

COMPARING MODESTY IN ORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE U.S



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Comparing Modesty in Orthodox Jewish Women and Muslim Women in the U.S

In this dissertation, I focus on (i) how the concept of modesty has been understood, interpreted, and practiced in Judaism and Islam by identifying similarities and differences and (ii) how Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women perceive the concept of modesty in a secular society, America. I tackle the question of how Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women in America make sense of modest dress code, where modest clothing, especially the practice of head covering, is seen largely as a sign of oppression, especially at the public level. More specifically, despite negative and orientalist representations of the concept of modesty embedded in American mainstream media and political discourse, religious women who embrace a modest dress code challenge stereotypical assumptions about and orientalist discourse on the practice of head covering. By using social media to be heard, they underscore that they dress modestly by choice, not by force. In doing so, they not only challenge popular assumptions, including that these women are forced to wear modest clothing, but also assert agency. In this study, I utilize the concept of modesty because this term functions as an analytical framework to explore the connections and commonalities between two cultures and religions. I employ narrative analysis and discourse analysis in examining media texts, journals, news reports, blogs, and other digital platforms. I also provide historical context for both religions in America and their responses to modernity to explore the layers and complexities of understanding religious modesty in a secular setting and draw attention to an ever-growing diversity in the interpretation, meaning, and display of modesty among orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women.

INTRODUCTION	1
Methodology	7
Literature Review	8
Theoretical Framework	16
 PART ONE: Historical Context of American Judaism and Islam.....	29
Chapter One: The Early History of Jews in America.....	29
Chapter Two: The Early History of Muslims in America.....	39
 PART TWO: American Jewish and Muslim Responses to Modernity	50
Chapter Three: The Jewish Response to Modernity	52
b) Conservative Judaism.....	60
c) Orthodox Judaism	63
d) Reconstructionist Judaism.....	75
Chapter Four: Muslim Responses to Modernity	81
a) Reformist Response to Modernity.....	86
b) Revivalist Response to Modernity	91
c) American Muslims' Reaction to Modernity.....	97
c.a) Neo-Traditionalism	99
c.b.) Neo-Legalism.....	101
c.c.) Neo-Conservatism.....	104
 PART THREE: The Concept of Modesty in Orthodox Judaism and Sunnī Islam.....	107
Chapter Five: Modesty in Orthodox Judaism	110
The Concept of Modesty (<i>Tznius</i>) in Orthodox Judaism.....	110
Head Covering in Orthodox Communities as a Practice of Modesty.....	122
Chapter Six: Modesty in Sunnī Islam	132
The Concept of <i>Adab</i> (Modesty) in Islam	132
The Practice of Hair Covering (<i>Hijāb</i>) in Sunnī Islam.....	147

PART FOUR: Political and Media Discourse on Jews and Muslims in America.....	153
Chapter Seven: Public Perception of Jews.....	158
Jewish Representations in American Politics.....	160
Media Portrayals of Jews.....	163
Chapter Eight: Public Perception of Muslims.....	171
Muslim representations in American Politics.....	181
Media Portrayals of Muslims	187
 PART FIVE: Orthodox Jewish and Muslim Women’s Perceptions of Modesty	194
Chapter Nine: Orthodox Jewish Women’s Understanding of Modesty.....	199
Chapter Ten: Muslim Women’s Understanding of Modesty	211
 CONCLUSION.....	223
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	229
 Curriculum Vitae	

INTRODUCTION

Is the concept of modesty universal? I think not. Rather, the understanding of modesty mostly remains individual. More importantly, modesty is an elusive concept to define. That is, one's account of modesty differs from another's. As Elizabeth Bucar succinctly puts it, the term modesty is "an abstract idea about conforming to standards of what is considered appropriate," and more importantly, "it is understood in relation to local perspectives on dress, gender, aesthetics, and so on."¹ Several factors could affect one's understanding of modesty. Religion, especially its reaction to modernity and modern norms, is one of the essential factors affecting how people perceive and express modesty. Thus, in this study, I will not attempt to define the word modesty.

On the other hand, I will attempt to describe broadly shared ideas of modesty among Jewish and Muslim women by discerning their similarities and differences that emerged in response to American public perception of Orthodox Jewish women and veiled Muslim women after the 9/11 attacks. As this study shows, American public perception of Orthodox Jewish women differs in significant ways from its perception of Muslim women. In this regard, I will show how Muslim women are exclusively stigmatized as "backward" victims in need of saving by politics and media due to their choice of modest clothing, especially the practice of head coverings, even though there are similarities in the understanding of modesty between Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women themselves. Muslim women in hijab (Muslim head covering) are depicted with the Orientalist terms because of their modest code. More specifically, the hijab is seen as a sign of oppression. American political discourse and media portrayal of Islam and particularly Muslim

¹ Elizabeth M. Bucar, *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 174-175.

women continue to be rooted in the legacies of colonialism and Orientalism. I will also shed light on the specific interest of the American media and politics about Muslim women.

I had a chance to observe Orthodox Judaism during my Master's studies at Columbia University, in New York City. I noticed that the lifestyles and clothing of Orthodox Jewish women are remarkably similar to Muslim women's understanding of modesty. I became more interested in women's studies during my M.A. and took several courses on Muslim women and the issue of the hijab. However, I realized that despite the similar understanding of modesty among Muslim women and Orthodox Jewish women, there is no mention of it in these classes. Thus, I spent a great deal of time on investigating the similarities between Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women, their experiences of a feeling of otherness, the difficulty of living observantly and of embracing the modest dress code in a secular world in which modest clothing is mostly seen as a sign of oppression. Obviously, they do not fit into secular beauty standards with their understanding of modesty. At that time, I decided to focus my research on Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women, especially their understanding of modesty. As a Muslim woman who wears a hijab, I expect to examine the stories of the marginalized to look beyond the stereotypes and labels that the Western media constantly present us. Moreover, the dearth of academic comparative studies on Jewish women and Muslim women, in particular the similar understanding of modesty they embrace, encourages me to study this topic.

It is worth stating that I am critical of the assumption that women who embrace modest dress codes are victims without the agency as well as the idea that modest clothing disempowers them. That is to say, in my analysis, I do not consider women who take on the modest dress code and the practice of hair/head covering as religiously oppressed or backward. A number of studies on women with hair coverings fail to take into account how modesty is used by women as a tool

to empower themselves to construct their identity as religious women. Hair covering also functions as a marker of religious identity and a sign of their religious devotion, rather than a sign of oppression. Especially, the practice of hair/head coverings demonstrates the wearer's relationship to her religion. Through modest clothing, they challenge modern beauty standards and womanhood. My familiarity with modest dress codes and hair covering has greatly helped me better to understand women's perceptions of modesty and its role in shaping their identity. At this point, I will raise a number of central questions in this study:

- A. How do Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women describe and define modesty?
 - How do Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women construct their identity through their understanding of modesty by negotiating the religious practices of modesty and public perceptions of modesty?
 - How do they interpret a modest dress code and, especially the practice of hair covering, in a secular world, where it is largely seen as oppressive to women?
- B. What are the types of discourse that are used to re/produce knowledge of Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women by the American media and political discourse?
What is the public perception of Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women?
 - Are Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women depicted in the same way by using Orientalist discourse because they choose to dress modestly?

In part one, I start with the history of Jews and Muslims in America. The historical background helps us to understand how the American public perceives Jews and Muslims since their first arrival to the Americas. I indicate that the historiography of Muslims and Islam in America is problematic since American scholars mostly view the Muslim American experience as

an immigrant issue and therefore disregard the early history of Islam and the presence of enslaved African Muslims in America despite the fact that the first arrival of Muslims in the New World dates back to the fifteenth century. Unlike American Judaism, there is limited research on the early history of Muslims in the United States. I will also show how the first Jews managed to preserve their religious identity, and also that they have been successfully acknowledged as a cultural and religious community since they first came to America. On the other hand, the early Muslim Americans were not able to preserve their religious identity. The historical background in this part serves as a tool to comprehend American public perceptions of Jews and Muslims in the American context. In particular, Muslim history in America sheds light on today's problems of American Muslims. The history of Muslims in America demonstrates that the exclusion of Muslims and the process of othering which Muslims have experienced is not a new issue. I argue that those problems cannot fully be understood if the American Orientalism present in the heart of the historiography of American Muslims is not analyzed. In other words, the history of Muslims in America is the history of American Orientalism since the history of Muslims in America shows that Muslims have rarely been seen as part of American society. Instead, they have often been alienated and labeled as exotic others. Orientalist representations of Muslims are very apparent in the historiography of Muslims.

It is worth noting that Muslim women were not specifically targeted by Americans at the very beginning of their first arrival to America. Along with modernity and colonialism and the changing status of women in the West, the question of Muslim women has attracted a great deal of attention. In particular, colonial rulers in Muslim lands became obsessively interested in Muslim women and Muslim modesty for women. European colonialists used the issue of hijab to justify colonial rule over Muslim lands. As Leila Ahmad points out in her book, *Women and Gender in*

Islam, in the nineteenth-century European colonists labeled Muslim cultures as “backwards” and the hijab that Muslim women wore an “oppressive” practice. More importantly, colonial rulers used the hijab to validate their colonial rules in Muslim countries by arguing that the colonists would liberate Muslim women from their backwards traditions and the oppressive practice of hijab. The colonial understanding has stigmatized Muslim women’s modest clothing as a sign of oppression and viewed Muslim women as oppressed victims in need of saving, even though Muslim women have used their hijab to challenge colonialist rule and Orientalist discourse in order to protect their religious identity. Thus, during the colonial era, the hijab became a symbol of anti-colonialism and anti-Orientalism in Muslim lands. Moreover, the colonial rulers’ approach to the concept of modesty for women, more specifically the issue of hijab, shaped Muslim response to modernity.

During colonial times, negative representation of Muslim modesty created a reaction to modernity in Muslim lands. Thus, in part two, I examine Muslim responses to modernity along with Jewish responses to modernity. Historical context and reactions to modernity enable us to see that unlike Jewish modesty for women, Muslim modesty is used by the West for colonial and political gains. More specifically, during colonial times, Muslim modesty was used to justify European colonialization and after 9/11, it was utilized to validate America’s military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. White-rescue discourse and Orientalist representation of Muslim women have always been at the heart of the discussion of Muslim modesty.

Part two discusses Jewish and Muslim responses to modernity. It is also crucial to see the presence of diversity in Jewish and Muslim communities. I will briefly examine the branches of Judaism in America, including Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Judaism. This brief examination clarifies different reactions to modernity, and more importantly, the place

of Orthodox Judaism in American Jewry. I highlight the differences between Jewish and Muslim communities with respect to how they have reacted to modernity. Unlike Jewish responses, Muslim responses to modernity are shaped by Western colonialism and imperialism. We shall discuss this issue in part two.

In part three, I deal with the question of how the concept of modesty is understood in Orthodox Jewish and Muslim contexts with a special focus on the practice of head coverings and their use to construct identity and womanhood in a reaction to modern standards. In religious communities, modesty functions as a challenge to modern beauty standards. It creates its own modernity while remaining within religious guidelines. This part is essential to see the similarities in the understanding of modesty between Orthodox Judaism and Islam.

Part four analyzes public perceptions of Jews and Muslims in the American context. To do so, I focus on representations of Jews and Muslims in media and politics. I specifically investigate portrayals of Muslim women in news media, including weekly newspapers and magazines and television news shows. Political discourse refers to the text and speech of professional politicians, such as presidents and other government members. Media and politics have a major impact on the ways in which people perceive Jews and Muslims. Thus, examining media and political discourse on Jews and Muslims is crucial. More specifically, I examine how American politics and media depict Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women who choose to dress modestly and wear head-coverings. This part also indicates how double standards embedded in media and politics function when it comes to Muslim women in hijab and the Muslim understanding of modesty.

Part five is based on internet networks and social media including blogs, Facebook accounts, and newspaper interviews with women. I will examine what the concept of modesty means to Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women and its role in shaping their lives. More

specifically, this part sheds light on the question of whether Jewish and Muslim women view modest clothing as a symbol of oppression as media and politics have labeled it, or if they have different interpretations. This part allows us to see similarities and differences between Jewish women's understanding of modesty and Muslim women's account of modesty.

Methodology

I primarily engage in narrative analysis including media texts in newspapers, news reports, and social media and blogs. I will analyze blogs and social media accounts and newspaper articles to show how Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women describe their understanding of modesty in response to the popular assumption that modesty amounts to oppressed women without agency. In my initial coding of the social media and blogs as well as newspapers, I focus primarily on how the concept of modesty is defined and perceived by women exploring the reasons behind the adherence to a modest dress code and the role the concept of modesty plays in women's lives. I will also examine how the American public perception of Jewish women and of Muslim women functions as a tool to talk about their perception of modesty and its essential role in their lives. In this regard, in presenting my analysis, I will use direct quotes that exemplify how women describe modesty in response to the representation of Orthodox Jewish women and of Muslim women in media and politics.

In the analysis of Orthodox Jewish women's understanding of modesty, I will focus primarily on the *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement (and certain newspaper interviews and blogs) through which Orthodox Jewish women have begun to tell their stories to challenge misrepresentations and misconceptions on television shows and other media regarding their lives and the concept of modesty. When I turn to Muslim women, I will analyze blogs and newspaper interviews to find their understanding of modesty.

Literature Review

The academic literature on the history of Jews and the history of Muslims serves as a tool to comprehend unequal attitudes embedded in the representations of Muslim women and Muslim modesty in American media and political discourse. Even though African Muslim slaves were brought to America in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the early presence of Muslims in America mostly has been neglected by historians. As Edward E. Curtis IV, among others, argues, not only the early presence of African Muslims has been overlooked, but also the issue of Muslims in America has been analyzed as “a first-generation struggle between American modernity and Islamic tradition.” Muslims have rarely been a part of American mainstream history or, for that matter, a part of the American social fabric. Muslims have experienced “otherness,” “alienation,” and “exclusion” since their first arrival to America and in the historiography of American Muslims.

On the other hand, the history of Jews in America has been thoroughly examined by historians as a part of American history. The literature on the history of Jews focuses on how Jews have maintained their identity and faith and have succeeded in becoming a part of American history despite the antisemitic sentiments they have faced. Thus, before turning to the literature that addresses the question of modesty, I consider a few sources on the history of Jews and Muslims in America.

A burgeoning literature is devoted to focusing on the history of Jews and Judaism in America. Historians agree on the date of the first Jewish arrival (1654). More importantly, due to a large number of documents, photographs, and illustrations, they have detailed knowledge about the Jews’ social and religious lives in America and their success in building up religious and cultural institutions that have enabled them to maintain their identity while also becoming American. The history of Jews and the history of Judaism are inextricably intertwined. In addition

to the chronological information including the date of arrival of Jews, and their numbers, the history of Jews and Judaism is focused mostly on antisemitism and the struggle Jews have experienced to preserve their faith and identity while also trying to become a part of society. For instance, *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. by Marc Lee Raphael, provides different aspects of the Jewish experience from early Jewish settlers (1654-1820) to the present. Particularly, Eli Faber's article, "America's Earliest Jewish Settlers, 1654-1820," is very helpful in learning about the experience and lives of early Jews. Moreover, *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. by Gary Phillip Zola, Marc Dollinger, also examines chronologically the history of Jews from the colonial era to today's America. This book sheds light on a variety of important themes on the history of Jews and Judaism, including the evolution of religious lives and efforts of Jews to become a part of society while maintaining their religious identity. Jonathan Sarna's book, *American Judaism: A History*, examines the evolution of American Judaism from the colonial era to the present in addition to the struggles Jews faced in balancing religious values and American values. Sarna also focuses on the assimilation of Jews, revitalization of Judaism, and religious movements, including Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist movements.

Unlike the history of Jews and Judaism, the history of Muslims is more controversial. As mentioned above, the early presence of Islam and Muslims in America has been largely overlooked by historians. More importantly, they mostly have begun the history of Muslims in America with the immigration of Middle Easterners in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the other hand, Sylviane A. Diouf's book, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, shows that a significant number of the African slaves brought to the Americas were Muslims, and unlike other slaves, they were educated and literate. Diouf also argues that Muslim slaves (like all

African slaves) were unable to maintain their religious identity and Islam did not survive slavery in the Americas. Similarly, in his book, *A History of Islam in America*, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, underscores the continuous presence of African Muslim slaves in America since European exploration and colonization of the Americas. Moreover, in his article, “Muslims in Early America,” Michael A. Gomez stresses the arrival of African Muslims as slaves. It is worth noting that sources on the early history of Muslims and their religious lives in America are very limited, including biographies of individual African Muslim slaves, writings, personal notes, and manuscripts written by African Muslim slaves.

Unlike the literature on the history of Jews more broadly, the academic literature on the concept of modesty, especially the practice of head coverings, in the Orthodox Jewish context is very limited. Muslim modesty and the issue of hijab are hotly debated in the Western context, while Jewish modesty and head coverings are relatively neglected. As Amy K. Milligan notes, “...little academic research has been produced concerning the practice of hair covering found within Orthodox Judaism.”² The present literature on Orthodox understanding of modesty views modest dress code as an identity marker of Orthodox Judaism and an expression of religiosity. The literature is based chiefly on fieldwork studies and interviews with Orthodox women, which enable women to express what modesty means to them. More importantly, the literature does not consider modest clothing primarily as a backward, primitive practice. Also, Orthodox Jewish women who choose to cover their heads and bodies are not considered “oppressed.” In her ethnographic study of the lives of Orthodox Jewish women, *Hair, Headwear, and Orthodox Jewish Women*, Milligan focuses on the practice of hair covering and what this practice means to Orthodox women. Milligan’s approach to hair covering is neither Orientalist nor reductionist. As Milligan

² Amy K. Milligan, *Hair, Headwear, and Orthodox Jewish Women* (Lexington Books, 2014), 2.

underscores, “my analysis does not assume that Orthodox Jewish women are religiously oppressed.... I disagree with those who discount Orthodox women who cover their hair as being backwards or uneducated;” rather, through the practice of hair covering “these women have asserted a very external sign of their religious commitment.”³ Through her ethnographic study, Milligan examines the motivations behind hair covering and its functions in the Orthodox community and views hair covering as “a religious symbol, a religious marker, and as an object in religious material culture.”⁴ Barbara Goldman Carrel contends that Hasidic women view their modest clothing both as a manifestation of Hasidic spirituality and “a protective shield against the larger (non-Jewish) New York City secular society.”⁵ In doing so, the concept of modesty functions as an expression of religiosity and spirituality as well as a tool that both distinguishes and protects them from the secular world. Carrel also distinguishes Hasidic women’s clothing from “exotic” Muslim clothing. In her words, Hasidic women’s mode of dress is not “the uniformed ‘folk costume’ of their male counterparts, or the iconic Roman Catholic habit of women religious, or one of the various exotic (to many Westerners) forms of veiling by women in Muslim cultures worldwide.”⁶

Lynne Schreiber analyzes the concept of modesty and the practice of hair covering. Schreiber points out the centrality of modesty in Jewish lives and “the reason that Jewish women

³ Milligan, *Headwear, and Orthodox Jewish Women*, 4.

⁴ Milligan, *Headwear, and Orthodox Jewish Women*, 13.

⁵ Barbara Goldman Carrel, “Shattered Vessels That Contain Divine Sparks: Unveiling Hasidic Women’s Dress Code,” in *Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 45.

⁶ Carrel, “Shattered Vessels,” 56.

are encouraged to follow practices of modesty is to de-emphasize external qualities so that we may more clearly recognize the special, internal characteristics of an individual.”⁷

Ayala Fader’s book, *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*, focuses on how Hasidic women in Brooklyn raise the next generation and teach girls the practices of Hasidic Judaism. Fader examines not only female modesty but also male modesty in the Hasidic community in Brooklyn. Fader stresses that the concept of modesty “can be understood as part of the broader Hasidic project of sanctifying the material world by bracketing bodily functions within practice.”⁸ Fader states that modesty shapes every aspect of the Hasidic community, especially women’s lives. She further argues that even though Hasidic girls and women are not allowed to attend certain activities, including movies, watching television and movies, or reading certain books, “they are neither isolated nor oppressed by their lives.”⁹

More importantly, in her fieldwork, Fader points out that Hasidic women’s ability to mediate the secular sphere and the religious realm allows them to create “an alternative religious modernity.” In her book, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism*, Lynn Davidman examines the motivations behind conversion to Orthodox Judaism. Davidman investigates “the experiences of modern secular Jewish women who are choosing the branch of Judaism that maintains the strictest divisions of role—in both the public and private spheres—by sex.”¹⁰ This ethnographic study indicates that even though Orthodox Judaism requires its devotees to follow a strict interpretation of *Halacha*—including a rigorous and rigid interpretation of

⁷ Lynne Schreiber, “What is Hair?” in *Hide and Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, ed. Lynne Schreiber (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2006), 21.

⁸ Ayala Fader, *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 148.

⁹ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 25.

¹⁰ Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 43.

modesty for women—an increasing number of secular Jewish women convert to Orthodox Judaism. Similarly, in her book, *Becoming Frum: How Newcomers Learn the Language and Culture of Orthodox Judaism*, Sarah Bunin Benor investigates the process of the transformation from secular Jews into Orthodox ones. Despite the difficulties of adapting to Orthodox culture, newcomers, both male and female, are happy to join the Orthodox community. It is worth noting that there is a growing body of literature on secular Jews' conversion to Orthodox Judaism. This literature on conversion to Orthodox Judaism serves as a challenge *per se* to an assumption that Orthodox Judaism in general and Orthodox interpretation of modesty in particular oppress women. Like others, Danya Ruttenberg also argues that even though the concept of modesty has a broad meaning and is applicable to both males and females, it is mainly used as a female-centered concept in the Orthodox community. Fader also states that the Orthodox community places more special emphasis on female modesty than male modesty in the Orthodox community.

Unlike the scarcity of academic interest on Jewish modesty and the practice of head coverings, there is a growing literature on Muslim modesty. Many Westerners, even scholars, mostly have regarded the Muslim version of modest clothing for women, especially head coverings, as a symbol of female oppression and gender inequality. In doing so, they maintain an Orientalist approach to Muslim modesty for women.¹¹ Susannah Heschel stresses that “a Muslim woman who covers her hair as a sign of religious identity and commitment may instead be viewed negatively, as a symbol for Islam as a repressive, oppressive religion.” More importantly, Muslim women in hijab are “often used as symbols for what non-Muslims regard as Islam’s alleged failure

¹¹ Bucar, *Pious Fashion*, 1. See also Theodore Gabriel, “Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions in Islam,” in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 17.

to modernize.”¹² According to Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan, especially in the Western context, “veil can be a symbol of alienness, opposition to cultural integration, opposition to cultural integration, even of covert evil intention.”¹³

However, scholarship on Muslim modesty has been growing recently. This literature stands in contrast to the earlier literature which held—at least implicitly—Orientalist assumptions including considering Muslim women “oppressed,” Islam “oppressive,” and Muslim men “violent.” Many scholars, including Lila Abu Lughod and Saba Mahmood, examine this issue but with an awareness of the distortions brought by Orientalizing analysis. Also, they focus on the motivations for Muslim modesty clothing, rather than labeling it backward, primitive, and outdated. Modest clothing can be a sign of piety, religious identity, and a commitment to Islam. According to Elizabeth Bucar, there can be social, political, and religious reasons motivating women to choose to dress modestly.¹⁴ In *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress*, Bucar observes Muslim women’s modest clothing in three Muslim countries, Iran, Indonesia, and Turkey. According to Bucar, the meaning of modesty is not the same in these three locations.¹⁵ Bucar also points out the diversity within Muslim modest clothing.

Theodore Gabriel historically investigates the issue of Muslim modest clothing. Gabriel stresses that the hijab is not a symbol of oppression and enslavement since enslaved people were

¹² Susannah Heschel, “Jewish and Muslim Feminist Theologies in Dialogue: Discourses of Difference,” in *Gender in Judaism and Islam*, ed. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet and Beth S. Wenger (New York: New York University Press, 2015.), 41.

¹³ Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan, “Introduction,” in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 2.

¹⁴ Bucar, *Pious Fashion*, 1.

¹⁵ Bucar, *Pious Fashion*, 174.

not allowed to wear hijab. Instead, it is seen as a sign of respectability and dignity.¹⁶ Gabriel also underscores that during the colonial administration of Muslim lands, the hijab was seen as “a symbol of cultural inferiority” and was used to “justify the Western powers conquering and ruling Muslim territories so as to bring about cultural reform and liberate Muslim women oppressed by their men.”¹⁷

Given the present media and political discourse on the hijab and Islam, it is safe to say that this Orientalist and colonial discourse has still effects today. To fight this neo-Orientalist discourse embedded in American public perception of Muslim women and hijab, Muslim women intentionally choose to wear hijab. According to Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, after the 9/11 attacks, the hijab was used to assert a public Islamic identity by many women. In addition, the hijab serves as a tool to resist the othering and exclusion of Islam and Muslims in America and to counter colonialist and Orientalist discourse targeting Muslims and Islam.¹⁸ Haddad, among others, analyzes Muslim modesty, particularly hijab, as an identity marker for Muslim women. More importantly, especially in the Western context, the hijab is used to manifest Muslim identity by women.

Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone point out that Muslim modesty is not limited to how women and men need to dress but also includes their words and deeds.¹⁹ Through social media

¹⁶ Theodore Gabriel, “Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions in Islam,” in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 17.

¹⁷ Gabriel, “Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions,” 12-13.

¹⁸ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Post-9/11 ‘Hijab’ as Icon,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), 253-267, 253.

¹⁹ Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, *Muslims in the United States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 141.

and blogs, Muslim women similarly emphasize that Muslim modesty pertains to both men and women, and modesty in behavior is as important as modesty in clothing.

Many Muslim feminists do not see modest clothing for women primarily as a religious requirement including Leila Ahmed, Asma Barlas, Amine Wadud and Azzizah Al Hibri.²⁰ They disassociate the practice of head covering and religion. According to Leila Ahmed, the head covering does not signify religiosity and piety. Instead, it is a symbol of Islamism, namely political Islam. Like the Orientalist approach to hijab, some Muslim feminists view the removal of hijab as a sign of liberation. However, in this study, my intention is not to focus on Muslim feminists' approach to modesty and modest clothing for women. Instead, my aim is to indicate how modesty is understood in the American Muslim context and what modesty means to Muslim women as unfolding American public perceptions of Muslim women concerning the issue of hijab. Also, I will point to the commonalities between Muslim modesty and Jewish modesty.

Theoretical Framework

To better comprehend how media and politics represent Muslims, especially Muslim women and Jews and Jewish women, it is crucial to focus on how the discourse around these issues has been fashioned by an Orientalist approach. The basic foundations of an Orientalist approach are useful in understanding the political and media discourses of Muslim women and Orthodox Jewish women. I will base my arguments on Edward Said's postcolonial theories to indicate how the colonial discourse was appropriated in the portrayal of Muslim women with hijab in American media and politics. It is safe to call the current approach to Muslims a neo-Orientalism. It is the

²⁰ Jasmine Zine, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: The Politics of Muslim Women's Feminist Engagement," in *(En) Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*, ed. Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel (New York: Routledge, 2016), 35.

continuity of accepted Orientalism. Maryam Khalid calls this new form of Orientalism that emerged after 9/11 “gendered Orientalism.” Khalid compares traditional Orientalism and gendered Orientalism with the following statement:

During the course of the War on Terror, a range of binaries situating the ‘West’ in opposition to the ‘East’ – for example, good vs. evil, civilised vs. barbaric, rational vs. irrational, progressive vs. backward – have been invoked. These binaries are deployed in U.S. War on Terror discourse in ways that are gendered and Orientalist, that is, through harnessing and manipulating perceived differences in gender, gender roles, and sexuality, along racial lines...Western constructs of Easterners as ‘other’ have been used to justify conquest and colonialism for over two centuries. These constructs have been both racialised and gendered and continue to function in contemporary times.²¹

More importantly, after 9/11, Orientalist discourse prevalent in media and politics has reconstructed Muslim women’s identity as a victim in need of saving to justify military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The discourse of the War on Terror used by George Bush is based on gendered Orientalism. In particular, the practice of hair covering and Muslim modest dress for women are used to define Muslim women publicly as “other” and “victim.” This gendered orientalist discourse reproduces knowledge on Muslim women and their modest clothing. This discourse redefines Muslim women in hijab as victims without agency. After the 9/11 attacks and the accompanying Orientalist portrayals of Muslims in general, Muslim women in particular have been highly visible in American media and politics. The Orientalist approach still shapes public perceptions of Muslims and the cultural imagination reproduces knowledge and myths of Muslims and Muslim women.

Muslim women are pictured as alienated from the dominant culture due to their choice modest clothing. More specifically, dominant culture and Western Orientalist discourse need religious differences—inscribed in a very visible way in the modest dress code and hair covering—

²¹ Maryam Khalid, “Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’ in the War on Terror,” *Global Change, Peace & Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (February 2011), 15–29, 15.

to highlight that these women who dress modestly and cover their hair are different from western “free” women. In this framework, the practice of hair covering serves as a sign of oppression and of gender inequality and the removal of it as a sign of liberation of women. At this point, it is worth noting that although there are many similarities in Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women’s understanding of modesty regarding clothing, albeit with the idiosyncrasies of each cultural setting in which they live, the Western-originated Orientalist agenda does not target Jewish women for their modest clothing but they still feel its effects. Orthodox Jewish women do not meet Western expectations of how “free” women should dress or its beauty standards. Hence, Orthodox Jewish women are indirect victims of Orientalist discourse due to their understanding of modesty.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said indicates how Western imperial powers used Orientalist discourses to draw distinctions between Western superiority and Eastern inferiority through negative racial stereotypes and anti-Muslim prejudice. Said offers several definitions of the term Orientalism. One of them is that “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’”²² Said also defines the word Orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”²³ The Western Orientalist discourse constructs “East” as the “other” and depicts the other as irrational, uncivilized, childlike, and lazy.²⁴ In doing so, Western Orientalism has situated the West as the opposite of the Orient. As Stuart Hall underscores, the

²² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 2.

²³ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

²⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 40. In Western culture, Western men also depicted Western women as irrational, childlike and emotional. As Helen Buss Mitchell, “Western culture has identified rationality with men and emotionality with women.” Helen Buss Mitchell, *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions* (Cengage Learning, 2018), 116. See also: Pam Oliver, “What Do Girls Know Anyways?”: Rationality Gender, and Social Control,” in *Representing Reason: Feminist Theory and Formal Logic*, ed. Rachel Joffe Falmagne and Marjorie Hass (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 214-215.

West provides criteria to define the “Other.” In this framework, the West defines not only the “other” but also itself: the West versus non-West: “‘western’=urban=developed; or ‘non-western’=non-industrial= rural=agricultural= under-developed,” or “‘the West’= developed= good= desirable; or the ‘non-West’= under-developed= bad= undesirable.”²⁵ Said also points out that Oriental women are mostly described as an object of sexual desire. In his words, “women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing.”²⁶ By doing so, the West produces knowledge about the “other” and the West simultaneously through these and other dichotomies.

Political power and imperial dominance are two of the essential tenets of Orientalism. As Said succinctly puts it, “modern Orientalism has been an aspect of both imperialism and colonialism.”²⁷ Orientalism produces the discourse of the West (rational, superior, and strong) and the “Orient” (irrational, inferior and weak, and in need of rescue) to justify European colonization. Today Orientalism continues to provide the dominant framework through which knowledge of the Orient is produced. Thus, it validates political intervention in the Middle East and shapes public perceptions of the “Other.” Said stresses the political aspect of Orientalism: “Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness.”²⁸ Orientalist discourse continues to be used by media and politics for political reasons.

In addition to the reproduction of knowledge of the Orient, Orientalism provides negative, prejudiced representations of the Orient to define and control the “other.” Said explains that the

²⁵ Stuart Hall, “The West-and-the-Rest: Discourse and Power” in *Formations of Modern Society*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 277.

²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 207.

²⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 123.

²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 204.

creation of misrepresentations of the Orient have become even more potent with the advent of mass communication technologies:

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds. So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of the 'mysterious Orient.' This is nowhere more true than the ways by which the Near East is grasped.²⁹

Through this negative stereotyping and misrepresentations of the Orient, Orientalist discourse produces knowledge and assumptions by presenting them as the Truth. In this context, Orientalist discourse functions as a tool to show how knowledge and power relations work together.

Said draws on Michel Foucault's discourse theory and the power/knowledge relationship when defining Orientalism as a discourse that reproduces/reframes the "Orient." Foucault's theories and ideas deeply influenced not only Said's theory of Orientalism but also postcolonial studies. Thus, it is crucial to feature Foucault's ideas here, especially the relation between power and knowledge, to understand Orientalist discourse's production of knowledge on Muslims. Foucault points out that power produces "reality," "domains of objects" and "rituals of truth." Power constructs the representation of the Orient and justifies domination of the West and colonialism. Foucault argues that power works both on social structures and bodies. He indicates how power functions at the level of the body through the production of knowledge: "in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their action and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday life."³⁰ In doing so, power

²⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 26.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 39.

controls bodies, people, and their knowledge. Foucault argues that the relationship between power and knowledge is inextricable. Hence, Foucault does not separate these two terms and uses a single hybrid concept “power/knowledge.” Foucault analyzes how the production of truth and power are inextricably linked to each other: “there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.”³¹ Power creates truth through discourse. Truth and meaning are produced through discourse by one who has power. Thus, according to Foucault, “truth is no doubt a form of power.”³²

Foucault’s discourse theory helps us to understand how Orientalism as a discourse reproduces Western knowledge, the truth, of the Orient and defines it as the “other.” Orientalism assumes that representations of the Orient and discourse on the Orient are truthful representations. During the process of the production of knowledge on the Orient, Western orientalist power utilizes its military, media, technological, and political power. It is worth noting that this Orientalist discourse not only reproduces the Orient politically, militarily, and ideologically but in so doing also shapes public opinions of the Orient.

Given the media representations of Muslim women in hijab and political discourse about Muslim women, it is safe to state that media and politics recreate meaning, recolonize Muslim women, and reproduce knowledge about Muslims and Islam through Orientalist discourse. Orientalist representations of Muslim women have found particularly fertile ground even in the Academy. As Katherine Bullock puts it, “until recently, the predominant methodological approach

³¹ Foucault, *Power/knowledge*, 93.

³² Michael Foucault, “Strategies of power,” in *The Truth about the Truth: De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. W. Anderson (New York: Tarcher/Putnam 1995), 45.

to the study of Muslim women has been Orientalist, or neo-Orientalist.”³³ Media and politics have the power to fashion public perceptions of Muslims through the reproduction of Orientalist discourse. Said’s theory of Orientalism and Foucault’s discourse theory help us to understand how Muslim women who embrace Muslim modesty are framed and represented by the media and politics in America and how the issue of hijab is used to reproduce Orientalist discourse. In media and politics as well as Western academia, Muslim head covering is labeled as a sign of oppression while the removal of it is seen as a liberatory act. Muslim women are stigmatized as oppressed victims and Muslim men or Islam itself as an oppressive force.³⁴ Similarly, Bullock underscores that mainstream Western media, politicians, mass-market books on Islam and women, and many Muslim and non-Muslim feminists see the hijab as a sign of oppression and women’s subjugation to men.³⁵ The issue of hijab serves as a catalyst to justify western dominance over Muslims and Orientalist discourse about Muslims. As Gayatri Spivak contends in her essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” British powers justified their colonial interventions by the use of the white savior rhetoric. In her words, “White men are saving brown women from brown men,” and by doing so, the British contended that their rule in India “liberates” oppressed women.³⁶ Like Said, Spivak criticizes colonial, Orientalist representations of the subaltern and colonial reproduction of knowledge in the Western academia.

Similarly, Lila Abu-Lughod in her article “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” indicates how the rescue rhetoric was used to validate the American war in Afghanistan. More

³³ Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002), XVIII

³⁴ Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

³⁵ Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, XV-XVI.

³⁶ Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice,” *Wedge* 7-8 (Winter-Spring 1985), 120-30.

specifically, according to Abu-Lughod, the American invasion and occupation of Afghanistan was justified by similar discursive practices - white American men were freeing Afghan women from oppressive, violent Afghan men. This Orientalist discourse was used by the mainstream American media and politicians during the occupation of Afghanistan.

In the occupation of Afghanistan case, as mentioned earlier, Muslim modesty for women, especially the practice of hair covering, was used to justify political domination and occupation. Since the colonial period, the issue of Muslim women has always been used by the West to justify colonial interests. As Leila Ahmed also stresses in her book, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, the status of Muslim women was used in part by the colonial rulers to justify the colonization of the Middle East.³⁷ The practice of hair covering in particular is seen by the West as a symbol of the oppression of women and backwardness of tradition in the Orient. Bullock states that when the West started to see the veil as a sign of oppression is unknown. However, “by the eighteenth century, the veil was already taken by Europeans to be an oppressive custom amongst Muslims.”³⁸

The rescue discourse redefined and reconstructed Muslim women’s bodies and their modest clothing in the post-9/11 era. This new Orientalism reproduced knowledge on Muslim women to rationalize military operations. Jasmine Zine calls it “gendered Islamophobia.” In her words, “the representation of Muslim women's bodies as signifiers of difference can be understood as a form of ‘gendered Islamophobia.’”³⁹ Gendered Islamophobia is a crucial part of Orientalism. According to Zine, the concept of gendered Islamophobia is “specific forms of discrimination

³⁷ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1992).

³⁸ Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women*, 1.

³⁹ Zine, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism,” 35.

leveled at Muslim women that proceed from historically contextualized negative stereotypes that inform and sustain the structural conditions of domination.”⁴⁰ Zine historically explains this word that “in the case of gendered Islamophobia, the discursive roots are historically entrenched within Orientalist representations that cast colonial Muslim women as backward, oppressed victims of misogynist societies.”⁴¹ She points out that the colonial discourse on Muslim women still exists in modern Western politics. She uses the word “gendered Orientalism” to show the resurgence of Orientalist tropes that label Muslim women as oppressed victims in need of saving.

From colonial times to the present, the West’s Orientalist approach to Muslim women and the Muslim practice of hair covering has changed little. Given the head scarf ban in some European counties, including France and Germany in the name of “liberating” Muslim women from their oppressive, backward tradition as well as media and political representation of Muslim women and their approach to the practice of hair covering, it is safe to say that the basic foundations of Said’s thesis remain relevant in the present’s context.

Hall underscores that European Orientalist discourse also has internal “others.” In other words, Orientalism targets not only Muslims and Arabs, but also other communities, including Jews, Eastern Europeans, and even “white” women. In Hall’s words, “treating non-European cultures as different and inferior, the West had its own internal ‘others.’ Jews, in particular, though close to western religious traditions, were frequently excluded, and ostracized. West Europeans often regarded Eastern Europeans as ‘barbaric,’ and, throughout the West, western women were represented as inferior to western men.”⁴² Similarly, Heschel emphasizes, in the nineteenth

⁴⁰ Jasmine Zine, “Unveiled Sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and Experiences of Veiling among Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School,” *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39(3), 239-252 (September 2006), 240.

⁴¹ Zine, “Unveiled Sentiments,” 240.

⁴² Hall, “The West-and-the-Rest,” 280.

century, “Judaism was an ‘Oriental’ religion were used to justify the exclusion of Jews from full membership in European society, and movements to reform traditional synagogue services were motivated in part by the desire to undermine that ‘Oriental’ image of Judaism as stagnant, primitive, and non-European.”⁴³

As stated above, Orientalist discourse depicts Muslim women in hijab as a victim without agency. To put it differently, they are forced to cover their bodies by their men; women have no say in the matter. In her ethnographic study, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Saba Mahmood examines the lives of pious Muslim women in the women’s piety movement in the mosques of Egypt. Mahmood focuses on the role of piety as an ethical practice in women’s lives. Mahmood examines the ethical self-formation of pious women through the Islamic virtue of female modesty (*al-haya*). These women in the piety movement “provided lessons to one another that focused on the teaching and studying of Islamic scriptures, social practices, and forms of bodily comportment considered germane to the cultivation of the ideal virtuous self.”⁴⁴ The women Mahmood observed view the veil (hijab) as “a necessary component of the virtue of modesty.”⁴⁵ They put a great deal of emphasis on “outward markers of religiosity—ritual practices, styles of comporting oneself, dress, and so on.”⁴⁶ These practices, like veiling, serve as a catalyst for these women to achieve an ideal of Muslim virtue. Mahmood argues that through the donning of the veil as a part of ethical self-formation, women assert an agency which differs from the western notion of agency. Mahmood challenges secular and liberal modes of agency seen as a resistance to social norms and “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against

⁴³ Heschel, “Jewish and Muslim Feminist Theologies,” 24.

⁴⁴ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.

⁴⁵ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 23.

⁴⁶ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 31.

the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles.”⁴⁷ According to Mahmood, western scholars fail to recognize the agency of pious women and their desire to submit to pious norms and obligations. Moreover, in her words, “to the extent that feminist scholarship emphasizes this politically subversive form of agency, it has ignored other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse.”⁴⁸ Mahmood conceptualizes the term of “agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable.”⁴⁹ Through willingly developing a modest disposition in clothing and behavior, women assert agency, even if the Islamic concept of modesty is seen as oppressive and “backward” by the Orientalizing gaze.

In the American context, religious women’s agency is little different from Mahmood’s definition of agency. More specifically, the notion of agency they exercise is diverse and nuanced. Religious women’s agency in the American context also cannot be understood through an “either/or” dichotomy—you either have it or you do not. It is more complex than one might assume. Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women utilize the language of “choice” in their own social media posts, which is congruent with a liberal discourse of choice that differs from Mahmood’s definition. These women consider themselves “agents.” They negotiate not only with religious authority to create their own space, a negotiation which enables them to construct their identity as religious women who have choice and options for how to dress modestly and fashionably but at the same time accepts modernity and the secular society in which they live. This act of negotiation dismantles hegemonic and colonial discourse on religious women’s agency (the

⁴⁷ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 8.

⁴⁸ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 153.

⁴⁹ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 18.

white savior complex) and religious modesty for women as a sign of oppression. It is also worth noting that their lived experiences indicate how agency coexists with constraints and boundaries. Some of those constraints they can choose, and some of those constraints they are not able to choose. In some ways, they challenge not only many religious boundaries but also assumptions and misconceptions regarding modesty and religious women's agency embedded in politics and media. They experience myriad challenges at the intersection of tradition and modernity. Unlike the women Mahmood observed, Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women in America face several challenges due to their choice of modest clothing. They intend to fulfill religious modest dress codes and devalue misconceptions about the modest clothing embedded in the secular society. As religious women, they do not fully reject modernity or modern values. However, at the same time, they also want to differentiate themselves from American secular women through their modest clothing. They navigate the religion-secular binary by establishing gray areas, contesting domains to exercise agency, and creating different subjectivities. Religious women's agency within the boundaries of a secular society creates different subjectivities.

In this framework, they challenge religious authorities (for example, some Hasidic women use social media to talk about their lives and their understanding of modesty, and both Muslim women and Orthodox Jewish women navigate fashion and modesty) and also destabilize negative representations of religious modest dress codes for women. Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women point out that modest clothing is not outdated, and it is possible to dress modestly yet fashionably. They underscore that they choose to dress modestly and follow modest dress codes for women. However, simultaneously they want to wear a fashionable dress and to look good, even though some might argue that looking good and dressing modestly are contradictory. By navigating fashion and modesty, they push the religious boundaries and constraints.

In this study, I define the concept of agency as a capacity for choosing to be religious and modest women in a secular setting. Unlike Mahmood, who reframes/redefines the notion of agency by analyzing Muslim women in a Muslim majority country, I examine how in the American context, the concept of modesty is understood by American religious women, both Orthodox Jewish and Muslim, and how they assert agency through their choice for modest clothing and their negotiation. As American women living in a secular and modern country, they can choose to conform to the modest dress codes that their religion requires them to wear. Thus it is their choice to be Orthodox Jewish women instead of entering other branches of Judaism, which do not require “strict” modest dress codes. Similarly, Muslim women choose to be religious instead of being non-practicing Muslims. Thus, I take the notion of agency as a capacity for choosing to be pious and modest women in a secular society, where modest clothing is seen largely as a sign of oppression, especially at the public level. Thus, they exercise agency not only by wearing modest clothing in a secular society but also by creating gray areas in which they can enact their choices. The diversity of understanding of modesty among Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women illustrates how these gray areas are multiple, distinct, and yet at times overlapping.

Many Muslim women and Orthodox Jewish women very actively use social media to show that they embrace religious accounts of modesty by free will, not by force, and they find it empowering rather than oppressive and backward. They challenge the Orientalist approach to modesty by sharing their lived experiences and lives on social media. Despite negative representation of modest clothing and the practice of hair covering, they continue to follow modest dress codes.

PART ONE: Historical Context of American Judaism and Islam

In this part, I offer some historical context regarding the early history of Jews and the early history of Muslims in America. This part is helpful to understand if and how early Jews and Muslims survived and preserved their identity in the American context. The historiography of Jews and Muslims also serves as an indicator of how Americans have perceived Jews and Muslims since their arrival in America. This part is also important to show commonalities between historiography and American public perception of Jews and Muslims. This part intends to provide a historical context to understand better the struggle that Jews and Muslims face today.

Chapter One: The Early History of Jews in America

This chapter serves the purpose of providing a historical context and framework that shows how Jews preserve their identity as a minority religious group in the American context. According to Jeffrey S. Gurock, “The history of Judaism in America, the story of how, from the seventeenth century on, different expressions of a traditional faith, transported from Europe, changed and survived under the conditions of freedom is another historical issue that has received, in recent years, a lion’s share of scholarly attention.”⁵⁰

The scholarly literature on American Judaism is growing larger than that of many other religious minorities, especially Muslims, in America because Judaism was successfully recognized as a cultural and religious community in America since the colonial period. In 1654, when the first Jews, who were mostly Sephardic Jews, came to America, more specifically to New Amsterdam (known as New York today), to escape religious intolerance, they founded many religious

⁵⁰ Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Introduction to the Series,” in *American Jewish Life*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock, 1920-1990 (New York: Routledge, 1998), ix.

institutions, including synagogues, schools, charitable societies, cemeteries, and ritual baths (*mikvaot*).⁵¹

There is a consensus among historians on the date of the first Jewish arrival (1654).⁵² It is crucial to note that Jews chose cities, like New York, to settle in not only for economic reasons but also religious reasons. As Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger underscore, “they also wanted civil equality and a social setting wherein they could fulfill their desire to worship openly as Jews.”⁵³ The primary motivation behind this demand is the idea that the first Jews and later generations were to be recognized among the founders of America. Since the very beginning of immigration, Jews have participated in public life in America.

After New York, Jews started to emigrate to other states with significant port cities, including Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Georgia, since they were engaged in the commercial trades.⁵⁴ They participated in transatlantic commerce as well. For instance, around fifteen families settled in Newport, Rhode Island, in the 1650s.⁵⁵ More Jews chose to settle in Newport in the following years since Newport provided both religious tolerance and economic opportunity for Jews.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Alan T. Levenson, “American Judaism,” in *The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History*, ed. Paul Harvey, Edward J. Blum, Randall Stephens (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 339. Also See: Marc Lee Raphael, *Judaism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 39-40. “Jews arrived in Recife in the seventeenth century when the Dutch conquered (1630) this part of northeastern Brazil from the Portuguese. With the reconquest by the Portuguese in 1654, Jews no longer felt secure, and thus twenty-three Jews stepped off the St. Charles (or the St. Catherine) onto the soil of New Amsterdam (later, New York) that same year. They were the first Jews to settle in what would become the United States.”

⁵² Eli Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers, 1654-1820,” in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 21.

⁵³ Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger, *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger (Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 7.

⁵⁴ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 7.

⁵⁵ Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 25.

⁵⁶ Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 25.

Jews in New York established the first synagogue in North America in 1728.⁵⁷ In 1733, Georgia witnessed Jewish settlement, known as the second settlement in North America. Over forty-two Jews from the Jewish community in London moved to Savannah, Georgia, in 1733.⁵⁸ The majority of the first Jewish settlers in early America, including Georgia, Newport, New York, were largely Sephardic. Eli Faber emphasizes that even though Ashkenazic immigrants outnumbered them by 1720, the Sephardic rite still fashioned Jewish religious lives in America until 1820.⁵⁹ Faber further argues that before the advent of Jewish religious movements, which emphasized the need for reform in Jewish law, Jewish communities in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries followed traditional rabbinic Judaism.⁶⁰

On the other hand, Levenson calls American Judaism during the colonial era “lax traditionalism” due to its distinctive features, including lack of “a trained clergy, traditional academies of study, and established cities.”⁶¹ Due to the absence of ordained rabbi and the scarcity of ritual specialists, the American Jewish community could not maintain the religious rigor of European Jewish life.⁶² For instance, intermarriage was common among Jews in the colonial period, while this practice was “an unusual occurrence for Jews who lived in the Old World.”⁶³ However, Ben Zion Bokser points out that the first Jews were still “largely traditional in their religious orientation.”⁶⁴ He further maintains that “while individuals undoubtedly allowed themselves laxities in their religious practices, a zealous adherence to traditional forms

⁵⁷ Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 26.

⁵⁸ Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 26.

⁵⁹ Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 28.

⁶⁰ Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 33.

⁶¹ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 340.

⁶² Levenson, “American Judaism,” 340.

⁶³ Zola, and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 8.

