

Faith, Fashion and Femininity

Visual and Audience Analysis of Indonesian Muslim
Fashion Blogs

Aulia Rahmawati

School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Cardiff University

This thesis is submitted to Cardiff University in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my primary supervisor, Dr. Cynthia (Cindy) Carter because of her patience, support and belief I finally finished this study. Also to my second supervisor, Prof. Paul Bowman, his word of encouragement kept me going until the end of the journey. I am especially thankful for academic and administration staffs from Jomec-Cardiff University that have been extremely helpful in creating a stimulating and vibrant academic environment during the past four years.

I would also like to express my deep and profound appreciation to all my friends and colleagues in the department of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, especially class of 2012 that have been together with me all along the journey and adversity of PhD degree. We know that it is a long and sometimes a scary journey, but I've never feel lonely because of their companionship.

To my family in Indonesia, my parents, brothers and sisters-in-law that constantly encourage me, I am deeply grateful for. And foremost, to my husband Arif and my son, Marell, this thesis is dedicated for both of you. We have been battered and bruised along the way, and yet in the end we are standing still. I can't wait for our next adventure!

Abstract

Although a seemingly trivial subject, fashion blogs could be put into the same categories as other feminine genres such as magazines, soap operas and romance novels that have been shown by feminist scholars to be worthy of scholarly attention. This study argues that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are an important and rich cultural text where gender identity, religion, nation and class intersect in contemporary Indonesian society. Using feminist audience ethnography as the methodological approach, this research first analysed why women read Muslim fashion blogs; second, how readers negotiate the articulation of modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation; third, the motivations behind the blogging practise; and fourth, how bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment.

Using individual interviews, FGDs and archival study to gather data which can then be analysed thematically alongside visual analysis of several texts garnered from the most popular blogs in Indonesia, this study illustrates that Muslim fashion blogs are being consumed as leisure and pleasurable activities, and that such activities are also associated with hobbies and youthful activities in which my participants practised more frequently before marriage and children. Reading fashion blogs allows readers to escape from mundane domestic lives and serves as a space of resistance despite the visual representation that still conform to the state's gender ideology and traditional Islamic discourses of femininity.

Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs also illustrate that the integration of modesty (through the interpretation of the *hijab* and Islamic clothing) and modernity (through the influence of global fashion) is undertaken with ease and fluidity despite readers' criticisms of certain styles of *hijab*. Muslim fashion blogs represent the *hijab* as a middle ground between Islamic identity and modernity that, borrowing from Smith-Hefner (2007), is "neither traditionalist nor anti-modernist reaction". Finally, this study investigated Indonesian Muslim bloggers as neo-liberal feminine subjects where empowerment may be understood through the construction of self as business, with the private sphere, such as family lives, being treated as promotional tools through personal blogs.

This study offers academic contribution to the scholarship of Muslim women and social media by analysing that *hijab* or modesty as a religious practise is being shaped by the globalisation process and neo-liberalism and furthermore, how such transformation is represented and negotiated in the age of social media.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Is that really a PhD-worthy topic?” was the response I often heard from friends and colleagues asking what my research topic was. Not only that, but when I finally held my fieldwork interviews I received the same reactions from my research participants. They were fully aware beforehand that my research topic centred on Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. They just did not fully comprehend that I would have asked them why they read them and how much they enjoy their blog-reading activities. It seemed like blog reading, for most people, is regarded as a trivial activity and why they spend their time reading such blogs is not worth discussing, especially with an academic researcher. In fact, one of the participants stated that any other social media, such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook but excluding fashion blogs, are far more exciting.

Research around women and the consumption of the feminine genre such as romance novels, gossip magazines, tabloids and soap opera has been historically perceived as trivial and unworthy of academic pursuit. However, feminist scholars (Radway 1984; Ang 1985; Winship 1987; McRobbie 1991; Brown 1994; Hermes 1995) through their contribution have proven that not only the consumption of women’s genre is worthy of academic pursuit, but also the act of resistance of women to escape from the mundane domestic lives. Based on this observation, I strongly argue that Muslim fashion blogs are important sites to understand Muslim women in Indonesia through their everyday media consumption.

Muslim fashion blogs in Indonesia are a further proof that such texts have become trajectories to so many different layers from gender identity, religion, nation and class in

contemporary Indonesian society. They highlight the way the *hijab* or headscarf has become the modern Indonesian Muslim woman's choice of clothing, illuminating the nation's changing attitude towards Islam as a religion and *hijab* as a bodily practice. It is important to note that only 20 years ago it was associated with cultural backwardness and an inability to adapt to modern Indonesian society. What has been happening in France for some years now, specifically, that some schoolgirls have been threatened with expulsion from their schools for wearing their headscarves, was also prevalent in Indonesia not so long ago. *Hijab*, as any other Islamic symbolism, has been vilified and demonised in such a way that wearing the *hijab* might mean challenging authoritative regimes during the New Order authoritarian era. Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs show that the *hijab* and religious attire are no longer regarded as a threat by the government, at least not in Indonesian society. Wearing headscarves is now typically regarded as a personal choice and, in fact, a modern urban choice for Indonesian women who care about their faith just as much as they care about their appearances (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007).

Furthermore, scholars such as Fealy (2008), Heryanto (2008) and Wientraub (2011) argue that, in contrast to two decades ago in Indonesia, Islamic religion has been transformed into a popular industry, which is focusing upon audience pleasure and the commercialisation of religion. Others have argued that Indonesia, as in many other Muslim majority countries like Malaysia and Iran, has experienced what Asef Bayat (1996) calls post-Islamism, where the Islamic political role has been reduced and the relevance of Islam can only be measured by its compatibility with human rights, freedom of choice and modernity. Heryanto (2014) maintains that Indonesia has also experienced the rise of Islamic feminism in recent years, based around arguments supporting the freedom of Muslim women to play an active role in public.

In addition, Muslim fashion blogs also show the way in which fashion blogs have been used by Indonesian bloggers not only to share their narratives and experiences—offering readers a glimpse into their homes and domestic lives—but also to pave their way into the more mainstream fashion industry. Some successful bloggers have also successfully launched their own Muslim fashion collections, building their names as Muslim fashion designers in Indonesia. It all started from their personal fashion blogs, with daily outfit-of-the-day posts that in the end brought them economic advantages. Muslim fashion blogs also prove that entrepreneurship has been made possible for women by the advancement of the internet and the growth of social media; blogs are one example of these.

Globally, Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are part of bigger transnational phenomenon of the fashion blog. Being a fashion blogger has become a desirable profession; major fashion weeks in New York, Paris and Milan, for instance, have collaborated with various renowned fashion bloggers such as Susanna Lau, Tavi Gevinson and Scott Schuman. Britain, Europe and America have also witnessed the emergence of Muslim fashion bloggers, such as Hana Tajima and Dina Tokio in the UK who have become the face of the next generation of British Muslims. I argue that Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers were inspired by these phenomena and aspired to imitate the same degree of success. However, what makes Muslim fashion blogs interesting is how the Islamic religion is significantly represented and permeates the textual representation of fashion as bloggers deal with the conventions and values of Islam. How religion, nationality, gender, globalisation, and femininity intertwine with textual representation and, furthermore, how the audience consumes these blogs as part of their daily media routine are the foci of this research.

Up until this thesis was written, there was no significant literature that focused on fashion blogs, a striking contrast with its counterparts, political blogs or journalism blogs. Rocamora (2011) argues that fashion blogs have often been regarded as trivial and not academic-

worthy compared to other genres of web-blogging such as journalism blogs or political blogs. This research is the first comprehensive analysis of Muslim fashion blogs, one that not only uses visual analysis but also seeks to understand how the readers or audiences negotiate what they read and interpret in their encounters with fashion blogs. The research utilises visual analysis with audience interviews, as well as interviews with some renowned Indonesian Muslim bloggers. With regard to the latter, I wanted to see what motivated them to start their personal blogs which I then sought to link to the ways in which Muslim fashion blogs are part of the complex process of the creation of Muslim women as a neoliberal feminine subjects. This study will show that *hijab* or modesty as religious practise is being shaped and transformed by the globalisation process and neo-liberal economy and how such transformation is represented and negotiated within blogs as social media.

The aim of this study is to elaborate the visual representation of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs and to find out how the audiences or blog readers engage with them. In order to do that, this research employs visual analysis, along with focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with blog readers as well as the bloggers themselves to answer four central research questions: first, why do Indonesian women read Muslim fashion blogs and how they make sense of them?; second, how do readers negotiate the articulation of modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs?; third, what motivates the Indonesian bloggers to write Muslim fashion blogs and how do they respond to their readers; fourth, in what ways do Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment?

All research questions provide a broad analysis of Muslim fashion blogs through three different elements: the blogs themselves, blog readers and bloggers. By posing these four research questions, Muslim fashion blogs may be understood in terms of their visual

representation as well as the relation between such representation and readers. Each central research question is analysed in a separate chapter (chapter 4, 5 and 6).

Furthermore, this research hopes to provide a valuable contribution to the scholarship on fashion blogs, one that is still under-researched and often being seen as not worth thinking about, not to mention a PhD-worthy subject.

For the remainder of this chapter, section (1.1) discusses the historical context of Indonesia, from the colonialism through the 18th century to the country's independence in 1945, a few days after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Particular attention is paid to the development of Islamic practice and culture in public lives before and after 1998, since these two periods are monumental in Indonesian history and directly relate to the discussion and analysis section of this research. These two monumental periods are pertinent in illuminating the way Islam and religious expression, including the use of *hijab* changed dramatically. In addition to that, section (1.2) focuses upon the structure and organisation of the thesis and furthermore also highlights what is discussed and elaborated in each chapter.

1.1 Set the Stage: The Cultural and Historical Context of Islamic Practice in Indonesia

As religion and culture provide the historical and cultural background for this study, it is paramount to briefly note pertinent points in the history of Indonesia and how Islam has had a major influence on politics and culture in Indonesia.

This section begins with the period when Islam was introduced in Indonesia by Middle-Eastern traders followed by a brief overview of the country's period of colonisation that started in the 13th century and ended after the country's declaration of independence in 1945. From there I will examine a central turning point in Indonesia's recent history, a period in which there was considerable political turmoil, divided into three significant

periods: 1945-1969; 1969-1998; 1998 to recent years. These momentous years also mark changing relations between civil Islam and the government.

1. Pre-Islamic history to the Dutch East Indies (before the Republic of Indonesia)

Despite being a Muslim majority country (85 percent out of 255 million)¹, there has never been a need to manifest Islamic law into the State's constitution. In fact, many would argue that Indonesian Muslims are considered to be tolerant and multi-cultural since Indonesia inherited the legacy of the two largest Buddhist and Hindu Kingdoms: *Srivijaya* (7th to 11th century) and *Majapahit* (12th to 15 century). Majapahit, in its golden era, conquered most of the Southeast Asian region which in the end became Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, East Timor and Southern Thailand (Sarkar 2001).

Indonesia used to be called *Svarnadvipa* or the island of gold (Shetty cited in Sarkar 2001), not because of its gold mining but because of its spices. Indonesia is an extension of India; therefore, it used to be called the East Indies or Far East Indies. Not only did the land produce spices just like India but pre-Indonesia also shared similarities with India regarding the religion, culture, art and architecture (Brown 2003).

It has been argued by Kumar (1979, pp.1-3) that the Islamisation of Indonesia could be explained by three different theories. First, as Kumar stated, the occupational theory. This states that Islam came to Indonesia through spice trading with Muslim traders from India and possibly the Middle East. Secondly, through Muslim missionaries who deliberately attempted to convert people to Islam, described as the religious theory. Thirdly, Kumar noted a more recent explanation, the political theory which explains that Islam came to Indonesia through the need to ally with other Muslim kingdoms in the neighbourhood as

¹ Recent survey by the National Bureau of Statistics stated by the year 2015, Indonesia population is 255 Million with 85 percent identified as Muslims.

well as in the far West as a struggle to regain sovereignty from the old Hindu and Buddhist Kingdoms which had already ruled for centuries. Furthermore, how deeply Islam is practised in Java and Sumatra, the two main islands in Indonesia, also varies. Sumatran people are considered to be stricter in practicing Islam whereas Javanese people had a more relaxed attitude, syncretising Islam with Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

In *The religion of Java*, Geertz (1960) divided the way communities in Java practised Islam into three main categories: *santri*, *abangan* and *priyayi*. The first category *santri* defines people who practice Islam strictly, usually because they are schooled in Islamic boarding schools or were trained to be Islamic scholars and missionaries. The second category, *abangan*, mainly consists of farmers and peasants who have loose beliefs in practising Islam and believe more in the mythic and old Javanese tradition. The third category, the *priyayi*, were bureaucrats and aristocrats, the elite communities who loosely practised Islamic syncretism with Hindu traditions combined. Until now, the way in which Islamic rituals are practised and adapted has varied from one community to another, influenced by the localities and sometimes ethnicities.

As was observed by Ricklefs (1981), European people began to colonise Indonesia (when it was still known as the East Indies) in the beginning of 16th century, especially the Dutch. For almost three and a half centuries. The Dutch used their trading company (VOC or Dutch East India Company) to import spices and other natural resources. The company became so powerful that it could regulate the local *sultanates* or localised kingdoms around Indonesia, even legalising forced labour and slavery.

During the colonisation period, Islamic organisations were established out of the struggle of nation's sovereignty. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) argued that a nation is imagined in that its members are collectively aware of its membership without necessarily having direct interaction as a nation. The development of radical publications

and underground media during these times also developed a sense of national identity and patriotism that, as one nation, Indonesian citizens should have been taking part in the nation's effort to fight for its sovereignty (Anderson 1991). Latif (2005) remarks that the rise of the Muslim intelligentsia, the most notable of the political parties, Islamic organisations and social organisations helped raise the nation's awareness of its centuries of colonisation. For Latif (2005, pp 14-29) the notion of a Muslim intelligentsia refers to the collective social stratum made up of modern and educated individuals who are intellectually aware of Western enlightenment and knowledge. This is different from the concept of the intellectual, which refers more to the individual rather than collective effort, although both terms are often used interchangeably. *Muhammadiyah* (1918) and *Nahdatul Ulama* (1926) have been the two largest Islamic organisations up until today in Indonesia, specialising in public education, health and social charities which suggests that the Muslim intelligentsia have always been a powerful social and political source of Indonesia's path to independence.

In terms of gender equality, the two aforementioned Islamic organisations have played a tremendous part in women's welfare development. Through its female-led arms, *Aisyah Muhammadiyah* and *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama*, the two organisations have specialised in the development of women's welfare, especially in health, reproductive reform and education. Up until now, *the Aisyah Muhammadiyah* and *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama* are still considered as the two largest female-led organisations in Indonesia, taking an active part in influencing the development of gender equality and feminism in Indonesia.

2. From The Independence to The Dawn of the Old Order (1945-1968)

Indonesia claimed its independence on 17 August 1945, a few days after the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings. Before the declaration of independence, Indonesia had been occupied by Japan for more than three years. Japanese occupation created the forced

labourer group called *romusha*, which resulted in a death rate of almost 80 percent of forced-labourers, often including women and children. This was far worse than any other labour force since Allied occupation. After the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings, which resulted in the absence of governance in the capital, Jakarta, founding fathers, Soekarno and Muhammad Hatta, proclaimed the country's independence. The two founding fathers were then to become the country's first president and vice-president.

During the early years of the nation's sovereignty, Islamic political parties, along with the Muslim intelligentsia, played a central part in the development of the nation's narratives about itself (Latif 2005). Parliament and the rest of the bureaucracy became a representation of the diversity of religion, ethnicities and localities, although towards the end of the Old Order government led by General Soeharto that diversity had given way to authoritarianism (Crouch 1979). It has also been noted by Mcvey (1965) that the Communist Party (PKI), supported by the army, had considerable power and therefore tended to dominate in government. Islamic parties were cast out and became the minority; some were banned as political parties.

However, the dominance of the Communist Party weakened. Beginning in 1965, there were massacres of those who were suspected to be members or allies of the Communist Party (Aspinall 2013). The Old Order was overthrown by the army, led by Lieutenant General Soeharto. President Soekarno, who had reigned since Independence Day, was under house arrest until he passed away in 1970. Thus the reign of the New Order led by future president Soeharto began (Crouch 1979). The Communist Party, along with all of its members and alliances were hunted, sentenced to death and the party was banned. One of the biggest Islamic organisations, the *Nahdatul Ulama*, along with its youth wing under the allied organisation *GP Anshor*, had played a central part in a "cleansing operation" of the Communist Party. It is estimated that the 1965 mass massacre resulted in the death of

approximately 500,000 people who were allegedly connected to this party (Mcvey 1965).

The party figures and leaders were sentenced to death. Since then, the New Order has prevailed.

3. From The New Order to The Reform Order (1968-1998)

National stability was restored after the massacre in 1965. Economic development and industrialisation became central to the programme of the New Order government led by General Soeharto. Crouch (1979, pp. 196-197) has argued that the New Order had brought “economic miracles”, far different from the near economic failure just few years before. In regards to this, he states that the New Order grew the economy “at an average rate of 7 per cent annually”. Furthermore, rice production along with the mining industry developed rapidly, especially the booming of oil production by 1970 (Crouch 1979). However, army officers were also given the authority to access the government administration including the economy. This led to massive corruption in the bureaucratic system along with a widening economic gap between the poor and the rich in the metropolitan cities. Muslim communities, as the largest majority in Indonesia, continued to be vilified by the authoritarian regime, being demonised as unable to keep up with the industrialisation by the more secular government (1979, p. 199).

Despite the efforts of the New Order to alienate the Islamic political parties, Islamic insurgences began in different parts in Indonesia (mainly in Java) and were inspired by the Islamic revolution in Iran in the 1970s (Wanandi 2002). Two pioneers of civil Islamic movements, Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholish Madjid, proposed the idea of *pararelism Islam* and *pribumisasi Islam*, suggesting that Islam has to be the principle of the nation’s building but also embracing universal values such as democracy, humanity and human rights (Dewi 2012). This social and cultural movement supported the idea that Islam, universalism and modernity could be manifested together and it was also supported by the

two biggest Islamic organisations, *Muhammadiyah* and the *Nahdatul Ulama* (Azra 2006). Student activists, especially in state universities around Java, fully embraced this Islamic cultural movement, signified by the increased visibility of female students who donned the *hijab*. It was when the government started to forbid the wearing of the *hijab* in public schools and government institutions that this 'new and dangerous' ideology became widespread. Such banning failed miserably following the continuous social movements which rejected this regulation. *Hijab* and other Islamic symbolism, like *abayas* and a long-beard, thus signify the rebellion against the authoritarian regime.

The economic crises that hit most Asian countries in 1998 had a major influence on the Indonesian civil uprising which resulted in the resignation of president Soeharto after months of street movements and demonstrations, which were predominantly initiated by the youth, college students and political activists. It has been argued (Aspinall 2013; Hadiz and Robison 2013) that the overthrow of the Soeharto's administration was not caused mainly by social movements and civil unrest but primarily due to the impact of economic crisis. Asia's economic crises in 1998 and the failure of Soeharto's administration to manage the situation played a major part in the civil uprising. The authoritarian regime which reigned for almost 32 years was finally overthrown in a period of economic collapse and high inflation. A general election was held within a year after Soeharto's resignation, under the guidance of interim President Habibie, Soeharto's former vice-president. Indonesia experienced the first taste of democracy in the success of general election in 1999. Abdurrahman Wahid, the former leader of the *Nahdatul Ulama*, and Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Soekarno, were elected as president and the vice-president.

4. The Reform Order and Islamic Culture (1998 - onwards)

Since 1998, Islamic culture has gained influence in the country. There has been an increased visibility in of the use of Islamic narratives and symbolism within public life. This

phenomenon is also reflected in the media industry by the burgeoning production of Islamic popular content. For instance, Islamic soap operas have been produced by every TV station, there has been a significant demand for Islamic women's magazines as well as Islamic-themed movies. This would appear to confirm a strong and growing public interest in the provision of Islamic popular media. The visibility of Islamic content in the mainstream media also inspired the development of a *sharia* economy, such as the *sharia* bank, Islamic Multi-Level Marketing businesses, even the development of *sharia* hotel chains.

That said, some scholars such as Fealy (2008), Heryanto (2008) and Wientraub (2011) have become sceptical of this development by suggesting that the various forms of Islamic themes are nothing more than industries trying to make money out of religion. That is to say, there is a suggestion that the rise of Islamic culture is a form of religion commodification which is focused solely on audience pleasure and economic interest rather than the substance of religion itself. Fealy (2008, pp. 27-28) observes that "growing consumption can be seen, in part, as a consequence of modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation". The modernisation and globalisation, along with the growth of the Indonesian urban middle class has resulted in competing identities where people are not only driven to be economically successful but also to embrace religiosity and inhabit Islamic values (Fealy 2008, p. 28). This era also saw the emergence of veiling practices amongst the Indonesian urban educated middle class to represent multiple self-identities that make up the modern self (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007). The booming of the Asian middle class also has been thought to have contributed to the growing number of urban middle class within Muslim communities in Indonesia. As Heryanto (2014, p. 33) observes:

"...the rise of urban middle class in Muslim communities around the world indicates that the growing class division within Muslim communities is a global phenomenon. The oil bonanza and greater access to education have led to expansion and political consolidation of

what, for want of a better term, has been commonly dubbed “the urban middle classes””

Furthermore, Jones (cited in Fealy 2008, p. 29) has suggested that the consumption of religious products also signified the representation of social class, combining the identity of a pious Muslim with middle class wealth. Heryanto (2008) suggests that the consumption of Islamic culture can be seen in the way the middle class “celebrate Islam as a symbol of wealth, modernity and lifestyle choice.” Additionally, Wientraub (2011) asserts that the growth of Islamic consumption in Indonesia has been made possible because the majority of Indonesian Muslims are moderate, hence they are open to the diversity and trans-national influences.

Asef Bayat (1996, p. 46) defines Post-Islamism as:

“a condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. As such, post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency to resecularise religion. In contemporary Iran, post-Islamism is associated with the values of democracy and aspects of modernity. It is expressed in the idea that Islam does not have answers to all societies’ social, political and economic problems. Post-Islamism implies an understanding that not only Islam is compatible with modernity, but its very survival as a religion depends upon achieving this compatibility. Yet, there also is a strong quest for an independent modernity.”

Furthermore, Bayat (1996, p. 47) argues that alternative thought with regard to Islamic principles and Islamic feminism are examples of post-Islamist development, a strand of feminism which tries to bind together gender equality and Islamic principles (which will be discussed further in the literature review in chapter 2). The growth of Islamism in Muslim majority countries like Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia, as Heryanto (2014, p. 42) argues, demonstrates that the newly-found religious consciousness in Indonesian Muslim communities has become a “major cultural and moral trend”. In Indonesia’s case, it was

especially pertinent after the New Order era when religion could be expressed more freely including through the use of *hijab* and other religious symbols.

To sum up, this section elaborated the historical context of Indonesia, especially Indonesian Islam and its recent developments. Despite taking an active part in the country's struggle over colonisation and gaining its independence in 1945, Muslim communities have been subjected to national oppression throughout the New Order administration from 1965 to 1998. The use of Islamic symbolism, such as headscarves was scrutinised and problematised until such vilification identified Islam as a threat to national security and the national development programme. Islam and the use of Islamic symbols were seen as symbols of backwardness and rejection of globalisation and industrialisation.

However, the last twenty years has been an era where Islamic expression is celebrated in public lives by the increased visibility of Islamic media content, including expressions of Islam such as the veiling practice. Some researchers have suggested that the emerging of Islamic expression is nothing more than popular culture where the media and entertainment industries are selling entertainment with Islamic packaging, while others have maintained that Indonesia is in an era of post-Islamism, as happened elsewhere in Muslim majority countries like Turkey, Iran and Malaysia, where religion has become secularised and Islamic principles have become more adaptable to modernity.

1.2 The Organisation of Thesis

This thesis contains seven chapters. The first, this Introduction, provides a brief overview of the historical context of Indonesia from the colonisation period, the country's declaration of independence to its more recent development. The historical context of Indonesia begins with the pre-Islamic history which is briefly explained to offer insights into why, despite being the Muslim majority country, Indonesian Muslims have been also considered

to be tolerant and multi-cultured. The significant portion of this section also examines the way in which the year 1998 to recent years marked an important momentum for Islamic resurgence in Indonesia since Islam has been clearly visible in public, including in the media, the way it has never been experienced before.

The literature review (chapter 2) elaborates on theories and scholarship within the four overarching themes of this study: feminism and femininity, gender in Islam, fashion, and fashion media. Each sub-chapter is divided further into smaller topics related to the overarching themes. The sub-chapters around feminism will focus specifically on the emergence of third world feminism and transnational feminism. The sub-chapter surrounding gender in Islam will explore the way in which gender is constructed in Islam and the way in which Islamic femininity is constructed around the ideas of domesticity and familiarity. This sub-chapter also explores the issue of the *hijab* and the female body and how the *hijab* has been subject to feminist and orientalist debates around the issue of female subjugation. The sub-chapter on fashion and modernity explores the way in which fashion has been used to articulate modern identity as well as marking social classes. The sub-chapter on fashion and the media situates my study alongside other minority studies on the subject of fashion blogs. This underdeveloped topic is a relatively new strand in fashion and cultural studies despite the rise of personal fashion blogs since the year 2000.

Chapter 3, focusing on the dissertation's research methods, begins by addressing its four research questions:

1. Why do women in Indonesia read Muslim fashion blogs and how do they make sense of them?
2. How do readers negotiate the articulation of modernity, modesty, motherhood, class and nation in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs?

3. What motivates the Indonesian bloggers to write Muslim fashion blogs and how do they respond to their readers?
4. In what ways do Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment?

The methodology used in this study, including a brief report on the pilot study which was done prior to the fieldwork, will also be discussed at length in this chapter. The methodology utilised is qualitative, focusing on the importance of 'interpretation' and the 'construction of meaning' among the subjects of research (blog writers and blog readers). This chapter also discusses the scholarship around the feminist methodology and previous research on feminist audience ethnography at length since my dissertation has benefitted tremendously from such studies especially in terms of methods chosen in the fieldwork stage.

Answering the first research question (RQ1) will be the focus of chapter 4. In this chapter, the reasons for why women read such blogs are elaborated in depth based on individual interviews and focus group discussions. Feminist audience ethnography and previous research on audience consumption of feminine genres is tremendously useful in this chapter to understand the way women are consuming fashion blogs in Indonesia. The appeal factor of fashion blogs will also be discussed here to illustrate readers' ambivalent connection with the bloggers. Insights drawn from Fan Studies research, such as an emphasis on understanding parasocial relationships and the rise of the micro-celebrity through popular television and social media, are beneficial to observe the connection and ambiguous relationship between the readers and the blogs they read.

Chapter five focuses upon the visual and audience analysis of Muslim fashion blogs. Here, the second research question (RQ2), which revolves around readers' negotiation of

modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation articulated Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, is addressed. Visual analysis, drawing on semiology, is used to look at the articulation of modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation, and this will be complemented with thematic analysis which is derived from 53 audience (blog readers) interviews. Literature concerning transnational feminism and Islamic feminism are employed, especially in section (5.1) and section (5.2) where the topics of modernity, modesty, and motherhood are discussed. Section (5.3) discusses the articulation of class and consumption and therefore literature on fashion and social class will be particularly highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter six moves the focus from text and readers and onto the bloggers. Here, the question (RQ3) on bloggers' motivation for writing blogs and the way in which they responded to and addressed criticism is addressed here. Foucault's (1988) notion of the technology of the self is used to theorise the act of blogging to better understand and examine the way Muslim fashion blogs serve as the bloggers' self-governed platform but, in addition, also facilitate the readers to further scrutinise women's appearances and bodily practices through comments sections. Section (6.3) specifically elaborates the fourth research question (RQ4) that observes the way in which bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment. Here, neo-liberalism as gendered processes will be discussed at length as analytical tools in observing Indonesian Muslim bloggers as neoliberal feminine subjects.

Chapter seven provides a critical summary and set of reflections on the dissertation research and explores a range of recommendations for further research on fashion blogs. This chapter also offers an assessment of the study's limitations, reflecting on the overall experiences of undertaking this research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In the previous chapter, I outlined the importance and significance of researching Muslim fashion blogs and their readers in Indonesia. I argued that research around fashion blogs, in general, has been very limited, and particularly with regard to the phenomenon of Muslim fashion blogs. A brief discussion of the history of Indonesia was provided in order to put historical and cultural context to my research. The historical background also demonstrated that the freedom to express Islamic practice in public life, i.e. the veiling practice in Indonesia, happened quite recently after the end of the dictatorship era. Oppression of Islam was the result of authoritarian government that often positioned Islam as being in opposition to national development and as a belief system rejecting globalisation.

In this part of the thesis, I outline and consider the pertinent academic literature to the study, through a focus on three central themes: firstly, feminism, secondly, gender and womanhood in Islam, and, thirdly, fashion and fashion media. In the section concerning feminism, the history of feminism and major strands of feminism as a social movement are discussed with special attention given to third wave feminism. Third wave feminism is the most recent iteration of a worldwide feminist movement, beginning in 1990s, and it has since paved the way for the development of transnational and Islamic feminism, two strands of which are used in the later findings and data analysis. This section also discusses the development of Islamic feminism in Indonesia, noting that while the term Islamic feminism might not widely recognised there, the struggle towards gender equality based

on an Islamic framework has been around through the proliferation of Islamic based organisations and political parties.

A sub-section on gender in Islam examines the construction of femininity in relation to the Islamic definitions and their articulations with marriage and motherhood. Femininity is discussed first, as a central issue of feminism where feminist scholars have not always agreed upon femininity as a form of oppression towards women and how to address it. This section then situates femininity within Islamic perspectives on marriage and motherhood. The way the *hijab* has been practised in Indonesia is also discussed later in this section to situate the narrative of the *hijab* as a form of religious piety and symbol of Islamic femininity, which also allows the multiplicities of identities and self-expression.

Fashion and fashion media are the focus of the third sub-section where fashion is discussed in relation to modernity, self-identity and social class. The work of Elizabeth Wilson (2013) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984) are discussed at length since they give a foundation on how fashion became a source of individualism and modernity and, in turn, how fashion is linked to class and taste. This section also looks at the way in which Islamic or modest fashion exists alongside modernity, challenging the perception of Islamic fashion as overly conservative, unfeminine and dull. Islamic fashion, especially in relation to growing consumerism in Indonesia, is further analysed suggesting that the *hijab* is considered as being part of an Indonesian middle class lifestyle which seeks to embrace individualism but also at the same time inhabit religious identity. This final section also discusses the fashion media, especially after the invention of social media. As the subject of research is Muslim fashion blogs, the development of fashion blogs and the recent trend of faith-based fashion web-blogging activities are explored further, including the emergence of Muslim fashion blogs in Indonesia.

2.1 Feminism: (Her)story and Trajectories

This section situates feminism as social and political movements that are signified by three historical movements, which later came to be called 'waves'. The discussion on third wave feminism continues within the elaboration of transnational feminism and Islamic feminism, certain strands of feminism that were born out of the complexities and multiplicities of women's struggles. The final sub-section focuses on the way in which Indonesian Islam has been subject to feminist struggle since the colonial period. Although the New Order administration exercised power and control over the woman's place as the husband's "complement," the feminist struggle has been thriving in the public sphere post-1998 with gender equality within Islamic teachings becoming the focus of some women's NGOs and Islamic organisations. These will be elaborated further in the forthcoming sub-sections.

2.1.1 Trajectories of the Feminist Movement

In *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks (2000, p.1) defines feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppressions." Toril Moi (1989, p. 116) proposes the definition of feminism as a "political label indicating support for the aims of the new women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s".

Although it was argued by Bryson (2003) that the feminist struggle has been present since the late 17th century in continental Europe and Britain, there are times where feminist efforts have become more prevalent in certain historical periods, or during certain "waves" (Freedman 2001). First wave feminism can be traced back to the late 19th until the mid-20th century, focusing upon the rights of suffrage, to own properties and have equal education (Tong 1998; Freedman 2001; Bryson 2003). The publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792 was pivotal in providing the foundation of

liberal feminism, the dominant feminist ideology during this time period. Considered to be the canonical text for the first wave movement of feminism, this publication highlights the importance of women's education, employment, rights to own property and their personal protection under civil law (Bryson 2003, p. 17).

While liberal feminists argue that legal and political structures must be changed in order to achieve gender equality, radical feminists have insisted that would not be sufficient (Tong 1998, p.2). Rather, as Tong (1998, p. 23) argues, radical feminists believe that "the social and cultural institutions (like family, the church and the academy), must also be uprooted". Radical feminists also stress their struggle in the arenas of sexuality, gender and reproduction, focusing upon "sex and gender as the fundamental causes of women's oppression" (Tong 1998, p. 46). The feminist movement in the United States during this time also made Black women's suffering and the abolition of slavery the focus of their agenda (Bryson 2003).

Second wave feminism emerged in the US and the UK during the 1960s to 1970s after the Second World War. Although it is rather impossible to determine a single issue as the focus of the second wave feminists since there are many strands of feminism, it is safe to say from the publication of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politic* (1970), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1983), and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953), that sexual politics was one of the major pivotal issues in this second wave. With the slogan the 'personal is political', feminist action was needed to change the way women have been subjected to domesticity. The struggle against patriarchal oppression thus operates on a personal level as well as societal, including issues such as marriage, family, reproductive rights and sexuality. Second wave feminists could be identified by the way they perceived that the problems women face come from sex based oppression. Women, as Friedan (1983) pointed out, have been the victim of the cult of domesticity promoted by magazines and advertising

and are constantly taught that their happiness lies in raising children and serving their husbands.

Second wave feminism has also been subject to many criticisms, most notable in that it mainly focused on middle class white privileged women and excluded women of colour and other ethnicities (bell hooks 2000). hooks (2000, p. 44) argues that the problem with the feminist movement during the second wave was that it:

declared that they have the movement, that they were the leaders and the rest of merely followers. Parasitic class relations have overshadowed issues of race, nation, and gender in contemporary neo-colonialism. And feminism did not aloof from that dynamic.

Scholars such as Saul (2003) and Pollit (2006) also argue that different women face different challenges and the second wave only focused on a one fits all approach. The disrespect for culture and systems of belief, argued by Pollit (2006), is one factor which caused a feminist backlash. Another point of criticism arises within the territory of the way a 'woman' is defined by the feminine characteristics. As Gillis, Howie and Munford (2004, p. 1) point out, "the elusiveness of this category of 'woman' raised questions about the nature of identity, unity and collectivity". Feminism should be inclusive and fluid and therefore should acknowledge different women's experiences and social positions. This awareness would be the basis of the emergence of third wave feminism in the 1990s.

Third wave feminism has been used as a term to separate it from and to differentiate from the tradition of second wave feminism which was criticised as being a white, privileged feminist movement. Instead, third wave has been used to describe the feminist movement that emerged in different parts of the world from different racial and ethnic groups, nationalities, religions, and economic classes. As has been discussed above, the older generation of feminists have been criticised for only acknowledging the struggle of the white

middle class women to the exclusion of other women's experiences in different parts of the world.

As Heywood and Drake (2004, p. 13) point out, the third wave agenda is partially shaped by "economic globalisation and techno-culture and by bodies of thought such as post-modernism and post-colonialism". Since the 1990s, the world has experienced the flow of globalisation and the spread of technology which has shaped and reshaped the new forms of feminism. As a result, many layers and strands of feminism have emerged during these times including transnational and Islamic feminism. The following section is dedicated to elaborating on these strands.

2.1.2 Third Wave Feminism and Transnational Feminism

The monolithic tendency of second wave feminism has become the central critique which drove the momentum of the third wave movements in the 1990s. As hooks (2000) stated, white-middle class problems and white feminists have become the face of the movement while other races and working class feminists seem to be getting lost on the radar. Feminist theorists like herself, Gloria Anzaldua, Audre Lorde and Gayatri Spivak highlighted the importance of drawing feminism into micro-politics and hence have made issues around race, social class, third-world problems, and sexuality central to their agenda. Therefore, the newer generation feminists were eager to distance themselves from their older counterparts and acknowledge that women come from different ethnic backgrounds, social classes, sexualities and religions, and hence put their efforts into understanding the multiplicity of the lives of women.

Among the feminist strands that emanated from the third wave agenda is transnational feminism. Transnational feminism specifically driven the intersections of race, gender, nationhood, religions, as well as economic exploitation which are affected by the

globalisation process (Woodhull 2004; Hedge 2013). Transnational feminism, as argued by Tong and Botts (2014, p. 246) is defined as:

Activism of various groups of women, whom mainstream Western feminist theory and practices traditionally marginalised, which directed feminist attention toward power difference rooted in the structure of race, culture, class, histories of colonisation and migration, sexuality, and so on. While this challenge to universal feminism has enabled more contextualised analyses of women's lives and opened new spaces for coalition building, it has unsettled traditional feminist demands for gender equality that were based on developmentalist and modernisation discourses.

Woodhull (2004, p. 256) further suggests that third world-feminists need to “take seriously the repressive effect of that process (economic driving globalisations), which stems from the operations of exploitative multinational corporations and transnational institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.” Radha Hegde (2013) further adds that globalisation is a heavily gendered process by which gender and sexuality interact with the Western ideas that are disseminated through the heavy flow of information and media platforms such as ideas of modernity. As modernity is related to anything ‘new’ and ‘moving forward’ and challenges tradition as ‘old’ and ‘needing to be left behind’, the conception of modernity thus usually conflicts with the local culture and tradition, and is manifested through consumerism (Rajan cited in Hegde 2013, p. 97). Global consumer culture has become the potential site of Western ideas of modernity which ended up targeting women as the recipients of this idea. Hedge gives examples of the proliferation of consumer culture with religion, most notably Islam. The image of modern Muslim bodies and the emergence of Muslim fashion around the world have become a prevalent example of how religion and faith have become part of transnational modernity (Hegde 2013; Tarlo 2010).

Thus, as Mohanty (2003, p. 223) argues, transnational feminism should engage in the “micro-politics level of context, subjectivity and struggle as well as to the macro-politics of

the global economic and political system and processes.” Gill and Scharff’s (2011) book entitled *New Femininities: postfeminism, neoliberalism and subjectivities* is an example of work where neo-liberal subjectivities are enacted through the practice of consumerism and femininity. As Gill and Scraff (2011, p. 7) investigated the interconnectedness between neoliberalism and postfeminism, they suggested that “the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism”.

Following the development of the third wave feminist movement that facilitates the multiplicities of women’s struggles and experiences, the Islamic feminism platform also had its momentum. As Mohanty (2003, p. 21) points out, the seeds of Islamic feminism had been existed around but were overlooked during the second-wave movement. The next section discusses the concept of Islamic feminism in further detail.

2.1.3 Islamic Feminism

In *Under the Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, Mohanty (1995) assesses a critical point in Western feminist discourse. Western feminist scholars, she stated, were inclined to see third world women as a monolithic category, blurring the diversity of experiences, and histories and tending to reconstruct the third world woman as being “victimised, subjugated and oppressed”. This binary way of viewing women was first formulated by Edward Said who stated that ‘the West’ has been falsely constructing the ‘East’ in general and Islam in particular as being the ‘other’ and ‘inferior’. Edward Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism* (1979) has influenced post-colonial thinkers such as Hybridity and Third Space’s Homi Bhabha (1994) and Subaltern’s Gayatri Spivak (1988) and ever since, studies in relation to Muslim women scholarships are growing (see Jawad 1998; Wadud 1999; Cooke 2001; Anwar 2006; Badran 2009). Cooke (2001) states that although the early studies dominated the US and Europe from the beginning of the 1980s, some

Arab Muslim feminists have appeared as the result of political events in the Middle East and U.S diplomatic policy paving the way for the blossoming of an Islamic feminism platform. As argued by Asef Bayat (1996), Islamic feminism was one of the results of post-Islamism movements in Islamic states such as Iran where the Islamic role in politics is limited and the need to integrate religion into individual choice and freedom is needed; Islamic feminism is one of those examples. He argued (1996, p. 48) that,

The activists, familiar with both the western feminist debates and Qur'anic teachings, are struggling within the Islamic discourse to revoke those anti-women laws and practices that are said to have religious justifications. Relying on the slogan, "equality of Men and Women in Islam," which has been accepted by clerical leaders, this movement has made considerable inroads to its effort to empower women in the domain of employment, education and family law.

Although some would regard a link between Islam and feminism to be an oxymoron, as argued by Badran (2009,p. 324), nevertheless the scholarship on this subject has been blossoming around the world. In contrast to what has been known as Western or secular feminism, which was born within the context of the secular nation-state, Islamic feminism as Badran (2009) stated, does not “separate the struggle for equality from the Islamic platform, but seeks women’s equality through initiating gender-sensitive interpretation and independent intellectual investigation of the Qur’an (*ijtihad*) and other religious texts”. Thus, as defined by Badran (2009, p. 324), Islamic feminism is:

A feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur’an and seeks rights and justice within framework of the equality of women and men in the totality of their existence as part and parcel of the Qur’anic notion of equality of all human beings. It calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institution and everyday live.

Badran (2009, pp 331-336) argues that the Islamic scriptures that are deconstructed by Islamic feminist are: *tafsir* (reinterpretation of Qur’an on the basis of gender and sexual

difference between male and female), *hadiths* (reinvestigation of the authenticity of some of the misogynistic *hadith* / the sayings of Prophet which have been circulated for centuries to denigrate Muslim women), *fiqh* (the reinterpretation of gender sensitive *fiqh* or Islamic jurisprudence, especially those that are heavily patriarchal), religious professions (promoting gender equality for women in the public sphere, especially women as highly appointed Islamic leaders in some countries) and the mosque (the rising demand of the equal access for women in the mosque around the world).

The rereading and reinterpreting of all Islamic scriptures has been centred on Islamic feminists' struggle. Mernissi (1991) acknowledges that female oppression in Muslim countries does not derive from the *Qur'an* or the Prophet Muhammad but rather from the male-dominated society. In her book, Mernissi suggests 'alternative' independent readings of the sacred texts including the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (Sayings of Prophet) as she argues that some of the hegemonic interpretations are male-biased, for example, verses about the *hijab*/headscarves and women as leaders (Mernissi 1991, pp. 85-100). Similar to Mernissi's assertion, other Islamic feminists, such as Leila Ahmed (1992), Amina Wadud (1999) and Asma Barlas (2003) to name a few, have also argued the importance of reinterpreting Islamic scriptures based on feminist points of view. Furthermore, Wadud (1999) states that the incorporation of "female inclusive exegesis is significant to expand the limitation of traditional interpretation of *Qur'an*". In line with women-centred religious readings, Ahmed (1992) states that the discourse concerning Middle Eastern Islamic women which has already been done had "little to do with women" and thus the production of discourse by "Muslim women themselves" is significant.

The growing discourse of Islamic feminism was organised into international agenda when in October 2005 the first international conference was held in Spain, gathering around 400 participants including Islamic feminist scholars such as Zainah Anwar, Asma Barlas, Margot

Badran and Amina Wadud (McGinty 2007). Furthermore, McGinty observed that this awareness then developed into WISE (Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality) which was publicly declared in New York and has resulted in recommendations to improve Muslim women's rights all around the world (2007, p.481). Badran (2009, p. 243) notes that the term 'Islamic Feminism' began to be used in the Middle East in the 1990s by various scholars such as Teheran women's journal *Zanan*, Mai Yamani in her book *Feminism and Islam* (Yamani and Allen 1996), and Nilufer Gole's book *The Forbidden Modern* (1996).

The term 'Islamic feminism' however does not have a clear-cut definition as some scholars have used various terms such as 'Muslim feminism'. Some are reluctant to use the words Islamic feminism although their works have been notable in giving a foundation to the movement. Some even differentiate between the term secular feminist, Muslim feminist and Islamist feminist (Karam 1998). Secular feminists separate their feminisms from the religious discourse while Muslim feminists articulate their gender equality struggle based on re-reading the Islamic sources and rejecting the male-biased interpretations and, at the same time "reconcile Islamic faith with international human rights." (Karam cited in Saadallah 2004, p. 218). Islamist feminists however, as Karam (1998) stated, tend to reject the Western feminist ideology and base their struggle solely on Islamic scriptures which do not need any re-reading or re-interpretation.

Some are even reluctant to use the term feminist at all (Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud for example) and tend to describe themselves as conducting a "woman-centred rereading of the Qur'an and other religious texts by scholar activists" (Badran 2009). However, from the growing global awareness which has taken form in recent years, Islamic feminism is not just an ideology based on feminist interpretation of Islamic scriptures but also a political agenda to improve Muslim women's rights and challenge the traditional, patriarchal gender inequality embedded within Islamic scriptures and cultures. It has led to

improvements that have taken shape in various geographical locations, even in the countries that seemed so far from women's equality such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran (Coleman 2010). As with any feminist struggle, there is still a lot of work to be done but the efforts and consciousness are already under way.

In spite of criticism and suspicion Islamic feminism is growing in popularity. It emerged both from Western and Eastern communities, majority, immigrant and diaspora communities, and massively circulated through the use of internet. From the ever-growing female led, independent readings of the sacred text, Islamic feminism provides the basis for women to create their own discourses and alternative narratives of women's rights in Islam. It is in this sense that I would like to highlight Islamic feminism, as an effort or struggle of Muslim women that are eager to incorporate their feminism into Islam.

There has been considerable research into the manifestations of Islamic feminism on many social media platforms and across geographical locations, for example: diasporic Muslim women's reading circles (Mahmood 2005; Bhimji 2009), feminism and internet activism in the Middle East and beyond (Dwyer 1999; van Zoonen, Vis and Mihelj 2010; Piela 2012), and Muslim woman's agency in Western/secular society (Dwyer 1999; Read and Bartkowski 2000; MacDonald 2006; Ramji 2007; McGinty 2007; Droogsma 2007; Mir 2009; Nourallah 2011; Contractor 2012; Siraj 2012). It can be concluded from the growing scholarship on Islamic feminism that the internet and online media have become a potential platform for the spread of discussions and ideas of gender *jihad* around the world. The next section will focus on the history of feminist movements in Indonesia from the colonisation period, where feminism was focused on supporting the nation's struggle to sovereignty, to its recent development. This section is pertinent to the study since the history of gender and femininity in Indonesia will directly related to the research findings.

2.1.4 Feminism and Women's Activism in Indonesia

Indonesian history is rich with stories about feminist heroines in the colonial periods.

Among those feminist heroines the most popular were Kartini (1879-1904), Dewi Sartika (1884-1947), and Cut Nyak Dien (1850-1908). While Cut Nyak Dien was the leader of a guerrilla struggle against the Dutch colonisation for 25 years, Kartini and Dewi Sartika were notable for their efforts in providing women's education by establishing women's schools to develop literacy, something that was seen as unimaginable at that period.

The nation's first women's organisation was *Putra Mahardika* whose members were middle class educated Javanese women and which focusing its struggle on the nationalist movement for Indonesian's independence (Rinaldo 2013). Furthermore, the first Muslim women's organisations established, *Aisyah Muhammadiyah* and *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama*, both focused on Islamic teaching and women's education reform (Dewi 2012; Rinaldo 2013).

Despite women becoming a central part of the Indonesian movement towards independence through the suffrage movements (Suryakusuma 1999) and education (Dewi 2012; Rinaldo 2013), there was a time when feminists faced their hardest struggle, that is during the New Order's administration which lasted for 32 years.

