



Understanding The Identity of Women Wearing The Niqab in Relation To Extremist and Radical Stereotypes

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ABSTRACT

Some people generally perceive that wearing the niqab is closely associated with extremist and radical groups. However, every individual has the right to choose how to dress according to their personal beliefs and values. This study discusses the relationship between the identity of women wearing the niqab and the perceptions linking them to extremist and radical groups. The identity of women wearing the niqab is often associated with the views and actions of such groups. The purpose of this article is to explore the legal arguments regarding the niqab based on the four schools of Islamic thought, to analyze the cultural concepts and interpretations of the niqab across different regions of the world, and to examine the relationship between the identity of women wearing the niqab from religious, social, and cultural perspectives. This study employs a literature review method, using data collected from national and international journal articles and analyzed through the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The findings reveal that the practice of wearing the niqab carries both positive and negative stereotypes. The negative stereotypes tend to portray the niqab as a marker of identity linked to extremist and radical groups. Meanwhile, several positive stereotypes are also commonly attributed to women who wear the niqab, such as piety and devotion, honor and dignity, wisdom and maturity, as well as serving as role models and sources of inspiration. It is important to understand that a person's identity is not solely determined by their appearance or clothing. The identity of women wearing the niqab can be influenced by religion, community, and culture; however, not all women wearing the niqab are involved in extremism or radicalism. Every individual has the freedom to express their identity in a way that reflects their beliefs, as long as it does not violate the law or human values.

Persepsi sebagian masyarakat secara umum memandang bahwa pemakaian cadar sangat berkaitan erat dengan kelompok ekstremis dan radikal. Setiap individu memiliki hak untuk memilih cara berpakaian mereka sesuai dengan keyakinan dan nilai-nilai mereka. Studi ini membahas tentang relasi identitas wanita bercadar dengan kelompok ekstrimis dan radikal. Identitas wanita bercadar sering kali dikaitkan dengan pandangan dan aksi kelompok ekstrimis dan radikal. Tujuan dari penelitian ini ialah untuk mengetahui dalil hukum bercadar menurut 4 mazhab, konsep dan telaah budaya bercadar di berbagai wilayah dunia, relasi identitas wanita bercadar secara agama, kelompok serta budaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian literature review dengan teknik analisis data model interaktif Miles, Huberman dan Saldana. Hasil penelitian ini ialah bahwa pemakaian cadar memiliki stereotip positif dan negatifnya masing masing, yang mana stereotip negatif tersebut mengarah pada penggunaan cadar yang dianggap sebagai identitas wanita bercadar dari kelompok ekstremis dan radikal. Terdapat pula beberapa stereotip positif yang seringkali muncul pada wanita bercadar yakni kesalehan, ketakwaan, kehormatan, martabat, kebijaksanaan, kematangan, serta keteladanan dan inspirasi. Penting bagi kita untuk memahami bahwa identitas seseorang tidak hanya ditentukan oleh cara berpakaian mereka. Identitas wanita bercadar dapat dipengaruhi oleh agama, kelompok, dan budaya, tetapi tidak semua wanita bercadar terlibat dalam ekstremisme atau radikalisme. Setiap individu memiliki kebebasan untuk mengekspresikan identitas mereka dengan cara yang mereka pilih, selama itu tidak melanggar hukum dan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan..

Introduction

The niqab is a type of face covering that extends from the head to the chin, worn by some Muslim women to fulfill the requirements of modest clothing according to Islamic religious values. Face coverings in Islam are not limited to the niqab; they also include the hijab or headscarf, which covers the entire hair and neck. However, the niqab represents the most comprehensive and, at times, the most controversial form of covering in both cultural and religious contexts (Sudirman, 2019).

In Indonesia, the term niqab is commonly referred to as *cadar* or *burqa*, derived from Arab traditions. Arab women had already practiced face veiling since pre-Islamic times, considering it a form of adornment and cultural attire. The words niqab and burqa are even found in pre-Islamic poetry as confirmation of this practice. Islam later introduced the concept of veiling and modesty to Arab societies that were previously unfamiliar with such customs. Meanwhile, non-Arab communities, such as Persians and Jews, had long practiced strict veiling traditions, often exceeding Islamic requirements, and even confined women indoors under strict regulations. With the emergence of Islam, the tradition of face covering was not abolished but was tolerated as a cultural expression, provided it did not violate Islamic legal principles. Generally, Islam grants autonomy to Muslim communities across different regions to adopt clothing styles that align with their local traditions, as long as they remain within the boundaries of Islamic law. During the Prophet Muhammad's era, the niqab was not widely used in Mecca or Medina. The wives of the Prophet, known as *ummul mukminin*, typically covered their faces with the edge of their headscarves rather than with a niqab. However, when they needed to go out while concealing their identities, they occasionally wore face coverings similar to those used by Arab women from outside Mecca and Medina, though only a small number did so (Ilham, 2021).