⁶⁴ Ben Zion Bokser, “Conservative Judaism,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4, Tercentenary Issue (Apr. 1955), 334.

characterized the conduct of the congregations and their leaders.”⁶⁵ In this framework, despite the colonial era’s “lax traditionalism,” Judaism and religious leadership remained an essential part of Jews’ lives, even though their perception of Judaism evolved after this period. Religious life in the colonial era was described as “synagogue-centered.”⁶⁶ Jews tried to strike a balance between being a part of society and being Jews. They did not reject the realities and values of the society where they lived. As Zola and Dollinger stress, they “fashioned their religious lives according to Jewish tradition as well as to the larger religious and civic culture of their surrounding communities.”⁶⁷

After the colonial era, America had declared independence, fought a war to establish its sovereignty, and written a Constitution. By then, Jews had already found a place in the new country’s communities. In this sense, Sarna succinctly states that “on the national level and in most of the American communities where Jews actually lived, they had achieved an unprecedented degree of ‘equal footing’ by the end of the eighteenth century.”⁶⁸ The founding of the United States – religious freedom, church-state separation, denominationalism, voluntarism, and patriotism – legitimized and validated minority religious groups. Even though not only the numbers of synagogues but also the numbers of Jews grew slowly until 1824 in America, they still enjoyed new freedoms under the new regime after the end of the colonial era. The newly formed Constitution provided Jews with religious freedom. The number of American Jews was 1,243 out of a total population of 2,810,248 in 1790.⁶⁹ Similarly, Levenson also states that for the first 150 years, the growth of the Jewish population in America was very slow, and the number remained

⁶⁵ Bokser, “Conservative Judaism,” 334.

⁶⁶ Zola, and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 8.

⁶⁷ Zola, and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 8.

⁶⁸ Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Heaven; London: Yale University Press, 2004), 38.

⁶⁹ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 41

smaller than 2,500 during the American Revolution.⁷⁰ Especially, the number of Jews in Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York were each no more than 200 Jews in 1776.⁷¹ Unlike Charleston, Newport, Philadelphia, Richmond, and Savannah, where congregations were founded in the eighteenth century, the first Jewish congregation in New York was established in the seventeenth century.⁷²

The newly formed United States of America witnessed the new wave of immigration. Particularly, the massive Jewish migration started from both Central and Eastern Europe during the antebellum period (from 1820 to 1860).⁷³ Due to migration, the number of American Jews significantly grew.⁷⁴ Jews built new synagogues as well as created several social, communal, cultural, philanthropic, and religious institutions in every place they migrated since the beginning of their first settlement in America despite their limited number.⁷⁵

Levenson underscores that this migration affected American Jewry by bringing myriad Jewish expressions, for example, “some secular-tending viewpoints.”⁷⁶ Moreover, after the immigration, American Judaism started to change and transform. Especially, after the increase of the German-Jewish immigration, the Jewish community became “more heterogeneous.”⁷⁷ For instance, European-trained rabbis started leading synagogues.⁷⁸ According to Sarna, the 1820s are

⁷⁰ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 339.

⁷¹ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 339.

⁷² Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 41. See also Sarna, *American Judaism*, 59. Sarna notes that in 1825, two synagogues existed in New York, four in 1835, ten in 1845, and over twenty in 1855.

⁷³ Zola, and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 67.

⁷⁴ While the Jewish population in 1880 in America was approximately 250,000 and 300 synagogues, this number grew very quickly in the following few decades, and the number of synagogues tripled in 1900, up to around 1,000 synagogues. Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 45. The Jewish population was roughly one million by 1900. Ashton, “Expanding Jewish Life,” 48.

⁷⁵ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 45.

⁷⁶ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 340.

⁷⁷ Bokser, “Conservative Judaism,” 334.

⁷⁸ Sarna, “American Jewish History”, 346.

“a remarkable decade in American Jewish history,” since American Judaism witnessed a variety of changes then, including an increase in Jewish immigrants from Western and Central Europe as well as the visibility of “a few extraordinary Jews”—such as Abraham Collins and Solomon H. Jackson—in American cultural and political life.⁷⁹ Gary Phillip Zola and Marc Dollinger also point out, “the new arrivals challenged existing customs and practices, actively supporting the reformation and Americanization of Jewish religious practice;” by doing so, “their novel approaches significantly influenced the evolution of Jewish life in the United States.”⁸⁰

In addition to the massive Jewish immigration from Europe, after the colonial era, several crucial Constitutional changes, especially changes to restrictive colonial laws and monopolistic church establishments, contributed to the transformation of American Judaism. For instance, the constitutional reforms in Jewish congregations in different states took place after the colonial period to “reconstruct synagogue polity in accordance with new American norms,” and more specifically with the intention to “harmonize the traditional hierarchic synagogue-community with the new democratic American state.”⁸¹ In this respect, Sarna maintains that this attempt caused tensions between religious values and new American values, namely with the traditions of the synagogue-community and but also with Jewish law.⁸² As I shall examine in the following chapter, several religious movements emerged which tried to adapt religious tradition to current conditions in America.

The perception of Jews embedded in America in the twentieth century, according to Michael L. Satlow, even though Jews constantly presented “themselves as Americans of a different

⁷⁹ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 54.

⁸⁰ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 67-68.

⁸¹ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 43-44.

⁸² Sarna, *American Judaism*, 44.

religion,” their efforts failed, and they were mostly represented “as a distinctive ethnic group.” Satlow further maintains that Jews started to redefine Judaism.⁸³ Unlike religious life in the colonial and early national eras, which was synagogue-centered, religious life in the antebellum period was much diverse because Jews “expanded their Jewish organizations and identities beyond the synagogue.”⁸⁴

This big change in Judaism, the “religious revolution,” also illustrates that American Judaism was no longer monolithic, and more importantly, as Sarna states, “no single synagogue was able any longer to represent the community as a whole.”⁸⁵ Jews considered themselves “a portion of the people” rather than “a people apart.”⁸⁶ Sarna explicates the nature of this transformation with the following terms:

For the first time, American Jews could now choose from a number of congregations, most of them Ashkenazic in one form or another, reflecting a range of rites, ideologies, and regions of origin....[S]ynagogue pluralism changed the balance of power between the synagogue and its members. Before, when there was but one synagogue in every community, it could take members for granted and discipline them; they had little option but to obey.⁸⁷

So, synagogue pluralism not only ended the “synagogue-community,” but also established a “community of synagogues” and created several congregations for American Jews. Jewish immigration to the United States of America continued during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as it continued to shape American Jewish life.

Despite the increasing number of synagogues, American Jews still confronted the challenges of assimilation. In this regard, Jews had to face not only the issue of assimilation but

⁸³ Satlow, “Defining Judaism,” 842.

⁸⁴ Zola, and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 67.

⁸⁵ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 60.

⁸⁶ Zola and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 67.

⁸⁷ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 60.

also witnessed the transformation of Judaism as well.⁸⁸ There were two crucial issues that Jews encountered: “increased rates of intermarriage” and “stepped-up efforts by Christian evangelical groups to convert them.”⁸⁹ These factors accelerated the process of assimilation. In this context, the growing number of Jews and all these changes in American Judaism also raised concerns with some Jews. More specifically, American Jews became concerned with “Jewish continuity.”⁹⁰ It is crucial to mention that Jews in America did not have ordained rabbis until 1840 and a seminary to train rabbis until 1875.⁹¹ Charles S. Liebman underscores that there was “a paucity of distinguished rabbis and scholars among the immigrants in early American Orthodox community despite a large number of Orthodox Jewish immigrants, namely around 50,000 Jews between 1881-1885.”⁹² Rabbi Rice, the first rabbi ordained in America, came to Baltimore in 1840, and explicates the plight of Jews to his teacher, Wolf Hamburger, in a letter with the following statement:

The character of religious life in this land is on the lowest level; most of the people are eating non-Kosher food, are violating the Shabbos in public . . . and there are thousands who have been assimilated among the non-Jewish population, and have married non-

⁸⁸ Pamela S. Nadell also explains how this decade gave rise to the religious revolution in American Judaism with the following formulation: What had once been a “synagogue-community” became a “community of synagogues.” In the 1820s, the American Jewish community was still very small – between three thousand and six thousand Jews. Nevertheless, tensions in synagogue-communities – between young and old, immigrant and native born, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, modernizers and traditionalists – simmered. In the end they burst forth in a “religious revolution that overthrew the synagogue-community;” by 1825, Jews in both Charleston and New York had split off from established synagogues to create new religious societies. These in turn paved the way for the extraordinary diversity of synagogue life that became a hallmark of American Judaism. Pamela S. Nadell, “Jews and Judaism in the United States,” in *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 211.

⁸⁹ Zola, and Dollinger, *American Jewish History*, 67.

⁹⁰ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 54.

⁹¹ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 46.

⁹² Charles S. Leibman, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 66 (1965), 29.

Jewish women. Under these circumstances, my mind is perplexed and I wonder whether a Jew may live in a land such as this.⁹³

Rabbi Rice expresses his frustration and dismay at the assimilation of American Jews. In this sense, similarly, Levenson maintains that the majority of these Jews “ultimately integrated (through intermarriage and conversion) into the general environment.”⁹⁴ In other words, even though some Jews were more observant of Judaism, many of them were not religious and instead had very secular lives, including working on the Sabbath and socializing with non-Jewish Americans.⁹⁵ Some Jews described it as “Jewish religious indifference,” and some as the “‘apathy and neglect’ manifested toward Judaism by young and old alike.”⁹⁶ For these reasons, Jews were concerned about the future and survival of Judaism in America.

Moreover, according to Israel Friedlander (1876-1920), known as one of the early architects of Conservative Judaism, “wholesale adoption of American attitudes and behaviors would cause the immigrants to succumb to assimilation and American materialism.” More importantly, his solution to this assimilation would be that “American Jewry must preserve its communal life and traditional culture within the context of American citizenship.”⁹⁷ Similarly, Diane Ashton argues that Jews integrated into “the gentile world” in the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ In this regard, Sarna contends that, however much nineteenth-century American-Jews assimilated

⁹³ Israel Tabak, “Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore: Pioneer of Orthodox Judaism in America,” *Tradition*, Vol. 7 (Summer, 1965), 102.

⁹⁴ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 339. Today the plight of American Jews is not very different from the past in terms of integration into the dominant culture. In this sense, similarly, Alan Levenson notes that: “Never before has Jewry been so integrated into main-stream American life, and numerous trends in the religious landscape (for example, de-institutionalization, individualism, a consumer mentality in matters of observance and affiliation, charismatic leadership, electronic and Web-based virtual communities) have Jewish counterparts.” Levenson, “American Judaism,” 346.

⁹⁵ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 340.

⁹⁶ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 54.

⁹⁷ Pamela S. Nadell and Marc Lee Raphael, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1988), 90.

⁹⁸ Ashton, “Expanding Jewish Life,” 51.

into dominant American culture, Jews still experienced antisemitism and overt missionizing.⁹⁹ On the other hand, Sarna underscores that the plight of Jews in America was still better than that of many Jews in Europe. For Levenson, even today in the American context, antisemitism “remains relatively marginal.”¹⁰⁰ Even more specifically, European Jews frequently faced antisemitism while the quantity of antisemitic incidents remained “marginal and insignificant” in America.¹⁰¹ Indeed, antisemitism was one of the primary reasons for the immigration of European Jews to America.¹⁰²

American Judaism as a minority religion within a Christian-majority country survives today, and American Jews also have managed to find a balance between being Jewish and being American. As Levenson indicates, “American Judaism seems destined to remain what it has been since the colonial period: a prominent non-Christian religion, both admired and disdained, and destined to serve the needs of its adherents to balance the sincere desires for both full Americanism and group survival.”¹⁰³ Thus, Jews simultaneously maintain their religious identity and American identity without rejecting either of them. The Jewish cultural and religious institutions they built since their first arrival in America also have contributed to the survival of Jewish identity.

⁹⁹ Jonathan D. Sarna, “American Jewish History,” *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Review of Developments in Modern Jewish Studies, Part 1 (Oct., 1990), 347.

¹⁰⁰ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 350.

¹⁰¹ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 40.

¹⁰² Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 53. Fader discusses the issue of Antisemitism during the colonial period. She argues that even though the plight of Jews in America was much better than Jews who lived in Europe, they still faced discrimination and exclusion from the political realm and to some extent, Antisemitism. She further states that Antisemitism in colonial America was mild and “did not take the violent forms it frequently did in Europe.” Unlike in much of Europe, in colonial America there were no economic restrictions or legal disabilities. Faber argues that despite this tolerance and acceptance, Jews in the British colonies were excluded from the political and public lives: they “could neither vote nor serve in public office; they had no civic existence.” It is crucial to mention that the condition of Jews in New York City was much different from Jews in other British colonies. For instance, they could vote in municipal elections. Faber, “America’s Earliest History Jewish Settlers,” 35-36.

¹⁰³ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 350.

Chapter Two: The Early History of Muslims in America

The history of Muslims and Islam in America merits discussion at greater length and from a wide variety of angles to comprehend the plight of American Muslims today and see that Islam has deep roots in the United States. John Esposito suggests that Islam in America not only “is the fastest growing religion,” but also “will replace Judaism as the second largest religion” in the twenty-first century given the high fertility rates in America.¹⁰⁴ Today it is safe to state that Islam is the second largest religion in the United States of America.¹⁰⁵ In addition to reproduction and migration, conversion to Islam is another crucial reason for Islam’s fast growth.¹⁰⁶ The date of the first arrival of Muslims in the regions that then became the United States of America stirs controversy over the early history of Muslims and Islam among historians. This problem basically stems from the historiography of slavery in the American context. The scholarship on the history of slavery mostly overlooks the existence of enslaved Muslim Africans. Thus, most histories of Muslims in the American context start with the immigration of Middle Easterners in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰⁷ In doing so, they fail to tell the story of African Muslim slaves in the United States. The history of African slavery is not independent of the history of American Muslims, as will be explained shortly.

¹⁰⁴ John L. Esposito, “Muslims in America or American Muslims,” in *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

¹⁰⁵ Another critical issue is the number of Muslims in America. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri highlights that even though the number of Muslims in America is very controversial because of lack of official estimate of Muslim population, he adds that “at the turn of the twenty-first century, the United States is home to about three million Muslims.” Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2. Given the lack of official data and the birth rate in Muslim communities in America as well as the continued migration of Muslims, it is difficult to determine the exact number of the Muslim population.

¹⁰⁶ Ba-Yunus and Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Jane Idleman Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.

Initially, these discussions center around the question of whether the history of Muslims is an integral part of American history and part of the American fabric. The question of their “indigenouness,” “foreignness” or “otherness” are key to their place in America. In particular, the concept of “Judeo-Christian” has become a popular way to think about what America means, and more importantly, it is used by some Americans not only to describe themselves, but also to exclude other faiths from being part of the “true” America.¹⁰⁸ As Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad puts, the use of the term “Judeo-Christian” inscribes others as “transient, permanently marginalized, or destined to disappear into the larger groups” as well as “outside the polity or subsume them only when they conform to the policies and desires of the dominant groups.”¹⁰⁹ In this framework, Islam and Muslims are not considered a part of the American fabric. Basically, ignoring the history of the arrival of African Muslim slaves as the first American Muslims serves as a tool for validating the use of the term “Judeo-Christian.”

This exclusion of African Muslim slaves as the first comers has not been confined to the history of America. The Muslim American experience is mostly represented as an exclusively immigrant experience in the American scholarship of Islam. Edward E. Curtis IV states that the formal study of Muslims in America started in the 1930s with a special focus on “the study of Black Muslims and a few immigrant groups,” and then “became a religious subfield” in the 1980s.¹¹⁰ In this framework, most importantly, according to Curtis, by focusing exclusively on post-1965 Muslim immigration to America, the field not only “obscured the presence of African American Muslims,” but also “mistakenly analyzed the Muslim American experience as a whole

¹⁰⁸ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Dynamics of Islamic Identity in North America,” in *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

¹⁰⁹ Haddad, “The Dynamics of Islamic Identity,” 23.

¹¹⁰ Edward E. Curtis IV, “The Study of American Muslims: A History,” in *American Islam*, ed. Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15.

through the lens of a first-generation struggle between American modernity and Islamic tradition.”¹¹¹ This approach to the history of Muslims in America omits the early history of Islam and enslaved African Muslims in America and contributes to the marginalization of Muslims and to the labeling of Muslims as “other.” It is worth noting that African Muslims brought not only Islam to America, but also “did so much work in the plantations, mines, transportation, and houses of the new world order of racial slavery and democracy.”¹¹²

Before discussing the history of American Muslims, it is important to note that Islam in America is much different from Islam in Muslim-majority countries, particularly because the Muslim population in the United States is much more diverse than in most countries where Islam is the dominant religion. As Sally Howell puts pithily, “The diversity of cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds found among Muslims in the United States today is not duplicated in any Muslim-majority country.”¹¹³ In other words, Islam in the American context “is a mosaic of many ethnic, racial, and national groups.”¹¹⁴ Even though there are several culturally, linguistically and racially different Muslim groups in America, most Americans “equate Islam and Muslims with the Arabs and the Middle East.”¹¹⁵ Additionally, not only Muslims from myriad ethnic and sectarian orientations settled in America, but also “Americans of African, European, Latin, and Native American ancestries have converted to Islam.”¹¹⁶ The majority of the American Muslim population includes “first- or second generation immigrants or African-American converts.”¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Curtis IV, “The Study of American Muslims,” 15.

¹¹² Richard Brent Turner, “African Muslim Slaves in Antebellum America,” in *American Islam*, ed. Juliane Hammer and Omid Safi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32.

¹¹³ Sally Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit: Rediscovering the Muslim American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

¹¹⁴ Esposito, “Muslims in America,” 4.

¹¹⁵ Ba-Yunus and Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, 1.

¹¹⁶ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Esposito, “Muslims in America,” 3.

As mentioned earlier, one of my goals in this chapter is to examine some aspects of the early history of Islam in the American context. Despite the importance of the early history of Muslims, research on the early history of Muslims in the United States is strikingly limited. It is worth noting that the early history of Muslims in the American context is based mainly on biographies of early Muslims in America as well as writings, personal notes, and manuscripts written by African Muslim slaves. Additionally, there are “newspaper articles and advertisements for runaway slaves, slaveholders’ records, and the testimony of slaves and their descendants.”¹¹⁸ Unlike other parts of the Americas, including Brazil, there are a limited number of historical manuscripts and documents in the United States of America. As GhaneaBassiri stresses, “scholarship on African Muslims in colonial and antebellum America has been largely biographical.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, Diouf states that the studies of African Muslims in the early American context mostly limited to the biographies of two African Muslims, namely Ayuba Suleyman Diallo enslaved in Maryland (Job Ben Solomon) and Ibrahim ‘Abd al Rahman enslaved in Mississippi.¹²⁰ Gomez also points to a paucity of primary sources and data in the American colonial and antebellum periods. Gomez explicates in detail two reasons for the problem of data scarcity:

First, colonial and antebellum observers, who were ignorant of the Islamic faith, did not accurately record the variegated cultural expressions of African slaves. The other factor contributing to the scarcity of data is the reluctance of the descendants of these early Muslims to be forthright in answering questions about their ancestors.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Michael A. Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Nov., 1994), 673.

¹¹⁹ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 15.

¹²⁰ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 5. For example, *Africa Remembered*, edited by Philip Curtin in the 1960s, contains information on and biographies of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Salih Bilali. Douglas Grant’s book, *The Fortunate Slave: An Illustration of African Slavery in the Early Eighteenth Century*, published in 1968 is about Ayuba Suleyman Diallo. Terry Alford’s book, *Prince Among Slaves* (1977), is a biography of Abd al-Rahman.

¹²¹ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 672.

In this sense, people's unfamiliarity with Islam and Muslims as well as social pressures on their descendants, has led to an unwillingness to take about their Muslim roots; these historical facts have contributed to the limit of our knowledge. Diouf further contends that even though all studies on African Muslim slaves provide crucial information on the history of African slaves, especially in Jamaica, the United States and Brazil, they still intended to support the assumption that "only a few Muslims were transported to a handful of Western countries or that only a small minority remained Muslims," since these books present their [African Muslim slaves] particular stories unconnected, which made them and their experience appear exceptional."¹²² In doing so, the history of African Muslims is marginalized as well as considered in isolation. GhaneaBassiri also points out that biographies of individual Muslim slaves can give rise to misunderstandings in the study of the early history of American Islam, including the number of Muslim slaves brought to America, when "scholars estimate that 'tens of thousands' of African Muslims lived in colonial and antebellum America."¹²³ GhaneaBassiri further addresses the fact that these individual biographies "represent only a tiny fraction of the Muslims in antebellum America."¹²⁴

In this sense, Diouf further argues that rather than writing biographies of individual African Muslims in Americas, as some scholars have done, a comprehensive framework must be developed that links "glimpses of lives and fragments of stories scattered over three continents into one narrative that could reveal a previously hidden dimension of African history, diasporan history, and Muslim history."¹²⁵ In her book, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, by bringing together many sources from not only the United States, but also other parts

¹²² Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 5.

¹²³ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 16.

¹²⁴ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 16.

¹²⁵ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*., 5-6.

of the Americas, Diouf maintains that “Islam and Muslims were not recent arrivals but had been part of the American fabric from its very beginning.”¹²⁶ More specifically, the history of Muslims in America started with the arrival of the first Africans in the New World early in the sixteenth century.¹²⁷ Diouf states that “Islam was already well established in West Africa” when the first African slaves started to be deported to the New World in the 1500s.¹²⁸ Hence, the first Muslims came to America as slaves by force in the 1500s. Michael Gomez also stresses that the existence of African Muslims in North America “antedates the arrival of the English colonists.”¹²⁹ More particularly, there was a significant number of Africans in Florida ruled by the Spanish from 1565 to 1763, as well as in Louisiana controlled by the French from 1719 to 1743, and especially, “by 1803 some 28,300 slaves had entered Louisiana, many from Senegambia” in which the majority of the population were Muslim at that time.¹³⁰ GhaneaBassiri also indicates how the history of Muslims in America starts with the earliest arrivals of Europeans during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

[A]s Europeans conquered and colonized the Americas, an Atlantic world emerged relating Africa, Europe, and the Americas through a triangle of mercantile relations and imperial networks. Muslims from North and West Africa were active participants in this triangle, and many of them ended up in America as slaves. Since that time, there has been a continuous presence of Muslims in America.¹³¹

In his view, the presence of African Muslim slaves dates back to European exploration and colonization of the Americas and of the West since African Muslims were involved in the transatlantic trade. The Atlantic slave trade brought African slaves to the New World. More

¹²⁶ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 2.

¹²⁷ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 20.

¹²⁸ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 20. See also Sulayman Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America* (Chicago: ABC International, Inc., 1999), 14.

¹²⁹ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 684.

¹³⁰ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 678-84.

¹³¹ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 1.

importantly, even though the history of Muslims in America dates back to the sixteenth century, some historians focus on African slaves without mentioning Islam as their religion. In this regard, Aminah Beverly McCloud criticizes these historians who overlook the early presence of African Muslim slaves in the New World and considers it “a well-kept historical secret.”¹³² Michael Gomez also underlines that the early presence of Islam in America barely receives scholarly attention, and “such neglect is most regrettable, given the possibility that one of America’s most illustrious sons, Frederick Douglass, may have himself been a descendant of Muslims.”¹³³ Diouf also critiques “the invisibility of the Muslims in the hundreds of books on slavery.”¹³⁴ Interestingly, even though African religions are analyzed in these books, the presence of Muslim Africans is ignored and as Diouf stresses, “only Islam had evaporated and had done so immediately.”¹³⁵ Diouf further asks the question: “How could the religious dimension, an essential part of people’s lives and identity, simply vanish once Africans had reached the Americas?”¹³⁶ This approach to the history of Islam ignores the fact that Muslims and Islam have very deep roots in America since the 1500s. Particularly, the arrival of first Muslims in the New World in the early 1500s make Islam “the second monotheist religion...—after Catholicism and before Judaism and Protestantism” in the Americas.¹³⁷ Despite its central role as the second monotheist religion, the first Muslims in North America faced several difficulties. These African Muslim slaves, for instance, “were forbidden to organize institutions for the practice of their faith” as well as to “marry endogenously, as free religious minorities (Jews and Roman Catholics) did.”¹³⁸ These restrictions

¹³² Aminah Beverly McCloud, *Transnational Muslims in American Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 1.

¹³³ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 671.

¹³⁴ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 4.

¹³⁵ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 5.

¹³⁶ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 4.

¹³⁷ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 2.

¹³⁸ Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 11.

prevented “the creation and spread of Muslim families among the enslaved.”¹³⁹ GhaneaBassiri also contends that enslaved African Muslims in the early history of Islam in America “are disassociated in them from contemporary, popular perceptions of the ‘typical’ Muslim or black African.”¹⁴⁰ GhaneaBassiri calls these processes of dissociation “de-negrofication” and “de-Islamicization.”¹⁴¹ Mainly, changing their Islamic names and religion was widespread in the early history of African Muslims in America.¹⁴² Some African Muslims even practiced Islam in secret while others converted to Christianity. For instance, as Gomez states, “Salih Bilali, or ‘Tom,’ remained a devout Muslim,” in contrast to Umar b. Said’s “possible conversion to Christianity.”¹⁴³ Some African Muslim slaves even collaborated in the process of “de-negrofication” and “de-Islamicization” in the hope of gaining better treatment or of returning to Africa.¹⁴⁴ Thus, as GhaneaBassiri highlights, some African slaves “sought to disassociate themselves from Negroid stereotypes and complied with whites’ de-negrofication of them.”¹⁴⁵ Gomez, furthermore, underscores that due to “the racist views of whites toward other Africans,” African Muslim slaves distanced themselves from being African going so far as to “deny any similarity to them.”¹⁴⁶ GhaneaBassiri also explains the role of Islam in Muslims’ lives in this era, “Islam did not shape a distinct Muslim community in colonial and antebellum America but rather was a way through which Muslims made sense of their new experiences and encounters and formed new individual and communal relations.”¹⁴⁷ In this

¹³⁹ Howell, *Old Islam in Detroit*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 18.

¹⁴¹ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 18.

¹⁴² For Ayuba ibn Sulayman changed his name as Job Ben Solomon. He was born in 1701 as a Fulbe Muslim of some rank from Bundu. He was abducted by Mandingo bandits and sold to the English on the Gambia River. Then he was deported to Maryland in 1732 and was enslaved on a tobacco plantation.

¹⁴³ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 688-689.

¹⁴⁴ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 22.

¹⁴⁵ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 704.

¹⁴⁷ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam*, 66.

framework, Islam in this area was practiced mostly at the individual level. Many African Muslim slaves did not have the freedom to practice their religion openly so that they continued to worship in secret within their families. Gomez adds that “Muslims made genuine and persistent efforts to observe their religion... They perpetuated their faith primarily within their own families.”¹⁴⁸ In this regard, Khan maintains that due to these difficulties, African Muslims “were unable to maintain their identity and, over time, Islam was lost by their offspring.”¹⁴⁹ Similarly, as Gomez highlights, “many Muslims struggled not only to preserve their traditions but also to pass them on to their progeny.”¹⁵⁰

Similarly, Sulayman Nyang argues that “during the period of slavery the survivability of Islam among the slaves was an impossibility because the maintenance of one’s religion presupposes freedom of thought and practice, a luxury that was incompatible with servitude.”¹⁵¹ Needless to say, Muslims, as slaves, were not able to build mosques for praying in congregation or Islamic institutions for learning and teaching the religion in early America, a fact which exacerbated their survivability as Muslims. Gomez explains “the gradual loss of Islamic knowledge” among Muslims:

Though they may have gathered in small numbers and clandestine places to pray, they could not openly maintain Qur’anic schools and did not have access to Islamic texts. Inevitably their collective memory eventually faltered....The gradual loss of Islamic knowledge, combined with the tendency to use Arabic exclusively for purposes of religion, undermined Islamic culture in early America.¹⁵²

In addition to these difficulties that Muslim slaves experienced, “the harshness of slavery and the determined efforts of the slave masters to separate persons of the same ethnic background made

¹⁴⁸ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 672.

¹⁴⁹ Khan, *Islam, Muslims, and America*, 27.

¹⁵⁰ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 695.

¹⁵¹ Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America*, 14.

¹⁵² Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 705.

the survival of Islam problematic.”¹⁵³ Although enslaved Muslims spent much effort to maintain their religious lives, there is not sufficient evidence to determine whether some managed to preserve their religious beliefs. As mentioned earlier, Curtis states that to improve their lives, some enslaved African American Muslims might have pretended to convert to Christianity and even perhaps wrote poetry to praise their masters.¹⁵⁴ Most of them experienced “forced conversion to Christianity.”¹⁵⁵ They even had to change their Muslim names. It is worth noting that there is a dearth of documents on the issue of the religious lives of the first Muslims. As Curtis points out, due to lack of sources, what remains uncertain is the question of whether or not the first generation of African slaves practiced their religion at the communal level.¹⁵⁶ The scarcity of information about how the first Muslim slaves practiced Islam itself shows the marginalization of American Muslims in the history of America. However, historical sources we do possess from in the nineteenth century indicate that they apparently were unable to preserve their religious identity. Diouf also highlights that unlike African Muslim slaves in the United States, African Muslim slaves in Brazil have survived as Muslims.¹⁵⁷

On the other hand, we can say that some Muslim African slaves had a different experience in terms of how they could practice Islam in early America. For example, some enslaved Muslims could practice openly in isolated and local communities on the Georgia and South Carolina coasts.¹⁵⁸ These isolated places where African slaves outnumbered the whites offered African slaves an opportunity to practice their religion for some time. Curtis argues that Muslim slaves who resided in St. Simons Island and Sapelo Island, Georgia, practiced Islam in the nineteenth

¹⁵³ Nyang, *Islam in the United States of America*, 13.

¹⁵⁴ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 11.

¹⁵⁵ Jane Idleman Smith, *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xiv

¹⁵⁶ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 14-15.

¹⁵⁷ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 15.

century as well as possibly into the early twentieth century.¹⁵⁹ Curtis builds this assumption on fragments of writing, personal notes, manuscripts, etc., attributed to individual slaves. Among those slaves that Curtis mentions is Salih Bilali enslaved in Georgia.¹⁶⁰ Most importantly, like many other Muslim slaves who lived in isolated areas, Bilali “may have been able to pass on elements of his religious culture to his children.”¹⁶¹ Many of these Muslims in the Sapelo community reluctantly converted to Christianity over time.¹⁶² In Gomez’s words, “With the establishment of the First African Baptist Church in May 1866, however, the open and collective pursuit of Islam became increasingly rare, although it is difficult to say when, exactly, it ended on the island.”¹⁶³ Even though African Muslims on the island were able to practice Islam for some time, they could not remain Muslims due to the difficulties they faced. As Diouf states, “Islam brought by the enslaved West Africans has not survived,” however, “It has left traces; it has contributed to the culture and history of the continents.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 15.

¹⁶⁰ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 15-16. Bilali, also called Ben Ali, Bilali Mahomet, and Bu Allah, was a Muslim African slave who lived in Sapelo Island. He had twelve sons and seven daughters on Sapelo. He bestowed Muslim names upon his children. His master put him in charge of other slaves. Like many Muslim slaves, he was educated. Curtis contends that given his Arabic manuscripts, he most probably had Islamic higher education. In the 1850s, one white woman from Georgia met Bilali’s children “recorded her impressions that...family ‘worshipped Mahomet,’ or Muhammad.” See Curtis 15-16. Gomez also points out that Bilali had “an extant collection of excerpts from an Islamic (Maliki) legal text known as the *Risala* of Ibn Abu Zayd.” See Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 689.

¹⁶¹ Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 16.

¹⁶² Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 79-80. See also Curtis, *Muslims in America*, 11-12.

¹⁶³ Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” 706.

¹⁶⁴ Diouf, *Servants of Allah*, 251.

PART TWO: American Jewish and Muslim Responses to Modernity

During modernization in the West, advancements in science and technology have brought about significant changes in every sphere of society. In the nineteenth century and afterward, the world witnessed social, political, and economic changes, including changing relationships between Church and State, the formation of nation-states, a rationalistic epistemology, and the secularization of societies. Modern values have transformed societies. The status and role of women and their social, political, and economic presence in Western societies have also changed dramatically. Women's traditional roles have started to be dismantled by reforms in the West, including the right to vote, working outside the home, and the availability of education for women.

These changes raise many questions, including how to adapt religious values to modern ones. Religious communities must face the challenges of modernity. In particular, women's changing roles in society also create a reaction in religious societies in which women were seen as the keepers of religious tradition and were essential to the survival and continuity of religious identity. Many attempts have emerged in Muslim and Jewish settings to adapt religious values to modern ones. They have reinterpreted religious texts and, by doing so, reproduced modern discourses, especially on women and gender in Jewish and Muslim societies. These attempts focus mainly on the compatibility of religion with modern values (although, of course, there are rejectionists in Islam and Judaism as well). Investigating the reactions to modernity that have emerged in both religious settings entails studying discourses and movements.

The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist movements all emerged and developed in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries in the hope of adapting Judaism to modernity. Their reactions to modernity and modern values have created different forms of Judaism and various interpretations of its practices. A variety of factors play roles in these divisions in Judaism.

It is worth noting that the changing role of women in society is one of the essential factors that have caused different reactions to modernity in the Jewish context. The following chapter will sketch out the Jewish response to modernity.

The second chapter of this part briefly discusses how a parallel but distinct Muslim response to modernity emerged and developed under colonial rule. More importantly, due to colonial rule's treatment of Islam and the practice of veiling, veiling itself came to be seen as a symbol of resistance to colonialism and Western hegemony.¹⁶⁵ As Leila Ahmed puts it, since "the custom of veiling and the position of women in Muslim societies became, in their [colonialists'] rhetoric, the proof of the inferiority of Islam and the justification of their efforts to undermine Muslim religion and society," veiling becomes a sign of resistance.¹⁶⁶ This part shows that the Orientalist representation of Islam and Muslim women is not a new discourse. When European powers colonized most Muslim lands, they depicted Muslim women as oppressed victims in need of saving and Islam as a backward religion.

This part discusses Jewish and Muslim responses to modernity to point out the diversity within both religions. Understandings of religion and the approach to modernity among Jews and Muslims are not monolithic. Given the diversity of religious responses to modernity and modern values, it is safe to say that understanding modesty in Jewish and Muslim settings is not fixed. This chapter will help us to understand the following chapter on modesty.

¹⁶⁵ In contrast to the Jewish response to modernity, Muslims had to deal with both the challenges of modernity and European colonialism at the same time. Thus, it should be noted that Muslim thinkers responded to the challenges of modernity under the hegemony of the colonial West. As Said puts it succinctly, "No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social positions, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society." Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 237.

Chapter Three: The Jewish Response to Modernity

The history of American Judaism and Jews is more complicated than one might expect. Before the advent of religious movements in Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Judaism), rabbinic Judaism, established by the rabbis of the first few centuries of the common era, was mostly seen as the exclusive Jewish system in America until the 1800s. Raphael describes Judaism in America in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries as “an adaptation of the centuries-old rabbinic Judaism.”¹⁶⁷ He further maintains that European Jews played a vital role in the emergence of these branches.¹⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, the arrival of new Jewish immigrants dramatically changed American Jewish life. In Eric I. Goldstein’s words, the immigrants turned American Jewry into “an unwieldy composite of various national, religious, political, and ideological groupings.”¹⁶⁹

Unlike Jews in Europe, who faced many difficulties, including discrimination and persecution, even expulsions, concentration camps, and extermination, American Jews have different factors that affect the history of American Judaism, including democracy, liberty of conscience, church-state separation, and voluntarism.¹⁷⁰ As Jonathan Sarna stresses, “as nowhere else to the same degree, Judaism has had to adapt to a religious environment shaped by the denominational character of American Protestantism, the canons of free-market competition, the

¹⁶⁷ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 46.

¹⁶⁸ Raphael points out the European Jews’ contribution to the emergence and development of these branches with the following statement: “Although this system faced attacks earlier, it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that central and Western European Jews began to create alternatives and, following the creation of institutions, formulate ideologies. To do so they had to negotiate a complex set of interlocking ethnic, linguistic, national, regional, and religious identities. Out of these challenges would emerge a plethora of modern Judaisms, most notably Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism.” Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 46.

¹⁶⁹ Eric I. Goldstein, “The Great Wave: Eastern European Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1880–1924,” in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 85.

¹⁷⁰ Sarna, *American Judaism*, xvi.

ideals of freedom, and the reality of diversity. What is distinctive in American Judaism is largely a result of these factors.”¹⁷¹ According to Stephen D. Corrsin, even though the Reform movement started to flourish in the early nineteenth century, four Jewish movements (Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Orthodox Judaism) “are essentially American movements, albeit descended from nineteenth-century German undertakings.”¹⁷² Basically, America provided Jews a fertile environment for important developments and the emergence of new religious movements. As Michael A. Meyer explicates, “these European barriers to Reform were mostly absent in the United States,” and despite prejudice against Jews in America, “there was no government control over religion, no conservative established church to set the pattern of religious life. Many denominations and sects competed for adherents in a free market of religions.”¹⁷³ Similarly, Sarna points out that Judaism in the American context experienced a distinctive transformative experience due to several factors, including the American Revolution, the ratification of the Constitution, the passage of the Bill of Rights, and the nationwide democratization of religion.¹⁷⁴ These tenets also served as a barrier to uniting American Jews. As Adam S. Fergizer explains, “these factors also neutralized numerous efforts such as that of Isaac Mayer Wise to unite American Jews under a particular framework and prevented rabbinic leaders from gaining authority beyond the voluntary memberships of their ‘private’ congregations or religious movements.”¹⁷⁵ This environment encouraged religious diversity.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Sarna, *American Judaism*, xvi.

¹⁷² Corrsin, “Progressive Judaism,” 98.

¹⁷³ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 226.

¹⁷⁴ Sarna, *American Judaism*, xvii.

¹⁷⁵ Adam S. Fergizer, “Abraham Geiger and the Denominational Approach to Jewish Religious Life,” in *Jüdische Existenz in der Moderne: Abraham Geiger und die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, ed. Christian Wiese (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2013), 190.

¹⁷⁶ According to Jacob J. Schacter, living in America meant a twofold experience for Jews. Schacter explicates: “Living in America, with its emphasis on freedom, democracy, and individualism, was— and

These branches not only provided American Jews with alternative Jewish religious identities but also represented “the openness of American life and the difficulty of imposing imported religious norms and practices in the new world, conditions that had existed for centuries.”¹⁷⁷ Abraham J. Karp also explicates Jewish movements’ response to modernity: “The twofold experience of enlightenment and emancipation that permitted Jews to enter the modern world provided them with opportunities, but also confronted them with the challenge to justify their continued corporate existence in a world that welcomed their assimilation.”¹⁷⁸ At this point, it is worth attending to rabbis’ contribution to the diversity within Judaism. Michael Satlow explains the importance of rabbis in the validation of any religious behavior and their role in the diversity of American Judaism.¹⁷⁹

Jewish communities, like other religious communities, had to deal with the question of how to reconcile religious and modern values or how to adapt Jewish tradition to modernity. In this regard, Neil Gillman demonstrates how Jewish communities in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century reacted to this need: “The Jewish community’s response to that need created a specific

continues to be—both a blessing and a challenge to perpetuating Jewish values and practice in this country. It is a blessing because Jews have been afforded an unprecedented opportunity to exercise their religion unhindered by external controls and constraints. At the same time, it serves as a real challenge because in a world without any ‘compulsory’ prerogatives, any choices—including those to define and reject Jewish practice and identity—are possible and even celebrated. And the more traditional the values and practice, the greater the challenge to its perpetuation.” Jacob J. Schacter, Foreword, In Eleff, Zev, *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), xxvi.

¹⁷⁷ Edward S. Shapiro, “Jewish Identity in America,” In *Encyclopedia of American Jewish History*, ed. Stephen H. Norwood and Eunice G. Pollack (2008), 54.

¹⁷⁸ Abraham J. Karp, “A Century of Conservative Judaism in the United States,” *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 86 (1986), 4.

¹⁷⁹ Satlow points out rabbis’ role in shaping religious life with the following statement: “Jewish communities typically exhibit a wide range of religious behaviors that they regard as ‘Jewish’ but which for contemporary rabbis are not normative. On the other hand, though, such behaviors, when not incorporated into traditional texts, rarely persist for long. Those that do persist are typically naturalized by the rabbis. Michael L. Satlow, “Defining Judaism: Accounting for ‘Religions’ in the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Dec. 2006), 853.

method of reading classical Jewish texts, a particular way of interpreting Jewish history, and an innovative way of making decisions about what Jews are to believe and how Jews are to live in a world that was strikingly different from the one in which those beliefs and practices originally came into being.”¹⁸⁰ Jewish scholars and rabbis tried to come up with solutions that helped to adapt religious tradition to modernity. The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist movements emerged not only in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries but also in reaction to both the Enlightenment and Emancipation.¹⁸¹ The relation of religious movements to the Enlightenment and Emancipation can be conceptualized/categorized in terms of the amount of tension between their traditional values and modern values. Raphael contends that these religious movements expose “deep divisions within Judaism over the program of the Enlightenment and Emancipation.”¹⁸² Similarly, Moshe Davis also accentuates modernity’s role in these divisions, as he argues that “the real challenge to Jewish religion in America, was to answer the question of the relevance of the Jewish faith to American society in an age of enlightenment, individualism, and egalitarian thought, and scientific progress, and intellectual achievement.”¹⁸³ Similarly, in the German context they all “searched for other ways to integrate Judaism into German life.”¹⁸⁴ As Michael Cohen highlights, like other branches of Judaism, positive-historical Judaism (known as the precursor to Conservative Judaism) “developed out of this impulse and provided a solution for its adherents to reconcile tradition with modernity.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Neil Gillman, *Conservative Judaism: The New Century* (West Orange, N.J.: Behrman House, 1993), 5.

¹⁸¹ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 4.

¹⁸² Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 4.

¹⁸³ Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in Nineteenth Century America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1963), 10.

¹⁸⁴ Michael R. Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter’s Disciples and The Creation of an American Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁸⁵ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 2.

Unlike Reform Judaism, adherents of Conservative Judaism believe that they could meet the expectations of modern life “without sacrificing their commitment to Jewish Law.”¹⁸⁶ In addition to the Reform and Conservative movements’ different responses to modernity, another response comes from Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), the founder of neo-Orthodoxy, who claims that “Jewish law, biblical and rabbinic are eternal and unchangeable.”¹⁸⁷ According to Raphael, these divisions in Judaism are “a battle between integrationists and separatists, between those who welcomed modernity and tried to adjust Judaism to it, and those who rejected modernity and tried to not permit its influences to infect them.”¹⁸⁸ So, it is safe to state that their relationship to modernity differs from each other. Orthodox Judaism, for instance, considers itself “the sole branch of Judaism which continues the authentic Jewish tradition, and it condemns other movements as having fallen away from or broken with tradition.”¹⁸⁹

On the other hand, it is not easy to contend that other Jewish movements reject tradition entirely. As Corrsin states, Reform and Conservative Judaism “continue to spend a great deal of energy debating which elements of the enormous range of Jewish traditions they are willing or obliged to perpetuate.”¹⁹⁰ According to Jakob J. Petuchowski, there are three main religious movements in contemporary American Judaism: “Orthodoxy on the right, Conservative Judaism in the centre and Reform Judaism on the left,”¹⁹¹ and more importantly, each of these movements has also “its own Right, Centre and Left.”¹⁹² In this respect, Raphael warns us not to generalize

¹⁸⁶ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 5

¹⁸⁸ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 4.

¹⁸⁹ Stephen D. Corrsin, “Progressive Judaism in Poland: Dilemmas of Modernity and Identity,” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 22, Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe (1998), 89.

¹⁹⁰ Corrsin, “Progressive Judaism,” 89.

¹⁹¹ Jakob J. Petuchowski, “Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim: Their Differences in Germany and Repercussions in America,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Vol. 22, Issue 1 (January 1977), 139.

¹⁹² Petuchowski, “Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim,” 139.

these branches with respect to the level of their religiosity since there are varieties of religious expression not only within American Judaism but also within each branch.¹⁹³ For example, the vast majority of Jews who see themselves as adhering to Orthodox Judaism may be identified “as modern, liberal, neo-, centrist, right-wing, sectarian and much more.”¹⁹⁴ In this regard, as Levenson notes, “even an adequate description of the four organized movements of Judaism would fail to reflect the diversity of worship styles within each.”¹⁹⁵ It is crucial to investigate these religious movements without making generalizations.

This chapter will briefly discuss the emergence and development of the four branches of American Judaism, with a particular focus on Orthodox Judaism. I will offer a glimpse into how these four branches reacted to modernity as shaping their own understanding of Judaism. The movements are not static and have changed over time. I should also note that each of them is ever-growing and transforming in the face of new developments. For instance, today’s Reform Judaism is quite different from two decades ago. This brief historical examination will help uncover the diversity in American Judaism and American Judaism’s varying responses to modernity.

a) Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism is the first movement within American Judaism that had to deal with the challenges of modernity. The Reform movement is the first branch of Judaism that slowly emerged before the others had come to be.¹⁹⁶ Generally speaking, as Abraham J. Karp demonstrates concerning the plight of American Jews in the middle of the nineteenth century, they “already had

¹⁹³ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 4-5.

¹⁹⁴ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 346.

¹⁹⁶ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 47.

the option of identifying with either of two religious tendencies, traditionalist or Reform.”¹⁹⁷ The rise of Reform Judaism profoundly influenced Jewish life and tradition in America.

According to Isaac Mayer Wise, known as the architect of American Reform Judaism, Judaism had to be not only Americanized but also modernized and democratized.¹⁹⁸ As its name suggests, this movement started with a number of crucial reforms in American Judaism. Basically, Raphael explicates these first changes and the emergence of the Reform movement with the following statement:

These reforms were largely ceremonial in nature, and they included adding an organ, mixed-sex choirs, family pews (i.e., mixed seating), Sabbath services on Sunday, scriptural readings in English rather than Hebrew, and a “recess” in the middle of the day of Yom Kippur prayers, as well as eliminating the second day of some holidays ([Rabbi Isaac Mayer] Wise abolished the second-day celebration of the three biblical “pilgrim” festivals in his Cincinnati synagogue in 1859 and of the Jewish New Year in 1873), head covering requirements for the synagogue, repetitive prayers, selling of honors and Torah chanting. Some of these additions and or removals were more widespread than others, some were more significant than others, but each of them indicated that the synagogue was moving away from tradition and toward what we loosely call Reform.¹⁹⁹

All these changes served as a catalyst for the emergence and development of Reform Judaism. These major reforms are indicators of the transformation of Judaism. Through these reforms, Reform rabbis expected to adapt religious tradition to modern conditions. Ellen M. Umansky further argues that when many rabbis gathered to discuss several crucial issues in Germany over 150 years ago, including the role of women in religious life, the Reform movement had begun.²⁰⁰ For instance, in 1846, “a commission appointed to reevaluate women’s traditional roles in the light of modernity recommended that ‘the rabbinical conference declare woman to be entitled to the

¹⁹⁷ Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 6-7.

¹⁹⁸ Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 7.

¹⁹⁹ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 49.

²⁰⁰ Ellen M. Umansky, “Feminism and American Reform Judaism,” in *The Americanization of The Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 267.

same religious rights and subject to the same religious duties as man.”²⁰¹ Even though some reforms are ceremonial and not radical, some are more profound, including eliminating head covering and some prayers.²⁰² On the other hand, Reform synagogues were not monolithic and did not all fully embrace all these reforms. Many synagogues in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, for instance, started to describe themselves as Reform yet “required men to wear head covering, continued to seat the men and women separately, and forbade the use of an organ.”²⁰³

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise played a key role in the development of the Reform movement in America. Rabbi Wise achieved several crucial changes in Albany in 1851, such as the abolition of a separate women’s gallery as well as the introduction of mixed seating in the synagogue.²⁰⁴ Similarly, as Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), the president of Hebrew College, explained the goals of Reform Judaism to a member of the Central Conference of American (Reform) Rabbis (CCAR) at the historic Pittsburgh Convention of 1885, “Reform Judaism will never reach its higher goal without having first accorded to the congregational council and in the entire religious and moral sphere of life, equal voice to woman with man.”²⁰⁵ It is safe to state that Reform Judaism put a great deal of emphasis on women’s equality since the very beginning of the Reform movement.

On the other hand, despite these revolutionary changes, Reform Judaism did not allow women to join rabbinic schools until the late 1960s.²⁰⁶ Sally Priesand entered the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in 1968 and became the first ordained female

²⁰¹ Umansky, “Feminism and American Reform Judaism,” 267.

²⁰² Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 50.

²⁰³ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 50.

²⁰⁴ Umansky, “Feminism and American Reform Judaism,” 267.

²⁰⁵ Umansky, “Feminism and American Reform Judaism,” 268.

²⁰⁶ Paula E. Hyman, “Ezrat Nashim and the Emergence of a New Jewish Feminism,” in *The Americanization of The Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 287.

American rabbi in 1972.²⁰⁷ Moreover, to increase the participation of women in the ritual life of the synagogue, Reform Judaism made several crucial improvements, including mixed seating and the promotion of equality of education for boys and girls.²⁰⁸ As Ellen M. Umansky contends, despite these early efforts to improve the roles and status of women in Reform Judaism and a resolution passed by the Central Conference of American (Reform) Rabbis (CCAR) in 1922 saying that “women could not ‘justly be denied the privilege of ordination,’ it was not until 1972 that women gained entrance into the Reform rabbinate.”²⁰⁹ Umansky also points out that in 1970, “96 percent of all Reform temples in the United States had elected a woman to their congregational boards....By the mid-1970s, it was no longer unusual for a woman to serve as synagogue president.”²¹⁰ By this time, women’s participation in the ritual life of the synagogue was no longer an issue in this branch of Judaism. Thus, American Jewish women have an enormous impact on the Reform movement.

b) Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism is considered the largest branch in American Judaism since it has the most adherents.²¹¹ Jewish people from this movement identify themselves as “the only group in [American] Israel with a modern mind and a Jewish heart, prophetic passion and western science.”²¹² Thus, they blend the Jewish tradition and modernity without rejecting either of them. German Rabbi Zacharies Frankel (1801-1875) had a significant influence on the emergence of Conservative Judaism. Frankel’s departure from the Reform Rabbinical Conference in Frankfurt in

²⁰⁷ Hyman, “Ezrat Nashim,” 271-87.

