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Islamic Pop Culture in Indonesia.

An anthropological field study on veiling practices
among students of Gadjah Mada University of Yogyakarta.

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ISBN-13: 978-3-906465-41-8

EAN: 9783906465418

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URL: http://www.anthro.unibe.ch/content/publikationen/arbeitsblaetter/arbeitsblatt_41/index_ger.html

This is the electronic edition of Claudia Nef Saluz, „Islamic Pop Culture in Indonesia. An anthropological field study on veiling practices among students of Gadjah Mada University of Yogyakarta.“, Arbeitsblatt Nr. 41, Institut für Sozialanthropologie, Universität Bern, Bern 2007

ISBN-13: 978-3-906465-41-8

EAN: 9783906465418

Electronically published December, 2007

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	The field and the research process	3
2.1	The location of my research: Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta	3
2.2	Methods of data collection	4
2.3	My position in the field – Locating the Self	6
2.4	My research in a larger research context.....	8
3	The variety of girls on campus.....	10
3.1	Students wearing the cadar.....	12
3.2	Students with long veils, long skirts and socks.....	14
3.3	Students wearing the Jilbab gaul – the trendy veil.....	18
3.4	Students without veil.....	23
4	Islamic dress from a historical and political perspective	25
4.1	Islamic dresses in colonial times	26
4.2	Islam and the government after independence	29
4.3	Islam becomes friendly and trendy	32
4.4	The Islamic movement in Indonesia in a larger global context	33
4.5	The ideological aspect of veiling	34
5	Islamic mass media	36
5.1	The rise of an Islamic press.....	37
5.2	Islamic soap operas – veiled TV-stars	41
5.3	Nasyid – Islamic pop music	42
6	Islamic consumerism.....	45
6.1	Selling the veil – modern advertisement.....	47
6.2	Ramadan Hedonism	49
6.3	Special shampoo for veiled women	52
7	The trendy Islamic lifestyle from a gender perspective	55
7.1	Veiling and sexual purity	55
7.2	Autonomy through an Islamic lifestyle.....	58
7.3	Islamic lifestyle and self control	62
7.4	The veil and the separation of space in the Javanese context	64
8	Islamic youth culture – a lifestyle	68
8.1	Identity in a hybrid world.....	68
8.2	Performance of an Islamic lifestyle.....	69
8.3	Destabilisation of meanings	70

9	Hybridisation between pop culture and Islam	72
9.1	Anybody can do anything	72
9.2	The limits of Islamic pop culture – Opinions of activists of Islamic student organisations.....	73
10	Islamic pop culture in a larger process of social change.....	78
10.1	Trends in Indonesian Islam	78
10.2	Construction of otherness.....	80
10.3	Individualisation: Lu lu – gue gue.....	82
11	Conclusion.....	83
	Bibliography.....	87

1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s the development of an Islamic pop culture in Indonesia has taken place. One of the most conspicuous symbols of this powerful new trend is the *jilbab gaul* – the trendy veil¹. In this research I explore the significances and underlying codes of veiling among students of Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. By analysing young women's experiences of veiling I want to see the changing image of Islam in a larger process of social change occurring in contemporary Indonesia. It is my aim to show how veiling reflects the dynamic interplay of the personal and the social, as Indonesian Muslims face the challenge of reconciling the mixture of practices of Western consumer culture, global Islamic influences and their local traditions. I argue that the new forms of trendy veils as well as other forms of the emerging Islamic pop culture are an expression of hybridisation as a process of cultural interactions between the local and the global. I see this hybridisation as a process of cultural transactions that shows how global influences are assimilated in locality and how locality is assimilated with global trends. The trendy veil and some forms of Islam no longer stand in opposition to practices of consumer culture; on the contrary, Islamic symbols have become part of it. It is trendy in contemporary Indonesia to live an Islamic lifestyle, especially for the young generation, for students.

In the first chapter of this research, I describe shortly the location of my research, Gadjah Mada University, the methods of data collection I have used and my own position in the research field. Furthermore I contextualise this research in a larger academic context.

In the second chapter I give an overview of the different girls on the campus, in particular their outward appearance, and then construct four categories based upon this overview. Further I look at how different groups interact with each other and how tolerant they are towards other ways of veiling or not veiling. For each category, I draw a portrait of one student studying at UGM.

¹ I will use the term veil (and the verb veiling) as a translation of the Indonesian word *jilbab*. As Brenner notes, it is not clear why Indonesians prefer the word *jilbab*, which is found in the Koran, to the Arabic word *hijab*, which is commonly used in the Middle East as well as in Malaysia (Brenner 1996: 692). *Jilbab* is relatively new in the Indonesian language and started to be used only in the 1980s, before that time the term *kerudung* was usually used to refer to the head cover (Astuti 2005: 49).

The word *jilbab* has two meanings in Indonesia nowadays, it was (and by some people still is) used to refer to the woman's Islamic clothing in general, others use it just to refer to the veil. The English word *veil* can, however, not convey the entire range of implication inherent in the word *jilbab*. But also in the Indonesian daily language the connotation of the word is not stable, depending on the context and the person using it. In everyday language it refers to some kind of head covering cloth. This ambiguousness also has consequences in every day life. If one thinks that *jilbab* only refers to the head cover, one can easily combine it with jeans and a top. The ambiguous meaning of the word *jilbab* hence sharply reflects the discourse and the practise of wearing different models of veils.

Subsequently in the third chapter, I look at the process of hybridization between the local and the global from a historical and political perspective, focusing on the triangular relation between global Islamic influences, Western influences and local traditions.

In making the image of Islam become popular and trendy, the mass media play an important role; this is the topic of the fourth chapter. The media culture constantly constructs and reconstructs cultural hybridity, for example by showing Islamic soap operas on TV, where veiled girls play the roles of the good, moral characters.

The fifth chapter deals with how Muslims, especially the youth, are perceived as potential consumers. Veils and other Islamic symbols are sold using modern advertising strategies that operate with a positive register and therefore make the image of Islam become positive and friendly. Religion does not seem to limit consumption anymore; this can for example be observed in the new “Ramadan hedonism”.

How this possibility of a new Islamic lifestyle affects gender conceptions is then discussed in the sixth chapter. I suggest that by wearing a trendy veil a girl in general gains individual autonomy, although the veil also has constraining aspects in Indonesia, as one also enters into a new field of social control. New forms of veils have emerged and different forms of femininities have appeared, reaching from very self-disciplining to girlish, emotional and playful.

In the seventh chapter, the practices of veiling among students are discussed in the context of youth culture as a means of identity construction. I show that in the process of hybridisation, the meaning of the veil is destabilised.

This contestation of meaning leads us to the next chapter, where I try to answer the question why one can talk about pop culture in the context of the new forms of veils. I depart from Andy Warhol’s idea of “pop”, that anybody can do anything (Warhol and Hackett 1990: 134). Subsequently, I discuss the question of how far this Islamic pop culture is still seen as “Islamic” with reference to different activists of the four biggest Islamic student organisations of Indonesia. Unsurprisingly, the opinions of the members of the different groups are very diverse.

Before drawing a conclusion, Islamic pop culture is seen in a larger process of social change in the ninth chapter. What does it reveal about Indonesia today? I suggest that this hybridisation reflects some broader transformation processes currently taking place in Indonesia.

2 The field and the research process

2.1 The location of my research: Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta

I conducted my research in Yogyakarta from September 2005 to March 2006². At that time I was studying anthropology and the Indonesian language, *bahasa Indonesia*, at Gadjah Mada University (*Universitas Gadjah Mada* or UGM) in Yogyakarta on the island of Java. Yogyakarta is located in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, one of the smallest provinces in Indonesia, and is widely known as the centre of Javanese culture, but also as a student city. The city of Yogyakarta itself has about half a million inhabitants and is home to 120 education institutions with more than 300'000 students in total.

The state University *Universitas Gadjah Mada* (UGM) in Yogyakarta is the oldest and, with currently about 55'000 students, also the biggest university in Indonesia. It consists of 18 faculties and is now located in an area of 300 hectares on which stand 670 buildings. UGM is not only the oldest and biggest university, but also one of the most reputable ones in Indonesia and students come from all over Indonesia to study at this University (see www.ugm.ac.id).

Yogyakarta is on the one hand a very dynamic and progressive city mainly because of the high rate of educated and young people. Many of them come from other regions of Indonesia and, as they often live far from their parents, many stay in boarding-houses³ or with relatives. Yogyakarta is however a city where the local Javanese culture is still very strong, especially in the southern areas, in and around the *Kraton* (the Sultans palace). In such a diverse setting it is not surprising that the practices of everyday life, and with it, the attitudes towards the veil are very diverse among people in the city.

My research will focus particularly on students from Gadjah Mada University. The campus is of course not an isolated world and it is therefore necessary to keep in mind the living

² This was my second longer stay in Indonesia, my first stay was from October 2003 to May 2004 in Padang, where I was living with an Islamic host family and working in an English school.

³ A boarding-house (*rumah kos*) is a good business in Yogyakarta. Girls and boys are generally separated. The number of people living in a boarding house may vary from only a few students to as many as forty or fifty students. The average is around twenty students per house. The prices per room vary from less than ten Euros to one hundred Euros per month, depending on the facilities and the environment. There are special houses for Muslim girls which generally have very strict rules. The rules in the girls' houses are normally a lot stricter than in those for boys. Many houses have 9 o'clock curfews and boys are not allowed in the rooms. The owner of the house is responsible for the good behaviour of the girls. One woman once told me that girls' boarding houses are a bit more expensive than boys', because one has to be a lot more careful. If one of the girls becomes pregnant or is seen doing things she should not be doing such as kissing or coming home late accompanied by a boy, this can be a shame for the owner and the neighbours will talk. Many girls told me that the rules have become stricter in the last years. Generally the cheaper houses are stricter than the expensive ones.

environment of the students, the city of Yogyakarta, Javanese culture, the Indonesian context and, last but not least, the global influences.

2.2 Methods of data collection

I used different approaches to collect my data. As an exchange student at University, I was in a double position as student on the one hand and observer on the other. I therefore gained a lot of information simply by listening to the conversations and gossip among students, by observing while walking around and through everyday conversations with fellow students, during group work or during classes.

I also lived in an area with many boarding-houses, for a while in a boarding-house with other Indonesian students and then with a Javanese family. I was not only among students during university time but also after class and on weekends, since most of my friends were students. I used to note interesting conversations, observations, questions and experiences in my diary, but of course by far not everything. My diary and my experiences are now a very rich source of data.

Besides this data, I recorded 26 interviews with different respondents; each interview lasting between 40 to 100 minutes. 17 of my interview respondents were still studying, all except 3 of them at UGM. Five of the other interviews were held with lecturers of UGM from different departments such as anthropology, sociology, archaeology, intercultural studies and Arab studies. The other four interviews were held with alumni students of UGM, three of them now writing for a magazine on cultural studies in Yogyakarta and one working for an NGO concerned with gender issues. I interviewed women as well as men, Muslims and non-Muslims, students wearing different styles of veils and students not wearing a veil at all. One student was interviewed twice, before and after starting to wear a veil. Seven of the interviewed students are active members of one of the four biggest Islamic student organisations. Some of these interviews were not held with only one person, but quite often the person I had arranged an interview with showed up with one or more friends who sometimes also participated in the interview. I did not mind these group interviews that were sometimes involuntarily formed on my part and therefore never told anyone to leave; neither did I try to exclude these friends from the discussion. In relation to this I think it does make a difference whether someone is interviewed alone or in a group. The question is now how it influenced the interview. During these kinds of interviews a person joining never criticised what her or his friend was saying, rather they were usually agreeing and giving additional input. In particular activists of student groups rarely showed up alone and I sometimes had the impression that they checked each other or asked a friend if they were not sure about something. I assume that in these group interviews people try harder to voice the group consensus.

I was using a minidisc player to record my data and had the recordings transcribed by two different students I had employed as paid research assistants. After I received the transcript, I

checked it to make sure the work was thorough. It might have been better to do the transcription myself but it saved me a lot of time and I was very happy that I found two very reliable students who did a good job.

The minidisc player was however not only a technical help but also influenced the interview. I had the impression that people took the interview more seriously, knowing that they were being recorded. Many were also proud to have been chosen to be recorded, and it seemed to me that many liked that, just as many students liked to have their photo taken. The most important difference in recording an interview, in comparison to not recording it, was that the person was watching more carefully what she or he was saying. In fact, at times it seemed that I was given an answer the respondent thought I wanted to hear. In order to avoid only expected answers I did not only ask about the respondent personally, but also whether they know someone affected by the issue or what some of their friends think or whether they have ever heard anything relevant to the topic from someone else. Through this form of indirect questioning many interesting answers were obtained.

Besides these accidental group interviews, I also organised one bigger group discussion with 35 participants. This was a discussion I had advertised by hanging up posters around the campus. My aim was to have a discussion between Indonesians and foreign exchange students to generate a better understanding of the veil. The result of this discussion was not really satisfying in my eyes, because it was mainly generating common stereotypes and thus the discussion stayed at a very dogmatic level, the Indonesians mainly pointing out the religious obligation to veil, citing Koranic verses and making the possibility of discussion very difficult since all arguments against the veil were perceived as an attack or at least as a sign of a misunderstanding of Islam. Furthermore, the discussion, if we can even call it this, was very much dominated by one girl, and I as a kind of moderator felt it rude to keep interrupting her. In future, I would note some points to follow on the white board, to have a guideline to follow and to facilitate discussion. Although I was not really satisfied with the result of the discussion, it was still very interesting to hear the different arguments. I also received very positive feedback from many students who found it a really good idea to organise discussions between Indonesian and foreign students. During the discussion, I also distributed a short questionnaire to everyone, thereby giving me additional interesting data. One downside of this discussion was that male attendance was very low.

Other very rich data sources for me were research papers the students had to write to gain their bachelor or masters degree, because other students had written about issues related to this topic before. Besides this I found a fair number of books in Indonesia about the veil, some of them arguing very strongly that it is a religious obligation, but also books about veil fashion or about how to look good with a veil and to choose the right model for the right time.

Other sources of information were magazines for Muslim women and practical guide books addressed to Muslim women on how to veil and why to veil, one part of these books was written by Islamic authorities, explaining which Koranic verses and *Hadiths* are related to the issue of the veil. Mostly, these books were written in a dogmatic way, speaking in favour of

the veil, whilst some of them tried to show that the veil is not a religious duty for Muslim women. The books about how to veil, veil fashion, showing different styles of tying it or decorating it with pearls or other accessories were generally written by famous artists who had decided for various personal reasons to wear a veil, by veil designers or by other commercial writers, wanting to gain money, because, as we will see later, the veil is not just a religious symbol to cover one's hair, but also a flourishing business. I will come to the point of commercialising and selling the veil in a later chapter.

How the choice of my informants, the accessibility of my data and my way of looking at the topic were influenced by my position in the field shall be the topic of the next section.

2.3 My position in the field – Locating the Self

What are the relationships between me and the fieldwork? How did my personal, emotional and identity issues have an impact on the fieldwork? Agreeing with Amanda Coffey, the writer of the book "The Ethnographic Self", I presume that the role of the ethnographic self is very important and should not be neglected (Coffey 1999: 17ff). I think that my "Self" influenced the way of data gathering very much and that the collected data does influence the analysis and focus of this research.

As an exchange student at Gadjah Mada University from August 2005 to March 2006 I was in a double position, as mentioned before: on the one hand a student of anthropology and on the other a researcher. In the eyes of my fellow students I was probably more in the position of a student, doing my homework, taking exams and joining group work. Some of them knew that I was doing interviews and collecting data for my thesis, but most of the students of the university just saw me as an exchange student, hanging around with them, eating in the cafeteria and joining discussions.

Besides some disadvantage, this double role had also many advantages. As a registered student I was not a stranger on campus and it was seen as normal that I was hanging out with the students, joining classes and talking to them in the breaks. Even though I was a bit older than most of the Indonesian students, I still had the status of a fellow student, a special one, because I was white and Swiss. This also helped me because a lot of students wanted to talk to me and spend time with me because of my background, and it helped me to integrate quite quickly. Another huge advantage was that my Indonesian was already quite advanced at the beginning (this being my second long-period stay in the country). This language factor was a good starting-point for my participant observation as I didn't have to legitimise my presence among these student groups.

The fact that I am not a Muslim and therefore not wearing a veil was an advantage rather than a disadvantage in my eyes. People were not trying to convince me to wear or not wear a veil and I didn't have to justify my position. From this point of view I was an outsider in this discourse of the veil. I dare say that many Muslim students would not have been able to ask

questions the way I asked them without having to legitimise their own choice for veiling or not veiling because this is not a neutral choice. My interest for the veil was surprising for some; it happened more than once that I was asked whether my parents knew that I was interested in Islam. They were worried that my parents would object to my learning about other religious beliefs because it might weaken my faith in the Catholic Church. Concerning my own faith, I tried to avoid this topic if possible. When asked about my religion, I would answer that I was a Catholic, although I would not call myself a Catholic back home. I knew that it is hard for many Indonesians to accept that someone adheres to none of the five acknowledged religions would cause a bad image and therefore I normally tried to choose to not have to explain myself and my concepts of spirituality. Normally my informants and fellow students were not too interested in my religion anyway and it was enough for them to know that I was not a Muslim.

Another thing that certainly affected my position in the field and the data I gained is the fact that I am a woman. As gender concepts are very important in this field of study, I think that a male researcher would have obtained different data and would not have been able to join certain events with veiled girls such as sleeping in the mosque with them, seeing them without veils and joking or telling more personal problems. I imagine that it would have been more difficult for a man to approach and make friends with girls wearing long veils since some girls wearing this style of veil do not mix freely with boys. On the other hand I think I missed the male point of view since boys too may behave differently in the presence of one or more girls. Although I did also interview boys, the answers given to me might be different to the answers they would have given to a man.

One other thing that was certainly of importance was my appearance and behaviour. I always tried to dress like many of the other students not wearing a veil did. Long pants and a shirt with sleeves and a collar were already prescribed by the dress code of the university. I tried to avoid tight or transparent clothes, tried to wear tops that would cover my back when sitting and avoided having a low neckline. When meeting with activists of very formalistic student organisations such as KAMMI, I realised that appearance was very important when meeting with girls as well as when meeting with boys. For these people it was a sign that I paid respect to their body concepts. I seldom wore a veil myself as I think it would not have been appropriate for me to veil when going to campus as it is still a symbol of Muslim identity.

To sum up this point I think it is important to keep in mind how my age, my position, my sex, my appearance, my religion and many other things that I might not even be aware of, have influenced my data and the following analysis. I do not determine whether the influence is positive or negative but I think that the data I obtained is related to my position in the field and would have been different if another person had completed the same fieldwork.

My position in the field was certainly constantly changing as fellow students got to know me better. In regard to my own position, my personal knowledge and specific interests constantly changed and through further knowledge new questions arose. Some very important informants I met only by coincidence and if I had not met some of them, I think my research

focus might have been different. By saying this I want to point out that the practice of veiling and its underlying code could have been understood in a quite different way by any other fieldworker.

2.4 My research in a larger research context

Many social analyses have been written about the veil and the veiling movement. The significance of the veiling movement in Middle Eastern countries has, among others, been described by Abu-Lughod (1986), Ahmed (1992), El Guindi (1991) and (1999), Fernea (1993), Hoodfar (1991), Lutrand and Yazdekhashti (2002), Mernissi (1991), Mule and Barthel (1992), Williams (1979) and Zuhur (1992). Fawzi El-Solh and Mabro (1994) presented a cross-cultural perspective ranging from the Middle East to Africa, Eastern Europe and South East Asia. Read and Bartkowski (2000) focused on identity negotiation in Texas, Shirazi (2001) studied the use of the veil in Western advertising. In my eyes the most important and most cited paper about the situation in Indonesia, more specifically in Java, in the area of Yogyakarta and Solo, was written by Suzanne Brenner (1996) "Reconstructing Self and Society: Javanese Muslim Woman and "The veil"". The question that Brenner asks is: „Given the social, psychological, and economic disadvantages that a woman who wears jilbab may encounter, one must ask what motivates Javanese women to veil and why the practice is becoming more popular, especially among young, educated women of the middle classes" (1996: 675)? One of the answers Brenner gives to this question is that "the significance of veiling is ultimately drawn from the local historical and cultural contexts in which it is practiced (...) In covering the sins of the past, so to speak, veiling here signifies a new historical consciousness and a new way of life, weighed down neither by Javanese tradition nor by centuries of colonial rule, defined neither by Western capitalism and consumerism nor by the dictates of the Indonesian political economy. It stands for a new morality and a new discipline, whether personal, social, or political – in short, a new, Islamic modernity." (1996: 690). Brenner assumes in her text that there is a consensus in the society about how to attribute meaning and interpret the veil. I agree with Brenner in many points of her analysis and her understanding of the veil, but I do not see a shared consensus and a stable significance of the veil. Different styles of veils are interpreted differently depending on social interaction and context. I see the significance of the veil hence as constantly shifting. Furthermore, I do not agree that the veil is not defined by Western capitalism and consumerism or by the dictates of Indonesian political economy.

Assuming that cultural forms, such as veiling practices, are constructed, contested and intersecting social phenomena, the meanings attributed to the Muslim veil are not intrinsic to the veil itself, but rather they are produced through cultural discourse and vast networks of social relationships (Read and Bartkowski 2000). I see the construction of the underlying code of the veil as a dynamic process and everyday practice that is fraught with ambiguity, contradiction and struggle. While the studies mentioned above raise very useful points of

comparison and give new input for asking questions or understanding answers, we have to be aware of the different living environments, histories, political differences and ways in which individuals interact and negotiate their identity in everyday life.

However, the larger research context and what has been written about the veil does not only give input to me, but as I did my fieldwork in an academic environment with people who have a good education, some of the research done on the veil has also influenced some of my informants and the general discourse in Yogyakarta. Most of the afore-mentioned articles are however not accessible in Indonesia. One book that is accessible and cited quite often is the book “Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance” by Fadwa El Guindi (1991), which was translated into *bahasa Indonesia* in 2003, and besides that, some writings of Fatima Mernissi. These were mostly the only two non-Indonesian authors writing about the veil cited in the final thesis of students of the UGM writing about the issue of veiling. They mainly focused on texts concerning the veil written by other Indonesians; in particular, authors writing critically about veiling are not translated as often as authors writing in favour of the veil.

Many texts then discuss the veil normatively, whether one should or should not veil, whether it is suppressing or liberating women.

In the following chapter, I would like to point out the large diversity of girls studying at UGM.

3 The variety of girls on campus

Walking around the campus of Gadjah Mada University, I was very much surprised by the large diversity of styles of veils, but also by the way girls not wearing veils were dressed. The variety reaches from students covering their whole body including their face to girls wearing trendy pink veils, tight tops and jeans to girls wearing skirts down to the knee combined with T-shirts - although all of them are Muslim.



Muslim girls studying at UGM. Yogyakarta, November 25th, 2005.

As my assumption is that the trendy veil is a conspicuous symbol of the new form of Islamic pop culture and with it the trendy and friendly image of Islam in Indonesia, I consider it as important to see this form of veil in a larger context. In this chapter I would therefore like to give an overview of the variety of choices Muslim students studying at UGM take in relation to choosing their form of dress and expressing their identity. There seems to be no neutral choice, and by one's outward appearance one also expresses the religious understanding of the Koran verses and *Hadiths*⁴ concerning the practice of veiling. Usually a strong emphasis is placed on the following two Koran verses: "O Prophet. Tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over themselves, that is more convenient than they should be known and not molested" (sura *an-nur* 33: 59) and sura *al-ahzab* 24: 31 that urges women "not to display their beauty and adornments" but rather to "draw their head cover over their bosoms and not display their ornaments" (Read and Bartkowski 2000: 400).

⁴ Hadiths are second-hand reports of Mohammed's personal sayings, traditions and lifestyle that had started to be collected shortly after his death.