The participation of women in the New Order administration (1966-1998) was highly limited. In the cabinet, women were only appointed for 'feminine' ministries, such as the ministry of women's affairs and the ministry of social affairs. Furthermore, President Soeharto, with his military-authoritarianism, administered gender ideology and sexual policy over the state's women's organisations, especially to exercise control over the civil servants, military and bureaucrats.

“State Ibuism” is the term coined by Suryakusuma (1999) to illustrate the way the state constructed women’s lives based around their function in the family, as wives and mothers. *Ibu*, which means ‘mother’ in the Indonesian language, was manifested into the New Order’s implementation of women’s organisation like *Dharma Wanita* which put women as “appendages of their husbands and casts female dependency as ideal” (Suryakusuma 1999, p. 98). Furthermore, in urban kampong settlements and rural areas there was the *PKK* (translated into Family Welfare Guidance), an organisation with the same function as *Dharma Wanita*: to put women in their place. Woman is believed to be the complementing unit to her husband and family, to serve and to protect the state’s gender ideology. In the military corps, women’s organisations were also similarly established with the same function: to support their husbands serving the state interest by maintaining good housekeeping and loyalty (Suryakusuma 1999).

Feminist organisations were flourishing in the public sphere just after the New Order government was ousted in 1998. Women’s NGOs like *Kalyana Mitra* and *Rahima* were actually established before the end of New Order as any other women NGOs, but their efforts were largely ignored by the state as well as religious authorities (Syamsiyatun 2008). After the Reform Order, feminists and female activists began to flourish. I differentiate the term feminist/feminism with women activist/women activism since some organisations reject the term ‘feminism’ as it was perceived as a Western ideology that challenges Islamic values. This is a common perspective for Indonesians (Arimbi 2009, Rinaldo 2013).

Rinaldo’s fieldwork research (2013) on feminism and Islam in Indonesia concluded that ideas and basic principles of feminism and Islam in Indonesia are not at all incompatible, in contrast to what Western scholars initially perceived. Although feminism is relatively rejected, in Islamic based organisations like the women’s wings of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the basic principles of gender equality are manifested in its programmes.

Rahima, which was established in 2000, clearly defined an Islamic feminist strategy as it was written that their existence is to focus on “empowerment of women in Islamic perspective” (Rahima.or.id 2016). Its activities are focused upon a “critical education programme” in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) across Indonesia to educate students on gender justice and equality. The modernising curriculum in the *pesantren* was part of the effort to eliminate the element of Islamic radicalisation as there are 47 thousand Islamic schools including *pesantren* in Indonesia (Hefner 2009). As a part of the modernisation of Islamic schools was the study of democracy and human rights, including the gender equality.

Although over centuries *Aisyah Muhammadiyah* and *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama* (women’s wings of two largest Islamic organisations in Indonesia) have been serving to improve women’s health and rights to education, their struggle has been based culturally rather than politically. Different from other non-Islamic women NGOs, which based their advocacy on legal and political reform and are sometimes even perceived as radical, *Aisyah Muhammadiyah* choose a “gradual and peaceful” way to raise awareness of promoting gender equality, educating women on “unjust treatment, abuse and violence that may happen in marital and familial life” (Syamsiyatun 2008). *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama*, another women’s wing of a major Islamic organisation, has based its Muslim feminist struggle on the contextual interpretation of *Qur’an* and *Hadith* (Rinaldo 2013). In coherence with the basic mission of *Rahima*, again, as suggested by Rinaldo (2013, p. 65), members of *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama* feel that feminism and Islam can co-exist and that women’s rights are fully supported within Islam. The *Fatayat* and *Nahdatul Ulama* tradition of contextual-interpretative readings of religious texts instead of a literal, face value reading is thus “forging the new model of middle class Indonesian womanhood, one based piety, social justice and equality, and respect for cultural difference” , as argued by Rinaldo (2013, p. 110).

2.1.5 Conclusion

This section has elaborated on the history of feminism which started from 17th century from the publication of *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft to the development of the third-wave feminism. Third wave feminism itself emerged from the criticism over the second wave which is seen as exclusively white-middle class feminism and centred in North American – European feminists. Second wave feminism is criticised since it failed to acknowledge that women face various struggles based on their class, sexualities, ethnicities, religions and that there is no single solution that fits all. Third wave feminism argued that feminism should be seen as an inclusive effort to acknowledge the diversity of struggles and experiences of women across cultures and geographical locations. The criticism and inadequacy of second-wave feminism in seeing diversity also birthed the various strands of third-wave feminisms such as transnational feminism, and furthermore, the development of Islamic feminism. The basic argument of transnational feminism is that globalisation is a heavily gendered process (Hedge 2013) and the acknowledgement that women's oppression derives from multinational neoliberal institutions such as the IMF and other corporations. The globalised and neoliberal economy also shape the enactment of neoliberal subjectivities that, as Gill and Scharff (2011) argued, bear a resemblance to postfeminist identities.

Finally, as the continuation of third wave feminism, Islamic feminism emerged firstly in Muslim majority countries such as Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries and sparked the rest of the world including the West. This strand of feminism attempts to find similarities and compatibility between Islamic teachings and women's rights which have been the basis of feminist struggle. Islamic feminism argues that Islam is not an opposition to women's rights and that the Islamic holy scriptures (*Qur'an* and *Hadith*) can be reread and reinterpreted using the feminist point of view. The practice and basic principles of

Islamic feminism could be seen in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia where women-centred organisations such as *Aisyah Muhammadiyah* and *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama* were established and successfully improve the health conditions and education of women in Indonesia. These two organisations also build on their tradition of interpreting Islamic scriptures contextually rather than literally so that Islamic teachings should be bound to national and local contexts.

This sub-section also demonstrates that feminist struggle in Indonesia was not new and women always been an active part of the nations' independence and sovereignty during the colonisation period. The 1990s witnessed the proliferation of NGOs (non-government organisations) which successfully raised awareness of women's struggles and took an active part in assisting the government in women based policies. The *Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama* and *Aisyah Muhammadiyah* have also continuously become the pillars of Islamic feminist movement, especially in providing and improving women's education and health.

Furthermore, the next sub-section will focus upon femininity, how it is constantly debated among feminists and the solutions offered by feminists regarding femininity as oppression. The next sub-section also encompasses how Islamic femininity is constructed and Islamic feminist counter-arguments over traditional interpretations of femininity. Finally, the veiling practice especially in contemporary Indonesia is discussed in relation to the emergence of the *hijab* among middle-class Indonesians.

2.2 Islamic Femininity: Womanhood and the Veiling Practice in Islam

This section encompasses the subject of femininity: how femininity has been discussed and challenged by the feminist and how femininity has been understood within Islamic framework. Here, the issues of body politics, motherhood and marriage are the focus of discussion among other forms of femininities since those three are related to the data analysis further in this study. Veiling practices, or the *hijab*, are also discussed here since this is one of the most heavily debated issues when Muslim women come into the discussion. This chapter also discusses the way *hijab* or veiling has been practised by Indonesian middle class Muslim women, not for the sake of piety itself, but also to signify a modern identity and as a marker of social class.

2.2.1 Femininity: The Feminist Critique

The debate surrounding feminine and masculine traits revolve around whether feminine and masculine are inherently natural or socially constructed. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990; Salih 2002) proposes the idea of gender as a performative act that is reiterated over and over again and becomes the norm which we now considered to be the natural traits of men and women.

Feminist critics exploring the notion of femininity acknowledged this at the height of second wave feminism around 1960s and 1970s. Betty Friedan's publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (1983) highlighted the anxiety and powerlessness of American White middle class sub-urban wives, whose lives revolved around motherhood and marriage. In the influential publication, that problem which she called the "problem that has no name", Friedan criticised the way in which post-war Americans had denied women equal rights and subjected them to domesticity. Furthermore, she argued (1983, p. 277) that the endless need to be in pursuit of femininity may separate women from their true potential, and in

order to “be healed”, women should find careers that fulfilled them. Of course, the solution Friedan proposes might seem simplistic, and it was also criticised for being embedded in white middle class privilege, but nevertheless Friedan has determined the way that femininity has been debated among many other feminists.

Germaine Greer, in her publication *The Female Eunuch* (1971), criticises femininity as the “induced characteristic of soul and body nowadays called stereotype”. She proposed (1971, p. 235) that marriage was a middle class illusion, that women were being socialised by the use of literature like Shakespeare. Similar books from Susan Brownmiller (1984, p. 13) defined femininity as “being good at what was expected” and demonstrated how this notion has been used to punish women if they are not “feminine enough”. Similar critiques have been highlighted by Bartky (1990), who argues that a woman’s body has always been constrained with femininity, and become the “docile body” and a “self-policing subject”.

Then, for these debates against femininities, what do feminists offer to women? Betty Friedan offers solutions that women must adopt masculine values and abandon femininity. Germaine Greer advised women to reject femininity and its values. She proposed that women should stop “cajoling and manipulating” and hence conform to the “virtue of masculine values of magnanimity and generosity and courage” (1982, p. 300). These solutions, however, have been dismissed by many as accidentally praising masculinity and patriarchy as being superior in terms of values and ideology. Another solution from Kate Millet (1970) is that women should make a breakthrough against the binary opposition of masculine-feminine and adapt to what has been called androgyny. This too is problematic, as an androgynous look is something that is difficult to define and unfamiliar.

Other feminist activists offered another stance towards the issue feminists have with femininity. For example, Julia Serano in *Whipping Girl* argues that rather than dismissing

femininity as an inferior female characteristic, it is more empowered to accept femininity and masculinity as human traits. As she stated (2007):

Indeed, much of the sexism faced by women today targets their femininity (or assumed femininity) rather than their femaleness. It is high time that we forcefully challenge the negative assumptions that constantly plague feminine traits and the people who express them. That is what I mean when I say we must empower femininity.

Serano, just like many other third-wave feminists, argues that rather than debating and discussing femininity as bad for women, it will be more productive to see the feminine as a choice rather than a coercion. Tong (2009, p. 3) summed up the rejection of the 'androgyny' solution as follows:

Some anti-androgynists maintain the problem is not femininity in and of itself, but rather the low value that patriarchy assigns to feminine qualities such as "gentleness, modesty, humility, supportiveness, empathy, compassionateness, tenderness, nurturance, intuitiveness, sensitivity, unselfishness," and the high value it assigns to masculine qualities such as "assertiveness, aggressiveness, hardness, rationality or the ability to think logically, abstractly and analytically, ability to control emotion." They claim that if society can learn to value "feminine" traits as much as "masculine" traits, women's oppression will be a bad memory.

The debate surrounding femininity has divided feminists about the way that femininity should be perceived and what is the best solution for women. Second-wave feminists, especially the radical feminists, also debated the way motherhood is constructed. Friedan (1983) argued that motherhood is seen as a way in which the patriarchal system oppressed women where a woman's value is determined by her ability to manage the household as well as nurture the children. As argued by Tong (2009, p. 83):

Nevertheless, patriarchal society teaches its members that the woman who bears a child is best suited to rear him or her. In viewing this tenet as one that often places unreasonable demands on women's bodies and energies, radical-libertarian feminists have tended to make strong arguments against biological motherhood. Not surprisingly, many radical-cultural feminists have challenged these arguments, insisting

no woman should, in an act of unreflective defiance against patriarchy, deprive herself of the satisfaction that comes from not only bearing a child but also playing a major role in his or her personal development.

Just like the way second-wave feminists debated femininity, the radical feminists, which Tong (2009) divided into libertarian-radicals and cultural-radicals, also debated how to seek solution to end the oppression over motherhood. However, as Tong later argued (2009, p. 85), technological motherhood as a solution offered by radical feminists that uses a surrogate to avoid biological motherhood, is also problematic as it creates division over women who employ other women to undergo the child-bearing process. Rich (cited in Tong 2009, p. 85) pointed out that “there is a world of difference between women deciding who, how, when, and where to mother and men making these decisions for women”. In other words, biological motherhood could be made powerful for women only when the decision on becoming a mother was taken solely based on choice rather than dictated by men, and let alone by the society.

It is worth mentioning that the mass and popular media also help to shape women’s perceptions of femininity. As argued by McRobbie (1991) that popular publications like magazines constructed femininity from an early age, different from men’s publication which usually revolves around hobbies, leisure and pornography without categorising men based on their ages. Girls’ and women’s publications, she argues (1991, p. 83) “define and shape the woman’s world, spanning every stage from early childhood to old age”. In other words, there will be women’s publication for every decade of women’s lives from teenagers to the more mature years. By examining *Jackie*, the most popular publication for teenage girls in Britain in the 1970s to 1980s using textual analysis, McRobbie (1991) identified that romance, fashion and individuality were the dominant codes that appear as

the ultimate goals of teenagers' lives. She argues (1991, p. 131) that sometimes adolescent femininity seems to be contradictory, especially in relation to individualism:

To achieve self-respect, the girl has to escape the 'bitchy', 'catty', atmosphere of female company and find a boyfriend as quickly as possible. But in doing this she cannot slide into complacency. Her ruthlessly individualistic outlook must be retained in case she has to fight to keep him. This is, therefore, a double-edged kind of individualism since, in relation to her boyfriend, she is expected to leave individuality behind on the doorstep.

The same arguments are also being addressed by scholars interrogating the conflicting messages of femininity in women's popular media. Research undertaken by Zoodma (2012) for example, concludes that women's fitness magazines address conflicting message to their readers, that while it is important for readers to feel happy and confident with their bodies, the fitness magazines also suggest the pursuit of unattainable physical fitness and attractiveness. Similar results were found within research on *Cosmopolitan* magazine, as argued by McCracken (1993) that *Cosmopolitan* offers pseudo-liberation, vicarious eroticism, and traditional moral values. A different angle on seeing the interconnection between women and women's popular media has been undertaken by Janice Radway (1991) who argued while the narratives of the romance novels were quite traditional, the act of reading the novels itself could be seen as liberating, as readers were allowed to briefly escape from their daily mundane house chores and create a space of relaxation. However, Radway's argument certainly also strengthens the conclusion that the dominant message is quite clear in women's genre such as magazines or romance novels, that traditional femininity is the powerful hegemonic message for all women's publication whether marketed for teenagers or to more mature women. I will later resume the feminist scholarship on women's popular genres in the methodology chapter (section 3.2). In addition to this, the next section encompasses the way in which femininity, which includes marriage, motherhood and modesty, has been debated within the Islamic feminist

approach and, furthermore, how the *hijab* is practised by contemporary middle class Indonesians.

2.2.2 Islamic femininity: An Islamic Feminist Perspective

As the previous section has explained, femininity can be defined as the social construction of gender appropriateness, and thus includes appearances and personal traits. The last section also argued that mass media and popular publications like women's magazines serve as powerful agents in disseminating what constitutes acceptable femininity (definitions which are, nonetheless, fluid and changing and never once or for all discursively fixed). Hence, femininity in this section is discussed under the Islamic feminist framework. The Islamic Feminist framework has been discussed in the previous section (section 2.1.3), as the feminist or gender-sensitive reading and interpretation of Islamic scriptures, especially *Qur'an* and *Hadith* (the sayings and doing of the Prophet) in relation to gender and women's rights.

In this section, the discussion of the subject of Islamic femininity is focused around the issue of body politics, that is the *hijab*, or veiling and modesty practices, then secondly with the way marriage and motherhood have been contested in the Islamic paradigm. This section will contrast the traditional interpretation of Islamic scriptures with the way Islamic feminists have been reinterpreting the same scriptures in relation to gender justice and women's rights.

Veiling practices or the *hijab* have been subject to numerous feminist debates, especially after the attacks on the US which occurred on September 11th 2001. As stated by Sreberny (2002, p. 272), the veiling issue is "complex, more problematic and ambivalent" and that thus meaning of such practice is fluid and different. A similar argument has been mentioned by MacDonald (2006, p. 20) that the on-going discussion of the veiling practice

with “different frames of thinking” across cultures and traditions is pivotal to gain understanding of how the veil is constructed differently. Simply suggesting that the *hijab* or veiling is an archaic patriarchal tradition and therefore embracing its practice is perceived as docile, would not be helpful to understand the complexities and multiplicities of the *hijab* practice, especially if it is done out of choice. This point of view is also undermines Muslim women’s agency. Such research that has been done on the subject of veiling practices in democratic countries (Dwyer 1999; Roald 2001; Bullock 2002; Ramji 2007; McGinty 2007; Droogsma 2007; Afshar 2008; Contractor 2012) suggest that veiling practice could be seen as agency and as preserving cultural values. As argued by McGinty (2007), rather than a form of oppression, the *hijab* should also be seen as part of the effort by women to free themselves from the male gaze and part of the feminist resolution. Similarly, research by Bullock (2002) in Canada, Roald (2001) in Sweden, Haddad, Smith and Moore(2006) in the US as well as Siraj (2012) in the UK have all resulted in similar conclusions. As Haddad, Smith and Moore(2006, p. 141) state:

The myth that Muslim women are incarcerated in their homes, without access to the public domain, is obviously untrue for most of those who live in America, as it is generally untrue for most of those who live in Western countries and, to some extent, for Muslim women in other parts of the world.

Nevertheless, as stated by Cooke (2001, pp. 135-136) modern Muslim women living in democratic society need to re-think the way the *hijab* has been made meaningful for them since it is “riddled with contradiction” and “saturated with patriarchal symbols” so it is sometimes difficult for Western-secular feminists to understand as a means of liberation and empowerment. Thus, Abu-Lughod (2002, pp. 783-790) suggests that Western feminists:

Be aware of differences, respectful of other paths towards social change that might give women better lives. Can there be a liberation

that is Islamic? And beyond this, is liberation even a goal for which all women or people strive? Are emancipation, equality, and rights part of a universal language we must use?

In Islamic scripture (*Qur'an*) the obligation towards the donning of *hijab* is usually built around two verses: an-Nuur verses 31 and al-Ahzab verses 59. Below are verses in *Qur'an* which directly discuss veils, as derived from an-Nuur verses 31 and al-Ahzab 59. This is the translation of the verse:

And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except for which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their hand possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not to stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed. (an-Nuur 31)

A previous verse (an-Nuur 30) is directed to men, with the same message, that men have to reduce some of their vision and guard their private parts. This is the translation of al-Ahzab 59:

O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful. (al-Ahzab 59)

Apart from the Islamic tradition, the veiling practice as stated by Guindi (1999), began long before Arab civilisation, long before Islamic history became recorded, in Byzantine and ancient Greek societies and it was donned to show social stratification rather than for protection or security purposes. She then also elaborates that the practice of veiling could be manifested in many forms, like the *niqab* or face veil which covers the entire body,

which sums up the veil as a cultural practice that was later adopted by religions including Islam.

Muslim feminist interpretation of the *hijab* verses is different from traditional conservative Muslims in the sense that *hijab* or veiling is seen as a suggestion towards modesty, instead of a body-covering practice *per se*. As suggested by Mernissi (1991) and Ahmed (1992), the verses around veiling are about privacy and honouring the Prophet's wives rather than the obligation for women to cover her entire body. Thus Mernissi (1991) suggests that the *hijab* is only required for the prophet's wives and modesty also involves the men lowering their gaze. Conservative Muslims believe otherwise, that the verses in regards of veiling and modesty, although in the *Qur'an* are directed to prophet's wives, are to be manifested by devout Muslims.

Despite the traditional Islamic view of woman's ultimate function as a child-bearer, Muslim feminists like Wadud (1999, p. 64) have argued that "although it does not restrict the female functioning as a mother, the *Qur'an* is emphatic about the reverence, sympathy, and responsibility due to the female procreator." Furthermore, as stated by Wadud (1999) that men and women are equal before God, the only difference is their piety. However, in practice, family nurturing and the preservation of Islamic teachings are still heavily considered as the mother's responsibilities. Research by Scourfield (2011) and Hartono (2012) suggest that the nurturing of children and the socialisation of Islamic teachings overwhelmingly stresses as the mothers' obligation. Scourfield (2010) argues based on an ethnographic study among 60 Muslim families in Cardiff, that

Mothers are typically the main teachers of children in families. It is usually seen as mothers' responsibility to ensure children are introduced to Islam and in most families it is mothers who are more available for this. Some Muslim fathers are very uninvolved in their children's religious learning.

The same conclusion has been confirmed by Hartono (2012) based on her research among Muslim communities in Auckland, a New Zealand suburb, that mothers have responsibilities to study Islam themselves in order to be better Muslims and, in turn, to pass that piety on to their children. Such a concept of mothers as selfless individuals and primary caregivers is not exclusively derived from an Islamic tradition. It exists across cultures, including Western culture. As argued by O'Reilly (2004), in Western culture the notion of a good mother usually entails mother as asexual, nurturing and the primary caregiver to their families. The concept of mother as sacred and woman's virtue has also been part of Christianity's idealisation of motherhood as a "self-sacrificing angel mother" (Kaplan 1992, p. 24).

In terms of marriage, Wadud (1999, p. 78) stated that "*Qur'an* prefers that men and women marry. Within marriage, there should be harmony, mutually built with love and mercy". However, she stated later that *Qur'an* also allows for divorce if everything else fails. Furthermore, contrary to the traditional beliefs of marriage within Islam which wives should obey husbands, Mernissi (1991) and Wadud (1999) believed that subjugation practices have been known long before Islam and are preserved mainly for the males' interests rather than the way it was taken from the *Qur'an*. As Wadud (1999, p. 77) asserts:

The Qur'an never orders a woman to obey her husband. It never states that obedience to their husbands is a characteristic of the 'better women', nor is it prerequisite for women to enter the community of Islam.

Thus, contrary to the belief that Islam dismisses women's rights, Jawad (1998) argued that Muslim women are entitled rights just as much as men. As argued by Jawad (1998, p. 7-11), Muslim women are entitled to eight basic rights in Islam: the right to independent ownership, the right to marry who she likes and initiate divorce, the right to education, the right to keep her own identity, the right to sexual pleasure, the right to inheritance, the

right to elect and to be nominated to political offices and participation in public affairs, and the right to respect. Hence, Islamic feminist scholars base their interpretation of Islamic scriptures on the spirit of feminism and human rights, but such interpretation sometimes clashed with the more conservative Muslim authorities. However, Islamic feminism has gained its momentum and continuously reformed the law to improve women's rights in some countries such as Iran, especially in employment, education and family law (Bayat 1996, p. 48).

The next section focuses upon the veiling practice in Indonesia, especially among Indonesian middle class Muslim women. The discussion is significant, since veiling practice has been the subject of decades of state's oppression. Considerable research has been undertaken in regards of the rise of veiling practise in Indonesia that are pertinent to the findings of this study.

2.2.3 Contemporary Veiling Practice in Indonesia

Despite being a Muslim majority country, contempoary veiling practices only began in the 1980s in Indonesia. Before that, as suggested by Dewi (2012, p. 124), the use of the *kudung* or loose veil, was mainly practised among Javanese noblewoman to distinguish themselves from non-pious or non-Muslim counterparts.

As it has been mentioned briefly in the background of study (section 1.1), the New Order reigned for 32 years and exercised power over political Islam. Islam was seen as the embodiment of anti-modernity and anti-national development. Hefner (cited in Dewi 2012, p. 124) suggested that "despite the successful marginalisation of Islamic political parties, the New Order policy ironically triggered the rise of pro-democratic Islam beginning in the early 1980s". This has been the result of Islamic revivalism in many parts of the world, including the Iranian revolution, Egypt and Pakistan during the 1970s. Students from

universities, mainly in Java, then started to adopt the *hijab* or the veil, to support Islamic revivalism but also to signify their resistance towards the New Order government. There were also times when the government tried to ban the veiling practice by issuing a regulation which forbade the use of the *hijab* for the school students. Although finally the ban was lifted in 1990 following civil movements in various parts in Indonesia, nonetheless this dynamic signified the government's anxiety over the resurgence of Islam, which was symbolised by the veiling practice among students (Dewi 2012).

Since then, scholars (Brenner 1996, Jones 2007, Smith-Hefner 2007) have examined the way the veil or *hijab* has been practised in Indonesia, especially in Java. As argued by Dewi (2012), since Java has been the central government and economic epicentre of Indonesia, Javanese women have better access to education and information, so it is understandable that they are more aware of socio-religious dynamics including the Islamic resurgence. Brenner (1996) examines the way in which the *hijab* has been practised by the middle class Indonesian Muslims to mark the new consciousness, which she defines as "becoming aware" of the new knowledge of Islam. She asserts (1996: pp. 673-697) that for middle class Indonesians, the veiling practices also mark the way they distance themselves from the past but also define their own version of "alternative modernity", different from the Western conception of modernity.

The same conclusions were also drawn from Smith-Hefner's research among university students in Java regarding the practice of veiling. Doing her research in 1999, 2001 and 2002, Smith-Hefner (2007) examined the way in which university students in Java engage with the veiling practice. Such a practice, as she acknowledges, has risen to more than 60 per cent among young Muslim students in those universities. She argues (2007, pp. 389-420) that just like any other *hijab* revival in Egypt, Jordan, Malaysia and Turkey, the veiling practice among students in Indonesia is "neither traditionalist nor an anti-modernist

reaction". For young Indonesian Muslim students, the *hijab* or veil symbolises the self-autonomy and agency which was offered by the higher modern education with commitments of Islamic values.

More recent research has been done on contemporary veiling practice and how it relates to the rise of Islamic consumerism in Indonesia (Jones 2007; Fealy and White 2008; Heryanto 2008; Ida 2009). Just after the end of the New Order in Indonesia, recent years have seen the emergence of Islamic capitalism or, as some scholars asserted, the rise of commodified religion in Indonesia. The media have been filled with Islamic themes catering to all segment and tastes. Ida (2009) and Rakhmani (2013) have examined how the so-called Islamic soap opera has played an important part in the rebuilding of the nation's identity after the Authoritarian order fell in 1998. The establishment of Islamic magazines for Muslim women have also been a mark of the way the religious has intersected with consumerism, offering recipes and suggestions on how to incorporate Muslim identity with the urban middle class lifestyle (Jones 2007; Wimboyono 2013).

Fealy (2008, p. 37) has suggested that commodified Islam in Indonesia is much more common today compared to the way it was two decades ago, especially under the influence of growing modernisation, globalisation and urbanisation. Furthermore, Jones (2007, pp. 211-232) has argued that rather than seeing these phenomenon as the signs of consumerism or need to be religious, they could be understood as complex processes and meaningful ways in which the need to be pious engages with modernity. Such an argument has been brought by Heryanto (2014), that the sudden entanglement with Islamic culture can be understood in relation to Indonesia's oppressed history under the New Order. As he has asserts (2014, p. 42):

Indonesian popular religious pietism articulates a morally-based commitment to correcting the modernisation that took place under

the New Order, but also constitutes a rejection of the notion of a *sharia*-based Islamist utopia.

On the other hand, while the growing consciousness about gender equality manifested through the rise of women's rights NGOs (non-governmental organisations), there was also the rise of the so-called feminine training phenomenon. Jones (2012, pp. 270-282) highlights the spread of femininity training which combined body aesthetics, like how to wear make-up, with professional training. As Jones suggested, while the New Order maintained gender ideology by coercion and standardising femininity, the times following the New Order regime were ones where middle class women maintained their professional identity and individuality by conforming to this kind of femininity training. As more women got into education, politics and the work force, more femininity training which adopted modernity or the Western conception of "career women", emerged (Jones 2012). Not surprisingly, this was also the case for their Muslim counterparts. As more Muslim women got into higher education and the work force, the more "how to be a successful career women" trainings became available to cater that needs. It is quite ubiquitous to see the 'hijab-style short training' or 'how to style your *hijab*' or 'make-up training for Muslims' advertised in the media or organised in the middle of shopping malls and high-end boutiques to cater to Muslims who want to keep up with the latest trends in beauty and fashion. The growing number of Muslim fashion blogs and the rise of Muslim bloggers who overwhelmingly are also young, beautiful and stylish are contributed to have catapulted these trends. The next section will be dedicated to the literature on the emergence of fashion blogs, especially Muslim fashion blogs in Indonesia and in the global sphere.

2.2.4 Conclusion

This section has demonstrated that femininity has been subjected to contentious debate among feminists themselves. While femininity is understood to be socially constructed

rather than naturally given (Butler 1990), feminist scholars have developed different arguments on how to find solution. Some argued that women should embrace androgyny (Millet 1970), while others take a more pragmatic stance, suggesting that femininity is a choice rather than coercion (Tong 1998). Mass media and popular publications such as women's magazines were also argued as powerful agents to disseminate the conflicting messages around femininity, where women should be independent but at the same time need romance and men (McRobbie 1991, McCracken 1993, Zoodsma 2012). This section also demonstrated that Islamic femininity is also subjected to debate and a dynamic power play between conservative and the feminist Islamic scholars. Not only was the *hijab* deconstructed as obligation towards women, the *hijab* was also reinterpreted as the embodiment of modesty, which suggested that men should also preserve their modesty as much as women. Islamic feminist scholars also reinforce the feminist interpretation of marriage and motherhood, suggesting that men and women have the same rights. This framework resulted in some law reforms in women's rights in Muslim majority countries such as the Iranian Republic. Finally, the *hijab* or the veiling practice in Indonesia is part of the nation's search for identity. *The hijab* was once vilified as a threat to national order during the New Order administration. The use of such a practice was seen as imposing radicalism, defying globalisation and rejecting national development, one of the major New Order agendas.

However, the recent surge of Islamic popular culture, beginning the end of 1990s, suggested that not only is the *hijab* compatible with modernity, the *hijab* is now the marker of middle class educated Indonesian women that care about piety as much as they care about fashion and beauty. The next section will focus upon theorising fashion and modernity and the emergence of fashion blogs.

2.3 Fashion and Fashion Media

This section concludes with four sub-sections that cover the literature on fashion, Muslim fashion, fashion blogs and Muslim fashion blogs. The first sub-section concentrates on fashion as a contentious space where modernity, identity and social-class are marked. Modernity in fashion, as I will later argue in this sub-section, will always relate to novelty and changes. Following the work of Elizabeth Wilson (2013) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984), fashion is also the extension of identity, individuality, taste and class.

The next sub-chapter then moves the discussion into the way in which the Muslim fashion industry emerged within the growing market of Muslim customers around the world. *The hijab*, which long has been associated with the anti-fashion movement, has become the key item to open up the fashion industry that targets Muslim customers around the world. Muslim fashion here will be discussed globally and locally, as this study focuses upon Indonesia. In Indonesia, as the popularisation of the *hijab* and Islamic consumerism emerged at the end 1990s, the Islamic fashion industry with all its components (fashion magazines, popular TV shows, *halal* cosmetics) thus followed this latest trend.

The study of fashion blogs elaborates the history of blogs as a recent phenomenon which put fashion bloggers on the map of the fashion industry. They used to be seen as banal and trivial, but the study of fashion blogs gained momentum from the study of media and popular culture as significant cultural texts. Fashion blogs are an emergent research interest in media and cultural studies with various topics addressed ranging from self-identity and performativity, the political economy of fashion blogs, to the relation between the taste and capital through fashion blogs. This sub-section will also elaborate upon two doctoral dissertations that specifically analysed fashion blogs or personal style blogs as their topics.

The literature then covers the existing subject to the study of Islamic fashion blogs.

Although to this date there is no existing literature on the subject of Islamic fashion blogs apart from several popular essays and newspaper articles, this study draws from the already existing scholarship on how Muslim communities, especially Muslim women communities, use technology, media and social media as a safe space of self and freedom in which enables them to generate discussion over religion and femininity. The birth of Muslim fashion blogs was partly influenced by this phenomenon and was inspired by the popularisation of fashion bloggers themselves. Following this, the emergence of Muslim fashion blogs in Indonesia is discussed as well as the global trend of Islamic fashion industry.

2.3.1 Fashion

Elizabeth Wilson (2013, p. 3) in her seminal work *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* defined fashion as:

dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles. Fashion, in a sense is change, and in modern Western societies no clothes are outside fashion; fashion sets the term of all sartorial behaviour.

Barnard (2002) and Wilson (2013) argue that unfashionable, outdated, or anti-fashion clothing has meant to define what has been perceived as fashionable, using the recent trends as parameters of what needs to be challenged. Wilson (2013, p. 5) further asserts that “to be unfashionable is not to escape the whole discourse”. Furthermore, as Arnold points out (2009), fashion is different from clothing. Clothing is defined as “more stable and functional form of dress that alters only gradually, fashion thrives on novelty and change” (2009, p. 297).

Elaborating the history of fashion, fashion theorists (Svendsen 2006; Wilson 2013) argue that the origin of fashion is tightly related to the history of capitalism. As Svendsen (2006, p. 21) further stated, that fashion could be traced back to the growth of mercantile capitalism in the late medieval period (13th to 15th century). Further, Svendsen (2006, p. 23) asserted that “the growth of fashion is one of the most decisive events in world history, because it indicates the direction of modernity”.

Following Svendsen’s argument, Wilson (2013, p. 16) argued that the birth of fashion as “rapidly change style” has been made possible by the growth of capital cities, trading activities, and the burgeoning royal and aristocratic societies in the 14th century.

Furthermore, Berman (cited in Barnard 1996) differentiates modernity into three historical periods: the first period (16th to 18th century) when people just begin to sense themselves as being part of a modern public, the second period (late 18th century to 20th century) when people’s knowledge about modern-living consciousness has been thought about more profusely and the third period (20th century onward) where modernity is ubiquitous and can be found in art and thought.

Barthes (2002) states that modernity is also characterised by newness and fast-paced changes; fashion thus becomes the embodiment of change and newness itself, following the separation with what can be considered as tradition. As Gianni Vattimo (cited in Svendsen 2006, p. 25) argued that:

Modernity as an era in which being modern becomes the fundamental value to which all others are referred. More precisely, ‘being modern’ becomes synonymous with being ‘new’.

Similar to the above quotation, Wilson (2013, p. 63) defines modernity as being interchangeably linked to modern capitalism, when the machinery took over and as resulting from industrial revolution. As she (2013, p. 63) argued:

Yet the word 'modernity' attempts to capture the essence of both the cultural and the subjective experience of capitalist society and all its contradictions. It encapsulates the way in which economic development opens up, yet simultaneously undercuts the possibility both of individual self and of social cooperation, 'Modernity' does also seem useful as a way of indicating the restless desire for change characteristic of cultural life in industrial capitalism, the desire for the new that fashion expresses so well.

The incorporation of the working-class into fashion is a relatively new phenomenon.

Svendsen (2006, p. 38) elaborates that until the 19th century fashion was the marking of a social class. The working class, he further adds, was forbidden to be fashionably distinctive as the upper class used fashion to mark their distinctiveness and self-identity. However, as Svendsen (2006, p. 38) further argues, the mass production of clothes was made possible by the invention of sewing and embroidery machinery that made fashion affordable and mass consumption flourished. However, even after the growth of mass production and mass consumption, fashion and social class are tightly bound. As Simmel (cited in Svendsen 2006, p. 43) argued, "all fashion is by definition class fashion, and fashion is driven forward the upper classes discarding a fashion (and embracing the new one) as soon as the lower classes have imitated it". In this sense, fashion is invented by the upper class to maintain their distinctiveness compared to the lower classes (Svendsen 2006, p. 49).

The distinctiveness of social classes was not only invented by fashion itself but fashion in modern Western societies also exaggerates the ways in which masculinity and femininity differ from one another. Wilson (2013, p. 118) asserts that it was not until the end of 18th century that gender identity was clearly defined by fashion. She states that "fashion is obsessed with gender, defines and redefines the gender" (p. 117). Wilson then gives examples of the ways women and men from the bourgeoisie dressed themselves. As stated by Wilson (2013, p. 118), the 18th century is the period where privacy, comfort and

modesty were redefined, resulting in women, although gaining more strength, being restrained at home in the name of protection and femininity. As she argues (2013,p.29) :

Yet at the same period the social and economic roles of men and women began to diverge more sharply; by the early nineteenth century women's role in society is narrowing, dress began to distinguish gender in more exaggerated ways and fashion was now no longer, as it had been in the aristocratic courts of the seventeenth century; simply a priceless frame of female beauty. Something more subtle occurred; woman and costume together created femininity.

For fashion and class, the work of Thorstein Veblen (1899) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984) are significant. In *Theories of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen argued that in post-industrial society, conspicuous consumption has been enacted as a way of showing the class distinction of the leisure class. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) observed social stratification based on taste. He suggested that rather than economic and social capital, cultural capital (such as education) determined the legitimate taste in the society. Cultural capital, as Bourdieu observed (1984, p.66) has been the result of "total, early, imperceptible learning, performed within the family from the earliest days of life". Featherstone (1996, p. 86) elaborates on Bourdieu's work, saying that:

Taste in cultural goods function as a marker of social class and in *Distinction* Bourdieu seeks to map out the social field of the different tastes in legitimated 'high' cultural practice (museum visits, concert-going, reading) as well as taste in lifestyle and consumption preferences (including food, drink, clothes, cars, novels, newspapers, magazines, holidays, hobbies, sport, leisure and pursuits).

Thus people with lower capitals will accept the legitimate taste as being natural, which Bourdieu (1984) asserted as a form of symbolic capital. Working-class people, although they have their own working-class culture, will always seek to emulate the most legitimate taste in the society even if they have lack resources to do so as a result of their educational background.

2.3.2 Islamic Fashion in Indonesia and Beyond

As a fashion industry, Indonesia is relatively 'off the radar' compared to major fashion capitals like Paris or Milan despite also being the home of talented designers and *couturiers* (Luvaas 2013). Despite being unrecognisable in global fashion, Luvaas (2013, p. 205) states that Indonesia is also one of the largest clothing manufacturers, producing for brands like Hugo Boss, Ralph Lauren, The Gap, Converse and Nike. The Indonesian garment and textile industry is one of the most important business sectors in Indonesia, making up 7 percent of the country's total exports in 2013 (gbgindonesia.com 2015).

Meanwhile, the growth of Islamic fashion businesses in Indonesia is directly related to the emergence of the veiling practice among Indonesian urban Muslim women. Brenner (1996), Jones (2007) and Smith-Hefner (2007) all concluded that the practice of veiling in urban Indonesian Muslims is not only part of religious self-identity but also the epitome of modern urban Indonesians. The practice of veiling in modern Indonesia has been extensively elaborated in the previous section that many urban Muslim women are now proudly wearing the *hijab*, which Smith-Hefner (2007) and Jones (2007) have concluded started with college students and middle class Indonesians. The growing consumption of the *hijab* and other Islamic attire is responsible for the growth of Islamic fashion retailers. *Shafira* brand is, for example, one of the very first Indonesian Islamic fashion brands, and has been established since 1989 by one of the first Indonesian Islamic designers, Fenny Mustafa. It has since expanded to 15 major cities in Indonesia (*shafira.com* 2016). Other self-proclaimed Islamic fashion designers, such as Anna Rufaidah, Merry Pramono, and Irna Mutiara also started their fashion businesses around these times and were also joined in the APPMI (Indonesian Fashion Designers Association). They often held their fashion shows abroad. The emergence of the fashion business has then responded to the growth of Muslim media, most notably Islamic women's fashion magazines. *Noor* (2003), *Aulia* (2003)

and *Paras* (2004), were a few magazines that are specifically marketed to urban Muslim woman and are highly stylised by the spread of contemporary Muslim fashion for professional working women and other fashion enthusiasts. My Master's thesis and journal article (Rahmawati 2009; Wimboyono 2013) concluded that the establishment of Muslim women's media like magazines is the direct result of the growing consumption of the Muslim middle class and young professional working women, especially in Indonesian metropolitan cities, looking for media that is directly designed to meet their needs.

Realising the need for more Islamic clothing designers, *Noor* magazine, as the oldest Islamic women magazine in Indonesia and the most established one, decided to organise an annual award named 'Noor's annual Muslim designer award', to create spaces and opportunities for designer beginners to start up and showcase their designs through the magazine. The emergence of Muslim fashion media creates another opportunity for the popularisation of Islamic fashion in other mainstream media, most notably television. Many programmes with religious content, such as Islamic soap operas (*My Prayer My Hope* 1998, *Prayer Brings Blessings* 2000), featured female stars who were starting to veil and, therefore, popularise the use of the *hijab* even more. This inspired the fan base to start to consider adopting the veiling practice as well. Beginning in 2011, Indonesia also held an annual Muslim pageantry contest which is being supported by the government and sponsored by national televisions and other Muslim fashion brands. It was claimed to be the first Muslim beauty pageant in the world. The event, which was called 'World's Muslimah Beauty', is attended by contestants across the globe. This included Asian counterparts, Middle Eastern countries like Tunisia, European countries like Turkey and African countries such as Nigeria. The pageant itself is quite similar to any pageant in the world, but with Islamic values and headscarves. For example, the contestants must be able to recite *Qur'an*, have knowledge about Islamic teachings and be judged by orphaned children (Frank 2015). Muslim model agencies, like Jakarta based *Zaura*, were established

in 2010 since many Muslim models are needed to represent Muslim clothing brands or be walking mannequins in Jakarta's Islamic fashion week. *Halal* (a *Qur'an* term that means permissible) cosmetics like *Wardah* and *Mazaya* have been acknowledged by Indonesian customers who are halal-conscious. All these seemingly Muslim customer-grabbing strategies are also constantly being criticised as selling cheap religious values and might very well be different from *Qur'anic* teachings over modesty and humility. Fealy (2008) and Heryanto (2008) suggest that these forms of fashion and beauty commercialisation consumerism signify how religion has been commodified, but nonetheless Islamic tastes and values have had influence over social, cultural and political life in recent years in Indonesia rather than in the 1960s.

Undeniably, the internet has a major part in the proliferation of Islamic commodification. The emergence of social media, for example, blogs, e-commerce websites and Instagram, have encouraged the growth of Indonesian Islamic fashion. *HijUp*, the first Indonesian Islamic e-commerce established around 2011, is now visited by 1.6 million online visitors per day, of which 20 per cent have originated from outside Indonesia (Pratiwi 2013). *HijUp* also uses YouTube to market their brand by creating *hijab* style tutorials on their channel (which garnered around 150,000 subscribers). The use of online marketing through fashion blogs was also followed by Muslim fashion bloggers that used their online platforms like their blogs, Facebook or Instagram to market their own brands. The success of *HijUp* thus inspired other Muslim e-commerce in Indonesia like *Hijabenka*, *Zoya* and *elzatta*. The proliferation of Islamic clothing e-commerce is not a new phenomenon. Tarlo (2010, p. 161) suggests that the past decade has been a time where websites selling Muslim clothes and accessories have spread with the help of the internet to target Muslims in the West. These are often also owned by fellow Muslims living in Britain, Europe, Canada and the U.S.

Besides *e-commerce*, Islamic fashion catwalks proliferated across the globe, which was unthinkable a decade ago. Jakarta Islamic fashion week has been organised since 2013 and now has become one of the most anticipated fashion events of the year for Indonesian Muslim designers to showcase their creativity. The same Islamic fashion week is also organised annually in Malaysia and Dubai. The 'Urban Muslim Woman' was organised for the first time in London in 2010 and continues to be held annually. It has been described as "a landmark event that is aimed solely at providing a platform to interact, celebrate and promote expertise of female professionals, entrepreneurs, designers and students" (urbanmuslimwoman 2015). The show itself is a gathering and networking meet-up rather than purely a fashion show. In the U.S, an Islamic fashion week is held by MDIFC (Modesty Defined Islamic Fashion Council of America) annually, to "provide a platform to American-based Muslim designers, raising their national and international profile, and catapult them and their industry counterparts into successful fashion entrepreneurship" (usaislamicfashionweek 2015).

This year, during her commencement speech at the opening of Jakarta Islamic fashion week 2015, the Indonesian Minister of Trade proclaimed that, by 2018, Indonesia will become the capital of the world's Muslim fashion along with Malaysia and Dubai (Setyanti 2015). In more popular culture, as opposed to high-fashion, young urban Muslim women (mostly in their 20s) have started a *Hijabers Community in (2010)*, a community of young affluent *hijabis* and Muslim fashion enthusiasts in major Indonesian capitals. Many of its members are fashion bloggers who popularise and have created the look of so-called Muslim street style, to signify a casual, affordable and chic Muslim daily style that is highly popular amongst young Muslims. Since its establishment, the *Hijabers Community* has 5,000 members in different cities, where they organise monthly meet ups which usually consist of *hijab* or fashion shows and social charities, along with *Qur'an* study circles. Another similar community, the *HijabersMom Community*, was also organised in a similar

manner, specifically for young urban mothers who are also fashion enthusiasts. These two communities, which started as fashion blogging communities, have been growing through the dissemination of new generations of designers, as a way for bloggers to expand their economic opportunities. Luvaas (2013) argued that despite being 'off the radar' of the worlds' mainstream fashion industry, Indonesia might have an opportunity to become one of the worlds' biggest capitals of Muslim fashion.

The emergence of Islamic fashion in Indonesia does not exist in a vacuum. In Western countries, as the direct result of immigration and the integration of Islamic practices into the Western values, Islamic clothing has become in demand. Lewis (2015) argues that the suspicion and seclusion after the September 11th attack directly resulted in the global emergence of Muslim fashion. She asserts that (2015, p. 318):

...innovations in *hijabi* fashion emerge as a response, a riposte, to the heightened scrutiny encountered by Muslims since 2001, with a transnational cohort of predominantly young women forging new styles of modest dressing that assert through their participation in mainstream consumer fashion cultures their place in modern society.

Furthermore, in *Muslim Fashion*, Lewis (2015) concludes that over the past ten years' Muslim fashion is a growing business signified by the high street retailer or high-end brands to create *Muslim look* attire. Muslim fashion, as scholars (Tarlo 2010; Moors and Tarlo 2013 and Lewis 2015) argue, keeps in pace with modernity and globalisation, far from the old stereotype that Muslim attire lacks the ability to integrate with Western fashion. Big high street retailers, for example *H&M* and *Zara*, added more modest clothing styles to appeal to more Muslim customers. In 2015, *H&M* recruited their first ever Muslim model, Mariah Idrissi, a 23-year-old Londoner, to represent their Muslim clothing line (Sowray 2016). *House of Fraser* followed a similar strategy, launching their 'sporty *hijabs*' — specifically designed modest sport wear that can be used for various sports like swimming and

aerobics. In addition to high-street stores, the lure of creating and producing Muslim fashion has inspired some high-end names to follow the same path. High-end designers such as *John Galiano* in 2009 started modest clothing lines to attract wealthy customers, especially from the Middle East. Other high-end designers like *Lanvin* and *Karl Lagerfeld* supported this business strategy by adding more modest styles of clothing like maxi skirts and long-sleeve blouses to their collections. *Donna Karan* launched the *Ramadan collection* in 2014 that was specifically designed with Muslim women in mind. Other than the already established designer brands, many Muslim couture brands like *Issa* (partially owned by Camilla al-Fayed) and other luxurious brands have flourished in the same way as more affordable Muslim clothing brands (Luckhurst 2013). Harrods, Selfridges and other high-end retailers are considered to be shopping heaven for rich Middle Eastern socialites that usually spend their summer around Britain and Europe. It is reported that those retailers specifically recruited Arabic speaking concierges to address the Middle Eastern ladies. Luxurious hotels like The Savoy- London are reported to have Arabic speaking female butlers, *halal* menus and prayer rooms to provide services for rich Middle Eastern socialites (Luckhurst 2013).

2.3.3 Fashion Blogs

Although the invention of web-blogs could be traced back before 1990s, the emergence of blogs happened in the mid-1990 (Rocamora 2011) and reached its peak after 9/11 and the Iraq war (Miller 2011).