²⁰⁸ Hyman, “Ezrat Nashim,” 285-86.

²⁰⁹ Umansky, “Feminism and American Reform Judaism,” 268.

²¹⁰ Umansky, “Feminism and American Reform Judaism,” 275.

²¹¹ Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 3.

²¹² Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 3.

1845 not only represents a disagreement over the use of the Hebrew language in a synagogue but also gives rise to an emergent counter-movement against Reform Judaism. As Pamela S. Nadell and Marc Lee Raphael state, “Frankel’s response to the challenges posed by Jewish emancipation was to teach ‘positive-historical Judaism.’”²¹³

Frankel’s approach to Judaism is “the positive-historical Judaism,” which is seen as the “architects of Conservative Judaism.”²¹⁴ In other words, Frankel is “the father of Positive-Historical Judaism, the European ideological predecessor of American Conservatism.”²¹⁵

In this framework, it is evident that Frankel’s positive-historical Judaism does not reject modernity. Rather, this understanding of Judaism underscores the evolving and explicitly historical character of the Jewish tradition. This movement of Conservative Judaism started to take shape in America in the 1870s and 1880s.²¹⁶ Conservative Judaism emerged during the mass migration of Jews from eastern Europe. Abraham J. Karp also explicates how the transition from the positive-historical Judaism to Conservative Judaism happened in the United States:

Frankel’s followers practiced a moderate form of Reform Judaism and cooperated with Reform colleagues and institutions, until these veered off to radical Reform. Then the moderates turned for religious camaraderie and joint enterprise to acculturated Orthodox colleagues. Together they founded the Seminary and thus laid the foundation for Conservative Judaism.²¹⁷

Frankel’s followers mostly called their movement “Historical Judaism,” and later “Conservative Judaism.” However, Sidney H. Schwarz states that the concept of Conservative Judaism was not largely embraced at the Seminary until Louis Finkelstein’s leadership in the Seminary in 1940.²¹⁸

²¹³ Nadell and Raphael, *Conservative Judaism in America*, 225.

²¹⁴ Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 5.

²¹⁵ Nadell and Raphael, *Conservative Judaism in America*, 166.

²¹⁶ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 342.

²¹⁷ Karp, “A Century of Conservative,” 6.

²¹⁸ Sidney H. Schwarz, “Conservative Judaism’s ‘Ideology’ Problem,” *American Jewish History*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (December 1984), 144.

As Neil Gillman points out, American Conservative Judaism emerged as “the result of earlier and far more impulse – the need of a religious community to respond to the challenges of modernity.”²¹⁹ Raphael states that Conservative Judaism is usually seen “as a reaction to Reform Judaism.”²²⁰ More importantly, its leaders were meticulous about distinguishing it from Reform and Orthodox Judaism.²²¹ As Michael Meyer highlights, “the modern Orthodox and the Conservatives each developed their own separate religious and organizational identities” while becoming “rivals of the organized Reform movement even as they shared some of its principles.”²²² Even though both try to find a middle path between modernity and religious tradition, they have different ways of adapting Judaism to modernity. Most Conservative Jews define their religious orientation by differentiating themselves from Reform and Orthodox Judaism, and more specifically by saying that “it means being not Orthodox and not Reform.”²²³

Conservative Judaism has several distinctive features. Significantly, unlike Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism urges males to use head covering during worship and prohibits the English Reform Union Prayer Book.²²⁴ Unlike Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism does not entirely reject modernity. Instead, As Alan T. Levenson and Neil Gillman highlight, Conservative Judaism in America “began with a deep commitment to modernity.”²²⁵ Conservative Judaism, unlike the Orthodox, “viewed *halakhah* as a dynamic system, responsive to the changing needs of its members.”²²⁶ Especially, one of the important changes is about increasing “women’s

²¹⁹ Gillman, *Conservative Judaism*, 5.

²²⁰ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 63.

²²¹ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 63.

²²² Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, XI

²²³ Gillman, *Conservative Judaism*, 5.

²²⁴ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 63.

²²⁵ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 343. See also Gillman, *Conservative Judaism*.

²²⁶ Judith Hauptman, “Conservative Judaism: The Ethical Challenge of Feminist Change,” in *The Americanization of The Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 297.

involvement in Jewish practice, such as replacing the *mehitzah* [separation of women from communal settings] with family pews and giving girls in its summer camps and junior congregations an opportunity to fill leadership roles in the prayer service.”²²⁷ By doing so, Conservative Judaism embraced modernity and distinguished itself from Orthodox Judaism.

On the other hand, there are similarities between Reform Judaism and Conservative Judaism. For instance, like Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism promotes women’s participation in synagogue rituals through mixed seating and equality of education for boys and girls.²²⁸ Moreover, many women have become members of the boards and presidents of synagogues.²²⁹ Reform and Conservative Judaism have a very similar stance in terms of the role of women in the synagogue. While these major changes make the Conservative and Reform movements very close to each other, they also increase the gap between the Conservative movement and Orthodoxy.

c) Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism is another response to modernity that emerged within Judaism. Very broadly speaking, Orthodox Judaism in Europe in the mid-18th century was established as “a reaction and opposition to the processes of modernization and reform in Jewish life.”²³⁰ More specifically, the advent of Orthodoxy is viewed as a “response to the disintegration of traditional society, the rise of the Enlightenment and Reform movements, modern developments, and the spread of secularization in the Western world.”²³¹ It is worth mentioning here that the term

²²⁷ Hauptman, “Conservative Judaism,” 297-298.

²²⁸ Hyman, “Ezrat Nashim,” 285-86.

²²⁹ Hyman, “Ezrat Nashim,” 290.

²³⁰ Motti Inbari, “The Modesty Campaigns of Rabbi Amram Blau and the Neturei Karta Movement, 1938–1974,” *Israel Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 109.

²³¹ Shlomi Doron, “Changing Identities Through Rituals: Newcomers to and Defectors from Ultra-Orthodox Judaism,” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (2013), 16.

“orthodoxy” is highly controversial among Jews. Some eschew using the word “orthodox” to describe their religious beliefs. Instead, they use the terms “traditional” Judaism and “Torah-true” Judaism. Samson Raphael Hirsch, known as the founder of modern Orthodox Judaism, for example, utilized the term “Torah-true” Judaism. Similarly, Rabbi Leo Jung also encouraged the use of the word “Torah-true” because, according to him, the word “orthodox” connotes “nothing positive about the Jewish faith.”²³²

Furthermore, Joseph Lookstein states that the word “orthodox” originally had no Jewish connotation.²³³ Rather, it is a term from Christian theology to show “the original Church as distinct from its various and eventual reformations.”²³⁴ Rabbi Lookstein further argues that later this term was used in the Jewish context not “by the adherents of Orthodoxy but by the deserters from its ranks” in an intention to “label that branch of Judaism as static, ancient, and unprogressive.”²³⁵ Thus, in the American context, according to Rabbi Lookstein, “Orthodox Judaism came to be associated in the minds of some with Fundamentalism, which is again a non-Jewish category.”²³⁶ Today, the words “Orthodox” and “Orthodoxy” are rarely used by American Jews.

Orthodoxy is meticulous in differentiating itself from other religious movements. Orthodox Judaism “would distinguish itself both from Reform and from the middle-of-the-road Jewish position that eventually became known as Conservative Judaism.”²³⁷ For example, the practices of *mehitzah* (separation of women from men in public spaces), which no longer exist in Reform,

²³² Leo Jung, “What is Orthodox Judaism?” in *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History* (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 2016), 145.

²³³ Joseph Lookstein, “Orthodox-Traditional-Torah-True Judaism,” in *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 149.

²³⁴ Lookstein, “Orthodox-Traditional-Torah-True Judaism,” 149.

²³⁵ Lookstein, “Orthodox-Traditional-Torah-True Judaism,” 149.

²³⁶ Lookstein, “Orthodox-Traditional-Torah-True Judaism,” 149.

²³⁷ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 184.

Conservative, and even some Orthodox synagogues and social settings, have become “a focally symbolic line of demarcation not only between women and men, but between different denominations: the sign of Orthodoxy itself” in Orthodox communities.²³⁸ They also serve as “indicators of authenticity and religious status” in Orthodox settings.²³⁹ Particularly, Ultra-Orthodox religious authorities view *mehitzah* as a halakhic requirement. Thus, *mehitzah* exists not only in synagogues but also in a variety of social events and gatherings, including lectures, concerts, weddings and bar mitzvah celebrations, and festive meals.²⁴⁰ For example, in Israel, this practice now includes “a phenomenon of separate work spaces for women and of public buses on lines used mainly by ultra-Orthodox Jews being divided into men’s and women’s sections, with women assigned to the back of the bus.”²⁴¹ Strict commitment to *Halacha* in many practices, including *mehitzah*, distinguish Orthodox Judaism from other forms of Judaism.

Rabbi Jung describes Orthodox Judaism as “the expression of the genuine historical faith of Israel, based upon the revelation of Sinai, the Torah, the Bible, the teaching of the rabbis.”²⁴² In doing so, Orthodox Jews zealously conform to the *mitzvot* (commandments) found in the Torah and *Halacha*.²⁴³ In Ze’ev W. Falk’s description, *Halakha* (Jewish religious law) “is part of Jewish tradition, defining a Jew’s duties towards God and fellow human beings.”²⁴⁴ Thus, as “the most

²³⁸ Shira Wolosky, “Foucault and Jewish Feminism: The Mehitzah as Dividing Practice,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, No. 17, Special Issue: Sexuality in Jewish Contexts (Spring 2009), 8.

²³⁹ Wolosky, “Foucault and Jewish Feminism,” 8.

²⁴⁰ Wolosky, “Foucault and Jewish Feminism,” 12.

²⁴¹ Wolosky, “Foucault and Jewish Feminism,” 12-13.

²⁴² Jung, “What is Orthodox Judaism?” 147.

²⁴³ Amy K. Milligan explicates the nature of *Halacha* within Jewish communities with the following statement: “*Halakha* is an organic body of rules that is open to interpretation and has changed with time. Often Jews turn to rabbinic authorities for help interpreting *halakha*. However, the application and interpretation of *halakha* can vary by region, group identity, and individual preference.” Amy K. Milligan, *Hair, Headwear, and Orthodox Jewish Women*, 23.

²⁴⁴ W. Ze’ev Falk, “Jewish Religious Law in the Modern (And Postmodern) World,” *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1994 - 1995), 465.

traditional arm of Judaism,” Orthodox Judaism requires its followers’ “adherence to ancient laws and particular rabbinic translations of those laws and customs.”²⁴⁵ Moreover, Orthodox Jews, especially Lubavitch Hasidim, “have become so certain that their version of Judaism is the only correct one and the only avenue for Jewish survival that they launched programs to help other Jews to ‘return’ to Judaism, i.e., become Orthodox Jews.”²⁴⁶ Jack Wertheimer mentions that *ba’alei teshuvah* (literally, “those who returned”), non-orthodox Jews who turn to Orthodoxy, “has raised the movement’s self-esteem and its prestige within the broader American Jewish community.”²⁴⁷ Wertheimer further emphasizes that positive media coverage on Orthodoxy “provides further evidence of Orthodoxy’s new respectability, and in turn, adds to the movement’s self-confidence.”²⁴⁸ Orthodox Judaism, despite its rejection of modernity, has gained favorable attention from non-Orthodox Jews and non-Jews in America.

Additionally, Sarah Bunin Benor states that “Orthodox Jews are expected to conform not only to *halacha* (Jewish religious law, literally way or path) but also to cultural practices—although there is less communal censure for cultural conformity” including dress, food, and language.²⁴⁹ For instance, many Orthodox Jews not only “give their children biblical names, like Rochel (Rachel) and Shmuel (Samuel)” but also “prefer Eastern European foods, minor musical modes, and Ashkenazi (Central/Eastern European) pronunciation of Hebrew words.”²⁵⁰ Likewise, Orthodox Jews, especially the Ultra-Orthodox, can easily be distinguished through their dress

²⁴⁵ Debra Kaufman, “Women Who Return to Orthodox Judaism: A Feminist Analysis,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* (August 1985) 545.

²⁴⁶ Jack Wertheimer, “Recent Trends in American Judaism,” *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 89, (1989), 112.

²⁴⁷ Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 113.

²⁴⁸ Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 114.

²⁴⁹ Sarah Bunin Benor, *Becoming Frum: How Newcomers Learn the Language and Culture of Orthodox Judaism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 3.

²⁵⁰ Benor, *Becoming Frum*, 5.

code. Most Hasidic men, for instance, choose to wear “a large velvet yarmulke [in Yiddish, the male Jewish skullcap; the Hebrew word for it is *kippah*] and on weekdays, a brimmed hat of various shapes, such as a high flat velvet hat or fedora.”²⁵¹ Milligan emphasizes Orthodox Jews’ other beliefs and practices:

Orthodox Jews are the most observant of Jews and believe that the Torah and the Oral Laws were given directly from God to Moses. These laws are the central tenets of their lives and govern most of their actions. For example, most Orthodox Jews keep strictly kosher, wear head/hair coverings, and uphold Sabbath laws.²⁵²

It should be mentioned that Orthodoxy is not monolithic, even though Orthodox Judaism “is much less monolithic than Conservative Judaism.”²⁵³ Like other forms of Judaism, Orthodoxy does not have “a single articulated theology.”²⁵⁴ Similarly, Chaim Waxman points to the diversity within Orthodoxy, “including ‘Hasidism’; ‘Haredism,’ ‘Sectarianism,’ or ‘Ultra-Orthodoxy,’; and ‘Modern Orthodoxy’ or ‘Centrist Orthodoxy,’ all of which have their own seminaries and rabbinic organizations.”²⁵⁵ Charles Liebman divides Orthodoxy into three groups: “uncommitted Orthodox,” the “modern Orthodox,” and the “sectarian Orthodox.”²⁵⁶ However, Orthodoxy generally can be classified into “two schools of thought with very differing approaches to modernity,” namely modern Orthodoxy and Ultra-Orthodoxy, also called *Haredim*.²⁵⁷ Ayala Fader mentions that “*Hasidis* Jews and ultra-orthodox Jews, broadly called *haredim* (in Hebrew, ‘those

²⁵¹ Ayala Fader, *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing Up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 149.

²⁵² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 25.

²⁵³ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 68.

²⁵⁴ Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 108.

²⁵⁵ Waxman, “From Institutional Decay to Primary Day,” 409.

²⁵⁶ Charles S. Liebman, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 66 (1965), 21-97. By the term “Sectarian Orthodox,” Liebman refers to “right- wing Orthodox.” As Jack Wertheimer states, the concept of right- wing Orthodox “roughly approximates the “sectarian Orthodox” identified by Liebman, the “traditionalist Orthodox” identified by [Samuel] Heilman and [Steven M.] Cohen, and the “strictly-Orthodox” and “ultra-Orthodox” identified by [William] Helmreich.” Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 109.

²⁵⁷ Yael Israel-Cohen, *Between Feminism and Orthodox Judaism Resistance, Identity, and Religious Change in Israel* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 17.

who tremble before God') have gradually chosen stricter religious observance in their communities where Jewish law offers alternatives."²⁵⁸ Roughly speaking, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Judaism have a lot in common, albeit with "its own set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices."²⁵⁹ To put it differently, they have differences in terms the level of religiosity and their relationship with the non-Jewish world. Lynn Davidman states that the most essential differences between the two groups of Orthodox Judaism stem from "their distinct stances toward modern society."²⁶⁰

On the other hand, according to Amy K. Milligan, Orthodox communities' relation to modern society in America is "assimilated" in terms of technology, even as their distinctiveness becomes visible through dress or head/hair covering. Milligan further argues that "even Orthodox Jews who wear more traditional dress embody a paradox of modernity with their cell phones holstered at their hips."²⁶¹ In doing so, they embody "a careful balance of assimilation and counterculturalism," which Milligan calls "a living contradiction."²⁶² Obviously, this contradiction shapes/exists in every aspect of their lives. For example, the Lubavitch movement, one of the ultra-Orthodox groups, uses cable television and televises the sermons of its rebbe.²⁶³

Chaim Waxman utilizes three variables to distinguish *Haredi* Judaism from Modern Orthodoxy. The first entails their stance on "both the larger society in general and the larger, non-Orthodox Jewish community, with the Haredim favoring an attitude of isolation, as opposed to the inclusive attitude of the modern Orthodox."²⁶⁴ The *Haredi* community embraces isolation as an

²⁵⁸ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 13.

²⁵⁹ Schacter, *Modern Orthodox Judaism*, xxvii.

²⁶⁰ Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 38.

²⁶¹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 34.

²⁶² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 34.

²⁶³ Wertheimer, "Recent Trends," 112.

²⁶⁴ Waxman, "From Institutional Decay to Primary Day," 410.

attitude toward non-Orthodox Jewish community, while the Modern Orthodox community leans towards inclusion. The second one involves their position on modernity, general scholarship, and science, “with the Haredim being antagonistic and modern Orthodoxy being accommodating, if not welcoming.”²⁶⁵ The third one is their attitude toward Israel and Zionism, with the Modern Orthodox being more supportive of Israel and Zionism and the *Haredim* being antagonistic.²⁶⁶

Moreover, the ordination of women as rabbis is another important issue. Unlike other branches of Judaism, there are no ordained women as Orthodox rabbis and no mixed seating in synagogues, except “very few Orthodox synagogues without separate seating,” such as one Orthodox congregation in Columbus, Ohio, with mixed seating.²⁶⁷ Yehuda Turetsky and Chaim I. Waxman state that even though the ordination of women has distinguished Orthodox from the non-Orthodox, this has recently started to change. Particularly, Rabbis Daniel Sperber and Avraham Weiss granted “the title Rabba (“Female Rabbi”) on an Orthodox Jewish woman who had served as a religious guide and offered spiritual and pastoral counseling at Weiss’ congregation” in 2009.²⁶⁸ They indicate how Orthodox women take on several positions in the Modern-Orthodox community:

[W]omen who are recognized as authorities capable of providing information on halakhic aspects of family purity, sexuality, and reproduction are becoming increasingly normative in American modern Orthodox communities. Additionally, there are now several women who function as members of the clergy, albeit without the title of rabbi.²⁶⁹

Given women’s changing roles in the Modern Orthodox community, it is safe to state that this is another difference between these two communities. In his book, *Legends of the Hasidim*, Jerome

²⁶⁵ Waxman, “From Institutional Decay to Primary Day,” 410.

²⁶⁶ Waxman, “From Institutional Decay to Primary Day,” 410.

²⁶⁷ Raphael, *Judaism in America*, 72.

²⁶⁸ Yehuda Turetsky, and Chaim I. Waxman, “Sliding to the Left? Contemporary American Modern Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May 2011), 122.

²⁶⁹ Turetsky and Waxman, “Sliding to the Left?” 122.

Mintz explicates the differences between Orthodox circles. According to Mintz, distinctions between Hasidim and other orthodox Jews are basically “particular traditions, customs, intensity and emphases in belief, varieties of rabbinic allegiance and social structure and organization.”²⁷⁰ Besides these differences, Barbara Goldman Carrel highlights the role of the *rebbe* (master), “the most characteristic sociological feature distinguishing the Hasidim, who has ‘the paramount authority in the community’ as well as is praised ‘as a spiritual intermediary between God and man.’”²⁷¹ In other words, *rebbe*s play a key role in shaping Hasidic Jews’ lives in many ways. For example, they ask advice from *rebbe*s, seen as spiritual leaders with “extraordinary powers,” on all matters of personal and religious life.²⁷²

In order to better understand the nature of Orthodoxy, it is helpful to provide some background information about each of these communities, namely the Modern Orthodox and the Ultra-Orthodox/*Hasidim*/*Haredim* communities. *Hasidism* emerged in Eastern Europe in the first half of the eighteenth century. This branch of Orthodoxy considers itself “the guardian of Jewish tradition and the representative of ancient Jewish values.”²⁷³ They practice strict interpretation and application of *Halacha*. Lynn Davidman asserts that *Hasidic* Jews “resist modernity in nearly every imaginable way.”²⁷⁴ To protect their religious tradition, they mostly live inside closed neighborhoods and choose to wear special clothes and use a particular language while practicing a strict interpretation of *Halacha*.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁰ Jerome R. Mintz, *Legends of the Hasidim: An Introduction to Hasidic Culture and Oral Tradition in the New World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 25.

²⁷¹ Barbara Goldman Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head Coverings: A Feminized System of Hasidic Distinction,” in *Religion, Dress and The Body*, ed. Linda Boynton Arthur (New York: Berg Publishers, 1999), 164.

²⁷² Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 39.

²⁷³ Inbari, “The Modesty Campaigns of Rabbi Amram Blau,” 106.

²⁷⁴ Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 39.

²⁷⁵ Doron, “Changing Identities,” 16.

As Mark A. Guterman puts it, “Ultra-Orthodoxy materialized, struggling to maintain traditional beliefs and practices by totally rejecting modernity, and viewing it as an existential threat to the continuity of the Jewish religion.”²⁷⁶ Moreover, even though the Ultra-Orthodox community is a minority among Jews, “they have influence in religious matters, setting the standard among all groups and tendencies, edging out the German Jewish tradition, equally strict in observance in its respect of secular culture.”²⁷⁷ Ayala Fader mentions that *Hasidic* Jews, a subgroup in Ultra-Orthodoxy, see themselves as “the bearers of authentic Jewish religion”²⁷⁸ as well as “the most religiously stringent.”²⁷⁹ There are a number of Ultra-Orthodox groups in America, including Belz, Satmar and Lubatvitch, which basically represent the European towns “in which the communities originated.”²⁸⁰ The center of ultra-Orthodox life in the USA is Brooklyn, New York. Twenty-five to thirty separate communities live in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg, Crown Heights, and Borough Park.²⁸¹ The vast majority of American Orthodox Jews live in the New York area.²⁸² These Orthodox Jews immigrated mostly from Nazi Europe.

Regarding these *Hasidic* Jews, Ayala Fader maintains that they “have increasingly become religiously stringent” rather than assimilating into American culture.²⁸³ However, at the same time, “this heightened religious stringency requires new forms of femininity, which include their

²⁷⁶ Mark A. Guterman, “Identity Conflict in Modern Orthodox Judaism and the Laws of Family Purity,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2006), 92.

²⁷⁷ David Lehmann, and Batia Siebzehner, “Power, Boundaries and Institutions: Marriage in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism,” *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (2009), 274.

²⁷⁸ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 1.

²⁷⁹ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 12.

²⁸⁰ Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 39.

²⁸¹ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head Coverings,” 165.

²⁸² Chaim I. Waxman, “From Institutional Decay to Primary Day: American Orthodox Jewry Since World War II,” *American Jewish History*, Vol. 91, No. 3/4 (September/December 2003), The 350th Anniversary of the Jewish People in America, 405.

²⁸³ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 1.

participation in the secular city around them.”²⁸⁴ On the one hand, *Hasidic* women critique the secular world, but on the other they become somehow involved in the North American public sphere in many ways, including “their fluency in secular modernity, evidenced in their education, their relatively unmarked clothing, their use of English (rather than Yiddish, the traditional vernacular of Eastern European Jews), and their work outside of the home.”²⁸⁵ By doing so, as Fader argues, they facilitate *Hasidic* men’s study of religious texts, as well as “complicate stereotypes about women in nonliberal religions.”²⁸⁶ Thus, it could be named “counterculturalism.” On the other hand, they eschew calling themselves “modern or secular Jew” since, for them, it is somehow tantamount to being identified as “Gentiles” (non-Jewish people), even as they “even enjoy the secular and the Gentile world.”²⁸⁷ Fader calls it an “alternative religious modernity” and explicates its effect on the lived experiences of *Hasidic* women:

Hasidic women’s authoritative version of religious modernity dismantles an opposition between the secular and the religious that is central to social scientific definitions of the modern. In their moral narrative, Hasidic mothers promise their daughters that when they learn to make the religious and the secular, the material and the spiritual, the body and the soul complementary, and not oppositional, they will find true personal fulfillment, be rewarded by God in the afterlife, and even, perhaps, do their part to hasten the final redemption.²⁸⁸

In this framework, it is safe to say that Orthodox women deconstruct an assumption regarding the incompatibility of religion and modernity and create their own liminal space that allows them to fulfill the requirements of religion and, at the same time, to enjoy the modern world. In doing so, they balance not only both worlds but also build an alternative religious modernity. Moreover, this role played by women in balancing the secular and religious empowers them and indicates how

²⁸⁴ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 1.

²⁸⁵ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 1-2.

²⁸⁶ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 2.

²⁸⁷ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 2-3.

²⁸⁸ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 3.

women practice agency over their lives. It is safe to say that Orthodox women, especially *Hasidic* women, reconstruct their religious identity and modesty laws by forming their alternative religious modernity. These elements of their lives are inextricably linked to one another.

Ayala Fader argues that “in everyday life the common goal of religious stringency united *Hasidic* Jews, especially women, often muting religious, political, or ethnic differences” although they have crucial distinctions among them, including their use of language (English, Yiddish, Hebrew, and Aramaic), religious stringency and their openness to American popular culture.²⁸⁹ For instance, Satmar, an *Hasidic* group centered in New York City, is seen as “the most religiously stringent and isolationist, evidenced in part by men and women’s fluency in Yiddish which is a result of limited exposure to secular education and cultural forms” while practicing “the strictest standards of piety and modesty.”²⁹⁰ It is worth stating that *hasidim*, which means literally ‘pious ones,’ “is characterized in terms of *ultraorthodoxy*.”²⁹¹

On the other hand, Modern Orthodoxy was established by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century.²⁹² Hirsch, as the founder of a counter-movement, intended to “shore up traditional Judaism against the attacks of Reform.”²⁹³ Even though Modern Orthodoxy was founded as a counter-movement against the Reform movement, there are several underlying similarities between them. For instance, Hirsch tried “to make peace with modernity, attempting to establish the fully observant Jewish life within it.”²⁹⁴ As Lynn Davidman puts it, “Jews did not have to choose between a commitment to tradition and life in the

²⁸⁹ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 11.

²⁹⁰ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 10.

²⁹¹ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head Coverings,” 164.

²⁹² Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 38.

²⁹³ Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 77.

²⁹⁴ Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 77.

modern world because classical Judaism mandated a creative synthesis between Torah and secular knowledge. Hirsch's guiding principle was *Torah im derech eretz*, combining 'Torah with the ways of the people of the land.'"²⁹⁵ In doing so, Hirsch built not only a new religious identity congruent with the modern world, but also a new modernity compatible with religion. More importantly, as Meyer underscores, Hirsch "'reformed' Judaism, although his principles were very different from those who identified themselves with the Reform movement."²⁹⁶ In Hirsch's Judaism, there is always room in Judaism for a reform. Liebman describes modern orthodox Jews in America:

On the one hand, they seek to demonstrate the viability of the *halakhah* for contemporary life; on the other, they emphasize what they have in common with all other Jews rather than what separates them. Until recently they composed almost the entire upper income, well-educated strata of the committed Orthodox. Many of the best-known Orthodox congregations in the United States, and most of the wealthy ones, are led by modern Orthodox rabbis.²⁹⁷

Generally speaking, unlike Ultra Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy emphasizes the importance of secular education in addition to the religious ones and inclusion. In this framework, as Lynn states, this new understanding of Orthodox Judaism "accommodates the pluralism and structural differentiation of the wider society: the synagogues have a loose social structure in which members come together for Sabbath and holiday observances" but carry out "most aspects of their lives within the secular society."²⁹⁸ In this regard, unlike Ultra-Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy opposes "the split between tradition and modernity" by seeking "to adhere to traditional religious commitments including observing the Jewish code of law (Halakha) while at the same time seeking to embrace many aspects of modern culture."²⁹⁹ In doing so, they balance religious and secular

²⁹⁵ Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 38.

²⁹⁶ Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 77.

²⁹⁷ Liebman, "Orthodoxy," 48.

²⁹⁸ Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 38.

²⁹⁹ Guterman, "Identity Conflict," 92.

lives. In other words, as Fader states, they “attempt to maintain Jewish religious practice while participating more fully in North American life, such as, for example, going to the movies or getting college degrees.”³⁰⁰ In doing so, modern Orthodox Jews become a part of the secular world by attending secular educational institutions, having non-Jewish friends, and having jobs outside of the Jewish community. At the same time, they become an important part of the Orthodox Jewish community by upholding Sabbath and holiday celebrations and adhering to a modest dress code. It is worth mentioning that through Yeshiva University (1915-1928), the Modern Orthodox approach was institutionalized at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States.³⁰¹ Yeshiva University has established seventeen schools and divisions, including “a Hebrew Teachers Institute for men and other women, a liberal-arts college for men and one for women, graduate schools of education, social work, and science and a medical school.”³⁰² Particularly, some viewed Yeshiva University as “the single greatest hope for a resurgence of tradition and, indeed, the survival of American Judaism.”³⁰³

d) Reconstructionist Judaism

Reconstructionist Judaism is the last and the smallest movement that emerged in American Judaism in the 1960s. Reconstructionist Judaism is also the only a full-fledged movement developed within American Judaism. To better comprehend the Reconstructionist movement, it is crucial to focus on Mordechai Kaplan (1881–1984) and his understanding of Judaism. In 1889, Kaplan immigrated to America from Sventzian, Lithuania, where he was born.³⁰⁴ Kaplan’s position on Judaism changed dramatically throughout his career. More specifically, he first

³⁰⁰ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 13.

³⁰¹ Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 38.

³⁰² Liebman, “Orthodoxy,” 63-62.

³⁰³ Liebman, “Orthodoxy,” 66.

³⁰⁴ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 243.

identified himself as Orthodox, then Conservative, and finally became the founder of the Reconstructionism movement.³⁰⁵ Kaplan started preaching the ideology of Reconstructionism in the 1920s—without officially establishing a new religious movement—when he taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS),³⁰⁶ and more specifically, as the rabbi of the newly formed Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York, Kaplan “started to ‘reconstruct’ Judaism” in 1922 through his ideology of Reconstructionism.³⁰⁷ As mentioned above, JTS is known as the Conservative movement’s main institution, that is of Positive-Historical Judaism. Kaplan supported some of the changes that the Conservative movements promulgated, including mixed-seating in synagogues, whereas he opposed others. Especially, Kaplan not only sermonized in English and presided over mixed-seating congregations but also viewed the synagogue as “a vehicle for communal identity as well as religious worship.”³⁰⁸ Kaplan’s religious views also influenced other forms of Judaism. Kaplan introduced important innovations to Jewish communities. For example, one of his innovations was that the practice of “the *bat mitzvah* ceremony for girls upon reaching the age of twelve—the first was that of his daughter, Judith, in 1922—was adopted by a growing number of Conservative synagogues,” as well as by many Reform and Orthodox congregations.³⁰⁹

On the other hand, Kaplan’s understanding of religion, especially in his new prayer book (1941) and new Passover Haggadah (1945), provoked heated debate among not only the Orthodox

³⁰⁵ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 149. Before establishing the Reconstructionist Society for the Advancement of Judaism, Kaplan had been Rabbi of the Orthodox Jewish Center in New York. Turetsky and Waxman relate that “in 1945, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, the Rabbinical Council of Greater New York, and others, excommunicated Mordecai M. Kaplan.” Turetsky, and Waxman, “Sliding to the Left?,” 123.

³⁰⁶ Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 74.

³⁰⁷ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 243.

³⁰⁸ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 342.

³⁰⁹ Lawrence Grossman, “Conservative Judaism,” in *Encyclopedia of American Jewish History*, ed. Stephen H. Norwood and Eunice G. Pollack (2008), 84.

movement but also among his colleagues at JTS.³¹⁰ In this regard, Kaplan defines Judaism as a “civilization” and Jewish laws as “folkways, part of the culture of the Jews.”³¹¹ In Kaplan’s words, “Judaism is an evolving religious civilization.”³¹² His understating of Judaism is “a naturalistic and dynamic faith.”³¹³ Given Kaplan’s definition of Judaism, the line between religion and culture becomes blurry. As Satlow succinctly puts it, they are “almost synonymous categories.”³¹⁴ By doing so, according to Nathan Glazer, in his redefinition of Judaism as “a religious civilization for the sake of justifying Jewish peoplehood,” Kaplan “made Jewishness central, Judaism derivative.”³¹⁵ According to Mer Scult, Kaplan was very concerned with “how to save the Jewish people,” and more specifically, “his mission was to bring unity to the Jewish people and to help them survive.”³¹⁶ In this sense, it is safe to state that he was very interested in preserving Jewish identity.

Kaplan not only viewed Judaism as an “evolving religious civilization” but also was skeptical of “the supernatural and aspects of particularism such as the concept of the Jews as ‘chosen people.’”³¹⁷ Kaplan’s understanding of Judaism was criticized by fellow rabbis and colleagues, including Louis Ginzberg, Louis Finkelstein, and Julius Greenstone. For example, according to Ginzberg, Kaplan was “undermining the very existence of Judaism.”³¹⁸ Similarly, Julius Greenstone staunchly opposed Kaplan’s position on the issue of revelation. In Greenstone’s

³¹⁰ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 345.

³¹¹ Satlow, “Defining Judaism,” 842.

³¹² Levenson, “American Judaism,” 345.

³¹³ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 245.

³¹⁴ Satlow, “Defining Judaism,” 842.

³¹⁵ Benny Kraut, “American Judaism: An Appreciative Critical Appraisal,” *American Jewish History*, Vol. 77, No. 2 (December 1987), 225-226.

³¹⁶ Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 14-15.

³¹⁷ Jeffrey A. Summit, *Singing God’s Words: The Performance of Biblical Chant in Contemporary Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 28.

³¹⁸ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 81

words, “without the belief in revelation as the compelling motive for leading a Jewish life, the nature of Judaism and of Jews will become so completely changed as to be unrecognizable.”³¹⁹

However, despite this controversy over his understanding of religion, the Reconstructionist movement did not formally emerge until his retirement from teaching at JTS in 1963. Jack Wertheimer indicates Kaplan’s position:

[Kaplan] focused instead on disseminating his views through a journal of opinion, *The Reconstructionist*, and a synagogue in New York, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. Kaplan remained firmly within the Conservative camp, presenting his viewpoint to generations of rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary and arguing for change before his colleagues in the Rabbinical Assembly.³²⁰

In this sense, Kaplan at first preferred to express his thoughts and criticisms while he remained within the framework of the Conservative movement and taught at JTS. As Michael R. Cohen states, Kaplan believed that “Reconstructionism and Conservatism could coexist,” since “the former have ‘no intention of organizing competitive institutions or organizations’ with the latter.”³²¹ More importantly, the Reconstructionists, including Kaplan and Ira Eisenstein (his son-in law), were considered “the left-wing of the Conservative movement.”³²² Until the 1960s, the split between Reconstructionism and Conservatism did not give rise to the emergence of Reconstructionism as a separate movement. After the retirement of Kaplan, his ideology of Reconstructionism began to evolve into an independent movement. To put it differently, his retirement functioned as a catalyst for the emergence of the fourth religious movement in American Judaism. As Wertheimer states, his retirement “freed him to support his followers’ desire to expand Reconstructionism from an ideological movement to a distinct denomination within Judaism.”³²³

³¹⁹ Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 109.

³²⁰ Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 74.

³²¹ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 151.

³²² Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 151.

³²³ Wertheimer, “Recent Trends,” 74.

As Kaplan then attenuated the difference between Reconstructionism and Conservatism, “while in Conservatism the main concern is what to do with Halakha, the traditional laws... the main concern of Reconstructionism is what innovations to introduce to render Judaism not only livable but a source of spiritual and moral creativity.”³²⁴

In this framework, as Cohen points out, “the slow process of creating a movement” was completed in 1960.³²⁵ The conservative branch of Judaism gave birth to the Reconstructionist movement in a similar way that the conservative movement broke off from the Reform movement. Kaplan’s theology profoundly influenced not only the Reconstructionist movement but also other forms of Judaism. Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer summarizes Kaplan’s ideology:

Kaplan’s project was to take the ideas of Torah, Israel, and God, deprive them of the power and prestige of divine revelation, and (here was the tricky part) enhance religious practice, commitment to the Jewish people, and spirituality. He wanted to demystify the key elements of Judaism, to see them as human constructions understood through social science, and then to have people find them more compelling than before.³²⁶

According to Fuchs-Kreimer, today, the majority of the Reconstructionist movement “are following Kaplan in their basic commitment to a naturalized view of Torah (Jewish law) and Israel (Jewish people).”³²⁷ It is safe to state that Kaplan’s theology has prevailed within Reconstructionism.

Like the Reform and Conservative movements, the Reconstructionist movement made a number of radical changes in ritual. In Reconstructionist Judaism, women can fully join synagogue rituals.³²⁸ Many issues, including women’s active participation in synagogue rituals, have brought

³²⁴ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 151.

³²⁵ Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism*, 150.

³²⁶ Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, “Seventy Years after ‘Judaism as a Civilization’: Mordecai Kaplan’s Theology and the Reconstructionist Movement,” *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter, 2006), Mordecai Kaplan’s “Judaism as a Civilization”: The Legacy of an American Idea, 128.

³²⁷ Fuchs-Kreimer, “Seventy Years,” 128.

³²⁸ Hyman, “Ezrat Nashim,” 290.

Reform and Reconstructionist movements closer. On the other hand, Levenson underscores that Reconstructionism as the smallest movement in American Judaism, is “more open than ‘the big three’ to the Eastern-style meditation, incorporation of kabbalistic kinesthetics, acceptance of gays and lesbians, and environmentalism.”³²⁹



³²⁹ Levenson, “American Judaism,” 345.

Chapter Four: Muslim Responses to Modernity

Like other religious communities, the Muslim world also encountered the question of how to answer the challenge of modernity in the nineteenth century, after European powers colonized many Muslim lands. In pre-modern Muslim societies, Sharī‘a (Islamic law) guided Muslims and played a crucial role in shaping every aspect of their lives. As John Esposito puts it, “Islamic law provides the ideal blueprint for society, delineating what can and cannot be done.”³³⁰ Islamic law is based on the two sources of Islam, the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. It is worth noting that not only Muslim communities in the American context but also Muslim societies in Muslim-majority countries are not homogeneous. In the American context, Muslims in America come from different social, economic, political, national, cultural (such as dress and language), and even sectarian (such as Sunnī and Shi‘ī) backgrounds. Given the diverse backgrounds of Muslim immigrants in America, various factors shape the identity of Muslim immigrants and their understanding of religion. More specifically, their identity “has been shaped by the Muslim societies in which they were raised and by their interaction with American society and with Muslims from other traditions.”³³¹ Their interaction with their host country and the home country also greatly impacts their understanding of Islam. It is difficult to identify an American Muslim response to modernity because of the complexities of the Muslim minority within a non-Muslim context. Therefore, this chapter will first offer a brief historical background of Muslims’ response to modernity in the Islamic context from which American Muslims come. In order to better comprehend Orientalist discourse on Muslim women and the issue of hijab which is prevalent today in the West, it is important to investigate first what Muslim immigrants have brought from their mother countries,

³³⁰ Esposito, “Muslims in America,” 5.

³³¹ Esposito, “Muslims in America,” 4.

especially Islamic responses to modernity in the Muslim world. Later, I will discuss the issue within the American context.

Muhammad Khalid Masud identifies four interrelated factors that have fashioned Muslims' relationship with modernity. First, in the eighteenth century, many Muslim intellectuals already noticed the decline in the Muslim world and called for reform.³³² Among those intellectuals was Shah Waliullah (d. 1768) in the Indian subcontinent, whom some scholars call the father of Islamic modernism, who pointed to the need for reform. Second, in the nineteenth century the Muslim world had to deal with colonial rule, "either directly, as in India and Egypt, or indirectly, as in Iran and the countries under the Ottomans."³³³ In this regard, colonialism gave rise to new movements in the Muslim world as a reaction against the colonial rulers' treatment of Islam generally and Muslim modesty for women in particular. Masud argues that in order to justify colonial rule over the Muslim world, "most European scholars described political and social systems in the Muslim world as essentially backward, tyrannical and unreasonable and explained that Islam was unable to respond to modern challenges."³³⁴

Similarly, in order to justify French colonial rule in Africa, in 1895, the French minister Gabriel Hanotaux argued that "Islam opposed reason and reform and supported tyranny," so that "Muslims felt obliged to defend their religious identity."³³⁵ Third, Christian missionaries' negative attitudes and attacks on Islamic teachings generated reactions among Muslims. Masud underscores that due to this denigration of Muslim beliefs, "most Muslims perceived modernity and colonial

³³² Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Islamic Modernism," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009), 240.

³³³ Masud, "Islamic Modernism," 240.

³³⁴ Masud, "Islamic Modernism," 240.

³³⁵ Masud, "Islamic Modernism," 241.

reforms as the promotion of Christianity.” Fourth, Muslim youth’s perception of modernization and Westernisation was seen a menace to Muslim identity. In Masud’s words, “Muslim youth educated in modern institutions believed that modernisation meant Westernisation; they disregarded and often ridiculed Islam and Muslim practices.” Thus, some Muslim thinkers felt the need to search for compatibility between Islam and modernity.³³⁶

As mentioned, all these factors are interconnected and linked to colonialism. The Muslim world was colonized, and to rationalize colonization, Islam was represented as a “backward,” “primitive” religion by the colonial rulers. Leila Ahmed argues that colonial rule in Egypt and other Muslim lands created a discourse around Muslim women and Muslim modesty for women, more specifically, the customs of veiling, in which veiling became a sign of the oppression of Muslim women. In her words, “Veiling—to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies—became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam’s degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack...”³³⁷ Ahmed further argues that Muslim veiling gained another meaning after the colonial treatment of Islam and veiling. More specifically, in conformity with Orientalist, colonial discourse, veiling became a symbol of resistance to Western colonialism and Western modernity.³³⁸ In her words, “the reemergent veil attests, by virtue of its very power as a symbol of resistance, to the uncontested hegemonic diffusion of the discourses of the West in our age.”³³⁹

³³⁶ Masud, “Islamic Modernism,” 241.

³³⁷ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 152.

³³⁸ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 164.

³³⁹ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 235.

To protect the cultural and religious identity of Muslim youth educated under the colonial rule and the colonial education system, Muslim thinkers developed a counter-argument with the hope of demonstrating that Islam is not a “backward” religion and not oppressive to women. Colonialism had influenced Muslim society and, more specifically, Muslim reaction to the challenge of modernity and the secularization process. Esposito explains the relationship of colonialism with the Muslim response to modernity:

Islamic Modernism was a response both to continued internal weaknesses and to the external political and religiocultural threat of colonialism....The responses of modern Islamic reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the impact of the West on Muslim societies resulted in substantial attempts to reinterpret Islam to meet the changing circumstances of Muslim life. Legal, educational, and social reforms were aimed at rescuing Muslim societies from their downward spiral and demonstrating the compatibility of Islam with modern Western thoughts and values.³⁴⁰

The advent of the West as an imperial and colonial power and the effects of Western colonialism and imperialism on Muslim reaction to modernity merit further investigations, which, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

After the Enlightenment, Muslims had to deal with the complexities of modern life. As mentioned earlier, Muslim scholars tackled the issue of whether Islam is compatible with modernity as well as whether it is possible to remain Muslim in a modern world. In this chapter, we are not mainly interested in offering answers to these questions. Our main objective here is to examine some aspects of the Islamic reaction to modernity. It is worth stating that, unlike Judaism, there was no durable religious movement or sectarian denominations to emerge full-fledged within Islam as a response to the challenge of modernity. From this perspective, studying Muslim reaction to modernity is quite problematic. Muslim responses could be divided and analyzed in myriad ways. For example, according to Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Muslim modern trends range from

³⁴⁰ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124.

reform to total rejection of either tradition or modernity.”³⁴¹ Similarly, Esposito explicates Muslim responses in detail, “Some religious leaders counseled cultural isolation, withdrawal, and non-cooperation, to resist the Western threat to their Islamic way of life,” while other Muslims, “ranging from secular to Islamic modernists, pursued a path of accommodation to harness the West’s scientific and technological power to revitalize the community and to regain independence.”³⁴² It is worth noting that some Muslim societies were not directly colonized. For example, Turkey and Iran were never under the direct colonial rule of any European power but nonetheless experienced a cultural colonization. The process of modernization in these countries is now considered a top-down imposition of modernization by a secular-nationalist elite over the unwilling Muslim masses. The ruling elite made many reforms to westernize Turkey and Iran and improve women’s position, including the introduction and promotion of Western clothing. The practice of hair covering was represented as an obstacle to being modern, and women who covered their heads as “backwards.” This radical modernization project used women’s bodies and women’s clothing to modernize society. Even though there were also several reforms to improve the position of women in both countries, they did not expand women’s freedom at the expense of women’s bodies. This ruling elite in both contexts fully embraced modernity while labeling religious values such as Muslim modesty for women as “backward.” More importantly, women’s bodies became a political site in which to modernize society. On the other hand, Muslim thinkers in colonized Muslim lands did not ignore the reality of modernity. They embraced a variety of reactions to it—some are attempting to reconcile Islam with modernity while others are resisting it.

³⁴¹ Masud, “Islamic Modernism,” 237.

³⁴² John L. Esposito, “Contemporary Islam: Reformation or Revolution,” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 645-646.

In this study, I will focus primarily on two groups (reformism and revivalism) that totally reject neither modernity nor tradition and instead try to respond to the challenges of modern life while preserving Islam. Gerhard Bowering highlights the differences between them: “modernism [also known as reformism] proposed adapting Islam to Western ideals, while revivalism advocated restoring the vigor of the original dynamics of Islam.”³⁴³ That is to say, reformists attempted to reinterpret the main textual sources of Islam per modern developments. For instance, Fazlur Rahman, known as a modernist intellectual and reformist, promoted “a modernist Islam that would make Islamic jurisprudence relevant to modern life.”³⁴⁴ On the other hand, revivalists focused on the Islamization of modern developments. In doing so, they differ in their understanding of reform, tradition, and modernity. I analyze these groups through Muslim intellectuals who helped to cultivate the roots of these movements in a context in which it both shapes and was shaped by historical changes.

a) Reformist Response to Modernity

Several Muslim thinkers attempted to deal with the question of how to respond to the challenges of modernity and the cause of the decline of the Muslim world. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in the Middle East and Fazlur Rahman in South Asia, among modernist, reformist thinkers, intended to adjust Islamic values to modern values. As Itzhak Weismann states, these intellectuals “advocate, in various forms and degrees, the adaptation of Islam to modern ideas and institutions in Western terms.”³⁴⁵ Each reformist points to the dynamic feature

³⁴³ Gerhard Bowering, “Introduction,” in *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.

³⁴⁴ Haddad, “The Dynamics of Islamic Identity,” 30.

³⁴⁵ Itzhak Weismann, “Indian Roots of Modern Islamic Revivalism,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Summer 2013), 25.

of Islam, albeit with some distinctions between them.³⁴⁶ Sherali Tareen states that all reformist intellectuals attempt “to achieve compatibility between the normative sources of Islam and conditions of modernity.”³⁴⁷ Their aim is singular and simple: to show that Islam does not contradict modernity, especially modern science. To do so, as Esposito states, they stressed “the need to reinterpret and reapply the principles and ideals of Islam to formulate new responses to the political, scientific, and cultural challenges of the West and of modern life.”³⁴⁸ In this sense, it is safe to state that they did not restrict reform to social aspects of Islamic law. Instead, they attempted to modernize many Islamic institutions, including education, theology, and jurisprudence. They wished to reconstruct the Muslim community in light of modern values. To do so, they essentially asserted “reform in education and the need for a new theology.”³⁴⁹ In other words, they all advocated “a bold ‘new theology’ or reinterpretation of Islam and the acceptance, not rejection, of the best in Western thought.”³⁵⁰ Esposito highlights that they also distinguished themselves from “the rejectionist tendency of religious conservatives as well as Western-oriented secular reformers who restricted religion to the private life,” and more importantly, in their perspective ideas of the modern West could function “to rejuvenate state and society.”³⁵¹

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897)³⁵² and his disciple, Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), for example, attempted to modernize Islam as well. They are considered “the most influential

³⁴⁶ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 647.

³⁴⁷ Sherali Tareen, “Narratives of Emancipation in Modern Islam: Temporality, Hermeneutics, and Sovereignty,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Spring 2013), 21.

³⁴⁸ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 647.

³⁴⁹ Masud, “Islamic Modernism,” 241.

³⁵⁰ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 648.

³⁵¹ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 647.

³⁵² There are some controversies about Afghani’s life, namely his nationality and his religious orthodoxy. Even though Afghani and his Arab disciples stated that he was born and raised in Afghanistan as Sunni, several Iranians argue that he was born and brought up in Iran as Shi’i. This discussion continues today. See also Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din “al-Afghani”: A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

spokesmen for Egyptian Islamic modernism in the 19th century.”³⁵³ Fazlur Rahman calls Afghani “the first genuine Muslim modernist.”³⁵⁴ Afghani viewed Islam not only as a religion but also as “a civilization, an ideology that provided the *raison d’etre* for Muslims both as individuals and as a sociopolitical community.”³⁵⁵ Thus, it is possible to state that he not only called for reforms in Islam to indicate that Islam is compatible with modern values but also hoped to reconstruct a Muslim community. As Rahman points out, in addition to being a reformist, “his ultimate purpose undoubtedly was to strengthen the world of Islam politically against the West.”³⁵⁶ According to Nikki R. Keddie, Afghani, like many modernist intellectuals, attempted to “reinterpret traditional Islamic ideas so as to meet the agonizing problems brought by the increasing incursions by the West into the Middle East.”³⁵⁷

Similarly, Abduh also stressed the reform of some parts of Islamic law. For instance, “the religious observances of Islam were immutable” while “the social aspects of Islamic law could be reformed in such areas as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.” He also advocated reform for religious education. In this sense, he managed to “modernize the curriculum at al-Azhar University, a major international center and training ground for Muslim religious scholars” as he pointed to the importance of education for women.³⁵⁸ Abduh criticized misinterpretations of Qur’an, especially regarding the issue of women. According to Ahmed, Abduh “was probably the first to make the argument, still made by Muslim feminists today, that it was Islam and not, as Europeans claimed, the West, that first recognized the full and equal humanity of women.” Thus,

³⁵³ Jackson, “Authority,” 34.

