousers or if I should wear them I should wear other trousers which were thinner beneath them. I was allowed to wear them in certain occasion such as in PE class or girls scouting. So there were certain occasions in which we were allowed to wear trousers. There is also a hadith about it if I'm not mistaken, that says that when we wear trousers we are like men, and this is forbidden. But I take TV programming as my major which forces me to do some shooting so I think it'll be difficult if I wear skirt since I need to move freely."*

Eka also has a similar opinion:

*"Well, we should cover our body from head to toe and Muslim women also should wear (long) skirt. But I ride a motorcycle so it's difficult for me to move freely if I wear skirt so I choose wearing trousers [jeans]. But I know that those who wear wide veil, they would wear skirt instead."*

From the above responses, it is clear that the respondents chose model of veil and clothes that enable them to be easily mobile and support their activities. Syar'i veil which is long and wide paired with skirts seems impractical and may put some restrain on their activities. As active adolescents living in a fast-paced era, they tend to avoid wearing clothes that are not compatible with their active motion. They are actually aware that Muslim women should not wear trousers since it resembles men's clothing, and to wear unisex clothing is considered as violating Islamic *syaria*. Therefore trousers eventually become an option since it supports their activities, and skirts rarely become a choice. It seems that they try to trade skirt with trousers. They assume that it is still acceptable to wear trousers it still covers the *aurat*. Thus, they have made a negotiation for wearing trousers. Such negotiation process indicates that these young women intend to conform to religious principles concerning the *aurat* but at the same time they also have to choose certain clothes to facilitate their activities.

In addition to practicality, most respondents also consider comfort as an important factor when they choose trendy veils. The meaning of comfort

here is closely related to being self-confident. They feel comfortable when they do not feel different from the other people in appearance because other people also wearing similar model. Being like other women who are wearing similar models of veil makes them feel confident since nobody will consider them as weird or out of place. Even though there are many new veil models or new veil trend, they do not follow them right away. If they see the (new) model does not suit them, they will not insist on wearing it. According to Fenty veil “[*should*] make us comfortable and confident when we wear it.” Eka also adds that for her “*the most important thing in wearing veil is neatness/elegance.*”

### **VEILING PRACTICE AND LIFE STYLE**

Several questions were given to the respondents regarding their life style related to the use of the media and daily activities, such as on the frequency of watching movies, browsing the internet, and going to the mall. Regarding Western movie, 28 respondents admit that they watch western movies (Hollywood) only frequently, while 20 respondents watch them occasionally, 9 rarely watch movies and 3 respondent states that they always watch Hollywoods. Though there is a wide range of frequency, it is shown that watching western movies is quite popular among these young women. There is no respondent who claims to never watching a movie. It is interesting to see that this distribution of frequency in watching movies is similar to the distribution of the frequency of the respondents in going to the mall. There are 22 respondents who go to the mall frequently, 25 occasionally, 10 rarely, 3 always. Concerning the purpose of going to the mall, 42 respondents state they go for shopping, 19 for window shopping, 19 for other things such as eating, buying clothes and karaoke, while 3 respondents for the purposes of socializing (hanging out with friends). Regarding the access to the internet, 23 respondents claim to always access them, 21 respondents frequently, 13 respondents sometimes, and 3 respondents rarely. When the respondents were given the options about

the purposes of using the Internet, there are 48 respondents who state that they access the Internet for research or study purposes, 39 respondents access the Internet for entertainment, 35 respondents for social networking (social media); 15 respondents for killing time. A few respondents mention other purposes, such as reading news and finding informations and tips.

From the data collected through the questionnaires presented above it can be concluded that respondents are relatively exposed to the kind of lifestyle offered by modern world, the media and the market. Saluz (2007) states that Islamic mass media, particularly targeting Muslim youth as readers, plays a role in popularizing a more “friendly” or trendy veils. In line with Saluz, Hamdani (2007) also agrees that Islamic mass media has helped the construction of veiled Muslim community, in this case the Muslim women wearing the so called “trendy” veils. During the discussion on the reference model of their headscarfs, Melati admitted that she found references for veil model from popular Islamic magazine. She said:

“I often read magazines, observe my friends’ veil style, maybe I can copy. It’s because there’s only me in my family who wear veil so nobody teach me how to wear it. But since my sister also begins to wear it, now I teach her.”

It is also interesting to note that most of the informants are using the internets for obtaining popular information and knowledges. The internets seem to have replaced the existing function of magazines to provide easy, informative readings. This is due to cheap access to social networking, mainly Facebook and Google search engine which are becoming increasingly popular and widespread. Access to the internet is lot cheaper than buying magazines. Some respondents admit that it is mainly through the Internet that they learn about various styles veils:

“My friends like to give “like” application in facebook pages on tutorial video of how to wear trendy veil. They also keep track of the development of veil styles. (Deliana)

"I like to search the internet to get some veil styles. I've tried some styles and the clothes too but since I like to keep it simple I only wear [trendy] veil once and never wear it again. I just wanna try so I'll know the difference." (Aisyah).