Web-blogs, or blogs can be defined as (Zelizer and Allan 2010,p. 11):

Diaries or journals written by individuals seeking to establish an online presence. The typical format revolves around a shared practice whereby each new entry is placed at the top of the page, its posting instantly time-and date-stamped.... the majority of early weblogs were 'personal' weblogs, that is authored by a single person, although some

'portal-like' or 'content aggregator' weblogs involved the collective efforts of a group of like-minded individuals making fresh contribution.

Personal blogs, as stated by Miller (2011) became the trend among the young generation, which turned out to revolutionise traditional journalism. This growing interest thus inspired academics and researchers to elaborate on some topics including blogging and citizen journalism (Allan 2006; Gillmor 2006; Tremayne 2007), blogging and identity construction (Turkle 1995; MacDougall 2005), and blogging and gender identity (Wajcman 2004; Van Doorn, Van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007). Although it is taught as a masculine technology, blogs, as stated by van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt (2007), became occupied by women since they have personal, confessional, diary-writing characteristics. In several pieces of research made on the subject of women and gender identity through blogs, several researchers (Hawthorne and Klein 1999; Wajcman 2004; van Doorn 2007) concluded that although blogs enable the expression of gender identity, those identities still fall within traditional gender identities. Apart from the existing literature on blogging and the creation of identity, Baumer, Sueyoshi and Tomlinson (2008) explore the role that the readers have in blogging activities. Using semi-structured interviews with 19 blog readers, Baumer, Sueyoshi and Tomlinson (2008) concluded that reading blogs is identified as habitual in nature and forms a community of belonging between the readers and the bloggers.

It is rather difficult to trace the history of fashion blogs as many sources cite different time frames, especially since the scholarship on the subject of blogs and fashion has been under-researched (Rocamora 2011). Fashion blogs, as Rocamora (2011, pp. 409) stated, do not attract many researchers because the contents are perceived as trivial, and therefore little is known of the history of fashion blogs. Wikipedia states that the first fashion blog was *Budget Fashionista* (2003), a U.S. based personal blog followed by several fashion publishers like *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* launching their own corporate blogs. As stated

by Rocamora (2012), personal fashion blogs have become increasingly important for fashion businesses as many influential bloggers or *power bloggers* (term to describe highly popular bloggers with wide readerships) help brands to grow with their personal endorsements through their blogs. Although personal fashion blogs could be different from corporate fashion blogs, the dichotomy is no longer clear-cut since personal blogs can be heavily commercialised as well (Rocamora 2011, p. 409). Personal fashion blogs are usually easy to identify by the way in which bloggers (authors) post their stories and photos (mostly consisting of daily outfits or magazine articles). Some fashion bloggers are even reluctant to be called fashion bloggers and prefer 'personal lifestyle' bloggers instead (Palmgreen 2010). Rocamora (2011, p. 407) defines fashion blogs as, "those blogs whose authors post pictures of themselves to document their outfit on a regular basis." Furthermore, (Chittenden 2010) adds that fashion blogs usually contain various images from runway fashion shows and magazines, which could be embedded into YouTube videos or another video sharing sites. Therefore, with the ability and flexibility of blogs to embed and interlink with other platforms, blogs are a popular choice to display personal tastes in fashion.

The increasingly important job of fashion bloggers to influence their readers has allowed fashion blogs to be given much attention in the fashion industry. In her recent interview with *The Guardian* (Fox 2015), Donatella Versace stated that the emergence of blogs and social media is among many ways to democratise the fashion industry. As she stated, fashion now is no longer in the hands of the fashion elite of designers and fashion journalists anymore. For Donatella, it is "a democracy, it is the real new things on the street" (Fox 2015). The prevalent function of social media, especially fashion blogs and bloggers, to democratise fashion industry was also stated by the famous fashion critic Robin Givhan in her article in *New York Magazine*. In her article, Givhan stated that, by the mid-2000s, bloggers like Susanna Lau, Bryan Yambao, Tavi Gevinson and Scott Schuman

had been representing the voices of ordinary people, those who were usually excluded from gaining access to fashion world. As Givhan (2014) stated:

They had unique points of view and savvy marketing strategies. They had a keen awareness of how technology could help them attract the attention of hundreds of thousands of like-minded fashion fans who had been shut out of the conversation.

Nevertheless, as she also said, instead of offering different voices from the mainstream fashion media, fashion bloggers in the end use their blogs as self-promotional campaigns. Her quotations suggested that fashion blogs were firstly established as a space of personal intimacy and closeness and, eventually by the popularity they garner, will attract the fashion industry to cooperate and therefore becomes an extension of the fashion industry itself. Such criticisms understandably come from the voices of fashion authorities, i.e. fashion critics, designers and editors that perhaps are anxious and threatened by the growing acceptance of powerful bloggers in the fashion industry. Similar arguments were also voiced by Luvaas (2014) and Lewis (2015), that the potentiality of fashion blogs to become the alternative space for people outside the fashion industry was finally being overridden by the bloggers' willingness to cooperate within the system either through promotional campaigns or product testimonies.

The existing scholarship on fashion blogs is mostly derived from the perspective of fashion blogs as political economic tools (Pham 2011; Pham 2013; Luvaas 2013), fashion blogs as the representation of taste and identity (Chittenden 2010; van Tilburg 2010; McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips 2013; Tilton 2015) and fashion blogs as self-governed platforms (Rocamora 2010). Susanna Lau, a British-Chinese fashion blogger, with her blog (stylebubble.com) created in 2006 was among the examples of the success of bloggers in the digital economy era. Pham (2013, pp. 248) notes that the success of Susanna Lau is "reflective of emerging global patterns born out of the rising significance of Asians and

young women (especially young Asian women) as consumers and producers in the digital economy". Following the logic of digital economy, Luvaas (2013) and Lewis (2015) note that, although the web-blog platform does offer a degree of autonomy to ordinary voices that are largely excluded from the fashion industry, in the end fashion blogs are merely a formulaic path for those who use blogs as a self-promotional campaign to create their own opportunities in the fashion industry. Power bloggers like Susanna Lau or Scott Schuman with his acclaimed blog the *Sartorialist* (in which he photographs street style fashion around the world) launched in 2005 pave the way to their own success in fashion business. Lau has been invited to a major fashion weeks since the success of her blog, and Schuman has since featured his work in major publishers like *Vogue* and *GQ* and had other lucrative deals with many designer labels. The 12-year-old U.S citizen Tavi Gevinson with her blog *Style Rookie* started in 2008 gaining attention and popularity within three years of it being published. She was named as one of the most influential teens in 2014 by *Time* magazine and has since launched her career in music, films and editing her teen-online magazine *Rookie*. The success stories of Susanna Lau, Scott Schuman and Tavi Gevinson signified that the path to success in fashion could be achieved by an unconventional strategy that is through the web-blogs.

Furthermore, as Chittenden (2010) who did her research on U.S. teenage fashion bloggers concludes, personal fashion blogs have becoming spaces for legitimising taste and social capital. Borrowing Bourdieu's concept of taste and capital, Chittenden (2010) argues that the ability of blogs to provide room and space for writing, giving comments and enabling the bloggers to control the commentaries of personal fashion blogs all create a popular platform for teenagers to re-enact their cultural tastes and reshape their offline identities. They could also improve the lack of social skills which they might encounter in their offline lives. Similar research by Van Tilburg (2010) and MacQuarrie (2013) also highlight the

display of taste in personal fashion blogs as a way to attract readers and gain social, cultural and economic capital.

Meanwhile, borrowing concepts from Michel Foucault, Rocamora (2011) elaborated that personal fashion blogs could be seen as the technology of surveillance. They argued that photography and computer screens function as a panopticon tool of self-governmentality, which enable bloggers to govern and control their own persona but also take ownership of their bodily appearances. Furthermore, as (Rocamora 2011, p. 422) states, with more women authoring their personal blogs than men, fashion blogs have become an “ambivalent space” for women, in the way that they control women’s appearances but at the same time also offer spaces for agency. Another study undertaken by Harju and Huovinen (2015) highlight the enactment of self-agency by the rise of *fatshion* blogs; these blogs are written by plus-size women as a way to resist and challenge the dominant-stereotypical feminine ideals that mostly permeate the fashion media.

Other than the above mentioned literature on the burgeoning scholarship of fashion blogs, there were two doctoral dissertations on the same subject that are worth mentioning here. First, Monica Tilton (2015) in her paper that was also part of her dissertation used textual and picture analysis to analyse the way in which fashion bloggers construct their identity as ‘fashionable personae’ through their enactment of visual and narrative stories on their blogs. She (2015, pp. 201-220) concludes that fashionable personae are achieved through the representation of bloggers’ self-identity that is situated, narrated and constantly built upon the performative characters of fashion bloggers. As she states (2015,p.217):

Fashion bloggers declare themselves as idealised fashion subjects by producing their own fashion-centred media formats and it is through the masquerading qualities of dress and fashion that they maintain a high degree of agency.

Focusing upon the bloggers as a performative subject, Findlay (2015) in her doctoral thesis researching personal style blogs combined participant observations, interviews, critical analysis and reader surveys to look at the interaction between the bloggers, readers and the blogs using performance studies. Using her own blog as part of her research (Findlay 2015, pp. 157-178) asserts that blogs are a site where tensions arise between “public and private, amateur and professional, individual and corporate, and intimacy and distance”. She concludes (2015) that a complex entanglement thus continually shifts and changes the blogging activities along with the dynamic of the relationship between readers, bloggers and the blog itself.

In line with what Titton (2015) and Findlay (2015), this research seeks to elaborate the relation between blogger, blogs and the blog readers. However, it differs from Findlay’s methodologies that use auto-ethnography of her own blog and her readers, because I am not a blogger myself nor do I identify myself as an avid blog reader. Prior to my research, I had only a little knowledge of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs with some occasional blog-reading in my spare time. Also while Titton’s study that relied heavily on textual and visual analysis, my study combines visual analysis and reader interviews together. The next subsection will focus upon the literature on Muslim fashion blogs, that will illustrate the proliferation of Muslim fashion media in the West and how it also emerged in Indonesia.

2.3.4 Muslim Fashion Blogs

Despite there not being much research done on the subject of Muslim fashion and the online media, the interest in how Muslims (especially Muslim women) generate internet or other online media has been growing in recent years (see Bunt 2003; Eikelman and Anderson 2003). Eikelman and Anderson (2003) stated that the presence of Islam and Muslim societies on the internet was shown by the emergence of the authoritative use of “Islamic symbols” as well as the increasing internet group discussions around Muslim

diaspora communities. Several pieces of research have been done on the subject under the scholarship of Muslim women and the internet (Sreberny and Khiabany 2007; Bastani 2011; Piela 2012; Nisa 2013) and have given reassurance that the internet enables Muslim women to share, learn, debate and negotiate even in strict Islamic censorship nations like the Iranian Republic.

Piela (2011), for example, in research on the subject of Muslim women generating online group discussions, concludes that internet online groups have given tremendous spaces for their members across various geographical locations discussing gender in Islam. Although she differentiates between the members who are positioning themselves as egalitarian (those who interpret Islamic principles from a gender equality point of view) and traditionalist (those that promote traditional gender ideology), nevertheless the internet has become a platform which enables these debates and discussions surrounding Islamic teachings to take place. Earlier research on the same subject by Bastani (2011) concludes that, through the internet, the participants in her research find a space where they no longer feel “physically and socially isolated” and that through the network, participants “support” each other. Specific research on web-blogs and Muslim women has been generated by Parsa (2008) on Iranian women’s online self-expressions. Blogging, for Iranian women, enabled them to be “visible” and functioned as a “safe place” to renegotiate the gender segregation which has been generated since 1974. Similar research on Iranian women and web-blogging (Amir-Ebrhami cited in Piela 2012) also concluded that blogs help them challenge the stereotype of “decent women” and in which they also wrote their experiences with femininity, including sexual experiences. Another study by Sreberny and Khiabani (2007) about the vibrant discussion surrounding women rights, politics and strict media censorship in the form of blogs in the Iranian Republic gives an optimistic vision of the potentiality of blogging as a new intellectual space. Even in the seemingly closed Muslim communities like *cadari* (an Indonesian community for face-veiled women), as

(Nisa 2013) argues, the internet can also be applied to the emerging virtual sub-culture which is different from the mainstream vision of the internet as the creation of a democratic civil society. Here, she elaborates that the internet, which in her case study takes the form of mailing lists, enabled this *cadari* community, which in public tend to be secluded, to be more present online.

Vis, Van Zoonen and Mihelj (2011) also explore the political activism and citizenship of Muslim women through video blogging platforms such as YouTube through the controversies surrounding the film *Fitna* (2008), the film produced by the Dutch parliament member, Geert Wilder, which proposed that Islam is a violent religion which has the tendency to oppress women. Their research concludes that through posting YouTube videos as an alternative voice and a critic of the *Fitna* film, YouTube enabled Muslim women and men to engage in the discourse surrounding their experiences and life narrative which were far different from what had been represented in *Fitna*. Furthermore, Vis, Van Zoonen and Mihelj 2011, p. 125) also argue that those actions could be considered as “global citizenship” actions when “political and religious actors...have not bothered to listen to them.” Burgess, Green, Jenkins and Hartley (2009) also conclude that blogs and video blogging have been really important in creating spaces for active citizenship.

Tarlo (2010, p. 162) explores that, during the past decade there was a rising phenomenon of *hijab* online stores, along with other internet platforms such as web-blogs from the Europe, Britain, Canada and the US that cater to Muslim consumers in those regions. While she also adds that the rise of Islamic specialised clothing lines is usual in the Muslim majority countries like Turkey, Qatar or Indonesia, it was a quite recent Western phenomenon that signified the growing need for Muslim customers to cater their needs and the internet makes it all possible. As other high-street retailers like *H&M* or *Topshop* started embracing Muslims customers by adding lines of clothes that fit into Islamic

modesty, Muslims in the West have many more options when it comes to fashioning their faith. As Tarlo also adds (2010, p. 222), the proliferation of Islamic clothing businesses in the West is “predicated on the idea that mainstream fashions are ‘un-Islamic’ or at least incompatible with Islamic ideals of modesty, an idea which may sometimes be exaggerated”.

The past decade has also witnessed the rise of fashion bloggers, and it could be predicted that Muslim bloggers were also taking part in the ‘blogging’ phenomenon. As Gokariksel and Secor (2013) note, along with the proliferation of *hijab* and Islamic clothing retailers from Turkey all the way to the rest of the Europe, there was a rise of Muslim bloggers across continents, from the UK, Europe and the United States. Tarlo and Moors (2013) state that “one key feature of these blogs is the creation of fashionable ensembles into the form of clothing collages or ‘sets’ which include accessories such as shoes, bags, jewellery and lipstick”. In Britain for example, Jana Kossaibati, a medical student, started her blog, *Hijabstyle*, in September 2007, as she realised that there was no blog dedicated to discussing everything related to Islamic fashion (Aquila-style 2015). Her blog mainly consists of product reviews, how to find them and her testimonies in regards to the products.

UK-based Dina Torkia is also considered a top UK blogger, with her blog and YouTube channel that has over 300,000 subscribers. Her blogs, *LazyDoll* and *DaysofDoll*, consist of her personal life stories, for example her journey to lose weight, alongside *hijab* or make-up tutorials (Torkia 2016). Starting to blog in 2011, Dina has just recently collaborated with Liberty London to create her signature scarf and collaborate with a BBC3 documentary to report the Muslim beauty pageant in Indonesia (Cochrane 2015). As Cochrane also stated that Dina is “part of the *hijabi* bloggers—Muslim women giving voice to their love of fashion, while wearing their *hijab*.” Hana Tajima, a 23-year-old London based blogger with

her blog, *Stylecovered*, has successfully launched her clothing label *Maysaa* for modest fashion customers (Tajima 2015). Recently, she teamed up with *Uniqlo* to create their modest-wear line. Europe, US and Canada, and other Muslim majority countries in Asia or the Middle East also saw a surge of Muslim fashion bloggers. Their aspiration is relatively straightforward and following the same path as any fashion blogger in the world. The success of their blogs or other social media platforms will present other opportunities such as being brand ambassadors, creating their own lines or collaborating with the already well-known high street retailers to create special Muslim and modest lines. The need for Muslim friendly media for example, helps launch websites and internet apps such as *Aquila-style*, an online magazine and app since 2010 that is dedicated to representing “modern Muslims living, pairing lifestyle with spirituality in a neat cutting edge magazines for men and women”. With contributors from all around the globe, *Aquila-style* consists of Muslim fashion, news related to Islam and Muslims all around the world, interviews with Muslim public figure like Malala Yousafzai and traditional Ramadhan recipes.

Muslim fashion blogs can easily be identified by the daily or regular posts on daily clothing and fashion style based on personal taste. What makes them distinctive or different from the usual fashion blogs is through the use of Islamic veiling practice, the *hijab*. The veil or the *hijab* style could be presented differently, again depending on the personal taste and style of the bloggers, some just wear turban style while still showing the neck area, some wear a more covered style with lots of style and accessories. However, the *hijab* or the head covering is the most distinct characteristic of Muslim fashion style. Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are also characterised by the *hijab* tutorials the bloggers post to achieve certain styles in styling the *hijab* or outfit. The clothing style is also very diverse. Some bloggers prefer to wear *abayas* and other traditional Middle Eastern style, some bloggers adopted Western clothing style such as denims, loose T-shirts and biker jackets. Following these mixed and eclectic styles, sometimes there have been some tensions over ‘what is

considered to be a proper *hijab* style' over another from hardliner Muslims readers suggesting that some bloggers might be crossing the line between Islamic convention of *hijabs* to Western-Secular fashion styles (discussion in relation to these issues will be explored in the chapter 4).

There is not any documentation to trace who published or wrote the first Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs and perhaps it is now not possible to trace this history at all given that the nature of the internet is one of fluidity, change, novelty and newness. However, Luvaas (2013) suggests that the emergence of Indonesian personal fashion blogs could be traced back to 2007. This is also the year when the personal fashion blogs gained momentum in the West. I argue that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs could have been published around the same time as the personal fashion blogs became a phenomenon elsewhere in the world. Dian Pelangi, one of the most famous Indonesian Islamic designers started writing her blog, *The Merchant Daughter*, around this time when she was 18 years old. In 2014, some of her collection was shown and sold in Harrods, London and this might lead her to global fashion sphere. In 2011 she was interviewed by CNN and noted as an influential young Asian designer. Her blog is filled with photographic visual images of her going to places from Europe to Africa to the United States while also promoting and showcasing her brand. Her Instagram account garnered almost 4 million followers and this year she is on the list of 500 influential people in the global fashion industry by BoF (Business of Fashion) based on nominations by fellow designers and fashion critics all around the world (Business of Fashion 2015).

Some Indonesian Muslim bloggers who are frequently mentioned through the interviews for this research all started their blogs around the years 2007 to 2008. Suchi Utami started her blog, *Last Minute Girl*, before her marriage and her blogs narrate her life journey from single girl, wife and now a mother of two children. Launching her clothing and *hijab* label,

Such! By Suchi Utami, *Last Minute Girl* is not only blog about her life story, but also about her distinctive daily style and marketing platform for her label. *Hijabscarf* is also among the most-read blogs in Indonesia; it started in 2010 and is authored by Fifi Alfianto and Hana Faridl, who work as a graphic designer and a photographer. Their blog then grew into a more professional website which resulted in the Muslim lifestyle magazine, *Laiqa*, in 2011. Not only that, their blog also enabled them to launch their fashion line in 2010, *Casa Elana*, a clothing line specialising in clothes for urban working women and breastfeeding-friendly tops for mothers.

In January 2015, some of the Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers launched *The Indonesian Hijab Blogger* (Indonesian-hijabblogger.com 2015) to gathered bloggers from all around Indonesia into a database. Although presumably lots of bloggers choose not to affiliate with this database, *Indonesian Hijab Blogger* enlisted around 250 bloggers to their website. They also frequently meet to maintain relationships so they not only read each other blogs, but also to know each other personally. Apart from this community, it is also worth mentioning that blog-based communities were established during recent years, for example the mother-bloggers community, travel blogs community, etc. The *Hijabers* community, a community of young, urban, stylish Muslim women, all started when some Jakarta bloggers frequently met and had since decided to launch the community that now counts 5000 women as their members. This shows that blogging is still a recent and up and coming phenomenon and that it will continue to be so.

2.3.5 Conclusion

This sub-chapter (2.3) has elaborated on the existing scholarship on the subject of fashion, Muslim fashion, fashion blogs and Muslim fashion blogs. The fashion sub-section (2.3.1) concluded that the obsession over modernity, identified as new, constant and fast-paced change, has driven fashion into an industry, especially after the industrial revolution period

(Wilson 2009) where fashion could be manufactured in mass-scale production. This section also argued that fashion is tightly related to the enactment of good taste, and hence articulates certain social classes, that Veblen defined as the leisure class (1899). French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) made similar observations in *Distinction*, that high cultural practice marks social class, including other pursuit of leisure activities such as fashion.

This section thus moved into the Indonesian fashion industry (section 2.3.2) that, since the 1990s, saw the emergence of a new *niche*, which is Muslim fashion. The Indonesian Muslim fashion industry grew after the period of the 1990s along with the emerging awareness of Muslim middle class women to don the headscarves. The need to find fashionable Muslim clothing catapulted professional Muslim fashion designers along with the publication of Muslim magazines that mostly cater to Muslim middle class women. In a global context, as the result of immigration and globalisation, the growing market of the Muslim fashion industry is also emerging, signified by the high-street retailers who produced so-called 'modest fashion', and the more high-end designers who launched their '*haute couture*' *abayas*. As argued by Tarlo (2010), the growing Muslim fashion industry in the West blurred the conservative paradigm that sees Muslim clothing as either un-Islamic or anti-fashion. Lewis (2013) also argued that the emergence of Muslim global fashion came after the suspicion and seclusion of Muslim communities post the September 11th attack, that resulted in Muslim communities, while still adhering to Islamic principle of *hijab*, accommodating Western influences over fashion. This phenomenon was followed by the proliferation of Muslim fashion media, such as magazines, newsletters, e-commerce websites and, in this case, fashion web-blogs.

Section (2.3.3) concludes that the fashion blog itself is a relatively new phenomenon, as it emerged in the 1990s and gained prominence in the mid-2000s. Zelizer and Allan (2010)

defined blogs or web-blogs as “diaries or journals written by individuals seeking to establish an online presence”, whereas Rocamora (2011, p.407)) defined fashion blogs as “blogs whose authors post pictures of themselves to document their outfit on a regular basis.” Fashion blogs have been hailed as the alternative ‘voice’ of fashion since they enable ordinary people express themselves and their personal taste on confessional journal-writing platforms. However, some argued (Lewis 2013; Luvaas 2013) that the seemingly independent, unfiltered, genuine and honest voice of personal blogs have eventually been used as self-promotional campaigns and to open up further opportunities in the wider fashion industry, as already showed by famous international bloggers like Susanna Lau (Lau 2010), Tavi Gevinson and Scott Schuman (Schuman 2005). It came like a pattern that the fashion industry has collaborated with famous fashion bloggers in terms of marketing, product testimonies or by harvesting new and fresh ideas from the bloggers as a way to reach new customers.

Section (2.3.4) concludes that the popularisation of international fashion bloggers thus inspired the birth of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, which are mostly owned and created by young, urban, middle class Muslim women. Other than regularly posting their ‘*hijab* of the day’ photographs, their blogs are also filled with daily life stories of bloggers as working women, wives and mothers. Some of them have become successful in gaining vast readership and have since also launched their own fashion labels and been hailed as the newest face of Indonesian fashion designers. The next chapter (chapter 3) will focus on the methodological approach of this study, where the research questions will also be addressed along with the pilot study conducted prior to the fieldwork.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter three attends to methodology aspect of this research. Here, the specific methodology, along with research questions, data collection and data analysis methods will be explored in length. Feminist methodologies, especially feminist audience ethnography which directly informs this study, will be examined in detail.

The chapter consists of seven sections, which start with the research question section. This section (3.1) elaborates the four research questions this study intends to address.

Furthermore, feminist methodologies will be discussed in the next section (3.2) which specifically concentrates on the research undertaken under the feminist audience ethnography scholarship and why this study is highly indebted to this scholarship.

The methods of data collection are derived from three data gathering methods, that are individual interviews, focus group interviews and archival research. These methods for data collection will be explored in section (3.3). Following this, the fourth section (3.4) explores the way in which data gathered from individual interviews, focus group discussion and archival research are analysed. Thematic and visual analyses are chosen to analyse the data from the fieldwork. The fifth section (3.5) of this chapter will report the initial findings from three pilot studies prior to fieldwork. The participant selections are discussed in section six (3.6), where the way I recruited 63 informants and conducted long-distance interviews (including the long distance focus group discussions) will be reported in great length. Finally, as the interviews were all conducted in an Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia), the problems which arise during transcription and translation will be discussed in the last section (3.7).

3.1 The Research Questions

This study argues that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs have been the sites of representation and negotiation around the notion of religion, femininity, class and national identity amongst their readers. Thus, in order to understand these complex entanglements between the text and the readers, there is a need for more comprehensive study of fashion blogs. Unfortunately, study of fashion blogs has been undeniably scarce in the academic community since fashion blogs have always been perceived as trivial (Rocamora 2011). Furthermore, as web-logs have been constructed as masculine technology and have been perceived as male-centred texts (Van Doorn, Van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007), this research scrutinises the notion that web-logs (fashion blogs) are the medium of women and consumed by women readers. To date there are only two dissertations (Findlay 2015, Titton 2015) which examined fashion blogs, both were in favour of textual / visual analysis over audience analysis. Although Findlay (2015) employed reader surveys as one of her research methods to gain their response, it is not sufficient to closely understand how the readers consumed the blogs. Thus, this research employs visual and audience analysis altogether, not only to examine the textual representations, but also to study the way in which the blog readers negotiate the meanings of such representation. Apart from several journals and popular articles, this study will also be the first study of Muslim fashion blogs and might also be the first of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. Specifically, this research focuses upon four research questions, which are:

1. Why do women in Indonesia read Muslim fashion blogs and how do they make sense of them?
2. How do readers negotiate the articulation of modernity, modesty, motherhood, class and nation in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs?

3. What motivates the Indonesian bloggers to write Muslim fashion blogs and how do they respond to their readers?
4. In what ways do Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment?

Research question number 1 (RQ 1) examines why women, in this case Indonesian Muslims, like to read Muslim fashion blogs and if so, when and how they are engaged with it in the context of daily life. Following this interrogation, this research question also examines how they make sense of such blog-reading practice and what the benefit of such practice is for them. This question is also interesting to tease out whether such activities, that some of my participants thought of as being banal and trivial, might potentially take a central role in their daily life routine.

Research question number 2 (RQ 2) relates to the way in which the readers negotiate the articulation of modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. Thus, RQ2 specifically engages with audience analysis as well as the visual analysis of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, as the previous research of fashion blogs has favoured textual analysis over audience analysis. Semiotics or semiology will be used to interrogate the codes of modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation which are being articulated through the blogs. Following this interrogation, the analysis of audience interviews will also be investigated.

The bloggers' motivations behind the production of such blogs will be the focus of RQ3. This part of the research question will also scrutinise the way Muslim bloggers respond to their readers, especially when dealing with backlash and criticism, as Lewis (2015) argues that modest bloggers sometimes face backlash over their stylistic creativity that challenges the conservatism of such religious dress. Following this, RQ3 will explore whether this also applies to Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers and, if so, how they deal with it.

Finally, RQ4 will analyse the way Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment. Here, following the emerging trend of women entrepreneurship through the use of internet and social media, it is imperative that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are being scrutinised to ask whether they claim to empower women and if so, how ?. Both RQ3 and RQ4 both will be answered and analysed together in chapter six.

Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs are defined as personal fashion web-blogs that are still active and updated regularly by the time of the interview by Indonesians who identify themselves as Muslims and their posts are overwhelmingly about distinctive Muslim fashion styles. Although some of these blogs also consist of personal stories like family life and cooking recipes, the fashion and photographic images of fashion dominate their daily blogs posts (Rocamora 2012). The web-blogs usually are characterised by the way posts are presented in reverse chronological order, where the newest post is located at the top which is different from those of websites although sometimes the web-blog addresses might resemble the website address (Zelizer and Allan 2010). Muslim fashion here is defined as specific attire and style for Muslim women, including the outfit and the use of headscarves or *hijab*. The term '*hijab*' will be used interchangeably in this research along with the use of words 'headscarves' and 'veil', and sometimes for the participants and Indonesian context, the word *hijab* and veils will also refer to the entire Muslim look (body covering) not only the head covering. The contextual use of the word *hijab* will be specifically explained in the findings and discussion chapters when these terms are used.

This research has benefitted tremendously from the feminist approach to audience ethnography especially those that analyse the way women consumed feminine genres such as magazines, soap operas or romance novels (the feminist ethnography research will be discussed at length in the next section). Since this research is not intended to garner data

quantification and focuses on interpretation and meaning-making, this research is qualitative. Bryman (2004, p. 266) defined qualitative research as “the research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.”

The data for this research are collected through individual interviews, group discussions, and archival study (archival research). The next section is dedicated to the brief analysis of the feminist approach to audience ethnography followed by the data collecting and data analysis methods.

3.2 Feminist Methodology: Towards the Audience Ethnography

Methodology can be defined as a set of theory about research methods. Therefore, methodology will inherently influence the various research methods, including data gathering and analysis that will be conducted in the research. Research methods, in short, are techniques to gather data and evidence for the research. Sandra Harding (1987, p. 3) defines methodology as, “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed”. Furthermore, she argues (1987, p. 2) that as a way to gather research evidence, usually research methods consist of: listening to (or interrogating) informants, observing behaviour and examining historical traces and records. The acknowledgment of women’s oppression and experiences thus become crucial factors in feminist research. Furthermore, she (1987, p. 7) argues:

One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematic from the perspective of women’s experience.

Feminist ethnography research, as Skeggs (2001) and Rheinharz (cited in Bryman 2008) argue is research which focuses on the voice and experiences of women, those that have been ‘trivialized’ as female activities from men’s point of view. Feminist ethnography

research, as Rheinharz (cited in Bryman 2008, p. 422) states, seeks to “understand women in context.”

Audience studies, as Hermes (2010) recalls, are influenced by first, the British-European media studies, second, American Cultural Studies and third, the classical tradition of mass communication research. British-European cultural studies are mostly influenced by the work of Stuart Hall’s *Encoding/Decoding* (1999), in which he analysed the ways in which television (especially news programme) was disseminated and circulated. He situated the audience in three different positions according to the way they decode the meaning of the message: hegemonic reading, oppositional reading and negotiated reading. Morley and Brundson’s audience research (1999) on the current affairs television programme, *Nationwide*, utilised Stuart Hall’s communication model to better understand how audiences made sense of the programme, thus rejecting the linearity of effects research which assumed ‘hypodermic effects’.

American media studies have also been influenced by feminist work in the literary tradition. Here, feminism is situated as ‘micro politics’ rather than ‘macro politics’. Feminist struggles are seen in everyday life situations as opposed to a bigger agenda (Hermes 2010). This study was also influenced by the feminist tradition in analysing the ways women consume media and popular culture like soap operas, romance novels and women’s magazines, those that are often considered women’s genres or trivial women’s texts. Furthermore, Van Zoonen (1994) adds that audience research is becoming popular because the textual analysis is seen as inadequate to capture the ‘effect’ of the meaning behind the text. Hermes (2010) asserts that ‘new audience studies’ emerged as a critique of audience studies before that, which tend to focused on text rather than audiences.

Alasuutari (1999) defines the new phase of audience studies as the new way of seeing audiences as discursive constructions, rather than audiences as the fixed entities. Radway

(in Alasuutari 1999, p. 6) points out that “instead of one particular circuit of producer, text and audience, people's daily lives must be the point of departure and object of research.” Thus, new audience studies have shifted from the ‘reading’ activities itself, into the wider paradigm of seeing how media and popular culture texts have becoming part of people’s everyday situation.

In American audience ethnography tradition, Janice Radway’s seminal work, *Reading the Romance* (1991), Ien Ang’s *Watching Dallas* (1985), along with other feminist ethnography research such as Joke Hermes’ *Reading Women’s Magazines* (1995) have been a beneficial influence in the foundation of this tradition. In *Reading the Romance* (1991), Janice Radway interviewed women of Smithton on how romance novels have been functioning as a pleasure to escape from mundane and boring married life. Gathering data through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, Radway (1991, p. 213) concluded that the act of reading romance functioned as an act of resistance towards patriarchal and traditional institutions.

Within British-European tradition, a study of how teenage girls read ‘Jackie’ magazines in sub-urban Birmingham in the 1970s, McRobbie (1991, p.131) concludes that the seemingly trivial and meaningless teen weekly magazines were deeply influential in shaping the feminine, and the sometimes conflicting message of adolescent femininity. In *Watching Dallas* (1985), Ien Ang analyses the way in which American soap opera *Dallas* filled in as a feminist text through the genre that is seemingly far-flung from feminist texts. In that research, Ang (1985,p.131) combined textual and audience analysis (through the use of correspondence letters with *Dallas*’ viewers) and argues that the pleasurable opportunities that being offered by romance novels and soap operas must not be ignored, and can be a window of opportunities for feminists to produce popular feminist texts-whatever they might look like. Other influential audience ethnography research has been employed by

Joke Hermes' in *Reading Women's Magazines* (1995). Using *repertoire analysis*, Hermes analyses the way in which women's magazines had been "easily put down" by their readers, and yet also functioned as relaxation sources. In that, Hermes also concluded that trivial texts, such as women's magazines that are seemingly taken for granted, had become part of readers' daily lives for almost their lifetime. Other research on women's magazines and soap opera within British-European tradition such as Gough-Yates (1983); Ferguson (1983); Ballaster (1991); Brown (1994) and Beetham (1996), similar with Hermes path, argued that although the textual content of women's magazines still strongly represented femininity and strong patriarchal tradition, the way femininity represents itself is changing and the way the readers understand and interpret the message and meaning was also complex and diverse. Recent studies on how American women read celebrities gossip magazines (Hatfield 2011; McDonell 2014) suggest that parasocial relationships were formed during the readers' interactions with the text where the celebrities were seen as real and ordinary and created a sphere of intimacy among the readers.

There is also a tendency for feminist audience ethnography to favour qualitative over quantitative data. Therefore, the use of in-depth interviews and participant observations are central in feminist research. To sum up, Hermes (2005, 2010) summarises the distinctive features of feminist audience ethnographic research as follows:

1. although New Audience Research is a type of audience research, its practitioners have a firm preference for qualitative over quantitative methods, which they believe allows them to do justice to the social contexts in which the media are used;
2. contrary to mainstream mass communication research, the New Audience Research often prioritizes respect for cultures or cultural backgrounds that are marginalised by the dominant culture and by mainstream research traditions;
3. its research object is usually popular culture, which includes both fiction and news genres; the New Audience Research is more political or 'critical' than popular culture research within such traditions as

American Studies or English Literature (in as far as they accommodate popular culture at all);

4. interactive research methods (interviews or participant observation) are preferred over textual analytical methods;
5. the political agenda of the New Audience Research is often a feminist agenda (although there is no reason why the methods of such research cannot be applied to a much broader agenda).

The third influence of audience studies other than American and British-European audience ethnography stemmed from classical mass communication research. Uses and gratification theory have influenced research on this genre which have sought to understand how audiences have been perceived as linear. A notable study in this genre that also favours qualitative interviews is Liebes and Katz's 1970s study of five different ethnic groups in America that analysed the way in which they watch *Dallas* (Hermes 2010).

The tradition of feminist audience ethnography that examines the ways women consume popular media that were typically regarded as banal, trivial and therefore unworthy of scholarly examination is what this research is mostly indebted to. As I briefly explained in the introduction, even my research participants thought that asking them about their blog reading habits was ridiculous and not worth pursuing. The triviality of fashion blogs, I argue, puts web-blogs in the same categories as other women's popular genres such as magazines, tabloids or soap operas. While, for my research participants, it was seemingly unworthy of academic pursuit, Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs instead are the powerful site where gender, femininity, religion, class and nation are articulated in the era of social media, where traditional media such as newspapers and magazines might no longer be the main sources of information. Feminist audience ethnography scholarship also shifts the perspective that, while textual representation is important, the voice and experience of women as media consumers are also equally important. This research intends to do both, using textual/visual analysis as well as analysing the blogs' readers and bloggers. The next

section will engage with data collection and data analysis methods followed by the reporting of pilot study prior to the fieldwork.

3.3 Data Collection

The methods for data collection are individual interviews, focus group discussions and archival research. In the end, there were 63 participants (consists of 10 bloggers and 53 readers) in total. Specifically, 34 readers were being interviewed individually and 19 were being interviewed through five focus group discussions. The recruitment process and the identity of each participant are further clarified in the sub-chapter entitled 'participants recruitment process' and the identity of each participant can be found in the appendix section. The data collected in this research were obtained through individual interviews, focus group discussions as well as archival study, all of which will be further detailed below.

3.3.1 Individual Interviews

Individual interviews are very common and widely used in qualitative or interpretative – based research (Gaskell 2000; Bryman 2004). They are defined as (Gaskell 2000, p. 38):

Interviews of a semi-structured type with a single respondent (the depth interview) or a group respondents ((the focus groups).

The individual interview, if generated successfully, can provide rich and thick description about the experience of informants. In more detail, Pickering (2008, p. 85) explains that individual interviewing is suitable for research which:

1. Aims for depth and detail.
2. Adopts a 'life perspective' covering various areas in individual's life.
3. Aims to establish comparisons and contrasts between individuals.
4. Aims to explore the interplay between individual and social factors through the cases of particular consumers.
5. Explores sensitive or controversial topics where group dynamics may be unhelpful.

Furthermore, to be successful, individual interviews must resemble the friendly, intimate conversation between friends but it is also different from everyday conversation in a way that it has distinctive purpose, which is for research (Gubrium and Holstein 2001).

In practice, interviews could be separated into three categories: structured and unstructured interviews. In a structured interview, as Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 701) explain, the interviewer asks a specific standardized set of questions with limited space for variation. Structured interviews also restrict the interviewer's ability to "improvise or exercise independent judgment" (Fontana and Frey 2005, p. 702). Furthermore, unstructured interviews is described as "...the open-ended, in-depth (ethnographic) interviews." This type of interview is usually used in ethnographic research, usually to analyse native language and culture. Furthermore, as (Bryman 2004) noted, social science researchers usually employ qualitative interviews, which are a combination or mix of both unstructured and semi-structured interview, as oppose to structured interview.

Furthermore, Van Zoonen (1994, p. 137) asserts that unstructured interviews, although advantageous for creating a relaxing atmosphere for the participants, could have detrimental effect in terms of the overwhelming data and the potential for losing interviewing focus. Thus, to avoid data saturation, researchers tend to use semi-structured interviewing to keep the conversation on track, although it could also be loosely used depending on how the informants make sense of their world. Semi-structured interviews help the researchers to focus on the interview questions while at the same time maintain their flexibility towards the interview direction. As Salmons (2012, p. 20) asserts that the semi-structured interview is the middle ground between structured and unstructured interview. It combines both the advantages of the two spectrums; the flexibility of the unstructured interview but at the same time also maintains the focus as in structured interviews.

Furthermore, conducting video conference interviews, as this research is based on, brings a set of challenges for the interviewer as well as the informants. As Salmons (2012) explained, although computer-mediated-communication (CMC) technology could be very beneficial in helping the data collection, there might be some barriers when it comes to natural human interaction. Therefore, before conducting e-interviews, the researchers should answer key questions, that are (Salmons 2012, p. 19):

1. Does the researcher plan to use structured, semi-structured, unstructured or combination of styles for the interviews?
2. How does the researcher align ICT functions, features and /or limitations with the selected e-interview style(s)?

Based on this consideration, the use of a video conference technology like Skype is the most suitable for this research. Video conference technology, like Skype, allows human interaction to become more “free flowing, conversational characteristic that closely resembles face-to-face dialogue” (Salmons 2012, p. 21). All individual interviews in this research were conducted through Skype video conference technology where, prior to the interview, I had called the participants in advance to arrange an appropriate time and date for interviews (considering that there is a seven-hour time difference between Indonesia and UK). All interviews were also recorded using Skype recorder where participants’ permission was obtained prior to the recording.

3.3.2 Focus Group Discussions

This research also employed focus group discussion (FGD) besides individual interviews. Group interviews or group discussions are a data collection method that is widely used in social research. Fontana and Frey (2005, p. 703) define group interviews as,

essentially a qualitative data-gathering technique that relies on the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting.

They later assert that group interviews are also popularly known as focus group discussions, which originated from marketing research where consumers are gathered to discuss specific marketing purposes. Just like individual interviews, focus group interviews could be structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

Kitzinger (1994, p. 103) also adds that the distinction between focus groups and any other discussion as follows,

The group is 'focused in the sense that it involves some kind of collective activity- such as viewing a film, examining a single health education message or simply debating a particular set of questions. Crucially, focus groups are distinguished from the broader category of group interviews by the 'explicit use of group interaction' as research data'

Furthermore, Gaskell (2000,p. 480) points out that the focus group interview is commonly used in audience research studies where the purposes are to:

1. Orient the researcher to a field of inquiry and the local language.
2. Explore the range of attitudes, opinions and behaviours.
3. Observe the processes of consensus and disagreement.
4. Add contextual detail to quantitative findings.

Pickering (2008, p. 74) explains that, compared to individual interviews, group discussions offer more broad description as it can capture common discourse amongst the participants.

Gaskell (2000, p. 43) also argues that in order to easily recall the interesting parts of the interview and avoid the loss of important data, the ideal amount of group discussions is somewhere between six to eight groups. The number of interviewees might vary from six to ten people per group (Bertrand and Hughes 2005, p. 81). These can be considered to be

an ideal and concise size since it enables interviewers to generate people to engage in dialogue and conversation and yet is still easily controlled. In addition, Fontana and Frey (2005) assert that group discussion could have some advantages compared to individual interviews for several reasons; first, group discussion is relatively cheaper than individual interviews. Secondly, they can be productive and engaging for each participant while the format might be flexible. Third, the format is flexible ranging from structured to un-structured, depending on how the interviewer conducts the discussion. However, as Fontana and Frey argue (2005, p. 705) group discussion also requires skilful interviewers as they are the ones who control the group dynamics.

Conducting group discussions through the use of video conference technology is far more challenging than conducting individual interviews with the same technology. There were several times when the technology failed (the Skype interview was cut short in the middle of discussions) and my ability to read the facial expressions and human interaction between the participants is limited. Based on these precautions, the participants were gathered in one place where the interviews took place. The number of participants was also limited to a five-person maximum for every round of group discussions to allow interviewer to pay attention to each informant. The group discussions were also recorded through Skype video recorder and participants were asked to give their consent beforehand.

3.3.3 Archival Study

The data collected for the purpose of this research was not only generated from the individual and focus group discussions. The internet archive is significantly beneficial to gather the data (written and visual) from various Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. Since there are so many web-blogs that could be categorised as Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, the written and visual data is gathered from the blogs that are popularly read by the

informants or participants. I was able to gather a database of blogs that were often mentioned by the participants.

Internet archive research also enabled me to gather transcripts of bloggers' that failed to be interviewed. Some famous bloggers refused to be interviewed and some could not make the time because of their hectic schedules, and thus for the purposes of this research I use their old interview materials that had been done in the past, which could be easily obtained through the internet archive. The use of internet archive research was also fruitful as a tool for secondary analysis, to complement the researcher's primary data and allowed data to be recalled for future purposes. As Carmichael (2008, pp. 391-392) suggests:

There is an ever increasing range of qualitative data available in the form of networked databases and archives, websites and other resources. It is important, however to distinguish between those which have been established and structured explicitly to allow for secondary analysis, and those to which secondary analysis may be applied even though this may not have been a central concern of originators.

The use of bloggers' past interview transcripts in the findings and analysis chapters will be treated cautiously as the interviews were already structured based on the purpose of the interview in the past by other mass media outlets. For example, there were interviews with Dian Pelangi, one of the most renowned Indonesian Muslim bloggers, by CNN Asia highlighting the way she successfully launched her fashion brand. Dian Pelangi's interview transcript will be treated cautiously and further analysed in the findings chapter as I am not the one who interviewed her. However, since she is one of the most famous Muslim bloggers in Indonesia and her blog was amongst the ones which were popularly discussed during FGDs, it is pertinent to use her past transcript as secondary data for this research. Transcripts which were gained during individual interviews and focus group discussions will be treated as primary data instead of the secondary data obtained through the internet

archive from various sources. The next section will discuss the data analysis techniques, which are thematic and visual analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered from individual and group interviews as well as internet archive was analysed using visual and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to analyse interview transcripts from the individual and group discussions, while visual analysis is used to analyse the visual data gathered from the internet archive, which in this case are mostly photographic images from fashion web-blogs. The next sub-chapter is dedicated to discussing both the analytical tools (visual and thematic analysis) used in this research.

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is defined as a widely used method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. Despite being widely used, mainly in Psychology and various research fields, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 77) assert that it is also seemingly dismissed. Jofee (2010, p. 210) asserts that thematic analysis has only recently been recognised as one of the best qualitative analytical tools. It is highly useful as an analytical tool for data gathered from interviews, focus group discussions and field notes, and thematic analysis is also flexible in a way that it also useful to analyse pictures and sounds (Braun and Clarke 2006; Jofee 2010). Grounded Theory has the same analytical phase, but thematic analysis is different in that it does not always lead to theoretical models (that Grounded Theory aims for) but it can lead to solutions and it works best for large sums of data (Guest, McQueen, Namey, 2012, p. 17).

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the six phases in doing thematic analysis, which involve:

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes.

4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

The first phase, familiarisation with the data, requires researchers to read and re-read all transcripts and field notes, highlighting some of the most interesting features in the data obtained. The interesting features could be built into codes and themes in a later phase. The process of transcribing interviews could be an important step for data familiarisation. The second phase is the process of generating initial codes. Braun and Clarke define codes as the interesting features or ideas which emerge from the bulk of data. Codes could be latent (implicit) or semantic (explicit). They also assert that codes should be different from the theme, in the way that a theme should be broader since it involves several codes that work together. The third phase begins after the initial coding is finished and the themes appear to be more prominent. In this phase, codes are analysed until they generate the overarching themes. This phase will end up with several themes emerging from the collection of codes that support the overarching themes. (Braun and Clark 2006, p.8)

Phase four, reviewing themes, is the process where all the themes have been identified and evaluated. It is possible to change a theme or combine two themes together. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that this phase involves two levels: the first level is to make sure that the codes building build the overarching themes work together and are coherent. The next level is to make sure that all the themes represent the validity of the data. The process of coding and building themes could be exhausting and time-consuming, it is the researchers themselves that decide whether a new additional code or theme would not add anything substantial and should resume the process. Phase five involves naming and defining the themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006, p.92) assert that this process entails the analysis of each of the themes and identifying the 'essence' of the themes. They later suggested that the names of the themes should be "concise, punchy and immediately give the reader a

sense of what the theme is about". The final phase, phase six, is the process involving the producing of the report. The report should be robust, thorough and demonstrate the validity of each theme. Codes and data have to be presented evidently in support of each theme. Braun and Clarke (2006,p.93) suggest that, rather than presenting and illustrating data, the report should also be analytical and move beyond just the mere descriptive.

From the six phases above, the process of coding and finding themes is crucial to thematic analysis process. Far from simple, a good thematic analysis is "beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both explicit and implicit ideas within the data" (Guest, McQueen and Namey 2012, p. 10). Braun and Clarke (2006,p. 94) add that a good thematic analysis report is not only descriptive but also offers an analytical and interpretive narrative.