³⁵⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2nd Ed., 1979), 216.

³⁵⁵ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 648.

³⁵⁶ Rahman, *Islam*, 216.

³⁵⁷ Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din “al-Afghani”*, 1.

³⁵⁸ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 648.

he promoted reforms regarding women. According to Abduh, there are several regulations in Muslim society resulting from misinterpretations of Islam, including polygamy and divorce.³⁵⁹

Afghanī and his chief disciple, Abduh, established the *Salafi* movement in the hopes of modernizing Islam.³⁶⁰ Despite the fact that it is known as a modernist and reformist movement, it “looks back to the time of Muhammad and his Companions as a guide to the right way to live.”³⁶¹ Basically, in addition to going back to the era of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions for guidance, the Salafi approach also promotes independent reasoning and science. This modern reform movement believes that “Islamic honor and self-respect would only be reestablished if Islam as both a religion and way of life was redeemed from cultural submission to Western powers and revitalized with its own internal resources.”³⁶² Moreover, according to this approach, some laws regarding worship such as fasting, prayer five times a day, and pilgrimage, are not changeable. However, “the majority of legislation, such as regulation on family law and the penal codes,” are changeable “according to the social and cultural traditions of the time.”³⁶³ They also felt the need for reforms in the Muslim education system, “combining the values of traditional pedagogy with the creativity of modern education.”³⁶⁴

Another important modernist was the Oxford-trained Pakistani intellectual Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988). Like other reformist scholars, Rahman also tackled the question of how to deal with the challenge of modernity and the compatibility of Islamic values with modern values. As Ebrahim Moosa emphasizes, one of the important questions Rahman and other Muslim scholars

³⁵⁹ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 139-40.

³⁶⁰ Majid Fakhry, “Islam and Theology: From the Eighth Century to The Present,” in *The History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 299.

³⁶¹ Jackson, “Authority,” 34.

³⁶² Bowering, *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, 16.

³⁶³ Jackson, “Authority,” 34.

³⁶⁴ Bowering, *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, 16.

in the twentieth-century focus on is “how does Islam as a religious, cultural, political, and ethical heritage deal with a modernizing and rapidly changing world?”³⁶⁵ Masud states that Rahman stressed the necessity of “a new approach to Islam and modernity by historicizing Islamic law and legal theory.”³⁶⁶ According to Rahman, the Muslim world needs a new methodology to reinterpret Islam as well as make it compatible with modernity.

Rahman, furthermore, highlighted the importance of reform in education as well. From Rahman’s view, one of the problems embedded in educational institutions was the “lack of creative synthesis and of an organic relationship between the traditional-religious and the modern-secular,” and more importantly, in doing so, “The institutions of traditional and modern learning are for the most part brutally juxtaposed, and produce two types of people who can hardly communicate with each other.”³⁶⁷ According to Rahman, to eschew these tensions between the modern and the traditional, Muslims need “some first-class minds who can interpret the old in terms of the new as regards substance and turn the new into the service of the old as regards ideals.”³⁶⁸ Rahman states that it is necessary to integrate the modern and the traditional in educational institutions.

In short, all these reformist thinkers, especially colonial-era thinkers, sought to “reconcile Islamic ideology with modern thought and reinterpret traditional concepts in the light of Western science.”³⁶⁹ As Jonah Blank puts it succinctly, “some colonial-era Muslim reformers [such as

³⁶⁵ Ebrahim Moosa, “Introduction” in *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Fazlur Rahman, ed. and with an introduction with Ebrahim Moosa (Oxford: One World Publications, 2003), 4.

³⁶⁶ Masud, “Islamic Modernism,” 252.

³⁶⁷ Fazlur Rahman, “Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism,” in *Change in the Muslim World*, ed. Philip H. Stoddard, David C. Cuthell and Margaret V. Sullivan (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 30.

³⁶⁸ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982,) 139.

³⁶⁹ Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe: Islam and Modernity among the Daudi Bohras* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 161.

Abduh and Khan] attempted to refashion Islamic orthodoxy itself so as to align it with Western ideals.”³⁷⁰ Despite these efforts, they failed to establish a movement to spread their thoughts. As Esposito addresses, their effort to the interpretation of Islam remained “an intellectual movement among a small elite sector of society,” so their failure to provide “an effective organization or movement with a leadership cadre, systematic program and institutional support resulted in the diffusion of the modernist movement in many directions.”³⁷¹ In this regard, Nasr similarly argues that not only modernist/reformist interpretation but also revivalist interpretations “as intellectual endeavors have failed. Islamism, however, has proved politically potent.”³⁷² On the other hand, the reformers played an important role in shaping the Muslim world as well. As Esposito stresses, reformist discourse contributed to “the development of the Muslim community and its attitude toward the West” as well as influenced Muslim intellectuals from the Muslim world “to emphasize educational reforms that incorporated a modern curriculum, legitimated legal and social change, and contributed to the formation of anti-colonial independence movements.”³⁷³ Particularly through articles and books written by them, the reformers inspired several intellectuals in the Muslim world to initiate anti-colonial movements.

b) Revivalist Response to Modernity

Some scholars use the term “Islamist” rather than “revivalist” for these Muslim scholars. Islamist/revivalist Muslim thinkers are known as “an intellectual/political movement in contemporary Islam that combined ideological antipathy towards secular modernity with the desire

³⁷⁰ Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe*, 9.

³⁷¹ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 650.

³⁷² Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, “European Colonialism and the Emergence of Modern Muslim States,” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 565.

³⁷³ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 650.

to curate an ‘authentic’ Muslim political order.”³⁷⁴ That is to say, they responded to the challenge of modernity by offering a counter-political order.

Like reformists, revivalists are influenced by colonial ideology, but in a different way. Revivalists had to struggle with colonial ideology during both the colonial and the post-colonial era. It is evident that even after the colonial era, the ideology of the colonial administration still is influential in Muslim states. In this sense, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr states that the ruling elite, trained in colonial educational institutions “were deeply influenced by the ideology and vision of the colonial administration”³⁷⁵ This westernized elite, who “has internalized the vision of the colonial state,” have tried to transform Muslim society “according to the blueprint,” which “is propagated as the state’s agenda for progress is thus deeply rooted in colonialism’s ideologies”³⁷⁶ The ruling elite’s modernization project created tension between governments and society. Nasr indicates this tension in the following terms:

The continuity between the colonial and post-colonial eras has created a disjuncture between what the states have viewed as the proper course of development and the values that Muslim society holds near and dear; between how the state envisions the society and how Muslims view themselves and their goals. Whereas the state followed a secular vision of development, the society has been deeply rooted in Islam.³⁷⁷

This ruling elite equates westernization and the ideology of the colonial state with progress. Like the colonial state, they blame Islam for the decline of the Muslim world and the “backwardness” of the societies they govern. In doing so, their goal is to dissociate the state from Islamic values, especially from Islamic law. It is safe to state that the revivalist reaction to modernity emerged and developed in this climate. As Nasr puts it succinctly, “the ideology and political programs of contemporary Islamist movements across the Muslim world have been shaped in response to this

³⁷⁴ Tareen, “Narratives of Emancipation,” 22.

³⁷⁵ Nasr, “European Colonialism,” 566.

³⁷⁶ Nasr, “European Colonialism,” 561-65.

³⁷⁷ Nasr, “European Colonialism,” 562.

disjuncture.”³⁷⁸ This situation also results in conflict between Islamist movements and states. As Esposito states, “the desire to transform society invariably led to involvement in politics and confrontation with the state.”³⁷⁹ The Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-i Islami faced forcible suppressions, and some of their leaders were executed;³⁸⁰ the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere continues today. This background helps understand the revivalists’ position on modernity, westernization, and secularization.

Revivalist thinkers do not oppose the idea of change altogether. Like Muslim reformists, Muslim revivalists also assert the urgent need for transformation and renewal. Similarly, their discourse on education for women and gender equality is not completely traditional. For example, like the reformists, Qutb also supports human equality. According to him, human equality is “one of the foundations of social justice in Islam.”³⁸¹ As Roxanne D. Marcotte notes, “Qutb insisted upon equality, not only in religious and spiritual matters but also in economic and financial matters.”³⁸²

As noted earlier, their method differs from reformist Muslims. Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, in explaining these differences, says:

Unlike the modernists, the Islamists have not sought to interpret Islam in terms of dominant Western values—at least not explicitly. Rather, they have sought to assert Islam’s domination, to interpret modernity according to Islamic values. Discussions of the Islamic state, Islamic economics, or the Islamization of knowledge all have this goal in mind.³⁸³

³⁷⁸ Nasr, “European Colonialism,” 561.

³⁷⁹ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 654.

³⁸⁰ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 654.

³⁸¹ Roxanne D. Marcotte, “Egyptian Islamists and the Status of Muslim Women Question,” JSRI No. 11 (Summer 2005), 62 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/15010733.pdf>

³⁸² Marcotte, “Egyptian Islamists,” 63.

³⁸³ Nasr, “European Colonialism,” 565.

In this sense, rather than rejecting tradition and Islamic values, revivalists reinterpret modern values in light of Islamic values. As Ali Zaidi explains, revivalist thinkers, including Abul Ala Mawdūdī, Hassan al-Banna, and Sayyed Qutb, “eschewed the early-reformers’ attempts to synthesize European emphases on rationality, science, and material development with an Islamic ethos,” as well as maintained that “liberalism and socialism represented secular and materialistic values, which threatened the cultural identity of Muslims.”³⁸⁴ They were primarily concerned about the survival of the Muslim identity.

Revivalists have considered the process of secularization a threat to Muslim societies. As Basit Koshul states, according to the revivalists, “the essential challenge facing the Muslim world is the process of secularization,” and hence, “the main goal of the Islamic revivalists has been to arrest the process of secularization and de-Islamization in Muslim societies.”³⁸⁵ In this regard, according to the revivalists, one of the primary reasons for the decline of Muslim societies was secularization.

Mawlana Mawdūdī (1903-1979) was one of the leading revivalist thinkers in the Muslim world. Even more importantly, Jane Smith states that Mawdūdī is considered “the father of Islamic revivalism.”³⁸⁶ As Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr states, “his views have influenced revivalism from Morocco to Malaysia, leaving their mark on thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb and on events such as the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979,” and he “has influenced the spread of Islamic revivalism in Central Asia, North Africa, and Southeast Asia.”³⁸⁷ Mention should be made that the advent and

³⁸⁴ Zaidi, *Islam, Modernity*, 10

³⁸⁵ Basit B. Koshul, “Fazlur Rahman’s ‘Islam and Modernity’ Revisited,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter 1994), 404.

³⁸⁶ Smith, *Islam in America*, 46.

³⁸⁷ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-4.

development of the ideas of Mawdūdī emerged during turbulent political times in British India where Muslims and Hindus fought for power. As Nasr succinctly puts it, “Mawdūdī’s ideas emerged at a time of flux in the history of the Muslim community of India,” and even more importantly, “His views were informed by the acute despair that gripped that community and was directed at finding solutions to its plight.”³⁸⁸ In this regard, Mawdūdī focused on the survival of Islam and Muslim identity in colonial India.³⁸⁹ Mawdūdī and other revivalists criticized modernity because Muslim identity and Islamic thought were fading in the wake of colonial rule. Hence, they developed a reactionary response to modernity. Similarly, Nasr contends that even though revivalists in general and Mawdūdī, in particular, seemed to be against modernity, at the same time, his views were influenced by modernity. Nasr underscores the impossibility of eschewing modernity and modern values altogether regardless of his vehement criticism of modern developments from politics to economy.³⁹⁰

Mawdūdī also rejected the concept of the nation-state and nationalism since these Western concepts of political organization are in conflict with the idea of the *umma*, “which is conceptually a supranational or transnational union.”³⁹¹ On this point, Mawdūdī believed that “nationalism would never protect the interests of Islam because of its secular nature.”³⁹² He also harshly criticized Western democracy and secularism.³⁹³ According to Masud, “Mawdūdī equated modernity with secularism, which he translated as ‘denial of religion.’”³⁹⁴ Hence, he inveighed

³⁸⁸ Nasr, *Mawdudi*, 4.

³⁸⁹ Nasr, *Mawdudi*, 51. Nasr quotes from the following source: Muhammad Yusuf, *Maududi: A Formative Phase* (Karachi: the Universal Message, 1979), 35

³⁹⁰ Nasr, *Mawdudi*, 50.

³⁹¹ Maidul Islam, “Umma and the Dilemma of Muslim Belonging in Modern South Asia,” *St Antony’s International Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 2017), Home, Displacement, and Belonging, 27.

³⁹² Nasr, *Mawdudi*, 20.

³⁹³ Fakhry, “Islam and Theology,” 300.

³⁹⁴ Masud, “Islamic Modernism,” 252.

against modernist Muslims and the idea of Islamic modernism. To fight these Western ideologies, like Hassan al-Banna, who established the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Egypt, Mawdūdī founded the Jamaat-i Islami in 1941. Mawdūdī and al-Banna opposed the Westernization of Islamic values and became known as preeminent anti-Western Muslim scholars. Thus, some consider them “fundamentalists.” On the other hand, Esposito rightly argues that despite the fact that “they have been dubbed ‘fundamentalists’ and equated with a retrogressive vision, they were in fact modern in their orientation and organization.”³⁹⁵ Smith similarly states that “the Western media erroneously label [revivalist movements] ‘Islamic fundamentalism.’”³⁹⁶

As for the Arabic-speaking Muslim lands, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), a Western-educated Egyptian from the elite, is considered another revivalist. Qutb even published his own Qur’anic exegesis, *Fi Zilal al-Qur’an* (In the Shade of the Qur’an).³⁹⁷ Like Mawdūdī, Qutb also opposed many Western phenomena and vehemently criticized them. From Qutb’s perspective, the West and secularism were “the causes of the decadence of the Muslim people.”³⁹⁸ He focuses mainly on the negative effects of Western civilization on humanity. More specifically, he blames Western civilization for corruption and irreligion.³⁹⁹ According to him, the solution to the problems caused by the West caused is a return to Islam.

In contrast to the colonial administration in Egypt, which asserted Christianity's superiority, Qutb asserted Islam's superiority by arguing that, unlike Christianity, Islam is not in

³⁹⁵ Esposito, “Contemporary Islam,” 653.

³⁹⁶ Smith, *Islam in America*, 46.

³⁹⁷ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “The Ulama and Contestations on Religious Authority,” in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Armando Salvatore and Martin van Bruinessen (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009), 218.

³⁹⁸ Fakhry, “Islam and Theology,” 299

³⁹⁹ Fakhry, “Islam and Theology,” 300.

conflict with science and reason.⁴⁰⁰ His account of scientific knowledge and the intellect is a continuation of Sunnī theology. Tareen states that Qutb saw “the pursuit of material achievements as a necessary component of human development.”⁴⁰¹ However, he vehemently criticized Western civilization due to “the West’s privileging of material progress over moral and spiritual growth.”⁴⁰² Like other revivalists, Qutb also opposed the secularization process and western secular democracy. John Calvert underscores that unlike Islamists/revivalists, like Hasan el-Banna, who focused mainly on European imperialism, colonialism, and cultural invasion of the West, Qutb not only provided a critique of Western civilization and “the West’s hegemony over Muslim lands,” but also “urged Muslims to confront what he regarded as the corrupt cultural and political foundations of their own countries.”⁴⁰³

c) American Muslims’ Reaction to Modernity

Islam is the second-largest religion in the United States of America. Muslims in America consist of not only immigrants from Muslim-majority countries but also indigenous Americans or converts. Muslims in America were influenced by both the trends discussed in the previous section, reformism and revivalism, both of which were affected by European colonialism. American Muslims, moreover, have expended efforts in the reconciliation of religious values with modern ones in America in particular and in the West in general. Living in a non-Muslim country produces different approaches to the challenge of modernity. American-born Muslims have different experiences and a different understanding of modernity because they do not meet modernity in the wake of colonialism or imperial colonial rule. Unlike immigrant Muslims, they easily engage with

⁴⁰⁰ Fakhry, “Islam and Theology,” 300.

⁴⁰¹ Tareen, “Narratives of Emancipation,” 22.

⁴⁰² Tareen, “Narratives of Emancipation,” 22.

⁴⁰³ John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Islamic Radicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.

the conditions of modernity and find a balance between tradition and modernity. They deconstruct the binary opposition: tradition/modernity.

Second- and third-generation young Muslims are not satisfied with the religious authorities in their parents' home countries. Hence, Masooda Bano stresses that "many young Muslims are turning for advice to new scholarly platforms emerging in the West, led by charismatic leaders."⁴⁰⁴ Like other trends discussed above, these new religious platforms face the issue of how to reconcile religious values with modern ones. These scholars do not reject Islamic tradition or modern values. Rather, they attempt to make sense of (or interpret, *ta'wīl*) Islamic values within the modern context for young Muslims who were born and raised in the West. More importantly, these scholars are not interested in offering "a 'modern,' or 'enlightened' Islam, unlike the post-colonial secular political and military elites, who wanted Islamic dictates to fit the Western moral and legal framework."⁴⁰⁵ Moreover, unlike modernists, these scholars do not reject Islamic values if they are in conflict with modern values. As Bano underscores, they "do not agree with abandoning or reforming aspects of Islamic *fiqh* that are seen to be inconsistent with Western modernity or liberal theory."⁴⁰⁶ They stay loyal to Islamic values, and, at the same time, they do not reject modern realities. To do so, these scholars employ a variety of methodologies that can be analyzed in three categories: neo-traditionalism, neo-legalism, and neo-conservatism.⁴⁰⁷ I shall follow this division here. Each of these reactions to modernity is an attempt by Muslim scholars living in the West to find a balance between being Muslim and being American. Even more importantly, their endeavor is focused on how to develop "American Islam" without rejecting "the core of Islamic *fiqh*, but all

⁴⁰⁴ Masooda Bano, "Introduction," in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change: Evolving Debates in the West*, Vol. 2, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 1.

⁴⁰⁵ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 3-4.

⁴⁰⁶ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 13.

are in agreement that Islamic legal and scholarly tradition requires them to engage in reasoned debate to find answers that are consistent with the spirit of the Sharī‘a and also are optimal responses to the needs of the times.”⁴⁰⁸ To better comprehend lived Islam in the American context, it is crucial to examine each of these approaches briefly.

c.a) Neo-Traditionalism

Some Muslim scholars in America have offered a restatement of traditionalism, known as neo-traditionalism, which seeks a methodological approach to religious tradition and as a response to the challenge of modernity. These scholars identify themselves as “renovators of an established tradition” rather than reformers since, according to neo-traditionalist Hamza Yusuf, the word “reformation” refers to “a complete restructuring,” which Islam does not need. On the other hand, it does sometimes need renovation. If needed, according to him, “Islam has all the tools necessary” for the process of renovation.⁴⁰⁹ By “tools,” Yusuf refers to the intellectual diversity and richness within the well-established Islamic schools of thought. Within this direction, neo-traditionalists seek new means through which they can address the question of how to preserve Muslim identity in a non-Muslim context without compromising Islamic teachings. In Bano’s words, neo-traditionalism views “the Islamic scholarly tradition as being inherently adept at coping with change and diversity; its focus is on reviving a respect for rich Islamic scholarly tradition as preserved by the four Sunni *madhhabs*,” and at the same time these scholars focus on “cultivating an appreciation for *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) through working on ‘cleansing of the heart.’”⁴¹⁰ In this framework, they point to the dynamic nature of Islam as well as the importance of Islamic

⁴⁰⁸ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 19.

⁴⁰⁹ Nathan Spannaus and Christopher Pooya Razavian, “Zaytuna College and the Construction of an American Muslim Identity,” in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change: Evolving Debates in the West*, Vol. 2, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 56.

⁴¹⁰ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 15.

tradition with a special focus on *tasawwuf*. The neo-traditionalist approach emphasizes “learning the *adab* (Islamic norms of behavior) and being in the *Suhba* (companionship) of the scholars.”⁴¹¹ Bano further states that to spread “their conception of authentic Islamic tradition,” neo-traditionalist scholars Hamza Yusuf, Imam Zaid Shakir, and Hatem Bazian founded the Zaytuna Institute located in Berkeley, California in 1996 (later transformed into Zaytuna College in 2008).⁴¹² They aimed to “train the future generation of Muslim scholars in the United States” at Zaytuna College.⁴¹³

Nathan Spannaus and Christopher Pooya Razavian also highlight that Zaytuna College aims not only to spread “knowledge of Islam and Islamic tradition self-consciously within an American context” but also “to create space for Muslims and Islam within the religious and educational landscape of America.”⁴¹⁴ Moreover, since this Muslim institute is overseen by two American Muslim scholars, Hamza Yusuf (a white American convert to Islam) and Imam Zaid Shakir (a black American convert), it facilitates “Zaytuna’s acclimation of Islam to the American setting.”⁴¹⁵ In addition to Yusuf and Shakir, most of its faculty members are “native converts, deeply steeped in American culture and society.”⁴¹⁶ Particularly, in the wake of September 11th, Yusuf gained a great deal of media coverage, and more importantly, the American mainstream media pointed out “his background as a well-educated white American, and his potential as a voice of reform” even though he considers himself revivalist rather than reformist.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹¹ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 15.

⁴¹² Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 16.

⁴¹³ Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 312.

⁴¹⁴ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 39.

⁴¹⁵ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 39.

⁴¹⁶ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 47.

⁴¹⁷ Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*, 306.

Hence, the fact that these scholars were natives of America contributed to the development of a peculiarly American Islam. Their familiarity with both Muslim culture and American culture was essential in the process of formation of Muslim identity within the American context as well. As Nathan Spannaus and Christopher Pooya Razavian put it, “the primary goal of Zaytuna... is the articulation of an American Muslim identity, a model of Muslimness suited to the American/Western environment.”⁴¹⁸ They also underscore parallels between Islamic culture and American culture. As Spannaus and Razavian note, “by being able to look at core values within both traditions, they are able to find points of overlap and agreement.”⁴¹⁹ In particular, Shakir did not view Islam in conflict with American democracy.⁴²⁰ Rather than rejecting the entire American culture, they focused on similarities between them and sought ways to remain Muslim in the American context.

On the other hand, there are a few distinctions between Yusuf’s and Shakir’s perspectives. More specifically, “the greatest distinction” between Yusuf and Shakir was their commitment to social activism since, unlike Yusuf, Shakir put much emphasis on social activism.⁴²¹ Another distinction is that Yusuf points out “the role of the heart in spirituality and piety,” while Shakir is interested in “outward expressions of piety, manifested in struggles for justice and equality.”⁴²² Basically, Yusuf is concerned about Muslims’ inner development and inner piety, while Shakir’s focus is on Muslims’ relation to society and ways to improve society. Their understanding of Islam is reflected in Zaytuna’s mission.

c.b.) Neo-Legalism

⁴¹⁸ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 45.

⁴¹⁹ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 60.

⁴²⁰ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 47.

⁴²¹ Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 44.

⁴²² Spannaus and Razavian, “Zaytuna College,” 44.

Neo-legalism is the second approach developed in the Western context in an attempt to reconcile Islam and modernity. As Bano explains, this approach aims at “enabling Islam to enrich Western modernity, guided by the conviction that Islam can in fact provide a moral framework capable of overcoming many challenges faced by the West.”⁴²³ In this framework, Islam is presented as a solution for some modern problems that Muslims encounter in the contemporary world. In order to achieve this, these scholars utilized different methodologies. More specifically, unlike neo-traditionalism, this approach lacks *tasawwuf* and *suhba*.⁴²⁴ They were not primarily interested in cultivating personal spirituality and morality. On the other hand, these scholars show greater concern for “finding answers to contemporary challenges by attempting to bridge the gap between Islamic law, contemporary realities, and modern sciences.”⁴²⁵ It is worth noting that both these approaches emphasize that Islam is not an “alien” religion and that it is not incompatible with science and reason. They indigenized Islam through these attempts in the American context. Similarly, to do so, some Muslim intellectuals from this approach established an institute, namely the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). This institute was founded in 1981 in a suburb of Washington, D.C by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-86) and Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman (1936-), and Taha Jabir Al-Alwani (1935-2016).⁴²⁶ IIIT explains their primary goal in this way:

The International Institute of Islamic Thought is dedicated to the revival and reform of Islamic thought and its methodology in order to enable the Ummah to deal effectively with present challenges, and contribute to the progress of human civilization in ways that will give it a meaning and a direction derived from divine guidance. The realization of such a position will help Muslims regain their intellectual and cultural identity and re-affirm their presence as a dynamic, positive force.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 17.

⁴²⁴ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 17.

⁴²⁵ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 17.

⁴²⁶ Nathan Spannaus, “From ‘Islamization of Knowledge’ to ‘American Islam’: The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT),” in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change: Evolving Debates in the West*, Vol. 2, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 98.

⁴²⁷ See IIIT website, <http://www.iiit.org/about.html>.

They were concerned with the challenge of modernity. In this connection, they promoted the idea of reform in Islamic thought and provided the Muslim community with a methodology to achieve this goal. The institute is active both in America and in many other countries through branch offices.⁴²⁸ It is safe to state that this institute has a global influence on the understanding of Islam through its religious and intellectual activities. IIIT focuses mainly on Islamic law in the hope of adjusting Islamic law to meet modern needs.⁴²⁹ Similarly, Bano contends that neo-legalist scholars, including IIIT, “have made comparatively more conscious efforts to develop new methodological tools to relate the essence of Islamic *fiqh* to modern realities.”⁴³⁰

It is crucial to note that since the beginning of this movement, neo-legalism has focused on the Islamization of knowledge and methodology, about which Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman directly wrote. According to them, the Islamization of knowledge project is interested in “thought, ideology, and a normative and ideational human pattern—and how such a pattern, its constituents, its roots in reason, psyche, and conscience may be built.”⁴³¹ IIIT not only points to the importance and relevance of science to modern life but also underscores that scientific achievements “must be thoroughly examined and critically checked in the light of Islam, its comprehensive norms, its guidance, and its ideals.”⁴³² Thus, from this perspective, the Islamization of knowledge is seen as “a type of knowledge based upon revealed norms and ideals of the Divine message,” as well as “a way and a method to formulate a methodological, scientific, mental approach to the humanities, social sciences, and applied sciences.”⁴³³ Based on these

⁴²⁸ Spannaus, “From ‘Islamization of Knowledge’,” 97.

⁴²⁹ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 17.

⁴³⁰ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 22.

⁴³¹ *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*, ed. AbdulHamid AbuSulayman (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2nd Ed., 1989), 84.

⁴³² *Islamization of Knowledge*, ed. AbuSulayman, 85.

⁴³³ *Islamization of Knowledge*, ed. AbuSulayman, 85.

considerations, it is safe to state that IIIT aims to reinterpret Western knowledge in light of Islamic values in order to make it viable for the Muslim community.

c.c.) Neo-Conservatism

The third trend is neo-conservatism. Unlike neo-traditionalism and neo-legalism, which have developed gradually over time, neo-conservatism is derived from very conservative interpretations of Islam, including Saudi Salafism. As Bano puts succinctly, neo-conservatism is “an extension of the two most conservative Islamic scholarly platforms....,” such as Saudi Salafism and Deoband.⁴³⁴ In the wake of the 9/11 events, the Salafi movement in the American context witnessed the rupture. As Zareena Grewal underscores, after 9/11, Salafi followers left the movement “in part due to police scrutiny of their leadership, but the movement also fractured as a result of infighting over theological issues.”⁴³⁵ For example, Yasir Qadhi, a former Salafi, is considered a neo-conservative Muslim scholar. Qadhi is an influential and controversial figure in the American context. Qadhi left the Salafi movement asserting the urgent need for reform of Salafism if it were to remain relevant and able to continue to exist in America. As Christopher Pooya Razavian states, Qadhi “has brought new life to Salafism in America by reforming the movement away from its conservative core, arguing that it offers no solutions for the modern age.”⁴³⁶ Qadhi serves as a faculty member of the AlMaghrib, founded in 2002.⁴³⁷ There are several other influential and popular Muslim scholars at AlMaghrib Institute, including Omar Suleiman and Yasmin Mogahed. Grewal contends that this institute “has almost singlehandedly revived the

⁴³⁴ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 18.

⁴³⁵ Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*, 330.

⁴³⁶ Christopher Pooya Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi and the Development of Reasonable Salafism,” in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change: Evolving Debates in the West*, Vol. 2, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 155.

⁴³⁷ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 157.

Salafi movement in the U.S. among Sunni American Muslim college students, and its success is demonstrable in its high student enrolment.”⁴³⁸ Due to some controversial figures related to AlMaghrib, including Anwar AlAwlaki known as the highest English-speaking cleric in AlQaeda, this institute came under scrutiny.⁴³⁹ AlMaghrib was also harshly criticized by other Salafi groups in America, calling this institute “too liberal.”⁴⁴⁰ Basically, this external and internal scrutiny and harsh criticism functioned as a catalyst for the transformation of this institute in particular and the American Salafi movement in general. As Grewal puts it, due to the scrutiny, “the theologically reformist organization rebranded itself and moved away from the public use of the label ‘Salafi,’ AlMaghrib faculty identify the organization as Salafi in ideological orientation privately.”⁴⁴¹ Razavian highlights that “Qadhi embodies this transition from mainstream Saudi Salafism to a more liberal Salafism.”⁴⁴² For example, Qadhi supports many modern values, including “democracy, the legality of same-sex marriage (albeit among non-Muslims) in secular societies”⁴⁴³ He has played a crucial role in the advent and development of American Salafism.

Qadhi also highlights the necessity of developing new scholarship because, according to him, traditional Islamic legal scholarship is no longer able to meet Muslims’ modern needs and has become nonfunctional in providing solutions to their problems.⁴⁴⁴ In this regard, Qadhi argues that Muslims living in the West have different problems and needs. To find solutions, Islamic law must be changed. In this framework, he embraces John Rawls’ concept of the “reasonable citizen” when it comes to the issue of “how Muslims should live in secular liberal societies.”⁴⁴⁵ For Rawls,

⁴³⁸ Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*, 330.

⁴³⁹ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 158.

⁴⁴⁰ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 158.

⁴⁴¹ Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*, 331.

⁴⁴² Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 159.

⁴⁴³ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 159.

⁴⁴⁴ Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority*, 23.

⁴⁴⁵ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 167.

the notion of reciprocity and equal citizenship are crucial.⁴⁴⁶ In this sense, Qadhi opposes “the implementation of any coercive practices by Muslims in the West” as well as “defends the freedom of others based on a notion of reciprocity.”⁴⁴⁷ In so doing, Qadhi has provided a neo-conservative blueprint for how Muslims can and should live in the West.

⁴⁴⁶ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 170.

⁴⁴⁷ Razavian, “Yasir Qadhi,” 175.

PART THREE: The Concept of Modesty in Orthodox Judaism and Sunnī Islam

The notion of modesty plays a central role in shaping Orthodox Jewish and Muslim societies. Through the word modesty, both communities seek belonging and, at the same time to distinguish themselves from the American culture around them. More importantly, these communities challenge secular womanhood and secular values by emphasizing modesty as cultural and religious norms. In this sense, modesty creates new womanhood, a new community, a new lifestyle, and a new way of life. Thus, modesty is not only associated with clothing, although that is its most visible marker. Rather it creates a counter-cultural stance. In doing so, modesty becomes a manifestation of alternative modernity that allows women to build new subjectivities and new identities as religious women. Religious women reside in secular settings where the modest dress is the most visible sign of alternative modernity. To comprehend the process of identity formation, it is crucial to investigate first how the concept of modesty is understood in general and second how women make sense of it as well as to what extent women shape their life choices through modesty. I also tackle the question of hair covering practices, which is considered a very important part of modesty in both communities. In this chapter, I explore what the concept of modesty and the practice of head covering means in both cultural settings as well as their role in re/constructing/shaping women's lives. In addition, this chapter hopes to demarcate similarities and differences between Orthodox Jewish and Muslim communities concerning the concept of modesty.

As stated above, hair covering is seen as an important part of modesty in both the Orthodox Jewish and Muslim communities. Therefore, in order to better understand the concept of modesty, it is crucial to investigate the issue of hair covering as well. To put it differently, hair covering and modesty are inextricably linked in both communities. More importantly, the practice of hair

covering plays a crucial role in forming religious identity and modest clothing. In this respect, the practice of hair covering not only fashions women's self-identity, but also functions as a catalyst for cultural and religious maintenance of the community in which they live. That is to say, hair covering practices are not only a religiously motivated act but also function as a tool to help women construct their identity as religiously observant. Milligan points out that hair is utilized as a "significant symbol" in many religious communities. In Milligan's words, "Hair, whether we show it or not, forms part of our self-identity. How we choose to style, display, color, tease, or cover it demonstrates and communicates our perception of self and can, at times, represent community allegiance."⁴⁴⁸

More specifically, hair is a part of the body, as well as a part of who we are. Thus, how women style their hair or whether, or not, they cover it, or how to cover it, all these decisions not only "convey how we wish others to perceive us or how we feel about ourselves," but also "make a profound statement about identity and religious and/or cultural values."⁴⁴⁹ Hence, Milligan argues that hair covering is not only the "externalization of these private practices," but also a "perceived symbolic both for the wearers as well as for viewers."⁴⁵⁰ Through modesty, especially modest clothing, a woman announces her religiosity and constructs her identity. More importantly, hair covering is seen as "a manifestation of personal belief" as well as a sign of women's "spiritual commitment."⁴⁵¹ In doing so, the practice of hair covering is understood to be both "spiritually and personally fulfilling" by those who choose to cover their hair.⁴⁵² For example, in the Orthodox Jewish context, after marriage, the practice of hair covering is a manifestation of a woman's "level

⁴⁴⁸ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, xi-xii

⁴⁴⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, xii

⁴⁵⁰ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, xii.

⁴⁵¹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 122.

⁴⁵² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 121.

of religious observance” and “her commitment to maintaining an observant Jewish home.”⁴⁵³ Thus, Milligan contends that the practice of hair covering operates on both an individual and a community level.⁴⁵⁴

Although there are several commonalities between Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women—including the practice of hair covering and the understanding of modesty—scholarly attention mostly has tended to focus on hair covering practices in Muslim settings; on the other hand, there is a paucity of academic research on the practice of hair covering within Orthodox Judaism.⁴⁵⁵ Hopefully, the present comparative study helps fill this gap by including Orthodox Jewish hair covering. Furthermore, many studies view Muslim veiling primarily as evidence of the oppression of Muslim women.⁴⁵⁶ In these works, Muslim women are primarily depicted as agentless victims of their religion and culture. In my analysis, I do not consider women who take on a modest dress code or who cover their hair as religiously oppressed or backward.

⁴⁵³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, xii.

⁴⁵⁴ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 122.

⁴⁵⁵ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 45.

Chapter Five: Modesty in Orthodox Judaism

The Concept of Modesty (*Tznius*) in Orthodox Judaism

The Orthodox Jewish community places a lot of emphasis on the notion of modesty. The concept has a very central role in people's lives. Motti Inbari contends that Orthodox Judaism "adopted a particularly strict approach to modesty from its inception."⁴⁵⁷ The Hebrew word for modesty is *tznius*. The term *tznius* derives from *tzanua*, which translates as "to conceal," and thus, the concept of modesty, "means keeping concealed that which should not be revealed."⁴⁵⁸ The concept of *tznius* is derived from Micah 8:6 : "What is good, and what does the Lord demand of you; but to do justice, to love lovingkindness," and "walk humbly, modestly, and discreetly with your God."⁴⁵⁹ Rav Yitzchak Yaacov Fuchs explains the centrality of modesty in Orthodoxy with the following statement: "Chazal⁴⁶⁰ tell us that the sanctity of the home, the foundation of Jewish life, is maintained primarily through the laws of *tzniuth* (modesty). *Tzniuth* creates an atmosphere of holiness and wholesomeness that permeates family life."⁴⁶¹

In this context, modesty is considered a crucial duty of women to protect and maintain family life as well as religious life. Furthermore, the holiness of Israel and the coming of the messiah are contingent upon the modesty of women. As Rabbi Eliyahu Falk, an Orthodox rabbi and expert on Jewish law in Israel, similarly argues:

Tznius, of which *kisuy sa'aros* [hair covering] is an integral part, is the far-reaching contribution of *n'shei Yisrael* [women of Israel] towards real morality and *kedushas Yisrael*

⁴⁵⁷ Inbari, "The Modesty Campaigns of Rabbi Amram Blau," 110.

⁴⁵⁸ Barbara Goldman Carrel, "Shattered Vessels That Contain Divine Sparks: Unveiling Hasidic Women's Dress Code," in *Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 47-48.

⁴⁵⁹ Yael Weil, "You've Come A Long Way, Baby," in *Hide and Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, ed. Lynne Schreiber (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2006), 37.

⁴⁶⁰ Chazal is acronym for Chachameinu Zichronam LiVrocha (Our Sages of Blessed Memory)

⁴⁶¹ Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael: A Woman's Guide to Jewish Observance* (Vol.1-2), New York:Targum Press, 2009), 69.

[the holiness of Israel]. The more women fulfill the requirements of *tznius*, and the more they strengthen it amongst their family and close associates, the more they are cultivating and promoting *kedushas Yisrael*. This in turn will cause the power of Yishmael [the Arabs] to be curtailed if not totally neutralized. Calm and tranquility will *b'ezer Hashem* [with God's help] return to our camp, and Moshiach Tzidkeinu [Our righteous Messiah] will come speedily in our days to herald our long-awaited redemption.⁴⁶²

In this view, from within the Orthodox community, women's fulfillment of modesty operates as a catalyst to ensure the holiness of Israel through the strengthening of family life. Milligan also suggests that in Falk's understanding, Orthodox men's noticeable dress code serves as a tool to demonstrate their affiliation to orthodoxy, while women's clothing is "spiritual and becomes part of their perceived holiness."⁴⁶³ That is to say, the term modesty is seen as "an important tenet of observant Jewish life," and "the parameters of tzniut apply most stringently to women."⁴⁶⁴

Ayala Fader states that during her ethnographic study on the Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, she barely heard about male modesty.⁴⁶⁵ Thus, she further maintains that "girls' modesty is more regulated than boys'."⁴⁶⁶ As the Conservative rabbi Danya Ruttenberg succinctly puts it, "in today's context, it [tznius] refers almost exclusively to female dress, and sometimes to female behavior" despite the fact that this concept has traditionally many meanings, including a more general sense that "a person should be humble and unassuming."⁴⁶⁷ More specifically, Ruttenberg explains how the concept of *tznius* evolved from a gender-free concept to female-centered one:

[I]t is also a communal value. When Maimonides discusses modesty in the Mishneh Torah, he talks relatively little about women as a category per se. He argues, instead, that the way to behave with *tzniut gedolah* (great modesty) is to be discreet in the bathroom, to refrain from talking louder than is absolutely necessary, to refrain from showing off your money,

⁴⁶² Pesach Eliyahu Falk, *Sheitels: A Halachic Guide to Present-Day Sheitel* (Jerusalem: Bnos Melochim, 2002), 44.

⁴⁶³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 12.

⁴⁶⁴ Lynne Schreiber, "What is Hair?" in *Hide and Seek: Jewish Women and Hair Covering*, ed. Lynne Schreiber (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2006), 21.

⁴⁶⁵ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 149.

⁴⁶⁶ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 149.

⁴⁶⁷ Danya Ruttenberg, "Toward A New Tzniut," in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 203.

and to generally keep other people's needs and reactions in mind as you move through the world.⁴⁶⁸

Ruttenberg criticizes the reduction of modesty to only women and offers a gender-inclusive understanding of modesty with the following statement: "Caring for others, after all, is a vital part of how we live an engaged life of service to God. This, then, is the core of a new *tzniut*: to dress and behave with sensitivity both to oneself and one's deepest needs, and to one's context, to the reactions of others; to love our neighbors as ourselves in our actions and in our interactions."⁴⁶⁹ In this framework, Ruttenberg reconstructs modesty as a crucial "spiritual value."⁴⁷⁰ More importantly, she de-genders it by tracing its meaning back to a time when modesty had a more general and gender-neutral valence.

Even though the concept of *tznius* is translated as modesty, it signifies more than modesty in dress. More specifically, Fader states that in Hasidic schools, girls are taught not only how to dress modestly, but also to behave and speak modestly as well as how to be a modest bride.⁴⁷¹ Fader, for instance, mentions that Orthodox women avoid using the word "intercourse", instead utilizing a number of English euphemisms in order to address their physical desire modestly.⁴⁷² She further asserts that in this branch of Orthodox Judaism, the term modesty is framed as "appropriateness" rather than "shame," especially when teaching girls the laws of family purity in the name of "creating modest women."⁴⁷³ In this framework, through the concept of modesty, women build an identity to present themselves to their community and the larger non-Jewish community. That is to say that their practices of modesty, embedded in every aspect of their lives,

⁴⁶⁸ Ruttenberg, "Toward A New Tzniut," 208.

⁴⁶⁹ Ruttenberg, "Toward A New Tzniut," 208.

⁴⁷⁰ Ruttenberg, "Toward A New Tzniut," 209.

⁴⁷¹ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 201.

⁴⁷² Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 202.

⁴⁷³ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 199-201.

function as a part of their identity as Orthodox observant women in particular and as a preserver of Orthodoxy in general. More specifically, Carrel explicates the modest dress code's function in the Hasidic context: "They [Hasidic women] perceive their mode of dress as the symbolic expression of Hasidic spirituality and modesty, which not only promotes a distinctively feminized Hasidic identity but also ultimately serves as a protective shield against the larger (non-Jewish) New York City secular society in which they live."⁴⁷⁴

So in this context, modesty and spirituality are inextricably linked. On the other hand, modern Orthodox Rabbi Yehuda Henkin defines the concept of *tznius* in terms of "Jewish standards of modesty in dress and behavior, as it relates particularly to women."⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, Henkin not only highlights the importance of behavior but also describes it as mainly women's standards. Rav Yitzchak Yaacov Fuchs claims that dressing immodestly is considered "a serious transgression" for women by saying, "By ignoring the laws of modest dress, a woman not only violates the Torah herself, but causes others who see her transgress. Jewish Law not only prohibits a woman from dressing immodestly but also forbids men to look at someone who is so dressed."⁴⁷⁶ So, for most Orthodox Jews, the modest law has two important aspects: women are required to dress modestly and conform to the laws of modesty in order that men will not break the law as it applies to them to avoid looking at women dressed immodestly.

It is also crucial to discuss from what sources the laws of *tznius* derive. Carrel states that the laws of *tznius* come from two essential sources: "the *Dath Moshe*, or those requirements specified in the Torah itself and the *Dath Yehudith*, or varying written traditions which have

⁴⁷⁴ Carrel, "Shattered Vessels," 45.

⁴⁷⁵ Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, *Understanding Tzniut: Modern Controversies in the Jewish Community* (Jerusalem-New York: Urim Publications, 2008), 11.

⁴⁷⁶ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 70-71.

defined the practice of Jewish women through generations by means of community interpretation.”⁴⁷⁷ In other words, Torah (*the Dath Moshe* or the Law of Moses) and the modesty law of Jewish women (*Dath Yehudith*) determine Jewish standards of modesty for women. Malkie Janowski accentuates these two sources:

Unlike *dat Moshe*, some aspects of *dat Yehudit* vary by place and era. The accepted codes in Spain of 1,000 years ago and Poland 600 years ago are different from each other, and different from now. Even today, you’ll find differences between different places. Nevertheless, certain basic rules never change, and it seems that those explicitly mentioned in the Talmud are among them, for example, not uncovering the thigh.⁴⁷⁸

As Rabbi Yehuda Henkin puts it succinctly, “*Dat Moshe* refers to norms of *tzniut* by the Torah or at least to rabbinical edicts with a *semach* from the Torah, while *dat Yehudit* includes those norms that originate in custom.”⁴⁷⁹ Thus, not only the understanding of modesty, but also the implementation of the Laws of *tznius* vary in Orthodox circles. Fader states that “The textual basis for women’s modesty is found in the Code of Jewish Law,” and rabbis’ interpretations in turn shape these general laws.⁴⁸⁰ That is to say, these various sources mainly regulate the practices of *tzinus*. There is no single understanding of *tznius* in Orthodoxy, although standards for women’s modesty are determined by the rebbe of each Orthodox community. These standards serve as “the guiding principle” for Orthodox women.⁴⁸¹ In this regard, Lynne Schreiber states that “a woman’s thigh, upper arm, and area below her collarbone are deemed *ervah*, or sensual, and are thus off-limits to the public eye.”⁴⁸² Danya Ruttenberg offers a number of translations of the word *ervah*: “nakedness,” “sexually forbidden,” or “intimate.”⁴⁸³ To conform to this modest dress code, Jewish

⁴⁷⁷ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head-Coverings,” 166.

⁴⁷⁸ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1248044/jewish/Who-Decides-What-Is-Modest.htm

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⁴⁷⁹ Henkin, *Understanding of Tzniut*, 31.

⁴⁸⁰ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 150.

⁴⁸¹ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head-Coverings,” 165.

⁴⁸² Schreiber, “What is Hair?” 21.

⁴⁸³ Ruttenberg, *Toward A New Tzniut*, 204.

girls from a very young age wear “sleeves that cover their elbows, skirts that extend several inches below the knee, and shirts that button up to the collarbone.”⁴⁸⁴ In other words, as Goldman Carrel puts it, according to *Halacka*, a woman’s neck “(below and including collar bone), her arms (the upper arms, and including the elbow) and her legs (the thighs, including knees)” are her *ervah* parts so that they need to be covered.⁴⁸⁵ Basically, according to most observant Jews, *ervah* parts are collarbones, elbows, shoulders, thighs, and knees.⁴⁸⁶ In this regard, Fuchs states that “a woman is required to wear a dress or skirt which is long enough to cover her knees whether she is standing or sitting, and this is necessary even if she wears non-transparent stockings.”⁴⁸⁷ A married woman’s hair, moreover, is regarded “an *ervah*, or erotic stimulus”⁴⁸⁸ “which is a direct result of the fact that the hair is forbidden to be seen by anyone other than the most immediate family.”⁴⁸⁹ Thus, in Orthodox interpretations of *halakhah*, a married Jewish woman is obligated to cover her hair as well. Besides covering these *ervah* parts, in order to not attract attention, most Hasidic women are meticulous in not wearing very bright colored dresses.⁴⁹⁰ More importantly, bright, red, and tight-fitted clothing as well as pants are considered immodest clothing for Torah-observant Jewish women.⁴⁹¹ Fuchs provides some detail on his view of Orthodox regulations about wearing pants: “A woman may not wear clothes that have been manufactured specifically for men....If the pants have been manufactured specifically for women, they may be worn for protection from the cold, provided they are worn under a skirt.”⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁴ Schreiber, “What is Hair?” 21.

⁴⁸⁵ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head-Coverings,” 165.

⁴⁸⁶ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 150.

⁴⁸⁷ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 72.

⁴⁸⁸ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s Head-Coverings,” 165.

⁴⁸⁹ Falk, *Sheitels*, 34.

⁴⁹⁰ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 150.

⁴⁹¹ Carrel, “Shattered Vessels,” 48.

⁴⁹² Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 101-103.

The prohibition against bright and tight-fitted clothing is that “it outlines the body.”⁴⁹³ In this sense, it is safe to say that modesty rules in clothing require women to wear long skirts, long sleeves, no pants, and no low-cut collars.⁴⁹⁴ In addition to the laws regarding dress codes, Fuchs also discusses his interpretation of miscellaneous laws of modesty. For instance, Torah-observant women “may not wear strong perfume in public” or “a male hairstyle” as a part of the laws of modesty.⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, they “may not dance in the presence of men,” and more importantly, “mixed dancing is strictly forbidden.”⁴⁹⁶ Fuchs highlights the prohibition against women’s voices. In this sense, he states that “a man is forbidden to listen to a woman sing...women should not sing in their presence.”⁴⁹⁷

According to Jewish law, Fader demonstrates how these material signs of modesty, including stockings, hats, wigs, skirt material, and skirt length, function as “a semiotic language that locates for other observant Jews where a girl and her family and if applicable, her Hasidic circle, position themselves in terms of Orthodox religiosity.”⁴⁹⁸ In this framework, it is safe to say that different understandings of modesty aid in the construction of different religious identities in a spectrum of Orthodoxy. Fader accentuates this spectrum: “The ‘very Hasidic’ (*zayer khsidish*) are at one end of a spectrum of Orthodoxy and the most modern, but still observant, are at the other. Many subtle variations are seen within these two extremes.” Thus, modesty standards serve as an identifier of the community they belong to. To put it differently, the variations in modesty in Orthodoxy differentiate one group from another as well as create different religious identities. In

⁴⁹³ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 104.

⁴⁹⁴ Miriam Feldheim, “Balancing Women’s Rights and Religious Rights: The Issue of Bus Segregation,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Winter 2013), 73-94, 73.

⁴⁹⁵ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 104.

⁴⁹⁶ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 112.

⁴⁹⁷ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 93.