It seems important to me to emphasise that the religious aspects are very important for a woman's decision to veil, but I would like to show here as well as in further chapters that religious motivation seems not to be the only reason for many students to veil. This can for example be seen when looking at the fact that the starting point to begin veiling is quite flexible.

In order to show how the veil is perceived and experienced among the students of Gadjah Mada University, I want to show a range of different "Islamic attitudes" towards the veil. There is no consensus about the "right" way of dressing. The phenomenon of veiling should thus be seen from different interrelated angles, wherein the religious dimension clearly seems to be linked to the social and cultural dimensions.

To give an overview of the large variety of models and styles of veils, I categorise the girls into four groups. The criteria for building these categories is the style of veil and clothes one wears. The first group are the girls wearing a *cadar*⁵, the second group consists of the girls wearing long veils and usually long skirts, the third group are the students wearing trendy veils combined with, for example, jeans and the last category consists of the girls not wearing the veil. These categories can however not be strictly separated, there is much overlapping and also within the different categories differences will occur. Some students might also switch between categories, as they are not consistent in their choice but wear different models of veils for different occasions or only veil occasionally.

Besides the outward appearance of each group, I will also look at how these groups interact with other groups and how high their tolerance towards other ways of veiling or not veiling is. For every category I will offer a portrait of one student I had the opportunity to interview and contextualise this specific point of view by adding some general information about each category.

⁵ In Indonesia the word *cadar* is used to refer to a long dark coloured dress reaching down to the ground combined with a face veil. Once again, the meaning of *cadar* is also ambiguous, as people in everyday practice often refer to *cadar* when they just mean the face veil. When students talked about someone who wears a *cadar* (*pakai cadar*), they point out that this woman wears a face veil. A woman who is wearing a long black dress and a long black veil but not covering her face is usually not said to wear a *cadar*. The Persian word *chador* however refers to a full-length outer garment and not specifically to the face veil. The term usually used in the Arabic world for face veil is *niqab*. I will use the word *cadar* as the Indonesian students use it – to refer to women wearing a dark coloured dress, a long dark veil and a face veil.

3.1 Students wearing the *cadar*



Nisa, on the left with her two friends. Yogyakarta, February 9th 2006.

Nisa is one of the few girls studying at UGM who wears a *cadar*, a dark long dress, combined with a dark long veil and a face cover. Only around one percent⁶ of the students at UGM choose to veil like Nisa.

She is studying at the faculty of biology in her fifth semester. I met her and her two friends and mother, all also wearing a *cadar*, with the help of a friend who gave me her phone number. She invited me to her house where she was living with her family. It was almost completely unfurnished and no photos or other pictures were on display. As I could tell from the house, they were not rich. According to Matthewman, women wearing *cadar* normally belong to the middle or lower class and mainly live in cities (2000: 31).

She started to wear a *cadar* about three years ago after she began to attend Koran studies in a mosque near UGM, beside the *Mirota Plasa* supermarket; before that she was already wearing a long veil. Almost all the women studying at that particular mosque wear a *cadar* and many of them are still students. Nisa had heard about this study group from a friend and decided that she wanted to try, and really liked it. She emphasises that this is not a sect and that one can choose to stop attending at any time. The teacher does not ever remember the names of his students, so one's attendance is not checked.

⁶ There exist no official numbers in UGM about how many girls are veiled in general, as this number is constantly shifting and as this is seen as a personal decision; it is no longer necessary to register. The numbers about how many girls might belong to each category are based on my own observations as well as on observations of fellow students asked to guess the percentage. Generally, about 55 – 60 percent of all female students wear a veil.

Nisa and the people studying there are all *Salafi*, adherents of a movement in Sunni Islam. They are taught and believe that Muhammad, his companions and the two succeeding generations should be seen as references as to how Islam should be practiced. The way the Koran was interpreted at that time is the only way one can interpret it. There is no way that one verse in the Koran can have two meanings. The meaning will never change until Judgement Day (“*Tidak mungkin punya maksud dua. Sampai besok hari kiamat maksud ayat itu tetap seperti itu.*”)

This textual understanding of the Koran and the *Hadiths* has consequences for the way that Nisa thinks a woman should dress. For her it is evident that a woman, when she first has her period, has to veil as this is written in the Koran. A woman has to cover her whole body, including hair and feet. She does not have to cover her face and the hands but Nisa says that this is better because especially the face is a very attractive part of the body. Also, the wives of the prophet wore veils and what is good for his wives is also good for any other woman⁷. Nisa feels it to be important not to attract the attention of men; therefore one should choose dark colours and of course conceal the shape of the body.

In Nisa’s eyes it is not enough to simply combine a veil with jeans. These girls do not really understand religion (“*Merka bukan orang yang mengerti agama dengan benar*”). According to Nisa, it is very dangerous if everyone interprets the Koran in his or her own way because as a result many wrong interpretations and different religious groups may appear, such as is the case in Indonesia today where Islam is no longer pure.

Nisa is often alone on campus or with friends also wearing the *cadar*. She does not interact with boys at all and does not hang out after classes, going home immediately. Students sometimes call her “Batman”, “ninja” or “power ranger”. From fellow students I heard that they think that these girls are very arrogant and exclusive and think that they are better Muslims than others.

Nisa does not listen to music, not even to Islamic music and usually does not watch TV or listen to the radio. Generally her media consumption is very low, a lot that is written and broadcasted is not in accordance with Islamic law she tells me. She thus focuses on studying.

The *cadar* is not yet accepted in Indonesian society and is perceived as odd and strange (“*Di Indonesia belum terbiasa pakaian seperti ini, itu aneh, asing*”). In some faculties face veils are not allowed, for example in the medicine and psychology faculty. Also, some professors ask her to open the face veil, in which case Nisa obeys but puts it on again afterwards.

The *cadar* is often seen as conflicting with local traditions. In the eyes of many Indonesians, one should not let religion get into one’s way of interacting with other people. Many parents are therefore strictly opposed when their child wants to wear a *cadar*, in contrast to Nisas

⁷ In sura *al-ahzab* (verse 33: 53) there are references to the seclusion of the Prophet’s wives: “If you ask his wives for anything, speak to them from behind a curtain. This is more chaste for you and their hearts” (Watson 1994: 145).

mother who herself wears a face veil. It is also not surprising that this way of veiling makes it hard to find a job, especially since September 11th and the Bali bombing as *cadar* wearers are also often associated with terrorism. People are afraid of the dark cloaks and think that this is too extreme.

This category of women who wear a *cadar* is small and it is quite rare to see them on the street as they tend to avoid public situations. The next category, the girls wearing long veils, have some characteristics in common with the girls wearing the *cadar*.

3.2 Students with long veils, long skirts and socks



Miftah in front of the mosque of UGM. Yogyakarta, November 28th, 2005.

One of the students I interviewed wearing a long veil is Miftah, a student of psychology in her eighth semester. I met her for the first time in front of the copy shop of the faculty. She was very friendly and interested in knowing more about me and we kept in touch during the whole time of my stay. She invited me to many activities such as *nasyid* (Islamic music) concerts, book discussions or invitations during Ramadan to break fast in the evening.

Miftah always wore a long veil usually reaching down to the waist, a long skirt and skin coloured socks combined with black, flat sandals. The colour of her veil and skirt varied from cream, white, brown, light rose to blue or green. The skirt always matched the colour of the veil and the loose shirt worn underneath the veil. She paid attention to her appearance, being fashionable within the limits she had set herself. She did not use bright colours that draw attention such as red or bright pink. Miftah was not using make-up to go to university; neither did other girls wearing long veils. Only for festive occasions would she wear decent-colored lipstick or eye shadow. She was almost always walking around with a simple backpack that

she had decorated with some pins, one having the text on it “*Free Palestine*”, one showing a veiled girl with the writing “*KAMMI UGM*” on it and another one having Arabic writing on it saying “*Allah*”.

As one might already guess from the pin on her bag, Miftah is a member of KAMMI *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* (Unity of action of Muslim students in Indonesia), a large and textual Islamic student organisation, where she has a leading position. Interestingly, most of the girls wearing long veils on campus are activists of this Islamic student organisation. Wearing a long veil is however not an obligation to become a member, but all female activists do so because they all understand the Koran and Sunna in the same way. Miftah has worn a long veil since she joined KAMMI three years ago. Prior to this she was wearing a shorter veil and jeans. In Miftah’s eyes veiling is a process, but the kind of veil she is wearing now is the one that according to the Koran and Sunna is correct and how one should dress. She sees it as a religious obligation to cover not only the hair but also the shape of the body as well as her feet. The female way of dressing should furthermore not resemble men’s clothing. This is also why it is not good to wear jeans. According to her, not everyone is allowed to interpret the Koran, but rather only certain people with a very high religious education. There is one meaning everyone should follow.

Miftah is, however, tolerant towards other ways of veiling and sees that the girls wearing a trendy veil are already on the right way to dressing properly. She hopes that one day they will decide to wear long veils. Not all girls wearing long veils agree with Miftah in this point; her friend Lisa for example said that the new forms of short veils give Islam a bad image.

Wearing a long veil is however not only a matter of dressing but also of behaviour. Miftah does not shake hands with boys and only interacts with them if she has to. When she has something to discuss she makes sure that she is not alone with a boy, does not sit too close to him and tries to avoid eye contact. When they have a meeting in KAMMI, they use a *hijab*⁸, a curtain between men and women. Furthermore, she has no boyfriend, as this would be against Islamic law. She does not go out at night, except if there is a special event at university, does not laugh too loud or talk badly about others. According to Miftah it is also not appropriate for girls wearing long veils to go to shopping malls or cafes. Miftah restricts herself also in her media consumption, she does not listen to Western music as the texts are often not in accordance with Islam, but prefers *nasyid* – Islamic music, reads Islamic magazines and is

⁸ The term *hijab* is often used in the Middle East as well as in Malaysia to refer to the veil, seldom in Indonesia. As El Guindi notes, the word is derived from the Arabic root h-j-b that can be translated as “to veil, to seclude, to screen, to conceal, to form a separation, to mask” (1999: 157). As a noun it can mean cover, wrap, curtain, veil screen or partition. Interestingly, the same word refers to amulets carried on one’s persons (particularly a child) to protect against harm. Another derivate, *hajib*, can also mean “eyebrow”. The European term “veil” El Guindi notes, that correlates with seclusion therefore fails to capture these nuances and oversimplifies a complex phenomenon. When *hijab* stands in reference to women’s dress, the pertinent meaning combines sanctity, reserve and privacy (El Guindi 1999: 157).

also very selective in her TV consumption. According to Miftah the function of the veil is to put limitations in place (*“Fungsi jilbab itu membatasi kita”*).



Miftah with three friends, all wearing a long veil. Yogyakarta, November 28th, 2005.

Normally Miftah hangs around with her friends also wearing long veils. This is mainly because they share the same interests. She says other girls do not want to interact with her too much as they think that she only talks about religion and that she is arrogant and will criticise them for not veiling properly. In my fieldwork, girls wearing a short veil or no veil confirmed this, having commented that these girls are boring and too serious and do not seem to want to have fun. Furthermore, boys usually do not try to approach them as they know that these girls do not mingle with the opposite sex. In relation to this, Miftah tells me that boys normally treat her with more respect than they treat other girls. If they try to approach her at all, they greet her in an Islamic way by saying *Assalamualaikum* (may peace be with you) and not like other girls by calling out *hi cewek* (hey girl). Miftah does normally not respond to such approaches. It is however not true, as assumed by many students not wearing a veil or a trendy veil, that the girls with long veils have difficulties in finding husbands due to not being allowed to date. Miftah tells me that she already received seven offers from men who wanted to marry her, but that she had turned them all down. The way of searching for a husband is however usually different from the way other girls find husbands. She explained to me that they write a kind of personal CV, entering data about their education, family background, hobbies and character. These CVs are then given to the religious teacher who tries to match potential partners. If the teacher thinks that a boy and a girl could match, he arranges a meeting but of course he does not leave the couple to talk alone. When both agree and the parents give their blessing, the marriage is prepared, but the girl as well as the boy has the

right to turn down as many offers as she or he wants. Miftah can also look through the boys' CVs herself and ask the teacher to arrange a meeting. The woman can become active as well and may make the first step, and there is nothing wrong with this as Mifah tells me. The Prophet was also asked by his first wife whether he wanted to marry her, it was not him who asked her. She seemed to be quite proud that she had already been proposed to by so many boys and told me that some had very good jobs and education. She is however still waiting for "Mister Right".

Generally in Javanese society, the long veils are not really accepted as they are seen as too exclusive. Also the way girls like Miftah behave, for example not wanting to shake hands with boys, is seen as too exclusive. Parents usually object when their daughter wants to start wearing a long veil because they are afraid that she will become too fanatic. What many students therefore do when their parents live in another city is to wear a long veil while studying and a shorter one when they return home to visit their parents.

About ten percent of the female students at UGM wear the long veil, and most of them are active in an Islamic student organisation. During classes these girls normally sit in front and participate actively. Many of the ones I met seemed very intelligent, could express themselves well and appeared to be very self-confident.

Although this category is quite homogenous in comparison to the next one, there are also girls standing in between, still wearing a long veil, skirt and socks but slightly tighter and more fashionable. This category of those wearing long veils is important to keep in mind in order to understand the changes that have taken place over the last few years with the rise of the trendy veil. This shall be the topic of the next section.

3.3 Students wearing the Jilbab gaul – the trendy veil



Tara, a student of economy at UGM, wearing a trendy veil. Yogyakarta, December 2nd, 2005.

The category of girls wearing the *jilbab gaul* is very heterogeneous and large. Around 45 - 50 percent of the female students at UGM wear a *jilbab gaul*, that means nearly ninety percent of all the girls wearing a veil. The *jilbab gaul* is the newest category of veils, as it became popular only around the year 2000 (Rubiyanti 2004: 55).

By *jilbab gaul* Indonesians understand a veil that is stylish and fashionable, usually combined with clothes that could easily be worn without a veil. This can mean jeans, high heels and a body tight shirt, displaying occasional flashes of belly or back, or also fashionable Muslim clothes as sold in many shops. There is a veil fashion and new models constantly appear on the market. In Muslim magazines and on television the latest models from the trendiest designers are promoted.

The word *gaul* can have the meaning of trendy, hip or in, but can also be associated with one's behaviour, where *gaul* or *bergaul* means to associate with people, to be communicative and sociable. This behaviour stands in opposition to the girls of the former two categories of veils, the long veil and the *cadar*. Girls wearing a *jilbab gaul* do often hang out with friends who do not wear a veil or also with boys. Many of these girls also have boyfriends.

I will now give one example of a girl wearing a trendy veil, but want to emphasise that this is only one example among many others.

Tara is a student of economics in her fourth semester. She started to veil one and a half years ago, after her first semester. I met her at my boarding house as she is a friend of one of my flat mates. Similar to my flat mate, who is a catholic and therefore does not wear a veil, Tara adores shopping and seems to have enough money to spend on the latest fashion. Her veils always match her clothes, her belt, shoes and handbag perfectly, something which is very important to her. She does not want to look boring or old-fashioned. In her opinion, the veil one wears has to match one's personality. She really likes to dress in a feminine manner and extravagantly and therefore also her veils have to be something special. Tara sometimes asks relatives living in Jakarta to send her some of the newest models, hoping that she will be the only one among her friends to have a certain veil. She would be ashamed to walk around in the same veil as one of her friends, which is also the case for shirts.

For her the veil has similarities with a common fashion accessory such as a handbag. The difference however is that people would gossip about her if she would not wear it one day. They would say that she has an unstable character, no clear principles, does not know what she wants yet and has not understood the Koran yet. Compared to a fancy handbag, the veil cannot be easily worn part time. There are however people who do so, but when wearing it part time one should be consistent in wearing it to campus and not wearing it to go shopping. Therefore one must be consistent with the environment in which one chooses to wear the veil or not. Especially for students, consistency is very important, in contrast to older women, especially the ones living in villages, who often only veil for special occasions, such as funerals or other events with a formal or festive character.

Tara has a boyfriend as many of her friends wearing trendy veils do. This is normal for her, however she would not walk around holding hands or even kiss him where someone could see her, but this is also the case for most girls not wearing the veil. She does not think that by veiling one has to behave differently. Behaving decently is enough.

People gossip more often when veiled girls go out with boys. The social control in her quarter and generally in Indonesia is already strict, but when one wears a veil, the control is even stricter. This annoys Tara sometimes, but on the other hand she also benefits from the positive image that the veil has, that is to say, people see her as a good woman.

Tara has many friends, some of them wearing the trendy veil, some of them not wearing the veil, some are boys. She does not have friends wearing a long veil or a *cadar*, as they are too exclusive and have other interests than she does. She just does not know what to talk about with these girls as they are too serious. She thinks that the way they veil is too extreme and that the short veil like the one she wears is enough. They are, Tara says, too Arabia-oriented, denying the Indonesian tradition of dress and also the western influence. Concerning her Muslim friends not veiling, she thinks that this is fine, that they are probably not ready yet. Furthermore, Tara sees veiling as a process of personal development, however she thinks that a Muslim woman should wear the veil sooner or later, as written in the Koran.

Tara listens to different music styles, one of her favourite bands are the *Red Hot Chili*

Peppers, but she also likes to listen to some bands playing Islamic music. On TV she really likes one Islamic soap opera called *Hidayah*. Concerning magazines Tara likes all different kinds of fashion magazines; she often buys Islamic fashion magazines to be up-to-date about the latest trends and to get some new ideas of how to wear her veil. From time to time she goes to a café with some of her friends, and sometimes even smokes. She has however never been to a night club since she wears a veil - she does not dare to.

The trendy veil is nowadays widely accepted. Also, Tara's parents did not object when she told them that she wanted to start veiling, in fact her mother even went shopping with her. Her mother also wears fashionable veils, but also only started to veil one year ago. She never tried to persuade Tara to veil, and her other daughter, Tara's sister, now living in Jakarta, does not veil.

Tara is just one example of a student wearing the *jilbab gaul* – the trendy veil. I met many other girls who have other opinions than Tara has. For Sari, also wearing a *jilbab gaul*, a veil should not be too attractive, as one purpose of the veil is to avoid the attention of men. One should, however, not look old-fashioned and boring either. Sari thinks that one is not allowed to have boyfriends before marriage as this is against Islamic law. She has male friends but is not too close with them. According to Sari, it is important to behave gently and decently when wearing a veil. Sari also says that the short veil is actually not enough and one day wants to wear a longer veil and a skirt, but she is still afraid that it might be an obstacle for finding a good job as she is studying marketing and in this field appearance is very important.



Hip-Hop ok! A sporty style of veil. In: Muslimah, February 2006, p. 27.

As I mentioned before, this category is very heterogeneous and there are many different styles of veils belonging to this category. I would now like to mention some of them. If you go to

almost any bookshop in Indonesia, you will find a shelf with books explaining step by step how to tie the veil. I will start with the simple veil made of a square piece of soft cloth such as cotton, silk or synthetic fibres that is comfortable to wear. It can be of one colour, multicoloured or patterned. The size may vary from 90 x 90 cm to 150 x 150 cm. The size that is normally used is 115 x 115 cm (Sanggarwaty 2004: 11). The cloth can be decorated with embroideries or beads.



Description to put on the veil in a fancy manner – step-by-step. In: Ragam gaya kerudung. APPMI (Asosiasi Pengusaha Mode Indonesia). Gramedia: Jakarta 2004, p. 22.

Another form of veil that is quite popular is the so called “instant” veil, *jilbab instant*, that is ready to wear, because it is sewn together under the chin, mostly made of elastic material. Besides the “instant” ones, we can also find “semi-instant” ones that are still very easy to put on but still allow the wearer to give it a personal note. Some others are like hats that leave the neck exposed, some looking like caps used for skiing. This style is especially preferred by sporty or hip-hop girls or by those wanting to show their earrings. A further model belonging in this “instant” category is the so called *bergo*, which resembles very much the upper part of *mukena*, the cloak worn for prayer, usually white in colour, used to cover a woman’s head and body. The difference is that the *bergo* only reaches a few centimetres over the shoulder. All of these “instant” veils are very practical for everyday life, primarily in or around the house or when one is in a rush. These veils can also be decorated with lace or embroidering (Sanggarwaty 2004: 11). These veils are very practical and often quite cheap; they are however commonly not regarded as very pretty. A girl would probably choose a fancier model for a very special occasion. These “instant” veils are also very popular among older women.

A further possibility of veiling is by using a *selendang*, a shawl usually worn over the shoulder or diagonally across the body. Again there are different possible sizes, reaching from 45 x 125 cm to 75 x 200 cm, and again we can find coloured ones or patterned ones, some decorated and some not; those with fringes are considered to be especially pretty. It is also quite popular to use a *selendang* with local motives on it, such as batik motives or ones that

are woven in a special traditional way, for example having silver or gold thread through it. Again there are several ways of wearing a *selendang* that one can easily look up in books or try oneself. It is rare to see girls at university veiling with a *selendang*, probably because it takes rather long to put it on. This style of veil is commonly used for festive occasions.

Many students who wear a veil do not put the cloth straight on the head but wear something underneath to keep the veil in a good shape and to make sure that the hair is well hidden. This is called *ciput* or *topi dalaman*, meaning an inner hat, looking like a hair net. There are many forms of these inner hats, some just serve to hide the hair and make the veil stay in place while others also shape the veil and have a kind of visor, similar to a sport cap. This style has more functions than just making the veil stay in place as it gives sun protection and also shapes the face. This style is especially suitable for girls or women with a rather round face, as it makes the face look longer and more contoured, as noted in many magazines for Muslim girls that give tips on which style to wear with which face form.



Left: Two models of a ciput or topi dalam, to wear under the veil. In: Ratih Sanggarwaty 2004, p. 15.

Right: Bands with flowers designed to decorate the veil, sold at the Sunday morning market near UGM. Yogyakarta, January 22nd, 2006.

Finally we come to the accessories that are often used to decorate the veil that the students can find in many shops and on the market. Accessories can be very expensive, but there are also more affordable ones on the market. Accessories for the veil reach from decorated pins and needles to brooches. Some pins show Islamic motives, others flowers, but surprisingly many wear pins with childish motives such as Disney characters. The too fancy-looking brooches and pins are normally not worn for studying but saved for more special occasions. Besides pins and needles, specially designed rings are also used to tie the veil together below the chin.

Another category of accessories used to tie around the veil are bands with artificial flowers, bands with pearls or beads, or ribbons with flowers.

One can really be creative and give the veil a personal touch and match it with the style of one's clothes and other accessories such as the handbag or the belt.

3.4 Students without veil

Around 40 – 45 percent of the girls studying at UGM for different reasons do not wear the veil. This number has been constantly decreasing for around 20 years, and a significant decrease has occurred in the last five years. In 1987 none or maybe just one of the students wore a veil, as Ibu Hindun, a lecturer of Arab studies has told me. In the year 2000 only around ten percent of the students were veiling.

Around fifteen percent of the girls not veiling belong to another religion, some of them are Christians, a few, usually from Bali, are Hindu and several, generally Chinese descendents, are Buddhists. Normally one cannot immediately tell the religious adherence of those girls as they usually do not expose their religion as freely as the Muslims do. Even though you can also buy stickers or pins with, for example, Christian signs or text on it such as bible verses or *Yesus penjagaku* (Jesus protects me) or *Yesus tak pernah kecewakanku* (Jesus never disappoints me), students do not commonly stick these kind of stickers on their motorbike helmet or put pins on their schoolbooks or bags, as many Muslim students do. Religion is seen as something rather personal and not something one should show off with (*“Agama itu sesuatu yang pribadi, tidak usah dipamerkannya”*). From outward appearance alone, it is therefore often not clear whether someone not wearing a veil is Muslim or belongs to another religion.



Sticker sold in a catholic book shops in Yogyakarta.