The niqab, as part of Islamic teachings, has continuously sparked debate among Muslims (Rasyid & Bukido, 2018). Its deeper meaning in Islam reflects the role and position of women within both religious and social frameworks. On one hand, the niqab is viewed as a symbol of obedience to Islamic dress codes; on the other hand, it is regarded as a means of protection from the gaze and sexual provocation of non-*mahram* men. In preserving women's purity and dignity, the niqab carries strong theological, moral, and social values within Muslim societies.

Nevertheless, in Indonesia, the niqab remains a controversial and often misunderstood practice. It is frequently perceived as an Arab cultural import or as a marker associated with radical and extremist groups (Mustagfirin & Arjanggi, 2020). Furthermore, the issue of niqab use has raised discussions concerning human rights, individual freedom, and gender equality in increasingly open and inclusive modern societies.

The identity of women who wear the niqab within extremist or radical groups is not solely determined by their dress or religious observance but also by how this identity is understood and perceived by others. Women who choose to wear the niqab often assert their piety as devout Muslims, yet they are sometimes misrepresented as supporters of violence or terrorism (Wahidah & Nuranisah, 2020).

The social influence of extremist and radical groups, particularly through mass media, has shaped public perceptions of women wearing the niqab. These groups tend to use the image of women wearing the niqab to strengthen their narratives about Islam as being in conflict with western culture or certain political agendas. By doing so, they manipulate public understanding of Islam and contribute to social tension and misunderstanding.

Addressing the negative perceptions of women wearing the niqab requires a balanced and informed approach. One effective strategy is to enhance public understanding of the diverse lives of Muslim communities in Indonesia and beyond. Amid rapid cultural change and globalization, it is crucial to promote tolerance and respect for differences in Indonesian society, especially regarding religious expression and belief. Therefore, the aim of this study is to contribute to socio-cultural discourse on the niqab by integrating theories of social identity, stigma, social construction, and feminism. This research also seeks to enrich academic literature on women wearing the niqab, moving beyond discussions on Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to include social, cultural, and gender dimensions. Furthermore, it offers a comparative, cross-cultural perspective that incorporates diverse scholarly interpretations, thereby strengthening the multidisciplinary understanding of this issue.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, presenting data in descriptive written form. The research adopts a literature review (content analysis) design, which involves several key stages: problem formulation, data collection, data evaluation, data analysis and interpretation, and public presentation (Randolph, 2019). The literature review serves as a means of demonstrating the researcher's understanding of existing studies, theories, variables, phenomena, methods, and historical developments. Adaptations made within a literature review are considered legitimate scientific contributions that can be published. Data were analyzed using a modified analytic induction technique (Ulfatin, 2015) and the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. The process includes three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Miles et al., 2014; Ridder et al., 2014). Data validity was ensured through four criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Literature Review

1. Legal Foundations of Wearing the Niqab

The perception that women who wear the niqab are merely following Arab or Middle Eastern cultural traditions is incorrect. Covering the face for women is an Islamic practice rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and authentic Hadith, as well as the practices of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions and subsequent scholars in Islam (*ulama*). Therefore, it is inaccurate to regard it merely as a cultural custom.

A study exploring Muslim women's perspectives on wearing the niqab across different contexts found that some views emphasize the obligation to wear the niqab in all circumstances, while others argue that it should be an individual right. It is crucial to create inclusive spaces where Muslim women can freely choose whether or not to wear the niqab without facing judgment or discrimination. Media and education play important roles in strengthening understanding of religion and women's rights, as well as in deconstructing negative stereotypes and promoting cultural and religious diversity. Ultimately, it is vital for an inclusive society to reaffirm Muslim women's rights and foster open discussions about differences (Secor, 2002).

