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Conservatism's Paradox: How Popular Culture Transforms the Identity of Conservative Women

This article investigates the paradox of conservative chic, whereby popular culture mediates the (re)construction of the self of religious women, specifically as practitioners of modest fashion in Turkey. Borrowing from ethnocultural and feminist literatures, it explores the impact of veiling, virtual communication and world fashion on the self and social roles of both devout women. The analysis emphasizes the contradiction faced by the Muslim community between upholding traditional religious values and the pursuit of contemporary aesthetic ideals, manifested in the emergence of hijab fashion and influencer culture. Articulating Turkish practices in relation to the global modest fashion phenomenon, the thesis elucidates how the culture of consumption and digital systems serve women's empowerment and their commoditisation. It maintains that religious women negotiate this paradox by blending tradition with modernity, but are in fact caught between secular and conservative censures. This research suggests how cultural authenticity can be preserved despite globalization.

Keywords: Conservative Chic, Hijab fashion, Popular Culture, Religious identity, Modest fashion, Social media, Gender relations, Consumption Culture.

Introduction

There is a remarkable contradiction in the notion of “conservative chic” in Turkey, which recognizes how religiously observant Muslim women mix an emphasis on religious modesty with modernity and fashionable forms of veiling [1]. This is a popular culture-driven phenomenon that redefines religious identity, particularly for women who use the hijab (hijab). The hijab fashion industry, has grown enormously with hijab fashion brands, social media influencers and an international market for modest fashion, has changed the way these women present themselves and are perceived by society [2]. Yet, this change is refracted through the struggle of spiritual beliefs to negotiate the ubiquitous filtering of identity through consumer culture [3].

In this article, we analyse how popular culture transforms the religious identity of women in Turkey, in particular, the dynamic interaction between hijab fashion, social media and global trends. Through the theoretical framework of ethnocultural and feminist readings, consumption practices, digital media and patterns of culture negotiation are analyzed. When juxtaposed to modest fashion movements around the world, Turkish practices reveal opportunities and challenges for religious women. “How does popular culture impact the identity development of religiously committed women? What are some of the internal tensions of “conservative chic”? How can cultural authenticity be maintained in the era of globalization? The article ends by urging that balance should be sought between tradition and modernity.

Research methods

This research follows a qualitative methodology and represents an exhaustive analysis of ethnocultural, feminist and sociological literature. Its approach contains the following three aspects:

Literature: Hijab fashion in Turkey and globe was studied through academic literature sources in relation to popular culture and religious identity (e.g. Gökarıksel & Secor, 2010; Sandıkcı & Ger, 2010; Lewis, 2015; Barbarosoğlu, 2005).

Principal Themes Through the re-reading and analysis of the above works, selected themes of modest fashion design as part of social media, influence, consumption, gender relationships and body image perception were developed.

Theoretical Framework: Ethnocultural theory studying cultural identity formation [4], feminist theory emphasizing the independence of women and their representation [5], and philosophical approaches concerning the historical change of body perception were considered were considered analytical perspectives.

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The authors do not gather primary data but conduct a secondary source research and present a strong literature analysis. The absence of primary data is one of the limitations of the study, which could deepen the respondents' experience.

Conservative Elegance as a concept type

3.1 Defining the Paradox

"Conservative chic" designates a contemporary aesthetic and cultural sensibility where religious women comply with Islamic-based modesty norms while also wearing fashionable and cutting-edge veils, in keeping with global fashion [1; 848]. This contradiction is based on the clash between religion (modesty and spiritual concentration) and pop culture (individualism, consumerism and visual attraction) [3; 16]. In Turkey, the hijab fashion of the 1970s, marked by the informality and limited color pallets, started to experience a fashionable life thanks to "hijab fashion shows" from the 1980s up to the present [6]. Here the (veiled) wives of politicians and officials have contributed to bringing conservative chic to the public eye.

It has even been stated by Barbarosoğlu that hijab fashion is not just a trend in fashion, but also an area of political and social negotiation. Hijab fashion shows represent religious women's attempt to square their identities with modern consumer culture. This parallels Foucault what takes place in the modern period with respect to power structures over the body, where the hijab functions both as an instrument of religious disciplining and as an act of individual assertion of responsibility. This doubleness intensifies the ontological tug-of-war of conservative chic, as women recast their bodies as "a remnant of the spirit" [5; 34], and as a modern, individualistic work-in-progress.

3.2 Historical Context

Throughout Turkey, the headscarf has been a source of contention, and emblematic of political, cultural and religious tensions. In the 1980s and 1990s, the bans on headscarves in public institutions incited discussions over secularism and freedom of religion [7]. During this time the notion of the hijab was seen as an expression of metaphysical and ontological position of Muslim women, however, since the mid-1990s, it has transformed into a modern category expressed through consumption [6; 137]. The lifting of prohibitions and the emergence of a Muslim middle class in the 2000s facilitated the development of hijab fashion as an act of individual agency and social ascension [3; 17]. Hijab as a catwalk phenomenon has been redefined, in response to the need to generate consumers; it has been internalized as an identity compatible with modernity within religious communication channels. [6; 166].