Among many other things that have become advantages of thematic analysis, the method also has limitations. Braun and Clarke (2006) have suggested that thematic analysis has limited interpretative ability if it is not backed up by a theoretical framework and it also lacks more nuanced data, different from the way the discourse analysis tend to focused on the use of specific language.

3.4.2 Visual Analysis

Visual images have been used as the complementary data or the sole research data for centuries. Beginning with the use of visual images in anthropology to study the colonisation period, visual images have now become an inter-disciplinary study with various methods (Banks 2008). Emmison (2000,p. 23) and Wagner (in Margolis and Pauwels 2011,p. 49) noted that sociology and anthropology are the fields that are "most receptive to photography", while cultural studies, which developed quite recently, put the production and consumption of culture such as visual images (films and photography) at the centre of

the field. Rose also notes that (2001, p. 2) visual culture, through movies, advertising, photographic images, are all considered to be fundamental in the development of Western societies thus making the study of representation (meaning-making) central to understanding this mechanism. There are various methods used to study visual images from content analysis that tends to be quantitative, to semiotic analysis, coming from the structuralist tradition.

Semiotic analysis or semiology is a visual analysis method which focuses upon signs and relations between signs (Rose 2001). The key concept of semiotic analysis was introduced by the French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, who looked upon the relationship between the sign, signifier and signified. A sign, which could be defined as “a basic unit of language” (Rose 2001,p. 113) consists of a signifier (a combination of letters) and the signified (the mental image or concept it refers to). For example, the word “rose” is a combined of the signifier letters of r,o,s,e but also signifies flower, beauty, passion and even lust. It could also be concluded that the relation between the signifier and signified is often arbitrarily and culturally-bound.

Roland Barthes (1973) extended this concept further into the analysis of cultural practice and critique. Van Zoonen (1994, p. 74) recollects that Barthes “introduced semiology to wider audience applying it to various forms of popular culture, ranging from toys, hairstyles and chip to cooking, soap powders and the new Citroen car. He outlined two key questions when analysing the visual images first, the question of representation, that is what and how the images represent; second, the question of the hidden meaning, that is what ideas and values do the people, places and things represented in images stand for. Barthes (1973) also concentrated his study on photographic images, building his visual semiotic study upon the concepts of connotation, denotation and myth.

Denotation is the explicit, semantic, literal meaning. This is the first layer of meaning of the text. The second layer of meaning is connotation. Van Leeuwen (2001, pp. 96-97) defines connotation as “the layer of broader concepts, ideas and values which the represented people, places and things ‘stand for’, ‘are signs of’”. Later, in *Mythologies* (1973), Barthes coined the term myth to further analyse connotative meaning as ideological meaning, a way to preserve the legitimacy of the status quo and those in powerful positions. Myth, as Barthes suggested “makes us forget that things were and are made; instead it naturalises the way things are. Myth is thus form an ideology.” The work of myth could be described as a way to naturalise things through denotative signs, as (Thwaites, Warwick, Mules 1994, p. 73) explain as follows:

Myths are naturalised codings of social meanings and values. The extreme effect of myth is to hide the semiotic workings of a text’s signs and codes. The denotations appear so true that the signs seem to be the things themselves.

Although semiological analysis is widely used for various texts, there is no standard protocol on how to apply it (McRobbie 1991). However, McRobbie’s semiological analysis of teenage magazine *Jackie* started with isolated codes and proceeded with denotative (literal meaning) and connotative meaning. As she argues (1991, p. 91):

Semiological analysis proceeds by isolating sets of codes around which the message is constructed. These conventions operate at several levels, visual and narrative, and also include sets of subcodes, such as those of fashion, beauty, romance, personal/domestic life and pop music. These codes constitute the ‘rules’ by which different meanings are produced and it is the identification and consideration of these in detail that provides the basic to the analysis.

Following the way McRobbie analysed different codes in *Jackie* magazine, this research will follow the semiological analysis process by isolating codes and follow this by looking at the denotative (literal meaning) and the connotative meaning. McRobbie (1991, p. 93) pointed

out that “codes of connotation depend on prior social knowledge on the part of the reader, observer, or audience, they are cultural, conventionalised and historical”.

3.5 Pilot Study

During the beginning of my fieldwork (February – June 2014), I conducted four interviews for my pilot study. The reason I did this was that this research targeted significant numbers of research participants, so I wanted to test the interview questions first. By testing out the interview questions first, I was able to evaluate and change the interview questions when the fieldwork finally took place. The pilot study also enabled me to evaluate whether conducting interviews entirely through video conferences was possible and whether the data and outcome were as good as I expected.

The pilot interviews were all conducted through Skype and ran, on average, from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. The pilot study participants were recruited through friends of friends who were known to like to read Muslim fashion blogs. I also interviewed my close friend Fiona whom I always knew loved to read fashion blogs and has been interested in fashion for the years I have known her.

The four interviewees have quite different ages and backgrounds. Sita and Fiona are both mothers in their 30s while Afini and Tiara are undergraduate students both majoring in Communication studies. Despite various geographical locations, Sita is the only working woman among all of my interviewees. Fiona is a homemaker who just recently resigned from her marketing job while Afini and Tiara are undergraduate students. They are all living in metropolitan cities around Java, educated, and seemingly coming from middle-class backgrounds. Sita holds the highest educational background, which is a post-graduate degree in Psychiatry, and has been in professional practice since.

My interviews focused upon three points of departure: their *hijab* stories, their habits and interest in reading Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs and their opinion of the ways in which Muslim bloggers represent themselves through their blogs. The following discussion is the summary of the three points of departure I have mentioned above.

3.5.1 The Hijab Stories

It is quite predictable that those who like to read Muslim fashion blogs are indeed Muslim themselves, especially those who decided to cover themselves (wear the *hijab* or headscarves). The four women that I interviewed for the purpose of my pilot study had all decided to wear the *hijab* years before the pilot study taken place. I suggest that their *hijab* stories—or what, how and why they decided to wear *hijab*—are fundamental to their blogs reading habits. That is why I argue that their *hijab* stories is pertinent during the interview.

As it has been explored in the introduction, despite becoming the Muslim majority country in the world, wearing the *hijab* is optional for many Muslims in Indonesia. In fact, many decide to cover themselves when they are well into their adulthood and are usually motivated by personal or religious reasons. The decision to wear the *hijab* has always been seen as a new phase of life, sometimes a historical and memorable momentum that changed the direction of their lives.

For Sita, a 37-year-old psychiatrist and mother of three living in Jogjakarta, Central Java, the decision to wear her *hijab* came after some tumultuous years in her life. After going through a very difficult childbirth with her third child and almost going through a divorce, Sita feels that wearing *hijab* is her proof of gratitude for her life. As she stated,

“...feels like I was reborn again. We decided to work and fight for our marriage again. I felt like being a better person, and I put my *hijab* as a proof to that. I feel like I became a more calm person, more spiritual, and full of gratitude.” (Sita, 37)

The need and hope to become a better person was also stated by Fiona, my college friend whom I have know for over five years. As she said, she also wants to be a better Muslim, and one thing to manifest this is the decision of wearing the *hijab*.

“You know, I was a naughty girl [laugh]. I dated so many bad boys. And then I think...when will this ever end? I will do the same thing over and over again. I won’t attract good men to marry me unless I become a good Muslim myself.” (Fiona, 31)

The state of being a good Muslim seems to connect tightly with the decision to wear the *hijab*. As Fiona added that although the *hijab* is not the only requirement to being a good Muslim, at least wearing the *hijab* signifies a stepping stone, that there is an intention to be a better Muslim and to be more pious in preserving Islamic teachings and values.

Afini and Tiara both also stated that their decisions to wear the *hijab* were motivated by the pious reasons. Afini also stated that the recent popularisation of the *hijab* and the consumerism of Islam in Indonesia strengthened her *hijab* decision.

“I have various reasons over this [decision to wear hijab]. Yes, my family is fully supported me. And yes, I want to practice Islamic teaching. Also, the way *hijab* is becoming popular recently and how easy it is to be stylish and fashionable, that just an added bonus. So yeah, I think that was the right time for me.” (Afini, 19)

As it has been mentioned in the introduction chapter, the reform era (post- 1998) marked the popularisation of the veiling practice among the Indonesian Muslim middle class. Just as Afini confirmed, her decision to wear a *hijab* was also made easier by how easy it was to buy fashionable *hijabs* and Islamic clothing. For young woman like her, just like Tiara, the need to be pious also coincided with the need to be fashionable. Tiara even added that she is one of the members of the growing *hijabers community*, a community of young urban

Muslim women that gather monthly and frequently hold fashion shows and *hijab* classes, where they learn how to dress-up beautifully based on Islamic teachings.

“I feel like it’s easy to wear *hijab* nowadays. There are so many options. This community [hijabers community] teaches me how to style your *hijab* and how to dress based on your body type. I don’t think there’s any reason to say that *hijab* is not stylish or not compatible with your lifestyle at all.” (Tiara, 23)

Just as Afini stated, Tiara also testified that the booming of Islamic clothing made her decision to wear the *hijab* so much easier, especially during her membership of the *hijabers* community which also teaches her how to combine modesty and fashion.

All in all, the four interviewees had all testified that their decisions to wear the *hijab* was something important to mark their new beginning as a better Muslim. The booming of Islamic industries, especially the clothing industry, had in fact made that important decision to wear the *hijab* seem easier. The next chapter will elaborate the informants’ blog readings habit, which are also tightly related to their decision to wear the *hijab*. That is why the context of the ‘*hijab* stories’ is important to setting the scene of my participants’ reading habits.

3.5.2 Blogs’ Reading Habit

All of my pilot study informants stated that they are fashion conscious, meaning that they are eager to know about the latest trends in fashion. They also stated that wearing the *hijab* does not and should not forbid them from following the latest fashion. Just as Sita stated:

“I always follow the Muslim fashion bloggers, just for the sake of knowing the latest style and sometimes they give an insightful idea on how to style your *hijab*. You know...how to tie your *hijab* in a cute way [laugh].” (Sita, 37)

Sita also added that since she is a working woman, it is important for her to maintain her appearance to look professional. Fiona gave slightly different testimony that since she is no longer working (resigned before the birth of her second child), maintaining her appearance is no longer an essential for her. Although she informed that she reads blogs for the sake of curiosity.

“Well, as you know...I’m now a homemaker. So, buying the latest trend is no longer important for me but you know me...I’ve always loved fashion, I enjoy it, although I never considered myself a shopaholic. I like reading Muslim blogs, they are everywhere right now, right? These bloggers, they are very talented and have good taste in fashion. They set the trends right now. I just want to know what they’re up to. What they wear, how to mix and match your outfits, that stuff.” (Fiona, 31)

Fiona stated that Muslim bloggers are the ones who set the latest trends right now. She also stated that Muslim fashion bloggers are on the rise in Indonesia in recent years. Although keeping up appearances is no longer important for Fiona, she still feels the need to know about the latest trends since she is a fashion enthusiast.

When I asked the four of them (separately) about their blog reading habits, only Tiara and Afini could specify that they regularly read fashion blogs (several times in a week). Sita and Fiona stated that because of their busy schedules in domestic and professional life, they read blogs sporadically. As they stated:

“Quite often...I guess several times a week. Although I can’t remember the exact amount of times. But definitely quite often.” (Tiara, 23)

“I think whenever I have spare time, which is quite a lot [laugh]. I spend most of my time on social media and that makes reading fashion blogs definitely become part of it. Maybe...yeah, almost every day. I have my own favourite bloggers. So their blogs are the ones I read.” (Afini, 19)

“Gosh...it’s quite sporadic. You know, I’m a working mum with three kids. Sometimes a week will be spent without even reading it.” (Sita, 37)

“Whenever I have a spare time. I mean, really really me-time. And it’s getting difficult after two babies. Sometimes I binge read. Maybe after weeks of absence, I open my laptop and read their blogs.” (Fiona, 31)

Here lies the difference in habits between Sita and Fiona (who are both mothers) and Tiara and Afini (who are both college students). College students like Tiara and Afini stated that they read blogs more regularly since they spend their leisure time on social media. Reading blogs, as stated by Afini, is part of her social media activities. She then further added that she has her own favourite bloggers, those whose blogs are always part of her daily media consumption. Sita and Fiona, on the other hand, although they stated that they like fashion and are always curious about the latest trends, they put reading fashion blogs as their last priority among the other more important priorities of being mothers. Fiona stated that she only reads blogs whenever she has absolute leisure time, which she called me-time. This suggests that blogs are not one of her daily habits. It seems that reading blogs is her reward, those that are allowed to be consumed only in leisure time as a homemaker. This suggests that she treats her love of fashion and her enjoyment of reading fashion blogs as her last priority in life, those that were legitimate to be fulfilled only when she was still single and working, but long gone after her marriage and the birth of her children.

To sum up, the section on informants’ reading habits has suggested that Muslim fashion bloggers were seen as fashion experts, people who set the trends in Islamic fashion in Indonesia. This section also suggested that the rise of Muslim fashion bloggers has made bloggers into those who now have a powerful influence over their readers’ choice of fashion and that also suggests that fashion bloggers are as important as magazine editors’ opinions or those of fashion designers. Despite gaining popularity over recent years, reading fashion blogs were still seen as something trivial, something that can be consumed only in leisure time. This is more prominent in the way in which informants (especially mothers) stated that reading blogs is the least of their priorities. Students have more habitual actions in acknowledging blogs as part of their daily media rituals, incorporating

reading blogs along with other social media platforms in their daily internet activities. The next chapter is to discuss what and how the Muslim fashion blogs represent, based on my pilot study informants.

3.5.3 What do the Muslim fashion blogs represent?

When asked during pilot study interviews what they think about the bloggers whose blogs they regularly read, my informants gave their opinions, which ranged from motherhood, fashion expertise and lifestyle. It is understandable since the Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs do not necessarily talk about fashion all the time, but also focus on daily stories of the lives of fashion bloggers as they drive themselves around the centre of their domestic and professional lives. These bloggers also had varying degrees of background stories, from single women, newlyweds, to fulltime and working mothers. Readers, including my pilot study informants, feel the closeness with these bloggers. It seems that the sense that bloggers are ordinary woman just like the rest of the readers is the reason why reading blogs is so appealing to the readers I interviewed. These are their testimonies,

“...I like Fifi Alvianto’s blog. You know that she transitioned from being a working mum to full time mum. Just like me. So, it’s interesting to read how she copes with that. And I like the way she dresses herself and her daughters. Her daily life stories are very funny sometimes, I mean...beside her good taste of fashion.” (Fiona, 31)

“It’s interesting to read about her life. She is a student like me, but of course she is studying in Germany. I like to read her stories about living in Germany, and her clothes, her style is very creative. I love to follow these kinds of bloggers, you know...Indonesian Muslims living abroad.” (Afini, 19)

“...just ordinary stuff. What do they do, where do they hang out with, their families, their boyfriends or spouses, where do they go on holidays. But they are rich [laugh] so they do everything in stylish way. Of course we always like to read or watch how the rich live their lives.” (Tiara, 23)

“well, they are basically Muslims living in Jakarta. But I’m proud of these women. They challenge the stereotype of Muslim as poor and unable to follow fashion. Look at them, I mean they change this

conception. They're very stylish, very modern, very educated, that's the way all Muslims should become." (Sita, 37)

From their testimonies above, it is clear that it is not only the fashion that makes blogs appealing for the readers, but also the close feelings that the readers felt towards the bloggers. Fiona, for example, mentioned one blogger that she thinks resembled her life narrative as a former working mother that transitioned to becoming a full-time mother. The blogger narrative reflected Fiona's recollection of the way she coped with that transitioning experience. The feeling of closeness is reflected through Tiara's and Afini's testimonies, although they also highlighted the difference of social background between them and the bloggers whose blogs they followed. Afini, for example, felt a closeness to her favourite blogger who is also a college student just like her, although the difference is that the blogger went to Germany for her study. Tiara also highlighted the difference of social economic background between her and the bloggers, apart from the "ordinary stuff" that the bloggers do. The fact that, in Tiara's opinion, the bloggers do mundane activities but always in a stylish way sets apart the readers like Tiara from the bloggers. On one side the readers have similar experiences as the bloggers, as mothers or students, but on the other side they are also distanced from the portrayal of tastes and lifestyle.

Sita gave slightly different testimonies from other informants, using the Muslim stereotype as she used the words "poor" and "uneducated" as opposed to the way she sees the Muslim bloggers that represent the "very stylish, very modern, very educated" Indonesians. She highlighted the problem of representation within Muslim communities and also historical consciousness from the past relationship between civil Islam with the New Order government in Indonesia. As has been illustrated in the social and historical context in the introduction chapter, veiled women had been as vilified as any Islamic symbols, as the representation of rejection of national development program as well as their inability to

become part of economic modernisation. Muslim fashion bloggers, in Sita's view, changed these perceptions by representing their selves through blogs as individuals who can adapt easily to modernity, which is signified by their fashionable clothing and urban lifestyle.

To sum up, this section has illustrated the ambiguous relationship between the readers and the bloggers and how fashion blogs create spaces of representation of the real and the ordinary but also distance the readers from the bloggers by the representation and the conspicuous portrayal of social and economic backgrounds. The domestic lives that the bloggers portrayed through their blogs, such as motherhood and other mundane activities, have been effectively giving the readers the feeling of closeness that makes the bloggers seem so believable. However, the portrayal of urban middle class consumption disrupts this relationship as it is creating a distance between the readers and the bloggers, and that is what made the readers constantly highlight their class consciousness during the pilot study interviews. Finally, this chapter illustrates that reading Muslim fashion blogs is at the same time also reading the way in which Indonesian Muslims reconnect with their past history by consciously trying to distance themselves from the past. The readers reflected on the way the bloggers represent themselves as being different from the way Islam and Muslims have been constantly demonised in Indonesian history. Readers have been reflecting, and almost it feels like they were praising the bloggers as agents of change, that as Muslim fashion bloggers; they have been succeeding in changing the old stereotype of Muslims as poor and backwards and changing it into the new Muslim identities with a lavish lifestyle and impeccable tastes, doing ordinary things like ordinary people and hence the only difference is that they do ordinary activities all in style and lavishness. It can also be concluded that visual representation of consumerism and a materialistic self through fashion blogs has been efficient in negating past xenophobia of Islam, even in the world's biggest Muslim country itself. Following this section, the next section will discuss the way participants for

this research have been recruited and the problems and considerations regarding the transcription and the translation process.

3.6 Participants Recruitment

During Spring-Summer 2014, I conducted interviews with 63 research participants with a combination of FGD participants and individual interviews (the list and identities of each of the informants is listed in the appendix A, B and C). Almost all interviews were done through Skype video conference. I also used the Skype recorder application to record the whole interview and help me during the transcription process. Technological barriers were the only gruesome challenge of doing long-distance interviews since they potentially disrupt the dynamics and clarity of the conversation especially during the focus group discussions. It is important to note that the internet connection in Indonesia is generally unstable but however five rounds of FGDs were managed successfully despite some technical issues.

I began my participant recruitment through two of my friends, Syafrida and Ade, who helped me to post advertisements through their Facebook pages, looking for those who ever read or liked to read Muslim fashion blogs. From there, I had three informants for the purpose of my pilot study. I also interviewed my friend, Fiona, for my pilot study as well. From those who I interviewed for the Pilot Study, it turned out that they knew someone or had other friends who are very fond of reading Muslim fashion blogs. I sent the screening form to those that were mentioned during pilot study interviews, to make sure that they were actually Muslim fashion blog readers themselves. Fourteen people were invited to do group discussions in my friend's house (Syafrida's). She was also the person who was responsible for preparing the laptops used during the interview and also kindly prepared lunch for after the interviews. Another five informants were interviewed in my other friend's house (Ade's house). I also asked permission to record the interviews beforehand

and sent the participants consent forms through their emails. Some of them gave direct-spoken agreement to be research participants and did not bother to fill any consent form. It is also worth noting that the informants had already known each other and some of them were even my acquaintances. This helped the discussions to run smoothly in a friendly manner. This kind of participant recruitment is called 'snowball sampling'. Snowball sampling is the technique used to recruit participants for "hard-to-reach populations, link-tracing sampling is an effective means of collecting data on population members" (Handcock and Gile 2011,p. 2). Other literature, such as that by Biernacki and Waldorf (1981,p. 141-163) defines snowball or chain referral sampling as "a study sample made through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interests."

While the recruitment of group discussions participants generated using friend-of-friend connections, the recruitment of individual interviews was quite different. Almost all participants of individual analysis were gathered from the hijabers community, Muslim women community that established all around Indonesia. A *Hijabers* community is a community of young, urban Muslim woman who like fashion and are usually also technologically-savvy. There are some metropolitan cities where such communities exist. They also have their own Facebook pages and sometimes their own web-blogs and websites. I contacted some of their Facebook pages and websites, inviting some members who like to read Muslim fashion blogs to join my research as participants. To my surprise, around 40 people contacted me through WhatsApp messenger, Facebook and phone message, declaring that they like to read these kinds of blogs. Some participants declared that they do not read blogs as a habit but only occasionally, and I decided that their opinion was valid as well. I contacted them first and did screening questions on whether or not they could be potential informants.

In the end, I interviewed 63 informants all through combination of individual interviews and FGDs. The participants originated from all around Indonesia, from Surabaya, Malang, Bandung, Bali, Jakarta, Medan, Solo, quite different geographical locations from all over Indonesia. Some informants did not have a sufficient internet connection and could only be contacted through phones. However, I used the Skype audio call facility to contact their phones to allow me to record the conversation. Six potential informants were rejected since they could not be contacted after the initial contact. The interviews always began by obtaining consent, ensuring they allowed me to record the conversation and that they would allow me to use their real names (the consent form is listed in the appendix).

The hardest challenge was on the last leg of fieldwork: the blogger recruitment. I initially thought that from the plethora of Indonesia Muslim fashion blogs I saw and read on the internet that they must be available for interview and be glad to do so. I have interviewed three blogger beginners (not the well-known bloggers) and I wanted to extend my interviews to the power bloggers (I described power bloggers as popular Indonesian bloggers who sometimes have also been successful in expanding their business opportunities as fashion designers). I contacted the 20 popular bloggers whose blogs were read by the majority of my informants and had been written about numerous times in Indonesian mass media as the most famous Indonesian Muslim bloggers. I contacted their publicist or PR and wrote them emails more than once and never got replies back. I even wrote three emails for one famous Indonesian blogger with the list of interview questions and also never got a reply. In the end, I interviewed ten bloggers and feel that this amount is sufficient for me to start writing my report. I felt that I could not waste any more of my time chasing bloggers to do interviews with me. With the bloggers I interviewed, I also asked permission to record the interviews and also asked permission to use their photographic images from their blogs for the purposes of my research or journals and conferences related to my research.

The only requirement for participants (blog readers) recruited in this research is those who read Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs (web-blogs) on a daily basis or occasionally. I identify Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs as web-blogs written by Indonesian Muslims (represented by their Muslim attire) that are dominated by pictures or stories about the blogger's fashion and style advice and anything that relates to fashion or clothing choice. I did not seek out participants or blogs readers as those who wear *hijab* / headscarves, but it turns out that all of the participants identified themselves as Muslim woman who wear the *hijab* on a daily basis. The age of participants ranged from 18 years old to 45 years old, those living in urban metropolitan cities all around Indonesia, having university degrees or at least in the process of studying in university degree level. Some participants have master's degree levels and work as lecturers. The majority of informants identify themselves as working women or working mothers, some identify themselves as homemakers with their own home businesses or part-time jobs. In the end, none of the informants identified themselves as full-time homemakers. All informants are from a middle-class background and identify themselves as social media users, who spend their time on internet and social media through their personal computers, laptops and mobile phones almost every day.

The use of Skype is very significant especially for contacting my informants in different geographical locations. Although at first I was sceptical that Skype might disrupt the dynamics of communication, I have not yet addressed any difficulties during my interview process. Perhaps the contributing factor is that some participants were recruited during group discussions are friends among themselves so this helped ease the tension of doing long interviews through the Skype. Focus group discussions usually lasted around 60 to 90 minutes. The only disruption came from failed Skype connections that happened several times during the group discussions. The individual interviews, although I had never met the participants before, ran smoothly since the topic is something that the participants really

love. Some has identified that reading fashion blogs is one of their hobbies. Most individual interviews ran for approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

As had been mentioned earlier, conducting interviews with the bloggers was very challenging. Sometimes, they (bloggers) changed the Skype appointment because of their blogging, fashion designing and family commitments. However, all the bloggers I interviewed were friendly and open to any kind of questions. The ten bloggers I interviewed were all 30 years old or under at the time of interview, they identified themselves as Muslim woman, middle-class, educated (at least a University degree) and mostly lived in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. Blogger interviews were shorter than I had hoped for, and some were conducted even through the phone instead of Skype, and usually last for 30 to 60 minutes. I also asked permission beforehand to record the interview and use their pictures or images on their blogs for the purposes of my research. All gave permission for me to use their photos in their social media sites including Instagram and their personal web-blogs as long as I mentioned their names as sources. All interviews (individual or group) were conducted in the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) since it is more natural for everyday conversation as some participants are incapable of speaking in English.

3.7 Translation and Transcription Process

As has been said earlier, all interviews were conducted in Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia). The reason for this was that most Indonesians are not bilingual (Indonesian-English) and the Indonesian language is the daily conversational language in Indonesia. Although some participants stated that they were capable of speaking English fluently, the decision to perform the interviews in the Indonesian language was purely based on convenience. It is important that participants speak in their own daily language as this will be the most natural and can capture the whole meaning of the conversation.

The interview recording plays a tremendous part in the transcription process, since this research employs selective transcription. The interview audio-recording was played over and over again to make sure that only important features are the ones which should be transcribed and translated. The interviews were not transcribed verbatim but rather were transcribed and translated directly into English. The reason for doing this was that the data obtained through the interviews was such a large amount of data and it was not possible to employ professional transcribers to transcribe everything verbatim. Halcomb and Davidson (2006, p. 42) assert that verbatim transcription is time and physically consuming and might have resulted in human errors. The transcripts are then analysed using thematic analysis (as has been discussed in the previous sub-chapter). This kind of selective transcription is called partial transcription. Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 144) note that selective transcripts are suitable for research purposes that aim to “to get sense of the things that mattered to people, not to probe those things in depth.” Furthermore, they assert that this method of transcription is also a relatively cheap, easy and quick way, especially when researcher has to generate a large amount of data. However, this kind of transcription also might not be suitable for linguistic or discourse based research.

The transcription was generated using the software *O transcribe* that is freely available on the internet (in this case in Google chrome application store). This allowed me to listen to the video and audio recording and transcribe together in one computer screen. This software also allowed me to slow or speed up the recording up to ten times and download the transcript directly into Word documents. I always tried to transcribe as soon as possible after the interview to allow me to recall some important details that occurred during the interviews.

Transcultural research with the use of multiple languages is challenging in any research.

Some Indonesian words that are difficult to translate into English will be explained further

in the findings and discussion chapter when this word is explicitly used and direct quotations will also be employed to highlight how these words are used in the specific context. This has been suggested by Halai (2007) that:

The researcher should check whether the source words have any equivalent in standard English words; if that is the case, they should adopt English words or phrases in translating the selected interviews, using quotes when the source words or phrases either do not have a direct equivalent or are difficult to translate or interpret.

The word 'modernity' for example, is rarely used in casual-daily Indonesian language conversation although the direct translation of the word modernity is *modernitas*. Hence, participants used other casual Indonesian language to refer to modernity such as 'up to date' or 'happening' when translated into English. These specific words and the Indonesian language will be clarified in the subsequent chapters when these words are used during the interviews. The next chapter will to explore the first research question which will look at and explore how the blog readers make sense of the Muslim fashion blogs.

Chapter 4

Leisure, Fashion Inspiration and Islamic Guidance:

Why do Women Read Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs?

This chapter intends to answer Research Question 1 (RQ1) which is: why do Indonesian women read Muslim fashion blogs and how do they make sense of them? Specifically, this chapter will explore who the readers are and what their background is in regards to their Muslim identity (section 4.1). Their background stories are pertinent, since this will give a sense of understanding about how they interpret and negotiate crucial aspects of Muslim fashion blogs, for example with regards to the *hijab* as modesty. Secondly, Section 4.2 intends to explore the reasons behind Muslim fashion blog reading practise and how such practises make sense for their readers. This part of the chapter also seeks to understand how such reading practises sits within blog readers' daily media consumption. Finally, Section 4.3 will explore the way in which Muslim fashion blogs appeal and are relatable with the readers, and how these relationships have been built through reading.

To answer these questions, some of the interview excerpts gathered from both individual interviews and group discussions will be quoted in this chapter. As mentioned before in the methodology section, I have in total conducted 63 interviews with 10 bloggers as well as 53 readers. Each interview excerpt in this chapter will be from individual interviews or from the focus group discussion (FGD). All names and ages in this chapter will be real given names, since all of my research participants have given me consent for the use of their real names and ages in the study.

All 53 blog readers are college-educated, Indonesian, and Muslim middle-class ranging from 19 to 40 years old with some readers also having Master's degrees and working as full-time lecturers in Colleges and Universities (the specific list of interviewees is available in the appendix A and B). The first section (4.1) explored the interviewees' identity and their *hijab* backstories in more detail.

4.1 Mapping the Audience: Who Are Muslim Fashion Blog Readers?

This section will lay the foundations of who Muslim fashion blogs readers are. This identification is crucial, since the way the interviewees constructed meaning behind the blogs was closely related to their personal lives and values, specifically with the way they interpret the *hijab* as a modesty requirement in Islam. This chapter will also illustrate the complexities of understanding behind the meaning of the *hijab* and how varieties of interpretation manifest and are enacted in different clothing practises.

All of my interviewees are middle-class Indonesian Muslims, urban, educated and wore a *hijab* or headscarf. I did not intentionally search for Muslim readers who wore the *hijab* and liked to read Muslim fashion blogs – this happened quite accidentally. My only requirements were participants, without specifying religion, gender or ethnicity, who liked to read Muslim fashion blogs. Indonesian blogs readers in my research are around 20-30 years old, with only two interviewees aged over 40. All were mostly working women and mothers, and only a few defined themselves as stay-at-home mothers or full-time homemakers. It should be noted that those who defined themselves as homemakers also had home-based small businesses like making birthday cakes or selling *Padangnese* cuisine. All in all, none were full time homemakers without side jobs. All of them were also Muslims who already covered themselves (wearing headscarves) at some point throughout their adolescence. It is worth noting that some interviewees also held Master's degrees from respectable universities and had permanent positions as University lecturers.

This revelation is also similar to previous research about veiling practises among Indonesian Muslim women (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007), that assert that veiling practises have been prevalent amongst middle-class educated Indonesian Muslims. Veiling for the Indonesian Muslim middle-class, some of the interviewees argued, was part of their self-agency and independence as young Muslim women living in the cities. The fact that some interviewees held University degrees and even Master degrees also suggests that the practise of veiling is part of educated Muslim identity. Smith-Hefner (2007) examines the growing veiling practise among University students in Java by the end of 2000, suggesting that veiling is part of the need to assert self-identity as “neither traditionalist nor anti-modernist reaction.” Veiling, for University students, as Smith-Hefner concluded, symbolises the idea that Islam could be integrated into modern, educated, middle-class people. The incorporation of veiling practises amongst working Muslim women in Indonesia, at least those that can be inferred through my fieldwork; donning the *hijab* could also be in line with modern lifestyles, even for professional working women.

Most interviewees stated that their decision to cover themselves with the *hijab* is part of their Muslim identity and personal decision, far different from underlying assumptions that people often make about the *hijab* as the result of coercion and submissiveness.

Interviewees also suggested that long before the popularity of Muslim fashion on social media, they had already decided to don the *hijab* or headscarf. It seemed they didn’t want to give me the impression that they donned the *hijab* because the *hijab* is now more fashionable. Donning the *hijab*, based on the impression I had during the interview, must be driven by a pious consciousness rather than Islamic beauty practices. There was a sense of pride whenever I asked participants when they decided to don the headscarves. Mostly, the earlier the women decided to cover themselves, the higher the praise they got, since this meant that their awareness of becoming ‘more Muslim’ became apparent as young as possible. This sense of becoming more ‘aware’ is also similarly found in Brenner’s research

(1996) in regards to the veiling practice research amongst the middle-class Muslim Javanese. She concluded that her participants connected their decision of donning their *hijab* with their new awareness, that a *hijab* could also be part of their empowerment. As Brenner (1996) argues, the decision to wear the *hijab* is often associated with the process of re-birth and becoming a new, better person.

The sense of becoming more aware of their Muslim identity, and the re-birthing process through donning the *hijab* were significantly voiced during the interview. These are some of the excerpts from one of the group discussions:

- Briefing: Well, it should not merely be a trend. The *Hijab* is compulsory for Muslims. So you should not wear a hijab just because it is more fashionable now. But, I guess having some choice in terms of clothes wouldn't hurt either.
- Silvi: I agree, but sadly I think some people and celebrities, you know public figures, wear *hijabs* for the sake of fashion. Sometimes they wear it during the fasting month only. Or celebrities pretend to wear [the] hijab just because they are in religious soap operas and Islamic movies.
- Moderator: And do you think that's wrong? Wearing the hijab just because now it is on trend?
- Fani: I think so. It requires responsibility. You are expected to behave in [a] certain way.
- Sinta: For me...I think of everything as a work-in-progress, including the *hijab* as well. Maybe today you are wearing [the] hijab just because now it's suddenly fashionable and perhaps tomorrow you will start learning more about Islam. Everyone has their own learning curve and there's nothing wrong with that.
- Fani: But still...it infuriates me sometimes. Like...for example Cut Tari. After the leak of her sex tape, she held a press conference and issued an apology while wearing the hijab. She was crying while apologising and she used the hijab to attract sympathy. That's really fake. Nobody believes that. (Focus Group Discussion 1)

All participants seemingly agreed that the decision on wearing the *hijab* should not be based on whether the *hijab* is on trend. Participants quoted above agreed that wearing a *hijab* should be based on a pure intention and motivation to become more pious Muslims and adhere to Islamic teachings concerning modesty. All participants agreed that wearing the *hijab* gave them the responsibility to become more pious, better Muslims. Some condemned the celebrities that only donned the *hijab* after they made horrible mistakes, or only during the Ramadhan season for the sake of gaining economic advantages and lucrative endorsements.

One participant, Fani, gave the example of the 2010 extra-marital sex scandal between Indonesian movie star, Cut Tari, with a high-profile band member. The actress then issued a public apology in a press conference while presenting herself in *hijab* and Islamic clothing, one thing that she never usually wore on a daily basis. This highlighted the issue that despite the *hijab* and Islamic clothing now being the subject of expansive mass production by the fashion industry in Indonesia, the decision to don it should be motivated purely by religious piety.

The same tension has been highlighted by scholars (Jones 2007; Fealy 2008; Heryanto 2008) that the contemporary veiling practises in Indonesia has been a sign of rising Islamic consumerism and commodified religion. Some interviewees also highlight that *hijab* wearers should bear responsibility, and behave in a certain way. The promiscuity that was illustrated by Cut Tari and her sex-tape scandal brought condemnation from many Indonesian Muslims, illustrating the complexities of the *hijab*, and that it should not be treated as a piece of fabric but an attitude and behaviour that reflects the spirit of modesty.

Some interviewees stated that although their parents and families persuaded or socialised them into the practise of veiling instead of coercing them, eventually the decision to wear

the *hijab* at some point in their lives came from their own consciousness. These are some of the excerpts:

“All the women in my family, including my mum and sisters, have already worn [the] *hijab*. They didn’t force me or anything. But finally I did it and I realised that I felt really comfortable in it.” (Dhika, 25, Individual interview)

“I just recently married and that’s why I decided to wear [the] *hijab*. I just wanted to protect myself and save myself only for my husband. My husband never asked [me] to cover by the way, so I think it’s purely my decision.” (Karisma, 27, individual interview)

“I wanted to wear [the] *hijab* for so long but always hesitated. I mean it takes courage to completely change yourself and your appearance. But, at one point, I was certain that it was the right time for me to wear it. I kept on praying and asked God to give me strength to make such a big decision. I made it, and didn’t regret it at all.” (Cietra, 24, individual interview)

“I attended Islamic school, so I think that’s part of the reason. And my parents taught me since the beginning as well. But I didn’t object to it as well. I know that there are some people who are inconsistent. Sometimes they don the veil and sometimes they don’t. But for me, even when I was little, I was never opposed to the veil. I feel comfortable and protected. I feel different before and after wearing the *hijab*.” (Amel, 22, individual interview)

“The *hijab* is an absolute obligation for Muslim women. So whether you’re ready or not, you have to wear a *hijab* at some point in your life.” (Zakia, 26, individual interview)

“Since I had my period, my mum always said that it was time for me to wear the *hijab*, but I never kept my promise to her. I made lots of excuses until I got married and pregnant and had to be hospitalised. From that moment I realised that it’s really hard to be a mother and I owed so much to her. So after I had my first child, I started to wear the *hijab*.” (Intan, 29, individual interview)

The six interview transcripts above illustrate the diversity of reasons of why my interviewees finally decided to wear their *hijabs*, and it also illustrates that the *hijab* has never been a state convention nor cultural tradition in Indonesia, different from the majority of the Middle-Eastern countries that required the use of a *hijab* with *abayas* for

women in public places. In fact, as previous research suggested (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007) the practice of veiling among the Indonesian middle-class was relatively new, emerging from the start of the 1980s, triggered by the same Islamic revivalism in Iran and Egypt. The practise of veiling amongst middle-class Indonesian Muslims also signified an act of defiance against the new-order regime that was relatively harsh in suppressing these kinds of practices at that time (Hefner cited in Dewi 2012). The women I interviewed also associated the wearing of the *hijab* with the effort of securing themselves, protecting themselves from the male gaze, and making sure they can only be looked at by spouses and close relatives. Donning the veil, for my interviewees, could also mark a shift in their lives, since they have to adjust their lifestyle including clothing choice to the modest values required within their interpretation of Islam. Although my participants stated that their *hijab* decision was based on their own consciousness, most informed me that family influence and preserving the Islamic legacy was a major part of their decision. None of participants suggested that their *hijab* was the result of coercion. Some participants defined coercion as obligation towards the donning of *hijab* enacted by the state, and compared their experience with some Muslim countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia where the *hijab* is a state requirement for its female citizens.

It is also important to note that as recorded in previous research (Scourfield 2011; Hartono 2012), that the Muslim family has successfully taught Islam to their children, since the responsibility is the mother's. This is concluded by some interviewees (including Dhika, Intan and Amel whose transcripts have been quoted above) that their decision over the *hijab* has been influenced by their families, especially the female figures like their mothers. Marriage and building Muslim family values also motivated other interviewees such as Karisma and Intan to finally decide to wear the *hijab*. All in all, preserving family values were mostly what motivated the majority of my interviewees in their decision to don the *hijab*, rather than purely motivated by their reading of holy scriptures. In fact, none of my

interviewees actually mentioned the Qur'an verses about the *hijab*. Some interviewees, such as Zakia, believe that the *hijab* is an obligation for Muslim women, although they did not specify where such conclusions are derived from.

Furthermore, it is equally important to highlight here that although my interviewees all wore the *hijab*, and some have practised veiling since they were young, all have different perspectives about the varieties of style and specific requirements for wearing the *hijab*. As highlighted by Sreberny (2002) and MacDonald (2006) that headscarves or veils are complex, problematic, and riddled with meaning that makes such practises highly personal and different for each wearer. One of the prominent Islamic feminists, Fatima Mernissi (1991) argues that such a practice is highly contextual and asserts that the spirit of the *hijab* is based on modesty rather than body-covering. The complexities of interpreting the *hijab* conventions also varied amongst my interviewees.

My interviewees give different opinions about what *hijab* requirements are and what needs to be covered on women's bodies. Some of them were not even sure which part of the Qur'an directly related to such practices and stated that they just knew the *hijab* through socialisation by their friends and families. Some even stated learning how to wear the *hijab* through their consumption of social media, including fashion blogs (this will be further analysed in section 4.2). These are some of the excerpts to illustrate the complexities of the *hijab*:

"I never ever wear jeans (denim pants). I left jeans years ago. But I wear loose trousers in the office because that is my uniform. For everyday outfits, I never wear jeans. For *hijab* (headscarves), I always make sure that it covers the chest area." (Zakia, 26, individual interview)

"I prefer skirts to trousers. I think trousers are more complicated than skirts, because you have to make sure that it covers your behind. Skirts automatically hide your bottom area, so it is more safe. So many *hijabis* (hijab wearers) wear tight pants and little tops, so when they bend over you can see their behind. I don't get it. What's the point? If

you wear [the] *hijab*, then make sure you wear it all the way.” (Epi, 28, individual interview)

“Of course, the *syar’i* (Islamic law) requires us to dress loosely, not tight, not transparent, not showing the shape of your body. That’s it! It’s not difficult at all. And there is so much space where you can be creative with fashion, without abandoning the *syar’i*. And also, it is important that you tone down the colours. I mean neon yellow and orange, of course you will attract people’s attention when you are dressed this way.” (Angga, 33, individual interview)

Those who I interviewed seemed to have arguments about what is considered acceptable, modest fashion and what is not, despite agreeing upon the requirement to cover the hair with a *hijab*. But in terms of outfit and style, they had different arguments. For example, some stated that it was acceptable to wear trousers instead of a skirt, particularly for working women, whilst others stated that it is preferable to wear a long skirt and *abaya* (long and loose garments, cloak or robe-like, usually worn by Arab Muslims). However, most of them stated that the *niqab/burqa* (face veil) is not in any way compulsory. All interviewees agreed that modesty demands that an outfit should not reveal body parts, should not be tight, and should not be short or transparent.

There are also some differences when it comes to personal style and how they interpret modesty. One interviewee stated that she prefers a skirt and avoids denim jeans although still wears long trousers as she is a working woman. It is interesting to note that the choice of *hijab* and clothing is based on whether one is working in a public place or not. Trousers, based on some informant testimonies are still acceptable as long as they are loose and do not show the shape of the body. Trousers are also considered a more practical choice for those who work and need mobility, since the motorcycle is one of the popular modes of transportation in Indonesia and it might be a hassle to drive a motorcycle while wearing a long skirt or *abayas*. This could also mean that fashion is the product of social conditions. The fact that women make up a huge part of the workforce in Indonesia suggests that

religious attire, like the *hijab* and other Islamic clothing, must cater to all of consumers and lifestyles.

Other interviewees preferred a skirt and never wore trousers at all, suggesting that a skirt is more acceptable in hiding the bottom area. Epi, for example, also criticised other women who cover their hair but still wear tight trousers and show the shape of their backs. One interviewee also stated that the outfit should not attract unwanted attraction, which means that colours should also be considered as a contributing factor when determining whether such clothing styles could be deemed as modest or not. What has been interesting from the interview excerpts above is how some interviewees avoid wearing tight jeans or denim altogether. Some interviewees said that jeans were mostly tight (as in skinny jeans) and some others stated that the fact that denim and jeans were associated with Western clothing style that made it inappropriate (further elaboration on the use of denim as inappropriate Muslim clothing will be discussed at length in section 6.2).

These tensions and disagreements upon what is acceptable in modest Muslim fashion and what is not affects the way interviewees interpret and negotiate some aspects of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. In chapter 6 (section 6.2), these tensions and disagreements are elaborated on further, especially in the section where bloggers face criticism over their clothing choices. The next section is focused upon the analysis of what makes readers read Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, and how they make sense of them.

4.2 Why Indonesian Women Read Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs and How Do They Make Sense of Them?

Some interviewees stated their apprehension about the intention of my research. At some points, they questioned why I made such banal and unimportant inquiries into why they liked to read blogs, specifically Muslim fashion blogs. Some interviewees who had higher

educational backgrounds (Master's degrees) and had been making a career as lecturers or junior researchers even asked me questions like "what really was your research question?" or "are you really getting a PhD out of fashion blogs?" At this point I realised that doing popular or cultural research is still considered insignificant by many people, even for some academics. This type of response also appeared to insist that reading fashion blogs was a waste of time, trivial and merely just for fun. I found this point to be very interesting since whilst holding these views, many were also very aware of the increasing popularity of fashion blogs in recent years. Most also eagerly mentioned some of their favourite blogs when I asked them about it.

Despite some saying fashion blogs were trivial, the majority of interviewees said that reading fashion blogs is something that they do frequently, ranging from several times a week to several times a month. Some others stated that they do it sporadically whenever they have some spare time. They also later stated that fashion blogs are not something serious – just to be read while doing other chores. It is interesting that for something they stated as not serious is something they do quite regularly.

Three interviewees I interviewed (Nia, Sekar and Hana) even mentioned that they read and are addicted to 'blog-walking' and 'blog-reading' on a daily basis. These three interviewees whom I interviewed separately even state that no days have gone by without them reading fashion blogs. They also like to read other genres of blogs like travel or culinary blogs besides fashion blogs. They used the term 'blogwalker' to describe themselves, referring to a person who enjoys reading various genre of blogs. These three special readers are elaborated further in this sub-section in relation to the way they used Muslim fashion blogs as a guidance to learn Islamic femininity. The ways in which Muslim fashion blogs become meaningful for the readers fit into three specific categories: these are pleasure and leisure,

fashion guidance and a guide into Islamic femininity. The following section delves deeper into each category.

Reading Fashion blogs during Leisure Time: Before being busy and before having a baby

Despite all interviewees stating they read blogs frequently, none of them specified the exact time of day when they read these blogs. Most stated they read blogs whenever they had time. These are some excerpts taken from the transcription:

“Oh, like only when I have spare time, I guess.” (Cietra, 24, individual interview)

“Not every day, because I’m quite busy. I mean I have a business to run and three children. It’s just quite random, I guess. Here and there...” (Nila, 44, individual interview)

“I used to read them a lot, but not anymore. I think...whenever I have time because now I have a baby. You know how it is, right?” (Septia, 30, individual interview)

“Usually once a week, not every day definitely. Quite busy lately with work and post-graduate stuff. I’m travelling a lot.” (Raissa, 23, individual interview)

“Now I read randomly, maybe two or three times a week. I’m very busy with work and a baby. But several years ago before I was busy, I was like read it a lot almost every day.” (Diennul, 25, individual interview)

“...because internet access in my office is quite fast, so when I have spare time in the office or when I got bored.” (Intan, 29, individual interview)

“I used to read them a lot, but after two babies, I don’t think I have much time to spare anymore.” (Fiona, 32, individual interview).

“I don’t think I routinely read blogs, although it’s also quite often. Because it’s like a refreshing thing to me. Like when I have to work in my laptop and I feel bored, so I briefly open it. Or when I have to put my children to sleep, sometimes I just open it briefly.” (Syifa, 31, individual interview)

The excerpts I quoted above summarise how Muslim fashion blogs are situated in women’s daily lives. Almost all of the interviewees (except three) said that reading blogs is

what they do when they have spare time, as it's less important than other activities. Some interviewees who are mothers also stated that reading fashion blogs was something they used to do when they were younger and without commitments, such as doing of house chores, raising a family or having a job. In this sense, reading fashion blogs could be most closely identified with youthfulness, something that could primarily be done while they were still young and single. It could also be inferred from the interviewees that reading blogs is equal to time wasting, or something to do to kill the time. From the excerpt above, it seems that reading blogs is associated with leisure time, which seems like precious time before they were 'busy' or had a baby.

