The Identity of "Islamic Fashion"

Asliza Aris[1], Suzlee Ibrahim[2], Hasma Ahmad[1]

[1]Department of Fashion Design, Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
40450 Shah Alam, Malaysia
[2]Faculty of Art & Cultural Management, Akademi Seni Budaya Dan Warisan Kebangsaan,
50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

arisasliza@uitm.edu.my, suzlee@aswara.edu.my, hasma_ahmad@yahoo.com

Abstract — This study looks at the issues in fashion where the term "Islamic fashion" is widely used for Muslimah's garments. "Islamic fashion" is interpreted largely by fashion designers with the understanding that the garments should clothe the body and hair of the wearer. The issue raised is whether the execution of "Islamic fashion" is syariah compliance, which corresponds to the Al-Quran and Sunnah. Samples of fashion garments are collected, analysed and compared to Islamic dress criteria, Malay wear and global fashion trend. Perhaps, the term, "Islamic fashion" is used commercially as fashion statement due to its "modest look" parallel to Malaysian society.

Keywords - Design, fashion, Islamic, Muslimah, Malaysian society.

1. Introduction

The term "Islamic fashion" has been used largely for commercial purpose in today fashion. "Modest wear, Muslimah fashion and Syariah-compliant" are the three terms most often used interchangeably to reflect "Islamic fashion" (https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/ flair/2018/08/399195/when-fashion-banks-faith). The increasing demands of "Islamic fashion" and lifestyle has been reported due to the rise of Islamic population in the world (Global Islamic Economy Report 2015/16, http://www.dinarstandard.com/state-of-the-global-islamic-economy-report-2015/). This report also stated fashion as one of the key sector that contributes to global Islamic economy amongst other sectors such as food and beverage, Islamic finance, travel, recreation, pharmaceutical and cosmetics. Since Islam is the main religion of Malay people in Malaysia, "Islamic fashion" has developed vigorously following fashion trends highlighted on fashion runways in major fashion cities such as London, Paris and Dubai.

In Malaysia, Muslim fashion is generally influenced by the Muslim women community called the Hijabers (Indriya, 2012) or Hijabistas (A.Ghani, 2011), Muslim fashion bloggers, fashion designers and fashion retail industries. The term hijab is an Arabic word defined as "barrier" or more often used to describe "veil" (Indriya, 2017).Thus, hijabers refer to women who wear veils and hijabista is a combination of hijab and fashionista which refers to a fashionable and stylish Muslim woman. The start of Muslim fashion magazines such as Aquila Style (Singapore, 2010), Hijabista Magazine (Malaysia, 2012) and Muslimah Magazine (Indonesia, 2013) also contributed to the development of Muslim fashion in Malaysia. Today, Muslim fashion designers are very much celebrated and their collections are well accepted by the mass. However, the most concerned issue raised by pious and Islamic scholars is whether Muslimah fashion is syariah compliance and parallels to Islamic teachings to be called "Islamic fashion" (Abd. Rahman, 2007). Other issues brought to attention include "Islamic fashion" designs produced by non-Muslim designers and brands who has little knowledge and understanding of the religion (Zulqarnain, 2017)Pepin (2012) stated that the fashion designers themselves are inconsistent with their interpretations of "Islamic fashion". Pepin also pointed that the Muslim community is divided by geographical, political and cultural influences, which probably makes the interpretation of the Al-Quran and Sunnah slightly differ from place to place. For example, in Morocco, Muslim women wear loose clothes but not necessarily cover their hair. Whereas, in Malaysia, many Muslim women wear jeans and T-shirts but puts on scarves or shawl to cover their hair. In Malaysia, wearing the tudung, scarf or shawl is important to show Islamic identity. Many Malaysian women cover their hair but at the same time put on tight dresses that show the contour of the body (Abd. Rahman, 2007). The implication to the lack of education and understanding the rules of Al-Quran affect the design works and the appropriateness of the term "Islamic fashion" used in promoting one's fashion collection.