Classical scholars from the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence (Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) have all discussed the legal rulings concerning the niqab. Some scholars even assert that wearing it is obligatory. However, as one scholar notes, enforcing the niqab as a requirement in

Indonesia could lead to social challenges, as this issue remains a subject of debate among jurists (*fuqaha*) (Sudirman, 2019). Numerous explanations and similar opinions exist among these schools regarding the law of wearing the niqab. The following outlines their respective positions:

a. Hanafi School

According to the Hanafi school, a woman's face is not considered part of the *aurat* (body parts that must be covered). Nonetheless, wearing the niqab is recommended (*sunnah*). However, if there is a concern that not wearing the niqab could lead to *fitnah* (temptation or sexual provocation), then it becomes obligatory.

b. Maliki School

In the Maliki school, a woman's face is also not considered part of the *aurat*. Thus, wearing the niqab is regarded as recommended or *sunnah*. However, if there is a risk of *fitnah*, some Maliki scholars consider it obligatory. There are also opinions within the Maliki school that classify a woman's entire body as *aurat*.

c. Shafi'i School

The most authoritative opinion (*mu'tamad*) in the Shafi'i school holds that the *aurat* of a woman before non-*mahram* men (men who are not closely related and whom she could legally marry or *ajnabi*) includes her entire body. Therefore, according to this school, women are required to cover their faces in the presence of men who are not their *mahram*.

d. Hanbali School

There are differences of opinion between Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and his followers regarding the boundaries of a woman's *aurat*. The most well-known view states that a woman's entire body constitutes *aurat* except for her face and palms. However, some scholars in this school hold that even the face and palms are included in *aurat* (Hakim, 2020).

2. The Concept and Cultural Interpretation of the Identity of Women Wearing the Niqab

Women who choose to wear the niqab are often confronted with negative stereotypes and social stigma. This phenomenon occurs not only in Western countries but also in several Muslim-majority nations. Women wearing the niqab are sometimes perceived as marginalized or overly conservative. Nevertheless, for many Muslim women, wearing the niqab represents respect for religious values and an affirmation of cultural identity. Therefore, understanding the identity of women wearing the niqab requires a broader cultural analysis.

Across diverse societies, the practice of covering the face and hair is not unique to Islam. It also appears in other traditions, such as Hindu and Sikh cultures. This suggests that the niqab, as part of a modest dress practice, can be related not only to religious identity but also to cultural expression.

Conceptually, the identity of women wearing the niqab is often debated. The controversy lies in how the niqab is perceived, not merely as a physical covering but as a symbol of what is considered the "true" understanding of Islamic teachings. This perception can lead to discrimination against Muslim women who wear the niqab differently from dominant interpretations. Social expectations often associate women wearing the niqab with good moral conduct and modest appearance (Suksin et al., 2020).

However, such assumptions can be reshaped through a more comprehensive cultural analysis, recognizing that wearing the niqab should not always be linked with rigid or radical religious identity. It can also be associated with aesthetic expression or personal style. Moreover, the social

and economic participation of Muslim women (their skills, competence, and contribution) should also be viewed as part of the broader identity of women wearing the niqab.

In practice, the meaning of niqab varies across cultures and nations. In some contexts, it has been used as a symbol of national pride, while in others, it represents liberation and empowerment. Ultimately, each woman has the freedom to decide whether or not to wear the niqab. Yet, the way society and surrounding culture respond to this choice plays a significant role in shaping the public identity of women wearing the niqab.

3. The Relationship between Religion and Groups in the Identity of Women Wearing the Niqab

In recent years, the niqab has become an increasingly visible phenomenon in society. A number of women have courageously chosen to wear the niqab in public spaces as part of their identity. Ironically, however, certain extremist and radical groups have also adopted the niqab as a symbol of their struggle. This situation raises a question: what is the actual relationship between women wearing the niqab and these groups, particularly from a religious perspective? The niqab is often interpreted as an attribute associated with radical, hardline, or fanatical Islamic organizations. This perception is reinforced by media coverage that tends to label women wearing the niqab as “terrorists” (Ratri, 2011).

As a form of self-chosen identity, it is necessary to challenge stereotypes that portray women wearing the niqab as oppressed or forced. In reality, wearing the niqab is often a matter of personal conviction and individual choice. Negative stereotypes against women wearing the niqab are harmful because they restrict personal rights and foster misunderstanding. Such stereotypes should be continuously addressed through education, open dialogue, respect for human rights and individual freedoms, and the cultivation of a more tolerant and diversity-embracing society. These efforts would foster gender harmony and promote equality, tolerance, and peace.

Nevertheless, while the decision to wear the niqab lies entirely with the individual woman, some groups intentionally manipulate this symbol and associate it with extremist and radical ideologies. They regard the niqab as a sign of struggle or resistance against what they perceive as contradictions to religious teachings. The use of certain symbols in various contexts often leads to differing meanings and interpretations. For many women, the niqab represents a manifestation of religious values such as piety, sincerity, and honesty. Yet, for others, it has been misused to promote extremist and radical ideologies. The perceived link between the niqab and extremism often arises from misinterpretations of religious teachings, which are then used to create divisions between “us” and “them.”