"I've searched tutorial in wearing veils in google several times and also once tried the style, but my friends didn't give any positive comments so I just dropped it. I have some collection of veiling styles from magazines but they're to be worn on special occasions not daily like going to campus." (Kartika)

Deliana's statement confirms the popularity of facebook among the trendy veiled respondents. People in the veil (hijab) and muslim clothing bussiness use the social media Facebook as strategic tools to promote and sell their products. They use Facebook account as a marketing media. The icon 'like' in a Facebook account is a cheap and easy promotion strategy. When many users click the 'like' icon on a product image, it means that there are many users who like the product, and it will attract more buyers. Repondents also use the new media to keep tract of the development of new hijab styles and then try to imitate and adopt different styles. Apparently the new media has influenced young muslim women in their veiling practices in terms of setting and spreading the standard of what is nice, cool, and trendy to wear.

However, it is interesting to note that these young women will buy or adopt the new style only when they consider it as necessary and practical. The sytlistic veils or hijabs are worn only on certain occasions such as attending wedding receptions, or when hanging around with friends. The reason is that those new styles are not practical and not comfortable to wear. Aisha states that she tries new models just to know it but does not always wear the model because it is not practical. Some of these respondents also expressed a similar experience:

"Yes, I've tried to up dated my veiling style, when I see the new ones. And yes I like new models [styles] too. But I don't always follow the trend because I like it to be simple. Besides, it's not possible for me to wear a kind of complicated veil style since I'm busy

with all campus activities which force me to wear simple style that allow me to apply it quickly. For me the important thing is that it is comfortable, simple and the color matchs my clothes." (Ervin)

"Yes, I want to try new style sometimes but when it looks weird on my face I'd better not wear it. I think it's better to think twice before we try new style. If it doesn't fit on us maybe we shouldn't force ourselves to wear it, otherwise it will look weird." (Erna)

The statements quoted above show that many of these young women are quite well informed of the newest veil fashion but they do not always follow the trends. They prefer to wear the style they consider to be practical and comfortable and suitable for their looks. This indicates that these young women have a full authority on what they should wear and put on. Saluz (2007) has argued that the media does not have power to dictate readers or media audiences (young women) nor have full control of the veiled women's clothing taste. In this case two parties, the media and the consumers (young veiled Muslim women who read and access the Internet are both active in a continuous interaction process. Thus the media alone cannot construct the trendy and cool veiling style.

The tendency to choose veiling style based on the occasion is also seen in the way the respondents choose their clothing styles. Many of the respondents prefer jeans and shirts in their daily lives, when they go to campus and hang out. They admit that they wear *gamis*, Muslim long loose robe, only on occasions such as family gathering and *pengajian* (a gathering to study religion):

"For me it depends on the model of the dress, if it fits I wear it. Some gamis are suitable to wear at school, but there are such models that are suitable for parties, invitations. For daily activities I wear pants and long sleeves, when wearing gamis I choose one that is not too tight, so it won't show curves. Also for training and some specific classes, I wear suitable, and there are other occassions such as the 'haji' [pilgrimage]. For daily activities I wear jeans or long skirt and longsleeves." (Kartika)

“When attending religious gathering, I would rather wear muslim clodings, pants and muslim dress, such as long blouse.” (Erna)

Despite the fact that they avoid intricate style for the sake of comfort and practicality, the statements above show that many of the respondents cannot escape from the trend to dress for occasions, meaning that they tend to dress up for each different occasion.

Spending time in the mall has also been part of the respondents' way of life. Like many other young people they like to go to the mall for different purposes. Though shopping has been selected by the majority of the respondents as the main activity when going to the mall, many respondents mention other activities they do in the mall in addition to shopping such as watching movie, gathering, and even karaoke, as expressed in the the following statements:

“Karaoke, watching movie. I don't go to the mall just for shopping” (Deliana)

“Usually I just go for window shopping to see what's interesting, and for eating.” (Aisyah)

For other respondents hanging out at the mall has become an alternative for overcoming boredom and the need for outings:

“For me, sometimes when we need to hang out, when our mind is much preoccupied with things. I think women enjoy looking, we don't shop just window shopping.” (Farida)

“When I get bored, I just go to the mall, just hang around. Maybe do grocery shopping, maybe eat something.” (Melati)

“I only go to the mall when I need something which I can get only in the mall. I don't really like the mall because things are more expensive. So when I go the the mall I just enjoy looking. I don't intend to buy.” (Fadhila)