Barbarosoğlu situates the historical evolution of the hijab as a response to negotiation with modernity. The transformation of the hijab from a metaphysical position to a consumerist aesthetic parallels Şişman's [5; 16]. analysis of the breakage experienced in the body's conception under modernity. This mutation reveals that the hijab is no longer exclusively a "remnant of religion" rather as an individual "property" [5; 34]. In this sense, conservative chic becomes a woman's effort to make herself over as a project in modern consumer society, but not always without the risk of becoming a commodity, which runs against traditional religious beliefs.

Popular Culture and the Making and Unmaking of Identity

4.1 The Role of Hijab Fashion

Hijab fashion is the new "conservative chic," providing religious women with options for personal expression while maintaining religious expectations. Gooden and Scohier write that brands like Aker and Kayra generate collections which incorporate the emerged trends of plus size blazers, flower pattern and simple pattern in step with the modern fashion. The narrow scarfs and chunky underwear of the 1970s became the chador styles of the 1980s and 1990s and synthetic and bright variations of the same fabric used as overcoats in the 1990s [8]. This transformation was intensified by the individualism and the Özal economy, which made religious groups more visible in the public arena. "My body is mine, it is here" and this realization contributed to the resurgence of the tight-fitting head bands and vibrant colors in hijab dress [8; 104].

Barbarosoğlu suggests that the hijab fashion is not only an aesthetic change, but is also an indication of gender and class relationships. The muteness of the hijab in response to "my body is mine" resonates with [Simone de] Beauvoir's notion of "one becomes a woman": as women culturally reconstruct gender roles, the hijab becomes a project at the level of the self, a personal project [5; 40]. But the development of deep red for a headscarf, and of course the rise of bright colors and man-made fiber (not to mention the check or stripe of the headscarf as an item of luxury fashion in its own right), in the wake of Sombart's argument that luxury consumption gives capitalism sustenance, runs the risk of the hijab becoming a status symbol, rather than a garment of religious modesty. This only clarifies the liberatory and commodifying appeal of conservative chic.

4.2.1 Social Media and Influencer Culture

Social media outlets like Instagram and TikTok have also increased visibility around “conservative chic”. Influencers like Kübra Ünlü and Esra Sezer have several million followers offering consulting in fashion-, and lifestyle [9].

The role models of covered head wearers in hijab fashion shows have impacted the dress code of women on the street, and in the 90s, especially, the “for-show” style of veiling has swept over younger girls in the outskirts [8; 105]. But artificial personae like these might be the opposite of modesty, promoting consumption [7; 657].

How social media has transformed hijab fashion into a “culture of spectacle”? The influence of fashion shows on street fashion is the impetus behind the claim made by Barbarosoğlu and thus the “culture of spectacle”. Influencers simultaneously empower and disempower women through aesthetic norms, as provided by technologies of discipline over the body, following Foucault. It reflects the paradox of conservative chic: Women rebuild their religious identities around a sleek, new modernity and in the process become subjects of consumer culture [5; 41]. A dialectic of body and power demonstrates that in this process, hijab is simultaneously a weapon of resistance and of compliance.

4.3 Consumption Culture

The phenomenon of “conservative chic” is integrally related to consumer culture which constructs identity through consumption [4; 24]. Due to the capitalist production in the clothing sector, religious women express their social status and modernity with the help of the hijab clothes of certain brand [3; 19]. Werner Sombart tells us that alongside men’s independence and capitalism, luxury is one of the forces which wields the baton over this world. In Turkey, there was an impact on hijab styles by Iranian Revolution aesthetics of the 1980s which was followed by a trend towards alternative individualistic styles that had bright colors in the 1990s [8; 106]. This vivid metamorphosis signifies not being loath to appear in public [8; 107].

Conservative Chic and the World

This fashion-trend called “conservative chic” is more than just a Turkish metamorphosis, it is equally generated by the dynamics of an international modest fashion industry. Hijab fashion is reworked in a site where local religious and cultural practices meet global consumer culture. This chapter addresses the impact of global modest fashion on Turkish hijab fashion and the specific strategies being developed within Turkey’s secular-republican framework relative to other Muslim-majority societies.

5.1. Modest Fashion at an International Level

The global modest fashion market has emerged as a significant business and cultural phenomenon since the 2000s. The global modest fashion market as for 2020, is estimated to cost \$300 billion and is forecasted to be growing at 5-6 % yearly until 2025 [10]. An increasing demand from religious consumers in muslim-majority countries as well as the rising interest from Western-based fashion brands have led to this . International brands such as H&M, Dolce & Gabbana and Uniqlo, among others, have also made hijab a part of a global aesthetic with their collections that incorporate hijab practices into global fashion discourses [2; 20]; [9; 47]. For example, H&M’s 2015 advertisement with a model wearing a hijab marked the placement of modest fashion as establishing a “trend” in the Western fashion system. In the same vein, Dolce & Gabbana released a luxury abaya and hijab collection in early 2016, and having wearing them in high fashion show an influence on the fashion industry.