This context also gives rise to debates about religious calling. Different interpretations of religious teachings produce fragmentation in understanding and implementation, often resulting in labeling others as either “right” or “wrong.” Consequently, some individuals question the decision of women who wear the niqab, even condemning them as being trapped in irrational or extreme behavior. On the other hand, women who decide to wear the niqab view it as the best way to express their spiritual identity and values, challenging limiting stereotypes imposed upon them.

To understand the relationship between the niqab and extremist or radical ideologies, it is essential to recognize that Islam, as one of the world’s major religions, upholds universal values of peace and coexistence. However, misapplications of religious practice can lead to extremism and intolerance. Therefore, it is crucial to promote open discussion and educate the public about the true essence of religion, its fundamental values, and how these values should be correctly implemented.

More importantly, efforts must be made to protect every individual's right to choose and express their identity, including in matters of wearing the niqab.

In conclusion, it is vital for society, particularly religious communities, to remain open to differences and diverse ways of thinking while prioritizing noble religious values. Communities must also respond wisely to any misinterpretation that associates the niqab with extremist identity. Without coercion or justification of extremist acts, women wearing the niqab should enjoy the same social reputation, rights, and responsibilities as any other women within a harmonious social context.

Furthermore, women wearing the niqab (as a self-chosen symbol of identity) are often linked to radical and extremist groups (Gunawan et al., 2021). This association occurs because the symbol is sometimes used as a tool to advance certain political or ideological agendas, particularly by radical groups. In terms of group dynamics, the decision to wear the niqab can also be influenced by external factors such as social pressure from close circles and the collective views of communities that support niqab use.

Women who choose to wear the niqab often demonstrate strong ambition and a clear desire to articulate their identity. However, this determination can sometimes make them vulnerable to the influence of radical or extremist groups that offer alternative visions of the world and the role of women within it. These groups often manipulate individuals by offering social or political opportunities rarely found in the broader society that stigmatizes niqab wearers.

At the same time, there are also groups that seek to broaden understanding of women wearing the niqab in a more comprehensive and positive way, aiming to dissociate them from harmful associations. These groups focus on educating the public about values of freedom, gender equality, and education grounded in religious principles. Within group relations, they emphasize shared goals in building a tolerant and peaceful society.

Therefore, the relationship between women wearing the niqab and radical or extremist groups is not straightforward, it is complex and multifaceted. This complexity stems from external factors that shape an individual's decision to wear the niqab, including social pressure or collective support within certain communities. From a group relations perspective, strategic approaches focusing on deeper understanding of freedom, gender equality, and religiously aligned education can help society view the identity of women wearing the niqab as an expression of independence, rather than as a reflection of extremist or radical ideology.

To overcome the unhealthy associations between niqab-wearing women and extremist or radical groups, sustained efforts are required. This can be achieved through educational initiatives and interreligious dialogue, creating greater space for individuals to express their identities, and improving societal perceptions of women wearing the niqab. Through such efforts, it is hoped that the protection of human rights and the establishment of a society that values freedom, tolerance, and peace can be realized.

4. Cultural Relations on the Identity of Women Wearing the Niqab

Several scholars have explained that the origins of the niqab can be traced back to societies surrounding Persia before the advent of Islam. However, there have also been unfounded claims against Islam from irresponsible parties who assert that the *hijab* and niqab originated from pre-Islamic Arab culture. It is possible that the niqab emerged from the tradition of pre-Islamic Arab society, which used it to distinguish between free women and enslaved women, or for other social purposes. Despite the different theories regarding the origins of the niqab, such historical debates

should not be used to disparage or discredit certain communities. The discussion of the niqab has been an important topic among classical Islamic scholars since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and it has never been limited to specific individuals or groups, but rather intended for the public good. The issue of the niqab has been discussed in Islam since the revelation of the Qur'an and has been addressed in several Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (Mujahidin, 2019).

The stereotype that women wearing the niqab are associated with extremist and radical groups has become a common phenomenon in many societies, including within certain cultural value systems. However, can a set of more positive cultural values act as a barrier to the tendency of women wearing the niqab to join extremist and radical groups? Previous research has shown that hostility toward women who wear the headscarf in Western Europe represents a subtle form of anti-immigrant prejudice (Saroglou et al., 2009). This finding is consistent with earlier studies on ethnic prejudice. Nevertheless, future research should consider the possibility that invisible or covert forms of prejudice or racism may influence such attitudes. Although conventional racism is believed to have declined, racism itself persists (Leach, 2005), and the outcomes of subtle prejudice are often similar to those of overt prejudice. Therefore, future studies should pay attention to both subtle and overt forms of prejudice when investigating the correlations between prejudice and discriminatory attitudes (Saroglou et al., 2009).