It appears that going to the mall with a variety of purposes such as eating, watching movies, window shopping, hanging out with friends, and even *karaoke* has become part of the informants' way of life. Such activities in the mall are hardly acceptable for women wearing long hijab because such activities are considered to be more harmful

than useful. In this case it can be said that for these young veiled women wearing hijab does not prevent them from enjoying ways of life offered by consumer culture. To some extent the mall has become part of these young women's ways of life. Thus, despite the fact that they are expected to adopt more Islamic ways of life since they now have put on the veils, they still make some negotiations with the modern lifestyle, in this case by adopting the mall with all of the pleasure and entertainment it offers. In the end veiling practice can be viewed as an attempt to practice Islam without necessarily rejecting the lifestyle offered by modern ease and pleasures. Such phenomenon is similar to the trend in Turkey as observed by Kuran Ibrahim, in which he argues that in the case of Turkey “..veiling becomes the representation of lifestyle as well as the discursive practice of Islamic faith” (2010:371)

#### **VEILING PRACTICE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN: THREE FORCES (FINALLY) MEET**

Washburn (2001) in her research on personal experience and veiling practice of Javanese women in Yogyakarta tried to find a link between the veiling practices which expresses personal transformation and the social patterns given emphasized through the Islamic movement. Washburn argued that the headscarf is a personal symbol that has a cultural and psychological meaning; veil could be interpreted as modernity as well as conservatism. What is interesting is her opinion that the veil also signaled an acceptance of gender roles in Islamic perspective, which incidentally is also in line with the construction of the New Order female roles that place women under male control (in Hamdani, 2007:15-16). The opinions of the respondents about the role of women they want to have after they are married confirms Washburn's opinion above. Deliana expressed her desire to wear syar'i veil when she is married, and her opinion of the necessity of obeying husband:

“Maybe one day once I get married (I'm going to wear syari veil). I still want to be flexible,

making friend with anybody, female and male since nobody forbids me in doing that. But when I have a husband someday, I'll follow his advice and order of course."

Deliana's view echoes the concept of leadership in Islamic perspective embodied in Surah An-Nisa verse 34 which says that man is the leader of women. The concept of leadership in Islam is also in line with the leadership in the Javanese family. In Javanese culture, family members are given the opportunity to express their opinions. However, in turn the father as the head of the family negotiates it again with his wife before he takes the final decision. Thus, even though there is a negotiation between father and mother, the final decision remains in the hand of the father (Purwadi, 2009:57)

Javanese culture also elevates the role and the nature of women as a housekeeper and child educators. A married woman should stay at home and take care of the household to educate children (Gandarsih MR in Purwadi, 2009:78). Farida and Eka's opinion below demonstrates the awareness of the value, despite the demands of the modern condition:

"I don't know much about it (whether or not a wife can have a career) but I know that a wife should be at home taking care of children and want not. But nowadays, I think it's ok for a wife to have a job since both male and female have the same opportunity to study, go to school/college." (Eka)

"Well, I take banking as my major because I want to work at a bank after I graduate from university. But I also think of having a business at home so I can take care of my children at the same time" (Farida)

Farida and Eka's opinion approve women's role as caretaker of children and home, and at the same time recognizes the importance of the wife in helping the husband in making a living. Sunoto, as cited by Purwadi, states that in Javanese culture there is a balanced work division in family life, where husband and wife bear the same (economic) responsibility and that husband and wife should works together during good and bad times (in

Purwadi, 2009: 56. The role of women in helping the husbands is also in line with the Islamic culture that allows women to work and became self-employed. Fadhila's and Bintang's statement affirm their approval on such women role:

"In my opinion it's ok for a wife to help her husband in making a living. Siti Khadijah [Prophet Muhammad's wife] herself was a successful businesswoman. She also helped Rosulullah's teaching with the money she got from her business. It means that it's not a must that a wife should wait for or rely on her husband to give her some money. It's not like a wife should become a housewife and it's the husband who goes for work. A wife should also help her husband in making a living." (Fadhila)

"I myself want to have a job. Well, we live in a modern world. There is gender equality in Islam too. I have a friend whose husband works, while she has a business at home selling Muslim clothes and accessories while also taking care of her children. It seems nice even though she's at home, she can get some money." (Bintang)

Fadhila and Bintang's opinion cited above shows that they see that women who work and earn their own money are justified in Islam. Their opinions also reflects that they see Islam as in tune with modernity, that women have freedom to actualize themselves outside the domestic sphere, in terms of work or career. Further, they assert that if educated women do not work, then their knowledge will be useless. According to Deliana, women who work and apply their knowledge and at the same time also take care of the family are seen as better than those who only stay at home as housewives:

"What's the purpose of us studying all this long? Well, of course to have our knowledge applied in the work field. So if it happens to us we are as career women, when a man proposes us he has to take us as we are. It's better to work than doing nothing at home because we can also help our husband. It's a kind of honor if we can become a good wife for our husband, a good mother for our children and at the same time we can also help our husband financially."