Inspired by this worldwide movement as well as recent changes in dress codes around the world, Turkish designers have paved the way for hijab fashion. The *hijab* has been brought into dialogue with sportswear and street fashion, becoming “coopted as an item of fashion with special appeal to the youth” [7; 659]. The iterative process toward global trends happens, for example, with the Turkish brand Armine with its minimalistic designs and neutral color range and with brands like Aker targeting youth with jogger pants etc. for the sports hijab category. Social media is an important vehicle for the dissemination of these innovations worldwide. On Instagram and TikTok, Turkish influencers remix international modest fashion trends to the local context. For instance, the posts of Kübra Ünlü attract both local and international people because she provides Western minimalist fashions together with Islamic modesty.

The rise of the global modest fashion industry can be contextualized within the theoretical framework of Homi Bhabha’s hybridity. Hijab fashion represents a “third space” where local, religious practices meet with global consumer culture; a space that is not simply traditional and is not simply Western. This incorporation by Turkish designers of sport and street fashion into hijab dress is indicative of the interaction of global and local aesthetics, as theorised by Arjun Appadurai [11] under the formula of cultural flows. Yet, this hybridity leads to a paradox with respect to Şişman’s [5; 34] trust-property binary: Hijab is in tension be-

tween an attempt to retain it as an authentic religious relic and being prey to treatment as an object within the global market. In post-colonial terms, H & M hijab ranges and those of similar brands such as Dolce & Gabbana, read as an 'orientalist reframing' which puts Muslim women's bodies in the service of the western-authored language of fashion [12]. These lays bare the emancipatory and exploitative promise of conservative chic: women are freed through global aesthetics, and objectified through consumer culture.

5.2 Comparison: Turkey with Other Muslim Environments

Turkey's "conservative chic" differs from Muslim-majority neighbours by virtue of its secular-republican past. Hijab styles in Turkey have been influenced by pressures in the locale, such as the series of headscarf bans in the 1980s and the political liberalization in the 2000s [3; 21]. This reality has turned hijab into a "tense field" whereby it "commands Islamist women to make peace on two contradictory fronts, a reformist secular one on which it offers them alliance and a conservative religious one, which it refuses to disown". Turkish hijab brands give us a different picture, with an aesthetic that appeals to the minimal, sporty look in secular young women, all while respecting the religious protocols of modesty.

The politics of weakening trendiness is further evident in Malaysia where modest fashion is legitimised by state policy to reinforce Islamic identity [2; 22]. Government-sponsored fashion and textile statutory bodies such as the Textile Association of Malaysia, the Malaysian Official Designers Association and the Malaysia Design Institute to inform local and international businesses about the local designers and art students as well as fashion and history of Malaysia. It allows the institution of hijab fashion as a national project. But the hijab style in Malaysia is less personal than the Turkish version, and is marked by much use of pastel colours and Malay traditional motifs. However, in Saudi Arabia, a hijab style that stands out and attracts attention is undesirable. Uniform clothing is indicative of stringent cultural and religious enforcement; however, in recent years we are seeing more embellished and individualised designs trending as a response to the luxury fashion companies that have taken the world by storm.

Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as other Muslim-majority countries provide an interesting contrast to Turkey. Indonesia, being the country with the largest Muslim population, is one of the biggest players in modest fashion. Local brands with bright, vibrant colours and tropical patterns inspired a look that emphasized youth and vibrancy, supported by the use of social media influencers who localized international trends for the local environment [13]. In the UAE, hijab fashion is highly associated with lavish spending, as Dubai-based designers target the high-income market with haute-couture abayas and Swarovski-embroidered headscarves. Unlike these countries, in Turkey there are still secular and conservative sides to cater for at the same time. Turkish hijab fashion is not a state-sponsored national project à la Malaysia, nor a practiced bound by strict norms à la Saudi Arabia, but it is about individual autonomy and cultural negotiation.

The particularity of hijab fashion in Turkey may be clarified through the help of Judith Butler's [14] notion of performative identity. Turkish women are always labouring to remake themselves through performances that navigate between secular and conservative norms embodied in the hijab. This performance focuses on the individual's personal aesthetic from state-oriented hijab in Malaysia or normative hijab in Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, Barbarosoğlu [8; 106] notes that the bright colours invite this kind of public performance which is also part of consumer culture. The hijab fashion of Turkey could be regarded as being within Appadurai's mediating space of global cultural flows, a global form of negotiation, representing a "phantasmic and hybrid assemblage" of "quotations", a kind of ethnoscape, implying that Turkish women form their identities in an interplay between local religious values and global fashion narratives. On the other hand, the cases of Indonesia and the UAE demonstrate how hijab fashion is informed by economic and political factors to particular localities. It is important to emphasize, however, that the cooptation of the hijab as a symbol of resistance and as a site of adaptation to the forces of modernity (as in Turkey's secular-republican history), when narrated in terms of Şişman's [5; 41] dialectic of body and power, runs the risk of becoming a commodity. This brings out the dual nature of conservative chic: as freedom and as commodity in a capitalist world economy.