Consuming women's genres like romantic novels or women's magazines has long been associated with leisure time. Some interviewees that stated they used to read blogs a lot before they are having babies made the same references when Joke Hermes (1995) conducted her research on reading women's magazines. In her research (1995, p. 31) she listed some of the reasons why her interviewees liked to read women's magazines in which being 'easy to put down' and 'relaxation' are two of the most prominent reasons. Just like the way women's magazines are to be read only when one has nothing more important to do, so are Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. One interviewee stated that sometimes she read blogs when she puts her children to sleep. This illustrates some of the Hermes' interviewees' experiences that reading women's magazines were read while babysitting. The 'putdown' factor of fashion blogs illustrates the same point as Hermes' findings: that these two activities, reading blogs and reading magazines are trivial and effortless. It makes sense that most interviewees could not specify any time of day when they were reading blogs, mainly because their leisure time was scattered sporadically during the day and the week. These findings conclude that Muslim fashion blogs are primarily consumed whenever the interviewees had leisure time after completing other commitments, including looking after children, doing house chores and other professional

work. It is also quite similar with Radway's work (1991) on women reading romance novels. In her research she highlighted that reading romance novels "provides escapism" for the Smithton ladies which allowed them to take a break from daily chores. The escapism through blogs is also closely related with Radway's research in a way that reading blogs often might be seen as 'light reading', just like romance novels.

The putdown-ability of fashion blogs consumed through mobile phones (to borrow Joke Hermes' term) might also mean that fashion blogs could be read without thinking. The majority of interviewees stated that they read the blogs on the go through mobile phones. Only a small number interviewees said they preferred to read blogs through their personal computer or laptops. For the majority of my interviewees, the act of reading the blogs was mostly about skimming and scanning what their favourite bloggers wore that day. As one interviewee said, fashions blogs are highly visual, thus making the visual aspect one of the most important characteristics of fashion blogs and the thing that attracts the reader's attention the most, rather than reading the bloggers' stories.

Fashion Inspiration

The word inspiration emerged a lot during the round of interviews, as most interviewees stated that reading fashion blogs gave them fashion inspiration. While others stated that they also read personal stories about bloggers' domestic lives like raising families, the main objectives of their reading was fashion guidance or in my interviewees' words, giving them fashion inspiration. These are some of the interview excerpts:

"Well, because my business is in fashion I read these blogs. I need fashion inspiration." (Amil, 21, individual interview)

"Sometimes when I can't go to sleep, or when I have nothing to do, or when I need to go to a fancy occasion and I need to see some mixed and matched styles." (Ikha, 24, individual interview)

“An inspiration and refreshing too, I guess. I mean, it adds my fashion knowledge and my shopping lists (laugh). In a way, it inspires you to be smarter in mix and match your outfit so you don’t have to buy something new. Or maybe if you want to buy something new, you know what is on trend right now.” (Marcha, 23, individual interview).

“...especially when I want to make a new dress, so I like to find an inspiration on blogs. These bloggers are setting the trend.” (Chica, 24, individual interview).

“Well, I’m looking for fashion inspiration. Sometimes ...because they are very good at mix and match style and colours, it is very interesting to me. [laugh]...I know it’s really trivial, just for mix and match. But it’s really useful when you start learning to mix and match your wardrobe and knowing your style.” (Mia, 30, individual interview)

“...And to add references about clothes and hijab. I’d like to see what’s on trend right now in Indonesia.” (Fani, 22, FGD1)

From some of the comments I quoted above, it seems that the interviewees see the bloggers as someone whose style and opinions are important when it comes to Muslim fashion. They stated that they often look out for fashion inspiration from some of these bloggers, especially when they wanted to go to a fancy special occasion like a wedding party, or even when they wanted to go shopping or have their dresses made. It seems like fashion bloggers, in this case Muslim fashion bloggers, were beginning to be seen as fashion experts, setting the trend of Muslim fashion in Indonesia. The excerpt above also highlights the fact that Muslim fashion bloggers act as a guide that teach women how to mix and match their clothing styles. Perhaps, the style and fashion guide is not the main area of women’s fashion magazines or any other mainstream fashion channel. Over the years, fashion blogs have given alternative style guidance compared to mainstream media. In fact, participants often admit they prefer to see fashion through the blogs compared to magazines since blogs offer more truthfulness and the sense of ordinary people wearing ordinary styles that are often more relatable than the fashion media.

Previous research on the subject of fashion blogs (Rocamora 2011, 2012; Pham 2011, 2013; Luvaas 2013) suggested that fashion blogs offer an alternative outlook on fashion from the voices usually shut out by the fashion industry. Western power bloggers, such as Susanna Lau (Lau 2016), for example, have been successful in integrating the sense of herself as an average girl being smart and savvy with fashion choices, mixing high street and high fashion into her clothing style while also maintaining her uniqueness being Chinese and living in the West (Pham 2013). I argue that this might also apply with Muslim fashion blogs. Different from what is usually projected through magazines filled with photos of models, blogs offer a different view on what it feels like when certain styles are carried off by an ordinary person. Although Muslim fashion magazines are also a growing business in Indonesia, fashion blogs offer more accessibility to be consumed anytime and anywhere since they're free and effortless. It is also important to mention findings from other research on fashion blogs by Titton (2012, p. 217) that bloggers themselves construct their identity as 'fashionable personae' by "declaring themselves as idealized fashion subjects by producing their own fashion-centred media formats and it is through masquerading qualities of dress and fashion that they maintain a high degree of agency". Although Titton's analysis was solely based on a textual study of fashion blogs (*Style Bubble* by Susanna Lau and *The Coveted* by Jennine Jacobs), it is closely related to the findings in this section that the Muslim bloggers construct themselves as the voice of fashion, one step ahead of other people in terms of style trends (since their other profession other than bloggers directly related to fashion industry i.e.: magazine editors, fashion designers etc.)

The excerpt above also highlights the fact that doing fashion is something that needs to be mastered, and thus it was important for my interviewees to be knowledgeable about the best way to mix and match certain clothing styles and the *hijab*. It is more profoundly highlighted by one interviewee who said that the need to look up for fashion inspiration is especially needed whenever she wanted to go to fancy occasions. Another interviewee,

Mia, from the excerpt above, later stated that although she considered it to be trivial, for her it was still important she tried to learn how to mix and match her wardrobe as knowledge that need to be mastered. Thus, Muslim fashion blogs offer tremendous visual images for fashion inspiration, just like the interviewees testified. This fact also highlights that that looking beautiful is considered important to the interviewees even after they decided to don the *hijab*, and Muslim fashion blogs are needed to guide readers to look more beautiful after they don the *hijab*. The need to be beautiful even in the veil is more obvious in some of these excerpts:

“I live in a very religious family and religious neighbourhood; I mean I have so many neighbours going to Islamic State University. They don’t really care about fashion. I was brought up in a family that educate me that being modest is much more important than being fashionable. So, I never see myself as a follower of fashion. But also because my profession as young dentist requires me to have a contact with patients or projecting a professional self, I try to comply with this as well. I put on a light make up, I make sure that I dress professionally and so on. Just in moderation I suppose.” (Hana, 21, individual interview)

“I like bloggers who are also mothers. It reminds me that as a mother, I can’t let myself go. These bloggers are mothers too, they travel with their babies, looked beautiful and stylish. It inspires me that as a mother, we should not sacrifice things that makes us beautiful. I need to have time for myself. As mothers, sometimes you forgot that you need to feel beautiful.” (Mia, 30, individual interview).

Hana and Mia also use Muslim fashion blogs to navigate and learn about fashion. For Hana, fashion blogs function as a guide to navigate her modest self (she stated to not being a fashionable person) with her professional life as a dentist-in-training that requires her to look more presentable and fashionable. Mia, on the other hand, uses fashion blogs to get inspiration and advice on how not to lose femininity during motherhood. Motherhood has always been constructed as a woman’s sacrifice, that the right to feel and look beautiful might be considered selfish. As Kaplan (1992, p.18) asserted, although the times have

changed that caring for the family should be done by men, research confirming that nurturing children still heavily relied on mothers. Reading fashion blogs allows Mia to navigate her feminine self but also still be able to care for her family, or in her words, “not let herself go”. Muslim bloggers that are also mothers themselves give reassurance to Mia that becoming a mother could also mean becoming more beautiful. Just like the way Hana navigates being modest and fashionable at the same time, Mia also treats Muslim fashion blogs as guidance for being a mother and being stylish at the same time. Both use fashion blogs to advance and help their appearance, while the participants in the next section use fashion blogs for religious guidance.

Learning the rules of Islamic femininity

Far deeper than just learning of mixing and matching the outfit from these bloggers, some interviewees in this section stated that they learned the rules of performing Islamic femininity through the blogs they read. One of the interviewees, who stated that she learned Islamic conventions of modesty is Sekar, a 21-year-old recent Muslim convert.

These are some of the excerpts:

“Yeah, almost every day. I mean, I always check whether they post a new update or not. So yeah, almost every day. Especially Indah Nada’s blog.” (Sekar, 21, individual interview)

Sekar even mentioned the name of the blogger who has always been her favourite, whose posts she checked almost every night. Sekar is a recent Muslim convert who also decided to wear headscarves following her conversion from Christianity. She was born to Christian parents, but was also very close to her Muslim grandmother. In fact, she was later raised by her grandmother. She decided to convert to Islam and also decided that she wanted to be fully committed to Islam by wearing a *hijab*.

“My parents are very democratic and they let me choose whichever religion I want to believe, as long as I believe in God. The most important thing is that I take responsibility on my religion. Doing all what has been suggested, not just being self-proclaimed Muslim or Christian but also doing what Muslim or Christian does all the way. So yes, I decided that I will choose either Islam or Christian, because I can’t find peace in between. I can’t mix them both.” (Sekar, 21, individual interview)

Sekar, in the excerpt above, stated that after years of going back and forth between Islam (her grandmother’s religion) and Christianity (her parent’s religion), she finally decided to fully embrace Islam. These are the excerpts about her recent conversion to Islam.

“Maybe because of my social pressures as well, I live in Muslim majority country. ...Yes...I read a story about one blogger whose family is all Christians and she decided to convert into Islam. I like her hijab style as well. I don’t like hijab styles that don’t cover my chest area...I’m still in the learning process of finding my identity and these blogs...well some of them, show me to do that, that your hijab should be long enough to cover your chest area and so on...” (Sekar, 21, individual interview)

Besides admitting that converting to Islam was purely driven by her own consciousness, it seems from her quotes that it makes more sense for her to convert to Islam rather than staying Christian, since Indonesia is a Muslim majority country. Despite the state recognising five official religions (Islam, Catholic, Protestant, Hinduism and Buddhism), Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. It is estimated that Islam is the religion of 88 percent out of 240 million Indonesians, and within the recent surge of Islamic popular culture and the emerging number of the Muslim middle-class who wear headscarves, Sekar might have taken these factors into consideration. Furthermore, when I pressed her about other reasons for converting, Sekar also stated that she is engaged to her Muslim boyfriend that she knew in college. Like she said, her boyfriend is a Muslim from a devout family, and under the state’s constitution, the marriage should be between a

woman and a man of the same religion. The social pressure that she refers to might well be this marriage under the same religion.

For Sekar, Muslim fashion blogs function not just as a style guide or inspiration, but also to learn the rules of Islamic modesty and femininity itself. She briefly stated that *hijabs* or headscarves should be long enough to cover the chest area, and she prefers to read bloggers that adhere to these conventions. She also learns new things in regards to this.

“I also found out in one blog that you must also cover your feet with wearing ankle socks for example. You know... Feet are still *aurah*. Many Muslims do not understand this.” (Sekar, 21, individual interview)

Aurah is the Islamic term referring to the body parts that must be covered. The majority of Islamic clerics stated that a *hijab* should cover all body parts except the face and the palms of the hands. The covering of the feet is sometimes debatable, which often takes place in social media. Some people agree that feet should not be covered, and some like Sekar believe that feet are considered *aurah*. Muslim fashion blogs, at least the one read by Sekar, believe that feet should also be covered.. Below are the other excerpts highlighting the ways in which fashion blogs function as a guide to Islamic femininity.

“I used to wear my old wardrobe even after I decided to wear a hijab. It’s out of date and out of style. I also used to wear denim jeans, leggings or tiny T-shirts. It is not suitable for a Muslim outfit. But the more I read these blogs, the more I learn how to dress the Islamic clothes properly. Now I prefer to wear abayas, long skirts ...I avoid jeans as well. Although sometimes it’s difficult since I’m riding motorcycle. You have to be more feminine if you wear abaya because I think it’s not good wearing abaya and hijab and being tomboy at the same time. In a way, wearing hijab will make you more feminine.” (Early, 23, Individual interview)

“I like Puput Utami’s blog. And her style ...I think she is very fashionable without compromising her faith. If you look at her hijab, it is very wide and long covering half part of her body but still chic and stylish. It is also a learning experience for me, because I’m a hijabi beginner, so I can learn how to wear hijab correctly.” (Chica, 24, individual interview)

“If you read Fitri Aulia’s blog, she posts a lot about religion and her clothes are mostly abayas. It’s highly Islamic. Those bloggers are not just selling stuff, but also performing Islamic preaching, in a creative way.” (Rizky Dwi, 25, individual interview).

In this sense, Muslim fashion blogs use the very same formula as any other women’s genre, especially women’s magazines. Previous research focused on the subject of women’s magazines like (Gough-Yates 1983; Ferguson 1983; Winship 1987; McRobbie 1991; Beetham 1996) concludes that the strong patriarchal tradition results in traditional femininity still being represented by various women’s magazines. Muslim fashion blogs, although at first glance seen as trivial virtual fashion images, instruct women how to dress as a Muslim properly based on their consumption upon these blogs. The readers, especially those young women that started to wear the *hijab*, or Muslims converts like believes that reading Muslim fashion blogs really helps her to construct ideas on what to wear and what not to wear as a young Muslim woman.

Based on my later observations with regards to the bloggers’ backgrounds, none of these bloggers, especially those I interviewed, were formally studying Islam while they were at University. It means that none of these bloggers were actually legitimately Muslim scholars. All bloggers I interviewed (Chapter 6 will focus on the bloggers’ experiences) stated they learnt Islam as they were growing up, with the majority socialised by their family since a young age and also being active in *pengajian* (Qur’an study circles usually organised within social groups weekly or monthly).

To make it more interesting, the understanding and interpretation of modesty is as widely varied among bloggers as among readers. One blogger loves to incorporate denim into their overall outfit; another blogger opts to wear Middle-Eastern styles such as a tunic or *abaya*, perhaps to strengthen their identity as a believer of religion that originated from

the Middle East. Whatever their sense of style and how these bloggers interpret modesty, readers are always on the other end of the consumption. Some of them use blogs for the sake of overcoming boredom. Some others, like Sekar and other *hijabi* beginners, use Muslim fashion blogs just like the way women read women's magazines – to learn the recipe for femininity – in this case, Islamic femininity. Her new status as a Muslim requires her to learn the ropes of femininity, perhaps also to give reassurance to her fiancé's family that she is worthy of marriage. Indonesian Muslims have been socialised since a young age that religion is one of the most important factors for choosing a life partner. In Sekar's case, Muslim fashion blogs offer the advice on how she should dress herself and also how to offer the interpretation of modesty conventions.

For the purpose of learning Islamic femininity, blogs offer the cheapest and most effortless way compared to other women's genres like magazines. Most of the Indonesian middle-class own smartphones, and Indonesians are regarded as one of the biggest users of social media, especially Facebook. The latest research, published by Techinasia (Balea 2016), concluded that 88 million Indonesians out of a total population of 259 million are active internet users, and 79 million are active social media users. Rather than spending money to buy magazines, blogs like Muslim fashion blogs are a relatively cheaper and more effortless way to gain information about anything related to Islamic femininity.

The previous findings highlighted that Muslim fashion bloggers served as style guides for merely aesthetic reasons (wardrobe mix and match), while this finding concludes that Muslim bloggers not only serve as aesthetic guides, but also as religious guides. In Sekar's case especially, the way Sekar learned about the *hijab* has been mediated by the way bloggers practice their Islamic understanding and this is manifested through their blogs. Far more than treating blogs as trivial, Sekar treats fashion blogs as Islamic guidance. Just like other participants quoted above, learn the veiling practice through the bloggers own

personal experiences, even though the bloggers themselves clearly have no religious authority or formal education.

In the previous section (4.1), I concluded that majority of interviewees stated that the decision in regards of their *hijab* have been mostly socialised through their family, especially the female figures in their family rather than their own religious discovery. Only a tiny number of interviewees actually stated and cited the Qur'an verses often cited as the 'verses of *hijab*'. Sekar, who does not have a Muslim mother, uses the Muslim fashion blog as a substitute for her lack of Muslim figures in her family and guide her through her religious conversion (she also stated that she neither had a religious teacher nor learned of Islam extensively). Sekar's desires to be wholly accepted in her future-husband's Muslim family also confirmed that Islamic values can be successfully preserved through the family including the need of converting the future family member to Islam. For these women, Muslim fashion blogs serve as more than just trivial hobbies during leisure time.

4.3 "They are ordinary women like Us, but they kind of like celebrities": The Appeal of Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs

This last section concludes that Muslim fashion blogs serve readers in three different ways: these are leisure activities, as a style guide and fashion references, and as a platform to learn the rules of Islamic femininity. I have concluded in the last section that some readers use Muslim fashion blogs not only for leisure and looking for fashion or style inspiration but on a deeper level, so as to learn the rules of femininity. Some readers suggested that they are the keen followers and readers of these blogs, not just merely skimming and scanning the visual images of bloggers wearing the latest style but also attached to their personal narrative and stories. Despite being treated as trivial and light reading by the majority of interviewees, fashion blogs, as this research concludes, are consumed frequently by the

participants. This section will analyse further what makes Muslim fashion blogs appealing to their readers.

Rizky, a 25-year-old-woman living in Palembang, concluded that she prefers to read personal stories rather than just skimming and scanning the photos. For her, bloggers' personal and daily stories are more intimate, giving the sense that the bloggers are relatable to their readers. As she said:

"They are doing everything in style, if you know what I mean. I like it...because their activities are very different from what I do, that's why it's interesting." (Rizky, 25, individual interview)

Rizky Dwi, now a post-graduate degree student and also working full time in a private company, says that despite being ordinary, the bloggers whose blogs she likes to read have different activities. When I asked her about what kind of activities she considered 'different' from hers, she concluded that the bloggers like to travel all around the world, and within that experiences, they share their stories in their posts. And the fact that she thinks these bloggers always look so stylish during their holiday experiences makes them different from ordinary people. Rizky stated:

"...I mean, even when on vacation, still, they will wear something comfy and chic. And I like Dian Pelangi too, because she is such a world traveller, so she has posted stories from all over the world, about how people in different parts of the world live and so on. I mean...looking at the world from someone else's perspective. I mean...yeah, they are ordinary women like me but they do something special, it's like they are social media celebrities." (Rizky, 25, individual interview)

It seems that apart from being a woman and also an Indonesian Muslim, the bloggers possess something that their readers do not have: beauty, wealth, and fame. The other thing that related to the readers is the fact that some bloggers are also mothers. Diana, 27-year-old mother of two stated:

“...I like Suci Utami, she likes to post stories about her family. About her children, it’s interesting...it’s like...she uses casual modern mum’s language. And the way she raises her children is pretty similar with how I raise mine.” (Diana, 27, individual interview)

But then she states that apart from breastfeeding and parenting style, she clearly admits that her life is very different from Suchi Utami, one of her favourite bloggers. When I asked her whether she feels similar to Suchi Utami, she quickly responds:

“Oh, definitely not (laugh). Well, maybe in raising our children, yes. I mean, from her personal story, maybe we hold the same values in raising our family. When she is breastfeeding, yes, I am breastfeeding as well. But, in terms of other, well, she is a housewife slash entrepreneur. She has to do lots of photoshoots for her collection, doing media promotion. There is no way our life is the same, in this sense.” (Diana, 27, individual interview)

Another interviewee, Mia Fauzia, mother of one, also stated that products endorsed by these bloggers are also seemingly believable, rather than using TV or other media ads. She stated that these bloggers are being ordinary people, rather than celebrities on TV. As she stated,

“...I guess people trust bloggers rather than seeing ads on TV, because blogs are more believable. Blogs are written by ordinary people like us, not models or celebrities. Bloggers are like your friends, suggesting your products they already tried themselves.” (Mia, 30, individual interview)

Analysing the excerpt (especially by Mia) above, the term ‘friends’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘closeness’ makes blogs more believable rather than watching adverts on TV or other mainstream media. Logically, there is no guarantee that these bloggers have actually tested the products they endorsed, but still, because of the bloggers being trusted friends, somehow for some readers, bloggers are more reliable than traditional advertising.

The sense of closeness and personal attachment to blogs and the bloggers they followed is also quite obvious, especially when they relate their own experiences with what they read on the blogs. From what the bloggers post, it seems 'ordinary stuff' like raising families and motherhood has become a frequent topic on their blogs. This experience could be summed up with what Anissa, a 24-year-old single fashion business owner from Bandung, West Java and Bella Yuri from Surabaya. These are the excerpts:

"I remember Suci Utami, like when she told her story when she experienced hardship during her pregnancy. I mean, if you look at her pictures, she is a happy mother of two, but we don't know that her pregnancy was not easy peasy like what we'd assumed." (Anissa, 24, individual interview)

"I like Zahratul Jannah's blog. She is beautiful and friendly. I met her once in one of fashion show and she was really friendly. Just because she is famous through her blogs sometimes people think they are arrogant or posh or socialite-like. But they are not like that." (Bella, 22, individual interview)

From what Anissa said, the readers like to feel mutual closeness with the bloggers through the description of their personal lives, sharing that their lives were also filled with series of downfalls despite their depictions of glamorous women living the glamorous life. Bella, another interviewee, also stated that the accidental meeting with her favourite blogger confirmed the way she would imagine the bloggers that she thinks as friendly and approachable. Not just reading and consuming what bloggers' fashion, readers like Bella also imagine a certain kind of bloggers' personality through the blogs she read. Another reader, Rizky Dwi, also confirmed the same sense. She stated that through reading her favourite bloggers, it made her feel like she understood the blogger's personality. This is the excerpt:

"Or...their attitudes also influence me, it is reflected through their blogs...like she (blogger) is an easy going person and cool. So it's like reading their blogs makes you can understand them and know their personalities. Puput Utami for example, she posted the day she

resigned from her work and started her fashion business. It opened my eyes, you know, there are endless possibilities you can do after you finish school. Entrepreneurship could be one of them.” (Rizky Dwi, 25, individual interview)

Understandably, the act of reading virtual diaries builds up the connection between the readers with their favourite bloggers. To some extent, readers like Rizky Dwi feels like they know bloggers’ personalities mainly through reading their posts regularly. However, despite admitting being inspired to become an entrepreneur like her favourite blogger, she also stated that reading blogs also makes her want things she could not afford. She stressed this:

“Some bloggers clearly promote consumerism; you know it makes me thinking of buying something I couldn’t afford. But it’s understandable since they maintain the quality and it is home industry so they sell it a bit more expensive than high street brands.” (Rizky Dwi, 25, individual interview)

Another reader also stated that scrutinising the way bloggers flaunt their lifestyle could be seen as envy. Just like what Rizky Dwi stated above, Diana shared a similar feeling:

“I don’t have any problem with her [blogger] travelling here and there and showing what she got. It’s really up to her, I mean she works hard for that and why should we criticise her. It’s none of our business. Envy is not a good personality.” (Rizky Dwi, 25, individual interview)

What has been interesting from the contrasting quotes above, is the way they criticised bloggers as the one who promote consumerism, but also at the same time they quickly defended this by saying that because they are small scale home industry and bloggers/designers, they (presumably) maintain their qualities. Rizky made a judgment that it is understandable. I argue this is because of her adoration and closeness to this bloggers, perhaps also her adoration from the fellow *hijabi*, she quickly defended their consumerist strategy just the way Diana defended her favourite blogger. She also warned that

scrutinising bloggers' conspicuous lifestyles could be interpreted as envy – something not allowed in Islam.

In Fan Studies, parasocial interaction refers to the attachment the fans formed with the celebrities through the mediated platforms like mass media. In other words, parasocial relationship refers to the relationship between “media users and media figures” (Giles 2002). The parasocial interaction has been central to the research of fan and audience studies. Early parasocial research was conducted by examining the way the audience interacted with their favourite characters from soap operas like *EastEnders* and *Dallas*. Furthermore, as Schmid and Klimmt (2011, p. 252-269) add, parasocial interactions and parasocial relationships are different. Parasocial interaction refers to “immediate psychological responses of media users to media characters in the moment of exposure, whereas parasocial relationships (PSRs) are more or less stable, long-term media users hold and can access both during and between exposure to messages featuring a media character” (Schmid and Klimmt 2011).

I would argue that this might be the case for Muslim fashion blogs readers. Consuming Muslim fashion blogs regularly and being an avid reader might lead to a parasocial relationship between the bloggers and the readers. Some readers feel mutual closeness with the bloggers because of their roles as wives and mothers, some other identify themselves as fellow *hijabi* and thus defend bloggers that seem conspicuous in representing their life through blogs. The way Rizky, a reader, defended her favourite bloggers as fellow *hijabi* indicating sisterhood in a sense that a Muslim should support another Muslim, especially the sisterhood of Muslim women.

Some readers stated that although they knew that bloggers try to sell items on their blogs, they also still believe that those marketing strategies are valid since they trust the bloggers would never lie with regard to what they were selling. Some even believe that marketing

through blogs is better than marketing through advertisements, since the blogs are personal and thus more believable for readers rather than mainstream TV or magazine advertising. Research by Chung and Cho (2014) on Korean fans' parasocial relationships with their celebrities through reality TV and social media resulted in a positive outcome.

Other research by Halvorsen (Halvorsen et al., 2013) conclude that advertisement through personal blogs has positive correlation with consumer buying decision since it is "non-intrusive" and "personal". As Chung and Cho (2014, pp. 47-54) further note, celebrities' self-disclosure through many forms of media representation including their social media platforms resulted in the purchase decision of brands that are used by fans' favourite celebrities. Blogs and other forms of social media thus could be seen as the medium to create 'new breed of celebrities'. That is, someone made famous by their social media presence, different from the traditional celebrity of TV or movies.

Muslim fashion blogs, just like any other social media, have given birth to the concept of micro-celebrities. Micro-celebrity as Senft (2008, p. 25) argues can be defined as "a new online performance in which people employ webcams, video, audio, blogs and social networking sites to 'amp up' their popularity among readers, viewers, and those to whom they are linked online". In the case of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, the readers treat bloggers as some sort of celebrity, whose seems real and authentic however hidden beneath the carefully constructed visual imageries and well-thought-out self-presentation.

Furthermore, research on the subject of the parasocial relationship between readers of women's genres like celebrity gossip magazines (Hatfield 2011; MacDonell 2014) have concluded that through forming parasocial relationships with the celebrities they encounter through the magazines and tabloids, the celebrities could be seen as real and ordinary. The same mechanism seems to also apply to the growing trend of Reality TV shows, where ordinary people suddenly become famous with no apparent talent. As Biressi

and Nunn (2008, p.153) argue, “the appeal of Reality TV lies partly in how seemingly unremarkable people are suddenly ‘especially remarkable’ and how that celebrity status is endorsed by the spectacle of their widespread public presence.”

The appeal of Muslim fashion blogs, as of any personal blogs out there lies in their ability to look real and intimate. The majority of Muslim fashion bloggers stated in their interviews that they never had any formal education in fashion, they just merely love fashion. The ability of these bloggers, who are able to transform their ordinariness and fashion amateur-ness into their online notoriety as micro-celebrities (to borrow the term from Senft 2008) through their web-blogs is strikingly similar with the way Reality TV creates its own celebrities. Furthermore, as Biressi and Nunn (2008) argue, Reality TV has a similar narrative which revolves around “personal triumph over ordinary obstacle” with the narrative of fashion bloggers who as my participants experienced ordinary women’s problems, such as pregnancy and raising families, but at the same time successfully built their enterprise in the fashion business. The seeming adoration for Muslim fashion bloggers as “ordinary women like us” thus successfully make readers easily become apologetic whenever the seemingly personal post was actually fully-packaged with self-promotional campaigns.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter answered the first research question, which is why Indonesian women read Muslim fashion blogs and how they make sense of them. Specifically, this chapter derived three key findings. First, who are Indonesian Muslim blog readers? Second, why do they read blogs? Third, how do the blogs engage and appeal to the readers? Three key findings will be elaborated as follows:

The first key points shed light on the identity of Indonesian Muslim fashion blog readers. This research had interviewed 63 participants in total, which made up of 53 readers and 10 bloggers. All blog readers identified themselves as Indonesian Muslim women, practicing Muslims, wore *hijabs*, were middle-class, and all also had at least college or universities education and some held Master's degrees and worked as University lecturers. The participants ages ranged from 19 to 40 years old, with the majority of interviewees working women living in urban areas around Indonesia with the highest concentration living in Jakarta and Surabaya, two of the biggest metropolitan cities in Indonesia. Those who identified themselves as homemakers also identified themselves as small-business entrepreneurs. In conclusion, none of my participants was a full-time homemaker.

An overwhelming number of participants stated although they are not coerced to wear the *hijab*, the socialisation of the veiling practice and other Islamic values started when they were children. The female figures in the family, mothers and sisters, were a crucial part of the decision with regards to the participants' veiling decision, more than their own personal quests to learn Islam. This finding supports the previous research findings (Scourfield et al 2010, Hartono 2011) that concluded that the reason Islam has been successfully preserved for generations is because mothers have a central role in the education of younger generations. Furthermore, although all participants wore the *hijab*, some even at a very young age, this research shows that there were varieties of understanding of what entails modesty and *hijab* requirements in Islam. All participants have their personal interpretation and understanding of how modesty should be practised, and what entails modesty in Islam. These nuanced and sometimes complex understandings, which vary from one participant to another, determine the way they read and negotiate certain visual representations of Muslim fashion blogs. The *hijab*, as my participants stated, was largely part of their identity, and, as Brenner (1996) argued, signifies their self-identity of becoming "more aware" of their Muslimness. The decision to

wear the *hijab* is seen as big, monumental decision, one that is necessary to preserve the Islamic values, family expectations and more pious selves.

The second key findings illustrated why readers read Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs.

Based on the analysis of the interview transcripts, my research participants mostly enlisted reading blogs as a leisure activity, which is done just whenever they have time in between other commitments such as doing house chores, raising children or working in professional career jobs. Reading fashion blogs is also often associated with pleasure and escapism, and even habit in the past, when readers still were still single, before having children and other work-life commitments. This finding is similar with previous research (Radway 1991; Hermes 1995) that sees consuming feminine genres such as magazines or romance novels as activities associated with pleasure and escapism. Participants also prefer to read fashion blogs through their mobile phones instead of personal computers, laptops or tablets, with attention mostly given to the skimming and scanning the visual aspects of the blogs rather than written posts.

Looking out for fashion inspiration was also the reason why fashion blogs are popular and appealing for Indonesian Muslim readers. Muslim fashion bloggers are seen as fashion experts, whose style and appearances inspires readers to update their appearances.

Fashion is being seen as something that needs to be mastered, and thus fashion bloggers (albeit with a lack of formal education in fashion) are seen as the voice of fashion. The uniqueness of the fashion bloggers as an alternative voice of fashion has been similarly voiced by researchers (Rocamora 2011,2012; Luvaas 2013), that fashion blogs have been successful and appealing since they represent ordinary people who are often being ignored by the fashion industry. And while most participants believe bloggers inspired their fashion, a tiny numbers of participants use Muslim fashion blogs to actually learn the rules of Islamic femininity. Rather than use blogs merely for fashion references, some interviewees

treat blogs as the source of Islamic teaching, specifically to learn the way they interpret modesty. Bloggers here have been seen not only as the voice of fashion, but as a legitimate representation of religious guidance. This case specifically applies to participants who are isolated in their social circle, i.e. a Muslim convert whose family is mostly Christian.

The key findings illustrate why Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are appealing for the readers. As I briefly mentioned, Muslim fashion blogs appeal to the readers since it depicts fashion from and for ordinary people. Readers also stated that bloggers were seemingly like a friend, and through reading the bloggers' personal stories, readers feel a mutual closeness with the bloggers. However, the readers also realise that the seemingly ordinary bloggers are extraordinary individuals, as they have abundant resources and finances to look stylish and travel with glamour. The relationship between readers and bloggers resembles the relationship between fans and celebrities. Senft (2008) coined the term of micro-celebrities to refer to someone who gained notoriety for their online media presence. Different from the traditional sense of celebrities, micro-celebrities appear as 'ordinary as possible' while at the same time carefully constructing their self-image through their blogs. The relationship between readers and bloggers could also be described as a parasocial relationship (Hatfield 2011; MacDonell 2014) that resembled the relationship between readers who read celebrity or gossip magazines and saw celebrities as real and ordinary. Similarly, research into reality TV shows (Biressi and Nunn 2008) also showed similar findings – a narrative which revolves around "personal triumph over ordinary obstacles". The Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are not only visually appealing in terms of fashion presentation, but the way bloggers carefully craft their personality as ordinary women made their promotional campaigns more believable compared to conventional advertising in the mainstream media. The next chapter (Chapter 5) will answer research question 2 (RQ2) which focuses upon visual representation of the blogs and the way the readers negotiate certain aspects of them.

Chapter 5

Visual and Audience Analysis of Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs:

The Articulation of Modesty, Modernity, Motherhood, Class and Nation

This chapter intends to answer the second research question (RQ2) about the way in which the blogs and readers negotiate modernity, modesty, motherhood, class and nation as these are articulated in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. To answer this research question, this chapter will be divided into three sub-sections which firstly, focus upon modesty and modernity, secondly focus upon motherhood in Islam, and thirdly, focus upon class and consumption. Through elaboration of this chapter, it is concluded that the blog reading practice is a set of complex practices where sometimes tension arises between what the bloggers intended and the way readers interpret certain aspects. Tension also sometimes arises during the round of discussions, especially when religion was discussed and each participant has their own opinions.

Visual analysis using semiotics or semiology will be employed to examine the way in which the codes (modesty, modernity, motherhood, class and nation) have been constructed through the blogs (visual and text) and complement this elaboration with findings from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The text chosen for the corpus of this research were taken from popular blogs which were regularly mentioned during the interviews and FGDs. The blogs, which already gained notoriety as the most read and popular blogs (in mainstream media or amongst participants) were chosen as the corpus of this research. There are some lively debates and discussions which were sparked by certain blogs posts or certain bloggers, which could also be a reason for choosing certain posts. In total, this chapter analyses ten visual texts from ten different blogs and bloggers, which all

happened to be the most read and popular blogs among my research participants. These 10 bloggers are also famous as the faces of young Indonesian Muslims, and the majority of them since successfully started their blogs have launched Muslim clothing lines and are deemed as the future of Indonesian fashion. While this chapter touches on certain bloggers whose names emerged during the round of discussion, the next chapter (Chapter 6) will be dedicated thoroughly to focus upon the bloggers themselves.

5.1 Between East and West: Representation of Modesty and Modernity in Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs

Skimming and scanning through Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, there is one thing that is certain across hundreds of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. That is that the *hijab* (by this, I mean headscarves and the entire clothing) has come a long way compared to when it began to gain popularity amongst middle-class Muslims in Indonesia. *Hijab* fashion has been more vibrant, lively and undeniably stylish in the hands of these young internet-savvy fashion bloggers. As someone who practiced veiling in the beginning of the 90's, I have seen the dramatic changes in the Muslim fashion sphere during the last 20 years in Indonesia. As many have also argued in many parts of the world, even in the Western world, that the *hijab* has been modernised and is adaptable in the hands of these bloggers (Tarlo 2012; Lewis 2015).

Among several codes operated within fashion blogs, the codes of modesty and modernity are chosen to be analysed further in this section. The tension between the two was also quite intense during the round of interviews and group discussions. Participants acknowledged that the blogs have portrayed the *hijab* as a form of modesty *vis-a-vis* modern fashion, and sometimes (in some visual representation of blogs), has been deemed to have gone too far. Among the blogs that were popularly discussed and mentioned

during the FGDs were Dian Pelangi's blog and Indah Nada Puspita's blog, which I will analyse further in this section along with other two blogs.

Dian Pelangi has been hailed in the Indonesian mass media as the face of Indonesian Muslims as her emerging fashion business and blogs gained widening popularity since 2010. Now at the age of 25, she is among the top Indonesian designers and she often showcases her collection abroad, even collaborating with Harrods in London in 2013. Her blog (dianpelangi.blog.com) which at first started as dianrainbow.blogspot.com, is filled with high-quality visual images from her travelling all around the world and her signature style. She is famous for her street-style *hijab* and colourful palettes. Last year, Dian published *Hijab Street Style*, a collection of photographs of young Muslim women with street-style *hijabs* who she encountered during her travels. She stated that her book was inspired by Scott Schuman's *The Sartorialist* (Schuman 2005), also a street-style photography book, only with a Muslim twist to it. Since her popularity as blogger as well as young designer, tie dye is also her signature style and she has since produced a collection of tie dye headscarves, skirts, trousers, blazers, jumpsuits, even a tie dye prayer dress.

The name Dian Pelangi has consistently been mentioned in the individual interviews as well as group discussions as the most popular Muslim blogger. Some like her young and colourful style, others have criticised her look as a deviation from the Islamic requirements of the *hijab*. Some even said that it should not be called a *hijab* at all, since it does not cover her chest area. This is one image from her blog which was discussed by participants during FGDs:



Picture 1. "Breeze" from blog.dianpelangi.com (Pelangi 2014) posted on September 4, 2014

This is the picture from her blog posted on September 2014 while she was on vacation in the Maldives. There is only one caption mentioning the brand of her jumpsuit (Dianpelangi) and her high wedges (Valentino). At first glance, all signs in the picture show a woman posed during her holiday, which later being clear that it was a holiday in Maldives. The title 'Breeze' connotes that it was a really relaxing time by the beach. But then, in a deeper

analysis the post could also be about how to be in style during a holiday. She made an extra effort even during her holiday, which signified by the use of high wedged sandals even when she could just sit and relax by the beach. Dian combined the expensiveness and stylishness of Valentino wedges with the approachability of a tie dye pink jumpsuit from her own collection.

The year 2014 is often considered by many fashion critics as the year of the jumpsuit. As Lauren Cochrane from the Guardian puts it, “the ‘done’ Hollywood glamour of dresses has been eclipsed by the all-in-one effortlessness of the jumpsuit” (Cochrane 2014). Dian decided to follow this trend, adapting the jumpsuit (which is often sleeveless) into a Muslim-appropriate jumpsuit with long sleeves. Her colourful tie dye signature emerges with this tie dye jumpsuit collection. The effort of wearing high wedged sandals tempered by the effortlessness of jumpsuit made this particular look seem so ambivalent, not just mixing a local brand (her brand) with an international one, but also the effortless jumpsuit with the inaccessibility of expensive high wedges.

In terms of the *hijab*, Dian also opted out the conventional *hijab* with a usually large fabric, but instead she decided to combine a white turban decorated with flowers along with a pink neck cover (which has been popularly called as the inner ninja, since the shape resembles a ninja’s balaclava). Not only that, she also made an extra effort with the use of a white turban decorated with pink and orange flowers, connoting romanticism and a girlish style. In terms of her pose, it is obvious that she is using an unnatural, high-fashion pose. With one arm on her hip and lifting her one leg to show that the jumpsuit gives a lot of accessibility and is easy to move around in, despite wearing high heels. Dian tries something daring and different in her look. Not only has she created something influenced by the look in the West (jumpsuit) but also created it to be wearable for a Muslim like her. She also tried something different in that she used a turban instead of the conventional

hijab, one that many criticised as not properly covering her bosom. Modesty here is being represented by the fact that her entire body (including hair and neck) is still covered, while modernity is being represented by the mix of high street (tie dye jumpsuit) and high end (Valentino wedges) together in one outfit. Modernity also being signified by the way Dian appropriates Western style for Muslim clothing, adapting and absorbing from the many influences she saw from major fashion week shows in New York, Paris or Milan.

The second image analysed in this section is taken from Indah Nada Puspita's blog (sketchesofmind.com) that she launched in 2010, the same year as Dian Pelangi's blog. Indah is also one blogger that keeps being mentioned during the fieldwork, especially among younger interviewees the same age as her. Born in 1993, Indah is an Indonesian Muslim fashion blogger who is now studying in Germany. While she is busy studying, she keeps going home to Indonesia to record and release her first album, along with launching her own scarf collection. Indah is famous for her cute, girly style, while also sometimes being adventurous. Her blogs are filled with her outfit-of-the-day pictures of her travelling around the world, especially between Indonesia and European countries.

In this picture, she tried to recreate Lady Gaga's bow hair, her trademark style which became famous in 2012 and was imitated with numerous celebrities like Paris Hilton. Indah tried to recreate this specific hair style and infuse it with Islamic modesty. This is the picture:



Picture 2. "Gaga's Bow" from Sketchesofmind.com (Puspita 2010) posted on August 25, 2012.

This is the full body shot of her entire look, which is black and white, incorporating a black frilly dress, white skinny denim jeans and black studded high heels. A first glance, this visual image signifies femininity through the use of a frilly dress combined with masculinity through the black studded high heels, worn along with tight white skinny denim pants. Indah recreated the Lady Gaga bow hair look by combining a big black and white turban which she made into a big bow on top of her forehead. Her neck was covered again just like Dian Pelangi by the black inner lining to conceal her neck. She also wore big square glasses, presumably to add a quirky aspect into her look. The use of denim, just like some of my interviewees said earlier in Chapter 4, is not appropriate for Muslims since it shows the

legs, just like the use of an inner lining that still shows the shape of the neck. Some of my interviewees also noted that Indah's hijab style, as well as Dian Pelangi's style, is not appropriate at all since it has not covered the chest area. What is especially interesting about Indah's homage to Lady Gaga look is that the fact that Lady Gaga's music tour was banned in Indonesia by the government in 2012. Backed by the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), Lady's Gaga concert was cancelled due her promiscuous performance but also her political stance that supports the LGBT rights movement. The government made a stance that by welcoming Lady Gaga, Indonesia will automatically be seen as supporting the Indonesian LGBT's movements – something that almost always results in a huge public backlash and condemnation from Islamic clerics.

The two controversies between a Muslim's modesty and appropriating Lady Gaga's look is intermingled in this visual image. The turban and the neck cover signify modesty; however, the high heels, the bow and the skinny denim signify a Western style, a style that is often being thought as being inappropriate for Muslim attire. Indah's post connotes that in terms of fashion, even modesty can be adaptable. Just like Dian's recreation of the jumpsuit, any particular look can be adjusted to a Muslim one. It also could be understood that in order to be seen as modern, modesty should be recreated into a more Westernised style.

Indah's look also perpetuates a view that fashion, even Muslim fashion, should be seen as fluid, adaptable, and playful. Fashion should also not be taken too seriously, especially when readers negotiated the two competing ideologies in her look: the modesty of the *hijab* and the promiscuity of Lady Gaga. For Indah and Dian, modesty, just like fashion, should be fluid and exudes personality rather than a formulaic ensemble that sees the *hijab* as a matter of essentialist tradition. Taste should be personal, although the marking of modesty is signified by the concealment of the hair and neck area. Other than that,

modesty in clothing (tops and bottoms) can be interpreted more loosely, even with the use of tight denim and sexy high heels.

The fluidity of Islamic fashion has been made more obvious with Yulia Rahmawati's blog. Although only two participants had come across her blog, I have been interested by her adaptation of men's fashion into the Muslim look. Readers noted that their liking of Yulia's blog comes from their tomboy personality, and they seek bloggers that represent the tomboy style, Yulia being one of them. This post is post under the title of "Oh Boy!" in the categories of daily *hijab* style dated March 2013. The picture is as follows:



Picture 3: "Oh Boy!" from Ladyulialogy.blogspot.com (Rahmawati 2013) posted on March 2013.

Her fashion style above, which she entitles “Oh Boy!”, is inspired by Yohji Yamamoto, the Japanese *avant garde* designer based in Paris and Tokyo. His fashion philosophy, as I quote from his 1983 interview with the New York Times, implements men and women’s fashion, although at first he designed for men, and in turn many women were actually comfortable wearing his designs (Duka 1983). He further added in the interview that men’s fashion is clean cut and simple with minor decorations and thus makes women feel comfortable wearing it. Yulia, inspired by Yohji Yamamoto’s 2013 Fall/Winter collection, created her outfit of the day with a feminine flair. Instead of wearing a dark, denim blue coat and cardigan, she changed it to a salmon pink outfit, which was her attempt to recreate a Yohji Yamamoto inspired fashion style. However, different from Yamamoto’s male model that wore blue, grey and black ensembles, Yulia opts for a pink, salmon and red combination, and thus seemingly connotes that male’s fashion could be appropriate for a feminine Muslim.

In terms of the hat, she chose pop red instead of black. The modesty, which signifies by headscarves or veil, in her version, is signified by the wearing of black hoodie which covers her head and hair (to use an Indonesian term, black inner ninja, because it resembles a ninja outfit). Yulia’s post doesn’t explicitly signify that she is a Muslim, especially a Muslim who chooses to cover. In this “Oh Boy!” post, the uses of headscarves, the veil or a *hijab* is not quite clear, especially without reading and opening her other post, the readers might not know that Yulia is indeed, a Muslim blogger who wears the *hijab*.

Another important thing to be noticed, Yulia draws a white moustache in her pictures, so as to resemble Yohji’s male model as close as possible. She is also posed the same way, the way her eyes look downward and the way she places her hat to covers some parts of her face, it can be inferred that she tries to be as close as possible to the way the model is posed. The *hijab*, in Yulia’s blog, seems like something that should be celebrated in

playfulness. Yulia, indeed, tries to push gender boundaries as well. The *hijab* for her and other two bloggers (Indah and Dian), is neither something that needs to be 'essential' and nor it is also something pure that needs to be well preserved in its original form, but something that constantly needs to be challenged, negotiated, decorated and adapted to the international fashion style. Yulia is a blogger who is different from Indah and Nadiyah away that she does not own her own clothing line. This blog is purely her personal blog, without any sense of marketing her brand, nor does she endorse any particular brands. Her style is quite consistent throughout her blogs in that she is a tomboy girl who is often inspired by men's clothing. Yulia herself is a college student majoring in Education, who loves fashion and photography. Her personal sense of style is always clean cut, often boyish and borrowing from men's fashion, using the latest fashion shows around the world. Just like Indah and Dian, Yulia shows that Western clothing styles can be borrowed and appropriated into Muslim fashion.

The last picture was taken from Fitri Aulia's blog (kivitz.blogspot.com) that launched in 2010. Realising that many people liked the way she styled herself, Fitri decided to launch her clothing brand, Kivitz, with Syar'i and "Stylish" as her motto. Syar'i refers to clothes that adhere to *sharia* (Islamic law) and with creating Kivitz, *sharia*-appropriate dress could be made into a stylish piece of clothing too. This is one example from her blog:



Picture 4: “Syar’i and Stylish as a career woman” from Kivitz.blogspot.co.uk (Aulia 2016) posted on January 12, 2016.