Although many Christian girls have many Muslim friends, they sometimes perceive girls wearing a veil, especially the ones wearing a long veil, as arrogant. Often non-Muslims, as well as some Muslims not wearing a veil, are associated with bad behaviour such as an easygoing lifestyle, including drinking alcohol, not fasting and having sex before marriage, or generally speaking, having less self control.

The largest share of the girls not wearing a veil are, however, Muslim girls who say that they are not ready to veil yet (*“Aku belum siap”*). The word *belum* (meaning “not yet”) is used very frequently in Indonesia to say “no”. When Indonesians are asked if they are married,

they say *belum*, if you ask them if they are hungry, they may say *belum*, if you ask about almost anything in the future that has not yet happened but may probably happen, they will answer *belum*, not yet. It can therefore not always be translated literally with “not yet”, but can also simply mean no, depending on the context. The fact that they say they do not wear a veil yet, (“*belum pakai jilbab*”) may simply follow the same linguistic logic and may sometimes have the implication of not yet and really express that a person intends to veil in the future, but does also often mean that one is not sure about it yet or even has no plan to veil. The time when one starts to veil seems to be very flexible and can be easily negotiated. The perception of veiling as a process similar to climbing a ladder is widely spread.

Girls who say that they do not plan to ever wear a veil in their life are hard to find, as this answer seems not to be socially acceptable. The only two women who were giving me this reason for not veiling were already over thirty years old: one was Mbak Tia, now a sociology professor in UGM and the other one was Mbak Lucy, the founder of the NGO LSPPA, the *Lembaga Studi dan Pengembangan Perempuan dan Anak* (the Institute for Research and Support of Women and Children). They argued in a similar way as Islamic feminists, for example Fatima Mernissi, does in her book “Beyond the veil”, which can be found in a few specific libraries in Yogyakarta. They say that the Koran and Sunna were interpreted by men in a distorted manner to preserve patriarchal traditions and suppress women. They therefore do not see veiling as a religious obligation. I suppose that many students do not know such arguments against veiling and therefore go the easy and widely accepted way by simply saying that they are not ready yet.

Putri is one of the girls saying that she is not ready to wear a veil yet. She was one of my fellow students in anthropology studying in her sixth semester. Putri usually wears rather tight jeans or sometimes a skirt, reaching down at least to the knee, as this is prescribed in the dress code of university. She likes to wear trendy T-Shirts, sometimes combined with a jacket; Putri also likes fancy handbags and long earrings. Her long black straightened hair goes down to her chest and is always neatly brushed. Since the very popular Indonesian teen film “Ada apa dengan Cinta?” (*What’s the matter with Love?*) was released, many girls have this haircut as it is like the one of the main character of this film, Cinta.

After class, Putri likes to hang out around UGM or go to a café with friends. Sometimes she also goes to one of the large discos in Yogyakarta, for example to Hugo’s. When she goes there with friends, she wears short skirts and a tank top; she would however not walk around the city this way. Her parents don’t know that she sometimes goes clubbing, as they live in another city. They would not allow her to, so she does not tell them.

When she goes clubbing, she only goes with friends who do not veil. As the ones wearing veils cannot possibly go clubbing, there are no girls there with veils as this would not be appropriate. Otherwise, outside of the clubbing scene she has a lot of friends wearing trendy veils and also likes to hang out with them. Putri has already lost friends on a number of occasions after they started to veil and then changed their behaviour, however not all of the girls change, she tells me. She also has many male friends, but currently no boyfriend.

She wants to start veiling some day, but does not know when. She is not ready yet to commit to wearing long-sleeved tops and not go clubbing anymore. According to her, although one should not change completely after starting to veil, one should still live decently, which would mean not going clubbing anymore and not smoking. Maybe in some years, she tells me, this will be possible, but not today.

Her parents and friends have no problem with the fact that she does not wear a veil yet, but sometimes veiled friends approach her and ask her when she wants to start or give her books on the issue. Before one is married it is usually no problem not to veil, Putri tells me. Women, especially educated ones who still do not veil often have to justify themselves. If she will start one day, she wants to be a fashionable Muslim; this much is already clear for her.

One last group within this category are the girls who once wore the veil but stopped doing so and took off the veil. This is behaviour that most people interpret as a personal failure. Taking off the veil is seen as a lack of stability, consistency and self control, as a sign of a weak faith and little religious knowledge. Girls who stop veiling are under quite strong social pressure to justify their decision and the social sanctions are quite strict. This is why many parents do not want their teenage girl to wear a veil before they are sure the child really wants it and they can be quite sure that she will not take it off again. This is also an important reason why very few parents force their children to wear a veil. They have to be convinced for themselves and the veil should be worn by personal choice. How personal this choice is and how social pressure plays an important role shall be discussed later.

To explain how the trendy veil could have become popular in such a short time, I will look at Islam in Indonesia from both a historical and political perspective and try to point out the triangular relation between Islamic influences, local traditions and global influences. My aim is to show that this new form of trendy veil is a reflection of the hybridisation that has taken place in the last few years – one sign of a new Islamic pop culture that makes it possible to combine elements that were once seen as oppositional.

4 Islamic dress from a historical and political perspective

This chapter brings us to the quite complicated relationship between the social, political and historical dimensions of the different forms of veiling and their meanings. I will focus on ways and means through which individuals and social groups distinguish each other and express themselves through their appearance. The topic of this chapter is the confrontation, assimilation or hybridisation between three main complexes of thought, manners and dress – Western, Muslim and Indonesian.

Indonesian societies have always been quite open to different influences from abroad and it would therefore clearly be futile to try to identify a period in Indonesian history when people

still wore their “original” clothes (Schulte Nordholt 1997: 8). The term globalisation should not only be applied to the twentieth century, but from the fifteenth century on. The coming of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) to Indonesia contributed to the formation of a mestizo culture, but even before the Dutch arrived in Indonesia there were different cultural influences, for example from the Chinese. The veiling movement is however, as Brenner notes, a rather new phenomenon in Indonesia: “In contrast to those countries in which the veiling movement is sometimes described as a “re-veiling” movement (Zuhur 1992) or a “return to the veil” (Hoodfar 1991; Mule and Barthel 1992), in many parts of Java veiling was limited until quite recently even though most Javanese are Muslim” (Brenner 1996: 674). She notes, however, that there are local differences in Indonesia and that the practice of covering the head has a longer history in areas known for their devotion to Islam (1996: 691). The veil as it is commonly seen today only started to be worn in the 1980s, and at that time only a few women veiled (Brenner 1996: 674). According to Ibu Hindun, an Arab lecturer at UGM, in 1987 still almost no one was veiled in her classes, yet today, less than 20 years later, almost all girls veil. I agree therefore with Brenner in reading the veiling movement in Indonesia as a new phenomenon and not as a return to a tradition.

As clothes are the expressions of a way of life and as the manner in which one chooses to dress can serve as a statement, the veil is certainly one piece of clothing that can have political implications. By showing the attitude of the Dutch colonial government and then the attitude of the Indonesian state towards the veil, one can see the triangular relation between Islam, the local traditions and the West. In the last chapter I will suggest that the *jilbab gaul* is one alternative uniting the three influences that were for a long time seen as contradicting. Before that I will look at the veil in colonial times.

4.1 Islamic dresses in colonial times

Ibu Hindun, teaching Arabic studies at UGM since 1982, tells me that the practice of veiling has existed in Indonesia since at least 1900. The way the head was covered was however different. Before the 1980s, she tells me, there were two styles of wearing a headscarf, one was known as the Padangpanjang-Style⁹, that means a *selendang*, a kind of shawl wrapped around the head and fixed with a needle on the side of the head, the other way was to simply put the *selendang* over the head without tying it or fixing it anywhere. According to Ibu Hindun, her grandmother used to cover her head, but only for formal occasions such as funerals or weddings. Only Muslim women covered their heads for these occasions, whereas Christians did not. Interestingly, Christian women nowadays use a *selendang* to put over the head for example when they attend Muslim funerals, whereas the Muslim women usually wear a veil, with the exception of some of the older women. The veil during colonial times

⁹ Padangpanjang is a village or a small city in West Sumatra on the way from Padang to Bukittinggi, and this area is well known for a long tradition of devoted Muslims.

was, however, usually not worn for activities of everyday life. Ibu Hindun also tells me that this was, first, not seen as necessary and, second, just not practical as it would not stay in place and would constantly slip off. Besides for formal occasions, the veil was also worn by students of *pesantren*, boarding schools of Koran studies.

In general, the Dutch were confronted with Islam and Islamic ways of dressing since the 15th century as Kees van Dijk writes: “The Dutch were confronted by people who dressed in a Muslim, often Arab way. Muslims contesting Dutch rule wore long white robes with a turban on their head. (...) Prince Dipanagara, the rebel leader in the Java War between 1825 and 1830, sometimes wore the jubbah, the long Arab robe, and a turban” (1997: 55).

Far into the nineteenth century, Islamic dress served as a symbol for high religious status and deep piety. At that time the journey to Mecca, the *hajj*, was still only made by few Indonesians and those returning from the Holy Land tended to adopt its fashion. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the annual number of Indonesians making the pilgrimage started to rise and this was cause for grave concern. At that time the Dutch even considered the possibility of forbidding the title *haji* and preventing Indonesians who had been to Mecca from wearing special garments, then referred to as “Mohammedan costume and turban”. Instead of forbidding the title and the dresses as worn in the Holy Land, the Dutch issued a certificate for the ones who had really returned from Mecca. They were tested to make sure that only those who had really been to Mecca called themselves *haji* and dressed in an Islamic way (Van Dijk 1996: 57ff).

Until the beginning of the twentieth century the scope of possible dress for ordinary inhabitants of the Indies was limited by specific rules imposed in the early days of Dutch occupation first by the VOC and, later on, by the colonial government. These rules concerned what costumes a certain group of people were allowed to wear and those to which they had no right. Western dress was taboo for many and if an exception was made, it was for people close to the Dutch. This changed however around the turn of the century, when clothing rules imposed by the colonial government were no longer enforced and the ideal of “progress” held a strong attraction for many of the pioneers of the nationalist movement. Consequently, a growing number of Indonesians started to wear “modern” dress (Van Dijk 1997: 40).

“Dress became an issue for people who wanted to escape the established order, and the discussion about what this changing appearance would signify was conducted partly in the press” (Van Dijk 1997: 40). Furthermore, “In Indonesia, subjected to Dutch domination for a long time and with a population of which the vast majority is Muslim, the function of dress is much more than simply to mark differences and similarities within the indigenous society. It has also provided a way to express a particular attitude towards foreign cultural and political influences” (Van Dijk 1997: 41).

From colonial times until today, dress, and with it manners linked to a certain way of dressing, have provided fuel for debates. “Headdresses”, as Van Dijk notes, “were explicitly mentioned in colonial clothing regulations before 1900, and each different type – headcloths,

turbans, ordinary Western hats, official cocked hats, caps and naturally, the black *kopiah* or *peci* of the nationalist movement – had its own strong associations”.

The veil however became an issue of controversy only in the 1930s, as previously the focus was more on the dress of men. In the Bandung area, stones were thrown at houses of Muslim women who covered their hair. “Some people accused the *bupati* of Bandung of having provoked the incidents. Earlier, in an address to the villagers, he had publicly wondered “Whether the head shawl, which costs only five cents, can become a passport to enter heaven?” The *bupati* admitted to having made this statement, but only in reaction to a sermon in which it was argued that “Women who do not cover their heads enter hell” (Van Dijk 1996: 65). Another incident that took place in the 1930s shows that already at that time the head scarf generated its own support and opposition. A seventeen-year-old school girl in Yogyakarta did not agree with the practise of veiling to safeguard a woman’s virtue, reasoning that Java is not Arabia, and following Islam does not necessarily mean complying with Arab rules. Even though the editors of the magazine *Islam Bergerak* (Islam in motion) agreed with her that Indonesia is not Arabia, she still had to continue to wear a veil, as they argued that wearing a veil was not an imitation of Arab ways as the veil in Indonesia is different to the ones used in Arabia (Van Dijk 1996: 65). The argument that Indonesia is not Arabia is still used today in relation to dress code.

Many women started however to copy the Western ways of dressing, but the opposite trend, in which Islamic reform meant stressing Muslim dress codes, was also observed well into the 1930s. Ahmad Hassan for example, a leading Muslim figure, complained that most women of the Javanese bureaucratic and religious elite did not wear a head shawl, citing leaders of Islamic organisations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama (Van Dijk 1996: 65).

Already at that time, women wearing Western dress were a more delicate subject than was men’s fashion because copying Western dress was often combined with also adopting Western behaviour, and this was seen as especially dangerous for women. In 1918, for example, three young Minangkabau ladies in modern European dress caused quite a sensation because they followed Western behaviour. “They preferred to go cycling in the afternoon, mingling with pupils from elsewhere in the Indies, for instance from Medan and Ambon. They stayed out till seven in the evening, and maybe went to the park, which is characterized by the concerned correspondent as a “very dangerous” place, where male and female students meet and seek “comfort”” (Van Dijk: 67).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Western dress became synonymous with an idle and wasteful life while the Islamic way of dressing was associated with a somewhat puritanical way of life. Already at that time for some, the Muslim community was deeply divided about how to dress. There was no neutral choice. Dress became one of the ways to identify Muslims who shared particular religious ideas (Van Dijk 63). This is, as we have seen in the context of the veil, still the case today.

Not only were the relations between the colonial government and the Islamic groups

sometimes tense, but also after independence there existed tensions in the relations between the Islamic groups and the new government.

4.2 Islam and the government after independence

As the Indonesian government after independence refused to establish an Islamic state, the relation between some Islamic groups and the government became even more troubled than during colonial times (Raleigh 2004: 5). During the bitter war of national liberation against the Dutch between 1946 and 1950, the Dutch started to make some efforts to gain sympathy from the Islamic groups by sending three thousand pilgrims a year to Mecca (Gibson 2000: 66). The Dutch plan to set up a separate state in Eastern Indonesia failed however. In 1953 a movement named Darul Islam became important supporting the Negara Islam Indonesia (Islamic State of Indonesia, NII). The ideology of this movement was to combine a rigid form of religious modernism together with an extreme “anti-feudalism” (Gibson 2000: 66).

Since President Suharto’s New Order regime came to power in the mid-1960s, the state has attempted to maintain a delicate balance in the triangular relation between the local, the Western and the Islamic influences. This was mainly done by acknowledging and, in certain aspects, encouraging Islam’s religious and cultural influence among the population whilst restraining its political influence and suppressing potential sources of Islamic political power (Brenner 1996: 676). According to Brenner, the government’s stress on religious belief could be observed for example in the educational system and the mass media; the state also sponsored neighbourhood prayer meetings and mosques and coordinated the pilgrimage to Mecca for thousands of Indonesians each year (1996: 693). Although the state did not officially promote Islam over other religions, it acknowledged Islamic interests. The state’s efforts to diminish the potentially subversive political power of Islamic forces have not been very successful. To give an example, in 1985 new legislation required all socio-political and religious organizations in Indonesia to acknowledge the official state ideology, *Pancasila*¹⁰, as their sole ideological basis (*azas tunggal*), on pain of losing their legal right to exist. This meant that the state ideology had to stand above all other creeds, including those of Islam and other religions. This ensured that no religious organisation or political party could legally deny or challenge the authority of the state. Violent protests and divisions among Muslim leaders were the consequences of this new law. The issue of this debate was over whether to accept the new legislation or not (Brenner 1996: 693). At this time, the state also prohibited veiling in public schools; this ban was however overturned after much protest, referred to as *demo jilbab* (Matthewman 2000: 15). This shows that the state has linked veiling with forms of Islam that seemed threatening.

¹⁰ The belief in God is one of the five pillars of *Pancasila*, the state ideology. There are five acknowledged religions, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Every Indonesian has to belong to one of these five religions.

One should keep in mind that the regime of President Suharto simultaneously helped to develop and domesticate Islam whilst also aggressively following a policy of economic development by opening up to foreign investment, trade, and tourism. This economic development influenced social structures and everyday life practices mainly in that it caused the distribution of wealth to become increasingly unequal. A strong middle class emerged with the financial means to consume. A further consequence of the economic upturn was that the population's education level increased. During these transformations, the state has tried hard to persuade its citizens to hold fast to "traditional" Indonesian cultural and religious values.

The responses to these changes were mixed. While there was considerable support for the regime and its "open door policy" among the middle classes, there was also much frustration. Many people felt disadvantaged and that the system was not socially just, as mainly the rich benefited from the liberal policy of Suharto. Especially in the cities the problem of social disintegration and moral decline was a further reason for a growing dislike of the government. These factors may have helped to encourage a turn to Islamic values and religion in general among the middle classes. Islam was seen as the key to maintaining an ethical and disciplined society in the midst of modernization, globalisation and the breakdown of the old social order (Brenner 1996: 677).

According to Hefner, the younger generation has been at the forefront of this Islamic movement; in the 1970s university students led the sudden increase in Islamic activity among the urban population. The past two decades have thus witnessed a sharp upturn in Islamic activism on campuses: Islamic student organisations, seminars, and study groups have sprung up in increasing numbers (Hefner 1993: 13-14). These groups supported a turn to the Koran as a source of guidance for everyday living and members were encouraged to read and discuss Islamic texts so as to better understand their meaning and their relevance (Brenner 1996: 677).

In the 1970s not only Islamic student organisations supported a turn to the Koran, but also the first Indonesian music superstar Rhoma Irama shaped this view. He emphasized the validity of Muslim values in everyday life through his music and his films and was able to reach a very broad audience. His films were seen by as many as fifteen million Indonesians – one-tenth of the population – in the years 1978 – 79 alone (Frederick 1982: 123). The 1970s were thus years of great cultural vitality. The form of Islamic music or movies such as produced by Rhoma Irama as well as his superstar personality could however not have survived in the ideological climate of Guided Democracy (Frederick 1982: 128).

Within this Islamic movement, in the 1980s some of the active female students started to veil when they demonstrated in 1985 against the new political obligation for all organisations to accept the *Pancasila* as their basis (Matthewman 2000: 14). As the female demonstrators wore veils these demonstrations were known as *demo jilbab* (Matthewman 2000: 15). The veil was however not yet accepted by most of the people who still associated it with Islamic fundamentalism. For that reason it was still forbidden in some schools and universities. In the

edition of the *Kompas*, a national Indonesian newspaper, there was an article responding to the issue of female students wearing veils saying that “For those who opted for wearing head covers, the government would facilitate them to move into private schools which provide for head covers” (Kompas, August 6, 1983). The argument was that the public school uniform was supposed to be unvarying for everyone. If it was not, it would not be a uniform. In 1988 the case of four students who were not allowed to veil in Bandung was mentioned in *Kompas* as well. It was noted that they clearly did not adhere to the manual of the school uniform by veiling (Kompas, July 17, 1988). A year later a similar case occurred in Jakarta where ten female students could not attend their classes due to lack of discipline regarding the school uniform and hence were sent home (Kompas, October 6, 1988). The decision to discipline the students was also supported by the head of the department of education and culture *Departement Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (Depdikbud)*, saying that they would like to convey their deep gratitude to the effort of this school to maintain discipline and obedience (Juliastuti 2003: 5). Finally, in 1991 an official declaration was made allowing female students wanting to wear a particular uniform due to private belief to wear it with the colour and design of the school uniform, however this was to be under condition of their parents or guardians’ agreement (Juliastuti 2003: 5). After this regulation any female student in a public school was free to wear a veil. The subversive character that the veil still had during the 1980s started to fade in the 1990s, however, also in the 1990s female students who veiled were still commonly seen as very religious, old fashioned or belonging to a fanatic group. The veil only started to become more popular and change its image towards the end of the New Order regime in 1998 and at the eve of start of the new millennium.

It is no coincidence that the veil started to become more popular at the same time as Suharto began to become more religious too. As his support weakened, he had to look for the backing of Islamic groups and learn to compromise. He allowed Muslims in Indonesia to open Islamic banks, became more liberal towards the Islamic press and to Islamic education institutions. As a now devout Muslim he also made his pilgrimage with his family to Mecca and his daughter – Tutut – started to veil in an interesting and trendy way (Raleigh 2004: 8). The veil was on its way to becoming trendy and colourful and these new models meant that the veil was in some of its forms no longer linked with those forms of Islam that seemed threatening and subversive.

4.3 Islam becomes friendly and trendy



The friendly face of Islam – a trendy model wearing a veil. In: Alia, September 2005, p. 16.

In the late 1970s, as Islam gradually started to become popular, the first “Islamic boutiques” started to open (Frederick 1982: 129). In the middle of the 1990s there were already a number of Muslim fashion shows where fashion designers who specialised in Muslim clothes showed their latest collections. At that time, the new Muslim fashion was presented in the Ramadan editions of women magazines, but after the reformation and further liberation of the press many magazines were published specially targeting Muslim women.

After the fall of President Suharto in 1998 veils became more colourful and trendier. Celebrities began to veil and tell their stories on TV. Generally one can say that since the fall of Suharto, since reformasi, the relationship between local Indonesian traditions, Western influences and Islam has found some new forms of expression in a kind of hybridisation of all three influences. I therefore disagree with Brenner that Islamic clothing “signals a rupture with – even an erasure of – both “Javanese” and “Westernised” dimensions of the local past” (1996: 682).

I suggest that a hybrid form has developed – especially since the trendy veil became popular. My interpretation of hybridization is as a process of cultural interaction between the local and the global, the hegemonic and the subaltern, the centre and the periphery. Agreeing with Nilan and Feixa, I see hybridization on the one hand as a process of cultural transactions that reflects how global cultures are assimilated in the locality and how locality is assimilated with

global cultures (Nilan and Feixa 2006: 2). In the Indonesian context Islam as a third player may be added that is influenced by the local as well as by global aspects, from the West as well as from the Arab world. The relation is nowadays not less problematic, and only the focus of the problem has shifted. For some Islamic groups for example, the shift of the veil as a previously religious symbol standing for a rather puritan life to becoming a fashion accessory may just be as problematic. The tension between the three components is therefore still very present in Indonesian society, just as it was during colonial times. With the emergence of the trendy veil, a solution seems however to exist in Indonesia nowadays that is not in strong opposition to influences of global culture, of local cultures or to Islamic cultural influences. The *jilbab gaul* seems to make it possible especially for young people such as the students of UGM, to combine the worlds that might be perceived as different or oppositional. However I do not agree with the assumption that these young people live in two different worlds or have a foot in opposing camps (Nilan and Feixa 2006: 2). I suggest that they do not share the perception of opposition or of different worlds. They live in one hybrid world.

What might be true for some of the girls wearing a trendy veil has however to be qualified for some of the girls wearing longer veils or not wearing veils at all. Before considering ideological aspects that might still motivate students to choose a certain model of veil or even decide to veil in the first place, I will now look at the veil in a global context.

4.4 The Islamic movement in Indonesia in a larger global context

The Islamic movement taking place in Indonesia that started starting in the universities in the 1970s, is directly connected to similar movements throughout the Islamic world. The means of mass communication make this connection become palpable and powerful. As Brenner notes: “Indonesians can see themselves as part of a vast extended community and powerful international movement through television and print media, sometimes quite literally; for example, a 1992 article on women in Iran in the weekly Indonesian magazine *Tempo* (1992) included a photograph of a smiling young Indonesian journalist in a *jilbab*, on site in Tehran, holding a poster of Ayatollah Khomeini and flanked by three Iranian women in long black cloaks and veil. Indeed, the Islamic movement in Indonesia clearly owes a good deal to its counterpart movements elsewhere in the Muslim world” (1996: 678). The Iranian revolution of 1979, for example, had a significant impact on the consciousness of Muslims in Indonesia and in other parts of Southeast Asia, in particular as a symbol of the victory of Islam over Western hegemony. Furthermore, in Indonesia students have also been exposed to the global Islamic resurgence through contact with other Muslims on university campuses from Cairo to Kuala Lumpur, and from Canberra to Chicago (Brenner 1996: 693).