⁴⁹⁸ Fader, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 151.

this regard, the appropriate way to dress modestly might vary from one religious community to another or even from one person to another. On the other hand, dressing modestly does not by itself make women “outdated” or “unfashionable.” On this point, Carrel expresses her observations of Hasidic women in Borough Park during the celebration of Purim indicating how they debunked Carrel’s perception of a modest dress code with their fashionable clothing by saying that:

In contrast to their male counterparts’ monotone and seemingly uniform mode of dress, these women revealed diversity and individual expression through the creative manipulation of color, design, fabric, and style....These blatant “fashion” displays challenged my rather ethnocentric notion of how Hasidic women would be, and perhaps should be, dressed. My understanding of the religious prescriptions that regulate their dress promoted an image of dark, matronly, outdated clothing. When I voiced this frequently held misconception to a twenty-year-old, newly married Hasidic woman named Suri, she responded, “[The Jewish laws] say we have to be modest. That doesn’t mean we have to be backwards.”⁴⁹⁹

So unlike Orthodox men who dress distinctively but relatively uniformly, including caftans, *yarmulkes*, and *payot*, Orthodox Jewish women “appear(s) to be appropriate to person assimilated to the majority culture.” Moreover, they purchase their modest clothing in secular department stores.⁵⁰⁰ Orthodox women have as much variety as secular women. That is why Fader underscores that Orthodox women enjoy the modern world while at the same time they embrace modesty laws. Even though their modest yet fashionable clothing does not necessarily demonstrate that they are Orthodox Jewish women, their hair covering practices not only mark them as Orthodox but also differentiate them from the secular world.⁵⁰¹ Through the concept of modesty, women construct their identity as distinct from secular women. Milligan calls it “an affirmation of their womanhood,” as well as “an external manifestation of Judaism that is uniquely female.”⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ Carrel, “Shattered Vessels,” 44-45.

⁵⁰⁰ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 126.

⁵⁰¹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 126.

⁵⁰² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 125-126.

On the other hand, some stigmatize women who choose to dress modestly as “religiously oppressed” or “backwards,” or “outdated.” Interestingly, they also assume that provocatively dressed women are free to dress however they want to and have agency while modestly dressed women are victims of their culture and religion who have no agency since their dress code does not fit western expectations of how women can dress. However, Milligan critiques this stigmatization of Orthodox women and contends that Orthodox women who choose to dress modestly “make choices about their bodies and self-presentation.”⁵⁰³ Modest clothing is a conscious choice made by women as self-identification. So, modesty serves as a signifier of their identity. In his book, *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg: A Study in the Sociology of Religion*, Solomon Poll also points out that unlike Hasidic women, especially unmarried women, Hasidic men dress relatively uniformly, including their use of noticeable religious garments and sidelocks (in Hebrew *payot*).⁵⁰⁴ Within this framework, women claim to be not only modest, and religious but also fashionable. More specifically, by doing so, Orthodox women demonstrate that “‘looking good’ and being modest are complementary, not contradictory.”⁵⁰⁵ Milligan illustrates how through their choice to wear less revealing clothing than many American women, Orthodox women reject a hypersexual culture:

Despite the hypersexualization of American culture, Orthodox women find empowerment in concealing their bodies and hair. Rather than accepting the secular influence of revealing themselves in order to feel attractive, they express beauty in other ways. The goal of modest dressing and hair covering is not to appear dowdy. Instead, Orthodox women generally express that they feel *more* feminine when covering their bodies and hair. They attribute this to the empowerment of the desexualization of their bodies.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 57.

⁵⁰⁴ Solomon Poll, *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg: A Study in the Sociology of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁵⁰⁵ Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 206.

⁵⁰⁶ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 126.

In this way, Orthodox women present a different understanding of beauty than other women. Through the *tznius*, they reject Western perceptions of idealized female beauty while establishing a counter-narrative. More importantly, without hypersexualizing women's bodies, this counter lifestyle provides women with a number of options to dress modestly and, at the same time, to reclaim beauty. In doing so, women not only create their own style, but also demonstrate that they have a great deal of choice (within, of course, certain limitations) and there is tremendous variation in Orthodoxy circles. To put it differently, Orthodox women utilize hair covering as “a method of desexualizing themselves in order to gain power,” and by doing so, people see “who they are truly are” as well as focus on “their thoughts, insights, and contributions,” rather than their bodies and “sex appeal.”⁵⁰⁷ In other words, Orthodox women do not want to be seen as an object of sexual desire.

In effect, these women negotiate effectively between their religious tradition and the modern world by dressing modestly and at the same time fashionably in a world in which the modern and the religious are mostly seen as an insurmountable divide. On the other hand, it is safe to say that this diversity even in one community shows that we cannot reduce the understanding of modesty in general or modest dress codes in particular to one definition or one understanding of it.

As mentioned above, in Orthodoxy, modesty is much more than covering *ervah* parts. That is to say, the understanding of modesty among Orthodox women is much more complex. For example, the term modesty also has a spiritual dimension. In her book for adolescent girls, *The*

⁵⁰⁷ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 126.

Wonder of Becoming You: How a Jewish Girl Grows Up, the Orthodox author Miriam Grossman underscores the spiritual dimension of modest dress codes in the following way:

Dressing in a revealing way draws attention to the body, but modest dress de-emphasizes the body. It permits the attention of others to focus on our non-physical qualities, for example, on our thoughts or our personality. A girl who dresses modestly is making a significant statement. She's sending out a message which says, "My body is important, but it is only the vessel for the real me—my soul. I think of myself that way, and I want people to relate to me with that in mind."⁵⁰⁸

Thus, for Grossman, modesty means not only covering a woman's body but at the same time also stressing her personality. As Carrel puts it, "Hasidic girls are taught at a very young age the importance of dressing in a manner that reflects the inner soul rather than any external manifestation of feminine physicality—sexual or otherwise."⁵⁰⁹ Hence, clothing choice for these women represents more than fashion or material desire. The author Lisa Aiken describes how she thinks women embody modesty in Jewish tradition: "Judaism believes that women were created to bring a number of qualities into the world. One of these qualities is modesty...we would have the capacity to bring "innerness" (modesty) into the world in a greater way than could Adam and his male descendants."⁵¹⁰

In doing so, Orthodox Torah-observant Jewish women distinguish themselves not only from the larger secular world of Gentiles,⁵¹¹ but also from irreligious Jewish populations and from

⁵⁰⁸ Miriam Grossman, *The Wonder of Becoming You: How a Jewish Girl Grows Up* (New York: Feldheim, 1988), 55.

⁵⁰⁹ Carrel, "Shattered Vessels," 46.

⁵¹⁰ Lisa Aiken, *To Be a Jewish Woman: The Discussion of Judaism and Women* (NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992), 130–31.

⁵¹¹ Ayala Fader explains the meanings of the word "gentiles" and "secular" according to Orthodox Jews: "[T]he word 'Gentiles' has specific meanings, women used the English term 'secular,' often coupled with 'North American,' as a vague description, which they said, depended on the context. At times it may mean a Jew who is not observant, especially referring to Jews who came before World War II and discarded most forms of religious observance in their efforts to assimilate. At other times 'secular' may refer to North American popular culture such as books, movies, fashion, magazines, or North American bodies of knowledge, for example, psychology or education. I believe the term 'secular,' as it is used

men. In this framework, a modest dress code empowers women by giving them “sacred status,” and an important role in the maintenance of religious tradition. Moreover, Milligan argues that some Jewish women utilize hair covering “as a tool of empowerment.”⁵¹² Carrel asserts that “this sacred status is inextricably bound to modesty” in the Hasidic context.⁵¹³ On this point, in her ethnographic research, Lea Taragin-Zeller investigates how ultra-Orthodox female teachers and their teenage pupils at a Bais Yaakov seminary in Jerusalem reconstruct their identity as well as debunk widely accepted perceptions within Haredi society for whom the main goal of women’s modesty practices is “to shield men from earthly temptations,” through re-interpretations of canonical texts on the topic of modesty.⁵¹⁴ Taragin-Zeller summarizes this process:

[T]he pupils turn modesty into a personal mission that encompasses all areas of their life. They interpret modesty as a spiritual practice embracing not only their dress code but also their thoughts and words. Each student constructs for herself a ladder of advancement that creates a personal relationship with God. The girls reject the masculine-halakhic discourse of what might be called “modesty for the sake of men” in favor of a discourse of “modesty for the sake of God,” replacing the erudite-male authority and its attendant hierarchy with a direct divine source for their practice.⁵¹⁵

By offering an alternative understanding of modesty, they challenge the existing masculine-erudite system as well as “convert the practice of modesty into a creative and dynamic feminine undertaking that is tied to the sphere of *midot* (virtues).”⁵¹⁶ To put it differently, for the Bais Yaakov students, modesty is “an internal undertaking” and a virtue.⁵¹⁷ Thus, the transformation of the understanding of modesty from “a social-masculine obligation into a divine one” provides

most often by Hasidic women I worked with, provides a broad label for North American cultural life that is not explicitly Gentile or Jewish.”

Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 15.

⁵¹² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, xiii.

⁵¹³ Carrel, “Shattered Vessels,” 46.

⁵¹⁴ Lea Taragin-Zeller, “Modesty for Heaven’s Sake: Authority and Creativity among Female Ultra-Orthodox Teenagers in Israel,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*, No. 26 (Spring 2014), 75-96, 75.

⁵¹⁵ Taragin-Zeller, “Modesty for Heaven’s Sake,” 76.

⁵¹⁶ Taragin-Zeller, “Modesty for Heaven’s Sake,” 75.

⁵¹⁷ Taragin-Zeller, “Modesty for Heaven’s Sake,” 87.

women the power to reinterpret the concept of modesty by reclaiming the power to define it away from “masculine-erudite authority.”⁵¹⁸ Moreover, this process of reinterpretation of modesty-related scriptures might be seen as an embodiment of lived experiences of women as well as an indicator of how agency and empowerment of women shape the ideology of the female body and modesty in the Haredi community.

Head Covering in Orthodox Communities as a Practice of Modesty

Head covering is considered a very crucial part of modesty in Orthodox religious tradition. Moreover, hair covering operates as “a marker of Jewish identity” as well as “a very external sign of their [women’s] religious commitment.”⁵¹⁹ Despite the centrality of hair/head covering, there are not many studies on this issue in Jewish communities. According to Amy K. Milligan, the paucity of a comprehensive study of Jewish hair covering practices in the Orthodox context “suggests a general misconception that either significant investigations of Jewish hair already exist or that hair is unimportant in religious dialogue.”⁵²⁰ It is worth mentioning that there is no study of hair/head covering in the nonorthodox context.⁵²¹ Lynne Schreiber, furthermore, critiques this scarcity of studies on the issue of hair covering in the Jewish context, saying:

Throughout the modern Jewish world, we find books upon books about every *mitzvah*, every philosophy, every *word* practically – but little on this commandment of hair covering...Because there has, until now, been no definitive guiding source on this *mitzvah*, most women who cover their hair do so from a weak standpoint – they rely upon the words of friends, *rebbetzins* (rabbi’s wives), mothers and colleagues, rather than turning directly to Torah sources.⁵²²

⁵¹⁸ Taragin-Zeller, “Modesty for Heaven’s Sake,” 86.

⁵¹⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 4.

⁵²⁰ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 13.

⁵²¹ Milligan stresses that there are two kinds of hair/head coverings in the Jewish settings. In Orthodox setting, Jewish women cover their full hair. On the other hand, in a nonorthodox circles women “wear *kippot*” in religious services. Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 13.

⁵²² Schreiber, “What is Hair?” 15.

Apparently, the lack of comprehensive studies on this issue prevents us from understanding the motivations behind the practice of hair covering. Milligan, moreover, underscores the shortcomings of studies on Jewish hair covering by claiming that they tackle this issue by “limiting it to the realms of religiously mandated dress or as ritualized behavior” rather than focusing on “its motivations and psychological implications for Orthodoxy.”⁵²³ In doing so, scholarly attention tends to dismiss women’s agency by labeling the practice of hair/head covering only as “religiously mandated dress” and not focusing on why women are willing to maintain this practice. Carrel also criticizes the approach to modest dress code in general and hair/head covering in particular embedded in Orthodoxy:

Their [Hasidic women’s] dress code and clothing practice have been virtually dismissed by both the academic literature and popular media as presenting no distinctive forms and/or meanings (other than modesty) because of the outward appearance of mass-produced fashion. Descriptions have often been reduced to “modestly dressed” or “heads covered with wigs or scarves,” with little if any discussion of cultural details.⁵²⁴

Furthermore, some consider the practice of hair covering “female submission,”⁵²⁵ or “oppressive to women.”⁵²⁶ However, for Orthodox Jewish women who choose to cover their hair, this practice is not only “empowering” but also an embodiment of “their commitment to Judaism.”⁵²⁷ As Milligan succinctly puts it, “rather than indicating submission, hair covering for Orthodox women demonstrates power and religious responsibility.”⁵²⁸ Moreover, Orthodox women see hair covering as “a way to present the true self that is not seen through the male sexualized lens.”⁵²⁹ That is to say, from Milligan’s point of view, hair covering serves as a catalyst to desexualize

⁵²³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 2.

⁵²⁴ Carrel, “Shattered Vessels,” 45.

⁵²⁵ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 122.

⁵²⁶ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 126.

⁵²⁷ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 122.

⁵²⁸ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 122.

⁵²⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 127.

women's bodies. Instead, the purpose of modest clothing and hair covering should be understood as women's attempts to have others value their thoughts and personality while devaluing their sexual appeal.

In order to better understand the issue of modesty and hair covering, it is important to investigate the reasons behind them and take into account cultural and religious factors with a special focus on how women perceive these practices as well as how they make sense of them in a secular world.

As mentioned above, women's hair is considered *ervah* as well in the Orthodox community. Hence, after marriage, an Orthodox woman is required to cover her hair.⁵³⁰ In other words, hair covering functions as an indicator of marriage in addition to functioning as a symbol of modesty. As Fuchs puts it, "[T]he Torah forbids a married woman to appear in public with her hair uncovered," and "*Dat Yehudith* mandates that she also cover her hair in a semi-public place [such as in a courtyard], even if men are not usually found there."⁵³¹ Thus, women who choose to cover their hair "uphold tradition and embrace their new status of Jewish wife, and eventually, Jewish mother."⁵³² Moreover, it "signals female centered Jewish ritual and tradition," and "upholding this practice emphasizes the centrality of women in preserving Orthodoxy."⁵³³ In this framework, as Milligan puts it succinctly, hair covering "has become a ritualized behavior that affirms the centrality of the feminine role in the survival of Orthodoxy."⁵³⁴ More specifically, the practice of hair covering operates as a tool to "differentiate levels of religiosity and group

⁵³⁰ Schreiber, "What is Hair?" 22.

⁵³¹ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 83-84.

⁵³² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 26.

⁵³³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 30.

⁵³⁴ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 30.

allegiance to those within Orthodoxy.”⁵³⁵ Similarly, Carrel views the practice of hair covering in the Hasidic community not only as “the embodied representation of a feminized Hasidic identity,” but also as “an embodied symbol which classifies the women of the Hasidic communities of Brooklyn, New York, in terms of religiosity.”⁵³⁶ In her ethnographic study of the lives of Orthodox Jewish women in a small synagogue in Lancaster, Milligan asserts that women utilize hair covering to “differentiate and distance themselves from the less observant Lancaster Orthodoxy, as well as their secular neighbors.”⁵³⁷ In doing so, hair coverings play a crucial role in forming religious identity and the continuation of Orthodoxy. As Yehuda Turetsky and Chaim I. Waxman point out, “a growing number of such women [who cover their hair] have developed a clearer consciousness of themselves as Jewish women and some have aspired to greater involvement and presence in the public spheres of the Orthodox community.”⁵³⁸ Regarding the hair covering practice, Milligan also indicates that there are an increasing number of Jewish women who uphold this tradition due to the fact that Orthodox families grow fast in number and in size and because more Jewish women have become observant recently.⁵³⁹ In addition to modest dress code to which women conform in order to maintain religious tradition, there are a number of other practices women embrace, including keeping a kosher kitchen, raising children according to Jewish Law, and creating an Orthodox home environment.

Torah-observant women cover their hair in myriad ways: *tichels* (scarves), hats, and *sheitels* (wigs). Some Jewish women “cover their hair, some show bangs or ponytail, and still others pair one of these coverings with a partial wig known as a fall,” and some also choose to

⁵³⁵ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 53.

⁵³⁶ Carrel, “Hasidic Women’s head Coverings,” 163.

⁵³⁷ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 71.

⁵³⁸ Turetsky and Waxman, “Sliding to the Left?” 122.

⁵³⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 30.

wear snoods, also called a “hair sock,” which “stays on a women’s forehead by virtue of elastic or a headband, and holds all of a woman’s hair in its sack-like body.”⁵⁴⁰ However, some consider snoods inappropriate “due to its casual nature.”⁵⁴¹ In similar fashion, *sheitels* (wigs) are controversial among Orthodox communities as well. More specifically, Rabbinic authorities have discussed the question of whether wigs fulfill the requirement for a married Jewish woman to cover her hair since the sixteenth century when wigs first came into use by Jewish women as a hair covering.⁵⁴² For example, according to Rabbi Katzenellenbogen, a sixteenth-century rabbi, wigs were “immodest” as well as “violated the spirit of the law” even though “the letter of law was upheld.”⁵⁴³ He definitely did not see wigs as sufficient for hair covering. Furthermore, some rabbis oppose wigs by arguing that “a wig could elicit the same feelings in men as a woman’s own hair.”⁵⁴⁴ Pesach Eliyahu Falk (1944-2020) also condemned *sheitels* as violating Jewish law, since they give a wrong impression that they are single and not married, and these kinds of *sheitels* are forbidden.⁵⁴⁵ On the other hand, some rabbis, for example, Rabbi Mosse Isserles, states that wigs fulfill the requirement and can be seen as a valid covering.⁵⁴⁶ Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Fuchs summarizes the issue of wigs with the following statement:

In communities where it is the accepted practice, a wig may be worn even if it is made from the wearer’s own hair. There are authorities who prohibit wigs made from the wearer’s own hair, but permit all other wigs. Some authorities forbid the use of wigs altogether, on the grounds that they often are mistaken for natural hair....All authorities agree that a wig is permissible with a headcovering over it, even if the wig can be seen.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁰ Schreiber, “What is Hair?”, 23.

⁵⁴¹ Schreiber, “What is Hair?” 23.

⁵⁴² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 57.

⁵⁴³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 57.

⁵⁴⁴ Schreiber, “What is Hair?” 24.

⁵⁴⁵ Falk, *Sheitels*, 9.

⁵⁴⁶ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 57.

⁵⁴⁷ Fuchs, *Halichos Bas Yisrael*, 89-90.

Despite the heated ongoing discussion on the use of wigs to cover a women's hair among rabbis for centuries, many Orthodox Jewish women still cover their hair with wigs. The decision to cover their hair with wigs or something else is based on personal choice and certain social contexts.⁵⁴⁸ As Milligan suggests, in Orthodox circles, *sheitels* are still used as “a form of observant dress.”⁵⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of ways for Orthodox Jewish women to cover their hair. For example, some Hasidic Jewish women choose to routinely shave their hair before covering their heads with scarves, wigs, or hats. Schreiber summarizes the reason behind this practice: “The custom of shaving is done to ensure that not a single strand of hair would ever peek out from beneath a covering and also that, when immersing in the *mikvah*,⁵⁵⁰ a woman need not worry about her hair rising to the water's surface, rendering the immersion unkosher.”⁵⁵¹

Ayala Fader also mentions the shaving of the hair as a practice of “very Hasidic women,” often referred to Hungarian Hasidic Jews.⁵⁵² Carrel tries to illustrate how all these different ways of hair covering signify different levels of religiosity based on her ethnographic fieldwork. That is to say, Carrel presents a hierarchy of women's hair covering practices that are based on religiosity and piety. According to this hierarchal system, women who entirely cover their hair with a *tikhl* (headscarf) represent the most religious Hasidic women, whereas women who cover their hair only with a *sheytl* (wigs made of 100 percent human hair) are considered less observant Hasidic women.⁵⁵³ In Carrel's symbolic hierarchical system of head coverings, there are twelve categories

⁵⁴⁸ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 58.

⁵⁴⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 12.

⁵⁵⁰ Mikve (pl. mikvaout) is a “ritual bath in which Orthodox women immerse themselves one week after completing their menstrual cycles.” It is also utilized for purification, conversion or rebirth.

Lynn, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 230-231.

⁵⁵¹ Schreiber, “What is Hair?” 23.

⁵⁵² Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*, 151.

⁵⁵³ Carrel, “*Hasidic Women's Head Coverings*,” 171-72.

that “represent(s) Hasidic women both within and across the boundaries of different Hasidic sects in Brooklyn.”⁵⁵⁴ More importantly, these hierarchical distinctions are essentially “based on Hasidic women’s head coverings from the most religious to the least.”⁵⁵⁵ In other words, a different way of covering the hair serves as an instrument to form different levels of religious piety in Hasidic communities. In doing so, each practice of hair covering represents a different manifestation of Jewish womanhood. This symbolic system “represents the different levels of appropriating the religious principle of *tzniuth*, in particular and Hasidic religiosity and piety in general.”⁵⁵⁶ In this framework, each way of hair covering functions as an indicator of different understandings of modesty. On the other hand, Milligan criticizes Carrel’s hierarchy with the following argument:

[Carrel] ignores cultural variations between Hasidic communities. It is generally true that...the more conservative the Hasidic court, the more conservative their garb; female head covering practices are heavily influenced by what is culturally acceptable within each Hasidic court...By ignoring this, she establishes a hierarchy with sound context.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ Carrel, “*Hasidic Women’s Head Coverings*,” 172.

Carrel explicates these categories in detail with the following statement:

“(1) Women who wear a *tikhl* (scarf) only. These women wear padding under the *tikhl* to feign the appearance of height that is thought to make the woman look more attractive. *The hair is completely covered.*

(1a) Women who wear a *tikhl* but add a *schpitzel* (a piece of brown pleated material worn as a piece under the scarf) to feign the appearance of synthetic hair.

(1b) Women who wear a *tikhl* but add a *schpitzel* made of a piece of wig that is 100 percent synthetic.

(2) Women who wear a *sheytl* (wig) made of 100 percent synthetic hair and a *tikhl* all of the time.

(2a) Women who wear a *sheytl* made of 100 percent synthetic hair and a hat all the time.

(2b) Women who wear a *sheytl* made of 50 percent synthetic-50 percent natural hair and a *tikhl* all the time.

(2c) Women who wear a *sheytl* made of 50 percent synthetic-50 percent natural hair and a hat all the time.

(2d) Women who wear a *sheytl* made of 100 percent human hair and a *tikhl* all the time.

(2e) Women who wear a *sheytl* made of 100 percent human hair and a hat all the time.

(3) Women who wear only a *sheytl* made of 100 percent synthetic hair.

(3a) Women who wear only a *sheytl* made of 50 percent synthetic hair-50 percent human hair.

(3b) Women who wear only a *sheytl* made of 100 percent human hair.” (171-172).

⁵⁵⁵ Carrel, “*Hasidic Women’s Head Coverings*,” 171.

⁵⁵⁶ Carrel, “*Hasidic Women’s Head Coverings*,” 173.

⁵⁵⁷ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 11.

As stated earlier, it is clear that rebbes have a tremendous role in shaping modest dress codes as well as Orthodox Jew's lives more generally. These distinctions among Orthodox communities have a number of functions as well. In particular, they are indicators of their religiosity and of which community they belong to. For instance, if a Jewish woman wants to "change her identity or realign with another Orthodox community, she can symbolically alter her self-presentation through the use of hair covering to represent this change."⁵⁵⁸ This can be seen as a manifestation of group allegiance as well as "a shared sense of community identification."⁵⁵⁹ As Milligan also argues, Orthodox women make crucial statements through the practice of hair covering. That is to say, they show their commitment to Judaism and their desire to live an observant life as well as exercise "agency over their bodies and self-presentation."⁵⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the practice of hair covering has external and internal meanings in women's lives. It functions as a tool to help them construct their identity and build a boundary between them and the secular world. As Milligan points out, the practice of hair covering "marks them as separate and different from the secular world, it also maintains a sense of communal unity within Orthodoxy."⁵⁶¹ In other words, through their choice of hair covering Orthodox women establish counter femininity, womanhood, and identity which does not fit into American cultural norms and is completely different from the secular world. Thus, the practice of hair covering is "more than just a ritual."⁵⁶²

Milligan also argues that hair covering choices create complicated identities. For instance, when Orthodox women are at work, "they largely live as assimilated American women." On the other hand when they go to synagogue and religious events, "they must function as Orthodox

⁵⁵⁸ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 123.

⁵⁵⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 123.

⁵⁶⁰ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 126.

⁵⁶¹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 128.

⁵⁶² Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 129.

women.”⁵⁶³ Milligan indicates how this tension causes a construction of “a tri-identity” for Orthodox women:

Cognitively they must merge these two conflicting concepts of self together into a third identity: how they truly perceive themselves, free of external pressures of American or Orthodox culture. A way they negotiate this tri-identity is through hair covering. Outside of the Orthodox community, they seek to blend in and appear fairly assimilated as an effort to alleviate some of the pressures they feel....Within the Orthodox community, they identify with particular strains of Orthodoxy through hair covering choices.⁵⁶⁴

In this respect, it is worth noting that Orthodox women “vary their hair covering based on context, comfort, and personal style.”⁵⁶⁵ According to Milligan, this variety in the practice of Jewish hair coverings “helps to create boundaries that enable the women, through self-identification, to negotiate the tensions of living in a small religious community.”⁵⁶⁶ Milligan further explicates this complicated identity formation:

Orthodox women manipulate hair covering to demonstrate their self-perceived uniqueness. For example, they may accessorize a *tichel* with a broach or a headband, choose specific colors in which they feel most confident, or select hats that are quirky, whimsical, serious, or understated. Likewise, *sheitels* present the opportunity to change hair color and style... *sheitels* also allow Orthodox women to externalize perceived personality, whether that be Jewish, related to attractiveness, or indicate expressions or levels of femininity. In this way, hair covering fulfills the desire to have a sense of individual identity, while at the same time allowing the wearer to conform to overall group expectations.⁵⁶⁷

In doing so, Orthodox women show their community that they fulfill the requirements of Halacha to cover their hair in a way that also gives them autonomy to create their own style. Basically, it is a manifestation of their agency over their bodies and decisions. The practice of hair covering, moreover, “works as a coping mechanism that allows women to engage in self-expression at the same time as identifying as part of a greater religious whole.”⁵⁶⁸ In this way, hair covering practices

⁵⁶³ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 124.

⁵⁶⁴ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 124.

⁵⁶⁵ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 122.

⁵⁶⁶ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 54.

⁵⁶⁷ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 124-125.

⁵⁶⁸ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 131.

function as a tool to establish identity but it also complicates identity. It also is used to negotiate the tensions between the religious and secular world. In this context, as Milligan pithily puts it, “Orthodox women engage in a careful balancing act where they must constantly negotiate secular and religious culture, they are influenced by pressures from both sides.”⁵⁶⁹ Hence, given this balancing act and the tensions of living a countercultural lifestyle, it is understandable why Orthodox women have complicated identities. On the other hand, interest in the practice of hair covering among Orthodox women continues to increase.

⁵⁶⁹ Milligan, *Hair, Headwear*, 130.

Chapter Six: Modesty in Sunnī Islam

The Concept of *Adab* (Modesty) in Islam

Like in Orthodox Judaism, the concept of modesty has an essential role in Islam. The term modesty has several functions, especially in women's lives. Muslim accounts of modesty in dress have received particular attention in Western scholarship. At this point, scholars have focused mainly on the hijab, the hair covering for Muslim women. The reason for such an interest is that, as Fagheh Shirazi underscores, the hijab has several meanings and interpretations in addition to a piece of cloth women wear, including meanings imposed by non-Muslim Americans.⁵⁷⁰

Similarly, when it comes to discussions concerning women's modest code in the Muslim world, the issue of hijab has remained an issue of enduring popularity. In the Western context covering hair has been seen exclusively as a visible signifier of Muslim women as if women from different faiths do not choose to cover their hair.⁵⁷¹ As Jasmine Zine states, "Although women's practices of veiling predate the Islamic context, this symbol has entered into the popular imagination in Western societies as the quintessential marker of the Muslim world and as a practice synonymous with religious fundamentalism and extremism."⁵⁷²

A question naturally arises: Is head-covering a religious obligation, a political reaction, or a social phenomenon? In the case of Turkey, leftist political parties have seen head-covering as a political reaction rather than a religious practice. On the other hand, in the Western context, it is

⁵⁷⁰ Faegheh Shirazi, "Islamic Religion and Women's Dress Code: The Islamic Republic of Iran," in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda B. Arthur (New York: Berg, 200), 115.

⁵⁷¹ Mohja Kahf states that women in many cultural and religious contexts veiled long before Islam. Not only Christian and Jewish women but also Roman, Greek, Indian, Assyrian women veiled. Mohja Kahf, "From Her Royal Body The Robe was Removed: The Blessings of the Veil and the Trauma of Forced Unveilings in the Middle East," in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 27.

⁵⁷² Zine, "Unveiled Sentiments," 242.

mostly depicted as a sign of women's oppression and the backwardness of Muslim cultures. As Jennifer Heath puts it, "To non-Muslim Americans and Europeans, the practice of veiling describes suppression and obedience to absolute male and religious authority and is the principal symbol in the West of supposed Muslim backwardness and ignorance."⁵⁷³ Similarly, Theodore Gabriel stresses that the vast majority of people in the West assume that Muslim women are forced to wear Islamic dress by their men.⁵⁷⁴ In this framework, some consider lifting it the liberation of women. For example, as Dinah Zeiger notes, the removal of the hijab/veil is "articulated by prominent Western feminists as part of emancipation."⁵⁷⁵ The Muslim scholarship about the hijab revolves primarily around its Islamicity. Non-Muslim scholarship focuses largely on women's agency. In other words, Muslim women who choose to cover their hair mainly consider it a sign of religiosity, a symbol of piety and modesty, while many non-Muslims consider it a sign of oppression and backwardness. Many parties are involved in this endless discussion about the hijab. The issue of hijab has even become an international political issue. As Simonette Calderini puts it, "Muslim 'modernists,' human rights activists, feminists, and the Western media invoke the issue of the veil to critique specific Islamic regimes."⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Jennifer Heath, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 18.

⁵⁷⁴ Theodore Gabriel, "Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions in Islam," in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 14. Katherine Pratt Ewing also argues that people in Germany and France presume that Muslim men force women to dress modestly. They support the banning of the head scarf in order to assimilate Muslim immigrants into their societies. See also Ewing, *Stolen Honor*. Eric Fassin, "National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe," *Public Culture*, 22 (3), Duke University Press (2010), 507-529.

⁵⁷⁵ Dinah Zeiger, "That (Afghan) Girl!" in *Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 277.

⁵⁷⁶ Simonette Calderini, "Female Seclusion and the Veil. Two Issues in Political and Social Discourse: The Reforms of Sultan Muhammed Shah," in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 48.

Some Western scholars have suggested that the hijab is a sign of low-class status or even of slaves. Theodore Gabriel points out that the hijab could not be a sign of enslavement since it was historically forbidden for slaves to wear hijab. More specifically, it is “not a symbol of oppression, enslavement nor restriction of freedom,” but it is rather “a mark of respectability and dignity.”⁵⁷⁷ Gabriel further maintains that it is also seen as “a symbol of a Muslim woman’s identity.” Muslims in the West “might feel a need to reinforce their religious identity with scripturally ordained apparel.”⁵⁷⁸ Still, both Muslims and non-Muslims understand modest Islamic clothing as an identity marker distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims. Broadly speaking, modest Islamic clothing includes loose-fitting attire from the neck down to the ankles as well as hair covering which is widely seen as the requirement of bodily modesty. Thus, to the vast majority of Muslims, Muslim women are required to cover their bodies, except the face and the hands. The Islamic modesty code is a requirement for women when in the presence of unrelated men and in public. Some Muslim women also choose to wear a face veil in the name of modesty even though most mainstream interpretations of Islam do not require it.⁵⁷⁹ By covering their bodies and hair from head to toes, Muslim women not only show their commitment to religion but also desexualize their bodies and challenge Western beauty norms. In this way, they distinguish themselves from other non-Muslim women.

Modest clothing functions not only as an indicator of women’s identity but also as a commitment to their religion. Modest clothing and hijab cannot be disassociated from religious identity. As Elizabeth Bucar puts it, modest clothing conveys strong messages about women’s

⁵⁷⁷ Gabriel, “Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions in Islam,” 17.

⁵⁷⁸ Gabriel, “Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions in Islam,” 14.

⁵⁷⁹ Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and The Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5. Badran further states that, in the nineteenth century, not only Muslim women but also Jewish and Christian women in Egypt practiced veiling. Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 5.

devotion to religion.⁵⁸⁰ Thus, modest clothing is used as a means of reflecting religious identity. As Bucar states, it “communicates moral beliefs, such as the meaning and relationship of key values (modesty, modernity, beauty),” and more importantly, “by wearing modest religious dress, an individual claims to be a pious woman, and that claim in turn demands that she be treated accordingly.”⁵⁸¹ In this framework, modest clothing is also a way of communicating to the public.

The modest dress code plays a crucial role in forming identity and self-presentation as well as interaction with the public. Women’s choice of clothing also indicates how Muslim women exercise agency through modest garments. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad argues that, particularly after the 9/11 events, a very significant number of Muslims “are assuming a public Islamic identity by wearing the *hijab* (headscarf).” In this framework, the hijab is an identity marker. Haddad further maintains that the hijab becomes not only “a symbol of an American Islamic identity” but also “a symbol of anti-colonial solidarity and resistance to efforts to eradicate Islam in an American environment that is increasingly seen as anti-Islamic.”⁵⁸² Thus, Muslim modesty in clothing has crucial functions in the American context.

In order to better understand how American Muslim women reconstruct identities, build a counterculture and challenge the western perception of femininity through the concept of modesty, it is crucial to examine the meaning of modesty in the Muslim setting. In this chapter, I will tackle the understanding of modesty and provide a general introduction to the understanding of modesty

⁵⁸⁰ Elizabeth M. Bucar, *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 3.

⁵⁸¹ Bucar, *Pious Fashion*, 14-15. See also Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 1959), 13.

⁵⁸² Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Post-9/11 ‘Hijab’ as Icon,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), 253-267, 253.

in the Muslim context. By doing so, it becomes possible to determine commonalities between Muslims and Jews with respect to how they define the word modesty and practice its principles.

Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone use the word *hijab* to describe Islamic modesty. The Arabic word *hijab* means veil, cover, or protection.⁵⁸³ Another meaning of *hijab* is curtain. Ba-Yunus and Kone take the broadest meaning of modesty without reducing it exclusively to a dress code. More specifically, in their description of modesty:

It [the Islamic account of modesty] means controlling your words and actions in everyday life. For instance, it has come to mean not to gaze at a member of the opposite sex, not to engage in lewd acts, and not to exhibit parts of your body in a suggestive manner. It means a controlled manner of speech, including one's choice of words (i.e., no double meaning and no small or leading talk). Thirdly, and quite commonly, it means the way you cover up as a man and as a woman.⁵⁸⁴

Thus, modesty is not only about the issue of how someone should dress but also how they should act and speak. From this perspective, the concept of modesty fashions every aspect of Muslims' lives. Islamic accounts of modesty thus regulate Muslims' relationships with the opposite sex. Despite the fact that these norms of modesty are widely accepted by Muslims, there are different words to describe these norms. For example, *hijab* is widely understood as a head scarf to cover hair or a full-body covering, not a term to define (as per Ba-Yunus and Kone) the entire set of practices associated with Islamic modesty. Thus, I choose not to use the term *hijab* for Islamic modesty in the more general sense.

Instead, I will use the Arabic word *adab* in the Islamic sense, which is very similar to the Jewish concept of *tznius*. As mentioned the previous chapter, the word *tznius* is related to not only how to dress but also how to speak and behave. The word *tznius* supplies followers with manners

⁵⁸³ Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Polemics on the Modesty and Segregation of Women in Contemporary Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Feb., 1987), 24.

⁵⁸⁴ Ba-Yunus and Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, 141.

that entirely fashion their lives. The Islamic principle of modesty, *adab*, has a similar function. The Arabic word *adab* literally means “invitation to eat.”⁵⁸⁵ However, *adab* is one of the most significant concepts connoting morality not only in Muslim culture but also in pre-Islamic Arab culture. Ira M. Lapidus explains the development of this term:

In its pre-Islamic Arabic usage it referred to the norms of correct behavior inherited from one’s ancestors. With the advent of Islam it came to apply to the ethical and practical norms that regulated the life of a good Muslim....*Adab* meant the proper upbringing of children and their morals and good behavior....Thus *adab* was used throughout the classical era of Islam to imply learning and knowledge acquired for the sake of right living. It was a concept of what a person should know, be, and do to perfect the art of living.⁵⁸⁶

In this framework, in ancient Arabia, the term *adab* meant norms and customs of ancestors. On the other hand, *adab* in Islamic usage came to mean the norms that shape every aspect of their lives in order to become “a good Muslim.” Thus, *adab* is a very comprehensive and sophisticated concept. It includes “decency, comportment, decorum, etiquette, manners, morals, propriety, and humaneness.”⁵⁸⁷ One of the crucial dimensions of *adab* is modesty, especially modesty in dress. Thus, the concept of *adab* also tells Muslims how they should dress modestly.

It is worth noting again that the norms of modesty apply to both women and men, except for the practice of hair covering because most Muslims view its principles of modesty as a requirement for both women and men. Nonetheless, it is mostly seen as a virtue for women. Ba-Yunus and Kone also point out that modesty is understood as “the sign of feminine modesty.”⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁵ M. Khalid Masud, “Adab al-Mufti: The Muslim Understanding of Values, Characteristics, and Role of a Mufti,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 127.

⁵⁸⁶ Ira M. Lapidus, “Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Concept of *Adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 38-39.

⁵⁸⁷ Spannaus and Razarian, “Zaytuna College,” 52.

⁵⁸⁸ Ba-Yunus and Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, 142.

There are a certain dress codes for Muslim males as well. As mentioned before, head covering is not exclusively practiced by Muslim women.

In Islam, females and males are responsible for modesty in behavior and attitudes as well as certain requirements of bodily modesty even though modesty is represented exclusively as the issue of females in the Muslim context and Western context. People in Muslim countries and the West mostly focus on modesty for women, especially the practice of hair covering. As Theodore Gabriel succinctly puts it, “the question of hijab is a hotly debated issue in modern times, especially in the West,” on the other hand, “the issue of male dress never enters this debate about Islamic dress.”⁵⁸⁹ As mentioned earlier, the colonial administrations in Muslim lands were obsessively interested in Muslim women’s modest clothing and especially the issue of hijab. Colonial rulers saw the hijab as an indication of the oppression of women and removing it as liberation of women in order to justify colonial rule. Similarly, after the 9/11 attacks, the issue of hijab was used to justify American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Also, Muslim ruling elites who embraced this colonial approach to modesty for Muslim women forced western clothing on women by labeling hijab a sign of backwardness. Mohja Kahf states that “the veil has been banned in much of the Middle East for much of the twentieth century.”⁵⁹⁰ To invalidate colonial, Orientalist discourse on Muslim modesty for women, many Muslims have stressed the importance and necessity of hijab. Hijab has functioned in this way as a tool to challenge Western colonialism and imperialism. Many Muslim women started wearing hijab to challenge the Orientalist representation of modesty.⁵⁹¹ In this sense, it is safe to say that from the colonial era to the present,

⁵⁸⁹ Gabriel, “Reflections on Sartorial Injunctions in Islam,” 12.

⁵⁹⁰ Mohja Kahf, “From Her Royal Body The Robe was Removed,” 31.

⁵⁹¹ Ashraf Zahedi states that after the Shah outlawed modest clothing and headscarf, many women in Iran challenged it by wearing headscarf. In Zahedi’s words, “The image of thousands of veiled women demonstrating against the Shah captured the world’s attention. The veil had found a new political meaning. No longer a symbol of backwardness and oppression, it now signified resistance. Even many secular and

Muslim modesty for women has been reproduced in a politized in a particularly colonial manner. In every colonized Muslim context, be it culturally or physically, modesty for women and especially the practice of hair covering has acquired a political meaning. Particularly, hijab has been utilized as a reaction against the colonial treatment of Islam and the western modernization project.

The Qur'an, accepted as a divinely revealed source by Muslims, provides the basis for general principles of modesty in general and modest dress code in particular. There are specific Qur'anic verses concerning bodily modesty. It is essential to mention that many Muslims also see the Sunnah—traditions associated with the Prophet Muhammed but not revealed in the Qur'an—as another source of Islam. In this sense, not only the Qur'an but also the Sunnah “constitute the source of law that has shaped the ethics and values of many Muslims.”⁵⁹² Muslim religious leaders generally explain the norms of Islamic modesty in dress, focusing on the verses from the Qur'anic chapters *al-Nur* and *al-Ahzab*. One Qur'anic verse from *al-Nur* regarding female modesty (24:31) reads: “And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty...”⁵⁹³ In this verse and the preceding verse, both men and women are asked not to stare at members of the opposite sex. Thus, this command applies to not only women but also men. There is also a word

modern women, who did not believe in wearing the veil, put it on in solidarity with religious women and in opposition to the Shah.” Ashraf Zahedi, “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran,” in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 258

⁵⁹² Jen'Nan Ghazal Read and John P. Bartkowski, “To Veil or Not to Veil? A Case Study of Identity Negotiation among Muslim Women in Austin, Texas,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Jun., 2000), 398.

⁵⁹³ Yusuf Ali translation of the Qur'an. The former verse focuses on male modesty (24:30): “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do.”

zeena used in this verse which is usually translated as beauty or ornaments. Interpreters of this verse typically understand *zeena* as referring to a woman's entire body, except the hands and face, so that a woman is required to cover her body except for her face and hands.

Notably, according to the earliest religious authorities, including Tabari, women need to cover up their bodies in public except for her hands and face.⁵⁹⁴ Another verse from *al-Ahzab* (33:59) says: "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments (*jalabib*) over their persons (when abroad): That is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is oft-forgiving, most Merciful." The word *jilbab* (*jalabib* is the plural form) used in this verse is translated as outer garments that cover the body. According to Qurtubi, *jilbab* is clothing that "covers the whole body." It is also not a skin-tight garment.⁵⁹⁵ Usama Hasan emphasizes that there is an agreement that this verse "was revealed in the context of sexual harassment by the 'hypocrites, perverts and mischief-makers' towards the women of Madinah." Thus, the commandment in this verse for "free women, whose dress should distinguish them from slaves."⁵⁹⁶ Moreover, this verse highlights that women are enjoined to wear hijab to avoid being harassed or molested. Dressing modestly is seen as a shield from harassment and an identity marker for Muslim women.

On the other hand, when it comes to the question of whether hair covering is a religious obligation, some Muslims interpret these verses differently and reject hair coverings as a religious obligation, although the majority of Muslim scholars state that these verses enjoin women to cover

⁵⁹⁴ Usama Hasan, "The Veil: Between Tradition and Reason, Culture, and Context," in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 66. See also Al-Tabari, *Tafsir* (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1412/1992), vol. 9, 303-7.

⁵⁹⁵ Hasan, "The Veil: Between Tradition and Reason," 68.

⁵⁹⁶ Hasan, "The Veil: Between Tradition and Reason," 68.

their bodies and heads. Muslims, who consider headscarf and modest clothing as a religious requirement, offer a different account of how to dress modestly and how to cover the hair. It is crucial to mention that the Qur'an does not specify any color or any style of clothing women need to wear. In this study, however, I am not interested in pursuing the debate about whether Islam requires women to wear hijab or not. Instead, I am interested in how Muslim women who embrace the Islamic modest dress code themselves define modesty and what it means to be a Muslim woman in the American context. In this sense, I will focus on their lived experiences and self-presentation. Before turning to that discussion in chapter ten, in this chapter, I will briefly examine the understanding of modesty across Muslim communities.

To understand the perception of modernity in the Muslim setting, let us mention a few issues related to modesty. Several words refer to women's modest clothing, which are used in each Muslim majority-country. In her book, *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress*, Elizabeth Bucar examines pious fashion in three Muslim majority countries, namely, Turkey, Iran, and Indonesia. Bucar points out that Muslims use the word *tesettur* in Turkey, *hijab* in Iran, and *jilbab* in Indonesia to refer to women's modest clothing. The Turkish word *tesettur* has an Arabic root (s-t-r) which means "covering" or "concealing." The Arabic word *jilbab* means full-length outer garment. Its plural version, *jalabib*, is stated in Qur'an 33:59. In this verse, the word *jalabib* refers to a dress that Muslim women need to wear. Bucar also states that Western academia mostly uses the term *hijab* when referring to women's Islamic dress.⁵⁹⁷ This focus on *hijab* fails to do justice to the diversity of clothing practices in Islam globally. Each Muslim community uses different words to refer to modesty in dress. M. Catherine Daly states that the concept of *haya* is commonly used among Afghans to refer to modesty in dress. Daly further explains that "the body is both

⁵⁹⁷ Bucar, *Pious Fashion*, 7-8.

modestly covered and concealed while the commitment of the wearer to Islam is visually communicated and therefore revealed to the perceiver.”⁵⁹⁸ Thus, the dress is visual and nonverbal communication. Islamic modest dress also indicates religious devotion.

In addition to different words for modesty used by Muslims in each Muslim country, there are also different interpretations of modesty. According to Muslims, what it means to dress modestly differs. Understanding of modesty is not fixed among Muslims. Muslim women cover their heads in a variety of ways with several different kinds of clothing. Bucar explains that women cover their hair variously with square-shaped headscarves and long scarves made of silk, linen, or cotton. Some women choose to wear their hijab loosely, and some wear them with tightly draping and pinning.⁵⁹⁹

Muslims are culturally and ethnically diverse, and thus there are several reasons for dress distinctions. Muslim women wear a variety of modest attires based on their country, personal preferences, and level of observance and religiosity. For example, Arab men mostly wear ankle-length robes when Turkish men wear shirts and pants. Their choice of clothing would be different again depending upon whether they are from urban or rural settings. This diversity is much evident in women’s clothing. As long as they fulfill modesty criteria, they can choose to wear anything they want. As Aisha Lee Fox Shaheed succinctly puts it, there are “profound differences between styles of dress and conceptions of female modesty across Muslim communities.”⁶⁰⁰ Hence, there is no single form of Muslim modest clothing.

⁵⁹⁸ M. Catherine Daly, “The Afghan Woman’s Chaadaree: An Evocative Religious Expression?” in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Linda B. Arthur (New York: Berg, 200), 137.

⁵⁹⁹ Bucar, *Pious Fashion*, 85-91.

⁶⁰⁰ Aisha Lee Fox Shaheed, “Dress Codes and Modes: How Islamic is the Veil?” in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 290.

Of course, culture also plays a crucial role in shaping the understanding of modest clothing. Modest garments vary from one country or region to another. In order to fulfill the requirement of modesty in dress, each Muslim community has developed its own clothing styles and, therefore, modest fashion as well. Today, modest fashion offers women more options to dress simultaneously both modestly and stylishly as well as provides flexibility in the dress. Shaheed points out that Muslim women in Pakistan wear “the baggy and brightly colored salwar kameez (trousers and tunic)” and “neutral colored cloaks that we call arabis, and face veils.” She also adds that not only Muslim women but also Christians, and South Asian Zoroastrians in Pakistan choose to wear these clothes.⁶⁰¹ Leila Ahmed explains that Muslim women in Egypt choose to wear long-sleeved shirts and ankle-length skirts or Western style robes as well as cover their heads in a variety of ways, “ranging from scarves, hats, and bonnets to what might be described as wimples and fabric balaclavas; and some of them, depending on how they personally interpret the requirement for modesty, wear face veils, which again come in a variety of styles and degrees of thickness and length;” some even wear gloves in the name of modesty.⁶⁰² Ahmed also underscores that some women do not choose to wear traditional dress despite the fact that it meets Islamic dress code because in many places traditional dress indicates a lower class or peasant status, and thus “traditional dress therefore identifies the wearer as from these classes.”⁶⁰³ So styles of dress are sometimes chosen based on the fact that they represent different class statuses as well as religiosity. In Turkey, there are similar approaches to traditional clothing. Muslim women eschew wearing traditional clothing and mostly wear Western-style clothing with headscarf. Choice of different clothing also indicates a cultural gap between rural and urban areas and to what extent they are

⁶⁰¹ Shaheed, “Dress Codes and Modes,” 291.

⁶⁰² Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 220-221

⁶⁰³ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 220-221

influenced by European colonialism physically, such as in Egypt, or culturally, as in Turkey. The reason for avoiding traditional clothing is an effect of the Orientalist mindset, especially the binary opposition of tradition/primitive/backward and modern/progressive. Even though this seems to create a paradox, it also shows how women negotiate culture, religion, and modernity.

In the Muslim faith, dress codes obviously form a crucial part of Islamic modesty. As pointed out earlier, there are certain principles for both women and men. According to the Islamic dress code, men need to wear garments that cover “their bodies from the knees to the navel,” and women are mandated to wear garments “that are not too tight or transparent and to cover all parts of their body except the hands and face.”⁶⁰⁴ Thus, women are required to cover their bodies from head to toe. As Leila Ahmed explains:

The garments, of whatever style, are intended to conform to the Islamic requirement that dress be modest, that is, not sexually enticing; the mandate applies to both men and women. It is generally taken to mean robes or loose-fitting, long-sleeved, ankle-length garments that do not reveal the contours of the body. Both men and women conforming to this code have developed styles of dress that are essentially quite new, neither the traditional dress of Egypt nor the dress of any other part of the Arab world, nor the West, though they often combine features of all three.⁶⁰⁵

There are also certain criteria for modest clothing. Modest garments should be long-sleeved and ankle-length but also not tight. On the other hand, there are no limitations on the choice of modest clothing which women are mandated to wear, whether traditional, cultural, or modern clothing. In other words, religion does not specify what kind of modest clothing women need to wear but enjoins them to dress modestly.