This picture is also followed by a written post (different from the three blogs before, that are dominated by visual images) and this is the excerpt that has been translated into English:

“I was invited into Muslim women workshop couple of months ago in Jakarta. I definitely opted for office look, thus I chose Kelly dress. Talking about office look, from the beginning of my Kivitz label, I designed clothes appropriate for working women....so Muslim women can be syar’i and stylish while working.” (Aulia 2016)

Fitri Aulia’s blog is essential in this chapter, since some readers praised her for being true to her Islamic roots. Some readers noted that her *abaya* signature and her long wide headscarves are the most appropriate look for Muslim women compared to the other posts I have analysed above. The *abaya* and long headscarves have been deemed as the ultimate

goal of modesty, and Fitri's look throughout her blog which started in 2010 is pretty consistent. Her signature look is all about long *abayas* or long flowy skirts with wide headscarves. The visual image above represents the image of conservativeness, signified by the use of *abaya* (a loose gown usually worn in the Middle-Eastern countries) along with wide headscarves covering half of her body and ending at her waist. Conservativeness is built by Fitri, who chooses to adapt traditional clothes from the region where Islam was born, and the same style of clothes is worn to emphasise that her way of wearing clothing is the most appropriate way for modesty. However, the left and right pictures also show the different fashion accessories that are high-heel pumps along with a designer brand handbag (Michael Kors). For the woman who wants a conservative look, the choice of heels and a designer handbag are quite contradictory. However, the mix and match outfit was made clear with the written post that suggested this is the appropriate office look for a career woman.

A career woman (*wanita karir*) is a popular Indonesia-English term that literally means working woman. The terminology of career woman in Indonesian culture refers to a woman who chooses to work in public (outside her house). The conservativeness of *abaya* and wide long scarves is combined with the use of high heels and a designer handbag to complement the *abaya*, this is appropriate enough for Muslim woman who has her career outside the home. Just like Fitri's Kivitz motto 'syar'i and stylish', Fitri's look represents modesty and modernity at the same time. The modesty and conservativeness of a long *hijab* and *abaya* becomes modern when encapsulated with the title of 'outfit for a career woman' along with the nude pumps and designer handbag. One thing I noticed from Dian Pelangi's and Fitri's fashion labels is that they also follow a global fashion convention by launching their collection based on Spring-Summer and Autumn-Winter collections. Interestingly, none of those seasons are actually applied in Indonesia's tropical climate. From the four bloggers analysed above, three out of four were wearing high heel shoes. High heeled shoes are a

subject of intense feminist debate, especially in relation to women's mobility and freedom.

As Susan Brownmiller argues (1984, pp.184-185) that,

In the 1920s, when women freed their bodies from corsets and dragging long skirts, the high-heeled shoe was reintroduced to fashion, partially to emphasize the newly exposed leg but perhaps unconsciously to offer a new feminine impediment to motion.

Fitri too, just like Dian, Yulia and Indah, follows global fashion including the trend of wearing high heel shoes as a means of women's empowerment. The female immobility and restriction of such beauty practices that has been voiced by the feminist scholars such as Brownmiller (1984), Tseelon (1995) and Ussher (1997) is being challenged by the sense of empowerment and confidence through such practice. As Gill (2008, pp. 35-60) puts it:

Stiletto heels, long imbued with sexual meanings, have acquired a particular symbolic potency in this postfeminist moment. The fact that they are difficult to walk in, even painful, adds to this by drawing attention to the valuing of sexual attractiveness over and above freedom of movement.

The sense of modern is also being shown by the similar tendency of some bloggers to wear alternative conversion of *hijab*. Some bloggers (Dian, Yulia and Nada) choose to wear alternative concealment of hair with the use of inner layers and turbans, while Fitri opted for a more conservative option with a modern twist of heels, a handbag and her marketing campaign that '*abaya* could be modernised too'. Just like readers in Chapter 4 showed, the interpretation of modesty varies with bloggers too, even the seemingly conservative ones. From the various images above, it is concluded that the bloggers all have different viewpoints in relation to the *hijab* and modesty.

I have concluded in the literature review in relation to the *hijab* requirements, that the *hijab* and what entails modesty is fluid and sometimes complex. Dian Pelangi, Yulia Rahmawati and Indah Nada Puspita grasp the incorporation of Islamic fashion with global

fashion trends, with their incorporation of jumpsuits, Lady Gaga's performance and men's fashion. Their adoption of global fashion trends and appropriating it into Muslim fashion with the use of turbans is the perfect example of such practices. However, Fitri Aulia seems quite conservative in comparison to the other three. While she embraces long *abaya* with wide headscarves, she however incorporates her modest look into a modern lifestyle, and that is the lifestyle of working women. In her fashion sense, Fitri reaffirms that even the conservative look could be relevant for the professional working woman, with a little touch of modernity (in the forms of high heels and a designer handbag).

The interpretation of *hijab* is diverse, complex and has multiplicities of meaning (Abu-Lughod 2002; Sreberny 2002; MacDonald 2006), including the way in which why women living in the secular, modernised Western world decide to embrace the practice of veiling needing to understand all of its complexities. Just like the way the previous research of veiling practice in modern Western societies (Roald 2001; Dwyer 2002; Bullock 2002; Ramji 2007; McGinty 2007; Droogsma 2007) which suggested that the veiling practice is about agency and preserving cultural values, the veiling practice in Indonesian middle-class communities could also have different complexities.

As I have elaborated in the literature review, the history of veiling practise in Indonesia is relatively new and saturated with acts of defiance against the authoritarian regime. As suggested by Dewi (2012), the veiling practice was quite scarce among the middle-class up until the 1980s, while before that such a practice was only applied by Javanese noblewomen who married Islamic clerics or studied Islam. However, with the overthrow of the New Order regime that often suppressed Islamic movements, the veiling practice was embraced especially among University students and middle-class urban women. As Brenner (1996) suggests, the veiling practice among urban middle-class women signified a growing religious identity. She adds (1996) that wearing the *hijab* is associated with a new self and

identity, but also there is the need to form a 'new kind of modernity', one that embraces modern, urban life, but still preserves religion and the cultural values of Islam. Such awareness not only comes from local identity, but is also in line with the Islamic resurgence in Iran, Egypt, Jordan and Malaysia. As Smith-Hefner (2007) argues, the *hijab* resurgence was prevalent among young, middle-class, educated, urban Muslims from those countries to mark the newfound 'new' Muslim identity, that is "not traditionalist nor anti-modernist reaction". This *hijab* resurgence signified that the new Muslims are those who believe that embracing Islam is also part of being modern itself. Indonesian modernity is about embracing both worlds, one based on religion values and another engaged with secular modernity. When it comes to Muslim women, modesty values, which in essence is about the *hijab* or the practice of veiling, is used to mark this disposition.

Religion in the 21st century is continually being forced to change and adapt into global modernity, and Islam is not an exception. Asef Bayat coins the term post-Islamism as a way Muslim countries such as Iran has been more open towards modernity. Asef Bayat (1996, p. 46) defines Post-Islamism as:

A condition where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, symbols and sources of legitimacy of Islamism get exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. As such, post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic, but rather reflects a tendency to secularize religion. In contemporary Iran, post-Islamism is associated with the values of democracy and aspects of modernity. It is expressed in the idea that Islam does not have answers to all societies' social, political and economic problems. Post-Islamism implies an understanding that not only Islam is compatible with modernity, but it's very survival as a religion depends upon achieving this compatibility. Yet, there also is a strong quest for an independent modernity.

Casanova (2010, p. 35) also proposes a similar argument, that "all world religions are forced to respond to the global expansion of modernity by reformulating their traditions in an attempt to fashion their own particular civilizational versions of modernity." This kind of

impression emerged during the interview and group discussions session. Muslim fashion blogs are being seen as the representation of this new form of Muslim modernity and that the bloggers projected that wearing the *hijab* could be modern at the same time and that the veiling practise is neither anti-modern nor anti-Western. This is some of the excerpt:

Silvi: That's why I love reading their blogs and looking into their design. I think...their fashion fit Islamic conventions on what the *hijab* should be. If you look at their design, it's almost the same. They don't wear tight jeans, or transparent tops. They dress beautifully but still also respect Islamic modesty.

Briefing: These bloggers and designers are educated people. I'm sure they learn so much about Islam...I think they know what Islamic clothes should be.

Moderator: But, I think some of you are also saying that their design or clothes are sometimes are over the top or inaccessible?

Fani: I think...because they need to be presentable or look great in the photos, and perhaps their accessories. But, if you look more closely, I think what they wear is pretty much modest.

Silvi: I think modesty in terms of wearing loose garments, not tight or transparent. But I think sometimes the way they accessories themselves is sometimes too much.

Briefing: I think they show us that dressing beautifully doesn't mean sexy. You can be beautiful and modest at the same time. (Focus Group Discussion 1)

However, the most interesting debate and tensions arise when I ask them about modernity. The word 'modernity' is not common and widely used in the Indonesian language. Instead, the word 'modern' is used more commonly to describe what the word 'modernity' means in English. In the excerpt, I choose to use the word 'modern' instead of 'modernity' to make it close as the word 'modern' in Indonesian. The word 'modern'

emerged several times when I asked the five women I interviewed about *hijab* fashion blogs about what the word modern means to them. This is the excerpt:

Moderator: Since you all mentioned the word 'modern' many times, I'd like to know in what way they are modern, you think?

Silvi: ...it's on their dress. Some of them are working women and they combine practicality of the business outfits with modesty, you know...how it should like in Islam.

Sinta: well, for me...it's when I see that they juggle their career as working women or business owners with their domestic task as mothers and wives.

Fani: I agree with both of them, I mean the fact that they are successful business owner, as designers or artists. Some of them graduated from abroad. They are smart and they actively promoting Indonesia and Muslims through their blogs. I'm proud of them...they show that Muslims are talented, creative and smart instead of poor and backward.
(Focus Group Discussion 1)

Silvi, Sinta and Fani all have similar opinions on what constitutes modern in seeing what the bloggers represent. Dress and stories on blogs about how they juggle family life and work are what for them represent modernity. Muslim fashion blogs, in their opinion, are offering alternative representations of what Muslims can do, instead of being poor and backwards.

Other interviewees, however, Briefing and Zakiyah, disagreed with three of them and tried to contest these arguments. For them, modernity should not be identified with dress or the representation of rich Muslims, nor it should be contrasted with a poor background and backwardness. This is the relevant excerpt of the FGD:

Briefing: Hmm...I don't know whether working women should be associated with modern women. It is as if housewives are

not modern. It should not be simplified like that. But I think I agree at least partially, that these bloggers do make difference in giving the alternative projection of Muslim women.

Zakiyah: Yes, I mean...not many women are like these women. Obviously they are rich and successful. I don't think modern should be associated with being rich, live in big cities. Modern for me, is more like a state of mind.

Moderator: Interesting...Could you clarify that? How modern relates to the state of mind?

Zakiyah: Hmm...how can I articulate this? modern is not always about what brand you could buy...you know...the outer look. It's more on how you think I think about the world's changing and how you constantly adapt and adopt new things without compromising who you are. Poor women living in rural areas could be modern too if she constantly tries to change her condition, work hard and study hard.
(Focus Group Discussion 1)

The same concern also arises within the second FGD, where participants largely felt that modern fashion sense is measured by the ability of the bloggers to adopt Western fashion.

This is something that has always been uneasy for some research participants.

This is the excerpt:

Moderator: Some magazines wrote about them [these bloggers] as the face of modern Muslims, like Dian Pelangi, I think she is one of the most famous Muslim blogger here [in Indonesia]? Her blog is phenomenal, the statistic of the readers in her blogs are amazing. How do you think about this?

Syifa: for me yes, perhaps. They are representing Muslim middle class. Definitely not all. I mean, what they wear is expensive. And specifically Dian Pelangi, perhaps yes, if modern means new and innovative, yes, she might be the representation of this new thing. But, in terms of being the proper Muslim, I don't think she does.

- Ratih: It could be, I think. I mean, her creation is the same as any Western influence anywhere. You know, that liberal fashion. I think her fashion style is like any other Western fashion in the world, the difference thing is that she is covering her hair. If that the definition of modern, then yes, I think she is modern. Hijab should cover the beauty of Muslims, not the opposite, emphasising it. Dian Pelangi shows the opposite, I think. She deliberately wants to show something.
- Resya: I agree, mostly. Modern means new and innovative, but if the question is about is it appropriate to Muslim modesty, then I think no. But the bloggers really influence the way women wear and style their hijab. Hijab style is more colourful and stylish. But the downside of it, hijab is also disengaged from its original intention. Many women want to wear hijab nowadays because hijab is now stylish, and it's make me sad. So, if it's not stylish then you don't want to wear it, then? That's not what hijab meant to be. It's not about stylish or not. (Focus Group Discussion 2)

The tension over why a modern Muslim should be associated with Western fashion emerged during the second FGD. The participants questioned why modernity should equal Muslim fashion being influenced by Western styles. One participant, Ratih, even used the word 'liberal' to be synonymous with anything Western. Other participants, Ratih and Resya, although admitting that Muslim bloggers are being successful in modernising Islamic fashion, they also criticise the way modernity itself uses the Western definition of modernity, and is signified by the way bloggers appropriate specific Western styles like jumpsuits, men's fashion and certain celebrities' styles. The blogs' readers questioned the authenticity of Muslim fashion itself and the way it finally decided to integrate into global fashion.

The tension and disagreement from the readers' comments with regards to Muslim bloggers appropriating Western fashion perhaps could have originated from the view that Muslim fashion is seen as an 'outsider' in Western fashion. As Lewis (2015, p. 12) puts it,

“fashion is a Western experience and that Muslims are not part of the West”. There is a sense of disagreement among the blog readers, which is quite obvious from the excerpt above, that while Muslim fashion blogs are being praised for giving modesty a modern look, they are still particularly criticised for using Western fashion as barometer for their modern look. Some readers even stated that modern is not always about look at all and emphasise that modern could be meaningful and less artificial when it is seen as a way of thinking and less about appearance. This all shows the incorporation of the *hijab* as modesty and the *hijab* as a modern fashion item is a complex, nuanced and even sometimes contradictory, as it has been illustrated by the participants.

In the *Circuit of Visibility* (2011,p. 1) Hegde argues that:

Globalization represents a complex disjunctive order that is clearly not captured by the popular rhetoric of easy fusion and smooth cultural transition; rather it is marked by jagged contours which can no longer be captured in terms of simple binaries that characterize centre-periphery models.

To put this into a historical context, Indonesia’s experience with globalisation could be dated back all the way through to the 1970s, after the fall of the Old Order regime. The New Order regime, which eventually became the longest authoritarian regime in Indonesian history (1965-1998) since its independence in 1945, has pushed the idea of national development based on integration into the global market economy. As I have illustrated in the introduction chapter, especially chapter (1.2) with regards to Indonesian history, economic development and industrialisation has been the centre of the New Order’s development programme (Crouch 1979). The dream of Indonesia as an industrialised country instead of a developing one has informed the national development agenda, and has been inscribed into the public imagination with all the keywords associated with it: globalisation, free market trade and modernity. Thus, in the name of

modernity and the dream of becoming an industrialised nation, the New Order regime has been tremendously cautious with what is acknowledged as an Islamic resurgence during all those years. As (Dewi 2012) asserts, the use of Islamic symbols and bodily practices such as the *hijab* had been demonised and vilified as a threat to national order. Progressing from this, the *hijab* resurgence in Indonesia (Brenner 1996; Smith-Hefner 2007) can be seen as a middle-way of creating a self-identity that is “neither traditionalist nor an anti-modernist reaction”.

The anti-essentialism of the *hijab* or veiling practice in Indonesia, I argue, has been more prominently shown by the emerging phenomenon of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. As the majority of my participants argued above, Indonesian Muslim bloggers have put forward the *hijab* and Islamic clothing as fashion and as Barthes (1983) and Wilson (2013) argue, fashion will always be characterised by newness, change and separation from tradition. Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are the visual representation and the textual artefact that the *hijab* and Islamic dress could be and should be seen not as a threat to Western ideas, but another version of modernity, one that still conforms to modesty even in the most controversial and peculiar ways, such as the adoption of Western sexually promiscuous pop-music star’s costumes. Even blogs that are seemingly more modest than others (Fitri’s blog) are still committed to the use of long *abaya*, but could not escape from the idea of the modern liberated self which showed with the presentation of Muslim career women and giving advice on how to dress for success as a Muslim woman.

Such dichotomies between modesty and modernity has been argued by Featherstone (1996) as no longer relevant, including what has been defined as modern. As he argues (1996, p.152):

With the shift in the global balance of power towards Asia, we are starting to see a rejection of some of the ‘orientalist’ categories and assumptions about the ossified unchanging East contrasted to the dynamic West. This binary was easily fed into the tradition–modernity

dichotomy with temporal and spatial dimensions. Tradition not only seen as the past of the West, but as central to cultural reproduction in non-Western societies, which would have allegedly remained confined to tradition without West intervention.

As has been shown in the analysis in this chapter, the Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs have shown that modesty is fluid and open to multi-interpretation and *hijab* as an anti-essentialist piece of clothing, even though readers, on the other hand, still look at Islamic and Western clothing as binary objects separated between the East and the West.

5.2 Domestic Goddess and Fashionable Mamma: Motherhood in Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs

This sub-chapter analyses the way in which motherhood is represented throughout Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. Based on many observations which I did during the fieldwork, I have found that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are not mostly about fashion and style. Many of them were also personal blogs, and more specifically, blogging about family and motherhood. Even though the majority of those blogs still project fashion and outfits in their day-to-day posts, some posts are also about personal lives, and many amongst them are specifically about motherhood.

Some readers pointed out that they also enjoyed these readers' daily stories. Some readers felt the connection with bloggers with regards to their parenting style and personal issues, which will later be discussed in this chapter. Among several blogs that were discussed was Fifi Alvianto's blog. Her blog is among the first fashion blogs that started in 2006. While fashion is still a major part of her blog, her personal and family story is also routinely updated. Some participants pinpointed this fact, that they enjoy reading Fifi's blog not only because of her attractive fashion style, but also her family stories and everyday narratives that usually revolved around the parenting of her two daughters, who are also frequently

photographed in her blog. This section will then look at the way motherhood has been articulated in Fifi's blog and two other blogs, and discussing the way my research participants negotiate the spectre of motherhood that has been articulated through the blogs.

The mommy blog is the popular term to describe the specific genre of blogs authored by mothers, usually dominated by the life and personal narrative of the bloggers' motherhood and family experiences. As Lopez (2009) argued, the reason why mommy blogs are popular is because of their honest view of motherhood, one that challenges the glorification of motherhood and represents mothers as flawed subjects. While the blogs analysed in this section still belong to the genre of fashion blogs since fashion is becoming the dominant content, the posts on bloggers as mothers and their everyday family life stories emerged quite strongly within three blogs which will be analysed further in this section.



Picture 5. "Family's Health Story" taken from the-alvianto.com (Alvianto 2016) posted in January 2016

The above picture was taken from Fifi Alvianto's blog (the-alvianto.com), one of the first Muslim fashion bloggers in Indonesia. She started writing her blog in 2006, following her decision to wear the *hijab*. She is also the founder of Casa Elana, a Muslim wear outlet specialising in maternity and breastfeeding-friendly clothing as well as the editor-in-chief of Laiqa, a Muslim fashion magazine. Following her resignation from Laiqa in 2014, Fifi is now a full-time housewife and also still actively designs and promotes Casa Elana and also

became a buzzer for many product endorsements since her blog gained almost 3 million readers.

Some participants stated they love Fifi's blog since she also shares many stories about her family, especially how she raises her two daughters, Lana and Lola (both under five years old). Some also said that they love to see how Fifi still maintains her beauty and stylish appearance despite having to take care of her family full-time, without help from nannies or babysitters. This picture is chosen to show how motherhood is being represented in Fifi's blog.

At a glance, the image shows a mother playing with her two daughters in the park. This seems like a usual activity, as playing is an integral part of childhood and growing up. Both daughters look happy and seem to enjoy their time in the park. They are both playing on the monkey bars. Their mother is very hands-on, signified by her presence not just sitting on a bench, but assisting them while they play. Fifi presents herself as stylish, a mother who is always present and still maintains her beauty through the choice of clothing which seems casual with the combination of a light grey-pink jumper, and a long and wide dark blue skirt with a grey headscarf. She also looks presentable by her use of make-up, signifying that a mother should always maintain her look even while doing the most trivial things such as playing in the park. Her look with full make-up and stylish appearance is quite consistent throughout her blog, suggesting that her look and appearance must be something that she values as important, just as important as nurturing her family. Apart from her stylish fashion, her smile exaggerates the impression that she is happy and content in serving her duty as a hands-on mother, while also suggesting that all her beauty and stylish appearance is effortless.

Her daughters, also while seemingly dressed casually, still look presentable through a combination of colour coordination between their footwear and clothes. They are both

well-dressed kids who are being nurtured by a well-dressed and hands-on mother. The picture and the activities of playing on the monkey bars in the playground seems trivial, however the colour-coordinated daughters, along with a beautiful mother mean that even the simplest things such as playing in the playground needs an effort, and that is to look beautiful even when you are a full-time mother with two young children. An effortlessness that has being shown by Fifi, at the same time also shows that being a mother should also still have to maintain the beauty, including on deciding what to wear.

The effort to look beautiful is also represented through the maternity shot of Suci Utami. Suchi started writing her blog (suciutami.com) in 2008 and after the success of her blog, she then launched such! by Suci Utami, a Muslim fashion label consisting of headscarves, *hijab* accessories, *abayas*, tops and bottoms. Despite using various models, Suci is also the face of her clothing label, which is shown by her picture below:



Picture 6: “Posh Preggo” taken from Suciutami.com (Utami 2014) posted on March 10, 2014.

The bio in her blog stated “I’m Suci Utami, an Indonesian blogger, a mother of two and a productive housewife”. It’s interesting to see the words ‘productive housewife’ in relation to maternity photoshoot above. It is obvious that a productive housewife could be defined as full-time homemaker, and yet still manage to work on something to contribute to the family’s economy, and in Suci Utami’s case, being a blogger and promoting her own fashion

line, even during pregnancy is the true meaning of the word 'productive housewife'. The title 'Posh preggo' defined the concept of her photoshoots, and that is how to look good while pregnant. Posh is also being represented by the use of a black dress ornamented with silver belt compliments with the use of a grey cardigan and high-heel platform shoes, while being five months pregnant. Her left hand mirrors the black dress, illustrating the dress's fabric as being light, feminine and comfortable to wear. The black colour also in a way hides the pregnant belly, making it look smaller than it should be.

The title 'posh preggo' thus means that being pregnant is not the time to be a slacker, but instead being productive, but at the same time maintaining beauty and style. Suci also uses heavy make-up along with high-heels, suggesting again that looking good and beautiful while pregnant needs a little bit of effort. While it is understandable that the picture is the marketing of her latest collection and therefore it is a professional fashion photoshoot, Suci Utami shows that it is possible to look beautiful during pregnancy. A pregnant body is not a wasted, ugly body, only functional for child-delivering purposes, but instead a beautiful, feminine body that should be celebrated with fashion, make-up, accessories and a feminine appearance. It is also represented that posh people (middle-upper class women) are the only ones who can look posh during their child-bearing period, since fashion, make-up and accessories are considered disposable income. Suci is the ultimate face of her own collection, a collection that helps any woman to look good at every stage of motherhood. Her clothing line is the extension of her vision, being a productive Muslim housewife but also being a beautiful woman at every stage of motherhood. The pregnant body is being depicted as a body which still delivers femininity and beauty and still deserves to be fashionable. Being pregnant is also represented as a beautiful moment in women's lives that needs to be commemorated and is worth a beautiful maternity photo shoot.

This sense of beautiful housewife and a devoted mum is also being clearly represented through the blog of Ghaida Tsurayya. She is the first daughter of infamous Indonesian Islamic preacher, Abdullah Gymnastiar, whom Time magazine had as its front cover in 2002 with the title 'Holy Man'. Ghaida started her blog in 2009, the following year she launched GDA by Ghaida, a feminine Muslim women dress which is usually dominated with pastel colours. Despite majoring in science, Ghaida stated that fashion design was always her passion. Now, at the age of 29 with three young children (two of them twins), Ghaida is a busy housewife and 'mumpreneur', navigating her time from family commitment, to entrepreneurship challenges. This is one of the images from her blog:



Picture 7: "Eid Mubarak Dear All Friends" taken from Gdagallery.blogspot.co.uk

(Gymnastiar 2015) posted on July 11, 2015.

This is a portrait of a happy Muslim Indonesian family. Posted on Eid celebration, Ghaida congratulated all her friends during the Eid celebration, celebrating the end of a month long fasting season, Ramadhan. This was taken in Ghaida's own home by the Italian photographer Alessia Gammarotta, a photographer recently making photography compilations of Muslim fashion around the world. All members of the family wore colour coordinated outfits that dominated with the colours of mint and peach – all are designed by Ghaida. Colour-coordinated clothes signify a family in harmony and happiness. This picture is also represented Ghaida's ability as a mum who is capable of dressing her small children well. The children look happy, beautiful and well-dressed. It is understandable that Eid is a special occasion in Indonesia. In fact, it is one of the biggest holidays of the year in Indonesia. It is usual and perfectly normal to see a family with a so-called 'uniform'. Just like any other Muslim family in Indonesia who celebrate Eid, Ghaida's family is celebrating Eid with a stylish mint and peach-themed family uniform. Her daughter was dressed in a tulle-ball gown like dress, quite similar to her own dress that is princess-like. Her daughter is also wearing a headscarf, suggesting that Ghaida and her husband socialised the veiling practice to her children at a young age, presumably since her background is from a famous religious family in Indonesia. However, the colour coordinated uniform and the well-dressed children and husband amongst her suggest that a mother is responsible for how the rest of the family should look like in a portrait. Ghaida's family is also being positioned to resembled the familial hierarchy, with the man (her husband) being located on the centre top of the picture, while Ghaida being located in the lower step.

Ghaida herself looked happy, content and beautiful despite having three children all under five years old. The picture suggested that the mother should take care of herself and the family. Ghaida seemed to manage her time well between motherhood and her work commitment as a fashion designer and entrepreneur. In some of her other posts, she shows that she is often invited as a speaker in women and entrepreneurship workshops all

around the country, and therefore the stakes are quite high for Ghaida to project her ability as a mom who seemingly can manage it all since she is the role model for 'mumpreneurships'.

In other posts, Ghaida stated that although she often feels exhausted, as she does not have nannies, her mother and mothers-in-law, along with her siblings, help her with child care and thus enable her to go on various business trips without her family. Therefore, Eid celebration is not only the celebration of her religious ritual, but also a celebration of her success on balancing the act of entrepreneurship and family commitments, one that she stated is exhausting and yet also rewarding, that deserved to be commemorated in a colour-coordinated family portrait (further discussion on bloggers as '*mumpreneurs*' will be further analysed in Chapter 6.3). The colour of mint-green, just like any other spectrum of green often associates with harmony, health, nature and freshness. Perhaps, through this picture, Ghaida represents her family harmony, along with the harmonious balance of her work and family commitments. Ghaida represents a young Muslim mum who is not only devoted to her family, but also takes good care of herself and her family, including in terms of the family's appearance. Ghaida's family is the perfect portrait of the modern Muslim Indonesian family, with the husband as the leader of the family and pious wives that take a good care of the children, looking beautiful in any situation with well-behaved children. She has done it all and seemingly has it all. Ghaida succeeded in private and public life, juggling her roles as a housewife and a mother while also being successful in her fashion business and being a productive fashion blogger.

Motherhood is a sacred concept in Islamic teaching. There is the famous *hadith* (the saying of the prophet Muhammad) that stated that "paradise lies beneath your mother's feet" to exemplify the significance of motherhood in Islam. However, as Islamic feminist scholar, Amina Wadud (1999, p. 64) has argued, contrary to the traditional perspective that sees

women as child-bearing, the Qur'an is "emphatic about the reverence, sympathy and responsibility due to the female procreator". As she later asserts (1999, pp. 64) that "there is no term in the Qur'an which indicates that childbearing is "primary" to a woman." She also added that the task of parenting within the Qur'an is for both parents.

Although parenting is all about the mother and father, it seems from the visual images of Muslim fashion blogs analysed above excluded the men or father figure altogether. Not only through the three visual images analysed above, but also through my observation of the three blogs in general, there was little to no representation of husband and father altogether (with Ghaida's blog being the exception). It is suggested from the three visual texts above that the mother is the sole and primary caretaker of their children. The text suggested that bloggers who represent themselves as mothers have more responsibility for the well-being of their children compared to the fathers. This fact is seemingly overlooked in the interview in the way that all participants see this as being natural, that mothers are supposed to care more about their children than the fathers. In fact, I have found during fieldwork that the image of motherhood and domesticity through Indonesian Muslim Fashion blogs gained lots of attention especially among readers who have children. These are some of the excerpts:

"I really enjoy her personal story, and her style, too. I mean, from her post, she is breastfeeding, and I do too. Maybe we hold the same values in raising our family. I can't imagine how busy she is because she is a housewife, mother and also entrepreneur. She shows that she is juggling her career and her family. I like to see that." (Diana, 27, individual interview)

"I like her blog [Suchi Utami's blog]. It's like using casual modern mums' language. Her kids are cute, I like her fashion style. And I think the way she raises her children is quite similar with my values as well, you know, when I read her post." (Zakia, 26, individual interview)

"I like bloggers who are also mothers. It reminds me that as a mother, I can't neglect myself. These bloggers are mothers too, they travel with their kids, they always look so beautiful and in style. It inspires me that as a mother we should not sacrifice things; we need to be beautiful. As

mother sometimes you forget that you need to feel beautiful.” (Fiona, 32, individual interview)

“So... even when you are a mother, you don’t want to look too motherly. You don’t have to look old even though you are a mother. Just like Suchi in one of her post, like she did photoshoots with all that make-up and beautiful clothes while bringing her baby. Isn’t that awesome?” (Mia, 30, individual interview)

“Well, I read Fifi’s blog, you know her journey from before she got married and now she has two daughters. Pretty much any woman experience, but they are doing it fashionably.” (Intan, 29, individual interview)

“I like their children, they are so cute. I like to read about their parenting style, how they dressed their kids while dressing up themselves. It’s so fascinating that despite they are busy...obviously...they still manage to look flawless and beautiful. You know ‘cause when you have children, it’s easy not to take care of your appearance.” (Karisma, 27, individual interview)

The excerpts above were taken when I asked participants why they liked to read Muslim fashion bloggers who are also mothers. It seems like most readers identify themselves with the parenting style which is visualised through the blogs. Furthermore, readers also highlighted the fact that they admire the bloggers’ fashion style, which one of them stated as being stylish, modern mothers whose style is appropriate without being too motherly, and who at the same time also dressed the children beautifully. The fact that the bloggers also represented themselves as the primary caregivers for the children is also perceived as something natural, that mothers are the primary caregivers, along with their ability for child-bearing and breastfeeding . Islamic feminist scholar, Amina Wadud (1999, pp. 64-91) asserts that although it is important in the Qur’an that the woman carries the continuation of the future generation, she also added that the task of childrearing and house chores is equally divided between men and women. Furthermore, she also added that it is the culture and society that in turn creates the specific gender roles which puts domesticity in the hands of mothers and women. The three visual representations of Indonesian Muslim

blogs seem to be reigniting the traditional gender stereotype that sees childrearing as the sole duty of the mother.

Kaplan (1992, pp. 17-18) argues that the changing discourse of motherhood in the West is divided into three historical periods, after the Industrial Revolution, after the First World War and after the Second World War. She also stated that the modern conception of the mother linked to the concept of the nuclear family developed after the industrial revolution. Welter (1966, pp. 151-174) remarks that women were ascribed four characteristics: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity during the post-industrial revolution. She states (1966, pp. 152) that:

“The attributes of true womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife – woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. Religion or piety was the core of woman’s virtue, the source of her strength.”

Furthermore, Kaplan (1992, pp. 17-18) argues that the era after the First World War saw that the suffragette movement, women filling up the work force, and the increased number of women entering higher education deconstructed the concept of the nuclear family. And finally, the era after the Second World War saw the increase of middle-class women entering professional jobs with the growth of the global economy, and this has resulted in the redefinition of the nuclear family.

Both conceptualisations of motherhood by Kaplan and Welters and its glorification seem nicely echoed in the way in which motherhood has been portrayed through the visualisation of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. It is obvious that motherhood, along with its child-bearing process (represented by the pregnancy photoshoot by Suchi Utami’s blog),

reinforces the embodiment of mothers as the bearers of virtue, purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity. I argue that despite more or less Western-transnational conceptions of motherhood also shaping the way in which motherhood has been depicted, the national-historical context has been more prevalent in shaping the discourse of motherhood in Indonesia (both I argue as mutually inclusive). Despite the women being at the centre of the struggle towards national independence (Dewi 2012; Rinaldo 2013), gender segregation and sexual policy has been the subject of government intervention. The New Order which reigned for more than 30 years has implemented what Indonesian scholars called State-*Ibuism* (*Ibu* means mother in Indonesian language). As Suryakusuma (1999, p. 98) stated, state-Ibuism illustrates the way in which the state constructed women's gender roles through their function in the family, as wives and mothers. Through women's organisations like *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*, the state regulated the marriage and gender roles amongst the military and civil servants (government officers). Women, in the New Order ideology, form the complementary unit of the family, valued by the way they supports her husband serving the state ideology and being the primary caregivers of the children.

I argue that this national gender ideology still holds some value today, even after the New Order collapsed. This has been reflected in the visual representation of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs: that motherhood has been constructed through the way women function in the family, which is precisely what Barbara Walters (1966, pp. 52) proposed: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. However, far from being responsible for child care and domesticity, the mother through Muslim fashion blogs is also presented as stylish, beautiful, and fashionable. This is hardly surprising, since the New Order gender ideology was also constituted as mothers taking care of their appearances whilst being good at domesticity. It is not enough that women are domestic goddesses, they have to find time to keep up appearances, in order to satisfy and be desirable for their husbands.

All three visual representations above construct Muslim mothers as beautiful, stylish, modern, fashionable, and well-dressed while also dressing their family (including their children) well. Even the heavily pregnant body of Suchi Utami is still construed as a fashionable expecting mother. This has been confirmed by the readers as well, suggesting the fact that one of the factors that drew the readers to the blogs is the fact that they (the bloggers) were seen as domestic goddesses and fashionable mothers. One interviewee even stated that the bloggers are fashionable without being too motherly. Looking 'not too motherly' even though one is a mother is being seen as an objective every mother should aspire to. Lopez's (2009) assertion of mommy blogs as a space where motherhood is portrayed in a more honest way is far different in comparison with the blogs I have analysed above. The truth about motherhood is being undermined with a fashionable and stylish representation of motherhood. Even the post where Suchi Utami told her stories of the ups and down of the pregnancy process or Fifi Alvianto's heartfelt stories about her struggle to nurture her two daughters without any help are seemingly contradicted by their glamour and fashionable sense of style.

The term 'yummy mummy' has been popularly used to refer to the hyper-feminine maternal representation of mothers in popular culture and media (Littler 2013). As Littler argued, the term usually refers to sexually desirable mums (including celebrity mums) who defy the Western-Christian tradition that makes mothers asexual (2013, pp.227-243).

Furthermore, she also stated that :

"The yummy mummy is profoundly classed. She has the ability to afford plethora of beauty treatments and good clothes as well as the time to buy them."

In Muslim bloggers case, the *hijab* is the way to asexualise themselves, while dress, fashion, make-up signify that they are still desirable and show that they take good care of themselves. Even Suchi Utami does not make any excuses not to look fashionable while

being heavily pregnant. While the readers praised them for showing that being mothers is not equal to sacrificing femininity, the bloggers were going the extra mile, that the children (even the pregnant bump) need to be stylishly and beautifully represented as well.

However, the modern conception of the 'yummy mummy', to borrow the concept from Littler (2013) is also useful to show the way in which maternal femininity is being embraced to show mothers as being a sexual subject, defying Western-Christian tradition that sees mothers as asexual beings. Thus, while the *hijab* is used as a way to defy sexualisation, the make-up, fashion and beauty mark the way in which Muslim mothers in some way still care and are desirable for their husbands. Not only presenting themselves as fashion-conscious mothers, the bloggers also presented their family as well-dressed, well-behaved and a beautiful, fashionable nuclear family. Furthermore, a pregnant body is treated as fashionable body that needs to be celebrated, as shown by one visual representation I have analysed above. Thus, Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs represent motherhood in the rigid demarcation of traditional gender ideology behind the glitz and glamour of a fashionable sense of style. The Islamic traditional ideology of gender and nations' historical perspective of womanhood, as I have argued above, heavily influence such a representation, even after the wave of Islamic feminist reading that has become more present in the national context. The nation's historical narrative of womanhood, which 'puts women in their place' as second to her husband, I argue, is also heavily ingrained and deeply embedded in the nation's memory, long after the authoritarian regime that produced such discourse had been overthrown.

5.3 *Hijab and Hermes*: Class and Consumption in Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogs

This section will take a closer look at how class and consumption is articulated in visual representations of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs and how participants negotiate these articulations. During a round of FGDs and individual interviews, participants often

commented and objected to the seemingly excessive display of wealth and consumerism in certain blogs. Some participants, as I will further elaborate in this section, even commented that the excessive display of wealth and promotion of consumerism is the opposite of Islamic teachings, and thus contradicts the bloggers' intention to present themselves as pious and devout Muslims. Two blogs emerged during discussion whenever participants discussed conspicuous consumption within the Indonesian blogger community, and those were Dian Pelangi and Diana Safira. Dian Pelangi's blog has emerged as one of the most popular Muslim blogs in Indonesia, and her relatively instant prominence as a blogger and Muslim fashion designer has been easily gained by her appearances in mainstream media in the form of interviews or celebrity appearances. Her face and name are successfully associated with Indonesian Muslim fashion and her age (under 25 years old) making her popular among the younger Muslim generation in Indonesia. Another blogger that was mentioned within a discussion of blogs and conspicuous consumption is Diana Safira, a relatively unknown name in the Indonesian media scape but it turns out her name and social media accounts (including her blog) are quite popular. In fact, some participants mentioned her as one of the elite circle of Jakarta socialites.

The first picture is taken from Diana Safira's blog (dsaksinstyle.com). Diana Safira is a wealthy homemaker married to a successful entrepreneur, spending her time travelling for leisure (holiday) almost every month to different parts of the world. Despite stating that she is a homemaker, she never shows a glimpse of her family (husband or children) in any of her social media platform in order to protect her family's privacy. Quite different from other bloggers who also make their business around fashion or product endorsement, Diana Safira never seems to be involved in any jobs (at least it is not present in any her blog posts). However, her blog is famous (some entertainment websites have declared her blog as one of the most read and talked about blogs) and filled with spectacular image of her

travelling experience and her collection of premium (high-end) brands, often associated with luxury. This is one of her posts entitled Bright Fuchsia Coat:



Picture 8: “Bright Fuchsia Coat” taken from DsaksInStyle.com (Safira 2015) posted on March 31, 2015

The picture sequence above is followed by the brief details on what brands she wore including a coat by Sandro, trousers by Zara, boots by Hermes and bag by Hermes (Birkin Himalaya). She also specified that the location is in Italy although she did not specify the exact location. The title suggested that her post is about her fuchsia winter coat, although in other picture sequences it is focused more on her Hermes bag. Vogue magazine noted that Birkin Himalaya is the most expensive and most desirable bag ever (Vogue 2014). Although at first the post suggested that Diana wanted to show her fuchsia coat during her

winter holiday in Italy, the later pictures suggested that the post is about her special Hermes bag, which she later also said was a special bag, named Birkin Himalaya. Not just mentioning the brand, the picture on the left zoomed in the Hermes bag with a snowy mountain as a background, suggesting that the bag closely resembled the snowy winter holiday that Diana was undertaking. Perhaps that was the reason why she brought her Birkin Himalaya during her winter holiday. The colour of the bag resembles the theme of the holiday. The post also suggested that being on a holiday is what the Indonesian high-class Muslims do in their free time. Not just being on any holiday, Diana's post suggested that the Muslim elite class have a holiday in a very stylistic and fashionable manner.

In regards of her fashion, Diana wore pink fuchsia coat with purple-grey fur stola scarves, along with a white bonnet. It did not seem obvious that she is a Muslim who wears headscarves in this particular picture, different from her other posts that clearly suggest that she wears headscarves. The picture clearly articulates that holidays are part of her leisure activities, preferably having a holiday far away from Indonesia, which in this case is Italy. Through the use of her fashion clothes and the close depictions of her Birkin bag, Diana seems to suggest that she does travel and holiday in style (particularly with expensive designer labels). The mentioning of brands, holiday space and location, along with the close depiction of the handbag, suggest consumerism as part of Diana's lifestyle, even during her holiday and leisure activities. Her blog also could be read as an example of a stylish Muslim blog, who can afford to go on holiday throughout the world, and also to signify her social status with the signs of consumerism through the ownership of designer brands, particularly the Hermes bag. Holidays and designer handbags (Hermes' Birkin) effectively work as the marker of social status, to represent its owner as the consumer of expensive products.

Diana's seeming obsession with premium designer brands was more obvious in her other post. Below is the picture sequence from her post:



Picture 9. "The Red Touch" from dsaksinstyle.com (Safira 2015) posted on February, 25, 2015

This post, which was filled with images of what she wore that day was also followed by the brief details of every brand she wore, which included Charlotte Olympia red high-heel shoes, a Valentino bag, a Cartier bracelet, a Moschino belt and Victoria Beckham sunglasses. In the left picture, Diana posed full-frontal from head to toe. Her fashion was dominated with black (blouse, headscarf and lace trouser). One leg was in front of the other, giving the illusion of long legs and slimness. Her handbag is also in the front centre, just like her left leg, signifying that the focus of this post are the red shoes and handbag.

Her monochromatic look is supported by the use of red colours, her handbag and shoes, and this is also the focus and the title signified 'the touch of red'. The right picture zoomed in on the details of her accessories, mainly her handbag (by Valentino) and Cartier jewellery. Besides the colours of red and black, the gold colour (projected by the bag chains and the jewellery from the Moschino belt and Cartier bracelet, along with her diamond ring) gave the impression of elegance and wealth. All that Diana wore in this post was designer, premium high-end accessories, from the handbag to the shoes, bracelet, sunglasses and belt. The close-up picture (the right one) also signified that she deliberately wanted to show the details of her premium accessories. She seemingly wanted her blog readers to have a look at what she had, just like the way she showed the close-up picture of the Hermes Birkin in the previous posts. Again, Diana plays with designer's accessories to signify her social class, this time not just a handbag, but much more than that, almost her overall look is built upon designer brands.

She also posed in seemingly the corner of her house (often portrayed in other posts). We get a glimpse of her wealthy life, articulated by the way she decorates her house which is dominated by gold (from the lights, the vases and the curtain). Diana's wealth is not only articulated by the way she dresses herself, but also in the way she decorates her house. Although the post only caught a glimpse of her house (one corner), it is safe to assume that the gold colour is used to articulate the wealth just like the way gold in her accessories is used to signify her conspicuous consumption. In a way, Diana's look compliments the way she decorated the corner of her house, the colour gold is used deliberately to create the wealthy living image. The use of vases, the giant golden curtain, the gold lights in the wall, a glimpse of the golden frame of a painting, all are golden coloured and being used to signify her conspicuous living.

The practice of designer brand consumption is also obvious in Dian Pelangi's blog. Dian Pelangi is not only famous for her fashion creation (as discussed in the previous chapter), but also for being famous for her lavish lifestyle which she continually projects through her social media platform, especially her blog. This is one of her posts:



Picture 9. "Subtle" from blog.Dianpelangi.com (Pelangi 2016) posted on January 8, 2014

This post is entitled "Subtle", which is ironic, considering the post also depicts one of Dian Pelangi's Hermes bags (she has several of them, which occur frequently during her blog posts). The left picture shows the vanilla éclairs, along with the name of the cafe, Cacaote, a trendy patisserie-brasserie-bar in Jakarta, Indonesia. The left picture also shows that Dian has presumably dined out, or at least has had an afternoon snack in a trendy Jakarta patisserie. The right picture, however, deliberately depicts Dian Pelangi sat in one of Cacaote's corners with one of her orange Hermes Birkin bags, along with her fashion ensemble, a colourful headscarf with grey tops and a long grey skirt. The bag functions as

the complimentary colour which complements the colour of her headscarf. The Hermes bag also signifies the social class of Dian Pelangi, as one of those wealthy Muslims who can afford dine out in a very stylish manner, signifying the fact that she carried her Hermes bag while dining out in a trendy patisserie bar in Jakarta. Again, just like Diana Safira uses her holidays and handbags to signify her social status, Dian Pelangi also uses a handbag with the dining-out activity to mark her social status. Dian sat in one corner, looking in the other direction while her right hand carried her handbag. It seems like the picture was taken accidentally, to illustrate that it was not her intention. However, her post, just like Diana's posts, both enlisted the brands of each clothing item they wore along with the brand of their handbags, suggesting that they want the readers to know what brands they wore on two separate occasions.

It is not clear what could possibly illustrate the subtlety, as the post's title suggested, since the space and place, along with the direct depiction of the designer handbag illustrate the otherwise. Just like Diana's post "big fuchsia coat" which did not depict the coat, but more the Hermes bag, Dian's post also played in an ambiguous manner. The title seems contradictory to what she has articulated. It wasn't just a simple dine-out or tea afternoon, it is important for her to bring out her expensive Hermes bag collection, suggesting that just like Diana who always travels in style, Dian Pelangi does everything (even eating in a patisserie in her hometown) in lavish style as well. I argue that "Subtle" here could have made more sense since the picture was taken accidentally, while Dian was looking in another direction rather than choosing a specific pose. Dining out is being treated as a marker of social class, just like holidays and the use of designer brands, especially handbags.

During my fieldwork, the way in which Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs tease out the element of consumerism as the marker of Muslim social class has been discussed among

the readers. Just like some readers stated that they like to see the emergence of fashionable Muslim women's image across media and social media, they also questioned whether such images are representative of Muslim women in general. Some readers highlighted this bipolar dichotomy towards the representation of Muslim women, mainly the poor and the rich. This excerpt is taken from one group discussion:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Moderator | : What do you think they tried to show here? |
| Fani | : I mean, of course they can dress beautifully because they are rich, but they try to challenge the impression of poor, unfashionable, fundamentalist Islam as we often see and read in the papers. |
| Sinta | : So much news about Islam and Muslims that always about poverty, terrorism, radicalism...so what if these women want to challenge this with their fashion blogs? It's good they do this. I'm not worried about this binary perception of Muslims, and it's either poor or rich, educated or uneducated. We need this to balance the world's perception of Islam. (Focus Group Discussion 1) |

Fani and Sinta, are both middle-class young Muslims in their mid- 20, praised the way the bloggers visualised themselves as rich Muslims and hence challenge the image of poor Muslims. Fashion and all its attributes, including the brands, the handbags and the shoes, are the signs to defy the stereotype of Muslim communities.

Numerous studies have showed that there are negative portrayals of Muslims in the Western media, especially Muslim women and the veil (Sreberny 2002; MacDonald 2006; Williamson and Khiabany 2010). As Williamson and Khiabany (2010, p. 85) argue, in the British media for example, the veil as such "has become an image of otherness, a refusal to integrate and an example of the 'failings' of multiculturalism". The two contesting debates around the notion of integration and terrorism have shaped the way such Islamic practices, including the veil, have been construed in the British media. Other research on the subject

of the veil and Muslim women has been fruitful in highlighting the competing narratives surrounding the veiling practice in democratic European countries (Roald 2001; Dwyer 2002; Bullock 2002; Ramji 2007; McGinty 2007; Droogsma 2007; Contractor 2012). These research have been valuable in highlighting the need to understand the practice of the veil from the perspective of Muslim women themselves rather than mistaken or ignorant assumptions.