“By identifying with the international Islamic community, Indonesian activists validate their sense of being part of the modern world without the need to adopt a Westernized way of life; for many Indonesians that life style lacks morality and religious faith and is materialistic and self-indulgent. The Islamic movement offers its followers an alternative modernity” (Brenner

1996: 678). I agree with Brenner that the veil can offer an alternative modernity, but nowadays it is also possible to live a, as many Indonesians still see it, materialistic Western life and wear a veil. Wearing a veil and living a Western life no longer stand in opposition, at least not for everyone.

A more recent event that has had a large impact on the way certain models of veils are perceived was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11th, 2001. It is difficult for me to mention all the wide reaching influences of this tragic event, but some are quite obvious and were often mentioned by my interview partners. The most striking one is that since then women wearing the *cadar* or other styles of long veils in dark colours are suspected of being terrorists or wives of terrorists. This fear has even increased since the Bali bombings in 2003 and 2005. The girls I interviewed wearing the *cadar* told me that they are sometimes afraid to walk around alone as people have been known to insult them on the street. Furthermore, since the Bali bombing veiled women living in Bali are having a hard time, and are for example more often searched or checked when entering public areas such as shopping centres or hotels.

Also when I was walking around the campus asking people whether I could take a photo, two girls wearing a long veil did not want me to at first because they told me that they were afraid of being associated with terrorist organisations. The whole issue of terrorism, I would argue, has helped the trendy veil to spread as it is important to look friendly or nice and not fanatic with the veil and it has become even more important to show the peaceful and sociable side of Islam. The media has played an important role in this image shift of the trendy veil becoming popular and the long ones as being associated with terrorism. In the next section I will discuss the ideological explanation for the spreading of the veil.

4.5 The ideological aspect of veiling

Keeping in mind the delicate relationship between the social, political and historical dimensions of the different forms of veiling and its underlying meanings, in this section I will look at whether the confrontation or assimilation of the three main influences, Islamic, Western and local ones, leads to political or ideological motivations for veiling among the students of UGM.

The assumption that veiling is a reaction to Western cultural influences and lifestyle has been made by many authors. Brenner for example sees the veil as a symbol of the rejection of the colonial past as the origin of Western imperialism as well as the postcolonial present, as the continuation of Western dominance (Brenner 1996: 680). Also Mule and Barthel see the veil as a symbol that “distinguishes Muslim women from the “shameless” Westernized women” (1992: 331). Mule and Barthel reject the purely ideological explanation for veiling, understanding veiling only as a reaction against the image imported from the West of supposedly liberated women (1992: 327). Also Read and Bartkowski note that some women veil as it keeps them from becoming influenced by American culture (2000: 407).

Considering the Indonesian context I generally do not perceive such ideological aspects as important factors for veiling anymore (for example, by seeing the veil mainly as symbol standing for opposition to Western capitalism). I would say that ideology was still a strong reason to veil in the 1980s, at the time when the veil still served to oppose the government, negative perceived influences of globalisation and some local forms of Islam that were in the eyes of some activists too impure and too far away from their understanding of the Koran and the Sunna (Matteuman 2000: 15). However, nowadays, while doing my research, I met no one who said that they wear a veil to oppose the government or some local traditions - neither the ones wearing *cadar* nor the ones wearing long veils. Some girls were even surprised that I could even propose such an idea and told me that their motivation was religious in nature. The government and also some people of the local population may however feel that these people wearing long veils or even covering their faces oppose local traditions or the government, but this is not their intention. The impression that these two styles of veils are oppositional may therefore still be true, but I would not see it as a motivation for choosing a certain model and rather as an often unintended “side-effect.” When I asked my informants wearing long veils or *cadars* whether they felt that by wearing a veil they were opposing Western culture, they answered that that was not their intention, but of course by their outward appearance one could recognize their ideological values. Girls who wear long veils, I was told, tend to indeed reject extensive consumption, free sex (i.e. sex before marriage), and alcohol and drug consumption. What they reject from Western culture are loose morals, overemphasised individuality and extensive consumption. They do however not reject everything from the West, as there are also components they like very much, mainly the education system and the opportunities of studying and working. I would therefore suggest that the long veils can still be seen as symbols communicating a certain ideology that is in accordance with strong or strict Islamic values.

The girls wearing the trendy veil are generally not perceived as opposing the government or the local tradition, as the *jilbab gaul* is nowadays widely accepted. The question whether students are motivated to wear the trendy veil in order to oppose or differentiate themselves from the images they have of Western women (as the authors mentioned above suggest) cannot be generalised as this group is very heterogeneous. In this point I also often had the impression that these informants gave me the answer that I wanted to hear. Many girls who veil, but also many who do not veil strictly, reject behaviour that they see as “Western”, once again ideas of free sex, alcohol and drugs. This view seems however to be quite common in Indonesia in general and cannot only be seen in connection with the veil. Consumption for example is seen by many as not being something one should refuse. I would therefore not agree with Brenner in seeing the trendy veil as an alternative to Western culture or to capitalism in general (1996: 680), but rather I see the trendy veil as a form of hybridisation of the three dimensions – local, global and Islam. Such new cultural patterns do not simply represent the coming together of authentic or original sets of practices. Rather, as Nilan writes, “the process of hybridization looks towards an ambivalent and complex third space of cultural practice, in which new authority structures pull young people towards different

narratives of identity” (2006: 108).

In the next chapter on the veil in the media I will discuss the central role the media play in forming this hybridity, through the construction of images of different models of veils as well as of girls not wearing veils.



Veiled girls eating in Mc Donald's with their male friends. Yogyakarta, January 7th, 2006.

5 Islamic mass media

I agree with Read and Bartkowski (2000) that cultural forms (such as the different meanings underlying the different models of veils) are best understood as constructed, contested, and intersecting social phenomena. The meanings of the veils are constantly produced and reproduced through continuous interactions. In this process of constant interaction, the media plays a crucial role. I do disagree with a simple stimulus-response model that sees the media as constructors and the students as passive receivers, nor do I understand the media as only reacting to social trends. I depart from a more dynamic approach, where media producers and the consumer of the media both participate actively in a process of constant transaction.

The role of the media was, as I have already mentioned, very important in making the veil and Muslim clothes in general become trendy. After the *reformasi*, the fall of Suharto, the media market was further liberalised. Besides the press, TV also had a large impact, just as Islamic music and novels did. I will start this chapter by looking at the impact the press had in making the image of Islam in Indonesia change and become friendly and sociable.

5.1 The rise of an Islamic press

One year after the fall of Suharto, in 1999, the press was further liberalised and many magazines started to be published that were either forbidden during the time of Suharto's media censorship or only published illegally in small numbers. Also, the Islamic press became more diverse at that time and started to occupy an increasingly strong position in the Indonesian print media market. At that time the number of Islamic magazines increased and with it their reader segments became more diversified and more and more specialized along different parameters such as age, gender, social group and religious conviction (Swastika 2003: 12).

Before continuing to write about the Islamic press, I would like to give a definition of what I understand by it. I will take the definition of Swastika, who wrote an article about the mass media in Indonesia: The press which serves, in its journalistic activity, the needs of the Islamic community, in material form (such as political needs) as well as in form of values. (*"Pers yang dalam kegiatan jurnalistiknya melayani kepentingan umat Islam, baik yang berupa materi (misalnya kepentingan politik) maupun nilai-nilai"*) (2003: 12)

The Islamic press is not a new phenomenon but has existed since the beginning of the twentieth century, with the rise of the ideas of reformation that had developed in the Middle East, mainly in Egypt. These ideas were carried to Java and as a result the Muhammadiyah organisation, as well as other Islamic organisations, was founded. The new organisations raised much discussions among Islamic thinkers, and it was in this climate that the Islamic press was born. Until the year 1959 it was tied to a specific political group and served spread a certain ideology. Even though the press was at that time still partisan, they still ran advertisements; the magazine *Adil* for example, edited to spread the ideas of Muhammadiyah, printed advertisements for a tobacco company (Swastika 2003: 12).

After the proclamation of independence the number of Islamic magazines decreased because during the Japanese occupation many editors were not allowed to edit their magazines due to the strict censorship laws in place and therefore went bankrupt. Others experienced serious financial problems. In 1959 the first Islamic magazine appeared that did not belong to a specific Islamic organisation, the *Panji Masyarakat (Panjimas)*, where many critical articles against the government and those in power were published. The *Panjimas* was the first Islamic magazine to have a large target group.

In general many Islamic magazines wrote about modernity and development. Towards the end of the 1980s, in the context of the student protests, in the academic environment a new generation of students started to create their own Islamic media, for example *Hidayatullah*, *Sabili* and *Ummi*. Also during this time, the big commercial editors began to see Muslims, especially young ones, as a potential target group. In 1986 the editor of the women's magazine *Kartini*, for example, launched *Amanah*, a new magazine with a special focus on Muslim families and Islamic content. *Amanah* can be considered as a pioneer of an Islamic press that is easy to read, popular and funny, with a strong orientation towards business and

earning money. Only one-third of the content consisted of Islamic articles, with the rest being popular entertainment. Three years after *Amanah*, *Ummi*, another commercial Islamic magazine targeting women was launched. As this magazine was successful, the editors of *Ummi* created a new magazine *Annida*, targeting Muslim girls. In the style of other magazines for the youth such as *Hai* or *Gadis*, *Annida* uses the language of the youth, *bahasa gaul*. Slang terms that are commonly used in these magazines are for example *banget*, *lho*, *tapi*, *kok*, *nggak* or *nih*. It is colourful and fun and contains a lot of advertisements for cosmetics, shops selling veils and Muslim clothes, Islamic music and so on.

As publishing became even less legally complicated in 1999, many more popular Islamic magazines started to be published, mostly targeting young Muslim women such as *Nikah*, *Noor*, *Karima*, *El-Fata*, *Puteri*, *Muslimah*, *Permata* and many others. The formula that was used was “to serve Islam with a smile” (“*menyuguhkan Islam dengan senyum*”) (Swastika 2003: 13).

How then did these trendy Islamic magazines make the veil become popular and help to cause a shift in the image of the veil as something old-fashioned, very religious and oppositional to something trendy and fashionable? To answer this question, I will look closely at the February 2006 edition of the magazine *Muslimah*, addressed to young Muslim girls. This magazine appears monthly and costs about one Euro.

On the cover of the magazine, the title *Muslimah* is written in white and bright pink, decorated with yellow flowers on the side, the subtitle reads “Trend of the Islamic youth” (*Tren remaja Islam*) and below the title there is an image of one of Indonesia’s young celebrities Zaskia, an 18-year-old girl, wearing very pretty Muslim clothes and a fancy veil that is decorated with a band of small seashells. On page twenty we find the cover story about Zaskia, illustrated with photos, showing her with different veils and dresses. In the following article she tells us that it is very easy to wear a veil nowadays and that many artists decide to make the veil become part of their identity and everyday appearance (*banyak banget artis-artis yang menjadikan jilbab sebagai identitas penampilan mereka sehari-hari*). The article then tells how the soap opera actress lived in glamour, wearing short and very tight clothes, going clubbing and to rave parties, even trying a little bit of alcohol, now of course admitting that it tasted really bad and that she would never try it again. She emphasises however that even though she was partying she never tried any drugs. This would maybe be too bad for her image. After a while, however, she suddenly realised that her life at that time, and that of her friends too, was empty and so she decided to return to the right track, the one of Allah. She changed her appearance, started to wear Muslim clothes and of course a veil. Finally she says she got back to the right way and was saved. She stopped clubbing and says that now, as she wears the veil, she is protected from many of the bad things in life. The veil just makes her feel safe and comfortable, *Alhamdulillah*, praise be to God, she says, smiling happily.



Cover of the magazine *Muslimah* with the cover girl Zaskia. February edition 2006.

In almost all Muslim magazines there are reports of artists and how they were on the wrong track but all of a sudden realised this and changed their ways, started to veil and wear Muslim clothes. In an interview with the UGM sociology professor Mbak Tia, I was told that Indonesians would forgive many sins of celebrities, such as drug or alcohol use or almost any sort of scandal if they just cried on camera, pleading that they were on the wrong track but had now found their faith again and would return to the good Islamic way of life. Of course it is even more effective if this statement is underlined by starting to wear a veil. There are many examples of artists who did that, she tells me. You only have to turn on the TV or read popular magazines.

Besides the artist report of Zaskia, there are several other rubrics in the magazine *Muslimah*. There is however not one single photo of a woman or a girl without the veil. A large part is dedicated to fashion, for example showing how to look cool by wearing a veil for every type of personality. You can look sporty, like a hip-hop girl, a sweet girly, or ethnic girl. The veil is by no means seen as uniform in these magazines, but as something that can help to express a personal, individual style and makes you look interesting. Besides fashion, there are also styling tips, including which model of veil and which colours look good with a certain face form. One example of a styling tip is that girls with darker skin should avoid dark coloured

veils, such as dark brown, as this makes the skin look even darker. Also with the veil, the beauty ideal is still white skin. Other articles include information on how to make chocolate sweets and explanations of the health benefits of drinking milk. A further long article is about cellular phones and the phenomenon of trendy “hand phones” (*fenomena HP gaul*), and about trendy flip-flops. Interestingly, the feet are not covered by the girls in this magazine, which does not seem to be important. Also the girl in the photo story wears a pink veil and jeans and wants to break up with her boyfriend, as she has seen him with another girl. In this edition the magazine *Muslimah* also looks for candidates who could become the model of the year 2006. Among other participation criteria, one has to wear a veil.

Besides many more articles, for example on an Islamic reggae band, there are also articles on Islamic issues, such as about a modern Islamic boarding school, Islamic short stories and an article about Muslims living in Eritrea. Besides articles, the magazine also has advertisements in it, for example for cosmetic products or shops selling Muslim clothes.

By looking through these magazines, the image that is transmitted of these young girls is a very good one, often held in opposition to the sinful and empty life of girls who have not yet found the way to Allah. The veiled girls are shown as friendly, merry, polite and having a good character without being boring. It is shown that by wearing a veil, one can only win and does not have to give up anything that is seen as enjoyable. Through these kinds of texts, Islam is seen to have a friendly and trendy image, and not to be a punishing religion. Instead of using the argument that if one does not veil one will go to hell, the veil is made attractive through the transmission of positive connotations linked to it. By reading and looking at magazines such as *Muslimah*, the question that arises is to what point has the veil just turned into a fashion accessory and to what extent is it still connected with religious convictions? Everything seems to become possible – this makes the trendy veil become a sign of Islamic pop culture in Indonesia.



Photo-love-story, the veiled girl is having troubles with her boyfriend. In: Muslimah, February edition 2006, p. 126.

In the next section I will give another example of the media's impact on the image of the veil and Islam in general by looking at Islamic television productions.

5.2 Islamic soap operas – veiled TV-stars

It is hard to measure, as to how far TV contributes in making veiling become attractive. It seems evident that many television programs and producers of soap operas or series have realised that Islam sells and see Muslims as a target group. According to Nuning, whom I had the chance to interview, it is only a rather recent phenomena that women and girls wearing veils are seen in TV. Nuning is a writer for a magazine of cultural studies in Yogyakarta and also a lecturer in media studies at UGM. According to her, the soap operas and series showing veiled women only started around Ramadan 2002 and only in the last two years began to become really popular. Another recent phenomenon is that of artist veiling and popular religious teachers giving speeches on TV.

The Islamic soap operas and TV series are very interesting, she tells me, because within their story lines there exist mostly two types of women, one type being the ones wearing a veil, playing the good, soft and moral part, caring lovingly for everyone and on the other hand there are the ones not wearing a veil, living an easy life, causing disorder, mostly having an

unbalanced and labile character. The clothes these women wear are rather sexy, clearly imitating the Western clothing style or at least the way in which Indonesians imagine typical Westerners dress. I myself have never seen a soap opera where the roles were switched, although it may happen in a storyline that a veiled woman makes mistakes, but she is always quick to regret her actions and to beg Allah for forgiveness. The equation “veiled woman equals good woman” and “unveiled woman equals bad woman” is obvious in these soaps and TV series. This is of course not directly transferable to the practices of everyday life, but the tendency to see veiled women as having higher moral principles was confirmed by almost all of my interview partners. Many people also say that the veil prevents women from behaving badly as they are under stronger social pressure and are therefore expected to behave well.

The general belief that a veiled woman has higher moral standards is also used by many artists to their own advantage, especially after having been involved in a scandal, as mentioned earlier. The easiest way to correct a ruined or bad image for an artist is by starting to wear a veil. This is however not the only recent motive for artists to start veiling.

As the demand for veiled actresses in Islamic soaps and other TV productions has increased because they were a good business, attracting a large public and generating money through good advertising rates, veiling is no longer deemed to oppose a career as a TV star and could even be a criteria to be chosen for a certain role. I do however not see this as a one-way process of either the public wanting to see veiled actresses or the TV stations suddenly starting to show Islamic programs, but as a constant interaction resulting in the veil becoming increasingly popular and trendy and associated with a good image, at least among the majority of the population.

5.3 Nasyid – Islamic pop music

Apart from Islamic TV productions, Islamic novels, Islamic magazines and newspapers, other media sources have also contributed to make the veil become popular, for example the *nasyid* groups, making music with Islamic lyrics. The style of music these groups make can vary from pop music, using drums and electric guitars, to reggae music such as the band featured in the February edition of “*Muslimah*”. Some however say that it is best to only use the instruments that existed in the time Muhammad lived or simply not to use instruments at all, only the voice. All of these music groups have one thing in common: they make music to praise Allah, based on Islamic teachings. One interview respondent told me that these songs are love songs for Allah (*lagu-lagu cinta untuk Allah*). Some of these groups sing in Indonesian, some in Arabic, whilst others may even sing in English.



Nasyid Reggae band “Mecca2Medina”. In: Muslimah, February edition 2006, p. 66.

There are very famous nasyid bands in Indonesia, such as Justice Voice, The Fikr or Ar-Ruhul Jadid. Besides many male nasyid groups, there are also female groups that are famous in Indonesia and of course the singers are veiled. Such groups once again help to make Islam, Islamic teachings and also the lifestyle that goes with it become popular. One can attend nasyid concerts, download nasyid ring tones for one’s cellular phone or join fan clubs. If you go to a market in Yogyakarta selling pirated DVDs, CDs and VCDs, you can choose from a large variety of different nasyid groups and these discs sell well.

There are however not only famous nasyid bands in Indonesia but also many small groups; I was told that almost every mosque usually has at least one band. Contests and many small concerts are organised, especially during Ramadan, when people gather to break fast together.

Islamic pop music is however not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. In this context Indonesia’s first true entertainment superstar, Rhoma Irama has to be mentioned. He was the first one who was clearly significant, beyond a relatively small economic or intellectual elite, to a large mass audience (Frederick 1982: 103). Especially in the years 1975 – 1981, he was enormously influential and has changed the face of Indonesian music (ibid. 108). Not only his work but also his outward appearance was strongly influenced by Islam - he had neatly trimmed hair and frequently wore a kind of Islamic dress in an “exotic Middle Eastern type” (ibid. 115). Rhoma can therefore be seen as the father of Islamic pop music; however, he was not the first to make music with an Islamic text. According to Frederick, Ellya for example, a famous Indonesian dangdut singer, had already included lines like “Let’s go to the mosque together and pray” in songs from the late 1950s – the practice however never developed beyond an occasional mentioning of prayer or proper behaviour. Rhoma Irama, however, moved boldly into the arena of what can be designated as dakwah music, that is, music with a conscious Islamic message. He went as far as to include Koranic phrases in his compositions (Frederick 1982: 116). Just like the nasyid bands, Rhoma Irama emphasized the validity of Moslem values in everyday life. Besides music, he also produced films based on Islamic values, and became very popular. Antariksa, now writing and working in KUNCI Cultural

Studies Centre in Yogyakarta, told me that when he was young and still lived in a village, he went once a year to town to watch a film by Rhoma Irama. People loved him.

As Islamic music, Islamic TV productions and Islamic magazines have become popular, Islam as a whole has become popular, and with it the veil has become popular. Shortly said, it is trendy to be Muslim and to show it.

In the following chapter I will discuss the spreading of the veil and the development of Islamic pop culture from an economic perspective.

6 Islamic consumerism

In this chapter I want to look at the veil from an economic perspective in Indonesian consumer society, since for affluent Indonesians, as elsewhere, consumption is one of the crucial, defining experiences of the age, whether they are devout Muslims or not (Nilan 2006: 94). The city of Yogyakarta is filled with huge advertising billboards that dominate the cityscape. It seems to be difficult for anyone, and especially for young people such as students, to avoid the discourse of avid consumption. As Pam Nilan writes in the article “The reflexive youth culture of devout Muslim youth in Indonesia” there is “membership of urban youth style culture for Islamist youth typically signalled on the body, what you carry, where you go and what you do, how you speak and what you talk about, what music you prefer and who your heroes and heroines are” (Nilan 2006: 94). For young Muslims there is an ever expanding range of products, and besides media products also Muslim fashion. These products are similar to those designed for young people in many other places of the world and, thus, young Indonesian Muslims do not have to miss out on consuming. The trendy veil is one good example for the possibility of consuming, fulfilling the needs of being trendy and practicing a religious duty at the same time.



Muslim fashion show, displaying the latest trends. In: Paras Islamic magazine, November edition 2005, p. 79.

According to Turner, identity is constructed through consumption: “The modern consuming self is a representational being. It is the surface of the body which is the target of advertising and self-promotion, just as it is the body surfaces which are the site of stigmatization” (Turner 1994: xiii). The veil as a good that is consumed can therefore be seen as an item of identity construction and representing the self. According to Turner “the notion of embodiment suggests that all of the fundamental processes of conception, perception, evaluation and judgement are connected to the fact that human beings are embodied social agents. It is not the case simply that human beings have a body but they are involved in the development of their bodies over their own life-cycle; in this respect, they are bodies” (Turner 1994: xi). The body is therefore becoming increasingly central to the modern person’s sense of self-identity.

In his book “The consuming body” Paci Falk writes one chapter that is especially interesting in the context of the economic perspective and the marketing of the veil, which is “Selling good(s): on the genealogy of modern advertising” (1994: 151-185). He notes that: “Modern advertising operates almost exclusively with the positive register, depicting the happy and content soap user for whom there is always room even in a cramped lift rather than the distressed non user who is left out” (155). “The outcome must establish a positive link between the identified product and the “good” that is characterizes it. The building of this link implies a metamorphosis in which the product transforms into representation – and it is this that modern advertising is basically about” (156). “This story is about how this world of goods becomes visible to the consumer and how this visibility constitutes a direct consumer-product relationship” (157).

With the liberalisation of the media I discussed in the previous chapter, the time seems to be ripe for modern advertising, as modern advertising requires the development of as many channels of mass communication as possible, such as TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards or posters. This is, according to Turner (1994: 159), necessary so that the message can be addressed to the potential consumer en masse but also that the consumer can be simultaneously “singled out” and addressed as an individual. According to Turner it is “this tendency to single out the individual that can be regarded as the distinctive characteristic of modern advertising. The individualizing mode of communication creates an imaginary relationship between the assumed consumer and the identified product that is personalized by means of positive characteristics, a relationship which appears to every consumer to be as unique as a romantic love affair” (160).

Islamic symbols such as the veil have been the target of modern marketing strategies. The times seem to be over when religiosity seemed to limit consumption. In her thesis “Konsumerisme religius: Etika agama dalam etos konsumsi” (Religious consumerism: The ethic of religion in the consumptive ethos), Sita Hidayah departs from the assumption that since around 2000, Islamic values have been sold and Islamic symbols bought and that Islam has become part of the extensive consumer culture existing in Indonesia. Hidayah sees the new styles of veils as the most striking example of this phenomenon (Hidayah 2004: 5ff).