Gender Dynamics and Autonomy

The "conservative chic" demonstrates a site where hijab fashion challenges the traditional gender role for Muslim women and enforces women's autonomy. Yet, this is a process with liberating and constraining forces. As consumer culture, the internet, social media, and global fashion trends change the way women express themselves, secular and conservative criticisms challenge the extremity of this change. We move on to the gender politics embedded in hijab fashion in a chapter that mixes case studies and visual representations, showing the contradictions and possibilities of female autonomy.

6.1 Fashion and the Process of Empowerment

As such a hijab fashion has also been recognized as a critical mechanism of power for religious women, allowing them an opportunity to identify and be recognized as individuals in the public sphere in a manner that remains religiously normative [7; 660]. Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement "on ne naît pas femme, on le devient" referred to an ability for hijab to culturally remould gender identities. For instance, the minimal tunic, overgrown blazer and lamé at hijab brands like the mod Armani and the sporty headscarf brand allow women to signal both their religious identities and modern aesthetic. Social media constructs speed this process through which women "spread" their stories, styles and modes of living to a global audience [9; 49]. The Instagram campaign "#TesettürleÖzgür", began by Kübra Ünlü in 2023, has given a space for collective solidarity by publishing countless pictures of women wearing hijab and also sharing the background stories of all of these women, and thousands of other women have also adopted this style.

The empowering factor of hijab fashion is not only being an aesthetic statement but also helping with women's economic and social independence. Small, independent clothing brands and design workshops have provided a space for women entrepreneurs, while social media has allowed women working from their homes to create micro-enterprises. In Ankara, a group of hijab-clad women found a collective called "Hikaye Örtün" that was best for making waves locally and abroad with their handcrafted headscarves and ethical perspective on fashion. By re-branding hijab fashion as a feminist act of self-determination and feminist collective action, these campaigns position hijab as symbols of both individual autonomy and collective belonging.

In Beauvoir's dialectic, hijab fashion is the means whereby women produce themselves as subjects, through which they transform cultural norms of gender within practices of subjectification. Şişman's recognition of gender as a cultural construction highlights that the hijab functions as a "site of both resistance and accommodation to modernity" for religious women [5; 42]. Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of gender exposes the fact that the hijab is a space wherein women act out their bodies, quote, and engage in religious as well as aesthetic performativity, in which "the hijab is not just a garment; the hijab is a stage" in which women perform and reconstruct their identities in a public realm. Rather, Bell Hooks' model of feminist solidarity reveals that hijab fashion illustrates individual agency in the context of a group endeavor. Projects like "Story Covering" also demonstrate that women in hijab are empowered as producers and narrators, not just consumers. This emphasis is indicative of the potential of hijab fashion to establish a feminist ethic of solidarity that runs counter to the atomising individualism of the capitalist consumer order.

6.2 Criticisms and Challenges

Hijab fashion has been criticised from both secular and conservative quarters. Secular detractors claim that the fashionable veil is contrary to the secular aspects of the Republic and to the utilitarian modes of public sphere aesthetics [3; 17]. In urban, secular districts of Istanbul, for example, the vibrant colors and expensive brand names of hijab fashion for some discredit the "traditional" headscarf. Conservatives, on the other hand, accuse the hijab's romance with fashion of occluding piety and undermining modesty. And especially in smaller towns, the expense of high-end hijab products also contributes to the critique that piety has been materialized into a status symbol.

Social media complicates those critiques. Foucault's technologies of power upon the body, for example, reveal that new forms of aesthetic regimes are also applied to women through social media [5; 41]. Instagram filters, algorithmically curated content and the perfect posts of influencers compel hijab-wearing women to fall in line with a certain aesthetic ideal. In 2023, for example, a campaign on social media run by a Turkish fashion brand under the theme of the "perfect hijab combo" drew both praise and criticism — some users said it stifled personal diversity by promoting an ideal image of hijab. Also, social media uses digital surveillance to establish a panopticon; women are being constantly evaluated through likes and comments, this can prevent one from seeking out autonomy.

Depending on the class and geographical background, the kind of criticism can be more or less harsh. Although urban middle-class women have adopted hijab fashion as a marker of status, for rural or poor women, it's not always accessible. This calls into question the inclusivity of hijab fashion: Can fashion empowerment be limited to one socioeconomic demographic? That, however, is both the promise and the peril of hijab fashion.

Foucault's biopolitical approach beautifully captures the liberational and disciplinary character of hijab fashion. Although social media has given women the opportunity to narrate their own lives, it has also reduced them to algorithmic standards of beauty and virtual surveillance. Şişman's dialectic of body and power explains how the hijab functions as a discursive social technology in consumer society — while it enables women to claim the right to autonomy, women themselves turn into subjects who are captured by market

demands and social judgments. Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum offers some insight here in that hijab fashion has been removed from the real, authentic marker of religiosity, and has become an empty sign found only in image and consumption. For instance, luxury hijab brands advertise religiosity as a "lifestyle brand," detracting from an emphasis on modesty. In fact, within the framework of feminism, Bell Hooks calls for "inclusive feminism," which prioritises that hijab fashion should take place beyond class and geographical inequalities, therefore ensuring an assemblage and inclusivity for all women. That encapsulates the paradox of conservative chic: The prospect of freedom is always at odds with the strictures of the market and social mores.