I argue that my participants also understand the complexities surrounding the way the *hijab* is represented in the Western media. My participants are all well-educated and internet savvy women who have absorbed various information and are well aware of the conflicting narratives of the *hijab*. Fani and Sinta (as has been showed through the excerpt above) highlighted exactly the problem of the representation of the veil, using words such as poor, stupid, unfashionable, terrorism, radicalism, and uneducated. Other than that, Indonesia has a long history with the struggle of the veiling practice. The New Order, which reigned for more than 30 years, had a long battle with Islamic practice which banned the use of veiling among students and civil or government officers. Islam, as argued by Hefner (cited in Dewi 2012) used to be seen as the embodiment of anti-modernity and anti-national development. However, the resistance against the veil in turn triggered the emergence of such practices starting in the 1980s, which ironically started in schools and universities, where it was harshly prohibited before.

However, as has been visualised through the Islamic fashion blogs, the veiling practice has begun to be a promotional platform and a display of class distinction and conspicuous consumption, as seen by the reference of designer brands and even Hermes bags. As if they were trying to say that the *hijab* is now part of the luxurious items and proudly worn by the high-class of Muslim societies. The use of the *hijab*, along with international designer brands, tell us that the veiling practice is no longer synonymous with the bleak image of the

hijab in the West, and the only way to do that is by putting it altogether with Hermes bags, the holy grail of handbags.

Thorstein Veblen, an American sociologist and economist, studied the leisure class and conspicuous consumption. In his book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen argued that in post-industrial society, as the result of accumulative wealth, the leisure class show their social status by displaying their conspicuous consumption, which Veblen defined as goods that have more worth than the actual price. The lower classes thus in turn try to emulate such practices that in the end create a society that wastes time and money.

Furthermore, Mike Featherstone (1996, p. 85) gave similar remarks:

The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, interior decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste.

The display of wealth and conspicuous consumption as projected in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs show that not only are these bloggers the members of an affluent and expansive growing upper-middle class, but the incorporation of the *hijab* with other luxurious fashion items such as Hermes bags could also be interpreted that the *hijab* is now acceptable as fashion for the elites as long as it is displayed with taste. The tasteful *hijab* as opposed to the bleak and backward *hijab* has been a massive part of the global expansion of Islamic clothing. As some scholars have argued (Tarlo 2010 and Lewis 2015), the Muslim fashion industry has been a growing business as designers like John Galliano and Dolce and Gabbana have just recently launched luxurious *abayas*, followed by fashion high-street retailers like Zara and H&M that added modest clothing styles into their collections. The *hijab* has become the latest *couture* for Dolce and Gabbana and John Galliano designers. Citing the work of Pierre Bourdieu on *Distinction*, Featherstone (1996, pp. 86) suggested:

taste in cultural goods functions as a marker of class and in *Distinction* Bourdieu seeks to map out the social field of the different tastes in legitimated 'high' cultural practises (museum visits, concert-going, reading) as well as taste in lifestyles and consumption preferences (including food, drink, clothes, cars, novels, newspapers, magazines, holidays, hobbies, sport, leisure pursuits).

Bourdieu (1984) in his book, *Distinction*, concluded that the people with more cultural capital (i.e. education) had more power in dictating what is acceptable as 'legitimate taste' and what is not. He also added that cultural capital is learnt from the very beginning and is socialised by older family members and through education.

Good taste and high cultural practice has been tremendously shown in Diana and Dian's blogs, through the choice of holiday destination and the choice of dining and eating out. Not only do they have economic capital, which shows the success of Dian as a young Muslim fashion designer or Diana as the spouse of a wealthy entrepreneur, but the display of high cultural practice, as Mike Featherstone (1996) puts it, also shows that they own cultural capital. Furthermore, Indonesia is the home of an affluent middle class and is an emerging economic powerhouse in Asia. According to the McKinsey Global institute (Shekawat 2016):

90 million new Indonesians are likely to join the consuming class, making it as big as about 135 million by 2030 (provided GDP grows between 5-6% annually). Rising employment and a steady increase in average minimum wages further evolve Indonesian consumer into a more confident and aspirational buyer. Growing digitalisation and influence of social media further add to consumers' growing willingness to spend not just on daily needs but lifestyles and entertainment activities as well.

With the increase of a consuming middle-class and new inward class mobility of 90 million Indonesians, the need to show cultural capital as marker of social class will be greater than before, especially through social media platforms.

However, the representation of conspicuous consumption among Muslim bloggers was negotiated with suspicion among my participants. This is an excerpt from Group Discussion 3:

Moderator: So, what do you think about this blog [Showing Dian Pelangi's post as in the picture 9]?

Puput: Well, I always think that she is always over the top. I mean her dress, her accessories, her way to show that she is wealthy.

Deni: But that's her money, so I think it's her right. But I agree with you in terms of her being over the top. Sometimes I feel like she and any other Muslim bloggers seemed so ...obviously ...you know trying to show people that they are the high society.

Roostika: That's their money, although I think it's part of their effort too to make names as international fashion bloggers and designers, not just being famous locally. And I think Hermes bag is the common ...for socialites you know they said that being called yourself a socialite, you must have a Hermes bag.

Puput: I don't really care what they want to show...I don't know about Hermes bag thing. It's their spaces and their right to say and show what they want. But it is also my right to say that they are very hedonistic. That's my point of view.

Moderator: But, I came across few readers that said that they [bloggers] want to show through their blogs that this is Indonesian Muslims. Rich, educated, stylish...and they want to change the negative portrayal of Muslims.

Puput: [laugh] oh, and they are so pretentious, aren't they? It's just their excuse to sell their stuff. If you want to sell your stuff, go ahead. But please don't pretend that you are the ambassador of Indonesian Muslims.

Titien: I do remember that...in one of the Qur'an class that I joined, my teacher said that humility and modesty is not just about headscarves, covering your hair and body, but also about attitude, being humble...just the way the prophet taught us. (Focus Group Discussion 3)

The words high society, show off, over the top, and hedonistic emerged in the excerpt to highlight the way the readers felt about Muslim bloggers and their conspicuous consumption. A few readers (Titien and Puput) even harshly criticised those portrayal of consumption as merely justification for economic purposes, while the others criticised conspicuous consumption as being the opposite of Islamic teachings about modesty and humility. Although first remarking that the excessive display of wealth challenged the spirit of modesty and humility as the core of Islamic teachings, some readers eventually agreed upon the notion that it is the bloggers' rights to splurge and show off their luxurious ownership, because it is their own money. There was a sense of ambiguous when it came to the Muslim upper class splurging their money and putting it on display through their personal blogs.

The critics of bloggers' articulation of class and conspicuous consumption and how this defies Islamic modesty itself was highlighted by one of the oldest participants. As a 44-year-old woman entrepreneur in children's clothing, Nila voiced her concerns. This is the excerpt:

"I don't blame them [bloggers] and I don't judge them. It is their right anyway. I'm just simply telling you my opinion...I mean *hijab* is so much more than just covering your body and your hair, it's also about modesty and humility. Humility means that you avoid being the centre of attention, avoiding self-pride to be called beautiful and stylish and pretty or fashionable. *Hijab* is not fashion. These people make *hijab* looks shallow, everything is about the latest trend and about how to be the most stylish people." (Nila, 44, individual interview)

In this sense, the integration of Muslim values into the fashion blogosphere seems like an oxymoron. Fashion blogs are all about the presentation of fashionable personae that are achieved by the performative characters (Tutton 2015), while the *hijab*, as many readers argue, is about the self-policing, modesty and humility. In the case of Indonesian Muslim

fashion blogs, there will always be tension between the modesty embedded in the use of the *hijab* and the need to promote a fashionable self and middle-upper class lifestyle. Modesty as what my participants argue could mean the modesty in the bodily practice of veiling, but also means being modest as opposed to conspicuous lifestyle. As I have investigated at length throughout this chapter, modesty when it is being articulated in fashion blogs, will always be ambivalent and complex.

5.4 Conclusion

Chapter 5 is dedicated to answering the second research question (RQ2) which focuses upon the way in which blogs readers negotiate modernity, modesty, motherhood, class and nation articulated through the textual and visual representation of Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. There are three sub-sections in this chapter which first focused upon the representations of modernity and modesty, second, focused upon the representation of motherhood and third, focused upon class and consumption. This chapter encompasses the visual, semiological analysis of blogs along with thematic analysis derived from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. The blogs examined in this chapter are among the most read and most popular blogs which were referenced and mentioned heavily during the FGDs and individual interviews. Several pertinent conclusions have been drawn out from the analysis and will be elaborated below.

In the first section, the analysis has shown that modesty in the form of the *hijab* is a fluid and complex practise, especially when it relates to how far modesty can be accommodated and adjusted into modernity and the global fashion industry. Four visual analyses of the blogs in this section (5.1) have suggested that the bloggers have different interpretations when it comes to modesty, and this creates tensions among the participants. Four blogs analysed in this chapter have shown that the *hijab* is yet again fluid, diverse, has multiple interpretations and is non-essentialist. Some bloggers adopt the elements of Western

fashion and pop culture such as tie dye, men's fashion and even some pop stars' costumes without thinking about how these might create disagreement and backlash among their readers. Even the seemingly conservative blogger, who consistently wears an *abaya*, also to some extent, adopts global fashion and neo-liberal influences such as creating *abaya* looks for career woman, wearing high heels to show self-confidence and incorporate a conservative look with designer handbags. The fluidity of the veiling practice shown through these blogs confirms the previous research on the *hijab* in Indonesia: that more urban, educated, Muslim middle-class Indonesian women embrace the *hijab* as the newfound Muslim identity that is "neither traditionalist nor an anti-modernist reaction" (Smith-Hefner 2007). Following Mike Featherstone (2007) and Radha Hegde (2011) assertions, that tradition and modernity must be seen as a complex entanglement rather than binary – opposition, the articulation of modesty and modernity through Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs has demonstrated that is the case even when participants still conform to East and West binary.

The articulation of motherhood in the second sub-section (5.2) has shown that traditional Islamic femininity and the nation's archaic discourse of gender ideology still emerged quite strongly in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. Lopez's (2009) assertion that mummy blogs have been popular in America because of their honest view of motherhood and have potentially challenged the glorification of motherhood does not emerge in Indonesian Muslim blogs. Through the visual analysis of three popular blogs, it can be concluded that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs represent the traditional gender stereotype that sees childrearing and childbearing as the sole duty of mothers. The Islamic traditional ideology of gender and nations' historical perspective of womanhood, as this section argued, heavily influenced such representations, even after the wave of Islamic feminist reading that has become more present in the national context. The visual analysis also shows that male figures have little or no presence within the blogs, signifying that child nurturing is more of

mother's obligation than a fathers'. The nation's historical narrative of womanhood or 'Ibuisim' which puts a woman in her place as second to her husband, I argue, is also heavily ingrained and deeply embedded in the nation's memory, long after the authoritarian regime that produced such discourse had been overthrown. Although fashion, accessories, and make-up are utilised to represent the image of modern, middle-class Indonesian mothers, the visual representation of the blogs still adheres to the image of the mother in traditional gender ideology. The readers acknowledge such representations as the ideal representation of motherhood, although readers also remark that combining the labour of motherhood whilst maintaining femininity are an effort that is hard to achieve and unattainable for many women.

The articulation of class and consumption has been analysed in the third section (5.3), which encapsulates the way in which Indonesian middle-upper class values and taste have been projected, some participants believe, quite excessively and conspicuously. The use of luxurious items such as high-end premium handbags, along with leisure spaces such as holiday destinations, fancy restaurants or cafes, or beautiful homes are used as the markers of taste, which in addition to the *hijab*, articulate the taste of upper-middle class Indonesian Muslims. Luxurious brands, holiday destinations and good living, according to Bourdieu (1984) are among things that signify social class, to distinguish oneself from the lower class. In Muslim fashion blogs, the articulation of class and consumption is also perceived by the readers as the way bloggers construct Islam and the *hijab* in particular as opposition to Islamic fundamentalism. The *hijab* has been constructed as modern attire far from conservativeness and backwardness. This chapter also argues that the rise of Asian economic strength contributed to the rise of 90 million new members of the Indonesian middle-class, which in turn will have a profound effect on the way people spend money and choose to show their wealth and consumption, especially through social media platforms. The readers negotiated these articulations of class and consumption rather ambiguously,

citing that the conspicuous consumption of wealth is contradictory with Islamic values of modesty and humility, but also making remarks that wealth, success and the way individuals spend their money should also be considered as a personal right. The connection between the right to success and bloggers' neoliberal, entrepreneurial selves will be developed further in the next Chapter (section 6.3). Modesty as it has been examined thoroughly in this chapter has dual meanings: as in the form of veiling practice but also as in the form of being modest (not to overly show off) in social media.

Chapter 6

Being an Indonesian Muslim Fashion Blogger: Self-History, Self-Censorship and Self-Entrepreneurship

The previous two chapters have focused on the blogs' readers and their interpretation of the text. Chapter 4 analysed the Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs in great detail, including who they are, why they read blogs and how they make sense of them. Chapter 4 (section 4.2) concluded that reading fashion blogs has been associated with leisure time and pleasurable activities, with looking for fashion inspiration and learning Islamic femininity coming in as the second and third subsequently. Chapter 5 concluded that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs as a site of articulation of modernity, modesty, motherhood, class and nation which lead to intense debate and negotiations among readers. This chapter thus will shift focus onto the bloggers themselves and analysing primary data gathered from interviews with 9 bloggers along with secondary data gathered from various online archives.

Chapter 6 intends to answer RQ3 and RQ4 subsequently and thus will be divided into three sections. The first section (6.1) elaborates the bloggers' identity, social class and scrutinises reasons and motivation of bloggers to start writing their blogs and their position in regards of the politics of the *hijab*. This section explores whether the seemingly trivial practice of writing fashion blogs could contribute to the shifting and changing dominant narrative of Muslim women that usually has been portrayed negatively by the Western media. This section also uses Foucault's technology of the self to illustrate the way bloggers create their narrative and persona. The second section (6.2) will take a closer look at how bloggers

respond to backlash and criticism while maintain their online relationships with their readers. Previous chapters have highlighted that some readers sometimes criticise some posts and this section will address how readers respond to those criticisms and whether, borrowing the work of Foucault on panopticism, web-blogging serves as a means to control bloggers' bodily practice by their readers .

Section (6.3) attempts to answer the fourth and the last research question (RQ4) which is the way in which Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers define and facilitate their readers' empowerment. This section analyses the way in which Muslim fashion bloggers define and articulate women's empowerment through their blogs. This section will take a closer look into the way Muslim fashion bloggers are neoliberal feminine subjects and deliver the message of women's empowerment through their creative entrepreneurship. This section will also take a look at the rising phenomenon of *mumpreneurship*, a transnational social media phenomenon that combines motherhood and entrepreneurship with the advancement of information technology and social media.

Unable to interview some of the most popular bloggers for the purpose of this research, I finally managed to interview ten bloggers, some quite popular among readers and some only beginning to start their blogs few years ago. Some interview excerpts from the bloggers in this chapter are derived from secondary data through online archives, as I haven't been able to interview some of the most high-profile bloggers I mentioned earlier.

6.1 Rewriting the New Self: Motivations Behind the Fashion Web-Blogging

To my surprise, all the 10 Muslim fashion bloggers interviewed in this research are young (under 30 years old at the time of the interview), all reside in the capital of Indonesia (although some also divided their time between Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia and abroad), middle-upper class, educated (some have Master's degrees) and most bloggers (8 out of ten) are married, and half of them have children (the specific list of bloggers is available in the appendix C). This demography is similar with the readers' demography. One blogger I interviewed divided her time between Indonesia and Australia following her husband, however several months in a year (especially during *Ramadhan* and *Eid*) always goes home to visit her family and relatives. All of the bloggers I interviewed enjoyed privilege as middle-upper class Muslims in Jakarta, where access to information and education are gained relatively easily compared to other cities especially Indonesian rural areas. Previous research has shown that Javanese women (including those who reside in Jakarta) enjoyed the privilege of living not only in the capital of Indonesia, but also at the epicentre of the Indonesian economy. A previous study from Smith-Hefner (2009) concludes that compared to previous generations, modern Indonesian women have tremendous benefits in employment and education. However, as Smith-Hefner (2009) later remarks, the social pressures of getting married and having children influenced quite strongly in Indonesian communities even in the urban areas, where the nation's traditional gender ideology and religious values are still heavily ingrained. As she (2009, pp. 67-68) observed:

Despite the new educational and economic opportunities for women, the marital imperative looms large; Javanese women are still expected to marry and have children. "Modern" marriages are romantic unions based on the free consent of the bride and groom. Yet, in interviews and casual conversations, young, educated women express high levels of anxiety about the difficulties of finding a marriage partner.

It is not surprising then, despite higher education and promising jobs, bloggers I interviewed had chosen to abandon their careers and work from home. The obligation of marriage and motherhood is highly influential for the bloggers so that becoming fashion bloggers and designers is considered as the ideal job for women since they can manage a household and fashion-related business at the same time. The discussion over bloggers' entrepreneurship will later be expanded in section (6.3).

A recent statistic confirms that 79 million Indonesians use social media networks, making Indonesia one of the biggest Facebook and Twitter users in the world (Balea 2016). The number is staggering, considering the social media users are highly concentrated in urban areas since the internet infrastructure in rural areas are difficult. Although less popular than Facebook and Twitter, personal blogs in Indonesia have started to get prominent. As Luvaas (2013, p. 59) asserts, as the second largest Facebook and Twitter users in the world, 30 percent of internet subscribers have blogs. He observed Diana Rikasari's blog, *Hot Chocolate and Mint*, as among the first Indonesian fashion blogs and one of the most influential. The years 2007 to 2009 were also the years when Muslim fashion bloggers I interviewed started their own blogs. Some of them inspired by the success of Diana Rikasari, some cited other international bloggers such as Britain's blogger Susanna Lau or the USA's Scott Schuman.

Interestingly, despite managing their Muslim fashion blogs, and later on also starting up their businesses in fashion, none of the bloggers I interviewed had formal education in fashion or design schools. Most stated fashion was their hobby, and some believed that they have talent in fashion because people praised their sense of style. This kind of confidence has its momentum when web-logs start getting popular in Indonesia. Luvaas (2013, p. 59) asserts that despite being one of the biggest social media users in Asia,

Indonesian bloggers “have yet to become a significant player in the Internet economy”.

However, Luvaas’s research only observed mainstream fashion blogs in Indonesia. He excluded the newly rising Muslim fashion bloggers which I argue have more chance in becoming influential voices in the fashion world. Indonesia is considered the biggest Muslim population in the world with Islam as the religion of the majority of 250 million citizens. With the rising consuming class, Indonesians and the Islamic consumers globally expanding, Muslim fashion bloggers have a potential *niche*.

Furthermore, during my individual interviews with readers, I have heard the word ‘inspiration’ (in Indonesian language inspiration is *inspirasi*) used very often. Usually, this word emerged when I asked them how reading Muslim fashion blogs gives meaning to them or how blogs changed them in any way, or what is their perception towards the bloggers was. These are some of those responses which include the word ‘inspire’ in them:

“It’s inspiring, really. Well, I’m not an avid fashion follower but it’s nice to see them excel in what they do, it’s amazing. They are building their own empire, I’m proud. I like to read their success story.” (Syafrida, 32, individual interview)

“I’m looking at her fashion and I think it inspires me. She inspires people to be more fashionable even for those who consider themselves not fashionable.” (Vhivhi, 26, individual interview)

“They (bloggers) inspire young women to wear hijab confidently without afraid to lose their beauty. These bloggers are very popular and many young women look up to them, so they open our mind on how to combine our obligation to religion and self but also to embrace modernity.” (Rizky Dwi, 25, individual interview)

“Like when she travelled all around the world, or reading her experiences building her fashion business, from zero to hero. I think it’s really inspiring.” (Hana, 21, individual interview)

“I love that Muslims present themselves as being fashionable, smart but also at the same time wearing hijab. That’s why I love Dian Pelangi (one of the bloggers) because she is so inspiring and motivating.” (Ayu, 23, individual interview)

“...hijab wasn’t quite stylish back then when I first became a hijabi. It just a triangle or square scarves...very conservative. So ancient (laugh).

The clothes were still conventional as well. These bloggers inspired me to dress like them, trying new style, it inspired me that wearing a long and wide headscarf can be stylish and fashionable as well.” (Anissa, 24, individual interview)

Inspiration, in their testimonies, correlates with the word ‘changing’. The bloggers, from my interviewees’ points of view, are changing the possibility that donning and putting on the *hijab* is not about sacrificing femininity, as has been widely elaborated on in the previous two chapters. With their (the bloggers’) abilities to intertwine fashion and faith, the *hijab* (and by this word I mean the whole outfit and veils or *hijab*) could be something that does not defy beauty and femininity, but embraces it the Islamic way. Changing and inspiring, in this sense, also means that the bloggers opened up possibilities that Islamic attire could be something lucrative and consumerist, something that would have been hard to imagine some years ago when the *hijab* was still considered ancient, to use the word from Anissa. Inspiring could also mean a changing perception of Islam and Muslims, which are usually perceived in the mainstream media as conservative and backward.

Indonesia, as I illustrated briefly in the first chapter, had a long history of struggling with Islamic movements. Despite being the biggest Muslim country in the world, Islamic movements have been repressed. There were two big Islamic organisations (Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama) and still are until this very day, but the wearing of the *hijab* was very scarce at that time. The *hijab*, amongst other things that visually symbolised ‘Muslim-ness’ had been banned in schools and public places. There were cases reported where several students were expelled from their schools for showing up and defending their rights to wear the *hijab*. These conditions improved in the 1980s when the government officially acknowledged the use of the *hijab* amongst schoolgirls. Islam, before this era, was always seen as the antithesis of modernity, something that was clearly the

opposite of the country, which focused on its major milestones and developments as one of the potential economic giants in Asia.

My interviewees, in their commentaries above, still share these past memories of the difficult Islamic history in Indonesia. They were aware that the right to don the *hijab* is relatively new. They recalled that the *hijab* ban in the 1980s happened due to it symbolising conservative values and backwardness. The fashion industry and the ability of bloggers/fashion designers to convert the *hijab* into being something relevant and pro-modernity are what have convinced some interviewees that the *hijab* is now different. The *hijab* now can be seen not as the opposite of modernism but rather being a part of it. These bloggers and designers can be seen as agents of change that bring differences to the *hijab*, by putting the *hijab* at the centre of the fashion industry itself, changing its meaning from conservative to modern.

One thing that is interesting from their testimonies above is the ability of the modern *hijab* to embrace femininity. The modern *hijab*, as was elaborated in Chapter 5, is something that accepts and modifies conventional beauty, not by revealing body shape or skin which is usually perceived as the Western idea of femininity, but by the ability of emphasising beauty through piety. Muslim fashion bloggers, in their readers' perspectives, thus contribute to transforming the *hijab*, not only to preserve religious identity, but also to emphasise Islamic femininity, that by wearing the *hijab*, women should not need to lose their beauty, instead emphasising Islamic beauty by adding fashion into it.

This portrayal of modern Muslims who wear the *hijab* beautifully and are proud of it were reflected by my interviewees' testimonies. By reading their blogs, readers are able to change the way they look, such as by changing their *hijab* style, donning a certain fashion style, thus giving them confidence that they can transform the way they look from 'unfashionable' to 'fashionable'. Reading the bloggers' personal struggles to start up their

fashion businesses and being successful was also give a sense of reassurance that the Muslim fashion industry, for my interviewees, is something that might be lucrative in the long run. It might be a delightful moment for some interviewees to find out that the *hijab*, has long been linked to conservatism, now has its own momentum in Indonesia's fashion industry as an economic force. Thus the word 'inspiration' has a layered meaning, from all of these perspectives.

The wearing of the *hijab* or converting from non-*hijab* to *hijabi* is often associated with the 'new self'. Not just for the sake of appearances, but the wearing of the *hijab* also marks the beginning of becoming a better Muslim, meaning that there is more responsibility in presenting oneself as the embodiment of Islamic values. For example: being more religious or more disciplined in doing the Islamic rituals, such as praying five times a day. Previous research (Brenner, 1996; Jones, 2007; Smith-Hefner, 2007) confirmed that the process of wearing the *hijab* among the Indonesian Muslim middle class in Indonesia is seen as the process of becoming more understanding of Islamic values and teachings. Not surprisingly the veiling practices are deemed necessary and well documented in the era of social media. Although the majority of bloggers stated that the *hijab* is not just about appearance, nonetheless fashion and appearances are the crucial aspects of their blogging experiences. One blogger stated that she wants to rewrite her entire new self and history through blogging. Blogging, for her, comes as a platform to immortalise her *hijab* experience (the way she is transformed through the wearing of the *hijab*).

"When I started wearing hijab, around in 2009. Well, at first I just wrote my daily activities. But, then I also started to put my daily hijab style, my outfit of the day. I just want to record my new self, memorise from the day one I'm wearing hijab. And at that time I don't think there were much hijab blogs in Indonesia. That's what made me want to start it". (Blogger-Puput Utami, 24, individual interview)

Just like previous research on the subject of the *hijab* and the Indonesian Muslim middle class, the decision of wearing *the hijab* is more often considered an important rite of passage for many Muslim Indonesians. It is considered hugely important that it needs to be written eternally in social media. Web-blogs offer space for that needs. Bloggers also stated that they choose web-blog platforms because of their ease of navigation and ability to be linked with other platforms, such as YouTube.

The decision to wear the *hijab* is also often seen as the process of becoming a better Muslim. The new self-identity is often associated with a more modest and covered appearance. For some bloggers I interviewed, the decision to wear the *hijab* is one of their biggest decisions in life, one monumental life-changing experience. The same decision was also taken by Suchi Utami on what motivates her to write her own blog,

“The first post...I think in 2008, but I haven't start wearing hijab. Well, it was mostly about fashion but I mean...it's still here and there. I was inspired by Diana Rikasari. But, after I wore hijab in 2010, I started writing blog again as hijabi. Just sharing my outfit as the new hijabi, how to mix and match your old clothes to be appropriate after you're wearing hijab. That sort of thing.” (Blogger-Suchi Utami, 26, individual interview)

For Suchi Utami, the blog of Diana Rikasari motivated her to start blogging. Diana Rikasari was among the first Indonesian fashion bloggers who are now successful with their own shoe companies. Although Diana's blog, *Hot Chocolate and Mint*, is not a *hijabi* blog, this inspired Suci to start blogging. She then created her newest blog just when she decided to wear hijab. Again, the *hijab* is seen as a life-changing experience to be written about on a virtual platform. Not all bloggers I interviewed decided to blog just after their *hijab* decision, although blogging still very much connected to their important life passages. Married life and then motherhood are also seen as new-phases that are worth being blogged about.

"I started wearing hijab in 2009 after I got married, about 9 months ago. It was one of the hardest decisions in my life and of course a big shock to everyone because it was kind of like "What! Fifi is wearing hijab now? Oh come on, seriously!?"". Yeah people disbelieved what they saw but anyway most of them really like the new me. They said the bad side of me had gone forever because of the hijab image, lol". (Blogger-Fifi Alvianto, 30, taken from her post on hijabscarf.com on 2010)

The need to record and write life experiences as the new Muslims, new mothers and other new life experiences are mostly what motivates the bloggers I interviewed when they started their own web blogs. Most bloggers stated that they are 'sharers', people who love to share their stories through online media. The words 'sharing' and 'expressing' have been used to describe what motivates bloggers to start writing their blogs on Muslim fashion blogs.

As noted in Chapter 4 (section 4.1), some readers expressed their motivation for reading blogs regularly as a way to learn about Islam, not just for the sake of style, but furthermore also as a guide to Islamic femininity. Bloggers function as fashion experts who give guidance on how to look modern but also modest at the same time. Of course, the way bloggers interpret how modesty and modernity could be troublesome for some readers, since modesty, as the last chapter argued, is fluid and complex. Some bloggers are also aware and addressed the difficult history of Islam and the *hijab* in Indonesia, and decided that writing blogs is an attempt to change the perception of the *hijab*.

Through ten bloggers whom I interviewed, only two clearly pinpointed that their blog is intended to defy the stereotype of Muslims. Tasya Gunoto, a 25-year-old blogger from Jakarta with her blog, *pretty in veil*, has been vocal about the need of changing perceptions towards Islam. Her blog, which is mostly about fashion and how to style your *hijab*, is written with this political consideration from the start. Tasya graduated with a Master's degree in Creative Marketing, and has published one book on *hijab* tutorials under her

name. She is also the editor for a Muslim fashion magazine, *Hijabella*. With a lot of accomplishments, she proudly uses her blog as a way to empower other women.

“Well, it was 2010 [when she started writing her blog], and I think people still remember quite vividly about Islam and terrorism. People still remember 9/11 and Bali bombings. And I think, hijab has a bad name because of this. But for me, hijab is about security and protection. I want my blog to offer new perspective about hijab in particular and Islam in general. I mean, fashion is a universal language. It makes me so happy that Islamic fashion has emerge. People first read these Islamic fashion blogs, then they think that hijab could be fashionable. It is up to date and cool to wear hijab. But although I admit some bloggers decorate their hijab too much. It makes so much controversy. But at least, from reading their blogs, people will understand that hijab could offer so much more. It makes me proud and happy that Islamic fashion industry emerges like this, and the government support this as Indonesia to be projected to be Islamic fashion powerhouse in the world in 20 years”. (Blogger-Tasya Gunoto, 25)

From the excerpt above, she is well aware that the Black September tragedy 11 September 2001 and the Bali bombings in Indonesia in 2002 and 2005 were responsible for projecting a bad representation of Muslims in general. Her claim is that through her fashion blog, this bad perception towards Islam could be altered. Through reading her blog, she hopes that readers can gain a new understanding of Islam. She also stated that fashion is universal, suggesting that through fashion the emancipation of Muslims can be gained. Another blogger, Fifi Alvianto, a 30-year-old mother of two, fashion blogger and also ex-editor-in-chief for the Muslim fashion magazine, *Laiqa*, and designer for Muslim wear *Casa Elana*, clearly addresses that Muslims and modernity could co-exist.

“I really appreciate it when people said that my blog could inspire people. It was my intention, that we want the world to see that hijab in Indonesia is very stylish and unique at the same time. We want to prove that hijab does not equal to backwardness and out-of-date. I’m sure that there are many amazing women out there who are also proud of their hijab.” (Blogger-Fifi Alvianto, 30, individual interview)

Just as she stated, Fifi is among the Indonesian Muslims who believe Islam and modernity can co-exist. Fashion, just like what Tasya also believes, is the equaliser that means Muslim fashion could be as stylish as any mainstream fashion in the world. Fifi, and also Tasya stated their pride in the *hijab*, suggesting that there was history when the *hijab* and other Islamic symbols were seen as shameful and backward in Indonesia. Tasya then addressed this oppression against the *hijab* in the past as she stated:

"I'm so proud that a lot of companies in Indonesia don't discriminate against women who wear hijab. I mean, in the past you heard lots of women don't get the job because they wear their hijab. Nowadays, mostly companies accept this. But, if you look in other parts of the world, there are still lots of discrimination against women. So, all of this happen because fashion hijab change people's perception."
(Blogger-Tasya Gunoto, 25, individual interview)

Tasya addressed the long history of Islam in Indonesia especially how the *hijab* has been perceived in public. Before 1998, the *hijab* had been banned in many schools and institutions. The *hijab* and other Islamic symbols like long beards and black *abayas* were seen as the sign of Islamic fundamentalism which defied the new-order government effort towards modernity at that time. There were women who have been rejected from jobs because of their *hijabs*. Tasya's blog, although seemingly trivial with its pastel colours, is written with a consciousness of history, that the celebration of *hijab*-wearing is such a long road in Indonesia and should not be taken for granted.

Other bloggers stated that the blogs are mostly about them sharing their stories and life experiences, which I have analysed in the first part of this chapter. Their individuality and personal motivations seemed to be more dominant regarding the reason why they write blogs. However, I feel that during the interviews that some of them avoided stating that their blogs contributed to changing perceptions towards Islam. Some of them avoided all 'political' questions about Islam and terrorism and how their blogs are one of the efforts of

Muslims to combat this unfortunate stereotyping. It seems that they defend their blogs as trivialities, focusing on fashion and familiarity only, without acknowledging that readers might read their blogs otherwise. Just like when I asked Ghaida Tsurayya, a blogger and designer living in Bandung, West Java whether her blog is intended to change the perception towards Muslims, she stated:

“(laugh)...not at all, truthfully, I didn't think that way. Blogging is just the way I express myself, and I like making friends through blogging. That's all...but I appreciate if people think that way, at least my blog could be useful for other people. Like for those who still learn about hijab, I at least show them this is how I wear my hijab”.

Different from Tasya and Fifi, who have a political consciousness and use their blogs with the intention of changing the people's perceptions towards Islam, Ghaida and other bloggers tend to keep blogging personal. Ghaida and other bloggers, except for Tasya and Fifi, seem to not take their blogging activities as a collective effort to defy stereotypes of Muslim women. Ghaida's tendency to trivialise her blog seems to stem from the perception that fashion blogs should not be 'political' blogs. Fashion blogs, from their point of view, should be intended for personal or business matters, since she is also a fashion designer.

It is interesting to me that Fifi and Tasya's political consciousness comes from their experiences working in the mainstream media, as *editors-in-chief* for magazines. Muslim magazines are a relatively new genre of magazines in Indonesia, emerging shortly after the reform order in 1998. It is safe to assume, as editors, Tasya and Fifi are well-aware of the bleak history of Islam and civil society in Indonesia and have decided to voice their politics more clearly.

Thus, despite readers' understanding that Muslim fashion blogs are part of a collective effort to change perceptions, the bloggers stated otherwise, with the exception of Tasya

and Fifi. Both bloggers stated that their blogs are political, in a sense that they have a consciousness that Islam has been perceived negatively, especially after the escalation of terrorism including those which happened in Indonesia. They also rendered historical memories from past experience on how the *hijab* was banned in Indonesia in the past. Thus, they strongly argued that their blogs, although seemingly trivial, try to defy misfortune representation towards Islam. Other bloggers seemed to insist that their blogs are merely their expression of individuality and never intended for anything other than triviality.

Research on the blogs as spaces of self-expression made similar findings. Early study by Herring et al (2005) and Baumer, Sueyoshi and Tomlinson (2008) concludes that personal blogs serve as intimate self-expression which enabled the interactivity between bloggers' text and readers. Blogs which at the start of its invention initially taught masculine technology, have been occupied by women since its appeal of confessional, diary-writing, feminine characteristics (Van Doorn, Van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007) and other research (Hawthorne and Klein 1999; Wacjman 2004) also suggested that the expression of gender through personal blogs still heavily falls within traditional binary gender identity.

Michel Foucault's concept of '*technologies of the self*' gives an analytical tool to see Muslim fashion blogs as the technology for Muslim bloggers to create and narrate their identities. Foucault (cited in Siles 1992) describes four dimensions in the creation of the self subjectification as follows: the ethical substance or the part of the self which is concerned with moral conduct, modes of subjectification, the self-forming activities performed on the self that aim to transform it and the *telos* or "the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way". Foucault (1988, p. 18) defined technology of the self as technology which "permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being,

so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality". Observing the history of Christianity, Foucault (pp. 48-49) later added that verbalisation is important in self-disclosure, or showing truth about oneself.

Web-blogs as social media technology enables Muslim bloggers not only to visualise, but also to verbalise their identity for various purposes from announcing the new self as the more pious Muslims after the donning of the *hijab*, celebrate life as a new wife or mother to the more political ones, to change the perception of Muslims. Rocamora (2011) which also uses the *Foucauldian* concept of blogging as technology of the self asserts that personal fashion blogs are not only a compilation of imageries but also an autobiographical project. She remarks (2011, p.412):

"Thus, the self-bloggers display on their pages is not a visual self only, but one whose external rendering is intertwined with autobiographical details. Indeed, following a personal fashion blog means not only discovering the sartorial style of its author, but also regularly finding out a bit more information about her life, the moments and events that punctuate it. Personal stories are narrated supporting the practise of fashion as a technique of the self."

Web-blogging, in this case Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs could be referred to as the technology of Muslim bloggers to narrate and visualise their autobiographical selves and identities for various reasons and purposes, from the seemingly trivial ones as the new *hijabi* or mother, to the more political ones as the agent of change towards the vilification of *hijab* and Islam. The next section will focused upon blogs as a means to surveillance to scrutinise women's bodily appearances.

6.2 Criticism and Self-Censorship: How Bloggers Responded to Their Readers

This section analyses the way in which bloggers deal with online criticisms with regards to their bodily appearances that readers often post in the blogs' comments section. The reason that this chapter needs to be written is that I found so much tension and disagreement in terms of what was considered as modesty, just like I have analysed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. As I have concluded in Chapter 4, the modesty requirement in Islam is fluid and each reader and blogger often interprets modesty and the requirement of modesty quite differently. Chapter 5 (section 5.3) also concluded that the conspicuous consumption which clearly reflected in some of the blogs posts also sometimes considered as immodest and some readers feel the need to voice their criticism in regards of bloggers' conspicuous consumption. Drawing from the way bloggers faced backlash over their posts, this sub-chapter will focus on the way readers react and the way bloggers respond to online criticism over their bodily presentation. Bodily presentation could be manifested in a *hijab* style, clothing choice or specific poses within the blog posts. Some examples of online criticism will be taken through the blogs' comments section.

All bloggers I interviewed confessed that criticism has become part of their social media lives, including through their personal blogs. Some bloggers I interviewed stated that sometimes their choice of clothing attracts criticism and disagreement amongst the readers. One of the bloggers, Suchi Utami, stated that there was one post that garnered attention and criticisms amongst the readers. It was when she was wearing a crop-top and ripped jeans. These are two examples of the aforementioned post from Suchi Utami's blog:



Picture 11. Taken from Suci Utami's blog (Suciutami.com) posted on 2015

As I stated in the previous chapter, readers sometimes feel uneasy, especially those who appreciate modesty. Some readers criticise the ripped jeans she wore. These are some readers' comments following her post:

"Jeans, especially ripped jeans...is a big no-no, sister Suchi."

"Ripped jeans is not appropriate clothing style for Muslim."

"Although I know that you wear inner leggings, that's still not make it right."

Some comments above questioned her decision to wear denim (popularly known in Indonesia as jeans). There is a constant discussion and debate that I sometimes encountered through social media that jeans or denim which is often being thought as from the West is not appropriate to be worn as a Muslim clothing style. While the debate is not about Western clothing per se, this debate also illustrates the search for an authentic

Muslim clothing style, which is often perceived as Middle-Eastern style. The incorporating of Western clothing, just like I have analysed in Chapter 5, illuminates that the quest of so-called Indonesian Muslim style is an ongoing discussion, which underlies many tensions and disagreements on what is considered modern style and so on. Responding to these kinds of criticisms, Suchi said:

“...my headscarves are always long, but I like to wear ripped jeans. You can’t see my skin, though. Yes, some people commented on this, but I never clarify or anything because it’s not necessary. I don’t have to defend my personal style and I never like confrontation, so I erased her comment and I blocked her, as simple as that.” (Blogger-Suchi Utami, 26, individual interview)

Another case comes from Noni Zakiah, a blogger from Jogjakarta, Central Java. The picture she posted in June 2015 had invited criticisms for she combined a long *abaya* with tight fitting jeans. This too, just like Suchi Utami’s case, has been deemed inappropriate by some of the readers.



Picture 12. “Abaya in Town” from noniizakiah.blogspot.com (Zakiah 2015) posted on 8 February 2015

In regards of this, she states:

“The intention of my blog is about myself. So many people criticise me, though and I usually ignore it. I take the positive side of it. Many readers told me they want to start wearing hijab after reading my blogs, and I’m grateful if my blog helping them who start wearing hijab and changing their appearances. We are in the learning process together. So, I just take the positives.” (Blogger-Noni Zakiah, individual interview)

Just like Suchi Utami’s readers, Noni Zakiah’s readers were also questioning the way she chooses her clothing. Again, tight jeans are deemed inappropriate with the way Muslim women should dress themselves. Noni Zakiah stated her fashion choice draws many criticisms, although she also stated that she is in the ‘learning process’ just like any new readers that started to wear the *hijab*. The sentence “we’re in the learning process together” is interesting because Noni seems to admit that she is still trying to figure out

how to dress as a 'proper' Muslim. Just like when Suchi said "my headscarves are always big, but I like to wear ripped jeans" suggesting that she is actually aware that big scarves should not be mixed with ripped jeans, and that she would be criticised for this. The fact that she chose to do so was neutralised by her big and long headscarves. Wearing 'proper Muslim clothing' is also subject to an on-going and never ending process, that any Muslims who choose to wear scarves should aspire to be 'perfect' someday after this on-going learning process. Jeans and any denim, for Islamic conservatives, are inappropriate for women not only because it's mostly tight and body-hugging, but also trousers in general are deemed only suitable for wear by men. For them, women should not appear man-like, including wearing something that originates from men's fashion. In that sense, Muslim women should only wear long skirts in the form of *abaya* or tunics. These are some of the criticisms found on the readers' comments following the post:

"The jeans are too tight; Islam forbid us to wear tight clothing."

"Maybe you should learn more about hijab before posting something."

"What's your point of wearing abaya and tight jeans underneath. Are you really serious in wearing the hijab? If you do, wear it right and no excuses!"

"The abaya is ok, but I think tight denim is not a good choice. Don't get offended, I just suggest something good for you."

It seems like Noni faced harsher criticism than Suchi's post, with regards to her decision to wear denim under her black *abaya*. Some readers even questioned her knowledge about hijabs, which reflected in her decision to mix *abaya* and denim. Again, this criticism also illustrates the on-going discussion on the tension regarding whether Western fashion style, which in this case is denim, could be appropriated in Muslim clothing styles. From some of the readers' comments below, it looks as if the Middle Eastern clothing style like *abaya* or tunics are deemed more appropriate as Muslim style instead of Western clothing style.

The way criticism was directed towards fashion bloggers was also seen in Ghaida's testimonies. With regards to this, although she didn't specify which post in her blog drew criticisms, she stated below:

"A lot [criticisms]. But that's the thing with the media, isn't it? People judge you because of one or two pictures you post in blogs or Instagram. I learn to ignore people like this, but if the criticism makes sense, I introspect myself. Maybe I am the one who made a mistake, maybe I was being irresponsible with my posts. So, criticisms can be destructive but can be constructive as well. We need to have wisdom to differentiate them both." (Blogger-Ghaida Tsurayya, 26, individual interview)

"Ignore the criticism but think and introspect about it" are mostly the bloggers' responses when dealing with criticism. However, Ghaida clearly addresses that criticisms somewhat influence the way she posts pictures. The way she stated that "maybe I am the one who made a mistake" suggests that web-blogs, as any other social media, serve as platforms to scrutinise women's appearances. Fashion blogs, because of the highly visual images of body and appearance, are even more legitimate in becoming the breeding ground of outlook-based criticisms and bullying. Ghaida, Noni and Suchi all ignored the criticism and did not respond online; however, the backlash determined what they wear and post in the future.

Ghaida, Noni and Suchi are not just being scrutinised by the way they choose their clothing and the way they represent this through their blogs, but also being scrutinised by the way they spend their daily lives, i.e. when they hang out at the malls. Comments like 'jet-set hijabis, rich hijabis, rich housewives' often emerged whenever bloggers posted leisure-related posts. This is in line with my round of focus group discussions in which readers (see previous chapter) commented on how seemingly luxurious the life these bloggers had. Although interviewees stated they never criticise these bloggers publicly through social media, nevertheless the bloggers' lifestyle is something that keeps on emerging during rounds of discussions.

In this sense, web-blogs are not as liberating as what it seems, since the bloggers stated that the way their readers react and comment about their posts influence what they might post next. Despite readers' assertions that blogs are platforms for self-expression, and how it enabled some bloggers to re-write their new self as *hijabis*, the interaction with readers are constantly coming into play regarding their self-awareness. Many have self-awareness that, as Muslims, they have a great responsibility to embody the 'proper' Muslim woman. Fashion blogs, thus, as any other form of traditional and social media, serve as panopticon or surveillance for women's bodies and appearances, even when the large part of body is fully covered. Islamic femininities keep coming into play as the standard which every Muslim blogger should adhere to in order to be the good Muslim role model. Rocamora delves into this issue, suggesting that fashion blogs served as panoptical tools for bloggers to embody gendered femininities (2011, p. 418).

Celia Lury in *Prosthetic Culture* (1998) also suggests that photographic images serve its duality as self-expression and the tools for control and surveillance. Furthermore, Rocamora (2011) concluded that within fashion blogs, the surveillance process is enacted by women (as readers) and for women (as bloggers). The readers' comments section function as the tool to control bloggers to comply with appropriate femininity, which in this case is Islamic femininity. The bloggers I interview stated that in turn of the way the readers scrutinise their bodily appearances, they finally have to be careful and thoughtful with what they post and its consequences.

In relation to what Lury (1998) and Rocamora (2011) have addressed above, Panopticism is the concept which was first used by David Bentham (cited in Schofield 2009) and later developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault, referring to the specifically designed part of the prison which allowed one guard to watch many inmates without their acknowledgment that there was only one guard. Implemented by the way social media

works, a computer screen serves as a platform of surveillance to have control over citizens. As Manovich (2001) suggested, the initial creation of computer screen serves as surveillance platform rather than for entertainment purposes. Fashion blogs thus enable this mechanism of control to take places. Similar to what Manovich and Lury assertion, Rocamora (2011, p. 418) suggested:

“Personal fashion blogs are flattering and comforting but they are also spaces of surveillance, by oneself and by others, and this also pertains to the characteristic of computer screens as mirrors. Indeed, the screen as appropriated by fashion blogs can be perceived as yet one more instrument imposing on woman the panoptic control which mirrors and the masculine gaze subject them to; one more surface onto which women can, or rather must, reflect themselves to think themselves, on which they must survey themselves to assert themselves. Like mirrors, computer screens are omnipresent. Like them they have become instruments of control and regulation that allow women to comply with their role as an object whose duty is to look after herself.”

In the Muslim bloggers’ case, control and surveillance meet with Islamic discourse of femininity, in a sense that proper Muslim women should look a certain way, dress themselves in a certain way, and spend their leisure time in a certain way. In my interview, wearing ripped jeans or tight jeans or spending too much time hanging out in the malls are considered inappropriate for good Muslims. The blogs as technology of the self which allows bloggers some spaces for expression is being tampered with the surveillance that takes place within the interaction between readers and bloggers. In conclusion, similar with what Rocamora has asserted (2011), that personal fashion blogs in one way allow individualism but also allows mechanism of control and surveillance on the other side.

6.3 Being Successful *Muslimpreneurs*: Indonesian Muslim Fashion Bloggers as Neo-Liberal Feminine Subjects

Indonesian bloggers come from the space of marginality within the global fashion sphere, seeking to open up opportunities as the key players in the fashion system. Luvaas (2013) and Pham (2010, 2013) have both analysed the way personal fashion blogs are capitalised as an entry point to the fashion industry. Focusing on Indonesia personal style bloggers (non-hijabi bloggers), Luvaas (2013) concludes that although at first fashion blogs are the sign of democratising the fashion industry in the hands of ordinary people, in the end those ordinary people integrated in mainstream fashion itself, following the same logic of fashion capitalism. Pham (2010, 2013) focuses on the success story of British-Chinese Susanna Lau with her blog (Stylebubble.com) and argues that the success of Lau is the sign of the times, where the tech-savvy Asian women began to take advantage of social media to become the voice of authority in fashion, as important as fashion critics, editors and designers.