Related to career, Aisha has a different opinion

from Deliana. Aisha views that women have no obligation to work for supporting family, when it is not necessary:

“Well, if we can have a job, why not? But if we have husband who can make a living, why should we go to work? If we have a husband who has a good career and a good income why should we go to work? It’s better to stay at home and take care of our children.”

Although Aisha’s opinion is contrary to Deliana’s opinion, it also has a base in Islam, because in Islam it is the men who have the obligation to make a living for the family. Thus when a man (a husband) is able to provide for the family, then there is no need for a woman (a wife) to work, and she can concentrate on taking care of the household.

The views expressed by the respondents above describes how young trendy veiled women doing some negotiations in perceiving the role of women in the household. It is in line with Washburn’s view in that they agree that women do not only have a main female’s role as a caretaker and educator but also an economic role as their husband companion to promote the welfare of the family. Their opinion refers to the Islamic view of the concept of a dual role in a woman. However, there is also similar concept of partnership in a household found in Javanese tradition. Therefore, it can be concluded that the value in Islam concerning the role of women in relation to the husband in the family and in the work field is in harmony with the modernity and Javanese values as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

The practice of trendy veiling among young Javanese women reflects their efforts to accommodate three forces within their lives, namely Javanese culture, the ideology of Islam, and modernity. At one point it is clear that the intention of fulfilling Islamic dressing code has been the main purposes of the young women practicing trendy veiling. Wearing a veil is recognized as part of the obligation to comply with religious rules so that they feel more complete as Muslims.

However, it appears that it is also through this practice of veiling that some Javanese values find new expressions. Most respondents admit that it is because they are wearing veils that they are encouraged to observe certain manners and etiquette uphold in Javanese culture and tradition such as in refinement of conduct and speech, as well as in interaction with the opposite sex. They agree that wearing the Muslim dress is in line with, and even supporting some Javanese values. Considering the daily activities of the respondents as young modern women students who also enjoy the comfort and pleasure offered by modern life, the practice of veiling does not appear by all means as a sign of resistance toward modernity. On the contrary, it is through the choice of practicing the so-called trendy veils—which they agree to call as “common or ordinary” veils—that they accommodate the principle of practicality and comfort in their dressing.

Certainly the meaning of trendy veiling has changed in the last few years. The popular practice of veiling today is different from the popular veiling practice in the 1980s and early 1990s interpreted by Brenner as an act of resistance toward the local traditional values and an attempt to capture a kind of non-secular modernity. Apparently the veiling practice of these young Javanese women reflects well Saluz’s contention which views veiling practice among young female students in the early 2000s as part of a cultural hybridization process in which women try to open new spaces in the practice of veiling by accommodating the local, global, and Islam (2007). Yet Saluz has also suggested that there is a possibility that modernity values such as individualism and freedom that are accommodated along the processes might weaken the meaning of veiling as a marker of (Islamic) morality and behavior. Saluz might be correct. But it will not be easy to measure or prove her assumption few years ago over the weakening meaning of veils as a sign of moral control and behavior among the young Muslim women who practice veiling, which will require further research. And despite some popular opinions that trendy veil is considered

as a sign of the weakening of both meaning and function of veiling as signifying *ketaqwaan* (religious observance) and morality, as shown in this research, it can be seen from this research that among these young Javanese women, veiling practice continues to have a strong religious reason.

The negotiation process between the three forces of Javanese culture, Islam, and modernity implied in the practice of wearing the trendy veils shows the importance of trendy veils in the assimilation of veiling exclusively practiced by the traditional *santri* and the long –veil communities in the previous decades into the larger ordinary community. These young women also perceive no contradiction in the concept of the role of women in Islam, Javanese culture, and modernity. In this case cultural values and traditions of Javanese, Islam and global influence became an equally important element in making some veiling practice compromise. However, despite the awareness of the ambiguous validity of their veiling models, their decision for taking on the veils reflects autonomy in the veiling practice; they choose to wear the veils out of free will to adapt to the surrounding forces. Meanwhile, the agreement among these young women not to categorize their veiling modes into the popularly so called *jilbab gaul* (trendy veils) show that they do not want to look conspicuous and different in the public, and that they do not want to be associated with a particular veiling groups or communities identified by a particular style of veiling. Thus, for them veiling practice is an apt strategy to adapt to the values of Islam, Java and modernity. It is part of the compromise they make in establishing their identity within a heterogeneous and constantly changing society.

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