1. Women's Wear

In general, the women's wear in fashion, has many interpretations. This depends on how a designer interprets his or her design to suit a certain function. Women's wear can be categorized to formal wear such as evening and office wear and informal wear such as casual and sportswear. Fashion also breaks women's wear into a variety of clothing items such as dress, blouse, skirt, trousers, jacket and outer garment (Jones, 2011). In fashion designing, there are eight basic silhouettes that relate to the form of the garment on the body. The silhouettes are tube, pencil, hour glass, A-line, empire, bouffant, bell and bustle (Figure 1).
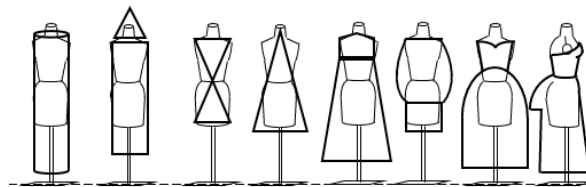

Figure 1. The bold lines on the dress form shows the types of silhouettes (Asliza Aris, 2014).

In Islam, dressing is considered ibadah, an obligation to cover up and a reflection of obedience to Allah SWT and His Messenger (Indriya, 2017). A woman's dress should not reveal the shape of her body and hair. A woman is allowed to only show her face and palms to people other than her immediate family members (Al-Quran, Surah An-Nur). The dress should be made from medium thickness of material so that it does not show the colour of the wearer's skin or shadow contour of her body. Ideally, the shape of the garment should be lose and long. Women are not permitted to wear excessive accessories and bright colours since this would attract men or inviting negative vibes from the public (Sual, 1994). In Islam, the headgear is a must for a woman to cover her hair, down to her chest. This means, the neck area too, must be covered (Al-Quran, Surah An-Nur). In the Al-Qur'an, jilbab and hijab are the two terms mentioned as garments for Muslim women. Islamic influence has changed fashion in terms of a woman's appearance that shows less waisted clothes, more covered clothing, layers of fabrics, longer hemlines and hair covered headgear (London Modest Fashion Show 2017, https://www.lmfw.co.uk/). Tube, pencil, A-line and empire silhouettes are often used to create Islamic influenced clothing.

1.1 Modest wear

Cultural theorists focused on four primary functions of clothing; utility, modesty, immodesty and adornment (Jones, 2011). However, Sproles (1979) added four more functions: symbolic differentiation, social affiliation, psychological enhancement and modernism. In Islam, the way a person dress tells people that the person is a Muslim (Ismail, 2005). Generally, modest wear reflects appropriate and decent clothing that is usually with hemline below the knees. The sleeves are often long, while the body of the garment does not emphasize the figure of the wearer (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/modest). As a whole, modest wear does not necessarily require a woman to cover her hair or address to cover the whole body as indicated by the Al-Quran. However, a Muslimah wear that adheres to Islamic faith is definitely categorized as "modest fashion" (Zabeen, Shams and Sultana, 2017). The interpretation of modest clothing for Malay wear reflects the Malay culture. The dress is unrevealing, covers the whole body and may be accompanied by a simple headgear such as a scarf. In Malay culture, the character of Malay costumes almost complies to Islamic teachings. In Malay costumes, the headgear does not necessarily cover the hair. Sometimes, thin fabric is used, colours from bright colour palettes or bold accessories worn by the wearer (Effendy, 2005). The modern Malay community has moved forward from wearing traditional dresses to Malay wear developed and inspired from the traditional Baju Kurung and Kebaya. Also today, many of the styles found in Malay wardrobe are a combination of Malay and western clothing's. As for global fashion mainstream, the term modest is interpreted by universal fashion understanding that again, reflects each and everyone's culture and background. The basic criteria of the garment include the length of the garment and unrevealing shape and design lines (Pepin, 2012). Colours are usually kept to earth and natural shades. Table 1 shows the comparison made to Malay wear and global fashion wear against to Muslimah wear as required in the Al-Quran. The comparison is made by observing fashion styles in the market, which promotes "Islamic

fashion" and "modest fashion". These fashion styles are promoted by printed media such as newspaper, fashion magazines as well as online fashion websites.

Table 1. A Comparison Study of Women's Wear Amongst Muslimah Wear, Malay Wear and Global Fashion Wear.

Criteria	Muslimah Wear	Malay Wear	Global Fashion
Objective	*Ibadah,* obedient	To clothe the body	To clothe the body
	To clothe *aurat*	Social status	Psychological
	Decency	Decency	Social status
			Fashion
Dress category	All functions	Formal	Formal
		Semi formal	Semi formal
		Informal	Informal
Criteria	Muslimah Wear	Malay Wear	Global Fashion
Style & coordination	Does not imitate the opposite sex	Dress	Dress
		Blouse	Blouse
		Trousers	Trousers
		Long skirt	Long skirt
Silhouette	Tube, Pencil, A-line	Tube, Pencil, A-line, Hour glass	Variety
Length	Maxi, Ankle length, long sleeves	Hip line and below, Maxi, Ankle length,	Hip line and below, Maxi, Ankle length,
Design line	Minimal	Minimal	Variety
Shape	Loose	Loose, semi fit	Variety
Headgear	Must cover hair down to chest. Sometimes cover part of face.	Sometimes cover hair or partly	Sometimes cover hair or partly but not necessary to have a headgear.
Colour	Pale, dark shades	Variety,	Variety, preferably natural shades.
Fabric	Medium weight material	Variety	Variety