In cultural relations, certain cultures regard the niqab as a symbol of feminine identity that represents values of purity, modesty, and sincerity. These cultures tend to encourage women to wear the niqab as part of their identity, although the final decision ultimately rests with each individual. Conversely, other cultures hold opposing views, often challenging the decision to wear the niqab as an act of social isolation or alienation from those with different beliefs.

In societies where wearing the niqab is not culturally supported, women who choose to wear it may experience feelings of exclusion or limited acceptance within their social groups. This sense of insecurity may lead them to seek alternative communities that are more accepting of the niqab as part of women's identity. Unfortunately, some of these groups may manipulate the symbol of the niqab, portraying it as a mark of struggle against forces they perceive as contrary to religious teachings.

On the other hand, awareness and positive cultural representation of individual identity can help reduce the likelihood of women wearing the niqab becoming involved with extremist and radical groups. Recognizing the niqab as part of women's identity and a matter of human rights can promote educational and cultural values that emphasize gender equality and tolerance. Such awareness strengthens women's sense of identity and encourages them to remain active within their cultural heritage. Awareness of positive cultural values can also serve as a preventive measure against the recruitment efforts of extremist and radical groups. Shared agreement on cultural and individual values (including respect for humanity and tolerance) can mitigate cultural pressures that, in the past, have led some women wearing the niqab to become associated with extremist and radical movements.

To understand the relationship between the identity of women wearing the niqab and extremist or radical groups from a cultural perspective, it is essential to acknowledge that cultural awareness promoting respect for diversity, equality, and tolerance can strengthen individual identity and influence women's decisions in expressing themselves, including through wearing the niqab. Such cultural dynamics can prevent women wearing the niqab from being drawn into extremist and

radical groups while contributing to the creation of a more harmonious society, one that fosters mutual trust and social cohesion without being bound by symbolic or religious divisions.

The use of the niqab as a symbol of women's identity varies across regions and cultures. Below are several examples of how the niqab is perceived and practiced in specific cultural contexts.

a. The Practice and Culture of Wearing the Niqab in the Middle East

The culture of wearing the niqab in the Middle East is often associated with strong Islamic traditions, where the niqab is regarded as a symbol of bodily purity, piety, and honor. In certain countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, wearing the niqab is even mandatory for women in public spaces. This regulation is based on specific interpretations of Islamic teachings that emphasize female modesty and submission to religious principles.

According to the views of some communities in the Middle East, wearing the niqab serves to protect women's physical purity and prevent acts of sexual harassment or oppression. Therefore, in several countries such as Saudi Arabia, women are legally required to wear the niqab in public. Regulations regarding clothing are also applied in workplaces and educational institutions, where employees or students are prohibited from wearing attire that does not comply with prescribed standards.

However, in some countries, such as Lebanon and Syria, wearing the niqab remains an individual choice and is not legally enforced. Although niqab wearing is mandatory in certain Middle Eastern countries, during the early spread of Islam in Indonesia, the use of the *jilbab* or headscarf was not yet common. At that time, the practice of wearing the face-covering veil was mainly found in Saudi Arabia, which was also influenced by its desert environment. In contrast, Indonesian Muslim women traditionally wore only the *jilbab* (a headscarf that covers the hair and neck but leaves the face visible) (Rasyid & Bukido, 2018). It is essential to emphasize that wearing the niqab should be a personal decision rooted in one's spiritual conviction and religious values. The act of wearing it should not be imposed but rather based on an understanding of its meanings and significance.

b. The Practice and Culture of Wearing the Niqab in South Asia

In South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, the full-body garment worn by women to cover themselves is commonly referred to as the *burqa*. In these regions, both modernly dressed women and those who wear the traditional *burqa* can be found (Qodir, 2018). The use of the niqab varies across ethnic groups. Generally, women who wear the niqab in South Asia tend to hold conservative values and uphold religious traditions, viewing it as an integral aspect of modest and moral appearance.

Since ancient times, South Asia has preserved and transmitted its distinct customs and traditions. One of the prominent practices among Muslim communities in the region is the wearing of the niqab, a veil that covers the entire body and face except for the eyes. It is regarded as a manifestation of faith. Although niqab-wearing has been practiced for centuries, it remains a subject of ongoing debate and controversy within society.