6.3 Case Studies

6.3.1 Kübra Ünlü: Reshaping Representation via Social Media

Kübra Ünlü and her 1.5 million Instagram followers present hijab as a contemporary lifestyle that is "empowering" [15]. The #TesettürleÖzgür campaign she spearheaded in 2023 centered individuality and solidarity through sharing personal stories of women who wear hijab. Yet, the fact that Ünlü is endorsed by luxury brands introduces a level of tension between authenticity and commerciality [3; 23]. In one of Ünlü's posts advertising a 10,000 TL (\$1,828) hijab outfit, for instance, one follower wrote, "is this hijab at these prices?" and articulated an issue of access. This is indicative of how influencer culture is both aspirational and alienating.

6.3.2 Aker: Women Employee — Fashion As An Avenue For Economic Empowerment

Aker economically empowers women through hijab fashion; women working in the brand's production and design have access to income [1; 850]. But the expensive, licensed products of Aker are only affordable for upper-middle class customers and serves to reproduce class differences. Rising prices of silk scarves, for example, that can't be sold much for less than 2,000 TL like in Aker's 2023 collection, mean that rural or lower working class women can never reach them. This in turn exposes the class boundaries of hijab fashion's economic promise.

6.3.3 Design Workshop of Neşe Şen: Tradition and Innovation in the Mix

Nese Sen's atelier of design in Istanbul: a place in which cultural heritage merges with a current aesthetic. Şen introduces local elements to hijab fashion by adding Anatolian motifs to modern cuts [9; 47]. But the atelier's niche market and steep prices make access limited. For example, a tunic hand-woven by the Şen group starts at the price of 5,000 TL, placing the brand in the luxury segment. This demonstrates how commercial imperatives affect the quest for authenticity.

6.3.4 Story Covering Collective: The solidarity economy and ethical fashion

"Hikaye Orten" is a collective based in Ankara where hijab wearing women produce hand-knit headscarves and ethical fashion products. Launched in 2022, the collective encourages women's economic autonomy and has a strong focus on sustainability and local craftsmanship. Products of the collective are marketed at competitive prices (100–300 TL) and are accessible to a larger population. But with limited production and no marketing online, it's challenging for the collective to grow much beyond the immediate region. This example illustrates the power of hijab fashion to blend personal autonomy with collective solidarity, yet scaling issues raise the larger structural constraints these efforts face.

Visual and Graphic Representations

In order to frame the gendered dynamics of "conservative chic", we provide below table and figure explanations about hijab fashion trend and influencer impact.

In this study, the role of social media is examined through leading hijab fashion influencers. As shown in Table 1, these influencers reach large audiences and demonstrate varying interaction rates, which highlight their impact on shaping modest fashion trends.

Table 1

Social Media Impact of Hijab Fashion Influencers

Influencer Name	Number of Followers (Instagram)	Interaction Rate (%)	Notes
Kübra Ünlü	1,500,000	5	Lifestyle and fashion content
Lifestyle and fashion	800,000	4	Sporty hijab and daily combinations

Note: Adapted from the literature [15; 38]; [9; 49].

This picture illustrates the social media coverage of popular hijab fashion influencers in Turkey, comparing the number of followers and the engagement rates on Instagram (data 2023). The bar chart also fo-

cuses on the influence of Kübra Ünlü (1.5M followers, 5 % engagement), Esra Sezer (800K followers, 4 % engagement) and Ayşe Yılmaz (500K followers, 3 % engagement) and demonstrates how hijab fashion was constructing a digital, public space.

In the context of Turkey, several hijab fashion trends have evolved over the past decades. As illustrated in Table 2, these trends range from minimalist hijab styles with neutral tones to vibrant colors popular in the 1990s, reflecting both cultural shifts and the influence of leading brands and influencers.

Table 2

The Trends of Hijab Fashion That Are Worth Mentioned In Turkey

Trend	Description	Peak Popularity	Important Brands/Influencers
Minimalist Hijab	Neutral tones, simple silhouettes	2018-Present	Armine, Kübra Ünlü
Sport Hijab	Sporty, comfortable designs	2020-Present	Aker, Esra Sezer
Luxury Fabrics	Silk, chiffon, high quality materials	2015-Present	Kayra, Neşe Şen
Bright Colors	Vibrant colors, synthetic fabrics	1990-2000	Tekbir Clothing

Note: Adapted from the literature [2; 16]; [1; 849]; [8; 106].

1. Tensions and Paradoxes

“Conservative chic” is an example of the creative possibilities as well as the tensions involved in religious women’s project of joining traditional religious values with modern consumer culture. Hijab fashion assumes a liminal identity, in and out of **the Islamic-cum-global frame**, between devout humility and global aesthetics, and its authenticity and spiritual essence face the challenges of consumerism and commoditization. This chapter delves into the paradoxical character of conservative chic and tangibly discusses the dissonances between tradition and modernity as well as the (in)authentic character, theorized and on the ground, of the commodification of hijab.