In the following section I will show how the veil is advertised in Yogyakarta and how this “romantic love affair”, as Turner notes, is becoming be established.

6.1 Selling the veil – modern advertisement

The modern forms of advertising operating with positive registers have, in my opinion, had a big influence in making the veil become popular. Not only the teachers of the Koran school started to inform people that one should wear the veil, but also business people started to realize that one could make money by selling veils and Islamic clothes. Young Muslims in Indonesia in particular are a group with large potential buying power. In Yogyakarta alone there are more than 30 shops specializing in Muslim clothes, wherein many stalls in the market sell only veils and veil accessories, whilst others specialise in general Muslim fashion. Also department stores such as *Matahari* have special sections where Muslim fashion is sold. All of these shops and stalls do not just sell veils and Muslim clothes because they believe that it is a good thing for Muslim women to veil, hence for religious reasons, but also, or mainly, to earn money. Muslim clothes, and with them veils, have become a lucrative business.

As previously mentioned, Muslim clothes and veils follow fashion trends in material, colour and cut. Fashion designers show their latest models at fashion parades. The largest designer association is the APPMI *Asosiasi Perancang Pengusaha Mode Indonesia* (Designer Association of Indonesian Fashion Entrepreneurs). The carefully selected designers that join this organisation work together with *Gramedia*, the largest bookshop and book publisher in Indonesia, and constantly publish books showing the latest fashion trends. The shops selling Muslim fashion therefore also follow the fashion trends. In Yogyakarta some stores have focused especially on young customers, with the biggest and best known being *Karita*.

The recently very successful store *Karita* with its pink décor and trendy posters opened in 2002 and has two floors, but the manager told me they already have plans to extend it this year, if possible before the end of Ramadan, as it is very successful. Most of the customers are women, only a few of them bringing their husbands along. They browse through the ground floor, with its wide range of clothes such as long embroidered skirts, all sorts of different tops reaching from batik to silk before heading upstairs, where they explore shelves of scarves and hats in every colour imaginable and cloth, as well as accessories to go with them. All of the clothes sold there have one thing in common - they are Muslim fashion. Some items are tight, some are loose, and they all have two main functions: the first being to cover the *aurat*, the part of the body that the Koran requires believers to cover, and the second and probably more important function, to make the wearer look good (Champagne 2004: 15).

When I went to *Karita* for the second time to look at all of the different garment styles again, I chose a relatively quiet morning in order to have time to talk to the shop assistant and to ask her which styles were trendy at the moment. She told me that currently veils in light pink and gold were selling very well because they would easily match with many styles of dresses. The

young woman wearing a beautiful golden-coloured veil decorated with a band of pearls told me that people normally decorate their veils with bands or pearls in a matching colour. She then showed me some of the latest models and demonstrated how to wear each of them. I was sitting there for more than half an hour and she placed all different models of veils on my head and after every model exclaimed how sweet I looked wearing this or that model of veil, telling me which ones especially matched the colour of my skin or the shape of my face or the shirt I was wearing. Finally I ended up buying a light purple one. She told me that she often helps girls with choosing veils and shows them different styles of wearing them. Bigger groups can also benefit from the opportunity to have a veil demonstration at their house, school or mosque for free. She really was a good seller and of course only mentioned the positive aspects of the veil and how it made me look nice. I did not have the feeling while sitting in this shop that the veil had any religious connotation, it was more like buying a handbag or a new shirt.

The whole concept of the shop works with positive appeals, they do not only sell veils but also sell images of sweet, good looking, stylish and trendy young women. Furthermore, their posters are displayed around the city, advertising for *Karita* and showing a sweet smiling girl with a beautiful veil, with a slogan below saying: “Muslim PENTING bergaya” (It is important for a Muslim to be stylish).



Advertisement of the young Muslim fashion store Karita – It is important for a Muslim to be stylish.

The name of another shop for young Muslims near UGM is *Jilbabers* (“Veilers”) also in a trendy design clearly addressed to a certain subgroup – to young trendy girls who wear a

jilbab and have money to spend. None of these shops uses negative appeals to advertise their clothes, for example that one will go to hell without the veil. They advertise exclusively with positive appeals, making the veil look friendly and trendy.

Looking at the staff or the clients of such shops, it becomes visible that spending a lot of money on clothes or veils and to trying to look as good as possible does not seem to be in opposition with Islam or with being a good Muslim. At least Tara who likes to buy different veils and spend money on them tells me that at least she is spending her money on something “good”. I realised that many fellow students followed this logic, that is, that it is better to spend money on veils than on shoes for example because the veil is something “good”, something that Allah likes. One can therefore spend money on Islamic clothing without having to have a bad conscience. Islam is not seen as opposing consumption by most girls wearing trendy veils. Some of the girls wearing long veils or *cadars* however told me that one should not consume too much, that one should be happy without too many material goods.

A problem however that some see when spending too much money on veils and fashion in general is that one of the reasons to veil, namely not to attract men, is fading away. Many Indonesians do not agree however that one should not attract attention by veiling. In their eyes it is written in the Koran and Sunna that a woman should cover her hair but not that she should not look stylish and trendy by wearing her veil. In the eyes of most students consumption and Islam are not in opposition. In the eyes of many, one can be trendy and fulfil ones religious duty at the same time – thanks to the new good-looking veils.

In the next section I will give another example of how young Muslims can be trendy and funky and fulfil a religious obligation at the same time - fasting. Not even fasting and consuming seem to stand in opposition – at least for most young people. This is for me an indication that there is an Islamic pop culture currently emerging in Indonesia, as what before was seen as contradictory is nowadays seen to be in harmony.

6.2 Ramadan Hedonism

When talking about consumption and Islam, I think it is worth mentioning the situation to be found in Yogyakarta during Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month, when, in the eyes of many, “Islamic hedonism” reaches its peak. In his article “Fasting”, Antariksa shows how students in Yogyakarta spend this special month in the Islamic calendar (Antariksa 2002). Along many streets, also around the campus of UGM, a lot of small stalls are set up and drinks and light snacks are sold for the breaking of the fast in the evening. Many people go to spend time with friends and there are many events during the whole month to eat together after a long day of fasting. As Antariksa notes, the major attraction of some of the “Ramadan strips”, such as for example *Jalan Kaliurang* passing by Gadjah Mada University, is not so much the refreshments sold to people breaking their fast for the day, but the opportunity to show off one’s style and wealth. Most of the vendors who set up a shop are not “career salespeople” but “sudden salespeople”, the children of the rich who stroll up and down past a line of luxury

cars. The atmosphere is festive and funky with the sounds of the latest electronic or rock music reverberating from expensive car sound systems. The casual visitor might actually be surprised to see what happens on this city street in the name of restraining desire. The music pounds, young people flirt and everyone is dressed in their best clothes. The students hanging out there see no problem in being religious and having fun - they still fast. That is part of the game. Discipline and hedonism are no longer seen as incompatible, indeed the subjugation of the body through body maintenance routines, such as fasting, is presented within consumer culture.

On *Idul Fitri*, the big celebration at the end of Ramadan, everyone should wear a new dress. This seems to be an unwritten rule in Indonesia that everyone seems to follow. The stores, especially those selling Islamic clothes, are therefore very crowded in this month. Critical voices can be heard saying that the shopping malls seem to become the new mosques, that the mosques move to the malls (*masjid pindah ke mall*), as the mosques seem to get emptier the nearer *Idul Fitri*, the end of Ramadan, comes. Critics say this consumerist culture distracts people from the real meaning of Ramadan, the fasting and with it renunciation and the searching for God. This criticism is mostly diplomatic in form; however it can also find violent expressions. In the year 2001 for example, a “sweeping” was carried out in some places in Yogyakarta known as “Ramadan Hedonism” centres. Over several days, dozens of activists of the *Gerakan Pemuda Ka’abah* (Ka’abah Youth Movement or GPK), a militant Islamic group, accosted the amateur vendors, destroyed several cars, and forced women to veil. Apparently, however, the GPK’s attempts to enforce its own version of piety failed to impress and a week after the “sweepings” ended, people came back to their Ramadan hangout. In Jakarta these “sweepings” are much more violent and carried out by groups such as the *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front or FPI). In the past years “places of sin” were especially targeted, such as centres for narcotics transactions, prostitution, gambling and drinking alcohol (Antariksa 2002). Also in Yogyakarta, quite many café, bar and disco owners decide to leave their business closed during Ramadan, as a result of the “sweeping”, for safety reasons.

Ramadan is also the month when many girls start to veil, as Anita and other fellow students tell me, because in many schools or also in many enterprises it is compulsory to veil during this time. In this context some people speak of the *jilbab musiman*, the seasonal veil. In Mc Donald’s in Yogyakarta for example female staff has to veil during Ramadan, and so also in KFC¹¹ and other sale centres. As in many primary schools and high schools the students have to veil during this time, Anita tells me that some people who start to like veiling continue to wear it. She herself started to wear the veil in Ramadan three years ago.

I would like to mention briefly that clothes are not the only Islamic symbols that are sold and,

¹¹ In KFC however the female employees are not allowed to wear the veil in other months. The female staff in Mc Donald’s is free to choose during the rest of the year.

thereby, give two further interesting examples: the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the label “*halal*” as another example of how money is made in the name of Islam.

Every year around 30’000 Indonesian Muslims depart for their pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is an enormous business for both the Indonesian state, as well as the specialised travel agents. One can find special packages that can easily cost 5’000 USD, but also the “normal” package is not at all cheap. The prestige a pilgrim gains after completing the *Hajj* seems however worth spending quite a lot of money (Hidayah 2004: 60). The Indonesian state airline *Garuda* has the monopoly on flying to Mecca. The pilgrimage is a very lucrative business for the Indonesian government.

Another example is the label “*halal*” to be found on almost any food packaging. This label is very important for many Muslims as it guarantees that Islamic food and slaughtering regulations are fulfilled. The only institution, however, that has the power to supply this label is the MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia), the committee of the most important and learned Muslims in Indonesia, which is very powerful. The label is however not for free – the consumer has to pay a kind of tax for every item bought with the label “*halal*” on it, costing 10.-Rp. (around 0,001 Euro) and that goes to the Indonesian government (Hidayah 2004: 77).

It has been my intention to show in this section that Muslims are a large economic target group and that in the last few years the economy has realised the huge potential in selling Islamic symbols through modern positive advertising strategies, making Islam become trendy and friendly. In an Indonesian context, I would therefore oppose the argument used by Mule and Barthel who state that, for Egyptian women, “the veil, so proponents argue, is intended to minimize social and economic differences among its wearers” (1992: 329). They see the veil as being consistent with the egalitarian spirit of the Islamic movement. Especially for young Egyptian women of the lower middle class it offers a practical solution to their inability to buy better clothing. “It overcomes feelings of inferiority in an urban world of fashion” (Mule and Barthel 1992: 329). I do not think that this argument could be transferred to the situation in Yogyakarta, looking at the veil fashion and the huge differences in models of veils and Muslim clothing in general. I would rather tend to state that by wearing a certain veil model one can display wealth and social status. The argument that the veil may minimize social and economic differences may however be true for the long veils and the *cadar*, but even there, I was told, people will be able to distinguish a cheap model from an expensive one. In my opinion the veil would not have been able to become as popular and widely spread in Indonesia if it had the character of a uniform, not making it possible to show one’s status, as this is something many Indonesian seem to consider as very important especially for the rich, who value consumption as a means of displaying their wealth.

The veil is, in my eyes, the most striking and best visible sign to show the process currently going on in Indonesia of Islam becoming popular and trendy. Islam seems to be perfectly able to adapt to the emerging consumer culture and since modern advertising operates almost exclusively with a positive register, advertising is now creating an endless stream of

representation in which products are transformed into positive experiences. That is to say, Islam and the veil are transformed into positive experiences.

If I should dare to give a prediction on how advertising of the veil will develop, I would say that it will soon become even more elaborate. Nowadays it is still rather rare to see brand names on veils. I think that this will develop further. I think that big and well-know brands will start to design veils. Karl Lagerfeld and Gucci have already taken one step in this direction, but so far this is still a small breakthrough. My prediction is that certain popular brands will emerge, as is the case for jeans and other clothing. Turner talks in this context of “naming the nameless” (Falk 1994: 160). Certain veils, I assume, will be singled out and stand out more clearly from other veils than now, certain veils will be even more capable of communicating a certain desired image: the good image of the veil as such and the image of a specific brand associated with a certain lifestyle or set of ideas.

In the next section I will show how Islam as a positive experience is used to sell ordinary products.

6.3 Special shampoo for veiled women

Not only are Islamic symbols sold with success, but also the marketing agents of other products have realised that Muslims are a potential target group. The good image of Islam is therefore used to sell all sorts of products. For the marketing of these products Islamic symbols are used, such as the colour green (Muhammad’s favourite colour), calligraphic writing or models wearing Muslim clothes, and of course women wearing veils. Advertisers not only use the good image that Islam nowadays commonly has, but also help a great deal in constructing and reconstructing it in a continuing interaction. The consequence of this process is the reinforcement of the good, polite, friendly, peaceful and trendy image of Islam in Indonesia, as not only Muslims but also big marketing companies seem to benefit from it. Islam is becoming popular and sells.

In Yogyakarta for example, an omnipresent advertisement in the city in 2005 and 2006 was a banner of a shampoo advertisement showing the famous Indonesian model and actress Inneke Koeshrawati who, in the 1980s, wore quite sexy clothes but now wears a veil. The shampoo she advertises for is *Sunsilk hijau* (green) and was specially developed for women wearing a veil. It should make the scalp stay fresh and stop the loss of hair. The colour green is not chosen accidentally but rather because it is associated with Islam. It is quite unique for a shampoo advertisement that one cannot see the hair of the model - a woman with veil. The veil she is wearing of course suits her very well and matches her greenish dress. Below the shampoo there is a slogan stating: “*Hati sejuk, kepala dingin*” (A fresh (satisfied) heart, a cool head). Inneke is smiling happily down upon the streets of Yogyakarta. Other shampoo brands have followed the example of *Sunsilk* and have also developed special shampoos for Muslim women wearing veils.

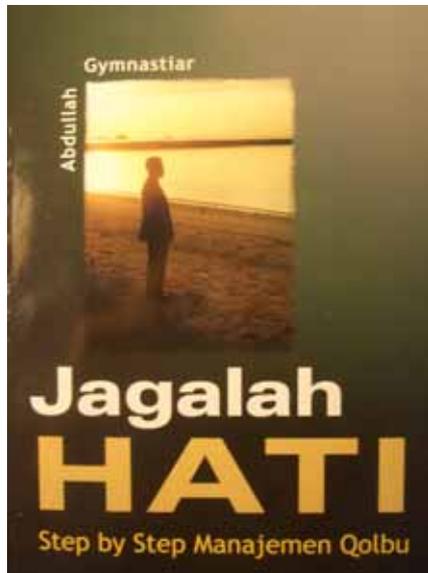
Apart from shampoo, some cosmetic brands also focus on the needs of Muslim women, for example *Wardah*, with the slogan *Kosmetika suci dan aman* (Holy and safe cosmetics), also written in green and using calligraphic writing in the logo design. These products guarantee that they are free from pork or other ingredients that are forbidden to Muslims - they are *halal*. Besides the usual cosmetic products such as lipsticks, make-up and eye shadow, many whitening products are also sold, as it is trendy in Indonesia to be as white as possible, not only for Muslim girls.



Advertisement for Wardah – holy and safe cosmetics. In: Paras, November edition, 2005, p. 3.

When it comes to selling products in the name of Islam one man is especially popular and has become rich by this strategy: Aa Gym, as he is commonly known, or Abdullah Gymnastiar. He is a very famous religious teacher in Indonesia, often holding sermons in Friday prayers or speaking on TV, where he has his own show. Besides this lucrative occupation, he also produced his own brand Qolbu, which can be translated as “heart” or “soul”. He publishes books for example carrying the title “Jagalah hati: step by step manajemen Qolbu” (Guard your heart: managing your soul step-by-step). There are books for beginners in “manajemen Qolbu”, but also those for more advanced readers having already read the first book. If one has problems in the process of becoming a better person through Islamic philosophy, this is what these books promise: one can contact Aa Gym’s team by email and write about one’s problems. Besides many books, he has also created Qolbu Cola, similar to Coca Cola but “better for your soul”. He has special Qolbu supermarkets in Bandung, Qolbu cafés where one can drink Qolbu Cola and read books about Qolbu, and he has even designed Qolbu motorbikes. All these products are sold in the name of Islam and are supposed to make your heart become pure (*membersihkan hati*). Besides the above-mentioned goods he also offers an SMS service which one can subscribe to and then receive an SMS every morning containing a Koran verse, a Hadith or another Islamic saying. This service also seems to be very popular.

His marketing strategies using positive Islamic registers seem fascinating and reflect the trend that Islam sells very well and once again reinforces the positive, friendly image of Islam. Of course, the women on pictures in his books or in advertisements or the staff in his supermarket all wear Muslim clothing.



Book cover of Aa Gym's bestseller – Jagalah hati, Step by Step Manajemen Qolbu.

For me it is however quite surprising that this kind of commercialisation of Islam and the selling of products in the name of Islam in the way Aa Gym does it seemed so acceptable to all the activists of the different Islamic student organisations I met. None of my interview respondents were particularly critical of what Aa Gym does. Even Akbar, the president of KAMMI of Gadjah Mada University, the most textual Islamic organisation, rejecting most goods from the West by saying that the Western world is too capitalistic, thinks that Aa Gym's marketing strategy is fine and sees no problem in the fact that he earns a lot of money. He says that as long as he runs his business according to Islamic law and does not show off his wealth, he sees no problem. It would, according to Akbar, be problematic if he were to have a very big house and did not give money to the poor. But Aa Gym, Akbar told me, is always giving a lot to the poor and also, among other good deeds, helps to build mosques, what he does helps to promote Islam and that's a good thing.

Besides the above-mentioned products, other examples of products aimed at Muslims include *Mecca Cola* or *Zam-Zam* drinking water. There are also businesses aimed at Muslims, such as Islamic banks, where of course the staff is veiled, offering financial solutions adapted to Islamic law. There are special travel agents for Muslims and special hair dressers for women wearing the veil where only women are allowed to enter. The trend of "Islamising" products becomes especially visible during Ramadan, when also Mc Donald's, KFC and many other restaurants and bakeries suddenly have special Ramadan packages and use Islamic symbols and green colours for decoration in order to attract Muslims.

In connection with this economic aspect of advertising the veil and Islam, Islamic femininity

and gender roles have also been constructed. In the next chapter I will discuss how far this “new Islamic spirit” and choosing to wear a veil has led to an alternative construction of gender in Indonesian society and has made veiling become attractive, especially for young women.

7 The trendy Islamic lifestyle from a gender perspective

In this chapter I will look at how cultural codes underlying the veil relate to the construction of gender associated with it. I would however like to highlight that I see constructions of gender as well as the codes underlying the veil as fluid and constantly changing. In this chapter I will consider the liberating aspects some models of veil may have for some women, but also try to point out some aspects of oppression that some veil models might have.

In discussing traditional cultural Javanese codes and gender constructions in the context of the veiling movement in Indonesia, I hope to show that veiling can be an alternative to traditional Javanese and Western gender conceptions. According to Brenner, the veil can be a new form of modernity (Brenner 1996: 678), or in the words of Mule and Barthel: “Young women find in the veil a powerful alternative: a positive identity and source of esteem sanctioned by Islam” (1992: 324). In this chapter I will look at how far the veil does offer an alternative to traditional Javanese, and also to Western gender conceptions. We will however also see that in some aspects certain models of veils may reinforce the traditional conceptions of gender. By giving some examples, I will qualify the results at the end of each section by showing that also this “alternative” construction of gender is very unstable, depending on the context, and constantly changing.

7.1 Veiling and sexual purity

The veil is often linked to the notion of sexual purity and is therefore seen to serve as a physical as well as symbolic barrier between the two sexes. The issue of veiling revolves around the Koranic concept of modesty, *sitr al-’aura* (literally “covering one’s nakedness”), and provides the basis for regulation of behaviour, the segregation of the sexes and proper dress. The Koran speaks of being “modest in thy bearing” (verse 31:19) and mentions Allah’s reward for men and women “who guard their modesty”. In other English translations, the Koranic notion of modesty is clearly associated with sexuality (Watson 1994: 143).

Many of my interview partners used arguments for veiling standing in some form in reference to sexuality. Some examples of students’ responses include: “It protects me from the view of men” (“*untuk menjagaku dari pandangan laki-laki*”), “I feel safer” (“*saya merasa lebih aman*”), “I feel comfortable, self confident and safe while wearing the veil and embarrassed when I take it off” (“*saya merasa nyaman, pd (percaya diri) dan aman kalau memakai jilbab dan merasa malu ketika melepaskannya*”), “so as to not cause sexual desire of the opposite sex,

because the body of a woman is different from the body of a man, to guard one's honour and so as to not be harrassed, the *aurat* of a woman has to be covered" (*"agar tidak menimbulkan nafsu bagi lawan jenis karena tubuh wanita berbeda dengan tubuh pria, untuk menjaga kehormatan dan untuk tidak diganggu, aurat wanita dalam Ialm harus ditutupi"*). I could mention more examples, but this association between the veil and protecting oneself was often made.

This argument exhibit an extreme form when it is argued that the veil protects women from rape or even worse, and in the case of rape the woman is seen as guilty if she is not veiled, but seen as the victim if she was veiled. The underlying assumption, then, is that the woman provoked the man by her appearance. This argument that girls should veil and wear Muslim clothes was also used by the mayor of Padang, the capital city of the province West Sumatra, when he obliged all school children in the city to veil and wear Muslim clothing. Not rarely, the condition of wearing clothes that do not cover the *aurat*, lures men into carrying out sexual abuse or even rape (*"Tak jarang, kondisi semacam ini memancing pria untuk melakukan tindak pelecehan bahkan pemerkosaan"*) (Padang Ekspres. Harian Pagi. Saturday, 12 November 2005: 24).

This link between veiling to protect women from male hypersexuality has also been pointed out by other researchers such as Read and Bartkowski: "For several women, the idea of masculine hypersexuality and feminine vulnerability to the male sex drive is crucial to this essentialist rationale for veiling. Despite that the fact that veiled women were rather guarded in their references to sex, their nods in that direction are difficult to interpret in any other fashion" (2000: 404). Similar to the perception of masculine hypersexuality is the metaphor that women are like diamonds, beautiful and precious and should therefore not be revealed to everyone – just to their husband and close kin (Read and Bartkowski 2000: 404). This argument was also mentioned in the context of veiling and inner beauty. Fitri, a student of sociology and wearing a long veil, told me that by veiling she wanted people to like her for her inner beauty and not because she was pretty. Fitri said that the veil helps her to gain respect and makes people look at what she does and says as opposed to how she looks.

According to many Islamic feminists such as Mernissi the veil was imposed on Muslim women because of men's unwillingness to tame their sexual desire. The veil therefore helps men to control themselves (Read and Bartkowski 2000: 408).

There are however women who object to this assumption that men cannot control their sexuality. One example is Lucy, the founder of the NGO LSPPA, the *Lembaga Studi dan Pengembangan Perempuan dan Anak* (the Institute for Research and Support of Women and Children) who says that this is simply scientifically not true and gives males the justification to demand women to veil and to do whatever they like to the ones not veiled, as it is their own fault that they are not veiled. She also notes that this assumption is unjust for men, as they are seen as uncultivated animals, unable to control their sexuality.

This idea of uncontrolled male sexuality is not seen in accordance with the traditional

Javanese idea of self control and self mastery. Brenner shows in her text “Why Women Rule the Roost: Rethinking Javanese Ideologies of Gender and Self-Control” that it is traditionally seen as a female attribute to be emotional and to lose self control, for a man however this would be considered as shameful (Brenner 1995). The assumption that women have to veil because of male hypersexuality does therefore not have a long tradition in Java and seems to oppose traditional gender perceptions.