Undeniably, the practice of wearing the niqab in South Asia has sparked modern controversies. Some view it as a symbol of female oppression, representing male authority and subordination of women. However, others consider wearing the niqab as a woman's personal choice, a right of self-expression that should not be misinterpreted as an act of subjugation or a threat to women's dignity.

The debate over wearing the niqab in South Asia gives rise to various perspectives and arguments. Some argue that the niqab does not necessarily represent oppression; rather, it may provide women with a sense of safety and comfort in environments that hold stricter boundaries for gender relations. On the other hand, a broader view perceives it as a symbol of gender inequality that accommodates patriarchal interpretations, limiting women's identity and participation in public life.

Given these tensions, there is a growing need to address the deep-rooted conflict surrounding the practice of wearing the niqab. It is important that every individual, especially women, has the right to choose how they dress without coercion. This can be achieved through social campaigns and educational initiatives that promote human rights awareness and gender equality. Establishing clear policies that prohibit the forced wearing of the niqab is also a crucial step in protecting women's freedom of choice.

In conclusion, the practice of wearing the niqab in South Asia reflects a dynamic tension between respecting cultural traditions and advancing women's human rights. There is a strong need for public awareness and education on the importance of individual rights in choosing attire, while also acknowledging cultural and religious values in decision-making. Serious efforts are necessary to prevent oppression linked to niqab-wearing and to ensure that women's dignity and well-being are preserved in accordance with the evolving social context.

c. The Practice and Cultural Context of the Niqab in North Africa

The use of the niqab has become one of the most debated topics in North Africa. In countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, the niqab is often associated with identity, religion, and women's rights. Although it is regarded as a symbol of faith, conviction, and tradition, the wearing of the niqab in these countries has often been criticized for its potential negative impact on women's rights and well-being. In fact, some North African countries have introduced bans on wearing the niqab in specific public areas (Redaksi, 2019).

It is important to note that the issue of wearing the niqab in North Africa is deeply tied to both identity and religion. In this region, the niqab is frequently linked to Islam and is often seen as a marker of devout Muslim women. While wearing the niqab is not legally mandated in all countries, many women choose to wear it as an expression of strong personal commitment to their religious beliefs. However, this practice also raises ethical questions related to coercion and the construction of women's identities by religious groups.

On the other hand, many civil society and feminist organizations support restrictions on the niqab, arguing that it can undermine human rights and gender equality in the region. They believe that wearing the niqab may serve as a form of pressure or compulsion that limits women's ability to participate fully in public life. Furthermore, they argue that the niqab reflects women's subordination and may diminish their dignity and sense of self-worth.

Amid this ongoing debate, several countries in North Africa have implemented regulations to control or restrict the use of the niqab. In Morocco, women are prohibited from wearing the niqab in certain public institutions, while in Algeria, the government has banned it in educational settings. Nevertheless, these policies have faced resistance from some groups who view them as barriers to religious freedom and women's rights to self-expression.

In this context, maintaining social order concerning the use of the niqab in North Africa is necessary, but it should not come at the expense of human rights and women's well-being. Governments in the region must take into account human rights and gender equality values when

formulating policies on the niqab. At the same time, efforts are needed to raise awareness of women's rights and foster mutual understanding between religious and feminist communities. Such efforts can be achieved through education and dialogue among governments, civil society groups, and women's organizations.

In conclusion, the practice of wearing the niqab in North Africa reflects the tension between identity, religion, and women's rights. This controversy underscores the need for constructive dialogue and active engagement with issues surrounding the niqab while preserving social harmony in the region. Education and open discussion are essential for developing balanced solutions that respect women's rights and uphold every individual's freedom to choose their way of dressing without coercion.

d. The Practice and Cultural Context of the Niqab in Europe

In Europe, the niqab and other forms of head coverings are religious symbols expressed by members of Muslim communities. The niqab is a type of veil that covers the face and head, whereas the *hijab* typically covers only the hair and neck. The wearing of the niqab has become controversial in Europe, as it is often perceived as a symbol of cultural difference and, in some cases, as a potential security concern.

In earlier decades, the niqab was rarely seen in Europe and did not attract much attention. However, in 2010, France banned the wearing of the niqab in public spaces. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights upheld this ban, a decision criticized for reinforcing stereotypes and being excessively restrictive (Fajrin/Reuters, n.d.). France introduced legislation prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols, including the niqab, in public places. This occurred amid growing concerns over cultural integration in Europe following a series of terrorist attacks committed by extremist groups.