7.1 Tradition and Modernity

“By mixing Islamic values of modesty with **the fashion** of the world, religious women form a hybrid identity, which is not completely traditional nor completely modern [2; 24]. Hybridisation has been exemplified by the hijab fashion in Turkey. The trend of wearing **sporty** overcoats with simple colors in the 1970s had transformed into conservative minimal **tunics** and sport head coverings by the 2020s as part of a desire of religious women [6; 117] to appropriate their religious identity with contemporary appearance. For instance, in 2023 the Turkish TV series *Kalbimdeki Hicab* revealed this hybrid identity in popular culture as a woman who was both hijabi and **a fashion editor**. The character’s muted clothes, luxury-brand scarves **encapsulate** the idea that the old ideal of modesty can coexist with the new one of individuality.”

Social media is an important factor in spreading this mixed identity. Millions of posts on Instagram under the hashtag #TesettürModası depict religious women trying global trends (like very baggy blazers, pastel palettes) in local contexts. Yet, consumerism may eclipse the spiritual preferences of this bicultural identity [3; 23]. The Turkish luxury hijab brand, Kayra, for instance, used in its 2023 ads the slogan “Get Free with Chic”, and portrayed the hijab as a token of freedom; however, its high-cost products (e.g.: 3,000TL silk tunics) have faced criticism for transforming religiosity into a status symbol. This only heightens the conflict between traditional and modern ways: As women expand their religious identities to include modern fashions, they become ensnared in consumer culture’s narratives of individualism and status seeks.

Homi Bhabha’s idea of hybridity indicates that hijab fashion generates a “third space” of meaning between tradition and modernity. This site demonstrates how religious women create an identity that is neither simply traditional nor simply Western by reframing Islamic modesty with global aesthetics. In this regard, Zygmunt Bauman’s spectacle of fluid modernity is illuminative in noting how hybrid identity is disintegrated under the force of consumerism — an example is the hijab not as a religious practice but as a fluid expression continually exposed to changing fashion [16]. Barbarosoğlu [6; 137] claims that hijab has turned from a metaphysical position to a product-oriented aesthetic, and this type of fluidity also corrodes spiritual values as he observes. From a feminist standpoint, this hybridisation simultaneously enhances women’s autonomy and incarcerates them in a story about individuality and the market. Memories of a look are also conjured and broadcast in representations of hijab fashion in popular culture (such as in *Hijab in My Heart*), which not

only make this tension visible but romanticize it, thus reflecting at once both the liberating and the constraining aspects of conservative chic.

7.2 Commodity and Authenticity

The way in which the hijab has been absorbed into global fashion systems has resulted in an intensified commodification and undermined its originality [9; 51]. The modernist body has been constructed as a project while the hijab metamorphosed from religious inheritance to individual property [5; 34]. Swarovski-studded abayas and silk scarves showcased by luxury hijab brands at Dubai Fashion Week in 2023 devalue hijab from what should be a practice associated with religious devotion, to a purchasable high-status object made decorative for its visual allure. Social media also structures this commodification more deeply: influencers of hijab outfits are advertised on Instagram as a “brand” and reduce religiosity into a lifestyle product. For instance, an influencer shared it to prompt a conversation around “luxury hijab” in a thread titled “Is this hijab?”, shared on social media back in 2023, with a 15,000 TL bag used in the post being criticised as “the opposite of modesty”.

In the face of commoditization, local craftspeople and ethical fashion projects are working to maintain the integrity of the hijab. In Ankara, the “Hikaye Örtün” collective relinks hijab to community values and local craft, through handmade headscarves and sustainable fabrics. But such efforts have little resonance in a market dominated by global brands and the manufactured aesthetic standards of social media. The quest for the authentic also inscribes a class tension; luxury hijab products are a means of symbolic capital (Bourdieu) for educated, upper middle-class women, while working-class and poor women face challenges affording such aesthetics.

Şişman’s relic-property distinction can be seen to articulate the philosophical shift in the production of hijab as fashion from religious duty to commodity: hijab is transformed from a sacred relic to an individual property, or a project through which the modern individual fashions herself. Jean Baudrillard’s notion of simulacrum further complicates this development: the hijab loses its authentic religious content and becomes an image and fashion accessory, relocating in a “hyperreal” space [17]. Thus, luxury hijab brands (a totally unnecessary and wasteful concept on its own) that market themselves as rebranding piety as a consumer lifestyle represent a reduction of hijab to an aesthetic affect, rather than a genuinely religious practice. Symbolic capital according to Pierre Bourdieu serves as a currency through which some rising products, for example, luxury hijab products, become effective as a form of social distinction, and are culturally and economically privileged for women who are upper middle class, while excluding women who are not well-to-do. From a postcolonial approach, this fashion that is made from the global industry regarding hijab as an “exotic” trend has been charged by Edward Said as implicated in the orientalism discourse, where Muslim women’s bodies are regarded as non-persons and the Western-centred narrative of consumption is normalized. However, projects like “Story Covering” defy Şişman’s discourse of body and power to reinscribe hijab as a particular and moral practice. This in turn encapsulates the paradox of conservative chic — that it undermines cultural authenticity even as it advances individual freedom.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The concept of “conservative chic” articulates a complex, multi-layered and contradictory dance between pop culture and religiosity in Turkey. Hijab fashion, social media and international fashion trends both support and challenge religious women in their quest to redefine themselves. This study has illustrated how conservative chic, as a paradox between tradition and modernity, authenticity and commodification, autonomy and discipline, reconfigures the practices of religious women constructing their bodies and identities. The body is reimagined as both sacred relic and individual project, religious veil and global aesthetic object [5; 34], starkly demarcating the philosophical dimensions of the negotiation of the hijab with modernity. Drawing conclusions from the article’s key findings, the chapter explores the social, cultural and philosophical dimensions of conservative chic and provides deontological guidelines and practical tactics that facilitate gender justice and freedom, while preserving one’s cultural trappings.