Similarly, the vast majority of American Muslim women believe that the Qur'an commands them to dress modestly. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine the basics of

⁶⁰⁴ Khan, *Islam, Muslims, and America*, 207.

⁶⁰⁵ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 220.

modest clothing within the culturally and ethnically diverse American context. As noted earlier, Muslim communities in America are very diverse. Each Muslim community might have its own cultural, traditional dress as “modest clothing.” Jane Smith points out the lack of “general standard of dress to which all American Muslim women conform.”⁶⁰⁶ There is no uniform modest dress American Muslim women choose to wear. Some American Muslim women still maintain “a version of the dress characteristic of their home cultures, and others adopt Western dress completely.”⁶⁰⁷ Thus, American Muslim women have different clothing styles. Thus, American Muslim women dress in a wide variety of styles. On the other hand, the majority of women dress modestly when in the mosque, even if they do not choose to follow Islamic dress code outside of mosques.⁶⁰⁸ Smith further states that even though the nature of modest and appropriate dress remains controversial among American Muslims, they agree on two issues: first, dressing modestly is a religious requirement for males and females; and second, anyone, including husbands or male relatives, cannot force women to dress modestly. American Muslims also point out that “Islamic dress is not necessarily the same as the traditional dress that women from other cultures may have worn.”⁶⁰⁹ Definitely, American Muslim women would like to fulfill their religious obligation while they assert agency through the particular style of modest clothing they choose to wear. They exercise agency by rejecting male domination over their choice of clothing.

It is essential to discuss why dressing modestly and wearing a hijab is a requirement and, even more importantly, why Muslim women choose to do so, although dressing Islamically might make them more visible and vulnerable to harassment, especially in the American context.

⁶⁰⁶ Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, 59.

⁶⁰⁷ Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, 59.

⁶⁰⁸ Smith, *Muslims, Christians, and the Challenge of Interfaith Dialogue*, 59.

⁶⁰⁹ Smith, *Muslims in America*, 108.

According to Arshad Khan, the main goal of the modest dress code is “to prevent women from becoming the object of enticement or desire.”⁶¹⁰ Contrary to popular assumptions embedded in the West, dressing modestly is not about the oppression of women or about coercion. Muslim women validate their choice of modest clothing on a variety of grounds. As Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith and Kathleen M. Moore state, “for many American Muslim women, it is...about making choices, about ‘choosing’ an identity and expressing a religiosity through their mode of dress.” In the American context, a modest dress code has become a manifestation of “identity and spirituality as well as modesty.”⁶¹¹ Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi also argue that the practice of wearing hijab offers college-age, second-generation Muslim Americans both “a clear identity marker” and “culturally legitimate space for young women who are formulating Muslim-American identities.”⁶¹² Muslim American women try to construct their identity as religious American Muslim women through their reinterpretation of Islamic modesty. In this framework, modest clothing is not only an expression of spirituality and piety but also a countercultural embodiment of opposition to, or at least distinction from the dominant American secular culture. Through modest dress codes, they also challenge the stereotypes and discrimination they encounter.

In America, Islamic schools also highlight the role of modesty in Muslims’ lives. In Islamic schools, both boys and girls are taught the importance of modesty. Barbara Sahli, Christina Safiya Tobias-Nahi, and Mona Abo-Zena, for example, describe how the Islamic Academy of New England (IANE), a full-time Islamic school in Massachusetts, explains to students their policy of

⁶¹⁰ Khan, *Islam, Muslims, and America*, 207.

⁶¹¹ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Yane I. Smith and Kathleen M. Moore, *Muslim Women in America: The Challenge of Islamic Identity Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.

⁶¹² Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi, “‘Hijab’ and American Muslim Women: Creating the Space for Autonomous Selves,” *Sociology of Religion*, 68(3) (September 2007), 269-287, 269.

gender separation and “minimizing contact between males and females” through the concept of modesty.⁶¹³ In this sense, the Islamic account of modesty fashions American Muslims’ lives too.

The Practice of Hair Covering (*Hijāb*) in Sunnī Islam

The practice of hair covering plays a significant role in Muslim women’s lives. This practice constructs a way of life for Muslim women who choose to cover their hair. Like other styles of clothing, this practice functions as an identity marker for Muslim women and the public. Through the practice of hair covering, Muslim women communicate their identity and religiosity with others. Thus, a headscarf is not simply a piece of clothing for Muslim women. Instead, it is a way of showing others their spirituality and identity. The practice of hair covering also differentiates *hijabi* Muslim women from both non-Muslim women and non-*hijabi* Muslim women. Even though the practice of hair covering is widely seen as a religious requirement, some Muslims, especially reformist-modernist scholars, do not see it as mandatory. For instance, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Sheikh Zaki Badawi, former Imam and Khatib of the Regent’s Park Mosque and founder of the Muslim College, argue that “uncovered female hair does not generally cause sexual temptation in modern Western societies (and others), and that therefore the requirement to cover the hair should no longer apply.”⁶¹⁴ Some feminists also see the practice of hair covering as a sign of Muslim oppression. Anderson Beckmann Al Wazni demonstrates that “although there has been a great deal of theoretical feminist critique of the practice of hijab, few empirical studies have examined how the hijab may serve as a source of empowerment for Muslim

⁶¹³ Barbara Sahli, Christina Safiyya Tobias-Nahi, and Mona Abo-Zena, “Authentic Interactions: Eliminating the Anonymity of Otherness,” in *Educating the Muslims of America*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad, Farid Senzai, and Jane I. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252.

⁶¹⁴ Hasan, “The Veil: Between Tradition and Reason,” 77.

women.”⁶¹⁵ Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi, for example, vehemently opposes the practice of head covering with the following statement:

The veil can be interpreted as a symbol revealing a collective fantasy of the Muslim community: to make women disappear, to eliminate them from communal life, to relegate them to an easily controllable terrain, the home, to prevent them from moving about, and to highlight their illegal position on male territory by means of a mask.⁶¹⁶

According to Mernissi, the headscarf limits women’s visibility and presence in the public sphere. Many secular feminists also reject the practice of hair covering. As Jasmine Zine states, they consider it “an unequivocal example of religious fundamentalism and patriarchal oppression and largely dismiss the views of Muslim women who wear the veil as a sign of modesty as ‘false consciousness.’”⁶¹⁷ It is worth noting that her understanding of the veil parallels the colonial narrative. To put it differently, there is a confluence between the western perception of the veil/hijab/headscarf and this kind of Muslim feminist discourse. In this framework, Mernissi reproduces colonial discourse and Western stereotypes on the issue of hair covering.

On the other hand, most Muslims believe that the practice of hair covering is a religious requirement for all Muslim women starting at puberty, regardless of social status. Ashraf Zahedi highlights that the practice of hair covering is neither “a marker of social status,” nor “limited to any certain class of women;” instead, it is used as an expression of modesty.⁶¹⁸ However, the specific brand of hijab certainly does function as a marker of social status among Muslim women.

⁶¹⁵ Anderson Beckmann Al Wazni Source, “Muslim Women in America and Hijab: A Study of Empowerment, Feminist Identity, and Body Image,” *Social Work*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 2015), 325-333, 325.

⁶¹⁶ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Cambridge MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1975), 85.

⁶¹⁷ Zine, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism,” 35-6.

⁶¹⁸ Ashraf Zahedi, “Concealing and Revealing Female Hair: Veiling Dynamics in Contemporary Iran,” in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 252.

Muslim women's motivations for hijab are various. Many Muslims see it as a manifestation of their piety and spirituality.⁶¹⁹ Thus, the headscarf/hijab symbolizes the modesty of women. Some Muslim women challenge Western colonialism by wearing hijab.⁶²⁰ Rabiha Hannan also states that some Muslim women see it as "a means of protection from abuse" and a way of making them "look less attractive."⁶²¹

On the other hand, some Muslim women do not see it as a religious obligation or "they live in a context where they feel uncomfortable wearing it" so they do not cover their hair.⁶²² For instance, according to Leila Ahmed, wearing hijab is not compulsory. She argues that the Prophet Muhammad's wives "were the only Muslim women required to veil."⁶²³ Ahmed—like many Egyptian feminists of the time—argued in her 1992 book *Women and Gender in Islam* that head covering was not an expression of piety, but it rather symbolizes Islamism. More specifically, it is a symbol of "a particular and very political form of Islam that had been gaining ground in Muslim societies since the Islamic Resurgence of the 1970s, a resurgence significantly fueled by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood."⁶²⁴ However, her views on the issue of the Islamic head covering changed. Ahmed explains this transformation in a 2011 article:

Until recently, I thought, as Hourani did, that the disappearance of the veil was inevitable; I was sure that greater education and opportunity for women in the Muslim world would result in the elimination of this relic of women's oppression. For decades, in books, op-eds, and lectures, I stood firmly and unquestioningly against the veil and the hijab, the Islamic head scarf, viewing them as signs of women's disempowerment. To me, and to my

⁶¹⁹ Sajida Sultana Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough "Introduction," in *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*, ed. Sajida Sultana Alvi, Homa Hoodfar and Sheila McDonough (Toronto: Women's Press, 2003), xiv.

⁶²⁰ Read and Bartkowski, "To Veil or Not to Veil?" 396.

⁶²¹ Rabiha Hannan, "An Exploration of the Debate Pertaining to Head Covering and Face Veiling of Women in the British Muslim Context," in *Islam and the Veil: Theoretical and Regional Contexts*, ed. Theodore Gabriel and Rabiha Hannan (Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 92-95.

⁶²² Sobia Ali-Faysal and Krista Riley, "How to Write About Muslims," in *On Islam: Muslims and Media*, ed. Rosemary Pennington and Hilary E. Kahn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 93.

⁶²³ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 5.

⁶²⁴ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 3.

fellow Arab feminists, being told what to wear was just another form of tyranny. But in the course of researching and writing a new book on the history of the veil's improbable comeback, I've had to radically rethink my assumptions. Where I once saw the veil as a symbol of intolerance, I now understand that for many women, it is a badge of individuality and justice.⁶²⁵

Albert Hourani maintained in the 1950s that many Muslim societies would witness the decline of the veil over time due to the spread of education. In his article, "The Vanishing Veil: a Challenge to the Old Order," Hourani strongly argued that veiling would disappear over time.⁶²⁶ In Ahmed's narrative, according to Hourani, "the veil was disappearing from most other 'advanced' Arab countries," while it stayed unchanged "in the Arab world's 'most backward regions.'"⁶²⁷ On the contrary, Bayan Itani demonstrates that the number of women who choose to wear hijab has been increasing steadily at the American University of Beirut.⁶²⁸

Despite reductionist and Orientalist assumptions that view veiling as a sign of backwardness, veiling is on the increase both in the Muslim world and the West. In this study, I am also interested in what it means for Muslim women to wear the hijab in the American context despite negative representations of Muslim women who choose to cover their hair.

Ahmed further states that after talking to women in America who choose to wear hijab, she came to realize that these women have a different understanding of its meaning. In her words, "my very first interviews began to unsettle my assumptions." She realized that they cover their hair by choice rather than by force. Ahmed highlights their view of hijab: "For many others, wearing the hijab was a way of rejecting negative stereotypes and affirming pride in the face of prejudice."⁶²⁹

⁶²⁵ Leila Ahmed, "Veil of Ignorance," *Foreign Policy*, No. 186 (May/June 2011), 40-43, 41.

⁶²⁶ Albert Hourani published his paper, "The Vanishing Veil a Challenge to the Old Order," in the *UNESCO Courier* in 1956.

⁶²⁷ Ahmed, *Women, Gender in Islam*, 20.

⁶²⁸ Bayan Itani, "Veiling at the American University of Beirut," *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (October 2016), pp. 536-551, 538.

⁶²⁹ Ahmed, "Veil of Ignorance," 42.

In the Western context, hijab has become a sign of resistance in addition to a sign of religiosity. Crucially, Ahmed's original understanding of Islamism and hijab were inextricably linked. She reduced the idea of hijab as a "religiously mandated" dress code for women to a sign of Islamism. Thus, she identified two important American Muslim organizations, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), with "Islamist roots" because they see the practice of hijab as a "religiously mandatory requirement" for women.⁶³⁰ Given the fact that the vast majority of Muslims consider this practice as a religious requirement, from her perspective, "they are all Islamist." Basically, Muslims might interpret the Qur'an differently, but more importantly, labeling people Islamist due to their choice of clothing is problematic. More importantly, this reductionist, biased understanding misleads and prevents us from understanding Muslim women's lived experiences and their self-presentations.

Definitely, there are a number of understandings of hijab among Muslims. Muslims and non-Muslims also see hijab differently. Similarly, it is worth noting that there are various specific terms for the practice of hair coverings, including hijab, veil, and headscarf. The words veil and hijab are also used to refer to Islamic dress. In this study, I use these terms to refer to hair coverings generally, although there are a variety of styles of head covering in the Muslim community.

Like other Muslim women from Muslim-majority countries, American Muslim women have a variety of clothing styles and cover their hair differently. In this sense, there is no one style or one color of hijab that all American Muslim women wear. More importantly, it is worth mentioning that not all American Muslim women dress Islamically or conservatively. Their

⁶³⁰ Leila Ahmed, *A Quite Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2011), 168-175.

understanding of modesty differs, an unsurprising fact given their cultural, geographic, class, and national diversity.



PART FOUR: Political and Media Discourse on Jews and Muslims in America

Orthodox Judaism and Islam have a lot in common in terms of their understandings of modesty. Also, the history of Jews and the history of Muslims in America have witnessed similar kinds of hostility. As immigrants, Jews and Muslims in America have had similar concerns. For instance, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are still problems in American society. As Reza Aslan points out regarding commonalities between these communities, “both communities boast higher-than-average levels of education, literacy, and income; both struggle with similar concerns when it comes to matters such as cultural assimilation, political representation, and media attention;” and more importantly they “share a common history of bigotry and marginalization as immigrant communities in the United States.”⁶³¹ On the other hand, today, Muslims’ position in American society is quite different compared with Jews. In particular, along with negative, Orientalist representations of Muslims and Islam in American media and politics, the 9/11 attacks have increased the anti-Muslim sentiments which had already existed in American society. Jews, on the other hand, have gained a modicum of public acceptance, particularly in the media and among many politicians.

It is worth noting that the 9/11 events have deeply affected the lives of minorities in the United States in general. More specifically, the 9/11 attacks increased ethnic hatred and stereotyping, and discrimination against minorities—especially Muslims—in media and politics. Thus, I will analyze media representations of Muslims and Jews and political discourse about them in the post-9/11 era. As mentioned above, the 9/11 attacks have changed not only Muslims’ lives

⁶³¹ Reza Aslan, Introduction, in *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities*, ed. Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

but all minorities' lives in America. It is worth noting that media and politics play a crucial role in shaping/reframing American public perceptions of Muslims and Jews.

Generally speaking, portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the media and political discourse is mostly prejudiced and negative. Notably, the 9/11 attacks exacerbated the plight of Muslims in America. On the other hand, media and political representations of Jews and Judaism are mostly not negative compared to representations of Muslims. According to a report published by the Media Portrayals of Minorities Project (MPoMP) at Middlebury College in September 2019 on the portrayals of minority groups in mainstream American newspapers, Muslims are the most vulnerable minority group in the United States. In this report, the researchers investigated how minority groups, such as African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims, are represented in media. The Middlebury researchers analyzed 26,626 articles in four American newspapers, namely *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *U.S.A. Today*. According to the report, portrayals of Muslims in U.S. newspaper coverage are more negative than any other minority group. As the Middlebury researchers emphasize, “our analyses show that coverage of Muslims stands out as being both the most frequent and the most negative by a wide margin.”⁶³² They also show how frequently newspapers covered antisemitism and Islamophobia. Specifically, only 2% of news articles about Muslims published in 2018 addressed Islamophobia, while 17% of news articles about Jews addressed antisemitism.⁶³³ Seemingly, the media's stance did not change concerning Islamophobia despite the increasing number of Islamophobic incidents right after the presidential election in 2016.

⁶³² Media Portrayals of Minorities Project, *Report on Media Portrayals: 2018 Newspaper Coverage of African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims* (Middlebury College, Middlebury: Vermont, 2019), 1.

⁶³³ Media Portrayals of Minorities Project, *Report on Media Portrayals*, 26.

On the other hand, antisemitism also exists today in the United States. Even though media portrayals of Jewish people are mostly not negative, Jews in America still experience prejudice and discrimination. For instance, there are some groups in the United States that build their identity upon and maintain their solidarity around enmity of minorities, including Jews. Richard King, for instance, analyzes how advocates of white power in America see Muslims and Jews. King describes the concept of white power: the term “refers to a range of racial ideologies, some of which pretend not to be, and a series of overlapping political movements,” including white supremacism, white separatism, and white nationalism, including the Ku Klux Klan, the National Alliance, the Aryan Nation, and sundry neo-Nazis.⁶³⁴ According to King, both Muslims and Jews are considered by these groups as “existential threats conspiring to destroy the white race.”⁶³⁵ Even though they use antisemitic and Islamophobic discourse, their perceptions of Muslims and Jews differ slightly. King summarizes their representations of Muslims and Jews:

They associate Muslims with violence and religious extremism, consider them to be alien outsiders, who refuse to adapt and do not have a capacity to assimilate. They frame many questions with regard to Islam and the West (read whites) in terms of a clash of civilizations. In contrast, they see Jews and Jewish powers everywhere: often borrowing heavily from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *The International Jew*, and *The Eternal Jew*, they cast them at once as parasites and masterminds, unassimilable outsiders and inside operatives, a flawed people and a transhistorical force, and tribal and cosmopolitan. Thus, whereas Muslims constitute a more singular evil in the minds of many advocates of white power, Jews represent something more nefarious, multi-faceted, and troubling.⁶³⁶

White power ideologies regard both Muslims and Jews as foes and Others despite the fact that the majority of Americans do not share these ideologies. Muslims and Jews experience different forms of discrimination. Charles S. Liebman also argues that Jews in the United States experience different kinds of antisemitism. In his words, “this new antisemitism is rooted in group rivalry

⁶³⁴ C. Richard King, “Renewed Hate,” *Cross Currents*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (September, 2015) Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Probing the History and Dynamics of Hate, 302-310, 303.

⁶³⁵ King, “Renewed Hate,” 303.

⁶³⁶ King, “Renewed Hate,” 306.

rather than an image of the Jew as estranged from the central elements of a dominant American culture or at least peripheral to them,” and more specifically, this new form of antisemitism “projects the Jew as competitor rather than outsider.”⁶³⁷ In this respect, unlike the regard of Muslims as “others” or “backward” outsiders, today American Jews are not seen as “others,” but rather considered mostly as rivals in the eyes of the anti-Semites. According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2003, 85% of Americans said that “they would vote for a well-qualified Jewish candidate for president.”⁶³⁸ The overwhelming majority of the American population has no problem with having a Jewish president. However, this does not eradicate the presence of antisemitism.

As mentioned earlier, Muslim modesty for women, especially the practice of hair covering, is mostly represented as a sign of oppression in media and politics in the American context. They connect women’s oppression exclusively to their religion, Islam. In doing so, Islam is depicted as oppressive to women. This perspective is problematic in many ways. First, this understanding portrays Muslim (but not Jewish) modesty for women as the signifier of oppression. Thus, Muslim women are labeled as oppressed victims if they cover their hair. If a non-Muslim woman covers her hair, she is not a person of interest and is not stigmatized as oppressed. Second, this approach assumes that other women are free from oppression regarding clothing. So, they wear whatever they want and have no limitations, regulations, or constraints. Muslim modesty for women lies at the intersection of race, gender, and religion.

⁶³⁷ Charles S. Liebman, “Jewish Survival, Antisemitism, and Negotiation with the Tradition,” in *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer, Norman J. Cohen Published (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 441.

⁶³⁸ Jeffrey E. Cohen, “Perceptions of Anti-Semitism among American Jews, 2000–05, A Survey Analysis,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (February 2010), 85–107, 86.

In this part, I shall examine the portrayals of Jews and Muslims in the American context, analyzing different levels of discrimination against Muslims and Jews by focusing on media representations of both Jews and Muslims and the political discourse surrounding them.



Chapter Seven: Public Perception of Jews

The majority of people in America are Christians or of Christian heritage. Their perception of people from different religions deserves further research. In this chapter, I focus on American public perceptions of Jews post 9/11. After the 9/11 attacks, anti-immigrant sentiments have increased antisemitic sentiments and acts, which is a considerably different case compared to Islamophobic sentiments. Islam was represented as a backward and violent religion, and more pertinently here, the Muslim practice of head covering and modest clothing for women was marked as a sign of oppression in U.S. media as well as in American politics. However, when it comes to Judaism and Jews, as stated, we have a different case. More specifically, there is no stigmatization of Jewish women, especially Orthodox Jewish women who choose to dress modestly, no identifying them as powerless, agentless victims, no labeling of Judaism as fundamentalist religion. It is worth noting that ultra-Orthodox Jews are sometimes called “fundamentalists” due to their opposition to modernity and resistance to integrating into modern society as well as to their strict interpretation of Halacha. Due to the Orthodox understanding of modesty, albeit its similarity to Muslim understanding of the concept of modesty, Jewish women are extremely rarely represented as being oppressed by their faith. In this sense, Judaism and Jews are not portrayed in Orientalist terms by either media or politics despite similarities between Judaism and Islam in terms of understanding of modesty and modest clothing for women, especially the practice of head coverings. Unlike Orthodox Jewish women, Muslim women in hijab are represented in gendered Orientalist terms by media and politics. In this gendered Orientalist framework, only Muslim head coverings are labeled as a sign of oppression. As Tariq Amin-Khan succinctly puts it, “the veil has become a convenient scapegoat for the Orientalist construction of Islam and gender in most

Western states,” even though this practice exists among orthodox Christians and Jewish people.⁶³⁹ On the other hand, there are a few negative articles in the MPoMP archive about Jews too. These are mostly related to political issues, such as the Israel/Palestine conflict. As the MPoMP report states, “articles associated with the politics theme were noticeably more negative for Jewish articles than for other groups.”⁶⁴⁰

As stated earlier, the vast majority of media representations of Jews and Judaism are not negative. Most political discourse on Jews is not discriminatory or derogatory. Yet, most American Jews remain concerned about antisemitism. According to Pew Research Center’s survey of U.S. Jews (4,718 Jews across the country) conducted from Nov. 19, 2019, to June 3, 2020, Jews point out the increase in antisemitism in the United States. The Pew Research Center study notes that “Three-quarters say there is more anti-Semitism in the United States than there was five years ago, and just over half (53%) say that ‘as a Jewish person in the United States’ they feel less safe than they did five years ago.” Also, Jews in religious garments, including a kippa and head covering, “are particularly likely to say they feel less safe.”⁶⁴¹ It is safe to say that antisemitism affects religious Jews more than secular Jews.

While there is no consensus on the definition of the concept of antisemitism, I use the following definition: antisemitism is “prejudice, hostility, and discrimination toward Jews as a religious or cultural group that can manifest on an individual, institutional, or societal level.”⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ Tariq Amin-Khan, “New Orientalism, Securitisation and the Western Media’s Incendiary Racism,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 9 (2012), 1595-1610, 1600.

⁶⁴⁰ Media Portrayals of Minorities Project, *Report on Media Portrayals*, 20.

⁶⁴¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

⁶⁴² Lewis Z. Schlosser, Regine M. Talleyrand, Heather Z. Lyons, and Lisa M. Baker, “Racism, Antisemitism, and the Schism Between Blacks and Jews in the United States: A Pilot Intergroup Encounter Program,” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 35(2) (2007), 116-128, 118.

The Anti-Defamation League released a report in 2018 regarding the number of antisemitic incidents in America. According to the organization's report, there were 1,986 incidents in 2017 and the number of incidents were 1,267 in 2016.⁶⁴³ Alan T. Levenson also argues that even though there is an increasing level of anti-Israel sentiment in America, antisemitism is still "marginal."⁶⁴⁴ On the other hand, while Jews do face discrimination in America, it is very different that that experienced by Muslims. More specifically, Jews are not stigmatized as "terrorists" or followers of a "backward," primitive religion despite the similarities between these two religions in terms of the understanding of modesty. The discrimination is less overt, and also not widely reproduced by political discourse or media coverage on Jewish people or Judaism. As Bernice Schrank stresses, "previously discrimination was fairly overt," including limited Jewish admissions to many American universities, exclusion of Jews from having property in some areas, and denial of Jewish people's membership in several clubs, fraternities, and sororities; however, "in more recent times, discriminating against Jews (and others) has become more subtle."⁶⁴⁵

Jewish Representations in American Politics

Most American presidents' stance and rhetoric regarding Jews and Judaism have been positive. One may rightly argue that American politics is not shaped around the antisemitic discourse. The political portrayals of Jews mostly avoid gendered Orientalist discourse, as it has been used as a tool against Muslims, especially after the 9/11 attacks. American politicians do not exclusively target Jewish women as agentless victims of Judaism or Jewish men as oppressors or terrorists. Jewish women in general—and Orthodox Jewish women in particular—who embrace a modest dress code are not stigmatized as "backward" or victims of their religion. Thus, it is safe

⁶⁴³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/27/us/anti-semitism-adl-report.html>

⁶⁴⁴ Levenson, "American Judaism," 350.

⁶⁴⁵ Bernice Schrank, "Cutting Off Your Nose to Spite Your Race: Jewish Stereotypes, Media Images, Cultural Hybridity," *Shofar*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Summer 2007), 18-42, 20.

to state that political discourse around modestly dressed Jewish women is not based on gendered orientalism. Politicians and the media are not interested in Jewish women or their clothing. More importantly, American politics does not use Jewish practice of hair covering for political gain.

There are several reasons for American politicians' sympathetic attitude towards Jews. Some argue that one of the essential reasons for positive representations of Jews is the increasing number of Jews in American politics. For instance, Cohen stresses, "Jews are overrepresented in the halls of Congress;" for example, "in the 110th Congress (2007-08), Jews held 13% of Senate seats (13), 18% of House seats (30), and 22% of Supreme Court seats (2), where the Jewish population has been estimated at about 2%," and during the George W. Bush administration "at least 30 Jews have served."⁶⁴⁶ In addition to the increasing number of Jewish representatives in Congress, presidents also have Jewish advisers. These Jewish advisers have a positive impact on issues regarding American Jewish people. For instance, considering the 2016 presidential race, it is easy to see the Jewish influence on the election. As Steve Linde underscores in a news article published by *The Jerusalem Post* on November 11, 2016, "both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were surrounded with Jewish advisers and even Jewish relatives, and both were supportive of Israel."⁶⁴⁷

Moreover, American presidents show their support and loyalty to Jewish people in their speeches in myriad ways. President George W. Bush, for example, proclaimed May as Jewish American Heritage Month on April 20, 2006 to recognize and celebrate Jewish contributions to American history, including American culture, history, science, and government. President Barack Obama (2008 - 2017) talked about Jewish people in a positive way in various occasions. Like other

⁶⁴⁶ Cohen, "Perceptions of Anti-Semitism among American Jews," 86.

⁶⁴⁷ <https://www.jpost.com/Magazine/The-challenges-facing-American-Jewry-472227>

presidents of the United States, President Obama did not use gendered Orientalist discourse or present Jewish women in an insulting way.

There is no discussion of Jewish women or Jewish head covering among politicians. The practice of head covering, which is common among Orthodox Jewish women, is not represented as a sign of oppression in American political discourse. When it comes to Jewish women, there is no gendered Orientalist discourse. The absence of negative discourse around Jewish women's dress is not exclusive to politicians. It even can appear in a positive light in some fashion discourse. As journalist Krithika Varagur said in her fashion article, "Meet the women creating a 'quiet way of dressing' inspired by The Row and Céline;" "there's a political dimension to Islamic modest dress that's largely absent from its Orthodox Jewish counterpart, in our current cultural climate."⁶⁴⁸ In this framework, unlike the practice of Muslim head covering for women, Jewish head covering is not politicized.

On the other hand, some politicians use problematic rhetoric toward Jews, which might be considered antisemitic by many. Donald Trump, for example, accused Jews of being disloyal in 2019, despite having a Jewish son-in-law.⁶⁴⁹ Trump questioned Jews' loyalty to America by Engaging in "dual-loyalty" tropes, a long-standing antisemitic tactic. This rhetoric may invoke antisemitic stereotypes. As Julie Hirschfeld Davis stresses, "the accusation that Jews have a 'dual loyalty — that they are not to be trusted because their true allegiance is to their religion, rather than to the country in which they live — dates back thousands of years. It animated the Nazis in

⁶⁴⁸ <https://www.ifdcouncil.org/how-orthodox-jewish-modest-wear-is-going-high-fashion/>

⁶⁴⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/us/politics/jews-disloyal-trump.html>

1930s Germany, when they accused Jewish people of being traitors and used charges of disloyalty to justify their arrests, persecutions, and mass killings.”⁶⁵⁰

Media Portrayals of Jews

Politics in the United States does not use gendered Orientalist discourse when it comes to addressing the issue of Jews. Nor does American political discourse equate Jews and Judaism with terrorism or violence. More importantly, political discourse is not interested in labeling Jewish women who dress modestly as victims of their religion. Some may argue that the increasing number of Jews in politics and media provides Jewish people with a modicum of empowerment. Unlike the Muslim community, which lacks significant representation in politics and the media, this positive climate improves all Jews’ lives in America.

Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, for example, contends that Jews’ advantageous situation empowers Jewish university students. In his paper, “The War of Words: Jews, Muslims, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on American University Campuses,” Tapper investigates how the Israeli-Palestinian question creates tensions between student groups—including Jewish and Muslim students—at over twenty-five university campuses in the United States between September 2004 and May 2010. Tapper’s research is based on interviews with students, faculty, and on-campus staff. In this study, Tapper points out Jewish empowerment through the overrepresentation in media and politics:

In contrast to the phenomenon of American Muslim students’ marginalization, on-campus Jews commonly express feelings of empowerment. This is a result of increased feelings of empowerment among American Jews more broadly, evidenced by their disproportionate representation in the power-spheres of academia, government, media, and pop culture.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁵⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/us/politics/jews-disloyal-trump.html>

⁶⁵¹ Aaron J. Hahn Tapper, “The War of Words: Jews, Muslims, and the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict on American University Campuses,” in *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities*, ed. Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 80.

Another example of how Jewish students manifest their self-confidence and empowerment on America's college campuses is to utilize university facilities without any rejection or controversy. Taymiya Zaman sheds light on Jewish students' advantageous position compared to Muslim students. Zaman stresses how institutional accommodation of Muslim religious practices has stirred heated debate and protest about institutional accommodation of Muslim religious practices, including the installation of footbaths and prayer rooms at the University of Michigan in Dearborn in 2007 and similarly when Harvard University granted separate gym hours for women in 2008 after female Muslim students' request. On the other hand, Jewish influence in politics and the media collaterally affects its dominance at universities. As Zaman succinctly puts it, "the presence of spaces in which Jewish students can practice religious rituals has not raised similar questions about the separation of church and state on these same campuses."⁶⁵²

According to the Media Portrayals of Minorities Project (MPoMP) report published in September 2019, 5,980 articles related to Jewish people. Media coverage of Jews in 2018 was mostly focused on the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting and everyday life, from weddings to art exhibitions. This report also emphasizes that even though some articles regarding political issues are negative, "oftentimes, negative articles associated with a general theme did not equate to an unfavorable portrayal of the Jewish community."⁶⁵³ As the findings of the report show, like American political discourse, mainstream media does not specifically target Jews or Judaism in a negative way. This attitude towards the Jewish community suggests that antisemitism in American society has attenuated over the years.

⁶⁵² Taymiya R. Zaman, "Muslims, Jews, and Religious Visibility on American College Campuses," in *Muslims and Jews in America: Commonalities, Contentions, and Complexities*, ed. Reza Aslan and Aaron J. Hahn Tapper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 93.

⁶⁵³ Media Portrayals of Minorities Project, *Report on Media Portrayals*, 20.

It is important to analyze how the media represents Orthodox Jews and female modesty embedded in the Orthodox Jewish community. In a CNN fashion article titled “Understanding the dress codes of Orthodox Jewish women and their diverse interpretations” and updated on 17th June 2020, Hannah Tindle focused on the diversity in modest dress codes in the Orthodox Jewish community by interviewing three Jewish women: Tamara Fulton (a fashion stylist and lifestyle editor, who is married to an Orthodox rabbi), a Jewish teacher in a girls’ seminary (she did not want to be named for reasons of modesty), and Batsheva Hay (a fashion designer, a founder of her namesake label, *Batsheva*). This article also featured Justine Seymour—who is not Jewish—the costume designer of a Netflix series “Unorthodox” about a Hasidic community in New York City. This article debunks the assumption that Orthodox modesty codes do not give women enough freedom to express their style. Indeed, the Netflix show “Unorthodox,” which is based on the true story of Deborah Feldman, a Jewish woman who left the Satmar community in Williamsburg, reinforces this perception. As Tindle states:

Orthodox dressing can often be perceived by outsiders as overly restrictive, and as leaving little room for individual freedom and self-expression. Feldman and the fictional character of Esty both struggled with the pressures put on them by their communities, which extended to their appearance, but all three of the Jewish women interviewed for this article felt that there’s more freedom to explore one’s personal style than people might assume -- particularly within less conservative households or branches -- and many devout women do play with fashion to reflect their personal taste, while staying within the religious dress codes they have chosen to follow.⁶⁵⁴

In this sense, Orthodox women, who choose to dress modestly and to follow the Orthodox dress code are not restricted in terms of their freedom and choices. Rather, they express their freedom through their own choice of clothing and reflect their style with their own fashion. Tindle also emphasized that the clothes Batsheva designs give Orthodox women more options to be modest

⁶⁵⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/orthodox-jewish-dress-codes/index.html>

and stylish at the same time. Tindle acknowledges the options of Jewish women by stating: “she [Batsheva] has developed a style that is modest but also distinctive and fun.”⁶⁵⁵

Another news article titled “A Glimpse Inside the Hidden World of Hasidic Women,” written by Sarah Maslin Nir on September 19, 2018, gives voice to Orthodox women. Accompanied by photographs taken by Sharon Pulwer, in the interviews, Jewish women talk about several issues, including the use of technology and the issue of head coverings. For instance, Sara Blau, who is a special-programs manager and author of nineteen children’s books, states that “we use modern technology to spread God’s awareness,” and adds “We’re not looking to hide and be sheltered. We’re looking to take what we have and go out and inspire the world.”⁶⁵⁶ Maslin explained the practice of head covering: “While some women chose merely to cover their hair with a cloth or sheitel, or wig, the most zealous shave their heads beneath to ensure that their hair is never seen by others.”⁶⁵⁷ In this article, Maslin did not use Orientalist or degrading discourse when she mentions several Orthodox issues not congruent with or that challenge secular lifestyles. The crucial part of this article is that it gives Orthodox Jewish women an opportunity to express themselves and tell their stories. This article also includes *Keren Simchas Chosson V’Kallah* (the Fund to Bring Joy to the Groom and Bride) founded by Devorah Benjamin to organize weddings for poor and parentless couples.⁶⁵⁸

Joseph Berger’s article titled “Netflix Series Stirs Debate About the Lives of Ultra-Orthodox Women,” published in the New York Times on October 27, 2021, focuses on the heated

⁶⁵⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/orthodox-jewish-dress-codes/index.html>

⁶⁵⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/nyregion/a-glimpse-inside-the-hidden-world-of-hasidic-women.html>

⁶⁵⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/nyregion/a-glimpse-inside-the-hidden-world-of-hasidic-women.html>

⁶⁵⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/nyregion/a-glimpse-inside-the-hidden-world-of-hasidic-women.html>

discussion about the Netflix show “My Unorthodox Life.” In the accompanying caption, Berger describes the show: “The show, ‘My Unorthodox Life,’ tracks the world of Julia Haart, who fled a religious community she found repressive. However, some in the community she left say they feel misrepresented.”⁶⁵⁹ Berger begins his article with a description of women in Ultra-Orthodox communities:

Even at the most liberal flanks of the ultra-Orthodox community here there are daily moments where women live quite differently from men. At synagogue, they must pray in segregated balconies or curtained-off sections. They are prohibited from becoming rabbis and are cautioned against wearing pants, singing solo in front of men or dancing in their presence, lest they distract the men from Torah values. But do they go to college, have careers, watch television, enjoy their lives?⁶⁶⁰

After Berger states the distinctive features of the ultra-Orthodox interpretation of Judaism, he underscores that some Jewish women are not happy with this show due to the misrepresentation and generalization of Orthodox women. Berger continues with the following question and answer:

“But do they go to college, have careers, watch television, enjoy their lives? Yes, say women of the Yeshivish community in this suburban hamlet thirty miles north of Manhattan, some of whom are upset by how they are portrayed on Netflix’s popular reality series ‘My Unorthodox Life.’”⁶⁶¹

Berger interviewed Haart and several critics of the show from the community. Haart talks about her personal experience and time in the ultra-Orthodox community. In Berger’s words, “Haart paints a dismal picture of her old ultra-Orthodox life, portraying it as oppressive, suggesting women are deprived of decent educations and are basically allowed just one purpose — to be a ‘babymaking machine.’”⁶⁶² Her negative depictions of Jewish women are not accepted by all religious Jewish women. As Berger points out, “It is an image that is rejected by women like

⁶⁵⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/arts/television/my-unorthodox-life-debate.html>

⁶⁶⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/arts/television/my-unorthodox-life-debate.html>

⁶⁶¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/arts/television/my-unorthodox-life-debate.html>

⁶⁶² <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/arts/television/my-unorthodox-life-debate.html>

Vivian Schneck-Last, a technology consultant who has an M.B.A. from Columbia University and worked as a managing director at Goldman Sachs. She feels Haart diminishes the intellectual and professional strides that women in the community have made.”⁶⁶³ This article includes both critics and supporters of the show which enable readers to learn more about the perspectives of both sides. Instead of expressing his personal thoughts on the issue, as an outsider Berger focuses on the views of critics and supporters from the community. In doing so, he does not lead readers one way, nor does he represent Jewish women as victims.

In this regard, it is worth noting that after the airing of “My Unorthodox Life,” Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women have started the *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement to challenge the negative representation of Orthodox women on television., particularly on the Netflix show, by sharing their success stories in social media. Jessica Roda and Alexandra Stankovich, an anthropologist and a philosopher, published an article, “Netflix’s ‘My Unorthodox Life’ Spurred Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women to Talk Publicly about Their Lives,” to discuss this controversy. They focused on mainstream media’s depictions of “exiters,” which refer to ultra-Orthodox Jews who leave their communities. As they state, “Our research shows that by sensationalizing stories of suffering within exiters’ experiences, notably those of women, mainstream media has created a shallow narrative about the exiting process.”⁶⁶⁴ In this framework, the exiters’ personal experiences and stories promote the assumption that all religious Jewish women have similar experiences. However, the Orthodox community is not monolithic. As Roda and Stankovich emphasize, “While Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox worlds are extremely diverse in their practices of Jewish laws,

⁶⁶³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/arts/television/my-unorthodox-life-debate.html>

⁶⁶⁴ <https://religionnews.com/2021/09/08/my-unorthodox-life-spurs-orthodox-jewish-women-to-talk-publicly-about-their-lives/>

known as Halakha, popular depictions do not encapsulate this plurality.”⁶⁶⁵ The *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement also serves as an indicator of this diversity. Roda and Stankovich describe the aim of this movement:

Many of the posts feature stories of women who are professionally accomplished and educated, contradicting the Netflix show’s perspective that success and religiosity are an oxymoron. To do so, they published numerous online messages exposing their religious life of following Orthodox Judaism precepts while also highlighting their careers. The primary objective of the movement is to reject the too simplistic representation provided by the reality T.V. shows and allow women to expose the richness of their lives through their own lens.⁶⁶⁶

Through social media, modern Orthodox Jewish women, have fought negative representations and generalizations. In doing so, they have created their own space to express their stories, experiences, and subjectivities. Most importantly, they have asserted agency. That’s why this *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement is empowering in myriad ways. It is worth noting that most ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities prohibit social media and internet. The women who joined the *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement to criticize the Netflix shows are unusual. Using the internet and being active in the social media is not common for *Haredi* Jews.

In an article published on February 24, 2017 by HuffPost as a Style and Beauty article titled “Israeli Models Hit the Catwalk For ‘Modest Fashion Day,’” Eli Berlzon talks about “Modest Fashion Day” in Israel. Berlzon underscores that this fashion show was organized for “Orthodox Jewish women, whose tradition requires they dress in conservative outfits.”⁶⁶⁷ In this short article, Berlzon presents Orthodox Jewish women’s modest clothing as embracing diversity in fashion without using any offensive language. Like the CNN article titled “Understanding the Dress Codes

⁶⁶⁵<https://religionnews.com/2021/09/08/my-unorthodox-life-spurs-orthodox-jewish-women-to-talk-publicly-about-their-lives/>

⁶⁶⁶<https://religionnews.com/2021/09/08/my-unorthodox-life-spurs-orthodox-jewish-women-to-talk-publicly-about-their-lives/>

⁶⁶⁷https://www.huffpost.com/entry/israeli-models-hit-the-catwalk-for-modest-fashion-day_n_58b05058e4b0a8a9b78174c1

of Orthodox Jewish Women,” this article was also in the fashion section. Another fashion article, “Batsheva Hay Rethinks the Traditions of Feminine Dress,” was written by Anna Russell in the *New Yorker* on September 3, 2018. Russell focused specifically on Hay’s journey to becoming a fashion designer. Russell points out that “Hay’s interest and immersion in Orthodox life have influenced her dressmaking.”⁶⁶⁸ In this fashion article, Russell does not represent Orthodox Jewish women or their choice of modest clothing as outdated, unfashionable, or unfavorable.

The *Washington Post* published an article titled “In a Break with Tradition, Orthodox Jewish Women are Leading Synagogues,” written by Julie Zauzme on July 28, 2018, about the increasing number of women ordained as clergy in Modern Orthodox communities in America since 2009. Zauzme indicates how today, there are many female rabbis in the Orthodox community, which was not the case in the past. She stresses Orthodox Jewish women’s changing roles as *rosh kehillah* (head of the community), *Rabbanit*, *Rabba*, and rabbi in the Orthodox community.⁶⁶⁹ This article also features interviews with female rabbis. Similarly, Daniel Estrin also focuses on the changing state of Orthodox Jewish women in his article, “Orthodox Jewish Women Take a New Lead in Talmud Study in Israel,” published on February 2, 2020 at NPR. In his words, “Among devout Orthodox Jews, the intense study of Talmud is no longer just a man’s world. Women are increasingly delving into this central religious work, and American expats in Israel are at the forefront of the trend.”⁶⁷⁰ According to the article, an increasing number of Jewish women are joining women’s Talmud study groups in Israel. Estrin interviewed several women, especially American Jewish women, who joined these study groups and included their perspectives

⁶⁶⁸<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/10/batsheva-hay-rethinks-the-traditions-of-feminine-dress>

⁶⁶⁹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/07/28/in-a-break-with-tradition-orthodox-jewish-women-are-leading-synagogues/>

⁶⁷⁰ <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/02/794684710/orthodox-jewish-women-take-a-new-lead-in-talmud-study-in-israel>

in his article.⁶⁷¹ These articles all indicate women's increasing power and authority in Orthodox communities.

In another NPR article on August 21, 2015, “Ultra-Orthodox in Israel: Keeping Cool While Keeping Customs,” Emily Harris indicates how Orthodox Jewish girls in modest clothing enjoyed a Jerusalem fountain in the hot weather. Harris interviewed several girls and their mothers. Moreover, Harris gives information about the modest dress code for women and men in the Orthodox Jewish community.⁶⁷² Her description of modest clothing does not include any insulting or Orientalist discourse labeling it as oppressive to Jewish women.

In conclusion, the mainstream media in America does not portray Jewish people in general, or Orthodox Jewish women in particular, with an Orientalist discourse. More importantly, rather than labeling it as oppressive or unmodern, Orthodox modest clothing is presented as a part of fashion. Mainstream media also does not utilize the colonial discourse of “we” versus “them” in their depictions of Orthodox Jewish women. Instead, media features Orthodox fashion designers and their success in the fashion industry. Orthodox women’s clothing choices are portrayed in these articles as neither oppressive or backward.

Chapter Eight: Public Perception of Muslims

“Western Christendom perceived the Muslim world as a menace long before it began to be seen as a real problem.”⁶⁷³ Maxime Rodinson

In this chapter, I will discuss the public perception of Muslim women in the American context. I will examine how Americans perceive Muslims in general and Muslim women who choose to

⁶⁷¹<https://www.npr.org/2020/02/02/794684710/orthodox-jewish-women-take-a-new-lead-in-talmud-study-in-israel>

⁶⁷²<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/08/21/433465836/ultra-orthodox-in-israel-keeping-cool-while-keeping-customs>

⁶⁷³ Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I. B, 1987), trans. by Roger Veinus, 3.

dress modestly and wear a headscarf in particular, with a special focus on media representations and political discourse on Muslims since both Media and politics play an essential role in shaping public opinion. As Martin Gilens pithily puts it, “to understand the roots of American public opinion, we need to understand Americans’ perceptions of the social and political world they inhabit and the role of the media in shaping those perceptions.”⁶⁷⁴ Especially after 9/11, American media and politics specifically targeted Muslim women in hijab and presented them as “oppressed victims,” which is a common stereotype of Muslim women. For example, Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah, an award-winning scholar, artist, and educator, shares her teaching experience at Columbia University on how Muslim women are perceived by her students. Ullah asked them to “identify a stereotype regarding Muslim women.” Stereotypes about Muslim women which the students submitted anonymously frequently begin with “Muslim women are oppressed” and end with “they are docile, weak and passive.”⁶⁷⁵ Negative images of Muslim women, especially the stereotype of Muslim women as oppressed, became more evident in media and politics after the 9/11 events.

I will focus specifically on American perception of Muslim women post-September 11 era. It is needless to state that the 9/11 events have fashioned Americans’ attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. Anti-Muslim sentiments have been on the rise since right after the 9/11. The 9/11 attacks become milestones for American Muslims.

To a survey conducted in January 2002, only 24 % had negative feelings towards Islam, whereas the 2006 poll, released by the Washington Post-ABC News poll, informs that more than

⁶⁷⁴ Martin Gilens, “The American News Media and Public Misperceptions of Race and Poverty,” in *Race, Poverty, and Domestic Policy*, ed. Michael Henry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 336.

⁶⁷⁵ <https://baraza.cdrs.columbia.edu/teaching-notes-ii/>

Sahar Ullah also states that “all the students are Ivy League undergrads majoring in various subjects; most of them were raised and educated in the U.S.”

half of Americans' perception of Islam is negative.⁶⁷⁶ The 2006 poll indicates that the increasing number of Americans' attitudes towards Islam dramatically changed after 9/11. According to the 2006 poll, the majority of Americans (58%) say that Muslims are more violent than any other followers of religion.⁶⁷⁷ James Zogby, the president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute, underscored that the results of the survey did not make him surprised, because "politicians, authors and media commentators have demonized the Arab world since 2001."⁶⁷⁸ According to another poll conducted by Cornell University in November 2004, 49% of Americans saw "Islamic countries and peoples as violent, 47% as dangerous, 45% as fanatical, and 35% as hateful."⁶⁷⁹

Americans' changing attitudes toward Islam and Muslims is an excellent example of how media and politics hugely impact people. Eric Marrapodi, CNN Belief blog co-editor, conducted another public opinion poll on September 6, 2011. Marrapodi states that "nearly half of Americans would be uncomfortable with a woman wearing a burqa, a mosque being built in their neighborhood or Muslim men praying at the airport. Forty-one percent would be uncomfortable if a teacher at the elementary school in their community were Muslim."⁶⁸⁰ It is safe to say that Americans' negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam have not changed much over the years. A 2020 national survey "Islamophobia Through the Eyes of Muslims" released by UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute seeks to evaluate the impact of Islamophobia on the lives of Muslim Americans 20 years after 9/11. The vast majority of participants (93.7%) stated that

⁶⁷⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/10/usa.religion>

⁶⁷⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/10/usa.religion>

⁶⁷⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/10/usa.religion>

⁶⁷⁹ Erik C. Nisbet, Ronald Ostman, and James Shanahan, "Public Opinion toward Muslim Americans: Civil Liberties and the Role of Religion, Ideology, and Media Use," in *Muslims in Western Politics*, ed. Abdulkader Sinno (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 161–99, 164.

⁶⁸⁰ <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/09/06/poll-many-americans-uncomfortable-with-muslims/>

Islamophobia has a major impact on their emotional and mental well-being. Muslim women are more likely than their male counterparts to experience Islamophobia (76.7% of women responded that they have experienced Islamophobia compared to 58.6% of men).⁶⁸¹ In an interview, Ethan Katz talks about the survey's findings with a special focus on the reasons behind the higher percentage of Muslim women experiencing Islamophobia. According to Katz, there are three main reasons for women being the target of Islamophobia: "the heightened scrutiny of women who choose to wear traditional Islamic attire, misconceptions about the relationship between Islam and gender and women's increased awareness toward issues of bias compared to men."⁶⁸² As seen, Muslim women are a more vulnerable target of Islamophobia than Muslim men due to their choice of modest clothing. The practice of hijab makes them victims of anti-Muslim sentiments. Negative representations of Muslim women in media and politics definitely fuel Islamophobia.