Although this association between the veil and sexual purity and innocence might be, just as the veil itself, a rather new phenomenon in Indonesian society, it is still wide-spread and constantly reinforced by the mass media. Also, in the academic context of UGM, veiled girls still have the image of having higher sexual morals than unveiled girls. This was also confirmed by many boys telling me that unveiled girls are easier to kiss or even to have sex with¹. Many boys therefore prefer to have a girlfriend who does not wear the veil, but would prefer veiled girls for more serious relationships or marriage. To give an example of how sexual morals and, with them, reputation are linked, I would like to give the example of Lena, a student of social anthropology at UGM.

Lena, whom I had the chance to interview before and then again four months after having started to veil, told me that many people started gossiping about her after she started to veil, saying that she is only wearing it because she wants to correct her somehow bad reputation. Lena, pretty and very popular, is still single. She has many admirers on campus. On Saturday afternoons her mobile phone is constantly ringing and different boys ask her whether she already has plans for the evening¹². Lena usually refuses when boys try to take her out on Saturday night and maybe this makes her even more attractive. However, it is not surprising that especially jealous girls started talking badly about her. After she had started to veil she told me that the boys respected her a lot more and did not try to approach her as much as before.

This gossip shows however that the veil can have this purifying aspect. Another thing that Lena gained by starting to veil was that she now had the right or a legitimate excuse to say no, that is, to say no to boys or to other obligations. The new ability to refuse, she tells me, is one thing she gained by veiling. I will discuss this in the next section.

¹² Saturday night (*Malam Minggu*) is the time in Yogyakarta for dating. Driving around the city, one can observe many couples riding around by motorbike or the richer ones by car, going to eat out together, for example in a *lesehan*, a small restaurant where one sits on the floor. There are many places to eat out in Yogyakarta, depending on one's taste and money. The boy normally comes to pick the girl up at her boarding house, this seems important for both, he has to show that he cares for her and the other effect is that they can ride the bike together, even though she has a motorbike as well and it would be much easier to meet at the restaurant directly. You can see some of the girls hugging their boyfriend (*pacar*), not all however. It is also quite common to see girls wearing trendy veils hugging their boyfriends while riding the motor bike. At around nine o'clock most girls have to be home, the boarding house is closing the fence and it is not suitable for decent girls to stay out longer. After nine the girls still sitting in the cafes or hanging out in the streets are usually not veiled and I have never seen a veiled girl in one of the discos in Yogyakarta. This does not seem to be an appropriate behaviour for veiled girls.

Many parents nowadays think that the veil protects their child from immoral sexual acts. Whereas ten years ago, according to Brenner, parents were still often opposed to their children's wish to start veiling (1996: 682), they nowadays usually congratulate them on this choice, as many interview respondents wearing trendy veils told me when I asked about the reaction of their parents. Of course there are enough examples of veiled girls becoming pregnant before marriage, but there seem to be more girls becoming pregnant who do not veil.

From the aspect of guarding one's sexual purity, the veil does not stand in opposition to traditional Javanese values. The idea of shame and modesty, as well as the idea of social disorder, *fitna*, of which women are considered to be the major source, has a long tradition in Java. The concept of shame and nakedness, and with it parts of the body that a women should cover, seems however to have shifted in the last ten or fifteen years. I would assume that with the trend of Islam becoming more and more popular, the perception of what clothes are perceived as sexy has changed. I would say that generally less skin is shown than ten or fifteen years ago.

The positive image of the veil as a means to guard one's sexual purity has however to be qualified and is becoming increasingly unstable. There are cases where the veil is used as a camouflage and almost everyone knows of girls who only wear the veil to benefit from its good reputation and to hide something. There are, for example, quite a lot of prostitutes in Yogyakarta who veil. Also, one can download pornographic movies from the internet showing women with veils. One video that became famous and caused a scandal was a recording made by an amateur with a phone camera showing a girl wearing a long veil and her boyfriend having sex near a river in Lombok. There are also many other pornographic pictures and videos on the internet of women with the veil. There seem to be men who are especially sexually attracted to veiled women. If I may dare to make a prediction for the coming years, this image of veiled women as having higher moral standards will continue to fade away.

7.2 Autonomy through an Islamic lifestyle

As mentioned in the previous section, the veil seems to stand in a dialectic relationship between "constraining" and "liberating", between structural constraints and free choice. In my opinion the veil can be liberating in some aspects and constraining in others. A further point that we should however keep in mind is that concepts of individual autonomy and constraint are probably Western concepts and not as such transferable to Javanese society. In our society, individual autonomy seems desirable while constraint has a negative connotation and is generally minimized or avoided. In contrast, in Javanese society individual autonomy is not seen as something entirely positive but is quite quickly associated with an egotistic and selfish lifestyle. Also in the eyes of many students, autonomy is only considered as desirable to a certain extent, as they see it conflicting with other values of society such as helping each other and caring for others. In discussing aspects where the veil has a rather liberating character, I

will try to keep in mind my positive association with autonomy and try to listen carefully whether our notion of the liberating aspects of the veil are also seen as positive by some of my interview partners. Of course what seems liberating and positive for one person does not have to be liberating for others.

The idea that the veil has a liberating character can be found in a lot of research done regarding the veil. Brenner for example writes: “For some women, veiling is a gesture of autonomy, a claiming of the right – and an acknowledgment of the obligation – to regulate their own behaviour rather than to be regulated by others, and to determine their own fate in this life and the next” (1996: 688), and in another passage “Women who veil emphasise their own individual responsibility for their actions, frequently undertaking this practice in defiance of wishes of parents, husbands and other figures of authority. In doing so they are claiming the right to act as autonomous persons in a society that has historically denied young, unmarried women such rights (1996: 691)”. Barthel notes in his study about veiling among Senegalese women that they on the one hand lost traditional values but gained individual rights and autonomy as they freed themselves from patriarchy (Barthel 1976, cited in Mule and Barthel 1992: 324). Also Mule and Barthel write in their study about Egyptian women that the veil “reflects women’s efforts to gain or maintain esteem within a patriarchal society in which possibilities for autonomy are exceptionally, and increasingly limited. Rejecting the negative image of women’s “pseudo-liberation” associated with Westernization, young women find in the veil a powerful alternative: a positive identity and source of esteem sanctioned by Islam” (1992: 328).

Let us look at Brenner’s assumption, stating that by veiling, women claim more autonomy, something that society has historically denied to young, unmarried women. In this statement I see a contradiction between traditional gender roles and new expectations. Many women seem to find themselves in the dilemma of having to choose between the traditional Javanese lifestyle where women have very little individual autonomy or between the Western lifestyle, that is seen as full of individual autonomy, but also of selfishness. The best alternative is therefore, as Sita tells me, to wear a trendy veil.

Sita is a masters student of Religious and Cross Cultural Studies at UGM. She wears a *jilbab gaul*, but a rather neutral one. She does not like to spend too much money on clothes, but it sometimes happens that friends ask her why she is not paying more attention to her dress. Sita is not especially interested in fashion. She has now been wearing the veil for four years, on the one hand because she sees it as a religious obligation for women to veil, but also because it is simply the best alternative for her, as Sita tells me. Before, she said, girls living in Yogyakarta had to choose between the traditional Javanese lifestyle with all its implications and obligations, a very conservative, strictly religious Islamic lifestyle and a modern Western lifestyle and the negative image attached to it. Sita tells me that compared to traditional Javanese gender roles, wearing the veil gives her a lot more individuality and personal freedom to do what she likes. It allows her to say no to some of the obligations in the family and in the village. Traditionally, she tells me, if a member of your extended family asks you

for a favour you have to cancel all of your other plans, as this always has priority, except if perhaps you have to sit an exam. Now by veiling she says that she has somehow refused these traditional values and that the people respect this choice. Of course there are limits; she does not want to refuse everything, as she still likes her family. Sita tells me that she just could not deal with all the expectations that many people traditionally have of women. Even if she wanted to, she says, she could not become a real Javanese woman anymore; she did not have the full education to become one. This door is closed as she has lived and studied in the city for too long. The alternative of living a fully Western-oriented lifestyle does not seem very tempting either, Sita says, because what is seen as Western lifestyle in Yogyakarta means dressing in a sexy manner, spending a lot of time and money in shopping malls, going to bars and discos and hanging out with boys. By wearing the veil, she tells me, she benefits from a good image and certain autonomy at the same time. People can more easily see who she is, as the signs she communicates by her clothes are understandable. People will see her as a modern Muslim woman with certain a autonomy, but still strong principles and moral. That is, at least, how Sita wants to be seen.

As discussed in the previous section, many parents nowadays support the choice of their child when they want to start veiling because they think that the veil will protect them from immoral actions. The veil is however not accepted by all parents and especially older members of the Javanese society, because as Brenner notes: “Jilbab may be seen by some parents as threatening because it seems to announce that the standards of morality, religious practice, and social behaviour passed down from parents to their children, are perceived by the children themselves as faulty. According to the conventions of Javanese hierarchy, knowledge and moral guidance should be passed from parents to children – not vice versa – while the latter are expected to reciprocate with deference and acknowledgment to their parents’ superior wisdom” (1996: 682).

Nowadays the trendy veil is however accepted by most parents as it is not perceived as something opposing traditional values anymore, that is to say one can nowadays be very traditional and Javanese and still wear a veil. The assumption that the veil helps girls to become more autonomous has therefore to be qualified. There seem to be Muslim girls who do not wear a veil who are very autonomous and veiled girls who are very traditional. Once again, with the popularisation of the trendy veil this aspect of the veil has, in my eyes and according to my observations, become unstable. The point of opposition towards traditional Javanese values seems however still to be true for the girls wearing a longer veil or a *cadar*. The dialectic relationship between the “constraining” and “liberating” potentials of the veil is more complex than might be suggested by its appearance. By veiling I suggest a woman does not only gain autonomy, but also enters a new field of control.

Brenner notes in this context: “Greater autonomy does not necessarily mean greater freedom: veiled women often become more constrained in their actions than they should otherwise have been. Jilbab promotes rigorous self-discipline and self-consciousness; it serves as a perpetual, bodily reminder for the wearer of her commitment to be a dutiful Muslim. A

woman realizes, moreover, that by wearing jilbab she is placing herself under the constant scrutiny of others. She knows that if she is caught in any kind of behavioural misstep she is likely to be doubly censured – first, by other religious Muslims who insist on a lifestyle that conforms completely to their understanding of Islamic doctrine; and second, by people who are not particularly devout but who are eager to point to the hypocrisy of those who are” (Brenner 1996: 688). Brenner’s assumption that the constraints one has to face after starting to veil are very serious and not to be neglected were confirmed by some of my interview partners.

Lena, the pretty girl who only started to wear a veil a few months ago told me that she is now especially careful with her behaviour, as people should not think that she is not really serious about wearing a veil. She feels that she now has to be especially cautious about her interaction with men. But also she told me that she makes sure not to talk or laugh too loud or to gossip extensively about other people.

A friend of mine, Andari, had stopped wearing the veil for this reason, that is, because she felt too controlled and restricted while veiling. People already watch you and the social control in Yogyakarta is already high, but it becomes even stronger if you wear a veil. By wearing a veil you can be identified as a Muslim woman and have to set a good example, thus you should uphold the good image of Islam. One day in a shopping mall, Andari told me, she could not stand the pressure any longer, when she had started to veil she had done so to become a better person, but she told me she then realized that she did not need the veil for this, so she went to a changing room and took her veil off. Afterwards she felt really free, she told me, although she was criticized by many people and had to answer a lot of questions. She explained that many saw it as failure and rather for her it was not a failure, but a sign of personal strength and courage as she knew that she would have to answer several questions.

Not all the girls, especially many of those wearing a trendy veil, see the veil as something that restricts them in any way. They say that they did not have to change their behaviour, for example in interacting with males or going to malls or cafes. As mentioned earlier, there are however places in Yogyakarta where it is almost impossible to meet veiled girls, for example in discos.

There exists however a trend in Yogyakarta to wear a *jilbab alternatif*, an alternative veil. The goal of the wearers of this style of veil is to take away the social constraints, such as a specific behaviour, nowadays usually still associated with the veil. They may for example combine a veil with a T-Shirt, go to bars and smoke. In her thesis “Reading the group of veiled women as sub-culture” (*Membaca kelompok perempuan berjilbab sebagai komunitas sub-kultur*), Astuti (2005) writes about five women who want to veil but live their lives as women without veils do, not restricting their behaviour. It is however, as she writes, not easy for these women because the veil may signify something different to them than to those who observe them. Therefore, they are often criticised for their behaviour and have to justify themselves.

The general consensus seems to be that by wearing a veil one should adapt an appropriate

behaviour. To what extent this is done however depends on the model of veil, on who is watching and on the situation. In my presence Lena for example was still gossiping or laughing because perhaps she knew that I would not judge her.

On the topic of the veil as being constraining or liberating, I would like to mention shortly that the veil can also be compulsory to wear not only in other parts of the world but also in some regions of Indonesia, for example in Aceh, and for all Muslim school children in Padang. There are more places in Indonesia where school children have to veil. Along with the *otonomi daerah* (the regional autonomy) more freedom was given to the Indonesian provinces and regions, and subsequently a mayor of a city can now decide that the veil is compulsory for school children, such as in Padang. Besides these regional areas the veil is also compulsory in most of the Islamic schools and universities in Indonesia. When the veil is compulsory and not a matter of personal choice, the attitude towards the veil also changes dramatically, as it really becomes an accessory or simply a part of the school uniform. It is therefore very common for students studying at Islamic universities to take the veil off after leaving the campus or to wear it in a way that would cause gossip, an especially sexy style of veil is therefore often called the *jilbab UII*, because this private Islamic university is infamous for girls dressing more revealingly and wearing veils, but many of them taking the veil off after class and going clubbing in the evening. At UGM I was told that as such behaviour would cause a lot of gossip, it would then be better to not wear a veil at all. I would therefore say that in UGM the association of veil and “good” behaviour is still strong, as students see it as a free choice to veil; but when one decides to veil, the students generally expect a certain behaviour. Because of this expectation from wider society, students also quite often see veiling as a way of becoming a better person and it seems that one is deliberately entering this field of control. This strategy of construction of identity through veiling and the associated form of self control shall be the topic of the next chapter.

7.3 Islamic lifestyle and self control

I have tried to show that at least some girls tend to impose a new discipline upon themselves that is tied to no particular institution or figure of authority, but mainly to a group of peers and society in general. The traditional Javanese gender roles as Brenner (1995) describes them in “Why Women Rule the Roost” seem therefore to be reversed as the woman is seen as being able to discipline herself whereas the man is seen as unable to control his sexual desire and behaviour.

In her text “Reconstructing Self and Society” Brenner develops the assumption that there seems to be a tendency of a rather new, strong femininity linked to the veil and with it in the women’s body. It does not seem to be a sexualised and emotional one, but rather a femininity of self-control, discipline and strong principles (1996: 688). I only agree with this assumption to a certain point. In my eyes this might still be true for the category of girls wearing long veils or *cadars*, however the students with the trendy veils only fit this image to a certain

extent. If one goes to a shop like *Karita* I described above and sees all the fancy veils and accessories, I do not agree that self-discipline applies to this context. The girls walking around there are too excited about all of the accessories and stylish veils, matching them with belts and handbags and it is akin to any other instance of girls buying any other good for consumption and to make themselves look prettier. Also, when I see some of them dating their boyfriends or driving through the city on their motorbikes with friends giggling, I do not agree with Brenner in that with the veil becoming popular a new disciplined femininity has emerged. My assumption is that with the spreading of the trendy veil, the tendency of new femininity that Brenner found in the 1990s when she conducted her fieldwork was challenged as the general image of the veil started to change with the emergence of the *jilbab gaul* in the new millennium. It does therefore not seem appropriate for me to talk about a different form of femininity in reference to the veil. I would state that different femininities have emerged, reaching from very self-disciplined to shallow, emotional and playful.

One other thing in the context of veil and femininity is noteworthy: Many students, for example Azzah, a student of anthropology, told me that she likes to veil because it makes her look older and grown-up. Also Wulan, one of my friends I was teaching with when I was in Padang for seven months, had started to wear a veil after becoming a lecturer at *Andalas* University. She told me that otherwise she would look like a student but by wearing a veil she would at least look slightly older. The fact that the veil is often associated with being grown-up is in my opinion because often girls only start veiling when they are a bit older. I was told by Ibu Hindun, the lecturer of Arab studies, that at UGM about half of the girls only start veiling after the first semester. This association of the veil as a sign of adulthood seems to be in flux as we can nowadays see young girls wearing coloured veils with comic characters such as Mickey Mouse or Daisy on them. Also it is quite common to see children in primary school already wearing a veil.



Little girl wearing a veil. In: Paras, September edition 2005, p. 33.

Normally very young people, I was told, also want to wear a veil because they think that it is fun and probably want to imitate their older siblings or their mothers. There are however also some parents who try to convince their children that it is good and attractive to veil, to make

them get accustomed to the veil even before they get their first period¹³. The fact that there are little girls of three, four or five years wearing veils seems to be seen as cute. In the group discussion with the foreign students this was however seen as a problem and, even worse, as oppression, especially in the eyes of two Australian girls. The Indonesians did however not see this practice as problematic or a sign of force against the free will of these children. For them this was fine and somewhat cute.

7.4 The veil and the separation of space in the Javanese context

“Dress in general, but particularly veiling, is privacy’s visual metaphor” (El Guindi 1999: 96). According to El Guindi the veil, veiling patterns and veiling behaviour are about privacy, sanctity and the interweaving patterns of worldly and sacred life (1999: 96).

El Guindi has analysed Arab culture about its notions of privacy and has linked this to the practice of veiling (1999: 77-96). She argues that in Arab culture, the worldly and sacred lives are rhythmically interwoven by linking women as the guardians of family sanctuaries and the realm of the sacred in this world. She continues by saying that “for the centrality of the cultural notion of privacy, as one that embodies the qualities of reserve, respect and restraint as these are played out in fluid transformational bi-rhythmic space” (1999: 96). In the Arabic world, she writes, privacy is based on a specific cultural construction of space and time central to the functioning of Islamic society in general, in the dynamics of Arab gender identity, and for direct unmediated individual or collective communication with God. What El Guindi writes is a distinctive quality of the Islamic construction of space and how it turns a public area into a private space. An ordinary place such as the street, a shop or an aircraft aisle can be converted into a sacred space simply by marking it and occupying it in a ritually pure state facing Mecca (1999: 77-78). During the course of the day, individuals move between worldly and sacred spheres. El Guindi sees this best described as fluidity of space and rhythmic patterns of time that interweave throughout the ordinary day (1999: 79). In regard to the Indonesian context, Swastika writes about the hybridisation of the worldly and the sacred spheres. She tries to explain the two spheres overlapping in the daily life of young Muslims.

¹³ I once joined a seminar on Islamic parenting, where the topic was how to educate children in accordance to Islamic values. One question that was asked was when one should start to make a little girl become used to the veil and at what age it was good to start veiling. One of the professor’s answers was that it was good to start to veil the child as soon as possible, but only at special occasions such as religious festivities or other formal occasions. One should however never force a child to veil, but on the other hand make sure that the veil is associated with positive experiences. The child should want to veil. It is therefore good to start veiling for particular occasions and then slowly make the child become accustomed to the veil so that she sees it as something normal and is finally ready to wear it constantly at the time the girl gets her first period. He emphasised however several times that one should not try to make children wear a veil by using negative appeals such as punishment, but should really pay attention in making it a positive experience. Allah should be seen as friendly, wanting the best for everyone and not as a punisher who wants to make our lives become difficult.

This happens mainly, she writes, because in Indonesia Islam has entered all sorts of spheres that were previously seen as worldly, such as TV, music, fashion products and many other areas. This melting together of the two spheres is the representation of a new form of Islam in Indonesia (Swastika 2003: 11).

“The paradigm public/private, and its corollary honour/shame, is the one most commonly imposed on Arab and Islamic cultural space to describe the division between the sexes” (El Guindi 1999: 79). The opposition of public and private in the link between space and gender as universal duality is however not appropriate for the context of Arab societies. Instead of this bipolarity, El Guindi suggests “privacy” as the notion that, in its transformational fluid form, embraces the Arab cultural construction of space that connects time to gender. Privacy is then seen as the need for individuals, families or other social groups to separate themselves from others at various times for certain well-defined activities (El Guindi 1999: 81). “Arab privacy does not connote the “personal”, the “secret” or the “individual space”. It concerns two core spheres – women and family. For both, privacy is sacred and carefully guarded. For women it is both a right and an exclusive privilege, and is reflected in dress, space, architecture and proxemic behaviour. (...) Arab privacy is about neither individualism nor seclusion. It is relational and public” (El Guindi 1999: 82).

The veil is therefore, according to El Guindi, a means for women to guard privacy. Also Mule and Barthel see the veil as a means that “allows them to cross gender boundaries without being penalized as intruders” (1992: 328). At the same time, they write, these gender boundaries are legitimized and strengthened and seem to reaffirm that the women’s proper place is at home. Similarly, the veil seems to offer them a practical solution to the problem of male harassment. Also, Brenner notes that it can be argued that the veil can serve women as a form of symbolic shelter that, as a portable extension of the secluded space of the home, enables them to enter public, male space without being subjected to criticism or harassment (Brenner 1996: 674).

I will now look at the argument that the veil serves as a means to guard privacy, developed by El Guindi, as well as at the argument that the veil can serve as a symbolic shelter for women to invade the public male dominated sphere firstly in the Javanese context, and then specifically for the students studying at UGM.

The argument that the veil has the practical effect of allowing women to move more easily through public space can, according to Brenner and also to my own observations, not simply be transferred to Java. Brenner notes that in Java women have rarely been confined to “private” or domestic spheres, nor has public space ever been considered as primarily a male domain. I also agree with Brenner in that veiling does not make it easier for women to earn a living outside of the house while maintaining social esteem and self-respect, as Mule and Barthel (1992: 328) seem to suggest. Added to this, I agree with Brenner that working outside the home is considered normal and acceptable for both sexes. Brenner then however continues by saying that “It appears that wearing jilbab is far more of a disadvantage than an advantage for those seeking secular types of employment. Because many Indonesians see veiling as

extremist, some employers will not hire a woman who veils” (1996: 675). At another point Brenner writes: “In Java veiling may actually hinder a woman’s freedom of movement; she may feel that certain places or actions are inappropriate for a woman who veils, leading her to restrict her own activities accordingly” (1996: 675). This might still have been true more than ten years ago, when Brenner conducted her fieldwork, however nowadays this has changed.

Whether one faces disadvantages because of the veil seems to depend very much on the model of the veil. Some of the girls wearing long veils still confirmed to me that there are still some fields where it would be hard or impossible for them to get a job, for example in the gastronomy or tourism sector, basically in many jobs where one stands in contact with foreign customers or has to be good-looking, communicative and representative, for example in sales jobs. There are however other jobs they told me where they are welcomed, such as in Islamic businesses (such as Islamic banks), or also in Islamic schools or in back offices of enterprises. By wearing a long veil, some doors seem to close and others seem to open. Generally they said they do not feel disadvantaged or excluded from many activities that they would like to join. They do not have to renounce anything.

In class, I did not feel there was a single girl wearing a long veil who told me that she had ever felt discriminated by a lecturer. On the contrary, I often perceived the girls wearing long veils as especially active during class. When I asked Miftah and her friends wearing long veils whether they thought that my observations were true, they said that this would generally apply, but that this was rather due to the influence of being active in a student organisation where one is also trained to speak in front of others. Brenner’s thesis that the veil is a disadvantage does not seem to be true for the girls wearing a long veil, at least not in the eyes of those who wear it. Some parents however still oppose the wish of their child to wear a long veil, for example by saying that they will not be able to find a good job.