Hijab fashion demonstrates how popular culture can be used as a site of expanding the visibility and agency of religious women in the Turkish public realm. The article’s section 5. Global Influences on Conservative Chic has demonstrated how the global modest fashion economy has added hybridity to the Turkish hijab fashion aesthetic, both good and bad. The added hybridity risks putting the Turkish hijab fashion industry at risk of becoming a commodity through static orientalist framings and consumerisation [2; 20]. 6. Some of the ways the girls can wear a hat, and thus feel included, were identified in the Gender Dynamics and Autonomy chapter, but aesthetic standards of social media and class inequities stifle such autonomy. 7. The sec-

tion Reflections on Contradictions and Ambiguities underscored the presence of a «third space» between tradition and modernity located in the hijab and warned that consumer culture might contribute to a loss of authenticity and further distortions of such space into a site of hyperreality [18]; [19].

This paradox also points out that hijab fashion plays a sociocultural mirror in the social context of Turkey: the conservative women employ hijab as one of the practices of resistance and autonomy; meanwhile they participate in the consumptive and aesthetic order of the popular culture. For instance, when the Instagram campaign “#TesettürleÖzgür” began in 2023, it opened up a sphere of shared solidarity by having women tell their private stories, where private stories become a (luxury branded) narrative. Stuart Hall [4; 25] posits this explanation with regard to cultural identity; by this argument, the performance of identity around the hijab is no longer a fixed religious custom but a performance of identity that is continuously spoken and represented. Theorist Donna Haraway’s [20] notion of cyborg identity complicates the philosophical considerations of this negotiation; hijab-wearing women occupy the intersecting space of the sacred and the profane, as cyborg subjects with one foot in traditional religious embodiment and one foot in the modern body of the consumer.

But this hybrid self is compromised by consumerism, advertising and commodification. Barbarosoğlu’s argument here is also confirmed by the erosion of cultural authenticity as a consequence of the shift of hijab from metaphysical attitude towards consumption-based aesthetics. From a post-colonial perspective, the fact that the global fashion industry works to construct the hijab as an “exotic” style or practice produces a situation in which the bodies of Muslim women are subordinated to a Western-oriented story of consumption. From a feminist point of view, however, the fashion hijab also offers women autonomy, but at the same time reduces inclusiveness according to class and geographical differences [21]. These tensions reveal that conservative chic isn’t just a fashion statement, but also a metaphor for Turkey’s historical negotiation of modernization, secularism and religiosity.

This reading of these negotiations is legitimised not least by the theoretical concept of the public sphere, as characterised by Hannah Arendt [22] and which also becomes a lens for analyzing the hijab fashion used by the girls. The hijab, as a practice of religious women’s “showing” in the public realm, enhances autonomy and identity, both independently and collectively. But this visibility is subject to the collective codes of aesthetics and of consumer culture. The question, then, is whether the hijab enables religious women to be out in public, or does it imprison them in an economy of visibility? This crystallizes the paradox that is the essence of conservative chic: a dance of liberation and restriction, authenticity and commodification, tradition and modernity.

Recommendations

The contradictory demands of conservative chic call for new methods to increase the autonomy and equality of religious women without sacrificing tradition. Below are recommendations that operationalize the findings of the article and provide community-based, political and academic responses.

Community-led Partnerships: The networks of religious women such as congregations should drive affordable and ethical fashion campaigns. For instance, local initiatives like the headscarf and sustainable fabric-makers’ collective “Hikaye Örtün” in Ankara encourages economic autonomy and cultural genuineness via handmade headscarves and sustainable fabric. We must scale up such initiatives through partnerships, and bring rural and low-income women into the fold. Moreover, community marketplaces on social media (such as a digital platform titled “Hijab Market”) would also be established to connect local craft makers with global consumers.

Media Literacy and Critical Awareness: Critical awareness about the consumption pressures and aesthetic standards of social media should be developed through educational campaigns. For example, NWACOs can conduct a workshop on “Digital Hijab: Freedom or Constraint?” to take women on a journey through algorithmic surveillance and curated aesthetics. These campaigns should be directed at young women, prospective hijabis, to urge them to reevaluate hijab without religious and cultural interference from consumer culture.

Policy Intervention and Cultural Retention: The government should assist in funding projects to maintain the cultural integrity of hijab fashion. For instance, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism could sponsor design competitions that incorporate Anatolian motifs and local crafts in hijab fashion. Tax incentives and grants could also be extended to small fashion startups to boost the competitiveness of local brands against their luxurious foreign competitors. Such policies serve to mitigate the commodification of hijab-fashion and work to preserve culture.