Politics and media had a major role in creating fear against Americans about Muslims after the 9/11 attacks. According to a poll conducted by N.B.C. News/Wall Street Journal, released in September 10, 2014, 47% of Americans state that they feel less safe now than at any time since the September 11 terrorist attack, 2001.⁶⁸³ According to a survey conducted in 2015 by New York Times/C.B.S. News, fear of terrorism in America has reached a level that has not been seen since the 9/11 events.⁶⁸⁴ This ever-growing fear affects American public perception of Muslims and

⁶⁸¹ <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/islamophobia>

⁶⁸² <https://www.dailycal.org/2021/10/05/uc-berkeley-survey-finds-most-muslim-americans-face-discrimination/>

⁶⁸³ <http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/isis-threat-fear-terror-attack-soars-9-11-high-nbc-n199496>

⁶⁸⁴ <http://www.ibtimes.com/americans-fear-terrorism-its-peak-911-new-poll-says-2221155>

This 2015 poll surveyed 1,275 Americans over the phone from Dec. 4-8, 2015. The pool of respondents included 431 Republicans and 384 Democratic primary voters.

Islam negatively. As John Sides and Kimberly Gross note, “many Americans have derogatory views of Muslims.”⁶⁸⁵

As stated earlier, the post-9/11 fear of terrorism prevalent among Americans leads to the fear of Muslims and Islam through Islamophobic rhetoric in media and politics. Negative representations of Muslims and Islam in media and politics fuel both the climate of fear and Islamophobia. Thus, many Americans have begun to identify Muslims “as dangerous, violent, and hateful fanatics.”⁶⁸⁶ On the other hand, a new form of orientalist discourse emerged, especially in the Western media after the 9/11 attacks, which influences Americans’ perception of Muslims. As Amin-Khan points out, the War on terror “for Western hegemony has produced a phenomenal rise in anti-Muslim racism in Western societies, which has been considerably aided by the Western media’s coverage of Muslims and the demonization of Islam along Orientalist lines across Europe, North America and Austra.”⁶⁸⁷ The new orientalism emerged after the 9/11 attacks in media and politics is the continuity of accepted orientalism. The increasing number of Islamophobic sentiments appears to be a manifestation of this orientalist discourse.

The U.S. Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO), a coalition of leading national and local Muslim organizations, organized a news conference on December 21, 2015. USCMO underscores that there is an unprecedented increase in hate crimes as well as a rise in Islamophobia nationwide.⁶⁸⁸ Particularly, after 9/11, Muslim women in hijab have become the target of hate crimes. Haddad emphasizes that even some Muslim women felt the need to remove their hijab “as

⁶⁸⁵ John Sides and Kimberly Gross, “Stereotypes of Muslims and Support for the War on Terror,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (May. 29, 2013), 583-598, 596.

⁶⁸⁶ Nisbet and Ronald Ostman, and James Shanahan, “Public Opinion toward Muslim Americans,” 164.

⁶⁸⁷ Amin-Khan, “New Orientalism,” 1595-1596.

⁶⁸⁸ <http://www.cair.com/videos/multimedia/13319-u-s-muslim-leaders-announce-campaigns-to-enhance-national-security-address-rising-islamophobia.html>

a precaution, as many were counseled to do, in order to avoid harassment or worse.”⁶⁸⁹ It is important to mention that in the United States, Muslims, as a small minority, in general, and Muslim women who wear headscarves in particular, encounter a variety of difficulties, especially after 9/11. The question of hijab/headscarf is always controversial in both Europe and America. Wearing the hijab is not only seen as oppression but also a threat to secular values. Thus, France banned the wearing of headscarves in schools.

Mention should be made that the plight of Muslims is still much better in America compared to many European countries. Unlike France, there is no headscarf ban in the United States. More importantly, in the American context, “Muslim women observe modesty (hijab) out of their own free will.”⁶⁹⁰ However, Muslim women who choose to wear headscarf still have to deal with discrimination and islamophobia in America. As John Esposito points out, Muslim women face discrimination because of their hijab in the United States and Canada despite the fact that they, as multi-cultural societies, “pride themselves on maintaining an individual’s freedom of choice and religion.”⁶⁹¹ He further states that the issue of hijab has been “at the center of some controversy in Europe and North America as a threat to the secular state.”⁶⁹²

According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Muslim beliefs are generally not understood in the United States, and Muslim practices are not supported by the social, professional, and economic structures of American society.”⁶⁹³ It escalates the process of othering of Muslims in American society. As Amaney Jamal similarly highlights, the racialization of Muslims “has involved a

⁶⁸⁹ Haddad, “The Post-9/11 ‘Hijab,’” 262.

⁶⁹⁰ Ba-Yunus and Kone, *Muslims in the United States*, 25.

⁶⁹¹ Esposito, “Muslims in America or American Muslims,” 8.

⁶⁹² Esposito, “Muslims in America or American Muslims,” 8.

⁶⁹³ Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Striking a Balance: Islamic Legal Discourses on Muslim Minorities,” in *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* Ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000),

process of juxtaposing the Other with and separating the Other from dominant mainstream culture.”⁶⁹⁴ Jamal further states that this process and portrayal of Muslims as a terrorist in media did not begin with 9/11. Rather it has a long history of negative representation of Muslims in the American context. In her words, “the 1960s large segments of U.S. culture have unofficially classified Arabs and Muslims as terrorists and perceived them as threats to national security.”⁶⁹⁵ The process of othering and misrepresentation of Muslims reframes the colonial construction of “we” versus “they.”

Several factors shape public perceptions of Muslims, including anti-Islamic discourse in media, politics, and popular culture. As Debra Merskin states, “Popular culture and mass media in the United States have generated and sustained stereotypes of a monolithic evil Arab; these stereotypes constructed all Muslims as Arab and all Arabs as terrorists,” and moreover, “using representations and language in news, movies, cartoons, and magazine stories, the media and popular culture” have continued to participate in the construction of these stereotypes.⁶⁹⁶

The 9/11 attacks have aggravated the problem of Islamophobia and Americans’ perceptions of Muslims so that the orientalist representation of Muslims has become prevalent in media and politics to justify the American international policy of Muslims by invading Afghanistan and later Iraq. When it comes to the domestic policy of the American governments for Islamophobia, these governments’ policy, because of their quietism, can be understood as a nod to Islamophobic

⁶⁹⁴ Amaney Jamal, “The Racialization of Muslim Americans,” in *Muslims in Western Politics*, ed. Abdulkader Sinno (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 206. See also: Susan Akram, “The Aftermath of September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims in America,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 24 (2/3, 2002), 61–118

⁶⁹⁵ Jamal, “The Racialization of Muslim Americans,” 206. See also: Salah D. Hassan, “Enemy Arabs,” *Socialism and Democracy*, 17/1 (2003).

⁶⁹⁶ Debra Merskin, “The Construction of Arabs as Enemies: Post-September 11 Discourse of George W. Bush,” *Mass Communication and Society*, 7/2 (2004), 157–175, 158.

perception against Muslims. Kayla Greaves states that “with media depictions of ‘oppressed’ Muslim women, and last summer’s failed burkini ban in France, as well as the European Union’s recent discriminatory rule against hijabs in the workplace, women of Islam have become a target for hateful ideals and ignorant rhetoric.”⁶⁹⁷ Muslim women are the most open target of Islamophobia because of their Islamic appearance and their account of modesty with head covering and similar practices.⁶⁹⁸ Similarly, Rana Elmir states that “because women who wear hijab and niqab are visible representations of our religion, they face a significant risk of exposure to discrimination, harassment, and attacks.”⁶⁹⁹ As Maryam Khalid succinctly puts it, “In the aftermath of 9/11, gendered and orientalist depictions of the Middle Eastern or Islamic ‘Other’ have been highly visible in the Western world in both official discourses and mainstream media.”⁷⁰⁰ It has become very common to witness binary opposition in media and politics. Representations of Muslims in government discourses and media mostly place Muslims in opposition to Americans. As Khalid indicates, “a range of binaries situating the ‘West’ in opposition to the ‘East’ – for example, good vs. evil, civilised vs. barbaric, rational vs. irrational, progressive vs. backward – have been invoked.”⁷⁰¹ This new orientalist discourse constantly employed after the 9/11 events utilize the image of Muslim women to justify America’s military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and to shape American public opinion of Muslims and Muslim women through media and politics. Khalid calls it “gendered orientalism.” In Khalid’s words,

⁶⁹⁷ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

⁶⁹⁸ <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/islamophobia> See also: Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson, “The Matrix of Gendered Islamophobia: Muslim Women’s Repression and Resistance,” *Gender and Society*, 34 (4), 648-678 (2020). Zine, “Unveiled Sentiments,” 240.

⁶⁹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/16/how-muslim-women-bear-the-brunt-of-islamophobia/> Elmir also mentions many reports published by Non-governmental organizations to show that women in hijab are more likely victims of Islamophobic sentiments.

⁷⁰⁰ Maryam Khalid, “Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’ in the War on Terror,” *Global Change, Peace & Security* Vol. 23, No. 1 (February 2011), 15–29, 15.

⁷⁰¹ Khalid, “Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’,” 15.

“women’s rights discourses have been co-opted into a broader discourse of gendered orientalism that marks ‘Other’ women as voiceless victims of a barbaric (male) ‘Other’ enemy, and positions the U.S.A. as enlightened, civilised, and justified in its military interventions.”⁷⁰² This orientalist representation of Muslim women in media and politics, which is stereotyped as “oppressed Muslim women in hijab,” is situated explicitly or implicitly in opposition to Western women who have agency and are free and modern. Chandra Talpade Mohanty focuses on this binary opposition; western women versus third-world women. In her words, the third-world women are “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented,” while western women are “educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the ‘freedom’ to make their own decisions.”⁷⁰³ In particular, discourse on the images of veiled Muslim women who are represented as oppressed victims is highly visible in media and politics. In doing so, Muslim women’s modest clothing has become a sign of oppression among Americans. As Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad succinctly puts it, “Increasingly the American public has identified ‘the veil,’ whether a hijab (a covering of the hair) or burqa (a coving of the head including the face), with Islamic militancy, extremism, jihadism, and oppression of women.”⁷⁰⁴ Rhys H. Williams and Gira Vashi also argue that American public sees hijab as inequality. In their words, hijab “can be considered a manifestation of inequality-women wear it, but men do not.”⁷⁰⁵ They also point out media’s role in shaping public perception of hijab.⁷⁰⁶ Orientalist images of Muslim women in media and politics recreate meaning, recolonize Muslim women, and reproduce knowledge about

⁷⁰² Khalid, “Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’,” 16.

⁷⁰³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse,” *Feminist Review*, No. 30 (Autumn, 1988), 61–88, 65.

⁷⁰⁴ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “The Post-9/11 ‘Hijab,’” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (Fall, 2007), Muslim Integration in the United States and France), 253-267, 255.

⁷⁰⁵ Williams and Vashi, “‘Hijab’ and American Muslim Women,” 276.

⁷⁰⁶ Williams and Vashi, “‘Hijab’ and American Muslim Women,” 276-77.

Muslims and Islam. Accordingly, these stereotyped views of Muslims and Islam fashion American perceptions of Muslims and Islam and their approach to the concept of hijab.

Even though several parameters play a crucial role in the formulation and establishment of popular views about Muslims and Islam, in this study, I investigate media and politics' role in this process. Needless to say, media is a crucial tool to shape public opinion on any given issue. Martin Gilens argues that not only do media representations affect public perceptions, but also public perceptions affect media representations. Gilens explicates the relationship between media representations and public perceptions in the following terms:

[T]he correspondence of public misunderstandings and media misrepresentations of poverty reflects the influence of each upon the other. On the one hand, the media are subject to many of the same biases and misperceptions that afflict American society at large and therefore reproduce those biases in their portrayals of American social conditions. On the other hand, Americans rely heavily on the mass media for information about the society in which they live, and the media shapes Americans' social perceptions and political attitudes in important ways. Media distortions of social conditions are therefore likely to result in public misperceptions that reinforce existing biases and stereotypes.⁷⁰⁷

Particularly, investigation of the role of media is very important to understand American's people negative feelings towards Islam and Muslims. The American News media portrayal of Muslims and Islam is always problematic because of its stereotyping tendency. After 9/11, the negative representations of Muslims become much more evident. More specifically, the American media has a tendency to present Muslims as terrorists and Muslim women who choose to wear hijab as oppressed victims. There is mostly a link between Muslim women in hijab and the word 'oppressed' as well as a link between Muslim men and terrorists in media representations of Muslims.

⁷⁰⁷ Gilens, "The American News Media," 337.

Similarly, most political discourse on Islam is not favorable. It is safe to state that negative stereotypes about Muslims in the media and politics are historical continuity of colonial orientalist discourse on Muslims. As Evelyn Alsultany succinctly notes, “In addition to government practices that defined Americans and Arabs/ Muslims as binary opposites, government and media discourses relied on old Orientalist tropes that positioned American national identity as democratic, modern, and free and the Middle East as primitive, barbaric, and oppressive.”⁷⁰⁸ This neo-orientalist approach to Muslims prevalent in politics and media has a major impact on American public perception of Muslims. Political discourse on Islam and Muslims as well as media representation of Muslims and Islam shape how Americans perceive Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular. To put it differently, the representation of Muslims in media and politics and American perception of Muslims are inextricably linked. Negative stereotyping and misconceptions of Islam in media and politics have fueled Islamophobia and created a culture of fear among the American public. Thus, in order to better understand how American public sees Muslims and Islam, now we can discuss how American politics represent Islam and Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular.

Muslim representations in American Politics

Anti-Islamic discourse in American politics is not uncommon, especially after 9/11. The 9/11 attacks drastically changed the lives of Muslim Americans. This climate of fear increased a significant upswing in anti-Muslim and Islamophobic rhetoric in American politics. For example, former New York representative, Peter King, claims that the vast majority of mosques in America are controlled by “radical imams.”⁷⁰⁹ In doing so, he labels directly many imams as “extremists”

⁷⁰⁸ Evelyn Alsultany, “Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Identity through Nonprofit Advertising Post-9/11,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Sep., 2007), 593-622, 594.

⁷⁰⁹ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/peter-king-mosques-radical-imams_n_813878

and indirectly members of these mosques “extremists.” Muslims have to deal with hate not only crimes and Islamophobic sentiments but also new legislations aiming at Muslims, especially after 9/11. The U.S. government passed new legislations after 9/11. For example, the U.S.A. Patriot Act was passed in October 2001 and renewed in 2005, 2006, 2010, and 2011. Alsultany demonstrates the impact of the U.S.A. Patriot Act on everyday lives of Muslims with the following statement:

[This act] legalized the following (previously illegal) acts and thus enabled anti-Arab and Muslim racism: monitoring Arab and Muslim groups; granting the U.S. Attorney General the right to indefinitely detain noncitizens whom he suspects might have ties to terrorism; searching and wiretapping secretly, without probable cause; arresting and holding a person as a “material witness” whose testimony might assist in a case; using secret evidence, without granting the accused access to that evidence; trying those designated as “enemy combatants” in military tribunals (as opposed to civilian courts); and deportation based on guilt by association (not on what someone has done).⁷¹⁰

The U.S.A. Patriot Act is a manifestation of legalized anti-Muslim sentiments. The U.S government not only limits the freedom of American Muslims but also creates a category of “second class citizenship” through this act. Evidently, this suspension of the constitutional rights of Muslims exacerbates the plight of Muslims in the American context as perpetuating Islamophobia in America. On the other hand, political leaders increasingly continue using the fear of the Other in their campaigns. In this regard, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric, which promote ethnopolitical and religiopolitical agendas, reorient the public perception of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular.

Sunaina Maria offers a description of Islamophobia in the American context. Islamophobia “is typical of an American experience that historically has marginalized and excluded certain groups from citizenships at particular historical moments. Muslims and Middle Easterners are the

⁷¹⁰ Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

current subordinated group.”⁷¹¹ American Muslims have increasingly become victims of an increase of both verbal and physical attacks after the 9/11 attacks. More scholars should study how 9/11 changed Muslims’ lives and the increased Islamophobia as well as how American public’s perception of Muslims evolved after 9/11.

As Anderson Beckmann Al Wazni highlights, “The image of the hijab as the symbol of oppression and violence against women by the hands of the uncivilized Muslim man became the rallying point not only for American politicians but for contemporary Western feminists as well.”⁷¹² It is safe to state that the stereotypical images of Muslims reinforce white savior complex in the American context. Politicians use the image of the “veiled oppressed Muslim woman” to justify political policies, including the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷¹³ In this framework, Muslims have to “defend themselves against the perception of Islam as being both oppressive and violent”⁷¹⁴

Negative images of Islam, and more importantly, the image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman utilized by politicians and media shape American public attitudes towards Muslim women and the issue of hijab. For instance, many politicians, including George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Trump, John McCain, Mitt Romney, Tom Tancredo, Rudy Giuliani, and Mike Huckabee, used Islamophobic rhetoric during the presidential primaries for political gain.⁷¹⁵ During his

⁷¹¹ John L. Esposito, “Introduction,” in *Islamophobia: The Challenges of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito, Ibrahim Kalin (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxx.

⁷¹² Anderson Beckmann Al Wazni, “Muslim Women in America and Hijab: A Study of Empowerment, Feminist Identity, and Body Image,” *Social Work*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 2015), 325-333, 326.

⁷¹³ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁷¹⁴ Al Wazni, “Muslim Women in America and Hijab,” 326.

⁷¹⁵ John L. Esposito, Ibrahim Kalin, *Islamophobia: The Challenges of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxxi.

administration, George W. Bush utilized Islamophobic rhetoric and discourse on binary opposites for political gain. Alsultany explains this binary opposition with the following statement:

President Bush's speeches were replete with references to the United States as a democratic nation saving others - Afghanistan and Iraq - from oppression and tyranny and bestowing on them democracy and freedom. His infamous statements, "They hate us for our freedom" and "You are either with us or you are with the terrorists," established a dominant binary paradigm for understanding the post-9/11 climate: American versus Arab/Muslim. Furthermore, President Bush's speeches positioned Christianity and Islam in opposition to each other by stating that the war against terrorism would be a crusade against evil-doers.⁷¹⁶

Bush reinforced the discourse of the War on Terror with this binary opposition: "we" versus "they." Moreover, Bush not only conflated Muslims with terrorism but also stigmatized Muslims as the "new" enemy of the West.⁷¹⁷ Merskin also emphasizes that after the 9/11 attacks, Bush's discourse "built on stereotypical words and images already established in more than 20 years of media and popular culture portrayals of Arabs as evil, bloodthirsty, animalistic terrorists."⁷¹⁸ Similarly, Juan Cole highlights that George Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney both justified the U.S. invasions and military occupations through a discourse of "an imagined Islamic enemy."⁷¹⁹

The Bush administration started their propaganda of war against terrorism to receive Americans' support for military invasions in Afghanistan. With this propaganda, the Bush administration aimed to encourage hatred of the enemy and receive public support and trust in their military operations. The plight of Muslim women was also utilized as a pretext to validate the military operation after 9/11. Political discourse underscored that one of the crucial objectives

⁷¹⁶ Alsultany, "Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Identity," 594.

⁷¹⁷ Ibrahim Kalin, "Islamophobia and the Limits of Multiculturalism," in *The Challenge of Pluralism in 21st Century: Islamophobia*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxxi.

⁷¹⁸ Merskin, "The Construction of Arabs as Enemies," 157.

⁷¹⁹ Juan Cole, "Islamophobia and American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The Bush Years and After," in *The Challenge of Pluralism in 21st Century: Islamophobia*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 127-142

of the military invasion was saving brown women. As Haddad puts it, “the campaign stressed the need to mobilize American armed forces to liberate the Muslim women of Afghanistan, in particular, from their degrading condition.”⁷²⁰

First Lady Laura Bush also depicted Afgan Muslim women in need of saving in her November 17, 2001 radio address. In her words, “Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”⁷²¹ In this framework, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan was represented as an act to liberate “oppressed” Muslim women in Afghanistan. Muslim women are shown in this speech as powerless victims who cannot even “listen to music.” This image of Muslim women is equal to slaves. In this speech, Laura Bush positioned Muslim Women as victims without agency in opposition to American women who have rights and agency over their bodies and lives.

On the other hand, according to Lila Abu-Lughod, the First Lady speech “enlisted women to justify American military intervention in Afghanistan and to make a case for the War on Terror of which it was a part.”⁷²² Similarly, Khalid emphasizes that “the discourse of gendered orientalism functions to preserve and promote U.S. masculinist power, and to justify violence under the banner of the War on Terror.”⁷²³ After the 9/11 attacks, the representations of veiled oppressed Muslim women in need of saving became a symbol of the war on terror led by the United States of America.

⁷²⁰ Haddad, “The Post-9/11 ‘Hijab,’” 255.

⁷²¹ Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html> (Retrieved 6 May 2003).

⁷²² Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 32.

⁷²³ Khalid, “Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’,” 16.

Similarly, Donald Trump used Islamophobic discourse to garner the support of Americans. During the presidential election, Trump utilized the fear of Others through anti-Muslim rhetoric and the fear of terrorism to gain the election. His first TV ad includes dark images of the San Bernardino shooters, who were Muslims, and body bags and explosions. During a news conference in 2016, Trump said that “I think Islam hates us,” in a response to CNN’s Anderson Cooper’s question, “Do you think Islam is at war with the West.”⁷²⁴ Trump further added, “...there’s a tremendous hatred. And we have to be very vigilant. We have to be very careful. And we can’t allow people coming into this country who have this hatred of the United States...and of people that are not Muslim.”⁷²⁵

Trump not only stigmatized Islam as a foe of America but also marginalized Muslims and Islam. Like many politicians, Trump constructs a binary of us versus them. Trump exploited the climate of fear to further his political aims and finally came to power with his Islamophobic narrative during the presidential campaign. After Trump was elected as the 45th president in America in November 2016, his anti-Muslim discourse did not end. Trump issued an executive order banning entry to the United States of America by immigrants from seven Muslim countries. It is worth noting that Trump demonized and dehumanized not only Muslims but also other minorities. As Lawrence D. Bobo states, “Donald Trump fueled and exploited anxiety about growing ethno-racial diversity in the U.S.,” through “demonizing and scapegoating Mexican immigrants, ostracizing Muslims, and grossly stereotyping black people and communities.”⁷²⁶

⁷²⁴ <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/susan-jones/trump-i-think-islam-hates-us>

⁷²⁵ <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/susan-jones/trump-i-think-islam-hates-us>

⁷²⁶ Lawrence D. Bobo, “Racism in Trump’s America: Reflections on Culture, Sociology, and the 2016 US Presidential Election,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 68, S1 (2017), 85-104, 99-100.

In conclusion, American political portrayal of Muslims ended up with binaries such as “we” and “they.” This binary attitude can also be seen in gender and politics: American women *versus* brown women, or oppressed women. Abu-Lughod highlights parallels between the use of the issue of women in the political discourse and colonial treatment of “brown” women, especially of Muslim women. More precisely, Laura Bush’s radio address on November 17, 2001 Abu-Lughod explicates that the colonial administration had “a selective concern about the plight of Egyptian women that focused on the veil as a sign of their oppression but gave no support to women’s education.”⁷²⁷ The colonial rule used the question of women to validate their administration and rule. Today the issue of Muslim women in hijab is recolonized and reconstructed as a sign of oppression by political discourse for justification of military operations and policies. Leila Ahmed calls it “colonial feminism.” The white savior discourse also indicates how Muslim women are perceived in the Western context.

Media Portrayals of Muslims

Similar to politics, media has a major role in shaping the formation of public views and attitudes towards many crucial issues. Media outlets, magazines, and T.V. shows function as very effective tools to shape public opinion on the issue of Muslims and Islam. More specifically, many American people view Muslims and Islam through the lens of media since most of them lack information and religious exposure. Mayida Zaal points out the role media has played in serving “to facilitate people’s perceptions of Muslims as a threat.”⁷²⁸ In this sense, it is safe to argue that what they know about Muslims and Islam mostly comes from the media. Thus, it is essential to examine media portrayal of Muslims to learn about how Americans see Muslims.

⁷²⁷ Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 33.

⁷²⁸ Mayida Zaal, “Islamophobia in Classrooms, Media, and Politics,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, Vol. 55, No. 6 (March 2012), 555-558, 556.

Needless to mention here that the press coverage in regard to Muslims is primarily negative.⁷²⁹ When media report news about Muslims, they mainly mention Islam in a negative way. Nahid Afrose Kabir contends that “In most instances, when the perpetrators are not Muslims, the media do not identify their religion at all,”⁷³⁰ on the other hand, “when the perpetrator is a Muslim, there is a tendency for journalists to connect the incident to the ‘Muslim other’ and blow their news reporting up out of all proportion to the event.”⁷³¹ Kabir came to this conclusion after she examined media representations of incidents in which Muslims and non-Muslims were involved, including the Fort Hood incident, the Times Square bombing attempt, the pipe bomb blast, the Arizona shooting, and the Hutaree case. This double standard and biased attitude media have embraced is very common since 9/11. For example, the 9/11 attack was stigmatized “Islamic terrorism.”⁷³² Haddad also notes that media has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion on Muslims and Islam after the 9/11 events. Like Evelyn Alsultany and Haddad, Sides and Gross stress that “while 9/11 is a new historical moment, it is also part of a longer history in which viewers have been primed by the media to equate Arabs and Muslims first with dissoluteness and patriarchy/misogyny and then with terrorism.”⁷³³ Similarly, Liz Jackson highlights that “Mass media associates Islam and Muslims, by and large, with terrorism, portraying the religion and the group most frequently as unreasonable, fundamentalist, and/or prone to reactive violence” after

⁷²⁹ Nazita Lajevardi, “The Media Matters: Muslim American Portrayals and the Effects on Mass Attitudes,” *The Journal of Politics*, Volume 83, Number 3 (July 2021). See also: Brian J., Bowe, Shahira Fahmy, and Wayne Wanta, “Missing religion: Second Level Agenda Setting and Islam in American Newspapers,” *International Communication Gazette*, Volume: 75 issue: 7 (2013), 636-652.

⁷³⁰ Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Young American Muslims: Dynamics of Identity* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2013), 136.

⁷³¹ Kabir, *Young American Muslims*, 143.

⁷³² Kabir, *Young American Muslims*, 139.

⁷³³ Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, 9.

9/11.⁷³⁴ Kabir also states that “through its reporting, the *New York Times* questioned Muslim Americans’ loyalty” right after the 9/11 attacks.⁷³⁵ The 9/11 events have started a new form of orientalist discourse prevalent in media. As Amin-Khan succinctly states, “The mainstream Western media has played a pivotal role in the incendiary racism within a new Orientalist mould.”⁷³⁶ In this context, the mainstream media’s negative news coverage of Muslims and their attempt to associate Muslims with terrorism have become the norm. Sides and Gross also underscore that depictions of Muslims as “violent” in the news and entertainment media is prevalent.⁷³⁷ It is worth noting that misrepresentations of Muslims exist before the 9/11 attacks. As Zaal puts it, “Muslims in the U.S., and Arabs specifically, have been vilified in images, cartoons, film, and television for many decades.”⁷³⁸ Today representations of Muslims as terrorists still exist in mainstream media in America. The negative stereotypes of Muslims in media reinforce the process of othering, stigmatization, and marginalization of Muslims embedded in American society.

The portrayal of Muslim women is not independent of this stereotyping attitude of media. Ahlam Muhtaseb also contends that western media not only depicts Muslim women as agentless victims but also features a certain type of Muslim women when they discuss the plight of Muslim women. Muhtaseb is highly critical of media’s selective representation of Muslims. These women, Muhtaseb calls them “media darlings,” need to meet a number of criteria. “Media darlings” are those women who are “Western-educated/influenced,” or who look like to “Western women, especially if they ascribed to a Western view of feminism that was not rooted necessarily in their

⁷³⁴ Liz Jackson, “Images of Islam in US Media and their Educational Implications,” *Educational Studies*, 46:1 (2010), 3-24, 6.

⁷³⁵ Kabir, *Young American Muslims*, 116.

⁷³⁶ Amin-Khan, “New Orientalism,” 1602.

⁷³⁷ Sides and Gross, “Stereotypes of Muslims,” 589.

⁷³⁸ Zaal, “Islamophobia,” 556.

indigenous cultures.” Muhtaseb further maintains that “the most dominant voices/faces of women representing Arab and/or Muslim women in Western mainstream media have been women such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji and Mona Eltahawy, all of whom speak very strongly against Islam and Muslim/Arab societies and, from a Western perspective, call for “reforms” of either the religion or those societies.”⁷³⁹ In this sense, media mostly eschews featuring Muslim women in hijab who do not perpetuate the colonial perception of Islam and Muslims since they contradict and challenge media representations of “the oppressed veiled Muslim woman.” The media’s negative portrayal of Muslim women and Islam is a reflection of the orientalist idea of the veil as a symbol of oppression.

There is a very complex relationship between media representation of Muslims and political discourse and policy on Muslims. As Fawaz A. Gerges explains this relationship, “...the media as a supportive arm of the state, whose negative coverage of Islam reinforces and reflects U.S. policy makers’ fears and prejudices,” and more importantly, “... the press as an indirect participant in the process insofar as it contributes to the climate in which policy is made-have this in common: the notion that the media’s coverage of Islam and Muslims sheds much light on the making of U.S. policy.”⁷⁴⁰ Media is used as an instrument to validate U.S policies towards Muslims as well. For instance, the Patriot Act was immediately praised by many media outlets, rather than being critical of it. As Abdulkader H. Sinno notes, “Some media outlets, such as Fox News and Christian religious programming, the American movie industry, and some Evangelical churches, have been promoting views and images of Muslims that encourage restrictions on their

⁷³⁹ Ahlam Muhtaseb, “US Media Darlings: Arab and Muslim Women Activists, Exceptionalism and the “Rescue Narrative”,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2020), 7-24, 7-9.

⁷⁴⁰ Fawaz A. Gerges, “Islam and Muslims in the Mind of America,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 588 (Jul., 2003), 73-89, 82.

civil rights and liberties.”⁷⁴¹ Moreover, Time magazine, Glamour and the Oprah Winfrey Show, victimized the Afghan women to justify the U.S military intervention. The cover of *Time* magazine (December 3, 2001) portrayed an Afghan Muslim woman who covered her hair with a black scarf. Its headline is “Lifting the Veil.” The accompanying caption said that “The shocking story of how the Taliban brutalized the women of Afghanistan. How much better will their lives be now?”

The Muslim woman in the magazine was depicted as a victim in hijab. Muslim women in hijab are associated with oppression. The removal of the veil and burqa is linked to the liberation of women. The negative image of Muslim women in this magazine becomes highly visible in the media. Another *Time* article titled “Islam: The Women of Islam,” written by Lisa Beyer on December 3, 2001, noted that “nowhere in the Muslim world are women treated as equals.”⁷⁴² This statement indicates how all Muslim women suffer inequality. This article depicts not only the issue of inequality as exclusively a problem of the Muslim world but also the Muslim world as a monolith. Beyer also argues that “Some women, including some feminists, wear them [head coverings],” on the other hand, “many Muslim women feel cultural and family pressure to cover themselves.” Beyer strengthens with this article the assumption that Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. Khalid notes regarding this *Time* article that “the implication is that gender equality has been achieved ‘here’ and that patriarchal violence is the domain of ‘the East’, located in ‘their culture.’”⁷⁴³ Similarly, this article endorses the binary opposition: Western women versus Muslim women. No need to mention that representing Muslim women and Islam in negative terms is a continuing colonial obsession with hijab and Muslim women embedded in western media.

⁷⁴¹ Abdulkader H. Sinno, “An Institutional Approach to the Politics of Western Muslim Minorities,” in *Muslims in Western Politics*, ed. Abdulkader Sinno (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 3.

⁷⁴² Lisa Beyer, ‘Islam: The Women of Islam’, *Time*, December 3, 2001.

<http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1001347-2,00.html>

⁷⁴³ Khalid, “Gender, orientalism and representations of the ‘Other’,” 22.

The western approach to the issue of hijab and the western perception of Muslims and Islam are inextricably linked. More specifically, there is a connection between Islamophobia and Muslim modesty, more specifically hijab. Pamela K. Taylor highlights that Americans generally see hijabi Muslim women as “oppressed, in need of liberation and empowerment.”⁷⁴⁴ The Western approach to the practice of hijab is mainly based on the assumption that hijab is a sign of male domination over women’s bodies and lives, and a tool of patriarchal oppression as well.

This patriarchal attitude has been explained through Islam. Islam is seen as generally “hostile to women.”⁷⁴⁵ Similarly, Therese Ignacio Bjoernaas contends that the veil is seen as “the ultimate proof of women’s oppression” and “a symbol of Muslims’ backwardness” as well as “as a threat to Western civilization” in the West so that it “makes Islamophobia a self-justifying phenomenon.”⁷⁴⁶ Thus, western media and politics target the issue of hijab to “liberate” Muslim women. For example, the West generally believes that Afghan women had to wear the blue burqa by force under the Taliban regime.⁷⁴⁷ Abu-Lughod states that liberals do not understand why Afghan women continue to wear the burqa after the removal of the Taliban regime in 2001.⁷⁴⁸ There is no need to mention that there is a common assumption in the West that the burqa or any other kind of covering is clothing women are only forced to wear, and women do not wear it by choice. Thus, it is a symbol of oppression. However, Abu-Lughod underscores that the burqa was not the Taliban invention. Rather it is “the local form of covering that Pashtun women in one region wore

⁷⁴⁴ Pamela K. Taylor, “I Just Want to Be Me Issues in Identity for One American Muslim Woman,” in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, ed. Jennifer Heath (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 121.

⁷⁴⁵ Haifaa Jawad, “Muslim Feminism: A Case Study of Amina Wadud’s Qur’an and Woman,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring 2003), 107-125, 107.

⁷⁴⁶ Therese Ignacio Bjoernaas, “Saving Muslim Women: A Feminist-postcolonial Critique of Veiling Legislation in Norway,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 2015), 80.

⁷⁴⁷ Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 35.

⁷⁴⁸ Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 35.

when they went out,” and more importantly, it “was one of many forms of covering in the subcontinent and Southwest Asia that had developed as a convention for symbolizing women’s modesty or respectability.”⁷⁴⁹

In conclusion, some Muslims may choose to wear modest clothing which might not meet Western expectations by which the Western media and politics standardize “free” and modern women. Abu-Lughod also points out that dressing modestly is women’s choice and, more specifically, “if liberated from the enforced wearing of burqas, most of these women would choose some other form of modest head covering.”⁷⁵⁰ They choose to wear modest clothing. Rather than seeing it as an expression of modesty, labeling any kind of modest Muslim clothing as oppression is part of the colonial discourse on Islam and Muslims. The burqa or any other form of covering could have different meanings. To put it differently, the practice of covering communicates meanings that contradict western values and western perceptions. The Muslim modesty in clothing creates its own subjectivities and femininities even though they challenge the Western version of them.

⁷⁴⁹ Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 35.

⁷⁵⁰ Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 37.

PART FIVE: Orthodox Jewish and Muslim Women's Perceptions of Modesty

Living in a secular and modern world, in which the practice of head coverings is seen as a sign of oppression, is a big challenge for religious women who embrace a modest dress code because they do not conform with modern understandings of beauty or the concept of a “free” woman. Another challenge for religious women is the question of how to navigate and balance a social life between their religious world and the modest clothing it entails and the secular world and fashion. The previous chapter focused on how American politics and media represent Jewish people and Muslims. As mentioned there, media and political discourse tend not to negatively depict Jewish women and their head coverings. Some television programs which focus on Orthodox Judaism have created a disturbance among the Orthodox Jews. For instance, some Orthodox Jews are not comfortable with the representations of Orthodox Jewish women in two Netflix series. In reaction, Orthodox Jewish women have been negating/challenging misrepresentations of Orthodoxy in these series and have expressed their understanding of modesty and its crucial role in shaping their lives and constructing their identity through social media, especially with blogs. Moreover, women's understanding of modesty is not uniform. What counts as modest clothing is not fixed. They create their styles when dressing modestly.

Muslim women who have chosen to dress modestly hope to deconstruct Orientalist narratives embedded in media and political discourse on Muslim women and the issue of Muslim head coverings. As stated in the previous chapter, media and politics promote the assumption that Muslim women are the victims of their faith, have no agency and thus are forced to wear hijab. On the other hand, this part indicates how Jewish and Muslim women utilize social networks and social media to produce alternative discourses about modesty to challenge public perception. In doing so, they not only aim to break stereotypical representations but also refute a binary view of

modest clothing, especially the practice of head coverings and fashion. To do so, I will analyze online sources, including blogs, Facebook, and newspapers.

As religious women living in a secular setting, Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women are cognizant of what it means to be religious women and that there are certain rules regarding modesty that they must follow. They are also well aware that modest clothing is seen as a sign of oppression in a secular setting. Despite these challenges, these women highlight that they choose to practice a modest dress code and that they are not oppressed by their religion or religious strictures around modesty. Instead, they find modest clothing empowering and liberating. Through their understanding of modesty, they challenge the Western perception of beauty standards and the sexualization of women, and at the same time, through their effort to balance modesty and fashion and looking good and dressing modestly, they also challenge religious authority. Being religious women and dressing modestly are not easy in a secular setting, and navigating modest dress code and fashion in a religious community is another challenge for these women. In both cases, through their understanding of modesty, these women assert agency by pushing religious and social boundaries.

How women manifest and address their perception of modesty on social media is shaped by various factors. Multiple axes of difference that intersect within women's lives shape how women perceive the concept of modesty and how they address their understanding of modesty. Fewer Ultra-Orthodox women actively use the internet and so fewer provide accounts of modesty on these platforms since the use of the internet and access to higher education in Ultra-Orthodoxy is quite limited when compared to Modern Orthodox women. Orthodox Jewish women (mostly Modern Orthodox Jewish women) and Muslim women I will analyze in this part are mostly educated, middle-class young women. Nearly all of them have a profession and a social life. Their

use of the language of “choice” might suggest their familiarity with liberal feminist discourse. Their understanding of modesty moves along multiple axes of difference. For instance, Muslim women are ethnically and culturally diverse, so that their understanding of modesty is not monolithic. Unlike Orthodox Jewish women, Muslim women experience oppression directly from American mainstream media and political discourse on Islam and women because Muslim women lie at the intersection of categories of race (mostly from Middle Eastern origin) and religion (Islam is seen as an oppressive religion to women). American news media and politics are generally more biased toward Islam and Muslim modesty. These intersections reinforce the marginalization of Muslim women in hijab and orientalist discourse on Muslim women.

I analyze blogs, Facebook, newspaper articles, and newspaper interviews that focus on modesty and modest clothing by searching for the terms “modesty,” “modest clothing,” “modest fashion,” “*tznius*,” and “hijab.” I tackle the question of what it means to be modest women and how Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women describe the concept of modesty and its role in their lives. I am also interested in the reasons behind the practice of head coverings. I challenge the assumption that women are forced to cover their bodies and heads. I use quotations to show how the concept of modesty is described by women who embrace a modest dress code in a context in which modest clothing is seen as sign of oppression.

As mentioned above, this study is mainly based on social media. I examine how Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women express their understanding of modesty and what being a modest woman means to them. Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women use social media, including blogs, Facebook, and Instagram, to highlight the fact that they dress modestly and follow a modest dress code by choice, not by force. They also criticize the common American assumption

that they have no agency and no freedom and that a modest dress code for women religion requires does not leave any room for women to create their own styles or to dress fashionably.

We learn from social media that these women are offended by these assumptions and misrepresentations of modesty. As a result, they need to express themselves to a wider audience. In order to do that, they use social media. Why? This question plays a significant role in understanding their reaction and their accounts of modesty. They contend that social media is the only way to convey their message. On the other hand, we may wonder how accurately their social media discourse expresses their genuine views. In other words, their explanations on social media might not be the same as an explanation they provide behind closed doors. There is always room for such a possibility. The reliability of their explanations would be thus called into question. I do not think their different explanations would greatly affect the course of this study because this study is interested in the question of how Jewish and Muslim women defend their account of modesty. Certainly, it is almost impossible for them to show their reaction to a wider audience by disregarding social media devices, modern theories, terminology, and especially modern values. Rather than focusing only on religious references to the necessity of modest dress codes for women in their religious community, they mostly utilize modern values and more liberal terms, such as agency and choice. In the following chapters, we will analyze how they defend and justify their view of modesty through modern values. We accept that the explanations they provide on social media are only partial, mediated as they are by the platform and its public nature. However, this discursive field still provides important clues about their understanding of modesty in a secular setting.

We can also know that their relationship to modernity and modern values is complicated. They do not fully reject or accept either. The use of social media as a platform to defend religious

requirement of modesty for women with liberal terms indicates layers and complexities in their relation to modern values and their accounts of modesty.



Chapter Nine: Orthodox Jewish Women's Understanding of Modesty

Religion is the hallmark of religious Jewish women. In particular, Orthodox Jewish women shape every dimension of their lives in light of *Halacha*. The majority of the Orthodox community willingly follow Orthodox Jewish traditions of dressing modestly. Although some claim that religious women who embrace modesty have no control over their lives and bodies, religious women consistently state that they choose to dress modestly. Orthodox Jewish women view the concept of modesty as an integral part of their identity as religious women. They find their understanding of the modest dress code liberating and empowering. For example, Rebecca Klempner, an Orthodox wife, mother, and writer living in Los Angeles, emphasizes the significance of religion in her life: “if I pick modest clothes, eat kosher foods with the proper blessings, greet people with a smiling face, choose to learn a little Torah instead of waste my time, I draw that G-dly energy into the rest of the day.”⁷⁵¹ Similarly, Emily Chilungu, a 35-year-old mother of four from rural Ohio who currently lives in upstate New York, talks about the role of Judaism in her life:

There are a lot of ways that Judaism has made my life (and the lives of my husband and kids) a lot richer and more meaningful. Judaism takes the everyday and elevates it, makes it special, and living an observant life pretty much puts Judaism into every area of your life, from what you eat to what you wear to how you structure your week.⁷⁵²

Like many Orthodox and observant women, Klempner and Chilungu stress the centrality of religion in their lives. They believe that religion gives their lives a deeper meaning. In this context, they are aware that religion leads their lives and tells them what they should wear. Rather than oppressive, they find it empowering and comforting. Even though some might see religion's role in women's clothing as oppressive, they are happy to fulfill *Halacha*, especially Orthodox modest

⁷⁵¹ <https://thiswaytoeden.wordpress.com/2014/11/13/orthodox-women-talk-round-3/>

⁷⁵² <https://thiswaytoeden.wordpress.com/2014/11/13/orthodox-women-talk-round-3/>

dress code for women. More specifically, the concept of modesty has a major impact on shaping the lives of Orthodox Jewish women.

As mentioned earlier, Orthodoxy in Judaism is not monolithic. Broadly speaking, Orthodoxy is divided into two groups: Modern Orthodox Judaism and Ultra-Orthodox Judaism (also called *Haredim/Hasidim*). Ultra-Orthodox Jews are considered “the most religiously stringent” Jews. Unlike Ultra-Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy finds a balance between tradition and modernity. Modern Orthodox Jews do not oppose the use of the internet or secular education and, more importantly, they are part of secular world while simultaneously observing the Jewish code of law.

In this chapter, I examine how Orthodox Jewish women construct their identity through the concept of modesty and how religion and especially the Orthodox interpretation of modesty becomes an essential part of their lives. I shed light on how Jewish women express themselves and their understanding of modesty and its role in their lives as a response to the representation of Orthodox Jewish women on television shows such as the Netflix series “Unorthodox” and the reality show “My Unorthodox Life.” As mentioned earlier, unlike Muslim women who are represented by media and political discourse in very negative and Orientalist terms, Orthodox Jewish women are not, for the most part, targeted by political and media discourse for their choice of modest clothing. On the other hand, there are some television shows and digital platforms regarding the lives of Orthodox Jews that have stirred heated discussions in the Orthodox community.

Orthodox Jewish women vehemently criticize the representation of Orthodoxy in these shows. Netflix has released several shows over the last few years regarding the lives of Orthodox Jewish women, including “One of Us” and “Unorthodox.” In opposition to these television shows, Orthodox Jewish women have a different story to tell. Particularly, after the reality show “My

Unorthodox Life,” Orthodox Jewish women have started the *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement to tell their stories. They have engaged in a rich discussion about their lives, their understanding of modesty, and their success through social media. In doing so, they have created their own platform to challenge generalizations, misrepresentations, and misconceptions regarding who they are and how they construct their identity through modesty. As a minority, they have boldly challenged these assumptions that fail to accurately represent their choice of modest clothing. Most importantly, they have asserted agency through challenging the modern construction of how a “free” woman should act and dress.

For instance, Rifka Wein Harris, a Haredi Orthodox Jewish woman who earned her J.D./L.L.M. from New York University School of Law and lives in New York City, challenges the stereotypical representation of Orthodox Jewish women on television shows. Harris, as an educated Orthodox Jewish woman, criticizes stereotypes and assumptions embedded in media regarding Orthodox Jewish women:

It is a uniquely fraught exercise to live as a “frum” (Orthodox-Jewish) woman in a secular environment that does not always understand us and rarely appreciates us. It is doubly fraught when we defy the one false-but-ironclad media stereotype foisted upon us: that we are oppressed, naive, stiflingly uneducated and narrow-minded, with small and inconsequential lives. It does not seem to matter what we achieve professionally, academically, or financially to puncture these stereotypes. No matter the true facts, we are sized up and measured against this overbearing metric again and again.⁷⁵³

Harris emphasizes the significance of her faith in her life. She does not view the Orthodox understanding of Judaism as “oppressive” or “outdated.” Instead, Harris sees her faith as “liberating and healing.” She also criticizes Julia Haart and the representation of Orthodox Jewish women in “My Unorthodox Life.” According to Harris, Haart “negated the agency of our own

⁷⁵³ <https://www.lohud.com/story/opinion/2021/07/29/my-unorthodox-life-increases-bias-toward-orthodox-women/5404581001/>

lived experiences and insulted the breadth, diversity, and uniqueness of our narratives.” Harris also complains about the media by saying that “by handing Haart the microphone, the media failed in its basic duty not to amplify bias.”⁷⁵⁴ Harris, a frum Jewish woman, tries to show how Julia Haart and others who have left the community do not represent the lived experiences of Orthodox Jewish women who have chosen to remain in the community. These women are happy to be religious and willingly follow their faith. Media fails to focus on their stories and their lived experiences. It is worth noting that most Haredi women cannot go to college and receiving higher education in Haredi communities is uncommon. Even some Haredi Jews do not view Harris as modest because of her college education and her job. Despite these the strict rules in Haredi communities, some women still go to college, pursue careers, and use the internet. In doing so, they not only challenge Netflix’s representations of Orthodox Jewish women but also religious authority.

Several Orthodox Jewish women have joined the *#MyOrthodoxLife* movement to express their pride in being Orthodox Jews and a part of the Orthodox community. For instance, Zlaty Klein, senior vice president of human resources at NewGen, talks about her Orthodox life with a special focus on her choice of being Orthodox. In her words, “Hey Netflix...I am daughter of amazing supportive Ultra-Orthodox Father. I am a SR VP of Human Resources for a successful healthcare company. I am a Bais Yaakov of Monsey graduate. I was born into an Orthodox family. I have seen all the life paths the world has to offer. I choose Orthodox Judaism any day.”⁷⁵⁵ Similarly, Sasha Friedman, a writer, teacher, and mother living in Los Angeles, joined this movement to talk about her life. Friedman states that “they will never make a Netflix show about

⁷⁵⁴ <https://www.lohud.com/story/opinion/2021/07/29/my-unorthodox-life-increases-bias-toward-orthodox-women/5404581001/>

⁷⁵⁵ <https://myorthodoxlife.net/blog/>

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/zlaty-klein-459b6325_hey-netflix-my-name-is-zlaty-klein-i-am-activity-6821619152780959744-g_Ao

my life. I had a charmed childhood. I grew up in San Diego, which I think is the closest place to Paradise in the continental US. I was not oppressed or repressed. There was nothing that I had to escape from. In fact, both my parents left their secular lifestyles to embrace an observant lifestyle.”⁷⁵⁶ Sarah Gershon also discredits the portrayal of Orthodox Judaism in the Netflix series. Gershon further states that being an Orthodox Jew is her choice:

I embraced Orthodox Judaism independently, as an adult. I fell in love with it, with rituals and depth, with the communities it creates, with its richness and complexity....Does being Orthodox mean that I have no criticisms of my own community or fail to see any of the issues or problems that do occur inside it? Quite the opposite. Orthodox Judaism is like any other community—composed of individuals—some of whom are role models and others who are deeply flawed and troubled.