I argue that this is also the case for Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers. The emergence of the *hijab* or veiling practises in Indonesia is a relatively new phenomenon, being only celebrated and increasingly visible after the 1980s. The fact that Indonesia is the home of textile and fabric manufacture that produce some of the most famous international brands showed that there is an opportunity that Indonesia could be a major player for home-grown fashion brands. And starting fashion blogs, despite bloggers claimed that it is part of their personal narrative and history diary, could also function as the marketing tool for self-promotion and brand marketing. To illustrate this mechanism, I would like to analyse some of the most popular and widely acknowledged Indonesian Muslim bloggers as neoliberal feminine subjects.

As Harvey (2005 cited in Gill and Scharff 2011, p. 5) defines,

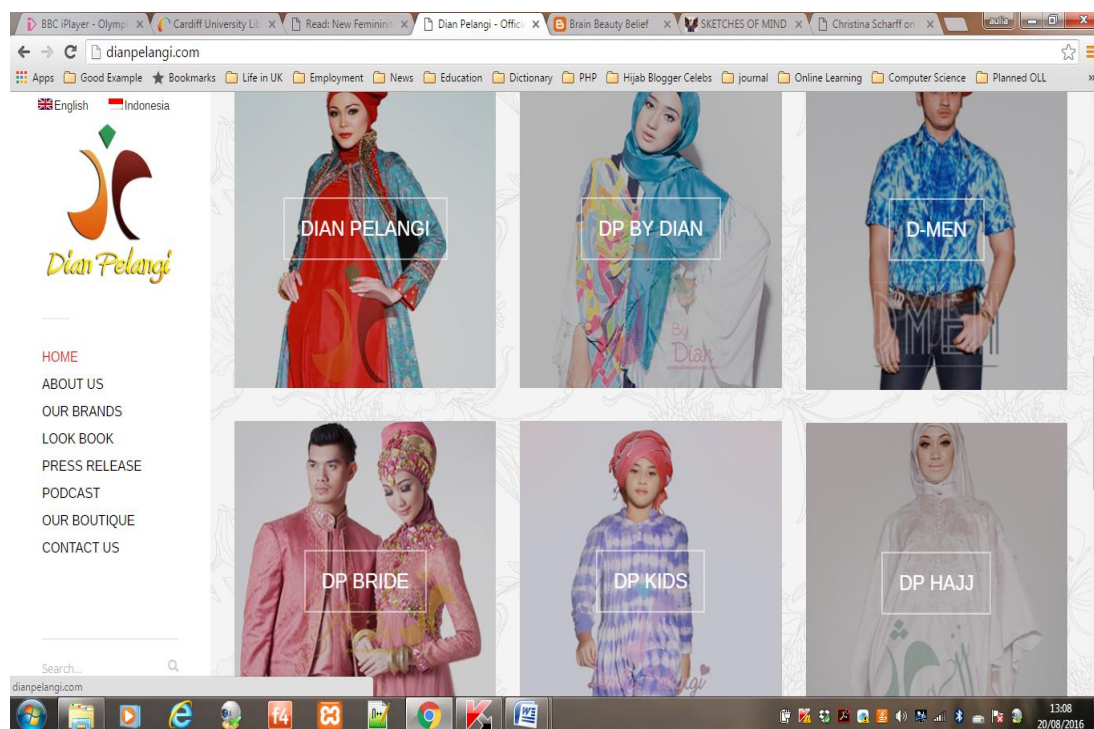
“Neoliberalism is, in the first instance, a theory of political economic practises that proposes that human well-being can be best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade”.

Gill and Scharff (2011) also argue that neo-liberalism bears a strong parallel with post feminism, in that it sees women as the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject. (Gill and Scharff 2011, p. 7) remark,

“women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their action as freely chosen”.

It is in this instance that I would like to analyse Dian Pelangi, a young Indonesian Muslim blogger and designer as the most widely recognizable figure of Muslim entrepreneur in Indonesia and look at her as the subject of neoliberal femininity. CNN in 2011 interviewed her as the face of successful Muslim designer not only in Indonesia, but also internationally as she showcased her collection in New York, Australia, London another fashion capital in the world. Started to blog at the age of 18 and launched her collection almost at the same time, Dian Pelangi inherited the already successful fashion business from her parents. Coming from the place of privilege Muslim upper class Indonesians, it is not difficult for Dian Pelangi to become a successful creative entrepreneur at such a young age. Despite also claiming that her clothing brand (Dian Pelangi) has been around for 20 years by her parents' legacy, her work is definitely widely acknowledged by her savvy social media presence, including her blog (it garnered more than 8 million readers since). In 2012, she launched her version of Indonesian Muslim street style, a book compilation of street style fashion photography inspired by the success of Scott Schuman's the *Sartorialist*. Dian

Pelangi started to launch her brand, *Dian Pelangi*, and up until now, Dian Pelangi brand has diversified into another *niche* including kid's apparel, Bridal, men's fashion, Dian Pelangi's *couture*, to DP *hajj*, religious apparel for Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The diversification of her brand could be traced in her website (Dian Pelangi.com 2016):



Picture 13. Dian Pelangi's range of clothing line (Dianpelangi.com)

From the picture above, it is obvious that Dian Pelangi is a smart and savvy business woman. She is well aware that as the biggest Muslim population country in the world, the Muslim consumers are a very lucrative market. Apart from her website (dianpelangi.com), Dian also uses her personal blogs as self-promotional tool, not only to promote her fashion brand but also as a platform for brand endorsement. Wardah, one of Indonesian cosmetic brands that positioning itself as *halal* cosmetics, has been recruiting her as the brand ambassador and been frequently being featured in her blogs.



Picture 14 and 15. The product placement in blog.dianpelangi.com ("There's More than Meets the Eye and Breeze, both are taken from blog.dianpelangi.com)

The practise of product placement and subtle advertisement (sometimes it is written entitled as the product or service review instead of blatant promotion) are similarly found in other Muslim fashion bloggers. Not just featuring fashion brand, but also beauty services like hotel, spa and beauty treatment, cafe and restaurant.



Picture 16 and 17: Spa review (from gdagallery.blogspot.com) and cafe review (from the-alvianto.com).

The incorporation of product placement and advertising into their personal blogs articulate the way bloggers, not just exclusively Muslim fashion bloggers, treated themselves as entrepreneurial subject. As it can be seen from the various pictures above, leisure time, self-indulgent time to family activities, those that supposedly treated as private are presented as promotional message of good living and consumption (I have discussed the articulation of class and consumption in length in section 5.3). As Pham asserted (2012, p. 261) that “fashion bloggers serve implicitly or explicitly as models for better living through consumer culture.”

Reflecting on Schraff research and interview with 60 classically- trained musicians (all are women), concluded that entrepreneur subjectivities treated the self as business. As Gerson cited from Scharff (2015, p. 6) puts it:

the view of oneself as a business designates a ‘move from the liberal vision of people owning themselves as though they were property to a neoliberal vision of people owning themselves as though they were a business’...By relating to itself as a business, the entrepreneurial subject establishes a distance to its self and can subsequently work on it.

From the use of pictures above, the Indonesian Muslim bloggers treat themselves, including their family as business. The inclusion of children in Fifi Alvianto’s post signified that in the entrepreneurial subjectivities, everything is promotional tools without exception.

Furthermore, Schraff (2015) also identifies the entrepreneurial self as disavowing inequalities. Entrepreneurial subjectivities always see that every individual has the same opportunities to success, and believed that their success based on hard work and merits. As Schraff (2015, p. 9)) argues, “arguably, entrepreneurial subjectivities are in part performed through a disarticulation of inequalities”.

As a successful young fashion entrepreneur, Dian has been invited to give lectures on ‘how to be successful *entrepreneur*’ or ‘how to be *Muslimahpreneur*’. *Muslimah* literally means Muslim women. Giving talks in front of 3,000 college students recently, this is some of the excerpts:

“Be consistent, don’t give up easily and always look up for opportunities. Learn how to maximise social media to promote your work, set up your blog, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram so the world is your market and they all can see your potential. That’s the way to promote yourself.”
(finance.detik.com 2016)

In her blog post entitled ‘opportunities, not limitations’ she has also written,

“Opportunities”, as opposed to limitation, is then the key word for today’s global phenomenon, as the Internet-driven socio-cultural drift allows greater freedom of expressions in the fields of arts and culture. Interestingly, women and the young population are ones most benefited from this change and the Islamic fashion world becomes the place where Muslim women could be the frontrunners in the incredibly crowded marketplace of over-7-billion-dollar industry worldwide. This significant number is not to be taken for granted and key players all over the world should start a serious conversation on how and where the modest fashion industry should be taken to and what can be contributed to the larger society in order to create more wealth and ensure sustainable and equitable development. (blog.Dianpelangi.com posted 23 November 2015)

The word ‘opportunities’ emerged in all her testimonies of business success. Dian Pelangi tries to convince her female counterparts and the young generation that there has been an enormous opportunity to be success in Muslim fashion business. It is the opportunity rather than limitation that define Muslim women and young generation. Such assertion that seeing all women, particularly Muslim women has the same opportunities in social media era to thrive economically is denying the fact that around 6.5 million Indonesian women are illiterate, twice the number of men and while in Jakarta, women are 88 per cent unemployed (national statistical bureau 2011). Other bloggers, which I will analyse next,

Fifi, Ghaida and Suchi, although not as successful as Dian Pelangi also have the same self-entrepreneurial subjectivities, with motherhood as the determinant factor.

Other interesting point that comes to the analysis of Indonesian Muslim bloggers as neoliberal feminine subjects, is that the testimonies that being creative entrepreneurs is the most suitable job for mothers, since it allows some flexibilities and promise freedom of time. Three bloggers I interviewed, Ghaida, Fifi and Suchi identified themselves as *mumpreneurs*, mothers and entrepreneurs. While the term bears the resemblance with *muslimahpreneur* or *muslimpreneur*, the term *mumpreneur* signified heavily the identity of self as mothers with the entrepreneurial self. *Mumpreneurship* is in fact, a burgeoning social media phenomenon across the world.

Mumpreneurship is defined by Ekynsmith (2011, p. 105) as,

“an individual who discovers and exploits new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seeks to integrate the demands of motherhood and business ownership”

Furthermore, the blogosphere is the first place where *mumpreneurship* phenomenon flourished in 2005 where mothers connected and managed networking relationships with other mothers (Ekynsmith 2014). Similar research on mumpreneurship also suggested that the proliferation of ICT (information-communication technology) and the need to manage work-life balance had helped the *mumpreneurship* to become the career option for women (Nel,Maritz and Thongprovati 2010; Duberley and Carrigan 2012).

The need to be present in child nurturing is the ultimate reason why these bloggers decided to work full-time on their personal blogs rather than working in corporate. Fifi Alvianto, the founder of Muslim fashion magazine, Laiqa, decided to resign as editor-in-chief and choose

to be a professional blogger and designer for her clothing label, Casa Elana, for the ultimate purpose to raise her two young daughters. As she stated in the interview,

“Being a *mumpreneur* is the best thing in the world. I’m still active and learning at the same time. I still prepare my new project and meet my clients, but it’s also very flexible. My daughters need me the most and being a mumpreneur enable me to achieve work and life balance. I think mumpreneur is the most suitable job for every mother since it’s very flexible and you can manage your life and not sacrificing your family altogether.” (Blogger- Fifi Alvianto, 30, individual interview)

Fifi stated that her blog has given her opportunities and income much bigger compared with what she had earned while she still worked as *Laiqa* editor-in-chief. The popularity of her as Muslim fashion bloggers has attracted many vendors to advertise in her social media platforms, most notably her personal blog. Similar with other research on *mumpreneurship* that has been done in Britain by Duberley and Carrigan (2012, pp. 1-23), the number of women in Britain engaged in *mumpreneurship* is rising, while they also conclude that mumpreneurship is “a route to try to sustain a certain lifestyle and identity which allows them to meet their desire to maintain a business career with their desire to fulfil a particular version of being a good mother.” The research which was based around interview with 20 British mumpreneurs also concluded that being a *mumpreneur* is allowing far greater involvement with children compared to corporate works (Duberley and Carrigan 2012, p. 1).

Like Fifi, Suchi also made the assertion of mumpreneurship as the most ideal job for her while implied that it is also the most suitable job for mothers. As she stated:

“I think yes, [mumpreneur] it is ideal for me. I mean I still contribute to my family, I can still express my love for fashion and design, without sacrificing my time with my children. But there are also designers out there, that although they can manage their time as they wish, they are still busy, even busier compared to other corporate employees. They have big ambitions, like launching as many clothes this season and what

would be their next project. I guess I made my choice. I don't have big ambition about my fashion business, growing slowly is good enough for me, as long as I can keep up with my children. It's for them that I choose *mumpreneurship*, so it's so not fair if I still busy and neglected them just because my business is growing. My family is my priority." (Blogger- Suchi Utami, 26)

Suchi testifies that, although *mumpreneurship* allows more flexibility, the ambition over business expansion might jeopardise its flexibility. She illustrates this with herself compared to other more ambitious designers that seem busier compared to corporate employees. Again, Suchi's young children limit her ability to expand her business faster and instead she opts for a steady and slow growing business. It is argued by Duberley and Carrigan (2012) and Nell, Maritz and Thongprovati (2010) that business constraint is one of challenge that has been faced by many *mumpreneurs* and require individualised strategies. Suchi Utami, for example, joined by her husband in building her fashion brand, focusing upon marketing and management task, while herself manages her blog and design the clothes. Fifi Alvianto, as another example, stated that she is fully supported by her family (husbands and parents) to regularly take care of her daughters while Fifi has to meet clients or being invited in fashion events that not appropriate for children.

Ghaida Tsurayya, another blogger and designer for her label GDA, mother for three young children (two of them are twins) is quite often being invited as motivational speaker for *mumpreneur* workshops all around Indonesia. As she said during the interview:

"I think for me, blogging is really paves my way to be a designer and an entrepreneur. I just didn't expect people will read my blog and like my design, which I used to advertised in my blog. And to be able to manage my time with family and work, I think it is important for me. Mothers are the first and the best teacher for their children, and I am very lucky...very fortunate that this job allows me to be close to my children, especially during their younger years." (Blogger- Ghaida Tsurayya, 26)

Mumpreneurs like Suchi, Fifi and Ghaida, just like Dian Pelangi, all come from the place of privilege in Indonesia. Ghaida is the daughter of one of the most famous Islamic preachers and an important national figure in Indonesia, one that several years ago made the Time magazine cover entitled 'The Holy Man'. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Ghaida's father) also owned and managed Islamic schools, farms, travel agent and owned radio and private television and multi-level marketing. As Hoesterey (2008) who made a research on Abdullah Gymnastiar for two years, argued the core message of Gymnastiar's Islamic sermon is about Muslim entrepreneurship. Certainly Ghaida as his oldest daughter benefitted from the success of her parents (her mother also a popular Islamic sermon with family and harmonious marriage as her core message).

Fifi Alvianto and Suchi Utami, two other bloggers I interviewed also come from middle-upper class Indonesian family. Fifi started her career, as she testified above in fashion magazine, a profession which definitely beneficial for her success as fashion bloggers. Her clothing label, Casa Elana has recently diversified into Casa Elana kids. Suchi, although not directly stated that her parents helped her to finance her fashion business has written in one of her earliest posts that she and her husband married in relatively young age (21 years old) and thus her parents and in-laws helped them tremendously as struggling young couple. Her clothing label, Such! By Suchi Utami has now managed by her husband while she is only responsible for the fashion designing.

All bloggers stated that being a creative entrepreneur is ideal job for mothers. It allows some flexibility while on the other hand offer wealth and financial success if managed professionally. Neoliberal *mumpreneurs* sees themselves as epitome and role model for modern motherhood, one that fully devotes her time to family but at the same time also make financial contribution. While working mothers are seen as 'bad mothers' because of leaving their family for her ambition, *mumpreneurs* are ideal since her ambition can be

achieved from her kitchen table. Blogs' readers often expressed desires to emulate what the prominent bloggers had achieved, suggesting fashion or lifestyle blogger as the 'it' profession for young Indonesians. There were numerous Facebook posts in regards of working mothers as selfish mothers, some even uses Qur'an verses to condemn working mothers as neglecting her family and thus defying the sole responsible of women according to Quran. While homemakers were also being seen as un-ideal since they solely dependent to their husband, the creative or social media *mumpreneurs* comes as solution. It is as one of my reader said "combining the best of both worlds: money and family".

In regards of creative and social media entrepreneurship as ideal job, Pham (2013) asserts that:

The new creative economy and the Web 2.0 technologies through which it operates promise flexibility and freedom for its largely female workforce and yet the prospect of the jackpot (digital stardom) also digs them deeper into an inherently asymmetrical economy. In the specific context of the contemporary fashion media complex, we see this dialectic of autonomy and dependency in the promise of digital democratization (the average person can take ownership of fashion) and the reality of uneven distributions of power and privilege. As the rhetoric of democratization moves into common-sense logic, the failure to realize the "career hits" imagined to be available to anyone are internalized as personal failures.

Neoliberal *muslimpreneurs* and *mumpreneurs*, in this case Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers sees themselves and their family members as business and enterprise. Through the enactment of Islamic femininity: *hijab*, Islamic clothing, *halal* cosmetics they show that they are different from the other Muslim woman. They distance themselves from 'that kind of Muslim women'. Scharff (2014) exemplifies that the empowered, neoliberal subjectivities is "constructed in opposition to allegedly powerless 'other' women". The other women, in this case is indeed the other Muslim woman that often being depicted as backwards, full-time homemakers who are unable to contribute financially, or in Dian

Pelangi's post, the Muslim woman who are failing to use tremendous opportunities in the burgeoning Muslim consumerism in the world.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter answers the third and fourth research questions (RQ3) and (RQ4) subsequently. Research question 3 is about the motivations behind the fashion web-blogging and the way the bloggers respond to their readers in regards of backlash and criticism, while the fourth research question (RQ4) is about the way in which Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers define and facilitate their readers' empowerment. The data used in this chapter is based on individual interviews with 9 Indonesian Muslim bloggers, combining the bloggers beginner with the already prominent ones.

First sub-section (6.1) showed that Indonesian Muslim bloggers has almost similar demography and characteristic compared to the readers. They are young Indonesian Muslim women (all under 30 years old by the time of interview), educated, urban, middle-upper class who mostly reside in Jakarta with the majority of bloggers being married and having children. Living in Jakarta as middle-class Indonesians brings many benefits especially in regards of job employment and education. However, as Smith-Hefner (2007) shows in her research, women are still expected to be married and having children despite higher education and better job opportunities. Most bloggers testified their fashion blogs as a space for self-expression. Writing blogs have been associated with rewriting self-history, one that connected to the more pious self after donning the *hijab*. Wearing *hijab* for the first time usually has been perceived as new life and rites of passage that need to be immortalised through web-blogs. Some bloggers also associate the new life as mothers or newlyweds as the reason and motivations behind their blogging activities. Minority of bloggers stated that they also have political reason to change the perception towards Islam and the marginality of Muslim women through their fashion blogs, an intention that has

also been perceived by the majority of readers. However, other bloggers refused to connect their blogs with the politics of veiling and instead opted for the triviality of fashion itself. Foucault concept of blogs as technology of the self is used to elaborate the way in which web-blogging as verbalisation medium for bloggers to enact the desired identities and motivations, from the seemingly trivial to the more political ones.

The way bloggers respond to their readers in regards of backlash and criticism is the focus of section (6.2). As it has been elaborated in the previous chapter (4.1), *hijab* is a complex and fluid and that each person has its own understanding. Indonesian Muslim bloggers stated they often received backlash and criticism in regards of the choice of style or clothing, which some readers feel defy the modesty requirement in Quran. Bloggers are often criticised for not only for their fashion style and choice of clothing, but also for their portrayal of hedonistic life and conspicuous consumption. Bloggers I interviewed usually ignore the criticisms. They did not confront nor offer explanation online. Some bloggers blocked the certain readers. However, the backlash and criticism in turns form the basis of bloggers to self-govern and self-censor themselves. Backlash and criticism facilitate the bloggers to evaluate themselves in the future. Borrowing the concept of panopticism from Foucault, computer screens is being utilised by bloggers to exert control over themselves to look or behave in certain way but on the other hand, readers' commentaries section also serves as the space of criticism as a way to control women's bodies and appearances, in this case ones that defy the proper and modest way to wear *hijab*. Similar with previous research on fashion blogs (Rocamora 2011), blogs serve as an ambivalent space that not only for the self-expression and individuality, but also to exert control and surveillance on the other side.

Finally, section (6.3) elaborated and answered the fourth research question (RQ4) by examining the way in which Indonesian Muslim bloggers define and facilitate readers'

empowerment. Empowerment is being facilitated by the enactment of neoliberal feminine subject. Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers treat their selves as business and enterprise, including their personal lives and family. Following the body of work of Gill and Scharff (2011), neoliberal self has strong resemblance with post-feminism subject, which sees women as active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject. Leisure time, family holiday, are all being presented through the visual blogs as promotional tools of good living and consumption. Scharff (2014) also identify that neoliberal subject as disavowing inequalities and believe that every individual has the same opportunities and choice to success and empower themselves. This kind of message has been articulated heavily in blogs, such as when bloggers deliver their success story in workshops and conferences. Bloggers also stated that being entrepreneur (*mumpreneur*) as the best and ideal job for mothers since it promises time flexibility and freedom. Being *muslimpreneur* or *mumpreneur* has been portrayed as the dream job for women who want financial independence and yet still devote their time for family. As Scharff (2014) argued that neoliberal subjectivities will always tries to distance themselves to allegedly powerless other woman thus it can be concluded that Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers depict themselves as symbol and the epitome of successful Muslim women, those that are different from backward Muslim women nor the full-time homemakers that unable to contribute financially and always dependent to their husbands. The empowerment in neoliberal subjectivities has been reduced only to define women as self-entrepreneurship individuals that achieve success at such young age, being an ideal mother and wife without acknowledging inequality or economic disparity. The next chapter will summarise the research finding and propose recommendation for further research.

Chapter 7

Conclusion, Limitation and Reflection of the Study

This chapter provides a summary of the dissertation research and reflects on key findings that have been discussed in chapter 4, 5 and 6. Each research questions will be addressed and summarised along with the research limitations and suggestions for further research. Second section (7.2) addresses the limitations, obstacles during the field research and the way this study opens up the next avenue of research involving social media, women and fashion industry. And finally, section (7.3) offers my personal reflection upon my own identity as Indonesian Muslim woman who undertake research upon other Indonesian Muslim women.

7.1 Conclusion

My interest in doing research on Muslim fashion blogs initially was sparked by the rise and popularity of these cultural forms. As the nation whose history filled with the oppression against religious expression, I would suggest that the growing presence of *hijab* fashion on social media platforms has contributed to changing the dynamics of the way religious expression has been represented, perceived and negotiated. Furthermore, social media platforms (in this case fashion web-blogs) have catapulted the *hijab* and Islamic clothing as potential key item in fashion industry and being marketed to the burgeoning Muslim consumers locally and internationally.

Across the globe, international fashion bloggers have been enjoying the success of building fashion professional career through social media. Fashion web-blogging is being utilised by

bloggers to pave their way to the more mainstream fashion industry as bloggers have gained notoriety through their wide readerships and smart self-promotional management.

This study is also being inspired by the feminist scholarship of audience ethnography that challenged women or feminine genre as trivial and not worthy of academic interest. Hence, being curious and intrigued I have sought to better understand Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs through examining links between fashion bloggers, blogs and their readers. As far as I am aware, this one of the things that makes this study unique is its triangulation of text, readers and bloggers (producers) on the subject of fashion blogs. The data gathering methods used for this research is individual interviews, Focus Group Discussions and archival research which involving 63 participants in total from a combination of bloggers and blogs readers. Thematic analysis and visual analysis were utilised to analyse the text in relation to the representation of images and the way readers negotiate certain codes within the images. The summary of each research questions are as follows.

Why do women in Indonesia read Muslim fashion blogs and how do they make sense of it?

Chapter 4 specifically addressed this research question in great length. Section (4.1) observes the identity of research participants in more details. All participants are Muslims, educated middle-class Indonesians who live in urban metropolitan cities across Indonesians and also identified themselves as working women and entrepreneurs. Blogs readers (53 of them) are all practising *hijab* and while they were not coerced into it, many indicated that female members of the family (mothers and sisters) have played pivotal part into socialising the veiling practise from early childhood rather than participants' own religious experiences. The analysis also shows that the understanding of *hijab* varies from one participant to another including what is allowed to wear and what is not based on Qur'an requirement.

Section (4.2) excavated the particular reasons on why participants read Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs. The reasons could be differentiated into leisure and pleasure, fashion inspiration and the guidance into Islamic femininity. Similarly to feminist audience ethnography that has looked at the ways in which female audiences consume feminine genres (Radway 1991; Hermes 1997), I have found that reading Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs is associated with leisure time and pleasurable activities. Based on individual interviews and focus group discussions with 53 blogs readers, I found that fashion blogs are consumed within the sporadic time of day, in between work and household chores. Reading blogs also being associated with past time hobbies and youthful activities my participants used to do more frequently before marriage and children.

Additionally, Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs are consumed for fashion inspiration. Bloggers tend to be regarded as fashionable and as such such expert guidance into looking like a modest and yet modern Muslim woman. Moreover, Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs have been utilised to give religious guidance into Islamic femininity i.e. the *hijab* requirement. This is specifically relevant for young readers who are just beginning to wear the *hijab* or Muslim converts who are perhaps isolated from their social group and need guidance into their new religion.

Section (4.3) revealed what are the most appealing aspects of fashion blogs for their readers. Bloggers have been seen as ordinary people who have nevertheless accomplished an extraordinary thing, which in this case is being stylish and beautiful Muslims, something unattainable for the majority of fashion blog readers. Bloggers are being seen as micro-celebrities, to borrow term from Senft (2008) to refer to someone who gained notoriety for their online media presence. Different from traditional sense of celebrities, micro-celebrities appear as 'ordinary as possible' while at the same time carefully constructing their self-image through their blogs. The relationship between readers and bloggers also

could be described as *parasocial* (Hatfield 2011; MacDonell 2012); that is to say, one which resembles the relationship between readers who read celebrities magazines or gossip magazines and saw celebrities as real and ordinary.

How do readers negotiate the articulation of modernity, modesty, motherhood, class and nation in Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs?

Section (5.1) illustrated that modernity and modesty are experienced as complex and fluid processes where what the bloggers post can be read quite differently by the readers. The visual analysis undertaken revealed that the *hijab* has been transformed into fashion item that is always changing and new, often inspired by Western styles and popular culture.

Similar to previous research on the subject of veiling practise among urban Indonesian Muslim women (Brenner 1996; Jones 2007; Smith-Hefner 2007) this study concludes that for Indonesian Muslims the *hijab* is seen as a middle-ground between the Islamic identity and modernity that such practise in Indonesia is, to borrow Smith-Hefner's term (2007), "neither traditionalist nor anti-modernist reaction". Hegde (2011) asserts that globalisation is a complex process that can no longer be easily and clearly identified within the binary East and West. Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs article integration between modesty and modernity with such ease and fluidity despite the readers' criticisms over certain style of *hijab* which perceives as not being adhere to Islamic values.

In section (5.2) I discussed the ways in which motherhood has been represented in Indonesian fashion blogs as middle-upper class and heavily constructed by traditional Islamic gender ideologies while also being influenced by the nation's past discourse of '*ibuism*', the term that first coined by Suryakusuma (1999) that constructed mothers as the support system to their husbands. While beauty and fashion practise are utilised to create the image of modern Muslim motherhood, nevertheless the overall visual representation still adheres to traditional gender ideology which heavily influenced by religion and

nationality. Readers that I interviewed regarded these representations as ideal Islamic motherhood while also acknowledging that such representation is heavily classed and based on beauty practises that are often unattainable for most Indonesians.

Section (5.3) analysed the way class and consumption has been articulated in fashion blogs. Readers offered criticisms around representations of conspicuous consumption which many regarded as undermining the purpose of Islamic teaching around feminine modesty and humility. Using Bourdieu (1984) and Featherstone (1996) to analyse class distinction, this section concluded that the inclusion of luxurious items, premium brands, holiday and leisure spaces in many Indonesian fashion blogs constructs Muslim bloggers' taste as middle-upper class, one that distances itself from lower classes. At the same time, this emphasis on consumption creates a discursive distance between bloggers and Islamophobic media constructions of Muslims as fundamentalists, pre-modern and potentially as terrorists. .

What motivates the Indonesian bloggers to write Muslim fashion blogs and how do they respond to their readers?

Much like their readers, Indonesian Muslim bloggers are relatively young (under 30 years old), middle-class, urban, educated Indonesians who are married and have children. The discovery of the new self as a more pious Muslims by the practise of veiling and by identification with the roles of wife and mother, prompted many of the bloggers included in this study to develop their blogs. Sections (6.1) thus concludes that rewriting self-history and self-expression has motivated many bloggers to start a fashion blog. Donning the *hijab* for the first time in Indonesian Muslim communities has been associated with being "reborn" and the discovery of a new self that ought to be celebrated and immortalised through web-blogs. Some bloggers also use their personal fashion blogs as political tools to defy and challenge the stereotype of Muslim women as backward and unable to identify

with modernity. This section uses Foucault's (1988) concept of *technology of the self* to look at the ways Muslim fashion blogs have been providing important spaces for bloggers to invent a sense of their identity, whether it is for the purpose of triviality and fun or the more politically motivated ones.

Section (6.2) concluded that despite admitting that they ignore their readers' backlash and criticism, bloggers nevertheless tend to self-censor as the result of criticism. Again, borrowing the work of Foucault of *Panopticism*, fashion blogs serve as forms of control and surveillance for both bloggers and readers. Bloggers use the screen for self-surveillance and to govern their performance while readers use commentaries sections on fashion blogs for critiquing bloggers' bodily performance, that in the end sometimes result in bloggers having to self-censor in their future blog posts. Both bloggers and readers included in this study have concluded that web-blogs are ambivalent spaces in which freedom of self-expression and the need to control self-persona is a complex process.

In what ways do Indonesian Muslim bloggers define and facilitate their female readers' empowerment?

Section (6.3) specifically engages with the Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers as neo-liberal feminine subjects. Following the work of Gill and Scharff (2011) and Scharff (2014), this section investigates empowerment in neoliberal subjectivities that may be understood through the construction of self as business and enterprise. My research has shown how this is accomplished in the case of Muslim bloggers. Muslim bloggers utilised private spheres of their family lives and themselves as self-promotional tools through their personal blogs. Empowerment is defined as being successful and wealthy at a young age, achieved through becoming a fashion blogger and creative / fashion entrepreneur. Success is perceived as merited because of their hard work, dismissing critique of their relative privilege over other women. The *Muslimprenur* and *mumpreneur* are represented as the

ideal for married women and mothers that offer them the best of both worlds; domesticity and professional success.

This study offers an academic contribution to scholarship relating to Muslim women and social media. Such findings are very relevant to better understanding of issues pertinent to the current global and political climate in which Muslim immigrants, especially Muslim women and *hijab*, are routinely represented as threats to the West. Observing how Indonesian Muslim identity and Western modernity intermingle in the form of fashion blogs has potential to develop understanding of how multiculturalism and cultural integration work in the age of social media, which brings its own challenges and complexities. Fashion blogs have offered space to articulate *hijab* and Islamic fashion that are strikingly contrast to the way hijab has been depicted in mainstream media. This study in essence shows that *hijab* as religious practice is being shaped by the globalisation process and neo-liberalism and furthermore, how such transformation is articulated and negotiated in the age of social media.

In terms of methodology, this study also demonstrates that feminist audience ethnography usually utilised for research in traditional media (i.e magazines, romance novels and soap operas), could also be used for social media research and hence remains relevant for other social media platform. The next section will discuss the limitation of study, along with the recommendation for future research.

7.2 Limitation and Recommendation for Further Research

Since research on fashion blogs and audience consumption of them is scarce, this research felt rather experimental. Therefore, the feminist scholarship on women consuming traditional feminine genres (soap operas, women's magazines, romance fiction) that I have elaborated at length in the literature review has given tremendous guidance into

methodological aspects in my research. The difficulty of arranging online long-distance focus group discussions for example, has necessitated that the data gathering method had to be modified. As a result of this, more participants were interviewed individually rather than through FGDs.

Initially, participant observation with direct observation was to have been part of the data gathering method; in the end has to be cancelled since it was very expensive to go back home to do fieldwork. Instead, I did all the interviews (individual interviews and focus group discussions) online using Skype technology. During the FGDs, there were also some technological barriers such as lost connections that made participant observation through online interaction is impossible. However, the FGD and individual interview successfully gathered 63 participants who enthusiastically engaged in the discussion. I also planned to interview more bloggers (especially the well-known ones) but the interview appointments were difficult to organise. Different time zones between the UK and Indonesia and also their busy schedules made interviews with famous Indonesian bloggers a hit and miss. Some well-known bloggers kept asking me to email my interview questions beforehand (which I did) with no response at all. Finally, I managed to interview 10 bloggers, a lower number than what I had expected to undertake.

Translation processes were also very challenging. As I am not a professional Indonesia-English language translator, some interview excerpts may sound peculiar in English. Interviews, although all conducted in Indonesian language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) used non-formal, everyday Indonesian language and even sometimes Javanese language can be found in transcription, all of which made it even harder to translate.

In addition to this, although this research has given comprehensive analysis through the triangulation of blogs, bloggers and readers, it is also opens up ideas for further research. It is imperative that there will be research on fashion and social media that not only focuses

on the visual representation, but also on its audiences and specifically use participant observation with direct observation to observe the way participants use and utilise social media. As I have been mentioned earlier, most research on fashion media usually are very heavily focused upon textual analysis that it is important to shift the focus to audience in order to cultivate bigger pictures about the way fashion media permeates daily lives of its audiences.

The scope of this research is Indonesian bloggers, Indonesian readers and Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs, in which questions of nationality and religion were crucial elements. Thus, research of fashion blogs in other national contexts would extend focus beyond these parameters. Muslim fashion blogs in the US, UK or Europe, for example, are still under researched.

Another potential area of study that might be opened up by this research would involve examinations of fashion and social media. Web-blogs are not the only platform where fashion enthusiasts exist. Instagram and YouTube, for example, have been tremendously popular where fashion and social media integrate and have become the latest and most popular platforms for ordinary people who love fashion and seek to express themselves. It is not surprising that major fashion labels (including their chief designers) like Alexander Wang or Riccardo Tisci (for Givenchy) have used Instagram to promote their latest designs while also being able to show a glimpse of their personal lives. The expansion of the fashion industry using social media platforms is the next avenue for research studies on fashion media as I have illustrated above that some designers maximise their social media platforms to engage and connect with their potential customers. The interconnection between social media and fashion industry as I have showed through this study, is even greater than before. The next section will offer brief reflection upon the research.

7.3 Closing Remarks and Some Reflections

Coming from a position of privilege in Indonesia (middle-class, educated and Muslim), it is hard for me to position myself to critically engage with the text as well as to distance myself from the bloggers who have economic and social backgrounds similar to my own. Especially in the last section (section 6.3) where I have to analyse bloggers' neoliberal feminine subjectivities, it is hard for me to distance myself and see their practice as not as empowering as I first imagined it would be.

The word 'neo-liberalism' does not have a positive connotation in Indonesian culture. Neo-liberalism has been imagined as a 'dirty' word in the sense that neoliberal individuals are perceived as too westernised, too capitalistic, too showy and hence nobody wants to be associated with neo-liberalism. However, the challenge of doing feminist research is to be able to separate ourselves as a researcher and as a 'fellow' woman. In the end, I have to conclude that just because Muslim fashion blogs may offer different perspectives on modern Muslims does not necessarily mean that they are empowering. To be empowering, Muslim fashion blogs should be offering something else, that is some reflection, truth and honesty on being Muslim women with all the struggle, challenge and complexities that entails, which is hard to achieve as long as such blogs are still being utilised as self-promotional platforms. Of course that is not to say that fashion blogs are fake and dishonest, but also it is far from true that the image of rich and middle-upper class Muslims is being used to challenge the impression of Muslims as poor, oppressed and backwards. Such representations of glamorous Muslims might even strengthen the binary image of Muslims: either poor or rich either sitting in the cafe with a Hermes bag or hidden behind their *niqab* in Afghanistan.

Whereas I am sceptical of Muslim fashion blogs as feminist texts, the practice of reading blogs has a more optimistic tone. My research participants used the Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs as a source of pleasure and escapism from their daily and mundane domestic or professional lives. Reflecting upon research into feminist audiences ethnography scholars (Radway 1984; Ang 1985; McRobbie 1991; Brown 1994; Hermes 1995), I would conclude that Indonesian Muslim fashion blogs could offer spaces of resistance for their readers and that is what makes such reading practices empowering, apart from textual / visual representation that still adhere to traditional gender ideology. It is also heartening to see that Indonesian female readers are critical, smart and not naive about the way blogs construct certain images of Muslim woman. And finally, I hope my study has proven that fashion blogs are worthy of further academic investigation and make an original and important contribution to scholarship on Muslim women and social media.

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Appendix A. List of Participants of Individual Interviews

No	Name	Age	Education	Location	Occupation/marital status	Favourite Blogs/bloggers
1.	Rizka Kartika	40	Bachelor degree	Sidoarjo, East Java	Muslim clothing shop owner, married & mother of 3	None / random
2.	Syafrida Nurrachmi	32	Master	Surabaya, East Java	Lecturer in Communication Studies, married.	Dian Pelangi, Siti Juwariyah, Suchi Utami, Ghaida Tsurayya
3.	Kania S. Andriani	23	Bachelor	Gresik, East Java	Bank's employee, engage.	Fitri Aulia, Dian Pelangi
4.	Bella Y.K Putri	22	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	College student, single	Indah Nada, Zahratul Jannah
5.	Aisya Yusuf	23	Bachelor	Pekanbaru, Sumatra	Designer of Muslim wear Saggnya, single	Indah Nada, Dian Pelangi
6.	Marcha D. Saraswati	23	Bachelor	Surabaya, east Java	Pharmacist, single	Dian Pelangi, Indah Nada, Puput Utami
7.	Dian E. Ahmad	29	Bachelor	Jakarta	Private company employee, single	Jenahara, Fitri Aulia, Fifi Alvianto
8.	Uswatun Khasanah	25	Bachelor	Bali	Muslim clothing owner, single	Dian Pelangi, Shella Alaztha, Tata Jundiyah, Ghaida Tsurayya.
9.	Karisma	27	Master	Jakarta	Post-graduate student, married.	Dian Pelangi, Indah Nada, Ria Miranda
10.	Dhika Lisyane	25	Bachelor	Gresik, East Java	Bank employee, single.	Dian Pelangi, Zaskia Mecca.
11.	Amilatun Nafishah	21	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	College student, single	Indah Nada, Dian Pelangi, Puput Utami

12.	Intan Nura Laili	29	Master	Malang, East Java	Post-graduate student, married, mother of one.	Siti Juwariyah, Indah Nada, Dian Pelangi
13.	Nia S. Nastiti	25	Bachelor	Jakarta	Civil servant, single	Dian Pelangi, Fitri Aulia, Indah Nada.
14.	Sekarsari	21	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	College student, single	Indah Nada, Rizky Amalia, Shella Alaztha
15.	Dwi H. Arimelia	22	Bachelor	Malang, East Java	College student, single	Dian Pelangi, Ria Miranda
16.	Udiana W. Defiantari	27	Master	Surabaya, East Java	Lecturer, married, mother of two.	Dian Pelangi, Suchi Utami
17.	Angga Nadya	33	Bachelor	Sidoarjo, East Java	Muslim clothing owner, married.	Dian Pelangi, Ria Miranda
18.	Nurul Muflikha	24	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	Online Muslim shop owner	Dian Pelangi, Siti Juwariyah
19.	Epi Islaminati	28	Bachelor	Jogjakarta, Central Java	Private company employee, married, mother of two	Zaskia Mecca, Dian Pelangi
20.	Mia Fauzia	30	Bachelor	Jakarta	Homemaker, blogger, married, mother of 1.	Mrs Delonika, Dian Pelangi, Indah Nada
21.	Diennul Khaira	25	Bachelor	Jakarta	Private company employee, married, mother of 1.	Indah Nada, Fitri Aulia, Fifi Alvianto, Dian Pelangi
22.	Vhivhi Marcella	26	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	Private company employee, single.	Ria Miranda, Jenahara, Dian Pelangi
23.	Hana Hanifah	21	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	College medical student, single	Dian Pelangi, Hana Tajima.
24.	Zakia	26	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	Banking employee, married, mother of 1.	Putri Ken, Zahratul Jannah
25.	Rizky Dwi	25	Bachelor	Palembang, Sumatera	Private company employee, married.	Siti Juwariyah, Restu Anggraini, Nalia Rifika

26.	Ayu Alif	23	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	Banking employee, single	Indah Nada, Dian Pelangi
27.	Anissa A. Febriyanti	24	Bachelor	Bandung, West Java	Muslim clothing store owner, single.	Putri Khasanah, Puput Utami, Siti Juwariyah
28.	Rizkha A. Hanum	24	Bachelor	Jakarta	Private company employee, single	Puput Utami.
29.	Fionasari Moerad	33	Bachelor	Surabaya, East Java	Homemaker, married, mother of two, self-employed in catering business	Dian Pelangi, Ria Miranda, Suchi Utami.
30.	Raissa Denik	23	Master	Jakarta	Post-Graduate student, Married.	Dian Pelangi, Indah Nada
31.	Septia Sukariningrum	30	Bachelor	Jakarta	Owner of Muslim wear Hermosa, married, mother of two	Dian Pelangi, Puput Utami.
32.	Vita Maulidia	33	Bachelor	Malang, East Java	Muslim clothing store owner, married, mother of three.	Dewi Nilam, Dian Pelangi, Kara Faz.
33.	Nila	44	Bachelor	Sidoarjo, East Java	Owner of children Muslim wear Dannis, married, mother of three.	None/ random
34.	Cietra Angga	24	Master	Surabaya, East Java	Post-graduate student, single, banking employee.	Dian Pelangi.

Appendix B. List of Participants of FGDs

Group	Name	Age	Occupation
FGD 1 (26 May 2014)	Sinta	21	Radio station intern, undergraduate student
	Briefing	25	Event organiser
	Zakiyah	24	Trading Muslim clothing in Facebook
	Silvi	22	Undergraduate student
	Fani	22	Undergraduate student, independent film-maker
FGD 2 (20 June 2014)	Syifa	31	Lecturer in Communication studies, ed.Master's degree
	Ratih	27	Lecturer in Communication Studies, ed.Master's degree
	Resya	25	lecturer in International Relation, ed. Master degree
	Ririn	27	lecturer in Communication Studies, ed. master degree
FGD 3	Puput	30	lecturer in Communication studies
	Titien	40	lecturer in the College of Journalism
	Pipit	28	lecturer in Communication Studies, ed. Master degree
	Deni	30	lecturer in the College of

			Journalism, ed. Master Degree
	Roostika	35	lecturer in management studies, ed. Master Degree
FGD 4	Ayu	29	Lecturer in Industrial Management, currently pursuing Ph.D in Indonesia
	Aris	30	small business owner
	Fitri	30	homemaker
FGD 5	Resi	30	working as administrative staff
	Rianti	35	working as administrative staff

Appendix C. List of Bloggers

Name	Location	Age & Education	Occupation	Blogs' Content
Inne Elsa Putri	Malang, East Java, Indonesia	18, college student majoring in Agriculture Technology	student, blogger, start-up designer	fashion, cooking recipe, travelling, family, student's life.
Anissa Aez	Bandung, West Java, Indonesia	20, college student in Japanese Literature	student, blogger, local TV presenter	experimental fashion, travelling, daily activities, products' review
Radhiana Purisanti	Jakarta, Indonesia	27, general practitioner	GP, blogger	fashion, daily activities, fashion show reviews
Suchi Utami	Jakarta, Indonesia	26, bachelor degree.	Mother of two, fashion designer of Such! by Suchi, fashion bloggers, guest speaker, writer of two books on hijab fashion tutorial.	Fashion, products endorsements, family, travelling, daily activities, business stories, guest speaker, cooking recipe.
Fifi Alvianto	Jakarta, Indonesia	30, bachelor of graphic designer	Mother of two, editor-in-chief of Laiqa magazine, fashion designer of Casa Elana, buzzer, fashion bloggers, guest speaker	Family, fashion, product endorsement, travelling, shows' buzzer, daily activities.
Ghaida Tsurayya Gymnastiar	Bandung- West Java, Indonesia	26, Bachelor of Physics	Mother of three, fashion designer of GDA by Ghaida, blogger, motivational speaker.	Fashion, products' endorsement, family, daily activities, travelling
Puput Utami	Jakarta,	24, Master Degree in Human Resource	Single, working in Social Media	Fashion, travelling, hang out places,

	Indonesia	Management	Department in Viva News Corp.	food, family.
Tasya Gunoto	Jakarta, Indonesia	25, Master Degree in Creative Marketing, married and now expecting first child.	Fashion blogger, graphic designer, editor of Hijabella magazine, publish one hijab tutorial book.	fashion, family (newlywed) lives, travelling.
Noni Zakiyah	Central Java, Indonesia	25, Bachelor Degree	Fashion blogger, fashion designer.	Fashion, travelling, family, product endorsements.
Kara Faz	Australia, Jakarta	25, Bachelor Degree	Fashion /beauty blogger, mother of two, entrepreneur.	Fashion, beauty, family

Appendix D. Bloggers interview questions

1. What motivates you to blog for the first time? Can you tell me about that?
2. Was the decision in regards of wearing *hijab* part of your motivation to blog? Or was there any specific reason which motivated you to start writing your blog?
3. Why choose personal fashion blogs?
4. Other than the fashion photography aspect of your blog, what else do you like to share?
5. How do people respond to your blog? Any negative reaction / comments/ criticisms? How do you respond to this criticism? Would criticism influence your posts in the future?
6. Some readers said that you (as Muslim fashion blogger) help to change the perception of Islam /Muslim, how do you respond to this?
7. How do you choose what you like to share and what should be kept private?
8. Does blogging open up more opportunities for you? Can you tell me more about this?
9. Do you think blogging or entrepreneurship is the ideal job for women or mothers?
10. Is this the ideal job / profession for you? How do you define women empowerment?
11. How does your husband or family take part of your blogging and entrepreneurship activities? How do you manage between work and life balance?
12. What do you think about Muslim fashion in Indonesia and globally?

Appendix E. Readers interview questions

1. How often do you read fashion blogs? Can you specify any time of day when you read blogs? When did reading blogs become your habit?
2. What is your favourite blog/which blog do you read most? Why? What makes certain blogs appealing to you? The visual or the stories?
3. Where do you mostly read blogs? At home or office? In mobile phone, tablet or PC?
4. How do these blogs influence you? Your *hijab* style for example?
5. Have you ever left any comments in these blogs?
6. If you don't mind, could you tell me your *hijab* story?
7. What do you think about these bloggers as a Muslim woman practising modesty / *hijab*? Do you think they (Indonesian Muslim fashion bloggers) modernise Muslim clothing?
8. Do you think they change the perception of Muslim or *hijab* or Islam? If so, how?
9. Have you ever read blogs that annoy you and why? Have you left any comments in these annoying posts?
10. What do you think of web-blogging as a profession?