Digital Solidarity Networks: Religious women make use of social media for forming solidarities. For example, look at how campaigns like “Free with Hijab” can be transformed into a space that highlights the economic and social struggles of women below the poverty line and not just beautiful posts. Transparent marketing of these ethical fashion products can be achieved on digital platforms based on blockchain technology, which can prevent the risk of commoditization.

Academic Research and Interdisciplinary Directions: There is a need to generate academic research that addresses the nexus of gender, class, religion and popular culture. For instance, ethnographic studies comparing how hijab fashion is reflected in urban and rural styles are essential in this context of class difference. Moreover, the use of postcolonial and feminist lenses to study hijab fashion can show how Muslim women are represented through the mechanisms of the global fashion industry. Through inter-disciplinary research centers in this area, universities can now explore more fully the social-cultural phenomenon of conservative chic.

These suggestions respond, both practically and conceptually, to the mystique of conservative chic. Hall's theory of cultural identity demonstrates that hijab fashion is an ongoing work of identity, a process of identity negotiation; Haraway's cyborg metaphor, meanwhile, multiplexes religious women in a process of subjectification and opens up traditions to modernity. Arendt's nod of the head to the public sphere in hijab shows that religious women do become public, but that their subjectification is repressed by consumer culture. These initiatives seek to mediate between Şişman's trust-property dichotomy; the hijab is re-imagined not as private property but as a communal and genuine trust. From a feminist standpoint, Hooks' (2000: 40) insistence on an egalitarian feminism suggests that these proposals should be crafted in ways that are inclusive of all women. From a post-colonial standpoint, the „local» busts a space of resistance to the orientalist compositions of the world fashion system, where cultural conservation projects and local initiatives create the local. These suggestions are designed to limit both the dangers of cultural degeneration and cultural inequality, while retaining the liberating promise of conservative chic.

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Консерватизм парадоксы: бұқаралық мәдениеттің консервативті әйелдердің болмысын өзгертуі

Мақалада Түркиядағы шариятқа сай киім үлгісін ұстанатын діндар әйелдердің болмысын бұқаралық мәдениеттің қалай (қайта) қалыптастыратыны зерттелген. Авторлар «консервативті шик» ұғымы аясында діни әйелдердің өзін-өзі тану және ұсыну процесіне бұқаралық мәдениеттің ықпалын қарастырады. Этномәдени және феминистік әдебиеттерге сүйене отырып, зерттеу хиджаб тағу, виртуалды байланыс және жаһандық сәннің діндар әйелдердің тұлғалық қалыптасуы мен әлеуметтік рөліне әсерін талдайды. Мұсылман қауымы дәстүрлі діни құндылықтар мен заманауи эстетикалық ұмтылыстар арасында қалып отырған қайшылық ерекше атап көрсетіледі. Түрік қоғамындағы тәжірибелерді жаһандық «мұсылманша сән» қозғалысымен сабақтастыра отырып, мақала тұтынушылық мәдениет пен цифрлық жүйелердің әйелдердің мүмкіндігін кеңейтіп қана қоймай, оларды тауарға айналдыратын тетіктерін ашып көрсетеді. Авторлар діндар әйелдердің осы екіұшты жағдайды заманауи үрдістер мен дәстүрлерді үйлестіру арқылы еңсеруге тырысатынын, алайда олар секулярлық және консервативтік сынның арасында қысымда қалып отырғанын айтады. Зерттеу жаһандану жағдайында мәдени түпнұсқалықты сақтаудың жолдарын ұсынады.

Кілт сөздер: консервативті шик, хиджаб сәні, бұқаралық мәдениет, діни болмыс, мұсылманша сән, әлеуметтік желі, гендерлік қатынастар, тұтыну мәдениеті.

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Парадокс консерватизма: как массовая культура трансформирует идентичность консервативных женщин

Данная статья посвящена исследованию парадокса «консервативного шика», в рамках которого массовая культура влияет на (пере) формирование личности религиозных женщин, особенно тех, кто придерживается моды скромности в Турции. Основываясь на этнокультурной и феминистской литературе, работа анализирует влияние ношения хиджаба, виртуальной коммуникации и мировой моды на самооощение и социальные роли верующих женщин. Внимание уделяется противоречию, с которым сталкивается мусульманское сообщество: между следованием традиционным религиозным ценностям и стремлением к современным эстетическим идеалам, что проявляется в развитии хиджаб-моды и культуры инфлюенсеров. Рассматривая турецкие практики в контексте глобального движения скромной моды, статья показывает, как культура потребления и цифровые технологии одновременно способствуют расширению прав женщин и их коммерциализации. Делается вывод, что религиозные женщины пытаются преодолеть данный парадокс, сочетая традиции и современность, но при этом оказываются под давлением как светской, так и консервативной критики. Исследование показывает возможности сохранения культурной аутентичности в условиях глобализации.

Ключевые слова: консервативный шик, мода на хиджаб, массовая культура, религиозная идентичность, скромная мода, социальные сети, гендерные отношения, культура потребления.

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