By sharing their Orthodox lives, they expect to demonstrate that they choose Orthodox Judaism of their own free will. Instead of choosing to be a secular Jewish woman who does not have to conform to the modest dress code that religion requires of them, these women choose to be Orthodox Jewish women, and more importantly, they are well aware of what it means to be Orthodox Jewish women and what rules regarding modest clothing they need to follow. Sarah London points out that some statements made in “My Orthodox Life” are not true. This show does not reflect all Orthodox Jews’ lives. London talks about her Orthodox life with the following statement:

My life is quite the opposite of Julia’s. I CHOSE to be an Orthodox Jew. Me and my liberal+feminist+ “hard-to-follow-rules” self. It would take a novel to explain why I made this choice. The short answer is that I saw truth, beauty, and meaning. To be a Torah observant Jew means to connect to yourself, to others, and to Gd...I am not stifled, I am actually liberated...I am not saying the Orthodox community is perfect. We have our own challenges (just like anyone), but I think it’s important to point out the good, while taking responsibility to try and make positive changes to the not so good.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁶ <https://myorthodoxlife.net/blog/>

⁷⁵⁷ <https://myorthodoxlife.net/blog/>

Like many Orthodox women, London also highlights that it is her choice to be Orthodox. Some Orthodox Jewish women are offended by the negative portrayal of Orthodox Judaism in Netflix series. For this reason, they share their stories to show that Orthodox Judaism does not prevent them from pursuing their dreams. More importantly, Orthodox Judaism does not oppress them. Soshea Leibler, a broadcast journalist in radio and television, also joined the #MyOrthodoxlife movement to debunk the assumption that Orthodox Judaism is oppressive to women. Leibler addresses her reaction to the show “My Unorthodox Life” with the following statement:

In response to the reality TV show My Unorthodox Life in which the star Julia Haart recounts the oppressive life she experienced growing up as an Orthodox Jew, I am joining many other Orthodox “frum” women with the story of #MyOrthodoxLife. I grew up in an Orthodox family, what we refer to as “Modern Orthodox.” I never felt less than, oppressed or stifled. On the contrary, I was brought up to believe in following my dreams and unlike Haart had a stellar Yeshiva education and was encouraged to pursue my bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

Through sharing her success and education, Leibler shows that being an Orthodox woman does not mean being uneducated and oppressed. Orthodox Jewish also address through the #MyOrthodoxlife movement that based on Haart’s life and experience, it is not acceptable to frame all Orthodox Jews, their culture, and their understanding of modesty as symbols of oppression by Orthodox Judaism. They also hope their posts on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn encourage other Orthodox women to share their lives and success stories to break down stereotypes the show “My Unorthodox Life” perpetuates. Raquel Hollander, a medical social worker, also talks about her Orthodox life. Hollander indicates how her life is the opposite to the representation of Orthodoxy in the Netflix series. She summarizes her life with the following statement:

I usually don’t share my personal life on LinkedIn but I’m hoping to share how we Orthodox Jews are not held back by our community. I am married to a wonderful and supportive husband. I am a mother to 3 beautiful girls. I completed my Master’s of Social Work with honors at 22 years old....Yes, there were guidelines as an Orthodox Jew such

as modesty and keeping Shabbos (the Sabbath). However, that never stopped me from pursuing my dreams. I am proud to be a successful Orthodox Jew.⁷⁵⁸

She underscores the importance of religion in her life, and, more importantly, that the religious requirement of modesty is not oppressive for her, and, like many Orthodox women, she willingly follows the modesty rules. Many Orthodox women emphasize that rather than oppressing women, the Orthodox interpretation of modesty empowers them. For example, Miriam Sandler, a singer, songwriter, and speaker, stresses that the modest clothing is not oppressive: “I am not an object, I am a neshama (SOUL) housed in a treasured body; I am not oppressed when I wear modest clothing—I am sending a message to the world that I have self-respect and I choose to identify with HIGHER PURPOSE, intellect and not physicality.”⁷⁵⁹ Like many women who follow modest dress codes, modest clothing allows Sandler to de-emphasize external appearances and to focus primarily on her soul and mind. Miriam Cohen also focuses on what being an Orthodox Jewish woman means to her. Cohen also addresses her reflection as a response to the Netflix movies. In her words, “being an Orthodox woman is not a hat that I wear; it is an inseparable part of my essence. It empowers me to live my true self, my highest self, to see my beauty, the light of my soul in all hats that I wear (and there are many). As a wife, a mother, a teacher, and a coach being an Orthodox woman brings joy, depth, meaning, and connection into each role.”⁷⁶⁰ Similarly, another Orthodox woman, Sasha, a speech-language pathologist, shows how Orthodox women stress the significance of soul over the body by following a modest dress code at an online prom dress website, “Virtuous Prom.” She mentions her reflection on the concept of *tznius*. More specifically, she explains what practicing *tznius* means to Orthodox women:

I am here to say that *tznius* for me and for so many other Orthodox Jewish women is not about men. It is not about dressing for men, thinking about men, or trying to get men to

⁷⁵⁸ <https://myorthodoxlife.net/blog/>

⁷⁵⁹ <https://myorthodoxlife.net/blog/>

⁷⁶⁰ <https://myorthodoxlife.net/blog/>

treat us in a certain manner. *Tznius* for me is about the soul. When I dress according to the laws of *tznius*, I put my soul first by de-emphasizing my physical body...when I follow the laws of *tznius*, I am telling everyone—men, women, children, even myself—look at my soul. Don't focus on my body, this temporary shell that I am living in, but that holy soul within me that can do such amazing things.

She tries to show that her soul is more important than her physical appearance. Through modest clothing, she emphasizes not only the importance of her soul but also the centrality of her faith in her life. In this framework, the concept of *tznius* becomes a manifestation of her identity. In her words, “*tznius* is a statement of my very essence: I am a soul, not a body, and I will let my soul shine through.” More importantly, Orthodox modesty standards provide her with an opportunity to see real beauty inside her. As she states, “I know that when I dress according to the laws of *tznius*, I will walk with my head held high because I know that I am acknowledging the importance of my soul over my body. In a way, I am not really covering/hiding my body, but am truly uncovering the beauty of the soul inside.”⁷⁶¹ Like other Orthodox women, Sasha wants to illustrate how her choice of modest clothing improves her life and soul rather than oppress them. Thus, through their choice of modest clothing, Orthodox women construct their identity: Orthodox Jewish women who are happy and proud to be religious and to practice *tznius*. Moreover, in this framework, modest clothing functions as an instrument of resistance to the sexualization of women's bodies and the use of women as an object.

Moreover, Sharon Langert, the creator of popular modest fashion and lifestyle blog, *Fashion-isha*, about Orthodox women's fashion, stresses the misconceptions and generalizations regarding Jewish modesty: “the public perception isn't always positive about *tznius*. It's sometimes about the woman not being allowed to have the choice to dress the way that she wants, but that's

⁷⁶¹ <https://www.virtuousprom.com/modesty-jewish-orthodox/>

not always true.”⁷⁶² Through social media, like other Orthodox women, Langert refutes the assumption that Orthodox women have no choice. According to her, modest clothing is a personal choice. Obviously, the Netflix series does not reflect all Orthodox women’s experiences and their attitude towards Orthodox Judaism and *tznius*. It is worth noting that the #MyOrthodoxlife movement emerged as a reaction to the reality show “My UnOrthodox Life” in order to manifest how Orthodox women identify themselves and how they perceive *tznius*.

Orthodox Jewish women also discredit a popular assumption that modest clothing would be necessarily outdated and not stylish. They expect to demonstrate that it is possible to dress fashionably without violating the Jewish law of modesty. As Michelle Honig, a self-identified Orthodox Jewish woman, states, modest clothing does not need to be “dowdy, unflattering, ill-fitting clothing,” but instead, “modest dressing can be beautiful, attractive, and, most importantly, fashionable. My modesty does not prevent me from buying fashion-forward clothing.”⁷⁶³ Thus, Honig further argues that, unlike popular assumptions that the Jewish law of modesty does not give women the freedom to create their own style, she has “a unique sense of style.”⁷⁶⁴ Honig tries to point out the diversity in understanding of modest clothing in the Orthodox community. Like secular women, observant Jewish women have their own fashion styles, and they are not monolithic. They are also interested in wearing stylish, beautiful clothing within the limitations of the word *tznius*. In doing so, they navigate fashion and modesty. To put it differently, they balance fashion and the modern world within the guidelines of the law of *tzinus*. Notably, an increasing

⁷⁶² <https://fashionista.com/2013/05/orthodox-jewish-women-find-new-ways-to-be-fashionable-in-crown-heights>

⁷⁶³ <https://www.vogue.com/article/orthodox-judaism-fashion-laws-of-modesty>

⁷⁶⁴ <https://www.vogue.com/article/orthodox-judaism-fashion-laws-of-modesty>

number of Orthodox Jewish designers serve this purpose and offer women more options to create their own styles.

Mimi Hecht, an Orthodox fashion designer and a co-founder of the modest Hasidic fashion label *MIMU MAXI*, discusses how modest dressing is stigmatized as a sign of oppression by saying that “when people say that modest women are oppressed, they’re inherently saying that to be free, you must show your skin....It’s insulting for people to assume that we don’t have a choice in this.”⁷⁶⁵ Hecht is offended by the assumption that Jewish women have no agency and power over their choice of clothing. This misperception devalues women and their decision to be modest. Though *MIMU MAXI*, Hecht, a modest fashion designer, offers more options for Orthodox Jewish women and other women who want to dress modestly. As Hecht states, “We think of our brand as a meeting point for Jewish, Muslim, and Christian women, anyone who wants to dress modestly.”⁷⁶⁶ More importantly, Orthodox fashion labels, like *MIMU MAXI*, serve as an indicator of the diversity in modest clothing. In addition to *MIMU MAXI* (an online store), there are many online stores, shops, and boutiques in America, especially in New York, which provides modest clothing for Orthodox Jewish women, including *June’s* (a Borough Park boutique), *Zelda* (a chic wig brand) and *The Frock* (an online store), and Brooklyn shops like *Elzee* and *Top Fashion*.

Leora Eisenberg, an observant Jewish woman, expresses her understanding of modesty. Eisenberg indicates how modest clothing and religious fundamentalism are juxtaposed to invalidate religious women’s choice for modest dressing. Eisenberg challenges many of the assumptions and misconceptions regarding modest clothing:

The moment someone catches a glimpse of my covered limbs and maxi skirts, they tell me how oppressed I am and how much I need to rebel against the patriarchal guidelines for

⁷⁶⁵ <https://www.ifdcouncil.org/how-orthodox-jewish-modest-wear-is-going-high-fashion/>

⁷⁶⁶ <https://www.ifdcouncil.org/how-orthodox-jewish-modest-wear-is-going-high-fashion/>

modest dress, designed by men to curb their sexual impulses....I used to feel that we belong to an age where a woman is free to dress, however she chooses. But I wonder – while Victoria's Secret Angels are free to go bare on the runway, am I no less free to cover up in public? In some quarters, "modesty" has come to mean sexual repression and religious fundamentalism. I like to think that I represent neither of the two phenomena.

Eisenberg reflects society's hypocrisy when it comes to dressing modestly. Western society views wearing a bikini as a sign of freedom, while dressing modestly is considered a symbol of oppression. From this perspective, society equates bikinis with freedom while equating modest clothing with oppression. In doing so, society continues to police what "free" women ought to wear. After pointing out this dilemma in the society, Eisenberg points out how modest clothing influences her life and people's attitudes towards her:

When I dress modestly, people treat me differently. Instead of inviting me to house parties or clubs, people instead invite for dinner or to a lecture. When I dress modestly, I treat myself differently. Instead of appeasing the promiscuous whims of teenage society, I find myself appeasing no whims, and instead I'm living up to my own religious convictions. The way people view me changes – and thus, their attitudes towards me do as well....In fact, I cover my body so that I may free myself from the often-unwanted male gaze and imagination, as well as from increasingly sexualized fashion trends that often show off the human body in the most erotically charged way possible....I am liberating myself from the sexualization of my body in the clothes I wear and in the male mind.

Like many religious women who choose to dress modestly, Eisenberg says that she receives less unwanted sexual attention. Like Eisenberg, many religious women who embrace modest clothing have similar criticisms of the understanding of women's appropriate place in society, including the sexualization of women in the fashion industry, the portrayal of women as sexual objects, and the representation of the exposure of the body as empowerment of women. Through modest clothing, Orthodox women fulfill their religious requirements as well as put an end to the sexualization of women. Eisenberg also criticizes the assumption that women are *forced* to dress modestly. In her words, "although I'm a religious Jew, no one is forcing me to wear what I do. No male figure is dictating that I clothe myself a certain way because of someone's supposed sexual

appetite.”⁷⁶⁷ Ironically, religious women are expected to forgo modest dress in the name of liberating themselves from patriarchal culture, while the sexualization of women in non-religious dress reinforces patriarchy by encouraging the male gaze.

Chaya Sarah Silberberg, as the *rebbetzin* of the Bais Chabad Torah Center in West Bloomfield, Michigan since 1975, also describes what the word modesty means to her. According to Silberberg, we cannot reduce women to physical appearances. Women are more than that. Modesty laws enable women to focus their souls and skills rather than exposing their bodies. Silberberg explains:

Tzniut – modesty – has always been the hallmark of the Jewish woman, *Tzniut* in its greater sense is dignity and self-respect, an understanding of one’s intrinsic self-worth. When a woman acts and dresses in a *tzniut* way, she effectively tells the world that she expects to be judged as a human being with skills and capabilities, intellect and emotions, and not as a “piece of meat” that is being displayed to attract the attention of a buyer. Read the “suggested dress for women” section in any manual on how to apply for a serious job, and you will be amazed at how closely it correlates to the general laws of *tzniut*. Because the woman applying for a job is expected to be hired on the basis of her abilities, not her body.

In this context, Orthodox women avoid being reduced to a sexual object. They believe that dressing modestly provides women with self-esteem and dignity and guides people to focus on women’s skills rather than their bodies. Thus, Silberberg further contends that “any true feminist would actively encourage all girls and women to dress *tzniut*!”⁷⁶⁸ According to Orthodox women, modesty is liberating and empowering. They do not have concerns about meeting Western expectations of how women should dress in order to be defined as “free” women. They are concerned about the representation of Orthodox Judaism and Orthodox women on television. As stated above, they have begun to engage in more honest conversations about their everyday lives,

⁷⁶⁷ <https://www.aish.com/ci/w/Why-I-Choose-to-Dress-Modestly.html>

⁷⁶⁸ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/626355/jewish/Why-is-it-important-to-dress-modestly.htm

successes, and identity to debunk stereotypes of oppression in a challenge to the representation of Orthodox women and Orthodox Judaism in the Netflix series. Their main aspiration is to show that their understanding of modesty does not prevent them from following their dreams or exclude them from social life.

Chapter Ten: Muslim Women's Understanding of Modesty

Muslim women who embrace *adab* (Islamic modesty) and especially those who wear headscarves deal with misperceptions and stereotypes regarding their understanding of modest religious clothing. Today, regarding the term modesty, especially a picture of a burqa-clad woman, brings to mind the image of an “oppressed” Muslim woman. Although modest Muslim clothing, especially the practice of hair covering, is represented as a sign of oppression by media and political discourse, Muslim women consider it a crucial part of their identity. The modest clothing of Muslim women particularly for those who live in Western countries, serves as an identity marker. Like Orthodox women, Muslim women debunk assumptions and misperceptions circulating about the issue of modesty. We have already covered the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of hijab in Western media and politics fueled by the Orientalist discourse. However, this discourse is offensive to those who have chosen to dress based on their understanding of the modest religious code, *adab*.

Every Muslim woman has her own story of how and why she began to wear hijab and how she perceives the concept of modesty. Through social networks, they share their stories and their journeys. They not only create their own space to express their perceptions of modesty but also assert agency. For example, Muna Abdi mentions how hijab became a part of her identity: “I wore the hijab at a young age. My mother wore it, my aunts and sisters wore it. All the female adults in my presence wore it. I knew why a Muslim woman wore the hijab, the reasons behind the

teachings, but it took me couple years of self-reflection to come to terms that yes, I am my hijab, and my hijab is me.”⁷⁶⁹ As a feminist, Abdi expects to debunk hegemonic views of Muslim women as powerless victims and of hijab as a sign of oppression with the following statement:

What I want folks to stop doing is assuming Muslim women are oppressed. I am a feminist, and for me, I choose to cover my body and celebrate it. And with that, we all celebrate our differences. Women from different cultures may dress modestly with their cultural-infused taste. A woman from Pakistan will dress different compared to a woman from Somalia. Both modest, both culturally infused styles.⁷⁷⁰

The diversity in Muslim countries in terms of modest clothing can be seen in any American mosque or Islamic center. Not only do women’s modest clothing choices themselves vary depending on a range of factors, but so does their understanding of modest clothing. Unlike the Orientalist assumption, Abdi also highlights that she has power over her body and willingly covers her body.

Jana Al-Akhras, a lawyer living in Ohio, talks about her journey of wearing hijab:

I chose to wear a hijab when I was about 13 years old. My reasons have varied over the years, but at this point, my hijab is one of many ways I choose to express myself. Every day we make conscious choices as to how we wish to be perceived by those around us — and I choose to be perceived visibly as a Muslim woman. I am proud of my faith, and I’m happy to be a symbol of it. Wearing long sleeves and pants even through the summer, making small adjustments to let current fashion work for me, all while wrapping a hijab on my head and staying on trend.

Al-Akhras views the hijab as an identity marker. Al-Akhras also mentions what modesty means to her: “Modesty varies between cultures — in some spaces, it is a commonplace to show more skin, in others the opposite — but I think the constant theme is not being ostentatious.” Like many Muslim women, Al-Akhras takes the word modesty in a broader sense. In her words:

I view modesty in the same way I view humility, and it encompasses far more than your dress; it's about how you carry yourself, how you speak to those around you. To me, modesty in fashion is less about how much you cover, and more about how you present

⁷⁶⁹ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

⁷⁷⁰ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

yourself. Hijab does not define modesty because a simple piece of cloth will never accomplish that on its own — rather it is the individual who gives the hijab its meaning.⁷⁷¹ According to Al-Akhras, modesty pertains to both clothing and behavior. Like others, she rejects the popular idea of reducing modesty to clothing alone. More importantly, the concept of modesty may be understood and practiced differently. Meriam Waqas also shares her story, which is quite different from the widespread assumption that Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. Waqas had to deal with the opposite struggle. Waqas’s story debunks the myth of how Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. Waqas was raised in a culture where the hijab is not commonly practiced. Waqas explains her understanding of hijab and her struggle and fights over her choice of wearing hijab:

The hijab is meant to serve as a positive force in your life. For me, it means serving as an ambassador for Islam in the most colorful way possible. Unfortunately, I think the idea of ‘modesty’ in Islam has been, to a degree, corrupted by the traditions of those who practice the faith. One side of my family is conservative Pakistani, with them, being modest doesn’t require a hijab, and instead subservience and a soft tongue. Needless to say, I think that wearing a hijab made me the opposite of a traditional modest Pakistani girl. It made me brave and confident enough to voice my opinions and fight for what I believe in....Luckily, I come from a line of resilient and fiercely independent women, so I don't pay much attention to those who try to bring my self-confidence down.⁷⁷²

Waqas’s case shows that Muslim women’s experience of wearing hijab might be various. It also indicates the existence of some Muslim cultural spaces where the hijab is not required or even discouraged. Obviously, understanding modesty in the Muslim world is not monolithic. Another Muslim woman, Fahmide Kamali, regards hijab as a part of her identity as well: “My hijab has become so much of my personal identity that I can’t imagine life without it. The experiences I have had while wearing my hijab have shaped me into the person I am today.”⁷⁷³ It is safe to say

⁷⁷¹ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

⁷⁷² https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

⁷⁷³ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

that modest clothing, especially the practice of hair covering, becomes not only an indicator of personal piety but also a visible sign of Muslim identity for many Muslim women.

Several Muslim women contend that the popular assumption that Muslim women have no choice but to cover up their bodies and hair disregards women's agency and depicts Muslim women as victims without the ability to make their own choices. Thus, many Muslim women have shown a willingness to share through social media their lives, their understanding of modesty, and the role that modesty played in shaping their lives and identity. For instance, Zahra Aljabri, living in Manhattan and the CEO and co-founder of Mode-sty which offers modest fashion to women worldwide, rejects these assumptions:

As a Muslim woman who not only dresses modestly, but also wears a head covering, I am oft-caricatured as oppressed. The implicit assumption is that some man in my life — father, husband or brother — has forced me to dress this way. This assumption is doubly degrading, because it connotes that I have no independent reasons for choosing to dress modestly and it calls into question my ability to think and act freely on other issues. It is a caricature that is deeply offensive: it paints a picture of Muslim women who, at best, are meek, and, at worst, brainwashed.⁷⁷⁴

Like other religious women, Aljabri stresses that the idea of forced modesty ignores women's agency and their free choice of modest clothing. Equating modest clothing and hijab with oppression is a reflection of an Orientalist understanding of Muslim women. Orientalist discourse portrays Muslim women in hijab as victims, and they are in need of saving from their “backward,” “oppressive” religion and their men. Moreover, to be “modern,” and “free,” women need to take off their hijab. As in Egypt, hijab was used as a tool of resistance to the colonial administration and Orientalist discourse which assumed hijab as a sign of “backwardness” and “oppression.” In other words, Muslim women in colonized Muslim countries utilized the hijab to challenge colonial and hegemonic discourse. Even today, the hijab serves as an instrument to challenge Western

⁷⁷⁴ <https://medium.com/muslim-women-speak/modesty-does-not-equal-oppression-fc92de6ff11a>

perceptions of beauty standards and sexual exploitation of women bodies. Unlike Orientalist images of Muslim women, Aljabri states that “I feel empowered and liberated by how I’ve chosen to dress.”⁷⁷⁵ As mentioned in previous chapters, the myth of forced modesty is prevalent in politics and media. Aljabri further explains:

These assumptions tear down the humanity of Muslim women as independent-thinking, intelligent beings, and cast modesty as a backward, old-fashioned practice that doesn’t fit with “modern” life. In fact, modesty is a value that is extolled in all the world’s major religions including Christianity and Judaism; it is a virtue that is widely practiced by modern women around the world.⁷⁷⁶

As Aljabri puts it, modest clothing and modesty are accepted as a value not only by Muslims, but also by Christians and Jews as well and by some secular women. She challenges the idea that modest clothing is “old-fashioned” and “repressive.” It is okay to dress modestly and also look fashionable. She also tells us her understanding of dressing modestly: “dressing modestly is a subtle reminder that far more important than my dress is my character: my treatment of others, my response to adversity, my support of those in need.”⁷⁷⁷ In doing so, she delivers a message to emphasize that her character and personality are more important than her body. She also criticizes other assumptions regarding Muslim women and Muslim modest dress code for women in politics:

Due to this shallow, narrow-minded and erroneous view of modesty and Muslim women, we are occasionally subject to absurd proclamations, assumption and rulings: in sports, claiming wearing longer-length pants or head-covering is a “safety” issue, or Donald Trump suggesting that Gold Star mother Grazala Khan was not allowed to speak at the Democratic convention. The most recent of these incidents played out over the last few weeks or so in France. In that country, the associations of modest dress have become more sinister, leading the Mayor of Cannes to believe that wearing a full-coverage swimsuit, or “Burkini,” as people were calling them, is a symbol of ISIS. Gallantly, the Mayor of Cannes decreed that, we Muslim women, don’t need to be under the control of those men (who they believe are oppressing us) and “set us free” by asserting his control over us and demanding we show more skin when on his beach.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁵ <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2016/12/133247/modest-dress-muslim-women-empowerment>

⁷⁷⁶ <https://medium.com/muslim-women-speak/modesty-does-not-equal-oppression-fc92de6ff11a>

⁷⁷⁷ <https://medium.com/muslim-women-speak/modesty-does-not-equal-oppression-fc92de6ff11a>

⁷⁷⁸ <https://medium.com/muslim-women-speak/modesty-does-not-equal-oppression-fc92de6ff11a>

Unlike these assumptions, Saulat Pervez, writer, researcher, and educator in the Washington, DC-Baltimore area, states that many Muslim women willingly wear hijab and modest clothing for religious reasons. Pervez states that “Muslim women wear the hijab to seek the pleasure of God and to uphold Islam’s code of modesty. The majority of women who wear hijab consider it a constant reminder that they do not adorn their bodies for men.”⁷⁷⁹ Namely, they see it as a religious requirement. Perves also underscores that Islamic modesty is not just about clothing. In her words, “More than a dress code, the hijab encompasses modest behaviors, manners, and speech. The inner humility as exhibited through etiquettes and morals completes the significance of the physical veil,” and more importantly, “contrary to popular belief, these characteristics are not limited to women alone.”⁷⁸⁰ In this sense, Pervez highlights that modesty rules in Islam apply to both women and men. Pervez dismantles the assumption that Muslim women are forced to wear modest clothing. She points out the media’s role in circulating misconceptions regarding modesty and Muslim women with the following statement:

Generalizations and stereotypes about Islam and Muslims are rampant in today’s society and, by extension, in the minds of many people whose worldview is shaped by the media. Muslim women in hijab are frequently stigmatized; they are regarded on the one hand as oppressed and, on the other, as religious fanatics. Due to such misconceptions, unfortunately, the larger society fails to acknowledge and appreciate Muslim women’s courage in standing up to societal norms in their determination to preserve their modesty.

Like many Muslim women, she shows that Muslim women choose to dress modestly. Muslim women do not consider modest clothing oppressive. She agrees that the media continues to portray Muslim women with Orientalist images. Unlike Orientalist discourse on modest clothing, however, according to her, “the primary motivation for wearing the hijab is to obey God.”⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁹ <https://www.virtuousprom.com/modesty-a-muslim-perspective/>

⁷⁸⁰ <https://www.virtuousprom.com/modesty-a-muslim-perspective/>

⁷⁸¹ <https://www.virtuousprom.com/modesty-a-muslim-perspective/> Saulat Pervez’s article, Hijab in Islam: Modesty, Humility and Dignity, published on whyislam.org as well.

Similarly, Iman Dobouni, a modest fashion blogger and a training and development manager at Canary Consulting in the Oregon District of Dayton, rejects the assumption that Muslim women are oppressed due to hijab. According to her, rather than being a sign of oppression, hijab is a sign of empowerment and a part of Muslim women's identity.⁷⁸²

Nabiila Bee, the popular YouTube star, Instagrammer and fashion blogger, talks about her account of modesty: "to me, modesty is more than just the way you dress, it's also about the way you carry yourself in public and how you treat other people."⁷⁸³ Thus, modesty has two aspects: modesty in dressing and modesty in behavior. According to Leena Asad, a Palestinian-American nurse in Texas and the owner of a modest fashion blog, the concept of modesty "means behaving and dressing in a way that displays self-respect. By showing a sense of decency in the way you act and the way you present yourself, you will naturally find that others respect you as well."⁷⁸⁴ An American Muslim woman from Detroit, style/fashion blogger, model, writer, novelist, and body-positive activist, Leah Vernon defines the word modesty in this way:

To me, modesty is internal. A connection between you and God. I believe once you embrace modesty on the inside, it will simply radiate outwards. Modesty just isn't about the clothes or hijab (Islamic head covering) but it's a way of life. Although, I'm not the most modest Muslimah out there, I do try every day to incorporate modest pieces into my wardrobe and keep it stylish and fresh.⁷⁸⁵

Many Muslim women give the concept of modesty a very deep meaning. They reject its reduction to clothing alone. Moreover, they do not view it as exclusively applicable to women. More importantly, according to them, modest clothing is a symbol of empowerment rather than of

⁷⁸² <https://www.bizjournals.com/dayton/news/2020/12/18/diversity-and-inclusion-iman-dobouni.html>

⁷⁸³ <https://www.artizara.com/pages/what-does-modesty-mean-to-you>

⁷⁸⁴ <https://www.artizara.com/pages/what-does-modesty-mean-to-you>

⁷⁸⁵ <https://www.artizara.com/pages/what-does-modesty-mean-to-you>

oppression. Ikhlas Hussain, owner of the popular Islamic fashion blog *The Muslim Girl*, expresses what modesty means to her:

To me, modesty means guarding and covering your private parts and dressing in a way that covers your body. But it's more than just a way of dressing, but it's also a way of behavior. So to be modest doesn't only pertain to the clothes on your body but also the way you act, in a way that is unassuming, polite, kind, and humble.⁷⁸⁶

Like others, Hussain takes the concept of modesty broadly. Her account of modesty encompasses both clothing and behavior. Similarly, Louisa Gardner, a white convert to Islam, states, "Modesty isn't just for women and our bodies. It's for men and their behaviors and words, too." Gardner also stresses the importance of spiritual modesty: "Part of the thing that brought me to Islam is the beauty of modesty. Not physical modesty, although I value that too. A spiritual modesty."⁷⁸⁷ Maryam Asadullah, modest fashion blogger and entrepreneur of a scarf collection from Texas, expresses how she perceives the word modesty with the following statement:

Modesty for me goes beyond just the meaning of dressing conservatively and hiding skin/hair. For me, modesty is in my speech, in my thoughts, and in my outlook on life. Modesty is not something that is mandated to me, rather, it is something I choose to be. Modesty in its full form is simplicity, kindness, selflessness, and acceptance. It's the behavior you set out that brings positivity to the people and situations around you!⁷⁸⁸

Like many Muslim women bloggers, Asadullah believes that modesty is more than a way of dressing. She also points out that dressing modestly is by her choice, not by force. Layla Abdullah-Poulos, a Muslim blogger, considers modest clothing a religious requirement and a crucial part of Muslim identity. As Abdullah-Poulos puts it, "for many Muslim women, hijab serves as an act of worship and hallmark to their identities. We cover our heads and relegate the way we dress to adhere to mandates set by Allah (S) and His Messenger (saw) and to connect to our broader Muslim

⁷⁸⁶ <https://www.artizara.com/pages/what-does-modesty-mean-to-you>

⁷⁸⁷ <https://muslimgirl.com/modesty-isnt-just-for-women-and-our-bodies-its-for-men-and-their-behaviors-and-words-too/>

⁷⁸⁸ <https://www.artizara.com/pages/what-does-modesty-mean-to-you>

culture,” and more importantly, “women across the globe who choose to adhere to the Islamic directive of hijab do so in a range of beautiful and wonderful ways that demonstrate the faith’s diversity.”⁷⁸⁹ Thus, there are myriad ways for Muslim women to cover their hair. Like other Muslim women, Abdullah-Poulos mentions that modesty does not pertain simply to the practice of hair covering: “hijab is more than covering one’s hair. It is a style of modest dress and behavior (don’t forget behavior) in accordance with Islamic teachings and applies to women and men.”⁷⁹⁰ In this sense, according to her, modesty in clothing and behavior is a religious mandate for both women and men. It is worth noting that many Muslim women complain about double standards in the application of modesty to the two sexes. Sumaya Karimi addresses how men are required to fulfill Islamist modesty as well:

What is interesting is that when people think of modesty, they think of one's clothing, especially as it pertains to women, which is inherently sexist. It should be highlighted that there is a clear distinction between culture and religion. The Quran clearly states modesty for both men and women. In fact, the Quran emphasizes the modesty of the eyes first, in Surah Al-Nur (The Light), in which God commands men not to gaze at women lustfully. When in fact, in most cultures, including the west, the women are often blamed and held accountable for the actions of men in regards to rape culture. When in fact, as the Quran states, it is the men who should be held accountable for their actions and not gaze at women lustfully, regardless of the way they choose to dress.⁷⁹¹

Like Orthodox Jewish women, Muslim women criticize the understanding of women-exclusive modesty and double standards embedded in both religious communities and secular societies. Hassanah El-Yacoubi, a fashion blogger and PhD student living in California, highlights that by fulfilling religious requirements, Muslim women can both dress modestly and reflect their styles

⁷⁸⁹ <https://blog.hautehijab.com/post/stay-cool-my-sisters-7-muslim-women-on-managing-hijab-modest-dressing-and-hot-temps>

⁷⁹⁰ <https://blog.hautehijab.com/post/stay-cool-my-sisters-7-muslim-women-on-managing-hijab-modest-dressing-and-hot-temps>

⁷⁹¹ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

while remaining within Islamic guidelines. El-Yacoubi debunks the narrative that a modest dress code does not leave any room for women to distinguish themselves. El-Yacoubi writes:

Modesty is my opportunity to show just how beautiful it is to leave something to the imagination, and at its core is the fulfillment of what I believe to be a religious obligation. Modesty is not an indication of who is a better Muslimah, but rather is a chance to outwardly display your inner aspirations of your best self. While modesty is manifested differently from person to person, we can all agree that its central principal is to cover as opposed to reveal. After all, the most treasured possessions come in the most beautiful wrappings.⁷⁹²

Muslim women cover their bodies and hair in diverse ways. This diversity also serves as an indicator of how Muslim women perceive modesty differently and how, in fact, style can only emerge from variety.

Many Muslim women stress that it is possible to dress both modestly and fashionably in such a way that modest clothing does not mean wearing outdated clothes. There are several Muslim fashion bloggers and designers who point out that modest clothing and fashionable dressing do not conflict with one another. There are several Muslim fashion designers who contribute to modest fashion. Like Orthodox Jewish women, Muslim women navigate modest clothing and fashion according to religious guidelines of modesty. Melanie Elturk, a fashion designer who specializes in fashionable Muslim attire, states that she started her business, *Haute Hijab*, to design fashionable yet modest clothing for Muslim women who want to stay within Islamic guidelines while dressing with style. To do so, Elturk quit her job as a Wall Street attorney. As she says, “it was a product that women were starved for, a social empowerment piece, so I started designing good quality, beautiful hijabs.”⁷⁹³ She defines a fashionable yet modest hijab as “a social empowerment.”

⁷⁹² <https://www.artizara.com/pages/what-does-modesty-mean-to-you>

⁷⁹³ <http://www.arabamericannews.com/2017/09/29/modestly-stylish-muslim-women-succeed-in-the-fashion-world/>

Certainly, one of the biggest challenges for Muslim women is the question of how to balance modesty and fashion. When one tries to navigate Islamic modest clothing and fashion, rather than meeting Western standards of beauty, they expect to create their own style and standards through modest fashion designers and bloggers. Asma Karimi demonstrates how she navigates modesty and fashion:

I decided to wear the hijab solely based on my own personal choice. It was a huge step for me as an adolescent who was discovering her identity. When I first began wearing the hijab, I was not too comfortable in it since I was not familiar with incorporating it in my everyday wardrobe. However, over the years I began to grow a huge interest in fashion, which helped me develop my sense of style. I am proud to say that my hijab has impacted my life in a very positive way and has played a huge part in shaping my identity growing up, into the individual that I am today. By wearing the hijab I am not conforming to the societal beauty standards that are set for me to follow as a young woman. Rather, it is my way of resisting the negative social and political backlash as well as the societal expectations of how I should look or dress as a woman. In fact, wearing the hijab makes me feel beautiful, confident and resilient.⁷⁹⁴

In this context, hijab serves as a catalyst for resisting secular beauty standards and the negative portrayal of Muslim women embedded in society, politics, and media. In doing so, hijab becomes an identity marker for Muslim women, especially in Western countries. There are many Muslim modest fashion bloggers and influencers who create their unique modest styles both to navigate modesty and fashion and to challenge Western beauty standards. Maria Alia, a blogger living in New York, for example, describes her understanding of modest fashion: “Dressing modestly is a personal choice based on my cultural and religious background that makes me feel empowered despite the mainstream misconception of oppression (which is not the case for me) that comes with the hijab,” and more importantly, “Modest fashion means choosing to cover what I want to cover and show what I want to show without sacrificing style.”⁷⁹⁵ Another modest fashion blogger, Noor Elkhaldi, living in New York, thinks that modest fashion should not be the exclusive domain of

⁷⁹⁴ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

⁷⁹⁵ <https://www.whowhatwear.com/modest-fashion-muslim-women>

Muslim women. According to her, “modest fashion is not unique to Muslim women, and modesty can be perceived and interpreted in a myriad of ways.”⁷⁹⁶ Similarly, Yusra Siddiqui indicates how modest fashion can be defined in a variety of ways:

There is not a single definition to it because everyone has their own varying explanations of what modest fashion means to them, so it’s a broad idea that gets very narrow inside those two words. Shortly, modest fashion is the act of covering up on purpose. The decision to do so can be religious/ethnic fulfillment or to attain a certain aesthetic and level of ease. To me, it’s a choice that I’ve made to commit to my faith, and everything about it gives me a sense of freedom in how I choose to display myself. We’ve centered modest fashion around a specific type of woman that fits the media’s obsession with eurocentric ideals. In reality, there’s no cookie-cutter image for how a modest woman looks. Modest dressers are not attached to one religion, size, or race. If you’re going to create a conversation around modest fashion, you need to acknowledge that first and foremost.⁷⁹⁷

Siddiqui not only talks about the concept of modest fashion but also highlights that it is her choice to dress modestly, and modest clothing gives her space to represent herself as she sees fit through her choice of clothing. She also emphasizes that we cannot reduce the modest fashion to one religion and that there is not Asma Karimi talks about her mission as a modest fashion blogger: “I love sharing and showcasing my personal style on my Instagram account in order to make hijab wearing Muslim women more visible in the fashion world.”⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁶ <https://www.whowhatwear.com/modest-fashion-muslim-women/slide4>

⁷⁹⁷ <https://www.whowhatwear.com/modest-fashion>

⁷⁹⁸ https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/muslim-women-fashion_n_15411952

CONCLUSION

Through this study, I seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women perceive the concept of modesty and modest dress code, and how they challenge both the assumption that they are victims without agency and that a modest dress code is a sign of oppression, ideas deeply embedded in the dominant media and political culture of America. More importantly, I argue that despite similarities between Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women in terms of their understanding of modesty and the centrality of religion in their lives, Muslim women are represented far more extensively by an Orientalist discourse in mainstream media and politics. Also, I argue that Orthodox Jewish women are far less frequently the targets of discrimination on the basis of their choice to cover their bodies and heads. These double standards, discrimination, and Orientalist representations of Muslims in the American context due to their understanding of modesty also emerge from the historiography of Muslims in America. Before discussing the concept of modesty in the Orthodox Jewish setting and Muslim setting, I have provided a brief history of Jews and Muslims in America. The history of American Muslims is largely ignored, and the presence of the first arrival of African Muslim slaves in the sixteenth century is mostly dismissed by historians. Importantly, the history of Muslims in America is treated primarily as an immigrant experience. Muslims are marginalized and excluded from consideration as an American religion. Since the very beginning of settlement in North America, Muslims have never been seen as a legitimate part of the American fabric. Unlike early Jews who managed to maintain their identity and practice their religion by building cultural centers and synagogues since they immigrated to America, the first Muslims were unable to preserve their religious identity or to pass their religion on to the next generations due to their underprivileged situation as slaves.

I also have examined Jewish and Muslim reactions to modernity. The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist movements emerged and developed not only as a response to the challenges of modernity but also as an attempt to adapt Judaism to modernity. Given this diversity in Judaism, each branch has distinctive features and thus different understandings of modesty. Even Orthodox Judaism is not monolithic in terms of the concept of modesty. In this study, I have focused primarily on Orthodox Judaism due to their similarity with Islam in the understanding of modesty for women. Orthodox Judaism is considered the most traditional branch of Judaism since it requires its followers to adhere to a strict interpretation of Jewish Law when compared to other branches of Judaism. It is worth noting that, despite its strictness, many non-Orthodox Jews turn to Orthodoxy.

American Muslims' response to modernity is much more complicated than one might expect due to the diverse backgrounds of Muslim immigrants in America, including social, economic, political, cultural, national, and sectarian backgrounds. In America, Muslims' understanding of Islam and their reaction to modernity has been shaped by their mother countries' responses to modernity and their interaction with the host country, America. Importantly, in contrast to the Jewish response, the Muslim reaction has been fashioned by colonialism and imperialism. Muslim lands were invaded and colonized by Western imperial rulers. Colonialism and Orientalism played a major role in the advent of reformist and revivalist movements in the Muslim world. American-born Muslims also have attempted to respond to the challenges of modernity which is again distinct from Muslim immigrants' reactions since they never directly experienced colonialism. The lack of this particular traumatic experience has allowed them more space to balance religion and modernity as well as to break down the binary opposition tradition/modernity. Despite their positive attitude towards modern values, American-born

Muslims are still represented through Orientalist discourse in media and politics. Thus, American Muslims face much more religious discrimination than followers of other faiths do as the American public has a biased and negative attitude toward Muslims and Islam.

In order to understand the distinct American public perception of Jews and Muslims, I have analyzed how American media and politics represent Jews and Muslims. Notably, media and politics have had a major role in shaping how the American public perceives Jews and Muslims. Thus, it behooves us first to examine their representations of Jews and Muslims. Even though Jews experience antisemitic sentiments in the American context, the representation of Jews in general and of Orthodox women in particular in media and politics is quite different from that of Muslims. The portrayals of Muslims and Muslim women in media and political discourse are largely prejudiced and hostile. Muslims in general are depicted as terrorists in media and politics. Islam is portrayed as a backward and violent religion and Muslim women as oppressed victims in need of saving. The white-savior discourse and the image of the oppressed veiled Muslim woman embedded in media and politics have been used to justify the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially after the 9/11 attacks, as well as the passing of discriminatory legislation domestically.

The Muslim practice of head covering and modest clothing for women always lies at the heart of the representation of Muslim women since it is seen as a sign of oppression while removing it is a symbol of freedom. There has long been a popular assumption that Muslim women are forced to cover their bodies so that they have no agency. They need to be rescued from their violent religion and from their men. Particularly, in Europe, including France and Germany, the practice of head covering is regarded as a barrier to the integration of Muslim women into the larger society. Thus, Muslim women need to remove their hijab to be modern and free. This

understanding of hijab was also prevalent in colonial times. Today Muslim women and modest dress codes for women are still portrayed in Orientalist terms. The issue of head covering functions as an instrument for the process of othering Muslims and the construction of the discourse of “us” versus “them” in media and political discourse. The colonial construction of “us” versus “them” prevalent in media and politics and the American public is the continuation of a received Orientalism.

This negative and Orientalist discourse exacerbates the integration of Muslims into mainstream culture. On the other hand, Orthodox Jewish women who have a very similar understanding of modesty as Muslim women do and who also do not meet western beauty standards or the construction of “free women” are nonetheless not depicted by an Orientalist discourse. More specifically, media and politics, even academia, have been relatively uninterested in the Jewish practice of head covering or their modest dress code. This comparative approach to representations of Orthodox Jewish women and Muslim women in terms of the concept of modesty allows us to see how double standards and power dynamics work in media and politics. These stereotypical views of Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular shape both the American public’s perceptions of Muslims and Islam and their attitudes towards Muslim modesty. It also exacerbates Islamophobia in the American context.

I also have investigated how Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women address their understanding of modesty through social media. As mentioned earlier, even though Orthodox Jewish women are not specifically targeted by media and politics due to their choice of modest dress code, television shows have promoted negative images of Orthodox Jewish women. Jewish women who embrace Orthodox interpretations of modesty are very active in social media in order to challenge these shows’ misrepresentations of their lives. They have commenced the

#MyOrthodoxLife movement to debunk generalizations about their lives. They point out the centrality and significance of religion in their lives and their desire to dress modestly. Moreover, they underscore that modest clothing is empowering rather than oppressive. Their lived experiences and success stories while simultaneously following Orthodox interpretations of modesty counter the negative images of Orthodox Judaism portrayed on television.

Similarly, Muslim women debunk misperceptions and negative images in media and politics. They emphasize that dressing modestly is their choice and they choose to cover their bodies and hair by their own free will. Contrary to Orientalist discourse, Muslim women in the American context stress that wearing hijab is their choice and that the issue of hijab should not be used to argue that they are in need of saving. They reject white-savior discourse that has been used by politicians and media to justify military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this framework, their modest clothing choices challenge the continuing Orientalist representation of veiled Muslim women and allows them to resist societal beauty standards.

There are several similarities between how Orthodox Jewish women and Muslims express their understandings of modesty. They have created their own spaces in social media to talk about their lives and challenge stereotypes. They use similar discourse when it comes to how modesty shapes their lives and what modesty means to them. For instance, Muslim and Orthodox Jewish women both insist that modest clothing not only empowers them but also becomes an essential part of their identity. Both Jewish and Muslim women consider modest clothing as an identity marker that distinguishes them from other women. They also challenge Western or secular beauty standards and the sexual exploitation of women's bodies through modest clothing. They underscore that their personalities and skills are more important than their physical appearances. Despite all the misrepresentations and negative depictions of modest clothing embedded in Western culture,

they willingly continue to wear modest clothing. Thus, they assert agency by embracing modesty while at the same time challenging Western modern standards.

Most Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women do not reduce the concept of modesty to clothing. According to them, modesty in behavior is as important as modesty in clothing; the latter is considered an outward sign and a reminder of the former. Moreover, modesty applies to both women and men. Thus, modesty should not be a female-centered concept. By doing so, they also challenge religious authority, which tends to focus exclusively on modesty for women.

Both Muslim and Jewish women have similar concerns regarding modest clothing and fashion. They emphasize that modest clothing is not outdated. Modest clothing can be fashionable and chic. More importantly, they can dress modestly and still reflect their styles without violating their modest dress codes. They balance religion and modern values by navigating modest clothing and fashion within religious guidelines. Several modest fashion designers in both communities offer women myriad options to create their own styles and dress both modestly and fashionably. Their understanding of modesty is not monolithic. Their description of modest clothing is not the same. The diversity in their understanding of modesty functions as an indicator that they have a variety of options when they have made the choice to dress modestly.

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Türkçe Öz (Turkish Abstract)

Amerika Bağlamında Orthodox Yahudi ve Müslüman Kadının Tesettür Anlayışlarının

Karşılaştırılması

Bu tezde, (i) benzerlik ve farklılıkları tespit ederek tesettür kavramının Yahudilik ve İslam'da nasıl anlaşıldığı, yorumlandığı ve uygulandığına odaklanırken (ii) Ortodoks Yahudi ve Müslüman kadınların, seküler bir toplum olan Amerika'da, tesettür kavramını nasıl algıladıklarını inceliyorum. Tesettür kavramının, özellikle de başörtüsü uygulamasının büyük ölçüde, kamu düzeyinde bir baskı and gericilik işareti olarak görüldüğü Amerika'da yaşayan Ortodoks Yahudi kadınların ve Müslüman kadınların, tesettür kıyafet kurallarını nasıl anlamlandırdıkları sorusunu ele alıyorum. Daha spesifik olarak, Amerikan ana akım medyasının ve siyasi söyleminin tesettür kavramına karşı olumsuz ve oryantalist temsillerine rağmen, dindar kadınlar bu klişeleşmiş varsayımlara ve oryantalist söylemlere meydan okuyor. Sesini duyurmak için sosyal medyayı kullanarak, kendi irade ve seçimleriyle mütevazı giyindiklerinin altını çiziyorlar. Bunu yaparken, kadınlar yalnızca mütevazı giysiler giymeye zorlandıkları da dahil olmak üzere pek çok popüler varsayımlara meydan okumakla kalmıyorlar, aynı zamanda bunun kendi seçimleri olduğunu vurguluyorlar. Bu çalışmada, tesettür kavramını kullanıyorum çünkü bu terim iki kültür ve din arasındaki bağlantıları ve ortaklıkları keşfetmek için analitik bir çerçeve işlevi görüyor. Medya metinlerini, dergileri, haber raporlarını, blogları ve diğer dijital platformları inceleyerek anlatı analizi ve söylem analizi yapıyorum. Ayrıca, bu iki dinin Amerika'daki tarihini ve moderniteye olan tepkilerini ortaya koyup tesettür anlayışının nasıl bir ortamda şekillendiğini ve daha kompleks bir yapıya evrildiğini gösteriyorum. Bunlara ilave olarak, Ortodoks Yahudi kadını ve Müslüman kadının tesettür anlayışındaki yorumlama ve uygulamadaki artan çeşitliliğe değiniyorum.

Curriculum Vitae

Hatice Altundal-Erkmen

Email:

INTERESTS

Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, Colonization, Decolonization, Islamophobia, Modernity and Imperialism, Secularism, Comparative Religion and Culture, Gender and Sexuality, Middle East Studies and Languages.

EDUCATION

- PhD Indiana University (2015-2022)
Ph.D. Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures
Dissertation: Comparing Modesty in Orthodox Jewish Women and Muslim Women in the U.S
- M.A Columbia University (2012-2014)
Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies (MESAAS)
Thesis: An Examination of “Honor” Killings in Turkish Religious and Secular Media
- M.A Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey (2009)
Psychology of Religion
Thesis: Religious Orientation and Values of Adult Women
- B.A Uludag University, Faculty of Theology, Bursa, Turkey (2005-2009)
Thesis: Religious Identity and Perception of Other

EMPLOYMENT

- 2010-2011 Academic Advisor for International Students, Turkish Religious Foundation, Istanbul.
- 2012-2014 TA for Modern Turkish and Ottoman Turkish at MESAAS, Columbia University
- 2014-Fall semester TA for Arabic at MESAAS, Columbia University

LANGUAGE

Turkish	Native Speaker
Ottoman Turkish	Advanced (Reading and Writing)
English	Advanced (Speaking, Reading, and Writing)
Arabic	Advanced (Reading and Writing) & Intermediate (Speaking)
Hebrew	Intermediate (Speaking, Reading, and Writing)
French	Advanced (Reading)

SEMINAR

- Lecturer: The Studies of Islāmic Psychology in the West, Center for Values Education, Symposium, May 29, 2010.

TRAINING

- Center for European Union Education Youth Programme, Dedeman Hotel, Rize, 2006.
- IIIT Summer Student Program (SSP) in Islamic Studies, Virginia (Summer 2017)

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2014-2020: A full fellowship granted by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education for PhD studies in the US, which covers all expenses including tuition, travel, health, and living expenses during PhD studies.

2011-2014: A full fellowship granted by Republic of Turkey Ministry of National Education for MA studies in the US, which covers all expenses including tuition, travel, health, and living expenses during MA studies

2009: Graduate from Uludag University as a second-best student.

2008: Scholarship from Uludag University thanks to being a high honor student.

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