Some researchers argue that limited face-to-face interactions between the French-speaking majority in Quebec and Arab Muslim minorities have contributed to negative stereotypes. Allowing members of majority groups to interact meaningfully with underrepresented minorities and to witness their competence and professionalism could help challenge such biases. When capable Muslim women who wear the niqab are represented in respected positions, it can counter stereotypes and promote a more positive public perception of Arab and non-Arab Muslims alike.

Nevertheless, as revealed by previous study and recent public surveys in Quebec, resistance toward Arab Muslims (particularly women wearing the niqab) remains prevalent. Security, secularism, gender, and symbolic concerns have all contributed to public policies that restrict the use of the niqab in public spaces, including workplaces, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, shops, and streets. Although similar bans were previously implemented in Egypt and Turkey, comparable laws are now being discussed or enforced in French-speaking Western democracies such as France, Belgium, and Quebec (Welch, 2007). These laws have been criticized by Muslim communities and civil rights advocates for stigmatizing and alienating Muslims, ultimately hindering their integration into Western societies (El-Geledi & Bourhis, 2012).

The controversy over the niqab has since spread across Europe. In 2010, Switzerland also banned the niqab in public places, while other countries such as Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Denmark have debated or proposed similar bans. Despite these controversies, many Muslim women in Europe continue to wear the niqab as a personal expression of faith and identity. They remain steadfast in defending their right to express themselves freely and to maintain their religious and cultural identity across Europe.

Several activist groups, organizations, and public figures have begun challenging discrimination against the niqab by advocating for individual rights and personal freedoms. Many Muslim women have found support within feminist movements that uphold the right of women to define their own identities. Likewise, many Muslim communities in Europe value freedom and autonomy in shaping their beliefs and lifestyles, despite cultural and religious diversity. A truly multicultural and inclusive society should provide space for such differences and ensure fairness for all members.

When discussing the cultural practice of wearing the niqab in Europe, it is essential to acknowledge that every individual has the right to determine their form of religious expression. Despite discrimination and stereotyping, there will always be individuals who choose to wear the niqab as a reflection of faith and self-identity. Their freedom to do so must be recognized and respected. The culture of wearing the niqab in Europe remains a highly debated issue today, centered on individual rights, freedom of expression, and citizenship. Nonetheless, all cultural expressions must continue to be respected and accommodated within open and inclusive societies that uphold personal freedom and human dignity.

e. The Practice and Cultural Context of the Niqab in North America

As nations founded on the principles of freedom and tolerance, the United States and Canada uphold the right of every citizen to practice religion and express their faith freely. For most Muslim women in North America, wearing the niqab or *hijab* is an individual choice and serves as an expression of both religious identity and faith. Nevertheless, the wearing of the *hijab* in North America can sometimes lead to challenges such as discrimination. Some Muslim women who wear the niqab may encounter situations where they are denied entry to places that prohibit religious symbols, or they may feel undervalued in workplaces and social environments. In 2019, following the bombing incident in Colombo, one of the first actions taken by the Sri Lankan government was to ban the use of the niqab, citing it as a potential threat (Ikhsani & Yanti Haryanti, 2020).

However, many Muslim women in North America actively advocate for their right to wear the niqab and hijab and to be respected in their daily lives. Various Muslim community groups have established organizations and advocacy networks to promote their rights within inclusive and tolerant environments. They have also received support from members of broader society who share similar views on freedom of expression and respect for diversity. These efforts go hand in hand with educational initiatives aimed at informing the general public about the values of tolerance and pluralism, as well as promoting cultural understanding as a unifying message.

The increasing visibility of the niqab and hijab in North America has also influenced several aspects of society, particularly fashion. The niqab is no longer seen merely as a symbol of “terrorism,” as was previously assumed by many. In fact, some fashion designers have drawn inspiration from this symbol of diversity, creating clothing that integrates religious tradition with contemporary style.

Although controversy and discrimination against the wearing of the niqab and hijab may still occur in North America, the culture of wearing the niqab has become an integral part of religious identity and self-expression for many Muslim women. In North America’s inclusive societies, individuals may wear the niqab or other religious symbols as a form of self-respect and religious expression—without fear of being judged or misrepresented by inaccurate stereotypes.