The long veil as a means to guard privacy, as El Guindi proposes, seems to be applicable also in the academic context of UGM. Miftah, the KAMMI activist told me that she would be very ashamed if a boy saw her without her veil. She said that this would probably have the same effect as if someone saw me without clothes. For her, the covered parts of the body seem to be very private. She also told me the story of a friend of hers who started crying after a man had entered her boarding house without asking permission and had seen her without the veil. This friend told me she was very ashamed and felt that she had lost something.

This concept of privacy can also be found among the girls wearing the *cadar*. They did not even take the veil off in front of me because, as I am not a Muslim woman, they think that I should not see their hair either. They see their body as very private as well and as something they want to hide. To the girls wearing the *cadar*, Brenner’s statement that the veil is “more of a disadvantage than an advantage for those seeking secular types of employment” (1996: 675), still seems to be true. When I asked Nisa what most of the women she knows wearing a *cadar* do, she told me that they usually stay at home, study Arabic, read the Koran and care for their children. She said that they generally tend to avoid leaving the house because many feel uncomfortable or are afraid. In the case of the women wearing the *cadar*, it seems that the

cadar is not a means to protect them from harassment but rather causes harassment.

If Brenner's statement is still true for girls wearing the *cadar* and, to a certain extent, for those wearing long veils, it is not so for the girls wearing the trendy veil. The trendy veil does not really seem to be an obstacle to finding a job anymore; however, I was made aware that there are still some companies that favour unveiled girls or do not accept veiled girls as employees. One example in Yogyakarta would be the fast-food chain KFC or some of the larger international hotels. In most companies I was told that it was no disadvantage to wear a trendy veil. As previously mentioned, some companies make their female staff wear a veil, such as Islamic clothes stores. There are even hair dressers who wear veils, specialising in styling the hair of women who veil. Some jobs seem to be only for unveiled women, but there are also many in Yogyakarta that are exclusively for veiled ones. This fact shows us that wearing a veil is no longer a marginal practice in Java, as Brenner still wrote in 1996 (685), but is nowadays largely accepted, at least in regard to the trendy veil.

The question whether a woman wants to guard her privacy by veiling cannot be answered for the category as a whole. I would say that some women veil for this reason, but by no means all. This also becomes obvious when I am told that the veil is not always worn when receiving male guests at home or quickly going to the neighbours' house, or getting food in the *warung*, the nearby food stall. To what extent the veil in this category serves to guard one's privacy varies very much. If I see girls walking around with veils displaying their ponytails, earrings and neck and combine it with a tight shirt clearly revealing the shape of the breast, I do not think that guarding their privacy, as El Guindi suggests, is their reason for veiling.

El Guindi's assumption of the veil as a symbolic shelter to guard privacy of as well as Brenner's assumption that this does not apply at all to the Javanese context and that the veil is more of a disadvantage, both have to be qualified and looked at separately for the different models of veils.

Considering the continuum of veiling at Gadjah Mada University, which runs from *cadar* to the very attractive coloured veil combined with tight clothes, there seems to be a large variety of how veiling and the idea of *hijab*, of religious modesty, are still applicable. With the new form of trendy veil the religious connotation of the veil as something that divides the sexes and guards one's modesty seems to be becoming unstable, as many of the decorative new veils can look very attractive, not concealing or domesticating female sexuality but instead giving it an intriguing new face. Thus, the symbolic character of the veil serving as a barrier between the two sexes becomes vague.

Young Muslim women, as shown in this chapter, constantly negotiate between apparently competing identity discourses on offer by filtering, synthesizing and choosing (Nilan and Feixa 2006: 3). I do not perceive that the students I interviewed are living in different worlds or inbetween two worlds where they constantly have to choose one side or the other. They live in a single, hybrid world, where something new is created through the combination of existing patterns. The new models of trendy veils seem to make it possible to combine what

has long been seen as oppositional, and therefore allow new gender roles. In the next chapter I will discuss this construction of an Islamic lifestyle in the context of youth culture.

8 Islamic youth culture – a lifestyle

In the constant process of hybridization in Javanese society young people play a central role. Nilan and Feixa point to youth cultures as laboratories for hybrid cultures (2006: 2). No matter where in the world, the lives of young people fit less and less within a linear model of change. The transitions between education and work, dating and mating, and childhood and adulthood are increasingly prolonged (Nilan and Feixa 2006: 7). As a consequence participation in youth cultures can no longer be characterized as a brief period, restricted to a limited period in the teens and early twenties. The late modern extension of youth culture practice has to be taken in two chronological directions, downwards towards late childhood and upwards towards the mid- to late-thirties (ibid. 7).

My interest in this chapter lies in the social construction of identity where young people take an active role. Like young people everywhere, their construction of local youth style signifies the fractured process of identity-formation in an uncertain world. Islamic faith may provide a strong and reassuring sense of certainty to those youths committed to it, but there are other aspects of their lives to be negotiated which are not as easily ordered by religious faith alone. Because of the rapid socio-economic transformation, transitions to adulthood are increasingly fractured (Nilan 2006: 92).

8.1 Identity in a hybrid world

Young Muslims combine, as discussed in previous chapters, lifestyle characteristics, such as consumption practices, with religious faith. They do, however, not frame their identities in relation to Western lifestyle products and trends but also in relation to influences of global Islam. Young Muslims thus draw upon religious law at the same time as on global popular trends to create hybrid youth products and practices that serve to anchor the young person securely in the world of Islam and teen popular culture (Nilan 2006: 107). A market for Islamic products was therefore able to develop where Islamic lifestyle products are sold such as Islamic magazines, *nasyid* music, clothes, *halal* cosmetics, stickers or pins. Young people in Indonesia, as elsewhere, have therefore no choice but to choose. By choosing what they consume, young people construct their identity, for example as young, trendy, Muslim and Indonesian. According to Nilan, Islamic youth culture in Indonesia constitutes a “third space” that is not shared by non-Muslim Indonesian age peers, Westerners or adults (2006: 93). They can thus construct their identity as fundamentally different from other Indonesian youths.

Clothes in general are very important for identity construction, especially among young people. According to Schulte Nordholt, clothes help us to make our individual bodies into

social beings and to communicate who we are. Clothes can be seen as our social and cultural skin (1997: 3). As veils are conspicuous symbols in framing one's identity they play an important role in identity construction and the construction of otherness. Young Muslims in Indonesia, for example the students of Gadjah Mada University, have different choices to express their identity, for example by wearing a certain model of veil. There is no neutral choice concerning the veil. As with any lifestyle the trendy Islamic lifestyle too is signalled by the body, "what you carry, where you go and what you do, how you speak and what you talk about, what music you prefer and who your heroes and heroines are" (Nilan 2006: 94).

Young Muslims select symbols and rituals of Islamic culture as well as symbols and rituals of Western culture. This form of hybridity, of combining global and local influences, challenges the assumption that cultural meeting points must signify relations of domination, this being the classic position of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, based on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. This view of "youth culture as resistance" proposes that the dominant groups in society, who possess the most valued forms of cultural capital, create and define hegemonic culture which serves to support and enhance their powerful position (Nilan and Feixa 2006: 9).

8.2 Performance of an Islamic lifestyle

I assume that the trendy veil is a testimony to how cultural forms are generated - allowing young women to express their multiple identities as fashionable Muslims. They shape it through acts of choices. To simply wear a veil is however not enough. Meaning, to the veil for example, is attributed through action. The attributed meaning is not stable but constantly changing depending on context. I adapt the idea held by Goffman that the world is a stage where all people merely play different parts (Turner 1994: xiii). According to Goffman, observers thus get clues from the conduct and appearance of others which allow them to apply previous similar experiences with other individuals to that which they observe - to apply stereotypes (Goffman 1959: 13). Information about the individual helps therefore to define a situation and one may therefore know how best to react within it. In the case of veiling, this may mean that when seeing a veiled girl one can tell that she is Muslim and act according to this by adapting one's behaviour, for example by not offering a pork sandwich to her or asking her to pet one's dog. "A "performance" may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1959: 26).

According to Goffman, information about an individual helps us to define a situation, as this enables us to know in advance what to expect (Goffman 1959: 13). It can thus be said that my interview partners may have projected stereotypes onto me when answering my interview questions and interacting with me, according to the assumptions they made about what I want to hear - for example by pointing out that the decision to veil is a personal one and emphasising that it is the will of Allah and written in the Koran. Some might have assumed

that freedom of choice is an important value for a young, Western girl or that I, as a non-Muslim, do not have a very profound religious knowledge. To underline this assumption, I want to give the example of my assistant who transcribed some of the interviews. When he returned one of the transcripts, he showed me proudly that he had printed two sayings in bold which he assumed were especially important for me, which were Koran verse citations concerning the veil. I explained to him that I knew of these verses already and that this was therefore not especially interesting to me. Interesting however is the underlying assumption of my interview partner who recited the Koran verses, as well as of my assistant who thought that this is new to me.

Goffman's idea stands in accordance with the approach of Cooley's looking-glass self, stating that we imagine how others see us and look at ourselves through the eyes of others and therefore adapt our strategies and therefore the meaning we attach (Helle 2006: 54).

I argue however that there is often a large discrepancy between what people say and what people do – between the discursive level and the level of practice. There are for example veiled girls who say that one should not veil and have a boyfriend, but do have a boyfriend, or boys who say that one should not drink alcohol but drink themselves. Especially when interviewing activists of student organisations or generally when the minidisc recorder was turned on, I had the impression that students often told me what they believe is normatively right, but these statements did not necessarily reflect everyday practices of youth culture. The answers I got in my interviews, I believe, thus do not reflect youth practices. To observe youth practices, I had to closely observe what people really do and how they really behave. I discovered out through my observations that, concerning the veil, there is also often a large discrepancy between what the wearer wants to express and the way it is seen and interpreted by the receiver. I see this as characteristic of the process of hybridity and a conception of identity, which lives within and through, not despite, difference. In the next chapter I will show how the image of the veil is becoming destabilised, as discourse and practice often do not harmonise anymore.

8.3 Destabilisation of meanings

At least at the discursive level that can be heard in UGM, the veil is still a symbol with strong religious connotations, meaning for example that by wearing a veil one is expected to behave in a certain way because, as mentioned in the Koran, one should guard one's modesty by veiling. However, on the level of everyday practice, its meaning and image is becoming increasingly contested and the trendy veil especially shows many characteristics of a common fashion accessory that has lost any religious connotation. A form of Islamic pop culture has developed that does seem to make everything become possible. One can be creative in constructing one's identity and "use" the veil and the good image attached to it to one's advantage.

Especially in the context of youth culture, social identity is constructed and constantly

negotiated. In the process of cultural interaction between the local and the global, young Muslims select and combine symbols in a creative way. This form of hybridity challenges the assumption that the veil has just a single meaning. As its meanings are constantly constructed and contested, the veil increasingly gains the characteristics of a common fashion accessory. Its meaning thus becomes detached from the religious connotations still connected to it, at least at the discursive level of some students of UGM. I will now give some examples of this process of destabilisation currently occurring.

As mentioned in the portraits about some girls wearing different models of veils, it is nowadays, at least at UGM, not yet well-regarded if one only wears the veil part-time. In other private Islamic universities in Yogyakarta, where the girls have to veil, it has already become quite common to only wear the veil when going to campus and to take it off afterwards. Standing in front of these campuses, for example UMI *Universitas Muhammadiyah Indonesia* or UII *Universitas Islam Indonesia*, one can observe how girls arriving on motorbikes put their veils on before entering the campus area and then take them off after leaving the campus. In these universities especially one can see girls who combine the veil with very revealing clothes. One friend also tells me that some of these girls sometimes smoke in cafes while wearing a veil. I think that in the long term this could become a common sight. Also it is becoming more and more common to see some veiled girls at concerts or staying out later at night. So far, there are however still no girls in discos wearing veils, at least to my knowledge.

The good image of the veil is further also used by some women as a kind of camouflage, for example by prostitutes. There seem to be many prostitutes in Yogyakarta who dress in an Islamic way, first, because they are not as easily recognised, but also because there is a market for veiled prostitutes. Some men seem to find veiled women especially attractive and erotic: the veil is thus specially worn to attract men rather than to protect one's modesty.

A further example of the meaning of the veil becoming increasingly destabilised are the veiled transsexuals in Yogyakarta, the *waria*¹⁴. Probably the most famous one in Yogyakarta is an alumni student of UGM who graduated in sociology and last year published a book that became a bestseller – “*Jangan lepas Jilbabku*” (Don't take my veil away) (Habiiballah 2005).

¹⁴ The word *waria*, as the transsexuals are often called, is derived from the Indonesian word *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man).



Shunniyya wearing a veil on the cover of her bestseller book. Shunniyya 2005.

As he or she sees himself or herself as a woman, Shunniyya says that he or she is obliged to veil and really wants to, as the veil is first of all a sign of femininity and a religious obligation for all women. Transsexuals wearing veils have become a rather familiar sight in Yogyakarta. One can argue that they actually are women and therefore have to veil, but there are also the “wrong” ones, as Shunniyya Habibiullah writes, who are actually gay and use the veil only to attract other gay men who like veiled, decent-looking women and to emphasise their feminine side.

These as well as the other examples however, show that the good image of the veil and also its connection to religious modesty is becoming subverted. The trendy veil in particular seems, in practices of everyday life, to show many characteristics of a common fashion accessory. Everything seems to be possible. I predict that this process will continue in the coming years and that the veil will lose much of its good image and religious connotation, although it will remain a symbol of adherence to Islam. I would not be surprised to see veiled girls in nightclubs, smoking or in company of their boyfriends in only a few years’ time.

9 Hybridisation between pop culture and Islam

9.1 Anybody can do anything

Within hybridisation seen as a process of cultural interactions between the local and the global, the veil, and with it other cultural forms, have become increasingly destabilised, as discussed in the previous chapter. As Islam has become part of an extensive consumer culture emerging in Indonesia, a form of Islamic pop culture has developed, with the veil as one of its most conspicuous symbols. I use the term “pop culture” to reflect the disappearance of

oppositions (Gemünden 1995: 235) and follow Andy Warhol's comment on pop: "The Pop idea, after all, was that anybody could do anything" (Warhol and Hackett 1990: 134). This definition of pop culture by Andy Warhol implies a notion of democracy; anyone can produce a masterpiece, taking its inspiration from the everyday (Gemünden 1995: 244). Applying this idea of one of the greatest pop artists to the changes to the face of Islam currently taking place in Indonesia, I use the term "Islamic pop culture" to show that a form of Islam has developed that does not stand in opposition anymore, neither to consumer culture, the local past, nor to the government, the West or the Islamic influences from the Middle East. Everything seems to be able to combined with anything. One can be creative in constructing one's identity as young, Muslim, a fan of the rock band Metallica and as Javanese. It is not necessary to exclusively select anymore. Everything becomes possible. The neon pink sticker on one's motorbike helmet, worn over a bright green veil saying "Allah is Great" can appear alongside others stickers saying "I'm sexy" or "Punk". You can also eat at Mc Donald's before going to the mosque to pray and after that go home and watch the new episodes of the daily Islamic soap opera *Hidayah* and then an Indian Bollywood movie. It is all possible.

The fact that these Islamic lifestyle symbols such as CDs, VCDs, clothes, books, stickers and *halal* cosmetics are mass-produced and are consumed by a large number is a further characteristic often associated with pop culture. In my eyes however the central idea of pop culture is the constant process of destabilisation of meaning, allowing new hybrid forms.

I do not share the opinion that it has to have a radical or subversive side, which is an idea that can be found among many scholars writing about pop culture (Gmünder 1995: 238). Islamic pop culture in Indonesia however, I assume, does challenge conservative ideas. It offers especially young people a place to construct an alternative identity. I agree with Nilan and Feixa that there is often a "submerged" link between forms of pop culture and wider subversive social and political movements, but that this is "most frequently an affinity link rather than the impetus for planned formal expressions of political resistance" (2006: 10).

Up to what extent one can do anything one wants to and that everything becomes possible depends very much on one's point of view. This destabilisation of Islamic symbols, for example of the veil, currently taking place in Indonesia is also worrying to certain groups and the limit of what is still perceived as "Islamic" varies. To show some different opinions as to what extent this pop culture is still perceived as being "Islamic" I will convey the opinions of leaders of the four biggest Islamic student organisations in Indonesia, also active at Gadjah Mada University.

9.2 The limits of Islamic pop culture – Opinions of activists of Islamic student organisations

While doing my research, I interviewed activists of different Islamic student organisations and also had the chance to follow some of their activities such as book discussions and social events like for example eating out together.

At UGM there are four large active Islamic student organisations besides a few small ones. Their main difference is their understanding and interpretation of the Koran and Sunna, and this has consequences on how they dress, how they hold their meetings and how they interact. The aim of all four groups is to have influence on political decisions. To give an example, during the time I was in Yogyakarta from August 2005 to March 2006, the activists of all the organisations were demonstrating against the increase in the price of oil, whilst another issue about which they were all demonstrating was the liberalisation of the university law allowing universities from foreign countries to open in Yogyakarta. All of the activists I spoke to told me that it would be their aim to establish an Islamic state based on the *Sharia*, the all-embracing Islamic legal system (Robinson 1999: 66). The different ideas about how to implement the *Sharia* held by the different activists however varied very much.

Concerning the hybridisation process currently going on in Indonesia, they did not all approve of it in the same way. The most critical organisation towards this new form of Islamic pop culture was KAMMI. KAMMI is the acronym of *Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia* (Unity of action of Muslim students in Indonesia). This Islamic student organisation was founded in 1998, before President Suharto's resignation (Rahmanto 2005: 69).

KAMMI is the most formalistic of the larger Islamic student organisations. According to this organisation's members, the Koran should only be interpreted on the basis of the Koran, not by anyone, but rather by experts in Islamic jurisprudence. This requires knowledge of the whole scripture together with two fundamental principles established by earlier commentators. After attempting to interpret the Koran in the light of the Koran, exegetes should next turn to the Sunna as preserved in the *Hadiths* – reports of what the Prophet said, did, and tacitly approved or disapproved of (Robinson 1999: 67). In the opinion of KAMMI activists, not everyone is therefore allowed to interpret the Koran in his or her own way by using one's own reason. They follow the Koran in a very textual way and, concerning their tolerance of forms of Islamic pop culture such as the trendy veil, they do not see this to be conforming to Islamic teaching. As mentioned before, the female members of KAMMI wear long veils, long skirts and socks and according to KAMMI, girls wearing short veils and jeans have not yet understood Islam correctly. They do however also see a positive side to the trendy veil: that is, at least more and more people are beginning to veil and are hopefully getting used to it and are becoming interested in learning more about Islam. In other words, many activists perceive it as a step in the right direction. Despite this, critical voices can also be heard, for example saying that girls wearing short veils with revealing clothes, hanging around with boys will harm the image of Islam.

Many activists are also critical towards Islamic TV series, especially the ones that combine Islamic content with Javanese ghost stories, where Islamic prayers mainly serve to dispel ghosts. Such syncretistic TV productions are very popular in Indonesia but have also been sharply criticised. More textual organisations and Islamic intellectuals especially put pressure on the mainly private TV stations to put an end to such productions. Finally a compromise

was found: Now such syncretistic series can still be shown, but at the end of the broadcast an Islamic scholar gives a speech for about five minutes on the “real” values of Islam. This is just one example that shows how forms of Islamic pop culture are negotiated. KAMMI activists themselves also reject extensive consumption; they do not go to shopping malls and in general they avoid products from the West, such as food from Mc Donald’s, Western music or films. They do however have Nokia mobile phones and would not reject a scholarship to study in Switzerland.

They do not have problems with people who sell Islamic symbols commercially such as Aa Gym (Adullah Gymnastiar), who even sells motorbikes in the name of Islam. It is fine to earn money with Islamic products or also to use Islam as a marketing strategy, as long as the money that is earned is well invested and not used to display one’s wealth.

Generally they see this Islamic pop culture, and they acknowledged that there is such a phenomenon, as both good and bad. On the one hand Islam is promoted, but sometimes the symbols are “empty”, and because of this people have to learn more and be able to continue with the Islamic way of life. They say that a lot still has to be done and the members of the organisation will thus endeavour to led people to the “right way” and to fill the “empty” symbols with meaning.

The other three Islamic student organisations are not as textual as KAMMI in their interpretations of the Koran. The female activists of IMM for example wear trendy veils and jeans. IMM stands for *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* (Student Association of Muhammadiyah¹⁵). In the structure as it is today, IMM was founded in 1964, but existed before as a sub-organisation of Muhammadiyah (Rahmanto 2005: 71). Although IMM is an autonomous organisation of Muhammadiyah, the members of IMM as the cadre of Muhammadiyah are not uninfluenced by the discourses held by the members of Muhammadiyah concerning different matters. (*“Sebagai kader Muhammadiyah, anggota IMM tidak terlepas dari wacana yang muncul di kalangan internal Muhammadiyah dalam berbagai masalah”*).

The activists of IMM I met see in forms of Islamic pop culture a chance to promote Islam, wherein one should not try to evade from global influences. Veiling is seen as a religious obligation, the trendy veil, however, is fine and one should not exaggerate by wearing veils that are too long. Furthermore, the *aurat*, meaning the body except the hands and the face, should be covered and the veil should not be used to deliberately attract men. They explained that Islamic pop culture becomes problematic at the point in which it becomes fully detached

¹⁵ Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 in Yogyakarta as an organisation dedicated to Islamic modernism. As Gibson notes: “The sort of reformed Islam advocated by this movement stressed individual reason, learning from printed texts, the absolute authority of scripture, and a rejection of all “innovations” in ritual. It was particularly hostile to organized Sufi orders and even traditional schools of law, in both of which a pupil is expected to accept the authority of a master” (Gibson 2000: 52).

from Islamic values and beliefs. The veil for example should not just become a fashion accessory and should link up to one's actions, wherein one has to live according to Islamic values, be a good person, help others and believe in Allah. This is the most important issue and as long as one keeps these values in mind, one can combine a veil with jeans and listen to *nasyid* music or to anything else one likes. Generally these new forms have helped to make the image of Islam in general become friendly and trendy, so more people are attracted and hopefully more people want to learn more about Islam, IMM activists tell me.

Agus, one of the leaders of HMI from Gadjah Mada University I met, thinks that Islam has to be *gaul*, meaning trendy and sociable. The Islamic student organisation *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam* (Association of Islamic Students) was founded in 1947, just two years after Indonesian independence. It is the oldest Islamic student organisation in Indonesia (Rahmanto 2005: 52) and also the most heterogeneous one. According to HMI thought, the trendy (veil as one of the most conspicuous symbols of Islamic pop culture) seems to be a good way of making Islam become popular, and there is nothing wrong with this model of veil. Wearing a veil is a personal affair anyway and not a religious obligation. They state that one has to read and interpret the Koran in a contextual way, meaning that what is written in the Koran should be adapted to the contemporary situation and society. Agus points out that when the Prophet Muhammad lived, living conditions were different, and if he had lived in contemporary Indonesia a lot might have been different. He sees the veil, as well as other practices, as a pre-Islamic phenomenon and not as an "invention" of Islam. That is, the veil is one expression of hybridisation of the local culture with the new religion, wherein a local tradition was integrated into the new religion. He does therefore not perceive the practice of veiling as a religious obligation that a woman has to follow, but more as an Islamic symbol to state one's identity. From the very beginning Islam was a hybrid religion, as Muhammad did not live in a cultural vacuum. The contemporary forms of Islamic pop culture are therefore just the normal order of things and should be accepted and used to make Islam develop, to become and stay popular. Agus warns, however, against using Islamic symbols too extensively, as they can also serve to exclude others, as is the case for example when women wear long veils or *cadars*. In his eyes, exclusivity starts when social interaction with other people becomes limited ("*kalau pergaulannya menjadi terbatas*"). The spirituality has to be a social one, not one specific to a certain group ("*Islam harus terbuka spiritualitas, spiritualitas sosial, bukan spiritualitas kelompok atau komunitas tertentu*"). Everyone should be able to read and interpret the Koran as long as one is convinced that this interpretation is right and in accordance with the ideals of Islam¹⁶ ("*Interpretasi Al-Quran itu, bisa dilakukan secara bebas*

¹⁶ Also Ernest Gellner, among many others, shares the perception of Islam as an open source that can be read and understood in different ways. He writes in the foreword to the book "Islam, globalisation and postmodernity": "Christianity has its Bible belt: Islam is a Qur'an belt. So Islam became a kind of permanent or cyclical reformation" (Gellner 1994, xii).

siapapun orangnya selama dia yakin bahwa interpretasi terhadap Islam benar menurut dia, sesuai dengan cita-cita Islam”).