2. The Identity of "Islamic Fashion"

Identification of a garment that falls under "Islamic" category is made whether or not the garment follows the rules of the Al-Quran. In the Al-Quran, it is clearly stated what is allowed and prohibited of how a woman should dress. It is not stated in the Al-Qur'an that Jubah is the only style of dress, which should be worn by Muslim women. The dress depends on form of the garment based on length, volume, thickness of fabric and the head cover. Although, the Al-Quran does not restrict the fashion of the garment and style, it is stated that a woman should not dress like a man and vice versa (Al-Quran, An Nur). In this observation, five main items are chosen for each set of clothing. The fashion clothings are chosen based on "Islamic and modest fashion" shows such as Kuala Lumpur Islamic Fashion Festival, Islamic Fashion Week and Modest Fashion Week. The main items are blouse, trousers, skirt, dress or outer garment and headgear. For the purpose of this study, four important factors of the clothing's are identified as regularity to "Islamic fashion". The factors are length and volume of the garment, thickness of material and head cover. The types of clothes and style of head cover are evaluated and compared to the standard of a Muslimah wear as stated in the Al-Quran.

Design 1	Coordination of items	Character
Islamic Fashion Festival Kuala Lumpur, 2008.	Blouse Skirt Headgear	Loose and long blouse, measuring to knees. Loose and long skirt. Use shawl but showing the hair. Design is inspired by *Baju Kurung.* Opaque fabric
Design 2	Coordination of items	Character
KL Modest Fashion Week, Putrajaya, 2016.	Blouse Trousers Headgear	Loose and long blouse. Loose trousers. Hair fully covered. Shawl does not cover the chest area. Opaque fabric
Design 3	Coordination of items	Character
  Modanisa, London Fashion Week 2017.	Dress Headgear	Loose flowy dress, layers Hair partly covered. Transparent fabric.

Design 4	Coordination of items	Character
Islamic Fashion Festival Kuala Lumpur, 2008.	Blouse Dress Trousers Headgear	Long blouse. Loose trousers. Long and loose dress with centre front opening. Hair fully covered with scarf drawn down o chest area. Opaque fabric
Design 5	Coordination of items	Character
New York Fashion Week, 2017.	Blouse Trousers Outer garment Headgear	Semi fit blouse/shirt Straight cut trousers Long coat Hair fully covered. Shawl does not cover the chest area Opaque fabric

Figure 1. Evaluation of Fashion Clothing in Regards of Islamic Fashion.

3. Analysis and Findings

The analysis made in Figure 1 are five sample designs used to identify Islamic-compliant characters in the garment worn by the models; hence to verify the appropriateness of the term "Islamic fashion" as used in promoting the fashion clothing. From the study, Islamic influence is seen in all designs that project "Islamic or modest fashion". However, the fashion garment produced is not accurate to the requirement of Muslimah wear as stated in the Al-Quran. A common character agreed by all designers are the nature of this dress must have long and loose body pieces; namely the blouse, skirt or dress. The garments are designed to ankle length and cover the whole body. The colours used are subtle colours except for Design 4 and Design 5, which used red and silver respectively. More importantly, the use of headgear is inconsistent to Islamic teaching which requires the women to fully cover their hair and bring down the length of the shawl to cover the chest area. The failure to properly wear the head cover is the main issue raised by the pious and Islamic scholars, which can be seen in Design 1, Design 2, Design 3 and Design 5. Design 3 used layers of thin fabric in attempt to avoid seeing the shadow of the body. However, on the sleeves area, one can still see the skin or shadow of the arms. From the analysis, it is clear that to produce an "Islamic fashion" design, one must first understand the fundamental of Islamic dress requirements rather than use personal interpretations of what muslim consumers want. The study points that to create "Islamic fashion" these six factors must be taken into account:

- Faith: core or fundamental understanding of Islamic teachings.
- *Aurat:* well covered in accordance to the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah.
- Length and Volume: the length and volume of garment must cover the form of busts and hips.
- Material: opaque
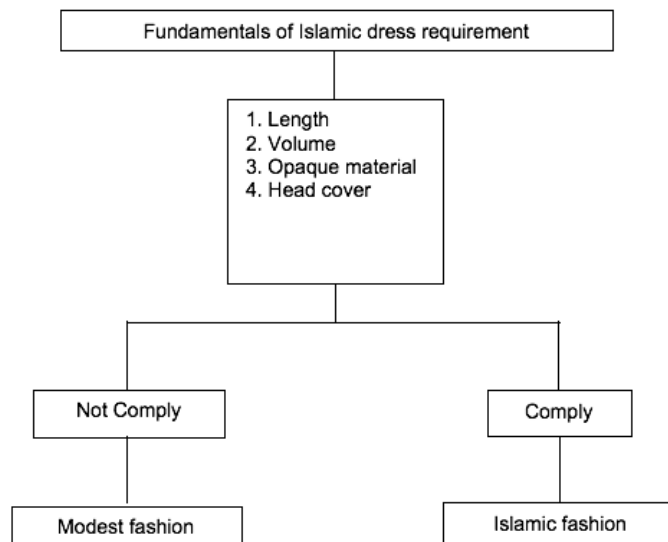- Headcover: properly cover the hair, neck and down to below chests.

Figure 2. Identification of Islamic Fashion (Asliza Aris, 2018).

4. Conclusion

The conclusion to this study is that the identity of "Islamic fashion" portrayed in many fashion shows does not exist in the standard that it is supposed to according to the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah. Many of the fashion clothing produced do not comply with the teaching of Al-Qur'an to be labelled as "Islamic fashion". It proves that the term "Islamic fashion" is used commercially to attract the population of muslim consumers who believe in freedom of fashion expression; a generation who wants to be fashionable and stylish yet covering up their modesty. The positive impact to the phenomenon is that more and more Muslim women dress in Muslim fashion style. However, without education and understanding of the Islamic dress, this category of garment is only best being called as modest garment. Furthermore, the market of this garment does not limit to Muslim people. In future, a designer designing for "Islamic fashion" must be aware of the Islamic requirements set in the Al-Qur'an. Ultimately, this study also proves that designing "Islamic fashion" must come from Muslim designers that have strong understanding of Islamic dress criteria. Clothing in Islam is a matter of "dressing the body" as *ibadah* not to cover the skin.

References

Al-Quran, Surah An-Nur

A.Ghani, A. (2011). Asian Muslim Women's Fashion of the Past. Aquila Asia.May-June 2011. Singapore: Aquila Media Pte. Ltd.

Abd. Rahman, Z. (2007). Pengertian Aurat Wanita. Metro Ahad. Kuala Lumpur: C17

Aris, A. (2014). The Evolution and Transformation of Baju Kurung in the Peninsular of Malaysia. Shah Alam: Universiti Teknologi MARA. (Doctoral Thesis).

Badarudin N.(August 8, 2018). When Fashion banks on faith. Retrieved from https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/flair/ 2018/08/399195/when-fashion-banks-faith

Crǎciun M. (2017). Islam, Faith and Fashion, The Islamic Fashion Industry in Turkey. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury.

Effendy, T. (2005). Ungkapan Tradisional Melayu Riau. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka.

Indriya, et.al. (2012).Hijabers Mom Community: Style Book.Jakarta: Kawan Pustaka.

Indriya, (2017). Muslimah Fashion Models in Indonesia (1990-2015). University Bogor Indonesia.

Ismail, A. (2005). Aurat Lelaki & Wanita. Kuala Lumpur: Progressive Publishing House Sdn. Bhd.

Jones, S.J.(2011). Fashion Design. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications.

Pepin (2012). Islamic Fashion. Traditional and Modern Dress in the Muslim World. Amsterdam. The Pepin Press.

Shawal, Z. (1994). Busana Melayu. Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Muzium dan Antikuiti Malaysia.

Sproles, G.B. (1979). Fashion: Consumer behavior toward dress. Minneapolis, Minn: Burgess Pub. Co. Zabeen M. & Shams S. & Sultana N. (2017). Growing Popularity of Muslim Attire: Faith or Fashion?, International Journal of Asian Social Science, Asian Economic and Social Society, vol. 7(9), pages 728-737, September.

Zulqarnain. (2017). Retrieved from https://muslimvillage.com /2017/01/11/121729/problemmainstreaming-islamic- fashion/ (Sept. 16, 2018).