Discussion and Results

1. The Phenomenon of the Niqab in a Socio-Cultural Context

The niqab is a social phenomenon that is not only linked to religious aspects but also to culture, politics, and identity (Ilham, 2021). In Indonesia, the practice of wearing the niqab has become increasingly visible over the past two decades, particularly among young Muslim women, university students, and members of certain religious study groups. For some women, the niqab represents a form of personal piety and an expression of religious identity (Aisyah, 2025) However, for other segments of society, the niqab is still perceived as something unfamiliar and is even associated with extremist ideologies.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the meaning of wearing the niqab varies across different societies. In the Middle East, the niqab is regarded as a long-standing tradition deeply intertwined with norms of modesty (Ayu Safitri et al., 2021). In Western countries, however, the niqab is often debated for being in conflict with values of openness and individual freedom (Paul, 2024). This demonstrates that the niqab is not merely a religious practice but also a symbol shaped by the socio-cultural constructs of each society.

2. Stigma, Stereotypes, and the Identity of Women Wearing the Niqab

Women who choose to wear the niqab are often confronted with stigma and negative stereotypes. In both Western and some Muslim-majority societies, women wearing the niqab are frequently viewed with prejudice or regarded as marginalized. On the other hand, for many Muslim women, wearing the niqab is a form of respect toward religious values and cultural identity. Therefore, understanding the identity of women wearing the niqab requires a broader cultural examination.

In diverse societies and cultures, clothing that covers the face and hair is not a new phenomenon. It exists not only in Islamic culture but also in other traditions, such as Hindu and Sikh communities. This shows that the practice of wearing the niqab is linked to identity not only in a religious context but also in a cultural one (Sudirman, 2019).

Conceptually, the discourse surrounding the identity of women wearing the niqab often centers on the perception that the niqab should not merely be viewed as a head or face covering but as a symbol of a “true” understanding of Islamic teachings. In this view, the form of niqab a woman wears should align with certain interpretations of religious doctrine. Otherwise, such differences may lead to discrimination against Muslim women who choose a different style of niqab. Society also tends to expect women wearing the niqab to behave in accordance with moral standards and modest appearance (Suksin et al., 2020).

Analyzed through the lens of social identity theory, women wearing the niqab are often positioned as an out-group, distinct from the majority of Muslims who do not wear it. This positioning contributes to stereotypes and discrimination that shape their self-identity (Ali, 2021). Meanwhile, from the perspective of stigma theory, women wearing the niqab experience repetitive labelling processes, which can either strengthen or weaken their personal identity.

However, for some women, the niqab serves as a symbol of resistance against modern beauty standards that emphasize bodily exposure (Rosenberg, 2019). They feel more liberated and empowered because their identity is no longer defined by physical appearance, but by spirituality and devotion. Thus, the niqab can be understood as an alternative form of identity amid the forces of modernization.

3. Islamic Scholars' Perspectives on the Niqab and Its Influence on Society

Islamic scholars hold diverse views regarding the niqab. Some scholars argue that the niqab is obligatory for Muslim women, particularly those who adhere to textual interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith (Nasrulloh & Mela, 2021). This view is commonly embraced by scholars in the Middle East. However, other scholars (especially those in Indonesia) regard the niqab as sunnah or a non-obligatory practice that is more cultural than religious.

Classical scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Al-Albani considered the niqab highly recommended as a form of preserving modesty (*aurat*). In contrast, contemporary Indonesian scholars, such as K.H. Quraish Shihab, emphasize that the niqab is not an Islamic obligation but rather an Arab tradition that may be practiced but is not mandatory.

These differing perspectives influence public acceptance. In communities where scholars advocate for the obligation of the niqab, its use is regarded as normal and respectable (Kumaini et al., 2024). Conversely, in more moderate environments, the niqab may be perceived as a sign of exclusivity. Thus, religious scholars play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing societal attitudes toward women who wear the niqab.

Conclusion

The wearing of the niqab by Muslim women around the world is closely connected to cultural, religious, and group identity. Although often seen as controversial, the niqab can be interpreted as a symbol of piety, protection from the male gaze, and religious identity. There are several positive stereotypes commonly associated with women who wear the niqab, such as piety, devotion, honor, dignity, wisdom, and inspiration. However, there are also negative stereotypes, including perceptions that they are isolated, oppressed, uneducated, or associated with extremism and terrorism.

Negative stereotypes about women wearing the niqab can be reduced through education, open dialogue, and respect for individual rights. Enhancing public understanding of Muslim life, fostering tolerance, and safeguarding the right of individuals to choose their form of dress are essential steps in addressing these misconceptions. This study demonstrates that the niqab is not a marker of extremist or radical identity. Instead, it represents a cultural and religious practice shaped by the interaction between faith and tradition. Negative perceptions of the niqab often emerge because some extremist groups have adopted this attire as part of their identity in carrying out acts of terror against society.

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