The activists of PMII *Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia* (Movement of Indonesian Islamic students) also see the phenomenon of Islamic pop culture mainly as a chance for Islam in general in Indonesia. PMII was born from the big Islamic organisation Nahdatul Ulama or NU that was founded in 1926. It took this organisation quite some time before it became autonomous in 1965 (Rahmanto 2005: 63). Hybridisation as a process of cultural transactions and assimilation with the local culture has always been one of the aims of NU as well as PMII. Contrary to Muhammadiyah, NU favoured syncretistic forms of Islam with the local Javanese culture and never understood the Koran in a very textual manner. Also, the activists of PMII believe, just as many members of HMI do, that already during the time of Muhammad Islam was influenced by the local culture of that period and place. Thus, today Islam should be adapted to contemporary circumstances. Concerning clothes, Imung, who holds quite a high position in PMII, tells me there are certain occasions when it may be suitable to veil, for example for demonstrating or for other formal occasions, but others where it would be disturbing, such as when the members of PMII go to spend a day on the beach. He says that this would be too hot for the body and therefore not something that is good. In these kinds of circumstances it is acceptable to wear simply a shirt and jeans, there is nothing wrong if one does not wear a veil, however the important thing is to guard the heart (*“Cukuplah memakai kaos, celana jins, jilbab ndak ditutup kan enggak salah, yang penting hati tetap kita jaga”*).

In regard to new Islamic commercial products such as TV series, books or cosmetics, PMII activists do not have any concerns. What is important however is that one lives in an Islamic way, meaning that one is a good person, helpful and always keeps the essential Islamic values in mind, otherwise one should rather not use Islamic symbols, such as the veil, because this would sully the image of Islam (*“mengotori Islam”*). What PMII wants is an “Islamisation” of Indonesia that is in accordance with the local traditions, and not “Arabisation” (*“Kembali ke yang diinginkan PMII, itu Islamisasi yang sesuai dengan tradisi-tradisi di Indonesia, bukan Arabisasi”*). Global influences from the Middle East should thus be adapted to the local tradition as well, just as global influences from the West should.

In the ongoing process of cultural interactions between the local and the global, Islam has become part of an extensive consumer culture. Within this process the meanings of Islamic symbols such as, for example, the veil have become increasingly destabilised. A form of Islamic pop culture has developed that does not stand in opposition anymore to consumptive practices, local traditions or global Islamic influences. These forms of pop culture are however currently challenging traditional ideas and, as showed in the example above, not everyone approves of this development, and many of those who do approve only do so to a certain extent. Positive as well as negative effects confront each other.

The destabilisation and hybridisation that have taken place shall in the next chapter be seen as part of a larger process of social change currently going on in Indonesia.

10 Islamic pop culture in a larger process of social change

The central question I ask in this chapter is: What does this ongoing process of Islamic pop culture reveal about Indonesia today? My aim is thus to observe the hybridisation taking place and with it the different forms of veiling in a larger process of social change. I believe that the phenomenon of Islamic pop culture and with it the trendy veil, as one of its most noteworthy expressions, tell us a lot about social transformations and social changes currently occurring in contemporary Indonesia. According to Frederick, just by looking at conventional data, one is only able to tell relatively little about such things as Indonesian populism, popular views of national character, or Islam in everyday life (1982: 104). He further notes that pop cultural phenomena illuminate the nature of the enormous change Indonesia has undergone in ways that other sources, especially quantitative ones, cannot (1982: 128). Keeping this in mind I assume that young people in particular, who also are the focus of this research, play an important part in transformation processes. Furthermore I agree with Nilan and Feixa that youth cultures can be seen as laboratories for hybrid cultures (2006: 2). The study of young people in particular can thus reveal social changes such as the hybridisation processes taking place in Indonesia giving birth, for example, to Islamic pop culture.

However, I do not want to take too functionalist an approach and I agree with Schulte Nordholt that clothes in general, and with it different models of veils, cannot only be seen as a reflection of social structure (1997: 2). Such an approach would ignore the role of individual actors and can therefore not explain the constant process of change taking place; it would seem too static and inappropriate for explaining the constant negotiation, construction and reconstruction taking place in a very dynamic environment such as a student campus.

I suggest however that by looking at the different practices of veiling, some significant trends in Indonesian Islam become visible. This shall be the topic of the next section.

10.1 Trends in Indonesian Islam

The most obvious trend in Indonesian Islam is, as discussed in previous chapters, its image shift towards a trendy, fashionable and adaptable religion. Islam has developed a colourful, friendly face. Concurrent with this image shift, a large market for Islamic products has emerged and Islam has become compatible with consumer society.

Islam in Indonesia, as elsewhere in the world, can only be understood in the context of dynamic cultural processes in an age of globalisation. Within the process of hybridisation of local and global influences, many practices that were long seen as oppositional have become compatible. As discussed in previous chapters, the Muslim students of UGM employ a range

of strategies to negotiate their individual identities in a hybrid environment where global influences meet local traditions, and their distinctive youth culture includes both religious law and global popular cultural trends (Nilan 2006: 91). I disagree therefore with Brenner's statement that: "Veiling and its attendant values and practices, however, reflect a deepening religiosity rather than an advancing secularisation, which links them to a vision of modernity that is also conceived in contrast to Western models – an alternative modernity" (1996: 674). First, as previously discussed, I do not agree that the veiling movement in Indonesia stands in contrast to "Western models" and do not perceive veiling and "Western models" as oppositional. I agree with Nilan that contemporary Indonesian Islam is being synthesized with some of the lifestyle characteristics of late modernity (Nilan 2006: 92). As the example of the trendy veil clearly shows, consumer practices no longer stand in opposition to Islam anymore.

Furthermore, I do not think that the term "secularisation" is a useful concept in the context of Indonesia, as the term secular is used to describe things that have no connection with religion and secularized societies are no longer under the control of influence of religion (Collins Cobuild English dictionary 1995: 1498). Religion still does play a very important role in Indonesia, not only at the level of everyday life practices, but also at a political and legal level. It is still compulsory in Indonesia to adhere to one of the five legal religions as this is one of the five pillars of the state ideology *Pancasila*. At the political level, for example in election campaigns, religion and especially Islam are important parameters in the choice for a party. A candidate thus has to position himself or herself in the religious discourse currently taking place. There is no neutral choice concerning Islam. It does thus make a difference whether politicians wear Muslim clothes or not and, for women, whether they veil or not. Also, at a political level, clothes are a statement. Of course it is nowadays, as it was already in the 1982 election campaign (Frederick 1882: 129), very important to gain the support of Islamic stars, such as artists or singers, to promote the party candidates and the program. Islamic pop culture is thus also reflected in the political process and Indonesia seems far from becoming a secular country.

Also, in everyday life practices the concept of "advancing secularization" does not seem appropriate and maybe never has applied to young people such as the students of Gadjah Mada University. Religious practices still play a central role in this domain and I assume that it is not possible to separate everyday life practices from religion. The students do not live in two worlds, in a religious one and in a secular one, and neither do they constantly "switch" between the two; I suppose that they live in one hybrid world where the spheres are overlapping and melting together. Here the trendy veil is once again a good example.

I do not agree with Brenner's idea either that "veiling and its attendant values and practices, however, reflect a deepening religiosity" – simply because nowadays 55 – 60 percent of the female students of UGM are veiled, and veiled women do not "remain a distinct minority of the population" (Brenner 1996: 674) anymore, this does not mean that only by wearing a veil one becomes more religious and that therefore Indonesian women are nowadays more religious than ten years ago, when only around ten percent were veiled. Such a linear

correlation seems unable to reflect the complexity of a multi-layered phenomenon such as veiling.

The question as to whether Indonesians have become more or less religious with the rise of Islamic pop culture is however very difficult to answer. I asked many of my interview partners this question and received quite diverse answers. The problem is that piety or spirituality is something that is difficult, if not impossible, to measure, as it is something very personal and subjective. I was told that the quality of religious education has improved over the last few years and that more people engage in religious activities such as studying together. This fact alone cannot however be taken as an indicator either, because many people join such study groups mainly for social reasons and not only for religious ones. What can be said is that Islam in Indonesia has become very diverse and within this diversity it is possible for Muslims to construct and express their individual identities in very different and creative ways. The great change that has taken place is that it has become fashionable in contemporary Indonesia to show that one is Muslim. As there are more and more diverse Islamic symbols, there are nowadays many ways to display one's religion on the body.

An Islamic pop culture, in which everything is possible, has however also led to an oppositional trend. Many of my interview partners told me that Islamic groups promoting very formalistic forms of Islam are becoming increasingly popular as well. One example of a very textual and formalistic oriented student organisation with strong support is KAMMI. Despite the fact that it was only founded in 1998, it has already become one of the four biggest student organisations and is still growing rapidly. Girls especially are attracted to join. Also, the often described as radical Islamist party PKS *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Justice and Prosperity Party), with KAMMI as its youth movement, is becoming very powerful in Indonesia and many students, and also some professors I talked to, predicted that this party will win the next election campaign.

There seem thus to be two major trends observable in today's Islam in Indonesia. On the one hand it is becoming very adaptive, friendly and compromising, but on the other hand one can observe a counter trend, wherein Islam is becoming stricter, more textual and rigid. I do perceive it as a counter trend because I see it as a reaction to some of the expressions of Islamic pop culture.

I want to emphasise, however, that Islam in Indonesia, as elsewhere in the world, is very diverse. As people become more and more individualistically oriented and have more space to be creative, religion diversifies and I assume that Islam in Indonesia will become even increasingly diverse in the future.

10.2 Construction of otherness

Beside the fact that it is becoming increasingly trendy to show that one is Muslim by using religious symbols such as the veil, stickers or pins, another phenomenon taking place is the

process of constructing otherness. Non-Muslims are excluded from the Islamic life style. Even though Christians also have trendy stickers and pins, according to my observations they do not have as many means to express their religious identity as Muslims have. Muslims are furthermore also favoured at the political level as they form the largest group of the population. It is not surprising that the new forms of Islamic pop culture also have discriminating aspects, even though this is actually against the idea of pop that I follow, that is, that everything is possible. To play and be creative with Islamic symbols is reserved for Muslims. It is not common at all for Christian or Hindu students to veil, to read Islamic youth magazines or to attend *nasyid* concerts. They are thus excluded. Not only are they excluded from this Islamic lifestyle, but also they do not gain advantages from the good image that especially veiled girls still benefit from, as discussed in earlier chapters. Vera, a Catholic girl told me that non-Muslims are often associated with an easy lifestyle and loose sexual morals, with staying out late, going clubbing and consuming alcohol.

Many of the non-Muslim students however do not say that they feel strongly discriminated against, but nevertheless still highlight some points. One thing often mentioned was the fact that there is a large mosque on the campus of UGM and praying halls in every faculty, but no church for example. Besides the Islamic student organisations, there are also Catholic and other religious student organisations who claim more rights and equality for their religion, but not very successfully.

Formal dialogue, for example in the form of public discussions or seminars between the student organisations of different religions, seems to be almost nonexistent at UGM. During the time I was there, not a single common inter-religious event was held, while there were many discussions with members of the different Islamic student organisations. Also in the compulsory university subject religious education (*pendidikan agama*), the students are divided into groups and only learn about their own religion. Learning about another religion is seen as a sign that one might abandon one's own community. I was for example asked by many whether I wanted to become a Muslim or whether it was fine for my parents that I was interested in Islam. The students' knowledge about other religions is as a consequence of this separation quite limited, as everything else is seen as potentially dangerous and often perceived as wrong.

Mbak Lucy, the founder of the Institute for Research and Support of Women and Children told me that this narrow-mindedness might one day lead to serious problems in Indonesia. In her opinion this attitude of mainly ignoring other religions should be corrected before it is too late. She would prefer, she told me, that her child, still in primary school, would learn more about other religions to promote tolerance in society. Lucy, who is herself a Muslim, thinks that now there is still time to act, at least in many places in Indonesia. What she sees as problematic in daily life, for example, is the tendency to force Islamic school children to veil, even in state schools, as this has been made possible since 2001 with the policy of the *otonomi daerah* (regional autonomy), where more freedom was given to the Indonesian provinces and regions. She says that according to her observation and experiences it causes a

lot of problems if almost all school children are veiled, but only a small non-Muslim minority is not. These children often feel uncomfortable and excluded, or sometimes want to veil themselves, which is often not accepted by their parents.

The now emerging forms of Islamic pop culture and the fact that the veil is becoming more and more popular in Indonesia not only have positive sides. It also seems to lead to a strong construction of otherness as it becomes popular to use Islamic symbols. In its extreme form, this process may lead to discrimination of non-Muslims and cause social problems. I do however not want to predict problems, as I think that it is more likely that religious symbols like the veil will lose part of their good image and with it their power to construct otherness, as their meanings become increasingly unstable. I hope and am confident that young people will become aware of this if the situation becomes problematic, and will act by creating new hybrid forms, by integrating different influences from different religions.

10.3 Individualisation: Lu lu – gue gue

The saying “lu lu – gue gue” (you you – me me), that has become even more popular in recent years, reflects the process of increasing individualisation currently going on in Indonesia. This saying means that “you do your things and are responsible for yourself and I do my things in my own way”. According to Antariksa, who writes articles for *Kompas* and is one of the founders of the cultural studies centre in Yogyakarta, even small children use this saying to express their own individuality and own choice. Individuality has become increasingly important in Indonesia.

Islamic pop culture is one among many phenomena in contemporary Indonesia that underline this process of individualisation in a larger social context. As veils and Muslim clothes have been influenced by the fashion industry, it is easily possible to express one’s identity and to define and describe oneself by what one wears. Veils and Muslim clothes in general are nowadays far from being a uniform that serves to make everyone equal. As discussed in previous chapters, it is quite possible to display one’s status or adherence to a certain community by wearing Muslim clothes. It is nowadays possible to be a hip-hop girl and veil or to use symbols of black metal music such as black long clothes, black make up and combine it with a black veil. It is all possible. Different models of veils are no longer obstacles but, on the contrary, can be used to create, recreate and negotiate one’s identity.

According to Abdullah and Sairin, since the beginning of the 1990s the tremendous impact of globalisation has changed the population’s mode of consumption. This was the time when in Yogyakarta, as well as in almost every city and town, supermarkets and shopping malls emerged. The urban population in particular thus used global products as instruments to articulate their class and group identity to differentiate themselves (2003: 104-105). Through the marketing industry new forms of taste and style were created. Local taste was mixed with global influences. This hybridisation of local taste and global influences can, for example,

easily be observed when visiting Mc Donald's: rice can be chosen to go with a Big Mac, and many people do choose rice, often however not instead of fries but as well as fries, as potatoes are not seen as a replacement for rice in Indonesia. The hybridisation of food and taste in the process of globalisation offers a very interesting field for further study. Regarding Islamic pop culture, I would like to agree with Abdullah and Sairin that with the emergence of a large advertising industry "individuality or at least group or class solidarity" (2003: 115) have been favoured. Individuality, I assume, was also promoted with the emergence of Islamic pop culture and that of the new trendy forms of veils that allow women to show that they are Muslim, but at the same time have a very distinct identity. Many students I interviewed see it as shameful when they wear the same veil as someone else and there seems even to be strong pressure to be individualistic.

I also want to emphasise that Islamic pop culture could only emerge in a climate where individuality was already seen as important. Expressions of Islamic pop culture are possible only under the condition that an individual can be active and creative. The idea of pop, that everyone can do anything, implies the ability of creative agency. As I see young people especially as agents of such transformations, this implies that young people already have the choice, money, opportunity and will to create their own identity. Apparently this was not always the case in Indonesian society, but is a rather new phenomenon that only started to this extent in the 1990s, when the patterns of consumption and marketing strategies changed (Abdullah and Sairin 2003: 104). This is the time when I suggest that Islamic pop culture slowly became popular and "pop".

11 Conclusion

I have presented a picture of Indonesian pop culture which I believe transmits both a sense of complexity and of the detailed interrelations among its forms. As we have seen, each element in the kaleidoscope has its own distinctive characteristics, styles and manners. My aim has been to give the reader an anthropological framework to see Islamic pop culture and the different practices of veiling as one expression of it, in its sociocultural context, and to focus on the meaning and expressions Islamic practices take in especially young urban people's everyday lives. I started by looking at the ambiguity of veiling practices among students of Gadjah Mada University to show how global influences are assimilated in locality. In the successive chapters, I examined the important role history and government policy, the mass media, the economic situation, as well as gender perspectives, play in the formation process of an Islamic pop culture and the diverse expressions Islam finds in daily life practices among students.

In the different ways Islam is contemporarily expressed and lived, a hybridisation process is reflected that shows the challenges Indonesian Muslims face in integrating, rejecting or adapting global influences from the Western world as well as from the Islamic Middle Eastern

countries. The example of the trendy veil shows how these global influences are integrated in locality and how locality is assimilated with global trends. Young people in particular are creative in constructing their own identity as each variant of veiling embodies a different attitude towards Islam. What brings them together is a common social context in which no single element can be understood without reference to the others. The complexity of borrowing, avoidance, suppression and irony, as we have seen, takes us beyond this purely formal and structuralist insight. Within a certain frame, individuals find creative ways and play an active role in constantly constructing and reconstructing meanings of symbols, for example of the veil. My aim has thus been to show how political and social tensions affect religious expressions, how they shape and mutate it, without neglecting the especially active role the youth plays in this very dynamic process.

This study on the varieties of expression Islam finds in Javanese society stands in a long tradition of a number of excellent studies such as Beatty (1999), Brenner (1996), Geertz (1960, 1984), Gibson (2000), Hanneman and Schulte Nordholt (2004), Hefner (1987, 1993, 1999, 2002), Howell (2001), Hudson (1986), Muzakki (2005), Van Dijk (1997), Woodward (1989) and many others. Many of these works, however, have one weakness in common: they tend, to a greater or smaller extent, to present local Javanese tradition as well as Islam as static and homogenous. Usually if change and transformation processes are described, this is done under consideration of external influences or structural changes, for example in politics, that then have an influence on the varieties of expressions Islam finds. The important role that the active and creative individual plays within these structural constraints is very often neglected, if not omitted. It was my aim to integrate this aspect of individual agency without neglecting structural constraints in the analysis. Besides the simply practical reason that, as an exchange student, I benefited from my ideal position for doing participant observation, I also chose to focus on students as I perceive them to be a particularly active social group and a driving force in the process of social change. In many studies, for example in Geertz's (1960) famous book of "The Religion of Java", one may furthermore gain the impression that there exist three religious variants and that the practitioners inhabit separate worlds, with each being consistent in his or her separate identity (see also Beatty 1999). My interest lies in the compromise and ambivalence which cannot be captured by a categorical opposition. I start with the idea that many students take elements from different traditions and also use global influences to constantly construct their identity – they constantly compromise, switch and make up daily life in mixed communities, where religious orientation is just one among many other parameters that define one's position in a fast changing world. It seems important to me to consider how religious orientations influence other spheres of social life, for example how it affects attitudes towards consumption. I agree with Beatty in the point that a strictly typological approach, which many authors on Javanese religiosity have taken, cannot register this kind of complexity (1999: 115-116).

With my study on Islamic pop culture in Indonesia, shown through the veiling practices among students of Gadjah Mada University, I hope to have made a small contribution to the

large and very diverse field of studies in transformation processes and religious diversity in Javanese society. By taking the veil as a concrete example of showing how global influences are assimilated in locality and how students use religious symbols to construct their identities, I also want to react to simplistic and often ethnocentric explanations that associate women's veiling almost exclusively with seclusion and patriarchal suppression and control. I hope to have been able to show that the veil is a more complex symbol and that the meaning attributed is not endemic to the veil itself but rather produced through cultural discourse and vast networks of social relationship (Read and Bartkowski 2000: 397). Its meaning is thus often fluid and changing depending on the context and may find many diverse expressions in everyday life practice.

One important omission that I have made myself and that, according to Howell, many researchers make who study Islam and "Islamic revival"¹⁷, as she calls it, is that I have mainly focused on the so-called "outer" (*lahir*) expression of Islam (Howell 2001: 701). According to her, "outer" expressions of the "Islamic revival" are the growing numbers of mosques and prayer houses, the increasing popularity of veils among Muslim women and school girls, and the increasing usage of Islamic greetings. "This kind of representation of Indonesian's Islamic revival", Howell notes, "failed however to call attention to the increasing popularity of Islam's "inner" (*batin*) spiritual expression, that is, to what I will call, following popular Indonesian contemporary usage, the revival's Sufi¹⁸ side" (2001: 701-702). Also among some students studying at Gadjah Mada University, Sufi practices are common and popular; there are special communities and also many individuals who still engage actively in learning and also teaching Sufi practices.

I agree with Howell that Sufism is becoming trendy in Indonesia, especially among the young generation and women (2001: 703). On TV special Sufi series are broadcasted and Indonesian pop bands, for example *Padi*, use Sufi texts in their songs; also in the large Indonesian book store *Gramedia* books on Sufism sell well. Because this research on Islamic pop culture has not sufficiently focused on traditional Javanese expressions of Islam, it would be promising to

¹⁷ I do not think that the term "revival" is appropriate in the Indonesian context, as it suggests that Islam was once stronger in the past, then became weaker and is now returning again. The expressions of Islam have changed over the time, but I would not call this process an "Islamic revival".

¹⁸ According to Howell many different senses have been attached to the term "Sufi" in Indonesia as elsewhere. The term Sufi only came into common use in Indonesia in the 1970s. She uses the term not only its in the West common use as "Islamic mysticism" or "Islamic esotericism", but in a broader sense as the interiorization and intensification of Islamic faith and practice. Conventional cultural practices that she identifies with the Sufi tradition are for example pilgrimages to saints' graves or *selamatan*, the Javanese ritual meal (2001: 702).

see which kind of mystical, *kejawen*¹⁹ or Sufi practices are popular among students, who perform them, how they affect practices of daily life, and how such practices are assimilated in other global trends and Islamic influences. It would be intriguing to see future research focus on the relation of Islamic pop culture and the *kejawen* tradition by surveying more closely how far religious beliefs affect, for example, leisure time activities, choice of food, music or sexual behaviour – to draw a vivid portrayal of Javanese popular mysticism and its trends under the condition of rapid social change and in consideration of active and creative individuals.



Muslim anthropology students of UGM playing Jailangkung – they try to call a spirit into the puppet. Yogyakarta, November 25th, 2005.

¹⁹ I agree with Woodward (1989) in seeing the Javanese religion, *kejawen*, as a form of Islam. Woodward challenges the construction as held for example by Geertz (1960) that *kejawen* is “not really Islamic”. He identifies the Islamic sources (largely Sufi) of Javanese mysticism and states that Geertz departs from too orthodox an idea of Islam.

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Lizenziatsarbeit
Universität Bern
Philosophisch-historische Fakultät
Institut für Sozialanthropologie
Betreut von Dr. Prof. H. Znoj
Eingereicht am 1. Oktober 2006

Claudia Nef-Saluz
Hauptfach: Sozialanthropologie
1Nebenfach: Medien- und
Kommunikationswissenschaften
2Nebenfach: Volkswirtschaftslehre
Matrikelnummer: 01-208-172



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